

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

Philosophy 106 Specialized branches

We come to a sort of catch-all for multiple *specialized branches* of philosophy. There are a number of realms of philosophy which some would debate should, or should not, be on this list. But, for the sake of this article, we will look briefly at six of these specialized branches.

Philosophy of language explores the nature, origins, and use of language. This is different from linguistics which is the scientific study of language. Philosophy of language is concerned with four questions: the nature of meaning, language use, language cognition (understanding), and the relationship between language and reality. This area of philosophy, combined with linguistics and study of the history of language, is helpful in identifying the origins of all language groups, which of course, is the plain, south of the mountains of Ararat, where one language was split into many at the Tower of Babel.

Philosophy of law, also called jurisprudence, studies basic questions about law and legal systems, such as “what is law?”, “what are the criteria for legal validity?”, “what is the relationship between law and morality?”, and similar questions. You can often hear people say that one cannot legislate morality, but the truth is, that every law is a legislation of a moral code or position.

Philosophy of mind studies the nature of the mind; mental events, functions, properties, consciousness, and the relationship of all of these to the physical body, particularly the brain. This is a large area of study with many different areas of research seeking to understand and define the mind. Dualism, Monism, Mysterianism, Externalism, Internalism, and Naturalism are all “isms” that are used in this area of philosophy. It even has philosophies contained within it; **Philosophy of perception** and **Philosophy of mind and science** are considered part this area of philosophy.

Philosophy of science explores the foundations, methods, implications, and purpose of science. The central questions of this area of study are concerned with what qualifies as science, the reliability of scientific theories, and the ultimate purpose of science. The Lutheran scientist Johannes Kepler described science as “thinking God’s thoughts after Him”. Christians are not opposed to science; we invented it as a way to clearly read God’s book of creation!

Metaphilosophy, sometimes called the philosophy of philosophy, is “the investigation of the nature of philosophy.” Its subject matter includes the aims of philosophy, the boundaries of philosophy, and its methods.

Philosophy of religion is the branch of philosophy concerned with questions regarding religion, including the nature and existence of God, the examination of religious experience, analysis of religious vocabulary and texts, and the relationship of religion and science. Other areas of philosophy used to work within this one include metaphysics and logic. This area of philosophy, in discussing the question of the existence of God, is where we get all the “isms” that describe the understanding of God. For example, **Theism** (the belief in the existence of one or more divinities or deities), **Pantheism** (the belief that God is immanent, inherent or existing as part of all things), **Panentheism** (the belief that God encompasses all things but is greater than all things; that is to say that he is both immanent and transcendent), **Deism** (the belief that God does exist but does not interact with the universe), **Monotheism** (the belief that a single deity exists), **Polytheism** (the belief that multiple deities exist), **Henotheism** (the belief that multiple deities may or may not exist, though there is a single supreme deity), **Agnosticism** (the belief that the existence or non-existence of deities or God is currently unknown or unknowable and cannot be proven), **Atheism** (the rejection of belief in the existence of deities), and lastly, **Apatheism** (apathy towards the existence of any supreme being).

I would also add to the above list **Scientism** (the belief in the universal applicability of the scientific method and approach, and the view that empirical science constitutes the most authoritative worldview), and **Humanism** (the belief that the collective sum of human learning is the most authoritative worldview). Humanist beliefs hold to the potential value and goodness of human beings. Humanism is also a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively. I add these to the list because many who hold to them do so with religious fervor, and these two positions in essence are choosing the collective human mind as God. Those who hold these views would claim to be agnostic, atheist, or apatheist, but they are in fact placing their faith in the human mind. That concludes our discussion of specialized branches; next time we will begin to address my favorite area of philosophy: logic.