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Preface

Metaphysics has been rejuvenated in the past few decades, after nearly a century of attacks from logical positivists, logical empiricists, behaviorists, and eliminative materialists, with their loud cries that metaphysics is “meaningless” or “non-sense.”

Traditional metaphysicians asked questions about the fundamental nature of physical reality. Modern metaphysicians claim to be looking into the *foundations* of metaphysics, sometimes called meta-metaphysics. Similarly, they are looking for a new basis for ontology, a meta-ontology.

They are also engaged in a critical review of why attacks on metaphysics were so successful in the past century. Some see many years of what can be looked at today as just verbal quibbling, what Kant once called “word-juggling” (*Wortklauberei*). Can the analysis of language, of concepts and their precise definitions, yield truths about the world? Many famous debates now appear to have been metaphysicians talking past each other, captivated by their elaborate conceptual schemes and dense jargon. Others think metaphysics might have had a more scientific approach.

Although few moderns draw much of metaphysical importance from today’s sciences of physics, chemistry, biology, or psychology, for example, some do like a methodology of hypothetical axiomatic systems that may even offer the kind of experimental testing that is the watchword of modern science.

Some view the “naturalization” of epistemology by WILLARD VAN ORMAN QUINE as a step toward a more scientific metaphysics, but others criticize the limited “extensional” approach of Quine and RUDOLF CARNAP, in which meaning and truth of our words are to be found in the members of sets of objects.

Other “intensionalists” find meaning located in human intentions, either in initial speech acts or final interpretations of meanings in relevant contexts, but both of these are vulnerable to charges of relativism from modern skeptics. Proponents look to philosophers of science who are impressed by interpretations of



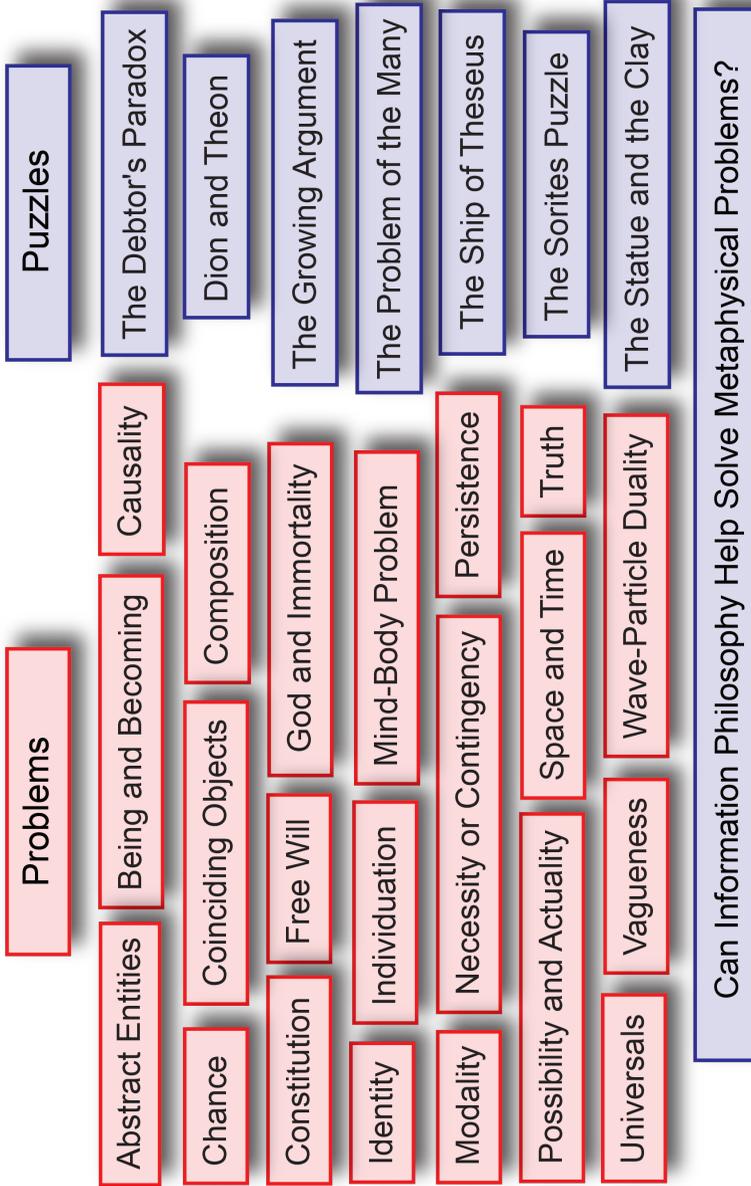


Figure iv-1. A taxonomy of metaphysical problems, puzzles, and paradoxes.



quantum physics that may indicate that reality is not an external, observer-independent entity.

Perhaps the most significant development in the rebirth of metaphysics has been the reintroduction of *modal* thinking that had been a vital part since Aristotle, but was more or less forgotten since the late-nineteenth century creation of second-order propositional logic by GOTTLOB FREGE.

Quine opposed the reintroduction of modality, but parallel to the existential and universal quantifiers he thought sufficed, modal logicians have added operators for possibility and necessity. Next to \exists , “there exists” or “for some,” and \forall , “for all,” modal logicians have added operators for \diamond “possibly” and \square “necessarily.”

Necessity is defined as propositions true in all possible worlds. Possibility is defined as propositions true in some possible worlds.

But there is no room in the new modal logic and its many possible worlds for *contingent* statements, about the future for example, propositions that are not yet either true or false.

The possible worlds of DAVID LEWIS are in fact as eliminatively materialist and completely deterministic as the most classical physics. *There are no possibilities in Lewis’s possible worlds.*

Leading metaphysicians who see the new modal logic as *metaphysics* have an opportunity to make a significant breakthrough in visualizing the fundamental nature of physical reality, if they can get beyond claims they have found an absolute *metaphysical necessity* - the necessity of identity, for example.

We will examine their arguments for the necessity of identity and offer a *criterion for identity*, one that establishes the existence of *relative identity*, as well as finding an *absolute identity*, which we find must be limited to cases of *self-identity*.

And we will make the case for the existence of *metaphysical possibilities*, which may allow metaphysics to become the ground for the so-called “quantum reality” of modern physics.

Without metaphysical possibility there can be no foundation for the possibility of metaphysics.



In part 1, chapters 1 to 23, we examine some classic problems in metaphysics, attempting to resolve them by analyzing their information content, not their logic or language.

Chapters 24 to 34, in part 2, look at some of the most ancient puzzles and paradoxes of metaphysics, still unsolved but now rejuvenated. We also look at a few modern puzzles.

These chapters are arranged alphabetically. They can be assigned for independent reading. As a result, there is considerable redundancy on some basic concepts.

Since this work is intended as a critical resource for students, we provide extensive quotations from original thinkers to avoid clumsy paraphrases in our words of their unique ideas.

In part 3 (chapter 35) we describe the works of some leading metaphysicians.

In part 4 (chapter 36) we briefly review the history of metaphysics.

In an appendix, we summarize a number of other problems in philosophy, physics, cosmology, psychology, and biology for which an information philosophy approach suggests plausible solutions.

Most of our chapters are supplemented by additional material on the web pages at www.metaphysicist.com.

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