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Metaphysics. by Peter van Inwagen

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BOOK REVIEWS

such issues as the completeness of quantum mechanics and whether it is a local theory. Part of the problem has been in figuring out what is meant by 'completeness' and 'locality'. A lot of hard work has also been done in designing and performing experiments to test quantum mechanics and compare it to rival theories. Shimony has made important contributions to all aspects of this endeavor—for example, his proof that quantum mechanical nonlocality, what he refers to as *passion-at-a-distance*, cannot be exploited for the purposes of sending signals at velocities greater than the velocity of light (2:134-36).

Of course, I have not done justice to Shimony's work on any of the topics I have considered, and there are many others I have not even mentioned. This collection of papers is an admirable contribution to the study of nature and of how we acquire knowledge of it. Shimony's work is an important model for how these investigations ought to be carried out.

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METAPHYSICS. By PETER VAN INWAGEN. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993. Pp. xiii, 222.

Van Inwagen's book is a survey of several basic metaphysical issues and is intended for use as a textbook in an undergraduate course. It is lucid and engaging throughout, reminiscent of Richard Taylor's widely used text, though the discussion of each topic is more developed and incorporates ideas from the contemporary philosophical scene. There is also a pleasing combination of sensitivity to the bearing of empirical information on traditional questions (sometimes transforming them) with a clear recognition of the persistent need for distinctively philosophical analysis and assessment. In a few places, the author advances arguments that will provoke new thought even in the professional student.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first of these ("The Way the World Is"), van Inwagen treats very general issues, with separate chapters on the existence and nature of individual things, Berkeleyan idealism, and metaphysical realism. The chapter on individuality lays out various forms of nihilism (the thesis that there are no individual things) and monism (the thesis that there is exactly one individual thing) in a readily understandable way. He manages, in particular, to give a concise and plausible-sounding account of Bradley's argument for monism, although it would have been helpful to distinguish the "truth-maker" kind of explanation Bradley seeks for the holding of an external relation from a

causal explanation, and indeed to discuss explicitly the issue of facts as a fundamental ontological category.

The exposition of Berkeley's case for idealism is also nicely done, but there is an abrupt change in tone when van Inwagen then takes up the defense of the "Common Western Metaphysic." For example, he says that by raising questions about the nature of an object in itself, apart from its properties, Berkeley is simply misdirecting one's attention away from a trivial truth, because "it is in the very nature of properties . . . to be *had*" (51). Putting this together with its implied corollary that it is "in the nature of" an object to have properties, the student is likely to regard this as a dogmatic response. Perhaps van Inwagen is right to think that, at the end of the day, this will have to be the fundamental position of one who wants to avoid a bundle theory conception of physical objects, but one would like the author to foster, rather than summarily dismiss, the natural sense of puzzlement that this position raises on first encountering Berkeley. In any case, it is recommended that the beginning student read Berkeley himself in conjunction with this chapter.

The final chapter on general ontology is van Inwagen's own attempt to come up with the most plausible version of what is going on in various arguments for metaphysical antirealism. He candidly acknowledges that he has difficulty making sense out of such arguments, and the argument he gives does indeed sound implausible. So why include this chapter at all? One certainly could motivate it as a head-clearing exercise for students who have been subjected to truly nonsensical antirealist arguments in courses in other humanist disciplines. (Van Inwagen's remarks certainly provide an effective antidote to *that* type of antirealist argument.) However, systematic treatments of universals, causation, and time were sacrificed in the interests of economy. Forced to choose, one would much prefer that van Inwagen had taken up one or more of these other issues instead. (And not only because of their importance in their own right, but also because of their importance for considering the subsequent topics of the relationship of the mental to the physical, the freedom of the will, and personal identity, respectively.)

Part 2 ("Why the World Is") discusses two versions of the ontological argument—Descartes's and Plantinga's—and a few variations on the cosmological argument from the contingency of the natural world. Van Inwagen also discusses (over two chapters in part 3) a contemporary form of teleological argument from recent cosmological evidence of "fine-tuning" (for the development of intelligent life) in the initial conditions and laws of the physical universe. All of these arguments are explicated and criticized in a fair manner, although there is plenty of room for reply to some of those criticisms. (The discussion of the teleological argument is particularly fascinating, especially his alternative "Darwinian" hypothesis,

applied to the cosmic scale.) This is clearly a place, though, where a bit of pruning for the sake of including another topic would have been wise.

Finally, in part 3 (“The Inhabitants of the World”) the author takes up the nature of mind and personal identity and the freedom of the will. In the two chapters devoted to the nature of human beings, van Inwagen limits the alternatives to a strong form of substance dualism and physicalism. His development of various arguments on both sides is, for the most part, rather brief and simplified. It *is* preferable, on the whole, to follow van Inwagen’s route of making available the broad outlines of a whole range of arguments, but the critical discussion does get a little thin at important places as a result.

For example, the critique of Descartes’s conceivability argument is too compressed for the typical undergraduate. On van Inwagen’s reading, Descartes notes that I can conceive my body’s non-existence, here and now, while I cannot conceive *my* non-existence, and infers that my body has a property that I lack—*can be conceived by me not to exist*—implying their non-identity. But, says van Inwagen, if this were right, I could argue for the false conclusion that I am not identical to the author of this review, since I can conceive of the author’s non-existence (it’s conceivable that all my relevant memories and beliefs be false), but not that I do not exist. The moral is that the alleged property is no property at all. Can I really conceive the author’s non-existence, though, given that I *am* the author? Of course, I can conceive that the *phrase* “the author of this review” applies to someone else or has no application at all, but that’s not the same thing, is it? One senses that there is more behind the objection than van Inwagen explicitly says, but the discussion is too brief to provide a clear clue as to what that something might be.

The author’s argument that Leibniz’s “mill” thought experiment brings out a mystery in the notion of a thinking thing *independently* of the issue of physicalism is very intriguing but also heavy going. (The mystery is a result of our inability “to form *any* sort of representation that displays the generation of thought and sensation by the workings of an underlying reality” (161).) But what of the intended reading of the argument as raising a problem exclusively for physicalist conceptions of the mind, owing to their apparent inability to capture the subjectivity of experience? According to van Inwagen, *this* form of the argument wrongly fails to distinguish a mental event from the first-person awareness of that event. What is the theory of introspective awareness presupposed by this reply? Is it a plausible one? Such questions are not addressed.

In the final chapter, on free will, van Inwagen does an admirable job of laying out the modal argument for the incompatibility of free will and determinism simply and clearly. But one would like more detail in the subsequent discussion of the problem of giving an *indeterministic* model of

free action. No distinction is drawn between an event's being uncaused and its being nondeterministically caused. And the discussion of agent causation is exceedingly brief; in the absence of any sustained treatment of causation generally, a student will be hard-pressed to assess the coherence of this idea.

Although I have criticized a few aspects of the structure and content of van Inwagen's book, it is easily the best textbook in metaphysics with which I am acquainted, a welcome and long overdue successor to Taylor's smaller book. The author is up front about his own views on where the truth lies in these matters, while generally being very fair to the views and arguments he rejects. In most instances, it is not difficult for a moderately capable student to spot what is attractive about rejected alternatives and to make a start on developing them in the light of the author's criticisms. And the writing style is wonderfully clear and elegant. Van Inwagen thus provides an ideal model for students of what we would like them to do for themselves.¹

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¹I have benefited from correspondence with Jan Cover and Peter van Inwagen in preparing this review.

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A MIND OF ONE'S OWN: FEMINIST ESSAYS ON REASON AND OBJECTIVITY. Edited by LOUISE ANTONY and CHARLOTTE WITT. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993. Pp. xvii, 302.

The goal of this volume of thirteen new essays is to examine the value of mainstream philosophical accounts of reason and objectivity for feminist theorizing. Each of the essays addresses at least one of the following two related questions: (a) Is there a need for a distinctively feminist epistemology (or epistemologies), differing in content from those currently available in the Western philosophical tradition? and (b) Are the concepts of reason and objectivity "masculine" or male-biased?

Louise Antony, Margaret Atherton, Annette Baier, Jean Hampton, Barbara Herman, and Marcia Homiack offer spirited defenses of the usefulness, for feminist purposes, of Quine, Descartes, Hume, Contractarianism, Kant (his views on marriage), and Aristotle, respectively. Relatedly, Charlotte Witt argues that there are no good reasons for feminists to abandon the enterprise of metaphysics. The opposite side is taken by Helen Longino, who presents a brief explanation and defense of