**PHI 206: Introduction to Metaphysics**

## Etymology and the Nature of Metaphysics

The word "metaphysics" is generally held to have come from the title given to one of [Aristotle](http://philosophy.wikia.com/wiki/Aristotle)'s works (containing 14 books) by the 1st century CE (at least a century after the death of Aristotle) most probable editor of those works, [Andronicus of Rhodes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andronicus_of_Rhodes), who was thought to have placed the books on first philosophy immediately after the work on *Physics*, and called them *ta meta ta phusika biblia* or "the books that come after (behind or among) the books on physics." This was, more or less, misread by Latin [scholiasts](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/scholiast), who thought it meant the science of what is beyond the physical, so that the metaphysical sciences would mean, as Thomas Aquinas puts it, those that we study after having mastered the sciences that deal with the physical world. Aristotle himself referred to the subject as "first philosophy,” not metaphysics.

Metaphysics can only be described since it is hard to define. It is one of the major branches of philosophy which investigates the fundamental nature of reality. The Ancient and Mediaeval Ages had a more unified central problems of metaphysics which could be today designated as the “Old” Metaphysics. *Metaphysics* was then divided into three parts, now regarded as the traditional branches of metaphysics, called (1) [ontology](http://philosophy.wikia.com/wiki/Ontology) which is the study of being, (2) (natural) [theology](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Theology&action=edit&redlink=1) which is the study of God, and (3) [universal science](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Universal_science&action=edit&redlink=1) which is the study of the first principles.

**Aristotle**

Aristotle himself described its subject matter in a variety of ways: as “first philosophy,” or “the study of being qua being,” or “wisdom,” or “theology.” He distinguished between things that are “better known to us” and things that are “better known in themselves,” and maintained that we should begin our study of a given topic with things better known to us and arrive ultimately at an understanding of things better known in themselves. The principles studied by “first philosophy” may seem very general and abstract, but they are, according to Aristotle, better known in themselves, however remote they may seem from the world of ordinary experience. Still, since they are to be studied only by one who had already studied nature (which is the subject matter of the Physics), they are quite appropriately described as coming “after the Physics.” His description of metaphysics as “the study of being qua being” is frequently and easily misunderstood, for it seems to suggest that there is a single (albeit special) subject matter—being qua being—that is under investigation. But Aristotle’s description does not involve two things— (1) a study and (2) a subject matter (being qua being)—for he did not think that there is any such subject matter as “being qua being.” Rather, his description involves three things: (1) a study, (2) a subject matter (being), and (3) a manner in which the subject matter is studied (qua being). Aristotle’s Greek word that has been Latinized as “qua” means roughly “in so far as” or “under the aspect.” So, it is a study of being, or better, of beings—of things that can be said to be—in a particular way: as beings, in so far as they are beings.

First philosophy is not the only field of inquiry to study beings. Natural science and mathematics also study beings, but in different ways, under different aspects. The natural scientist studies them as things that are subject to the laws of nature. The mathematician studies things *qua* countable and measurable. The metaphysician, then, studies them in a more general and abstract way—*qua* beings. So, first philosophy studies the causes and principles of beings *qua* beings. In Book Ε, Aristotle adds another description to the study of the causes and principles of beings *qua* beings. Whereas natural science studies objects that are material and subject to change, and mathematics studies objects that although not subject to change are nevertheless not separate from (i.e., independent of) matter, there is still room for a science that studies things (if indeed there are any) that are eternal, not subject to change, and which are independent of matter. Such a science, he says, is [natural] theology, and this is the “first” and “highest” science.

**Aquinas**

St. Thomas Aquinas argued that one can understand the nature of metaphysics by ascertaining its particular subject-matter, its field of investigation. He argued that to ascertain the subject-matter of any particular science one must distinguish between the different intellectual operations that are used when engaged in some particular scientific endeavor. Broadly speaking, these fall into two categories: the speculative and the practical which make up two distinct classes of science: speculative science and practical science. Speculative sciences are those that contemplate truth whereas practical sciences are those that apply truth for some practical purpose. The sciences are then further distinguished through differentiating their various subject-matters. Insofar as the speculative sciences merely contemplate truth but do not apply it for some practical purpose, the subject-matter of the speculative sciences is that which can be understood to some extent. Working within the Aristotelian tradition, Thomas holds that something is understood when it is separated from matter and is necessary to thing in some respect. For instance, when we understand the nature of a tree, what we understand is not primarily the matter that goes to constitute the tree in question, but what it is to be a tree, rather than a plant. Furthermore, assuming our understanding is correct, when we understand a thing to be a tree, we do not understand it to be a dog, or a horse, or a cat. Thus, in our understanding of a tree, we understand that which is necessary for the tree to be a tree, and not of anything that is not a tree.

There are three divisions that can apply to speculative objects, thereby permitting us to differentiate the sciences that consider such objects: (i) there is a class of speculative objects that are dependent on matter and motion both for their being and for their being understood, for instance, human beings cannot be without matter, and they cannot be understood without their constituent matter (flesh and bones); (ii) there is a class of speculative objects that depend on matter and motion for their being, but not for their being understood, for instance, we can understand lines, numbers, and points without thereby understanding the matter in which they are found, yet such things cannot be without matter; (iii) there is a class of speculative objects that depend on matter and motion neither for their being nor for their being understood. Given these three classes of speculative objects, the speculative sciences that consider them can be enumerated accordingly: (i) physical science considers those things that depend on matter and motion both for their being and for their being understood; (ii) mathematics considers those things that depend on matter and motion for their being but not for their being understood; (iii) metaphysics or theology deals with those things that depend on matter and motion neither for their being nor for their being understood. Thomas takes this threefold division of the speculative sciences as exhaustive.

The third class of speculative objects comprises the objects of metaphysics or theology. Now Thomas goes on to distinguish between the proper subject-matter of metaphysics and that of theology. Recall that this third class of speculative objects comprises those things depending on matter and motion neither for their being nor for their being understood. Such things are thus immaterial things; however, Thomas here draws a distinction. There are things that are immaterial insofar as they are in themselves complete immaterial substances; [God](https://iep.utm.edu/god-west/) and the angels. To give the latter a title, let them be called positively immaterial. On the other hand, there are things that are immaterial insofar as they simply do not depend on matter and motion, but can nevertheless be sometimes said to be found therein. In other words, things of the latter category are neutral with respect to being found in matter and motion, and hence they are *neutrally immaterial*. St Thomas’s examples of the latter are: being, substance, potency, form, act, one and many; such things can apply equally to material things (such as *humans, dogs, cats, mice*) and, to some extent, to positively immaterial things. Thus, the neutrally immaterial seem to signify certain aspects or modes of being that can apply equally to material and to immaterial things. The question then arises: what is the proper subject-matter of metaphysics: the positively immaterial or the neutrally immaterial?

According to Thomas, unaided human reason cannot have direct knowledge of the positively immaterial; this is because such things (God and angels) outstrip the human intellect’s capacity to know. Nevertheless, direct knowledge of the positively immaterial is possible, but this will not be on the basis of unaided human reason; it will require that the positively immaterial reveal themselves to us in some way. As it is a purely rational science, not dependent on or presupposing the truths of revelation, metaphysics will be a study of the neutrally immaterial aspects of things, that is, a study of those modes of being that apply to all beings, whether they are material or immaterial. Such a study will be in accord with the Aristotelian conception of metaphysics as a study of being qua being, insofar as the neutrally immaterial apply to all beings and are not restricted to a certain class of beings. However, Thomas does not adopt the Aristotelian phrase (being qua being) as the subject-matter of metaphysics, he offers his own term. According to Thomas, ens commune (common being) is the proper subject-matter of metaphysics. Through an investigation of ens commune, an investigation into the aspects of being common to all beings, the metaphysician may indeed come to a knowledge of the causes of being and might thereby be led to the affirmation of divine being, but this is only at the end of the metaphysical inquiry, not at the beginning.

Metaphysics then is a study of the certain aspects common to all beings; and it is the task of the metaphysician to uncover the aspects of being that are indeed common and without which a thing could not be. There are certain aspects of being that are common insofar as they are generally applicable to all beings, and these are *essence* and *existence*; all beings exist and have an essence, hence metaphysics will be primarily concerned with the nature of essence and existence and their relationship to each other. Having completed an investigation into essence and existence, the metaphysician must investigate the aspects of being that are common to particular instances of being; and this will be a study of (i) the composition of substance and accident, and (ii) the composition of matter and form. The format of Thomistic metaphysics then takes a somewhat dyadic structure of descending generality: (i) essence and existence, (ii) substance and accident, (iii) matter and form.

**New Metaphysics**

Since the [Age of Reason](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Age_of_Reason&action=edit&redlink=1) or simply Enlightenment (1685-1815), the era of the “New” Metaphysics, some problems that were not originally considered metaphysical have been added to metaphysics. Other problems that were considered metaphysical problems for centuries are now typically relegated to their own separate subheadings in philosophy, such as [philosophy of religion](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_religion&action=edit&redlink=1), [philosophy of mind](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_mind&action=edit&redlink=1), [philosophy of perception](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_perception&action=edit&redlink=1), [philosophy of language](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_language&action=edit&redlink=1), and [philosophy of science](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_science&action=edit&redlink=1). In some cases subjects of metaphysical research have been found to be entirely physical and natural, thus making them part of [physics](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Physics&action=edit&redlink=1). For instance, problems such as free will, mind-body problem that do not relate to the first cause or unchanging entity and which Aristotle and the Mediaevals would have assigned to physics are today regarded as metaphysical problems. Today’s central questions in metaphysics include particulars and universals, change and permanence, being, necessity and possibility and others. Based on the evolution of the word metaphysics, in the 17th century the word *Ontology* was invented as the science of Being as such since Metaphysics has gained a loosed understanding. This loosed sense of metaphysics was justified by Christian Wolff (1679-1754) who argued that even though the subject-matter of metaphysics is being, being could be investigated in general or in particular, hence the distinction of metaphysics into general metaphysics which studies being as such and special metaphysics which deals with being of various objects such as the souls or material bodies. Even those philosophers who deny the existence of the first cause are regarded today as making metaphysical assertions, included are also those who deny that there is change such as Parmenides or those who argue that everything is in a state of flux like Heraclitus.

With regard to African Philosophy, two models shall be put up for reflection - the science-oriented model (as seen in Western philosophy) and the mythological model. In African philosophy metaphysics takes the form of a set or body of belief and practices in relation to the ultimate reality. This is the mythological model. In this form the dynamic constitution of nature, whose self-explanatory force is fundamental for scientific growth, is replaced by belief in a dynamic force in the form of a personal deity, spirit or other agencies responsible for explanation of the reality of things. K. C. Anyanwu wrote: "Africans have their own popular metaphysics, namely, mythology." African traditional philosophy exhibits the character of lack of conscious separation of religion and myth from scientific research. Such mythological metaphysical approach could be a serious hindrance to scientific progress if it is not consciously checked and systematically reversed in attempts to give account of the ultimate foundation of reality.

## Outline of the major concerns and scope of metaphysics

The contemporary philosophy has expanded the scope of metaphysics beyond the boundaries allotted to it by Aristotle. The question today is whether the contemporary metaphysics encapsulates all the philosophical problems that cannot be assigned to other branches of philosophy or does it have its own common theme. An attempt to answer this contends that today metaphysics maintains continuity with science in that metaphysics tries to develop generalizations from confirmed scientific theories.

Metaphysics is considered one of the four main branches of philosophy, along with [epistemology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistemology), [logic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logic), and [ethics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics). Metaphysics investigates topics such as [existence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existence), [objects](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object_(philosophy))  their [properties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Property_(philosophy)), [space](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space) and [time](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time), [cause and effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causality), necessity and [possibility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subjunctive_possibility). It has both central questions which in most cases considers mainly problems that belong to “Old” metaphysics, and peripheral questions which also in most cases consider problems of the “New” metaphysics. The *old* metaphysics concentrates on the metaphysical questions of the ancient and mediaeval philosophy while the *new* metaphysics focuses on the modern and contemporary questions.

**The central questions of metaphysics are:**

Ontology (Being as such), First causes, Unchanging things, Substance, Categories of being and Universal, Identity and change, Space and time, Causality, Necessity and possibility

**The peripheral questions are:**

Cosmology and cosmogony, Mind and matter, Modality, Persistence and constitution, Determinism and free will, Natural and social kinds, Number, Applied metaphysics.

### Central questions

**Ontology**

It is a branch of metaphysics (philosophy) that deals with being under concepts like existence, becoming, reality, being and the grouping of entities into basic categories such as substance, properties, relations, states of affairs and events. These categories are characterized by fundamental ontological concepts such as particular and universals, abstractness and concreteness or possibility and necessity.

**Identity and change**

Identity investigates what it means for something to be identical to itself or to something else across a period of time including the criteria for determining identity and how it can be expressed linguistically. While Parmenides denied the possibility of change, Heraclitus argued that was ubiquitous. Identity is sometimes referred to as numerical identity or sameness which has to do with relation of a thing to itself and not to another. Leibniz in his *Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals* says that if some object *x* is identical to some object *y*, then any property that *x* has, *y* will have as well. Two rival theories used to explain change and identity are *perdurantism* which treats of the tree as a series of tree-stages, and *endurantism* which treats the same tree as present at every stage in its history.

**Space and time**

Concrete objects appear in time and space but abstract entities such as classes, properties and relations do not.

**Causality**

Causality recognizes a number of causes even teleological future causes. In causality, space and time are involved. It is common understanding that causes precede effects. But since the laws of physics are symmetrical in time, it could be used to describe time as running backward. The question here is whether effects could precede its cause as queried by Michael Dummett (2019) in one of his paper presentations.

**Necessity and possibility**

Metaphysicians speak about possible world or worlds and debate about how things would have been in those worlds. David Lewis speaks about plurality of worlds in his work On the Plurality of Worlds. Even Gottfried Leibniz treated the issue of possible worlds. A necessary fact is true across all possible worlds while a possible fact is true in some worlds even if it is not in the actual world. For instance, it is possible that dog could have two tails. The ancient logic spoke of God as a necessary Being. But the modern logic of analytic tradition regards only analytic propositions or tautologies as necessary.

### Peripheral questions

**Cosmology and cosmogony**

Metaphysical cosmology deals with the world in its totality with space and time. Previously it formed part of the major aspects of metaphysics alongside Ontology. But in the contemporary philosophy it stands at the peripheral level. Cosmogony deals with the question about the origin of the universe. Both of them treats concepts such as monism, creationism, pantheism, emanationism, dynamism, mechanism, hylomorphism, atomism, teleology.

**Mind and matter**

This refers mostly to the mind-body problem which some philosophers tried to resolve with the theory of substance dualism and other with monism. Some theories in both camps are Idealism, panpsychism, property dualism, neutral monism, dual-aspect theory, materialistic monism, type identity theory, token identity theory, functionalism, reductive physicalism, nonreductive physicalism, eliminative materialism, anomalous monism, property dualism, epiphenomenalism and emergence.

**Determinism and free will**

Determinism argues that every event, including human cognition, decision and action, is causally determined by an unbroken chain of prior occurrences. It states that nothing happens without being pre-determined. Free will on the other hand argues that humans are conscious determinants of their actions and decisions. Incompatibilists are of the view that determinism and free will are mutually exclusive and one has to believe in one. Hard determinists such as Baruch Spinoza and Ted Honderich view free will as an illusion. Henry Bergson believes that free will is real. Incompatibilists who accept free will but reject determinism are called libertarianism such as Robert Kane and Alvin Plantinga. Compatibilists such as Thomas Hobbes, John Martin Fischer, Gary Watson, Harry Frankfurt believe that both are coherently reconcilable.

**Natural and social kinds**

There are threefold principal metaphysical questions concerning natural kinds. First, our classification of things into natural kinds genuinely *natural*? Or are our classification more anthropocentric than natural? Secondly, are natural kinds any sort of entity or are they basic ontological entities or are they derived from or reducible to other entities (e.g., universals)? Thirdly, do natural kinds possess essences (essentialism)?  Plato in his Phaedrus argued that biological classification system seems to “carve nature at its joints.” Later philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jorge Luis Borges challenged the capacity of natural and social classification.

**Applied metaphysics**

Despite the fact that metaphysics is more hypothetical, it has also practical application in some areas of philosophy, science and today in information technology. Those areas focus on ontology such as objects and their properties, classes, space and time, and also on other metaphysical stances on issues like causality and agency. Science often bases some theories on the ontological assumption of object with properties such as electron having charges, but some other theories reject objects completely such as in quantum field theories where spread-out ‘electronness” becomes property of space-time rather than an object. Social branches of philosophy such as morality, aesthetics and religion which in turn results in practical subjects like ethics, politics, law, and art, require metaphysical foundation such as value, beauty and God.

## Mind-body problem

The mind-body problem is a perennial problem in the [philosophy of mind](http://www.philosophy-index.com/philosophy/mind) and in [metaphysics](http://www.philosophy-index.com/metaphysics/) which concerns the nature of the relationship between the mind, or consciousness and the physical world. The mind-body problem asks a number of questions: Are the mind and body are separate substances or elements of the same substance? What is the relationship between them? What is consciousness? Can consciousness arise out of ordinary matter? Anaxagoras argued that reality consists of matter and mind (Nous) which are independently from each other eternal though the nous sets order in nature. Plato in his *Phaedrus* argued that the body is from the material world while the soul is from the world of Forms. Aristotle in *de Anima* regarded the mind as a faculty of the soul which is the form of the body. Aquinas believed like Aristotle that the mind and body are one like seal and wax, but that the soul survives the death of the body.

The exacerbation of the problem came with Descartes who argued that the mind, though independent of the body, exacts control over the brain through the pineal gland. Kant argued that beyond mind and matter there is a world of *a priori* forms like space and time which are pre-conditions for understanding. Karl Popper argued that there are three aspects of mind-body problem which are the worlds of matter, mind, and the creation of the mind such as mathematics. John Searle (b. 1932) believed that mind-body problem is false dichotomy because the mind is simply aspect of the brain. Gilbert Ryle describes the Cartesian dualism as a category mistake and as “the dogma of the Ghost in the machine.”

There are a number of responses to the mind-body problem but none have universal acceptance. The responses are outlined thus:

1. **Dualism**: it has two main forms which are substance and property dualism. *Substance dualism* holds that the mind is a distinct type of substance that is not governed by the laws of physics. *Property dualism* argues that mental properties involving conscious experience are fundamental properties alongside the fundamental properties identified by physics. An aspect of this is *Epiphenomenalism* states that the physical brain can cause mental events in the mind, but that the mind cannot interact with the brain at all; mental occurrences are simply a side effect of the brain’s processes. Dualism in general is the position that the mind is essentially not physical, and exists separately from the body. Other forms of dualism are:
   1. Interactionism, which states that the mind and body have causal interaction. This was the position of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) who believed that the mind and body interact through the pineal gland. It has changed a lot with the contemporary version of Karl Popper and John Carew Eccles. A more recent version of it is the view of *emergentism* which argues that the mental states is the result of the brain states, and that the mental events can influence the brain, resulting in two-way communication between mind and body.
   2. Occasionalism, which states that apparently causal links between mind and body are actually divine intervention. Some followers of Descartes such as Nicholas de Malebranche and especially Arnold Geulincx (1624-1669) tried to differ from Descartes by propagating occasionalism or parallelism when he argued, while maintaining strict dualism of mind and body, that: When I decide or will to move my arm, it actually moves. But my will does not cause my arm to move. Rather there are two parallel series of acts going on simultaneously, one physical and the other mental. When I will to move my arm, on that occasion God moves it and thereby creates an action parallel to my thought.
   3. Parallelism, which states that the apparent causal link between mind and body is an illusion, and that mind and body run parallel to one another. A version of this is psychophysical parallelism states that there is no interaction nor communication between mind and body. *Double aspectism* is an extension of psychophysical parallelism states that the mind and body cannot interact and cannot be separated – Baruch Spinoza and Gustav Fechner. *Pre-established harmony* is another offshoot of psychophysical parallelism which contends that mental events and bodily events are separate and distinct but they are coordinated by an external agent who is God or deity – Leibniz’s monadology.
2. **Monism**, the position that the mind and body are not fundamentally separate. Monists include the Ionian philosophers, Stoics, Middle Platonists – Numenius-, Plotinus, Spinoza, German Idealists – Schelling, Fichte and Hegel-, Engels and Karl Marx, Russell, Ryle, Whitehead. Types of mind-body monism:
   1. Physicalism, including most commonly-held positions today, which asserts that the mind may be reduced to the physical processes of the brain.
      1. Behaviourism, which holds that talk about mental states can be reduced to talk about behaviours.
      2. Functionalism, which states that mental states are caused by behaviours, senses and other mental states.
      3. Type physicalism, which argues that mental states are equivalent to brain states.
   2. Idealism, which claims that the mind is all that exists.
      1. Phenomenalism, which reduces the physical world to perceptions which exist within the mind alone.
   3. Neutral monism, Matter and mind is reduced to 3rd substance which is the only one sort of fundamental thing that exists.

## Appearance and reality

This concept often implies an opposition between the perception of things and their objective reality; the way things look and the way they really are. The use of terms “appears’, “seems,” “looks,” “feels” are not always the same. “The oar appears bent,” may mean either ‘The oar looks bent,” or “The oar seems to be bent.” The problem of appearance and reality is as old as philosophy. The Greek philosophy started by the quest to understand the hidden reality or the stuff of things beyond the universe of appearance. The Ionian philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes posited water, indeterminate boundless and fire respectively as the underlying stuff of things beyond appearances. Anaxagoras, for instance, argued that everything is in everything; each thing contains the seed (*spermata*) of all things but perception do not show us this fact. If one amount of particle dominates in a thing, perception only shows us this dominant particle but not the less dominant ones. For him, different persons or animals have different perceptions of the same thing. Parmenides and his successors presupposed that the real world is different from the world we perceive. Zeno of Elea (c. 495 – c. 430 BCE) a disciple of Parmenides argued that motion and multiplicity are illusions. He used the paradoxes of Achilles and Tortoise, and the flying arrow to demonstrate this. Once the tortoise is place before the Achilles it can never overtake the tortoise, even when appearance shows otherwise, because it has to traverse an infinite points or continuum in finite time.

In his *Theaetetus* Plato quotes Protagoras as saying thus: "Man is the measure of all things…any given thing is to me such as it appears to me, and is to you such as it appears to you." Here we see as “it appears to me” and “it appears to you” as expression of relativism. Plato, for instance, in his metaphor of the *Divided Line* identified appearance with opinion and reality with truth or knowledge. In Book VII of his *Republic,* Plato presents "The Allegory of the Cave" to demonstrate that appearance is sometimes different from reality. During the Hellenistic period of the ancient Greece, the two prominent schools of thought who identified themselves as sceptics were: The Academics and the [Pyrrhonists](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pyrrhonism" \o "Pyrrhonism). They drew inspiration from the early dialogues of [Plato](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Plato) in which the character Socrates attempted to demonstrate that someone who purported to be an authority in a certain subject does not really have knowledge of that subject. Academic believed that the gap between appearance and reality was in principle unbridgeable. The Pyrrhonist made no emphasis on the gap.

About the oar being bent in water St. Augustine in his *Contra Academicos* (III, xi, 26) writes: "Is that true, then, which the eyes see in the case of the oar in water? Quite true. For since there is a special reason for the oar's looking that way, I should rather accuse my eyes of playing me false if the oar looked straight when dipped in water; for in that case my eyes would not be seeing what, under the circumstances, ought to be seen." In the 16th & 17th centuries, the gradual acceptance of the Copernicus’ heliocentric model of the solar system led to the realization that the old geocentric view of Aristotle’s classical Greek and Ptolemy of Roman Egypt about the rising and setting of the suns was an illusion.

The empiricists, like David Hume, who have tradition dating back to the Sophists in the ancient Greece, argue that data apprehended by the senses, hence appearance, constitute the true reality of things and it is the only source of the knowledge of the truth. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz has argued that bodies with their qualities, such as colours, are well-founded appearances; in reality there can be no such things as coloured bodies. [Rene Descartes](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Rene_Descartes)' *Meditations on First Philosophy* resolved the problem of appearance and reality by becoming certain that he thinks and that God exists who alone is the ground of all realities.

Bertrand Russell on the problem of appearance and reality writes: "Although I believe that the table is 'really' of the same colour all over, the parts that reflect the light look much brighter than the other parts, and some parts look white because of reflected light. I know that, if I move, the parts that reflect the light will be different, so that the apparent distribution of colours on the table will change." But further on he wrote: "To return to the table. It is evident from what we have found, that there is no colour which pre-eminently appears to be *the* colour of the table, or even of any one particular part of the table—it appears to be of different colours from different points of view, and there is no reason for regarding some of these as more really its colour than others." Russell has simply suggested an ontology that can preserve the difference between appearance and reality. That is, that there are not only objects like table but also sense-datum. The colour, smells, sounds etc are not properties of the table rather they are sense-data. But the problem with sense-datum is that it always generates scepticism. Warnock’s treatment of the expression “seeming” states that its essential function is that it is noncommittal as to the actual facts.

Problem of appearance and reality which is connected with the argument from illusion is sometimes used to justify some form of phenomenalism or subjective idealism. This is based on the fact, like Russell’s appearance, that things sometimes appear differently to different people or differently to the same person in certain circumstances. This fact is supposed to show, as Berkeley argued against Locke, that sensible qualities, such as colours or odours, are not really "in" things. Berkeley as well as G. E. Moore insists that there is a distinction between “is” and “appears” or “looks” in that “is” is a logical function of the latter but the latter is not logical function of “is”. Berkeley rejected the appearance/reality distinction by arguing that all realities are more mental. Immanuel Kant argued that we can know things only as they appear to us but not as they really are in themselves. Kant used the term noumenon to describe unknowable reality as distinguished from phenomenon which is the reality as they appear.

## Universals and Particulars

Particulars are individual entities like Socrates, horse, John, etc. Universals are abstract terms like maness, horseness, etc. Apart from Universals, some philosophers endorse views according to which there are abstract particulars. Example of abstract particular is this *white*, as distinct from whiteness. Also, some list mathematical objects and objects of fictions as examples of abstract objects. The view that there are no abstract objects in reality is called materialism.

Plato's ontological categories could be seen in his theory of Forms which are universals. His ontological category presents Forms or Universals as existing prior to the individual objects, *ante res*, not necessarily in the individual objects, *in rebus*. Hence the question arises as to whether the universals exist *ante res* or *in rebus*? Aristotle believes that the universals exist in the objects, *in rebus*. Although Aristotle does not use these **terms** “Said-Of” in the *Categories*, it is clear that he intends to capture the notions of universal and particular with it:

A **universal** is what is SAID OF some subject. E.g.,

a. Man and animal are universal substances (Aristotle calls them “secondary substances.”)

b. White and color are universal qualities.

A **particular** is what is not SAID OF any subject. E.g.,

a. Callias and “this horse” are particular substances. (Aristotle calls them “primary substances.”)

b. “This white” is a particular quality.

**Repeatability and Instantiation**

What exactly is the distinction between a universal and a particular?  Universals are often said to be repeatable entities, ones-over-many or ones-in-many.  Particulars, then, are unrepeatable entities.  It is said that particulars instantiate universals. One and the same universal, F-ness, is repeated in the following facts: Fa, Fb, Fc.  But, as Frank Ramsey sates, is it not one and the same particular repeated in Fa, Ga, Ha?  If so, particulars are as repeatable as universals, in which case repeatability cannot be the mark of the universal.

Instantiation that exists between particulars and universals is asymmetric: if a instantiates F-ness, then F-ness does not instantiate a.  (Instantiation is not in general asymmetric, but nonsymmetric: if one universal instantiates a second, it may or may not be the case that the second instantiates the first.)  The asymmetry of first-level instantiation may provide a solution to the Ramsey problem.  The asymmetry implies that particulars are non-instantiable: they have properties but cannot themselves be properties.  By contrast, universals are properties and have properties. So, we can say the following:  The repeatability of a universal is its instantiability while the unrepeatability of a particular is its non-instantiability.  So, despite appearances, a is not repeated in Fa, Ga, and Ha. For a is a particular and no particular is instantiable (repeatable). The problem of universals give rise to theories thus: realism, nominalism and conceptualism.

**Realism**

Realism accepts that there are universals and particular. There are extreme realism and strong realism. Extreme realists, such as Plato, believe that there is another entity in the world of Forms. Strong realism inspired by Aristotle argue that there are no independent existing forms outside the individual particular things, hence one universal is in various individuals at the same time. The objection to extreme realism is posited by the *Third Man Argument* which argues that since Plato’s explanation of the origin of the individual is the Form, the explanation of the origin of the Form yellow has to posit another Form yellow since the explanation must come from where one participates say yellow participates in the Form yellow. Then one will posit another yellow Form to explain the origin of the previous one and it will go on ad infinitum. But Plato himself posited a limit to Forms, so he did not say that there is Form for everything. In fact, he was not sure whether there are Forms of dog, water and some other things, but in his *Parmenides,* he was certain that there were no Forms of *dirt* and *mud*. Anti-realism has two camps namely: Nominalism and conceptualism.

**Nominalism**

Nominalism argues that only individuals exist and that solves the problem of universals. There are: Predicate nominalism, Resemblance nominalism and Trope nominalism.

*Predicate nominalism*

It states that what makes an individual what it is, is its predicate. What makes an orange yellow is its predicate yellow. Some argue that predicates fit well with individuals but others do not. But in reality, predicates are not individuals as such.

Resemblance nominalism

This collects individuals into sets based on resemblance relation. An individual yellowness is explained by the fact that it belongs to the set of yellow things. But semblance is not individual. With the objections to the above two, thinkers now move to trope nominalism.

Trope nominalism

Tropes are relatively new to contemporary metaphysics even though it was known by the Mediaeval philosophers. Tropes are a type of individual which is described as qualitative simple since it is a particular property instance while ordinary individuals are qualitative complex. Example of tropes is “blue” sky which is distinct from the “blue” shirt another trope. Many Tropists view individuals or substances as collection of tropes or bundle of properties. For the theory of topes to solve the problem of universals, it must explain the truth about the appearance of generality in reality.

**Conceptualism**

Conceptualism makes generality a feature of our mind and concepts in the mind rather than a feature of reality. It denies that individuals are sufficient to solve the problem of universals and they reject extreme universals.