

Chapter 4: Metaphysics

It is thus necessary to examine all things according to their essence, to infer from every species such true and well established propositions as may assist us in the solution of metaphysical problems. ~Maimonides

All external links that are not explicitly marked as "Required" are to be considered as "Optional" readings.

Overview

SECTIONS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 Overview | 5 Existentialism |
| 2 Materialism | 6 Pragmatism |
| 3 Idealism | 7 Post Modernism |
| 4 Dualism | 8 Conclusion |

Metaphysics deals with what is *real*. Have you ever heard or said any of the following:

Q.1

Is that *real*?

Does God *exist*?

There *aren't* any ghosts!

Is it *really* true?

Well, just what is meant by *reality*? What does it mean to be *real*? Is there a reality beyond merely what we perceive? How could we know if there were?

These are some of the questions of metaphysics. When someone dies and a survivor wonders whether or not souls are real, they are engaging in metaphysical thinking. As soon as they begin to think about what exactly it means to be real, they become metaphysicians.

We have many metaphysical beliefs: *Physical objects are real. Ideas are real. Relationships (taller than, older than) are real. They are all real, but they are not the same.*

You check out something to determine whether or not it is real. A testing process is used. The testing involves the use of the senses, physical objects and measuring devices. But are all things that are real detectable by means of such physical devices? This is a metaphysical question.

Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that could be of significance to humans as they must deal with claims about things and state of affairs about which they wonder, "Are they real or not?" At the beginning of the Twenty First

Century Philosophers are exploring alternatives to the post modernist view that would restore some notion of there being a reality. It is too soon to discern which traditions in Philosophy may reassert themselves and in what form to displace the discredited postmodern rejection of the idea of a single reality.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a movement in philosophy called *linguistic analysis* that held that most, if not all, of the most basic problems confronting philosophers and humans were the result of language problems and once they were solved with a method of clarification the human problems would be solved as well. This has not proven to be the case. Some but not all of the problem with the idea that there are "multiple realities" may very well be a problem with language and the sloppiness with which people use it.

Let's consider the idea of "multiple realities." At first glance many will agree that there are multiple realities. But when asked exactly what is meant by that claim, there are different ideas. We need to clarify the meaning of the term "reality." As with many words there is more than one meaning, and to switch from one to another in a conversation or an argument is called equivocating (*equi-* (equal) -*voca* (voices): treating different meanings as if they were equal). In philosophy, this problem is known as equivocation. Many people equivocate on the term "reality."

VIEW (Optional): Multiple Realities and Multiple Meanings <http://youtu.be/f-14mVKI6ZY>



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Overview

MEANING 1

Let's start with what is perhaps the oldest and most important meaning of the word "reality."

Reality1 = the sum total of all that is real.

By this is meant the total sum of all things that exist and are experienced no matter what or where they are. These would be real things meaning as opposed to imaginary or illusory.

Now there is a universe and it is composed of galaxies and they are composed of solar systems and they have planets and moons and then there are asteroids and comets and throughout it all there is dark matter and energy and dark holes and the forces of the universe: gravity, electro-magnetic, strong and weak. This universe occupies and constitutes space. It has three dimensions of length, breadth and depth. Add the dimension of time and the entire space-time continuum is reality1. Thus reality1 is the total of all real things that are space-time continuum.

Now if there should be more dimensions than the four of the known space-time continuum, well then reality1 would consist of the sum of all those dimensions. String theory holds for many more dimensions than the four of space-time. If there should be other universes with their own galaxies and solar systems, etc... then reality1 would be the total of all those universes and dimensions.

Reality1 is singular. There is only one reality1. Whatever is real and exists makes for reality1.

MEANING 2

The word reality is sometimes used not in the sense of meaning1 or reality1 but in another way.

Reality2 = a person's experience of reality1

With this usage each person has a unique and individual experience of all that is real and those experiences constitute the reality2 of that person. No two people, not even identical twins, have the self same set of experiences and so no two people have the same reality2. Thus there are as many realities2 as there are conscious beings to experience what exists. Thus there are multiple realities2.

It is obvious that the experiences of different people are different and the more different people are so are their experiences and so is their reality2. So in the sense of reality2 there are multiple realities2.

Rich people have a different reality2 than poor people. Tall people have a different reality2 than short people. Males have a different reality2 than females and so on.

MEANING 3

There is still another meaning for the word "reality" that is operative in discussions about reality.

Reality3 = a person's belief about reality1

As different people have different beliefs about what is real then they have a different reality3.

So each person holding a set of beliefs about reality1 has a reality3. Different beliefs will produce different realities3.

So with meaning 2 and meaning 3 there are multiple "realities"

If in metaphysics the issue is "What is real?" then the meaning of the word "real" and the resulting "reality" would be the sense of the word using the meaning of reality1.

Now with post-modernism there came the notion that since humans do not know with objective knowledge and with absolute certainty what reality1 is then all thinking about reality1 is merely about reality3. Thus different groups of people have different beliefs about reality1 and thus there being no set of beliefs that are certain to be true and complete knowledge of reality1 then there is no reality1 that humans know and all talking about reality1 is merely talking about reality3 and thus there can be and are multiple realities3 and that is all that humans can do.

Post modernism presents the claims:

There is no absolute certainty about reality1.

There can be no certain knowledge of reality1.

There can be no objective knowledge of reality1.

All thinking about reality1 is done within groups by individuals and amounts to no more than reality3.

So, there are only multiple realities3.

Is this actually the case that there is no reality1 and there are only realities3?

Is there no way to get beyond the relativity of thinking about reality?

Some think that there is.

Let us consider as an example of something that is real and would be a part of reality1, the planet earth. More precisely, let's consider the shape of the planet earth.

To begin with we start out with there being only one such planet on which we who are writing and reading or listening to these words are living.

If each of us has his or her own planet earth then there is no explanation as to why we are each on the other's planets.

So we agree that there is ONE PLANET EARTH.

The planet earth is physical and occupies space-time.

As there is only one planet earth it has only one shape.

The shape of the planet earth is of a multi dimensional object. It could be something like a cube, or a saucer, or a cylinder, or a spherical shape, or some other three dimensional shape.

Whatever is its shape it has ONLY ONE SHAPE.

If it has only one shape and there are people who think it is a cube and others who think it is a saucer and others who think it is a spherical shape then they can not all be correct at the same time. No matter what the shape of the earth is some of those people must be WRONG about the shape because the planet earth can not have more than one shape at the same time.

So in reality¹ the planet earth has one and only one shape.

Different people have different experiences of the planet earth and thus different realities².

People also have different beliefs about the shape of the planet and thus different realities³.

Some people think that the shape is flat (Flat Earth society members). Some think that the shape is an oblate spheroid. So they have different realities³.

Are they equally correct? No they could both be wrong. This could happen if the earth turned out to have a pyramid shape or some other shape beside a spheroid or flat. But the people who think it is flat and those who think it is an oblate spheroid can not both be correct at the same time.

So what is the reality¹ about the planet earth? We think that it is an oblate spheroid given the overwhelming amount of evidence that supports that and the evidence that refutes the claim that the planet earth has a flat shape to it.

It would be foolish (defying logic and basic reason) to claim that there are multiple realities using reality¹ meaning. It would be obvious to claim that there are multiple realities about the shape of the earth using reality³ meaning.

So where are we with all this talk about reality and multiple realities? Well the American Pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce wished to distinguish himself from the other pragmatists because of a few points of fundamental difference with them. **Most held that there was no reality¹, but Peirce held that there is a reality¹, and that humans can develop better and better understandings of just what reality¹ is but never capture it totally and completely.** He wished that his own form of pragmatism that held out for such a thing to be known as "pragmaticism" but that did not catch on. So we have the post modernism of Peirce and then the post modern relativism of the others including pragmatists who want to claim that there is no reality¹.

It seems that Peirce was more accurate than those others who would go on to promulgate many ideas about the lack of certainty and the impossibility of objective knowledge and truth.

The shape of the planet earth is something that humans come to know. Their thinking about is checked against the way that things are. There is a method for checking on the empirical claims of human beings and that method is self correcting. Science develops over time a better and better understanding of the nature of things and of reality¹.

We should not accept that there are multiple realities¹, but only that there are multiple realities in the sense of meanings 2 and 3. We would do better to stop using those meanings, and when we want to claim that there are multiple realities in the sense of meanings 2 or 3 we should make claims like these:

- b) There are different experiences of what is real.
- c) There are different beliefs about what is real.



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Overview

ACADEMIC METAPHYSICS

The term *metaphysics* originally referred to the writings of Aristotle that came after his writings on physics, in the arrangement made by Andronicus of Rhodes about three centuries after Aristotle's death.

Q1 Traditionally, *metaphysics* refers to the branch of philosophy that attempts to understand the fundamental nature of all reality, whether visible or invisible. It seeks a description so basic, so essentially simple, so all-inclusive that it applies to everything, whether divine or human or anything else. It attempts to tell what anything must be like in order to **be** at all.

To call one a metaphysician in this traditional, philosophical sense indicates nothing more than his or her interest in attempting to discover what underlies everything. Old materialists, who said that there is nothing but matter in motion, and current naturalists, who say that everything is made of lifeless, non-experiencing energy, are just as much to be classified as metaphysicians as are idealists, who maintain that there is nothing but ideas, or mind, or spirit.

Perhaps the best definition of **materialism** is that of Charles Hartshorne (*Insights and Oversights of Great Thinkers*, p. 17): "the denial that the most pervasive processes of nature involve any such psychical functions as sensing, feeling, remembering, desiring, or thinking." **Idealists** assert what materialists here deny, and say something even stronger: they deny that there are any material processes; everything that is is sensing, feeling, thinking, etc.

Dualists say that immaterial mind and matter are both equally real, while **neutral monists** claim that there is a neutral reality that can appear as either mind or matter. Philosophers are generally content to divide reality into two halves, mind and matter (extended and unextended reality), and do not recognize distinctions within the mind, for instance, half as spirit and half as soul.

POPULAR METAPHYSICS

A commonly employed, secondary, popular, usage of metaphysics includes a wide range of controversial phenomena believed by many people to exist beyond the physical.

Popular metaphysics relates to two traditionally contrasted, if not completely separable, areas (1) **mysticism**, referring to experiences of unity with the ultimate, commonly interpreted as the God who is love, and (2) **occultism**, referring to the extension of *knowing* (extrasensory perception, including telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, retrocognition, and mediumship) and *doing* (psychokinesis) beyond the usually recognized fields of human activity. The academic study of the occult (literally *hidden*) has been known as *psychical research* and, more recently, *parapsychology*. Both New Age and New Thought emphasize mysticism and its practical, pragmatic application in daily living, but New Thought discourages involvement in occultism.

The terms *metaphysics* and *metaphysical* in a popular sense have been used in connection with New Thought, Christian Science, Theosophy, and Spiritualism, as in J. Stillson Judah, *The History and Philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America* (The Westminster Press, 1967), as well the New Age movement, and in the name of the Society for the Study of Metaphysical Religion (see below). Some of the varying understandings of *metaphysics* held by some founders of New Thought and Christian Science are given in the opening pages of *Contrasting Strains of Metaphysical Idealism Contributing to New Thought*.

PURE AND APPLIED METAPHYSICS

Cutting across the division of the academic and the popular, there is another way of dividing metaphysics: theoretical and applied. This distinction is like the division between science and technology; one describes; the other applies the description to practical problems, putting knowledge to work. Gathering knowledge (or alleged knowledge, critics of metaphysics would say) in metaphysics traditionally is by rational thought; in a more popular understanding, knowledge gathering may be either mystical or occult; in either case the pure (?) knowledge is to be distinguished from the practical application of it.

More on this:

Reading (Suggested): <http://websyte.com/alan/metamul.htm>



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Overview

These are the sub-divisions of Metaphysics:

ONTOLOGY: The field of metaphysics that studies the traditional metaphysical questions associated with existence: What is Being? What exists? What is real? What are existing things made of (substances and properties, bundles of properties)?

Reading (Suggested): <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ONTOLI.html>

Traditional Metaphysical Questions:

Does God exist? Do the soul, mind, body, space, time, eternity, future, past, motion, particles, atoms exist?

COSMOLOGY

The field of metaphysics that studies the traditional metaphysical questions about origins: What is the origin of reality? matter? space? time? This is also a field in physics.

AXIOLOGY

The field of metaphysics that studies the traditional metaphysical questions about actions and values: What are Values? Do they exist? Are they ordered? How should we act?

Some topics in metaphysics:

MINDS AND BODIES

SOULS AND IMMORTALITY

FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM

SPACE AND TIME

TIME AND ETERNITY

CAUSATION

GOD: being, causation, nature, eternal, nature, existence of evil

IDEAS or CATEGORIES Relations; Properties; Substances

The Metaphysics of Aristotle

Reading (Optional) : <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.html>

The following schools of thought, or traditions of thought, in Metaphysics will be examined in the following sections.

The Variety of Metaphysical Traditions:

- A. MATERIALISM: ALL THINGS THAT EXIST ARE MADE OF MATTER IN SOME WAY
- B. IDEALISM: ALL THINGS THAT EXIST ARE IDEAS IN SOME MIND
- C. DUALISM: MINDS AND BODIES EXIST AND ARE SEPARATE SUBSTANCES
- D. POSTMODERNISM
- E. PRAGMATISM
- F. EXISTENTIALISM
- G. CRITICAL THEORY (critical race theory; critical gender theory)



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Materialism

MATERIALISM is a tradition of thought in which all things that exist are made up of *matter* in some way. To update this theory, it might be said that materialists today believe all existence is made up of energy in some form or other. Matter is a form of energy. (**NOTE: You must read only those linked materials that say Required.**)

READ (Required): <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10041b.htm>

Philosophical Materialism, by Richard C. Vitzthum

In this view, all human behavior is explained in physical terms. There are no minds separate from the brain. There are no souls or spirits and no God. To explain human behavior, there is evolutionary biology and sociobiology, which attempt to explain all behavior in physical terms. Humans are conditioned to respond to stimuli. They have basic physical drives and they have the evolutionary drive to continue their species. This explains mating behavior and even the actions of some humans to save the lives of other humans, even at their own expense. It is all about continuing the genetic inheritance, the chromosomal patterns. (More on this in the chapter on the *mind-body problem*.)

Reading (Optional): For the thought of John Dewey, an American Pragmatist, see this site for a description of his version of materialism: <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/d/dewey.htm>

NATURALISM

For an overview of a variety of Metaphysical positions that do not accept as real anything that is beyond nature,

READ (Required): Dallas Roark <http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/roark-textbook/Chapter-9.htm>



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Idealism

PLATO'S IDEALISM

This is the view that the only reality is the ideal world (the world of ideas). A well-known exponent of this view was Plato (428-347 BCE). Plato believed that the physical world around us is not really real; it is constantly changing and thus you can never say what it really is. There is a world of ideas, which is a world of unchanging and absolute truths that are the form of the world we perceive. This is the real reality for Plato. Does such a world exist independently of human minds? Plato thought it did, and whenever we grasp an idea, or see something with our mind's eye, we are using our mind to know and understand something in the ideal world. There are a number of proofs of this ideal world.

The concepts of geometry, such as the concept of a circle, which is a line equidistant from a point, is something which does not exist in the physical world. No physical circles, such as wheels, drawings, etc. are perfectly round. Yet our minds have the concept of a perfect circle. We understand it. We know what it means, even though we've never perceived one. Since this concept could not come from the physical world, it must come from an ideal world.

Another proof is that from moral perfection. We can conceive of a morally perfect person, even though the people we know around us are not morally perfect. So where does someone get this idea of moral perfection? Since it could not have been obtained from the world around us, it must have come from an ideal world. Platonism has been an extremely influential philosophy down through the centuries.

Idealism is the metaphysical view that associates reality to ideas in the mind rather than to material objects. It lays emphasis on the mental or spiritual components of experience, and renounces the notion of material existence. Idealists regard the mind and spirit as the most essential, permanent aspects of one's being. The philosophical views of Berkeley, Christian Science, and Hinduism embrace idealist thought as they relate it to the existence of a supreme, divine reality that transcends basic human understanding and inherent sensory awareness. -

Omonia Vinieris (2002)

BISHOP BERKELEY'S IDEALISM

READ (Required): <http://www.ul.ie/~philos/vol1/berkel.html>

George Berkeley was an Anglican bishop from Ireland who challenged the commonsense notion that matter exists autonomously, outside the mind, as Locke and other empiricists speculated. Berkeley's immaterialist ontology maintained that material substance cannot be real beyond the confines of the mind because inanimate objects do

not have the ability to operate as causal agents. It is nonsensical and foolish to designate the causal qualities of humans, or spirits, to inert matter. Only life-forces, such as spirits or souls, are able to function causally through perception and are the only substances that really exist. Knowledge springs from perceptions, and because material objects are not causal agents, they unquestionably do not arouse perceptual activity. Berkeley says that only an infinite being may produce and direct causally the perceptions that humans (spirits) have of physical matter.

“But whatever power I may have over my own thoughts, I find the ideas actually perceived by sense have not a like dependence on my will. When in broad daylight I open my eyes, ‘tis not in my power to choose whether I see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall represent themselves to my view; and so likewise to the hearing and other senses, the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will. There is therefore some other will or spirit that produces them,” (*Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1710).

Berkeley asserted that man’s ideas are emitted from the Divine, and thus all humans are merely ideas in the mind of God. When he thinks of us, we are begotten and our existence activated. Yet, God still remains ineffable as he is beyond our comprehension. It is ultimately God who causes us to sense the physicality of objects by means of his direct volition. First He will conceive the idea that we humans sense or perceive an object and then we actually do as He thought. Hence, the effect of God’s mind on the mind of humans is required for sensation to occur. Berkeley explicates that all physical objects are perceived via sensation. Material objects are merely ideas obtained through perceptual activity and their attributes are sensible rather than being physical properties. Sensation is therefore impossible without the presence of ideas or else anything sensed would be unperceived or unthought. In conclusion, Berkeley asserts that all physical things in this world are ideas of the Divine and specifies this concept as *esse est percipi*, Latin for “to be is to be perceived.”

Omonia Vinieris (2002)



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Idealism

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE'S IDEALISM

Christian Scientists generally believe that God is a disembodied spirit who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. They set all being in His mind. He is and encompasses all aspects of existence as he is referred to as "God is All-in-all." Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, states that due to God's spiritual nature, humanity (the product of His creation) must also appropriately be spiritual and not material. The concept of additional spiritual deities is excluded because of His "All-in-all" totality. The true universe in its entirety, according to divine metaphysics, or Christian Science, is comprised of ideas that are completely spiritual and fashioned by divine thought, just as Berkeley espouses in his immaterialist views. Therefore, Christian Scientists specify that we as humans are in truth spirits produced by divinity, and in consequence are all incarnations of God. If we ignorantly deny the truth of God's spiritual existence, it is then that we will mistakenly envision the world in the form of material, as it will be an illusion. All ideas hostile to God's infiniteness, permanence, and goodness, such as conceptions of death, hell, and evil, are flawed and wicked hallucinations and are NOT real. God envelops all that is real, and therefore, everything he is (eternal, omni beneficent, etc.) is justifiably real. Everything else is just mortal error.

"Wipe out or eliminate all that can be called a material universe or a material man, and the true man, the true expression of God, still remains, and will forever remain, no more subject to change or annihilation than is God, the infinite Principle, in whom man lives, and upon whom he depends, and whom he represents," (Christian Science: Pure Metaphysics, Dr. Fluno). -Omonia Vinieris (2002)

HINDUISM'S IDEALISM

The Advaita Vedantin tradition in Hinduism

The concept that all experience emanates from the mind of Brahman (God) is incredibly important in Hindu epistemology, as it is predominant in most religious works, such as the Upanishads, ancient philosophical texts, and the Bhagavadgita. In accordance with idealist thought, Hindus counter material existence outside the mind. The mind itself is even held to be unreal and is epitomized as the nemesis and interruption of the liberation of the soul as it amalgamates with Brahman (moksha). "Matter exists only as it is perceived" is the central premise recounted in a legendary myth of Brahman and one of his multiple manifestations, Vishnu. The Upanishads further explicate

that Brahman as totality of all existence “permeates the universe.” His very essence transcends all our comprehension, yet we are partially capable of obtaining merely a nominal understanding unless we submit to self-enquiry (Atmavichara) and self-realization. These processes allow one to negate the obstacles of the mind and the concept of the ego because the Self is really and truly a manifestation of Brahman that yearns for union with its divine source. Of course, once we comprehend the Self and unite it with Brahman, we may then come to comprehend his true being. The Self, however, can willingly choose to disjoin itself from Brahman. Mortality and suffering are illusions that obstruct the reality of the Self, instigated by the fabrications of the Mind that is artificial.

King Janaka says,

“The mind is the thief stealing my natural bliss,”

The mind is the demarcation of the Self and of one’s total consciousness. By means of self-realization, one may achieve union with the infinite reality of Brahman and merge with his perpetual intransience. The real is always existent, unlike the physical body that is finite. It is said that Brahman is the real source of all physical (tactile, auditory, gustatory, auditory, and visible) sensation and perception, although he remains transcendent of these senses. Thus man does not perceive because he opts to, but more accurately because Brahman promptly instructs him to as He is the ontological origin of all that is potentially sensed in this universe. This is why the Self must look to desist the mind of its deceptive conduct and encase itself in the authenticity of Brahman.

“...all natures are from Me, but I am not in them, they are in Me,” (Brahman in the Bhagavadgita).

- *Omonia Vinieris (2002)*

FORMS OF IDEALISM

Skeptical Idealism - concludes that there are only ideas from the argument that there is no proof that material objects exist;

Problematic Idealism - the belief associated with Descartes that we can only rationally believe one empirical truth, which is that “I exist.”

Dogmatic Idealism - starts with the argument that the concept of “space” is inseparable from all objects, and therefore, that space can’t exist in itself. Thus, it nothing in space can exist and are merely images. This is Berkeley’s position.

We could all be merely sets of thoughts in the universal set that is God. God thinks of everything, and God’s thoughts are those things. God thinks of us, and of our sitting at our computers, and our sitting in a room with other

people all at the same time that he thinks of those rooms and those people and those computers. And that is all that we are: thoughts in God's mind.

For an overview of IDEALISM **READ (Required):** Dallas Roark

<http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/roark-textbook/Chapter-10.htm>



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Dualism

According to dualists, both minds and bodies exist, and they are separate types of entities. There are some dualists who claim that there is one reality which is composed of two different *substances*: physical and spiritual. These two substances are quite different from one another. There are some dualists who claim that there is one reality that has two *aspects* to every real thing: the physical and mental. For the varieties of dualism and some criticisms:

READ (Required): <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05169a.htm>

PLATO'S DUALISM

Plato thought that the soul could and would exist apart from the body and would exist after the death of the body. He offered a "proof" for this position and was the first to do so in writing that we have any evidence of doing so. He offered several different proofs or arguments none of which are convincing today. In contemporary philosophy, they are considered specious arguments, that is, terribly flawed and unconvincing. Plato held that humans are composed of bodies and souls, but the soul is more important and immortal. His arguments used premises which we question today. For example, Plato thought that he could conclude that the soul could exist independent of the body because it acts independently of the body when it engaged in pure thought. This is no longer accepted as true since it is equally evident today that, without a physical brain, thought is unlikely to occur. Plato thought that the only way to explain how people come to know things is that they are remembering the knowledge implanted in their souls when the souls were in the realm of pure thought and eternal forms before entering into the body after which they forgot as they became confused by physical emotions and feelings and limited experiences through the senses. This is no longer accepted as the best explanation of how people come to have knowledge. Nonetheless, Plato is credited with being the first human to attempt to set out any sort of a proof that humans had souls and that they survived the death of the body and that they were immortal. He offered these arguments in the Dialogue he wrote titled the PHAEDO (optional).

Descartes also believed that the soul existed prior to and separate from the body (see Meditation II (optional) of *Meditations on First Philosophy*) and so was immortal. In his view, all of reality consists of two very different substances: matter, or the physical, and spirit, or the non-physical. The physical is what is extended in time and space, and the non-physical is not extended. For Descartes, the soul of a human exists prior to and separate from the body. His proof consists of arguments that have been seriously criticized and rejected. He thought that if he could, in some form, demonstrate that humans can prove they exist without first proving that they have physical bodies, then that would prove that they did not need a physical body in order to exist. He thought that his famous claim that "I think therefore I am" established not just that he existed but that he is the sort of thing that could

exist without a body as a "thinking thing." A "thinking thing" is a thing that thinks, and by that would be included imagining, conceiving, hoping, dreaming, desiring, fearing, conjecturing, reasoning, remembering, and more. For him, a "thinking thing" needed no physical parts to do what it does. Modern science has established that there is no evidence of humans that are without a physical body and its brain. There is no evidence that thought is possible without a brain. There is much evidence that what has been associated with Descartes's "thinking thing" is now explained solely in terms of the brain, how the brain is physically structured and the functioning of the brain.

Now, most people born in the West in the twentieth century have acquired the belief in dualism through their culture. It is part of the belief system of the Judeo-Christian-Islam traditions. It appears to most people as quite obvious that humans have souls. It carries with it however, several major problems. One of them is the division created between the material realm which includes human bodies and brains and the non-material realm or the spiritual realm, which would include minds and souls or spirits. In Philosophy of Mind, dualism is the general position that minds and bodies are distinct substances, and the mind is not physical and not part of the body.

VIDEOS (OPTIONAL):

From [QualiaSoup](#) on Substance Dualism - a good philosophical overview of the idea and problems with it.

Pt 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RS4PW35-Y00>

Pt 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZTCK8ZluEc>

More on this form of dualism will be covered in a later chapter.



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Chapter 4: Metaphysics

It is thus necessary to examine all things according to their essence, to infer from every species such true and well established propositions as may assist us in the solution of metaphysical problems. ~Maimonides

Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical movement or tendency that emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice. It influenced many diverse writers in the 19th and 20th centuries.

READ (Required) at least "Concepts" from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existentialism#Concepts>

READ (Required) at least the "Existence Precedes Essence" section from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/> and <http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/sartreol.htm>

The existentialists separated themselves from the debate between the materialists and the idealists. Instead, they focused on what humans could know for certain. We know that we exist and that we are aware of that existence. We are aware that there are things that exist that do not appear to be aware and do not have freedom. So, there are those things that have that awareness and those that do not.

As Sartre categorized real things:

a BEING-FOR-ITSELF is conscious and free

a BEING-IN-ITSELF is not conscious

So, for the existentialists there are two types of real things, two types of things that exist: BEING-FOR-ITSELF and BEING-IN-ITSELF.

There is no proof of souls or spirits or ghosts or deities, and thus their existence is nothing other than what people make a decision to believe. People decide whether or not to believe that such entities are real or not and they decide on the criteria for making such decisions. What is given immediately to consciousness is consciousness and through it the awareness of what is not conscious and not free.

Some existentialists hold that such beliefs are and must be beyond reason so that humans must make a leap of faith into the beliefs of the reality of such nonphysical entities. What humans can know for certain is their own existence and the existence of things not like humans because they have no consciousness and are not free.

READ (Required): Dallas Roark **On Existentialism** <http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/roark-textbook/Chapter-13.htm>

View VIDEO (Required): Introduction to Existentialism <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilg7PiDD8yY>

Videos (Optional): William Barrett on Existentialism

Pt 1 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvfgAvtNulw>

Pt 2 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bp2KWixFQ6E>

Pt 3 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blkqKhuqt58>

See a later Chapter on **Freedom and Determinism** for more material on existentialist views of freedom.



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Pragmatism

See these sites for information on the pragmatist theory of reality:

READ (Required): <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pragmatism>

READ (Required): <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12333b.htm>

The pragmatists applied their theory of meaning and truth to language about reality to find that such language does not necessarily describe reality as it is or may be but that the word itself has whatever meaning is assigned to it by the group of speakers. Thus, different groups can have different realities and that are equally accurate and truthful if the language satisfies the expectations of the group concerning the use of that language. The idea of reality is seen as a construct, which performs certain functions. There is not an external something to which the language refers and against which the language can be evaluated for its accuracy. Talk about reality is performing social functions.

There is no one thing that is reality!

READ (Required): Dallas Roark <http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/roark-textbook/Chapter-12.htm>

This idea served the postmodern movement to declare that there is no one reality and that there can be multiple simultaneous realities.

VIDEO (Optional):

Who founded Pragmatism <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRnqmU66DaQ>



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Postmodernism

The pragmatists applied their theory of meaning and truth to language about reality to find that such language does not necessarily describe reality as it is or may be but that the word itself has whatever meaning is assigned to it by the group of speakers. Thus different groups can have different realities and that are equally accurate and truthful if the language satisfies the expectations of the group concerning the use of that language. The idea of reality is seen as a construct, which performs certain functions. There is not an external something to which the language refers and against which the language can be evaluated for its accuracy. Talk about reality is merely the performance of a social function.

This idea served the postmodern movement to declare that there is no one reality, and that there can be multiple simultaneous realities.

The distinguishing characteristic of postmodernist theorizing is its rejection of the questions and methods of traditional philosophy and metaphysics. The Western philosophical tradition itself is, of course, a record of *debate* rather than agreement. The postmodernists, however, claim to have rejected not one thesis or another but rather the entire philosophical tradition, from Plato through George Santayana. Deconstructionists, pragmatists, and New Historicists certainly make assertions and criticize opposing views, just as traditional thinkers did. Unlike traditional philosophers, however, postmodernists make no attempt to tell the truth about reality. They realize, what in their view their predecessors failed to grasp, that human reason is an inadequate instrument for achieving truth. They have therefore renounced metaphysics and philosophy in favor of what Carl Rapp calls "post-rational criticism."

READ (Required): <http://www.nhinet.org/seatonr.htm>

VIEW (Optional): [Explaining Postmodernism: Chapter 1: What Postmodernism Is by Stephen R.C. Hicks](#)

For the postmodernists, there can be no single reality or privileged view of reality or even concept of what reality is for there is no single objective or truthful way in which to verify any claims about a singular phenomena to be called "reality." Thus in postmodernism there is a reality for each group of speakers that chooses to use the word and accept that usage of it.

In postmodernist thinking, there being multiple groups of speakers and multiple ideas about what constitutes the real, the result is multiple realities existing at the same time. Could this be the case? Is there one reality and different views of it or are there multiple realities coexisting with one another? Is there one reality with multiple views of it, some being correct and some being incorrect? Or, are all views of what is real equally correct?

Is the earth flat or is it spherical, an oblate spheroid? There are those who claim it is flat. They claim that the reality is quite different from those who claim that the earth has a spherical shape.

Is the earth both flat and spherical at the same time? Are there multiple simultaneous realities?

CONSIDER:

There is a large object or entity in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. It is very large indeed. It has been there for some time and a very large and very expensive new building has been built around it rather than attempt to move it again. It was brought to the museum from the northwest of the United States. It has been labeled as a meteorite, the Willamette Meteorite, from the Willamette Valley of Oregon. It weighs 15 tons and scientists claim that it fell to earth about 10,000 years ago. There is a group of native people from a tribe (Clackamas) in the state of Oregon. They are part of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde of Oregon. The native peoples claim that it is not a rock but a messenger, the Sky Person, Tomanowos, from the sky god who came to earth as a messenger and guide and who speaks to their people. They want the messenger returned to their people. The museum acquired it from a woman, Mrs. William Dodge, who donated it to the museum. She bought it from an iron mining company that had it on land owned by the company. Both parties went to court. A settlement was reached out of court. The original peoples will get to visit the rock-messenger each year and perform rituals there in the museum. Now is the object an inanimate rock or an animated messenger? Is it both or neither? What is the reality? For the postmodernists it is both at once. They would allow that it really is a messenger and it really is a rock at the same time, because there is no one objective reality or truth.

Click here for a few photos of the entity [photos](#) (optional).

Most, if not all of you, will probably refer to the entity in the American Museum of Natural History as a meteorite. This might indicate that because you were brought up in a culture that accepts scientific method and materialism that is how you look at it. You think of it as a meteorite that some people think contains a spirit. But this may not be correct. The original peoples see it as a spirit NOT a meteorite. They think of it as a spirit that some people choose to think of as a rock. But to them it is a spirit and NOT a rock. It is alive and NOT dead.

Now which is it?

- a. rock/meteorite and dead
- b. spirit and alive

You cannot choose to think of it as a rock that people think of as a spirit because when you do, all you are claiming is a.) that it is a rock that some people may perceive differently. Is that what you think, or is it b.) a spirit that some people choose to think of or perceive as a rock?

Or is it both or neither? Which is correct and why?

There is a body of a human that died over 9,000 years ago that was found in a riverbed in Oregon. The scientists who uncovered it think that it can teach us a great deal concerning how humans crossed over the land bridge that once existed across the Bering Straits. Now the original peoples have sued to recover the bones of one of their ancestors so that they can have a proper ritualistic burial. They claim it is one of them. The anthropologists claim

that these peoples have only existed as a distinguishable group for 800 years and that the bones are thousands of years older. The original peoples claim that they have always been in North America. Their belief is that they sprung from the land as plants do. They did not emigrate from any other place. The bones are of the ancestor. Which is the reality? Which claims are true? For the postmodernists, all claims can be true at once within the group by and for which they are given a meaning.

For the postmodernists the only manner in which conflicting claims are to be settled is through the use of power. The federal government, Secretary of the Interior, has determined that the bones are to be turned over to the tribe that has claimed them (2000). Is this because their claims are true, their reality is reality? Or, is it because it is politically correct or popular to do so?

See latest reports on [Kennewick Man](#) (optional).



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Chapter 4: Metaphysics

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Some feminists (from a group known as "radical feminism") claim that their reality is different from that of males. Women have are so biologically different and have been treated so differently socially, that they actually perceive reality in a fundamentally different way than men. To be sure, very few feminists hold such a strong view. Most feminists (liberal and libertarian feminists) argue simply that women and men should be treated equally, socially, legally, and morally. Nevertheless, among radical feminists, there is a uniquely feminist metaphysics.

If these radical feminists are right, there might actually be multiple realities.

Similarly, in the literature of Law and Legal Studies, there is an approach to legal structures called "Critical Race Theory," in which it is argued that members of a minority who serve on a jury should vote in a manner to remove a member of their minority group who is the defendant from the operation of the judicial system which is a source of oppression and injustice for minorities. The question of whether or not the evidence supports the charge against the defendant is not the matter of importance and whether or not it is true that the defendant did the acts alleged is not a matter that can be determined objectively (which is always impossible). Thus the correct action is to acquit the defendant. What is the reality? Did the accused do the deed? For one group the reality could be the accused did the action. For another group the accused did not do it. Which is the reality? For the postmodernist, both at once!

How to resolve the conflicts in views of reality between groups? Power! (Whether state or revolutionary power.)

This is certainly how it has happened throughout history (war, activism, revolution, civil disobedience). But is that the only way to resolve these disagreements?

The idea of reality is seen by postmodernists as a tool for social organization and preservation wherein those who do not agree with the criteria by which reality is determined or realized by the group are regarded as threatening to the political and economic order and are to be by one means or another removed as a threat. This means that those who have the power to run the educational systems and the governmental structures are in a position to further support the criteria by which the members of society come to understand the reality of the group. They are also in a position to ridicule, criticize, and dismiss all those who threaten social order, that is, those who are critical of their view of what is "real". Some scientists of European cultures will label the shamans of the original peoples of the Americas as quacks, fools, misdirected, uneducated, and use other terms meant to discredit their views and the very fundamental ideas the original peoples have concerning what makes something real.

Those who are acculturated within a group will have the criteria for what makes the "real" as part of their heritage and will think accordingly.

So, whoever has the most power will declare what reality is and impose that view upon those with less power who might otherwise disagree.

Is it really the case that there is more than one reality? Is it the case that there are many realities? Or is it the case that there is but one reality, not known by humans with great certainty, but viewed differently by humans? Are there multiple realities or are there multiple belief systems or multiple perspectives on and experiences of the one reality?

Perhaps this may assist you in understanding the issue here.

Consider this scenario: **SOULS or NO SOULS**

Suppose you are on a boat in the ocean with someone you love most dearly. Suppose your loved one become extremely ill and is about to die during the trip and the captain gives you a choice as to which country or island the boat would stop at and place the body there for care or perhaps to die. There are two countries nearby: A and B.

In country A the people believe that there are souls that survive the death of the body and go on in some form living in another place or dimension forever. In country B the people there do not believe in an afterlife. There is no survival of death for human beings.

Now do you believe that bringing your loved one to country A or B would make any difference as to whether or not there are souls and your loved one would survive the death of the body?

Do you think that whether or not anyone has a soul depends on what people around them believe? Do you think that people in one country have souls but people in another country do not have souls?

If you accept multiple realities it would make a difference where a person was when they die as to whether or not they have a soul. If you do not think that it makes a difference you do not really accept multiple realities as being possible. Further, you should reflect on your thinking and drop the idea of there being multiple realities and instead think that there is but one reality that we may not know all about with clarity and certainty, but only one. There are different perceptions of and experiences of and views of the one reality but there is only one reality. We may not know what the reality is but it can not be both that there are souls and that there are no souls at the same time.



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Conclusion

Claims about the shape of the earth or any other physical claim can be determined, in theory and in practice, to be true or not by using scientific method (according to some definitions of "truth"). Yet there is but one physical universe. More about this in the chapter on Epistemology. For now, perhaps thinking about this matter can be simplified a bit by considering that what we are thinking and talking about are claims about what is real and the basic claim about reality itself. How do we know of the claims we make about what is true are correct or not? Consider the different types of claim that people make.

Claims in mathematics and its branches (e.g., arithmetic, geometry, algebra, topology..) can also be determined to be true or false by using the rules of the mathematical systems.

Most, not all, claims about logical propositions can also be determined to be true or false by using the rules or laws of logic.

Claims about the meanings of words can also be determined to be true or false by using a dictionary.

Claims about what is beautiful or what is morally correct can not be determined to be true or false using any absolute and universal or objective schema or set of criteria because such ideas are social constructs and vary from one society and culture to another. But these claims are not claims about what exists and is real but rather they are claims about what people think about their own experiences and behaviors. More about this in the chapter on Epistemology and claims about truth and in the chapters on Ethics and Aesthetics for claims about what is morally good or beautiful.

So claims about what is real fall under claims that are called cognitive claims and persons making those claims are asserting that what they claim is true. Claims about what is real can be resolved using a method for falsifying or verifying claims about physical reality. How can we know if the claims are true? That is the subject of the next chapter.

End of chapter.



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