

Søren Overgaard, Paul Gilbert and Stephen Burwood. *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy*. Cambridge University Press 2013. 240 pp. \$94.99 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780521193412); \$29.99 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780521175982).

Metaphilosophy is more in vogue than it has ever been. To a large extent, this is a result of the rise of experimental philosophy: by suggesting that traditional philosophical methods may not deliver all they promise, experimental philosophy has spurred a great deal of reflection about how philosophy should be done instead. Newcomers to this topic will find *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy* an enormously helpful guide. Part of the popular *Cambridge Introductions to Philosophy* series, the book surveys the central questions of metaphilosophy and sketches the main answers that have been given to them. It is revealing that the book has three authors with significantly different areas of interest. People come to metaphilosophy with all sorts of backgrounds, so few authors, and even fewer readers, will be familiar with the entire subfield. All told, *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy* is the best primer to the field of which I am aware.

The book's eight chapters present brief but helpful overviews of the most important metaphilosophical questions. The first, introductory chapter asks why anyone should be interested in metaphilosophy. It defends the subfield from some longstanding prejudices—for example, the view that a philosopher's job is to solve highly specialized problems, and that asking what these problems and their solutions have in common is unnecessary and unhelpful. The authors grant that metaphilosophical reflection *can* be unhelpful, especially when it is dogmatic or overly general. But 'the conclusion to draw from this is not that we shouldn't do metaphilosophy, but that we should strive to do it *better*' (9). Chapter 2, entitled 'What is Philosophy?', describes and evaluates classic accounts of the discipline's nature, ranging from the view that it is 'part of science' (26) to the view that it is an 'edifying conversation' (43) and 'not a cognitive enterprise of any sort' (44). Chapter 2's focus is prescriptive: it asks what people *should* take philosophy to be, not what they actually take it to be. Chapter 2 also functions as a second introduction to the book, since many of the views it sketches are explored more fully in later chapters.

Chapter 3, 'Philosophy, Science, and the Humanities', examines different views of how philosophy is related to the latter two enterprises. Much of the chapter deals with the question of whether philosophy progresses in a similar way to the natural sciences. The authors think that 'the prospects for showing that philosophy has made progress comparable to the natural sciences are very dim indeed' (54), but they do not think this discredits the discipline. Those who lament philosophy's lack of progress, they suggest, are often in the grips of the dubious assumption that natural science is 'the *only* way to say something meaningful or important about the world' (57). But philosophy, they suggest, is especially concerned with what Sellars calls the manifest image, and the importance of the manifest image 'does not shrink, regardless of the advances of the natural sciences' (62). As for philosophy's relation to the humanities, the authors are sympathetic to the view that philosophy is engaged in a 'more general' (66) version of the enterprise pursued by history and literary studies. Like these disciplines, philosophy 'tries to answer questions about what it is for us to be the human beings we may be by capturing distinctively human perspectives on the world' (66). But they admit that philosophy's humanistic side clashes with the naturalism 'that is difficult to deny without abandoning the modern world view in its entirety' (68). In the end, they conclude, philosophy's scientific and humanistic sides involve 'a clash of outlooks, the resolution of which is at the heart of contemporary philosophy' (68).

The title of Chapter 4, ‘The Data of Philosophical Arguments’, is somewhat misleading. ‘Data’ suggests a concern with philosophy’s subject matter, but what Chapter 4 really discusses is methodology: the question of how philosophers should justify their claims. The link between method and data is suggested by Timothy Williamson, who claims that any academic discipline is *disciplined by* something, and must ‘make a systematic conscious effort to conform to [its] deliverances’ (70). Chapter 4 examines two rival ways of being disciplined by philosophy’s subject matter—phenomenological description and conceptual analysis—and briefly defends each from classic criticisms. It defends phenomenology from the charge that it is an armchair method without general significance. But it takes seriously the worry that different phenomenologists might have radically different experiences, and it concludes that phenomenology is most fruitful when it is used in conjunction with other methods. Chapter 4 also defends the method of conceptual analysis from the ‘intuition scepticism’ (93) encouraged by some strands of experimental philosophy. The authors resist the most radical conclusions of intuition sceptics—for example, that there is no reason to think that ‘intuition is a *reliable* source of evidence about anything’ (98). But they urge practitioners of conceptual analysis to defend their method more explicitly, by giving ‘more details about what they take intuitions to be and what the underlying mechanisms might be’ (101).

Chapter 5, ‘Analytic and Continental Philosophy’, asks whether there really are two fundamentally different sorts of philosophy. It considers several popular strategies for fleshing out this distinction, such as the claims that these kinds of philosophy have different topics, doctrines, methods, and style. The authors doubt that any of these provide a satisfactory way of distinguishing analytic and continental philosophy. But they believe there is *something* to the distinction. Following Hans-Johann Glock, they suggest that each sort of philosophy has a limited identity based on ‘trails of influence and family resemblance’ (131). We often succeed in identifying members of each tradition through ‘various traits—some doctrinal, others methodological and yet others stylistic’—even though ‘it is futile to attempt to provide necessary and sufficient conditions’ (132) for membership in them.

Chapter 6 discusses the role of truth in philosophy. It is largely devoted to the work of Richard Rorty, whom the authors present as arguing that philosophers propose pictures and metaphors rather than truth claims. The authors astutely point out that for Rorty, metaphors ‘do not have cognitive content in the sense of being believed or disbelieved. Rather we accept them as apt or reject them as inapt’ (139). However, some of the details of Chapter 6’s reading of Rorty seem questionable. At one point Rorty is described as having a ‘pragmatist theory of truth’, according to which truth is not ‘correspondence to fact’ but rather ‘what it is “good to steer by”’ (140). But Rorty insisted repeatedly that his intention was not to replace one theory of truth with another, but rather to show that truth is something of which we do not *need* a theory. That said, Chapter 6 advances some worthwhile criticisms of Rorty’s influential metaphilosophy: for example, that his critique of systematic philosophy is based on ‘an overly narrow view of system’ (157). The chapter makes a compelling case that ‘Rorty’s recommendations for philosophy are not mandatory’—that ‘even if one goes along with both his anti-representationalism and his historicism’ (159), one may still hope for a true account of how the world is.

Chapter 7, ‘What is Good Philosophy?’, explores the topic of standards. It is framed by a contrast between Socrates and the Sophists, according to which the former is clearly a genuine philosopher, and the latter are clearly not, but it is surprisingly hard to explain what distinguishes the two. In trying to pin down the difference between good and bad philosophy, the authors offer stimulating accounts of several of the standards most commonly invoked to do so, including rigour,

reflectiveness, and virtues such as integrity. Particularly interesting is the chapter's discussion of seriousness, understood as the conviction that philosophy's results matter. The authors grant that their list of standards is incomplete. 'Originality and profundity', for example, are typically 'features of very good philosophy' (187), but they do not discuss them. But Chapter 7 makes helpful suggestions about how to begin thinking about the standards widely held to govern philosophical practice.

The eighth and final chapter discusses philosophy's value. Entitled 'What Good is Philosophy?', it asks how philosophy might benefit those who engage in it, and perhaps society at large. The authors doubt that philosophy offers much in the way of moral improvement, at least in the form of 'explicit ethical messages' (206). But they hope that by 'uncovering assumptions, exposing them to criticism, and raising fresh questions for investigation', philosophy may 'foster a culture of critique and change' (216) as no other practice can.

Cambridge Introductions are typically geared toward undergraduate students encountering a subfield for the first time. *An Introduction to Metaphilosophy* would certainly be useful to students taking an undergraduate course in metaphilosophy, but I wonder how widespread such courses currently are (though with any luck, they will become more widespread as interest in the field grows). A more obvious audience for the book might be graduate students and researchers looking for brief surveys of the secondary literature on specific metaphilosophical topics. The book's extensive bibliography and even-handed approach could be useful to researchers wondering where to start with a particular topic. A final and unexpected use of the book is pedagogical. Most teachers of philosophy have struggled with the question of how to present the subject to newcomers. Chapters 1 and 8 are treasure troves of suggestions about how to do so: how to start a discussion of what philosophy does and what good it is. In that respect, and in many others, this book is a reminder that doing metaphilosophy can help us become better philosophers.

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