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## Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra

Professor of Metaphysics

University of Oxford, UK

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

Metaphysics is perhaps my oldest intellectual interest. Indeed at a very young age – perhaps when I was eleven or twelve years old – I became for a while fixated on the question whether there could be two “identical” stones. This is, of course, the question whether the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles is true – a metaphysical question *par excellence* – and, as I formulated it then, I was bound to fall into confusion about it.

But what drew me into it? I believe it is the unique combination of fundamentality, simplicity and difficulty peculiar to Philosophy: its questions, although fundamental, can be formulated in a very simple and clear way, but are nevertheless extremely difficult to answer. Metaphysics, in my view, is the study of the most general nature and basic structure of reality. In a sense, then, Metaphysics is the most fundamental theoretical discipline, and so it is the field in which that unique combination of factors common to all fields of Philosophy becomes most attractive. Whether or not that is what initially drew me into Metaphysics, it is certainly what keeps me interested in it.

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

It would be more interesting to know what others consider to be my most important contributions to Metaphysics. But, anyway, I am going to answer this question. I list what I think are my most important contributions in what I think is their order of importance.

(1) The full development of a version of Resemblance Nominalism that can avoid the Imperfect Community and Companionship difficulties, as well as other difficulties, using a dyadic non-contrastive resemblance predicate. The main place where I effected this contribution is in my book *Resemblance Nominalism* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

(2) The development of arguments for the existence of truthmakers for a large class of synthetic propositions that includes negative existentials. These arguments are presented in my article “Why Truthmakers” (in Beebe and Dodd (eds.) *Truthmakers: the contemporary debate*, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 17–31).

(3) Showing that the Bundle Theory neither entails nor is otherwise committed to the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles and, furthermore, that the Bundle Theory can be developed in such a way that it is committed to the falsity of the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles. This is done in my article “The Bundle Theory is compatible with distinct but indiscernible particulars” (*Analysis*, 64 (1), pp. 72–81, 2004).

(4) A philosophically illuminating specification of the properties that, when quantified over, render the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles trivial. This is done in my “How not to trivialize the identity of indiscernibles” (P. F. Strawson and A. Chakrabarti (eds.) *Concepts, Properties and Qualities*, Ashgate, 2006, pp. 205–223).

(5) Showing that Modal Realism and Metaphysical Nihilism are compatible with each other. This is done in my article “Modal Realism and Metaphysical Nihilism” (*Mind* 113 (452), pp. 683–704).

(6) Providing a refutation of the so-called Entailment Principle, according to which a truthmaker for a proposition is a truthmaker for any proposition entailed by the proposition in question. This is done in my “Truthmaking, entailment, and the conjunction thesis” (*Mind*, 115 (460), pp. 957–982).

**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?**

As I said above, being the study of the most general nature and basic structure of reality, Metaphysics is the most fundamental theoretical discipline. The concepts of metaphysics, concepts like time, space, identity, resemblance, substance, property, fact, event, composition, possibility, etc., are the most fundamental concepts.

This does not mean that Metaphysics is about concepts; Metaphysics is about reality, but those concepts are supposed to apply to the most basic features of reality – and although Metaphysics is about reality the elucidation of those and other concepts is useful to Metaphysics and it is one of the tasks of the metaphysician. In one way or another all other disciplines (whether philosophical or not) employ these concepts and/or others derived from them and so Metaphysics contains the conceptual foundations of the rest of knowledge. The role of Metaphysics in relation to other disciplines, whether philosophical or not and including the natural sciences, is thus a foundational role. Lack of clarity in the concepts of Metaphysics implies lack of clarity in other disciplines (both theoretical and practical) employing those concepts or employing concepts that depend on those of Metaphysics.

In the Preface to the French edition of the *Principles* Descartes compared Philosophy to a tree whose roots are Metaphysics, its trunk is physics, and its branches are all the other sciences, which he thought reducible to three principal ones: medicine, mechanics and morals. Although I would not classify physics, medicine, mechanics and morals as part of Philosophy, I share the Cartesian idea that the totality of knowledge forms a tree whose roots are Metaphysics.

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

The question of the method of Metaphysics can be taken in two ways. In one sense it refers to the method by which one arrives to metaphysical truths. I cannot say much more about this than the following triviality: the best method to follow is to be sufficiently informed about the matter at issue and to think clearly and hard about it. Being informed about a metaphysical matter *might* require knowing not only what other metaphysicians have thought about it, but also what other philosophers and scientists have thought about that matter and related ones, and what the pre-philosophical and pre-scientific intuitions about the matter are. What counts as being sufficiently informed will depend, to some extent, on the metaphysical matter at issue.

There is thus a kind of influence of non-Metaphysics on Metaphysics (and I think in many cases there should be a similar kind of influence of Metaphysics on non-Metaphysics), but this does not go against what was said in the previous answer, namely that Metaphysics has a foundational role with respect to the other dis-

ciplines at the conceptual level.

In another sense the question refers to the way in which we are supposed to decide between competing metaphysical theories. Here I think the task is to develop a set of criteria or parameters by which to judge metaphysical theories, and to assign such parameters different relative weights. In my book *Resemblance Nominalism* I proposed to evaluate solutions to the problem of universals with respect to six such criteria: (a) coherence (understood in a broad way that goes beyond merely logical coherence and that counts explanatory circularity, among other philosophical vices, as incoherence); (b) preservation of intuitions and received opinions; (c) ideological economy; (d) quantitative ontological economy; (e) qualitative ontological economy; and (f) avoidance of *ad hoc* ontology. These parameters differ in their relative importance. And of course different parameters might be relevant in different metaphysical areas or with respect to different metaphysical problems. And the same parameters might receive different relative weights in different metaphysical areas or with respect to different metaphysical problems.

Since the opinions (or even the intuitions) referred to in (b) need not be *metaphysical* opinions (or intuitions), there is a sense in which metaphysical theses can depend for their justification on extra-metaphysical thought. Again, this does not go against what was said in the previous answer, where the point was merely that the concepts of Metaphysics are prior to those of other disciplines.

**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 am happy with the level of productivity and creativity shown in Metaphysics in the last 30 years or so. And I believe that it is likely that this trend will continue for a while. But, in general, I would like Metaphysics to become more conscious of its own history. Not that there are not enough books or articles on the history of Metaphysics. But by being more conscious of its own past contemporary metaphysicians might come to discover neglected topics and problems, and might involve metaphysicians of the past in their contemporary discussion. The idea is to make the past participate of the contemporary discussion to a greater extent than is now done.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>– I thank Ezequiel Zerbudis for a conversation in which we discussed

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some of the issues touched on in this questionnaire.