

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE  
 Department of Philosophy

Core Philosophical Skills

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Are you a good philosopher?  
 The essentials of philosophical anatomy

- Study the picture of a philosopher hard at work
- Which major anatomical feature do you talk out of?
  - Mouth...
    - You have philosophical potential
  - Butt...
    - Don't worry - consultants make more money anyway




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What makes a good philosopher?

- What an ancient Greek will tell you
  - Lover of wisdom
  - Follow the argument wherever it leads
- What I tell you
  - Apply the four essential skills...




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**Four essential skills**

- Exegesis
  - Understand other views
    - What are the main views in the debate?
    - What **arguments** support those views?
- Thesis
  - Develop your own view
    - Interesting & challenging
    - Focused and defensible with good, clear **argument**
- Argument
  - Defend your view
    - Give good reasons in support of your view
    - Persuade reasonable people who may disagree with you
- Style
  - Express yourself clearly
    - Be guided by the structure of your **argument**

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**Watchit!**



Most of what you read, and almost everything I say will be misleading or even wildly inaccurate. At least, that's what I say. So...

- Be alert
- Be questioning
- Be critical
- Be careful
- Be suspicious

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**Humptification:**  
 "Now there's a glory for you!"



"Quando in uno una parola," disse Humpty Dumpty in tono alquanto sprezzante, "questa significa esattamente quello che decido io... ed più ed meno."

"Bisogna vedere", disse Alice, "se lei vuol dare tanti significati diversi alle parole."

"Bisogna vedere", disse Humpty Dumpty, "chi è che comanda. E tutto qua".  
 Lewis Carroll, Attraverso lo Specchio

- "Philosophy is the systematic abuse of a terminology specially invented for that purpose." -Arthur Koestler
- "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less." -Humpty Dumpty

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**Humptification in action**

- Meanings of 'person'
  - Everyday
    - Human being
  - Philosophical
    - Being with reason, reflection, self-awareness,...



John Locke

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**Remember...**

- A philosopher is
  - a machine for turning food into dung and ideas
- A good philosopher is
  - one who does not get these functions confused



Don't forget

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Philosophy gives the means to speak with apparent authority on all matters, and to make oneself admired by the less learned; while law, medicine and the other sciences bring honor and riches upon their practitioners.

- Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method

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