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The central aim of Morris Lazerowitz's metaphilosophical investigation is to arrive at an understanding of the nature of philosophy. Why such an investigation is necessary appears plainly in his treatment of classical philosophical problems - problems which occur in every field of philosophy and which have been raised again and again in the course of a long history. Traditionally, philosophers have conceived their work as a search for truth, and their goal as knowledge of reality as against mere appearance. Yet the body of propositions which constitute philosophy presents us with an enigma; it is unlike other disciplines in that not a single one of its theses is non-controversial. A philosopher advances his theory with the assured air of asserting an incontestible truth, yet every theory is surrounded by disputation. Some philosophers have been aware of this situation, and openly deplored it. For example, Kant. He wrote:

There is no single book to which you can point as you do to Euclid, and says This is metaphysics; here you may find the noblest objects of this science, ... proved from principles of
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pure reason*, in all ages one metaphysics has contradicted another, either in its assertions or their proofs, and thus has itself destroyed its own claim to lasting assent.²

Descartes made a similar observations

I shall not say anything about philosophy, but that it has been cultivated for many centuries by the best minds that have ever lived, and that nevertheless no single thing is to be found in it which is not subject to dispute* and in consequence which is not dubious...

and more recently G.E. Moore* writes

Philosophy is a terrible subject: the longer X go on with it, the more difficult it is to say anything at all about it which is both true and worth saying. You can never feel that you've finished with any philosophical question whatever: got it finally right* so that you can pass on to something else...

Justification for these complaints is found on every
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side. For example, note the continuing disagreement about the existence of abstract entities, which goes back to Plato. Again consider the uncertainty about the validity of Descartes' "cogito". Does it beg the question? Does Descartes put into his premise what he claims to deduce from it in the conclusion? To take still another example, consider the dispute about causation. Kant says "every event has a cause" is an a priori truth, A.J. Ayer raises the question whether an event must have a cause and maintains that it need not.

Disputation is rife not only among classical philosophers but among present day philosophers as well. And there is hardly a problem among contemporaries but has its source in antiquity. This would suggest that something in the nature of philosophical position and the arguments for it is not understood. The existence of interminable debate is the most compelling reason for Lazerowitz's kind of investigation.

The extensive treatment in his writings on logically necessary, as contrasted with contingent or (empirical) propositions is an indication of the importance to be attached to a study of their features. The
central question of Lazerowitz, 'How is a philosophical proposition to be understood?' has been answered in the history of philosophy in diverse ways - some philosophers appear to claim that their views are a priori, while yet other philosophers take them to be empirical generalisations. Thus the preliminary task in the attempt to understand their nature is to achieve clarity on the nature of a priori and empirical propositions. Once we are clear on their features we shall be in a position to determine whether philosophical theories have such features.