

# Introduction to Philosophy

## Lecture 1

Phil 1000, Fall 2008  
Prof. Bryan Benham

## Outline

- Welcome
  - Goals, texts, and grading details
- What is philosophy?
  - Working definition
  - Types of problems
- Logic: Tools of the trade
  - What is an argument?
  - Evaluating arguments

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## Welcome

Syllabus is online: [hum.utah.edu/~bbenham](http://hum.utah.edu/~bbenham)

- Goals
  - Familiarize students with some fundamental philosophical problems and the methods of philosophical analysis and evaluation.
- Texts
  - *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition.
  - Other content available via course syllabus, online.
- Grading
  - 75% = 3 in-class exams
  - 15% = Reading questions
  - 10% = Philosophy news journal

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## What is philosophy?

Philosophy

*philos* + *sophia*

Greek = “lover of wisdom”

Not much help...

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## What is philosophy?

SOME YEARS AGO, being with a camping party in the mountains, I returned from a solitary ramble to find every one engaged in a ferocious metaphysical dispute. The corpus of the dispute was a squirrel – a live squirrel supposed to be clinging to one side of a tree-trunk; while over against the tree's opposite side a human being was imagined to stand. This human witness tries to get sight of the squirrel by moving rapidly round the tree, but no matter how fast he goes, the squirrel moves as fast in the opposite direction, and always keeps the tree between himself and the man, so that never a glimpse of him is caught. The resultant metaphysical problem now is this: Does the man go round the squirrel or not? He goes round the tree, sure enough, and the squirrel is on the tree; but does he go round the squirrel?

– William James, *What is Pragmatism?* (1904)

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## What is philosophy?

“Which party is right,” I said, “depends on what you practically mean by ‘going round’ the squirrel. If you mean passing from the north of him to the east, then to the south, then to the west, and then to the north of him again, obviously the man does go round him, for he occupies these successive positions. But if on the contrary you mean being first in front of him, then on the right of him, then behind him, then on his left, and finally in front again, it is quite as obvious that the man fails to go round him, for by the compensating movements the squirrel makes, he keeps his belly turned towards the man all the time, and his back turned away.”

– William James, *What is Pragmatism?* (1904)

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## What is philosophy?

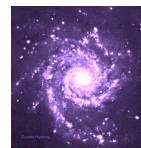
Philosophical inquiry is similarly aimed at figuring out what, exactly, is the nature of the problem(s) we face and the available solutions – questioning assumptions, asking for reasons.

*“We question all our beliefs except for the ones we really believe, and those we never think to question.”*

– Orson Scott Card

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## Types of Philosophical Problems



**Metaphysics** – What exists?



**Epistemology** – How do we know?



**Ethics** – What should we do?  
(Axiology – What should we value?)

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## Our Course

- **Logic** – Arguments
- **God** – Exists? Evil? Faith?
  
- **Knowledge** – Skepticism? Science?
- **Mind** – Others? Animals? Machines?
  
- **Freedom** – Freewill? Responsibility?
- **Ethics** – Relativism? God? Utility? Fairness?

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## Philosophic Methodology – Logic

**Working def.:** Philosophical inquiry is aimed at figuring out what, exactly, is the nature of problem(s) we face and the available solutions; questioning assumptions, asking for reasons.

### Opinion

Expressing views without providing evidence or reasons in support of that view or claim.

### Argument

Giving evidence or reasons in support of a view or claim.

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## Which is an argument?

**A**

Today is Tuesday and my mother wants me to come home for dinner tonight. I have lots of homework to do for the first week of classes. Dark clouds usually mean a storm is possible. Animal cruelty should be stopped.

**B**

Today is Tuesday and my mother wants me to come home for dinner tonight. I have lots of homework to do for the first week of classes. Dark clouds usually mean a storm is possible. Therefore, animal cruelty should be stopped.

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## Which is an argument?

**A**

Today is Tuesday and my mother wants me to come home for dinner tonight. I have lots of homework to do for the first week of classes. Dark clouds usually mean a storm is possible. Animal cruelty should be stopped.

**B**

Today is Tuesday and my mother wants me to come home for dinner tonight. I have lots of homework to do for the first week of classes. Dark clouds usually mean a storm is possible. **Therefore,** animal cruelty should be stopped.

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# Components of Argument

Working def.: Giving reasons or evidence in support of a view.

**Premises:** the reasons or evidence in support of a conclusion.

**Conclusion:** the claim that the premises claim to support.

**Inference:** the claim that the premises support the conclusion; the inferential claim.

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## Standard Form for Arguments

Today is Tuesday and my mother wants me to come home for dinner tonight. I have lots of homework to do for the first week of classes. Dark clouds usually mean a storm is possible. **Therefore**, animal cruelty should be stopped.

**P1:** Today is Tuesday and my mother wants me to come home for dinner tonight.

**P2:** I have lots of homework to do for the first week of classes.

**P3:** Dark clouds usually mean a storm is possible.

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**C:** Animal cruelty should be stopped.

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# Evaluating Arguments

A **good argument** is one whose premises make the conclusion reasonable to believe or accept as true.

**Key criteria** for a good argument:

1. Premises must be true or acceptable
2. Premises must provide adequate logical strength (a.k.a., inferential support).

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## Why is this not a good argument?

1. Are the premises true or acceptable?
2. Do the premises provide adequate logical strength?

**P1:** Today is Tuesday and my mother wants me to come home for dinner tonight.

**P2:** I have lots of homework to do for the first week of classes.

**P3:** Dark clouds usually mean a storm is possible.

---

**C:** Animal cruelty should be stopped.

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## Argument Example 1

At midnight, one stormy night, a badly beaten body was found in the library of Mystery Mansion. When the detectives arrived on the scene they interviewed the residents at the mansion and discovered the butler had been seen hurriedly leaving the library just before midnight. When the butler was interviewed he was frightened, had blood on his cuffs, and gave an implausible account of it – “a shaving accident.” The detectives concluded that the butler did it.

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## Standard Form of Example 1

At midnight, one stormy night, a badly beaten body was found in the library of Mystery Mansion. When the detectives arrived on the scene they interviewed the residents at the mansion and discovered the butler had been seen hurriedly leaving the library just before midnight. When the butler was interviewed he as frightened, had blood on his cuffs, and gave an implausible account of it – “a shaving accident.” The detectives concluded that the butler did it.

- P1: At midnight a badly beaten body was found in the library of Mystery Mansion.
- P2: Residents reported seeing the butler hurriedly leaving the library just before midnight.
- P3: When interviewed, the butler was frightened.
- P4: Blood was on the butler’s cuff and he gave an implausible account of it.

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- C: The butler did it.

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## Is this a good argument?

1. Are the premises true or acceptable?
2. Do the premises provide adequate logical strength?

- P1: At midnight a badly beaten body was found in the library of Mystery Mansion.
- P2: Residents reported seeing the butler hurriedly leaving the library just before midnight.
- P3: When interviewed, the butler was frightened.
- P4: Blood was on the butler’s cuff and he gave an implausible account of it.

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- C: The butler did it.

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## Argument Example 2

What is the difference between science and superstition? The chief trouble with the word “superstition” is that it always applies to the beliefs of someone else, not your own. The entire history of science shows that, in varying degrees, much that even the greatest scientists believed to be fact is today either false or else somewhat less than factual. It follows that what the best scientists today believe to be fact will suffer the same fate: the science of today will be the superstition of tomorrow.

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## Standard Form of Example 2

What is the difference between science and superstition? The chief trouble with the word "superstition" is that it always applies to the beliefs of someone else, not your own. The entire history of science shows that, in varying degrees, much that even the greatest scientists believed to be fact is today either false or else somewhat less than factual. It follows that what the best scientists today believe to be fact will suffer the same fate: the science of today will be the superstition of tomorrow.

**P1:** Juxtaposing science and superstition is misleading.

**P2:** The history of science shows that, in varying degrees, much that was believed to be fact is today either false or less than factual.

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**C:** What scientists today believe to be fact will turn out to be false, perhaps even superstitious, in the future.

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## Is this a good argument?

1. Are the premises true or acceptable?
2. Do the premises provide adequate logical strength?

**P1:** Juxtaposing science and superstition is misleading.

**P2:** The history of science shows that, in varying degrees, much that was believed to be fact is today either false or less than factual.

---

**C:** What scientists today believe to be fact will turn out to be false, perhaps even superstitious, in the future.

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## Argument Example 3

If Bruce goes to the party with Alice, David will be upset. If David goes to the party with Alice, Carla will be upset. So, either David will be upset or Carla will be upset, because either David goes to the party with Alice, or Bruce does.

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## Standard Form of Example 3

If Bruce goes to the party with Alice, David will be upset. If David goes to the party with Alice, Carla will be upset. So, either David will be upset or Carla will be upset, because either David goes to the party with Alice, or Bruce does.

**P1:** If Bruce goes to the party with Alice, David will be upset.

**P2:** If David goes to the party with Alice, Carla will be upset.

**P3:** Either David goes to the party with Alice, or Bruce does.

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**C:** Either David will be upset or Carla will be upset.

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## Is this a good argument?

1. Are the premises true or acceptable?
2. Do the premises provide adequate logical strength?

**P1:** If Bruce goes to the party with Alice, David will be upset.

**P2:** If David goes to the party with Alice, Carla will be upset.

**P3:** Either David goes to the party with Alice, or Bruce does.

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**C:** Either David will be upset or Carla will be upset.

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## Argument Example 4

The Looney Tribe of East Hope Island believes that all men are made of wood; how else would men float in the water? So when Harry and Wilma landed on their island, the Looney Tribe tried to burn Harry but left Wilma alone. Harry was a man, so clearly he was made of wood, and wood burns. But why didn't they try to burn Wilma?

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## Standard Form of Example 4

The Looney Tribe of East Hope Island believes that all men are made of wood; how else would men float in the water? So when Harry and Wilma landed on their island, the Looney Tribe tried to burn Harry but left Wilma alone. Harry was a man, so clearly he was made of wood, and wood burns. But why didn't they try to burn Wilma?

**P1:** The Looney Tribe believes that all men are made of wood.

**P2:** Harry is a man and Wilma is a woman. (Assumption)

**P3:** (Thus) The Looney Tribe believed Harry was made of wood (but not Wilma).

**P4:** Wood burns.

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**C:** The Looney Tribe tried to burn Harry (but not Wilma).

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## Is this a good argument?

1. Are the premises true or acceptable?
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**P1:** The Looney Tribe believes that all men are made of wood.

**P2:** Harry is a man and Wilma is a woman.

**P3:** (Thus) The Looney Tribe believed Harry was made of wood (but not Wilma).

**P4:** Wood burns.

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**C:** The Looney Tribe tried to burn Harry (but not Wilma).

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## Assignment 1

Find an argument in a newspaper article (opinion and editorials are good sources). Write out the basic argument in standard form, eliminating non-essential elements. Then evaluate the argument using the two criteria for a good argument already discussed.

Typed; 1-2 pages maximum, doubled-sided okay; include original article. **Due in class on Thursday.**

**Remember:** syllabus is online:  
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## Key concepts

- Philosophy
  - Lover of wisdom
  - Working definition
- Types of Philosophical Problems
  - Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics
- Arguments
  - Opinion vs. Argument
  - Components of an argument
  - Standard form for arguments
  - Key criteria for a good argument

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