

Michael Rea

Metaphysics

the basics

Second Edition



METAPHYSICS

THE BASICS

Metaphysics: The Basics is a concise and engaging introduction to the philosophical study of some of the most important and foundational aspects of the world in which we live. Concerned with questions about existence, time, identity, change, and other basic elements of our common-sense and scientific ways of thinking about the world, metaphysics has long fascinated people. But to the uninitiated, many of the issues and problems can appear bewilderingly complex and intractable. In this lively and lucid book, Michael Rea examines and explains the core questions in the study of metaphysics—questions such as:

- What is the relationship between an object and its properties, or between an object and its parts?
- What is time, and is time travel possible?
- Are human beings free?
- What is it for an object or person to persist over time?

This second edition has been thoroughly revised and includes a new chapter on the metaphysics of gender. With suggestions for further reading and a glossary of key terms, *Metaphysics: The Basics* is an ideal introduction for those coming to the subject for the first time.

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Second Edition

Michael Rea

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Western philosophy began with metaphysics. The earliest Greek philosophers were on a quest for the underlying natures of things. Some said everything is ultimately water; others said everything is fire; still others said that it is air. Pythagoras thought that everything was ultimately made up of mathematical objects (and *that* mystical view still has adherents even today). They also worried about change. The world is all in flux, observed Heraclitus—so much so that it is impossible to step into the same river twice. But what does *that* mean? You can step into the Nile twice; you can step into the Mississippi twice. So if it is really impossible to step into the same river twice, does that mean that there is something illusory about the Nile and the Mississippi, and perhaps about everything else that is changing? Parmenides said yes. Many in his wake decided that ultimate reality had to consist only of *unchanging* things. No more water, fire, and air; now it was ungenerated and indestructible atoms, or abstract ideas, or other esoteric things. And on and on.

Metaphysics in the 21st century deals with these questions and much, much more. It is a core area of philosophy and has flourished as such throughout most of the history of the discipline. And with good reason: metaphysics deals with some of the deepest, most existentially important questions about human persons and the fundamental

features of reality. Many of the questions that matter most to us—can we survive death? are we free? what is it to be a person? do we have immaterial souls?—depend on decisions about matters metaphysical. Even the apparently esoteric answers described in the first paragraph to questions about change and the ultimate nature of things have proven important, exerting tremendous influence not only on the history of philosophy but on the history of theology as well, impacting even our very concept of God.

This book aims to provide an accessible introduction to the basics of metaphysics. Metaphysics is an abstract subject. Rarely does it make for breezy reading. But I have tried as much as possible to keep things simple, to avoid the jargon of the trade and to expose the structure of the arguments under discussion so that readers can see with clarity what is going on. In some cases, the inclusion of technical terms was unavoidable. I have bolded the first substantive occurrences of terms like this that recur multiple times in the text, and I have supplied definitions or explanations in the Glossary at the end. The Glossary does not add much beyond the definitions I supply in the text itself; but its purpose is to allow the reader to quickly access those definitions without having to look for them in the various chapters in which they are given.

The book begins with a chapter that explains what metaphysics is and what some of the main criticisms of metaphysics have been. Subsequent chapters focus on six topics that have been central to the discipline both throughout its history and in the contemporary literature. My hope is that this text will be of use not only to people who are looking to be introduced to some of the main problems and perspectives that have taken center stage in the contemporary literature in metaphysics, but also to people who just want to reflect on some of the great problems that have occupied the minds of great metaphysicians throughout the history of philosophy.

My approach, then, is *problem-based* rather than *figure-based*: I focus more on the problems that have occupied metaphysicians rather than on the metaphysicians themselves. But I have tried throughout to provide references both within the text and in the “Further Reading” that will guide the reader to some of the most important defenders (both contemporary and historical) of the perspectives developed herein. Also, I should note that, following the general format for this

series, I have not provided in-text citations for the philosophers I discuss or the texts from which I quote throughout the book. Rather, in each chapter I have simply indicated whom I am discussing or quoting and, where necessary, I have also given titles; then I have listed the works discussed or quoted from in the Further Reading section at the end. I have written this book so that a natural companion for it would be my edited textbook, *Arguing about Metaphysics* (also published by Routledge). The two books treat the same topics (except that the present volume includes a chapter on “substance” whereas *Arguing about Metaphysics* does not have a special section on that topic), and many of the specific articles discussed in this book are reprinted in *Arguing about Metaphysics*.

I am grateful to several friends and colleagues who offered valuable help at various stages in the process of writing this book. The discussions of temporal experience and time travel in Chapter 3 were heavily influenced by discussions of papers written by me and by L. A. Paul in the Notre Dame Metaphysics & Philosophy of Religion Reading Group. Contributions to those discussions by Meghan Sullivan and Kenny Boyce were particularly helpful. Andrew Bailey provided me with very helpful comments on early drafts of the first three chapters, and Siobhán Poole reviewed the manuscript for the press and offered many suggestions for making things shorter and more accessible. For all of this I am very thankful. I am especially grateful to Alicia Finch and Jeff Snapper, both of whom commented on all of the chapters. Whatever its remaining failings might be, the book is much clearer and more accessible now thanks to their generously extensive and insightful comments. Finally, I am most grateful to my wife Chris and to my children, Aaron, Kristina, Gretchen, and Matthias, all of whom graciously put up with me during those periods when the writing of this book dominated far too much of my work and free time.



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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The present edition of *Metaphysics: The Basics* offers a significant reworking of the structure of the book, with an eye both to making it still more user-friendly and to enable instructors to use just portions of the book in classes without assigning the whole text. The previous edition had six rather long chapters, whereas the present edition divides (mostly) the same material into eleven chapters and adds one additional chapter of new material.

The new chapter focuses on the metaphysics of gender and, because issues about “social construction” play an important role in the literature on social metaphysics, it also includes substantial discussion of mind dependence and related notions. As I note in that chapter, gender is just one among several important topics in social metaphysics that have been the subject of a great deal of recent interest. I would have liked to have been able to survey a broad range of those topics; but, in the end, I decided that treating one such topic in greater depth would be of more use to readers than a relatively shallow survey of a broader range of topics. Gender is one of the topics that has received the most attention in the years since the first edition of this book was published, and it has been the focus of much of my own recent research and teaching.

I will not repeat here the acknowledgments that appear in the original Preface to this book, but I remain deeply grateful to the friends, colleagues, and family members mentioned there for their help and support. My daughter Penelope, who was not yet born when I wrote the first edition, ought now to be added to the list of supportive family members. I would also like to add my thanks to the anonymous reviewers for Routledge who provided feedback on the first edition that informed the revisions for this second edition of the book, and to Jc Beall and Daniel Nolan for advice on some technical details in a couple of the chapters; and I am especially grateful to Elizabeth Barnes, Sara Bernstein, Lindsey Breitweiser, Laura Callahan, and Robin Dembroff for their helpful comments and advice on earlier drafts of the chapter on gender.

INTRODUCTION

Most of us have questions about the world that science does not answer. Some of these are questions about what exists, questions about the intrinsic natures of things, questions about how things in the world have to be or about how they could have been different, or questions about the fundamental structure of the world. These are the sorts of questions with which this book is concerned.

For example: My words here are causing you to have certain thoughts. But what is the *nature* of the causal relation? What is it, exactly, for one thing to cause another? Is causation some sort of necessary connection between objects or events? When a cause occurs does its effect *have* to follow afterward? If you are caused to do something, does that mean that you do not do it freely? For that matter, do you do anything freely, or is everything you do determined by the laws of nature? What does it even mean to say that you are free, or that there are such things as laws of nature? Is there a God? Do you have an immaterial soul? When you say “the number three”, is there some actual thing that you are referring to that is prime, odd, and somehow in between two other things, namely the numbers two and four?

For some people, questions in metaphysics are conversation stoppers. Ask, over coffee, what it means to be free and you might be answered with a roll of the eyes, or a profound, tight-lipped, “meaningful nod”. For others, however, they are scintillating puzzles—invitations to

unravel a myriad conceptual knots in our commonsense and scientific ways of thinking about the world.

The eye-rollers tend to convey the impression that they have never even thought about metaphysical questions. The distributors of meaningful nods indicate by their nodding that *of course* we all know that metaphysical questions are profound but unanswerable. But in fact most people have at some point in their lives both thought about metaphysical questions and thought that those questions could be answered. Many of us begin reflecting on matters metaphysical in early childhood. We wonder what it could mean to say that God is everywhere. We wonder about the passage of time: If time moves, what does it move *in*? (Not in time, of course. But then what?) We wonder about ourselves: Do we control our thoughts? Can we exist outside our bodies? And so on. To the extent that we entertain and try to answer questions like this, we are *doing* metaphysics. But what exactly *is* metaphysics? My goal in this chapter is to provide an answer to this question.

Bookstores often have entire sections devoted to “metaphysics”. They tend to be filled with books that deal with occult topics like astrology, ghosts, psychic powers, the secret lives of plants, and the like. These issues are what folks in the general public recognize as falling under the label “metaphysics”. So if you tell your dental hygienist or your prospective in-laws that you are studying metaphysics in college they are all too likely to think that you are devoting your time and attention to something strange and frivolous rather than to a serious academic subject. But in fact these topics have very little to do with those studied by academic metaphysicians.

So what *can* we metaphysicians and students of metaphysics tell our friends and family about the subject to which we are devoting so much of our time? Here are a few common answers, followed by the one that I myself prefer.

BEING AS SUCH

Aristotle famously characterized metaphysics as the study of *being qua being*, or of *being as such*. A simpler way of putting the same idea is to say that metaphysics, according to Aristotle, is an investigation into the

different kinds or categories of being. To understand what he had in mind, it is helpful to know that, as Aristotle saw things, terms like “being” or “existence” have a variety of different meanings. For example, what it is for a horse to exist is very different from what it is for a number to exist. You might think that this is just a funny way of expressing the commonsensical idea that a horse is a different kind of thing from a number. But that wouldn’t be quite right. A horse is a different kind of thing from a cat; but what *existence* is for a horse is the same as what existence is for a cat. They have the same kind of being, even if they are not exactly the same kind of object. Numbers, on the other hand, besides being different kinds of objects from horses or cats, do not even *exist* in the same way. They have a very different kind of being.

Aristotle’s idea was that “being” and related words (like “is” or “exists”) mean one thing when predicated of a horse or a cat and something else when predicated of a number. The meanings are related to one another, but still different. We can understand this point by way of an analogy. Consider the word “healthy”. We might say that a meal is healthy; we might also say that someone’s complexion is healthy, or that they themselves are healthy. It seems that “healthy” means something different in each of these three cases. The meanings are related; but they are still different. So likewise, Aristotle thought, with words like “exists” or “is”: they too vary in meaning, depending on the sort of thing to which they are applied.

According to Aristotle, then, the fundamental task of metaphysics is to discover and more richly understand the most general kinds or categories of being. In carrying out this task, what we are most interested in are the different meanings of the term “being”, which correspond to the different categories. We are not so interested in what it is *to be a horse*, or *to be the number three*. Rather, we are interested in what it is *to be*, in each of its different senses. In other words, we are interested in being *as such*, and not in *beings* themselves and their particular distinguishing attributes.

The trouble with this characterization is that most philosophers nowadays think that there is a lot more to metaphysics than the study of being as such. Questions about the compatibility of freedom and **determinism**, or about the nature of the causal relation, for example, don’t seem to be questions about being as such, but they are generally regarded as belonging to the domain of metaphysics. Likewise,

non-scientific questions about what there is—whether there are abstract objects, for example, or a divine being, and questions about what such things would have to be like if they did exist—are generally regarded as metaphysical questions; but it is hard to see them as questions about being as such. Moreover, the view that these kinds of questions are metaphysical questions isn't a recent development. It is how the field has been conceived for hundreds of years.

ULTIMATE REALITY

According to a more common characterization, metaphysics is the study of *what there is*, or of *what there REALLY is*, or of *ultimate reality*. But these characterizations too are less than helpful. Why think that it is in metaphysics, rather than in botany or zoology or theoretical physics, that we learn about “ultimate reality” or about “what there really is”? Why are we doing metaphysics when we ask whether there are numbers or sets, but not when we ask whether there are unicorns? Why do questions about the nature of causation have more to do with ultimate reality than do questions about the function of a human heart, or about the defining characteristics of electrons? What does it even mean to make a distinction between what exists and what *really* exists, or between reality and *ultimate* reality?

We can get some insight into the idea underlying this characterization when we look at the difference between the way in which metaphysicians ask certain kinds of questions and the way in which scientists, mathematicians, or people in the ordinary business of life ask those same questions. Is there a table in this room? As an everyday sort of question, the answer is settled by a quick look around. We take for granted the idea that, as a general rule, table-experiences are caused by tables. So, after looking around, if we find ourselves with table-experiences we say, “Yes, there is a table in this room”.

If we are doing metaphysics, however, part of what we are calling into question is the assumption that our table-experiences are caused by (or are in some other way dependent upon) objects answering to the general description of a *table*. We don't normally believe that *football teams* are large objects made up of players. We normally think that our football-team experiences are caused not by a single object but by a bunch of objects acting in concert. Why not say

the same thing about (so-called) tables? In other words, when you have a table-experience, why suppose that there is a single object—a table—causing that experience? Why not suppose instead that *there is no table*, but just a bunch of atoms arranged table-wise?

We can now begin to see why people say that metaphysics is concerned with questions about what *really* exists, or about what is *ultimately* real. “Is there a table in this room?” is naturally construed as an ordinary question with a straightforward answer. But if we ask, “Is there *really* a table in this room?” or “Are tables part of *ultimate* reality?” we signal our interest in some of the further, metaphysical questions raised at the end of the previous paragraph. Depending on how we answer these questions, we might conclude that the “straightforward” answer is false, even if it is perfectly appropriate for the ordinary business of life. Or, depending on our views about language, we might conclude that it is true, but somehow not in conflict with the answer we give at the end of our metaphysical inquiry—just as we take there to be no conflict between the “ordinary” claim that the sun is setting over the mountain and the more scientifically informed claim that the Earth’s rotation is causing the mountain to obscure our vision of the sun. Either way, the main point to note is that the questions we are interested in when we ask whether there is *really* a table in the room are not answered by science or observation alone. Instead, the answers depend upon the truth or falsity of more general metaphysical claims about what it takes to make several objects become parts of a larger whole, or about what it is to be a material, and so on.

Still, as a general characterization of metaphysics, the idea that metaphysics is the *study of what really exists* falls short because it is incomplete. The question whether free will is compatible with determinism, for example, is a paradigmatic example of a question in metaphysics. But it is not naturally construed as a question about what really exists, or even as a question about ultimate reality.

THE FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL

For the past couple of decades, there has been a growing trend among metaphysicians of saying that metaphysics is (or should be thought of as) the study of what is **fundamental**, or *basic*. This way of thinking

about metaphysics has also been attributed to Aristotle, and it has been gaining traction since the publication of Jonathan Schaffer's influential paper, "On What Grounds What". Schaffer's paper opens by declaring his intention to revive a conception of metaphysics that differs from the one that he then took to be dominant in the field. On the dominant conception, he says, "metaphysics is about what there is. Metaphysics so conceived is concerned with such questions as whether properties exist, whether meanings exist, and whether numbers exist". On the conception he aims to revive, metaphysics "does not bother asking whether properties, meanings, and numbers exist. Of course they do! The question is whether or not they are *fundamental*".

Fundamental things, if there are any, are the things out of which all others are made, or the things without which nothing else could even exist. They are the "grounding" entities, the things on which everything else in the world depends. For example, Thales famously said that everything is water. The view seems absolutely incredible if we think that what he meant was that, contrary to all appearances, there's no real difference between a baseball and a raindrop. But the standard way of understanding Thales' famous claim is as a claim about what is fundamental. The underlying stuff in the world is water; everything is ultimately made out of water; water is the fundamental stuff of the universe. Similarly, many people nowadays endorse **physicalism**, which can be roughly characterized as the view that everything is ultimately made up of properties and objects posited by our best theories in physics. This, too, is naturally understood as a thesis about what is fundamental.

The view that metaphysics is concerned with what is fundamental is obviously related to the idea that metaphysics is concerned with what "really" or "ultimately" exists. "Ultimate" is sometimes used as a near synonym for "fundamental", so it is easy to see why the idea that metaphysics is concerned with ultimate reality might be understood as the idea that metaphysics aims to discover what is fundamental. Similarly, a metaphysician who says, for example, that table-experiences are caused not by tables but simply by atoms arranged table-wise might express their view by saying "there aren't *really* any tables". But since the very same metaphysician will probably, in the ordinary business of life, do things like ask their children to come sit at the table for dinner, we might think that all they mean by saying

that there aren't really any tables is that tables are not fundamental, that they are instead reducible to atoms or particles.

As with previous characterizations, however, the problem with this one is incompleteness. Metaphysics *is not* just about what is fundamental. Historically, the following questions have been almost universally acknowledged as falling within the domain of metaphysics:

- Is change really possible? If so, what does it mean to say that something has changed?
- Can the past be changed? How about the future?
- Is the passage of time possible? What is time, anyway?
- What is an event? Can the same event happen more than once? What is involved in one event's *causing* another?
- What are human minds? Are they immaterial thinking substances, or are they material objects (brains, perhaps?), or something else entirely?
- Are there any non-physical things? If so, could they causally interact with physical things?
- Are human beings free? Is freedom even possible?
- Is it possible to live after death?
- Do human beings or human faculties have anything like a proper function?

None of these is plausibly construed as a question about what is fundamental.

I suspect that claims like “metaphysics is about what is fundamental” are not usually intended to be taken strictly at face value. They are most charitably construed as hyperbolic claims intended to push metaphysicians into a particular way of thinking about their discipline. The goal isn't to get metaphysicians to see questions like those just mentioned as falling outside their discipline, but rather to get them to see questions about fundamentality and grounding as in an important way *central* to their discipline.

Even so, I must still register skepticism. Why think that questions about what is fundamental are in any way more “central” or “important” than questions about human free agency, or the possibility of change? So far as I am aware, there is no argument to be had for the conclusion that they are. So it is hard to see why we should think anything more than that questions about fundamentality are *among* the

questions of metaphysics—which, of course, no one would ever have denied.

THE FINAL CHARACTERIZATION

We do best to approach the question of what metaphysics is by first looking at what sorts of questions metaphysicians typically ask, and then asking what, if anything, those questions share in common. We have already seen quite a few sample questions; here are a few more:

- When you assert something is there some *thing* that you're asserting? If so, what kind of thing is it?
- When you talk about ways things could have been (e.g., there's more than one way this class could turn out), to what sorts of things (if any) does the word "ways" refer?
- What is the relation between an object and its properties? Are the properties of a thing parts of it? If so, then do objects have any other kinds of things as parts—say, a bare substratum that *has* all of the properties? If not, then are we supposed to imagine that properties are somehow external to the things that have them, and are related to those things simply by resemblance or some other sort of relation?
- A gold statue is constituted by a lump of gold. The lump of gold still exists after it is melted down and reshaped, but the statue doesn't. So, what is the relationship between the lump and the statue? Are they two different things in the same place at the same time? If not, then how do "they" have different survival conditions?
- Are there contingent beings, or is the way things are somehow the way things have to be? Is there a necessary being (a God, perhaps) who created all contingent things?

There are many more such questions, but these are sufficient to provide a feel for the sorts of issues with which metaphysicians typically concern themselves.

What do these questions have in common? I used to say that what they have in common is that they are non-scientific questions about what exists, and about the necessary connections among certain kinds of concepts—namely, those falling outside the domains of ethics, epistemology, logic, and socio-political theory. Although I still think that this is reasonably accurate, putting it this way suggests that there is no methodological continuity whatsoever between

metaphysics and science. It also suggests that metaphysics is a sort of hodge-podge discipline, encompassing all and only questions that haven't been taken over by another sub-discipline. As my colleague Meghan Sullivan put it to me in conversation, this is a "garbage bag" conception of metaphysics; and, more importantly, it does not really capture what it is that *unifies* the discipline of metaphysics. It would be nice if we could do better.

In the previous edition of this textbook, I said that questions in metaphysics have the following in common: To answer them, one must make non-**empirical** claims (i.e., claims that are not based on observation or experience) about what there is or could be, or about the nature or defining essence of some concrete thing, or about the proper analysis of concepts of a certain kind. What kind? At the time I wrote the first edition, I thought the answer was "Just about any kind *other than* those used specifically for the evaluation of the actions, beliefs, or reasoning processes of agents and the institutions created by agents". So, as I thought of it then, most moral and aesthetic concepts, a variety of social, psychological, legal, and political concepts, the concept of knowledge (which, under some analyses, includes the concept of "justification"), and many others would all be excluded from the purview of metaphysics. I excluded these latter concepts because I took their analysis to be central to other fields of philosophy—most notably, ethics, socio-political philosophy, epistemology, and aesthetics. I now think, however, that excluding these concepts from the purview of metaphysics is a mistake. This is not to say, of course, that it is a mistake to think that the analysis of these concepts is indeed central to other fields. Rather, the mistake lies in thinking that metaphysics does not *overlap* with those other fields in dealing with the analysis of their central concepts.

My final characterization of what questions in metaphysics have in common, then, is this:

Questions in metaphysics are non-empirical questions about what exists (in every sense of the term "exists"), about the nature or defining essence of some thing (in the broadest sense of the term "thing"), or about how things must be or how they could have been different.

Note that I have left out of this characterization reference to the “analysis of concepts”, not because I think that metaphysicians aren’t concerned with analyzing concepts (far from it!), but rather because I think that analyzing a concept (whether it be an abstract concept like *freedom* or *love*, or a social concept like *money* or *politeness*, or a concept of some object-kind like *human being*, *horse*, or *table*) is just one way of inquiring into the nature or defining essence of something. Note, too, that I am here using the term “non-empirical” somewhat imprecisely to mean what would normally be expressed by “not entirely empirical” or “not purely empirical”. Questions in metaphysics, and their answers, and metaphysical theorizing often take empirical data into account. Moreover, one might reasonably be skeptical, as Quine was, of the idea that there is a sharp distinction to be drawn between the empirical and the non-empirical. But the more precise mode of expression is unwieldy and, because of this, it is also potentially confusing; so I have opted to stick with the term “non-empirical” and to impress upon the reader that the term is not meant to convey that metaphysics is *entirely* free of empirical influence.

The final characterization here adequately captures the fact that (a) metaphysics is a non-empirical mode of inquiry, (b) it is partly about *what there is*, (c) it is partly about describing the essences or natures of things, and (d) it is concerned with what is possible, necessary, or impossible. On this way of thinking about the discipline, metaphysics is not defined solely by its method, nor is it defined solely by its subject matter. Although I have not explicitly identified questions about “being as such” or about “what grounds what” as among those that are investigated by metaphysics, neither does this conception locate them outside the discipline. In fact, they do fall within the domain of metaphysics under this conception; for answering those sorts of questions will involve exactly what I have said that answering metaphysical questions will involve: one will have to make non-empirical claims about the natures of things, about how things can be or must be, and about what there is.

People sometimes distinguish metaphysics from **ontology**, which is often seen as a sub-field within metaphysics. Ontology is commonly characterized as the study of *what there is*. Or, more precisely: it is commonly seen as the branch of study which focuses on *existence* claims of the sort studied by metaphysics, and on the logical consequences

thereof. So, on this way of thinking, metaphysical claims that tell us what exists or that tell us about the natures of things would generally belong to the domain of ontology, whereas metaphysical claims that simply tell us what there *could* be or about how things *must* be (either absolutely, or given certain background conditions) generally wouldn't. I am not myself committed (or even attracted) to the idea that there is any helpfully precise distinction to be drawn between ontology and metaphysics. but the distinction is widespread enough that one must take note of it in an account of the nature of metaphysics.

FURTHER READING

The opening books of Aristotle's *Categories* and *Metaphysics* provide his own characterization of metaphysics. For a contemporary defense of a broadly Aristotelian conception of metaphysics, see Kathrin Koslicki's "Metaphysics: The Science of Essence", in Javier Cumpa (ed.), *The Question of Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). A good single source for discussion and display of the other conceptions of metaphysics discussed in this chapter is David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (eds), *Metametaphysics: New Essays in the Foundations of Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), hereafter cited simply as *Metametaphysics*.

I mentioned several philosophers who take metaphysics to be the study of what is fundamental. A good starting place for this view is Jonathan Schaffer, "On What Grounds What", in *Metametaphysics*, 347–383. Interested readers will also want to see L. A. Paul, "Building the World from Its Fundamental Constituents", *Philosophical Studies* 158, no. 2 (2012): 221–256 and Theodore Sider, *Writing the Book of the World* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2011). As we saw, Schaffer denies that metaphysics is most centrally about "what there is"; but, as we also saw, some think that questions about what there is are best construed as questions about what is fundamental. On this, see Ross P. Cameron, "Truthmakers and Ontological Commitment: Or How to Deal with Complex Objects and Mathematical Ontology Without Getting into Trouble", *Philosophical Studies* 140, no. 1 (2008): 1–18; and "How to Have a Radically Minimal Ontology", *Philosophical Studies* 151, no. 2 (2010): 249–264.