

METAPHYSICS

'Metaphysics' comes from two Greek words, originally referring to "the writings after the writings on the physical world". When Aristotle's writings and lectures were collected, they did not know what to call the material that dealt with fundamental questions on the nature of ultimate nature of reality. They grouped these writings together and put them in the collection after Aristotle's teachings on the nature of physical reality (= "the writings on the physical world"). The subject matter took up the name '**metaphysics**.' Meta can also mean "beyond" – metaphysical questions are questions that go beyond questions about the nature of ordinary reality to ask: "What is the nature of ultimate reality?"

Metaphysics has become something of a "grab bag" of basic questions of existence. Mind/Body and Freedom/Determinism are now often included within metaphysics. Our focus will be upon '**ontology**' = "the science of being" that provides **theories – accounts of ultimate reality**.

The fundamental distinction in ontology / metaphysics is "**appearance vs. reality**." We know that things are not always as they appear to be. The question is: "What is real?" vs. "How do things appear to be?" -
- What is the ultimate "stuff(s)" of which reality consists? - What is / are the ultimate principles that govern reality?

Thales (circa 600 b.c.e.) was "the first western philosopher" and evidences the metaphysical interest that characterized pre-Socratic philosophy. He broke from the **mythological** way of explaining reality, in terms of the actions of gods / God (supernatural explanation based upon religion / revelation). He sought to explain things *in terms of his own reason and experience* and to *understand nature in terms of nature*. He held that the ultimate reality is **water**.

Subsequent pre-Socratic philosophers exemplify some **basic views / options** in metaphysics:

- Is reality ultimately ONE thing-principle, or MORE-THAN-ONE thing-principle?
(**'Monism'** vs. **'Pluralism'**)

Thales and Parmenides vs. Empedocles and Democritus

- Is reality ultimately NON-MATERIAL in nature or MATERIAL / PHYSICAL in nature?
(**'Idealism'** and **'Theism'** vs. **'Physicalism'** / **'Materialism'**?)

Parmenides and Pythagoras vs. Thales, Empedocles, Democritus

- Is reality ultimately STATIC / unchanging or DYNAMIC / ever-changing?
(**'stasis'** vs. **'flux'**)

Parmenides and Zeno vs. Heraclitus