

What is a metaphysician? They talk a lot about **THE WORLD**. This course is no exception. Our main questions:

What does **THE WORLD** contain? (Ontology.)

What holds **THE WORLD** together? (Properties, Causation.)

How could **THE WORLD** have been different? (Modality.)

What is our place in **THE WORLD**? (Mind/Body Problem.)

Is there really such a thing as *THE WORLD*, the single true way things are? (Realism.)

But physicists and others talk about the world too. What makes the metaphysician different?

1. An obsessive concern with *appearance vs. reality*. Copenhagen vs. Bohm interpretation of quantum mechanics. Both predict same appearances, which to many physicists is enough; but what is the underlying reality? Plural vs singular theory of tables; same thing. **THE WORLD** is the reality behind the appearances.
2. Metaphysical statements are supposed to be *fully general*. Carl Sagan: "The cosmos is all there is or ever will be." This is science if limited to physical things; he could be denying parallel universes spatiotemporally disconnected from ours. It's metaphysical if he meant to be talking about absolutely everything.
3. Metaphysicians want to be taken *fully literally*. This is not at all normal! "I've got three holes in my sweater." "It's trying to rain again." "The sun beat down without mercy." Etc.

So do 1,2,3 characterize metaphysics? Not really. They are not necessary, since "There is a God" is metaphysical without being fully general. (Other examples?) They aren't sufficient, either, "No two things are exactly alike" seems to concern appearance vs. reality (some things may look alike); it seems to be fully general; it purports to be the literal truth. But it might be true "by accident," which does not befit a truth of metaphysics (or even physics). Perhaps we should add

4. Metaphysics purports to state necessary, or at any rate highly non-accidental truths.

But let's not pursue this any further. For we can already see that it is not obvious a subject like metaphysics is even possible. It might be *practically* impossible; how on earth are we supposed to tell which of two empirically indistinguishable theories better describes **THE WORLD** as it is in itself? It might be impossible *in principle*, because the very idea of **THE WORLD** as it is in itself is confused.

Not long ago it was thought that metaphysical statements were high-flown twaddle. The positivists had a principle: *the meaning of a statement is exhausted by its empirically verifiable consequences*. To the extent that metaphysical statements lack such consequences, they're meaningless. The trouble is that the positivists' principle does not itself have any readily evident empirically testable consequences. One in a long series of cases of philosophers being hoist on their own petard.

A sample metaphysical problem. Are there, over and above the various concrete particular things that exist, some additional (non-concrete? non-particular?) things: their *properties*. Nominalists say no, platonists yes. Nominalists have their work cut out for them. We certainly say things like "Spiders share some of the anatomical features of insects," and that looks to commit us to anatomical features, presumably a kind of property. The nominalist has at least five options:

- (a) Stop saying spiders share the anatomical features of insects (eliminativism).
- (b) Keep saying it but don't advance it as literally true. (fictionalism)
- (c) Advance it as the literal truth but insist that taken literally it doesn't imply the existence of properties. (paraphrase strategy)
- (d) Admit it implies the existence of properties but insist that they're properties of a particularly harmless and inoffensive sort (deflationism).
- (e) Stop being a nominalist (surrender)

Eliminativism is attractive for talk of witches and phlogiston. Fictionalism is attractive for talk of Hamlet and Holmes and the man in the moon. Paraphrase is attractive for talk of holes and chances ("the chance of rain is increasing"). Deflationism is attractive for talk of moods, voices, and laps. What about properties, or numbers, or possible worlds? Good question.