

# **Philosophical Theology 1 (TH5)**

## **Metaphysics**

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# Philosophical Theology 1 (TH5)

Aug. 15 – Intro to Philosophical Theology; Logic

Aug. 22 – Truth & Epistemology

Aug. 29 – Metaphysics

Sept. 5 – ***No Class***

Sept. 12 – Philosophy of Religion; Philosophy of  
Science

Sept. 19 – Human Nature; Philosophy of  
Politics

Sept. 26 – Ethics: What is Right?; Aesthetics:  
What is Beautiful?

October 3 – Conclusion; Final Exam

# What is philosophy?

- Literally, it is *a love of wisdom* – *phileo* is Greek for “love,” *sophos* means “wisdom.”
- Philosophy is the critical examination of our foundational beliefs concerning the nature of reality, knowledge and truth; and our moral and social values.
- Philosophy is the means and process by which we examine our lives and the meaning in our lives.
- **Philosophy is the attempt to think rationally and critically about life’s most important questions in order to obtain knowledge and wisdom about them.**

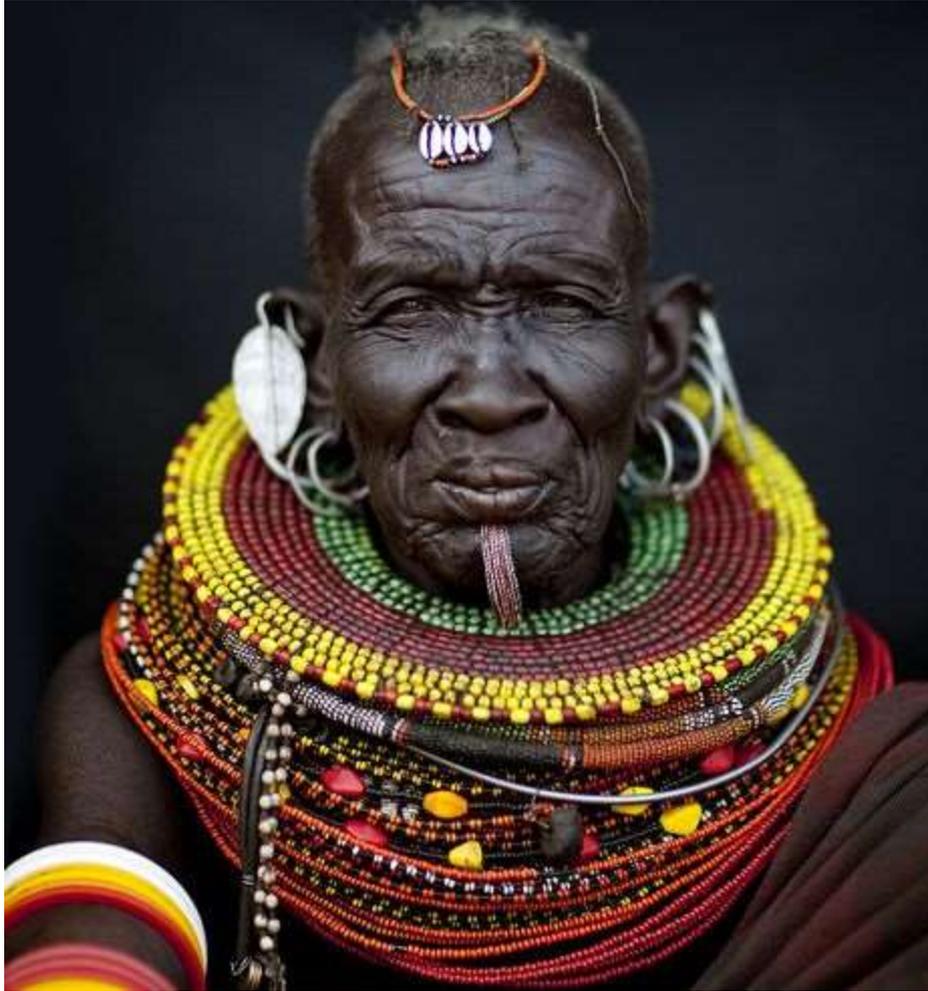
# Metaphysics

- **Metaphysics** is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of reality; with answering the question, “*What is real?*”
- **Metaphysical Questions**
  - *What is the nature of the world – what is it made of?*
  - *Is what we see, hear and touch the real world; or is this only the shadow of something else that is more real and significant?*
  - *Is there reality beyond the physical universe? Is there a God? Are there other spiritual beings? Do humans have a soul that is eternal? Is anything eternal?*
- **Ontology** is a subset of metaphysics that deals with being – that is, what does it mean to exist, or to *be*?

# Metaphysics

- The most basic metaphysical question is, “*What is the underlying nature of reality?*”
- The earliest philosophers posed several options, proposing that the world is made of water; or fire; or tiny particles called “atoms;” or a combination of the “basic elements” – earth, air, fire and water.
- One of the most basic challenges to metaphysics has been to understand the apparent *unity and diversity* in the world – the “*the one and the many.*”
- That is, how is it that the many *diverse* things in the world seem to be both different, and yet part of *almost universal subsets*? How does this relate to the nature of reality?





# Metaphysics

- There have been THREE primary philosophical approaches to explaining the nature of reality:
- ❖ **Dualism** – the belief that reality is made up of TWO fundamental types of things, substances or realms (*Platonism*).
- ❖ **Materialism** – the belief that all that exists is physical matter, and the laws that govern the behavior of that matter.
- ❖ **Idealism** – the belief that physical matter does not exist, and that all reality is made up of ideas that exist in the mind. (*Berkeley*)

# Metaphysics

- **Dualism** explains the challenge of *the one and the many* by proposing that there are two aspects to reality:
  - The imperfect, changing, temporal realm of the physical or material, which contains objects that we experience with our senses.
  - The perfect, immutable and eternal “spiritual” realm which is made up of “forms” or “universals” – the ideals that exemplify and unite subsets of objects in the material realm, and which don’t exist in space and time.
  - Plato’s “*Allegory of the Cave.*”
  - Plato proposed that the spiritual world is *more real* than the physical world that we perceive.

# Metaphysics

## ➤ In support of Dualism:

- Dualism seems to provide the most accurate description and best explanation of what we humans experience and can know of reality.
- Dualism readily explains the existence of “*the one and the many*” – the diversity and constant change in the world, and yet our ability to perceive *classes* (or *categories* or *subsets* or *forms*) of things.
- Dualism seems best able to accurately describe both our sensory experiences (color, sound, pain), and the abstract and non-material aspects of our lives (beliefs, desires, emotions).
- Dualism supports and grants permission for belief in the non-material world – including belief in God, the human soul (body/soul dualism), life after death, etc.

# Metaphysics

- **Materialism** insists that the physical world and the laws governing it are all that exist, and that immaterial substances (*God, angels, souls, mind, etc.*) either do not exist or can be explained as the products of events in the material world.
- Materialism sees the universe as one massive machine which operates according to fixed physical laws.
- *Hard determinism* is the materialistic view that all events are *necessitated* by the laws of physics, so that creatures are neither free nor morally responsible for their actions.
- *Nominalism* is one aspect of materialism, which insists there are no “forms” or universals, but that we simply have adopted conventions for naming similar things.

# Metaphysics

## ➤ In support of Materialism:

- Materialism would seem (at least on the surface) to be a more simple explanation for the nature of reality, and so better qualified under the demands of Occam's Razor (that the simplest explanation is almost always the best).
- Materialism is most consistent with Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, as both propose that all things are explained as the result of "natural" causes.
- Belief in the *progress of science* – that science continues to find explanations for the nature and operation of the universe, and that eventually ALL explanations will be found in the material world (the hypothetical *Theory of Everything* that will link together all the physical aspects of the universe).

# Metaphysics

## ➤ **Problems with Materialism:**

- Materialism does not allow the existence of any non-material beings – so there cannot be a God.
- Occam's Razor is only applicable for use as the deciding factor in the event that available options are otherwise equal in explaining a situation.
- Materialism fails exactly where all naturalistic attempts to explain the universe fail – it is logically impossible to believe the universe came from nothing, whether the proposition is that the universe always existed, or that it started as a Big Bang explosion of an extraordinarily dense speck of matter (which came from ???).
- Science is unable even to begin to begin to conceive how the physical brain can be *the same* as the human mind, or any other concrete-abstract connection.
- Materialism destroys any belief in or appeal to human moral responsibility, or any moral values of any kind.

# Metaphysics

## ➤ **Problems with Materialism:**

- The *progress of science* is uncertain at best, and even if science does provide us with an accurate picture of the physical universe, it still would not prove materialism, as this would not include the whole of reality.
- Materialism asks us to accept that the only *real* things are in the physical world, without recourse to beliefs or concepts – yet materialism is a belief and a concept, and so asking us to accept it is logically self-defeating.
- The dependence of materialism on Darwinian evolution demands that all human faculties and beliefs exist only as a result of natural selection, which means all beliefs are linked to and motivated by our instinct for survival. Since false beliefs can contribute to survival as readily as true beliefs, there is as much reason to think belief in materialism is false as to think it is true. So, again, materialism is logically self-defeating.

# Metaphysics

- **Idealism** asserts that physical matter does not exist, and that all reality exists only in the mind – and so is the *exact opposite* of materialism.
- Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753) proposed that for a thing to exist it must be either a *perceiver* (Descarte's "*cognito ergo sum*") or an *idea perceived* by the mind of the perceiver.
- Berkeley denied that any matter exists outside a perceiving mind, but insisted that what exists inside the perceiving mind is nonetheless *real*.
- The world, then, is not made of *matter*, but of ideas – and ultimately these ideas exist in the mind of God, over and above their presence in our minds.

# Metaphysics

## ➤ In support of Idealism:

- There is nothing in idealism that is inherently contrary to Christian belief.
- Idealism affirms the existence of universal “forms,” though it views them as existing in the mind of God.
- Because what we perceive is not the real world (Locke’s *representational theory of perception*), but only our *perception* of what exists in the world – and we in fact cannot even conceive of any mind-independent objects – the existence of physical matter is unnecessary and even absurd.
- If the apparent conflict between a *real* world and our *perception* of it does not in fact exist, then the skepticism that arose from our unproven perceptions (i.e., Hume) is defeated.
- We can remove the idea of a material world from our conception of reality and the world we experience will be unchanged.

# Metaphysics

## ➤ **Problems with Idealism:**

- Most arguments for idealism hinge on the representational theory of perception, so arguments in favor are weakened if we assume a different mode of perception.
- Some philosophers favor *direct realism* – which proposes that we experience external, material objects immediately and directly, rather than representationally, as ideas. If this is correct, idealism falls.
- Direct realism maintains that while there are *causal intermediaries* in our perceptions (the retinas and optic nerves in our eyes, the nerve endings in our fingers, etc.), we are unaware of these intermediaries and so our experience of the external world is *directly about* the physical world, and not just *ideas about* the world.

# Metaphysics

## ➤ How we understand & describe the world

- Both Dualism and Idealism propose the existence of “*universals*” – the immutable abstract “forms” that exist outside space and time. (like “dogness” or “chairness”)
- *Concrete objects* exist in the physical world; *abstract objects* (or *concepts*) do not exist in the physical world.
- *Properties* are the characteristics or qualities of a thing.
- *Relations* are another kinds of universal that reflect how things are in relationship to one another (including relative size, direction, age, etc.).
- When we describe the presence specific *relations* between objects, we express *relational properties*.
- Propositions are another kind of universal which is the content or meaning of a statement about an object.
- Object “have” *properties*; they “stand in” certain *relations*; and they “express” certain *propositions*.

# Metaphysics

- *Extreme Nominalism* is one type of materialism that denies the existence of properties and relations altogether, believing instead only in concrete objects. Instead it proposes that all objects simply belong to “sets” of things that we have decided to group together.
- *Moderate Nominalism (Trope Theory)* admits the existence of properties, but maintains that each abstract property (or *trope*) defines each object as a *completely separate entity*. Platonism, by comparison, sees all red apples as reflecting a universal property of “redness;” while Trope Theory sees every red apple as a discreet object which we may or may not choose to gather together in a “set” with other red apples, as their common “redness” is nothing more than a brute fact that cannot be explained.

# Metaphysics

- *Essences , or Essential Properties* – those universal properties without which a thing would not exist. (*being a dog, being a human, etc.*)
- *Non-essential Properties* – those properties which are not necessary for the existence of a thing. (*having red hair, being tall, etc.*)
- Both extreme nominalism and trope theory reject the existence of universals, and so reject the idea of *essential properties*.
- The consequence of this rejection of essential properties has radical ethical consequences. If there are no essential differences between a person and a tree, there is no justification for valuing the life of a person over that of a tree.
- We see this reflected in our culture – for example, if a fetus does not have an inherent “personhood,” because personhood is *contingent rather than essential*, then there is no ethical reason why it must be treated as a “person” according to social custom.

# Metaphysics

- **Conceptualism** – the view that all properties are only mental concepts, existing only in my mind, and not related to anything outside myself.
- Conceptualism is ultimately subjective – without a mind to create and hold the concept of properties, there are no properties and nothing would exist.
- Like nominalism, conceptualism cannot explain why we group things in the way we do.
- Unlike nominalism, some conceptualists do allow for the existence of God – proposing (as with Berkeleyan idealism) that the mind that contains the concepts may be God’s mind, and that (like Platonism) these divine ideas may include universal “forms” that we see reflected in real objects. (humaness, dogness, etc.)

# Metaphysics

- **What are particular things?**
- A *particular* is an individual thing of some kind – whether an inanimate object, a living organism, an artifact or a supernatural being.
- The *Principle of Indiscernability of Identicals* says that if two things are really only one thing (*numerical identity*), they will have the same properties in common. (“*Don’t be fooled by different names for the same thing.*”)
- The *Principle of Identity of Indiscernables* says that if two or more objects have the same properties in common (*qualitative identity*), they are the same thing. (“*Just because two things appear to be the same does not mean they are the same.*”)

# Metaphysics

- ***Bundle Theory*** maintains that a particular thing is nothing more than the sum of its properties (*rather than* the idea that properties are what a particular thing *has*).
- *Mereological Essentialism* is one aspect of bundle theory, which demands that every property of a particular thing is essential for that thing to exist, so there is no distinction between essential and accidental properties. (*If anything changes in the properties of a thing, it has become a completely new thing.*)
- Most metaphysicians maintain this is a false application of the *principle of identity of indiscernibles* – that *sameness* is a factor of qualitative identity (appearance) of two or more objects.

# Metaphysics

- ***Substratum View*** of reality proposes that beneath the properties of a thing there exists “something” that is not itself a property – a “substratum” which itself has no properties, but on which other properties reside.
- ***Substance View*** of reality says that the concrete particulars of a thing should themselves be taken as its most fundamental entity – that a thing (or at least a “*natural thing*” or living thing) exists in its wholeness as a basic and irreducible entity or substance.