On Metaphysical Possibility – in Classical and Analytic Philosophy

OTTO MUCK, Innsbruck

Toward the end of the last century, Lowe's idea gained attention that the aim of metaphysics is not conceptual analysis but an investigation of metaphysical possibility (Lowe 1998 and 2008). This, together with experience, should help to develop a better knowledge about reality as a whole.

Metaphysical possibility is distinct both from logical and from physical possibility. So it was asked how this could be known. Lowe wants to pay attention to the essences, which are the essences of entities, the objects of intention of our concepts.

Lowe's approach was regarded as an innovation, and with regard to the development of analytical metaphysics, there is something to this. But familiar with the tradition of classical metaphysics, one might say that it was always an aim of general metaphysics to investigate the most basic structures of being without which reality cannot have existence. Furthermore, a closer knowledge of concrete reality was left to the branches of special metaphysics which try to understand special realms of reality by taking into account appropriate experience.

However, within this tradition during the last century, the question of how to know what is metaphysically possible found different proposals, some of them even associated to the developments in analytical philosophy. It might be useful for the present discussion – in my opinion – to summarize some of the most interesting tendencies.

1 Metaphysical possibility according to E.J. Lowe

First of all for Lowe, metaphysics is not simply an assembly of irrational opinions.

Further, according to Lowe, the importance of metaphysics does not concern merely the consideration of particular aspects of reality, but it has to investigate the compatibility of these parts, that is, to consider reality as | whole. Thus, the task of metaphysics   **[38]** cannot be fulfilled by the special sciences alone.

For Lowe, the aim of metaphysics is not reached only by describing how we speak about these various realms in life or how we describe common beliefs about the world, both of which are intended by descriptive metaphysics.

In addition, formal semantics, which develops interpretations and models for the conceptual consistency of formalized theories, is insufficient for metaphysics. Formal ontology, according to Lowe, does not care primarily for logical form as formal semantics does. It cares for ontological form.

> Knowing the nature or essence of a (possible) kind of being or entity cannot be reduced to knowing the meanings of words or understanding concepts and knowing logical relations between them. (Lowe 2008, 33).

The attention to essences reveals differences between entities in what regards their possibility to exist, and it thereby leads to different categories of entities. Lowe explained this in his Four-Categories-Ontology. The categories make explicit that metaphysical possibilities are the ultimate underpinnings for our judgments about the things which we meet in experience. To gain knowledge of the things which actually exist, experience is required, but

the framework, which is used for this task, is to be clarified by investigating the metaphysical possibilities, especially the basic categories of being.

In defending his approach, Lowe uses, among others, the following types of arguments:

Considering the essences of the things we speak about should by no means be regarded as impossible. Even in semantics, we use an understanding of essence when one speaks of concepts and representations. Both are beings and have their respective essences. So, essences are also objects of the language of semantic investigations.

It is interesting for me here that Lowe uses an argument which some would see as part of an operational analysis which makes explicit an understanding of a term, here of the meaning of "essence", by pointing to the linguistic operation in which it is used.

And, then, this is combined with an indirect argument in order to defend the possibility of using our understanding of essences, at least as an argument *ad hominem*.

[39]

2 Questions and observations arising from Lowe's intentions

In order to resume the ideas of Lowe and discuss their merits, I will use the concept of a model. When using a model (e.g., a road map), its purpose and its specific advantages must be kept in mind – as well as the limits of its representation of reality. Call these the *conditions of adequacy* of an explication or an interpretation.

Models, therefore, are usually only *partial interpretations* of the field which they should help to understand. Their adequacy depends on the purpose for which they are used. Therefore, in using a model one should be careful not to draw unjustified conclusions. For example, road maps provide reliable information about reality if I want to find my way. But it would be a misunderstanding to scold them for being unrealistic as they do not present the beauty of the landscape.

When Lowe contrasts his own metaphysical approach to several trends in Analytic Philosophy, this does not mean (so I take it) that he would not appreciate the merits of Analytic Philosophy in the last century. But Lowe locates ontological questions beyond the boundaries of semantic models of modal logic. The task of investigating metaphysical possibility cannot be achieved by formal semantics alone. The semantic approach to systems of modal logic is useful to show the consistency of these systems by presenting abstract interpretations, which satisfy the formulas of the systems. These semantic models show the logical consistency of the systems. But the fulfilment of this minimal requirement for formal systems does not provide further ontological conditions for the beings about which we speak when we use concepts, which refer to objects of experience.

For Lowe, the model of reality used in everyday life has its limits as well, and metaphysical analysis should help to transcend them. For him, descriptive metaphysics deals only with the common sense model of reality, as I would call it. This model sees reality only with regard to practical purposes instead of caring for reality as such. According to Lowe, this bears a similarity to neo-Kantianism and to the mistake of idealism: they are all satisfied with the way how we *think* about reality and do not ask about reality as it *is*.

But is it true that the model of reality which we use in life, in our "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*), is unable to contribute to a better knowledge of reality? I want to point out some methodological elements which this model can contribute to develop metaphysics.

[40]

2.1 The "Life-world" as the frame of reference for questions to be solved by metaphysics

There is no doubt that our everyday model is imperfect in interpreting reality. Nevertheless, it represents certain traits of reality – otherwise it could not provide reliable

information for many tasks in our life, which it obviously does. This leads to the further question of how much assistance our pre-philosophical language can provide for a critical appraisal of reality.

The model which directs our everyday life, our "*life-world*", should be regarded as the benchmark for the material adequacy of metaphysical proposals. Metaphysics is expected to assist us in solving *questions that arise in everyday life*. Are solutions to these questions supported by the considerations of metaphysics? If metaphysics should improve the model of reality which we are using in life, this should help to find answers to the questions arising there. Therefore, testing the sufficiency of metaphysical ideas has to consider the consequences for our life. This does not entail an uncritical acceptance of opinions of our common sense model of reality – this is not even the case in descriptive metaphysics according to Strawson (Löffler 2007, 123-130).

I want to take the occasion of this paper to express my high estimation for Edmund Runggaldier's way of dealing with philosophical problems. On the one hand, his many publications display his openness to the manifold proposals of how to handle philosophical problems, including formal ontology. On the other hand, he constantly considers how proposed ideas can be solutions for the field where the problems had their origin – our lifeworld.

2.2 The concepts which refer to beings with their essences have been produced in the formation of our life-world

In order to have access to essences, we rely on the process which has led us to the *formation of our everyday-model of reality*. In that vein, Scott A. Shalkowski (2008, in response to Lowe 2008) raises an obvious question: How do we obtain concepts of the entities which contain those essential features which (according to Lowe) should be the proper object of attention in metaphysics? For Lowe, insight into essences is a condition *a priori* for empirical knowledge, which is formed *a posteriori*. But one should note that the formation of concepts is linked with the formation of experiential knowledge. So the "apriority" of essences for empirical knowledge | should not be misunderstood in a temporal way. **[41]** Therefore, the concepts used in the model of everyday knowledge (its need for critical improvement not withstanding) can be expected to give us sufficient acquaintance with the essences for the purpose of formal ontology.

2.3 Understanding of intended essences is manifested in relations between concepts

But how tight is the link between ordinary language and reality? On the one hand, the practical interests of everyday life in the process of original formation of language seem to distort our relation to reality, and on the other hand, these interests must take into account the structures of reality. Is ordinary language thus distorting or rather revealing reality? Recently, Paul Symington (Symington 2010) has pointed out different views on this question in medieval philosophy.

According to Symington, Thomas Aquinas considered the expression of our relation to the intended reality as strong enough to be helpful for determining differences in reality. This is done by reflecting on expressions in language. Modes of per se predication indicate how a predicate is related to its subject. These different modes reflect relations of the essences intended by the concepts. They are not merely a matter of our insufficient understanding of reality. Symington shows how, following this way, one can provide a reconstruction of Lowe's four categories but at the same time overcome some difficulties which they seem to include (Symington 2010, 134-139).

2.4 The Life-world grounds our operations and interests for investigations in special realms

We should not forget that all our attempts to develop a critical view of reality rely on *ordinary language* – it has at least the function of indicating problems and drawing our attention to ways of solving them. Methodical constructivism shows how this can be done, e.g., by an operational approach to logic and to the foundations of mathematics and the empirical sciences (Lorenzen 1969).

This attention to the roots of specialized investigations and formulations helps to understand their power as well as their limits. It also highlights the relevance of our theoretical investigations for our relation to reality in everyday activity. C.F. Gethmann **[42]** labels this approach of methodical construc-|tivism as "phenomenology after the linguistic turn" (Gethmann 2010, 23). He shows how our insight into essences has its consequences in our practical life, especially in the performance of language.

This use of ordinary language (i.e., to draw attention to our activity) can also be useful for the task Lowe is interested in, namely, the explication of what goes on when we gain insights regarding essences. In this way, insights which are operative in the performance of these activities could be explicated critically. This may help to avoid the danger of burdening the formulations of these insights with misleading associations.

2.5 The Life-world also uses an understanding of essences in their relevance for our active occupation with reality

How does the *practical engagement with reality* in our life find consideration in the metaphysical quest for reality? This should not be neglected as an adequacy condition for metaphysical proposals. It seems to me that Lowe's interest is unduly restricted to the static possibility of things with regard to existence and identification. But wouldn't it also be a task of ontology to pay attention to the dynamic possibility of coming into existence? It seems that the experience of action (and of the causal interdependence with reality involved in it) reveals that there are presupposed *a priori* conditions for the possibility of coming or bringing to existence. Why not also treat them in ontology?

Anyway, the dynamic aspect of coming into existence has several aspects which deserve attention, since misunderstanding them may lead to failures in action. (Examples are given by Aristotle, who paid much attention to the different aspects of explaining how beings come into existence, change and vanish.)

So reality and being are not to be understood just as the actualisation of a possibility for existence. The existence of a being is essentially connected with the activity of beings, as our life proves. Therefore, the conditions of metaphysical possibility should also cover the conditions for coming into existence by action.

2.6 The Life-world is related to the personal world-view, which integrates   our life

One might ask whether descriptive metaphysics is restricted to the opinions and presuppositions present in the common understanding of language | users. This seems   **[43]** to be the case in Strawson's *Individuals* (Strawson 1959) and in Stephan Körner's "immanent metaphysics" (Körner 1984). They both rather reflect the commonly shared system of rationality (Hudson 1991), not the concrete world-view of a person.

Lowe would agree that metaphysics should not only be interested in one aspect of reality but in reality as a whole. Therefore, I think, metaphysics should help to clarify the personal outlook on life as it is used in the concrete actions and decisions of persons. This task goes beyond analyzing the beliefs immanent in the common understanding of language.

It concerns beliefs of single persons. In the investigation into the logic of religious language, which started with A. Flew (Flew 1963, cf. Muck 1967), this stock of beliefs was sometimes called *Weltanschauung* (world-view). Körner would have labelled it as a person's "transcendent metaphysics" (Körner 1984, ch.11 and 17).

In our search for a critical account of the "reality" which a personal world-view intends to understand, the reference to commonly accepted structures is only of limited importance: The reason is that such common sense structures, when used by a person for leading her life, underlie personal evaluation. Furthermore, the common sense model extends only to beliefs which find concordance among people. It never has the universality of a person's unlimited quest for reality which is exemplified in the questions this person could ask.

The personal world-view depends on experience, including personal experience. Nevertheless, one may also ask for minimal *a priori* conditions for personal world-views, which are based on personal experiences of life. The discussion about personal world-views continues to shed light on formal structures and minimal requirements for a reasonable improvement of personal world-views, especially by way of dialogue (cf. Ferré 1961, Bochenski 1965 and 1994; Riordan 1991).

Due to their basis in personal experience, personal world-views have an essentially personal element. Nevertheless (or just because of that!) a dialogue between world-views is possible and fruitful; it presupposes respect for the differences and involves the exchange of personal reasons and experiences. Therefore, the realm of admissible questions in metaphysics should not be limited a priori to questions with generally accepted answers. Metaphysics, therefore, should also direct our attention to the a priori conditions of forming and rationally improving personal world-views, | which involves personal experience.   **[44]** In a similar vein, Karl Popper described this as the task of philosophy:

> We all have our philosophies, whether or not we are aware of this fact, and our philosophies are not worth very much. But the impact of our philosophies upon our actions and our lives is often devastating. This makes it necessary to try to improve our philosophies by criticism. This is the only apology for the continued existence of philosophy, which I am able to offer. (Popper 1973, 33)

3 Some tendencies among philosophers who try to renew traditional metaphysics

Around the beginning of the 20th century, many philosophers who were interested in metaphysics welcomed the phenomenological movement as a "turn toward the things" instead of getting lost in critical reflection. This again raised the question whether such a turn could lead only to essential relations between *intentional contents*, or whether it was apt to discuss questions of *existence*. In his development of phenomenology, Martin Heidegger created the idea of a fundamental ontology. But from the viewpoint of logical empiricism, this was not an encouragement to do metaphysics!

As an alternative way to achieve better knowledge about the things as they are, some philosophers favoured "inductive metaphysics": they regarded metaphysics as the fruit of further hypotheses that reach beyond scientific hypotheses. Seen that way, metaphysics appears as a sort of very general empirical discipline.

Against this approach (and inspired by Pierre Duhem and Henri Poincaré) Jacques Maritain emphasized the methodological distinction between metaphysics and empirical sciences – a distinction which had already been explicated by Thomas Aquinas, as Pacificus Borgmann pointed out in his critique of the scientism behind inductive metaphysics (Borgmann 1934).

This distinction is associated with the difference between inductive and deductive arguments and corresponding types of explanation. The former start from experience and aim at describing its sufficient conditions, using general nomological statements. These statements

permit forecasts and can hence be tested empirically. The latter start from experienced beings and apply to them some general principles which require that some other being exists. These necessary conditions make the existence of the observed being ontologically possible.   **[45]**

Such an explanation derives its strength from an assumed general principle that states that the actuality of a being with special features presupposes the actuality of a being of a certain kind. Such principles are not conceptual necessities but express general truths concerning the world of human experience. This obviously raises a question: how do we get to know such principles? (Muck 1994, 47-48)

The critical discussion of different forms of epistemology in the first decades of the last century lead some philosophers to see the foundation of human knowledge in an immediate evidence of necessary connections of the contents of our intentions. A much discussed example was the link between essences, referred to by 'contingent being' and 'existing in virtue of a proportionate efficient cause', as this was defended in the thirties, e.g., by Josef de Vries (de Vries 1937).

An obvious difficulty of that approach was identified in the personal character of such immediate evidence. A further problem was seen in the adequate linguistic expression of it. So this procedure was challenged by hermeneutical considerations, pointing to the dependence of the verbal expression of the immediate insight on personal and cultural conditions. Analytic philosophy challenged it by the considerations concerning the problems connected with basic experiential sentences (see the debate in the Vienna Circle about the nature of protocol sentences) and of private language.

To meet such problems, Joseph Maréchal's (1878-1944) approach to develop metaphysics exploits the idea that the basic insights of metaphysics could already be operative in the development of human knowledge. In our reflection upon this process, these basic insights are to be articulated as conditions of the possibility of this knowledge. This bears a similarity to Shalkowski's above mentioned consideration that Lowe's approach should better rely on concepts developed in such a process. Although these concepts contain essences and are *a priori* insofar as they make experience possible, they are not explicitly formulated in advance of experience. They are grasped as conditions of metaphysical possibility of the things we can find in experience.

Since Maréchal asks for the conditions of the possibility of human consciousness of objects, he finds an initial similarity between his and Kant's method (Maréchal 1922-1944). But he tried to show how this transcendental approach can be further developed. According to Maréchal, Kant's restriction of knowledge to the realm of appearances/phenomena can **[46]** be | transgressed towards the unlimited field of being. This field of being is relevant for our activity, for our contact with actual reality. Maréchal's thought had an impact on the philosophies of Johannes Baptist Lotz (19031994), Karl Rahner (1904-1984), Emerich Coreth (1919-2006), Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) and many others. Their work can be understood as emphasizing different aspects of this transcendental-realist approach. Coreth, e.g., starts from reflecting upon the activity of asking questions. He critically explicates the minimal conditions of the possibility of this performance. The meanings of the concepts involved in that explication are determined in relation to the performance of asking as such. He calls this procedure a "dialectic between concept and performance (Begriff and Vollzug)" (Coreth 1968). In that way, Coreth accomplishes an operational reinterpretation of classical metaphysics without relying on an obsolete cosmology.

A comparative look at the procedures of these philosophers reveals some basic methodological elements (Muck 1968, 307-342) which have also been further explicated in the light of 20th century analytical philosophy (Muck 1969, Runggaldier 1990). Maréchal himself had already pointed to Aristotle's defence of the legitimacy of the principle of non-contradiction. For Aristotle, this principle belongs to the basic structure of a cognizing subject. It is immediately evident and indispensable for anybody who speaks and

communicates. So the content of such a sentence is (a) claimed to be evident and is (b) shown to be operative in any intellectual action. Furthermore, this fact is (c) reinforced in an indirect manner, reminding us that it is presupposed in any communication. Later on, element (b) was identified as operational analysis (Hoenen 1954) and (c) as indirect argumentation in the form of retorsion (Isaye 1954). Retorsive arguments show the inconsistency between the content of the negation of the principle and the performance of the very act of negating this principle (Muck 2009). Because such a principle expresses an operational structure, the reflection on this structure is the way to determine its meaning and its practical consequences. This reflection does not depend on a special language.

In his book *Insight* (Lonergan 1957), the Canadian philosopher Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) takes up and develops the approach of Maréchal in his own way (Muck 2010, 1324-1425). Lonergan investigated the details of the process leading to knowledge, and he did this in two steps: At the first stage (a phenomenological analysis of the process of knowing), he tried to elucidate what we are doing when we strive for knowledge. He observed a | **[47]** *recurrent operative structure* of our mental process in all different forms of knowing: starting from the experience of *data*, we try to *understand* them, and then we attempt to *affirm* what we have understood. For that purpose, we return to the data again until there are no further questions which are relevant for our understanding and our affirmations.

In a second stage of his investigation, he asks what is attained when we engage in that activity. The answer to this question arises not from an uncritically assumed model of cognition, but from the immanent operative structure of knowing which is manifested in the activity of knowing. By a kind of retorsion, Lonergan argues that there is *no knowledge without that recurrent operative structure of cognitional activity* he had observed in his phenomenological analysis. (The same, by the way, holds also for the reflection upon this activity itself.) He then shows that one cannot in principle deny the *objective validity* of the results of that process. Doing this, he clarifies the core meaning of "objective validity" in terms of the operative structure itself. For Lonergan, the operative structures are not themselves knowledge, but they are the condition of the possibility of knowledge and of its organization. The expression of our awareness of these conditions might be dependent on language and culture, but the operative meaning of them has *intercultural importance*.

The variety of different directions of investigation, which has led to the development of different sciences with their own principles, has its roots in this process, too. For Lonergan, these principles are heuristic structures for dealing with the various questions which life prompts. Those structures are involved in the acts of special questions and investigations as their presuppositions.

Lonergan's account of the operative structures of knowing and of its relationship to retorsive justification helped to make clear the logical structure of Maréchal's transcendental method with its operative and retorsive elements. It also helped to make explicit and to justify the claim for objective validity underlying human knowledge. It does so by providing an operational criterion for affirming knowledge as valid, namely, its stability against all relevant questions (Muck 1969).

Can the indicated procedure help to improve our personal outlook on the world and the ways we speak about it? Is a useful combination of the indicated methodological elements possible which might be fruitful for the task of metaphysics?   **[48]**

4 Suggestions for metaphysical analysis

If metaphysics should assist us in coping better with questions that concern the beliefs which underlie the conduct of our life, then it seems natural to pay special attention to difficulties which appear as puzzles or antinomies. Their critical appraisal starts against the background of our previous cognitional practice, which was leading us to the personal model of reality with which we have lived so far; and against that background, we also discover those conflicting sentences which prompt our questions for truth.

Let us start with the experience that we are sometimes confronted with opinions which seem to constitute reliable beliefs but oppose each other. Examples could be beliefs we hold, or experiences which seem to contradict well-founded expectations, or surprising statements of people whom we regard as reliable and serious in their views. Such experiences can lead to a process of critical appraisal of the conflicting beliefs. In my view, such processes can be understood as exemplifications of Maréchal's and Lonergan's ideas.

The process of a critical appraisal of our often insufficient grasp of reality may start with the formulation of oppositions between beliefs both of which seem to be justified. My discussion of a simple example is intended to elucidate the structure of a process that could be called "integrating synthesis". Lowe seems to intend something similar when he writes:

Perhaps the most fundamental principle governing truth is the principle of noncontradiction, according to which a proposition cannot be both true and false – or, as it might more strictly be put, a proposition and its negation cannot be both true. (Lowe 2003, 121)

[…] reality is fundamentally one: that there is just one sum total of existence – one world – which is the same for all thinkers, places and times. And my suggestion is that, to the extent that we are committed to the unity of truth, at least in as much as this amounts to an unconditioned acceptance of the principle of non-contradiction, we are committed, in short, to realist metaphysics. Fortunately, this still leaves plenty of scope for many forms of pluralism [...].Our ontology will admit of multitudes within The One". (Lowe 2003, 123)

A possible start for such a process may be situations where we ask which of two or more conflicting sentences might be true. In order to give an idea of the methodologically relevant considerations which can make insights explicit, I will make use of a simple, old and rather innocent example. (Wolfgang Stegmüller also used it to draw the attention to the **[49]** way how we | speak about "reality".) It is the situation that a stick which is partly dipped into water looks buckled.

Obvious questions like "is the stick really buckled?", "is it true that it is buckled?" may arise (see 4.1 below). Our reaction could be that we try to solve the questions by touching the stick (4.2) and, in recalling some elements of optics, to understand that the stick is not really buckled (4.3), but only appears buckled (4.4).

What is involved in this understanding of the situation and our reaction? Let me sketch its epistemological and ontological implications.

4.1 The challenge of opposite statements – the implicit ideal of reliable cognition

Firstly, we may become aware of the fact that our surprise reveals our tacit conviction that it cannot be true that (under the same circumstances) the stick is buckled and is not buckled.

Furthermore, this can be understood as the application of an ideal norm for reliable beliefs: according to this norm, a reliable belief is one for which no question which is relevant for this belief is open. (A note on my terminology: A "relevant question for belief p" is a question that admits of at least one possible answer that is incompatible with p. And a relevant question is "open" if it has not yet been ruled out that one of those incompatible answers is the reliable answer.) This norm might be seen as a postulate for our cognitive activities if we come across oppositions and wonder what should be accepted.

Comparing this postulate with our actual cognitive practice in everyday life, we have to add specifications. We usually cannot check all relevant questions and decide whether some of them are still open. In practical life we have learned to restrict the relevant questions to those for which we have a prudent doubt which is based on our experience so far. Put in another way, for such questions there is a danger of error and not just the bare possibility of

error. Let us call these questions "positively relevant questions for p". This restriction is a matter of prudence: subjects who are unable to prudently distinguish between possibility and danger of an error would not have survived up to now.

This epistemic quality of beliefs, which we use in practical life, was called *hypothetical certitude* (by Josef de Vries) and *practical certitude* (by Karl Popper [1973, 78]): For such beliefs, the relevant questions are me-|thodically | restricted to the positively **[50]** relevant questions. This certitude is hypothetical, as it is dependent upon the realm of experience which a per-son could have taken into consideration. It is also dependent on the beliefs which are involved in our judgements about the conflicting statements – including our beliefs about sound ways of arguing.

4.2 Attention to the support of the statements. An operational explication of "reality" and "truth"

The same hypothetical character also affects our beliefs in the model of reality which has guided our life so far and which had also been used as support of the conflicting statements. This can be seen as the reason for the limitations of this model. These limitations become manifest when we meet inconsistencies with other investigations or opinions – we then begin to develop a closer interest in reality by gaining a critical distance to the beliefs we use in practical life. We then pay critical attention to the support for our beliefs in order to find out whether these beliefs have perhaps transcended the limits of their hypothetical validity within the model we used.

So we ask for the truth of our beliefs, and hence, we quest for reality and being and not merely our opinions about it. But what do we understand by "truth", "reality" and "being" in such a context?

We may first note the parallels between the use of "reality" or "being" and the use of "truth". This makes us aware of a use of "true" which requires that the state of affairs represented by the proposition is real and not fictitious. Or, as Aristotle put it, a statement is true when it says what is of that which there is.

Next, we may consider that the question for truth arose when relevant questions beyond the recognized limits turned up. This insinuates that the truth of a proposition is a minimal condition for the reliability of corresponding beliefs.

When the support of a belief leads to practical certitude we may propose to say the following: within the (hypothetical) limits of the positively relevant questions, and for the practical purposes of ordinary life, we can trust in this belief as if it were true. Or in other words: within these limits, the model we use for our ordinary life can be taken as a model that matches with reality. But becoming aware of the limits and posing questions beyond these limits, e.g., questions for truth and reality, we distinguish between the reality according to the model and reality as it is. This corresponds to the | distinction between positively **[51]** relevant questions and all relevant questions. This distinction may at first glimpse appear as a merely epistemological matter. But it should also be seen in its ontological importance.

In our buckled-stick-example, we distinguished between how "it appears" and what "really is the case". This correlates with the difference between restricting the relevant questions to a limited range and considering all relevant questions without limitation. Hence, statements for which the relevant questions are not limited are intended as statements about what really is whereas statements about how things appear express that this holds only for a restricted realm of relevant questions.

It is important to keep this distinction in mind because even when we only describe appearances, we use a language by which we usually intend to say what there is. So the restriction must be made explicit if it is not just obvious from the circumstances. If a restricted affirmation only intends to describe the content of appearance, this "brackets" the ontological

value suggested by ordinary use and leaves it open to further specification. Since such a specification would consist in considering further relevant questions, this shows the ontological priority of the realm of being compared with that of appearance or other methodically restricted scopes of our claims.

This should also be kept in mind when evaluating the familiar "realist" objection that a reflection on necessities of thinking cannot gain any knowledge about reality. But this objection relies on a common sense understanding of "reality" which is in need of critical improvement. The operational criterion of validity relies on the performance of activities that are also exercised in formulating the very objection, i.e,. by asking, affirming and reflecting on our activities. These activities do not only work within our every-day model of reality; they are also involved in critically reflecting it. Therefore, our understanding of "reality" should not be restricted to that model of reality which is to be improved. It should be formed according to the more general activity by which we are enabled to scrutinize the common sense model. And this understanding has been developed in the given example of an integrating synthesis.   **[52]**

4.3 Understanding the initial problem – improving our experiential knowledge

Hence, if we are intending to talk about "reality" or "being", this involves statements with an unrestricted domain of relevant questions. Of course, such claims are again open to relevant questions, in the sense that they can be criticised and undergo further development. (I stress this since meta-physical statements, like any other statements, are in principle open to revision.)

The example above suggested a cautious use of "reality". Similar caution is called for regarding words like "being", "appearance", etc., which are used to formulate appropriate differentiations. They determine a horizon of questioning, but they do not yield the answers. Therefore, they can be called "heuristic concepts". They would be misunderstood if they were associated with special features which are borrowed from an inadequate model of this realm. But they may imply elements which are a priori conditions under which something can possibly be an object within this horizon of questioning. But thereby it is not decided in advance what will be detected here in detail. Asking detailed questions is the way in which reality becomes present – or at least aspects of reality, corresponding to the horizon. So the procedure proposed here is not to be misunderstood as a kind of idealism, and it does not just lead to our construction of reality. What it shows is the way how reality becomes present in prompting and answering our relevant questions. This is the way how beings like us can become acquainted with a reality to which they stand in conscious and active relations.

In our example, one statement of the initial opposition (namely the claim that the stick is buckled) is refuted by further experiments with the stick, e.g., by touching it, and by explaining the visual impression of a buckled stick via optical laws. As a consequence, the opposing statement "the stick is not buckled" can be reaffirmed, whereas the former one can be reaffirmed in a revised way: "it just appeared as if the stick was buckled", thereby restricting the range of relevant questions. I would call this a critically positive interpretation: It is an interpretation since it is a reconstruction of the meaning of a statement. It is a positive one since it emphasises what can duly be affirmed in view of the given support. And it is critical, since it adjusts the meaning to the limits of supported validity. Thereby it | **[53]** improves our apprehension of reality. By this consideration an ontologically relevant differentiation became manifest.

4.4 Solution of the problem – integrating the criticism of its assumptions   into our way to apprehension of reality

The process by which critically positive interpretations are developed may be called an integrating synthesis. It elaborates the a priori conditions by which the limits of our knowledge can be understood, and it elucidates what "validity" means within these limits. It thereby develops elements of a basic structure of reality, and those elements in turn delineate what can be known in detail by further experience in the various realms of questioning.

At the same time, this synthesis distinguishes a priori elements, which are necessary conditions for any representation of reality (call them pure a priori), from merely methodological or even subjective a priori conditions, which result both from particular personal interests or from a limitation for practical purposes dependent on previous experience. To identify limitations imposed by such special forms of a priori conditions is an important result of the process of integrating synthesis. Chief occasions for becoming aware of such limitations are oppositions which become apparent in a dialogue. This fact suggests that diligence in pursuing special ways of investigation must be combined with an evaluation of their results: Only such an evaluation can determine what they can contribute to our orientation in life. Interesting examples of attempts to finding an integrating synthesis of opposing views can be found, e.g., in the ongoing discussions about the relations between science and religion or between naturalist and non-naturalist worldviews (Jacobs 2008).

To summarize, I have tried to take up Lowe's suggestion to go beyond mere opinions about reality and to turn to reality, to the essence of beings, by investigating minimal conditions for the possibility of the existence of beings. Recalling similar endeavours in analytical and classical metaphysics, I tried to indicate ways how metaphysics should assist our understanding of the connection between our life-world and the underlying reality. I also suggested to make the understanding of essences explicit by means of analyzing activities which make use of these insights.

[54]

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