

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.

And to do that, you will have to learn a bit about what arguments are, and what makes arguments good or bad. I will come back to that in a bit. But first, some nuts and bolts about how the course will work.

That is a bit like the attitude I want you to take toward philosophy. Questions about whether God exists, whether you have free will, and how you should form beliefs are questions which you should care about. So, just as you cared about the arguments for and against various options for college, you should care about the arguments for and against (for example) the existence of God.

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