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*Metaphysical Perspectives* by Nicholas Rescher (review)

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The Review of Metaphysics, Volume 72, Number 1 (Issue No. 285),  
September 2018, pp. 151-153 (Review)

Published by The Philosophy Education Society, Inc.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/rvm.2018.0023>



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easy to spot a wolf in sheep's clothing." Rescher cites as examples the cases involving Alger Hiss, Claus Fuchs, and Anthony Blunt.

Rescher concludes with the acknowledgment that evaluating reports prepared for state purposes is a complex business. There is an inevitable gap between the supporting evidence provided and the objective factual claims often based upon it. The information actually at our disposal in many matters confirms our claims but does not always demonstrate them. One is reminded of Plato's discussion in the *Meno* where, in introducing the notion of "true opinion," Plato has Socrates speak of the value of such knowledge. True opinion, although supported by fact, falls short of demonstrative knowledge but is nevertheless required by those who would govern. "Men," says Socrates, "become good and useful to states not only because they have knowledge, but because they have right opinion."

Given the practical wisdom offered in this volume, it could well be required reading for any high school or college journalism class, and promoted for principled guidance to others, especially those who report on matters of state.—Jude P. Dougherty, *The Catholic University of America*

RESCHER, Nicholas. *Metaphysical Perspectives*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017. x + 255 pp. Cloth, \$45.00—*Metaphysical Perspectives* includes nineteen self-contained chapters, but there is a structural development among them that contributes to Rescher's main project.

In the introduction, Rescher notes that philosophy, especially metaphysics, is a complex affair the chief aim of which is to grapple with life's big questions.

Chapter 1 begins the big-questions journey. According to Rescher, while "Why is there something rather than nothing?" is an important question, the crucial one is "Why is there something *contingent*, for example, why does the universe exist *as it is*?" What we need is a collective explanation—one explaining why the whole collection of existents exists. We also seek an axiological, teleology-of-value explanation, not a factual one. Thus, we must focus on possibility and value. Reality is optimific, so we must eliminate all suboptimal possibilities. The best world is actualized, one that maximizes the conditions for rational agents to exist.

This is the book's key chapter because it clarifies Rescher's goal. And I think teleology must be involved if the crucial question is the one Rescher identifies. But he dismisses too quickly "Why is there something rather than nothing?" and the importance of causal explanations. I think Rescher's approach may be useful in identifying the most axiologically satisfying possible world among alternatives, but it will not explain why

that world was actualized. To do that, the dismissed question comes to the fore, and the best answer to that question is a necessary being (to avoid a vicious infinite regress) with libertarian agency (to explain contingency).

Chapter 2 (“World Views”) follows naturally since the given project entails finding the optimal worldview. So, we avoid reductionist worldviews (for example, mechanistic ones) that over-employ simplicity, we recognize that worldview issues transcend scientific ones, and we are guided by teleological axiology. There is no clear way, says Rescher, to find a single, universally binding worldview. Rather, we look for one that is optimal for a particular person for cogent/convincing reasons.

This caveat leads Rescher to explore and embrace “Terminological Contextuality” (chapter 3): Every linguistic domain is semantically autonomous with its own rational and communicative ground rules. This is not relativism. It implies that context determines meaning, truth hinges on what is meant, and rational constraints apply. But relativists are indifferent to rationality and choose beliefs arbitrarily. Chapter 4 focuses on contingency and necessity. Rescher opines that a fact is contingent if its obtaining is not necessary, and something is necessary if its negation is inconsistent with some body of definitively established and incontestable truths.

In chapter 5, Rescher argues that the interests of rationality and order can sometimes be best served by randomness (arbitrary “choice”), even in moral philosophy (for example, in random but fair decision procedures). This claim allows Rescher to fulfill his axiological project in an actual world with randomness.

Chapter 6 is chock full of distinctions regarding self-reference and paradox. These distinctions are analyzed because Rescher correctly notes that they do a lot of work in metaphysics, including the elimination of some worldviews.

Chapter 7 defends a version of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR: every true fact admits of an ontological explanation of why it is so rather than otherwise). And PSR is a coordinative explanation, a systematic, coherence account for a fact that embeds it in a wider web of facts. Such explanations ultimately bump up against ultimate unexplainable facts. Rationality is such a self-grounding fact, and PSR is rooted in a commitment to the rationality of the real.

Chapter 8 further elaborates the rationality of the universe by considering two approaches to its apparent design: evolutionary Neoplatonism (cosmic evolution teleologically directed for optimal rational beings) and intelligent design (God, not inherent teleology, directed history for us to appear). The former claims that the universe is designed *with* and *for* intelligence and the latter says it was designed *by* intelligence. Rescher adopts evolutionary Neoplatonism because he thinks there are too many problems with intelligent design. It is here that Rescher’s eschewal of “Why is there something rather than nothing?” is relevant, for if that question were considered, it could lead to theism which, in turn, could provide background support for intelligent design.

Chapters 9 and 10 tackle the problem of evil. In chapter 9, Rescher eschews the reality of possible worlds and says they are unnecessary for analyzing counterfactuals. And counterfactuals such as “If  $p$  had not happened, then  $q$  would have” are impossible to assess because of interconnectivity. One cannot remove facts piecemeal. Take one away, and that ripples throughout the world, changing other things. In chapter 10, Rescher rejects the improbability thesis (the actual world could have been better) by arguing that we have no idea what a world would have been like without Hitler or other natural evils due to interconnectivity and the butterfly effect of chaos theory.

Chapters 11 through 16 zero in on facets of human persons, their moral agency, and their social relations to others. Chapter 11 focuses on consciousness, claiming it is a set of disjunctive states with private access that are correlated with but not caused by brain activity and that make intelligence possible. Chapter 12 covers the issue of control. The main point is that only beings capable of conscious and willing control over outcomes are subject to moral assessment. Do we have such control? Chapter 13 explores this question, and Rescher concludes that freedom inheres in the very nature of processes of deliberation. Moreover, freedom is analyzed in terms of a causal theory of action combined with compatibilism. Chapter 14 analyzes personhood, and Rescher says that “person” is a metaphysical concept, not a biological one, and embodiment is not a necessary condition for a person to exist. Qua rational, social agents, one recognizes that he has intrinsic value and others like him do as well. Our moral obligations are grounded in the fact that by failing to do them, I diminish myself, lose respect, and am less entitled to see myself as a decent human being. Thus, I injure myself and the same goes for the one to whom I have an obligation. Moral action is the rational thing to do. Chapter 15 argues that moral obligation is part of the natural order, inherent in the nature of our relationships of affinity with others. Along the way, Rescher notes that there are different sorts of “ought implies can,” and not all of them are correct. He also presents a consequentialist ethic that centers on maximizing the best interests of communities and, thus, their members. Finally, in chapter 16, Rescher claims that empathy is based in type-affinity grounded in the intuitive apprehension of kind-kinship. Knowledge of other minds comes from the capacity of noninductive immediacy or apprehension of natural kinds. In turn, this grounds our knowledge of shared experiences among our kind and, as a result, our empathy toward others.

The book closes with three chapters that, roughly, show that even though philosophy is an inexact science and in spite of discord, philosophers should continue to focus on the big issues of life. Religion has a role here as well, and as long as one selects a religion that seems rational and best for oneself and allows for religious pluralism.—J. P. Moreland, *Biola University*