Towards a PL-Metaphysics of Perception: In Search of the Metaphysical Roots of Constructivism

Konrad Werner • Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland • konrad.t.werner/at/gmail.com

Introduction

1 Cognition, i.e., experiencing, thinking, acting, speaking, etc., is grounded in a subject’s interaction with the world, but on the other hand, the world is constituted, at least in some of its aspects, by the interaction with the cognizing (hence experiencing, thinking, etc.) subject. This seems to be the simplest credo of the philosophical movement, including, on the one hand, phenomenology (Husserl 1901, 1913, 1976; Merleau-Ponty 1965; and most recently Vörös 2014) and radical constructivism on the other (Glasersfeld 1991, 2001; Riegler 2007, 2012). It also includes, to some extent, the ideas of enactive and embodied cognition (Varela, Thompson & Rosh 1991, O’Regan & Noë 2001), and the idea of extended mind (Clark & Chalmers 1998). They all proclaim a mutual subject-world (or mind-world) dependence: neither component of this pair can be fully apprehended without the other. As such, these conceptions are opposed either to realism, regardless of its type, i.e., to the belief that the world is independent of cognition, or to the belief that the subject, as a kind of separate sub-domain, is the locus of thoughts, feelings, decisions, etc., more or less independently of the world. Finally – they may be opposed to both views.

2 I am going to focus on radical constructivism (RC) as originally outlined by Ernst von Glasersfeld. I argue that RC needs metaphysical grounding. However, this claim contradicts what von Glasersfeld explicitly stated and that is why the relation between RC and metaphysics in general will be investigated in the first place. In fact this metaphysical ground can be found deep in the tradition of Western thought, including inter alia Plato and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Possibly it can be found in each of them only partially, nevertheless these parts are significant. However, surprisingly, in the Platonic-Leibnizian tradition, the mutual mind-world dependence is fully acknowledged within realism. In other words, I am going to argue that a realism that accepts the fact that mind and world are an inseparable pair is possible.

3 Here is the plan. Let me first say a few words about the concepts and ideas that this study will explore: perception, metaphysics, radical constructivism, and fi-
Philosophy of perception and metaphysics

Perception

"5" One might at first presume that the term “PL-metaphysics” is a specific modifier, thanks to which all collocated terms acquire some non-ordinary meaning. Quite the contrary. "Perception" means here what is usually meant — this is a process by virtue of which the world becomes apparent or accessible via the senses.

"6" Philosophy of perception focuses on questions such as: Is perception intentional? Does it have conceptual or non-conceptual, propositional or non-propositional content? And most importantly — what exactly is perceived: an independent reality or entities such as impressions or sense data? If the existence of such entities is admitted, do they somehow relate to an independent reality or is reality completely inaccessible (Price 1932; Smith 1982; Robinson 1994; Foster 2000; Brewer 2007)? It is clear that philosophical investigations of perception can hardly be isolated from a broader context, since they essentially concern the status of the perceived (more generally — cognized), apparent world. Philosophy of perception is thus closely related to metaphysics (Goates 2007 even uses the term “metaphysics of perception”) — the most abstract discipline of human thought, which asks questions about such seemingly obvious issues as being and existence: What exists? How and why? What is possible?

Metaphysics

"7" Traditionally, as regards a subject-matter and goals, metaphysics investigates all things, as Michael Loux (2006) nicely puts it, from the perspective of their being beings. Metaphysicians strive to uncover the architecture of the whole realm of beings (qua beings), and their nature (once again — the nature of all beings qua beings, not the nature of some beings e.g., qua chemical complexes), i.e., what they are (Kit Fine 2012b distinguishes the “what” questions of metaphysics from the “how” questions of science).

"8" Note, however, that as such, i.e., capturing the realm of beings as a whole, metaphysical concepts do not reveal any order inside the world, as does e.g., the folk taxonomy of animals found in the closest surrounding, or the scientific taxonomy of living creatures, or finally the periodic table of chemical elements. In other words, metaphysics does not pose questions within any particular linguistic or conceptual framework. This fact has been famously pointed out by Rudolf Carnap (1950). On the other hand, these taxonomies and tables do reveal a particular organization inside the world because this world already presents itself as a universe of substances, processes, relations, etc. Thus metaphysics, rather useless when it comes to empirically investigated, internal conceptual organizations, specifies what constitutes the world as knowable domain; in the Aristotelian, reduplicative manner, what constitutes the world qua world, and qua reference of cognition.

"9" Since the word “world” may have many differing senses, and since perception is my principal issue here, I’m going to speak of the perceived world (more generally, cognized world or cognized reality), which is defined ostensively: it refers to the realm of ordinary things around me. Hence from this standpoint (of course there are different standpoints), metaphysical concepts uncover a basic architecture or skeleton of the cognized reality; a skeleton that makes reality changeable (think of renovations, redecorations, etc.), but it is more or less stable over time. Analogously, metaphysical concepts do not refer to any specific elements or parts of the actually cognized world; they refer to the fundamental arrangement that makes reality cognizable (this approach to metaphysics has been inspired by Kołodzieczyk 2006).

"10" Let me give an analogy. Someone might complain that the walls in the old building of the British Museum have hardly changed over the last two hundred years, while the paintings on them have been changed constantly. Note, however, that thinking of paintings together with walls, despite their apparent collocation, is a category mistake. Walls, walkways, corridors, together with the ideas of a curator, form the arranged universe in which a work of art can be presented. They make a presentation possible. Arrangement of this kind is also changeable (think of renovations, redecorations, etc.), but it is more or less stable over time. Analogously, metaphysical concepts do not refer to any specific elements or parts of the actually cognized world; they refer to the fundamental arrangement that makes reality cognizable (this approach to metaphysics has been inspired by Kołodzieczyk 2006).

"11" Hence, when I speak of metaphysics and the metaphysical grounding of RC, I have in mind the metaphysics of perception; in other words, the metaphysics of the perceived world, and more generally, the metaphysics of the cognized world. To put it in Aristotelian terms, this investigation does not refer to the study of being qua being, which might be called general metaphysics, but to the study of perceived things qua beings.

"12" Someone might argue that in doing metaphysics, we have to presuppose the existence of an “objective” reality; that metaphysics is essentially about “the objective,” as opposed to “the subjective.” I disagree. What do “objective” and “subjective” mean and why are they opposed? Must they be opposed? Any answers to these questions depend on what kind of general architecture one imposes on the world; thus the answer, or different variants thereof, result from metaphysical

2] Provided the artist did not intend otherwise — as in the case of Edward Kraśnicki’s installation “Intervention 8” at the National Museum in Warsaw.
considerations. Metaphysics does not presuppose an objective reality as it must first explain what we mean by ‘objective reality.’

Finally, it should be mentioned that although metaphysics is frequently distinguished from ontology, here, for the sake of simplicity and to unify the terminologies used by different thinkers, these two terms will be used interchangeably.

**PL-metaphysics**

Perzanowski (2009a, 2009b) uses this term in reference to the metaphysical tradition associated first of all with Plato (therefore “P”), Leibniz (therefore “L”), and finally with a philosopher who is not celebrated by the term itself – Ludwig Wittgenstein. I am going to give more detailed characterization of this tradition in the next section, focusing attention exclusively on the “founding fathers” – Plato and Leibniz. I would like to mention here just one thing. In Perzanowski’s diagram of PL-metaphysics (Perzanowski 2009a), we find almost all the great philosophers and logicians as well as a number of scientists (e.g., Isaac Newton, Dmitri Mendeleev and Albert Einstein). Perzanowski does so purposely (he recognized PL as a mainstream of philosophical and scientific thought), though this is not the place to discuss it. However for the metaphysiological purposes of this particular study, such broad account of PL-metaphysics is completely useless because it includes both Plato and Aristotle, Rene Descartes and John Locke, Leibniz and David Hume, and moreover, inter alia, Edmund Husserl, Gottlob Frege, and Alfred Tarski. Hence, it seems that the notion of PL-metaphysics does not distinguish one particular tradition of rational thought (the PL) from another rational paradigm (non-PL), but it does separate rational and plausible inquiries (PL) from the domain of dark irrationality and dead cognitive ends (non-PL). If so, someone might naturally ask about the criteria used to assign a particular thinker to PL rather than another tradition.

Hence my proper intention is to take up the idea of PL-metaphysics as proposed by Perzanowski but in a narrow sense – closely related to Plato and Leibniz – and to find out whether it has anything interesting to offer in the field of philosophy of perception. My contention is that it does have something interesting to offer there. In other words, on the assumption that there is, as Perzanowski believed, an essential link between Plato and Leibniz on purely metaphysical level, I ask how this metaphysical thread conditions philosophical accounts of perception, and more generally the mind-world relation. I must also stress that I take full responsibility for what I say, since Perzanowski, absorbed in general ontology and logic, did not investigate perception.

**Radical constructivism**

According to von Glasersfeld, RC is based, inter alia, on the recognition made by skeptics, that we can have no certain knowledge of the real world, because, even if we could discover how our knowledge is derived from experience, there is no way of discovering how our experience might be related to what is before we experience it. (Glasersfeld 1991: 2)

on instrumentalism in the philosophy of science; and, finally, on the evolutionary approach to knowledge, according to which “the evolution of knowledge could be mapped by using the central concepts of Darwin’s theory, namely natural selection and adaptation” (ibid: 3).

Von Glasersfeld distinguishes experienced reality, i.e., what I call the perceived (cognized) world, and the ontological reality, i.e., reality as it is in itself. The latter is just a postulate or theoretical fiction, since we cannot have any knowledge of it. Knowledge, and experienced reality, are constructs that do not adequately represent ontological reality; moreover – and this is the crucial point – representation is not their proper goal:

the function of cognition is adaptive in the biological senses. […] What matters is not to match the world, but to fit into it in spite of whatever obstacles or traps it might present. Applied to cognition, this means that ‘to know’ is not to possess ‘true representations’ of reality, but rather to possess ways and means of acting and thinking that allow one to attain the goals one happens to have chosen. (ibid: 4)

Hence RC does not only claim that knowledge and experienced reality are constructs; in fact, it proposes a redefinition of knowledge. RC proposes “to give up the notion that knowledge ought to be a veridical ‘representation’ of a world as it exists’ prior to being experienced (that is, ontological reality)” (ibid: 4). In this context, Alexander Riegler distinguishes dualistic constructivism, according to which “constructed mental structures gradually adapt to the structures of the real world” (Riegler 2012: 240) and non-dualistic constructivism, such as RC. According to the latter reality should be rather conceived of as a “black box,” whereas mental structures are “the result of trying to find regularities in its input–output behavior” (Riegler 2012: 244). Moreover, these regularities are not presented in the flow of experiences as such” (Riegler 2012: 245), but rather they are created by cognition. Dualism means here that there is a feasible and plausible distinction between mental structures and real structures. Konrad Lorenz was surely a dualistic constructivist, who, as von Glasersfeld outlines,

incidentally falls into the same trap when he argues that the fact that human organisms have evolved and successfully use the categories of space and time, proves that these categories pertain to an ‘objective’ reality. (Glasersfeld 1991: 4)

However, it is crucial to note that RC does not deny the ontological reality. Von Glasersfeld confesses:

As a constructivist, I have never said (nor would I ever say) that there is no ontic world, but I keep saying that we cannot know it. (ibid: 5)

All these claims, if I am not mistaken, justify the title of the paper that I am referring to, “Knowing without Metaphysics.” Von Glasersfeld thus links metaphysics with the idea of ontological reality. If that is true, one might argue that the idea of a metaphysical basis of RC is flawed from the very beginning; RC does not have, and cannot have, any metaphysical basis, as the very position from which it springs is essentially anti-metaphysical. Von Glasersfeld puts it explicitly:

I emphasize once more that Radical Constructivism makes no ontological claims and is intended as no more, but also no less, than a useful model of knowledge and the activity of knowing. (ibid: 12)
Constructivism  
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"21" However, when the metaphysics of perception and of the perceived world is taken into account, the distinction between experienced reality and ontological reality itself turns out to be metaphysical. Let me stress that I am not arguing that if we are unable to refer to ontological reality then we must not even use the term. Philosophy needs concepts that balance on the very edge of our rational capacity to describe that edge, i.e., the limits of our rational capacity and what lies beyond. This is not the place to discuss their logical status. I have another thing in mind, namely, provided the reference to “experienced reality” and “ontological reality” is somehow fixed, if the very distinction is made, then we enter the area of metaphysics. This is precisely the metaphysical differentiation of two realms, as it imposes the most abstract conceptual scheme on the world we live in, conceived of as a whole, and not just on some part of it. Someone might reasonably argue that the distinction does not presuppose any theses, and that only theses can make something metaphysical. But there is a thesis – let me call it the separation thesis: experienced reality has nothing in common with ontological reality. Heinz von Foerster (2003) puts it as follows, however using von Glasersfeld's terms:

"Although surprising, this should not come as a surprise, for indeed 'out there' there is no light and no color, there are only electromagnetic waves; 'out there' there is no sound and no music, there are only periodic variations of the air pressure; 'out there' there is no heat and no cold, there are only moving molecules with or less than mean kinetic energy, and so on." (Foerster 2003: 215)

"22" Von Foerster must have some idea of "out there" in order to be able to claim (or even to suppose) what is and what is not out there. And any idea of "out there" – whether realist or constructivist – is metaphysical as long as it is an element of the most fundamental conceptual architecture that we impose on the mind and world. Moreover, when von Glasersfeld states that there is no cognitive access to ontological reality from experienced reality, he presupposes some kind of relation that might at least obtain between them. I mean that he must already have some idea of such a relationship in order to deny its occurrence. And once again, this idea belongs to metaphysics. In fact, this is the core metaphysical enterprise: think of the world around you as a whole and then try to locate this familiar world against some background. Now, the difference between RC and Plato, for instance, is that the latter believed that we are capable of uncovering this background (in the case of Plato – the realm of ideas), whereas RC, much like apophatic theologians, claims that we are completely ignorant in this respect. Yet this difference is a difference inside the realm of metaphysics, at least as is conceived of here. And placing the known world against the background of the unknown world is what "traditional" philosophers have done since the very beginning of philosophy and science. The metaphysical context of the constructivism–realism dispute should therefore be uncovered. This is what I mean by metaphysical grounding of RC, and at the starting point I mean nothing other than this.

PL-metaphysical oppositions

"23" I am going to compare PL-metaphysics with the tradition that for the present purposes I would like to call DL-metaphysics (to remain in the same convention). "D" celebrates Descartes, and "L" celebrates Locke.

"24" Perzanowski used to begin his lectures on general ontology with a list of fundamental conceptual oppositions, which organize the cognized world on the most abstract level (Perzanowski 1990, 2009b). Let me note that introducing conceptual oppositions does not imply dualism in Riegler's (2012) sense. According to my understanding, "do not dualize" means roughly "do not use conceptual distinctions, organizing our thinking, as iron curtains really dividing reality into separated parts!" And moreover, "be aware of your distinctions, otherwise you might forget that they are distinctions, not true walls!" As a matter of fact, I would like to use some of these distinctions explicitly – explore them in order to disarm some of their dualizing users. Here is a short list, essential to the subject matter of the present inquiry:

A: simple – complex

"25" For any given object there is the question of whether it can be decomposed. Any two objects can be compared with respect to their complexity. This is the cornerstone of both scientific and philosophical thought: analysis (decomposition), by way of which suitable (with respect to a given method of analysis) simples are obtained; and synthesis, which explores the way in which complexes are build up from these simples (Perzanowski 2004). From the PL-metaphysical angle, the cognized reality is a realm of facts or events (Wittgenstein 1922 outlines this thesis in the opening passages); thus – a realm of complexes.

B: primary – secondary

"26" For any given object (quality or phenomenon) there is also the question of whether it is grounded in anything else; if so, then how is it grounded – is it reducible or emergent (thus rather irreducible)? To put it simply – philosophers (and ordinary people as well) generally tend to distinguish things that exist in a somewhat stronger sense than others, be it substances (physical vs. mental or physical vs. ideal) or qualities (primary properties vs. secondary properties; relational properties vs. internal properties), etc.

C: intelligible – unintelligible

"27" It seems that the human intellect naturally singles out objects or domains in virtue of their rational organization (e.g., harmony, purposefulness, fitness, etc.). Due to this organization, they are accessible for the intellect. However, this opposition has not only an epistemic aspect (that something is accessible) but also an ontological one (why is it accessible? What makes it accessible?). Perzanowski did not mention this opposition explicitly, but it seems crucial – especially the ontological aspect. It is in this context that the ancients introduced the notion of logos (intelligible aspect of reality); in the same spirit, PL-metaphysics distinguishes causes and reasons. Causation occurs inside the complex world of facts, whereas reasons may be – so to speak – external. Leibniz writes:

"Besides the world or aggregate of finite things, there is a certain One which is dominant […] For the dominant One of the universe not only rules
the world but fabricates or makes it; it is superior to the world and, so to speak, extramundane, and hence is the ultimate reason for things. For a sufficient reason for existence cannot be found merely in any one individual thing or even in the whole aggregate and series of things.** (Leibniz 1969b: 486)

« 28 » This point is naturally connected with Leibniz's distinction between truths of reason, the opposite of which is contradiction, and truths of facts, the opposite of which does not yield contradiction but is due to the limited capacities of finite minds. However, I would like to highlight a different aspect here. It is not so much the differentiation of finite and infinite minds but the differentiation of two realms – the realm of what exists, i.e., causally correlated facts, and the realm of reasons for existence and reasons for the intelligibility of what exists. In the same vein, Plato's ideas are "extra-mundane" reasons for perceived reality. Perzanowski summarizes:

"Now, it is reasonable to think that reasons of the world, inter alia reasons for existence, can, at least in part, be out of components of the world; that a reason for being a fact need not be a fact. From an ontological point of view [...] the world therefore seems to be open with respect to its reasons. ** (Perzanowski 1994b: 170)

Hence, from the perspective of PL-metaphysics the cognized reality is a complex, secondary phenomenon based on a rational, primary stratum of simples.

« 29 » However, I am going to highlight two other threads. Perzanowski writes:

"What is given? Is everything immediately given, or is there maybe beyond the objects of our everyday cognition a hidden mechanism, reason and sense of the world around us? If the given, this particular fragment of reality in which we live, and the whole reality is – as we suppose – a result of a hidden order, then what is this hidden mechanism of reality? What is the reason for this apparent complexity? ** (Perzanowski 1994a: 271; my translation)

« 30 » Firstly, it is clear from the above quotations, that according to PL-metaphysics, the apparent world is based on a hidden foundation – a hidden, rational stratum of being or substance (the realm of ideas pos-
tulated by Plato or the realm of monads postulated by Leibniz), i.e., a rational base of what might be called, following Wilfrid Sellars (1962), the manifest image of the world. Hence I propose to add the following pair:

D: apparent – hidden

« 31 » Secondly, it is clear that if the apparent (cognized) world springs from hidden fundamentals, then the former should be conceived of as an actualization of the latter, i.e., of some potency. Hence, there is another pair (the Aristotelian one):

E: actual – potential

« 32 » For any given apparent object there is (a partially recognized) family of its potential actions, reconstructions, its further development and its relations with other items; in other words, what may happen to the object and what the object can do by virtue of its nature. And any apparent object itself can be conceived of as an actualization of some potency.

DL-metaphysical modifications and PL-metaphysics (partially) restored

« 33 » DL-metaphysics starts with the same set of oppositions, but with one important and well-known innovation. Namely the opposition of an internal realm of mind (the realm of ideas or representations) and so-called external reality. Hence, let me add one more pair, F: internal – external.

« 34 » Philosophy, together with science, owes this innovation to Descartes (according to Husserl 1976 and Hilary Putnam 1987 to Galileo as well) and his methodic skepticism; his search for the foundation of all possible knowledge (Descartes 1996); his theory of perception, influenced by the optics which developed at that time (Yolton 1996; Osler 2008; De Rosa 2010); and finally – though this notion must not be considered separately from the others – to his mind-body dualism. The conscious mind finds the foundation of all possible knowledge in the primitive fact of its own existence (cogito ergo sum), and in the internal realm of innate ideas (the idea of God). Together with the discovery of my own indubitable existence, I discover that everything else becomes dubitable; not only access to external reality, but also the existence of that reality. The empiricist Locke rejects innate ideas; however, he accepts the overall paradigm proposed by Descartes. As Guido König (1973) neatly pointed out, according to the Cartesian paradigm, the conscious mind is like a closed box filled with ideas, impressions, representations. Interaction with the external world (if any) via the senses, on the other hand, is like a foreign correspondence; the correspondence between two different, separated kingdoms (Ryle 1949). This is the cornerstone of modern, dualistic epistemology (and correlated disciplines) in the first place, but also, to a large extent, of modern metaphysics (recall, e.g., the mental – physical or primary – secondary distinctions), and even of ethics (e.g., the sharp dichotomy of facts and values).

« 35 » The dichotomy external reality – internal realm of mind could hardly be overrated. In fact, the dichotomy even works as a specific modifier, giving a new meaning to some of the other oppositions listed. Let me examine some examples of such modification, turning first to D. In DL-metaphysics, being hidden means being outside the mind. To put it even more emphatically – an object is hidden because it is outside the mind, and that, precisely, is what being hidden means. Being apparent means being inside the mind and – similarly – being precisely so. Hence, according to the DL tradition from Descartes all the way down to Husserl (Zahavi 2003), only my own internal mental machinery of ideas or experiences is fully accessible and perfectly transparent to me. Moreover, according to the dominant, empiricist version of DL, appearances of external things are not only conditioned by my cognitive apparatus; they must be mediated by some distinct mental objects or states usually called representations (e.g., recall the idea of phenomenal properties proposed by Sydney Shoemaker 2006; it seems at first that the story is about objects in the world, however it turns out that in fact Shoemaker refers to some special features of representations).

« 36 » There is a different understanding of the apparent-hidden opposition in the PL tradition. The thought processes of ancient thinkers are to a large extent unin-
telligible from the current standpoint. However, in this particular case, contemporary philosophy is in a fortunate position. In the common repertoire of both, philosophers and ordinary people, there is at least one metaphor, which was also crucial to ancients – the metaphor of light.

« 37 » In the sixth book of the Republic, Plato (2008) says roughly something like this: material things are visible because they are illuminated by the sun, so analogously, there must be something “illuminating” things and making them intelligible, i.e., accessible for the intellect. A thing may be “seen” by an intellect. After all, the intelligibility of the world – however obvious it appears to a profane observer – is a true mystery, a striking phenomenon, which has fueled philosophical reflection from Heraclitus all the way down to R. Penrose. According to Plato, the highest idea, the Good, is the source of this rational “light.”

« 38 » The PL-metaphysical conception of reality and knowledge is then essentially presentational, which has thoroughgoing consequences when it comes to the problem of perception. However, presentationalism is not merely opposed to representationalism; it does not equal naïve realism, where appearance is identical to reality. Presentation, in this Platonic sense, is the rational illumination of things, as a result of which a thing becomes intelligible. PL-metaphysicians looking for additional intuitions regarding D (apparent – hidden), refer rather to C (intelligible – non-intelligible), than to F (internal – external). The difference could hardly be overrated.

« 39 » Hence, according to PL-metaphysics, being apparent metaphorically means being in the light or being illuminated (in some way). Consequently – to use the same metaphor – being hidden does not mean being outside, but being in the dark. Hence, it is the circumstances of a given location (e.g., lack of light) that are responsible for being hidden, i.e., inaccessible for cognition, rather than the location itself (e.g., being outside the mind). Note that a somewhat PL-metaphysical account of mind as a light, not as a bucket (of ideas, sense data or information) is also proposed by Karl Popper (1972).

« 40 » Let me now consider C (intelligible – unintelligible). The dichotomy of external reality vs. internal sphere of mind finally forces DL-metaphysics, however not so much Descartes himself, to identify, or at least closely correlate the intelligible with the mental. This means that we owe the intelligibility of the world to the actions of mind. According to empiricism, causal stimulation of the senses produces impressions or sense data, and on this experiential basis mind builds up an intelligible representation of the world. Recall also the influential idea of Sellars (1956) and John McDowell (1996), which might be seen as a critique of empiricism from a DL-metaphysical standpoint – they oppose the space of reasons to the given and claim that the latter is in fact a myth. It seems that space of reasons is the space of human understanding, arguments, deliberation, etc. Meanwhile, the fragments quoted from Leibniz’s and Perzanowski’s works, as well as Plato’s metaphor of light clearly show that from the PL-metaphysical perspective, all reality – i.e., the mental and the physical, the internal and the external – is the space of reasons, thus, in a sense, the domain of intellect; a domain pervaded by intellect and/or illuminated by intellect (again – illuminated in some way, thus uncovering some of its aspects). This was quite natural way of thinking in antiquity and the middle ages (Toulmin 1981, King 2007, Lagerlund 2007, Tweedale 2007; Knuttila 2008).

« 41 » However, in the modern era a relation between this intelligible aspect of reality and cognizing intellect is not clear. The distinction between PL and DL could improve clarity in this respect. Note that Immanuel Kant (1999), Husserl (1901, 1913), and Wittgenstein (1922), together with Sellars and McDowell, all claim that the cognized, intelligible reality cannot be separated or effectively extracted from intellectual activity as a raw thing in itself. All that can be accessed already presents itself in some way to fit a particular intellectual capacities. Similar views come from the constructivist tradition – the world we live in, the environment, comes to existence due to cognition (Gläserfeld 1991, 2001; Foerster 2003; Riegler 2007). But what status does this presentation (the environment) have? It seems that it is precisely the DL-metaphysical claim that the intelligible = the mental that is responsible for so many misunderstandings when it comes to the transcendental idealism of Kant or Husserl. Since the domain of thought is identical to the domain of someone's mental life – a DL-metaphysician argues – I am unable to apprehend how it is possible for the world I live in to be conditioned by my cognitive apparatus and at the same time not be a product and a part of my mental life. However, it seems that Kant and Husserl investigated precisely how cognition constitutes the apparent world, i.e., phenomena or presentations, and at the same time did not claim that this world is produced by the mind or located inside the mind (Zahavi 2003; Allison 2006; Marshall 2013).

« 42 » In this context, it is also clear how DL-metaphysics of perception approaches A, i.e., the simple – complex opposition. The incoming data are atomized, thus they are simples with respect to the perceived world, and their meaningful organization is possible due to the cognitive capacities of the mind. Recall the sensation – perception distinction (Peacocke 1983, Aaron Ben-Zeev 1984 criticizes this distinction in a somewhat PL-metaphysical spirit, and calls it the "Dualist Approach to Perception"). Recall here Carnap’s (1928) Aufbau, i.e., the idea of “elementary experiences” and sentences referring to them – an idea which has recently been taken up by David Chalmers (2012). From this angle, the ecological theory of J. J. Gibson (1979), together with his idea of affordances, goes in the opposite direction – the incoming data are complex and, so to speak, meaningful (interestingly, this idea of meaningful data goes back to the conception of “rational impressions” proposed by the ancient Stoics: Lokke 2008).

« 43 » Finally let me look at B (primary – secondary). In light of the internal – external dichotomy, a primary object or quality is identical with an item located outside, i.e., in

3 | I am not sure what Husserlian orthodoxy would have to say about this, but in my view Husserl’s theoretical efforts can only be understood in the broader context of PL-metaphysics; or, more precisely, they can only be understood properly when we reconsider Husserl anew as being on the border between the PL and DL paradigms. Possibly Kant is also on the border. However, I would not like to discuss it here – Husserl’s and Kant’s cases are the topics for another investigation.
the physical world, existing independently, and – moreover – ready-made independently of mind. “Ready-made” (Putnam’s 1982 term) means here roughly that an item has no undetermined (open or unsaturated, so to speak) aspects or parts; that it is a complete, solid substance fully determined by its own essence.

« 44 » In this context, a secondary, i.e., phenomenological object or quality is something that exists for and in a phenomenally conscious mind. Hence, once again it is about location (broadly understood; “location” does not necessarily refer to an address in physical space – Perzanowski 1993), whereas in PL-metaphysics the difference between primary beings and secondary beings is rather a consequence of different modes of being.

« 45 » A conscious mind itself may be considered by DL-metaphysics as a secondary phenomenon as well. Reductive materialism is a clear example of this way of thinking. Admittedly materialists are sometimes willing to accept a subjective realm of phenomena; however, they clearly state that it is a reducible consequence of physical events, without relevance when it comes to scientific knowledge of primary reality. Locating materialism inside DL-metaphysics might be regarded as controversial, first of all with respect to Descartes himself. The author of “Meditations on First Philosophy” surely was not a materialist; however, he created a paradigm in which both dualism and reductive materialism have arisen. This fact is clear for John Searle (1992), who famously argues that the latter wrongly applies the inadequate vocabulary of the former, i.e., a terminology that sharply distinguishes between the mental and the physical. If these realms are already opposed on the purely conceptual level, before any empirical data come into play, then every theorist inevitably feels the urge to declare that either there are two kinds of substance, and the one is clearly distinct from the other, or – provided the dichotomy is still relevant – there is only one kind (purely physical or purely mental). Meanwhile, according to Searle, contemporary biology clearly proves that this conceptual dichotomy is itself out of date.

« 46 » Hence, in DL-metaphysics “secondary” usually means “mental,” “subjective,” or “internal,” whereas “primary” means “external,” “objective.” DL philosophers adhere to a specific, say, severability thesis, according to which the phenomenal is not real, and the real is not phenomenal. Should one then conclude that reality does not in any way appear to conscious minds? One might reasonably ask: If phenomena are not real in any sense, and if reality is not phenomenal in any of its parts, then how is access to the latter possible through the former?

PL-metaphysics of perception

« 47 » With regard to perception, one thing is clear in light of the above considerations: for DL-metaphysics, which serves as a basis of dualistic approaches to perception and cognition in general, the main problem is the accessibility of primary, objective, physical reality, located outside the mind, through secondary, subjective, mental phenomena located inside the mind. If there is any access at all, then the relationship between the internal and the external becomes a more specific issue: it must be physical and at the same time representational, i.e., representations must somehow be grounded in causation. In this context, a naïve realist will claim that we have perfect access – reality is what it seems to be. An indirect realist will not be so optimistic: our worldview is a more or less adequate, internal construct. Let me underscore the fact that naïve realism is a position inside the DL tradition, and that it is incomprehensible outside this context. The PL-metaphysician cannot be accused of being naïve realist, since he thinks in an entirely different way about the relation between phenomenal appearances and reality: neither separation nor simple identification of them is adequate.

« 48 » Aside of extremes, i.e., naïve realism on one side and idealism on the other, it may be concluded that in DL-metaphysics, perception is understood as being constituted by some kind of transmission from the external world to the internal sphere of the subject. There are many names for these transmitted items, the most popular being “impressions” and “sense data.” In the contemporary naturalized understanding: perception is constituted of physical stimulation caused by external objects, carrying information that is afterwards decoded and elaborated by the internal representational system. DL-metaphysics is thus the philosophical basis for the information-processing paradigm of cognitive science, established by Ulric Neisser (1967), and which has been recently criticized from the perspective of information-generating, constructivist paradigm (Riegler 2007).

« 49 » Let me be clear: the above critical remarks on the internal – external distinction do not mean that this conceptualization of mind and world should be abandoned. Indeed, it is very natural. The point is that being natural is not the same as being fundamental on the philosophical, conceptual level. There is no reason to treat this distinction as a basic factor determining the entire arrangement of cognized reality. It is just one of many possible oppositions functioning along the same lines. The critique applies not so much to the distinction itself, but to the privileged role that it plays in DL-metaphysics.

« 50 » What is therefore the nature of perception from the perspective of PL-metaphysics? The complete answer cannot be given in one article. Moreover it seems that the conceptual tools of PL-metaphysics of perception are, from the current perspective, less advanced than the tools of DL-metaphysics, also successfully applied by empirical science. I, however, am going to point out the general idea of PL-metaphysical account of perception. For this purpose, having in mind previously elaborated DL-metaphysical modifications, let me focus on E(actual – potential).

« 51 » Once again, from the Cartesian as well as Lockean standpoint, since external reality is ready-made, and since causation is the only relation that may occur between the external and the internal, any perceptual

4] There is a question of to what extent, for example, the internal realism of Putnam (1982, 1987) belongs to the PL tradition, but that is not the subject-matter of this investigation. I decided to focus, following Perzanowski, on Plato and Leibniz.

5] Intentional mental states referring to the external reality are, in the light of DL-metaphysics, the reverses of causation. My point is that causation is the only “link” between the external and the internal, that, so to speak, runs from the ex-
or cognitive actualizations of the external objects must take place not in these objects (ready-made means, so to speak, completed with respect to perception and cognition) but in the cogizing mind. Thus, in fact, “actual” means no more than “secondary” and “internal.” In this vein, empiricists speak of an external object’s potency to cause an experience of red or blue in the perceiving subject. This has given rise to two contemporary notions: Mark Johnston’s (1998) idea of a response-dependent property and Shoemaker’s (2006) idea of a phenomenal property.

52 How does the actual – potential distinction (with regard to perception) function in the PL tradition? Let me start from Plato. In the Theaetetus he distinguishes between two kinds of motion and then he turns his attention toward perception:

53 Does this mean that the ordinary objects encountered in everyday life are products of perceiving? Take any object x. I understand Plato’s claims in the following way: thanks to the cognitive apparatus of an observer, x is not created, but rather acquires some appearance, some “look”; in other words – x presents itself in some manner, appropriate for a given observer “as a white thing, be it stock or stone or whatever else may chance to be so colored.” Hence, not x qua x but x qua perceived arises in perception. However x qua perceived is not in the observer’s head (this is the DL-metaphysical way of thinking).

54 When it comes to perception, Aristotle seems to follow the quoted lines from the Theaetetus (here my view differs from the opinion of Simo Knuuttila 2008: 4). In De Anima we read:

55 Aristotle puts in his own technical terms the idea expressed metaphorically by Plato. On the one hand there is an x having some potency, namely a potency to be perceived in some way; on the other hand there is actualization of this potency thanks to an observer, i.e., x qua perceived. However this is not the potency to cause anything, but the potency to become something. Hence, reality – ontological reality in von Glaserfeld’s (1991) terminology – is not ready-made; it is, so to speak, open, and perception is essentially an actualization or a realization of some aspects of reality, not “foreign correspondence” between the internal domain of the observer’s mind and an external, distant kingdom called the “external world.”

56 Now let me turn my attention to Leibniz. Surprisingly, he can hardly be found in the numerous companions and introductions to philosophy of perception available, although in his view perception plays a significant role: first in the establishment of monads; then in the establishment of apparent world. It seems that two levels of perception can be distinguished with respect to the realm of monads:

a the level of a monad’s internal activity – here Leibniz himself speaks of percepts and perceiving when he describes the dynamics of a monad (its “life”).
b the level of a monad’s being; of what a monad is – here Leibniz speaks of “expressing the universe.” However, it is clear that this “expressing” is a way in which the universe can be recognized or viewed; hence the way in which it can be perceived, in the broadest possible sense of the term. A monad is precisely an actualized (by God) viewpoint of the universe. Being a viewpoint is the very nature of a monad:

57 Moreover, if monads do not transfer information (they are “windowless”), then perception is essentially something else than transmission. Note that interestingly, Plato, together in this respect with Aristotle, and Leibniz all think in terms of potencies and actualizations. I find this crucial. Needless to say, a breakneck synthesis of their conceptions is not my goal. I have merely pointed out a common thread when it comes to the general problem of the mind-world relation and of perception in particular.

58 Here is the general idea: according to PL-metaphysics, perception is not a transmission or, as Gilbert Ryle (1949) calls it, a “foreign correspondence” between external reality and the internal mental realm. As a result of perception, reality (ontological reality) is actualized in some way, i.e., it acquires some presentation(s) or appearance(s). Perception is metaphysically significant. By virtue of perception the apparent world comes to existence. This, however, does not mean that the perceived realm is a projection of mind, a kind of hologram; that it exists “in the head.” Antirealism of this kind – traditionally called “solipsism” – is a DL-metaphysical position. Let me recall anew the famous illustration by Thomas Nagel (1974): bats live with appearances that for them are completely unlike those for humans (due to having a cognitive apparatus unlike the human), but deriving from the same (ontological) reality. They, so to speak, actualize reality in a different manner.
It is clear now that the opposition actual – potential is crucial for the PL-metaphysical account of perception, instead of the DL-metaphysical pair internal – external. In this context, other oppositions come to play their roles too. The perceived world is a product of both: “hidden,” rationally organized, but not ready-made reality, accompanied by the repertoire of its potential appearances (i.e., potential ways of making it ready), and perceiving subjects actualizing some of these potentials; it is a product of their cooperation. This position is definitely a kind of realism (since reality is not produced by the mind and since appearances are appearances of reality), however it is, say, cooperative and non-dualistic realism (Putnam’s 1982, 1987 term “internal realism” is not good in this perspective since it still suggests the internal-external distinction). Remember that “hidden” does not mean “external”; it does not refer to a distinct realm. Instead – “hidden” marks a theoretically postulated situation or circumstance: it refers to reality, so to speak, before any appearances, i.e., reality without cognitive lighting. On the other hand, the position is a kind of constructivism by virtue of the thesis that reality is ready-made in cognition. I believe that the realism – constructivism distinction should also be conceived of in a non-dualizing manner (Völker Gadenne 2008 reconciles realism with constructivism as well). This metaphilosophical distinction must not separate two distinct discourses. It is rather a context-dependent, useful way in which differing aspects of metaphysical theories can be organized.

However, the general idea is merely a general idea – nothing more. That is why I have used the word “towards” in the title of this target article. Although based on the ideas of great thinkers, PL-metaphysics of perception, and of mind and world in general, is still ahead of us, waiting for a modern formulation. It is a challenge. But is it worth our while?

Conclusion

Does the distinction between the DL and PL tradition have any value apart from that of a purely historical categorization? Is it relevant to contemporary philosophy, metaphysics and cognitive science?

First let me point out once again that one should not think of PL, DL, and all the other debates around other conceptual oppositions as the cold war arms race. That is, as if the dispute was a total war resulting in the complete destruction of the enemy. One should rather think of these fundamental conceptual oppositions as different manners of ordering the complex cognizable universe, or as the infrastructure arranging the cognized world. Final answers – like victory in war or success in the evolutionary struggle for survival – can hardly be found in philosophy. Hence, when I claim that PL-metaphysics of perception should be reinvented, I do not say that the DL tradition must be dismissed, just as a new arrangement of paintings at a museum does not constitute the dismissal of a previous one but is rather a way to uncover a new aspect of those works of art. Hence, a reformulation of PL-metaphysics is plausible as long as a PL-metaphysical reorganization of thinking about the world enables one to uncover some new aspects of this world.

The DL paradigm has been criticized many times in the twentieth century (though of course not under this name). One thing is interesting about this critique. Namely, that mostly it could only have appeared on DL’s terms. The DL paradigm sets the conditions of acceptable critique. Drawing an exact distinction between DL and PL allows this peculiar situation at least to be recognized. Husserl’s phenomenology is the best illustration of this point. A hundred years ago, Husserl (1901, 1913) explicitly rejected the internal – external dichotomy (that is why he cannot be regarded as simply claiming that the conscious mind produces reality), while at the same time accepting one of its major consequences – the doctrine of a conscious mind’s privileged access to itself. This is one of the cornerstones of phenomenology. Take another example, already highlighted above: today, we naturally reject the mind/body dichotomy established by the DL tradition, but at the same time this rejection is constituted by a more fundamental DL dichotomy between physical reality vs. the mental realm of thoughts and experiences (Searle 1992 argues in a similar vein). According to the so-called naturalistic consensus, and against the DL tradition, a conscious mind is a product (emergent or reducible) of purely physical objects and events. However the idea of such pure physicality is indeed a DL-metaphysical one.

Similarly when it comes to cognition, there are such conceptions as “embodied cognition,” “situated cognition,” and “extended mind,” rightly stressing the fact that cognition cannot be separated from embodiment and its environmental context (Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991; Clark & Chalmers 1998; O’Regan & Noé 2001). But if one takes into account the achievements of Kant, Husserl, Wittgenstein and Putnam, together with the results of cognitive psychology, comparative psychology, ethology, and, last but not least, constructivist theoretical biology (Maturana & Varela 1980), can the environment be separated from the way it is perceived? There are enough arguments, conceptual and empirical, to prove that all worldviews – hence also the scientific views of physical and biological reality – to some extent depend on the observer’s cognitive capacities. The environment, like the mind, is not ready-made. Recall in this context the influential notion of Umwelt proposed by Jakob von Uexküll (1926): every organism lives among species-specific objects (Lorenz 1973 should be mentioned here as well). There is no environment as such; environment is always ascribed to the observer.

Finally let me note that it is especially interesting whether radical constructivism is grounded in PL or in DL. On the one hand, Riegler (2012) claims that RC breaks with the dualistic dichotomy of internal representations and external entities, and profound a new understanding of knowledge; on the other hand, however, von Glasersfeld (1991) sharply distinguishes experienced reality from ontological reality. Moreover, von Foerster (2003) describes what is ‘out there’ as opposed to experiences. I suppose that Riegler is right as regards the notion of knowledge. Consequently, RC certainly rejects the DL idea that although knowledge is built up out of experiences, in order to call anything knowledge one must appeal to the
reality behind experiences. RC strongly argues that such an appeal is not only unnecessary – it is in principle impossible. However, rejecting the DL conception of knowledge, RC seems to be still grounded in the DL understanding of experiences themselves and their thinkable relation to external (ontological) reality. Let me stress this point – note that for any \( x, y \), and for any relation \( R \), if you are keen to claim that \( R \) does not occur between \( x \) and \( y \), or even that \( R \) is impossible between \( x \) and \( y \), you must first have some idea of \( x \), of \( y \), and of \( R \). You have to know what you are talking about. And I suspect that in RC the initial ideas of experiential reality, ontological reality, and finally the list of thinkable relationships between them are in fact DL ideas. I do not call the relationships “possible”, as their possibility is to be further examined, but merely “thinkable”: you must describe some way represent an independent, ‘objective’ reality, and knowledge of it, or he has nothing to do with what ontological reality is, but can only know how to behave. Hence, a philosopher has only two options for understanding knowledge and cognition in general: representing or acting. You could not know what reality is in some other manner than by representing it. Thus, if the notion of representation is flawed, then any attempt to ask and answer “what” questions should be given up. Of course von Glasersfeld’s thesis is stronger, namely that representations are in fact impossible, but I would like to stress that he takes into consideration only representing and representations when it comes to “what” questions about reality. And this is a DL-metaphysical supposition. In light of PL, there is at least one more option: actualizing and actualization, which engages both “what” and “how” aspects.

7 To conclude: my point is that we need to rediscover PL-metaphysics to improve an understanding of this specific mutual correlation between mind and reality, of how they shape each other (see Vörös 2014 for the most recent recognition of this mutual correlation). Philosophy needs it to integrate the various data derived from many different empirical and conceptual analyzes. DL-metaphysics is hardly fit for this task, since it is characterized by a sharp separation of mind and world.

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Open Peer Commentaries on Konrad Werner’s “Towards a PL-Metaphysics of Perception”

Do We Need a Metaphysics of Perception?
Peter Gaitsch
University of Graz, Austria
peter.gaitsch/at/uni-graz.at

> Upshot • My general concern is that transferring the analysis of perception to a metaphysical and even metametaphysical level is not very helpful when it comes to justifying a certain philosophical conceptualisation of perception. To this end, a phenomenological analysis is needed. Furthermore, I point to an ambiguitiy within Werner’s correlationist account of the mind-world relation – and to a last resort for radical constructivism.

1 Konrad Werner offers an interesting, and in many respects impressive, way to approach an ancient philosophical problem, the comprehension of the mind-world relation instantiated in perception. The new approach could be labeled “metametaphysical,” for it proceeds by way of distinguishing two types of metaphysical paradigms, which date back to Descartes and Locke (“DL-metaphysics”) and to Plato and Leibniz (“PL-metaphysics”) respectively. Both paradigms work with different conceptual distinctions and put their emphasis on different aspects of perception. According to Werner’s metaphilosophical analysis, DL-metaphysics, which is prevalent in modern thinking about the mind-world relation, implies a dualistic architecture: it is dominated by the internal-external distinction (§35), where the mind is treated as a “bucket” preoccupied with its internal representations, while the world is a “ready-made” reality located outside the mind (§43). It follows that the actuality of the mind-world relation in perception is only of secondary importance, since it is only a happening of phenomenality within the cognizing mind (§51). For instance, the perception of red hair, strictly ontologically speaking, does not tell us anything about some being in the world, but only about our state of mind, since colour belongs to the perceiving subject. Hence, phenomenality and reality are deemed strictly separated when treated ontologically (§46). Nevertheless, this ontological view still allows for different epistemological views, since DL-metaphysics is not committed to a certain kind of constructivism but is also compatible with native realism (§47).

2 Against this representational view on perception, the author introduces PL-metaphysics, which is focused on the actual-potential distinction, and hence conceptualises perception in terms of actualisation of reality (§58). Within this framework, the perception of red hair does indeed tell us something about some being in the world, since its phenomenalisation is the very actualisation of reality and is therefore ontologically significant. Werner concludes that radical constructivism (RC), as an epistemological theory, would be better advised to acknowledge fully its metaphysical grounding in PL-metaphysics rather than in DL-metaphysics in order to avoid the recurring aporias of mind-world dualism. Accordingly, reality is not an inaccessible exteriority separated from experience but what is constituted in strict “mutual correlation” (§68) with the mind (Vörös 2014; Gaitsch 2014). The main outcome of this view is that the realism-constructivism distinction itself can now be understood “in a non-dualizing manner” (§59).

3 To facilitate a discussion, it might be useful to distinguish three different claims raised by the text:

T1: First, the mind-world relation instantiated in perception is better (read: more adequately?) conceptualised by the use of the actual-potential dichotomy than by the use of the internal-external dichotomy.

T2: RC has a metaphysical grounding.

T3: RC’s metaphysical grounding should be PL-metaphysics rather than DL-metaphysics.

In what follows, I will segregate the discussion on perception (T1) from the discussion on RC’s metaphysical grounding (T2, T3).

4 Beginning with the discussion on perception, I generally doubt whether transferring the analysis to a metaphysical level is particularly helpful. The author introduces metaphysics as “the most abstract discipline of human thought” (§6), dealing with the most basic conceptual oppositions, which are deemed to organise the world (§24). A first doubt concerns the author’s strong reliance on the notion of the world, which implies a grip on totality recently questioned by Markus Gabriel (2015a, 2015b). Gabriel follows a similar intuition to Werner’s (abandoning the notoriously vague notion of an external world to establish a new – “neutral” – kind of realism), but he argues more radically that we cannot trust in any metaphysical notion of the world at all, but have to face the “ontological pluralism” of different fields of sense. With this in mind, Werner would be well advised to consider the additional option that Gabriel labels “metametaphysical nihilism” or “no-world-view” – other-
wise his own metametaphysical discussion seems to be significantly incomplete. More positively, the correlationist account of the mind-world relation might also be established without assuming the totality of the world.

5 Concerning Werner’s correlationist version of the mind-world relation, I wonder whether he intends to defend a “weak” or a “strong” version of it (Mellassoux 2009). On the one hand, to argue that perception is the actualisation of reality seems to imply strong (idealistic) correlationism, insofar as reality is deemed to be nothing but an experiential category. On the other hand, the Aristotelian analysis of perception as actualisation of reality, to which Werner refers (§54), seems rather to imply weak correlationism, insofar as the actualisation of reality in perception is not meant to be an ontological production of reality. My impression is that the correlationist account put forward by Werner reveals at this point an impression is that the correlationist account put forward by Werner reveals to be an overly generic and overly abstract way of approaching the problem at stake. This lack of a phenomenological level of analysis manifests itself not only methodically (at the level of justification), but also thematically: for how could it be permitted to identify perception with vision on a phenomenological basis? That a sort of tacit identification of perception with vision – characteristic of, but also ruinous for, Western philosophy (Jonas 1966: 135ff.) – is still at play in Werner’s analysis is shown in his aim to conceptualise the perceived reality as unequivocally transcendent (as simply being not “in the head,” §58). This might be true for the seen reality; but if other modes of perception, especially touch, are taken into consideration, the aim to establish the unequivocal transcendence of the perceived reality becomes more questionable. This is a classical topic of phenomenological analysis, since Husserl offered his first analysis of the constitution of the lived body by the “double apprehension” of touch (Husserl 1989: 151ff.; Merleau-Ponty 1968; Henry 2015).

6 But what sort of justification would this be: metaphysical justification? My general point is that metaphysics does not offer the appropriate level of analysis and explanation of the problem of perception. To prevent metaphysical claims and the decision between metaphysical systems (DL-metaphysics vs. PL-metaphysics) from being arbitrary, they must be grounded in a phenomenological analysis, as emphasized by Edmund Husserl (Zahavi 2010: 17; Vörös 2014: 99; Gaitsch 2014). It is only at this level that we might be able to decide rationally how to conceptualise perception adequately (T1). By contrast, the article does not give any indication of how to decide rationally between PL- and DL-metaphysical claims. In this sense, metaphysics, as conceived of by Werner, reveals to be an overly generic and overly abstract way of approaching the problem at stake. This lack of a phenomenological level of analysis manifests itself not only methodically (at the level of justification), but also thematically: for how could it be permitted to identify perception with vision on a phenomenological basis? That a sort of tacit identification of perception with vision – characteristic of, but also ruinous for, Western philosophy (Jonas 1966: 135ff.) – is still at play in Werner’s analysis is shown in his aim to conceptualise the perceived reality as unequivocally transcendent (as simply being not “in the head,” §58). This might be true for the seen reality; but if other modes of perception, especially touch, are taken into consideration, the aim to establish the unequivocal transcendence of the perceived reality becomes more questionable. This is a classical topic of phenomenological analysis, since Husserl offered his first analysis of the constitution of the lived body by the “double apprehension” of touch (Husserl 1989: 151ff.; Merleau-Ponty 1968; Henry 2015).

7 For my final critical remark, I turn to T2 and T3: RC has a metaphysical grounding (T2), which should be elaborated in PL-metaphysical terms (T3). Concerning T3, I do not see why RC should rationally opt for PL-metaphysics rather than for any other metaphysical view – unless this option is justifiable by a (hidden) phenomenological analysis, of course. Why can RC not stick with an explicitly metaphysical version of the evolutionary adaptational approach to perception instead (§§16f, 66f)? Are there any objections against such a “procedural” metaphysical theory of perception other than phenomenological? What is more, I suppose that a sheer methodological understanding is still feasible – this goes against T2. To explain, we are not obliged to conceive the “separation thesis” (§21) metaphysically, but we can still read it as a methodological abstention from any ontological claims about how reality has to be conceived. However, due to Werner’s metametaphysical approach to RC, there is an important lesson to be learned by a RC adherent: she should either fully embrace her adaptational model of perception as a (but how justifiable?) metaphysical theory or simply be more careful in avoiding any ontological claims.

Peter Gaitsch gained his Ph.D from the University of Vienna in 2013 with a thesis in metaphilosophy. He is a faculty member at the Department of Theology, University of Graz. His current research interests are in the fields of phenomenology, philosophy of biology and philosophy of religion.

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Do We need a Metaphysics for Perception? Some Enactive, Phenomenological Reservations

Matt Bower
Texas State University, USA
membower/at/gmail.com

> Upshot: I disclaim the need for a metaphysics for perception, in the sense of a general metaphysics, and suggest that the motivations for embarking on that project can be satisfied in an interesting way without any general metaphysical stock-taking, by appeal to phenomenological and enactive accounts of perception.

1 In an attempt to open up the possibility for a reconciliation of constructivism and realism, Konrad Werner suggests the
need for a general metaphysical inquiry into the world as perceived. My present aim is to suggest that such a metaphysics of perception is explanatorily unnecessary, especially so for enactive and epistemically innocent approaches to perception, and that there are other routes toward a constructivist-friendly realism of sorts.

« 2 » Werner presents two broad camps into which a metaphysics of the world as perceived might fall, the Plato-Leibniz (PL) camp and the Descartes-Locke (DL) camp. The DL camp is known for its internalist leanings, stemming from its prioritization of the inside/outside distinction. Perception might thus be understood as some sort of information transfer between two orders of reality. The PL camp, which Werner prefers and where he suggests we might find a happy union of constructivism and realism, uses the more venerable being/becoming and actual/potential distinctions to do the same, i.e., explaining how the world becomes accessible for a subject in perception.

« 3 » The advantage of the PL camp's approach is that it stipulates no occult metaphysical transaction between mind and world. Rather, in making the world accessible, perception facilitates a transformation in the perceived from having the potential to appear thus and so to some perceiver. Perception might thus be understood as some sort of information transfer between two orders of reality. The PL camp, which Werner prefers and where he suggests we might find a happy union of constructivism and realism, uses the more venerable being/becoming and actual/potential distinctions to do the same, i.e., explaining how the world becomes accessible for a subject in perception.

« 4 » I think it is worth observing, first, that one's broader (i.e., not simply metaphysical) outlook on perception will determine just how a metaphysics of perception might be explanatorily salient. Werner's framing of the discussion bears traces of a familiar approach in the philosophy of perception that seeks to understand how perception could ever put a perceiving subject in a position to know truly about the world. It would be of interest for philosophy of perception if a metaphysics of perception could shed light on the epistemological problem of how (and perhaps whether) the claims of perception, i.e., its contents, measure up to the way things stand in the world externally to and independent of the perceiving subject. Naïve realism, constructivism, and other approaches to the philosophy of perception are typically committed to offering just such a theory. These views seemingly stand to gain from certain of the possible forms that a metaphysics of perception might take, if Werner is right in correlating these views with either the metaphysical DL or the PL camp. DL metaphysics supports the epistemological projects of broadly Cartesian and naïve realist views of perception, while PL metaphysics speaks in favor of a more Aristotelian or, perhaps, constructivist view of the matter.

« 5 » Yet, this epistemological desideratum is not shared by all. It is not shared by any view of perception on which perception is epistemically innocent, i.e., on which perception simply makes no claims about the world or lacks (semantic) content. Disjunctivists about perception hold this view (e.g., Travis 2013), and so do proponents of radical enactivism (Hutto & Myin 2013) and radical embodiment (Chomero 2009). If all perceptual experiences or some large subset of perceptual experiences are non-representational or lack semantic content, the inside/outside distinction will lose relevance, and so will the actual/potential distinction as Werner explains it. For Werner, these two distinctions have the same explanatory function, i.e., of clarifying how the world is accessible to a perceiving subject. If accessibility is an epistemic notion, as seems to be the case (see, e.g., Werner's remarks in §55), then the actual/potential distinction will lack salience for anyone maintaining that perception is epistemically innocent. So, to reiterate, the explanatory value of these metaphysical distinctions may depend on one's core theoretical commitments about perception.

« 6 » Let me press the worry one step further. It would be an even graver difficulty for the project of a metaphysics of perception if one's non-metaphysical commitments about perception also determined whether a metaphysics of perception were necessary at all for an adequate understanding of perception. The task of a metaphysics of perception, as Werner describes it (§§9–11), is to understand the perceived world as such, in the broadest and most abstract terms possible – in the style of general metaphysics – and to leave aside the issue of how to carve up and categorize the entities that populate the world (i.e., a topic for some area of special metaphysics).

« 7 » So the issue of the metaphysics of perception is not quite the same as that of the contents of perception, concerning whether we perceive, e.g., other minds, causation, or perhaps only simpler things such as, inter alia, color and shape as such (Siegel 2010). That said, the only apparent reason that a metaphysics of perception would be necessary is if there were some general metaphysical characteristic of the world that was uniquely pertinent to perception. And for Werner's preferred variant of PL-style metaphysics, this is indeed so, because on that view any item in the world is poten
tially an item bearing a look or appearance to some perceiver.

« 8 » On other views, there may be nothing unique to gain from general metaphysics and hence no need for a metaphysics of perception. Even those metaphysically dubious views in the DL camp that make much of the inside/outside distinction may not need any special recourse to general metaphysics. What is interesting about the inside/outside distinction is the inside member of the conceptual pair, not the outside. One invokes the inside/outside distinction primarily because the mental interior is conceived in some metaphysically interesting way, e.g., as non-physical. But that is a local or special metaphysical question about the metaphysics of mind, not the sort of question Werner really wants to engage with in pursuing the metaphysics of perception. A DL-type view need not (and probably does not) say anything about the outside member of the conceptual pair that would call for any revisions to one's general metaphysical picture, or for which a general metaphysical analysis would be illuminating.

« 9 » Very few approaches to the philosophy of perception will require the kind of metaphysics of perception for which Werner calls. The PL metaphysics he favors needs it because it denies the existence of a “ready-made world” (§§57, 61). For the world to be ready made is for it to be fully determinate and identical in all metaphysically fundamental (i.e., general metaphysi-
cal) respects before and after an act, or any act whatsoever, of perception. George Berkeley’s view of perception (namely, the *esse est percipi* thesis) resembles Werner’s view in denying that the world is ready made in this sense. The idea has some affinity with mutualist views of perception as well, such as those of phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and enactivists such as Francisco Varela. On the other hand, as Werner notes (§3), at least some versions of DL metaphysics maintain that there is a ready-made world. Interestingly, that is yet another reason to think, as I have already said, that they do not need a metaphysics of perception that takes special recourse to general metaphysics.

« 10 » We should not deny that the world is ready made – not in this (general metaphysical) sense, anyway. (I am sympathetic to some renderings of the denial that the world is ready-made, e.g., as one finds in Merleau-Ponty, Varela, and perhaps theorists of cognitive niche construction. But the productive character of perception on such views can likely be cashed out in terms of biological, psychological, and socio-cultural categories without any need for fundamental metaphysical tinkering.) We will not likely derive, then, any special explanatory benefit by embarking on a metaphysics of perception.

« 11 » Werner is tempted to deny that the world is ready made for two reasons, which together lend credence to his hypothesis of realist constructivism. First, he wants to do justice to the mutualistic character of perception (§61), i.e., that the perceiving subject and the perceived world both actively contribute in producing an episode of perception. Perception is not the product of the unilateral agency of the perceiving subject, nor does it result from the unqualified patience of the perceiving subject as a passive recipient of sensory information. Second, Werner wants to give a realist theory of perception.

« 12 » The first and the second claim may seem to constitute a paradoxical pairing, to the extent that a mutualist account of perception attributes a productive, if not creative, function to the perceiver. The idea, perhaps, is that if our perceptual capacities generate their own content or part thereof, and if they are our only means of accessing reality directly, it will be difficult if not impossible to discern whether the contributions of the perceiving subject are fictitious or reflects how things really are in the world. The worry is supposed to disappear on Werner’s view, since the achievement of the subject’s productive activity is not an internal simulacrum of the world, but a change in the world itself, which the perceiver now has access to as such.

« 13 » Interpreting the second claim in that way would at least open up the possibility of a constructivist view that keeps its mutualist commitment and hesitatingly embraces a version of realism at the same time. But the price of making this move is high, and, by my lights, too high. There is simply no compelling warrant for introducing a new, fundamental metaphysical category, i.e., reality as perceived, and without that, we would do well to heed Occam’s wisdom and opt for the sparser metaphysical framework.

« 14 » The category “reality as perceived” designates appearances as *properties* or *features of things in the world*. Werner does not present any sustained explanation of what he takes an appearance to be. From a mutualist perspective, though, it seems more natural to understand such notions as picking out instead *features of the perceptual process as a mind-world interaction*. Phenomenologically, too, talk of looks and appearances refers to structural features of the intentionality of perception, spanning perceiving subject and perceived object alike. To apply the terms “look” and “appearance” to the object is a mistake, since we do not see looks or appearances, but we see objects (or whatever it is perception may target) in looks and appearances, features of perception as an activity or mind-world interaction.

« 15 » Indeed, while Werner’s thesis is that looks and appearances belong to the world (whether as potential or actual) (§§55, 60), he, too, occasionally slips into speaking of them more narrowly as features of mind-world interactions. For instance, he describes potential appearances as “potential ways of making it [i.e., what is perceived] ready” (§61). He adds, further, that appearances are “appearances of reality” (§61), i.e., suggesting they are inherently embedded in intentional states, assuming that “of-ness” or aboutness is inherently a feature, even the defining feature, of intentional states. If, as such talk recommends, we attribute looks and appearances to world-involving perceptual activities, then these will obviously not figure in any scheme of general metaphysical categories.

« 16 » Finally, I think there is no need for the perceptual process to engender fundamental metaphysical categories in order to fit mutualism (and, so, perhaps constructivism) and realism together. Realism, though, will not be an epistemological thesis, but one concerning the intentionality of perception. (The epistemological issue may thus dissolve, or simply be relocated elsewhere, but, in any event, its resolution will not be necessary to explain perception.) The idea here is not that there are claims about the world, content of some sort, within the perceptual process that, if things go well, accurately reflect or make apparent to the subject how things stand in the world. That is not the basic task of perception, as Werner (§17) also intimates. Rather, perception is fundamentally action-oriented, and also epistemically innocent (Hutto & Myin 2013). This is a form of realism inasmuch as its conception of perceptual processes takes them to be constitutively world-involving, and one that is in no way at odds with a mutualistic view denying that either mind or world unilaterally governs perception and affirming its synergistic character.

Matt Bower earned his Ph.D from the University of Memphis in 2013, with a dissertation on Husserl’s genetic phenomenology. He was recently a postdoctoral fellow at Ruhr-University Bochum, and is now a lecturer at Texas State University. He is interested in intersections of phenomenology and philosophy of mind in the philosophy of perception.

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A Mess of the Grounding Role of Metaphysics

Adriana Schetz
University of Szczecin, Poland
adriana.schetz/at/gmail.com

> Upshot • In his target article, Werner focuses his efforts on finding a metaphysical paradigm in which it would be suitable to embed – as he puts it – some movements in contemporary philosophy and cognitive science, and especially radical constructivism and the embodied cognition approach. In my commentary, I shall briefly discuss the question of metaphysical grounding or embedding of radical constructivism, and make an attempt to show that the author has failed to explain what this grounding is supposed to be, and that radical constructivism has to remain characteristically an anti-metaphysical doctrine. Of course, I do appreciate the ingenious efforts to find the metaphysical grounding of radical constructivism, as far as the question of cognitive access to and the knowability of reality is concerned, but I would like to undermine the key tenet of the article that radical constructivism is in the process of providing the description of ontic reality. To sum up, according to Werner, RC is anti-metaphysical in its approach to the status and practice of knowledge.

> 1 > Radical constructivism (RC), as developed by Ernst von Glasersfeld, is described by Konrad Werner as the view according to which we shall distinguish experienced reality from ontological reality. Werner takes experienced reality to be “the perceived (cognized) world,” and ontological reality to be “reality as it is in itself.” In contrast to the former, the latter is supposed to be “just a postulate or fictional fiction, since we cannot have any knowledge of it” (§17). According to von Glasersfeld, the aim of cognition is not to produce true representations of reality but rather biological adaptation consisting of increasing skills of action in a changing environment. In addition, these skills are not the results of behavioural tuning to environmental requirements or constraints; they are simply the outcome of accumulation of contingent and accidental, yet successful, actions (Glasersfeld 1984a: 4). Werner proposes to consider knowledge and experienced reality as “constructs that do not adequately represent ontological reality” (§17). This does not mean, as Werner – following von Glasersfeld – emphasizes, that RC is committed to denying the existence of an ontic world; merely that it is bound to be sceptical about its knowability. Warner concludes that this scepticism about obtaining knowledge of reality, endorsed by RC, leads to severing the link between knowledge and metaphysics, since the former is solely the construction of the human mind, while the latter aspires to provide has the aspiration of providing the description of ontic reality. To sum up, according to Werner, RC is anti-metaphysical in its approach to the status and practice of knowledge.

> 2 > These considerations are seen as conveying something essential about the metaphysics of perception, as Werner puts it. For him, “when the metaphysics of perception and of the perceived world is taken into account, the distinction between experienced reality and ontological reality itself turns out to be metaphysical” (§21). Werner stresses that the difference between concepts of these two kinds of reality depends on “difference between two kinds of realms” (ibid). He expresses his view on this matter as follows: “the separation thesis: experienced reality has nothing in common with ontological reality” (ibid). He subsequently admits that thinkers who accept the separation thesis have to deploy some concept of the relationship between experienced reality and ontological reality; and, as Werner emphasizes, “this idea belongs to metaphysics” (§22). For this reason, Werner claims that RC needs metaphysical grounding, to be found in the so-called PL-metaphysics, in the metaphysics of Plato and G. W. Leibniz.

> 3 > Two statements are particularly striking in the context of Werner’s discussions:

- Knowledge and experienced reality are merely constructs that do not adequately represent ontological reality;
- From the fact that the concept of the relationship between experienced reality and ontological reality belongs to metaphysics, it follows that if one makes use of this concept, one needs metaphysics.

> 4 > The first statement is worrying to the extent of involving the category of adequate representation. Indeed, Werner is justified in claiming that RC takes knowledge and experienced reality as constructs of mind, social practice, effects of biological adaptation, etc. However, he needlessly charges radical constructivists with assuming that cognition or knowledge does not adequately represent reality. After all, he himself quotes von Glasersfeld as denying that the aim of cognition is to produce representations, and especially that one is not allowed to talk here about any criteria of adequacy. And this means that Werner is not entitled to object that radical constructivists do not have in their purview the possibility of recognizing the relationship between cognition or knowledge and reality. One should bear in mind that for RC, “the function of cognition is adaptive in biological sense […] and allows one to attain the goals one happens to have chosen” (§17; Glasersfeld 1984a: 4). It is rather odd that Werner ignores that, since he himself invokes the first part of this quote.

> 5 > ”Whereas in the traditional view of epistemology, as well as of cognitive psychology, that relation is always seen as a more or less picture-like (iconic) correspondence or match, radical constructivism sees it as an adaptation in the functional sense. […] From the radical constructivist point of view, all of us – scientists, philosophers, laymen, school children, animals, indeed any kind of living organism – face our environment as the burglar faces a lock that he has to unlock in order to get at the loot. This is the sense in which the word ‘fit’ applies to Darwin’s and neo-Darwinists theories of evolution.” (Glasersfeld 1984a: 3)

It seems to me that the properly identified problem with RC does not consist of the absence of adequacy between cognition or knowledge and reality, but rather of its virtual presence under a different name, due to being smuggled in through the back door, as it were. So what does it mean after all that as cognizing subjects we tend to fit to our environment, and to how this environment is conceived?

> 6 > As far as the second statement is concerned, the matter appears to be more serious and closely connected with the foregoing question. Is it really the case that everyone who invokes, explicitly or implicitly, notions related to the broadly understood
constructive scheme of metaphysics, presupposes a determinate metaphysics or should attempt to find metaphysical grounding for one’s claims? I believe that there is no such transition. Werner concludes his convoluted and painstaking investigations by insisting that “RC seems to be still grounded in the DL [Descartes-Locke metaphysics] understanding of experiences themselves and their thinkable relation to external (ontological) reality” (§65). What does it mean that a given conception or theory or theoretical approach is grounded in metaphysics? Werner gives a very superficial and brief account of the notion of grounding. He writes:

“The metaphysical context of the constructiv-ism–realism dispute should therefore be uncover- ed. This is what I mean by metaphysical ground- ing of RC, and at the starting point I mean nothing more than this.” (§22)

This is acceptable at the starting point, but what about the ending point? We are not giv- en any clue as to how to fulfill our curiosity, as the word “grounding” does not even reappear in the article. From what has been said at the beginning, one can infer that for Werner the search for metaphysical grounding of RC is closely connected with the search for an appropriate metaphysical context for close examination of this view. Unfortunately, saying this is saying almost nothing, especially when contrasted with detailed and elaborate debates about metaphysical grounding in the rapidly burgeoning literature on this notion (see, e.g., Correia & Schnieder 2012).

“As any case, one of the most signifi- cant attempts to establish that the notion of knowledge does not have to be coupled with the notion of representation, taken as a con- cept involving heavy metaphysical apparatus, has been undertaken by Huw Price (2013). He introduces the complementary notions of “e-representation” and “i-representation.” The former is the notion of “answerability to the environment,” and the latter is the concept of inferential or functional role of expressions. The category of representation should not be assimilated here to the classical notion of representation, understood as a crucial element of one’s mental architecture, since Price declares himself to be an advocate of a robust anti-representationalism that does not require a substantially construed notion of truth or adequacy (according to Price, the true predicate plays merely the role of generalizing device). It also does not require metaphysical grounding, no matter how interpreted, since e-representations en- able one to terminate philosophical analysis on the e-world, which is the “i-world of the scientific vocabulary” (Price 2013: 55), and i-representations allows one to remain at the level of discussion about asking for reasons. Although one may disagree with Price (for example, John MacFarlane 2014), it is appar- ent that thorough discussion about the need to incorporate metaphysical threads into contemporary debates on RC, or other views mentioned by Werner, ought to appeal to the Price’s proposal, since it is one of the most intriguing anti-metaphysical accounts of the relationship between cognition or knowl- edge and the world.

Adriana Schetz is an assistant professor at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Szczecin, Poland. Her interests include philosophy of mind, cognitive science, philosophy of psychology, and especially the problem of perception, consciousness, and animal cognition. She is the author of a book Biological Externalism in the Theories of Perception, published in Polish in 2014.

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Towards a Metaphysics for Constructivist Thought

Spyridon A. Koutroufinis

Technical Univ. of Berlin, Germany

kout1967(at)mailbox.tu-berlin.de

> Upshot • My commentary has three aims. Firstly, to provide additional support to Konrad Werner’s correct insight that radical constructivism is based on a radical distinction between experienced reality and ontological reality. This is a strong metaphysical statement. Second-ly, that radical constructivism is implicitly rooted in Cartesian ontological dualism. Thirdly, that Whitehead’s process ontol-ogy provides a fruitful foundation for Werner’s thesis that perceptions are metaphysically significant.

**1** Konrad Werner criticizes the anti-metaphysical attitude of radical constructiv-ism (RC), as it has been introduced by Ernst von Glasersfeld. He argues that von Glasers-feld grounds his epistemology on a strict distinction between the knowing subject and the known object or experienced reality and ontological reality (§§17, 19, 21, 66, 67). This, according to Werner, is a metaphysical assumption. It seems that Werner has found the pivotal point of RC (of which I was not aware before reading his article). In order to emphasize the correctness of Werner’s argu-ment, I will present some central ideas of leading theorists of RC.

**2** In his “An Introduction to Radical Constructivism,” von Glasersfeld tries to overcome subjective idealism and solipsism (which he considers as the inescapable fate of realism as soon as skeptical arguments are taken seriously) by claiming that:

**we must find our way back to the very first steps of our theories of knowledge. Among these early steps there is, of course, the definition of the relationship between knowledge and reality, and this is precisely the point where radical construc-tivism steps out of the traditional scenario of epistemology. Once knowing is no longer understood as the search for an iconic representation of ontological reality, but, instead, as a search for fitting ways of behaving and thinking, the traditional problem disappears. Knowledge can now be seen as something that the organism builds up in the attempt to order the as such amorphous flow of experience by establishing repeatable experiences and relatively reliable relations between them.” (Glasersfeld 1984a: 39)

**3** Von Glasersfeld, and with him other leading theoreticians of contemporary constructivist thought, which includes more than RC, do not try to solve epistemologi-cal issues but to let them vanish by reduc-ing cognition and knowledge to biological functions that serve an organism’s survival. Whether there is a correspondence between ontological and experienced reality (the problem of skepticism) would be an inappropriate question since knowledge would have to serve only biological survival. Thus theories of knowledge might be entirely sep-arated from ontologies or theories of being.

**4** Von Glasersfeld and other pro-ponents of constructivist thought, such as
Heinz von Foerster and Humberto Maturana, often use concepts such as “organism” (Glaserfeld 1984a: 22f, 30), “adaptation” (though in a “functional sense,” ibid: 20), and “fitness” (ibid: 21f) in their arguments. From the perspective of RC, those terms cannot be seen as representing something ontologically real in nature. They must be considered as our constructions, whose value consists of serving our survival. Indeed von Glaserfeld often refers to “us” as constructors of “our” experiences and knowledge by using the personal and possessive pronouns “we” and “our” (ibid: 18ff, 27ff). “We” would be “subjects” (ibid: 31, 34f) that construct the features of their “objects”:

“Subjects” (ibid: 238, my translation). These worlds contain the two ontologically different brains that each experiencing subject has:

“[T]he continuity in the existence of an individual object is under all circumstances the result of operations carried out by the cognizing subject and can never be explained as a given fact of objective reality.” (ibid: 34)

“Constructivism necessarily begins with the (intuitively confirmed) assumption that all cognitive activity takes place within the experiential world of a goal-directed consciousness.” (ibid: 32)

So, intuition would confirm that each one of “us” is a “goal-directed consciousness.”

“Of course, “consciousness” is a highly metaphysical term, therefore its appearance in an anti-metaphysical philosophical text needs to be justified.

“Is it a coincidence that von Glasersfeld does not do so? Leading theorists of constructivist thought establish their supposedly entirely non-metaphysical epistemology on one and the same implicit presupposition (though in a “functional sense,” ibid: 20), and “fitness” (ibid: 21f) in their arguments. From the perspective of RC, those terms cannot be seen as representing something ontologically real in nature. They must be considered as our constructions, whose value consists of serving our survival. Indeed von Glaserfeld often refers to “us” as constructors of “our” experiences and knowledge by using the personal and possessive pronouns “we” and “our” (ibid: 18ff, 27ff). “We” would be “subjects” (ibid: 31, 34f) that construct the features of their “objects”.

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“Is it a coincidence that von Glasersfeld does not do so? Leading theorists of constructivist thought establish their supposedly entirely non-metaphysical epistemology on one and the same implicit assumption about the relation between consciousness and brain. In a series of publications, Heinz von Foerster – who for many (e.g., Schmidt 1987) is a proponent of RC (although he rejected this attribution, see, e.g., Foerster 2014) – introduces different basic statements about the nature of all kinds of mental phenomena, which are grounded on the same metaphysical hypothesis, according to which our brain produces all our subjective experiences:

“[O]ut there' there is no light and no color, there are only electro-magnetic waves; 'out there' there is no sound and no music, there are only periodic variations of the air pressure; [...] Finally, for sure, 'out there' there is no pain.' [...] the fundamental question arises as to how does our brain conjure up the tremendous variety of this colorful world as we experience it any moment while awake, and sometimes in dreams while asleep. This is the problem of cognition [...]” (Foerster 2003: 215)

“Von Foerster considers it an unquestionable fact that phenomenal qualities or qualia of conscious beings, such as sounds, colors, and pain are products of the brain. Starting from there, he reduces subjective aspects of experience to tangible and measurable spatio-temporally localizable events or objective physical data that take place in the brain. Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela – who for many are proponents of RC as well (e.g., Schmidt 1987; but see criticism in Mitterer 2011) – also abide by this most fundamental metaphysical hypothesis of contemporary mainstream neuroscience. They are firmly convinced that subjective mental phenomena are produced in nervous systems, which they consider to be self-referential and, most importantly, structurally determined material systems (Maturana & Varela 1992: 96).

“The reader as he reads this understands what he understands because his structure in the present and, indirectly, his history so determine. Strictly speaking, nothing is an accident.” (Maturana & Varela 1992: 96)

“Japanese scientists, we can deal only with unities that are structurally determined. That is, we can deal only with systems in which all their changes are determined by their structure [...]” (Maturana & Varela 1992: 96)

“The neuroscientist Gerhard Roth, who was strongly influenced by RC, tried to solve this paradox by making a strict distinction between “two ontologically entirely different worlds, the (physical in the broadest sense) material real world of the organism and the cognitive ‘actual’ world [...] which are (probably) causally but not spatially connected” (Roth 1988: 238, my translation). These worlds contain the two ontologically different brains that each experiencing subject has:

“The brain that is accessible to me, that I, as an anatomist or physiologist [...], can behold and examine, exists inside my cognitive space and is certainly not identical with the real brain that constitutes the cognitive space.” (ibid: 238f, my translation).

“From Roth’s constructivist perspective, the strict ontological separation that he makes between the “real world” and the merely cognitive “actual world” is necessary. But this is, of course, a highly metaphysical position. However, von Glasersfeld’s understanding of RC does not support Roth’s distinction between brains that belong to two ontologically different worlds. At least in their early publications, von Foerster, Maturana, Varela, and Roth think in a strictly biological way. Josef Mitterer describes Maturana as a bio-constructivist (2011), which cannot be said for von Glasersfeld. Nevertheless his reference to organisms as constructors of their experienced world (Richards & Glaserfeld 1987:195; see above) brings RC in a certain proximity to biological-constructivist approaches that can lead to reductionist misinterpretations.

“Short exposition of ideas of influential theorists of the wide constructivist tradition shows that contemporary
constructivist thought is grounded on a strict distinction between experienced and ontological reality. My reference to leading theorists of RC and other constructivist approaches underscores the correctness of Werner's argument that RC is based on a metaphysical assumption that separates experienced reality from ontological reality.

«12» Another essential point of Werner's criticism is the relation between what he describes as Descartes-Locke (DL) metaphysics and RC (§§65–67). Von Foerster's strict separation between phenomenal qualities (colors, sounds, and pain), on the one side, and the material structure (brain) that would generate them, on the other side, has deep roots in Western metaphysics, especially in ancient atomism and in DL-metaphysics; Descartes himself clearly separated phenomenal qualities from objective features of material entities in his second and sixth meditations (Med. 2: §§11f; Med. 6: §15). This separation follows logically from Descartes's central metaphysical position, the ontological division between mind and matter. As Werner says (§43), although Descartes was not a materialist, his ontological division became the basis of materialistic neuroscience, in which I would also count Maturana and Varela's understanding of the nervous system as a structurally determined material unity. Roth's metaphysical separation between the phenomenal "actual world" and the "material real world" is a typical mind-body split of materialistic interpretations stemming from DL-metaphysics, according to which "the phenomenal is not real, and the real is not phenomenal," as Werner says (§46).

«13» Finally, I would like to embrace Werner's position that Platonic-Leibnizian (PL) metaphysics does not commit one to an ontological separation between perception and reality (§§55–58). I should, however, say that Werner's understanding of Aristotle (who certainly belongs to the PL tradition) – as saying that perception is the actualization of some aspects of reality (§55) – is ambiguous. In De Anima (Book II and III), Aristotle outlines a theory of perception according to which the act of perception actualizes only the potency of the faculty of sense and not of the potency of the object. The subject perceives aspects of the perceived object that are already actualized in it, i.e., before perception takes place. Perception does not influence the essence of the perceived object; therefore Aristotle criticizes the "earlier natural philosophers":

"They supposed that without seeing there was neither white nor black, and without tasting no flavour." (De Anima III, 426 a20–22)

«14» Werner's position on the intrinsic connection between the subject and the object of perception in PL-metaphysics applies more to Leibniz's theory of monads than to ancient metaphysics. Since monads are conceived of as individual substances, the essence of which implies necessarily all events of their history, including perceiving and being perceived by other monads, I agree with Werner's claim that Leibnizian metaphysics supports his position (§56f).

«15» I think, nonetheless, that Alfred North Whitehead's process ontology supports Werner's position more than all other metaphysical systems. Whitehead, whom I count in the PL tradition of rationalism, considers the most elementary, indivisible facts of reality to be processes and not substances. He calls them actual entities or actual occasions. In contrast to Descartes, Whitehead anchors his central argument on the basic assumption that "relatedness is dominant over quality" (Whitehead 1979: 74). Like Leibniz, he conceives of actual occasions as processes of experience. They are entities endowed with subjectivity that are always related to other elementary subjects, i.e., other actual occasions. Whitehead does not separate the essence of the processual subject from its experiences. He conceives of the actual occasion as a totality of experiences that grows together to form a whole. Every processual subject has experience-relations to other already existing processes (ibid. 18). It is these relations that make up the essence of the experiencing subject (Koutroufnis 2014: 12–17, 2006: 135–139). Whitehead calls these relations "prehensions." The experiencing subject becomes real through its perceiving relations or prehensions. Thus, prehensions fulfill Werner's idea that prehensions are metaphysically significant (§58) in an ideal way.

«16» Finally, it is worth noting that prehensions are not passive representations. Actual entities actively construct their perceptions of other actual entities. Thus, Whitehead's ontology provides a fruitful metaphysical foundation for constructivist epistemologies that depart from Cartesian dualism.

Spyridon Koutroufnis is Privatdozent at the Institute for Philosophy of the Technical University of Berlin. His main areas of specialization and teaching are biophysics, process philosophy, and theory of self-organization. He is the author and editor of several books, articles, and book chapters in these areas.

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Reconciling Constructivism with Realism: How Far Non-Dualism Should Be Followed
Istvan Danka
Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Hungary
danka.istvan@at/filozofia.bme.hu

> Upshot • In his target article, Werner proposes a metaphysical foundation for a radical constructivist epistemology that is nonetheless claimed to reconcile constructivism with some sort of realism. While acknowledging his success in demonstrating that constructivism without an external/internal dualism is suitable for his purposes, I shall argue that rejecting a distinction between epistemological and ontological issues makes it questionable whether PL-metaphysics can make constructivism compatible with realism.

«1» Perhaps the most challenging claim of Konrad Werner's target article is that PL-metaphysics reconciles (non-trivial) constructivism with a non-naïve (§38) and non-dualistic (§59) realism (see also "Implications"). Let us call this claim the "reconciliation requirement." In order to satisfy the reconciliation requirement, Werner intends to overcome a classical dualism of the "internal" and "external" (among some others) that he attributes to DL-metaphysics. He claims that Ernst von Glasersfeld's as-

http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism/journal/11/1/148.werner
signment of constructivism to “knowing” rather than “being” (Glasersfeld 1991: 5) is grounded in this distinction too (§66). Replacing a DL-metaphysical “internal” / “external” opposition with a PL-metaphysical opposition between “actual” and “potential” (§59) would dissolve a distinction between epistemology (“knowing”) and ontology (“being”) as well. The latter distinction seems for Werner to be a DL-dualistic residue of radical constructivism. While I agree that the reconciliation requirement needs a rejection of the external/internal dualism, I do not think that a rejection of a distinction between epistemological and ontological issues should be also involved.

= 2 = Central to Werner’s arguments against the distinction is his separation thesis (§21). At least three critical remarks are in order here. First, given that ontology and metaphysics are taken to be interchangeable (§13), two levels of discussion have to be distinguished in §21: a level where ontology may or may not be opposed to epistemology, and a meta-level where the distinction may or may not be made in order to talk about epistemological and ontological issues separately at the first level. Second, if making the distinction is an ontological (meta-level) thesis, it is at least questionable how it relates to (first-level) ontological questions that are opposed to (first-level) epistemological questions (in DL at least). It does not seem to be prima facie evident that meta-level ontological claims and first-level ontological claims would correspond to each other, and hence that an internal/external dualism occurring at the first level would imply an occurrence of any dualism at meta-level. Third, nothing forces a proponent of the epistemology/ontology distinction to draw it as a (meta-level) metaphysical or (meta-level) ontological thesis. It can also be taken to be a meta-level epistemological point, claiming that if the separation thesis is reformulated in (meta-level) epistemological terms, a commitment to DL is unnecessary for holding a sharp distinction between knowing and being. In light of the first two, this commentary will expand on the third objection.

= 3 = Why is a sharp distinction between ontology and epistemology so important at all? For a constructivist, it is at least tolerable that an ontological position would depend on epistemological considerations. For an ontological constructivist (e.g., an idealist claiming that ontological reality is mind-dependent), ontological entities are typically constructed by epistemic activities of the mind, so epistemological issues of knowing and ontological issues of being go hand in hand.

= 4 = Though epistemological constructivists such as von Glasersfeld disregard ontological issues in favour of issues in epistemology, at least an extension of constructivism to both issues should be possible without hurting fundamental epistemological constructivist principles. But the problem is that a clear-cut distinction between the two is essential for the realist (and hence for satisfying the reconciliation requirement) as the domain for “real” things as opposed to items of perception and knowledge (that may be unreal in her view). If so, a central conflict between constructivism and realism is rooted in their respective positions regarding a distinction between ontology and epistemology.

= 5 = A distinction between ontology and epistemology is important because in harmonising constructivism and realism, something must be left for the realist. Insofar as knowledge is the proper place for (radical) constructivism, ontology should be a good price for constructivism to pay for a peace. At least one promising way for a theory to be realist and constructivist is to hold a realist ontology and a constructivist epistemology at the same time (Danka 2015). To put it as simply as possible: realism intends to say something about “reality” (whatever it is), and constructivism intends to say something about “knowledge.” Why not let them talk about their respective issues rather than forcing them into a conflict?

= 6 = When constructivism starts to talk about ontological questions, it crosses this boundary, just as realism does so when it claims a dualism of things-as-experienced and things-to-be-experienced to be a real (ontological) opposition in the form of an “internal” / “external” dualism, according to which items of reality and items of experience numerically differ. Since Werner seems to share my worries about a numerical difference (recall his separation thesis again), a promising strategy would be to hold a numerical identity of epistemological and ontological items and a qualitative distinction between them at the same time on the ground that they are taken as ontological items on some occasions and also taken as epistemological on other occasions. This seems compatible with Werner’s account of perceived things as perceived and as being ($11) but incompatible with his rejection of the epistemological vs. ontological distinction.

= 7 = Rejecting a distinction between epistemological and ontological questions does not seem to be a suitable alternative. As soon as ontological questions were epistemologised, realists would protest and hence the reconciliation requirement would have to be neglected. But the separation thesis can be rejected on other grounds than straightforwardly rejecting the whole distinction. A way of doing so might be to take the distinction to be a meta-level epistemological rather than a meta-level ontological distinction. Let us call this the “distinction thesis.” The distinction thesis claims that a difference between first-level epistemological and first-level ontological issues is subject to theoretical decisions rather than theory-independent facts (as the meta-level ontological separation thesis would imply). For some theoretical purposes, items of reality are taken as objects of experience. For other purposes, they are taken as objects of being in themselves. Obviously, constructivists would deny an epistemic accessibility to the second, and realists would deny the sufficiency of the first for an ontological investigation. But a problem of accessibility, as Werner has demonstrated, is DL-dependent ($§27–30, §§33–39), and a need for ontological investigations is neither desirable nor possible for an epistemological constructivist such as von Glasersfeld. Werner’s PL-metaphysics of perception might be at least one candidate for a realist ontology that is compatible with epistemological constructivism. But in order to implement compatibility between realism and constructivism this way, a distinction has to be made between ontology and epistemology so that a conflict between an epistemologised constructivist ontology and an epistemology-free realist ontology should not occur.

= 8 = All the same, it seems that if a DL-driven separation thesis is replaced with a PL-compatible distinction thesis, von Glas-
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István Danka is an assistant professor at the HPS Department, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Hungary. Holding a Ph.D in philosophy (2013, University of Leeds, UK), his research interests include constructivist themes in epistemology, philosophy of education and argumentation theory.

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Opening Spatial Preunderstandings at the Roots of Constructivism
Paul Downes
Dublin City University, Ireland
paul.downes/at/dcu.ie

> Upshot: Key aspects of Werner’s concerns involve overcoming dualisms. This presupposes an implicit spatial preunderstanding that is neglected in Werner and needs amplification. Diometric and concentric spatial-relational frames for cognition and perception offer a supporting framework for Werner’s interrogation of constructivist roots, to go beyond Cartesian metaphysics and to concretise difference that is not mere dualistic separation.

1 Key limbs of Konrad Werner’s search for the metaphysical roots of constructivism are a concern to shed, or at least reconstruc, aspects of a perceived Cartesian (and Lockeian) metaphysics generally, and to develop overcoming of dualism in von Ernst Glasersfeld’s radical constructivism further. Without necessarily echoing Werner’s further steps to construct a PL- (Platonic-Leibnizian) metaphysics, it is these initial limbs that require further consideration, through amplifying a neglected aspect in Werner’s argument, namely, the role of space in the conceptual roots of radical constructivism. Given Werner’s concerns with perception, it is somewhat surprising that spatial preconditions for constructivism were not given more attention in his target article. This response seeks to highlight a particular spatial-relational preunderstanding, both to challenge Cartesian metaphysics and to relate it to preunderstandings in von Glasersfeld’s radical constructivism and Werner’s concerns regarding this task.

At the outset, it is to be recognised that a Cartesian metaphysics treats space as passive and inconsequential; Descartes referred to ‘empty space, which almost everyone is convinced is mere nonentity’ (Descartes 1954: 200). Challenge to a Cartesian metaphysics needs to reanimate space. It is worth noting that in his consideration of space and identity, von Glasersfeld (1984b) draws much inspiration from the work of William James. This particular passage of James, though not directly quoted by von Glasersfeld, also brings to the fore a notion of a dynamic spatial background as a “river”:

Traditional psychology talks like one who should say a river [stream of association] consists of nothing but pailsful, spoonfuls, quartpotsful, barrelful and other moulded forms of water. Even were the pails and the pots all actually standing in the stream, still between them the free water would continue to flow. It is just this free water of consciousness that psychologists resolutely overlook.** (James 1890: 255)

Within cognitive psychology, Ulric Neisser acknowledged that space itself was a concept that could be problematized in the realm of perception: “Space is another cognitive dimension which is important but not as ‘primitive’ as is sometimes supposed” (Neisser 1967: 291). Neisser problematized it from a constructivist approach to perception: “Position on the retina is an important source of stimulus information, but it is not directly represented by a position in cognitively elaborated space” (ibid: 292). This view implicitly echoed that of Jean Piaget & Bärbel Inhelder, who argued that passive Euclidean space was a developmental construction in a child’s capacity for perception and representation, observing that drawings of children aged on average 3.6–4 years revealed that “Euclidean relationships were...completely ignored” (Piaget & Inhelder 1956: 52). They criticised a position that is “confused after the manner of
elementary text-book authors who start out by treating distances and simple euclidean figures as if they constituted real “elements” in the construction of space” (ibid: 45).

4. The focus for current purposes needs to consider a dynamic space at a prior level, not only as a constituent element of perception, but as a prior relational precondition for constructivist processes, whether this is treated at a metaphysical level, an ontological one or otherwise. This blind spot in understanding of “a kind of invisible space” (Luhmann 1995: 25) requires acceleration of focus on a specifically spatial excavation.

5. A key concern of Werner is not only to challenge traditional Cartesian splits between inner and outer but also to allow for a mode of conceptualizing that allows for distinctions that are not “true walls” or “iron curtains” (§24). Werner aptly recognizes the need to go beyond a “sharp separation of mind and world” (§68). Werner seeks prior roots of a monism of identity where “neither separation nor simple identification of them is adequate” (§47, italics in original). This resonates with von Glasersfeld’s interrogation of space, time and identity, where he seeks an understanding of a relation of difference in spatial and temporal terms, stating “the construction of the concept of change requires a judgment of ‘different’ with regard to the two experiential items that are considered to be one and the same in the sense of different identity” (Glasersfeld 1984b: 7). What needs further emphasis here is not only that a relation of identity-cum-difference is possible but that this can be conceptualised in concrete spatial terms.

6. These concrete spatial terms can be understood as contrasts between diametric spatial structured projections and concentric spaces. Building on Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963, 1973), a diametrical spatial structure is one where a circle is split in half by a line that is its diameter, or where a square or rectangle is similarly divided into two equal halves (Figure 1). In a concentric dualistic spatial structure, one circle is inscribed in another larger circle (or square); in pure form, the circles share a common central point (Figure 2).

7. A key distinguishing feature of concentric and diametric structures, observed by Lévi-Strauss, is that they tend to co-exist in “functional relation” (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 73) and not simply in isolation. They are structures of relation as part of a system of relations. Being mutually interactive, at least potentially, Lévi-Strauss recognizes that they are fundamentally interlinked, so that an increase in one is compensated for by decrease in the other; they coexist in dynamic tension.

8. A key entailment of relative differences between diametric and concentric spaces is ascertainable in principle. It is evident that the inner and outer poles of concentric space are fundamentally attached to each other, unlike in diametric space; both concentric poles coexist in the same space, and thus, the outer circle overlaps the space of the inner one. The outer circle surrounds and contains the inner circle. The opposite that is within the outer circle or shape cannot detach itself from being within this outer shape. Similarly, notwithstanding that the outer circle or shape can move in the direction of greater detachment from the inner circle, it cannot, in principle, fully detach itself from the inner circle in concentric relation (even if the inner circle becomes an increasingly smaller proportion of the outer).

9. In contradistinction, in diametric space, both oppositional realms are basically detached and can be further smoothly detached from the other. These conclusions operate for both structures, whether they are viewed as being two-dimensional or three-dimensional. A concentric space assumes connection between its parts and any separation is on the basis of assumed connection, whereas diametric space assumes separation and any connection between the parts is on the basis of this assumed separation. As structures in relational difference, this contrast is a relativistic one of degree. Concentric and diametric spaces thus can be seen to offer contrasting structures of differential relation. Lévi-Strauss (1963, 1973) observed these contrasting cross-cultural spatial structures as interacting; however, he overlooked this key contrast between these spaces in relation to assumed connection and separation (Downes 2012).

10. Concentric relation offers a model of distinction between poles, nevertheless held in a relation of assumed connection; this relational space transcends a diametric oppositional space of assumed separation, as well as a collapse into a monistic dimension of pure identity. Werner can be understood as seeking to dismantle, or at least reconstruct, the iron curtain and true walls of diametric space. Concentric space can be interpreted as a spatial relational system in interaction with diametric space (Downes 2015).

11. Such a spatial preunderstanding with regard to relation and division is further relevant to radical constructivism, as it provides contrasting framing modes of relation to underpin various cognitive constructions. As an illustrative example, explored in more detail elsewhere (Downes 2012, 2015), Carol Gilligan’s (1982) moral reasoning processes in contrasting modes of ethic of care and logic of justice are reliant on implicitly spatial preconditions framing these different modes.

12. Gilligan contrasts two eleven-year-old children’s modes of relation:

44 To Jake, responsibility means not doing what he wants because he is thinking of others; to Amy, it means doing what others are counting on her to do regardless of what she herself wants … she, assuming connection, begins to explore the parameters of separation, while he, assuming separation, begins to explore the parameters of connection.” (Gilligan 1982: 38, italics in original)
These assumptions of separation and connection provide an illustrative example of the relative differences between diametric and concentric spaces as spatial frames for cognition. Diametric and concentric structures are necessary spatial-relational conditions for framing the two different constructions of Gilligan’s moral reasoning process. These spatial preunderstandings go beyond binary splits such as mind/body, where distinction can be recognised without being division or reduction to monistic relations of identity.

These proposed diametric and concentric spaces are argued elsewhere to be precognitive frames for understanding, relational horizons within which cognition is shaped (Downes 2012, 2015), pertaining directly also to perception in Jakob von Uexküll’s Umwelt (Downes 2010b), sought by Werner (§64). A related argument is that much of the information processing paradigm of cognitive science is trapped by Cartesian-Newtonian spatial assumptions of passive space as mere non-entity, including in understandings of schema-based explanations (Downes 2010a) and Alan Newell and Herbert Simon’s problem-solver computational models (Downes 2006, 2010a, 2010c). A wider argument for the importance of diametric and concentric spaces seeks also to challenge traditional understandings of metaphysics (Downes 2012, 2013), so interrogation of prior spatial preconditions for understanding may need to go further than being rooted in metaphysical assumptions.

Other entailments of the relative differences between concentric and diametric spaces than assumed connection and assumed separation include those highlighted by Lévi-Strauss (1963, 1973). These are diametric structures as mirror-image inverted symmetry and relative closure of non-interaction between foreground and background; in contrast, concentric spatial relations offer symmetry as unity rather than inversion (Downes 2012) and a more open structure with background rather than diametric spaces.

Werner cites von Glaserfeld (1991) on the need to challenge categories of space and time as objective realities (§18). Diametric and concentric spaces are argued to be irreducible to simple subjectivism or objectivism (Downes 2012); moreover, they do not hinge on Lévi-Strauss’s structuralist commitments (Downes 2012, 2013). This invites a wider discussion about metaphysical understandings of truth locked into subjectivist-objectivist frames of understanding (Downes 2012).

Werner’s questioning of the roots of radical constructivism, to seek pathways removed from remnants of Cartesian metaphysics, is to be welcomed. These aspects of his argument can gain support through this spatial questioning of prior background diametric and concentric structures of relation that frame cognitive constructs, as prior spatial preconditions as constructions for both thinking and perception.

Paul Downes is a senior lecturer in education (psychology), Dublin City University, Ireland. His most recent books are The Primordial Dance: Diametric and Concentric Spaces in the Unconscious (2012) and Access to Education in Europe: A Framework and Agenda for System Change (2014).
Philosophical concepts in constructivism

Hegel and the birdlimed twig

« 5 » It seems reasonable to say that Hegel proposed the most systematic model of PL-metaphysics (perhaps even more accurate than those introduced by Plato or Leibniz). The fundamental premise of Hegel’s "phenomenology of spirit" goes like this: the world taken entirely is simultaneously subjective and objective (substantial), i.e., the entire world is given to itself in its entirety as an identity of an object (substance) and the subject. Applying Hegel’s terminology, we would call this identity the Absolute, i.e., a subjectivised being. The Absolute does not have and cannot have anything “beyond it,” for there is nothing outside of it. Here, we are referring to the thinking cognizing (perceiving) the being, on the one hand, and the being cognized (perceived) by thinking.

« 6 » Hegel’s central idea, in which he criticizes all possible dualisms of strictly subjectivist philosophical schools, and, therefore, of epistemic pessimism, is that any perception (from the first stage of the process) is proportionate to the reality it is handling, otherwise it would not be able to process anything. How, in essence, is any philosophy of subject developed? There is (supposedly) some reality, which someone or something approaches and perceives/cognizes and, depending on their inherent specifics of perception/cognition, forms their own world (“reality” for themselves). Hegel points out that if the world of the perceiving entity (and, therefore, the perception) was indeed material (within the limits of the subject) and the material (an object) are elements of the same reality. In Hegel’s word:

**6** However much we were just supposed to bring the absolute a bit closer to us by means of the instrument and not have the instrument change anything in it at all, perhaps similar to the way we would ensnare a bird on a twig covered in birdlime, the absolute itself would nonetheless almost surely cast scorn on this ruse if it were not both in and for itself already there with us and wanted to be there. **(Hegel 1977: 69)**

« 8 » Hegel’s conclusions are easy to understand. Since (a) the truth is only in the Absolute (the same as the truth can be only absolute), and since (b) the Absolute is subjective by nature, then (c) our perception is (from the very beginning) an element of reality and, moreover, of the absolute reality, beyond which nothing exists.

« 9 » With this approach, the task of cognition is materially simplified. From now on, we should only be concerned with the task of verification in the full sense of this word, so that all we have to do is to engage in a…

**6** simple observation because consciousness conducts self-verification. For consciousness is, on the one hand, a realization of an object, and on the other – realization of itself: realization of what is the truth and acknowledgement of the fact of having knowledge of what is the truth is. **(Hegel 1977: 211)**

« 10 » Werner mentions Husserl’s methodology as an example of PL-metaphysics. I completely agree with him: the similarity of Hegel and Husserl’s methodologies is obvious. Phenomenology is a science about the “consciousness-contemplating-essence” it emphasizes that contemplation should be done with precision, and namely, with a pure description of the contemplated object because that which we actually see is what is present in reality. Husserl’s division between perceived and non-perceived (phenomena and noumena) is blurred due to the core phenomenological principle of intentionality. In accordance with this concept, consciousness does not exist until it is engaged by objects, and a subject does not exist until consciousness recognizes it. With such an approach, cognition turns into contemplation, just as in Hegel’s works, or even into a direct recognition of essences, which is successful because a subject is no longer separated from an object by an impermeable wall of its own subjectivity.

Transcendentalism vs. naturalism

« 11 » Does the approach described above mean that there is a real alternative to various subjectivist metaphysics? If so, how well will this approach work for constructivism?

« 12 » Werner proposed basing constructivism on the platform of PL-metaphysics. I, however, think that this would not make much of a difference. In any case, the focus will still be on a subject and it will be linked not so much to the resolution of the issue about the participation of a subject in the development of the world, as to the problem of the subject’s blind spot.

« 13 » In this sense, the fundamental difference and even intense opposition between metaphysicians will concern the DL/PL-metaphysics and even more so, transcendentalism/naturalism.

« 14 » Without going too much into details, the difference between naturalism and transcendentalism can be described as follows. Naturalism assumes that the world is completely exhausted by that which is given, and that everything given is epistemically accessible. In contrast, transcendentalism postulates that the world is created such that the given is always a result or a consequence of some system requirements (which I call “constructs” below) for the organization of reality, which themselves do not belong to this reality and cannot be found in it: that through which reality is created is not a part of it.

« 15 » Plato’s concepts of beauty, courage, fairness, etc., Aristotle’s categories of essence, quality, quantity, etc., Immanuel Kant’s categories of space and time, etc., are examples of such constructs (which are also sometimes called “transcendental forms” in classical philosophy). In more recent contexts, Wittgenstein approached this topic more closely than others, having identified the laws of logic, values, subject and sense as being transcendental. There are other possible similar constructs, but they should be introduced and justified separately. There-
fore, in this text, I limit myself to only the well-known examples from the history of philosophy and a description of the common underlying theoretical principle.

« 16 » It is important to understand that the rule described in §14 above works regardless of who or what plays the role of the creator of the existing reality. If the world is somehow set, fundamental constructs of this setting will not belong to the world, at least under the same conditions under which exists that which is generated by constructs. The constructive flip side of the world will not be a part of the world and cannot not be found in the world.

« 17 » At the same time, it is important that these constructs are not something unrecognized or unrevealed. Indeed, on the contrary, they are given explicitly and we are well aware of them; they are mostly strictly functional and operational (the essence of a construct); they can be operated, but cannot be recognized subjectively (objectified), which (if it were possible) would allow them to be spoken about from a third-party view or make them universally observable.

« 18 » And it is not compulsory to connect this organizing activity with a subject as is traditionally done in different versions of philosophy of subject: (a) transcendentalism of the Kantian type established a link between the system requirements for the formation of reality and a subject, but this link is not mandatory; (b) in Plato or Wittgenstein’s philosophic teachings, system requirements are not linked to a subject; instead, they are non-biased terms of the existence of the world, and just not manifested in it. Those are, for example, Wittgenstein’s logic and Plato’s values. They represent those constructs through which and in which the world comes to existence, but they lie beyond this world just the same as other objects or facts. The core concept of transcendentalism, which can be represented in the versions of dual ontology (Kantian transcendentalism) and homogeneous ontology (Plato’s transcendentalism), is reflected in this statement. Objective knowledge about these constructs cannot be formed; they cannot be defined (Plato); we cannot define them verbally, but can show them (Wittgenstein).

« 19 » The constructs we are talking about always answer the question “how,” and not the question “what.” In this case, we are talking about two levels of description of reality: objective and non-objective ontology from the first and the third party views (Baker 2011), facts and values, sentences, and the laws of logic (Wittgenstein 1921).

« 20 » Related to this, Wittgenstein quoted the famous metaphor of an eye, which does not see itself when observing something:

** Where in the world is a metaphysical subject to be noted? You say that this case is altogether like that of the eye and the field of sight. But you do not really see the eye. And from nothing in the field of sight can it be concluded that it is seen from an eye.**

(Wittgenstein 1922: 5.633)

« 21 » We can reinforce this metaphor with one simple example: a movie technician who shows a movie in the movie theater cannot appear in the movie as one of its characters or participants, just as we cannot see the flammable film and watch the movie at the same time. In other words, the rules in compliance with which the world is organized are not present in the world itself.

« 22 » When we speak about the difference between branches of metaphysics, perhaps the difference between approaches used in transcendentalism and naturalism would be very important with respect to epistemological possibilities of metaphysics, since this distinction determines epistemic optimism from the pessimism of a specific metaphysics program.

« 23 » Now, if we apply these “tools,” it will be clear that Hegel’s metaphysics, though representing a PL model, is closer to naturalism than transcendentalism (see also Friedrich Hayek 1952 regarding the proximity of Hegel’s philosophy and positivism). That has to do with the fact that Hegel’s Absolute features a unique ability in self-reflection: it is able to cognize not only that which is present in the world, being the result of its cognition, but also the mechanism of own cognition.

« 24 » In contrast, Plato and Wittgenstein’s philosophies – though also representing the PL model – are more an example of transcendentalism because Plato’s categories (beauty, fairness, courage, etc.) and Wittgenstein’s language/logic are examples of constructs that, though explicitly participating in the process of organization of reality, are not present in it as objects of cognition.

**Conclusion**

« 25 » Based on my argumentation so far, I claim that depending on which program of metaphysics constructivism is based on, constructivism will maintain its epistemic positions, characterized by certain degree of epistemic pessimism. Whether it will be the dualistic ontology of Rene Descartes’s type (DL-metaphysics), or the homogenous Plato-Wittgenstein’s (PL-metaphysics) type, constructivism will maintain its transcendental vector to the extent to which transcendentalism itself successfully collocates with both ontologies (or metaphysics, in Werner’s terminology).

« 26 » Even if we are talking about PL-metaphysics, embodying Hegel’s principle of identity of a subject and substance, in application to constructivism, the existence of such an integer will still depend on the presence of certain cognitive non-understanding of one’s own mechanism of operation.

« 27 » Concerning this matter, constructivism, which regards the world as a certain system, would most probably consider various restrictions of the self-referential type. Here we are talking about difficulties of self-reference in the spirit of Kurt Gödel’s theorem of incompleteness (Gödel 1931), although Alfred Tarski (1905) and Wittgenstein (1921) also rigorously developed this intuition, while Niklas Luhmann (1990) did it in contexts similar to constructivism. Consistent and complete self-reference of the system within the boundaries of its continuous self is fundamentally impossible. A system is always either contradictory or incomplete if it attempts to cognize itself (its construct applying its own “tools”).

« 28 » It appears that incompleteness of our knowledge about the world is a systemic failure of knowledge, required for a successful functioning of the system and we reproduce it auto-poietically.

« 29 » Consequently, the statement about the non-transparency of a system’s own settings is fundamental for constructivism, and it can be applied to both the DL- and PL-metaphysics. Thus, I absolutely
agree with Konrad Werner that constructivism may very well be supplemented by PL-metaphysics; however, what I am proposing is that such a metaphysics by itself does not add epistemological optimism to constructivism.

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Diana Gasparyan has held fellowships in the Department of Philosophy at M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University. Currently she works at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow, Russia. She has a PhD and holds an Associate Professor of Philosophy position. In 2009–2010, she was a visiting Professor at Clark University (Massachusetts) within the Fulbright Program. Her webpages are at: http://www.hse.ru/en/org/persons/66551 and https://suhse.academia.edu/DianaGasparyan

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Author’s Response

Subjects, Worlds and (PL-) Metaphysics – What Is It All about?

Konrad Werner

> Upshot • My principal goal in this response is to reintroduce my understanding of metaphysics, which turned out – as I have learned from almost all of the commentaries – to be problematic, to say the least. Having done this, I will be able to address some of the most topical remarks provided by commentators, thereby further clarifying and also modifying my position.

1 I am deeply thankful for all the commentaries. There are two major points of criticism toward my target article. One finds fault with my attempts to employ metaphysics (a) within the philosophical accounts of perception, and (b) in the realism–constructivism debate. The other consists of intriguing suggestions and reflections that broaden my perspective on the possible correlations between the PL-metaphysics perspective and other, sometimes even surprising, areas of thought.

General remarks on metaphysics

2 In order to respond some of the criticism regarding the employment of metaphysics, I will recapitulate and clarify my attitude toward and understanding of metaphysics.

3 I shall start from the worry expressed by Peter Gaitsch pertaining to my use of the word “world.” Following Marcus Gabriel (2015a, 2015b), he writes that “we cannot trust in any metaphysical notion of the world at all” (§4). In response, let me refer first to the footnote that I made in the initial steps of my reflection. I do not link “world” and “subject” to any particular philosophical position: “I simply need these notions, taken in their usual senses, to introduce the philosophical issue” (§1). Therefore, as I pointed out in §9, “world” is “defined ostensively: it refers to the realm of ordinary things around me.” Here we touch on quite a profound issue, namely the question of a relationship between our everyday experience (or “folk psychology”) on the one hand, and sophisticated considerations undertaken by philosophers and scientists on the other. Let me outline an example from the philosophy of perception: Howard Robinson singles out the principle laid down in the early 20th century sense-data theories (ensuing from Locke’s and Hume’s empiricism, although not endorsed there explicitly), i.e., the Phenomenal Principle: “If there sensibly appears to a subject to be something which possesses a particular sensible quality then there is something of which the subject is aware which does possess that sensible quality” (Robinson 1994: 32). Although the principle can be thought of in many ways (and I disagree with almost all things that sense-data theoreticians have built up on this basis), one thing is central there: if I am faced with something in my everyday perception, then it is the job of a theory of perception to deal with it instead of replacing it with items having no phenomenal aspects at all (such as propositional contents). In other words, even these highly abstract (philosophical) or scientifically sophisticated stories of perception must take care of their links with the plain fact known to all folk, that in everyday perception they (indeed we) have the world in view.

4 The notion of the world as I use it in the initial paragraphs of my target article is immersed precisely in this “folk” recognition of something’s being in view. What is it exactly? That is another question.

5 Having the world in view, the question arises: What can we do with it? Following the distinguished tradition of Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz (1934) and Rudolf Carnap (1950), among many others, we can – in fact we should – capture this view with some conceptual frameworks. Now, as I pointed out in §8f, provided these frameworks are set forth, there are – as Carnap (1950) proposed – internal questions (thus answers as well) of science and external questions of philosophy. The latter should be abandoned, says Carnap. This is the place where I can reintroduce my approach toward metaphysics. Being inspired by Roman Ingarden (1964), Jerzy Perzanowski (1990, 2004), Sebastian Tomasz Kołodziejczyk (2006, 2009), Kit Fine (2012b), and Nicholas Rescher (2008), among others, I claim that there is a discipline whose objective is not so much to break the limits of conceptual frameworks, thus to get out of the world captured and constrained by them (in conjunction with all other cognitive factors); not so much to get a glimpse of reality an sich, but rather to problematize the most general architecture of this conceptually constrained world. By “architecture,” I mean the basic setup of items imposed by such pairs as the Aristotelian ones: matter–form, actual–potential, simple–complex; by such categories as substance, object, process, fact, event, relation, etc. This discipline is called ontology, and metaphysics is a special part of it. Rescher puts it aptly:

"Since categories are correlative with questions they delineate and canalize our efforts to secure information. They provide the conceptual frame of reference in terms of which we pose our questions about the nature of things – the cognitive scaffolding we employ in erecting our view of the world, or some sector thereof. To think is to
order,’ said Thomas Aquinas, and the categories we use are our conceptual ordering tools, our devices for setting out on the task of collecting, gathering, and arranging our thoughts about how things stand. The theory of categories is accordingly the study of thought-tools we use in forming and shaping the agenda of the issues that we face in our cognitive dealings the facts (or purported facts) of the world.” (Rescher 2008: 27)

Therefore:

6 On such basis, it becomes a key task of ontology to elaborate and elucidate the concepts and distinctions on which an instructive classification of the realm of being can be founded.” (ibid: 26)

According to Perzanowski, and in fact according to all PL-metaphysicians, the world in view – our initial datum – is complex. He singles out and strongly endorses Descartes’s method of analysis and synthesis outlined in Discourse on the Method. For Perzanowski (2003), this is a universal manner of doing science and philosophy. Analysis means decomposition of a complex datum. In general, there are two groups of analytical methods – natural ones (chemical analysis being the paradigmatic example) and conceptual ones. The latter are enhanced by imagination and thought experiments manipulating, so to speak, our phenomena, recombining them according to the possible scenarios (Descartes’s “distillation” of ego cogito over the course of his six meditations is the best example; but think of Hilary Putnam’s Twin Earth (1973) or brain in a vat scenario, or of Ned Block’s Inverted Earth (1990) if you wish).

Now, each method of analysis reveals (or postulates) suitable simples, that is to say, the, at least provisional, level of items (or just one item) at which they cannot be further decomposed. Note that what simples you can get depends on what method you carry out. Descartes arrives at ego cogito and the idea of God when it comes to his first-personal analysis; and at the idea of a force when it comes to his natural analysis. Block (1990), to take a contemporary example, ends up with his qualia. Leibniz arrives at the idea of monads, and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922) also takes this route.

8 When you obtain simples you have to go back, so to speak, or go up in order to find out how complexes actually are and might be composed of these simples – this is the route of synthesis. For instance, when you obtain monads you have to ask how and why they generate the world you know. But over the course of synthesis, you obtain much more – not only the actually realized scenario but all possible scenarios as well (cf. Wittgenstein’s logical space being the space of all possible configurations). That is why Perzanowski holds that ontology is the general theory of possibility. Leibniz introduces here the ontological basis of his theodicy – God chooses the best option from the space of all possible options.

9 Figure 1 depicts these remarks with the help of a simple diagram, the simplified version of Perzanowski’s (2009b) original one.

10 Following Ingarden (1964), Perzanowski treats metaphysics as a part of ontology: metaphysics deals exclusively with this fragment of the space of analysis, and synthesis – which is, so to speak, devoted to our initial datum – to the actual world.

Response to the commentaries

11 Now I can address several remarks made by the commentators. I shall start from Matt Bower’s rejection of metaphysics. In §10 he writes:

12 For any A, B, C, if I say that I need A and B, and I do not need C, I must suppose that A, B, C are such items that rounding them up to make a list is a comprehensive procedure. However, if one accepts the above-mentioned approach, then Bower’s rejection of metaphysics is flawed. One cannot say “I take biology instead of metaphysics,” just as one cannot say “I take metaphysics instead of biology.” These disciplines are devoted to completely different matters – i.e., they employ different methods of analysis and synthesis – therefore such statements are in fact not false, but meaningless in the actually discussed context. “Metaphysics” and “biology” do not belong to the same list, therefore the functor “instead of” cannot produce a meaningful statement. As regards contexts, of course I can say “I deal with biology instead of metaphysics” when I want to underscore, e.g., the decision I made with respect to the path of my professional career. This means that I have no time for metaphysics or that I am not interested in metaphysics, etc. And that is OK. But in our context and in Bower’s, “without any need” are different.

13 Let me go back to my main metaphor (§10) – of course one can say “I am able to focus on paintings themselves without any knowledge of how they are organized in the gallery.” However, imagine that one holds this: “Generally speaking, pictures are the only things deserving our attention and we do not need to care for all these curator’s ideas of how to collect them, and for all these manners and places in which they are exhibited.” As an opinion it is clear and sound, albeit controversial, but supposedly the result of it would be such that someone else takes care of these neglected matters anyway. This is because pictures and all other works of art, however modern they can be, must always be located somewhere, in some organized space, be it a gallery or Central Park in New York City. Hence – sooner or later – someone must get a handle on that space.

14 This leads me to a somewhat controversial claim that reveals the attitude

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prevailing in my article: I believe that metaphysics is not something that we can switch on when needed and switch off when “biological, psychological, and socio-cultural categories” promise to do the job “without any need for fundamental metaphysical tinkering” (Bower §10). Of course we can switch off this or that metaphysical overview of the world, but not a metaphysical overview or the need for a metaphysical overview. Provided the world is in view and the conceptual frameworks capturing it, metaphysical problems are just there, whether or not we want to take them on. We can even demur to call them metaphysical and to regard our attempts to deal with them as metaphysics, nevertheless – let me reiterate – the problems are there. They are set up by the ways in which we are acquainted with the world; they emerge from the conceptual complexity of this acquaintance (see Kołodziejczyk 2006).

« 15 » This refers to the dramatic question posed by Adriana Schetz:

“Is it really the case that everyone who invokes, explicitly or implicitly, notions related to the broadly understood conceptual scheme of metaphysics, presupposes a determinate metaphysics or should attempt to find metaphysical grounding for one’s claims? I believe that there is no such transition.” (§5)

It is not clear what “should” means here. I do not claim that all people are obliged to actually carry out metaphysical investigations. Since I suppose Schetz’s good will in reading my article, I cannot imagine her taking my claims that way. Moreover, I do not even want metaphysics to succeed in their explanations. I just hold that since metaphysics is necessary for all other disciplines or even for other branches of philosophy, that they need metaphysics to succeed in their explanations. I just hold that since metaphysical problems are set up by the very fact that we attempt to capture the world with our cognitive tools, someone (not everyone but someone) should get a handle on them.

“17 » When I was exploring the DL-metaphysical underpinnings of constructivism I did not pick out a supposed ready-made metaphysical conception, unwillingly endorsed by Ernst von Glasersfeld or others. I was aware of – not surprisingly – the constructive character of my work. As result of that work it turned out – in my view – that von Glasersfeld’s distinction of experiential reality and ontological reality and his sticking exclusively to the latter as opposed to the former fits well with DL-metaphysics and could be rediscovered in this powerful, however problematic (as all others), tradition of Western thought. Spyridon Koutroufinis aptly points out in this context that “both the concept of ‘subject’ and the distinction between subject and object are deeply rooted in Western metaphysics” (§5). Moreover, he adds, “von Foerster’s strict separation between phenomenal qualities (colors, sounds, and pain), on the one side, and the material structure (brain) that would generate them, on the other side, has deep roots in Western metaphysics […]” (§12). That is all I am saying too.

“18 » In a sense, this refers to Bower’s concept of epistemic innocence. He mentions views of perception “on which perception is epistemically innocent, i.e., on which perception simply makes no claims about the world or lacks (semantic) content” (§5) and then goes on to claim, without any comment, that “[d]isjunctivists about perception hold this view (e.g., Travis 2013), and so do proponents of radical enactivism (Hutto & Myin 2013) and radical embodiment (Chemero 2009).” So, he concludes, if all perceptual experiences or some large subset of perceptual experiences are non-representational or lack semantic content, the inside/outside distinction will lose relevance, and so will the actual/potential distinction as Werner explains it.” (§5)

“19 » This suggests that perception is epistemically innocent if it conveys no representative content. I cannot comprehend just how this could be the case. Does it mean that the predicate “epistemic” is by definition associated with representationalism? Such a strong claim would require some deliberation. Moreover, disjunctivists hold that perception is constituted by perceived things, without the mediation of content, and therefore hallucination is simply not a perceptual state. I agree with them in many respects, but I fail to understand how the claim that I have access to real things might be thought of as epistemically innocent, whatever the latter means. After all this very access, thought of in a PL or DL manner, is the sticking point of epistemology since the time of Heraclitus. And the question of how this immediate access contributes to knowledge is being discussed these days by Imogen Dickie (2010), Mark Johnston (2011), Susana Schellenberg (2011), and John McDowell (2013), among many others. So, it is epistemically pregnant, not innocent! Finally, it does not seem correct that the enactive approach is epistemically and metaphysically innocent if apparently within this approach there is an ongoing debate between idealistic and/or realistic commitments and how these commitments differentiate Francisco Varela and Evan Thompson on the one hand, and Alva Noë and Kevin O’Regan on the other (see Mossio & Taraborelli 2008, Taraborelli & Mossio 2008, Pascal & O’Regan 2008; also DeJesus 2015 on radical enactivism compared with Varela’s and Thompson’s views).

“20 » Epistemic innocence may give rise to the idea of a metaphysical innocence, and this refers to the anti-metaphysical
projects such as Huw Price’s, mentioned by Schetz. Here is not the place to discuss it in detail, but this issue is not as easy and straightforward as Schetz seems to suggest. This is because philosophers belonging to the analytic tradition, broadly construed, employ the difference between metaphysics and ontology, often rejecting the first while carrying out the latter. This is especially the case after having recognized that some of the ontological issues were set forth anew in the philosophy of science and philosophy of language. Therefore, it is not always clear whether philosophers such as Carnap, W. V. O. Quine, Michael Dummett, Wilfrid Sellars, and Price himself reject ontological/meta-
physical problems themselves or just some of the traditional ways of assorting them, while holding that the right place for them is, e.g., philosophy of science (as Quine would argue) or language (as Dummett would argue). Moreover, it is not clear whether acknowledging metaphysics/ontology means acknowledging problems/questions in the first place and leaving room for many possible answers to them, or whether it means being committed to particular ontological/metaphysical positions. Recall what Price notes on Carnap, pertaining to Carnap’s (1950) idea of linguistic frameworks:

Does being a pluralist about ontological commitment mean rejecting ontology altogether? And as regards metaphysics vs. ontology in Carnap’s view, Price writes:

Carnap’s view combines pluralism about ontological commitment with a strikingly deflationary attitude to metaphysics in general. (Ibid: 325)

This short sentence exhibits all the issues that I have just picked out: metaphysics or ontology; ontology or philosophy of language/science; recognition of problems and pluralism with respect to answers vs. metaphysical/ontological commitment. When it comes to my attitude, I put the stress on ontological/metaphysical problems rather than answers, thereby leav-

I acknowledge the fact that adequacy is not, in von Glasersfeld’s view, a condition of knowledge. Needless to say, I am on his side here as well. However, I take responsibility for this misunderstanding. The very fact that I had employed the notion of adequacy turned out to be misleading, and Schetz’s criticism gives me the chance to make it clear.

A promising strategy would be to hold a numerical identity of epistemological and ontological items and a qualitative distinction between them at the same time on the ground that they are taken as ontological items on some occasions and also taken as epistemological on other occasions.

I sympathize with the pragmatic spirit of these remarks. They give me the chance to upgrade Perzanowski’s schema in Figure 1 to adapt it to the present discussion.

The route of metaphysics (Figure 2) starts from the world (reality) side, that is to say, from what is thought of as a domain existing independently of subjects. We naturally ask what is the ultimate substance of the world (if any).

The route of epistemology (Figure 3) starts from the subject (knowledge) side; that is to say, from our cognitive activity and its products. We naturally enquire about basic conditions and components of knowledge; we struggle to uncover the

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perception-to-knowledge links, among other things. This is, in my view, what Danka recommends when he talks of taking items as ontological on some occasions and as epistemological items on other occasions.

« 28 » The route of phenomenology (Figure 4) is quite extraordinary since it starts not from one side of the distinction but from the distinction itself — it focuses on the very “fact” that the world appears somehow. That is why I disagree with Bower when he claims that “What is interesting about the inside/outside distinction is the inside member of the conceptual pair, not the outside” §8 and then proceeds to praise Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Varela. No, phenomenology is not about the inside — it is precisely about the inside-outside. Edmund Husserl held that this focus — on appearing itself or phenomena themselves — is principal, more fundamental than the two previously mentioned routes. However, it is not the place to discuss it.

« 29 » Note, however, that over the course of synthesis we always obtain more than a reconstruction of the side that we have started from. We obtain:
- a metaphysical account of the world and of the subject (subject is captured as a being, substance, process, etc.);
- an epistemological account of the subject and of the world (e.g., it turns out, when we have perception analyzed, that the world is constrained by our species-specific mechanisms of perceiving);
- a phenomenological account of appearing together with phenomenological accounts of the world and of the subject (here, the idea of a transcendental subject comes on stage, and of the world as its correlate); Not to mention the fact that we obtain the whole variety of possibilities.

« 30 » So, we have three routes; but in the spirit of Perzanowski I should say — and indeed I believe — that all of them are in fact ontologies. We have three different routes within the schema but the schema itself is provided by ontology. Thus we have ontology of the real (Ingarden’s and Perzanowski’s metaphysics); ontology of knowledge, perception, thinking, etc.; and finally, ontology of phenomena (phenomenology). The latter seems especially controversial, but note the interesting fact that when we think of Husserl himself (for instance his analysis of the part-whole relation), not to mention Ingarden, who made it evident and explicit, the link between phenomenology and ontology seems close and intimate.

« 31 » This is the model — admittedly a very rough one — of what I mean by “metaphysical grounding.” In fact it should be now called ontological grounding. However, this is not about the term. I am happy to accept another term and to admit that I was too relaxed with respect to “grounding” as Schetz pointed out (§5). However, there is no ambiguity or indeterminacy in my use of the term, as long as I speak of metaphysical grounding and not of the metaphysics of grounding, as it is carried out, e.g., by Fine (2012a). This is because in the first case, “metaphysical” is the functor picking out, say, one of many possible groundings (the metaphysical grounding and not some other possible kinds of grounding whatever they might be), whereas in the latter case, “of grounding” picks out one of many possible branches of metaphysics (the one devoted to grounding and not, e.g., to universals). Therefore, “grounding” occurs in two entirely different functions and I see no reason to evoke the latter while my article is clearly about the former.

« 32 » Such a model is admittedly conservative, in particular when we take into account Paul Downes’s posit, i.e., that this model is still diametric. Within the concentric model of inner-outer relation we have:

** unlike in diametric space; both concentric poles coexist in the same space, and thus, the outer circle overlaps the space of the inner one. The outer circle surrounds and contains the inner circle. The opposite that is within the outer circle or shape cannot detach itself from being within this outer shape. Similarly, notwithstanding that the outer circle or shape can move in the direction of greater detachment from the inner circle, it cannot, in principle, fully detach itself from the inner circle in concentric relation.** §8; see also Figure 5)

« 33 » While Downes’s proposal is genuinely intriguing, his commentary would require a completely new paper and probably a reorientation of my thinking on many issues. Nonetheless, I can address it here briefly as follows. The anterior view that Figure 5 depicts (by analogy to the anatomical terms
of location) might be an illusion. Two circles of more or less same size, arranged in tiers, might look from the observer’s perspective as if one were inside the other. Suppose that this is the case, and that it is available from the other observer’s perspective – the perspective that might be called, to stay in the same convention, a \emph{lateral view} (Figure 6).

Figure 6 • The lateral view. Arrows stand for the subject’s movements.

\begin{itemize}
\item Figure 6 presents the same circles, but from the lateral perspective, so that they do not even look like circles. Suppose that one circle symbolizes the world (\emph{W}) and the other stands for the subject (\emph{S}). Suppose that \emph{S} can move (along the red line) with respect to the observer (\emph{O}). Now, having this dynamic model, we can depict several philosophical positions. If \emph{S} is behind \emph{W} it looks to \emph{O} as if it was inside \emph{W}. This is the view that gains traction these days, endorsing the subject’s \emph{being in the world}, being situated and active in the environment, finally – being embodied. However, in the extreme version of this view, \emph{S} is so far behind \emph{W} that it looks to \emph{O} as if there were no \emph{S} at all; say, the subject is embedded so deep in the world that it is hardly discernible. This is more or less, and admittedly very roughly, the radical enactivism of Daniel Hutto and Erik Myin (2013), which turns out to be a new form of reductive materialism, interestingly differing itself from a more traditional materialism. The latter has operated rather in the diametrical space, with the subject-side merely thrown away or seized on by the world-side.

\item If \emph{S} is in front of \emph{W}, then it looks to \emph{O} as if \emph{W} was inside of \emph{S}. This is a kind of idealism, again – interestingly different from the scholarly, rather diametric one. By calling it “scholarly,” I want to underline the fact that it occurs in course books; but I would be surprised if it was actually was endorsed by any philosopher. Rather, I suppose the concentric and dynamic model fits better with, e.g., the alleged idealism of Husserl. In the radical version of this arrangement, the world ceases, as the subject ceased in radical materialism.

** With today’s technology it is possible to observe the activities of our own nervous system. Our own brain, as it appears, say, in an FMRI, is nothing but a subjective phenomenon within our experiential world. If we claim that our subjective phenomena are generated in our brains, as von Feuerstein, Maturana and Varela think, we distinguish a very small piece of our experience by ascribing to it the magic ability to produce all the other phenomena including itself […]** (99)

Although I feel some reservations towards such phrases as “nothing but a subjective phenomenon,” I think that \textit{Krouf tinis} aptly points to the fact that all we can perceive and know, including our abstract ontological models, depends on perspectives. Maturana expressed it nicely in his famous dictum: “Anything said is said by an observer.” There is no “global observer,” as Diana Gasparyan (2015) calls it, or a view from nowhere. \textit{Koutroufinis}’ words strictly correspond to the observation that has been made by cognitive biologist Ladislav Kováč, namely that “our world of consciousness is a phenomenon of the brain, but our brain is also a phenomenon of the brain” (Kováč 2000: 55).

\item Therefore, bearing in mind \textit{Koutroufinis}’ remarks, we should remember that the observer \emph{O} in Figure 6 is not alone in the field; there is also the observer whose perspective is depicted by Figure 6. It is clear then that Figure 5, should be upgraded (Figure 7).

\item Taking Figures 6 and 7, we can see that each time we have the subject depicted, we also have the subject depicting – which has been nicely pointed out by \textit{Koutroufinis} and Kováč. That is why the ultimate reduction of the subject, whatever it might be, is a priori impossible: each time you succeed in the \textit{reduction} of the subject within one model, you must keep in mind that this very model is necessarily \textit{ascribed} to the subject (in this case – to you and to the community of subjects, e.g., the scientific community that you belong to).

\item However, these upgraded pictures are still not quite adequate since they suggest that both observers are, in a sense, outside the model. As a matter of fact, the two observers and \emph{S} in Figure 6 should be the same subject multiplicated just for the purposes of this presentation.

\item This observation leads to Gasparyan’s remarks placing Hegel’s thought within

\begin{itemize}
\item Figure 5 • Downes’s anterior view.
\item Figure 7 • Supplemented anterior view.
\end{itemize}

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Philosophical concepts in constructivism

The world taken entirely is simultaneously subjective and objective (substantial), i.e., the entire world is given to itself in its entirety as an identity of an object (substance) and the subject. **(§5)**

Lack of space prevents me from addressing this in detail, but let me express the following concern. Gasparyan also writes: "Apply-..." **(§5)**

In the same spirit she carries on to stressing the subject-side. In the absolute, while, the PL-model, as I outlined it in the previous paragraphs, is more fair-minded in the sense of Figure 6, then priorization of one side depends on a given perspective. At the end of the day, this approach is pragmatic — there is no ultimate a priori reason to take this or that perspective; however, there are still pragmatic justifications for such choices. In other words, the ways in which the world maintains its own self-recognition are not programmed inside this world and determined. A Perzanowski-an PL-metaphysician would say, following Wittgenstein, that the reasons of the world lie outside of the world, but let me take advantage of Wittgenstein’s closing claim and stay silent on this matter.

**Combined References**


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