

# Metaphysics

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**Metaphysics** is a branch of philosophy investigating the fundamental nature of being and the world that encompasses it.<sup>[1]</sup> Metaphysics attempts to answer two basic questions:<sup>[2]</sup>

1. Ultimately, what *is there*?
2. What *is it like*?

Topics of metaphysical investigation include existence, objects and their properties, space and time, cause and effect, and possibility. A central branch of metaphysics is ontology, the investigation into the basic categories of being and how they relate to one another. Another central branch is metaphysical cosmology: which seeks to understand the origin and meaning of the universe by thought alone.

There are two broad conceptions about what "world" is studied by metaphysics. The strong, classical view assumes that the objects studied by metaphysics exist independently of any observer, so that the subject is the most fundamental of all sciences. The weaker, more modern view assumes that the objects studied by metaphysics exist inside the mind of an observer, so the subject becomes a form of introspection and conceptual analysis. Some philosophers, notably Kant, discuss both of these "worlds" and what can be inferred about each one.

Some philosophers and scientists, such as the logical positivists, reject the entire subject of metaphysics as meaningless, while others disagree and think that it is legitimate.

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## Central questions

### Being and ontology

Ontology deals with the determination whether *categories of being* are fundamental and discusses in what sense the items in those categories may be said to "be". It is the inquiry into being *in so much as* it is being ("being *qua* being"), or into beings insofar as they exist—and not insofar as (for instance) particular facts may be obtained about them or particular properties belong to them.

Most ontologies assume or assert the existence of categories including objects, properties, space and time. Immediate questions arising from this include the nature of objects. Only properties can be observed directly, so what does it mean for an object to exist and to possess them if we can never observe an object directly? How can we be sure that such objects exist at all?

The word "is" has two distinct uses in English, separated out in ontology. It can denote existence as in "there is an elephant in the room" and also can denote the possession of a property by an object as in "the elephant is grey" (ie. the elephant has greyness). Some philosophers also include sub-classing as a third form of "is-ness" or being, as in "the elephant is a mammal".

Some philosophers, notably of the Platonic school, contend that all nouns (including abstract nouns, called universals) refer to existent entities. Other philosophers contend that nouns do not always name entities, but that some provide a kind of shorthand for reference to a collection of either objects or events. In this latter view, *mind*, instead of referring to an entity, refers to a collection of *mental events* experienced by a *person*; *society* refers to a collection of *persons* with some shared characteristics, and *geometry* refers to a collection of a specific kind of intellectual activity.<sup>[3]</sup> Between these poles of realism and nominalism, stand a variety of other positions. An ontology may give an account of which words refer to entities, which do not, why, and what categories result.

Other controversial categories of objects and properties which may be argued to exist or not include aesthetic and moral properties, and social constructs such as money and ownership. Stances about the status of such things may form the foundation for other branches of philosophy such as aesthetics, ethics and political philosophy.

## Identity and change

Identity is a fundamental metaphysical issue. Metaphysicians investigating identity are tasked with the question of what, exactly, it means for something to be identical to itself. Other issues of identity arise in the context of time: what does it mean for something to be itself across two moments in time? How do we account for this? Another question of identity arises when we ask what our criteria ought to be for determining identity? And how does the reality of identity interface with linguistic expressions?

The metaphysical positions one takes on identity has far-reaching implications on issues such as the mind-body problem, personal identity, and ethics, and law.

The ancient Greeks took extreme positions on the nature of change. Parmenides denied that change altogether, while Heraclitus argued that change was ubiquitous: "[Y]ou cannot step into the same river twice."

Identity, sometimes called Numerical Identity, is the relation that a "thing" bears to itself, and which no "thing" bears to anything other than itself (cf. sameness).

A modern philosopher who made a lasting impact on the philosophy of identity was Leibniz, whose *Law of the Indiscernability of Identicals* is still in wide use today. It states that if some object *x* is identical to some object *y*, then any property that *x* has, *y* will have as well.

Put formally, it states  $(x)(y)((x = y) \rightarrow (P)Px \leftrightarrow Py)$

However, it seems, too, that objects can change over time. If one were to look at a tree one day, and the tree later lost a leaf, it would seem that one could still be looking at that same tree. Two rival theories to account for the relationship between change and identity are Perdurantism, which treats the tree as a series of tree-stages, and Endurantism, which maintains that the organism—the same tree—is present at every stage in its history.

## Causality and time

Classical philosophy recognized a number of causes, including teleological future causes. In special relativity and quantum field theory the notions of space, time and causality become tangled together, with temporal orders of causations becoming dependent on who is observing them. The laws of physics are symmetrical in time, so could equally well be used to describe time as running backwards. Why then do we perceive it as flowing in one direction, the arrow of time, and as containing causation flowing in the same direction?

Causality is usually required as a foundation for philosophy of science, if science aims to understand causes and effects and make predictions about them.

## Necessity and possibility

Metaphysicians investigate questions about the ways the world could have been. David Lewis, in "On the Plurality of Worlds," endorsed a view called Concrete Modal realism, according to which facts about how things could have been are made true by other concrete worlds, just as in ours, in which things are different. Other philosophers, such as Gottfried Leibniz, have dealt with the idea of possible worlds as well. The idea of

necessity is that any necessary fact is true across all possible worlds. A possible fact is true in some possible world, even if not in the actual world. For example, it is possible that cats could have had two tails, or that any particular apple could have not existed. By contrast, certain propositions seem necessarily true, such as analytic propositions, e.g., "All bachelors are unmarried." The particular example of analytic truth being necessary is not universally held among philosophers. A less controversial view might be that self-identity is necessary, as it seems fundamentally incoherent to claim that for any *x*, it is not identical to itself; this is known as the *law of identity*, a putative "first principle". Aristotle describes the *principle of non-contradiction*, "It is impossible that the same quality should both belong and not belong to the same thing ... This is the most certain of all principles ... Wherefore they who demonstrate refer to this as an ultimate opinion. For it is by nature the source of all the other axioms."

## Cosmology and cosmogony

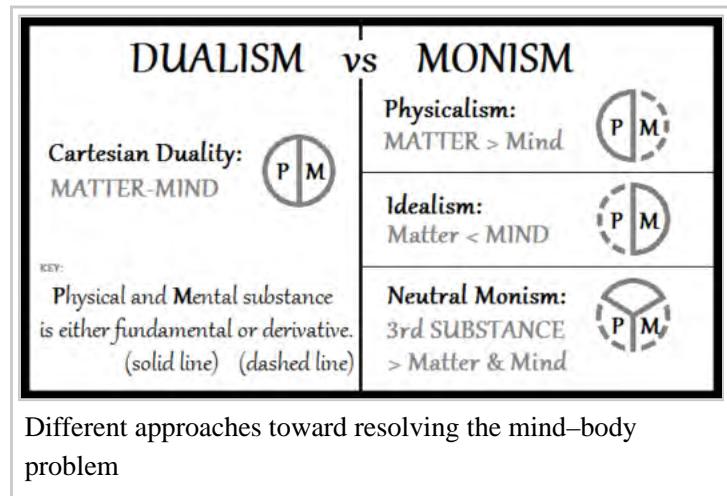
Metaphysical cosmology is the branch of metaphysics that deals with the world as the totality of all phenomena in space and time. Historically, it has had a broad scope, and in many cases was founded in religion. The ancient Greeks drew no distinction between this use and their model for the cosmos. However, in modern times it addresses questions about the Universe which are beyond the scope of the physical sciences. It is distinguished from religious cosmology in that it approaches these questions using philosophical methods (e.g. dialectics).

Cosmogony deals specifically with the origin of the universe. Modern metaphysical cosmology and cosmogony try to address questions such as:

- What is the origin of the Universe? What is its first cause? Is its existence necessary? (see monism, pantheism, emanationism and creationism)
- What are the ultimate material components of the Universe? (see mechanism, dynamism, hylomorphism, atomism)
- What is the ultimate reason for the existence of the Universe? Does the cosmos have a purpose? (see teleology)

## Mind and matter

The nature of matter was a problem in its own right in early philosophy. Aristotle himself introduced the idea of matter in general to the Western world, adapting the term *hyle*, which originally meant "lumber." Early debates centered on identifying a single underlying principle. Water was claimed by Thales, air by Anaximenes, *Apeiron* (the Boundless) by Anaximander, fire by Heraclitus. Democritus, in conjunction with his mentor, Leucippus, conceived of an atomic theory many centuries before it was accepted by modern science. It is worth noting, however, that the grounds necessary to ensure validity to the proposed theory's veridical nature were not scientific, but just as philosophical as those traditions espoused by Thales and Anaximander.



The nature of the mind and its relation to the body has been seen as more of a problem as science has

progressed in its mechanistic understanding of the brain and body. Proposed solutions often have ramifications about the nature of mind as a whole. René Descartes proposed substance dualism, a theory in which mind and body are essentially different, with the mind having some of the attributes traditionally assigned to the soul, in the seventeenth century. This creates a conceptual puzzle about how the two interact (which has received some strange answers, such as occasionalism). Evidence of a close relationship between brain and mind, such as the Phineas Gage case, have made this form of dualism increasingly unpopular.

Another proposal discussing the mind–body problem is idealism, in which the material is sweepingly eliminated in favor of the mental. Idealists, such as George Berkeley, claim that material objects do not exist unless perceived and only as perceptions. The "German idealists" such as Fichte, Hegel and Schopenhauer took Kant as their starting-point, although it is debatable how much of an idealist Kant himself was. Idealism is also a common theme in Eastern philosophy. Related ideas are panpsychism and panexperientialism, which say everything *has* a mind rather than everything exists *in* a mind. Alfred North Whitehead was a twentieth-century exponent of this approach.

Idealism is a monistic theory which holds that there is a single universal substance or principle. Neutral monism, associated in different forms with Baruch Spinoza and Bertrand Russell, seeks to be less extreme than idealism, and to avoid the problems of substance dualism. It claims that existence consists of a single substance that in itself is neither mental nor physical, but is capable of mental and physical aspects or attributes – thus it implies a dual-aspect theory.

For the last one hundred years, the dominant metaphysics has without a doubt been materialistic monism. Type identity theory, token identity theory, functionalism, reductive physicalism, nonreductive physicalism, eliminative materialism, anomalous monism, property dualism, epiphenomenalism and emergence are just some of the candidates for a scientifically informed account of the mind. (It should be noted that while many of these positions are dualisms, none of them are *substance* dualism.)

Prominent recent philosophers of mind include David Armstrong, Ned Block, David Chalmers, Patricia and Paul Churchland, Donald Davidson, Daniel Dennett, Fred Dretske, Douglas Hofstadter, Jerry Fodor, David Lewis, Thomas Nagel, Hilary Putnam, John Searle, John Smart, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Fred Alan Wolf.

## Determinism and free will

Determinism is the philosophical proposition that every event, including human cognition, decision and action, is causally determined by an unbroken chain of prior occurrences. It holds that nothing happens that has not already been determined. The principal consequence of the deterministic claim is that it poses a challenge to the existence of free will.

The problem of free will is the problem of whether rational agents exercise control over their own actions and decisions. Addressing this problem requires understanding the relation between freedom and causation, and determining whether the laws of nature are causally deterministic. Some philosophers, known as Incompatibilists, view determinism and free will as mutually exclusive. If they believe in determinism, they will therefore believe free will to be an illusion, a position known as *Hard Determinism*. Proponents range from Baruch Spinoza to Ted Honderich.

Others, labeled Compatibilists (or "Soft Determinists"), believe that the two ideas can be reconciled coherently. Adherents of this view include Thomas Hobbes and many modern philosophers such as John Martin Fischer.

Incompatibilists who accept free will but reject determinism are called Libertarians, a term not to be confused with the political sense. Robert Kane and Alvin Plantinga are modern defenders of this theory.

## Religion and spirituality

Some of the primary metaphysical questions concerning religious philosophy are: whether there is a god (monotheism), many gods (polytheism), or no gods (atheism), or whether it is unknown or unknowable if any gods exist (agnosticism and apophatic theology); whether a divine entity directly intervenes in the world (theism) or its sole function is to be the first cause of the universe (deism); and whether a god or gods and the world are different (as in panentheism and dualism) or are identical (as in pantheism).

Stances on these questions can form the foundation for philosophy of religion and theology, but the metaphysical questions are prior to these disciplines.

The existence of god is sometimes assumed or required by ontologies in order to avoid problems of subjectivity and relativism. If each subject can perceive the world in different ways, and has no access to perception of any independent reality, then how can it make sense to discuss or assume any such independent reality, for example, as the basis for philosophy of science? Some philosophers, beginning with Descartes, extend the concept of mind and phenomenal perception to a single all-encompassing God-mind which perceives everything at every time. This allows them to claim that there is a single objective reality, which the task of science is to learn about.

## Metaphysics in science

Prior to the modern history of science, scientific questions were addressed as a part of metaphysics known as natural philosophy. Originally, the term "science" (Latin *scientia*) simply meant "knowledge". The scientific method, however, transformed natural philosophy into an empirical activity deriving from experiment unlike the rest of philosophy. By the end of the 18th century, it had begun to be called "science" to distinguish it from philosophy. Thereafter, metaphysics denoted philosophical enquiry of a non-empirical character into the nature of existence.<sup>[4]</sup>

Metaphysics continues asking "why" where science leaves off. For example, any theory of fundamental physics is based on some set of axioms, which may postulate the existence of entities such as atoms, particles, forces, charges, mass, and/or fields. Stating such postulates is considered to be the "end" of a science theory. Metaphysics takes these postulates and explores what they mean as human concepts. For example, do all theories of physics require the existence of space and time,<sup>[5]</sup> objects, and properties? Or can they be expressed using only objects, or only properties? Do the objects have to retain their identity over time or do they change?<sup>[6]</sup> If they change, then are they still the same object? Can theories be reformulated by converting properties or predicates (such as "red") into entities (such as redness or redness fields). Is the distinction between objects and properties fundamental to the physical world and/or to our perception of it?

Much recent work has been devoted to analyzing the role of metaphysics in scientific theorizing. Alexandre Koyré led this movement, declaring in his book *Metaphysics and Measurement*, "It is not by following experiment, but by outstripping experiment, that the scientific mind makes progress."<sup>[7]</sup> Imre Lakatos maintained that all scientific theories have a metaphysical "hard core" essential for the generation of hypotheses and theoretical assumptions.<sup>[8]</sup> Thus, according to Lakatos, "scientific changes are connected with vast cataclysmic metaphysical revolutions."<sup>[9]</sup>

An example from biology of Lakatos' thesis: David Hull has argued that changes in the ontological status of the species concept have been central in the development of biological thought from Aristotle through Cuvier, Lamarck, and Darwin. Darwin's ignorance of metaphysics made it more difficult for him to respond to his critics because he could not readily grasp the ways in which their underlying metaphysical views differed from

his own.<sup>[10]</sup>

In physics, new metaphysical ideas have arisen in connection with quantum mechanics, where subatomic particles arguably do not have the same sort of individuality as the particulars with which philosophy has traditionally been concerned.<sup>[11]</sup> Also, adherence to a deterministic metaphysics in the face of the challenge posed by the quantum-mechanical uncertainty principle led physicists such as Albert Einstein to propose alternative theories that retained determinism.<sup>[12]</sup> A. N. Whitehead is famous for creating a process philosophy metaphysics inspired by electromagnetism and special relativity.<sup>[13]</sup>

In chemistry, Gilbert Newton Lewis addressed the nature of motion, arguing that an electron should not be said to move when it has none of the properties of motion.<sup>[14]</sup>

Katherine Hawley notes that the metaphysics even of a widely accepted scientific theory may be challenged if it can be argued that the metaphysical presuppositions of the theory make no contribution to its predictive success.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Rejections of metaphysics

A number of individuals have suggested that much or all of metaphysics should be rejected. In the eighteenth century, David Hume took an extreme position, arguing that all genuine knowledge involves either mathematics or matters of fact and that metaphysics, which goes beyond these, is worthless. He concludes his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* with the statement:

If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.<sup>[16]</sup>

Thirty-three years after Hume's *Enquiry* appeared, Immanuel Kant published his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Although he followed Hume in rejecting much of previous metaphysics, he argued that there was still room for some *synthetic a priori* knowledge, concerned with matters of fact yet obtainable independent of experience. These included fundamental structures of space, time, and causality. He also argued for the freedom of the will and the existence of "things in themselves", the ultimate (but unknowable) objects of experience.

The logical atomist Ludwig Wittgenstein introduced the concept that metaphysics could be influenced by theories of Aesthetics, via Logic, vis. a world composed of "atomical facts".<sup>[17][18]</sup>

In the 1930s, A. J. Ayer and Rudolf Carnap endorsed Hume's position; Carnap quoted the passage above.<sup>[19]</sup> They argued that metaphysical statements are neither true nor false but meaningless since, according to their verifiability theory of meaning, a statement is meaningful only if there can be empirical evidence for or against it. Thus, while Ayer rejected the monism of Spinoza, noted above, he avoided a commitment to pluralism, the contrary position, by holding both views to be without meaning.<sup>[20]</sup> Carnap took a similar line with the controversy over the reality of the external world.<sup>[21]</sup> This logical positivist school is now generally considered to have run its course, with AJ Ayer in particular saying "it was false" when asked what was wrong with it during a television interview.

Arguing against such rejections, the Scholastic philosopher Edward Feser has observed that Hume's critique of

metaphysics, and specifically Hume's fork, is "notoriously self-refuting".<sup>[22]</sup> Feser argues that Hume's fork itself is not a conceptual truth and is not empirically testable.

Some living philosophers, such as Amie Thomasson, have argued that many metaphysical questions can be dissolved just by looking at the way we use words; others, such as Ted Sider, have argued that metaphysical questions are substantive, and that we can make progress toward answering them by comparing theories according to a range of theoretical virtues inspired by the sciences, such as simplicity and explanatory power.<sup>[23]</sup>

## History and schools of metaphysics

### Pre-history

Cognitive archeology such as analysis of cave paintings and other pre-historic art and customs suggests that a form of perennial philosophy or Shamanism metaphysics may stretch back to the birth of behavioral modernity, all around the world. Similar beliefs are found in present day "stone age" cultures such as Australian aboriginals. Perennial philosophy postulates the existence of a spirit or concept world alongside the day-to-day world, and interactions between these worlds during dreaming and ritual, or on special days or at special places. It has been argued that perennial philosophy formed the basis for Platonism, with Plato articulating, rather than creating, much older widespread beliefs.

### Bronze age

Bronze age cultures such as ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt (along with similarly structured but chronologically later cultures such as Mayans and Aztecs) developed belief systems based on mythology, anthropomorphic gods, mind-body dualism, and a spirit world, to explain causes and cosmology. These cultures appear to have been interested in astronomy and may have associated or identified the stars with some of these entities. In ancient Egypt, the ontological distinction between order (*maat*) and chaos (*Isfet*) seems to have been important.

### Pre-Socratic Greece

The first named Greek philosopher, according to Aristotle, is Thales of Miletus, c.500BCE. Rejecting mythological and divine explanations, he sought a single first cause or *Arche* (origin or beginning) under which all phenomena could be explained, and concluded that this first cause was in fact moisture or water. Thales also taught that the world is harmonious, has a harmonious structure, and thus is intelligible to rational understanding. Other Miletians, such as Anaximander and Anaximenes, also had a monistic conception of the first cause.

Another school was the Eleatics, Italy. The group was founded in the early fifth century BCE by Parmenides, and included Zeno of Elea and Melissus of Samos. Methodologically, the Eleatics were broadly rationalist, and took logical standards of clarity and necessity to be the criteria of truth. Parmenides' chief doctrine was that reality is a single unchanging and universal Being. Zeno used *reductio ad absurdum*, to demonstrate the illusory nature of change and time in his paradoxes.

Heraclitus of Ephesus, in contrast, made change central, teaching that "all things flow". His philosophy, expressed in brief aphorisms, is quite cryptic. For instance, he also taught the unity of opposites.

Democritus and his teacher Leucippus, are known for formulating an atomic theory for the cosmos.<sup>[24]</sup> They are considered forerunners of the scientific method.

## Chinese metaphysics

Metaphysics in Chinese philosophy can be traced back to the earliest Chinese philosophical concepts from the Zhou Dynasty such as Tian (Heaven) and Yin and Yang. The fourth century BCE saw a turn towards cosmogony with the rise of Taoism (in the Daodejing and Zhuangzi) and sees the natural world as dynamic and constantly changing processes which spontaneously arise from a single immanent metaphysical source or principle (Tao).<sup>[25]</sup> Another philosophical school which arose around this time was the School of Naturalists which saw the ultimate metaphysical principle as the Taiji, the "supreme polarity" composed of the forces of Ying and Yang which were always in a state of change seeking balance. Another concern of Chinese metaphysics, especially Taoism, is the relationship and nature of Being and non-Being (you 有 and wu 無). The Taoists held that the ultimate, the Tao, was also non-being or no-presence.<sup>[26]</sup> Other important concepts were those of spontaneous generation or natural vitality (Ziran) and "correlative resonance" (Ganying).

After the fall of the Han Dynasty (220 CE), China saw the rise of the Neo-Taoist Xuanxue school. This school was very influential in developing the concepts of later Chinese metaphysics.<sup>[27]</sup> Buddhist philosophy entered China (c 1st century) and was influenced by the native Chinese metaphysical concepts to develop new theories. The native Tiantai and Huayen schools of philosophy maintained and reinterpreted the Indian theories of shunyata (emptiness, kong 空) and Buddha-nature (Fo xing 佛性) into the theory of interpenetration of phenomena. Neo-Confucians like Zhang Zai under the influence of other schools developed the concepts of "principle" (li) and vital energy (qi).

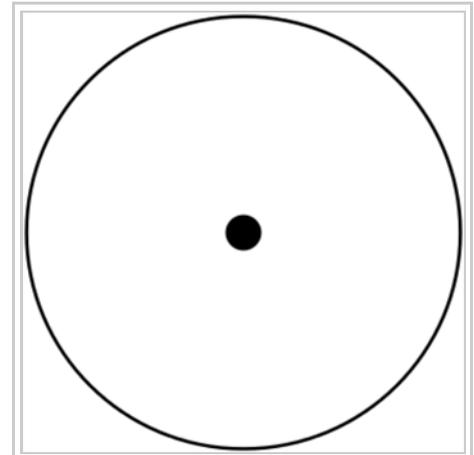
## Socrates and Plato

Socrates is known for his dialectic or questioning approach to philosophy rather than a positive metaphysical doctrine.

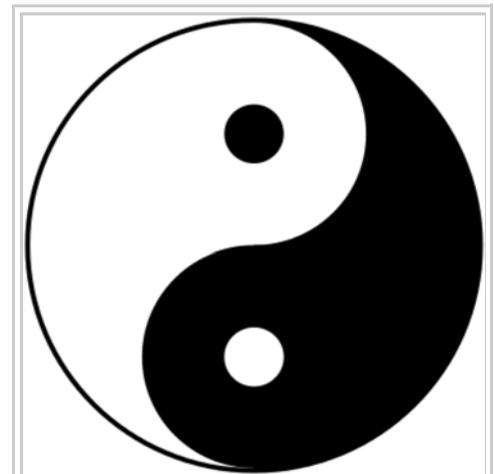
His pupil, Plato is famous for his theory of forms (which he places in the mouth of Socrates in the dialogues he wrote to expound it). Platonic realism (also considered a form of idealism)<sup>[28]</sup> is considered to be a solution to the problem of universals; i.e., what particular objects have in common is that they share a specific Form which is universal to all others of their respective kind.

The theory has a number of other aspects:

- Epistemological: knowledge of the Forms is more certain than mere sensory data.
- Ethical: The Form of the Good sets an objective standard for morality.



The circled dot was used by the Pythagoreans and later Greeks to represent the first metaphysical being, the Monad or The Absolute.



The modern "yin and yang symbol" (*taijitu*).

- Time and Change: The world of the Forms is eternal and unchanging. Time and change belong only to the lower sensory world. "Time is a moving image of Eternity".
- Abstract objects and mathematics: Numbers, geometrical figures, etc., exist mind-independently in the World of Forms.

Platonism developed into Neoplatonism, a philosophy with a monotheistic and mystical flavour that survived well into the early Christian era.

## Aristotle

Plato's pupil Aristotle wrote widely on almost every subject, including metaphysics. His solution to the problem of universals contrasts with Plato's. Whereas Platonic Forms are existentially apparent in the visible world, Aristotelian essences dwell in particulars.

Potentiality and Actuality<sup>[29]</sup> are principles of a dichotomy which Aristotle used throughout his philosophical works to analyze motion, causality and other issues.

The Aristotelian theory of change and causality stretches to four causes: the material, formal, efficient and final. The efficient cause corresponds to what is now known as a cause *simpliciter*. Final causes are explicitly teleological, a concept now regarded as controversial in science.<sup>[30]</sup> The Matter/Form dichotomy was to become highly influential in later philosophy as the substance/essence distinction.

The opening arguments in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Book I, revolve around the senses, knowledge, experience, theory, and wisdom. The first main focus in the *Metaphysics* is attempting to determine how intellect "advances from sensation through memory, experience, and art, to theoretical knowledge".<sup>[31]</sup> Aristotle claims that eyesight provides us with the capability to recognize and remember experiences, while sound allows us to learn.

## Classical India

### Sāṃkhya

*Sāṃkhya* is an ancient system of Indian philosophy based on a dualism involving the ultimate principles of consciousness and matter.<sup>[32]</sup> It is described as the rationalist school of Indian philosophy.<sup>[33]</sup> It is most related to the Yoga school of Hinduism, and its method was most influential on the development of Early Buddhism.<sup>[34]</sup>

The Sāṃkhya is an enumerationist philosophy whose epistemology accepts three of six *pramanas* (proofs) as the only reliable means of gaining knowledge. These include *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāṇa* (inference) and *śabda* (*āptavacana*, word/testimony of reliable sources).<sup>[35][36][37]</sup>

Samkhya is strongly dualist.<sup>[38][39][40]</sup> Sāṃkhya philosophy regards the universe as consisting of two realities; *puruṣa* (consciousness) and *prakṛti* (matter). *Jiva* (a living being) is that state in which *puruṣa* is bonded to *prakṛti* in some form.<sup>[41]</sup> This fusion, state the Samkhya scholars, led to the emergence of *buddhi* ("spiritual awareness") and *ahankāra* (ego consciousness). The universe is described by this school as one created by *puruṣa*-*prakṛti* entities infused with various permutations and combinations of variously enumerated elements, senses, feelings, activity and mind.<sup>[41]</sup> During the state of imbalance, one of more constituents overwhelm the others, creating a form of bondage, particularly of the mind. The end of this imbalance, bondage is called

liberation, or moksha, by the Samkhya school.<sup>[42]</sup>

The existence of God or supreme being is not directly asserted, nor considered relevant by the Samkhya philosophers. Sāṃkhya denies the final cause of Ishvara (God).<sup>[43]</sup> While the Samkhya school considers the Vedas as a reliable source of knowledge, it is an atheistic philosophy according to Paul Deussen and other scholars.<sup>[44][45]</sup> A key difference between Samkhya and Yoga schools, state scholars,<sup>[45][46]</sup> is that Yoga school accepts a "personal, yet essentially inactive, deity" or "personal god".<sup>[47]</sup>

Samkhya is known for its theory of guṇas (qualities, innate tendencies).<sup>[48]</sup> Guṇa, it states, are of three types: *sattva* being good, compassionate, illuminating, positive, and constructive; *rajas* is one of activity, chaotic, passion, impulsive, potentially good or bad; and *tamas* being the quality of darkness, ignorance, destructive, lethargic, negative. Everything, all life forms and human beings, state Samkhya scholars, have these three guṇas, but in different proportions. The interplay of these guṇas defines the character of someone or something, of nature and determines the progress of life.<sup>[49][50]</sup> The Samkhya theory of guṇas was widely discussed, developed and refined by various schools of Indian philosophies, including Buddhism.<sup>[51]</sup> Samkhya's philosophical treatises also influenced the development of various theories of Hindu ethics.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Vedānta

Realization of the nature of Self-identity is the principal object of the Vedanta system of Indian metaphysics. In the Upanishads, self-consciousness is not the first-person indexical self-awareness or the self-awareness which is self-reference without identification,<sup>[52]</sup> and also not the self-consciousness which as a kind of desire is satisfied by another self-consciousness.<sup>[53]</sup> It is Self-realisation; the realisation of the Self consisting of consciousness that leads all else.<sup>[54]</sup>

The word *Self-consciousness* in the Upanishads means the knowledge about the existence and nature of Brahman. It means the consciousness of our own real being, the primary reality.<sup>[55]</sup> Self-consciousness means Self-knowledge, the knowledge of Prajna i.e. of Prana which is Brahman.<sup>[56]</sup> According to the Upanishads the Atman or Paramatman is phenomenally unknowable; it is the object of realisation. The Atman is unknowable in its essential nature; it is unknowable in its essential nature because it is the eternal subject who knows about everything including itself. The Atman is the knower and also the known.<sup>[57]</sup>

Metaphysicians regard the Self either to be distinct from the Absolute or entirely identical with the Absolute. They have given form to three schools of thought – a) the *Dualistic school*, b) the *Quasi-dualistic school* and c) the *Monistic school*, as the result of their varying mystical experiences. Prakrti and Atman, when treated as two separate and distinct aspects form the basis of the Dualism of the Shvetashvatara Upanishad.<sup>[58]</sup> Quasi-dualism is reflected in the Vaishnavite-monotheism of Ramanuja and the absolute Monism, in the teachings of Adi Shankara.<sup>[59]</sup>

Self-consciousness is the Fourth state of consciousness or *Turiya*, the first three being *Vaisvanara*, *Taijasa* and *Prajna*. These are the four states of individual consciousness.

There are three distinct stages leading to Self-realisation. The First stage is in mystically apprehending the glory of the Self within us as though we were distinct from it. The Second stage is in identifying the "I-within" with the Self, that we are in essential nature entirely identical with the pure Self. The Third stage is in realising that the Atman is Brahman, that there is no difference between the Self and the Absolute. The Fourth stage is in realising "I am the Absolute" - *Aham Brahman Asmi*. The Fifth stage is in realising that Brahman is the "All" that exists, as also that which does not exist.<sup>[60]</sup>

## Buddhist metaphysics

In Buddhist philosophy there are various metaphysical traditions that have proposed different questions about the nature of reality based on the teachings of the Buddha in the early Buddhist texts. The Buddha of the early texts does not focus on metaphysical questions but on ethical and spiritual training and in some cases, he dismisses certain metaphysical questions as unhelpful and indeterminate (*avyakata*), which he recommends should be set aside. The development of systematic metaphysics arose after the Buddha's death with the rise of the Abhidharma traditions.<sup>[61]</sup> The Buddhist Abhidharma schools developed their analysis of reality based on the concept of *dhammas* which are the ultimate physical and mental events that make up experience and their relations to each other. Noa Ronkin has called their approach "phenomenological".<sup>[62]</sup>

Later philosophical traditions include the Madhyamika school of Nagarjuna, which further developed the theory of the emptiness (*shunyata*) of all phenomena or dhammas which rejects any kind of substance. This has been interpreted as a form of anti-foundationalism and anti-realism which sees reality has having no ultimate essence or ground.<sup>[63]</sup> The Yogacara school meanwhile promoted a theory called "awareness only" (*vijnapti-matra*) which has been interpreted as a form of Idealism or Phenomenology and denies the split between awareness itself and the objects of awareness.<sup>[64]</sup>

## Islamic metaphysics

Islamic philosophy was highly active during Europe's 'dark ages', beginning with the arrival and translation of Aristotle into Arabic.

## Scholasticism and the Middle Ages

Between about 1100 and 1500, philosophy as a discipline took place as part of the Catholic church's teaching system, known as scholasticism. Scholastic philosophy took place within an established framework blending Christian theology with Aristotelian teachings. Although fundamental orthodoxies could not be challenged, there were nonetheless deep metaphysical disagreements, particularly over the problem of universals, which engaged Duns Scotus and Pierre Abelard. William of Ockham is remembered for his principle of ontological parsimony.

## Rationalism and Continental Rationalism

In the early modern period (17th and 18th centuries), the system-building *scope* of philosophy is often linked to the rationalist *method* of philosophy, that is the technique of deducing the nature of the world by pure reason. The scholastic concepts of substance and accident were employed.

- Leibniz proposed in his *Monadology* a plurality of non-interacting substances.
- Descartes is famous for his Dualism of material and mental substances.
- Spinoza believed reality was a single substance of God-or-nature.

## British empiricism

British empiricism marked something of a reaction to rationalist and system-building philosophy, or *speculative* metaphysics as it was pejoratively termed. The sceptic David Hume famously declared that most metaphysics should be consigned to the flames (see below). Hume was notorious among his contemporaries as one of the first philosophers to openly doubt religion, but is better known now for his critique of causality. John

Stuart Mill, Thomas Reid and John Locke were less sceptical, embracing a more cautious style of metaphysics based on realism, common sense and science. Other philosophers, notably George Berkeley were led from empiricism to idealistic metaphysics.

## Kant

Immanuel Kant attempted a grand synthesis and revision of the trends already mentioned: scholastic philosophy, systematic metaphysics, and skeptical empiricism, not to forget the burgeoning science of his day. As did the systems builders, he had an overarching framework in which all questions were to be addressed. Like Hume, who famously woke him from his 'dogmatic slumbers', he was suspicious of metaphysical speculation, and also places much emphasis on the limitations of the human mind. Kant described his shift in metaphysics away from making claims about an objective noumenal world, towards exploring the subjective phenomenal world, as a Copernian revolution, by analogy to (though opposite in direction to) Copernicus' shift from man (the subject) to the sun (an object) at the center of the universe.

Kant saw rationalist philosophers as aiming for a kind of metaphysical knowledge he defined as the *synthetic a priori*—that is knowledge that does not come from the senses (it is a priori) but is nonetheless about reality (synthetic). Inasmuch as it is about reality, it differs from abstract mathematical propositions (which he terms analytical a priori), and being a priori it is distinct from empirical, scientific knowledge (which he terms synthetic a posteriori). The only synthetic a priori knowledge we can have is of how our minds organise the data of the senses; that organising framework is space and time, which for Kant have no mind-independent existence, but nonetheless operate uniformly in all humans. A priori knowledge of space and time is all that remains of metaphysics as traditionally conceived. There *is* a reality beyond sensory data or phenomena, which he calls the realm of noumena; however, we cannot know it as it is in itself, but only as it appears to us. He allows himself to speculate that the origins of phenomenal God, morality, and free will *might* exist in the noumenal realm, but these possibilities have to be set against its basic unknowability for humans. Although he saw himself as having disposed of metaphysics, in a sense, he has generally been regarded in retrospect as having a metaphysics of his own, and as beginning the modern analytical conception of the subject .

## Kantians

Nineteenth century philosophy was overwhelmingly influenced by Kant and his successors. Schopenhauer, Schelling, Fichte and Hegel all purveyed their own panoramic versions of German Idealism, Kant's own caution about metaphysical speculation, and refutation of idealism, having fallen by the wayside. The idealistic impulse continued into the early twentieth century with British idealists such as F. H. Bradley and J. M. E. McTaggart. Followers of Karl Marx took Hegel's dialectic view of history and re-fashioned it as materialism.

## Early analytical philosophy and positivism

During the period when idealism was dominant in philosophy, science had been making great advances. The arrival of a new generation of scientifically minded philosophers led to a sharp decline in the popularity of idealism during the 1920s.

Analytical philosophy was spearheaded by Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore. Russell and William James tried to compromise between idealism and materialism with the theory of neutral monism.

The early to mid twentieth century philosophy also saw a trend to reject metaphysical questions as meaningless. The driving force behind this tendency was the philosophy of logical positivism as espoused by the Vienna Circle.

At around the same time, the American pragmatists were steering a middle course between materialism and idealism. System-building metaphysics, with a fresh inspiration from science, was revived by A. N. Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne.

## Continental philosophy

The forces that shaped analytical philosophy—the break with idealism, and the influence of science—were much less significant outside the English speaking world, although there was a shared turn toward language. Continental philosophy continued in a trajectory from post Kantianism.

The phenomenology of Husserl and others was intended as a collaborative project for the investigation of the features and structure of consciousness common to all humans, in line with Kant's basing his synthetic apriori on the uniform operation of consciousness. It was officially neutral with regards to ontology, but was nonetheless to spawn a number of metaphysical systems. Brentano's concept of intentionality would become widely influential, including on analytical philosophy.

Heidegger, author of *Being and Time*, saw himself as re-focusing on Being-qua-being, introducing the novel concept of *Dasein* in the process. Classing himself an existentialist, Sartre wrote an extensive study of *Being and Nothingness*.

The speculative realism movement marks a return to full blooded realism.

## Process metaphysics

There are two fundamental aspects of everyday experience: change and persistence. Until recently, the Western philosophical tradition has arguably championed substance and persistence, with some notable exceptions, however. According to process thinkers, novelty, flux and accident do matter, and sometimes they constitute the ultimate reality.

In a broad sense, process metaphysics is as old as Western philosophy, with figures such as Heraclitus, Plotinus, Duns Scotus, Leibniz, David Hume, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, Gustav Theodor Fechner, Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg, Charles Renouvier, Karl Marx, Ernst Mach, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Émile Boutroux, Henri Bergson, Samuel Alexander and Nicolas Berdyaev. It seemingly remains an open question whether major "Continental" figures such as the late Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, or Jacques Derrida should be included.<sup>[65]</sup>

In a strict sense, process metaphysics may be limited to the works of a few founding fathers: G. W. F. Hegel, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, Henri Bergson, A. N. Whitehead, and John Dewey. From a European perspective, there was a very significant and early Whiteheadian influence on the works of outstanding scholars such as Émile Meyerson (1859–1933), Louis Couturat (1868–1914), Jean Wahl (1888–1974), Robin George Collingwood (1889–1943), Philippe Devaux (1902–1979), Hans Jonas (1903–1993), Dorothy M. Emmett (1904–2000), Maurice Merleau Ponty (1908–1961), Enzo Paci (1911–1976), Charlie Dunbar Broad (1887–1971), Wolfe Mays (1912–), Ilya Prigogine (1917–2003), Jules Vuillemin (1920–2001), Jean Ladrière (1921–), Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–), and Reiner Wiehl (1929–2010).<sup>[66]</sup>

## Later analytical philosophy

While early analytic philosophy tended to reject metaphysical theorizing, under the influence of logical

positivism, it was revived in the second half of the twentieth century. Philosophers such as David K. Lewis and David Armstrong developed elaborate theories on a range of topics such as universals, causation, possibility and necessity and abstract objects. However, the focus of analytical philosophy generally is away from the construction of all-encompassing systems and toward close analysis of individual ideas.

Among the developments that led to the revival of metaphysical theorizing were Quine's attack on the analytic–synthetic distinction, which was generally taken to undermine Carnap's distinction between existence questions internal to a framework and those external to it.<sup>[67]</sup>

The philosophy of fiction, the problem of empty names, and the debate over existence's status as a property have all come of relative obscurity into the limelight, while perennial issues such as free will, possible worlds, and the philosophy of time have had new life breathed into them.<sup>[68][69]</sup>

The analytic view is of metaphysics as studying phenomenal human concepts rather than making claims about the noumenal world, so its style often blurs into philosophy of language and introspective psychology. Compared to system-building, it can seem very dry, stylistically similar to computer programming or mathematics. Despite, or perhaps because of, this scientific dryness, it is generally regarded as having made "progress" where other schools have not. For example, concepts from analytical metaphysics are now routinely employed and cited as useful guides in computational ontologies for databases and to frame computer natural language processing and knowledge representation software.

## Etymology

The word "metaphysics" derives from the Greek words *μετά* (*metá*, "beyond", "upon" or "after") and *φυσικά* (*physiká*, "physics").<sup>[70]</sup> It was first used as the title for several of Aristotle's works, because they were usually anthologized after the works on physics in complete editions. The prefix *meta-* ("after") indicates that these works come "after" the chapters on physics. However, Aristotle himself did not call the subject of these books "Metaphysics": he referred to it as "first philosophy." The editor of Aristotle's works, Andronicus of Rhodes, is thought to have placed the books on first philosophy right after another work, *Physics*, and called them *τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ βιβλία* (*ta meta ta physika biblia*) or "the books that come after the [books on] physics". This was misread by Latin scholiasts, who thought it meant "the science of what is beyond the physical".

However, once the name was given, the commentators sought to find intrinsic reasons for its appropriateness. For instance, it was understood to mean "the science of the world beyond nature" (*physis* in Greek), that is, the science of the immaterial. Again, it was understood to refer to the chronological or pedagogical order among our philosophical studies, so that the "metaphysical sciences" would mean "those that we study after having mastered the sciences that deal with the physical world" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in librum Boethii De hebdomadibus*, V, 1).

A person who does, or is doing, metaphysics is called a *metaphysician*.<sup>[71]</sup>

There is a widespread use of the term in current popular literature which replicates this understanding, i.e. that the metaphysical equates to the non-physical: thus, "metaphysical healing" means healing by means of remedies that are not physical.<sup>[72]</sup>

## See also

- Creation myth

- Metaphilosophy
- Metaethics
- Personal identity
- Philosophical logic
- Philosophical realism
- Philosophical theology
- Philosophy of physics

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## Further reading

- The London Philosophy Study Guide (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/philosophy/LPSG/>) offers many suggestions

on what to read, depending on the student's familiarity with the subject: Logic & Metaphysics (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/philosophy/LPSG/L&M.htm>).

## External links

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