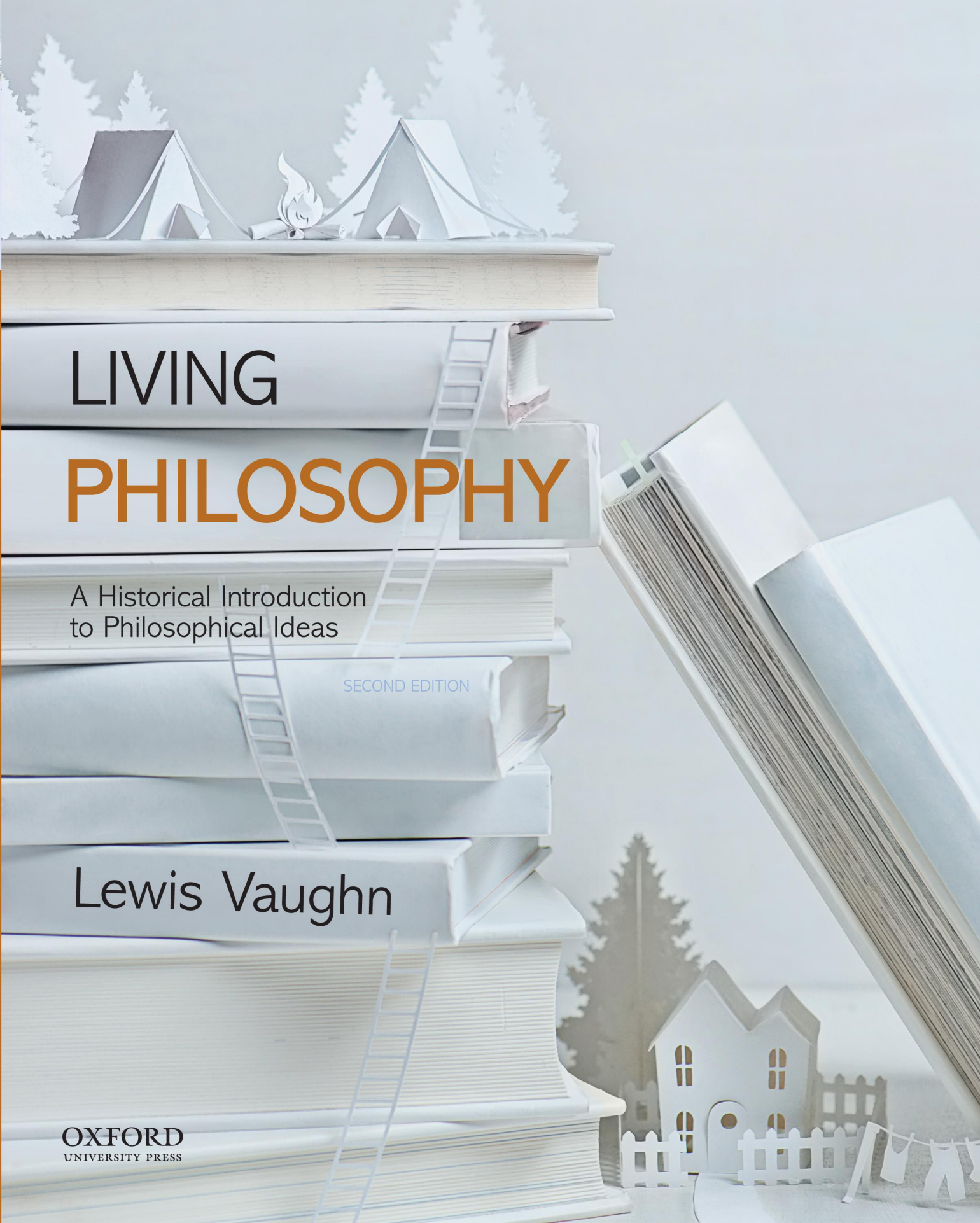

LIVING PHILOSOPHY

A Historical Introduction to Philosophical Ideas

SECOND EDITION

Lewis Vaughn

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

LIVING PHILOSOPHY

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LEWIS VAUGHN

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Brief Contents

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Preface

This second edition of *Living Philosophy*—like the first—is designed to guide students in a survey of the historical march of philosophical ideas, encouraging an appreciation of the significance of these ideas in Western and Eastern thought. *Living Philosophy* provides this guidance in five fundamental ways: it tells a coherent story of philosophical thought from the pre-Socratics to the present; it provides the cultural and intellectual background for this story; it explains why the major issues and arguments are important and relevant today; it includes substantial, well-chosen excerpts from the philosophers' works; and it presents all these elements in a way that engages and stimulates student interest and understanding.

To foster a serious understanding of philosophy, *Living Philosophy* includes solid coverage of critical-thinking skills and argument basics as well as practice in reading philosophical works. Students learn how to *do* philosophy—to think and write philosophically—when they get encouragement and practice in analyzing and critiquing their own views as well as those philosophers they study. To this end, *Living Philosophy* emphasizes philosophical writing, reinforced with step-by-step coaching in how to write argumentative essays on philosophical topics and supported by multiple opportunities to hone basic skills.

In addition to these core elements, *Living Philosophy* further engages today's learners with abundant illustrations and graphics; marginal glosses, questions, and quotations; profiles of a diverse array of philosophers; and ample representation of non-Western and nontraditional sources and voices.

CHAPTERS AND READINGS

Eighteen chapters span the breadth of the historical development of philosophy, both Western and Eastern, from ancient times to the present day. Attuned to recent discussions in the field regarding issues of diversity and representation, *Living Philosophy* includes important voices not often found in introductory textbooks:

Women philosophers are represented not only in Chapter 16, "Feminist Philosophers," but also throughout the text; students will meet Themistoclea, Arignote, Theano, Diotima, Hypatia, Hildegard of Bingen, Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, Martha Nussbaum, Alison Jaggar, Jan Crosthwaite, Judith Thurman, Annette Baier, Virginia Held, Elizabeth Anderson, Louise Antony, Alison Ainley, and Eve Browning Cole.

Non-Western philosophers represented include Avicenna, Averroës, Maimonides, Buddha, Lao-Tzu, and Confucius. Chapter 6, "Eastern Thought," is unique among

introductory textbooks in its coverage of Hindu philosophy as well as Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.

MAIN FEATURES

- **A comprehensive introductory chapter that lays the groundwork for philosophical thinking.** Through examples drawn from philosophical literature and everyday life, this chapter explains clearly the nature and scope of philosophy and how it relates to students' lives. This first chapter also covers how to devise and evaluate arguments and guides students in thinking and reading critically about philosophical issues. The chapter includes a questionnaire to survey students' philosophical attitudes, prompting immediate engagement with the relevance of philosophy to their lives and concerns and affording an opportunity to evaluate how the course changes their understanding of these issues.
- **Critical-thinking questions that correspond to relevant passages in the main text.** These questions, located in the margins of the text, invite students to draw out the implications of the material and to think critically about the assumptions and arguments found there. The questions are numbered and highlighted and easily lend themselves to both writing assignments and class discussion. The point of their marginal placement is to prompt students to think carefully and analytically as they read.
- Four types of text boxes demonstrate the value and relevance of philosophy:
    - o **"Then and Now"** These boxes address how particular philosophical ideas and issues of the past have affected contemporary thinking, demonstrating that many of the same questions that have concerned noted philosophers also arise continually in contemporary science, society, ethics, religion, politics, medicine, and more. Each box ends with discussion questions that prompt critical thinking and philosophical reflection.
    - o **"Portrait"** Each of these profiles the lives and work of compelling figures in philosophy, past and present, Western and non-Western or nontraditional, and men and women. Some feature a philosopher from the past whose story adds a human and historical dimension to the ideas discussed in the chapter, while others profile a contemporary thinker who is grappling with similar important issues today. The point of these features is, of course, to show that philosophy is very much a living, relevant enterprise.
    - o **"Details"** These boxes supplement selected issues or concepts mentioned in the main text with more detailed information and discussions. They too end with discussion questions.
    - o **"Writing and Reasoning"** These essay prompts ask students to critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of the views discussed throughout the chapter. Students can get help in answering essay questions in the appendix: "How to Write a Philosophy Paper."

Living Philosophy supplements these features with other elements to make the material even more engaging and accessible:

- **Marginal quotes** These pithy, compelling quotes from an array of philosophers appear throughout the text, inviting students to join the ongoing conversation of philosophy.
- **Key terms, marginal definitions, and end-of-book glossary** Key terms in each chapter appear in boldface at their first appearance in a chapter, and a marginal definition helps students learn the term within its immediate context. A list of the chapter's key terms appears at the end of each chapter. Finally, a glossary of those key terms and definitions provides an essential reference for students as they review and prepare for tests as well as draft their own philosophical essays and arguments.
- **Chapter objectives** This list at the beginning of each chapter scaffolds student learning by providing both structure and support for previewing, note taking, and retention of content.
- **Review Notes** Concluding each chapter, this feature revisits the chapter objectives and encourages students to reflect and review.
- **An index of marginal quotes** This supplemental index helps students locate the words of philosophers that seem especially insightful or inspiring.
- **Timelines** Featuring philosophers' lives and important events, this visual learning tool on the inside front and back covers helps students appreciate the historic significance of philosophical ideas by placing them within a larger context.
- **Engaging, relevant visuals** Appearing throughout the book, these have been selected or created to deepen student engagement with and understanding of complex ideas and abstract concepts. In addition, captions for these images include brief and open-ended questions to help students "read" visuals with the same critical attention they learn to bring to written texts.
- **For Further Reading** Located at the end of each chapter, these useful references point students to sources that will enhance their understanding of chapter issues and arguments.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

- **A new chapter on the meaning of life (Chapter 18)**—This chapter discusses how philosophers have clarified and explored the topic of life's meaning. It covers the main philosophical perspectives on the subject and samples the views of thinkers past and present, including Arthur Schopenhauer, Paul Edwards, Leo Tolstoy, and Julian Baggini.
- **A completely revamped appendix on writing papers**—In response to requests from teachers, the appendix "How to Write a Philosophy Paper" has been revised to provide more explicit instructions on how to handle formatting, quotations, and citations. These guidelines are demonstrated in an updated sample paper.

- **More interesting and informative photos.** Text illustrations should do more than decorate the pages. Along with their captions, they should tell an interesting and informative story related to the subject at hand. To that end, many photos have been replaced, deleted, or added.
- **More primary sources**—Readings by Aristotle, Aquinas, and Descartes have been expanded, and new readings have been added in the last chapter.
- **New text boxes**—"Buddhism and Science," "Is Religion Necessary for a Meaningful Life?" and "What Can and Cannot Give Life Meaning"
- **Numerous updates**. In several chapters, concepts have been clarified, and minor errors have been corrected.

ANCILLARIES

- Ancillary materials are available on the Oxford University Press **Ancillary Resource Center (ARC)** and include the following:
  - An **Instructor's Manual** containing brief summaries of each reading, summaries and goals for each chapter, sample syllabi, and useful Web links and other media resources for each chapter.
  - A **Test Bank** containing about 30 multiple-choice, 20 true/false, 10 fill-in-the-blank, and 10 essay/discussion questions and answers per chapter.
- The **Companion Website** for both students and instructors is available at www.oup.com/us/vaughn. It includes the following:
  - Introduction to Book/Author:
    - Table of Contents
    - About the Author
  - Instructor's Resources:
    - A downloadable version of the Instructor's Manual.
    - PowerPoint lecture outlines.
  - Student Resources:
    - Summaries and goals for each chapter.
    - Key terms and definitions for each chapter.
    - Web links and other media resources for each chapter.
    - Self-quizzes for practice, containing about 15 multiple-choice, 10 true/false, 5 fill-in-the-blank, and 5 essay/discussion questions and answers per chapter, some of which are from the Test Bank in the ARC.

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CHAPTER 1

Why Philosophy

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

1.1 PHILOSOPHY: THE QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING

- Know the practical and theoretical benefits of studying philosophy.
- Take an inventory of your philosophical beliefs.
- Know the four main divisions of philosophy and the kinds of questions they examine.

1.2 SOCRATES AND THE EXAMINED LIFE

- Understand why Socrates declared, "The unexamined life is not worth living."
- Explain the Socratic method and how Socrates used it in search of understanding.

1.3 THINKING PHILOSOPHICALLY

- Define *argument, statement, conclusion,* and *premise.*
- Know the two conditions that must be met for an argument to be *good.*
- Define *deductive argument, inductive argument, valid, sound, cogent, strong,* and *weak.* Understand inferences to the best explanation and how their strength is evaluated.
- Be able to identify arguments in the form of *modus ponens, modus tollens,* affirming the consequent, and denying the antecedent.
- Be able to identify arguments in various contexts and tell whether they are valid or invalid, sound or not sound, strong or weak, and cogent or not cogent.
- Understand the guidelines for reading and appreciating philosophy.
- Be aware of common fallacies and know how to identify them in various contexts.

1.1 PHILOSOPHY: THE QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING

The title of this text, *Living Philosophy,* is meant to suggest two themes: first, that philosophy, after two-and-one-half millennia, is still alive and relevant and influential; and second, that philosophy is not only for studying but also for living—that is, for guiding our lives toward what's true and real. Philosophy, even with its ancient lineage and seemingly remote concerns, applies to your life and your times and your world. Philosophy achieves this immediacy by being many good things at once: it is enlightening, thought provoking, life changing, liberating, theoretical, and practical. The world is full of students and teachers who can attest to these claims. More importantly, you will find proof of them in the remainder of this text—and in the writings of the great philosophers, in your effort to understand what they say and the reasons they give for saying it, and in your honest attempts to apply philosophy to your life.

"Science gives us knowledge, but only philosophy can give us wisdom."
—Will Durant

Philosophy is the name that philosophers have given to both a discipline and a process. As a discipline, philosophy is one of the humanities. It is a field of study out of which several other fields have evolved—physics, biology, political science, and many others. As a process, philosophy is a penetrating mode of reflection for understanding life's most important truths. This mode is called the **philosophical method**—the systematic use of critical reasoning to try to find answers to fundamental questions about reality, morality, and knowledge. The method, however, is not a master key used exclusively by professional philosophers to unlock mysteries hidden from common folk. The philosophical method is the birthright of every person, for we are all born with the capacity to reason, to question, to discover. For thousands of years, great minds like Aristotle, Plato, Confucius, Descartes, Aquinas, and Sartre have used it in their search for wisdom, and what they found has changed countless lives. But amateur philosophers like you have also used it—and continue to use it—to achieve life-altering understanding that would have eluded them otherwise.

philosophical method The systematic use of critical reasoning to try to find answers to fundamental questions about reality, morality, and knowledge.

The Good of Philosophy

1. Suppose you had a fundamental belief that the mind, or soul, does not survive the death of the body. What other beliefs would this fundamental belief be likely to support?

Philosophy is not just about ideas; it's about *fundamental* ideas, those upon which other ideas depend. A fundamental belief logically supports other beliefs, and the more beliefs it supports the more fundamental it is. Your belief or disbelief in God, for example, might support a host of other beliefs about morality, life after death, heaven, hell, free will, science, evolution, prayer, abortion, miracles, homosexuality, and more. Thanks to your upbringing, your culture, your peers, and other influences, you already have a head full of fundamental beliefs, some of them true, some false. Whether true or false, they constitute the framework of your whole belief system, and, as such, they help you make sense of a wide range of important issues in life—issues concerning what exists and what doesn't, what actions are right or wrong (or neither), and what kinds of things we can know and not know. Fundamental beliefs, therefore, make up your "philosophy of life," which informs your thinking and guides your actions.

"Philosophy should be responsive to human experience and yet critical of the defective thinking it sometimes encounters."
—Martha Nussbaum

Perhaps now you can better appreciate philosophy's greatest *practical* benefit: it gives us the intellectual wherewithal to improve our lives by improving our philosophy of life. A faulty philosophy of life—that is, one that comprises a great many false fundamental beliefs—can lead to a misspent or misdirected life, a life less meaningful

than it could be. Philosophy is the most powerful instrument we have for evaluating the worth of our fundamental beliefs and for changing them for the better. Through philosophy we exert control over the trajectory of our lives, making major course corrections by reason and reflection.

The Greek philosopher Socrates (469–399 BCE), one of Western civilization's great intellectual heroes, says, "The unexamined life is not worth living." To examine your life is to scrutinize the core ideas that shape it, and the deepest form of scrutiny is exercised through philosophy. This search for answers goes to the heart of the traditional conception of philosophy as a search for wisdom (the term *philosophy* is derived from Greek words meaning "love of wisdom"). With the attainment of wisdom, we come to understand the true nature of reality and how to apply that understanding to living a good life.

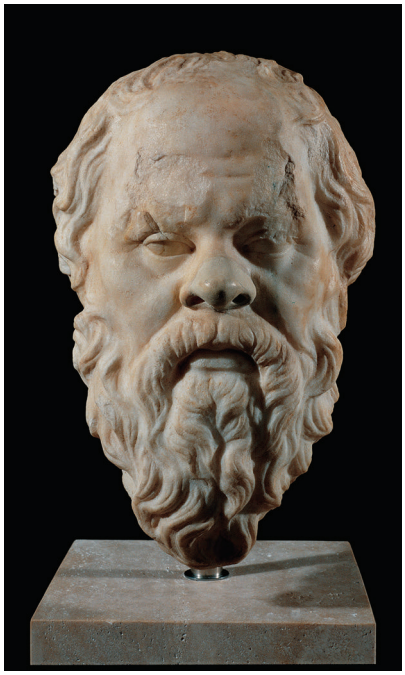

Figure 1.1 Socrates (469–399 BCE).

Philosophy's chief *theoretical* benefit is the same one that most other fields of inquiry pursue: understanding for its own sake. Even if philosophy had no practical applications at all, it would still hold great value for us. We want to know how the world works, what truths it hides, just for the sake of knowing. And philosophy obliges. Astronomers search the sky, physicists study subatomic particles, and archeologists hunt for ancient ruins, all the while knowing that what they find may have no practical implications at all. We humans wonder, and that's often all the reason we need to search for answers. As the great philosopher Aristotle says, "For it is owing to their wonder that people both now begin and at first began to philosophize."

For many people, the quest for understanding through philosophy is a spiritual, transformative endeavor, an ennobling pursuit of truths at the core of life. Thus several philosophers speak of philosophy as something that enriches or nurtures the soul or mind. Socrates, speaking to the jurors who condemned him for practicing philosophy on the streets of Athens, asks, "Are you not ashamed that, while you take care to acquire as much wealth as possible, with honor and glory as well, yet you take no care or thought for understanding or truth, or for the best possible state of your soul?" In a similar vein, the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE) says, "Let no young man delay the study of philosophy, and let no old man become weary of it; for it is never too early nor too late to care for the well-being of the soul." And in our own era, the philosopher Walter Kaufmann (1921–1980) declares, "Philosophy means liberation from the two dimensions of routine, soaring above the well-known, seeing it in new perspectives, arousing wonder and the wish to fly."

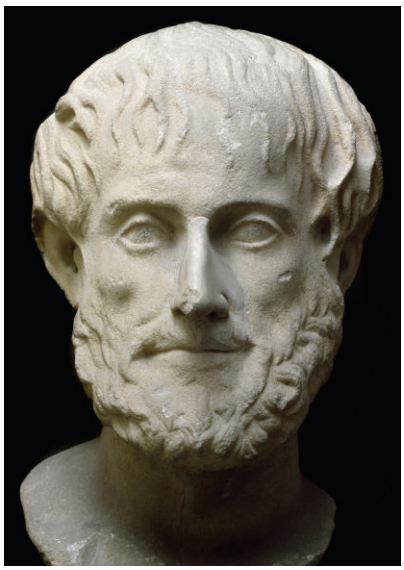

Figure 1.2 Aristotle (384–322 BCE).

Along with philosophical inquiry comes freedom. We begin our lives at a particular place and time, steeped in the ideas and values of a particular culture, fed ready-made beliefs that may or may not be true and that we may never think to question. If you passively accept such beliefs, then those beliefs are *not really yours.* If they are not really yours, and you let them guide your choices and actions, then they—not you—are in charge of your life. You thus forfeit your personal freedom.

2. Is it possible to lead a meaningful life without self-examination?

"Philosophy is the highest music."

—Plato

"To teach how to live without certainty and yet without being paralyzed by hesitation is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can do for those who study it."

—Bertrand Russell

But philosophy helps us rise above this predicament, to transcend the narrow and obstructed standpoint from which we may view everything. It helps us sift our hand-me-down beliefs in the light of reason, look beyond the prejudices that blind us, and see what's real and true. By using the philosophical method, we may learn that some of our beliefs are on solid ground and some are not. In either case, through philosophy our beliefs become truly and authentically our own.

Philosophical Terrain

Philosophy's sphere of interest is vast, encompassing fundamental beliefs drawn from many places. Philosophical questions can arise anywhere. Part of the reason for this is that ordinary beliefs that seem to have no connection with philosophy can become philosophical in short order. A physiologist may want to know how our brains work, but she ventures into the philosophical arena when she wonders whether the brain is the same thing as the mind—a question that science alone cannot answer. A lawyer studies how the death penalty is administered in Texas, but he does philosophy when he considers whether capital punishment is ever morally

DETAILS

Your Philosophical Beliefs

Where do you stand on the fundamental issues in philosophy? Here is your chance to take inventory of your views. After you finish this course, take the survey again. You may be surprised at how your perspective has changed or become more nuanced. Answer with these numbers: 5 = true; 4 = probably true; 3 = neither probable nor improbable; 2 = probably false; 1 = false.

1. The God of traditional Western religions (an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-good deity) exists. ____
2. This God does not exist. ____
3. The apparent design of the universe shows that it had an intelligent designer. ____
4. The theory of evolution is a better explanation of the apparent design of biological life than the theory of "intelligent design." ____
5. Right actions are those commanded by God; wrong actions are those forbidden by God. ____
6. God does not make actions right or wrong by commanding them to be so. ____
7. At least some moral norms or principles are objectively true or valid for everyone. ____
8. Moral standards are relative to what individuals or cultures believe. ____
9. Mind and body consist of two fundamentally different kinds of stuff—nonphysical stuff and physical stuff. ____
10. The mind, or soul, can exist without the body. ____

permissible. A medical scientist wants to know how a human fetus develops, but she finds it difficult to avoid the philosophical query of what the moral status of the fetus is. An astrophysicist studies the Big Bang, the cataclysmic explosion thought to have brought the universe into being—but then asks whether the Big Bang shows that God caused the universe to exist. On CNN you see the horrors of war and famine, but then you find yourself grappling with whether they can be squared with the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God. Or you wonder what your moral obligations are to the poor and hungry of the world. Or you ponder whether government should help people in need or leave them to fend for themselves.

3. Has your thinking recently led you to reflect on philosophical questions? If so, how did the thought process begin, and what fundamental belief did you end up contemplating?

We can divide philosophy's subject matter into four main divisions, each of which is a branch of inquiry in its own right with many subcategories. Here's a brief rundown of these divisions and a sampling of the kinds of questions that each asks.

Metaphysics is the study of reality in the broadest sense, an inquiry into the elemental nature of the universe and the things in it. Though it must take into account the findings of science, metaphysics generally focuses on basic questions that science alone cannot address. Questions of interest: Does the world consist only

metaphysics The study of reality.

11. Our mental states are nothing but brain states (mind states are identical to brain states). ____
12. No one has free will. ____
13. Persons have free will (some of our actions are free). ____
14. Although our actions are determined, they can still be free (free will and determinism are not in conflict). ____
15. We can know some things about the external world. ____
16. We cannot know anything about the external world. ____
17. Truth about something depends on what a person or culture believes. ____
18. Libertarianism is the correct political theory. ____
19. Welfare liberalism is the correct political theory. ____
20. Meaning in life comes from outside ourselves, from God or some other transcendent reality. ____
21. Meaning in life comes from within ourselves. ____

Is it accurate to say that we have *faith* that these everyday events will occur? Or are we merely expecting them to occur based on good evidence—our many previous experiences with the events?

DETAILS

Main Divisions of Philosophy

DIVISION	QUESTIONS
Metaphysics	Does the world consist only of matter, or is it made up of other basic things, such as ideas or mind? Is there a spiritual, ideal realm that exists beyond the material world? Is the mind the same thing as the body? How are mind and body related? Do people have immortal souls? Do humans have free will, or are they determined by forces beyond their control? Can they be both free and determined? Does God exist? How can both a good God and evil exist simultaneously? What is the nature of causality? Can an effect ever precede its cause? What is the nature of time? Is time travel possible?
Epistemology	What is knowledge? What is truth? Is knowledge possible—can we ever know anything? Does knowledge require certainty? What are the sources of knowledge? Is experience a source of knowledge? Is mysticism or faith a source? Can we gain knowledge of the empirical world through reason alone? If we have knowledge, how much do we have? When are we justified in saying that we know something? Do we have good reasons to believe that the world exists independently of our minds? Or do our minds constitute reality?
Axiology	What makes an action right (or wrong)? What things are intrinsically good? What is the good life? What gives life meaning? What makes someone good (or bad)? What moral principles should guide our actions and choices? Which is the best moral theory? Is killing ever morally permissible? If so, why? Are moral standards objective or subjective? Is an action right merely because a culture endorses it? Does morality depend on God? What makes a society just?
Logic	What are the rules for drawing correct inferences? What is the nature and structure of deductive arguments? How can propositional or predicate logic be used to evaluate arguments? Upon what logical principles does reasoning depend? Does logic describe how the world is—or just how our minds work? Can conclusions reached through inductive logic be rationally justified?

"And what, Socrates, is the food of the soul? Surely, I said, knowledge is the food of the soul."

of matter, or is it made up of other basic things, such as ideas or mind? Is there a spiritual, ideal realm that exists beyond the material world? Is the mind the same thing as the body? Are the theories of science true, or are they just convenient fictions? How are mind and body related? Do people have immortal souls? Do humans have free will, or are they determined by forces beyond their control? Can they be both free and determined? Does God exist? How can both a good God and evil exist

simultaneously? What is the nature of causality? Can an effect ever precede its cause? What is the nature of time? Is time travel possible?

Epistemology is the philosophical study of knowledge. Questions of interest: What is knowledge? What is truth? Is knowledge possible—can we ever know anything? Does knowledge require certainty? What are the sources of knowledge? Is experience a source of knowledge? Is mysticism or faith a source? Can we gain knowledge of the empirical world through reason alone? If we have knowledge, how much do we have? When are we justified in saying that we know something? Do we have good reasons to believe that the world exists independently of our minds? Or do our minds constitute reality?

epistemology The philosophical study of knowledge.

Axiology is the study of value, including both aesthetic value and moral value. The study of moral value is known as **ethics**. Ethics involves inquiries into the nature of moral judgments, virtues, values, obligations, and theories. Questions of interest: What makes an action right (or wrong)? What things are intrinsically good? What is the good life? What gives life meaning? What makes someone good (or bad)? What moral principles should guide our actions and choices? Which is the best moral theory? Is killing ever morally permissible? If so, why? Are moral standards objective or subjective? Is an action right merely because a culture endorses it? Does morality depend on God? What makes a society just?

axiology The study of value, including both aesthetic value and moral value.

ethics The study of morality using the methods of philosophy.

Logic is the study of correct reasoning. Questions of interest: What are the rules for drawing correct inferences? What is the nature and structure of deductive arguments? How can propositional or predicate logic be used to evaluate arguments? Upon what logical principles does reasoning depend? Does logic describe how the world is—or just how our minds work? Can conclusions reached through inductive logic be rationally justified?

logic The study of correct reasoning.

In addition to these divisions, there are subdivisions of philosophy whose job is to examine critically the assumptions and principles that underlie other fields. Thus we have the philosophy of science, the philosophy of law, the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of history, the philosophy of language, and many others. When those laboring in a discipline begin questioning its most basic ideas—ideas that define its subject matter and principles of inquiry—philosophy, the most elemental mode of investigation, steps in.

Although this text covers mostly Western philosophy, it's important to keep in mind that non-Western civilizations have also produced distinctive traditions of philosophical inquiry, some of which arose thousands of years ago. (See Chapter 6: "Eastern Thought.") China, Japan, and India have been especially fruitful ground for provocative ideas and unique perspectives on philosophical issues that concern both East and West. In the past, Western philosophers took little notice of non-Western thought, but that has changed. Studying the philosophical traditions of non-Western cultures—a field called "world philosophy"—seems more worthwhile than ever in our age of globalization and increasing cultural diversity.

"There's a difference between a philosophy and a bumper sticker."
—Charles Schulz

1.2 SOCRATES AND THE EXAMINED LIFE

There is no better way to understand and appreciate the philosophical quest for knowledge than to study the life and work of Socrates, one of philosophy's greatest practitioners and the most revered figure in its history. Socrates wrote no philosophy, but we

PORTRAIT

Plato

Figure 1.3 Plato (c. 427–347 BCE).

No philosopher—with the possible exception of Aristotle—has had a deeper and more lasting effect on Western thought than Plato (c. 427–347 BCE). He was born in Athens into an influential aristocratic family and grew up during the perilous years of the Peloponnesian War, a struggle between Athens and the Peloponnesian states. He was a student and admirer of Socrates, who turned Plato's mind toward philosophy and the pursuit of wisdom. He was horrified by Socrates' execution in 399 for impiety and corruption of Athenian youth, so he left Athens, traveling widely, possibly to Sicily and Egypt. When he returned to Athens, he founded the Academy, a teaching college regarded as the first university, and devoted the rest of his life to teaching and writing philosophy. (The Academy endured for hundreds of years until it was abolished by the Eastern Roman emperor Justinian I.) The Academy's most renowned student was Aristotle, who entered the school at age seventeen and remained for twenty years.

Plato's thinking is embodied in his dialogues, twenty-five of which exist complete. They were written during a span of fifty years and have been divided into three periods: early, middle, and late. The early dialogues include *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Meno*, and *Gorgias.* These early works portray Socrates as a brilliant and principled deflater of his contemporaries' bogus claims to knowledge. The middle dialogues include *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Theaetetus*; the late ones consist of *Critias*, *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Laws*, and others.

"The point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it."

—Bertrand Russell

know about his thinking and character through his famous pupil Plato, who portrayed him in several dialogues, or conversations (notably in *Euthyphro, Crito,* and *Apology*).

For millennia Socrates has been inspiring generations by his devotion to philosophical inquiry, his relentless search for wisdom, and his determination to live according to his own high standards. As mentioned earlier, he famously said that "the unexamined life is not worth living," and he became the best example of someone living his life by that maxim.

4. Socrates says that a good man can never be harmed. What do you think he means by this?

For Socrates, an unexamined life is a tragedy because it results in grievous harm to the soul, the immaterial, divine part of a human. The soul is harmed by lack of knowledge—ignorance of one's own self and of the most important values in life (the good). But knowledge of these things is a mark of the soul's excellence. A clear sign that a person has an unhealthy soul is her exclusive pursuit of social status, wealth, power, and pleasure instead of the good of the soul. The good of the soul is attained only through an uncompromising search for what's true and real, through the wisdom to see what is most vital in life. Such insight comes from rational self-examination and critical questioning of facile assumptions and unsupported

beliefs. To get to the truth, Socrates thinks, we must go around the false certitudes of custom, tradition, and superstition and let reason be our guide. Thus he played the role of philosophical gadfly, an annoying pest to the people of Athens, prodding them to wake up and seek the wisdom within their grasp.

We know very little about Socrates' life. He spent all his days in Athens except for a term of military service when he soldiered in the Peloponnesian War.

THEN AND NOW

Socrates Café

The Socratic method is alive and well in the twenty-first century; Christopher Phillips, author and educator, has seen to that. He has traveled from one end of the country to another to facilitate philosophical discussions based on the Socratic method. These informal gatherings attract people of all ages from all sorts of backgrounds and life experiences. He calls the dialogues *Socrates Cafés*. They are held in coffeehouses, day care centers, senior centers, high schools, churches, and other places, and they have had a profound effect on him and on many people who have participated in such discussions. As Phillips says:

> For a long time, I'd had a notion that the demise of a certain type of philosophy has been to the detriment of our society. It is a type of philosophy that Socrates and other philosophers practiced in Athens in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. A type that utilized a method of philosophical inquiry that "everyman" and "everywoman" could embrace and take for his or her own, and in the process rekindle the childlike—but by no means childish—sense of wonder. . . .
>
> The Socratic method of questioning aims to help people gain a better understanding of themselves and their nature and their potential for excellence. At times, it can help people make more well-informed life choices, because they now are in a better position to know themselves, to comprehend who they are and what they want. It can also enable a thoughtful person to articulate and then apply his or her unique philosophy of life. This in turn will better equip a questioning soul to engage in the endless and noble pursuit of wisdom.—*Socrates Café* (2001)

Phillips is the author of several books, including *Socrates Café* and *Six Questions of Socrates: A Modern-Day Journey of Discovery through World Philosophy*. He is also co-founder of the Society for Philosophical Inquiry (www.philosopher.org), which supports the creation and development of Socrates Cafés around the globe. He says there are now over six hundred Socrates Cafés worldwide.

Socrates Cafés usually begin with a question such as "What is sanity?" "When is life not worth living?" or "Is there such a thing as human nature?" The list of possible questions is long and varied. If you were to participate in a Socrates Café, what question would you most like to address?

Socratic method Question-and-answer dialogue in which propositions are methodically scrutinized to uncover the truth.

He was married and had three sons. He spent much of his time roaming the streets of Athens, speaking with anyone who would listen. His habit was to ask people seemingly simple questions about their views on virtue, religion, justice, or the good, challenging them to think critically about their basic assumptions. This sort of question-and-answer dialogue in which propositions are methodically scrutinized to uncover the truth has become known as the **Socratic method**. Usually when Socrates used it in conversations, or dialogues, with his fellow Athenians, their views would be exposed as false or confused. The main point of the exercise for Socrates, however, was not to win arguments, but to get closer to the truth. He thought people who pursued this noble aim as he did should not be embarrassed by being shown to be wrong; they should be delighted to be weaned from a false opinion. Nevertheless, the Socratic conversations often ended in the humiliation of eminent Athenians. They were enraged by Socrates, while many youths gravitated to him. He was soon indicted, tried before a jury, and convicted of disrespecting the gods and corrupting the youth of the city.

"The chief benefit, which results from philosophy, arises in an indirect manner, and proceeds more from its secret, insensible influence, than from its immediate application."
—David Hume

"Astonishment is the root of philosophy."
—Paul Tillich

5. Socrates never seems adversarial or combative in his dialogues. What effect do you think this approach has on those who enter into dialogue with him?

"Science gives us knowledge, but only philosophy can give us wisdom."
—Will Durant

1.3 THINKING PHILOSOPHICALLY

As we have seen, to think philosophically is to bring your powers of critical reasoning to bear on fundamental questions. When you do this, you are usually clarifying the meaning of concepts, constructing and evaluating philosophical theories, or devising and evaluating logical arguments. This latter task constitutes the principal labor of philosophy. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and other great thinkers do not deliver their philosophical insights to us without argument, as if we are to automatically accept their views with no questions asked. Philosophers provide *reasons* for thinking their ideas are plausible—that is, they give us arguments. And if we believe what they say, it should be because there are good reasons for doing so. Likewise, if we expect intelligent people to accept *our* philosophical views, we must argue our case. Since the philosophy we read will most likely contain arguments, our understanding of the text will hang on our ability to identify and understand those arguments.

Reasons and Arguments

argument A group of statements in which one of them (the conclusion) is supported by the others (the premises).

statement (or claim) An assertion that something is or is not the case and is therefore the kind of utterance that is either true or false.

conclusion In an argument, the statement being supported by premises.

premise A statement that supports the conclusion of an argument.

As you might have guessed, the term *argument* does not refer to heated disagreements or emotional squabbles. An **argument** is a group of statements in which one of them is supported by the others. A **statement** (or claim) is an assertion that something is or is not the case and is therefore the kind of utterance that is either true or false. In an argument, the statement being supported is the **conclusion**, and the statements supporting the conclusion are the **premises**. The premises are meant to provide reasons for believing that the conclusion is true. A good argument gives us good reasons for accepting a conclusion; a bad argument fails to provide good reasons. In philosophy—and in any other kind of rational inquiry—accepting a conclusion (statement) without good reasons is an elementary mistake in reasoning. Believing a statement without good reasons is a recipe for error; believing a statement for good reasons increases your chances of uncovering the truth.

When we do philosophy, then, we are likely at some point to be grappling with arguments—we are trying to either (1) devise an argument to support a statement or (2) evaluate an argument to see if there really are good reasons for accepting its conclusion.

Note that *argument* in the sense used here is not synonymous with *persuasion.* An argument provides us with reasons for accepting a claim; it is an attempted "proof" for an assertion. But persuasion does not necessarily involve giving any reasons at all for accepting a claim. To persuade is to influence people's opinions, which can be accomplished by offering a good argument but also by misleading with logical fallacies, exploiting emotions and prejudices, dazzling with rhetorical gimmicks, hiding or distorting the facts, threatening or coercing people—the list is long. Good arguments prove something whether or not they persuade. Persuasive ploys can change minds but do not necessarily prove anything.

Figure 1.4 Hitler was a master persuader, relying not on good arguments but on emotional rhetoric. How many people today would be persuaded by a contemporary politician with Hitler's rhetorical talents?

Now consider these two simple arguments:

Argument 1

> It's wrong to take the life of an innocent person. Abortion takes the life of an innocent person. Therefore abortion is wrong.

Argument 2

> God does not exist. After all, most college students believe that that is the case.

In Argument 1, the conclusion is "abortion is wrong," and it is backed by two premises: "It's wrong to take the life of an innocent person" and "Abortion takes the life of an innocent person." In Argument 2, the conclusion is "God does not exist," which is supported by the premise "After all, most college students believe that that is the case." Despite the differences between these two passages (differences in content, the number of premises, and the order of their parts), they are both arguments because they exemplify basic argument structure: a conclusion supported by at least one premise.

Though the components of an argument seem clear enough, people often fail to distinguish between arguments and strong statements that contain no arguments at all. Suppose we change Argument 1 to this:

> Abortion is wrong. I can't believe how many people think it's morally okay. The world is insane.

"Philosophy asks the simple question, what is it all about?"
—Alfred North Whitehead

"One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes . . . and the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility."
—Eleanor Roosevelt

Now there is no argument, just an expression of exasperation or anger. There are no statements giving us reasons to believe a conclusion. What we have are some unsupported assertions that may merely *appear* to make a case. If we ignore the distinction between genuine arguments and nonargumentative material, critical reasoning is undone.

The simplest way to locate an argument is to *find its conclusion first, then its premises.* Zeroing in on conclusions and premises can be a lot easier if you keep an eye out for *indicator words.* Indicator words often tag along with arguments and indicate that a conclusion or premise may be nearby.

Here are a few conclusion indicator words:

consequently	*as a result*
thus	*hence*
therefore	*so*
it follows that	*which means that*

Here are some premise indicator words:

in view of the fact	*assuming that*
because	*since*
due to the fact that	*for*
because	*given that*

Just remember that indicator words do not *guarantee* the presence of conclusions and premises. They are simply telltale signs.

6. Recall some statements that you have heard or read in which strong assertions were made but no argument was presented. Did the assertions prove anything? What was your reaction at the time? Were you persuaded or impressed by them?

Assuming we can recognize an argument when we see it, how can we tell if it is a good one? Fortunately, the general criteria for judging the merits of an argument are simple and clear. A good argument—one that gives us good reasons for believing a claim—must have (1) solid logic and (2) true premises. Requirement (1) means that the conclusion should follow logically from the premises, that there must be a proper logical connection between the supporting statements and the statement supported. Requirement (2) says that what the premises assert must in fact be the case. An argument that fails in either respect is a bad argument.

deductive argument An argument intended to give logically conclusive support to its conclusion.

There are two basic kinds of arguments—deductive and inductive—and our two requirements hold for both of them, even though the logical connections in each type are distinct. **Deductive arguments** are intended to give *logically conclusive* support to their conclusions so that if the premises are true, the conclusion absolutely must be true. Argument 1 is a deductive argument and is therefore supposed to be constructed so that if the two premises are true, its conclusion cannot possibly be false. Here it is with its structure laid bare:

Argument 1

1. It's wrong to take the life of an innocent person.
2. Abortion takes the life of an innocent person.
3. Therefore, abortion is wrong.

Do you see that, given the form or structure of this argument, if the premises are true, then the conclusion *has to be true?* It would be very strange—illogical, in fact—to agree that the two premises are true but that the conclusion is false.

Now look at this one:

Argument 3

1. All dogs are mammals.
2. Rex is a dog.
3. Therefore, Rex is a mammal.

Again, there is no way for the premises to be true while the conclusion is false. The deductive form of the argument guarantees this.

So a deductive argument is intended to have this sort of airtight structure. If it actually does have this structure, it is said to be *valid.* Argument 1 is deductive because it is intended to provide logically conclusive support to its conclusion. It is valid because, as a matter of fact, it does offer this kind of support. A deductive argument that fails to provide conclusive support to its conclusion is said to be *invalid.* In such an argument, it is possible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false. Argument 3 is intended to have a deductive form, and because it actually does have this form, the argument is also valid.

An elementary fact about deductive arguments is that their validity (or lack thereof) is a *separate issue* from the truth of the premises. Validity is a structural matter, depending on how an argument is put together. Truth concerns the nature of the claims made in the premises and conclusion. A deductive argument is supposed to be built so that *if* the premises are true, the conclusion must be true—but in a particular case, the premises might *not* be true. A valid argument can have true or false premises and a true or false conclusion. (By definition, of course, it cannot have true premises and a false conclusion.) In any case, being invalid or having false premises dooms a deductive argument.

"Philosophy, when superficially studied, excites doubt; when thoroughly explored, it dispels it."
—Francis Bacon

Inductive arguments are supposed to give *probable* support to their conclusions. Unlike deductive arguments, they are not designed to support their conclusions decisively. They can establish only that, if their premises are true, their conclusions are probably true (more likely to be true than not). Argument 2 is an inductive argument meant to demonstrate the probable truth that "God does not exist." Like all inductive arguments (and unlike deductive ones), it can have true premises and a false conclusion. So it's possible for the sole premise—"After all, most college students believe that that is the case"—to be true while the conclusion is false.

inductive argument An argument intended to give probable support to its conclusion.

If inductive arguments succeed in lending very probable support to their conclusions, they are said to be *strong.* Strong arguments are such that if their premises are true, their conclusions are very probably true. If they fail to provide this very probable support, they are termed *weak.* Argument 2 is a weak argument because its premise, even if true, does not show that more likely than not God does not exist. What college students (or any other group) believe about God does not constitute good evidence for or against God's existence.

But consider this inductive argument:

Argument 4

1. Eighty-five percent of the students at this university are Republicans.
2. Sonia is a student at this university.
3. Therefore, Sonia is probably a Republican.

This argument is strong. If its premises are true, its conclusion is very likely to be true. If 85 percent of the university's students are Republicans, and Sonia is a university student, she is more likely than not to be a Republican too.

When a valid (deductive) argument has true premises, it is a good argument. A good deductive argument is said to be *sound.* Argument 1 is valid, but we cannot say whether it is sound until we determine the truth of the premises. Argument 3 is valid, and if its premises are true, it is sound. When a strong (inductive) argument has true premises, it is also a good argument. A good inductive argument is said to be *cogent.* Argument 2 is weak, so there is no way it can be cogent. Argument 4 is strong, and if its premises are true, it is cogent.

Checking the validity or strength of an argument is often a plain, commonsense undertaking. Using our natural reasoning ability, we can examine how the premises are linked to the conclusion and can see quickly whether the conclusion follows from the premises. We are most likely to make an easy job of it when the arguments are simple. Many times, however, we need some help, and help is available in the form of methods and guidelines for evaluating arguments.

Having a familiarity with common argument patterns, or forms, is especially useful when assessing the validity of deductive arguments. We are likely to encounter these forms again and again. Here is a prime example:

Argument 5

1. If the surgeon operates, then the patient will be cured.
2. The surgeon is operating.
3. Therefore, the patient will be cured.

"Philosophy is like trying to open a safe with a combination lock: each little adjustment of the dials seems to achieve nothing, only when everything is in place does the door open."
—Ludwig Wittgenstein

This argument form contains a *conditional* premise—that is, a premise consisting of a conditional, or if-then, statement (actually a compound statement composed of two constituent statements). Premise 1 is a conditional statement. A conditional statement has two parts: the part beginning with *if* (called the *antecedent*), and the part beginning with *then* (known as the *consequent*). So the antecedent of Premise 1 is "If the surgeon operates," and the consequent is "then the patient will be cured."

The best way to appreciate the structure of such an argument (or any deductive argument, for that matter) is to translate it into traditional argument symbols in which each statement is symbolized by a letter. Here is the symbolization for Argument 5:

1. If *p*, then *q*.
2. *p*.
3. Therefore, *q*.

We can see that *p* represents "the surgeon operates," and *q* represents "the patient will be cured." But notice that we can use this same symbolized argument form to represent countless other arguments—arguments with different statements but having the same basic structure.

It just so happens that the underlying argument form for Argument 5 is extremely common—common enough to have a name, *modus ponens* (or affirming the antecedent). The truly useful fact about *modus ponens* is that any argument having this form is valid. We can plug any statements we want into the formula and the result will be a valid argument, a circumstance in which if the premises are true, the conclusion must be true.

An equally prevalent argument form is *modus tollens* (or denying the consequent). For example:

Argument 6

1. If the dose is low, then the healing is slow.
2. The healing is not slow.
3. Therefore, the dose is not low.

1. If *p*, then *q*.
2. Not *q*.
3. Therefore, not *p*.

Modus tollens is also a valid form, and any argument using this form must also be valid.

There are also common argument forms that are invalid. Here are two of them:

Affirming the Consequent

Argument 7

1. If the mind is an immaterial substance, then ESP is real.
2. ESP is real.
3. Therefore, the mind is an immaterial substance.

1. If *p*, then *q*.
2. *q*.
3. Therefore, *p*.

Denying the Antecedent

Argument 8

1. If morality is relative to persons (that is, if moral rightness or wrongness depends on what people believe), then moral disagreement between persons would be nearly impossible.
2. Morality is not relative to persons.
3. Therefore, moral disagreement between persons is not nearly impossible.

1. If *p*, then *q*.
2. Not *p*.
3. Therefore, not *q*.

7. Before reading this chapter, would you have found any of the invalid argument forms persuasive? Why or why not?

The advantage of being able to recognize these and other common argument forms is that you can use that skill to readily determine the validity of many deductive arguments. You know, for example, that any argument having the same form as *modus ponens* or *modus tollens* must be valid, and any argument in one of the common invalid forms must be invalid.

Inductive arguments also have distinctive forms. In *enumerative induction,* for example, we arrive at a generalization about an entire group of things after observing just some members of the group. Consider these:

"The essence of philosophy is that a man should so live that his happiness shall depend as little as possible on external things."

—Epictetus

Argument 9

Every light fixture I have bought from the hardware store has been defective.

Therefore, all light fixtures sold at the hardware store are probably defective.

Argument 10

All the hawks that I have observed in this wildlife sanctuary have had red tails.

Therefore, all the hawks in this sanctuary probably have red tails.

Argument 11

Sixty percent of the Bostonians I have interviewed in various parts of the city are pro-choice.

Therefore, 60 percent of all Bostonians are probably pro-choice.

As you can see, enumerative induction has this form:

X percent of the observed members of group A have property P.

Therefore, X percent of all members of group A probably have property P.

The observed members of the group are simply a sample of the entire group. So based on what we know about this sample, we can generalize to all the members. But how do we know whether such an argument is strong? Everything depends on the sample. If the sample is large enough and representative enough, we can safely assume that our generalization drawn from the sample is probably an accurate reflection of the whole group of members. A sample is representative of an entire group only if each member of the group has an equal chance of being included in the sample. In general, the larger the sample, the greater the probability that it accurately reflects the nature of the group as a whole. Often common sense tells us when a sample is too small.

We do not know how many light fixtures from the hardware store are in the sample mentioned in Argument 9. But if the number is several dozen and the fixtures were bought over a period of weeks or months, the sample is probably sufficiently large and representative. If so, the argument is strong. Likewise, in Argument 10 we don't know the size of the sample or how it was obtained. But if the sample was taken from all the likely spots in the sanctuary where hawks live, and if several hawks were observed in each location, the sample is probably adequate—and the argument is strong. In Argument 11, if the sample consists of a handful of Bostonians interviewed on a few street corners, the sample is definitely inadequate and the argument is weak. But if the sample consists of several hundred people, and if every member of the whole group has an equal chance of being included in the sample, then the sample would be good enough to allow us to accurately generalize about the whole population. Typically, selecting such a sample of a large population is done by professional polling organizations.

DETAILS

Valid and Invalid Argument Forms

Valid Argument Forms

Affirming the Antecedent
(*Modus Ponens*)
If *p*, then *q*.
p.
Therefore, *q*.

Example:
If Spot barks, a burglar is in the house.
Spot is barking.
Therefore, a burglar is in the house.

Denying the Consequent
(*Modus Tollens*)
If *p*, then *q*.
Not *q*.
Therefore, not *p*.

Example:
If it's raining, the park is closed.
The park is not closed.
Therefore, it's not raining.

Invalid Argument Forms

Affirming the Consequent
If *p*, then *q*.
q.
Therefore, *p*.

Example:
If the cat is on the mat, she is asleep.
She is asleep.
Therefore, she is on the mat.

Denying the Antecedent
If *p*, then *q*.
Not *p*.
Therefore, not *q*.

Example:
If the cat is on the mat, she is asleep.
She is not on the mat.
Therefore, she is not asleep.

Figure 1.5 How much is a watch like the universe? Everything depends on the relevant similarities and differences.

Figure 1.6 Clarence Darrow (1857–1938).

"The object of studying philosophy is to know one's own mind, not other people's."

—Dean Inge

Reading Philosophy

Unfortunately, arguments in philosophical essays rarely come neatly labeled so you can find and evaluate them. You have to do that work yourself, a task that requires careful reading and thinking. The process can be challenging because, in the real world, arguments can be simple or complex, clearly stated or perplexing, and apparent or hidden. This is true for philosophical essays as well as for any other kind of writing that contains arguments. In some philosophical prose, the relationship between the conclusion (or conclusions) and the premises can be complicated, and even good arguments can be surrounded by material irrelevant to the arguments at hand. The remedy for these difficulties is instructive examples and plenty of practice, some of which you can get in this chapter.

Let's begin by identifying and analyzing the argument in the following passage. The issue is whether humans have free will or are compelled by forces beyond their control to act as they do. The statements are numbered for ease of reference.

> (1) The famous trial lawyer Clarence Darrow (1857–1938) made a name for himself by using the "determinism defense" to get his clients acquitted of serious crimes. (2) The crux of this approach is the idea that humans are not really responsible for anything they do because they cannot choose freely—they are "determined," predestined, if you will, by nature (or God) to be the way they are. (3) So in a sense, Darrow says, humans are like windup toys with no control over any action or decision. (4) They have no free will. (5) Remember that Darrow was a renowned agnostic who was skeptical of all religious claims. (6) But Darrow is wrong about human free will for two reasons. (7) First, in our everyday moral life, our own commonsense experience suggests that sometimes people are free to make moral decisions. (8) We should not abandon what our commonsense experience tells us without good reason—and (9) Darrow has given us no good reason. (10) Second, Darrow's determinism is not confirmed by science, as he claims—but actually conflicts with science. (11) Modern science says that there are many things (at the subatomic level of matter) that are not determined at all: (12) They just happen.

Indicator words are scarce in this argument, unless you count the words "first" and "second" as signifying premises. But the conclusion is not hard to find; it's sentence 6: "Darrow is wrong about human free will for two reasons." Locating the conclusion enables us to see that some statements (statements 1 through 4) are neither conclusion nor premises; they are just background information on Darrow's views. Most argumentative essays contain some supplemental information like this. Statement 5 is irrelevant to the argument; Darrow's agnosticism has no logical connection to the premises or conclusion. Statement 12 is just a rewording of

statement 11. After this elimination process, only the following premises and conclusion (statement 6) remain:

> (6) But Darrow is wrong about human free will for two reasons.
>
> (7) First, in our moral life, our commonsense experience suggests that sometimes people are free to make moral decisions.
>
> (8) We should not abandon what our commonsense experience tells us without good reason.
>
> (9) Darrow has given us no good reason.
>
> (10) Darrow's determinism is not confirmed by science, as he claims—but actually conflicts with science.
>
> (11) Modern science says that there are many things (mostly at the subatomic level) that are not determined at all.

Statements 7 through 11 are the premises. They are all meant to provide support to statement 6, but their support is of unequal weight. Statement 10 gives independent

"The true function of philosophy is to educate us in the principles of reasoning and not to put an end to further reasoning by the introduction of fixed conclusions."

—George Henry Lewes

PORTRAIT

Hypatia

Figure 1.7 Hypatia (c. 370–415).

Hypatia (c. 370–415) was the greatest philosopher of her day. She lived in the Greek city of Alexandria, which in the fourth century was the intellectual epicenter of the world, excelling in scientific and philosophical learning. It also was the home of the famed Library, which contained thousands of scholarly manuscripts drawn from the best thinkers of ancient times, including the works of Plato and Aristotle. In this rich environment, Hypatia achieved fame as a Neoplatonist philosophy teacher, an astronomer, and a mathematician. At around age twenty-five or thirty, she became the director of the school of the renowned philosopher Plotinus—a very high honor since women were traditionally not appointed to such offices. Another indication of her sterling reputation was that she was appointed by a Christian government even though she was known to be a pagan.

She taught the works of the "pagan" philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, and students came from far-flung places for the privilege of being her students. She also is thought to have written three commentaries on noted mathematical treatises.

In 415, Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria, arranged for Hypatia's murder at the hands of a Christian mob: she was pulled from her chariot, hauled to a church, stripped naked, and skinned alive with oyster shells. Cyril, on the other hand, was later canonized.

"Philosophy is a kind of journey, ever learning yet never arriving at the ideal perfection of truth."
—Albert Pike

support to the conclusion without the help of any other premises, so it is an *independent* premise. We can say the same thing about statement 11; it too is an independent premise. But notice that statements 7, 8, and 9 are *dependent* premises supporting the conclusion. That is, taken separately, they are weak, but together they constitute a plausible reason for accepting statement 6. Statement 10 directly supports the conclusion, and in turn is supported by premise 11.

Now take a look at this passage:

> (1) As the Islamic clerics cling to power in Iran, students there are agitating for greater freedom and less suppression of views that the clerics dislike. (2) Even though ultimate power in Iran rests with the mullahs, it is not at all certain where the nation is headed. Here's a radical suggestion: (3) The Islamic republic in Iran will fall within the next five years. Why do I say this? (4) Because the majority of Iranians are in favor of democratic reforms, (5) and no regime can stand for very long when citizens are demanding access to the political process. (6) Also, Iran today is a mirror image of the Soviet Union before it broke apart—there's widespread dissatisfaction and dissent at a time when the regime seems to be trying to hold the people's loyalty. (7) Every nation that has taken such a path has imploded within five years. (8) Finally, the old Iranian trick of gaining support for the government by fomenting hatred of America will not work anymore (9) because Iran is now trying to be friends with the United States.

The conclusion is statement 3, and the premises are statements 4 through 9. The first two statements are extraneous. Statements 4 and 5 are dependent premises and so are statements 6 and 7. Statements 8 and 9 constitute an argument that gives support to the passage's main conclusion (statement 3). Statement 8 is the conclusion; statement 9, the premise. Notice also that the sentence "Why do I say this?" is not a statement.

So remember: When you read a philosophical essay, you are not simply trying to glean some facts from it as you might if you were reading a science text or technical report. Neither are you following a storyline as if you were reading a mystery novel (though philosophy papers sometimes contain their share of mysteries). In most cases, you are tracing the steps in an argument, trying to see what conclusion the writer wants to prove and whether she succeeds in proving it. Along the way, you may encounter several premises with their accompanying analyses, clarifications, explanations, and examples. You may even run into a whole chain of arguments. In the end, if you have read well and the writer has written well, you are left not with a new set of data or a story ending, but a realization—maybe even a revelation—that a conclusion is, or is not, worthy of belief.

The best way to learn how to read philosophy well is to read philosophy often. You will probably get plenty of chances to do that in your current philosophy course. Having a few rules to guide you in your reading, however, may help shorten the learning curve. As you read, keep the following in mind.

1. Approach the text with an open mind. If you are studying philosophy for the first time, you are likely—at least at first—to find a good bit of the material difficult, strange, or exasperating, sometimes all three at once. That's normal. Philosophy is an exploration of the rugged frontiers of our knowledge of fundamental things, so much of this new territory is likely to seem daunting or unfamiliar. There's also an excellent chance that your first visits to this terrain will be vexing, perhaps even infuriating, because you may sometimes disagree with what you read.

There is no shame in experiencing any of these reactions. They come with the territory. But if you are to make any headway in philosophy, you need to try your best to counteract these attitudes and feelings. Remember, philosophy at its best is a fair-minded, fearless search for truth. Anything that interferes with this noble quest must be overcome and cast aside.

Avoid making a judgment about an essay's ideas or arguments until you fully understand them and have fairly considered them. Make sure you are not reading with the intent to prove the conclusions false (or true). Be open to the possibility that the essay could give you good reasons to change your mind about something.

Try to maintain a neutral attitude toward the writer, presuming that she is neither right nor wrong, neither sinner nor saint. Don't assume that everything a renowned philosopher says must be true, and don't presuppose that everything a philosopher you dislike says must be false. Give the writer the same attention and respect that you would give a friend who is discussing a serious issue with you.

If you are reading the work of a famous philosopher and you find yourself thinking that his or her ideas are obviously silly or ridiculous, think again. The odds are good that you are misunderstanding what you read. It is wiser to assume that the text offers something of value (even if you disagree with it) and that you need to read more carefully.

2. Read actively and critically. Philosophical reading is intense. It cannot be rushed. It cannot be crammed. It cannot be done while your mind is on automatic pilot.

Philosophical reading is *active* reading. Instead of reading just to get through a piece of writing, you must take your time and ask yourself what key terms and passages mean, how the argument is structured, what the central thesis is, where the premises are, how certain key ideas are related, whether the main conclusion conflicts with propositions you know are true, even how the material compares with other philosophical writing on the same subject.

Philosophical reading is also *critical* reading. In critical reading, you ask not just what something means but also whether a statement is true and if the reasoning is solid. You ask if the conclusion really follows from the premises, whether the premises are true, if the analysis of a term really makes sense, if an argument has been overlooked, if an analogy is weak, whether there are counterexamples to key claims, and whether the claims agree with other things you have good reason to believe.

3. Identify the conclusion first, then the premises. When you first begin reading philosophical texts, they may seem to you like dark thickets of propositions into which you may not enter without losing your way. But your situation is really

8. Suppose you are presented with written material containing statements and arguments that strike you as irreverent or unorthodox. Would you be able to read such a text with an open mind? Can you recall a case when you did just that?

"Small amounts of philosophy lead to atheism, but larger amounts bring us back to God."

—Francis Bacon

not that bad. In argumentative writing (the kind you are most likely to encounter in philosophy), you can depend on there being, well, an argument, a conclusion backed by premises. There could, of course, be several arguments that support the main argument, and the arguments could be complex, but these sets of conclusion-plus-premises will all serve as recognizable guideposts. If you want to penetrate the thicket, then, you must first identify the argument (or arguments). And the key to doing that is to find the conclusion first, then look for the premises.

When you find the main conclusion, you thereby identify the main point of the essay, and you then have the number-one clue to the function of all the rest of the text. Once you uncover the point that the writer is trying to prove, finding the supporting premises becomes much easier. And when you isolate the premises, locating the text that explains and amplifies the premises gets easier too. Therefore, the first—and most important—question you can ask about a philosophical essay is, *"What claim is the writer trying to prove?"*

4. Outline, paraphrase, or summarize the argument. Understanding an essay's argument is so important that testing whether you really "get it" is crucial. You can test your grasp of the argument by outlining, paraphrasing, or summarizing it. If you can lay out an argument's premises and conclusion in an outline, or if you can accurately paraphrase or summarize the argument, you probably have a pretty good understanding of it. Very often students who think they comprehend an argument are surprised to find that they cannot devise an adequate outline or summary of it. Such failures suggest that, although outlining, paraphrasing, or summarizing may seem to some to be unnecessary, it is not—at least not to those new to philosophy.

5. Evaluate the argument and formulate a tentative judgment. When you read philosophy, understanding it is just the first step. You also must do something that many beginners find both difficult and alien: you must make an informed judgment about what you read. Simply reiterating what the writer has said will not do. Your judgment is what matters here. Mainly, this judgment is your evaluation of the argument presented by the writer—an assessment of (1) whether the conclusion follows from the premises and (2) whether the premises are true. Only when the answer is yes to both these questions can you say that the conclusion of the argument is worthy of acceptance. This kind of evaluation is precisely what your instructor expects when she asks you to critique an argumentative essay in philosophy.

Fallacious Reasoning

fallacy A common but bad argument.

You can become more proficient in reading and writing philosophy if you know how to identify fallacies when you see them. **Fallacies** are common but bad arguments. They are defective arguments that appear so often in writing and speech that philosophers have given them names and offered instructions on how to recognize and avoid them.

Many fallacies are not just failed arguments—they are also deceptively plausible appeals. They can easily appear sound or cogent, misleading the reader. Their potential for slipperiness is another good reason to study fallacies. The best way to avoid

being taken in by them is to study them until you can consistently pick them out of any random selection of prose. Here are some of the more prevalent ones:

Straw Man. The *straw man* fallacy is the misrepresentation of a person's views so they can be more easily attacked or dismissed. Let's say you argue that the war in Afghanistan is too costly in lives and money, and your opponent replies this way:

> *My adversary argues that the war in Afghanistan is much too difficult for the United States and that we ought to, in effect, cut and run while we can. But why must we take the coward's way out?*

straw man The fallacy of misrepresenting a person's views so they can be more easily attacked or dismissed.

Thus, your point has been distorted, made to look more extreme or radical than it really is; it is now an easy target. The notion that we ought to "cut and run" or "take the coward's way out" *does not follow* from the statement that the war in Iraq is too costly.

The straw man kind of distortion, of course, proves nothing, though many people fall for it every day. This fallacy is probably the most common type of fallacious reasoning used in politics. It is also popular in many other kinds of argumentation—including student philosophy papers.

appeal to the person (ad hominem fallacy) The fallacy of rejecting a statement on the grounds that it comes from a particular person, not because the statement itself is false or dubious.

Appeal to the Person. Closely related to the straw man fallacy is *appeal to the person* (also known as the ad hominem fallacy). Appeal to the person is the rejecting of a

Figure 1.8 Politics is rife with fallacies—especially straw man, appeal to the person, and slippery slope. What fallacies in politics have you heard or read lately?

"This is patently absurd; but whoever wishes to become a philosopher must learn not to be frightened by absurdities."
—Bertrand Russell

statement on the grounds that it comes from a particular person, not because the statement, or claim, itself is false or dubious. For example:

> *You can safely discard anything that Susan has to say about government. She's a dyed-in-the-wool socialist.*
>
> *Johnson argues that our current welfare system is defective. But don't listen to him—he's a conservative.*

Ad hominem arguments often creep into student philosophy papers. Part of the reason is that some appeals to the person are not so obvious. For example:

> *Swinburne's cosmological argument is a serious attempt to show that God is the best explanation for the existence of the universe. However, he is a well-known theist, and this fact raises some doubts about the strength of his case.*
>
> *Dennett argues from the materialist standpoint, so he begins with a bias that we need to take into account.*
>
> *Some of the strongest arguments against the death penalty come from a few people who are actually on death row. They obviously have a vested interest in showing that capital punishment is morally wrong. We therefore are forced to take their arguments—however convincing—with a grain of salt.*

Each of these arguments is defective because it asks us to reject or resist a claim solely because of a person's character, background, or circumstances—things that are generally irrelevant to the truth of claims. A statement must stand or fall *on its own merits.* The personal characteristics of the person espousing the view do not necessarily have a bearing on its truth. Only if we can show that someone's dubious traits somehow make the claim dubious are we justified in rejecting the claim because of a person's personal characteristics. Such a circumstance is rare.

appeal to popularity The fallacy of arguing that a claim must be true not because it is backed by good reasons but simply because many people believe it.

Appeal to Popularity. The *appeal to popularity* (or appeal to the masses) is another extremely common fallacy. It is arguing that a claim must be true not because it is backed by good reasons but simply because many people believe it. The idea is that, somehow, there is truth in numbers. For example:

> *Of course there's a God. Everyone believes that.*
>
> *Seventy percent of Americans believe that the president's tax cuts are good for the economy. So don't try to tell me the tax cuts aren't good for the economy.*
>
> *Most people believe that Jones is guilty, so he's guilty.*

In each of these arguments, the conclusion is thought to be true merely because it is believed by an impressive number of people. The number of people who believe a claim, however, is irrelevant to the claim's truth. What really matters is how much support the claim has from good reasons. Large groups of people have been—and are—wrong about many things. Many people once believed that Earth is flat, mermaids are real, and human sacrifices help crops grow. They were wrong.

Remember, however, that the number of people who accept a claim *can* be relevant to its truth if the people happen to be experts. Twenty professional astronomers who predict an eclipse are more reliable than one hundred nonexperts who swear that no eclipse will occur.

Genetic Fallacy. A ploy like the appeal to the person is the *genetic fallacy*—arguing that a statement can be judged true or false based on its source. In an appeal to the person, someone's character or circumstances is thought to tell the tale. In the genetic fallacy, the truth of a statement is supposed to depend on origins other than an individual—organizations, political platforms, groups, schools of thought, even exceptional states of mind (like dreams and intuitions). Look:

genetic fallacy Arguing that a statement can be judged true or false based on its source.

That new military reform idea has gotta be bunk. It comes from a liberal think tank.

At the city council meeting Hernando said that he had a plan to curb the number of car crashes on Highway 19. But you can bet that whatever it is, it's half-baked—he said the plan came to him when he was stoned on marijuana.

The U.S. Senate is considering a proposal to reform affirmative action, but you know their ideas must be ridiculous. What do they know about the rights of the disadvantaged? They're a bunch of rich white guys.

Equivocation. The fallacy of *equivocation* is assigning two different meanings to the same significant word in an argument. The word is used in one sense in a premise and in a different sense in another place in the argument. The switch in meaning can deceive the reader and disrupt the argument, rendering it invalid or weaker than it would be otherwise. Here's a classic example:

equivocation The fallacy of assigning two different meanings to the same significant word in an argument.

Only man is rational.

No woman is a man.

Therefore, no woman is rational.

And one other:

You are a bad writer.

If you are a bad writer, then you are a bad boy.

Therefore, you are a bad boy.

The first argument equivocates on the word *man.* In the first premise, *man* means humankind; in the second, male. Thus, the argument seems to prove that women are not rational. You can see the trick better if you assign the same meaning to both instances of *man.* Like this:

Only humans are rational.

No woman is a human.

Therefore, no woman is rational.

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."
—William Shakespeare

In the second argument, the equivocal term is *bad*. In the first premise, *bad* means incompetent; in the second, immoral.

appeal to ignorance The fallacy of trying to prove something by appealing to what we don't know. It is arguing that either (1) a claim is true because it hasn't been proven false or (2) a claim is false because it hasn't been proven true.

Appeal to Ignorance. As its name implies, this fallacy tries to prove something by appealing to what we *don't* know. The *appeal to ignorance* is arguing either that (1) a claim is true because it hasn't been proven false or (2) a claim is false because it hasn't been proven true. For example:

> *Try as they may, scientists have never been able to disprove the existence of an afterlife. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that there is in fact an afterlife.*
>
> *Super Green Algae can cure cancer. No scientific study has ever shown that it does not work.*
>
> *No one has ever shown that ESP (extrasensory perception) is real. Therefore, it does not exist.*
>
> *There is no evidence that people on welfare are hardworking and responsible. Therefore, they are not hardworking and responsible.*

The first two arguments try to prove a claim by pointing out that it hasn't been proven false. The second two try to prove that a claim is false because it hasn't been proven true. Both kinds of arguments are bogus because they assume that a lack of evidence proves something. A lack of evidence, however, can prove nothing. Being ignorant of the facts does not enlighten us.

Notice that if a lack of evidence could prove something, then you could prove just about anything you wanted. You could reason, for instance, that since no one can prove that horses *can't* fly, horses must be able to fly. Since no one can disprove that you possess supernatural powers, you must possess supernatural powers.

false dilemma The fallacy of arguing erroneously that since there are only two alternatives to choose from, and one of them is unacceptable, the other one must be true.

False Dilemma. In a dilemma, you are forced to choose between two unattractive possibilities. The fallacy of *false dilemma* is arguing erroneously that since there are only two alternatives to choose from, and one of them is unacceptable, the other one must be true. Consider these:

> *You have to listen to reason. Either you must sell your car to pay your rent, or your landlord will throw you out on the street. You obviously aren't going to sell your car, so you will be evicted.*
>
> *You have to face the hard facts about the war on drugs. Either we must spend billions of dollars to increase military and law enforcement operations against drug cartels, or we must legalize all drugs. We obviously are not going to legalize all drugs, so we have to spend billions on anticartel operations.*

The first argument says that there are only two choices to consider: either sell your car or get evicted, and since you will not sell your car, you will get evicted. This argument is fallacious because (presumably) the first premise is false—there seem to be more than just two alternatives here. You could get a job, borrow money from

a friend, or sell your DVD player and TV. If the argument seems convincing, it is because other possibilities are excluded.

The second argument asserts that there are only two ways to go: spend billions to attack drug cartels or legalize all drugs. Since we won't legalize all drugs, we must therefore spend billions to assault the cartels. The first (either/or) premise, however, is false; there are at least three other options. The billions could be spent to reduce and prevent drug use; drug producers could be given monetary incentives to switch to nondrug businesses; or only some drugs could be legalized.

"Philosophy is at once the most sublime and the most trivial of human pursuits."
—William James

Begging the Question. The fallacy of *begging the question* is trying to prove a conclusion by using that very same conclusion as support. It is arguing in a circle. This way of trying to prove something says, in effect, "X is true because X is true." Few people would fall for this fallacy in such a simple form, but more subtle kinds can be beguiling. For example, here's the classic instance of begging the question:

begging the question The fallacy of trying to prove a conclusion by using that very same conclusion as support.

The Bible says that God exists.

The Bible is true because God wrote it.

Therefore, God exists.

The conclusion here (God exists) is supported by premises that assume that very conclusion.

Here's another one:

All citizens have the right to a fair trial because those whom the state is obliged to protect and give consideration are automatically due judicial criminal proceedings that are equitable by any reasonable standard.

This passage may at first seem like a good argument, but it isn't. It reduces to this unimpressive assertion: "All citizens have the right to a fair trial because all citizens have the right to a fair trial." The conclusion is "all citizens have the right to a fair trial," but that's more or less what the premise says. The premise—"those whom the state is obliged to protect and give consideration are automatically due judicial criminal proceedings that are equitable by any reasonable standard"—is equivalent to "all citizens have the right to a fair trial."

When circular reasoning is subtle, it can ensnare even its creators. The fallacy can easily sneak into an argument if the premise and conclusion say the same thing but say it in different, complicated ways.

Slippery Slope. The metaphor behind this fallacy suggests the danger of stepping on a dicey incline, losing your footing, and sliding to disaster. The fallacy of *slippery slope,* then, is arguing erroneously that a particular action should not be taken because it will lead inevitably to other actions resulting in some dire outcome. The key word here is *erroneously.* A slippery slope scenario becomes fallacious when there is no reason to believe that the chain of events predicted will ever happen. For example:

slippery slope The fallacy of arguing erroneously that a particular action should not be taken because it will lead inevitably to other actions resulting in some dire outcome.

This trend toward gay marriage must be stopped. If gay marriage is permitted, then traditional marriage between a man and a woman will

be debased and devalued, which will lead to an increase in divorces. And higher divorce rates can only harm our children.

This argument is fallacious because there are no reasons for believing that gay marriage will ultimately result in the chain of events described. If good reasons could be given, the argument might be salvaged.

composition The fallacy of arguing erroneously that what can be said of the parts can also be said of the whole.

Composition. Sometimes what is true about the parts of a thing is also true of the whole—and sometimes not. The fallacy of *composition* is arguing erroneously that what can be said of the parts can also be said of the whole. Consider:

Each piece of wood that makes up this house is lightweight. Therefore, the whole house is lightweight.

Each soldier in the platoon is proficient. Therefore the platoon as a whole is proficient.

The monthly payments on this car are low. Hence, the cost of the car is low.

"Philosophy should quicken life, not deaden it."
—Susan Glaspell

Just remember, sometimes the whole *does* have the same properties as the parts. If each part of the rocket is made of steel, the whole rocket is made of steel.

division The fallacy of arguing erroneously that what can be said of the whole can be said of the parts.

Division. If you turn the fallacy of composition upside down, you get the fallacy of *division*—arguing erroneously that what can be said of the whole can be said of the parts:

The house is heavy. Therefore, every part of the house is heavy.

The platoon is very effective. Therefore, every member of the platoon is effective.

That herd of elephants eats an enormous amount of food each day. Therefore, each elephant in the herd eats an enormous amount of food each day.

WRITING AND REASONING CHAPTER 1

1. What is the difference between an argument and an explanation? What is the difference between an argument and a set of accusations? or expressions of outrage?
2. How is reading philosophy different from, say, reading a physics text? or reading a novel?
3. What is philosophy's greatest practical benefit? Do you think studying philosophy could change your life goals or your fundamental beliefs? Why or why not?
4. What is the philosophical method? Who can make use of this approach to important questions? Can only philosophers use it? Have you used it? How?
5. Devise an argument in favor of the proposition that people should (or should not) be punished as Socrates was for speaking their minds.
6. Write a Socratic dialogue between yourself and a friend. Imagine that your friend declares: "Everyone lies. No one ever tells the truth." Show that those statements are false.
7. Choose one of your fundamental beliefs that you have not thought much about and write an argument defending it or rejecting it.
8. The straw man fallacy is rampant in political debates. Give an example of this tactic being used by commentators or politicians, or make up an example of your own.
9. Think about the political commentators you've read or listened to. What fallacies have they been guilty of using?
10. Socrates died for his principles. What ideas in your life would you be willing to die for?

REVIEW NOTES

1.1 PHILOSOPHY: THE QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING

- Studying philosophy has both practical and theoretical benefits. To some, the pursuit of knowledge through philosophy is a spiritual quest.
- Taking an inventory of your philosophical beliefs at the beginning of this course will help you gauge your progress as you study.
- The four main divisions of philosophy are metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and logic. There are also subdivisions of philosophy that examine basic issues found in other fields.

1.2 SOCRATES AND THE EXAMINED LIFE

- For Socrates, an unexamined life is a tragedy because it results in grievous harm to the soul, a person's true self or essence. The soul is harmed by lack of knowledge—ignorance of one's self and of the most important values in life (the good).
- The Socratic method is a question-and-answer dialogue in which propositions are methodically scrutinized to uncover the truth. Usually when Socrates used it in conversations with his fellow Athenians, their views would be exposed as false or confused. The main point of the exercise for Socrates, however, was not to win arguments but to get closer to the truth.

1.3 THINKING PHILOSOPHICALLY

- An argument is a group of statements in which one of them is meant to be supported by the others. A statement (or claim) is an assertion that something is or is not the case and is therefore the kind of utterance that is either true or false. In an argument, the statement being supported is the conclusion, and the statements supporting the conclusion are the premises.
- A good argument must have (1) solid logic and (2) true premises. Requirement (1) means that the conclusion should follow logically from the premises. Requirement (2) says that what the premises assert must in fact be the case.
- A deductive argument is intended to give logically conclusive support to its conclusion. An inductive argument is intended to give probable support to its conclusion. A deductive argument with the proper structure is said to be valid; a deductive argument that fails to have this structure is said to be invalid. If inductive arguments succeed in lending probable support to their conclusions, they are said to be strong. If they fail to provide this probable support, they are termed weak. When a valid (deductive) argument has true premises, it is said to be sound. When a strong (inductive) argument has true premises, it is said to be cogent. In inference to the best explanation, we begin with premises about a phenomenon or state of affairs to be explained. Then we reason from those premises to an explanation for that state of affairs. We try to produce not just any explanation but the best explanation among several possibilities. The best explanation is the one most likely to be true.
- The guidelines for reading philosophy are: (1) Approach the text with an open mind; (2) read actively and critically; (3) identify the conclusion first, then the premises; (4) outline, paraphrase, or summarize the argument; and (5) evaluate the argument and formulate a tentative judgment.

KEY TERMS

appeal to ignorance
appeal to popularity
appeal to the person
argument
axiology
begging the question
composition
conclusion
deductive argument
division
epistemology
equivocation
ethics
fallacy
false dilemma
genetic fallacy
inductive argument
logic
metaphysics
philosophical method
premise
slippery slope
Socratic method
statement
straw man