

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-11083-9 - The Problem of Metaphysics  
D. M. MacKinnon  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

THE PROBLEM OF METAPHYSICS

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-11083-9 - The Problem of Metaphysics  
D. M. MacKinnon  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

# THE PROBLEM OF METAPHYSICS

D. M. MACKINNON

*Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity  
in the University of Cambridge*



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-11083-9 - The Problem of Metaphysics  
D. M. MacKinnon  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521110839](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521110839)

© Cambridge University Press 1974

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1974  
This digitally printed version 2009

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 73-79309*

ISBN 978-0-521-20275-6 hardback  
ISBN 978-0-521-11083-9 paperback

## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
1 Introduction	1
2 'Thrusting against the limits of language': an aspect of Plato's <i>Republic</i>	17
3 Metaphysics and fact	31
4 Empiricism: a note	46
5 Ethics and metaphysics	53
6 Parable, ethics and metaphysics I	73
7 Parable, ethics and metaphysics II	84
8 Return to Plato and Aristotle	94
9 Empiricism and transcendence	104
10 Miracle, irony, tragedy	114
11 The transcendence of the tragic	122
12 Ethics and tragedy	136
13 The notion of presence	146
14 Conclusion	164
<i>Index of proper names</i>	171

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-11083-9 - The Problem of Metaphysics  
D. M. MacKinnon  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## Preface

This book contains the substance of the Gifford Lectures delivered under the same title before the University of Edinburgh in the springs of 1965 and 1966. The material has, however, been drastically revised, sometimes shortened and sometimes expanded. The resulting work is hardly worthy of the illustrious foundation under whose auspices the Lectures were delivered; but it represents an attempt to discuss certain fundamental questions relating to the nature and possibility of metaphysics, and is offered as a contribution to a discussion that is likely to continue for a very long time.

It would be impossible for me to list the many individuals and institutions of learning to whom I am indebted in the preparation of this book, but I must offer my most sincere thanks to the University of Edinburgh for the invitation received in January 1964 to prepare and deliver the Gifford Lectures for the next two years, for the great honour done to me by this invitation and for the many kindnesses extended to my wife and myself during the periods we spent in Edinburgh in 1965 and 1966. I should like also in this connection to mention both the Principal of the University and Lady Swann, and the staff of the various departments, philosophical and theological, both for the help they gave in the presentation of the Lectures and for giving me the opportunity to discuss them after they were delivered with members of the audience.

But my greatest debt is to my wife, both for her ceaseless patience and goodness to me during the preparation of the Lectures and still more of the book in which their substance is presented; and also for the very many suggestions she made and references to which she called my attention in the worlds of poetry and art, in which she is always a teacher and I myself never more than a learner.

D. M. MacKinnon

*Cambridge, 1972*