



Stephen Mumford

METAPHYSICS

A Very Short Introduction

OXFORD

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LOGIC

A Very Short Introduction

Graham Priest

Logic is often perceived as an esoteric subject, having little to do with the rest of philosophy, and even less to do with real life. In this lively and accessible introduction, Graham Priest shows how wrong this conception is. He explores the philosophical roots of the subject, explaining how modern formal logic deals with issues ranging from the existence of God and the reality of time to paradoxes of self-reference, change, and probability. Along the way, the book explains the basic ideas of formal logic in simple, non-technical terms, as well as the philosophical pressures to which these have responded. This is a book for anyone who has ever been puzzled by a piece of reasoning.

'a delightful and engaging introduction to the basic concepts of logic. Whilst not shirking the problems, Priest always manages to keep his discussion accessible and instructive.'

Adrian Moore, St Hugh's College, Oxford

'an excellent way to whet the appetite for logic... Even if you read no other book on modern logic but this one, you will come away with a deeper and broader grasp of the *raison d'être* for logic.'

Chris Mortensen, University of Adelaide

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What is an introduction?

Metaphysics is one of the traditional four main branches of philosophy, alongside ethics, logic, and epistemology. It is an ancient subject but one that continues to arouse curiosity. It holds an attraction for many who have only a basic inkling of what it is but are keen to know more.

For some, it is associated with the mystical or religious. For others, it is known through the metaphysical poets who talk of love and spirituality. This book will aim to introduce the uninitiated to how metaphysics is understood and practised by philosophers. Many introductions to the topic begin with a consideration of what metaphysics is and how its truths can be known. But this itself is one of the most difficult and contentious questions, and the reader could quickly become bogged down and lose interest. This book is therefore written back to front. The question of what metaphysics is and how it is justified will be left to the very last. The best way to understand an activity is often through doing it rather than theorizing about it. In that case, we start by doing some metaphysics: considering some seemingly simple little questions but which concern the fundamental nature of reality.

We will go through a variety of issues with only a few technical concepts and terms. By the end, there should be a fair grasp of the problems around substance, properties, changes, causes,

possibilities, time, personal identity, nothingness, and emergence. It is hoped that the book will not intimidate its readers in a way that many philosophy books – particularly in metaphysics – can.

Often, the ideas, concepts, and questions of metaphysics sound easy – childish even. What are objects? Do colours and shapes have some form of existence? What is it for one thing to cause another rather than just being associated with it? What is possible? Does time pass? Do absences, holes, lackings, and nothingnesses have any form of positive existence at all? To some, these seem like silly questions, but for others they are at the core of what philosophy is all about. And those who see it that way often get a sense that the issues these questions raise are the most fundamental and profound about which humans can think. Metaphysics is the subject among all others that inspires the sense of wonder in us, and for that reason some think that doing metaphysics is the most valuable use we could make of our time.

If you have made it this far, perhaps metaphysics has already captured your imagination and your curiosity. In that case, we should begin forthwith on our little tour of the metaphysical furniture of the world. But where to begin? Philosophers never really know. The things they worry about are often interconnected. To understand one issue, you need first to understand another. Yet we have to say the same about the second issue as well: to understand it, you need to understand a third, and so on. And this seems to be true no matter where we start. Sometimes an understanding of the world comes only by grasping the whole, which makes it hard to explain the problems of philosophy in a neat sequence, as books must inevitably try to do. Where we begin is thus to an extent arbitrary.

Chapter 1

What is a table?

When I look at the world around me, I see that I am surrounded by all sorts of things. I see a table and two chairs, buildings, an aeroplane, a box of paper clips, pens, a dog, people, and a wide variety of other kinds of things. But this is a book about metaphysics, and in metaphysics we are concerned with the nature of things in very general terms. I am tempted to say, as a metaphysician, that all of these things I have listed are particular things, or groups or kinds of them. The notion of a particular is very important to us. I want to know that the pen on the table is my particular one rather than someone else's, or that the woman in the room really is my wife rather than her identical twin sister. To understand the importance of these issues, we need to probe them more deeply.

In front of me stands a table that I can see, feel, and hear if I rap my knuckles on it. I have no doubt that it – the table – exists. But now I will start the philosophical questions. What is this thing? What is the nature of its existence? Is the table something I know through experience or do my senses reveal to me something else? After all, when I look at it, I see its colour: the brownness of the wood. And when I feel it, I feel its hardness. Brownness, hardness, four-leggedness, and so on, are the qualities or properties of the table. One might then be tempted to say that I do not know the table itself but only its properties. Does that then mean that the table is

an underlying something about which I know nothing? Its properties seem wrapped around it and impossible to strip away.

What goes for tables, goes for other particular things too. There is nothing special in the choice of a table as my example. In the cases of coins, motor cars, books, cats, and trees, I know them only through knowing their qualities. I see their shape, their colour, I can feel their texture, smell their fragrance, and so on. The nature of these properties of things – redness, roundness, hardness, smelliness, and so on – will be the topic of the next chapter. But we really cannot avoid mentioning properties as soon as we mention the particulars to which they attach.

The more things change, the more they stay the same

Now why would I suggest that the table is something other than the brownness, hardness, and four-leggedness that I can see in front of me? One reason is that I could imagine these properties changing while the table remains the same particular that it was. I could paint the table white, for instance, because it fits in better with the decor of my office. If I did that, then it would still be one and the same table, it would simply have changed its appearance. Something will have changed, while something has remained the same.

In philosophy, we see that all sorts of confusion can reign if we speak loosely of it being the *same* table, so we employ an important distinction. We can say that something has changed *qualitatively* even though it has remained *numerically* the same. So the table can be different in its qualities – it was brown and now it is white – but it remains one and the same thing. The table that was brown is now the table that is white. Imagine if a visitor comes into my room and asks what's happened to my old brown table. It's perfectly acceptable for me to respond that it's still here: it's just that they didn't recognize it because I had painted it. Being