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Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings: 2nd Edition (Routledge Contemporary Readings In Philosophy)



Synopsis

Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings is a comprehensive anthology that draws together leading philosophers writing on the major themes in Metaphysics. Chapters appear under the headings: Universals Particulars Modality and Possible Worlds Causation Time Persistence Realism and Anti-Realism. Each section is prefaced by an introductory essay by the editor which guides students gently into each topic. Articles by the following leading philosophers are included: Allaire, Anscombe, Armstrong, Black, Broad, Casullo, Dummett, Ewing, Heller, Hume, Kripke, Lewis, Mackie, McTaggart, Mellor, Merricks, Parfit, Plantinga, Price, Prior, Putnam, Quine, Russell, Smart, Swinburne, Taylor, Van Cleve, van Inwagen, Williams. Featuring a new section on causation, this new edition is highly accessible and provides a broad-ranging exploration of the subject. Ideal for any philosophy student, this reader will prove essential reading for any metaphysics course. The sections and selections of readings have been updated to complement Michael Loux's textbook Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction, third edition.

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Customer Reviews

If you're looking for a good anthology of the contemporary debates in metaphysics, this is a good book. It is appropriate for undergraduate philosophy courses and will prove useful to anyone who wants a nice survey of contemporary metaphysical debates. If you're looking for anything above a simple anthology of the debates, look elsewhere. My only complaint is that there is not enough discussion of Quantum mechanics or relativity but those debates get esoteric quickly so I can

understand their absence.

...from the Library of Dr. Pangloss Loux is an academic on the faculty of Notre Dame University, which is near South Bend, Indiana. In my personal experience I found the Notre Dame philosophers distressed by the contemporary pragmatic realism that prevails in the literature today. They have a Panglossian belief in rationalism, which I expect has broad-based sympathy in other Catholic philosophy schools. In the final section of this book, as in his previous writings, Loux calls contemporary pragmatism "antirealism." His locution "realism"/"antirealism" are a polemical caricature, a distortion due to a failure to understand the motivating origins of contemporary pragmatism. Quine is typical of pragmatic realists. His paper "Ontological Relativity" is included in this book. But in his earlier writings Loux rejected Quine's thesis of ontological relativity, which Quine also calls "referential inscrutability", and Loux is unsympathetic to Quine in this book also. Philosophy has been changed in a fundamental way due to the two great revolutionary developments in twentieth-century physics. Both Einstein and Heisenberg practiced ontological relativity. In his *Across the Frontiers* Heisenberg describes how Einstein construed relativistic space and time realistically, and how he himself then construed his own uncertainty relations realistically. Here are some basic pragmatist ideas to consider: (1) Metaphysical realism is the thesis that there exists mind-independent reality accessible to human knowledge. The thesis is literally a prejudice that is neither a conclusion, nor an inference nor an extrapolation. It is primal and is simply accepted, and is probably recognized at the dawn of one's distinction between self and surroundings. Contrary to Loux's claim, Quine talks explicitly about realism. And he seems quite emphatic affirming what he calls his "unregenerate realism." In "Scope and Language of Science" in his *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays, Revised Edition* Quine wrote: "We cannot significantly question the reality of the external world or deny that there is evidence for external objects in the testimony of our senses; for, to do so is simply to dissociate the terms 'reality' and 'evidence' from the very applications which originally did most to invest these terms with whatever intelligibility they may have for us." In the next sentence he wrote metaphorically further emphasizing the primitive nature of the realist conviction: "We imbibe an archaic natural philosophy with our mother's milk." (p. 516). Likewise in his *The Construction of Social Reality* Searle, a realist, maintains that there can be no argument for realism that is not question-begging (p. 184). However, this understanding of the primitive and prejudicial nature of metaphysical realism is incomprehensible to rationalist Notre Dame philosophers like Loux. (2) Ontology on the other hand consists of the features and aspects of reality that are captured by our descriptive beliefs, and

especially by the language of science, which becomes more empirically adequate through growth of experience including scientific development. Ontology is thus reality that is language-dependent for our apprehension. It is direct but not simple. Recognition of ontological relativity means that philosophers and scientists need no longer associate realism with any single privileged ontology, and then reject the realism in past science or common sense. For example, the famous solar-eclipse experiment of 1919 vindicated Einstein's theory of gravitation over Newton's. Yet today NASA continues to use Newtonian physics to navigate rockets through the solar system, and Newton's theory is still seen as descriptive of reality. Thus the ontology described by Einstein's theory is more realistic than that described by Newton's. Furthermore the pragmatists need not say as Popper does in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Routledge Classics) that science cannot achieve truth, because as Jarret Leplin can say, Einstein's theory is the truer. A Notre Dame philosopher, Loux longs for good-old-fashioned traditional metaphysics. He is not of our time. Like the Thomists, Aristotelians are a vanishing breed, and Loux is a cultural atavism. His world is that of his book *Primary Ousia* and of his several journal articles on Aristotle. I found little evidence that he understands the contemporary pragmatist philosophy of language and of science, the problems that occasioned its development, and how it solves the problems of today. I found no reference to relativity theory in the section on the topic of time in Loux's book. The section on the topic of causality makes no mention of the issues in the uncertainty relations in quantum theory. In this connection a much more sophisticated and relevant discussion of causality can be found in Hanson's *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science*. The sections on universals and particulars cover his favorite perennial quarrels. Loux calls Quine an "austere" nominalist. But in his autobiography *The Time of My Life: An Autobiography* Quine denies that he is a nominalist, because he accepts the existence of classes, which he views as a kind of "abstract entity." He accepts the existence of classes, because he could not eliminate them in the logistic reductionist programme. And his famous refrain "To be is to be the value of a variable" does not decide between nominalism and realism. Quine merely believes that it enables expression of one or the other view depending on whether or not one chooses to bind a predicate with a quantifier. He rejects "mental entities", but in his *Word and Object* (Studies in Communication) he proposes "stimulus meanings", which he says are universal. His nominalism is not easily described as "austere." Overall I found this 625-page book to be both frivolous and tedious. With ontological relativity much that had formerly been speculative metaphysics has been decided by empirical science. This basically is Quine's "naturalized epistemology" thesis and his rejection of "first philosophy." Thus most of Loux's selections amount to pedantic speculations. Loux's book might

offer inconsequential entertainment to some tenured academics. But for more contemporary and consequential philosophy I invite readers to readÂ Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Science: A History. Thomas J. Hickey

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