

# Philosophy

## As Brief As Possible Reference Guide

BY: David Klier  
Five Minute Philosophy

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### Metaphysics

Metaphysics is the question of what it means to be “x” where x can be anything. What is the nature of all things? This is also the field of ontology. Metaphysics is more broad, in “all things” and ontology is more specific.

- **Idealism:** All things are immaterial; ideas. What makes something what it is based on what it resembles. Ex. a chair is a chair because it reflects, or is similar to, the idea of “chairness.”
- **Materialism:** All things are material. What makes something what it is based purely on physical constituents. Ex. a chair is a chair because of a certain number of legs and a seat to sit. This is one possible answer a materialist might give.
- **Dualism:** All things have material and immaterial qualities. What makes something what it is based on both the physical constituents and the immaterial ideas or “soul” in which it represents. Ex. a chair is a chair because the legs together with the seat represent what we would generally call “chairness.” This is one possible answer a dualist might give.
- **Eliminativism:** Nothing really exists. What makes something what it is based in fiction, and is not real at all. It may be an illusion! Ex. a chair isn’t a chair, there is no chair, we only have biases and generalizations, but those aren’t “real” either. This is one possible answer an eliminativist might give.

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## Epistemology

Epistemology is the study and theory of knowledge. Questions like “how do we know things?” Reside here. Further questions of “what is knowledge” reside in epistemology as well.

- **Rationalism:** Knowledge is gained through rational insight alone. Ex. “socrates was a man. All men are mortal. Therefore, Socrates was mortal.” Relies on deduction heavily (for “deduction” see section on logic)
- **Empiricism:** Knowledge can only be gained through observation. Ex. Every dog I have ever seen has legs, therefore, dogs have legs. Relies on induction heavily (for “induction” see section on logic)
- **Skepticism:** We don’t have knowledge and never will. Ex. We are stuck in our own perception of the world, how do you know your not in the matrix, or dreaming right now? Maybe everything you think you know is false.
- **Relativism:** Knowledge is subjective, or at least depends on your perspective. Ex. I know the color blue from my own perspective, who is to say the color blue isnt entirely different for you?
- **Justified True Belief:** A basic standard model for knowledge, the idea is that knowledge is a belief that is both true, and justified.
- **Gettier Cases:** Cases in which a belief is both justified and true, but we wouldnt normally call it knowledge. For example: You are a herders son, asked to check if there is a sheep on the hill. You go and look, and you see on the hill a sheep. You now know there is a sheep on the hill. Only, it was a bag in the breeze. But, behind the bag was actually a sheep! You did not see this sheep, but thought you did. So, you had a belief that there was a sheep on the hill. It was true as well, and you were justified by your having gone to check. But it isn’t generally considered knowledge that you knew the sheep was there.

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## Axiology

Axiology is the study of values. It is another word for “value theory,” of which there are two main fields. The first is of ethics and morality, the study of right and wrong. The other is of aesthetics. We will be covering the idea of “the good” here.

- **Utilitarianism:** Utilitarianism starts out with the idea that happiness (or some other end) is the prime good. From there, the idea is that this prime good should always be maximized. So that happiness should be maximized. For a utilitarian, what constitutes something as “good” is generally what generates the greatest amount of happiness (or whatever end is being discussed.)
- **Deontology:** Stemming from the root word for duty, deontology focuses on what must be done, doing your duty. The only thing that can be considered good is that which values everyone's autonomy. The only way to do this is by agreeing on a set of rules, or duties, that we all live by in order to act autonomously. Think if you were to act on a lie, were you able to actually act according to your goals? The deontologist says no, and we must accept rules and apply them universally so we all live by the same ones. This is called the categorical imperative.
- **Virtue Ethics:** Very different from the others, when deciding whether something is right or wrong, good or bad, for the virtue ethicist, the act itself doesn't matter. What does matter is the virtue displayed while doing the act. Bravery sits between cowardice and foolhardiness. What matters is that you be brave. If the act was brave, for this example, then it was good, because it exhibited a virtue.
- **Nihilism:** Also very different from the others, the nihilist claims that there is no right and wrong, good or bad. Nihilists have varying reasons for this claim, but a common one is that the only way there could be any morality is if there were a god, but, the nihilist denies the existence of a god, and so, there is no morality.
- **Relativism:** We have seen the relativism before, and the same idea rings true here. What is right or wrong, good or bad, for the relativist is a matter of perspective.

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## Logic

Logic is the study of effective reason. It also studies how to make and analyze arguments.

- **Validity and Soundness:** Validity and soundness is only used in deduction. Validity is gained when if the premises, taken as true, would follow (see the deductive forms below.) Soundness, on the other hand, is an argument that is valid, but also has true premises
- **Strength and Cogency:** Strength is validity for induction and abduction. If we take the premises as true, would they lead to the conclusion? If so, it would be a strong argument in induction and abduction. If the premises are also true, it would also be a cogent argument.
- **Deduction:** where premises (the statements supporting what you want to arrive at, aka, the conclusion) lead certainly to the conclusion. These are the ones philosophers try to use most often, since if they are true, their conclusions are certain. Valid deductive forms:
  - **Categorical Syllogism:** A's are B's. B's are C's. Therefore, A's are C's. Or A is a B. All B's are C's. Therefore, A is a C.
  - **Modus Ponens:** If P, then Q. P (is the case.) Therefore, Q (is the case.)
  - **Modus Tollens:** If P, then Q. not Q (or, Q is not the case). Therefore, not P (or P is not the case.)
  - **Hypothetical Syllogism:** If P, then Q. If Q, then R. Therefore, if P, then R.
  - **Disjunctive Syllogism:** Either P, or Q. Not P (or, P is not the case.) Therefore, Q.
  - **Constructive Dilemma:** Either P, or Q. If P, then R. If Q, then S. Therefore, either R, or S.
  - **Destructive Dilemma:** If P, then R. If Q, then S. Either not R, or not S. Therefore, either not P, or not Q.
- **Induction:** Induction is a means of arguing by examples, we are going to generalize from that which we already know. Example: Most dogs I have seen have 4 legs. Therefore, the next dog I will see will most likely have 4 legs.
- **Abduction:** "inference to best solution." Multiple premises that could each independently support the conclusion.

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## (Some) Logical Fallacies

Logical Fallacies are flaws in an argument. They can be formal, a problem with the form (like in the deductive arguments above) or informal, just generally unjustifiable reasons.

- **Denying the Antecedent:** This is where in a “if P, then Q” argument, instead of the next sentence being “P (is the case)” or “Q (is not the case)” we deny the P instead. For example: “If I like icecream, then I will buy some. I do not like icecream. Therefore, I will not buy some.” The problem should be obvious, I may buy ice cream for my child or significant other, who does love ice cream.
- **Affirming the Consequent:** Just the opposite of the previous, we instead of affirming the P in the “If P, then Q” statement, we affirm the Q. In example: “If I like icecream, then I will buy some. I have bought some. Therefore, I like icecream.” Again, the problem is that I may have bought it for my child or significant other.
- **Ad Hominem:** Meaning “to the man,” the ad hominem is an argument against the character of another, rather than their argument, leaving their argument stable. For example: person 1: “If I were to be elected mayor, I will ensure no many goes hungry. Because no man deserves to go hungry.” person 2: “you’re only saying that because you’re really just a tool whose trying to pull the wool over everyones eyes.... Sheesh!”
- **Relativist Fallacy:** “it’s true for me.” The problem is that either there is a tree on the hill, or there is not. How could there be a tree there for you, but not for me, when we are looking at the same hill. Heck, maybe the hill isn’t even there for you either.
- **Gamblers Fallacy:** “It can’t just keep coming up tails!” Just because you have flipped a coin 10 times and every time has been tails, does not mean that it is actually going to be a heads next.
- **Appeal to (Unauthorized) Authority:** This fallacy pops up most often when a credential is misplaced in an area that the credential is not for. If an archaeologist PhD says something about contemporary pop culture, their PhD in archaeology should not be a reason to believe them. Some argue this should extend to even relevant authorities, as an authority of anything should be able to explain their argument, and then we use the argument, not their name or credential.
- **Post-hoc Fallacy:** Meaning “after this,” in latin, alludes to its meaning. It is a mistake in having something come before something else, and then assuming that the first caused the last. Just because I sneezed before taking my test and got an A, does not make my sneeze responsible for my A.
- **False Dilemma (Dichotomy):** When presented with an either or, there is no other option. We need to be sure that they are in fact the only two options, unless we want to commit the fallacy of False Dilemma, or False Dichotomy.

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## Philosophers (as brief as possible)

This section is reserved for major (canonical) philosophers. We are trying to remain very brief here, leaving each one to two major ideas. Not in particular order.

- **Socrates/Plato:**“The Forms:” In the allegory of the cave, Plato is teaching us about “the forms,” which are ideas of things themselves. The idea is that all things are really ideas (idealism from earlier) the reason a chair is a chair is that it merely reflects the idea of a chair, it itself is but a shadow cast on a wall, of which we mistake as the thing itself.
- **Aristotle:** Disagreed with his teacher, Plato on the forms. Instead of being somewhere outside of whatever was being discussed, Aristotle thought “the form” of it resided within it. “Chairness” resided within each example of a chair. This was a materialist view. Aristotle also credited with virtue ethics: the example of bravery from earlier comes from him.
- **Epictetus:** One of the founders of the philosophical school stoicism, Epictetus advocated for a kind of determinism, or lack of free will. Epictetus uses this lack of free will to say that it is out of our control and thus should not worry about it. Why fret over the fact that its raining when you don’t control the weather?
- **Epicurus:** Similar sounding name, but very different. Epicurus founded, aptly, Epicureanism. The idea for Epicurus was that life is about happiness, but some kinds of happiness are better than others. Seek out the things that will bring about the greatest happiness, like friendships and family, rather than base desires that come back as soon as they are satiated.
- **St. Anselm:** A christian theologian and philosopher, set to prove God’s existence, starts by calling God the greatest thing imaginable, which nothing greater can be conceived. Yet, what exists in reality is greater than that which only exists in the mind. So, God must exist in reality. Some argue this begs the question, I leave this to the reader to decide.
- **Thomas Aquinas:** Another christian theologian and philosopher set to prove God’s existence, Aquinas argues that all things had to have had a beginning. How did the universe begin? Aquinas’ cosmological argument is that it was Gods’ doing. The only uncaused causer, who set all causes in motion.

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## (Philosophers Cont.)

- **Rene Descartes:** Do you know you're not in the matrix right now? Are you a brain in a vat?? Well Descartes was worried he might have been. As such, he threw away all of his knowledge and inspected everything rationally only (since what he sees may be a lie anyways..) What Descartes starts with is only that which can be certain. He was certain that by doing this very investigation, that he was thinking. But, thinking requires a thinker. Thus, Descartes discovered that he exists! "I think, therefore I am." As what? Not sure.. But he does exist!
- **Thomas Hobbes:** What would life be like without society? Hobbes says it would be awful, actually, Hobbes goes as far as to say that it would be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. He thinks we would be animals and lose all civility, stealing and killing.
- **John Locke:** So, who are you? How have you become... you? Locke argues that we start out as a blank slate, a "tabula rasa." We write on this slate the story of our lives. Further, Locke make a distinction for all things as having either primary, or secondary qualities. The primary qualities are observable things, size, shape, quantity, and motion. The secondary qualities are things that reside or occur in our minds: color, smell taste and sound. The secondary qualities, Locke says are subjective, since they only exist in our minds.
- **David Hume:** Hume thought there was a problem with induction. No matter how many times I have seen the sun rise, does not guarantee that it will raise tomorrow. Hume thought this makes induction not reliable, but customary.
- **Immanuel Kant:** Was the one that created the categorical imperative in duty ethics (deontology) from earlier. Also transcendental idealism, which is the idea that starts out saying we are stuck in our own minds. Because of this, we have a filter between us and the world as it actually is. We perceive the world through "rose colored glassed," of our senses. The perceived "world" in our minds Kant called the "phenomenal" realm. While the world as it actually is he called the "noumenal" realm.

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## (Philosophers Cont.)

- **John Stuart Mill:** a main proponent of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism. Made some modifications to basic utilitarianism, stating that instead of seeing acts as one off occurrences, we should determine the happiness resulted from a *type* of action. Killing, versus this situation of deciding whether to kill, for example.
- **Jean-Paul Sartre:** Starting off saying that there is no god to give meaning or purpose to our lives, Sartre says we exist before we have meaning. He says "Existence precedes essence," by which he means that we exist before we eventually define ourselves. We are the writers of our own narrative. We go through a process of "becoming" who we are to become.
- **Friedrich Nietzsche:** Claiming "God is dead, and we have killed him," Nietzsche was suggesting that God is either unnecessary to us anymore, or possibly that we have neglected God, that is for readers of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to decide. Either way, God being gone, for Nietzsche, means all things attached to God, for example, morality. There is no morality (nihilism) but this isn't all bad, we can now do the things that we would consider a social misstep like jumping in puddles, not caring who seen!
- **Ludwig Wittgenstein:** With Wittgenstein, we start to turn into what is called "analytic philosophy," which has a focus on clarity. This is because Wittgenstein argued that we just can't seem to agree on definitions, and if we could just be clear about what we actually mean when we say something, we wouldn't disagree at all. He considered the symbolic nature of words, when I am speaking to you, they are symbols of ideas in my mind that I want to impart to you. This symbol can get lost in translation and conjures a different idea in you. So let's just be clear on what we actually mean.