



A large, light gray speech bubble with a dark gray outline. The bubble has a long tail pointing towards the bottom left corner. Inside the bubble, there is a block of text in a dark gray serif font.

“What’s the  
point of looking at  
arguments about how to  
answer these questions, if  
we can’t know for sure  
which is right?”

Suppose further that you really care about the origins of life on earth. Does that fact that no biologist can tell you what the origins in fact were mean that you should not look at the arguments given for the competing theories?

That does not seem reasonable.

Or take a less intellectual example. In the recent past many of you spent some time thinking about where would be the best place for you to go to college. Was there a proof you could find, or some infallible authority you could consult?

But that didn't make it unreasonable for you to think long and hard about the arguments in favor of various options. Just the opposite — because you cared about this question and because there was no authority to consult, it was more important for you to think hard about the arguments.

Readings are short. Learning how to read philosophy is a very important skill, but not our focus.

The guiding theme of the course: your goal is not to learn what others have thought about these topics, but to (1) figure out what **you** think about these topics and (2) learn how to defend your views by argument.

Everything is structured around this theme.

My job in lecture: explain to you the most important arguments for and against various views on our big questions.



Given this goal, I am sorry to say: no laptops.

Every lecture (after today) will include a mid-class break to let you clear your mind and ask any questions about the first half of the lecture. We use

Slack for this, in two ways.

Your job in lecture: thinking about what I am saying, making objections, and asking questions. Lectures are not for memorizing or scribbling down what I am saying; the notes are all posted online.

Instead of spending lots of time doing readings before lecture, you should spend lots of time thinking about the material after lecture. The main mechanism for doing this is the My Philosophy page on the course website.

This page has two main purposes. First, it is a tool for helping you to figure out what you believe. Second, it is a tool for helping you to see logical connections between topics which might at first seem disconnected.

Your work on this page is your main assignment for the course, and will make up 85% of your grade. You should spend a lot of time on it. There is no busy work in the class: your only job is to figure out what you think and defend your views to the best of your abilities.

If you go into that part of the website, you will see on the left bar an 'FAQ' button which will give you a lot of information about how to approach this assignment and how to do well on it. But let's talk through a few common questions.

that you should not look at the arguments given for the competing theories?



That doesn't seem reasonable.

Support further that you really care about the origins of life on earth. Des

that fact that no biologist can tell you what the origins in fact were mean

some time thinking about where would be the best place for you to go to

could be. Was there a proof you could find, or some infallible authority you

Or take a less intellectual example. In the recent past many of you spent

could consist?

care about this question and because there was no authority to consult, it



But that didn't make it unreasonable for you to think long and hard about

the arguments in favor of various options. Just the opposite because you

was more important for you to think hard about the arguments.

skill, but not our focus.

Reading are short. Learning how to read philosophy is a very important

The guiding theme of the course: you go and learn what others have

these topics and (2) learn how to defend your views by argument.

thought about these topics, but to (1) figure out what you think about



Everything is structured around this theme.

against various views on big questions.

My job in lecture: explain to you the most important arguments for and

Every lecture (after today) will include a mid-class break to let you clear

Stack for this, in two ways.

your mind and ask any questions about the first half of the lecture. We use

and asking questions. Lectures are not for memorizing or scribbling down

what I am saying; the notes are all posted online.



Young job in lecture: thinking about what I am saying, making objections,

Instead of spending lots of time doing readings before lecture, you should

spend lots of time thinking about the material after lecture. The main

mechanism for doing this is the MyPhilosophy page on the website.

connections between topics which might at first seem disconnected.

This page has two main purposes. First, it is about helping you to figure

out what you believe. Second, it is about helping you to see a

make up 85% of your grade. You should spend a lot of time on it. There is



defend your views to the best of your abilities.

Your work on this page is your main assignment for the course, and will

no busy work in the class: you're only job is to figure out what you think and

Your work on this page is your main assignment for the course, and will

make up 85% of your grade. You should spend a lot of time on it.

but which will give you a lot of information about how to approach this

questions.

assignment and how to do well on it. But let's talk through a few common



If you go into that part of the website, you will see on the left bar an 'FAQ'

but which will give you a lot of information about how to approach this

questions.

assignment and how to do well on it. But let's talk through a few common

If you go into that part of the website, you will see on the left bar an 'FAQ'