

# INTRODUCTORY

## TEXTBOOK OVERVIEW

### WHAT TO EXPECT

Unlike other textbooks you might have seen, this one isn't designed with the idea of the reader as some sort of fly-on-the-wall observer, watching what philosophers have done or are doing. In this book, you will be doing philosophy. My job will be to teach you how to do it and to lead you into the practice. Of course, you will be looking at what many other thinkers have done and tried to do, but you'll quickly learn that philosophy is interactive—a conversation—like some sort of out-of-time laboratory where big issues and problems are being analyzed, tested, and debated by people who lived thousands of years ago and people who will be born a century from now, all working side-by-side. But you are hereby invited to enter our lab and learn how to use our tools.

Actually, my hope (and plan) is not only to show you how to use these tools, but to have you using them and philosophizing almost immediately. To that end, this book is broken up into three large sections, corresponding to what often amounts to three different courses you might find at your college. Before these sections, however, you'll find a standalone chapter on *Philosophy Driver's Ed*, which is a very useful part of each of these courses, should you take them in isolation from each other.

*continued...*

### WELL, HERE YOU ARE.

You're in perhaps your first philosophy course, and I bet you've got a number of ideas about what *philosophy* is. Somewhere along the line, you might have seen a movie or watched some show that talked about philosophy, and I'll wager it involved a bunch of people talking about how nothing is real or asking things like "if a tree falls in a forest, and nobody is there to hear it, does it make a sound?" Or maybe you saw this book in the store that called itself an exploration into philosophical questions, but these questions turned out to be more like "hey, dude, if you drink a glass of water and pee at the same time, it feels like it's going right through you!"<sup>1</sup> Although such things are interesting and maybe even fun, they ultimately aren't the stuff philosophers do—well, not what they do professionally.

I suppose to start out our discussion, then—and since you'll soon see that when we do philosophy, we start with definitions—I should start by defining our central term: *philosophy*. The word is Greek in origin, and it's made up of two words: *philia* and *sophos*. The first word we actually have in the name of Philadelphia, and the second we use all the time when talking about 10th-graders, calling them

<sup>1</sup> I'm really not kidding. There's this book called *Astonish Yourself*, that presents these weird experiments as if they're offering some profound philosophical insight into relevant, everyday questions.

Sophomores. Philadelphia is known as the *city of brotherly love* (well, that's its motto, and let's be kind and suppose the city is still brimming with tender kindness), and Sophomores, once they've survived and transcended their awkward Freshman year, like to think they're no longer the ignorant newbies they once were, having grown into savvy wisdom (which they often love to bestow upon their new inferiors). *Philia* means 'love.' And *sophos* means 'wisdom.' So, technically, *philosophy* should be the 'love of wisdom.'

So we're going to love wisdom in this class? How in the heck does *that* work? Maybe we should start smaller. Philosophical reasoning is aimed towards *truth*. And philosophy is a *discipline*, which means it involves a methodology.

Not all philosophers follow the exact method we'll use in this book, but you can bet they have something darn similar, and that if you get the hang of this method, you'll be able to understand what they're doing if you come across thinkers who go about things slightly differently.

ONE OF THE MOST TELLING  
THINGS ABOUT A PERSON  
IS HOW THEY SAY HELLO.  
(MIGUEL)

## WHAT TO EXPECT, *continued*

Think now of philosophy as a sort of journey.

### Drivers' Ed

The first part of this book will be our 'driver's ed' section, getting you comfortable with the tools we need to operate our vehicles (which happen to be our minds). Like in driver's ed, you learned how to coordinate all the tricks of steering, shoulder-checking, and paying attention to all drivers around you while attempting to maneuver your car into a tight parking spot or through rush-hour traffic—all things that at one time were bewilderingly complex but now probably come as second nature to you—so too we'll learn about defining terms, avoiding cognitive biases, building arguments of many different kinds, and developing good habits of thought.

## THREE MAIN PHILOSOPHICAL AREAS

### The Scope of this Book

### CRITICAL REASONING

If you really want to become skilled at using your mental vehicle, you'll find critical reasoning a powerful training ground. Here is where we look much more carefully at *why* certain things work and others don't in the world of arguments, inferences, and evidence. We'll analyze our mental starting points and see how they can either



*Admiral Robert Peary surveys the route for his North Pole expedition.*

enable us to find truth or thwart our efforts. We'll learn the many different uses (and kinds!) of definitions, and focus on how to make a carefully analytical definition that helps us to avoid fallacies. Then we'll look very closely at both deductive and inductive reasoning, learning which kind of arguments give us which kinds of conclusions, and how easily we fall into bad thinking (fallacies), either by reasoning poorly ourselves or by falling for the mental manipulations of bad reasoners who want to guide us to their own preferred conclusions. We'll learn to defend ourselves by thinking *for* ourselves. We'll learn how to fix bad arguments, how to build good arguments, and—more importantly perhaps—how to tell the difference between the bad and the good.

## INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Once we see how to do decent argument structure, we'll take a series of short trips into philosophical analysis. The first area we'll explore will not only introduce us to a huge problem that we still struggle with every day in human experience, but it will also be presented in such a way that you'll learn how to *test* arguments and theories that drive the arguments. That is, in the first part of the text, you learn how to build arguments (and what counts as a good one or a bad one), and

**HELLO**  
my name is

**PHILOSOPHY**

in this second part you'll move into how to test not just the structure but the content of the arguments you (and others) build.

There are hundreds of questions philosophers ask and analyze. The lab is always humming, and sometimes you might catch a burst of insight as something gets answered, or some question gets so large and developed that the thinkers working on it push through into their own laboratory, expanding their work into a whole new discipline. Back in Plato's day (d. around 347 BCE), geometry was a philosopher's job. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was a biologist and literary theorist among his many other philosophical jobs. But nowadays, we see math, biology, and literature as three completely different disciplines. Medieval thinkers like Thomas Aquinas and Moses Maimonides worked on quite a lot of things, including theology

and physics. These issues moved out of philosophy and into their own labs. More recently, Sigmund Freud and William James were philosophers who did psychology. B.F. Skinner was a philosopher doing sociology. And these also moved into their own space. Nowadays, we see issues relating to artificial intelligence, cognitive

development, and genetics moving out of the philosophy lab and into their own specializations.

Since there's so very much happening in our labs, we won't have time to see it all in this short introduction. We'll focus on a small set of problems that still puzzle and awe us, and we'll see that the world around us is still huge and mysterious, amazingly complex and bewildering, even if we often take it for granted as if we understood everything around us. So the second section of this book will be like a Willy Wonka type tasting tour, focusing only on a few well-respected and hardworking rooms in our lab.



## ETHICS

After we take a few short exploratory tours about the lab, we'll go into one of the rooms for good. Or maybe we can say that after we take a few short road trips, we'll go on a long one. However you want to see it, the last third of the book focuses on ethical reasoning—that area of

## Savage Chickens

by Doug Savage



philosophy that looks especially to questions about how we evaluate actions or people as morally good. We'll weigh different theories of good and bad against real world issues, and we'll do our darndest to determine whether there can in fact be a universal standard that best evaluates human morality.

And even though we'll spend a long chunk of time in this one area, we'll still only barely scrape the surface of what ethical reasoning involves and explores. Still, by the time you're done with this project, you'll know how to do philosophy, you'll have done a bunch of your own work in the lab, and you'll leave this study with both a skill set you didn't have before and an appreciation of the importance of philosophical thought to human life. Not to brag, but you won't be the same.

*A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence. (David Hume)*

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE COUNTDOWN: INTELLECTUAL HONESTY & PHILOSOPHY DRIVER'S ED

### OVERVIEW

#### The Content & Purpose of Chapter One

The first chapter of this textbook constitutes what I call **Philosophy Driver's Ed**: that is, it presents the general overview of what philosophy is, and how it's done. You'll thus be introduced to a number of terms and rules that it is imperative you get very familiar with, if you want to succeed in this endeavor. In fact, I strongly recommend you take the time to memorize the following five main components of philosophy, what I call **The Countdown**:

- the *five* Rules of Discourse,
- the *four* kinds of reasonable conclusions,
- the *three* laws of metaphysics (or logic),
- the two tasks of analysis (of learning),

- and the *one* guiding principle.

Each of these will be referred to repeatedly, and eventually, as you use them, you'll find that memorization will give way to understanding.

Still, for now, commit these babies to memory, stopping when you come upon them and writing them down so that you're involving more parts of your body to learning.\*



MISTAKES ARE THE PORTALS OF DISCOVERY.

(JAMES JOYCE)

### READING QUESTIONS

*As you study this chapter, keep these questions in mind for critical thinking and analysis.*

- Explain, in your own words, the core principle of *intellectual honesty*. What are its three parts?
- Summarize the *Allegory of the Cave*, explaining how it illustrates the following: intellectual honesty, the philosophical endeavor to discover the truth, and the potential problems for truth seekers when they confront either those who don't reason carefully (for whatever reason) or those who are intellectually dishonest.
- What's wrong with "winning is everything"?
- What's the difference between Socrates and the Sophists?

*continued...*

\* It's true! The more physical senses you use to learn something, the more you'll remember what you've learned. So take notes! This takes more time than simply highlighting, and forces you to think, to use your motor skills and more parts of your brain. If you read your notes aloud back to yourself, you'll be using even more parts of your body, making it more likely you'll remember what you are trying to learn.

The key is that you need to *slow down*, Speed Racer. Rome wasn't built in a day, and you didn't learn how to drive a car in a single afternoon. It takes time. Allow yourself that time.

Oh, and another thing! **Allow yourself to make mistakes.** I'm not kidding. Scientists and psychologists have shown that failure actually *increases understanding*, thus, improves learning. So go screw up! Get it wrong! **Risk failure to achieve success.** This scientific truth informs how I've set up *every* assignment in this text.

If you risk testing yourself *before* the content is discussed in class, you'll learn the concepts and skills *far better* than if you avoid doing the homework until after class discussions.

## FOUNDATIONS

In Driver's Ed, we'll discuss the following foundational things:

- The aim of philosophical inquiry (and of any educational pursuit) is to *find the truth*. This means that there is truth to be found and requires us to acknowledge that we don't already have or know it.
- To do philosophy successfully, we must *first* know what we're talking about, *then* know what kind of claim we're making, and *finally* be able to determine whether our evidence gives adequate reason to believe that claim.
- It is a mark of good thinking when one concludes, based on all available evidence, that one cannot know the truth of a claim or that the claim or theory is utterly nonsensical.
- To accomplish this, we must maintain honesty, which entails valuing the truth over everything else (finding that truth is more important any face-saving rhetorical "win").
- People generally reason sloppily, thus fail to attain true insights. It follows that doing philosophy can be difficult, because it requires attentiveness and care.
- Good reasoning can be understood in terms of the Rules of Discourse.
- A common and pernicious mistake that plagues would-be philosophers and kind-hearted truth-seekers is relativism. It should be recognized and avoided by any who truly desire understanding.

We'll need to be sure we understand these key concepts (I promise: I'll be explaining them and their funky symbols in this section):

**The Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC):** It is a logical law that for any claim  $p$ , it is false that both  $p$  and not- $p$ .

**PNC:**  $\sim(p \& \sim p)$

**The Law of Excluded Middle (LEM):** It is a logical law that for claim  $p$ , either  $p$  is true, or  $p$  is not true.

**LEM:**  $p \vee \sim p$

**Bivalence:** Every claim or theory has exactly one truth value, either true or false. (That is, both PNC and LEM apply.)

**Leibniz's Law (LL):** It is a logical law that for anything  $x$ , anything  $y$ , and any property  $P$ , if  $x$  is identical with  $y$ , then  $x$  and  $y$  will both have  $P$ .

**LL:**  $(x = y) \rightarrow (Px \& Py)$

## TASKS & CRITICAL QUESTIONS (CQs)

Every chapter of this text is designed to facilitate learning. But you'll have to do the work.

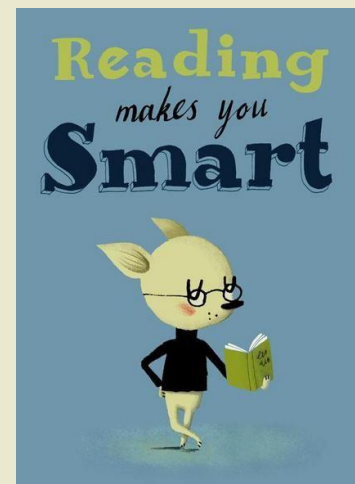
Though never marked aside with special headings that signal your bells and whistles (well, except the first time), each assignment is mandatory if you want to grow in philosophical skill. The assignments are always labelled, but they crop up in the *middle* of discussions and at key moments in concept analysis. So you really shouldn't skim the text, if you want to ensure you've done all the homework.

Still, because I'm a nice person, I'll always tell you in each chapter overview how many and what kind of assignments you can expect.

This chapter contains *four* tasks and *no* critical questions.

## READING QUESTIONS, *continued.*

- What is the relationship between philosophy and science?
- What are some guiding standards to keep in mind when doing philosophy?
- What are the two steps of rational analysis? Why define terms first?
- What are the three metaphysical laws of logic?
- What are the four different kinds of conclusions one makes? Explain each, including how each is an important and useful kind of conclusion to come to.
- What are the five rules of discourse? How do they work to ensure intellectual honesty in those who practice them?
- What *is* relativism, and what are four problems with it? Try to explain each one, thinking about how you see them sabotaging your (or your friends') efforts in finding the truth.
- Given what you understand from this chapter, how might one adequately *define* philosophy?



## DOING PHILOSOPHY

### Finding the Truth in More Ways than One

When you think of a philosophical argument, what comes to your mind first? Be honest. It's probably not an image of careful deliberation, methodology, and discipline. Often, people think doing philosophy is spouting personal opinions (that "I've got a right to!") and attempting to one-up others who are doing the same thing. But that's not learning. That's what one of my students meant, years ago, when he wrote that "philosophy is nothing more than intellectual masturbation." It's just making oneself feel good by showing off what one thinks one knows. And it amounts to a whole lot of nothing, unless you think "winning is everything."

This student was mistaken. Well, he was right if that's truly what we do when doing philosophy, but he was quite wrong because that isn't what we do. That's what people do on Facebook and Twitter. So the first thing we have to get out of our heads, if we truly want to do philosophy, is that pernicious notion that "winning is everything."

### Winning Isn't Everything

This isn't to say that winning is nothing. Sure, there are times when winning matters. But this requires there to be a *something* out there to actually *win*. So what do we win? Frankly, the "winning is everything" mindset doesn't care. In fact, you can win the "I'm the biggest jerk out there" and be happy with the win. Being the loudest, the most stubborn, the richest, the most weaponized, the whatever-est is to *win*.

We're going to reject this. Having any old superlative isn't what it's about. Finding the truth is what it's about. We're on a quest, now. A difficult trek through difficult and often blindingly confusing and competing claims. The only thing that matters is getting out intellectually alive, and thriving. And that means finding the truth.

### C.S. Peirce and Contrite Fallibilism

The foundational principle that underlies the academic quest worldview is the principle of **intellectual honesty**. A person is intellectually honest if she both desires the truth and realizes that she can make mistakes. The American philosopher (and the founder of American pragmatism) Charles Sanders Peirce (pronounced like "purse") gave us a way of understanding this radically different way of thinking. He wrote,

The first step toward *finding out* is to acknowledge you do not satisfactorily know already; so that no blight can so surely arrest all intellectual growth as the blight of cocksureness; and ninety-nine out of every hundred good heads are reduced to impotence by that malady. ... Out of a contrite fallibilism, combined with a high faith in the reality of knowledge, and an intense desire to

## Thales & the Sophists

The mindset change I'm talking about is the paradigm shift that became the cornerstone of what we now call the Humanities. Way back about 500 BCE, this guy Thales began to wonder whether he could actually *know* the truth, instead of just accepting what the religious oracles and poets said.\* It was a move from simple acceptance to inquiry and testing of evidence.

It is also the shift that happened in ancient Athens when the Sophists—the educators of an up-and-coming Greek middle class—where divided against one of their own, who came to be considered absolutely *not* a Sophist because of his move from the "winning is everything" mindset to the "wisdom is everything" mindset.

The Sophists believed—and taught the Athenians to believe—that whoever won a debate had created the truth. "Man is the measure of all things," the Sophist Protagoras famously said. In one way, Protagoras was right: we are the ones doing all the measuring. And that we are the ones who determine standards of good, just, and fair—this also is right. But if it is taken to mean—and it often was (and is!)—that what we measure as "good" or "right" or "just" is *by the very measurement* always good, right, or just, then this is patently false. This understanding is the "winning is everything" gone amuck.

*continued...*

\* Thales of Miletus lived from about 624 BCE to 546 BCE. Called one of the "Seven Sages of Greece," he is considered the first person in Western Civilization to practice scientific philosophy. We trace the movement from religious mythology as the source of knowledge to humanistic, scientific study as the source of knowledge from his thought. So yay for Thales!

find things out, all my philosophy has always seemed to me to grow.\*

Peirce notes this worldview has three characteristics:

1. contrite fallibilism (a humble recognition of one's own lack of knowledge),
2. a strong faith in the reality of knowledge (i.e., a confidence that the truth exists and is discoverable), and
3. a yearning to discover (to find out the truth).

To put this into contemporary language, we can understand it this way: first, ***the truth is out there***. Second, ***I might not have it***. And third, ***I passionately want it***. This three-sided mindset is intellectual honesty. Intellectual honesty is about as far from “winning is everything” as one can mentally get. The one who thinks winning is everything won't back down even if they're proven wrong, immoral, or otherwise undesirable. That's what Peirce meant by “cocksureness” (what we today call “being cocky”). The cocky person preens and struts, but they strut right past truth—especially if its uncomfortable or personally challenging—often arguing that it is “fake” on the basis that they don't believe or like it, so it must be false. Like a Sophist would do. And as Peirce notes, this stunts their intellectual growth and reduces them to “impotence.”

Philosophers are passionate about the truth. We believe it is out there, can be found, and that to some degree, we can know it.

Intellectual honesty is our starting point. When we're honest with ourselves, we realize we don't know everything—probably can't know everything—and in fact, some of what we think we know we're quite simply wrong about. This notion of fallibility is beautifully illustrated in an allegory Plato offered when discussing knowledge and reality.



\* In his letter to Cassius J. Keiser, dated 10 April 1908. The letter archived is at Columbia University, Cassius Jackson Keyser Collected papers. Italics mine.

## Thales & the Sophists

*continued.*

This idea is that *if I believe something then that something is true*. Just saying something makes it true. Just valuing something makes that something good. But this isn't always the case. People value genocide and torture, believe the planet is flat, and blame Obama for not responding soon enough to Hurricane Katrina.\*

Socrates saw the problems with this worldview, and he saw through the economic opportunism of the Sophists. For them, it was about winning, and to win all they had to do was get people to pay huge fees to learn how to win the Sophist way. This meant a lot of clever and convincing rhetoric and one-upmanship. Like what my student thought was philosophy.

But Socrates, though he used a lot of the rhetorical style of the Sophists, saw that the *elenchus* (the struggling dialogue) wasn't about winning. He realized that the goal of the *elenchus* was to *find* not *create* truth.

In Athens before Socrates, people were fighting about who would be the strongest truthmaker. Socrates overturned this—we aren't the *makers* of truth, we're the *discoverers* of truth. The *elenchus* doesn't establish the truth based on who wins the debate, rather on evidence it reveals.

The truth is often independent of us, and we can often be wrong.

Socrates, and his student Plato, believed that the *elenchus* was a quest not a battle. It was certainly difficult, but the difficulty was an internal, intellectual struggle, not an external, combative skirmish.

\* See this story:

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/ouisiana-republicans-blame-president-obama-hurricane-katrina-response-article-1.1433096>

Katrina happened in 2005, and Obama wasn't elected for his first presidential term until 2008.

## THE ALLEGORY (OR MYTH) OF THE CAVE

*Plato, From Republic, Book VII. (514a-520a) \**

**Socrates:** Imagine human beings living in an underground cave which is open towards the light; they have been there from childhood, having their necks and legs chained, and can only see into the cave.

At a distance there is a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners a raised way, and a low wall is built along the way, like the screen over which marionette players show their puppets. Behind the wall appear moving figures, who hold in their hands various works of art, and among them images of men and animals, wood and stone, and some of the passers-by are talking and others silent.

**Glaucon:** A strange parable, and strange captives.

**Socrates:** They are ourselves; and they see only the shadows of the images which the fire throws on the wall of the den; to these they give names, and if we add an echo which returns from the wall, the voices of the passengers will seem to proceed from the shadows.

Suppose now that you suddenly turn one round and make him look with pain and grief to himself at the real images; will he believe them to be real? Will not his eyes be dazzled, and will he not try to get away from the light to something which he is able to behold without blinking?

And suppose further, that he is dragged up a steep and rugged ascent into the presence of the sun itself, will not his sight be darkened with the excess of light? Some time will pass before he gets the habit of perceiving at all; and at first he will be able to perceive only shadows and reflections in the water; then he will recognize the moon and the stars, and will at length behold the sun in his own proper place as he is.

Last of all he will conclude:—This is that which gives us the year and the seasons, and is the author of all that we see. How will he rejoice in passing from darkness to light! How worthless to him will seem the honours and glories of the cave!

But now imagine further, that he descend into his old habitations;—in that underground dwelling he will not see as well as his fellows, and will not be able to compete with them in the measurement of the shadows on the wall; there will be many jokes about the man who went on a visit to the sun and lost his eyes, and if they find anybody trying to set free and enlighten one of their number, they will put him to death, if they can catch him.

**Glaucon:** That seems right to me. But what of the blindness of him who returns?

**Socrates:** Blindness is of two kinds, and may be caused either by passing out of darkness into light or out of light into darkness, and a man of sense will distinguish between them, and will not laugh equally at both of them, but the blindness which arises from fullness of light he will deem blessed, and



### NOTES

\* Public domain. Available at [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org) Modified into script (and slightly abridged) by BJ Kurle. Minecraft illustration created by Duncan L. Burge, specifically for this text.



## NOTES

pity the other; or if he laugh at the puzzled soul looking at the sun, he will have more reason to laugh than the inhabitants of the den at those who descend from above. There is a further lesson taught by this parable of ours. Some persons fancy that instruction is like giving eyes to the blind, but we say that the faculty of sight was always there, and that the soul only requires to be turned round towards the light. And this is conversion; other virtues are almost like bodily habits, and may be acquired in the same manner, but intelligence has a diviner life, and is indestructible, turning either to good or evil according to the direction given.

Plato's story is a type of **thought experiment**—a mental exercise designed to get at the truth of a concept. The allegory describes the process of learning the truth, which requires the prisoner of falsehood to humbly drop his false beliefs and struggle out of the cave of ignorance into the blinding truth. It demonstrates how one does philosophy acting with intellectual honesty.

But such an account also warns us—indirectly—what mistakes can easily trap those who don't aim for intellectual honesty and truth.

## TASK 1

Here's your very first assignment. In a *well-formed paragraph* (complete sentences, with a topic sentence, supported with the content of the rest of the paragraph's sentences),\* summarize the Allegory of the Cave. How does it tease out the difference between those who just want to 'be right' and those who seriously want to know the truth? How does the one journeying to the surface demonstrate intellectual honesty?

Write clearly, explaining the allegory as if you're explaining the thought experiment to somebody who's never heard it before, and you're explaining to that person what Plato is trying to say about intellectual honesty and the quest for truth in that allegory. This isn't a summary. What is Plato's point in the myth? Write on a college level. Oh, and this isn't the whole assignment associated with this reading. Save the document when you're done with it, and

when the next part of the assignment comes up in this reading, add that to this.

## Assignments and This Textbook

By the way! This is how you'll be finding all your assigned tasks in this text. They come up in bits and pieces as you do the reading. And they *will never again* be set apart with a heading (like you might find 'homework' or 'assignments' or 'exercises' or 'study questions' in other textbooks), since they always come along naturally with the reading.

I do it this way because this is a hands-on textbook. The tasks will make no sense if you've not done the reading, and the reading will remain unclear unless you stop at times and try it out for yourself in the assigned tasks. So when you see a task, stop. Complete the task before you read on.

This means you want to be sure to **give yourself time** to do the reading and tasks. Don't procrastinate your homework. Plan ahead. Figure you'll need a couple

\* If you don't know or are not confident about your paragraph writing capabilities, consult your instructor! We're here to help, and we actually (shocking, I know) *want you to succeed!*

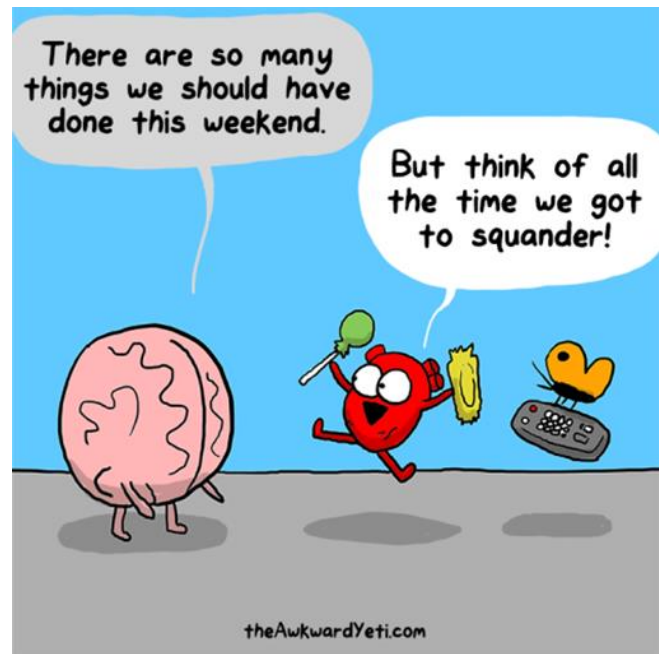
hours, and set aside a chunk (or two) of (undistracted) time. Don't think that you can accomplish what you need to accomplish by putting the homework off until two hours before class. Sometimes your most productive work will happen in that time after you tried to do a task and you thought about it for maybe a day or two. Sometimes you might find starting something—then putting it down and returning to it later—will yield you the greatest rewards.

No single assigned task is overly huge—in fact, none is ever as big as an assignment found in most textbooks like this. However, none of the tasks in this text is optional, either. The tasks are designed to enable you to gain (at least one of) the following:

- an increased skill in doing some philosophical action (such as defining, arguing, analyzing, or inquiring),
- an appreciation of the complexity of an issue, skill, or argument, and
- a specific set of questions of your own to bring to class discussion.

If you do not understand the assignment, *do not skip over it*. Sometimes, we *come to understand* something by attempting it. There are many things we learn by *doing*. By *trying*. By *risking*. Philosophy is one of them.

It's very tempting to give up on something that is frustratingly hard at times. It's tempting to skip the hands-on and go back to the passive mode of letting somebody else *tell* you about what's going on around you. You won't learn anything that way. Learning is like climbing out of that cave—the hard work is in the climbing, and you'll find yourself bruised and with scraped and bleeding knees (as it were). But oh, the vistas you get after that work!



I am not kidding. Study after study has shown that testing yourself *before* you fully understand something is a powerfully effective way to learn, to actually gain understanding.\* Do **not** skip homework tasks. Do them as they come. If you don't understand what you're doing, keep on. Try. Fail. Try again. Fail again. Keep trying. Learn. If you fail in a number of different ways, you'll better understand the class discussion, because *you'll have a set of reference points*. You'll understand *why* things work exactly this way when you've got a bunch of things that show you why not other ways.

But you have *got to try*. Not doing the tasks—even wrongly if you just don't understand—is a guaranteed way to sabotage yourself.† Success *requires* effort. It requires pushing yourself farther than you think you can go. And it often involves failure.

\* Nate Kornell, Matthew Jenson Hayes, and Robert A. Bjork. "Unsuccessful Retrieval Attempts Enhance Subsequent Learning," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, Vol 35, no.4 (Jul 2009): 989-998.

In this article, the authors argue that unsuccessful retrieval attempts (failure) work to make "fertile ground," to prepare the mind for future learning. In their abstract, they write that their results "demonstrate that retrieval attempts enhance future learning; they also suggest that taking challenging tests—instead of avoiding errors—may be one key to effective learning." Their test contrasts those who were given the answer at the same time as the question with those who received only the question. The latter group fared better in actually learning the material in question.

† In my classes, I do not grade the homework for accuracy, but for effort. Evidence that you tried to do the work and perhaps failed to do it accurately does a lot more for your grade than hit-and-miss record of inconsistent effort. I realize you're new at this. Give yourself permission to **not know everything**. You don't have to be magically perfect right off the blocks!

*Do not skip homework tasks. Do them as they come. If you don't understand what you're doing, keep on. Try. Fail. Try again. Fail again. Keep trying. Learn.*

It's like becoming a great athlete. To be a fantastic football player, you don't just watch others play or jump in during a game. You have to train; you have to develop skill sets. Sometimes you run lap after lap after lap. Sometimes you do things that don't seem at all related to the game itself—like lifting weights to strengthen certain muscle groups, or learning the technical rules of what makes for good or poor strategy. It might be days and days of training, and no game play at all. But if you want to be a good player, you trust your coaches and managers to lead you towards success as a player. You'd probably even find out you're better at some things than at others. It's really the same here, only we're doing mental exercises, running mental laps, and training mental 'muscles.' We're learning the rules and strategies of philosophical analysis, and even though

sometimes the tasks seem mundane or unhelpful or completely "out there," please know that they're actually designed to help you do philosophy better.

If you find yourself lost, make a note *at the time you find yourself lost*, of what exactly confuses you, what you think you're supposed to be doing, and so on. Include this in your homework so that your instructor has evidence that you saw and attempted the task.

And if you understand even the littlest bit of what the task requires, soldier on! Try it! Keep working at it until you have something. Sometimes, tasks have a number of questions to work through, and you'll have a flash of understanding after you've worked on the first few. Sometimes you'll think you're doing it all wrong, but find out in class you've got it exactly right! Just don't quit. You *will* get better at this as the course wears on—that is, you will get better if you keep at it. ***But you'll only get out of this course what you put into it.*** So put into it! Learn how to do philosophy by *doing* philosophy, even if you're not doing it all that well at first.

We now return to our regularly scheduled textbook.

## THE COUNTDOWN

Beginning with that one guiding principle—intellectual honesty—we can establish what it is to do philosophy.

The term "philosophy" literally means "love of wisdom." This right away shows us how important it is to find the truth—as the truth is what enables us to be wise. And thus our one principle gets us a set of guiding standards that help us determine whether we're acting with intellectual honesty:

- Finding the truth is more important than "being right" or winning.
- There is *nothing* embarrassing about being wrong. But being wrong while arrogantly insisting that you are right and ignoring arguments against you is *very embarrassing*.
- Emotions are not good indicators of truth. People are wrong all the time about things they passionately believe in.
- Beliefs need justification. It is important to consistently question one's own views.

It follows that a person is intellectually honest if she desires the truth and accepts that she can (and does) make mistakes.

## Philosophy & Science

Philosophy is different from *empirical science* in that scientists are only interested in those questions that can be answered by means of experimentation. Philosophers, by contrast, are only interested in those questions that cannot be fully answered by means of experimentation. They rely on a process called **rational analysis**.

This claim, requires two important qualifications.

*First*, philosophers take for granted the knowledge gained through everyday sense experience (called **empirical inquiry**).

For example, we know by experience that there are tables and chairs. Philosophical questions, however, are ones which cannot be answered by *further* empirical inquiry.

*Second*, the boundary is sometimes fuzzy between philosophy and science in certain areas where both rational analysis and empirical inquiry are relevant. For example, many problems in theoretical physics are directly related to problems in metaphysics. Likewise, many problems in linguistics are directly related to problems in philosophy of language. In such cases philosophers and scientists work together.

## Two Tasks of Rational Analysis

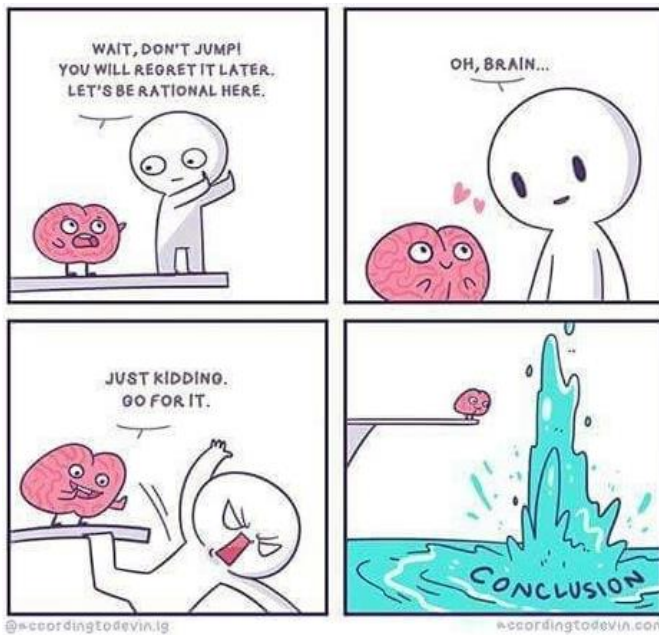
Nowadays, we might say that philosophy is a discipline devoted to the systematic study of questions that cannot be answered by empirical experimentation (since those questions have gone into their own scientific labs). Philosophers attempt to answer such questions through **rational analysis**. A *rational analysis* involves two steps,\* in this order:

1. **defining the terms** involved, and
2. **analyzing arguments** for and against the conclusion.

For example, whether God exists or why it is morally wrong to set children on fire for no reason are not scientific questions (because no experiment is relevant here), they are instead philosophical questions. The only way we know how to approach the question of God's existence is to:

1. Define the relevant terms involved, which might involve answering questions like these:
  - What do you mean by "God"? Or more specifically, what qualities must something have to have in order to be considered God?
  - It is often said that God exists "outside of the universe"—how does this work?
  - What does it mean for something to be outside of the universe? Is the universe the type of thing that has an outside?
  - Does "omnipotent" (i.e., all-powerful) mean the ability to do everything (including acts that are self-contradictory) or the ability to do everything that can be done (which would exclude self-contradictory acts)?
2. Analyze arguments for and against the existence of God:
  - What arguments have been developed for God's existence and what against? What are the best interpretations of these arguments?

\* Much of the discussion in this section comes from conversations with Jason Waller.



- Which arguments are good and which are not? What makes for a good argument? And why?

Think about it. We have to know what in the world we're even talking about before we begin determining whether claims are true or false. And we have to know what our terms mean before we can see whether evidence supports any claim about this term or not.

If we want to find the truth, we need to be careful about making the best roadmap for our quest—or maybe, we need to make sure our methodology is the most effective way to access it. So we begin with clarity, by defining our terms. Only when we're clear on this should we move into analyzing arguments.

## Four Reasonable Conclusions

After defining the terms and analyzing the arguments, the philosopher reaches one of four types of conclusions.

### Certainty

A **certain** conclusion is absolute. If a philosopher claims to be certain about something, she means she knows without even the slightest doubt. This is the kind of knowledge you get from mathematical proofs. I am certain in addition, for example, that

$$1 + 1 = 2$$

or, when determining the length of the hypotenuse of a right triangle, that

$$A^2 + B^2 = C^2$$

In logic talk, we'd say that *deductive* arguments (if they're any good) give us certainty. Regarding our example discussion (above), a *certain*

conclusion would say that there is no doubt at all that "God exists" or that "God does not exist."

### Probability

A **probable** conclusion is more flexible. Philosophers here mean that there is room for doubt, but it's far more likely than not that the conclusion is true.

This is the kind of knowledge you get from scientific analysis. This isn't at all to say that we don't know things from scientific analysis, but to say rather that to demand *certainty* from evidence that indicates *probability* is to reason poorly (as you'll soon see).\*

In logic talk, we say that all *inductive* arguments give us probable conclusions, and the arguments with more probable conclusions are better (stronger) than those with less probable ones. In our "does God exist"

scenario, this kind of conclusion would say something like "it is likely God exists," "it is unlikely that God exists," or "it is more likely that God exists than it is that God does not exist."

### Impossibility

This conclusion looks specifically at what it is possible for us to infer. To say that a conclusion is **impossible** is simply to say that it's impossible for us to know right now. There isn't enough evidence. In principle, the answer is out there. But we just don't have enough evidence or sufficient ability to find it. Yet.

Don't confuse this with a different use of the term 'impossible.' This is a kind of *conclusion* we can make, not a claim about reality itself. It's a claim about what we can infer from the evidence, not about whether something out there can be.

\* In fact, most of our practical conclusions—most of what we call 'knowledge' in everyday life—is probable, not certain. It's even probable—not certain—that the sun will rise in the east tomorrow! So don't toss out probability as if it's not a powerful tool, but don't give it more than it really is, either.

In technical terms, we'll distinguish these things as a difference between what can be known (epistemic claims) and what can be real (metaphysical claims). An **epistemic** claim is a claim about what can be known or believed. A **metaphysical** claim is about what can or cannot be a part of reality.

Thus, in our "does God exist" scenario, an *impossible* conclusion would look like this: "I don't have enough evidence to conclude one way or the other," or "theoretically, I know that the conclusion is out there, but I don't—or humanity at present doesn't—have enough evidence to draw a reasonable conclusion."

### Incoherence

There are a lot of silly questions that present themselves as meaningful and serious. But on closer analysis, we find out they're crazy talk nonsense. They are unanswerable, since meaningless. Thus, the response the philosopher has to them is to conclude that such questions are **incoherent**.

### Three Metaphysical Laws

In our quest for truth, one mistake seems more common than most, and this mistake is *most* common among those who intend to promote a sense of tolerance and diversity but end up professing absurdity and ignorance. This is such a pervasive and pernicious problem that it merits a whole discussion all to itself, though rightly

speaking, it's a special way one breaks the rules of discourse, which we'll get to in a moment. It's pernicious because people generally intend good things when they make this mistake, and they have no clue that what they're really promoting is disastrous.

For example, we might talk about square circles or the flavor of two.

But circles are geometric figures, every point on which is equidistant from the center—and squares are most certainly never that. Squares are equilateral geometric figures with exactly four 90° angles—and circles are most certainly never that!

And numbers—like two—are certainly not the sorts of things that have flavor.

To ascribe properties (ways things can be) this way is crazy talk.

These are obvious, but of course, not all incoherencies are so obvious. Sometimes, we'll find that what seems right, on a closer inspection, is playing fast and loose with language, and embarrassingly enough, is incoherent.

And if it is incoherent, we should toss it on the trash heap of nonsense and lessons learned the hard way.

Notice, then, that *certainty* is only one kind of conclusion. Much of the knowledge we have is not, *strictly speaking*, certain.\*

To demand certainty where none is to be had is not intellectually honest or even all that helpful.



\* The term **strictly speaking** reminds us that we can use language less specifically, more generally or even sloppily. In this book, we're going to talk very carefully about things much of the time, using our terms with exactness. When we do this, we'll say we're speaking 'strictly,' and when we talk more informally, where ambiguities might creep in, we'll say we're speaking 'loosely.'

pool: consider this chapter a huge exposure to philosophical logic and important concepts regarding how the world holds together. Don't be intimidated by it; rather, simply try to grasp the main ideas. These will be referenced through the whole course, which means that you'll understand them more and more as they are more practically applied.

### Philosophy Jargon Stuff

First, we need some tools. There are six logical operators that we use when looking at arguments.\*

- ~ means 'not' or 'it's not the case that'
- & means 'and' or 'but'
- ∨ means 'or' (inclusive)
- means 'implies' or 'if...then'
- ↔ means 'if and only if' or 'just in case'
- = means 'is identical to'

And like algebra uses **variables**  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$ , so too philosophy will use these for placeholders in definitions or arguments. However, philosophy tends to prefer the variables  $p$ ,  $q$ ,  $r$ , and  $s$  when looking at the basic structure of arguments or theories themselves.

If a specific entity, statement, or concept is being discussed, we use **constants** that stand in for that entity, statement, or concept (just like you did when explaining your answers to math story problems). I might, for example, talk about somebody  $S$  who believes that  $p$ . Then I'll talk about  $S$  and  $S$ 's belief that  $p$ .

If I want to say  $S$  believes  $p$  is false, I will write  $S$  believes  $\sim p$ . If I want to say  $S$  believes  $p$  and  $q$ , I will write  $S$  believes  $(p \ \& \ q)$ . That's enough for us to go on now. Don't be intimidated by this; you'll get the hang of it faster than you think.

### The Metaphysical Laws

There are three important laws that govern reality. These are not laws of nature, but laws of logic. Without them *nothing at all is possible*. These laws describe and explain possibility itself—what is and isn't possible, much like the laws of nature describe and explain nature itself—what is and isn't possible *in nature*.

### The Principle of Non-Contradiction, or PNC

The first law, in everyday language, says that something can't both be a certain way and not be that way. More carefully, it says that a claim that something is a certain way cannot both be true and false. In our symbolic language (TL),<sup>†</sup> that is

$$\sim(p \ \& \ \sim p)$$

This reads "it is not the case that both  $p$  is true and  $p$  is false." In short, you can't have contradictions. In fact, this is called the **Principle of Non-Contradiction** (or PNC, for short).

What this amounts to is that any claim you make (call this claim  $p$ ) about anything you want, that claim cannot both be true and false. This builds on the broader metaphysical law that says things cannot both be a certain way and *not* be that exact same way at the same time. Things can't both be

what they are and not be what they are. If something is a chair, then it's a chair. If it's a fan, then it's a fan. If it's yellow, then yellow. It can't both be a chair and not be a chair. It can't both be yellow and not be yellow.

Thus, statements *about* things, statements that describe reality, cannot both be accurate and inaccurate, cannot both be true and not true. It's got to be one or the other.



In short, and for logical clarity (which will make sense later), we say

**PNC:** It is a logical law that for anything  $p$ ,

$$\sim(p \ \& \ \sim p).^\ddagger$$

Now don't get silly about this: the PNC isn't assuming that something can't be yellow in places and non-yellow in places. It's saying that a statement like "this banana is yellow" can't both be true and false. It's understanding that something (in this case a banana) cannot both be what it is and not be what it is. It can't be both yellow in places and not yellow in any place at all.



\* There are quite a few more, but these are the only ones we'll use in this text.

† This stands for "truth-functional logic," and we dedicate a whole chapter to understanding and using this language at a basic level.

‡ There are more careful ways to state this, but they require a higher level of logical expression to do so.

First step: for a statement to be *true* is for that statement to accurately describe reality in a meaningful way.\* So the PNC requires that if a statement *p* is true, it must 'hook up' to reality in that way, properly representing reality. If things *are* one way, not another, then a statement that says they're *both* one way and *not* that way is crazy talk. How so?

Well, imagine you think you're looking at a computer screen. If it is both a computer screen and not a computer screen, then we have a problem. What is it if it's not a computer screen? Logically, the set of all things that are not computer screens is gigantic, diverse, and filled with possibility. Our non-computer screen could be *anything*. It could be the jaws of a rabid dog. It could be a flaming hot oven that will sear off your eyebrows if you get close enough to look at it. It could be a blank wall. So how do you know which it is—a computer screen or something else? If you deny the PNC, there's no telling, since there's no difference. Without PNC, the computer screen/not computer screen is everything. It is both your screen and whatever else isn't a screen.

But logic declares that crazy talk impossible. The point is: something *p* is what it is and not something else. That's the Principle of Non-Contradiction.



## The Law of Excluded Middle, or LEM

The *next* important logical law we need here (and it's just as obvious as the PNC, when you think about it) requires that things either are a certain way or they're not. That is,

$$p \vee \sim p$$

This reads "either *p* is true or *p* is false."

What this says is that for claims about reality there are only two choices: true and false. For anything you like, either it's blue or it's not blue. Either it's a computer screen or it's not a computer screen. Either it's a fan or it's not a fan. This is called **the Law of Excluded Middle** (or LEM for short). It says that there are no middle ways between true and false.

**LEM:** It is a logical law that for anything *p*,

$$p \vee \sim p.$$

Like the PNC, this is a law that governs *truth*, hence statements about reality. But like the PNC, this law is founded on metaphysical necessity, that is, the way things have to be *in* reality. Notice how the PNC and the LEM work as two sides of the same coin: a claim is either true or false (LEM) and not both (PNC). In fact, these two principles together are called **bivalence**.<sup>†</sup>

$$(p \vee \sim p) \ \& \ \sim(p \ \& \ \sim p)$$

This statement is read "either *p* is true or *p* is false, but it is impossible for *p* to be both true and false [at the same time]."

## Leibniz's Law

Our last logical law is named after the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, who, independently of but at the same time as Isaac Newton, discovered the calculus. This law looks at two things—which, using mathematical variables, we'll call *x* and *y*. It also looks at what we call **properties** or the way anything can be.

One way something can be in the world is its precise color; another would be its exact density, another its age. Any way something can be in the world is called a *property* of that thing. Thus, I have the properties of being a philosopher, a woman, a cat owner, and a coffee lover. And in fact, I have infinitely many other properties. For example, I currently have the properties of sitting in front of a black laptop, listening to Loreena McKennitt on mp3, left hand located three inches from a quad iced latte, right knee bent at a 88-degree angle, body slightly cooled by a ceiling fan, existing at 2:54 pm on a Tuesday, and so on.

Unlike the PNC and the LEM, which look at *statements about reality*, Leibniz's Law looks directly at reality itself. It looks at objects, at how we can determine what **identity** is. What is it that makes two things *identical*? We have to be careful, here. In everyday conversation, we might say "I've got that identical shirt!" when what we *really* mean is more like "I've got a shirt that looks quite similar (regarding pattern, color, fabric, or other relevant properties) to that one!" But that's not as catchy.

\* There's actually a whole discipline in metaphysics and logic that analyzes how truth works. I will say nothing here about what this involves, other than to note that I am here not giving preference to one theory of truth.

† Pronounced *bi-VAY-lence*.



We'll call the way we talk in everyday situations *speaking loosely*. But when we're looking at things carefully, when we're evaluating the way things can and cannot possibly be in reality, we have to speak much more precisely. We cannot be ambiguous. So avoiding ambiguity—and losing a lot of the catchiness of conversational speech—we'll call *speaking strictly*. So, strictly speaking, I can't possibly have that identical shirt at home. Why? What's the principle that denies that? Leibniz's Law states that *if two things are identical, they share all the same properties*. All of them.

So if you have that shirt on your body and I have one just like it at home, then these two shirts have at least one property distinct from each other: location. (And in fact, if you think about it, this means they turn out to have infinitely many different spatial properties, not to mention the properties about which specific bits of material they are made of!)

A final little note: in logic, we're dealing with *all* things, not simply concepts like numerical values. Thus, the symbol '=' is applied more broadly than the mathematical concept of *equality*. It is *not* to be read as "equals," but as "is identical to," because when we think of the statement  $2 + 2 = 4$ , we're not thinking about all the things the statement on the left of the '=' symbol has in common with the statement on its right.

In contrast, we *do* say something about what's on either side of that

operator in logic. We say that they have *everything* in common. Thus, we want to include not only the concept of numerical equality, but all other shared properties. So we read '=' as *is identical to*. Thus, the statement ' $x = y$ ' is read ***x is identical to y***.

Here's Leibniz's law symbolized, though I need to warn you that it requires a little higher level of logic, called predicate logic (which we'll only barely discuss here). Since this is the only time you'll need predicate logic in this whole book (and since we'll be using Leibniz's Law a whole heckuva lot in this book), I'm only going to explain what you need to know for this one law.

We write predicate statements with the property (or logical predicate) in capital letters (even if a variable), and preceding the subject, which remains in lower-case (even if a constant). All operators remain the same. So if I say Bill is wearing a blue shirt, I might use 'b' to stand in for 'Bill' and W to stand in for 'blue shirt wearing.' Then, I'd have Wb. It's weird, I know. But we'll only use it for this one law. So understanding this notation, we say

**Leibniz's Law:** It is a logical law that for anything x, anything y, and any property P,  
if  $x = y$ , then  $Px \ \& \ Py$ .

We can note this even more carefully:\*

for anything x, anything y, and any property P,

$$(x = y) \rightarrow (Px \ \& \ Py)$$

This is how we logically encapsulate how identity works. Notice it's a *conditional* statement. It says that *if* two things are identical, *then* they have this property-sharing relation. This is not a claim that all things and only things that are identical are indiscernible.<sup>†</sup> We'll understand the asymmetrical relation that the arrow indicates in our chapter on TL. Promise.

One last but **very important** note on these laws. PNC and LEM apply to *claims*—to things we *say* about reality. They apply to sentences, not to non-binary states of reality. Not everything in the cosmos is binary, so Bivalence (these two laws together) doesn't apply in non-binary contexts. For example, gender identity or sexuality or subjective experiences or mythos—none of these are simple declarative statements, so to apply Bivalence to them is to reason poorly.

Actually, it's to break the Rules of Discourse, which we'll discuss below.



\* And we'll come to a much clearer understanding of this notation in chapter 6.

† For anyone who cares, this law is also called the **indiscernibility of identicals**. If we say that  $(Px \ \& \ Py) \rightarrow (x = y)$

we're making a *different* claim, called the **identity of indiscernibles**. Some believe that both of these laws are true, whereas some do not hold that the latter is. We're only going to be concerned with Leibniz's Law in this text.

But first, it's time for Task 2. You just got a dose of some serious logic, and it might be utterly bewildering. So slow down a moment, and try to decode it into ordinary language: In a well-formed paragraph, explain what I just wrote here about the three laws as if you were explaining it to your kid brother.

You must

- 1) write a well-formed paragraph
- 2) about the PNC, the LEM, and Leibniz's Law,
- 3) explaining them to somebody who's never taken a college course.

Don't think that because you're writing this to a non-college person you can skip on the criteria of college writing. Don't worry if you don't have this down pat: this assignment is your chance to wrap your brain around something new. It's an exercise in learning, not a test of understanding.

## The Five Rules of Discourse That You Should Memorize and Live By

### Separate out the different issues and consider them one at a time.

Issues are complicated. Suppose you're in a discussion about abortion. There are ethical, political, biological, legal, women's rights, religious, medical, insurance, health, and who knows how many other issues and problems that have to do with just that one topic. If you don't slow down and separate out the issues, you might find yourself talking past each other, with one person arguing religious issues, another talking political issues, and still another worrying about health issues. Nothing gets done this way—well, nothing productively directed towards finding the truth, anyway. So instead of jumping into any verbal altercation willy nilly, clarify which issues are on the table for discussion, and treat them one at a time. You'll avoid a lot of bad reasoning, a lot of unnecessary hurt feelings, and a lot of confusion.

There's another reason to follow this rule. Sometimes even one issue is extremely complicated, and understanding is hard to come by unless the issue is broken down into more easily digestible parts. We'll see this in this textbook when we consider questions of free will or perceptual knowledge or slavery. Just defining each of these is hard enough, but even when we have that part done, understanding the fullness of a problem will require we break it down into manageable parts.

Finally—and *crucially*—begin with the parts of the issue your interlocutor (that is, your discussion partner) is most passionate about. Show your respect for finding the truth by trying to get to the heart of what most matters to them. Once that's nailed down, you'll have

## Two Mistakes of Sloppy Reasoning

Not counting the amazing number of fallacies people commit even in everyday thinking (many of which we'll look at in later chapters), there are two important errors in reasoning that are relevant to our current discussion of doing philosophy.

### Ambiguous Language.

We cannot know what we're talking about if we don't define our terms. And often we use ambiguous language without questioning what these terms mean—supposing we (and those to whom we're speaking) know what they mean. It's amazing how often we don't really know what we're even saying ourselves.

I read somewhere—I think in Nietzsche (but I can't remember for sure)—that “those who are truly wise make clear what is difficult to understand, but those who want to *seem* wise obfuscate.” Said more plainly: it is impossible to be both profound and ambiguous—though it is certainly possible to *seem* profound while using ambiguous terminology. If we truly wish to be wise, we need to make certain both we ourselves and those to whom we communicate clearly understand the language we use.

*continued ...*

shown you truly want to make your opponent your ally. And then your opponent will be far more likely to get to the heart of what's most important to you, too.

### Imagine and debate against an ideal opponent.

More specifically, imagine that you are arguing against someone who disagrees with you but is supremely intelligent, supremely well informed, and supremely moral. Work hard to make sure that you understand your opponent's view *in all of its complexity*. Always ask yourself, what would an *ideal opponent* say in response?

An easy rule of thumb here is to suppose the person you're arguing against is *smarter than you are*. How differently would your discussion with that person go if you gave her the respect you'd give someone who truly is much smarter than you? And if that person you're really facing is dumb as a brick, then think about those who *are* brilliant and who have the same convictions as this person. Smart people disagree with you, and they have really good arguments to support their beliefs. How might you respond to *their* arguments? Maybe the argument you've got right in front of you isn't the best one for the claim you're discussing. What *might be* the best argument for it? Respond to *this* ideal argument.

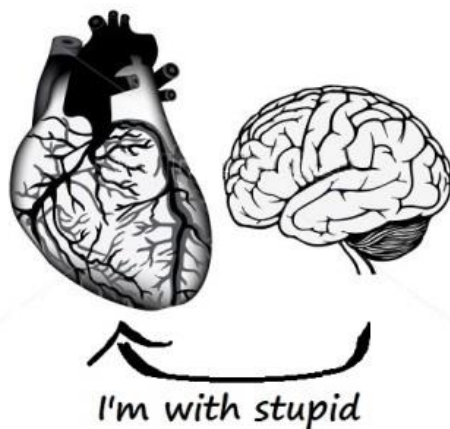
If you find this better argument challenges your own belief, that's a great thing. It's pushing you towards finding the truth. It's really easy to reduce opposing views to absurdity—to make the opponent look stupid. But how does this get us the truth? Remember that we aren't all about 'being right' or winning a debate: we want the truth.

And check this out! Doing this either helps you get closer to the truth (because you have better reasons for believing what you do), or it helps you get closer to the truth (because you find out there are reasons against your opinion that you should consider).

### Replace all language that triggers emotional responses with language that does not.

Emotions are fantastic in that they show us what's important to us and they give us the momentum to pursue what matters to us. That's their job. They're *supposed* to tell us, "hey, this matters!"

But they are *horrible* indicators of truth. And they are distractors from truth in our discussion of important matters. When emotions are triggered, we should quickly note that the issue is important to us, but then take extra special care to determine what is *actually* being said,



## Two Mistakes, *continued.*

### Out-of-Context Terminology

Nietzsche (if it was he who said the above aphorism) would certainly see this second mistake as another example of obfuscation. People often use special terminology—like scientific jargon—to impress people. \$5-words might make people feel they look smart, but they only make things more confusing and the truth more elusive for anyone who doesn't already know what these terms mean.

So, unless you're in an astronomy class or talking to astronomers, for example, don't use the term "quasar." Instead, say "a very bright object very far away that is moving at nearly the speed of light." Everyone will understand the description—not everyone will understand the term "quasar."

To avoid these mistakes and follow the guiding standards, we have five Rules of Discourse to direct our reasoning activity. These rules not only dictate good reasoning, but we'll find that every fallacy (that is, every bad argument) arises from breaking these rules. It's thus a *really good idea* to memorize them. We'll return to them often throughout the course of our study.

what actual evidence is there—we should take deliberate care to avoid jumping to unjustified conclusions or emotional reactions.

In fact, avoiding emotional language aids us in two ways: it escapes the mistakes of ambiguity and it protects us from the fallacy called *loaded language*. Emotional language is almost always ambiguous, and thus gets us nowhere fast on the road to truth. Resorting to it stacks the deck against your opponent's view (that's the fallacy) instead of dealing out a fair pack where you both struggle together towards true understanding of the complexity of the issue at hand.

ALL VIOLENT FEELINGS HAVE THE SAME EFFECT. THEY PRODUCE IN US A FALSENESS IN ALL OUR IMPRESSIONS OF EXTERNAL THINGS, WHICH I WOULD GENERALLY CHARACTERIZE AS THE PATHETIC FALLACY.

(JOHN RUSKIN)

### *How Emotional Language Gets in the Way*

I'm going to spend a bit more time on this rule, because it's so very important. There are three ways emotional language can block the truth.

SOME LANGUAGE HAS NO MEANING OTHER THAN THE EMOTION IT IS USED TO ELICIT.

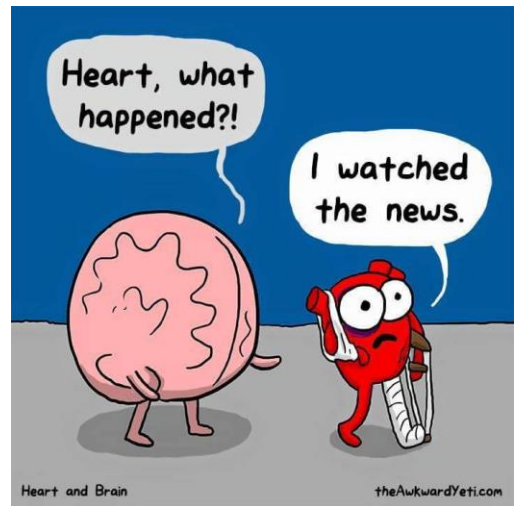
Consider terms like "family values" or "freedom haters." These are essentially meaningless. People use them to get the feels, as tools to grab emotional allegiance or give an emotional outlet for fear, anger, or outrage.

Terms in this category include (but certainly aren't limited to) "feminazi," "snowflake," "alt-right," "fake news," "activist judge," "politically correct," and "libtard." Taking the emotion out of it requires one to say less catchy things, but it comes out as more honest—"women who want equal rights" or "people with whom I have strong political disagreements." It doesn't have that emotional sway any longer, and it's much more likely to enable productive truth-questing.

SOME LANGUAGE HAS LOST ITS *DENOTATION* FOR *CONNOTATION*.

Consider terms like "agenda" or "entitlement." Strictly speaking, *agenda* means "to do list," but it is mostly used to get one to feel suspicious of what exactly is on that to-do list. It carries an emotional sense of evil. When you think, for example, of the "gay agenda," you're not likely thinking of things like running to the store, picking up the kids, or changing the oil in the car. Rather, you're supposed to be thinking of some insidious master plan to take over the country and indoctrinate all American children into sexual deviancy. The same goes, by the way, when people on the political Left use the term. It is *supposed* to make us feel like that to-do list is evil. So just avoid the term.

We have a huge language and have other ways of saying things.



### NOTES

Words that have changed into this emotion-overpowering sense include "entitlement" (which simply means "legal right," but now has the sense of certain groups claiming rights they should not have) and "socialism" (which simply denotes a political or economic system that attempts to give all members in it equal economic or political weight, but now has the sense of taking my rights or freedoms away from me). While "socialism" is beginning to regain its denotation (its non-emotional, literal meaning), it is probably still best to avoid the term in order to communicate most clearly what is intended.

#### SOME LANGUAGE HAS EMOTIONALLY DESTRUCTIVE POWER THAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT BECAUSE IT DOESN'T AFFECT YOUR GROUP.

We all know to avoid the N-word. Whether you are African American or not, you should know that this term is dehumanizing and hateful. Instead of making your interlocutor your ally, you're slamming their face into the wall and saying you're much better than they are if you use such language. We know this.

But what about stereotypes? If they aren't going to help you find the truth, don't use them. It's true that we use stereotypes as a helpful shortcut to get to the truth, but the very second they replace the truth with a dehumanization or they distract from the truth, they have become weapons instead of tools. Toss 'em.

What happens if you find out something you normally say is destructive? This is where that contrite fallibilism comes in so powerfully. If you find out you're habitually saying something unhelpful and dehumanizing, you have an opportunity to grow intellectually. The question is whether you're willing to take that growth step.

In my own life, I've had to reconsider using things I grew up saying. Things like "Paddy Wagon" or "Eskimo" or "Gypped" or "Indian Style." We used to call police vans "Paddy Wagons" because they were often used to take drunks to jail for the night—apparently on the assumption that every single drunk they hauled away was Irish. And to sit cross-legged is apparently how every single Native American routinely sits. And every single Roma—called the gypsies—apparently are thieves who short change you. And finally, every single Inuit or Athabaskan person must bang noses together for kissing, or must dress or play a very specific way. Each of these usages strip the complexity of a culture, of a human being, and smash it down into a flat caricature. Dehumanizing in such a systematic way that we who aren't a part of these groups don't even see how painful it is. Until our group is so reduced (and us with it).

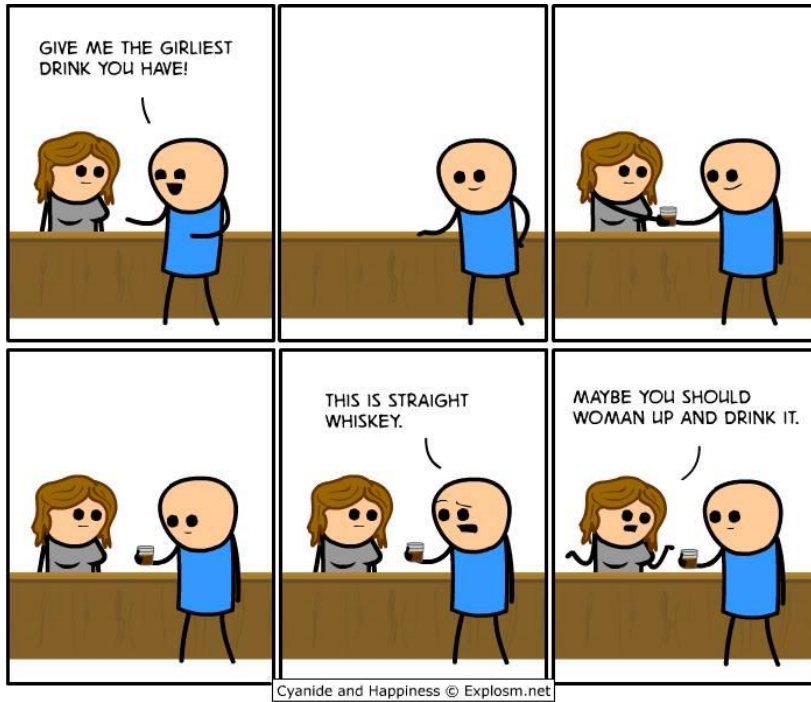
Words and phrases that do such things are so pervasive, we don't often realize they're there. But when we're made aware, intellectual honesty dictates we carefully excise them from our conversational habits. Any language that dehumanizes a whole group simply because it *is* that group falls here.



#### NOTES

So instead of saying things like “right-wing fanatic,” “family values,” “agenda,” or “that is so gay!” which all carry emotional baggage (whether originally designed to or not)—use words that more neutrally and specifically describe the matter at hand.

NOTES



**Do not state conclusions that are stronger (or claim more) than your evidence supports.**

Think very *hard* before using words like, “obvious,” “everyone,” “all,” etc. These are very strong claims which are easy to refute. Concluding that “everyone” knows something, or “it’s obvious that x,” might seem true because *you* know something x or x is obvious *to you*, but you can’t see inside everyone on earth’s brain, and it’s quite likely that a great many people don’t find x obvious at all.

Further, when we reason carefully, we quickly realize that much of what we take for granted in everyday life is not at all certain. Remember that some arguments give us really good reason to believe something, but not certainty. There are four kinds of conclusions, recall, and if we have evidence that leads to probability, it’s incorrect to conclude with certainty.

Finally, it’s easy to make unjustified logical leaps because we’re not reasoning carefully. Don’t be too quick to conclude something that maybe your conditioning or your emotions propel you towards (rule 3!). Slow down and make sure that your *evidence* actually compels you to believe the claim you’re making. If you don’t have adequate evidence, you can’t make the conclusion. So don’t.

**When someone you are debating points out a problem with your argument or view, acknowledge it.**

*Admit weakness.* Truly. Admit weakness.

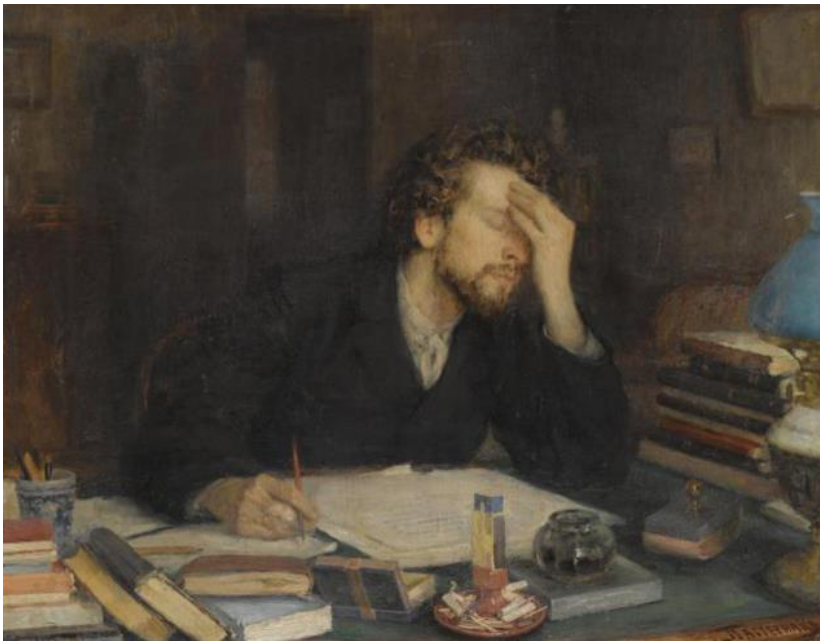
Remember you are more interested in finding the truth than in winning the debate. Thus, when you find out you're wrong about something—acknowledge it in true intellectual honesty. Like Peirce said: 'the first step toward finding out is to acknowledge you do not satisfactorily know already.'

Consider two scenarios. In the first, you are debating with somebody who believes "winning is everything!" so they refuse to back down. Even when you have proven their claim ridiculously false. You *know* you're actually right this time. But they won't back down.

And you think they're ridiculous.

Now consider what you'd think if that person realized they were wrong. That they'd made a mistake. And they say, "wow, I hadn't thought of that."

What do you think of them now?



The point is that we've been taught that "winning is everything," so we won't back down. Even if we're proven wrong. Frankly, we've embraced a behavior that *guarantees* others will disrespect us. They'll think us ridiculous. But if we admit weakness, we'll actually gain respect. And we'll find the truth in the bargain.

Now that you've read these five rules—that you need to *memorize*—take some time thinking about them. Yes, this is Task 3. Specifically, think about *each* of the five rules. Then, in a well-written paragraph for *each* rule,

1. mention a time you can think of when this rule has been violated in everyday conversation,
2. explain how the rule was violated, and
3. explain how the participant(s) might have behaved had they obeyed the rule, and consider how the conversational outcome would have been different had the rules been obeyed.

## Savage Chickens

by Doug Savage



www.savagechickens.com

## THE COUNTDOWN

### Five Rules of Discourse

- Break issues down and treat parts individually
- Imagine & debate against an ideal opponent
- Replace emotional language with neutral language
- Don't conclude more than your evidence allows
- Admit weakness

### Four Reasonable Conclusions

- Certainty
- Probability
- Impossibility
- Incoherence

### Three Logical Laws

- Law of Excluded Middle
- Principle of Non-Contradiction
- Leibniz's Law

### Two Tasks of Analysis

- Define terms, then
- Analyze arguments

### One Guiding Principle

- Intellectual Honesty

A WRITER WHO SAYS THAT THERE ARE NO TRUTHS, OR THAT ALL TRUTH IS "MERELY RELATIVE," IS ASKING YOU NOT TO BELIEVE HIM. SO DON'T.

(ROGER SCROTUN)

## THE TROUBLE WITH RELATIVISM

People who want to embrace tolerance or avoid dogmatism have much to teach us about the importance of diversity and patience. However, there is an important mistake that is easily made in the attempt to remain non-prejudicial and patient.

This mistake is to respond to a claim one finds unappealing or somehow wrong with the statement

(T) You have your truth, and I have mine.

It might *seem* that statement T is true, but it sure isn't obviously so.

Why not? The first problem is that this does bizarre things to the meaning of the word 'truth.' Words mean things. When somebody says T, when you think about it, the meaning is something more along the lines of "you believe something x is true but I believe that x is false." It's more like "you have your belief set and I have mine." And *truth* does not mean the same thing as *belief set*.

But when people say T, they certainly mean more than just what I wrote just now. "You believe one thing and I believe another" is *trivially true*. Well of *course* we all have our own sets of beliefs. The fact that somebody even uses T in a conversation indicates that the having of beliefs was very apparent to everyone involved.

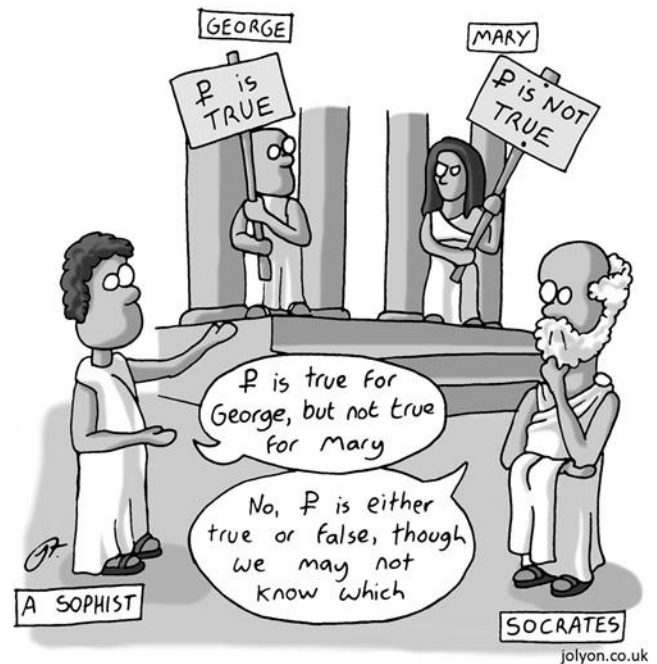
So when people say T, they intend to make a stronger claim than we each have different beliefs. They want to show respect to people with whom they disagree, and they don't want to say that what these other people are claiming is false—for some reason it's considered a horrible shame to be wrong about something—so they attempt a reconciliation by saying that *belief is identical with truth*. Or, in less happy conversations, they might mean "you believe one thing, I believe another, and I think you're horribly wrong, and so dumb as to be incapable of reasoning with me to find truth." Or maybe "I believe something different than you, and I am unwilling to continue any discussion that might make me admit I'm wrong." Stop a minute and think about how any of these intentions—even in the respectful scenario—break the rules of discourse.

The claim that we all have different beliefs is *very* different than the claim that belief = truth. The former is trivially true; the latter is not only false, it *cannot possibly be true*. (We should already have warning bells going off, with Leibniz's Law clanging in every overtone.)

The notion that

belief = truth

is called *relativism*. And as we'll see, there are four *huge* problems with relativism.



### The metaphysical problem: the denial of non-contradiction.

Now say I believe that p and you don't believe that p. Then, if belief = truth, we have to say, given Leibniz's law, that p is true for me and false for you. Then p is true, and p is false. That is, the PNC is *false*. But we cannot reject this principle if we want reality to work.

How so? Well, let's specify p to stand for the statement "This is a chair." Then it is true that "this is a chair" and it is false that "this is a chair." *But then if things can be both true and false, then anything might be the case.* The chair might be a snake. let x be "chairs stay chairs until they are



destroyed or recycled.” If *x* is false, it turns out true that chairs might suddenly morph into pterodactyls or vanilla lattes. In fact, they’d not need to morph. They’d always be *everything*. Chairs are now also stripey cat whiskers and microwaves. And dot matrix printers. And waterbeds.

And this is just silly.

—and worse, *it makes all knowledge of the world impossible* (actually, an epistemological consequence of this problem). For *p* to be known, *p* must be true, and for *p* to be true, other things must be false. In fact, for *p* to be *knowable*, *p* must be possibly true (possibly false)—not both. Knowledge demands non-contradiction. If relativism is true, anything and everything can be both true and false. But if everything can be both true and false, then nothing is knowable.

But I do know things. So relativism cannot be true.

If *p* stands for the statement “this is a chair,” and if relativism is true, then when I say “this is a chair” and you say “this is not a chair” we’re both right. So where in the heck are we supposed to sit? If relativism is true, then I can’t know.

Or, worse, everything is completely beyond our ability to communicate to each other. See, if we’re *both* right about *p* (that thing over there is both a chair and not a chair), then any disagreement requires multiple truths. That is to say that everything will be everything. Chairs are tables, are striped cats, are bear traps, are dried basil leaves, are vials of deadly poison, are freshly ground wheat, are pine needles, are killer sharks. Any belief—rational or not—is true.

People don’t have delusions or hallucinations—it’s all exactly real! (This is the epistemological problem, and I’ll discuss it further below.) And if that’s the case, then we can’t ever correct false impressions, because there are no such thing. And if there are no false impressions, we have no way of correcting each other, no way of communicating, no shared knowledge.

In fact, if the PNC is false, then you can’t read this text, and get from it what I expect you to—at least I can’t know that you will, since every word here would mean everything. The word “false” can mean “carrot.” For all I know, you’re reading this and wondering why you’ve been required to read a menu for the class. In short, not only can we not know

what thing are, but we can’t communicate anything with any certainty—if relativism is true.

But we can know things. We can communicate things to each other. We know things because things are certain ways and not other certain ways. If relativism is true, then things will always be everything and nothing. But this isn’t how things are (or aren’t), so relativism cannot be true.

### The epistemological problem: the denial of fallibility.

Remember that relativism is the idea that belief = truth. Yet this problem steps beyond pure logical impossibility into problems about knowledge and belief.

Suppose somebody were to say,

*Yeah, whatever. Let’s not get all crazy about total reality. It’s not that I believe that’s a chair and you don’t, rather that I believe something *p* is good and you don’t. Narrow the field a bit! Don’t apply T so broadly.\**



But “Belief = truth” assumes that every belief everybody has is *correct*. Even if we narrow the field, it implies that *in that field*, every belief we have must be right, must be true (by Leibniz’s Law). And if truth means something like “accurately represents reality,” then this means that every

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\* Remember, T stands for “You have your truth, and I have mine.”

belief (related to whatever area we say T can accurately cover) must likewise accurately represent reality. First, that doesn't remove the metaphysical problem; it only limits it to that area.

And second, even with the domain so limited we can see that it brings us to a big problem about what we know and believe. **Epistemology** is a term referring to belief and knowledge. Now the big time epistemological problem is that *if belief = truth, then every belief must accurately represent reality*. That is to say, we can't be wrong.

Ever.

One reflective glance, and we'll find that we *often* misjudge or base our beliefs on incomplete evidence. And this is so regarding more than beliefs about *preferences*—science has countless instances where what was commonly believed is soundly disproved.

Copernicus proved the Ptolemaic understanding of the solar system false, using verifiable evidence. If relativism is *true*, then was it the case that the planets *both* orbited around Earth *and* orbited around the sun—or maybe that suddenly, BAM! upon Copernicus's testing, the whole solar system shifted to a new orbital pattern?



And of course, this means both that there was a Holocaust *and* that there wasn't ever a Holocaust; that in the 1960s people did walk on the moon *and* that people have never walked on the moon; that the 9/11 attacks were planned and executed by Al Q'aida alone *and* that there was significant CIA involvement; that scientific theories are correct about

the origin, development, and maintenance of life *and* that really, we were put here by aliens who helped us because we could never have possibly be intelligent enough to discover, design, or develop anything as amazing as we find around us in this wild world.

If relativism is true, then every belief must be true. Every child's belief about Santa, imaginary friends, and living toys as well as every psychotic hallucination and paranoid conspiracy theory. All of them.

But this isn't the case. Sometimes beliefs are wrong. Sometimes the world denies the truth of beliefs. Sometimes we make mistakes. So relativism cannot be true.

### The moral problem: the denial of improvement.

Relativism is commonly endorsed in ethical reasoning. In this case, people observe strongly held beliefs among opponents, and assume that because differences are (or seem) irreconcilable, there must then be *no fact of the matter*.

Notice that this assumption just is the epistemological problem. People disagree—but this does not imply that *because* people disagree, there is no objective truth to be had. If A says "p is immoral" and B says "no, p is just dandy, thanks," it doesn't follow that p is *both* moral and immoral. It *might* be the case that p is *neither* moral *nor* immoral (called "amoral") — it's possible that *both* A and B are wrong. But it cannot be that both A and B are *right*.

We'll see this when we look at *categorical* reasoning,<sup>\*</sup> but for now, notice how this works.

We might believe that p is morally praiseworthy, that people *ought* to do p, and that those who do p should be commended. But then say we find another group who believe that p is morally blameworthy, that people *ought never* to do p, and that those who do p should be condemned.

Now, if we think about it carefully, we will stop and consider whether we're wrong. That's the intellectually honest thing to do, remember. We'd want to listen to the arguments for the moral badness of p. And we'd want to offer the arguments for the moral goodness of p. And if we're seeking truth, we'd come to some understanding of why people

<sup>\*</sup> In chapter 5.

might think *p* is bad. Maybe we'd revise our own belief; maybe they'd revise theirs.

But if we say that belief = truth, then we can't learn the truth, since we can't learn anything. Whatever we believe just happens to be right. If belief = truth, we don't need ever to learn. We know. Always. Everything. Lucky us! Everything we do is morally praiseworthy. We never do wrong! Never!

Now consider this beyond just you and me. If groups A and B are both right about the moral praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of *p* (if moral relativism is true), then (just like we can't ever learn anything) we cannot have either moral progress or moral regress. Things never get better or worse in the world, even though it's always changing.

We believe that the end of slavery in the US was a *good* thing for us. We became a *better* nation for it. But if *p* (in this case, slavery) is *both* good and bad, then we didn't get any better, *just different*.

The same thing follows for changes for what we think are the worse. Germany moving from the democratic Weimar government to the fascist Nazi government wasn't a change for the worse, *just different*. Elections? Well, there's no better or worse parties. Whomever is elected and in power, decided by majority vote—well, they're just the same as whomever was there before or will be there later. There are no black marks in history.

It's all good.

But surely we think societies can improve or decline morally. And if we want to maintain this belief as rational—and all the practices and institutions we have founded on it, like governments, religion, courtesy, and ethics (or even claims that "that wasn't fair!")—then we must conclude that relativism cannot be true.

### The internal problem: the denial of consistency.

This is the logical silliness of relativism when applied to itself. The claim that relativism must be *true* presupposes that other things are *false*, and that, in fact, not all claims are equally legitimate. But relativism is supposed to be just that idea that all claims are equally legitimate.



To be consistent, relativism cannot be called *true*, since it then forces other things (like the claim that belief  $\neq$  truth) to be false. So even by its own standards, relativism cannot be true.

That was a heck of a lot of stuff to digest. And it's quite likely that either your eyes are blurring, or you're thinking about how quickly you can drop this class and find another one to fit your schedule (is it all going to be like this?!), or you're feeling a bit overwhelmed at this blast of information.

Breathe.

Here's Task 4. And maybe you see by now why I throw the Task assignments in like this—to slow you down and give you time to digest. You've got a handle—however slippery—on the PNC by now. Pick *one* of the four problems I discussed above and write a well-formed paragraph explaining it (make sure to explain the PNC and its importance), as if you're explaining it to somebody in your family who's not been in college. Remember that you are in college, though, and write clearly and completely, carefully following the format of Standard American English.

