whether it is a good view (likely to be true) or a bad view (likely to be false), and as a philosopher, you must have reasons for making that evaluation. Therefore, someone who has studied philosophy—given how we have clarified that idea—has either learned to think clearly for the first time or else already knew how to think clearly to some extent but has now had lots of additional practice at it, and so presumably thinks even more clearly. There is a defense of the first premise: a reason to think that the first premise is true.

Now consider a defense for the second premise, that thinking more clearly is always valuable. Surely we can all agree that doing something that helps you get what you want is valuable—that you benefit significantly from doing something that enhances your ability to get what you want (unless, of course, what you want is not good for you). We contend that clear thinking always does that. Suppose, for example, that two people—call them Joe and Doug—each want to finish college as efficiently as possible, and suppose further that Joe thinks much more clearly than Doug. Suppose that Doug never quite thinks hard enough to keep the degree requirements straight or even realize that some of the requirements exist. Suppose that when an advisor suggests to Doug that he take a particular class, Doug never asks why or how that class will fit into his overall program. Doug probably doesn't have a clear plan, but he does have the desire to finish college as efficiently as possible. Suppose that Joe is constantly honing his thinking skills: he always asks the advisor to clarify her advice, always asks why this is a good class to take, and keeps the degree requirements clearly in mind. It is reasonable to assert that because of Joe's ability to think more clearly than Doug, Joe is more likely to realize his goal than Doug is—and this is not even the best example, is it? You do not have to think with exceptional clarity to realize the goal of finishing college as efficiently as possible. Imagine how clearly you have to think to be a responsible citizen or a loving friend or a terrific parent. Being able to distinguish between believing something on the basis of wishful thinking as opposed to believing something on the basis of good evidence might make the difference between doing a good job and doing an inadequate job in many areas of human relations. So thinking clearly is always valuable because it helps you get what you want, whether you want to be a law clerk, a good parent, or a couch potato.

At this point, we have given reasons to think that both premises are true, and it seems initially clear that if the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true. So we have presented and defended an argument, but does that suffice to justify the claim? It surely is a justification, but it is not yet the strongest justification we could give. An even better justification for a claim also includes considering and responding to objections to our own argument.

Objections: Considering Reasons Against the Truth of the Premises

Some students are reluctant to consider **objections** to an argument they are trying to defend, because it seems to them that they are weakening their own position. But an argument that considers and responds to objections is much stronger than an argument that considers no objections at all. Imagine that you are reading two editorials in the newspaper, one of which expresses your own political views, while the other expresses views contrary to yours. Suppose that each piece argues for its position without considering any alternative points of view that might lead to objections. When you read the one you agree with, it is—unfortunately—all too easy just to go along with the argument (you do, after all, already agree with the conclusion). But when you read the one you disagree with, you are probably thinking of objections along the way, and so perhaps you don't feel challenged in your own view because you think that you have good objections to the reasons given for the conclusion you disagree with. But imagine that the editorial you disagree with proceeded to consider objections similar to the ones you are thinking of as you read it, and imagine further that the responses it gives to those objections are pretty compelling.

Wouldn't you feel more uncomfortable shrugging off the view it defends in that case? Wouldn't the challenge to your own view seem more serious? Analogously, wouldn't the piece arguing for the view you agree with be even stronger if it also considered and responded to objections? Any view argued from just one side, without considering alternative perspectives and

the resulting objections, is not as compelling as a view that has considered the strongest objections and has also shown how those objections, however strong they seem, can be satisfactorily answered. This is an especially important philosophical habit of mind: see many sides of an issue—don't be satisfied with just one perspective.

We want to consider and respond to objections for the purpose of strengthening our argument, but presumably we find the argument pretty convincing (since we devised it), so how does one go about finding good objections? This is another one of the skills that you'll acquire as you develop philosophical habits of mind: you will need to be able to take up a critical attitude, criticizing the arguments of other philosophers. You can also take that same point of view in relation to your own argument, pretending that you hold the other point of view and looking for weaknesses in your original argument.

You might think at first that the way to object to an argument is to object to its conclusion—to find reasons for thinking that the conclusion is false. But in fact this doesn't really work very well if you are trying to criticize the original argument. For if you offer reasons to think that the conclusion is false, then you have simply produced another argument for the opposite conclusion. You now have two opposed arguments, leading to opposed results, but not really engaging each other in any more substantial way. They can't both be valid arguments with true premises, and it is unlikely—though not impossible—that they are both strong. But the mere conflict between them gives in itself no insight into which one is mistaken or—even more importantly—*how* it is mistaken. Thus what makes more sense, if the goal is to evaluate, criticize, or strengthen the original argument, is to consider objections to its premises or to the reasoning from the premises to the conclusion, rather than reasons to reject the conclusion. If there are good reasons to think that the premises of an argument are false or that the reasoning from the premises to the conclusion is faulty, then the argument fails to support its conclusion; but if those objections can be answered, then the overall case for the conclusion is strengthened.

Let's first consider an objection to each premise of our sample argument. An objection to a premise is a reason to think that the premise is false. Consider the first premise: that studying philosophy makes you think more clearly. Someone might object by saying that studying philosophy is very confusing. To study philosophy, you have to read many different authors on many different questions, and many of the authors lived a long time ago, so their writing style is very different from ours and often hard to understand. Philosophical questions are hard to understand in the first place because they are so abstract and so remote from everyday concerns. Thus many people who study philosophy just end up very confused, and surely someone who is very confused is not someone who thinks clearly. Therefore studying philosophy does not make one think more clearly.

What about the second premise: that thinking more clearly is always valuable? Someone might object to this premise by pointing out that the more clearly one thinks, the more clearly one sees how vulnerable we puny humans are. We have many grand desires, but our ability to "get what we want" is largely dependent upon conditions beyond our control, and thus all our planning and scheming is in the end just pathetic. The more clearly we think, the more clearly we realize this and the more paralyzed we become. We obviously do not benefit from being so paralyzed. On the contrary, ignorance and murky thinking are bliss. Therefore, thinking clearly is not always valuable.

Objections can also be made to the *reasoning* involved in arguing that the conclusion is likely to be true, given the truth of the premises. Consider an objection to the reasoning of the sample argument. Suppose that someone grants the truth of both of the premises but argues that there are other, indeed much easier ways to learn to think more clearly than by studying philosophy. If the conclusion—that studying philosophy is always valuable—means that anyone should, all things considered, study philosophy, then that conclusion might very well be false, in which case the argument isn't really valid after all. Suppose that you are a math major; and suppose also that studying math teaches you to think more clearly; and suppose further that given your talents and interests, taking the time to study philosophy would take time away from other things that you enjoy without adding very much benefit (since you are already learning to think clearly by studying math). So you could argue that even if it is true that studying philosophy

would teach you to think more clearly and that thinking more clearly is always valuable, it is false that studying philosophy is valuable for you. It is false that you, given all of what is true about your life, should study philosophy. This objection challenges the reasoning involved in drawing the conclusion from the premises instead of challenging one of the premises.

At this point, we have formulated an objection to each of our premises and an objection to the reasoning of the argument, all with the ultimate goal of strengthening our case for the claim that studying philosophy is valuable by answering these objections. 4

Responses: Showing Why the Objections Fail

Obviously we need to *respond* to these objections: we need to show why these objections are not strong enough to seriously affect the force of the original argument. In responding to objections, you will sometimes show that the reasoning of the objections is faulty, while at other times you may respond by showing that the original statement of the premise or the reasoning needs to be altered or qualified in order to accommodate the objection (while still being able to make the case for the claim you are defending).

The first objection claims that studying philosophy, rather than leading to clear thinking, is confusing. But while some people do find it confusing at first, that sense of confusion almost always goes away once one works at it a bit harder. It is really not very easy to pass four philosophy classes without acquiring the thinking skills that clear up the confusion. This objection might have had serious weight if we had specified the idea of studying philosophy as meaning passing only one philosophy course, but it has no serious weight against the first premise when studying philosophy is understood as requiring one to have passed four philosophy courses (or done the equivalent).

The second objection claims that we are virtually powerless to get what we want, no matter how carefully we plan and anticipate, so that clear thinking really isn't always valuable. But what evidence can be offered for such a claim? What reason can this objector offer for the view that our planning and careful thinking make no difference (or so little difference as to be irrelevant) to the outcome of our efforts? Suppose that you point out that you know of many examples of people who have often succeeded in getting what they want when they've planned carefully, and of other people who don't plan carefully and fail to get what they want. These examples are **counter-examples** 5 to the objector's view: examples which give some reason to think that the view is false. Of course no one would claim that careful planning guarantees good results. The defense for the premise under consideration need only claim that careful, clear thinking makes getting what you want more likely—which is enough to make such thinking valuable. So the objector needs to give some reason to think that it is false that careful, clear thinking makes it more likely that you will get what you want.

The defender of the objection might respond that all of those people who planned carefully were just lucky, and the people who didn't plan well were just unlucky. Suppose that the objector continues to say the same thing (planners are just lucky) no matter how detailed your examples are and no matter how many examples you come up with. There is nothing that anyone can say that would conclusively prove that we have more control than the objection says we do, so the objector's view cannot be shown conclusively to be wrong. Is the objector's insistence on the view thereby legitimate? Is it intellectually respectable to insist on a view despite possible counter-examples, just because the view hasn't been *conclusively* proven to be false? This seems clearly unreasonable.

Our main response to this objection, then, is that the objection relies on a very controversial, ill-defended assumption, one that seems to us to be clearly wrong. Therefore, the objection fails to have any serious force against the premise it is aimed at.

What about the objection to the reasoning of the argument? The main response to that objection is that the objection misunderstood the content of the conclusion. The point of the argument was not to argue that everyone ought to study philosophy, even though it was perhaps not entirely unreasonable for the objector to interpret the conclusion that way. One way to understand the claim that studying philosophy is always valuable is to think that studying philosophy will be valuable for *anyone*. And that strongly suggests that anyone ought to do it. But we could argue that the

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STOP Can you think of any other objections to this argument?

5 *Editor Comment*

Another important philosophical skill is giving counter-examples to philosophical claims or theories. To create a counter-example, you need to first figure out just exactly what the claim or view says and then think carefully about how it applies to many situations, looking for examples that show that it is wrong.

conclusion of the argument does not mean that anyone, no matter what else is true of him or her, ought to find some time to study philosophy. The conclusion instead just means that *if* you study philosophy, then that study will be valuable for you in the sense that you will benefit from it. This conclusion is completely consistent with the claim that for any particular person, he or she ought not to study philosophy because for that particular person the study of philosophy, in spite of the benefits that it produces, would not be valuable, all things considered, given what would have to be sacrificed to engage in it and given the possibility of acquiring those same or very similar benefits in some other way. (Here you can see how considering objections also can help to clarify a position.)

Summary

We have clarified and justified the claim that studying philosophy is valuable. We have thereby illustrated many of the skills and philosophical habits of mind required by the method of philosophy. Can you see how the claim is clarified further in the process of justification? Can you see how much stronger the justification is because we have considered and responded to objections?

As you can see now, one of the first challenges of doing philosophy is to learn how to tell when a philosopher—whether it is you or someone you are reading or listening to—is arguing for a view, objecting to it, or responding to objections. As you practice thinking philosophically, you will get better at recognizing these different activities, and you will get better at clarifying claims, drawing distinctions, and making arguments, objections, and responses yourself.

Reading Philosophy

With a little work, almost anyone can learn to think philosophically. But you might wonder what you need to do to work effectively at acquiring this ability. The first, most valuable resource on which you should practice thinking philosophically is the set of reading selections in this book (and any other philosophical texts you may read). But we've learned that students often find reading philosophy very difficult at first, and so we've included some advice about reading philosophy, together with some brief illustrations. And while the advice is directed primarily at reading philosophy, the main points also appl to listening to a philosophical lecture or partic pating in a philosophical discussion.

Philosophical material is primarily argume tative and critical, almost never merely expos tory. You don't read philosophy in order to gath lots of facts that you will then memorize. Y should read philosophy as if you were active thinking along with the author of the text, as you were having an intellectual conversati with him or her. Philosophers are arguing fo view or position. You should think of the auth (or lecturer or discussant) as saying: "Look this is *what* I think, and this is *why* I think What do you think?" Thus you should alwa keep four questions in mind while readi (or listening to lectures, or engaging in disc sion with another philosopher): first, what vi or position is the philosopher advocating? T answer to this question may differ at differ places in an article: an article may make m than one point, and you should ask how th points connect with each other. Notice also what is being advocated at a particular point be very simple and general (e.g., the claim God exists) or very complicated and spec (e.g., the claim that a particular objectio a particular argument that God exist mistaken). The second question to ask is reasons or arguments are being offere support of the view being advocated. Tr sketch the answers to these two questions as read—either in your head or, even bette paper (perhaps in the margin of the book). will then be in a good position to ask the nex questions: how *strong* are the reasons off and are there objections to them? It is virt impossible to do this while relaxing in a pa frame of mind. Successfully reading philos requires an active, critical, imaginative m set—one of the distinctively philosophical h of mind that you need to cultivate in ord learn to think philosophically.

There is one major source of confusion to out for. Because philosophy is essentially n tive and critical, a philosopher will typ discuss other positions and arguments besid one defended in a particular article. These include any of the following: (1) pos opposed to the one defended; (2) positions s to, but still significantly different in some re from the one defended (where the difference