

Syllabus for *Introduction to Philosophy*

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Office Hours: tbd

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Introduction

What is philosophy? And how does one go about doing philosophy well?

These questions shall guide our course, but we won't answer them directly. Rather, we'll jump in and learn philosophy by doing it. At the end of the course, we'll find that the answers to what philosophy is and how one should go about doing it... aren't very clear. In fact, philosophers are just as likely to disagree about the answers to these questions as any of the other questions we'll think about in this course!

One thing I'll try to persuade you of in this course is that one feature philosophy questions tend to share is that they are *hard*. That doesn't mean philosophy is only for super-smart people (thank goodness for that, say I!); instead, it means that doing philosophy means thinking *slowly*. Philosophy, as a discipline, rewards patience.

But that doesn't mean we won't make some progress! Sometimes, the best we can hope for in philosophy is to end our inquiry with more refined questions than we started with. If we're asking better questions about and within philosophy by the end of the course, that will be a job well done.

This course isn't a comprehensive survey: it's an in depth look at some representative topics across philosophy. Along the way, we'll develop a particularly useful philosophical tool: argument mapping. Ultimately, we want not only to *map* arguments, but to be able to *extract* and then *critique* map-able arguments from the philosophical texts we read. These are tools for helping us to think deliberately, visually, and—most importantly—slowly.

If the slowness of philosophy doesn't sound exciting, I invite you to think of it as liberating. Here is a place where we may wallow in wondering. Where we may sit with questions for as long as we like. And where, eventually, we may yet answer them.

Course Goals

Goal 1: Students will learn how to map simple arguments: they will be able to visually represent how reasons, objections, and conclusions fit together structurally in an argument while being sensitive to some first-order logical constraints on reasoning.

Goal 2: Students will learn how to extract and critique (map-able) arguments from a paragraph-length philosophical argument

Goal 3: Students will gain familiarity with one debate from four subfields of philosophy (epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, and the philosophy of religion), becoming acquainted with the breadth of philosophical topics while also learning to appreciate sustained philosophical examination of a single issue.

Goal 4: Students will learn to engage civilly and intelligently about complex topics, both orally and in writing.

Required Materials

You should bring paper, a writing utensil, and a copy of the day's reading to class every day.

There is one required 'text' for this course: a subscription to Rationale. Make sure you get the (cheaper) 'Rationale Education Extra' option. This package includes mapping software, mapping tutorials, and a (short) *Critical Reasoning* textbook. We will use all three of these. You can find it here: <https://www.rationaleonline.com/accounts/upgrade/educational>. (\$39)

All other readings and materials can be found online on our course site.

Course Readings: General Description

Our class has two components. First, throughout the course, we will learn a technique for mapping arguments. Along the way, we will learn some basic rules of propositional logic. Argument mapping is a useful philosophical tool in its own right, but you can also think of this component as a taste of what you'd get in a logic or critical reasoning course.

The second component of the class is a sampler of philosophical debates from four central areas of philosophy: epistemology (the study of what to believe), ethics (the study of how we should live), metaphysics (the study of what there is), and the philosophy of religion (the study of questions that bear on religious beliefs and practices). Necessarily, this strategy will leave many important philosophical questions untouched. But I hope it will give you a feel for the *kinds* of questions that philosophers ask, and it will give us the opportunity to (slowly, patiently) spend a bit more time with some questions than we would in a more comprehensive course. Here are the specific questions we'll ask:

EPISTEMOLOGY: Can I rationally believe something if (I know that) equally smart and informed people disagree with me?

ETHICS: Does morality (objectively) require me to give most of my money to charity?

METAPHYSICS: Do we have free will?

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: Is the fact that there is so much evil in the world a good reason not to believe in a God?

By the end of the course, you'll have done a bit of epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, philosophy of religion, and logic. And you'll be well-positioned to explore further philosophical topics and courses of interest to you!

The two strands of our course will merge in the final weeks, as you undertake an argument-mapping project, wherein you'll use the tools you learned with Rationale to extract and analyze an argument from one of our philosophical readings.

Course Readings: Schedule

LEGEND

Topic: The philosophical topic we are exploring that week

Readings:

- (1) always, a 10–25 page philosophy paper that will guide our discussion for the week, and
- (2) occasionally, a 2–5 page excerpt from an historical source that is background reading for the main text.

CT:

These are the readings from our online textbook *Critical Thinking*. The subsections are quite short. So even when multiple subsections are listed, expect fewer than 10 pages of actual reading.

RT:

These are exercises from the Rationale Tutorials. You will complete roughly one problem set per week.

Other:

If there is a quiz, exam, or other assignment due during the week, it will be listed here.

Wait a minute... how long will this take?

Your mileage will vary (and that's ok). But as a very general rule of thumb, I advise first-time philosophy students to set aside 5 minutes per page of a philosophy article. So, reading a 25-page philosophy paper might take just over 2 hours: let's round up to 2 ½ to give us time to re-read any tricky bits.

The CT reading will be both shorter and (usually) easier: plan on about an hour each week for the CT textbook.

The Rational Tutorials may be the hardest to predict from week to week. These could take anywhere from half an hour to two hours on the upper end.

EPISTEMOLOGY

WEEK 1

Topic | Is Reasonable Disagreement Possible?

Readings:

- (1) Feldman, Richard (2006). 'Reasonable religious disagreements,' in Louise Antony (ed.) *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, Oxford University Press: 194–214.
- (2) This syllabus

CT:

Chapter 1 | Introduction to Argument Mapping
Chapter 2.2 Topic 5 | Argument

RT:

Argument Mapping | Before you start

Other:

Sign up for office hours

WEEK 2

Topic | Disagreement Part I, Conciliationism

Readings:

Christensen, David (2007). 'Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News,' *Philosophical Review* 116 (2):187–217.

CT:

CT 2.2 Topic 6 | Reason
CT 2.2 Topic 7 | Objection
CT 2.2 Topic 8 | Basis

RT:

Critical Thinking | Problem Set 2: Argument Parts

Other:

None

WEEK 3

Topic | Disagreement Part II, Steadfastness

Readings:

Lackey, Jennifer (2008). 'What Should We Do When We Disagree?' in Tamar Szabó & John Hawthorne (eds.) *Oxford Studies in Epistemology, Volume 3*, Oxford University Press: 274–293.

CT:

CT 2.3 Topic 9 | Proposition

CT 2.3 Topic 10 | Identifying Arguments in Prose

CT 2.3 Topic 11 | Identifying Contentions

RT:

Argument Mapping | Problem Set 1: Simple Arguments

Other:

None

WEEK 4

Topic | Skepticism

Readings:

(1) Rinard, Susanna (forthcoming), 'Reasoning one's Way out of Skepticism,' in *Brill Studies in Epistemology*. (Only read §1–4, that is, pages 1–18)

(2) Excerpts from chapter 1 of Al-Ghazali's *Deliverance from Error*

CT:

CT 2.3 Topic 12 | Indicators

CT 2.3 Topic 13 | Indicators – examples

RT:

Critical Thinking | Problem Set 3: Indicators

Other:

Argument Mapping Quiz 1

ETHICS

WEEK 5

Topic | Is Ethics Objective?

Readings:

Shafer-Landau, Russ (2016). 'Ethical Subjectivism,' in Joel Feinberg & Russ Shafer-Landau (eds.) *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 16th ed., Cengage Learning, Inc.

CT:

CT 2.3 Topic 14 | Refining Claims

RT:

Critical Thinking | Problem Set 4: Refining Claims

Other:

None

WEEK 6

Topic | How Demanding is Morality? Part I

Readings:

Singer, Peter (1972). 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (3):229–243.

CT:

CT 2.4 Topic 15 | Assumption

CT 2.4 Topic 16 | Rabbit Principle

CT 2.4 Topic 17 | Holding Hands Principle

RT:

Argument Mapping | Problem Set 2: Simple Argument Structure

Other:

None

WEEK 7

Topic | How Demanding is Morality? Part II

Readings:

Wolf, Susan (1982). 'Moral Saints' *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (8):419–439.

CT & RT:

Study for Midterm

Other:

Midterm (multiple-choice and short-answer exam on the units 'Epistemology' and 'Ethics')
Argument Mapping Quiz 2 (cumulative, taken at the same time as the midterm)

WEEK 8

Topic | Libertarianism

Readings:

Chisholm, Roderick M. (1964). 'Human Freedom and the Self' in Robert Kane (ed.), *Free Will*, Blackwell.

CT:

CT 2.4 Topic 18 | Inference Objection

CT 2.4 Topic 19 | Argument Pattern

RT:

Argument Mapping | Problem Set 3: Multi-Reason Arguments

Other:

None

WEEK 9

Topic | Compatibilism

Readings:

Wolf, Susan. 'Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility' in Ferdinand David Schoeman (ed.), *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*, Cambridge University Press: 46–62.

CT:

CT 2.4 Topic 20 | Deductive Argument

CT 2.4 Topic 21 | Inductive Argument

CT 2.4 Topic 22 | Abductive Argument

RT:

Argument Mapping | Problem Set 4: Multi-Layer Arguments

Other:

None

WEEK 10

Topic | Hard Determinism

Readings:

Pereboom, Derk (1995). 'Determinism *al dente*,' *Noûs* 29 (1):21–45.

CT:

No new reading, but you may find it helpful to reread CT 2.4 Topic 18

RT:

Argument Mapping | Problem Set 5: Inference Objections

Other:

Argument Mapping Quiz 3 (cumulative)

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

WEEK 11

Topic | The Problem of Evil

Readings:

(1) Rowe, William (1990). 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism' in Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (eds.) *The Problem of Evil*, Oxford University Press.

(2) Dostoevsky, Fyodor. Brief excerpts from 'Rebellion' in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

CT:

CT 2.5 Topic 23 | Evaluating Claims

CT 2.5 Topic 24 | Evaluating Reasons

RT:

Critical Thinking | Problem Set 8: Evaluating

Other:

None

WEEK 12

Topic | The Soul-Making Theodicy

Readings:

Hick, John (1981). 'An Irenaean Theodicy,' in Stephen T. Davis (ed.) *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*.

CT:

CT 2.5 Topic 25 | Cognitive Bias

RT:

Critical Thinking | Problem Set 9: More on Evaluating

Other:

In preparation for *The Final Mapping Project*, read: Mackie, J.L. (1955). 'Evil and Omnipotence,' *Mind* 64 (254):200–212.

WEEK 13

Topic | Is Suffering Unavoidable?

Readings:

Gäb, Sebastian (2015). 'Why Do We Suffer? Buddhism and the Problem of Evil' *Philosophy Compass* 10 (5):345–353.

CT & RT:

None

Other:

Final Argument-Mapping Project part I

WEEK 14

Topic | Argument-Mapping Project & Final Review

Readings:

No new reading (but you'll need to continue referring to Mackie for the *Argument-Mapping Project*)

CT & RT:

Review session in class

Other:

Argument-Mapping Project part II

Course Reflection due

Study for the final

Argument Mapping Quiz 4 (cumulative)

FINALS WEEK

Final Exam: multiple-choice and short-answer exam on the units 'Metaphysics' and 'Philosophy of Religion' (non-cumulative)

Assignments and Assessments

Assessment

Your grades on individual assignments will be combined to form your course grade in the following way:

Problem Sets: 15%

Quizzes: 20% (5% per quiz)

Midterm: 20%

Final: 20%

Argument-Mapping Project: 15%
Office Hours Assignment: 5%
Reflection: 5%

Problem Sets

Problem sets from the Rationale Tutorial are graded on a pass/fail model. All work that is (a) complete and (b) shows a good-faith effort will receive full credit. To receive credit, make sure that you complete all the exercises in a given problem set.

Quizzes, Midterm, Final

This course has four quizzes, one midterm, and one final. The quizzes are only on argument mapping and cover the material in the *Critical Thinking* textbook and Rationale tutorials covered up until that point in the course. All the quizzes are cumulative

Your midterm and final mainly cover the ‘philosophy readings’ portion of the course, although they may employ concepts from the argument mapping sections. They are not cumulative (in that your final will not ask you any questions about epistemology or ethics). They will include multiple-choice and short answer questions.

Argument Mapping Project

After weeks 1–12, you will have finished the Rationale textbook and tutorial—now it’s time to apply that work to real, philosophical writing!

Stage 0: Receiving the Assignment

At the end of week 12, I will pick a paragraph from J.L. Mackie’s ‘Evil and Omnipotence,’ which we will not have read together in this class. You will be responsible for mapping that argument and writing a brief paper explaining the map you have made.

Stage 1: Mapping the Argument

Using all the tools you have learned through Rationale, you will map the selected argument. You may discuss the map with your peers, but only after you have attempted it on your own.

Stage 2: Explaining the Argument

With your map in place, you will write a short, 2–3 page paper (max 1,000 words) explaining your map. Your paper should clearly (a) state what Mackie’s conclusion in the relevant section is and

(very) briefly relate it to Mackie's main argument. Then you should (b) verbally explain the map that you will turn in. [(a) and (b) together should not take more than a page.] Then you will (c) briefly explain why Mackie does (or might reasonably be taken to) think that each of the premises identified in your map is true. *Justify* the premises (this needn't mean you agree with them. [section (c) might take up to a page and a half]. Finally, in one paragraph or two at most, you will identify one objection that someone could make against a premise or inference in Mackie's argument. It doesn't have to be an objection you agree with: just put the objection that you think you can best articulate briefly.

Your project will be evaluated against the following rubric:

Accuracy of map: 20 points

Correct identification of conclusion: 10 points

Plausible and textually sensitive justification of Mackie's premises: 10 points

Plausible objection to one of Mackie's premises: 5 points

Writing style: 5 points

Total: 50 points

We will take some time in weeks 13 and 14 to prepare for doing this project well, and I will provide you with a sample paper (based on a different passage).

Office Hours Assignment

Once during the semester (you'll sign up for a slot on the first day of class) you will come to office hours. You can come either by yourself or with a friend (who may but need not be in the course, but who must be a member of the college).

Passing the *Office Hours Assignment* is easy—all you need to do is show up for 15 minutes. (You are not being assessed in any way for your 'performance' during office hours.) We can do one of three things:

- (1) We can talk about a specific philosophy question you have. It can be a question from our course, but it doesn't have to be.
- (2) We can talk about your progress in the course and strategies for doing well in it.
- (3) You can tell me about how your semester is going.

Which of those three we do is completely up to you!

Reflection

Learning a new skill requires not just completing a challenge but reflecting on how you've overcome that challenge. It's easy for that part of the learning process to be lost in the mad rush of final

exams. And so, the last project of our semester together is a reflection on what you've learned in the course.

The reflections are due to me by email on the final day of class. You will get full credit for anything you turn in, no matter how long or short, no matter whether your reflection is positive or negative. If you don't need to write much at all, that's ok too.

That said, it's probably useful to have some guidance. Here are some questions I'd be especially interested to have you consider:

1. Has argument mapping changed the way I think about or understand arguments?
2. If my younger sibling or cousin asks me what philosophy is over the upcoming break, what will I tell them?
3. My mind changed in this course when we talked about _____.

I'd love to see the reflection touch on one of these questions. But it's ok if the reflection evolves in a different direction. A single-spaced page of writing would be a good length to aim for.

Reflection is indulgent work, but it is work, nonetheless. Carve out at least an hour to write and reflect. I look forward to reading your thoughts.

Expectations

Reading

It is expected that you will carefully read the texts before class and contribute to discussion during class. The overall length of reading per week will never exceed 35 pages, but those pages should be read closely.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. This class is based on discussion, and when you miss class, you miss an integral part of the course (and we miss your contributions as well!). I will take attendance at the beginning of every class.

I am very willing to excuse absences for mental or physical health reasons or for family emergencies—this course isn't supposed to get in the way of your health. You can request an excused absence for other reasons, but they will be decided on a case-by-case basis. In all cases, excused absences *must be requested in advance of the start of class time*. It's your obligation to request an excused absence before missing a class.

Attendance is not ordinarily a part of your grade. But if a student has a pattern of unexcused absences that remain unaddressed or unchanged after a conversation with the instructor, their grade is reduced by one full letter grade.

Office Hours

I hold office hours on day of week from time to time and also on day of week from time to time.

Come to office hours whenever you like! Office hours aren't punitive (like Occlumency with Professor Snape in *Harry Potter*): they are a chance to discuss anything about philosophy, our course, or college life. You don't only have to come during our scheduled session.

Returned Grades

I will do my best to return grades on assignments within two weeks of submission.

If you receive an extension to turn something in late, that is of course fine. But it may delay the time in which I am able to get your work back to you.

Late Work/Extensions

Assignments are due at the start of class. Late work will not be accepted. *But* extensions may be requested.

Except in extreme circumstances, extensions should always be requested well in advance (at least 48 hours, ideally more).

Plagiarism and Citations

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work as your own. Don't do it. Give proper credit whenever you are using another person's words, arguments, or ideas. When in doubt, cite.

Citing well isn't just a way to avoid plagiarism—it's an opportunity to demonstrate that you have engaged seriously and in good faith with other thinkers. Citing well also (perhaps counter-intuitively!) highlights where you have made an original contribution, making it easier for your readers to see what distinguishes your work from that of others.

When citing printed material, always include the author's name, date of publication, and page number. Every citation should match an entry in your bibliography.

Plagiarism will result in an F on the assignment and reported to the dean. If the plagiarism is blatant or repeated, it will result in an F in the course.

The university's policy on academic integrity can be found here: <link>.

Technology Policy

You are welcome to use technology in class for and only for class-related purposes (e.g., displaying the course readings). Please be aware that when you use screens for other purposes it is often a distraction to others around you. If you are the sort of person (like me!) who is likely to find oneself distracted if one brings one's computer—even given the best of intentions—consider going analogue during class.

Email Guidelines

You should feel free to email me at any point for any course-related content.

Email is an excellent medium for short, specific, and professional questions about the course (questions that aren't answered in this syllabus, that is!). I will always aim to get a response to you within two working days (i.e., I won't generally respond on weekends). Feel free to gently remind me if, after a couple of days, I seem to have overlooked your email.

Email is *not*, however, a medium that replaces office hours. If you have an in-depth philosophical question, then (1) most importantly, hurry! Please ask me about it! and (2) please come to meet me during office hours to do so. This isn't because I don't *like* your engaged philosophical emails, it's because I like them too much, and I'm likely to spend too much time responding to them and too little time doing the other (less interesting) things the university requires of me. Help me to manage my time by taking advantage of office hours when they are offered.

Similarly, if you'd like extensive feedback on an assignment or need to have a conversation about how to get back on track in the course, meet me in office hours if possible. If my regular office hours are impossible for you, we can try to set up an appointment for an alternative time.

If you ask me what I take to be a long question, I may send you a brief reply asking you to come to office hours or talk at the end of class. This isn't meant to indicate that there was anything wrong with your question: it's simply a tool for making sure that (a) I actually *do* answer your question (b) in a way that is sustainable for time-management.

Civil Discourse

All discussion in this class must be performed in a respectful and charitable way. Here is a statement on civil discourse from a fellow philosophy department:

'In our community we expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging other's views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way.'¹

For practical suggestions for achieving this kind of space, see the appendix.

Accessibility

Please get in touch with the Office of Disability Services (<link>) if there is any way at all that this course can be made more accessible for you. I want to make this course as accessible for everyone as possible!

Other Services for Students

[e.g., Writing Center, Health Center, etc.]

¹ Rutgers University Philosophy Department: <<https://philosophy.rutgers.edu/climate-v2/civil-discourse>>

APPENDIX

Guidelines for Being a Good Discussion Peer in Philosophy

A Guide for Students

Christopher Willard-Kyle

Philosophy, perhaps more so than other disciplines, revolves around dialogue. Philosophers talk a lot. One of our favorite things to do is to give arguments. Arguments give rise to objections. Objections give rise to responses, which are often just objections to the objections. It doesn't take a philosopher to see that a regress is coming. So philosophers, perhaps more so than other academics, need to think carefully about how we talk to each other. How should we talk philosophy, especially in the classroom?

Part A. How to Interact with Others

1. Adopt a general attitude that you and your classmates are involved in the common pursuit of the truth.
2. Everyone has a presumptive seat at the philosophy table. Respect everyone's place and cultivate an expectation to learn from everyone.
3. Make eye contact when listening to other students and show them they have your full attention. Wait until the speaker has fully finished before responding.
4. Name other students when you're responding to their idea. This shows that you've been listening to them and gives them credit for their contributions. Even when you are making an opposing point, mentioning them communicates that you think their comment is worthy of discussion.
5. Unless the class is very small (and probably even then), raise your hand before making a contribution. If the instructor is doing their job, this helps them to distribute talking time fairly and to facilitate discussion.
6. Recognize that you, like everyone else, are subject to implicit biases—that is, attitudes or stereotypes about social groups that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner—and work actively to counter them. Do you (for example) tend to zone out when someone with a particular accent is speaking? Then make it a special goal to make note of what that student says during discussions.

7. Be sensitive in the examples that you choose to illustrate your points: don't use gratuitously traumatic examples when others will suffice. Be reasonably mindful of how the words you use may be experienced by others.
8. Interpret other students' contributions charitably. Before responding, consider the possibility that they meant something else or are sensitive to a concern or argument that you aren't. Even if it turns out that the other student has just made a silly mistake (after all, we all do this from time to time), you'll never lose points with your classmates (or instructor) for taking someone's words seriously. This is one way of expressing your expectation to learn from everyone.
9. Be charitable toward the philosophers we read in class too, even though they aren't here. Otherwise, your peers won't think you can be charitable toward them.
10. Accept responsibility when (inevitably) you aren't the best discussion peer you could be. Sometimes the implicit biases win or you find that you've interrupted someone in your enthusiasm to make your point heard. Take responsibility, make quick amends if appropriate, and then move on. We'll try to treat you as generously as we hope you'll treat us when we err.
11. Make friends with your classmates. It's meaningful to share ideas with people. It's one of the ingredients out of which friendship is made. Of course, you're not obligated to befriend or even like any of your classmates: respect is sufficient. But what is better than a good philosophical discussion if not a good philosophical discussion among friends?

Part B. What Kinds of Contributions to Make

12. One of the greatest philosophical tools is thinking slowly. Make small points in clear steps.
13. Ask clarificatory questions frequently. One of the goals of philosophy is to clarify concepts. If you're asking a clarificatory question, you're doing philosophy right! There's an art to asking clarificatory questions well: when you can, be specific about what exactly is confusing and why it is confusing. Is it confusing because there is an unfamiliar word or because a familiar word is being used in an unfamiliar way? Is the argument confusing because you aren't sure what the structure is or because you aren't sure what the motivation is for believing one of the premises?
14. Explain references to papers or authors that we haven't read together in this class. It's wonderful to make connections to readings from past philosophy classes or other disciplines—the ability to make those connections is one of the goals of a good philosophical education! But make sure that you allow your peers to understand those

connections too. When you draw a connection to something we haven't read in our course, assume that someone in the class would benefit from a succinct explanation: don't name drop.

15. Objections are gifts, not attacks. Be generous, therefore, and give objections.
16. Objections are gifts, not attacks. So give them as gifts. That is, present them as opportunities to sharpen each other's' viewpoints, not as a way of scoring points against an opponent.
17. Objections are gifts, not attacks. So graciously receive objections. If someone objects to what you say, that means that they thought your argument was worth engaging seriously.
18. Be willing to change your mind. If you rarely change your mind in response to another student's contribution, you probably aren't listening closely enough. Appropriately changing your view is much more likely to gain you the respect of your peers (and instructor) than winning an argument.
19. Sometimes the objection becomes the main kind of comment in a discussion. That's ok, but remember that there are other kinds of equally (perhaps more) valuable comments to make. In addition to providing counterexamples, you can provide examples that illustrate someone's point. In addition to developing an objection, you can develop a supporting argument or a response to a potential objection. Sometimes it's just a matter of framing: nitpicky objections, though useful, are often better framed as motivating an amendment to a view rather than outright rejection. Some philosophers have made whole careers out of making distinctions. And there are all sorts of questions: clarifiers, refreshers, and comprehension-checkers; detail-seekers, explanation-seekers, and motivation-seekers; big picture, small picture, and nitpick-ture. All of these are good questions.
20. Practice identifying what kind of contribution you are making (using the categories above or your own). Learning to do this will help you to frame your contributions: 'This is just a nitpicky point...?' 'Maybe you could amend your view to get around it by doing this...?' 'Would the proposed change preserve the motivation behind your original idea?' 'I think there's a big-picture concern regarding premise 2...'
21. Philosophers often use just-so stories (sometimes called 'test cases' or 'thought experiments') to try to understand a concept. Here's a famous example from Bertrand Russell meant to show that knowledge is different from (mere) true belief:

Stopped Clock: There is the man who looks at a clock which is not going, though he thinks it is, and who happens to look at it at the moment when it is right; this man

acquires a true belief as to the time of day, but cannot be said to have knowledge.
(Russell, 2009: 91)

Russell's story is short and simple. There aren't any fancy words, and it is easy to imagine the story being true. Most of us find that it persuasively illustrates how knowledge differs from (mere) true belief. The simplicity is important. When introducing your own just-so stories to evoke a philosophical intuition, start by eliminating as many variables as possible. In this (limited) way, think of it as a laboratory experiment. For instance, if you're trying to think about the moral difference (if there is one) between the act of lying and the act of withholding the truth, think about cases in which the consequences of the two acts are the same. Otherwise, our reactions to the cases might track what we think about consequences and not what we think about the distinction between lying and withholding the truth.

22. But then also proceed to talk about insights from and applications to the complicated, social, lived-in world. Such 'fieldwork' cases are often messier than the sanitized 'controlled [thought] experiment' cases that philosophers generally focus on. But wading through the mess is worth it. Philosophy should, after all, tell us something about the messy world we live in. We didn't stop doing fieldwork in the sciences when we invented the laboratory: some things are easier to discover in the field. We shouldn't needlessly give up tools in philosophy either.