

Metaphysics
Handout
Sep 4, 2002

1. **Defining 'metaphysics'**
2. **Our focus in this course: questions of *ontology***

Is there a God?

Are there material objects?

Are there colored objects?

Are there statues, lumps of clay, arms and legs, and other such things?

Are there any large (composite) objects at all?

Are there past and future objects?

Are there abstract objects, like numbers and properties?

...and if so, what are these things like, and how are they related to things of other sorts?

3. **Other sorts of questions metaphysics is concerned with**

What is it for...

...something to be possible/necessary

...something to cause something else

...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 persist through time

...something to change

...something to be a person

...something to have free will

Questions about possibility and necessity, such as:

Could a person survive a brain transplant?

Could a table have been made out of different matter?

'Why' questions, such as:

Why is there something rather than nothing?

We'll be considering many questions of these forms, including, most obviously, questions like

What is it for something to be God?

...for something to be a material object?

...for something to be colored?

etc.

4. **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.'

c) 'This question is ambiguous; in one sense the answer is "yes", in another sense the answer is "no".'

d) 'The answer to this question is simply obvious.'