

An Introduction to Metaphysics

This book is an accessible introduction to the central themes of contemporary metaphysics. It carefully considers accounts of causation, freedom and determinism, laws of nature, personal identity, mental states, time, material objects, and properties, while inviting students to reflect on metaphysical problems. The philosophical questions discussed include: What makes it the case that one event causes another event? What are material objects? Given that material objects exist, do such things as properties exist? What makes it the case that a person may exist at two different times? *An Introduction to Metaphysics* makes these tough questions tractable by presenting the features and flaws of current attempts to answer them. Intended primarily for students taking a first course in metaphysics, this lucid and well-written text is also an excellent introduction for anyone interested in knowing more about an important area of philosophy.

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-82629-7 - An Introduction to Metaphysics
John W. Carroll and Ned Markosian
Frontmatter
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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521533683

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First published 2010

7th printing 2015

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc.

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

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Carroll, John W.

An introduction to metaphysics / John W. Carroll, Ned Markosian.

p. cm. (Cambridge introductions to philosophy)

ISBN 978-0-521-82629-7 (hardback)

1. Metaphysics. I. Markosian, Ned. II. Title. III. Series.

BD111.C335 2010

110-dc22 2010001514

ISBN 978-0-521-82629-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-53368-3 Paperback

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Preface

The aim of this book is to introduce the philosophically curious to the central topics of contemporary metaphysics.

We expect that our audience will include undergraduate philosophy majors who have maybe already taken an introductory survey course in philosophy or a first course in symbolic logic, and who are now enrolled in a course devoted solely to topics in metaphysics. We also expect that our audience will include graduate students in philosophy who are either getting their first opportunity to tackle contemporary metaphysical issues or are looking for a book to keep on hand as a useful resource as they undertake a rigorous research seminar on some specific metaphysical topic. We hope that many more reflective minds, ranging from the contemplative layperson to sages of the philosophical professoriate, will find our text valuable as a source of sober reasoning and at least the occasional insight.

We have written this book as teachers. Though we realize that there is no way to keep our own philosophical commitments from seeping into our arguments and our choice of topics, we have tried not to make the book a forum for advancing metaphysical doctrines. We have gone out of our way to introduce topics and arguments without pressuring the reader to settle on any definite conclusions. In fact, the reader will find scattered about lots of spots where we cut off the discussion in order to identify the pros and cons of a particular thesis and then move on to another issue. In no case do we take what we say here to be the final word on a topic.

To help make the book accessible and engaging, we have not burdened it with extensive references. So, for example, we have made no attempt to identify everyone who has defended compatibilism about freedom and determinism or to reference all the possible criticisms of compatibilism.

We focus our discussion only on the most important formulations and criticisms of the view. Our annotative approach has been to include references to a few excellent and central works that would be a good next stop for readers on their way to further knowledge of metaphysics, whether they are needing sources to write a term paper or just want to find out what else David Armstrong, David Lewis, or Peter van Inwagen – three philosophers who figure centrally in this book – has to say.

It is rare that a philosophy teacher takes a class from the beginning to the end of a single metaphysics book. So each chapter of our book is self-contained; a teacher can assign any subset of the chapters. We should say, though, that we think all students planning to read any of the main topic chapters will benefit from having read Chapter 1. There we introduce our conception of metaphysics, introduce some basics about necessity and ontology, and explain why we set aside a certain common sort of skeptical question that can get in the way of thinking about metaphysical topics.

Although we write in the first person plural and have both been involved at least a little in writing each of the chapters, it will be obvious to those familiar with our other work who did the bulk of the writing in each of the eight main topic chapters. For those not so familiar: Ned was the primary author on “Freedom and determinism” (Chapter 3), “Personal identity” (Chapter 5), “Time” (Chapter 7), and “Material objects” (Chapter 8); John was the primary author on “Causation” (Chapter 2), “Laws of nature” (Chapter 4), “Mental states” (Chapter 6), and “Properties” (Chapter 9). (Chapter 1 was closer to being a joint project than any of the others.) Basically, each of us focused on the topics with which we felt the most comfortable. Fortunately, our own philosophical views are compatible enough – and the nature of the text is sufficiently devoid of specialized judgments – that it has not been difficult for either of us to live with the words put in our mouths by our co-author.

Thanks to Hilary Gaskin at Cambridge University Press and to Mark Heller for getting us started on this project. Additional thanks to Hilary for guiding us to publication; this includes arranging for a helpful review editor who provided comments on a nearly final draft. Funding to support preparation of the index by Ann Rives was provided by the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at NC State. Our thanks also go to the many colleagues and teachers who have discussed the central issues with us or who have otherwise provided crucial support over the years. These

include David Auerbach, Randy Carter, Catherine Driscoll, Ron Endicott, Doug Jesseph, Michael Pendlebury, Ann Rives, Stephen Schiffer, David Robb, Melissa Schumaker, and David Sipfle, as well as Mark Aronszajn, Greg Fitch (RIP), Ed Gettier, Robert Grimm, Fred Feldman, Hud Hudson, Gary Matthews, Sharon Ryan, Tom Ryckman, Ted Sider, and Ryan Wasserman. We hope we haven't forgotten any teachers or colleagues who should be on this list. We certainly won't forget our immediate families. They are our greatest source of support. Thank you wives and children. Ned lost both his parents during this project. John's are doing well but have had their own serious health challenges to deal with. For getting us on the does-exist list and for decades of nurture and guidance, most of all, thank you moms and dads.