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### **Why were you initially drawn to metaphysics (and what keeps you interested)?**

I wrote a Ph.D. thesis on the philosophy of chance (i.e. of physical as opposed to epistemic or subjective probability) in the History and Philosophy of Science Department of Cambridge University in the 1960s. The metaphysics of science was not taken seriously there then: the *methodology* of science was (supposed to be) what all the philosophers there did and debated. It was only when I'd completed my thesis (*The Matter of Chance*) that I realised I'd been doing metaphysics all along – rather as Monsieur Jourdain in Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* realises he's been speaking prose for forty years without knowing it. I've been doing metaphysics ever since, because it's the branch of philosophy that interests me most and – partly as a result – that I do best. It also seems obvious to me that the methodology of science in particular, and epistemology in general, needs an accompanying metaphysics: it's not enough to know whether, when and how you know something if you've no idea what that something is.

### **What do you consider to be your most important contributions to metaphysics?**

The theory of chance in *The Matter of Chance* (1971), of causation in *The Facts of Causation* (1995) and of time in *Real Time* (1981) and *Real Time II* (1998) – and especially the way in which these works link causation both to chance and to time.

### **What do you think is the proper role of metaphysics in relation to other areas of philosophy and other academic disciplines, including the natural sciences?**

That rather depends on how broad the scope of metaphysics is taken to be: for example, ethics will depend on it far more if it includes meta-ethics than if it doesn't. This is not just a trivial matter of terminology, since it involves substantive questions about the nature and existence of values, and how these are related on the one hand to ethical discourse and on the other to the metaphysics of the mind and of the external world. Similarly with epistemology, whose relation to the metaphysics of cognition and perception is itself a substantial issue within epistemology.

However much or little epistemology and meta-ethics depend on an independent metaphysics, the latter certainly offers an indispensable foundation for several other central areas of philosophy, notably the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language. Less so with other areas of philosophy: for example, the philosophy of logic, understood as a philosophy of inference, is relatively independent of metaphysics, as are aesthetics and political philosophy.

In all this I've assumed that most metaphysics is not reducible to science, logic, epistemology or the philosophy of language. That assumption is not based on abstract meta-metaphysical arguments – most of which seem to me worthless – but on the substantive and clearly irreducible metaphysical work that many philosophers have been and are still doing. Why others, who cannot do it, should be so keen to disparage it, is a mystery to me. One of them, who once compared Karl Popper on induction to a competitor in a race who jumps up and down on the starting line shouting 'I've won! I've won!', is himself, on metaphysics, like an unfit competitor who lies down on the starting line murmuring, as he drifts off into a dogmatic slumber, 'Race? What race?'. I am no more impressed by such stares of incomprehension than David Lewis, the master metaphysician of our age, was by the incredulous stares that greeted many of his own doctrines, e.g. his modal realism.

### **What do you consider to be the proper method for metaphysics?**

Great artists – painters, writers, performers – rarely have anything unobvious or profound to say about how they get their results, any more than historians, biologists or mathematicians do. (Bertrand Russell is reported to have declined a request to write a 'Teach Yourself Logic' book by saying that he had nothing to say about how he did logic.) Similarly with philosophers in general and metaphysicians in particular. The best way to learn how to do metaphysics is not by reading about how to do it but by

reading *it*, while starting to do it under the supervision of people who are doing it already; in short, by becoming an apprentice.

**What do you consider to be the most neglected topics in contemporary metaphysics, and what direction would you like metaphysics to take in the future?**

I cannot think of any important metaphysical topic that is being seriously neglected. The range and vigour of work on the subject, well illustrated in the recent *Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, edited by Robin Le Poidevin and others, amply justifies the claim by Peter Simons, another of that volume's editors, that 'at the beginning of the twenty-first century, metaphysics appears to be enjoying an astonishing golden age'.