

Introduction to Metaphysics

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An overview of the fundamental questions, main branches, and key concepts that define this central area of philosophy.

1. What Is Metaphysics?

Aspect	Description
Definition	The branch of philosophy that investigates the nature of reality, existence, and what lies beyond the physical world.
Goal	To answer “what is ultimately there?” and “what is it like?”
Method	Conceptual analysis, logical argumentation, and thought experiments (often independent of empirical data).
Historical Roots	Originates in ancient Greece (e.g., Aristotle’s <i>Metaphysics</i>), but appears in many philosophical traditions worldwide.

2. Core Questions

- 1. Ontology** – What kinds of things exist?
 - *Examples:* objects, properties, events, minds, numbers.
 - 2. Identity & Change** – How can something remain the same while undergoing change?
 - *Key notions:* persistence, perdurance, the Ship of Theseus.
 - 3. Causality & Agency** – What does it mean for one thing to cause another?
 - *Issues:* deterministic vs. indeterministic accounts, free will.
 - 4. Space & Time** – What are the nature and structure of space and time?
 - *Debates:* absolute vs. relational, presentism vs. eternalism.
 - 5. Modality** – What does it mean for something to be possible, necessary, or contingent?
 - *Tools:* possible-world semantics, modal logic.
 - 6. Mind?Body Problem** – How are mental phenomena related to the physical world?
 - *Positions:* dualism, physicalism, panpsychism, idealism.
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3. Main Branches

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Branch	Focus	Representative Positions
Ontology	Study of being and categories of existence.	Substance theory, bundle theory, mereology.
Philosophy of Modality	Nature of possibility and necessity.	Modal realism (David Lewis), modal actualism.
Philosophy of Time	Temporal ontology and the flow of time.	Presentism, eternalism, growing? block theory.
Metaphysics of Causation	What constitutes causal relations.	Counterfactual theories, regularity theories.
Philosophy of Mind	Relation between mental states and physical world.	Dualism, materialism, functionalism, panpsychism.
Metaphysics of Properties	Nature of qualities, universals vs. particulars.	Realism about universals, nominalism, trope theory.

4. Key Concepts & Terminology

Term	Meaning
Substance	An entity that exists independently and bears properties (e.g., a particular tree).
Property	A feature or quality that can be instantiated by substances (e.g., redness).
Universal	A repeatable property that can be shared by many particulars (e.g., the property of “being red”).
Particular	An individual, concrete entity (e.g., this specific apple).
Trope	A particularized property; a concrete instance of a universal (e.g., <i>this</i> shade of red).
Possible World	A complete way reality could have been; used to analyze modality.
Essential vs. Accidental	Essential properties define what a thing is; accidental properties can change without altering its identity.