

# Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

## Philosophy 104 Metaphysics

Metaphysics is the study of the general features of reality, such as existence, time, the relationship between mind and body, objects and their properties, wholes and their parts, events, processes, and causation. Traditional branches of metaphysics include cosmology, the study of the world in its entirety, and ontology, the study of being. The philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650), a mathematician and scientist who spent most of his life in the Dutch Republic, is considered the father of modern Philosophy, and much of subsequent Western philosophy for that matter. His famous dictum, “I think therefore I am”, falls under this area of philosophy.

Metaphysics is a traditional branch of philosophy concerned with explaining the fundamental nature of being. This branch attempts to broadly answer two basic questions: “what is there?” and “what does it consist of?” Ontologically speaking, this is one of the hardest areas of philosophy to define, simply because every answer brings about another ontological question of being. For example, the contents of a simple list of the categories of being have been in a state of flux since the first list was penned. Philosophers have many differing views on what the fundamental categories of being are. A broadly accepted list would look something like this: physical objects, minds, classes, properties, relations, space and time, propositions, and events. This list is by no means exhaustive, and some items are abstract while others are concrete in nature.

Many philosophers have sought to simplify ontological categories. For instance, David Hume regarded space and time as nothing more than psychological facts about human beings, which would effectively reduce space and time to ideas, which are properties of humans (substances). Nominalists and realists argue over the existence of properties and relations. Finally, events and propositions have been argued to be reducible to sets (classes) of substances and other such categories. If that has your head spinning, then welcome to the club!

Aristotle began the discussion on categories with his essay *Categories*, in which he discussed, among other things, ten categories. Since then, others, like Plotinus, Kant, Hegel, and Pierce, have added, modified, shortened, and lengthened Aristotle’s original list. Whether or not we like or dislike how any philosophers define categories, we all use the tools they have developed to describe what things consist of and how they function or exist. Even though much of this philosophical discussion is theoretical, in whole or in part we use ontological tools to explain things. Ontology deals primarily with the second question, “what does it consist of?”

The first question, “what is there?” is primarily a cosmological question. This is the primary realm of philosophy in which the Creation / Evolution debate exists. Because we cannot prove with observable science that which is in the past the question of how all that is came into existence is primarily a cosmological, metaphysical, philosophical question, and as such, needs to be discussed in the area of forensic historical evidence, not empirical science. However, before we get too deeply into that debate, we need to discuss the area of philosophy called *logic*, which I am saving for the end because it will take a few lessons to do it justice.

Enough about metaphysics and its questions of “what is there?” and “what does it consist of?” I think we will address ethics and political philosophy next time... that is, if we really do exist in the unforeseen nebulous possibility of a future time and place! ☺