

*Contemporary Readings in the Foundations of Metaphysics*. Edited by Stephen Laurence and Cynthia Macdonald. Oxford, Blackwell, 1998, pp.xii+469, £55.99 hardback, £16.99 paperback.

This volume is intended as a textbook for undergraduate and graduate courses in ontology. Apart from the editors' brief introduction ("Metaphysics and Ontology"), it consists of seven sections, each of which kicks off with a "state-of-the-art" essay by a well-known philosopher, and then continues with a selection of "classic" papers on the subject under discussion.

Part I ("Methodology and Ontological Commitment") begins with an essay by Peter van Inwagen ("The Nature of Metaphysics"), and contains papers by Quine ("On What There Is"), Alston ("Ontological Commitments"), Cartwright ("Identity and Substitutivity") and Haack ("Descriptive and Revisionary Metaphysics", and an excerpt from *Philosophy of Logics*).

Part II ("Possible Worlds and Possibilia") begins with an essay by Bill Lycan ("Possible Worlds and Possibilia"), and contains papers by Lewis (an excerpt from *Counterfactuals*), Stalnaker (an excerpt from *Inquiry*) and Forrest ("Ways Worlds Could Be").

Part III ("Universals and Properties") begins with an essay by George Bealer ("Universals and Properties"), and contains papers by Putnam ("On Properties"), Lewis ("New Work for a Theory of Universals", and "Against Structural Universals"), and Bigelow and Pargetter ("A Theory of Structural Universals").

Part IV ("Substances") begins with an essay by Michael Loux ("Beyond Substrata and Bundles: A Prolegomenon to a Substance Ontology"), and contains papers by Allaire ("Bare Particulars", and "Another Look at Bare Particulars"), Chappell ("Particulars Re-Clothed), and van Cleve ("Three Versions of the Bundle Theory").

Part V ("Events") begins with an essay by Brian Lombard ("Ontologies of Events"), and contains papers by Davidson ("The Individuation of Events") and Kim ("Events as Property Exemplifications").

Part VI ("Tropes") begins with an essay by Cynthia Macdonald ("Tropes and Other Things"), and contains papers by Campbell ("The Metaphysic of Abstract Particulars"), and Simons ("Particulars in Particular Clothing: Three Trope Theories of Substance").

Part VII ("Mathematical Objects") begins with an essay by Hartry Field ("Mathematical Objectivity and Mathematical Objects"), and contains papers by Putnam ("The Philosophy of Logic") and Benacerraf ("What Numbers Could Not Be").

As the editors themselves note (p.7), there are many other topics which might have been covered—e.g. facts, states of affairs, propositions, states, functions, actions, values, attitudes, content, supervenience, reduction, essence, causation, law, space, time, infinity, and on and on—and many other papers which might have been included in the sections which were actually chosen (Armstrong on universals, Bacon on tropes, Cresswell on possible worlds, Devitt on universals, and around and around through the rest of the alphabet). Moreover, questions might be raised about the balance of material in the various sections (are "substitutionalists" over-represented in Part I? ) and even about the arrangement of the

sections (shouldn't tropes reside with universals and properties?). However, despite the range of possible cavils which might be raised against any textbook of this kind on any subject matter, it seems clear that the editors have put together a well-chosen collection of interesting and important "classic" papers, and that this collection could serve as the basis for a good undergraduate or graduate course in ontology and the foundations of metaphysics.

If the book contained nothing more than the "classic" papers, then it is not clear to me that it would be the best choice amongst available texts for undergraduate and graduate courses in ontology. Even if one chooses to teach from a collection of "classic" papers, one might prefer to work with a more clearly unified collection of papers (e.g. Mellor and Oliver (ed.) *Properties* Oxford: OUP, 1997, which covers the ground of Part III and Part VI of Laurence and Macdonald in rather more detail). And one might well prefer to work with a monograph—Lewis on the plurality of worlds, Armstrong on states of affairs or universals—which treats of various metaphysical issues from a sustained viewpoint. (Or—university policy permitting—one might prefer to put together one's own collection of readings at something closer to the cost of photocopying this amount of material. All of the "classic" papers contained in the book are readily available elsewhere.)

However, as I mentioned earlier, the book also contains seven "state-of-the-art" essays by "leading contemporary metaphysicians", and most philosophers interested in ontology and the foundations of metaphysics will want to have a look at these essays. The editors claim that the "state-of-the-art" essays are intended to serve two functions: (i) to orient beginning readers to the debates in the fields; and (ii) to present the latest views of the "state-of-the-art" authors themselves (p.7). Some of these essays do better at serving one of these functions than the other, but all of these essays are worth further examination (and will be of use to philosophers designing lectures on the topics to which they are addressed).

The essays by van Inwagen, Lycan, Lombard, Macdonald and Loux are likely to be most useful to students. Van Inwagen provides a gentle introduction to the characterisation of metaphysical inquiry, objections to logical positivist arguments for the impossibility of doing metaphysics as thus characterised, and some indications that debates about universals fit under the rubric of metaphysics as thus characterised. Lycan provides a compact survey of current approaches to the metaphysics of modality, mentions some of the problems which each approach faces, and concludes that there is much work to be done before the various issues are resolved. Lombard provides a nice survey of theories of events which might well encourage students to pursue items from the bibliography which are not included in the text itself. Macdonald provides an extended argument in favour of realism about universals (and against the acceptance of tropes) which also manages to convey the motivations for development of trope theories. And Loux provides a nice summary of the debate about bundle theories and bare particulars (though in a way which suggests that this debate is really dead, and that students would profit more from trying to develop a substance ontology than from working over the "classic" material presented in this part of the book).

The remaining essays—by Field and Bealer—are, I think, the most interesting "state-of-the-art" essays in the collection, but they are also essays which students may find difficult. Bealer's essay is an extended argument in favour of his conception of universals as "irreducible *ante rem* entities" (137). Much of it is an advertisement for the views developed in *Quality and Concept*, though with some updating. Opposing views mostly get very short shrift: nominalists and those who analyse properties as sets of possible worlds are dismissed with very short (and, I think, not very persuasive) arguments. However, as a guide to Bealer's

current thinking on these matters, this essay seems to me to be well worthy of examination. Field's essay is an interesting set of reflections on mathematical objects and mathematical objectivity. Although Field aims to persuade the reader that "logical objectivity is all the objectivity that there is" (401), his tone is less dogmatic than Bealer's. On the other hand, Field covers a lot of difficult material very quickly, in a way which I suspect will challenge most students. (In particular, he refers to difficult concepts, difficult arguments and difficult mathematics without providing enough explanation even for many graduate students.)

This book is reasonably priced, nicely presented, and well-edited. While I would not go so far as to say that it is "ideal" for undergraduate and graduate courses in metaphysics—cf. the blurb on the back cover—I do expect that there will be many excellent courses which are based upon it.

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