

Varieties of Things

Foundations of
Contemporary
Metaphysics

Cynthia Macdonald

 **Blackwell**
Publishing

Contents

Preface	vii
Part I: Metaphysics and Its Tools	
1 The Nature and Function of Metaphysics	3
The Methodology and Subject Matter of Metaphysics	4
Aristotle's Conception of Metaphysics	8
Kant's Conception of Metaphysics	11
A Working Conception of Metaphysics	14
2 Some Tools of Metaphysics	36
Criteria of Ontological Commitment: Two Examples	36
'No Entity without Identity': Identity Conditions for Objects	56
Individuation Conditions, Identity Conditions, and Metaphysical Kinds	59
Principles and Criteria of Identity	63
Part II: Particulars	
3 Material Substances	79
Our Ontological Commitment to Material Substances	79
The Bundle Theory and the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles	81
Problems with the Bundle Theory	84
The Bare Substratum Theory and the Principle of Acquaintance	110
Objections to the Bare Substratum Theory	113
An Alternative	114

4	Persons and Personal Identity	135
	Our Ontological Commitment to Persons	135
	Candidates for Persistence Conditions for Persons	138
	The Closest Continuer Theory and Its Problems	150
	Does the Concept of Identity Apply to Persons?	155
	The Multiple Occupancy Thesis	162
	Back to Basics: Continuity and Fission	164
	A Suggestion	169
5	Events	181
	Our Ontological Commitment to Events	183
	Three Criteria: Spatio-temporal Coincidence, Necessary Spatio-temporal Coincidence, and Sameness of Cause and Effect	186
	The Property Exemplification Account of Events (PEE)	193
 Part III: Universals		
6	Universals and the Realism/Nominalism Dispute	219
	The Issue	223
	Varieties of Nominalism	225
	Two Conceptions of Universals	236
	The Regress Charge and Two Unsuccessful Attempts to Meet It	239
	An Alternative	245
	 Bibliography	 260
	Index	272

Preface

As anybody who has an interest in metaphysics will know, a book on metaphysics can cover any number of topics, from free will and determinism to causality, arguments for the existence of God, the problem of evil, why there is something rather than nothing, personal identity, the nature of space and time, propositions, and possible worlds and possibilities, to name just a few. While it is perfectly legitimate to include any, or all, of these topics in a book on metaphysics, I have come to think that many of them presuppose an understanding of basic topics and issues in ontology, the study of what sorts or kinds of things there are in the world. For example, discussions of causality presume an understanding of what sorts of things are involved in causal relations, whether these be events, states, or facts, and also of what sorts of things causal laws relate (whether they relate properties, conceived of as universals, or classes of tropes, for example). The topics in ontology, to my mind, raise some of the most fundamental and interesting questions in metaphysics and, more generally, in philosophy.

Not surprisingly, then, this book is a study in ontology. In it I offer a systematic way of thinking through a central question of metaphysics – what are the most fundamental kinds of things that exist? I begin with a thorough and accessible discussion of the nature and aims of metaphysics and of the tools that can be used to engage in metaphysical thinking about different ontological categories. I then employ these tools in order to explore diverse views about various categories of things, such as material substances, persons, and events, as well as universals, examining the realist/nominalist debate. The book both surveys existing accounts of the natures of these kinds of things and argues for substantial original positions of its own. The arguments support a systematically anti-reductionist view of the basic ontological categories.

Chapter 1 gives a brief account of some of the history of metaphysics and of Aristotle's and Kant's conceptions of the nature and methodology of the subject, as a means by which to give a characterization of the nature and purpose of metaphysical theorizing (specifically, theorizing about ontology) that will figure in subsequent chapters of the book. Chapter 2 outlines some of the principles that figure in metaphysical thinking about fundamental ontological kinds, such as principles of identity, criteria of identity, and criteria of ontological commitment.

These two chapters are important because it is so often thought by those who first come into contact with the subject that it has no unified subject matter and that there are no criteria on which to judge one metaphysical theory as being better or worse than another. But I think that both of these thoughts are false: there may be many different ways of doing metaphysics, and there may be many principles by which to judge a metaphysical theory as better or worse than another, but there is method and system to the subject.

Partly by way of illustrating this, the remaining chapters of the book set out to employ the methodology and principles articulated in the first two chapters. Chapter 3 discusses the category of material substances, argues that two reductionist theories of the nature of such substances are unsatisfactory, and offers a third, non-reductionist theory and criterion of identity for members of that category. In a similar vein, chapter 4 examines a number of different criteria of persistence for persons and rejects them, eventually settling on one that flows from a particular, non-reductionist account of the nature of persons proposed. Chapter 5 discusses a third candidate for a fundamental ontological kind, the category of events. It begins by examining various proposals for criteria of event identity, and, finding them unsatisfactory, considers two non-reductionist theories of events from which a satisfactory criterion of event identity might flow, defending and extending the second of the two.

These three candidates have been chosen because of their obvious relationships to one another. It may seem that the topic of persons and personal identity is better located in a book on the philosophy of mind, rather than one on metaphysics. But persons at least have bodies even if they are not identical with them, so there are interesting and important metaphysical questions that arise about the relation between them and material substances. Even if one were to settle the question in the philosophy of mind of whether physicalism is true, of whether mental phenomena and properties are physical, the question of whether persons form a fundamental metaphysical kind would remain. As for events, both material substances and persons are continuants, things that persist

through time and are capable of surviving change. So, they are the subjects of events, and this invites interesting and important questions about the relations between the categories of material substances and persons, on the one hand, and events, on the other.

The book concludes by asking whether, in addition to various categories of particulars, there might also be a fundamental category of abstract universals. In pursuing this question, the final chapter engages in the debate between Realists – those who think that there are abstract, universal things – and Nominalists – those who think that all that exists is particular. One reason for raising this question is that talk of properties (and various conceptions of properties) pervades discussions in the first five chapters of the book. Although limitations of space and structure prohibit the development of a theory of universals (or one of properties, generally), an argument for a version of Realism, Platonism, is mounted and defended.

There are many topics that I have touched on in the book and would have liked to pursue in more detail but have not had the space to do so, such as the debate between endurantists and perdurantists about material substances and persons and issues concerning the nature of space and time. Others that I haven't even touched on I would have wished to explore, notably the topic of causation. I take some comfort in the fact that I have at least managed to discuss topics that are fundamental to the nature of causation, namely, those of events and properties, so that those interested in pursuing the topic of causation are better equipped to do so.

I have benefited enormously from discussions with and comments from a number of colleagues and students during the course of constructing this book. First and foremost I thank Lawrence Lombard and Graham Macdonald, both of whom have not only discussed with me every topic in detail, but have read and commented on drafts of every part of the book. Even if I have not always responded in a way in which they would approve, their discussion and comments have been invaluable. During the 2003–4 academic year I was an External Residential Fellow at the Humanities Institute, University of Connecticut, under whose auspices I completed the final manuscript of this book. I am indebted to the Institute, and to its Director, Richard Brown, and its Associate Director, Françoise Dussart, for the generous support extended to me. I am grateful to my colleagues at the University of Manchester and the University of Canterbury, especially Graham Bird, Derek Browne, Philip Catton, and Paul Studtman, for discussion on the various topics in the book. Over a period of four years, as a Visiting Professor at the Queen's University, Belfast, I delivered parts of the book as Public

Lectures, and I am grateful to colleagues in the department for discussions, especially to David Evans, Jonathan Gorman, Christopher McKnight, and Alan Weir (who tried to keep me philosophically honest by reminding me of the ‘holiday luggage’ phenomenon). I am indebted too to the students in my metaphysics courses, especially Nick Bellowini and Mark Rowlands, who kept pressing me to clarify the positions and arguments discussed in the various chapters of the book, and to find better defences of them. I thank Zoe Reeves for very efficient and patient help with references, notes, and index in the preparation of the final manuscript, and Helen Gray for her very careful and efficient work on the final manuscript. Finally, I extend my thanks to Ian and Julia, whose warmth, intelligence, and wonderful sense of humour are a constant source of pleasure.

C.A.M.

Part I

Metaphysics and
Its Tools

1

The Nature and Function of Metaphysics

What is metaphysics? And why would anyone wish to study it? The history of philosophy is full of very different answers to these questions. Here is one suggestion, common to many of them: metaphysics is the study of what there is in the world (or, more precisely, of what fundamental or ultimate reality is); and it is worth studying because we all hold beliefs about the world concerning which we wish to know whether, and how, they could be true.¹ Conceived of in this way, metaphysics is the study of ontology, of being, in contrast to epistemology, which is the study of knowing. On this view, metaphysics studies what there is, whereas epistemology studies how we can know what there is. (We shall see, however, that these disciplines are not as independent of one another as these remarks seem to suggest.)

It is roughly this conception of metaphysics that will be the focus of the remaining chapters of this book. It needs some refining, however. The answers given to the questions just posed raise a host of other questions, and at least some of these need to be addressed before proceeding any further. For instance, the characterization speaks of ‘the world’ and ‘fundamental reality’. But what do ‘the world’, or ‘reality’, and ‘fundamental’ mean here? Further, why do we need metaphysics to tell us why or how our beliefs about the fundamental nature of the world could be true? Why aren’t various other disciplines, in particular, the empirical sciences – physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, etc. – sufficient for this purpose? What could metaphysics tell us about the world that these other disciplines couldn’t tell us?

In this chapter, we shall work on the conception of metaphysics described above as a means of arriving at a more precise one that can be employed in the remaining chapters of the book. We’ll begin by outlining two ways in which metaphysics differs in kind from empirical science, one in terms of its methodology, and another in terms of its

subject matter. We shall then turn to two quite different conceptions or views about what metaphysics can discover, as embodied in the work of two important figures in the history of metaphysics, Aristotle (384–322 BC) and Kant (1724–1804). These figures provide us with first and second approximations, respectively, of the conception of metaphysics that we shall articulate in the final section of the chapter and that will figure in the remaining chapters of the book.

The Methodology and Subject Matter of Metaphysics

According to the definition of ‘metaphysics’ just given, it is the study of ultimate or fundamental reality. We’ve noted, however, that this raises questions about the need for it, given that empirical science seems also to be in the business of discovering what, fundamentally, there really is. It would be natural to think that metaphysics and empirical science compete as disciplines concerned to arrive at knowledge about ultimate reality, or about what, fundamentally, there really is. But there are two very important differences between these disciplines, and seeing this can help to dissolve the appearance of conflict between them.

First, metaphysics and empirical science differ in their methodologies, in the ways in which they treat their subject matter. Whereas the method of arriving at knowledge employed in the empirical sciences is the empirical method – the method of sensory observation and experimental test, the method in metaphysics for arriving at knowledge is by means of the intellect, or by understanding, thought, and the application of logical rules that govern transitions in such thought, without appeal to sensory experience.² One way of characterizing the difference in these ways of arriving at knowledge is to say that, whereas empirical science arrives at knowledge in ways that are justified *a posteriori* (by appeal to sensory experience), metaphysics arrives at knowledge in ways that are justified *a priori* (or independently of appeal to sensory experience).

The contrast between these two ways of arriving at knowledge is one that we can see in operation when considering, for example, the difference between physics and mathematics, specifically, algebra. Whereas physics uses the empirical method for arriving at knowledge, the mathematical method arrives at knowledge by appeal to proofs that make use of rules or axioms which themselves are justified independently of any appeal to sensory experience. So, for example, if I want to know whether a scientific hypothesis is true, I subject it to experimental test and observe the results of the experiment. If, on the other hand, I want to know whether a mathematical theorem is true, I attempt to derive it by the

application of mathematical axioms or rules and other mathematical theorems, without appeal to empirical evidence.

Thus, we have here one clear example of a difference in methodology that marks off one discipline from another that can be exploited in helping to understand what makes metaphysics different from empirical science. Moreover, since few doubt that mathematics yields knowledge that is distinctive and valuable, the example shows that the a priori method is as legitimate a way of arriving at knowledge as is the empirical, or a posteriori one.

Many philosophers believe that this difference in methodology is fundamental to the difference between metaphysics and the empirical sciences. But appeal to the mathematical example to show this is itself problematic. After all, mathematics is a discipline that arrives at knowledge in an a priori way! Analogies between mathematics and metaphysics may help us to see what makes them both different disciplines from empirical science, but generates another problem. Why do we need metaphysics to tell us what there ultimately is when we have other a priori disciplines that can do that? What could metaphysics tell us about reality that these other disciplines could not?

The problematic nature of the mathematical example can actually help us to see that there is another, fundamental, difference between science and metaphysics. This has to do, not with methodology, but with subject matter. We opened this chapter with a characterization of metaphysics that immediately prompted the question, what could metaphysics tell us about reality (fundamental or otherwise) that empirical science could not? We now see that an appeal to differences in methodology alone is not enough to provide a satisfactory answer to this question; it simply prompts a more general reformulation of it. So we can ask, what makes any discipline different from another, once we put methodological differences aside? And one clear answer to this is: subject matter. What makes chemistry a different empirical science from biology is the objects, properties, and phenomena, that fall within its domain. These form the subject matter of the various disciplines, the things about which they set out to obtain knowledge. Chemistry deals with things chemical: with chemical elements, chemical properties, and chemical phenomena; biology deals with things biological: with biological organisms, biological properties, and biological phenomena. All of these things are physical things, but they form different categories of physical things. Likewise, what makes algebra a different a priori discipline from arithmetic, at least on one understanding of the disciplines, is that they deal with different mathematical things, different properties of these things, and different (mathematical) functions that operate on these things.

If metaphysics differs from other a priori disciplines, but not in methodology, then, it is because the subject matter of metaphysics is different. It is different in being far more general than the subject matter of other a priori disciplines. Metaphysics is not concerned with the existence of numbers of particular kinds, such as rational numbers, real numbers, or imaginary numbers, nor is it concerned at arriving at knowledge about these things. Nor is its interest restricted to things that are the objects of study by the a priori disciplines, such as mathematics. As the definition states, it is the study of fundamental reality – and not just some part of it. So, its subject matter includes everything that there is, including everything physical. However, even setting aside differences in methodology, metaphysics is not concerned with the existence of particular *physical* things or kinds of things, nor is it concerned with arriving at knowledge about these things. Its concerns are far more general, and in two ways.

First, its concerns about existence cut across differences between the domains of different disciplines: metaphysics is concerned with the existence of the most fundamental kinds of things, where, by ‘fundamental’ it is meant, ‘of the most general kinds presupposed by other disciplines’. For example, it concerns itself with questions like these: Are there both physical and non-physical things? Are there physical and non-physical properties? Are things (both physical and non-physical) nothing more than ‘bundles’ of properties? Or are there properties as well as things that have them? Are there mental things? Are mental things just physical things? Are there persons? Are persons just physical things? Or are they physical and mental things?

Second, its concerns are not just about whether things of certain fundamental kinds exist. Its concerns are about what it is for things of these kinds to be of the kinds they are. Just as scientists ask whether items of certain kinds – such as electrons – exist and also what it is for these items to be items of the kinds they are (or, what it is for these kinds to be the kinds they are), so too, with regard to the most general and fundamental kinds of things that are the subject matter of metaphysics, metaphysicians ask whether items of these fundamental kinds exist and also what it is for these items to be items of the kinds they are (or what it is for these kinds to be the kinds they are). So, they don’t just ask questions of the form ‘Are there Xs?’, where the Xs are of the most general kinds presupposed by other disciplines; they also ask questions of the form, ‘What is it to be an X?’. Note, however, that these questions are not independent of one another. A satisfactory answer to a question of the form ‘Are there Xs?’ should require us to have, or arrive at, a very good idea of what it is to be an X. Alternatively, failure to come up with

a satisfactory answer to a question of the form ‘What is it to be an X?’ should make us wonder whether there are Xs at all.

Four features of metaphysics, viewed as the study of ultimate reality, emerge from this brief discussion and characterize it in a way that marks it off, as a distinct and valuable discipline, from others. The first is its concern with questions about the ‘real’ nature of things, and of what, fundamentally, there really is in the world. As the above paragraph makes clear, the fundamental kinds of things with which metaphysics is concerned are not those whose existence and nature are the concern of other disciplines, whether empirical or a priori, to discover and describe, but are rather ones whose existence and nature are presupposed by those disciplines. The second is its ‘intellectual’ or a priori nature, where, by ‘a priori’, it is meant that its subject matter is knowable independently of sensory experience. As Aristotle (and countless others) conceived of it, metaphysics is an intellectual or a priori discipline concerned with questions that cannot be answered by empirical observation and experiment. The third relates to the universality or generality of its concerns, that it is concerned with existence as such, in its most general form, and not, as the particular sciences are, with the existence of things of this or that particular kind.³ In other words, metaphysics is concerned with questions of existence and reality that are inherently more general than those that occupy the particular sciences and other disciplines, and is in this sense more universal. Psychology may concern itself with human beings as cognitive agents, and geology may concern itself with rocks; but metaphysics concerns itself with all of the things of all of the kinds that there may be, their natures, and their relations to one another. Moreover, it does so without being constrained by the assumptions that inevitably limit the particular disciplines (Irwin 1988; Loux 2002). For example, physics may concern itself with the various kinds of physical things that there are, but it does not question whether there are physical things, and if so, what it is to be a physical, in contrast to a non-physical, thing. However, metaphysics does raise precisely this kind of question.

It is perhaps this third characteristic of metaphysics, more than any other, which may explain its utility in relation to other disciplines, in that the latter proceed on the basis of assumptions that metaphysics makes explicit and attempts to justify. It may also account, at least in part, for the history of disagreement amongst metaphysicians, and the subject’s reputation for ‘making no progress’ with regard to generating an agreed body of information or knowledge. It is relatively easy, one might argue, to adjudicate between competing claims within the individual sciences, because such sciences work with principles or assumptions that they do

not themselves question. Within such a framework, there are agreed criteria of how to go about settling such disputes. But metaphysics, it might be thought, by its very nature can appeal to no fixed criteria of this kind to settle its disputes: beyond standards of internal consistency, indefinitely many metaphysical theories can provide equally adequate explanations of our beliefs about the world. (As we shall see in chapter 2, this assumption that metaphysics can appeal to no principles or assumptions that it does not itself question is unwarranted, as is the assumption that there is radical indeterminacy in metaphysical theorizing of a kind that does not obtain in other disciplines such as science.⁴ There are, within the discipline of metaphysics, principles and criteria by which to adjudicate between competing ontologies.)

Finally, because the nature of metaphysics is to deal in an a priori way with the most general and fundamental questions of the natures and kinds of things that there are, the propositions of metaphysics have traditionally been conceived as being necessarily rather than contingently true. That is, if true if at all, they concern not only what is the case but also what must be the case. Thus, for example, Aristotle thought that whereas natural science can discover which the substances are, or what things count as substances, only metaphysics can discover what it is to be a substance, so that metaphysical truths about substance, if true at all, *must* be true, and so are presupposed by natural science. And Kant, as we shall see, thought that metaphysics discovers propositions about the world that must be true if experience of the world is to be possible.⁵

Aristotle and Kant shared a conception of metaphysics that embodied all of the above characteristics. However, they differed fundamentally in their views about what metaphysicians can or will discover or come to know. Aristotle believed that we can discover what is beyond experience, and he believed this because he did not recognize the roles that our senses and minds play in shaping what we can know. Kant, in contrast, believed that we cannot discover what is beyond experience, and he believed this because he thought that all of our a priori knowledge – knowledge whose justification is independent of sensory experience – is about, not how the world must be, but how the world must be experienced. This difference will become clearer as the discussion of Aristotle's and Kant's views progresses below.

Aristotle's Conception of Metaphysics

Aristotle conceived of metaphysics as justifying, by reason and logic, fundamental assumptions made by the sciences – commonsensical ones, such

as that there are material things – about the natural world. Specifically, its aim is to arrive at knowledge of the highest principles and causes of things. His work provides a conception of metaphysics that takes us some way towards understanding both what it means to say that metaphysics is the study of fundamental reality and why it has a distinctive place amongst other disciplines.

Aristotle held that it is in the nature of metaphysics to study being as such, or, as he puts it in Book IV (Γ.1) of the *Metaphysics*, ‘being qua being, and the attributes that belong to this in virtue of its own nature’, and he described this study as the science of being. Other disciplines may be concerned with the nature of things of particular kinds, such as trees, and frogs, but they are not concerned with being in general, the kind of being that abstracts from the nature of this or that particular thing, or indeed, of things of this or that particular kind. But metaphysics is concerned with the existence of anything, insofar as it exists at all, or under the aspect of existing. This is not to be understood as the claim that metaphysics has a peculiar kind of subject matter, that of being qua being. Rather, the claim is that metaphysics is a discipline that studies beings, or things that there are, and does so in a certain manner, or in a certain way, namely, just *as* things that are (Cohen 2003). Aristotle thought that other disciplines, such as mathematics and natural science, also study things that there are, but that they do not do so insofar as they are things that are. Mathematics studies things insofar as they are measurable or countable; and science studies things insofar as they change or move. But metaphysics asks and attempts to answer the question, what is required for something – anything – to be, or exist?

Aristotle was concerned both with whether things of certain kinds are ones whose existence is fundamental to the existence of others and with what it is for these things to be what they are, what their natures are. With respect to the latter, he held that there are many different kinds of being, or ways in which things are; for example, the being of substances, the being of properties or qualities of substances, and the being of changes and/or processes to which substances are subject. He believed, however, that some things are ones whose being is more fundamental, more basic, than is the being of others. It was his view that particular substances (such as individual human beings, or individual apples) are the ones whose being is fundamental in that their existence is fundamental to the existence of others, and (in the *Organon*) he distinguishes between primary (or individual) substances and secondary substances (or kinds, such as the kind, *tiger*). The latter are the species and genera into which individual substances fall. The nature of a primary substance is explained in terms of four causes. Briefly, these are (1) the formal cause,

which concerns the essence of a substance, that which makes it the thing of the kind that it is, (2) the material cause, which concerns its material constitution, that which composes it, (3) the efficient cause, which concerns how it came into being, or into existence, and (4) the final cause, which concerns its purpose or end. The first two notions, in explaining the essence and constitution of a substance, help to explain what capacities or potentialities it has, whereas the final two notions help to explain how change with regard to a substance is possible.

Aristotle's doctrine of substance forms the core of his metaphysics. His view was that a material substance comes into being through a form being given to matter, somewhat like the way in which the lump of matter from which a statue is carved becomes an individual thing when it acquires the form of a statue. Since every material substance consists of both matter and form, Aristotle rejected the view that the only reality that there is consists of pure forms. Nevertheless, he considered the forms that 'shape' matter to be most important in explaining both what the nature of a substance is and how a substance changes (its highest cause). Further, at one point in the *Metaphysics* VII (Z)–IX(θ), he suggests that the principal subject matter of metaphysics is the nature of substance (VII.1), that substances are basic subjects that are identical with their essences (i.e., with that which gives them their natures), and that the essences of substances are their forms. Further, he suggests that, in engaging in metaphysical enquiry, he is not so much concerned with the perceptible substances, but ultimately with the unperceptible ones, namely, the pure and divine ones that are without matter (Z, ch. 11, 1037a 10–17). Taken together, these claims imply that metaphysics is the science of forms (Irwin 1988, chs 10–12), some of which (like the Unmoved Mover, or God) are 'pure' forms and so are immaterial substances. The Unmoved Mover, in being the first cause of all things, is the highest of all causes.

The result is that two rather different conceptions of what metaphysics can discover are to be found in the work of Aristotle. On the one hand, there is the conception that construes metaphysics as arriving at knowledge, in most general terms, of the nature of substance as a combination of matter and form: the study of the ultimate constituents of each and every kind of individual substance in the experienceable world (each individual being of the kind it is in virtue of its matter being informed by the form it is). On the other hand, there is the conception that construes metaphysics as arriving at knowledge of forms, some of which are 'pure' ones. This is well illustrated by Aristotle's arguments for the necessary existence of the Unmoved Mover (or God), the initiator of all change in the experienceable world that is not itself part of that world, whose

existence is knowable only through the intellect. Despite the fact that Aristotle struggled to free himself entirely from the second conception, both conceptions are important to an appreciation of his work, since he believed that a complete philosophy was also a theology.

This conception of metaphysics as first philosophy, we have seen, is of a discipline that studies the general nature of kinds of substances that particular sciences presuppose. Aristotle, however, made an important and controversial assumption about the nature of the subject. In claiming that, whereas natural science studies things that are better known to us, first philosophy studies things that are better known in themselves, he was assuming that it is possible, by the exercise of reason or the intellect alone, to have knowledge of what things are in themselves, without this knowledge being shaped by any perceptual and conceptual apparatus. The eighteenth-century British empiricists, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume attempted to account for our general knowledge of the world on a model of the mind according to which, although the mind has innate powers, it has no innate structures or concepts – that is, no structures or concepts in it from birth. However, this attempt was unsuccessful, and it eventually led to the sceptical philosophy of David Hume. Since then it has become increasingly clear that the role of the human mind and the concepts it employs play a much larger role in the acquisition of knowledge of the world than Aristotle was prepared to acknowledge. What he did not recognize is the roles that our senses and minds play in shaping what we can know; he thought that the human mind is a kind of transparent medium through which we can just ‘see’ how things are in the world.⁶ In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant occupied himself almost exclusively with this issue, and his discussion of it led to a new conception of what metaphysics can or will discover, and so of what, by means of it, we can come to know.

Kant’s Conception of Metaphysics

As we have seen, Aristotle held that we grasp the truth of metaphysical propositions by means of the intellect alone. But these propositions, concerned as they are with the being of things as they are in themselves, provide us with knowledge of the world; of the ultimate nature of substance and of the Unmoved Mover. So, on this view, the intellect alone can give us knowledge of the real world.

Furthermore, some of these propositions, for example, those concerned with the necessary existence of the Unmoved Mover, are knowable only by means of the intellect because they concern a reality that is

supersensible, incapable of being sensed. So the intellect alone can give us knowledge of supersensible reality. This aspect of Aristotle's metaphysics – the aspect that construes metaphysics as providing knowledge of what is beyond experience – contrasts sharply with the conception of metaphysics developed by Immanuel Kant.

Kant did not believe that propositions that purport to describe a reality knowable to the intellect alone could constitute knowledge. He believed that if any proposition is knowable a priori, it could provide knowledge of the world only if it is applicable to the world accessible to sense experience. Kant captured this idea in the notion of a synthetic proposition that is knowable a priori. This is a proposition that is independent of sense experience in that no proposition describing sense experience entails either it or its negation (and so it is a priori), but yet is applicable to – possibly true of – the experienceable world (and so is synthetic). Kant thought that the proposition that every event has a cause is one such proposition. He believed that propositions of this kind form the basis of (in the sense of making possible) substantive knowledge in disciplines – sciences – other than metaphysics, in particular, mathematics and empirical science. But he also believed that metaphysical propositions, if they were to provide real knowledge, must also be of this kind.

So Kant, like Aristotle, believed that metaphysical principles are knowable a priori, are presupposed by all sciences, and have a generality or universality that particular sciences lack. However, by setting limits on what is knowable, he set limits on metaphysical knowledge itself. Metaphysical knowledge, inasmuch as it is possible at all, must concern itself with truths that are knowable a priori but are synthetic. It follows that we can have no knowledge, by means of the intellect alone, of the supersensible.

According to this conception, the main tasks of metaphysics are: first, to identify the synthetic but knowable a priori judgements used in perception and thought about the world; and, second, to demonstrate their indispensability to such perception and thought. Kant claimed that certain synthetic but knowable a priori judgements used in perception and thought about the world were indispensable because (1) they employ certain a priori forms or structures of perception (specifically, space, and time), one, or the other, or both, of which are presupposed by every act of perception but are not themselves the objects of perception, and (2) they employ certain fundamental concepts (which he called 'categories') such as the concept of causality, and the concept of modality, without which thought about and understanding of the world is impossible.⁷ He treated the question, 'How is metaphysics possible?' as elliptical for the

question ‘How is metaphysical knowledge possible?’. His view was that the answer to the latter is to be determined by the results of enquiry into the conditions of knowledge in general.⁸ This turns metaphysics into epistemology, thus obliterating Aristotle’s distinction between being qua being and being qua known.

Kant’s rejection of metaphysics as the study of being qua being, insofar as it involves rejecting the view that it is possible to have knowledge of things as they are in themselves, is a rejection of transcendent metaphysical knowledge; knowledge of a reality that cannot be experienced. His view is that metaphysics is possible only if metaphysical propositions can constitute knowledge; and this in turn is possible only if such propositions employ forms of sensibility and concepts that are applicable to the world of sensory experience. It follows from this that there can be no body of knowledge obtained by the exercise of reason or the intellect alone.⁹

Despite this fundamental departure from Aristotle, Kant believed in the a priori and universal nature of the propositions of metaphysics. And, like Aristotle, Kant worked with assumptions about the nature of the subject. Specifically, he believed that perception and thought about the world require that these two faculties have specific structures which cooperate to yield knowledge; that, within these faculties, are quite specific a priori forms (intuitions and concepts) without which perception and thought about the world would be impossible. To be sure, these forms could not themselves yield knowledge of the world, since they require content, derivable only from sensory experience. But, without the forms of intuition and thought, no knowledge of the world is possible.

Unfortunately, the structure of perception or intuition that Kant assumed supposes that space is Euclidean, i.e., three-dimensional, and that time is Newtonian, i.e., that it is a separate dimension from the spatial dimension, and this does not do justice to the many existing non-Euclidean geometries nor to the concept of four-dimensional space-time. This suggests that empirical study into the nature of space and time might yield truths that are not only incompatible with the propositions of metaphysics but falsify them, thus undermining the claim that the propositions of metaphysics are a priori. Further, Kant argued that ‘we cannot think of an object without Categories’ – fundamental concepts embodied in certain synthetic a priori judgements about the experienceable world. Yet developments in quantum mechanics in the twentieth century suggest that the ‘principle’ of causality – that every event has a cause – and the category of causality embodied in it, are not indispensable to thought about the world, which again undermines the a priori status of metaphysical propositions.

There is, however, a way of defending Kant's claims about the necessity of the forms of perception and thought to knowledge about the world against such scientific refutations, thereby protecting the a priori status of metaphysical knowledge. This is to argue that the claims of metaphysics should be interpreted as ones about what is necessary to make experience of the world possible. Thus, for example, we can argue on Kant's behalf that if the concept of Euclidean space is not fundamental to experience of the world, the concept of physical space, whatever that may entail, is fundamental to experience. Interpreted in this way, Kant's position is that metaphysics is compatible and continuous with science in that it aims to identify the fundamental intuitions and concepts presupposed in perception and thought – both commonsensical and scientific – about the world, but will presuppose no particular realization of scientific theory. Its claims will be corrigible, not because it presupposes the claims of some particular scientific theory (as was being claimed above), but rather, because its a priority will not make it immune to error. And why should it? After all, the a priority of a claim has to do with how it is justified, not with whether it is true. What matters to the a priority of metaphysical propositions is not whether they are immune from error, but what sorts of error they might be vulnerable to. If metaphysical knowledge is subject to error, it is not subject to the same sorts of error to which science is subject. Metaphysicians should not be deceived by the senses – but that is because metaphysical knowledge is not sensory knowledge. Still, metaphysicians may be deceived by other sorts of error, such as fallacies in reasoning; its a priority will not protect it from that.

A Working Conception of Metaphysics

We began with a description of metaphysics as the study of fundamental reality, of the ultimate categories or kinds of things that there are in the world. This description is equally true of Aristotle's and of Kant's metaphysics: both are concerned in a very general way with questions of being or existence. Further, both take the method of metaphysics to be a priori. However, Aristotle and Kant differ in their views of what metaphysics, thus conceived, can discover. We've seen that this difference between them is signalled by Kant's rejection of the view that metaphysics is the study of being qua being as opposed to the study of being qua known.¹⁰ Because Kant, but not Aristotle, believed that all knowledge, metaphysical knowledge included, is shaped or informed by the human perceptual and conceptual apparatus, he, unlike Aristotle, believed that we could not have knowledge of things as they are in them-

selves, and so could have no knowledge of truths about God, causation, and other matters traditionally conceived as metaphysical.

These remarks express a fairly determinate view of the nature and function of metaphysics. By way of helping to develop it further, we shall conclude this chapter by discussing two important distinctions that have figured in recent thinking about the discipline of metaphysics, as raised and examined by a contemporary philosopher, Susan Haack (1976, 1979). Haack raises a number of questions about the aims and claims of metaphysics, specifically with regard to ontology, that part of metaphysics that explores the question of what things or sorts of things there are. Her questions go right to the heart of what metaphysics is and why it has been held in such contempt from the eighteenth century onwards in Western philosophy, from Hume to the Logical Positivists. These thinkers took exception to Kant's view that some synthetic propositions could be known a priori, and so rejected the possibility of metaphysics as Kant conceived of it.¹¹ Haack's discussion is instructive for a number of reasons, one of the more important ones being that it helps illuminate the relation between metaphysics and our common-sense thinking about the world. But it also leads very naturally to a more fully developed account of the nature and function of metaphysics that we will presume throughout the remainder of this book.

The Strategy

In 'Some Preliminaries to Ontology' (1976), Haack examines Carnap's (1950) distinction between two kinds of questions, 'internal' ones, and 'external' ones. Carnap's purpose is to distinguish certain kinds of ontological questions, which make sense and are capable of being answered relatively unproblematically, from other kinds of ontological questions, which make no literal sense at all. 'Internal' questions are questions that can only be asked sensibly after the adoption of a particular linguistic framework (i.e., interpreted language fragment), and are about the domain associated with that framework. Examples of internal questions that can be legitimately raised and answered are particular questions about an entity of some kind, such as 'Is 5 a prime number?', as well as general, category questions about the existence of items of a given kind, such as 'Do numbers really exist?' According to Carnap, questions of the latter sort, while being very general, can be answered unproblematically 'within', or after the adoption of, a given conceptual or linguistic framework. So, for example, if you were to ask me whether there really are numbers, I, who have adopted the linguistic framework of numbers, could meaningfully reply, 'yes, there are numbers, since 5 is a number'.

Haack takes the form of an internal question to be ‘Are there so-and-so’s according to L?’, where L is a linguistic framework/interpreted language fragment.

‘External’ questions, on the other hand, are questions that arise prior to the adoption of a given linguistic framework, about the ‘reality’ of the framework itself. Haack takes them to have the form ‘Are there so-and-so’s (period)?’ These are inherently general and fall into two sorts. First, there are questions of a practical kind that we can ask about a given linguistic framework, say, the framework of numbers. We can ask whether it is useful or expedient in some way to use number-talk, or to use number-concepts. (So the question ‘Are there really numbers?’ actually has two ‘senses’, an internal one and an external one, both of which can be meaningfully addressed.) Carnap considers this first type of external question to be harmless because, in his view, it is not one whose answer commits any speaker or thinker using the framework to the existence of items corresponding to the terms or concepts in the framework.

However, Carnap maintains that there is a second kind of external question, which does not make any sense at all, and to which we cannot give an intelligible answer. This is a ‘framework’ question understood, not as a pragmatic question, but as a theoretical one about the ‘reality’ of the entities in the domain associated with the framework. Thus interpreted, it is a question about the truth or falsity of the framework itself.

Haack argues that Carnap’s attempt to show that external theoretical questions are literally meaningless does not succeed. She discerns two main arguments in Carnap’s work (principally, in his 1928 and 1950 work). The first has two threads, one focusing on the sense of ‘real’, and the other focusing on the sense of ‘so-and-so’s’ in ‘So-and-so’s are real’. Haack disentangles these two threads, and argues that neither establishes that external theoretical questions make no sense.

One thread of argument in Carnap is that only after the adoption of a conceptual/linguistic framework can it make sense to ask what is real and what is not. Haack disagrees. She argues that there is always the possibility of constructing a metalanguage – a language in which there are expressions that enable us to talk about the conceptual/linguistic framework at issue – in which such questions can meaningfully be formulated.¹²

A second thread of argument in Carnap is that prior to the adoption of a linguistic framework, ‘so-and-so’s’ has no established sense. Only a linguistic framework can give it a sense. Here Haack agrees, but wonders how this shows that external theoretical questions are pseudo-questions. Certainly no question about the reality of ‘so-and-so’s’ will be meaningful if ‘so-and-so’s’ has no meaning. But how are we to assess the claim

that only a linguistic framework can supply a meaning? If we think of natural languages, every existence question will be relative to a linguistic framework, and no existence question will be senseless. If on the other hand we restrict ourselves to formal languages, then there will be some external existence questions, and the distinction between internal and external theoretical questions will be saved. But saving it requires that we commit ourselves to the highly implausible view that only expressions in formal languages have sense.

The second main argument in Carnap is that we cannot make sense of external theoretical questions by means of the internal sense of ‘so-and-so’s’ in ‘There are so-and-so’s according to L’ and the question whether the sentences of L are true. According to Carnap, the acceptance of a linguistic framework is a pragmatic rather than a theoretical matter, and so carries with it no ontological commitment. If so, this way of attempting to make sense of external questions would be blocked, since accepting L would not be a matter of accepting the sentences of L as true. But Haack points out that in order for Carnap’s response to work, one would need to construe him as an ‘epistemological pessimist’ – one who holds that we cannot know or discover whether theories are true, but only which ones are compatible with the data, and of these, which are preferable on grounds such as simplicity and/or other pragmatic criteria. The problem with this is that Carnap was not in general an epistemological pessimist. She concludes that:

Carnap’s distinction between internal and external questions could be seen as an unsuccessful, but not altogether abortive, attempt to explain how persistence with the question, whether there really are so-and-so’s, may be a symptom of controversy about whether they are, really, what they are ordinarily taken to be. (Haack 1976, p. 272)

In ‘Descriptive and Revisionary Metaphysics’ (1979), Haack revisits the issue of the nature and function of metaphysical enquiry. Here she is concerned, not specifically with the question of how we are to understand ontological questions, but more generally with the question of how we are to understand the nature of metaphysical claims. Her subject matter is the distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics as drawn by Peter Strawson in *Individuals* (1959) and embodied in his work and in Whitehead’s *The Concept of Nature* (1930).

Haack’s discussion falls into two parts. In the first, she compares and contrasts Strawson’s ‘descriptive’ metaphysics with Whitehead’s ‘revisionary’ metaphysics. In the second, she raises some difficult and important questions about the distinction between these two types of metaphysics and assumptions underlying it.

According to Strawson, descriptive metaphysics aims to describe the actual structure of our conceptual framework, the scheme by which we think about the world. It differs from conceptual analysis only in its generality. Whereas, in one traditional view, the latter is concerned to make explicit the necessary and sufficient conditions for any concept to be the concept it is, descriptive metaphysics is concerned to uncover the fundamental concepts required for human thought about the world to be possible. It aims to:

lay bare the most general features of our conceptual structure . . . a massive central core of human thinking which has no history . . . the commonplaces of the least refined thinking . . . the indispensable core of the conceptual equipment of the most sophisticated human beings. (Strawson 1959, pp. xiii–xiv)

This conceptual scheme has a core that has remained constant throughout history and is invariant between languages. It is this central core that descriptive metaphysics attempts to uncover. Note, however, that uncovering it is not simply a matter of taking our talk and thought at face value. As Strawson recognizes,

The structure [which the metaphysician] seeks does not readily display itself on the surface of language, but lies submerged. He must abandon his only sure guide when the guide cannot take him as far as he wishes to go. (Strawson 1959, pp. 9f.)

It seems, then, that the results of doing descriptive metaphysics can surprise us, and can be counter-intuitive to unreflective common sense. The relevant contrast here is that between a description of how we appear to think (i.e., the conceptual structure that we appear to work with), on the one hand, and how we really think (i.e., what conceptual structure we really work with), on the other. Aristotle and Kant are cited as descriptive metaphysicians.

Revisionary metaphysics, in contrast, aims to change or alter our actual conceptual scheme by recommending another, on the grounds that it is more adequate for some purpose other than that which serves ordinary thought and talk about the world, such as the purposes of science. Strawson describes its relation to descriptive metaphysics thus:

The productions of revisionary metaphysics remain permanently interesting, and not only as key episodes in the history of thought. Because of their articulation, and the intensity of their partial vision, the best of them are both intrinsically admirable and of enduring philosophical utility. But

this last merit can be ascribed to them only because there is another kind of metaphysics, which needs no justification at all beyond that of inquiry in general. Revisionary metaphysics is at the service of descriptive metaphysics. (Strawson 1959, p. 9)

This passage suggests that Strawson views revisionary metaphysics as viable, but only alongside and against the background of descriptive metaphysics. However, Haack questions whether this is Strawson's considered view.

She argues that there is a deep ambiguity in Strawson's work concerning the relation of revisionary to descriptive metaphysics. Although Strawson's 'official' view about the possibility and value of revisionary metaphysics vis-à-vis descriptive metaphysics is modest and conciliatory, there is a persistent strand of thinking in individuals that challenges its credentials to contribute anything of value to metaphysics. This emerges in his discussions of 'our' conceptual scheme, and, within that scheme, of the priority of material bodies and persons over other categories of particulars.

Strawson's claim that 'descriptive metaphysics needs no justification at all', and that 'there are categories and concepts which . . . change not at all' suggests that revisionary metaphysics is not just an alternative to descriptive metaphysics, but one that could never seriously compete with it. His claim that 'persons and material bodies are what primarily exists' suggests that he thinks not only that the concepts of person and material body are fundamental to our thought about the world, but that persons and material bodies themselves are ontologically basic. His claim that the concept of a person is primitive confuses concept with object:

the meaning of saying that this concept is primitive is that it is not to be analysed in a certain way or ways. We are not, for example, to think of it as a secondary kind of entity in relation to two primary kinds, viz. a particular consciousness and a particular human body. (Strawson 1959, pp. 104–5):

The first occurrence of 'it' in the above quotation refers to the concept, *person*, but the second occurrence plainly refers to persons themselves.

It is hard to see how purely descriptive claims about our conceptual scheme could directly support claims about what kinds of things exist in the world beyond our concepts. But Strawson plainly thinks that they do. This makes better sense if he is understood, not as making ontologically conservative claims on behalf of descriptive metaphysics, but, rather, as making quite radical ones. Understood conservatively, he is

claiming that, for those of us humans who happen to be working with this particular conceptual scheme, the world itself could not but be constituted by particulars, and, of those, persons and material bodies. This leaves it an open possibility that there might be humans who experience and think the world differently, which undermines the move from claims about our conceptual scheme to claims about what kinds of things exist (period). However, understood radically, Strawson is claiming, not just that certain concepts are indispensable to our conceptual scheme, but also that ‘we’ includes all possible human beings. His claims that ‘our’ conceptual scheme is without a history and is ‘the indispensable core of the conceptual equipment of the most sophisticated human beings’ suggest this more radical view that there simply could not be human beings who experienced and thought the world in a fundamentally different way. And that suggests that ours is not just one conceptual scheme amongst many other possible ones (for human beings), but is the only possible one. If so, then the qualification ‘for those of us’ is otiose, and the move from claims about fundamental concepts to claims about ontologically basic kinds is natural, if contentious. It is contentious because, even if ours is the only possible conceptual framework, it does not follow that non-conceptual ‘reality’ answers to it.

Haack argues that there is real rivalry between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics if Strawson is construed in the radical way, since the radical interpretation makes it impossible to do revisionary metaphysics. But she wonders whether, on this understanding of ‘descriptive’ metaphysics, the distinction between it and revisionary metaphysics can ultimately be made out. This is where the difficult questions arise.

Real Metaphysics

Haack ends both of her discussions by posing some questions and suggesting directions in which answers might be found, which are promising and important. First, she suggests that, although Carnap’s attempt to distinguish internal and external theoretical questions fails, there is something of value to be salvaged from it. What remains is a distinction between ‘straightforward’ ontological questions and ‘hard’ ones. It is possible, Haack suggests, that the hard questions are hard, not because they are about whether items of a kind really exist, but because they are about what it is to be an item of that kind. Of course, sometimes a question of the form ‘Are there really “so-and-so’s”?’ is intended to challenge the assumption that so-and-so’s exist at all. But more often than not, it is intended to challenge the assumption that ‘so-and-so’s’ are things of the kind that we thought they were. As she puts it:

But isn't it, one might ask, simply perverse, not to say downright inconsistent, to admit that two is a number, but to deny that there are numbers? . . . the point is that there remains room for dispute about what, exactly, numbers are. And those who hold the apparently perverse position of admitting that x is a ϕ but denying that there are really any ϕ s often turn out to do so because they hold an unusual view about what ϕ s really are; they think that numbers are really logical constructions out of propositional functions, for instance, or that physical objects are logical constructions out of sense-data. (Haack 1976, p. 471)¹³

Haack's attitude towards the internal/external questions distinction is echoed in her discussion of the distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics. Having identified the source of Strawson's radical view about the nature of descriptive metaphysics as involving commitment to a kind of 'conceptual invariance' thesis with regard to all languages, she points out that whether such a thesis is true is not an easy matter to determine, since it raises many difficult questions that need answering. Here are only a few of them:

What is a concept? How are concepts individuated? What is a conceptual scheme? How are conceptual schemes individuated? What is the relation between a language and a conceptual scheme? How are languages individuated? Who are the 'we' of 'our conceptual scheme'? Is descriptive metaphysics possible? Is revisionary metaphysics possible? What could it mean to say that one conceptual scheme is 'better' than another? (Haack 1979, p. 27)

Haack ends by suggesting how one might begin to answer at least some of these questions. First, she suggests that Strawson's commitment is to a 'global conceptual invariance' thesis, and that he takes the connection between a conceptual scheme and language to be strong rather than weak: if a language has certain features, then speakers of it must employ a certain conceptual scheme.¹⁴ She argues that there is some reason to think that this connection is weaker than Strawson envisages. Second, she points out that the global conceptual invariance thesis makes it impossible to do revisionary metaphysics since, if there is no alternative to 'our' conceptual scheme, it is not possible to produce a more adequate one, whatever the purposes for which it may be required. Third, she points out that the individuation of conceptual schemes will require some criterion for the individuation of concepts, since we will need to know when it is right to say that a concept has changed, and when it is right to say that it has been replaced by a new one. She favours a view about concepts, which treats them as dynamic, rather than static. The dynamic

view can be reconciled with Strawson's 'revisionary' metaphysics, construed in a modest way as offering something viable that can be of use to descriptive metaphysics. The static view, however, encourages the dismissal of revisionary metaphysics as suffering from conceptual confusion. She ends by quoting Geach as paradigmatic of the static view, to which she offers the following response:

'at the same time' belongs not to a special science but to logic. Our practical grasp of his logic is not to be called into question on account of recon-dite physics . . . A physicist who casts doubt upon it is sawing off the branch he sits upon. (Geach 1965, p. 312)

I will reveal my sympathies by urging that we are not on a branch, as in Geach's metaphor, rather, on a raft, as in Neurath's. And if you object that this means we are all at sea, I reply that this is no worse, at any rate, than being up in the air. (Haack 1979, p. 30)

Haack's remarks not only suggest a certain view about the nature and function of metaphysics, but also contain the foundations of a solid, positive account. According to this account, there are genuine, real metaphysical questions, the so-called hard ones, even if there is no useful internal/external question distinction. Some general, category questions about ontology make sense, as do their answers. These questions are best seen as arising 'within' a linguistic framework. Why do they make sense? They do because, although they arise after the adoption of a linguistic framework, they question whether what in the world answers to at least some of the category concepts embedded in it is what we thought answered to them. These are not just questions about what concepts and conceptual structures are embedded in the linguistic framework adopted. They are questions about what the world is like, given those concepts. Of course raising such questions will require using these concepts. But the questions that are raised are not naturally viewed as 'about' those concepts. Nor, principally, are they best viewed as questions about whether anything at all answers to those concepts (although some part of metaphysical thinking will involve questions like these, for certain falsehoods in the framework). They concern the natures of things of certain kinds. According to this view, then, metaphysics is not fundamentally about whether items of this or that kind exist; it is about what it is for items of this or that kind to have a nature, and what that nature might be.

Because this is what 'real' metaphysics is concerned with, it cannot be merely descriptive, for it is concerned not only with whether sentences in a linguistic framework are true, but also with what in the world makes them true when they are. Because its aim is to arrive at our best theory

of the world, it will inevitably involve conceptual change. As Haack puts it:

The [view], with which I sympathize, sees our concepts as the result of a long and continuing evolution, and as containing residues of earlier scientific and metaphysical theories. (Haack 1979, p. 30)

Does this mean that descriptive metaphysics is fine as far as it goes, but revisionary metaphysics is also viable and important? Or does it mean that there really is no distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics, since nothing that we would wish to call ‘real metaphysics’ – the kind of metaphysics that deals with the ‘hard’ questions – answers to ‘descriptive metaphysics’? Haack would probably say the latter. This is not just because she views concepts as dynamic, whereas Strawson’s descriptive metaphysics treats them as static. It is also because, at any stage in the evolution of ‘our’ concepts, the ‘hard’ questions will need to both mention and use these concepts in asking what in the world answers to them. We shall need to both mention and use the concept *number*, such as it is, in order to raise and answer the question ‘Are there really numbers?’ because doing metaphysics partly involves doing semantics. Properly understood, revisionary metaphysics actually incorporates a ‘descriptive’ element. But, in attempting to arrive at a ‘best’ theory of the world, it will be concerned to refine and shape these concepts so as to better express that theory. Evolution of concepts in metaphysics is motivated by the need to find better concepts to better express our best theory of the world. So a good descriptive metaphysics is also at the same time a good revisionary one. And there are constraints on what counts as a good revisionary metaphysics.

Let us develop these remarks further. On the present view metaphysics aims to arrive at our best theory of the world – of the fundamental kinds that there are, and what their fundamental natures are – in an a priori, rather than an a posteriori way. Its starting point is just where both Aristotle and Kant thought it was: with our ordinary common-sense and scientific thought about the world. Beginning with this, it attempts to refine and defend the view of the world embodied in such thought, especially common-sense thought, since such thought is the basis for science. Why is refinement necessary? Because our common-sense views about the world generate puzzles, and apparent inconsistencies, which need resolving. Here is just one: material substances – things like apples, human beings, and tables – can change, and can remain the very same things through change. But change involves something’s being different from one time to another. So, it seems that material things can be both

the same and not the same throughout change. If metaphysics is to defend this – common-sense! – view of material things, it needs somehow to refine that view.

Thus, metaphysics is bound to be, not merely descriptive of our actual thought, but revisionary in at least two ways. First, in attempting to arrive at our best theory of the world, metaphysicians will inevitably ‘attempt to produce a better structure’ than that contained in our actual thought about the world. This is because the aim in producing our best theory is first and foremost to produce a – or the – true theory. Strawson, who describes the proper aim of metaphysics as descriptive, cites Descartes, Leibniz, and Berkeley, as revisionary metaphysicians. To the extent that they were, their aim in producing a better structure was to produce a better theory of the world, of what kinds of things there are and what their natures are. They thought their theories were better because they better describe the world as it really is.

Since all knowledge is shaped or informed by the human conceptual apparatus, metaphysical knowledge is too. This means that metaphysics is the study of what there is, where this study (like any other study) is shaped and informed by the human conceptual apparatus. Metaphysical knowledge, like all knowledge, is constrained by conditions, some of which concern the psychology of the knower. This does not mean that metaphysical truths do not describe facts in the non-mental world, or that the truths about them are somehow only true ‘relative’ to our perceptual and conceptual apparatus, any more than that the truths of science are only true relative to our perceptual and conceptual apparatus merely because scientific knowledge is constrained by the psychology of those that discover it. Whether knowledge of facts in the non-mental world is possible depends partly on whether human beings have concepts of the appropriate kinds, and partly on what, if anything, in this world answers to those concepts.

So metaphysics is revisionary in at least this way. But it is revisionary in another way as well. It does not purport to study what there is according to the conceptual framework or frameworks by which we think about the world. It purports to study what, fundamentally, there really is.¹⁵ It is true that, in order to do so, it must make use of concepts and/or categories by which we think about the world. But this does not show that metaphysics is not the study of what, fundamentally, there really is, but is rather the study of what there is according to our conceptual and perceptual framework. At most it shows that how the formulation of questions about what there is, is dependent on what concepts are available to us.

Given this conception of real metaphysics, one begins doing metaphysics by identifying conceptual frameworks. Theories, whatever else

they may be, are typically expressed by sets of sentences and are commonly identified in this way.¹⁶ We speakers of English often use sentences of English to refer to objects or other things or phenomena in the world and say things about them. One of the paradigmatic ways in which certain words, namely, singular terms, are used in English and other natural languages is to refer to or to pick out single, individual objects or other things in the world, in order to say things, truly or falsely, about them. However, any speaker of a language that expresses a theory will make use of terms to which no particular ontological significance is attached. So not all words or expressions are taken to refer, or do refer, to anything at all. Matters are more complicated still, since there are expressions in English that have the grammatical, but not the semantical form of a referring expression or singular term, since they do not function to refer to or pick out a single object. Think, for example of the expression ‘the sake’ in ‘She did it for the sake of her country’. The form of this expression is grammatically that of a singular term, like ‘the cat’. But no one seriously thinks that the expression ‘the sake’ refers to an individual thing, a sake, despite its grammatical similarity to other singular terms that are taken to refer to things such as cats. This distinction is what Strawson has in mind when he says that the structure of our conceptual framework ‘does not readily display itself on the surface of language, but lies submerged’ (Strawson 1950, p. 9; see also van Inwagen 1998a, 1998b; Benardete 1989; and Loux 2002.) Given this, how can we work out what the ontological commitments of a theory actually are?

It has been argued that, in order to determine the ontological commitments of a theory, one needs a criterion of ontological commitment (Quine 1960, 1964a, 1964b; Lombard 1986; Aune 1986). This is a principle for determining just what objects or entities a theory says there are (or what entities must exist in order for a theory to be true). It tells us what features a theory must have in order to be committed to the existence of items of any sort, and it also tells us that the presence of these features is enough, or sufficient, for such commitment. Suppose, for example, that the rather crude picture of reference hinted at above, that all words refer, were one that was presumed by speakers of the linguistic framework of English. Then a criterion of ontological commitment, in attempting to make explicit the ontological commitments of speakers of that framework, would need to be sensitive to that presumption. It might do this by formulating the criterion in something like the following way: a theory *T* is committed to just those items that are required to be objects of reference of its words. Clearly, given the example above of expressions like ‘the sake’, the theory of reference presumed here is too crude to be plausible, but for present purposes that is

not what matters. What matters is that the criterion of ontological commitment be capable of expressing the ontological commitments embodied in the theory expressed by speakers of English: it must make explicit what may be only implicit background assumptions made by speakers of that linguistic framework. And commitment is both different from, and prior to, the issue of truth. One cannot adjudicate between theories with respect to their truth if one cannot even tell what their commitments are, and so what they take to be true.

A criterion of ontological commitment is capable of serving two purposes. First, it can enable users of it to adjudicate between competing claims, given any particular linguistic framework as to what speakers of that framework are ontologically committed to. Given that speakers of any language will make use of terms to which they attach no particular ontological significance, this purpose would be served even if there were only one conceptual framework, common to all languages. But, second, supposing that there is more than one such framework, a criterion of ontological commitment can enable users of it to discern, amongst them, what their differing ontological commitments are. This latter is a necessary preliminary to choosing between competing theories of the world.

To see this is to see that a criterion of ontological commitment is a meta-theoretical principle; a principle that can be employed by metaphysicians when attempting to determine what there really is by attempting to specify the best theory of what there is. The starting point for metaphysics is our conceptual system embodied in natural language and thought. Applying a criterion of ontological commitment to it, we can see what *prima facie* ontological commitments are implicit in this system. For example, English contains the noun-phrase, 'goodness sake', and because of the presumption that the objects that a theory says there are are those that are referred to by the noun-phrases employed by it, English speakers appear to be committed to the existence of sakes. Since, however, these are only *prima facie* commitments, we can exercise a certain amount of freedom in attempting to specify what the real ontological commitments of that system are. Suppose again that the conceptual system embodied in English were to presume the crude theory of reference suggested above. Then a criterion of ontological commitment based on such a theory would assign ontological status to expressions such as 'the sake' and 'Pegasus'. One way of rectifying this unwanted consequence would be to distinguish real from merely apparent singular terms (that is, terms that function grammatically, but not semantically, like singular terms), thus refining the crude theory of reference, and then to re-apply our criterion of ontological commitment to the real singular terms. Tampering with the conceptual system in natural language and

thought is guided throughout by the same criterion of ontological commitment (we have not here rejected the original, reference-based criterion in favour of another), and at each stage we can evaluate the implicit commitments of the theory we have. The goal of tampering with the original theory is to arrive at a theory of the world that we can take to be a canonical statement, an ontologically perspicuous statement of the theory. Then, when we apply our criterion, what we get are our serious ontological commitments: what we think really exists.

In other words, if we start with a crude theory of reference, which says that a true sentence entails the existence of entities that its contained singular terms appear to refer to, we end up with the view that there are *sakes*, because it is true that Jones died for the sake of his country. So a refinement of the crude theory is necessary. According to this, a true sentence entails the existence of the entities that are referred to by all the singular terms that are really in it, where the ‘really’ is cashed out by a serious theory. This theory is only partly semantic. We don’t banish *sakes* merely because we can produce a semantic theory of English that does not have expressions that name them, or because we can replace expressions that contain the noun ‘*sake*’ with expressions that don’t. We banish them because our metaphysical scruples will not tolerate them, for reasons developed more fully below.

If there is only one theory to serve as the object of our metaphysical reasonings, then this process of moving from one description to another, canonical one will yield our best theory of what we think really exists. But if there is more than one such theory, then even after this process is complete, it may not be that only one theory will emerge as ‘the best’ theory of the world. At this stage, metaphysics may be incapable of fixing on a unique theory of what we think there really is. Further, it is possible for different people to arrive at very different final theories via the process. Consider, for example, the different ways that Meinong and Russell deal with singular terms which apparently lack reference: whereas Russell attempts to show that they are not really singular terms at all, Meinong takes them to be genuinely referential, and expands his ontology accordingly.¹⁷ Both, however, use a reference-based criterion of ontological commitment, which places the weight of ontological commitment on the singular terms, specifically, the names, in sentences of the language fragment. As this example indicates, the nature of the tampering is important, so there should be some constraints on what counts as acceptable, even if this issue is poorly understood and little discussed.

One such constraint, and a crucial one at that, is common sense. Metaphysical thinking, being meta-theoretical, does not take place in a vacuum: it takes place against the background of ongoing theoretical

practices, such as science. Just as those practices must be reconciled with our commonsensical beliefs about the world, so too must metaphysics. When we theorize about the nature of reality, we do so against the background of beliefs such as the belief that there is a mind-independent reality, a world with various kinds of objects and phenomena in it, such as trees, persons, lions, and earthquakes, which relate to one another causally and in other ways. One way of constraining the process by which a metaphysical theory is arrived at is to test it against the dictates of common sense. Commonsensical beliefs are the springboard of much of our theorizing; they are what motivate it, and they are, in the end, what such theorizing attempts to explain. But they aren't sacrosanct: like most other beliefs, they may be false. The dictates of common sense may also be defeasible, or capable of being overridden, for other reasons. One is that it might not be possible to vindicate all of our commonsensical beliefs, since there may be inconsistencies between them. This is why metaphysics, if a defence of common sense, is also a refinement of it.

Nevertheless, common sense provides one, albeit defeasible, constraint on the kind and extent of tampering that is acceptable. Another emerges from doing ontology itself. Suppose, for example, that we have before us two possible paraphrases of the English sentence, 'Sally was born at midnight'. One says that the sentence speaks of two entities, Sally and her birth, and both entities must exist in order for the sentence to be true. The other says that the sentence speaks of only one entity, Sally, and that that entity is the only one that must exist in order for the sentence to be true. Which one is right?

Doing semantics will not by itself yield an answer to this question. Nor will appealing to common sense alone. We know that some of our talk is talk of events: we speak of earthquakes and avalanches, and we even use singular terms that apparently refer to events (e.g., 'The Big Bang'). We also know that much of our talk is talk of substances, typically effected by means of singular terms. We could generate an argument from semantical considerations to favour one over the other of these paraphrases, the event-positing one, and, if this consideration wins, then there are events, since 'Sally was born at midnight' entails 'there are events'. But this alone would not be decisive in favour of that paraphrase. Why? Because one wants to know whether, in addition to things that undergo change, such as substances, there really are changes. In order to know that, we really need to know what kinds of things events might be; what they are like, and how they might relate to such items as substances: in what ways they might be like, and in what crucial respects different. We need, in other words, a metaphysical theory of events. And, although the paraphrase requires us to suppose that there are such things,

it cannot by itself make it true that there are such things. If there are, then the paraphrase is correct. If not, then although it may be well motivated semantically, the semantics is wrong.

So, when we engage in metaphysical thinking, we do not just do semantics for sentences of natural language, for two reasons. The first is that, in arriving at a best theory of the world, we may need to tamper with those natural language sentences. In particular, we may take theories as they are naturally expressed and paraphrase away certain *prima facie* commitments. As I stated earlier, this introduces a serious degree of freedom between determining the apparent ontological commitments in natural language (where every sentence's semantic properties must be accounted for) and the final account that we take to be ontologically committing (where only some of these sentences will be of interest). The freedom extends beyond choosing one over another paraphrase of a natural language sentence such as 'Sally was born at midnight', where the question of what the real semantic structure of such a sentence is (one which speaks only of substances, or one which speaks of substances and events) arises. This might require doing more than semantics, but here we are still attempting to account for the real semantic structure of such a sentence. The freedom involved in doing metaphysics extends further because paraphrase is not limited to giving the real semantic structure of natural language sentences (which may not be apparent on the surface). One might paraphrase in such a way that no essential appeal to certain entities implicitly appealed to in the natural language 'correlate' is made, and this marks a real departure from semantics for natural language.¹⁸

This first reason leads directly to the second, which is that doing ontology is largely independent of doing semantics, even when we have applied a criterion of ontological commitment and have a canonical statement of the theory expressed by a given language. The criterion can discern what semantic values are the real ontological commitments of the criterion (say, the semantic values of names, viz. their referents), but not what their natures are, nor how they are related to one another. For example, a criterion of ontological commitment can perhaps tell us whether a best theory of the world will contain reference to numbers and reference to sets, or to material things and persons; but it cannot tell us whether numbers are (nothing but) sets, or whether persons are (nothing but) material things, and so it cannot tell us whether this best theory is ontologically committed to both numbers and sets or persons as well as material things. This second point in particular brings out clearly that arriving at an adequate criterion of ontological commitment is only part of what is involved in doing metaphysics. The rest – which

is what doing ‘real’ metaphysics is – is trying to arrive at our best theory of what kinds of things there are, and what their natures are. And by ‘best’ is meant, ‘true’.

We have attempted to develop an account of the nature and function of metaphysics that is both consistent with, and builds upon, foundations suggested by Susan Haack in her work. There is much that remains to be said, but we shall confine ourselves here to a final – suggestive – remark. Haack favours a dynamic view of concepts, according to which they evolve over time and contain remnants of earlier metaphysical and scientific theories. Her purpose in doing this, apparently, is to undermine the distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics. However, it is doubtful that the distinction between a static and a dynamic view of concepts alone can do this. The reason is that it seems to be orthogonal to the distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics. Strawson’s distinction between how we apparently think and how we really think is compatible with a view of concepts according to which they are dynamic rather than static: on this view, descriptive metaphysics describes the actual concepts we employ to think about the world. That such concepts contain remainders of past theories (even restricting these to common-sense ones, as Strawson does) doesn’t threaten the enterprise. What threatens the enterprise is the thought that describing how we really think, and (perhaps) what the history of the concepts we now use is not what ‘real’ metaphysics claims to be doing. What is missing in descriptive metaphysics, even if it describes our concepts as they evolve, is an account of why they evolve. In the case of certain, fundamental concepts, such evolution is motivated by the aim to come by our best theory of the world. Finding better concepts – or concepts which better ‘fit’ the world as it is – is part of that aim. So revisionary metaphysics – recommending conceptual change – is necessarily part of ‘real’ metaphysics.

Notes

- 1 The word ‘metaphysics’ is Greek in origin, whose two root terms, *meta* and *physika*, mean, respectively, ‘after’ and ‘nature’. The term was created by the Greeks as a name for works written by Aristotle that subsequently became known as his *Metaphysics*. (Aristotle himself evidently did not use this term, but rather preferred the term ‘first philosophy’.) The title records the fact that the books on first philosophy were written by Aristotle after he wrote the *Physics*, or the books on nature. Aristotle thought that the books on first philosophy concern things ‘prior and better known in themselves’ and should be studied after the books on nature, which concern

things ‘prior and better known to us’ (for this distinction see *Posterior Analytics* 71b32; *Prior Analytics* 68b35–7; *Physics* A.1, 184a6–20; *Metaphysics* Z.3, 1029b3–12; and *Topics* Z.4, 141b2–142a12). He also characterized first philosophy as the study of ‘being qua being’ (or the study of the being of things, this study being conducted from or under the aspect of being), in contrast with the study of ‘being qua known’ (or the study of the being of things, from or under some other aspect by which they are known to us). For more on this, see the discussion of Aristotle on pp. 8–11. The title ‘metaphysics’ has subsequently become associated with the idea that its subject matter is further away or remote from sense experience.

- 2 The logical rules are ones such as the law of non-contradiction, Leibniz’s Law (or the combined Principles of the Indiscernibility of Identicals and the Identity of Indiscernibles), and rules of inference such as *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*, rules of transitivity, and so on. For more on some of these, see chapter 2.
- 3 For further discussion of these features, see Walsh (1967), van Inwagen (1993, 1998a, 1998b), and Loux (2002).
- 4 Indeterminacy in that there could be two or more such theories that are equally compatible with all possible evidence for their truth, and that there is therefore no ‘fact of the matter’ about which, if any, is the correct one. This characterization has its roots in the work of W. V. O. Quine, who advanced the thesis of the indeterminacy of translation. See Quine (1960 and 1970); and for discussion of the thesis, see Hookway (1988), McCulloch (1999), and Soames (1999).
- 5 There is a question as to what kind of necessity the propositions of metaphysics have, since they do not appear to have the kind of necessity that, say, conceptually true propositions are thought to have. Specifically, the propositions of metaphysics do not seem to be ones whose negations are contradictions, as are conceptually true propositions like ‘A square is a four-sided figure’ and ‘Anything red is coloured’. Still, they are thought to be ones that must be true if they are true at all. Some believe that they must be true if the world is to be possible (this is possibly Aristotle’s view); others (like Kant) believe that they must be true if the world is to be experienceable or thinkable.
- 6 If all knowledge, including metaphysical knowledge, is mediated by sensory organs and internal structures that shape and inform all of our experience, then, as Kant argued, we have no way of telling whether the world as it is in itself is the way it appears to us to be. But it doesn’t follow from this alone, nor should it be taken as a consequence of this criticism of Aristotle, that the world might be utterly different from the way it appears, so that what we know is not what things are in themselves. For, just as we have no way of telling that the world as it is in itself is the way it appears to us to be, we have no way of telling that the world as it is in itself is not the way it appears to us to be. What things are in themselves may not be inaccessible to us, just inaccessible without the mediation by sensory organs and internal structures that shape our experience.

- 7 One way to understand Kant's view here is to see him as distinguishing between the structure of perception and thought, on the one hand, and the content of perception and thought, on the other. Experience provides us with the content of perception and thought, but not its structure. Nevertheless, all experience and thought is structured, so the structure of each is something that is applicable to it but not derived from it (it is a priori).
- 8 Examples of contemporary metaphysicians who endorse this general approach are Collingwood (1940), Strawson (1959), Körner (1974), and Putnam (1981 and 1987), although, as Loux (2002) points out, Strawson's work is broadly Aristotelian despite his neo-Kantian language. This will be a matter for discussion in the final section of this chapter (pp. 14–30). The approach taken in this book is broadly Aristotelian in just this way.
- 9 This falls short of the claim, which Kant did not endorse, that there can be no world of things in themselves. Many interpret Kant as maintaining that there is a world of things in themselves, as well as the world of things that we experience. The problem, as he saw it, was that we can have no knowledge of things in themselves. There are truths about God, causation, and so on, but we can have no access to them. This is because, in order to know a truth, one must be able to think, or understand it, and in the case of things in themselves, the conditions on understanding cannot be met; we cannot sense, and so cannot understand, facts about them.
- 10 To reject the conception of metaphysics as the study of being qua being is not thereby to reject the view that there is a mind-independent reality to be known and studied by the sciences and by metaphysics. For it is open to a Kantian to hold that although all knowledge is shaped or informed by the human conceptual apparatus, whether reality conforms to those concepts is not up to humans. What there is and what its nature is like cannot be established by the mere existence of certain fundamental concepts.
- 11 The Logical Positivist, verificationist program was initiated and made popular by a group of philosophers and scientists, among them A. J. Ayer, Moritz Schlick, Rudolph Carnap, Otto Neurath, and Frederick Waissmann, in the 1920s and 1930s, and originated in discussions of a group known as the Vienna Circle. The roots of the philosophical position taken by its members stem from the doctrines of the seventeenth-century empiricists, notably those of Hume. Maintaining the Humean position that all knowledge is ultimately derived from 'impression' and 'introspection', the Logical Positivists embarked on what they considered to be a more thoroughgoing empiricism, according to which propositions that are neither empirically *verifiable* (in being capable of establishment as true) nor *analytic* (in being logical or conceptual truths) were deemed literally meaningless. In other words, the program of the Logical Positivists was to adopt an empiricist principle of significance and adapt it by applying it, not, as Hume did, to *ideas*, but directly to propositions or statements, as a test of meaningfulness. Any proposition or statement that failed the test for empirical significance and yet was also non-analytic was to be judged meaningless on the grounds that it purported to provide information about a reality that one could never in principle experience.

Implicit in the Logical Positivist attack on metaphysics is the view that all meaningful empirical statements or propositions are a posteriori, and that all meaningful a priori statements or propositions are analytic, i.e., they are 'true by virtue of meaning alone, and independently of fact', or are purely *conceptual* truths. In this they fully endorsed the Humean position that all propositions fall into two categories, those expressing 'relations of ideas' and those expressing 'matters of fact'. Since metaphysical propositions fail to fall squarely into either of these two categories, and these two categories exhaust the list of meaningful propositions, metaphysical propositions are literally meaningless.

- 12 It is doubtful, however, that Carnap would consider the appeal to a metalanguage as a way of making sense of an external theoretical question, since he would view any question couched in such a language to be one raised after the adoption of an interpreted language fragment.
- 13 It is possible that Carnap would claim that his view is not that we can admit that two is a number but deny that there are numbers. Rather, the view is that we can admit that two is a number whilst remaining agnostic about whether there are numbers, since the latter is a framework question.
- 14 The global thesis is that the same conceptual scheme is associated with all languages.
- 15 For a conception of metaphysics that is similar to this, see Lowe (1998).
- 16 Note that this is not to say that the identity and individuation conditions of theories can be given in this way: the same theory can be expressed by different sets of sentences.
- 17 See Russell (1905), Russell and Whitehead (1910), and Meinong (1904).
- 18 Consider, for example, Field (1980), who 'reinterprets' physics so that it makes no essential appeal to mathematical entities. In doing so, he probably doesn't see himself as doing the semantics of the statements of physical theory.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Historical

- Ayer, A. J. (1990): *Language, Truth, and Logic*. London: Penguin. First published by Victor Gollancz (1936).
- Barnes, J. (ed.) (1984): *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Beck, L. W. (transl.) (1950): *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Carnap, R. (1950): 'Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology'. In *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4, 20–40. Revised and reprinted in Carnap, R. *Meaning and Necessity*. 2nd edn. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.
- Guyer, P. (ed.) (1992): *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Guyer, P. and Wood, A. (transl. and eds) (1998): *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: The Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Irwin, T. (1988): *Aristotle's First Principles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McKeon, R. (ed.) (1941): *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. New York: Random House.
- Meinong, A. (1904): 'The Theory of Objects'. In Chisholm, R. (ed.), 1960, pp. 76–117.
- Russell, B. (1905): 'On Denoting'. In *Mind*, 479–93. Reprinted in Marsh, R. (ed.), 1956, pp. 39–56.

General

- Aune, B. (1986): *Metaphysics: The Elements*. Oxford: Blackwell, chapters 1 and 2.
- Bernardete, J. (1989): *Metaphysics: The Logical Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Introduction and chapter 1.
- Cohen, S. M. (2003): 'Aristotle's Metaphysics'. In Zalta, E. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2003 edn). URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2003/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/>>.
- Edwards, P. (ed.) 1967: *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Haack, S. (1976): 'Some Preliminaries to Ontology'. In *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 5, 457–74.
- Haack, S. (1979): 'Descriptive and Revisionary Metaphysics'. In *Philosophical Studies* 35, 361–71. Reprinted in Laurence and Macdonald (eds) (1998), pp. 22–31.
- Körner, S. (1974): *Categorical Frameworks*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Laurence, S. and Macdonald, C. (eds) (1998): *Readings in the Foundations of Contemporary Metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell, essays in Part One.
- Lombard, L. B. (1986): *Events: A Metaphysical Study*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, chapters 1 and 2.
- Lowe, E. J. (1998): *The Possibility of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, chapter 1.
- Loux, M. (2002): *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge, Introduction.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1964a): 'On What There Is'. In Quine 1964f, pp. 1–19.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1964b): 'Logic and the Reification of Universals'. In Quine 1964f, pp. 102–29.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1964f): *From a Logical Point of View*. 2nd edn. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Strawson, P. F. (1959): *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. London: Methuen.
- van Inwagen, P. (1998a): 'The Nature of Metaphysics'. In Laurence and Macdonald (eds) 1998, pp. 12–21.

- van Inwagen, P. (1998b): 'Introduction: What is Metaphysics?'. In van Inwagen and Zimmerman (eds) 1998, pp. 1–13.
- van Inwagen, P. (1993): *Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Introduction.
- van Inwagen, P. and Zimmerman, D. (eds) (1998): *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Walsh, W. H. (1967): 'Metaphysics, Nature of'. In Edwards (ed.) 1967, pp. 300–7.