

An Introduction to Metaphilosophy

What is philosophy? How should we do it? Why should we bother to? These are the kinds of questions addressed by metaphilosophy – the philosophical study of the nature of philosophy itself. Students of philosophy today face a confusing and daunting array of philosophical methods, approaches and styles, and also deep divisions such as the notorious rift between analytic and continental philosophy. This book takes readers through a full range of approaches – analytic versus continental, scientific versus humanistic, ‘pure’ versus applied – enabling them to locate and understand these different ways of doing philosophy. Clearly and accessibly written, it will stimulate reflection on philosophical practice and will be invaluable for students of philosophy and other philosophically inclined readers.

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-19341-2 - An Introduction to Metaphilosophy
Søren Overgaard, Paul Gilbert and Stephen Burwood
Frontmatter
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

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
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521193412

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First published 2013

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by the MPG Books Group

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

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Overgaard, Søren, author.
An introduction to metaphilosophy / Søren Overgaard, Paul Gilbert, and
Stephen Burwood.
pages cm. – (Cambridge introductions to philosophy)
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-0-521-19341-2 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-17598-2 (paperback)
1. Philosophy. I. Gilbert, Paul, author. II. Burwood, Stephen, 1959– author.
III. Title.
B53.O94 2013
101–dc23 2012036676

ISBN 978-0-521-19341-2 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-17598-2 Paperback

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Preface

This book is an introduction to metaphilosophy – the branch of philosophy that asks what philosophy is, how it should be done and why we should do it. As far as we know, it is the first such introduction in English; at least we are fairly certain it is the only one currently in print. As a consequence, we wrote this book feeling that we had entered completely uncharted territory, and while the idea of writing the first introduction to the field of metaphilosophy was an exciting one, the task was also daunting and extremely difficult. But if this book can generate more interest in metaphilosophy, and perhaps induce others to write rival introductions, pointing out the mistakes and limitations in our approach, we will consider our mission accomplished.

We have tried to make each chapter as accessible and student-friendly as possible, though no doubt in many cases we have failed in this endeavour. But then, as P. F. Strawson remarked: ‘There is no shallow end to the philosophical pool’ (1992: vii). This goes for metaphilosophy as much as for the rest of philosophy.

Several people have helped us at various stages of this project. We would like to thank David Cerbone, Antony Hatzistavrou, Bob Plant, Suzanne Uniacke and the readers for Cambridge University Press for providing input of various kinds. We are especially grateful to our clearance reader for making a number of useful suggestions. Some of the material included in Chapter 4 was presented at the Ph.D. seminar ‘Intuitions in Philosophy’, organised by Mikkel Gerken at the University of Copenhagen in December 2011. We are grateful to the participants for helpful questions and comments. Special thanks are due to Hilary Gaskin and Anna Lowe of Cambridge University Press for their patience and assistance.