

An Introduction to Metametaphysics

How do we come to know metaphysical truths? How does metaphysical inquiry work? Are metaphysical debates substantial? These are the questions which characterize metametaphysics. This book, the first systematic student introduction dedicated to metametaphysics, discusses the nature of metaphysics – its methodology, epistemology, ontology, and our access to metaphysical knowledge. It provides students with a firm grounding in the basics of metametaphysics, covering a broad range of topics in metaontology such as existence, quantification, ontological commitment, and ontological realism. Contemporary views are discussed along with those of Quine, Carnap, and Meinong. Going beyond the metaontological debate, thorough treatment is given to novel topics in metametaphysics, including grounding, ontological dependence, fundamentality, modal epistemology, intuitions, thought experiments, and the relationship between metaphysics and science. The book will be an essential resource for those studying advanced metaphysics, philosophical methodology, metametaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of science.

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Preface

Metametaphysical issues, or methodological issues pertaining to metaphysics, have been central in my work for about a decade. My dissertation was called *The Necessity of Metaphysics* – I have always been optimistic about our ability to overcome the many methodological challenges that metaphysical inquiry faces. Although my views regarding many specific questions have changed over the years, my general attitude towards metametaphysics has remained largely unchanged: I still think that realism is worth defending, that modal epistemology is of particular methodological importance in metaphysics, and that we cannot do metaphysics without relying on at least some *a priori* reasoning, whatever the correct account of the relationship between *a priori* and *a posteriori* turns out to be.

In recent years I have taught several courses in Helsinki on the topics of this book. There's no doubt that preparing for these courses and discussing the material with my students has helped me to better articulate many of the central questions of metametaphysics. Much remains to be done before this young area reaches the conceptual clarity that one might desire, but I hope that this book goes at least some way towards this goal.

I would like to express my gratitude to the following people, who read and commented on the material of this book: Hanoch Ben-Yami, Francesco Berto, Matti Eklund, Guglielmo Feis, Marcello Oreste Fiocco, Joachim Horvath, Markku Keinänen, James Miller, Matteo Morganti, Donnchadh O'Conaill, Olley Pearson, Paavo Pylikkänen, and Anand Vaidya. Their valuable feedback saved me from many errors and omissions; any remaining errors are my own. I have discussed the material of this book with too many people to list here as well as presenting the papers related to the book at numerous seminars and conferences. I appreciate the feedback received at these events. I would also like to thank Hilary Gaskin at

Cambridge University Press for support throughout the process of writing this book, as well as an anonymous reader for helpful comments. My greatest debt, however, will always be to my mentor and PhD supervisor, the late E. J. Lowe. In Jonathan’s work I first discovered the metametaphysical attitude that continues to guide my work today. Finally, most of the work for this book has been made possible by various grants from the Academy of Finland.

I have drawn on the following previously published and forthcoming material, although it has been extensively reworked for the purposes of this book. In addition, some material in Chapter 9 is based on joint ongoing work with Matteo Morganti. I’d like to thank him for the permission to use that material in this book.

‘A New Definition of *A Priori* Knowledge: In Search of a Modal Basis,’ *Metaphysica* 9.2 (2008), pp. 57–68.

‘*A Priori* and *A Posteriori*: A Bootstrapping Relationship,’ *Metaphysica* 12.2 (2011), pp. 151–164.

‘In Defence of Aristotelian Metaphysics,’ in T. E. Tahko (ed.), *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 26–43.

‘Counterfactuals and Modal Epistemology,’ *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 86 (2012), pp. 93–115.

‘Boundaries in Reality,’ *Ratio* 25.4 (2012), pp. 405–424.

‘Truth-Grounding and Transitivity,’ *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 2.4 (2013), pp. 332–340.

‘Boring Infinite Descent,’ *Metaphilosophy* 45.2 (2014), pp. 257–269.

‘Natural Kind Essentialism Revisited,’ *Mind* 124.495 (2015), pp. 795–822.

‘Ontological Dependence,’ in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 edn); see <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/dependence-ontological/> (with E. J. Lowe).

‘Empirically Informed Modal Rationalism,’ in R. W. Fischer and F. Leon (eds.), *Modal Epistemology After Rationalism*, Synthese Library (Dordrecht: Springer, forthcoming).

‘The Modal Status of Laws: In Defence of a Hybrid View,’ *The Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming), doi:10.1093/pq/pqv006.

‘Minimal Truthmakers,’ *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming), doi:10.1111/papq.12064 (with Donnchadh O’Conaill.)