

# Introduction to Philosophy

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## What Philosophy Is (and Isn't): What Philosophy Is

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

### Readings

- Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave".
- Voltaire, "The Good Brahmin".

### Background

In the Allegory of the Cave, Socrates gives his famous image of the human condition as alienation from truth and reality. In response, philosophers, as lovers of truth, must leave their ivory towers of contemplation and liberate their fellow man from the chains of ignorance. However, this comes with no small risk to the philosopher, as Socrates' own life illustrates and Voltaire's "good Brahmin" expresses.

### Questions

1. Describe Plato's allegory of the cave? What happens to those who return back to the cave? Are they welcomed back? Why should those outside the cave be forced to return? Will those outside the cave want to return? How is this story related to education? What does this say about the nature of philosophy and the philosopher?
2. In Voltaire's story, why is the Brahmin in despair? Why doesn't he want to be like his ignorant neighbor? Which would you choose if you could not have both: a life of happiness or a life of reason? Why? What does this say about the nature of philosophy and the philosopher?
3. Ultimately, is there any value to philosophy or it is just a waste of time that makes its practitioners miserable?