

Metaphysics

This branch of philosophy explores the nature of reality. Just what is the nature of reality? What is real? There have been many different attempts to answer this question, but the two most popular approaches are monism and dualism. **Monism** is the view that reality consists of just one kind of thing. **Dualism** is the view that reality consists of fundamentally two different kinds of things. Another important metaphysical question is whether reality is fundamentally unchanging or changing. Metaphysics also includes questions about God's existence and the nature of the self. Does God exist? What is the nature of God's existence? What is the self? Is there such a thing as an immortal soul, or is the self just this mortal body? Is the mind or soul different from the body?

Epistemology

This branch of philosophy concerns the theory of knowledge (from the Greek *episteme* or "knowledge"). How do we know what we know? What is knowledge? Is knowledge possible? The main divisions within epistemology are between **Rationalism**, which claims that we know reality through the use of reason alone and not through the senses, and **Empiricism**, which claims that we know reality through the senses, and **Skepticism**, which claims that we really cannot know anything. Epistemology is also concerned with the question of truth. What is truth? Is truth discovered or created? Is truth of a belief a matter of a *correspondence* to reality, the *coherence* with our other beliefs, or the *pragmatic* usefulness of the belief?

Ethics

This branch of philosophy concerns moral values. The main division within ethics is between **Absolutism**, the view that there is one correct ethical system of moral values for all people, and **Relativism**, the view that moral values are simply relative to different cultures in different times and places, or, perhaps even relative to different individuals.

Social and Political Philosophy

This branch of philosophy focuses on practical social and political questions like: What is the ideal society or form of government? Can the idea of government be rationally justified, or must all governments be irrational? Do humans have any political duties or social obligations? Under what conditions? Are there such things as natural social rights? Can such rights be justifiably removed as a form of punishment? What is one's obligation to obey the law?

Aesthetics/Philosophy of Art

This branch of philosophy concerns the theory of art, or more narrowly, the theory of beauty. In Aesthetics one examines questions like: What is art, and how does one determine the difference between art and non-art? How does one determine the difference between "good" art and "bad" art? Is there an objective standard by which the relative value of artworks can be evaluated or is this simply a matter of individual taste?

Logic

Logic, the most specialized branch of philosophy, is the study of argument or reasoning. In this study one examines the structure of arguments in order to distinguish "valid" patterns from "invalid" patterns of reasoning.