

Metaphysics
Handout
Jan 17, 2001

1. Defining 'metaphysics'

2. Some questions that metaphysicians ask

Is there a God?
Are there souls?
Is there free will?

Are there...

- ...numbers (or other mathematical entities)
- ...properties and relations
- ...propositions/facts
- ...events
- ...fictional characters
- ...spaces, times, or spacetime regions
- ...material objects?

If so, what are these things like, and how do they stand to material objects?

What is it for...

- ...something to be possible/necessary
- ...one event to be the cause of another
- ...there to be a chance of something's being the case
- ...something to be disposed to do such-and-such, if so-and-so were to occur
- ...something to be future or past
- ...something to be a person
- ...something to be red, loud, square, a tiger, made of water...
- ...something to be an electron
- ...something to exist?

3. Doubts about the worthwhileness of metaphysics

- a) 'This question is too hard; we could never know what the answer is.'
- b) 'This question is meaningless, so it doesn't have an answer.' Or alternatively: 'This question is ambiguous; in one sense the answer is "yes", in another sense the answer is "no".'
- c) 'The answer to this question is simply obvious.'

4. Some questions we will focus on in this course

Does it ever happen that two material objects are in exactly the same place at exactly the same time?

What is it for something to change, to persist through time?

Are there any such things as tables, statues, trees, people...?

Under what circumstances do some things compose something?

What sorts of processes can a table/statue/tree/person survive?