This is all, we (current) philosophers think, excellent. But it is not complete. There remain questions — fundamental, basic questions — which we have not been able to devise any science capable of answering. Those questions are the province of philosophy.

The sciences have particular methods which are designed to deliver answers to some limited range of questions. Philosophy is the completely unrestricted discipline: it is the attempt to use our reason to answer any question whatever about reality. As we will see, philosophy so understood is not really an alternative to scientific investigation of the world: it is an attempt to understand the nature of reality which incorporates rather than opposes the results of the sciences.

These great philosophers went on to form systematic new ways of answering the questions in which they were interested. These 'new ways of answering questions' are just what we now call 'sciences.'

Epistemology is derived from the Greek word ἐπιστήμη (episteme), which was the word for knowledge or understanding. Epistemology is the study of what we can know about the world.

Metaphysics is derived from the Greek prefix μετά (meta), which means after, and the Greek φύσις (physis), which means nature. This might encourage the view that metaphysics is the study of the supernatural. Fortunately, it isn't. Metaphysics is a name for the study of the ultimate nature of reality.

So our topic is a broad one: the nature of reality and what we can know about it.

Which of these questions are we going to talk about in this course?

This course is an introduction to metaphysics and epistemology. Both of these words also derive from ancient Greek words.

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