Special Issue

Author Meets Critics Symposium
Discussion on *The Relevance of Models*

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Guest Editor

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Organon F 30 (2) 2023: 128–129
https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30201
ISSN 2585-7150 (online)
ISSN 1335-0668 (print)

Preface

The book *The Relevance of Models. Idealization and Concretization in Leszek Nowak* by Giacomo Borbone was the first monograph in English devoted to Leszek Nowak (1943-2009) – a Polish philosopher, cofounder of Poznań School of Methodology and an author of the idealizational theory of science in the philosophy of science, the analytical reconstruction of Marxism, non-Marxian historical materialism in the philosophy of history, and negativistic unitarian metaphysics (on Nowak output and its impact, see: Brzeziński *et al.,* eds. 2007; Brzechczyn 2022, Brzechczyn, ed. 2022). The discussion on Borbone's book focused mainly on Nowak's research in methodology and philosophy of science, historical conditions of the rise of Poznań school and its reception in the world of philosophy. The online discussion was organized by the Faculty of Philosophy at Adam Mickiewicz University and the Poznań Division of Polish Philosophical Society on Dezember 13, 2021.

The participants of discussion whom I would like to thank you for accepting my invitation and providing contributions were: Francesco Coniglione (Catania Uniwersity, Italy), Adolfo Garcia de la Sienra (Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico), Igor Hanzel (Professor Emeritus at Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia), Theo A.F. Kuipers (Professor Emeritus at Groningen University, The Netherlands), Stephen Turner (University of South Florida, USA), Rafał Paweł Wierzchosławski (Faculty of History at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), and the author of the book, Giacomo Borbone (Catania University) who responded to the remarks and comments.

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Organon F 30 (2) 2023: 130–136
https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30202
ISSN 2585-7150 (online)
ISSN 1335-0668 (print)

DISCUSSION NOTE

Leszek Nowak, a Neglected Thinker

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Received: 2 February 2022 / Accepted: 2 March 2022

Abstract: In this short paper, I will describe how I came across Leszek Nowak's ideas and how this influenced my student, Giacomo Borbone, to embark on a similar path. He has made an important contribution to the knowledge a particular school of thought and a philosopher who has often been overlooked in the international epistemological discourse, a particular school of thought and a philosopher who has often been overlooked in the international epistemological discourse, despite the existence of similar concepts within it. I also aim to provide some insights into this neglect, attributing it not to the malice of individuals but to a broader dynamic between the dominant cultural center and intellectual peripheries, as highlighted by Nowak himself in some of his essays.

Keywords: Giacomo Borbone; cultural centre; intellectual peripheries; Leszek Nowak; Poznań School of Methodology.

Let me begin with a few personal considerations, which relate to my experience with a school of thought and a thinker - such as Leszek Nowak - who exerted a decisive impact on my entire intellectual career and my personal life. I will refrain from delving into biographical details about Nowak's life in this paper. For comprehensive information, I recommend

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consulting Krzysztof Brzechczyn's excellent work (2022) where you can find detailed insights.

When I was about to finish writing my first book (Coniglione 1978), I came across the first Italian translation of Nowak's book *La scienza come idealizzazione. I fondamenti della metodologia marxiana* (Nowak 1977). It was a real revelation for me: not only did it give a plausible interpretation of Marxism in line with what contemporary epistemology has elaborated, but it also provided all the conceptual tools to understand Feyerabend's anarchic and anti-methodological drift. I wrote a short article in *Rinascita* (then the theoretical organ of the Italian Communist Party) on this original methodological presentation of Marxism, which I contrasted with the dominant historicist version of Marxian thought in Italy, and I sent it to Nowak. Not long afterwards Nowak's wife, Izabella Nowakowa, replied to me, telling me that her husband had been interned in a prison camp following General Jaruzelski's coup d'état and was therefore unable to reply.

Nowak wrote to me, however, as soon as he was released from the prison camp, inviting me to Poznań. From then on, a continuous relationship was born. It had its most significant moment in my stay of about nine months as a guest of the Poznań university and in annual stays of about one month. I had the opportunity not only to learn the Polish language, but also to understand the cultural depth behind Nowak's theorizing and to get to know the dozens of scholars who were inspired in various ways by what was called the 'Poznań School of Methodology'. Among them there were those who were already known in the West, such as the historian Jerzy Topolski, but also others less known but equally important, such as Jerzy Kmita. Alongside them - who can be considered, together with Nowak, the founders of the school – there are numerous pupils, some of whom are still active, including, first of all, the organizer of this meeting, Krzysztof Brzechczyn. Many other names could be mentioned of intellectuals who, although not strictly speaking pupils of the three initiators of the school, nevertheless came close to it, sharing the same methodological perspectives, such as Jan Such and Władysław Krajewski.

But in addition to this vast and rich group of scholars, my stay in Poznan also enabled me to realize that the Poznan School was not born like a mushroom, isolated in the woods; it had its roots in a rich and extremely

nourishing terrain of philosophical and epistemological studies: that of Polish scientific philosophy, which had been represented mainly by the Lvov-Warsaw School, founded by Kazimierz Twardowski, and had constituted the most important trend in the entire philosophical history of Poland during the 20th century. During my first long stay in Poland and thanks to subsequent visits, I had the opportunity to study all these themes in depth, which then resulted in an extensive study of *Realtà ed astrazione. Scuola polacca ed epistemologia post-positivista*, (Coniglione 1990). To the second edition (revised and corrected) of this study (Coniglione 2010) Giacomo Borbone also had the opportunity to collaborate, not only reading the text and correcting it in several places, but also drawing up a complete list of Leszek Nowak's writings (1963-2009).

I will stop here with the recollection of personal events, which were only meant to reach this point: the birth of Borbone's interest in Nowak, for which I take responsibility. In fact, Borbone graduated in 2006 with a thesis on the Italian Marxist Antonio Labriola, which I directed. He then received his PhD in 2010, again under my supervision, with a dissertation entitled *Questioni di metodo. Idealizzazione e materialismo storico non-marxiano nella figura di Leszek Nowak*. During his doctorate I had introduced him to the circles of the Poznań School, where he went for four months (between 2008 and 2009) as a guest of the Adam Mickiewicz University, under the supervision of Andrzej Klawiter, one of Nowak's best students, then professor of epistemology and cognitive science at the Institute of Psychology in Adam Mickiewicz University. It was at this stage that his interest in the idealizational perspective of science, developed in the Poznań School, was established, and this took shape in the publication of the book *Questioni di metodo. Leszek Nowak e la scienza come idealizzazione* (Borbone 2016), as well as numerous articles published in a variety of journals. The volume we are discussing today is the timely and, I would say, almost necessary English translation of the latter, in substance almost entirely in accordance with the original.

I deemed it necessary and opportune not by chance, because such a translation not only allows the work of a talented scholar to be known outside national borders, but also set another significant stone to contribute to the knowledge of a philosopher and a cultural experience that, in my

opinion, has not received sufficient attention at the international level and especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. And here allow me to be "politically incorrect", by stating more clearly and distinctly what Borbone cautiously and politely mentions in the first note to his volume (Borbone 2021, 4).

In asking why there is so little awareness not only of the rich Polish epistemological tradition, but especially of what the Poznań School of Methodology has done with its idealizational theory conception of science (ICS), Borbone puts forward several reasons, to one of which I would like to draw my attention. He refers to what Gereon Wolters has called "globalized parochialism", that is, the particular attitude that makes so-called "minority" and peripheral cultures practically invisible compared to those that have cultural hegemony, especially in some areas, such as the philosophy of science and epistemology, where English-speaking countries dominate. This marginalization should not, however, be understood in a moralistic sense, as if it were the fault of individual scholars, but in the light of a complex and articulated cultural phenomenon where the general relationship between the Centre and the periphery comes into play; a phenomenon that has been well studied in sociological and historical contexts. Among the causes of this "minority" is the imperfect mastering of the hegemonic language (English), which does not allow other cultures to participate with equal dignity and effectiveness in international debates. Wolters uses the example of the Poznań School to illustrate this phenomenon:

> (...) I would like to mention the Polish philosopher Leszek Nowak (1943-2009), who has launched the contemporary debate on idealization and has greatly contributed to it. He is nonetheless, rarely quoted, although a substantial part of his work is published in English: He just seems to have had the wrong address: University of Poznań. (Wolters 2013, 10)

Indeed, there is no lack of important scholars who have given due weight and consideration to the ICS in their works, citing and explicitly taking into account what has been done in the Poznan milieu; I would mention only the names of Ilkka Niiniluoto, Craig Dilworth, Nancy Cartwright, Theo A. F. Kuipers, Igor Hanzel, Martti Kuokkanen, Bert Hamminga, Adolfo Garcia de la Sienra. However, many others, while valuing the role of idealization in science and the role of scientific models – especially in the last decades –

seem to ignore the existence of ICS. I will stop here, but countless other cases could be mentioned.

To contribute to this phenomenon there is also, in my opinion, a characteristic of the epistemological tradition of Anglo-American ascendancy, certainly not due to the ill will of individuals and which only in recent years seems to be increasingly questioned: the lack of historical sense in addressing the problems, with the risk of rediscovering the wheel or of falling into forms of disarming philosophical naivety. An example for all: a meagre entry on "Idealization" contained in the *Companion to the Philosophy of Science* (Ben-Mehanem 2000) does not contain the slightest mention (not even in the bibliography) of the elaborations developed in hundreds of articles and dozens of books produced on the subject, both by the Poznań school and by scholars, even Western ones, close to it. This is all the more serious when one considers that it is an encyclopedic entry that, by its nature, should have provided a tendentially complete overview of the main positions on the subject. This is not a question of easy moralizing, because only in a few cases has there been conscious concealment, as in the case of an Italian scholar who takes the ICS theses almost literally, without ever mentioning it, in order to propose his own solution to one of the classic problems of the philosophy of science.

But, beyond these "personal sins" (the world of research is full of conscious and unconscious plagiarism, literal or reformulated as simple paraphrases), we are here dealing with a general problem – sociological rather than moral. This is explicitly and very significantly acknowledged by the exponents of the Poznań School themselves, primarily Nowak. In volume of Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities, entitled *Thinking about Provincialism in Thinking* edited by Krzysztof Brzechczyn and Katarzyna Paprzycka, articles by Nowak and other scholars - including Giacomo Borbone - are published. In particular, in his article Nowak (2012) describes the cowardly mentality of the provincial intellectual, who lacks the courage of his own ideas and believes he can emerge by imitating and repeating those of the cultural metropolis. He then goes on to describe three different types of researcher's personality (creative, correctional and applicational) and then transfers this distinction to the global level, where in a given science there is "the *central sphere* and subsequent,

ever lower, provincial spheres" (Nowak 2012, 63). For instance, "American universities are the centers, followed by the West-European universities, the Central-European ones, and finally universities located even further to the East than our own" [i.e. Poznań University – F.C.] (Nowak 2012, 63). This can be seen simply from the direction of the citations: it is always scholars from the more marginal universities who quote those from the more central universities, never (or rarely) the other way around. Thus:

> being from Harvard or Sorbonne means, in a given science, that your work contains theories that other, from Ljubljana or Lublin, can only comment (…) On the other hand, nobody from Harvard or Sorbonne will lower herself to commenting on the work of authors from Ljubljana or Lublin. This is not mere "pathology". It is the norm! (…) These artificial hierarchies of influence distort real hierarchies of discoveries in different degrees in different sciences. (Nowak 2012, 63-64)

It would be naive not to think that this diagnosis, although supported by solid theoretical arguments and grounded in Nowak's general conception of science, does not reflect his own personal and painful experience. And I can bear direct witness to this, as we have often talked together about this phenomenon, referring to our two countries, Italy and Poland: both, Nowak used to say, are second-class cultural countries and therefore very difficult to be recognized in the wider context of international debate. And indeed, why should an intellectual from the Centre of the Empire not have the deep-rooted conviction that if something important can be produced in the philosophical field, then surely it will happen in the numerous, rich, well-equipped, and up-to-date American universities? Why should he take the trouble to read Polish or Italian or the occasional article produced in the often-inelegant English of "minority" cultures, when there are hundreds of studies on the same subject produced by his accredited colleagues in an excellent and fluent language?

Fortunately, this is not always the case because, as often happens in science, there are innovators and outsiders who, by dint of insisting, succeed in triggering an avalanche movement that arouses ever greater interest and eventually ends up giving due weight to new ideas, regardless of where they come from. After all, today's meeting could be a step in this direction, and

Giacomo Borbone's book can be another piece in drawing well-deserved attention to the work of Leszek Nowak and his school. Perhaps the day will come when someone will write a history of the fortunes of such ideas, hopefully with a positive ending.

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Organon F 30 (2) 2023: 137–147
https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30203
ISSN 2585-7150 (online)
ISSN 1335-0668 (print)

DISCUSSION NOTE

On Historical Context of Leszek Nowak's Idealizational Conception of Science

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Received: 24 April 2022 / Accepted: 1 July 2022

Abstract: The famous saying *Habent sua fata libeli*, can (at least sometimes) also apply to (philosophical) ideas, especially the most abstract ones. As it seems, the invocation of this maxim may also have some application in interpreting the concept of idealization of the concept of science, for the understanding of which it is useful to pay attention to the historical, social and political context. I argue that the analytical Marxism of the Poznan School of the 1970s and 1980s was a philosophical reflection of certain modernization processes of the real socialist system (the managerial revolution and the technocratic modernization of the Gierek era), which was an attempt to "escape forward" from the dysfunctional "manual control" of the system during the period of minor stabilization of the 1960s. At the same time, this period ended the ideological (quasi-religious) functions of Marxist philosophy (March 1968) by introducing an expert dimension that emphasized the use (adaptation) of contemporary currents of thought present in the thought of Western countries. The idealizing interpretation of Marx as an insightful methodologist, whose legacy makes it possible to overcome methodological dilemmas in modern philosophy of science, was also aimed at finding such an aspect (idealizing models) that made it possible to defend against

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factual charges directed against the Marxist system in the social sciences (apologetic function). A refined conceptual scheme was supposed to give the nimbus of being scientific (logical analysis). However, the sophistication of the late scholasticism of analytical Marxism did not save this construction in its empirical verification (the problem of predicting social phenomena) and led the author to create a non-Marxist Historical Materialism as a separate theory, which was to focus on the structural-functional analysis of the historical process, which involved putting aside the study of idealization "to the side."

Keywords: Idealization; Leszek Nowak; modernization; non-Marxian historical materialism; social systems; Poznań School of Methodology.

I came into personal contact with Leszek Nowak as a philosophy student at the Catholic University of Lublin, when, in 1983, I invited him on behalf of the Philosophy Students' Club to the annual Philosophy Week conference. It should be noted that this was the first Week after martial law, and its theme was focused on the philosophy of history. The choice of this topic was for the organizers an obvious example of an attempt to grasp the moment (significance) of the historical events of that time. They succeeded in inviting several prominent speakers from Poland. Leszek Nowak accepted the invitation and, in a University auditorium packed with students, presented the fundamental issues of non-Marxian Historical Materialism in the context of predicting future historical events, i.e. the possible collapse of the triple rule system of domination: ideological, economic, and political. In the evening he and another distinguished guest of the week, Professor Jerzy Szacki [an eminent historian of social thought from Warsaw University], had long discussions with students who invited him to a private meeting. Later, in 1984-85, when I returned to my home town of Poznań, I attended his academic seminars, first at the Institute of Philosophy of the Adam Mickiewicz University, and later, after he had been expelled from the university by the Minister of Science, in other places, which were organised by students. Thus, I personally got to know the philosopher from Poznań in the second phase of the development of his views and at the beginning of the third and final phase, when he began to formulate the first theses in the area of negative metaphysics.

Nowak's Idealizational Conception of Science can be treated as a special case of modelling in science and one, but not the only one of many faces of idealization, which the discussed book by Giacomo Borbone rightly points out. I think that it is one of the main merits of the author of the book which is that he went beyond the narrowly conceived philosophy of science and points to the procedures of idealization (or, more broadly, modelling) e.g. in philosophy (Husserl, Cassirer). The fact of the multiplicity of approaches to modelling in science has been raised by Leszek Nowak himself (Nowak 1971, 1992, Brzechczyn 2019, 2022a, 2022b; Wajzer 2022). The merit of Borbone's book is that it introduces other cognitive approaches into the "salons of idealization" and thus broadens the scope of possible understanding of the modelling procedure at hand [using idealization], especially since in the case of Ernst Cassirer or Edmund Husserl we are dealing with anti-naturalistic and ontological-epistemological approaches that definitely go beyond methodological approaches (of the philosophy of science).

I formulate my vote on Borbone's book from a perspective external to idealizational conception of science. This perspective can be described as a historical sociology of scientific knowledge. At the same time, it seems that a certain distance in time already allows for a certain attempt to look at (and evaluate) the broader context within which the philosophical ideas of the Poznan school were born.

I was inspired to take such a perspective in the presentation of the problem of idealization in terms of Poznań's analytical Marxism by reading Katreen Forrester's (2019) fascinating book. The author brilliantly shows the historical, social and political conditions of the emergence of John Rawls' theory of justice and political liberalism, a concept that, although formulated very abstractly, sought to answer the problems of American and non-U.S. society at the time.

In the context of extending the scope and "liberalizing" the method of modelling (e.g. phenomenology), further questions arise: is the Marxian heritage important for grasping the very mechanism of idealization in science, in the version proposed by Leszek Nowak, or is the fact of referring to Marx incidental and historically forced by the "Marxism" then in use and imposed administratively in the academy of the real socialism Poland? Confirmation

of my intuition can be found in the opinion of one of his closest collaborators from those times, Professor Andrzej Klawiter:

> The concept that Leszek created was based on Leszek Nowak's ideas, and in Marx these ideas are most simply absent. And this should be clearly stated". (...) it was Leszek's creativity that determined the creation of the school. On the one hand, he would invoke Marx, but on the other, he would show how to make something original out of the relatively vague statements that were there in Marx. Under his eye Marx turned out to be, if not more skillful, then at least as methodologically skillful as Galileo. (Klawiter 2003, 70)

The question about the Marxism of the Poznan School is all the more justified because if we derive its heritage from the tradition of the research approach of Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz and his Poznan students, especially Jerzy Giedymin and Andrzej Malewski, we must remember that they were not Marxists, and at the same time they proposed going beyond the narrow and orthodox positivist understanding of (philosophy of) science. At the other hand, it is worth noting that they survived under the umbrella of logic and its applications the worst period in Polish science, i.e. Stalinism, and skillfully took advantage of the opportunities offered by the period of the so-called "Post-1956 Thaw".

In this context it is also worth to recall the first book written jointly by Jerzy Kmita and Leszek Nowak (Kmita, Nowak 1968), a book in the spirit of the tradition of Ajdukiewicz, and especially Jerzy Giedymin, and the critical rationalism of Karl Popper that he advocated. The authors propose a position of methodological holism (structuralism) and thus go beyond the methodological individualism that characterizes Popper and Giedymin, but this reference to the category of structure (e.g. in linguistics or ethnology) does not have a decidedly Marxian sense; it can rather be interpreted in the tradition of Wittgensteinian rule-following. This book is worth recalling because it contains a certain rhetorical device which marks the cognitive perspective adopted by Nowak, from the point of view of which he discusses different views and presents his own: "It is an attempt to oppose the anti-naturalistic concepts of the humanities with a naturalistic position which, while respecting the correct intuitions of the anti-naturalistic concepts,

would nevertheless be free of some of their shortcomings" (Kmita, Nowak 1968, 4). This schema was taken over by Nowak, in a setting definition of opponents' positions, in relation to which the idealizing approach would constitute their overcoming and abolition of cognitive aporias.

In their case it was the Marxism of the "October Thaw," which soon passed into Gomułka's phase of "minor stabilization" 1956-1968. As he himself analyzed his decisions years later:

> March was for me an overt testimony that the deficiencies of this system are not deficiencies, but that it is something systemic. The gap between the ideal and the reality is too great, something has to work spontaneously, causing this gap. At the time, I believed that the system was being reformed and, moreover, I believed that one had to do as Keynes did. That is, Keynes finally turned with his doctrine not to the opposition but to those in power, and it was up to those in power to reform the system in accordance with the recommendations of his theory. I thought that this kind of path had to be followed again, and it was not about my ambition - I thought it should be done at all. And then I thought that it would be some kind of economic theory, a non-standard theory of socialist economy, from the theoretical side it would remain within the framework of Marxian economism. (Nowak [1988] 2011, 678-679)

From this we can infer that Marx's views were close to him earlier, and that his turn was an expression of the ideological stance taken from the family home and the need not only to understand the world, but also to change it. Leszek Nowak quickly became the *Wunderkind* of Polish Marxism in the Gierek era of socialist modernization. He published and printed more books, became a priest of the modern version of the Marxist methodology of science, lectured not only at his home university in Poznań, but also taught doctoral students at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and at Warsaw University, and the methodology of economics at the Institute of Political Economy of Poznań School of Economics [today Poznań University of Economics and Business]. In the party line, he was a member of the Ideological Commission of the PZPR (Polish

United Workers' Party) University Committee (from 1972). In 1975, at the age of 33, he became a full professor.

In an attempt to understand this turn to Marxism (more or less expected), it is worth noting that there is a curious convergence of two post-1968 tendencies. In Western countries there is a young post-war generation for whom Marxism is an attractive 'paradigm' for thinking in a phase of culturally contradictory capitalism. This convergence of Western academic Marxism e.g. analytical Marxists (non-bullshit Marxism) such as Gary A. Cohen, Eric Olin Wright, John Elster, Johen Roemer and the modernizing and relatively unorthodox or methodological reorientation in contrast to earlier ideological applications of domestic Marxism can be seen as a *signum temporis*.

It seems that both the phenomenon of the Poznań School, and especially that of Leszek Nowak's group (similarly to the marriage of Marxism with Merton's structural-functionalism in sociology by Piotr Sztompka's Kraków group) can be treated as examples of the opening up of Polish science to the West (windows of opportunities) and the introduction of new, let us say "licensed," products to the still mandatory Marxist legitimization ideology, intended to make it more attractive and adjust it to the debates of the time.

In both cases one can observe a modernizing and accommodating tendency, in the sense that, if properly interpreted, it is possible to show that Marx's ideas are still (*sic!*) valid as a cognitive device analogous to the issues raised and developed in the approaches of the time in the philosophy of science or in sociological theory.

As one Warsaw sociologist recalls his performances of those years: "the early 1970s, I listened to a lecture on his theory that raised my deep doubts. He was then admiring himself and his political-intellectual success. I also remember Piotr Sztompka taking great pride in the fact that reading his article on Leninist party theory was recommended for party training."

On the one hand, they were involved in looking for answers in Marx's philosophy, but on the other hand, they simultaneously became part of a system of "intellectual oppression" (ideological chastity), or at least this is how they were perceived by young people from other faculties of the university, whose students have to take compulsory courses in Marxist philosophy and sociology. This aspect undoubtedly differentiates the historical

and social context of the development of Marxist thought in Poland from the setting of its development in Western countries. There it was not a form of domination and enslavement, as the later fate of the author of ICS testifies, when his heterodox intellectual search led him to formulate a version of non-Marxian historical materialism - which in fact is a testimony to his intellectual honesty. Nevertheless, to be a Marxist was at the same time to be a man of the system (in the sense of public perception).

Thus, taking into account the social factors conditioning, or at least accompanying, the development of the concept of idealization, it is worth returning to Klawiter's remark about the [potentially] occasional significance of Marx, perhaps not so much for its origin, but rather for its content. In the light of the line of development that can be traced in the works of Leszek Nowak, it is in the first works that the protagonist of idealization modelling is exclusively Marx, e.g. *O zasadzie abstrakcji i stopniowej konkretyzacji* [On the principle of abstraction and gradual concretization, Nowak 1970], *U podstaw Marksowskiej metodologii nauk* [At the Foundation of Marxian Methodology of Science, Nowak 1971], *Zasady marksistowskiej filozofii nauki* [Principles of Marxist Philosophy of Science, Nowak 1974). In later works, such as *Wstęp do idealizacyjnej teorii nauki* [An Introduction to the Idealizational Theory of Science, Nowak 1977], which is a more mature account of idealization as a form of modelling in science, Marx is an important author, but not the only one among the classics of scientific cognition, in whose works it is possible to extract (reconstruct) this type of cognitive perspective. In later works, other classics of idealization in various scientific disciplines like Galileo, Charles Darwin or Noam Chomsky appear almost on equal footing.

At the same time, it should be noted that the theory of idealization became a kind of Marxist 'Organon' in the construction of social theory. This was followed by a certain political idea, which Nowak defined in retrospect over the years in the following way:

> socialism needs its good, non-conformist and therefore critical theory, which would reveal its hidden mechanisms and thereby give the ruling party an intellectual basis for a more effective policy aiming, as I believed at the time, at the realisation of Marxian ideals. The paradigmatic example was Keynes's theory,

> which - as I believed at the time - made it possible to transform the also dreadful pre-war capitalism into something at least acceptable to the people. The idea was to build a theory of socialism of the Keynesian type. With far-reaching criticism of the political practice of the system, and especially of its ideology - I already had no doubt at the time that it was babbling - it was to be a theory faithful to Marx's message and addressed to those whom I considered to be its makers, to the party. (...) But how to make such a theory? One had to look for a method, a Marxian method. While digging through the volumes of *Capital*, I found the method of idealization. And by the way, a Marx quite different from Kołakowski's Marx (by the way, this Marx of Kołakowski's always made an impression on me as a hysterical humanist; I'm not surprised that in the end he got tired of the interpreter himself): Marx the founder of an original methodology. The question was, however, whether this methodology was indeed a good one. The answer was provided by numerous monographs showing that this method, intuitively sketched only in writings, is respected and applied by every field of science, as soon as it emerges from its factual childhood: from physics, through biology, psychology, economics to linguistics or jurisprudence. (Nowak 1985 [2011b], 592-593)

In the context of the "idealization turn," the strategy proposed by Leszek Nowak of reconstructing Marx's methodology can be seen as analogous to the formal and logical sophistication of late scholasticism, which, however, did not save this current from a certain decline (withering away) and its replacement by other approaches. For if we take into account the various functions of language present in the proposed methodology of abstraction and gradual concretization, and in addition to the semantic function of referring to the world, distinguish certain persuasive-polemical (apologetic) functions, then [especially in the first publications on the idealizing reconstruction of Marx's methodology] we see a certain methodological "flight forward." That is, the strategy of avoiding accusations of the empirical inadequacy of Marxian theories (e.g. within economics), by pointing out that the polemicist does not accept or does not perceive (does not realize) at all that his accusations do not relate to the merits, because he adopts a factual

perspective. In Nowak's view, Marx's theses are formulated in terms of an idealizing model rather than empirical (factual) claims subject to direct verification or falsification. As counterfactual theses, they are an attempt to grasp the essence of the phenomena under investigation, which, by the same token, is their radical simplification (abstraction, idealization). Thus, the accusation of empirical inadequacy put forward by opponents of Marxist social, political or economic theory is fundamentally misplaced, since, according to Nowak, it does not directly refute a simplified idealizing model.

If my reading is correct, then, at least in part, the genesis of the ICS can be seen as a search to overcome various "prejudices" and objections to both Marx's texts themselves and their interpretation in existing Marxist interpretations (both canonical and heterodox). It is worth noting that this procedure is put forward at a time when a certain number of former praetorians and apostles of the new faith are eliminated from the Academy within the framework of cleansings in the apparatus of power (the ideological division), most commonly because they have lost their faith and moved to skeptical and revisionist positions (Leszek Kołakowski or Adam Schaff).

The real question, then, is to what extent the suggestion made here, that independent of the intentions of the authors, was a form of reformed, scientific (not to say 'technocratic' - because of the logical form of expression) Marxism. The term technocratic in this context is appropriate in the sense that reformed Marxism was not only to describe and explain the world, but also, according to the old principle, to change it. It was to provide intellectual tools for effective problem solving and optimization (the category of rationality) of the system. Nowak assumed that ICS and its application in further areas of Marx's thought of categorical dialectics, and especially historical materialism, would enable a social theory formulated in this way to perform diagnostic and predictive functions in the correct (optimal) functioning of the system, which, however, was increasingly evading the analytical categories applied to it. And paradoxically, the transition to a higher level of abstraction, which (at least as a side effect) introduced an idealizing turn, turned out to be the final nail in the coffin of Marxism in its up to now interpretation. For the ideological reconstruction of historical materialism led to the "semantic defeat" of the adaptive interpretation of the same and forced Leszek Nowak and his collaborators to develop a new

approach, which at the turn of the 70s/80s became non-Marxian historical materialism. Emphasizing the significance of the apologetic functions of ICS is not meant to diminish the significance of the originality of the model thinking proposed by Nowak, but rather to point to certain concomitant conditions (*hic et nunc*) of the emergence of this approach, which do not cross out or eliminate the validity of the discussed reconstruction.

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Organon F 30 (2) 2023: 148–152
https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30204
ISSN 2585-7150 (online)
ISSN 1335-0668 (print)

DISCUSSION NOTE

Leszek Nowak, Idealization and Interpretation

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Received: 15 November 2022 / Accepted: 15 December 2022

Abstract: The paper is a voice in discussion over Giacomo Borbone's book The Relevance of Models. Idealization and Concretization in Leszek Nowak. The author characterizes intellectual tradition of Poznań School of Methodology and considers types of interpretation of Marx's writing adopted by Nowak and his collaborators. According to him idealization theory of sciences resulted from two kinds of interpretations: adaptive and historical ones.

Keywords: Idealization; interpretation: Leszek Nowak; Poznań School of Methodology.

Giacomo Borbone's book The Relevance of Models. Idealization and Concretization in Leszek Nowak (Borbone 2021) consists of an introduction, three principal chapters: Origins and Characters of the Poznań School of Methodology, Science and Marxian Method, Leszek Nowak and the Idealization Conceptions of Science, a conclusion, and a comprehensive bibliography which encompasses Leszek Nowak's and his cooperators' works on the idealizational theory of science.

Borbone considers the intellectual genesis of the Poznań School of Methodology in the context of the tradition of Polish analytic philosophy

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started in Poland, at the end of the 19th century, by Kazimierz Twardowski. After World War II, the links between the tradition of the pre-war Lwów–Warsaw School and the later members of that school in Poznań were Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz (Twardowski's son-in-law) and Adam Wiegner.

Borbone notes the importance of Jan Łukasiewicz whose works contain the idea that scientific law does not simply represent the studied reality but distorts it in such a way that it is possible to extract its most important elements. To that map of intellectual influence, it is worth adding the impact of Tadeusz Kotarbiński's lectures frequented by Leszek Nowak when he was an extension student of philosophy at the University of Warsaw and the inspiration from Janina Kotarbińska who was the supervisor of Nowak's master's thesis (Brzechczyn 2022).

The second tradition of the Poznań School of Methodology was Marxism. After 1956, there appeared so-called scientific Marxism which assumed less dogmatic form, at least in Poland. Within its framework researchers tried to make use of the achievements of the newest methodology of life sciences and of the philosophy of science. The third pillar of Poznań School were Popper's methodological concepts popularized in Poland by Jerzy Giedymin (review of different traditions of idealization in history of science, see: Wajzer 2022)

However, apart from scientific Marxism based on mature Marx's works, anthropological Marxism based on his earlier works was also developed in Polish philosophy in the second half of the 20th century. Borbone wonders what motivated Nowak to only take mature Marx's works as the starting point. He quotes Nowak himself explaining that:

> Each of us has numerous 'works' written when he was still a student (…). Imagine that one of your treatises, which you held among your papers for decades only out of a natural feeling for your own youthful naivety, is 'discovered' by someone and that then numerous 'interpreters' begin to declare what you have published is meaningless and that instead your true 'conceptions' are those contained in these unpublished writings of your youth: well, what would you think of it? I would submit the matter to a court of justice! (…) Not only the living but also the deceased

> have 'human rights.' And Marx's rights as an author have been seriously violated. (Nowak 1987, 274)

That line of reasoning, though, is not convincing for Borbone. According to him, the criterion of having been published is not the only one criterion of choosing any work as a base of interpretation:

> the reasons that Nowak puts forward are not entirely satisfactory: why does Nowak in his works often turns his gaze to Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* as well as to *Grundrisse* and Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value*? In fact, it is known to specialists that these works remained unpublished but nonetheless Nowak makes constant use of and refers to them, forgetting, in this case, his previous mistrust of the manuscript. The only explanation, in our opinion, consists in Nowak's conscious choice to use Marxian and Engelsian works where there is that idealizational conception of science so dear to him. This explain why Nowak very often makes use of Marxian and Engelsian 'manuscripts' which he in principal underestimates as an authentic source of the thought of the author who, in his opinion, only finds the best expression in published works. (Borbone 2021, 47)

Perhaps Nowak applied two criteria at once: the criterion of having been published and criterion of the time of creation. The second criterion was crucial for Nowak – whether the work was created in its author's youth or mature age. Of the works created in the author's youth, those which fulfill the criterion of having been published can be the subject matter of reconstruction. However, the criterion of having been published does not apply to the works written in the mature age.

It is worth noting that while interpreting Marx's concept, Nowak distinguished two types of interpretation used in philosophy: historical interpretation and adaptive interpretation (Nowak 1989). The goal of the former is to recreate what the author meant at the given time, when the statement in question was made. In adaptive interpretation, the expression of thought is ascribed a particular meaning on account of it being the answer to the interpreter's question (or problem) which is significant in the context of the interpreter's culture or society. According to Bogusław Wolniewicz, in that type of interpretation:

> We are not then interested in intentions or motives. We are faced with certain theses the origin of which does not matter because we are only interested in the logically necessary consequences of those theses and in their possible reasons. We could phrase it like that: the interpretive issue of the latter kind does not concern the meaning intended by a person but the 'intended meaning' of a system of statements. (Wolniewicz 1968, 53)

One might put forth the thesis that the idealization method discovered in Marx's writings (also called the abstraction method) was the result of the application of historical interpretation. Marx's methodology was interpreted in a similar way by Bert Hamminga (1990) and Adolfo García de la Sienra (1992). Nowak and his cooperators' transformation of Marx's abstraction method into the idealizational theory of science was, on the other hand, the result of the application of adaptive interpretation (Nowak 2000, 178).

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Organon F 30 (2) 2023: 153–159
https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30205
ISSN 2585-7150 (online)
ISSN 1335-0668 (print)

DISCUSSION NOTE

Conceptual Concretization

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Received: 5 January 2023 / Accepted: 5 February 2023

Abstract: Leszek Nowak is rightly known as the pioneer of empirical concretization. As Giacomo Borbone notes, there is also a kind of conceptual concretization. This specific form of concept explication is illustrated by two transitions: from Bayesian conditionalization to Jeffrey conditionalization and from 'the straight rule' of learning from experience to Carnap's continuum of inductive methods. The paper closes with a schematic list of checkpoints for conceptual concretization in two rounds.

Keywords: Carnapian learning from experience; concept explication; concretization; Jeffrey conditionalization; idealization; Leszek Nowak; Poznań School of Methodology; schematic recipe for explication.

Let me begin with a characteristic anecdote with Leszek Nowak. My wife (Inge de Wilde) and I were around November 24, 1981, a couple of days the guest of Leszek and Izabella Nowak. Their hospitality in these hard times, just before martial law, was incredible. For one evening Leszek had invited a number of young philosophers. They showed up with a present

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for Leszek, which appeared to be the first copy of his new book that they had produced in some secret way. My wife knew at that moment that much of Polish that she immediately doubted whether the printed title, *Wolność i władza* (*Freedom and Power,* Nowak 1981), was the one Leszek had been talking about before, viz. *Własność i władza* (*Property and Power*)[1]. So she asked it in private to Leszek, upon which he said to her that he also had noticed this immediately, but that he didn't want to confront them so directly with their mistake.

Giacomo Borbone (2021) did an impressive job by presenting a systematic exposition of the main lines of thought of Leszek Nowak regarding idealization and concretization.

Surprisingly enough, he uses in his concluding section an expression, 'conceptual concretization', that does not occur in the rest of the book. As part of the concretization of an idealized law he summarizes, I quote: "concepts constituting conceptual concretizations of the idealizing concepts previously analyzed must be introduced" (Borbone, 2021, 166). Of course, in the book he has made clear what is here intended: e.g. idealized concepts, like 'ideal gas', have to be replaced by more realistic concepts. Related to this, I wrote in my contribution to The Courage of Doing Philosophy:

> In my view, Idealization and Concretization (henceforth I&C) is not only an important methodology in the empirical sciences (empirical I&C)[2], but also in philosophy, at least as far as philosophy is engaged in 'concept explication'. In concept explication one aims at the construction of a simple, precise and useful concept which is, in addition, similar to a given informal concept. According to the standard strategy of concept explication one tries to derive from the informal concept to be explicated and relevant empirical findings, if any, conditions of adequacy that the explicated concept will have to satisfy, and evident examples and counterexamples that the explicated concept has to include or

[1] The book was published in English by Reidel (Nowak 1983). I did the proofreading, since Leszek was interned at the time.

[2] Added note: I elaborated 'the paradigm example of [empirical idealization and] concretization', viz. the Law of Van der Waals, in (Kuipers 1985). An adapted version is available upon request: T.A.F.Kuipers@rug.nl

> exclude. As in the empirical case, it may be very useful to start with an idealized way of catching cases and conditions, in order to make it gradually more realistic. This I will call "conceptual I&C." Of course, conceptual I&C is useful not only for concept explication but also for concept formation in general. Moreover, explication may go further than the explication of informal concepts, it may also aim at the explication of intuitive judgments, i.e. intuitions, including their justification, demystification or even undermining. (Kuipers 2007a, 75-76)

So far for this quote. Let me stress that in case of conceptual concretization, the idealized initial explication of the concept reappears, as a rule, as an extreme special case of the concretized explication. In the rest of the 2007a-paper, I illustrated all this with a typical cluster of examples of concept and intuition explication, viz. confirmation, empirical progress, and (more) truthlikeness.[3] Here I will indicate some more examples of conceptual concretization, and close with a recipe for concept explication in general and conceptual concretization in particular.

Examples

Example 1: For the conceptual concretization of the concept of 'updating probabilities', I quote from (Kuipers 2007b, p. xv):

> Another example of [conceptual] concretization is the transition from simple or Bayesian conditionalization to 'Jeffrey conditionalization', taking into account that the posterior probability of a hypothesis may be based on evidence about which one is not certain. I just quote from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: "Simple Conditioning: If a person with a 'prior' such that $0 < \mathbf{P}(E) < 1$ has a learning experience whose sole immediate effect is to raise her subjective probability for E to 1, then her post-learning 'posterior' for any proposition H should be $\mathbf{Q}(H) = \mathbf{P}_{\mathrm{E}}(H)$."

[3] One core example in this cluster, "truth approximation by concretization", was earlier more extensively elaborated in (Kuipers 1992).

> [Here $P_E(H)$ is standardly defined as $P(H\&E)/P(E)$ – T.A.F. K.]
> [...]
> Jeffrey Conditioning: If a person with a prior such that $0 < \mathbf{P}(E) < 1$ has a learning experience whose sole immediate effect is to change her subjective probability for E to q, then her post-learning posterior for any H should be $\mathbf{Q}(H) = q\mathbf{P}_E(H) + (1-q)\mathbf{P}_{\neg E}(H)$. Obviously, Jeffrey conditioning reduces to simple conditioning when $q = 1$." (Joyce 2003, 13–14) [That is, the latter is an extreme special case of the former - T.A.F. K.].

Example 2: in explicating the concept of 'learning from experience when sampling' one may start with the 'straight rule', that is, using the observed relative frequency (n_i/n) for estimating whether the next, the (n+1)-th, individual will have or will not have a certain property P_i. Here one neglects the prior knowledge that, say k, properties may be involved, and leaves after one trial only room for the observed property. Carnap (1952) in fact concretized the straight rule to the so-called continuum of inductive methods, leading to $(n_i+\lambda)/(n+\lambda)$, with a finite parameter λ, indicating a kind of inverse of the learning speed. Here the straight rule arises as an extreme special case: $\lambda=0$.

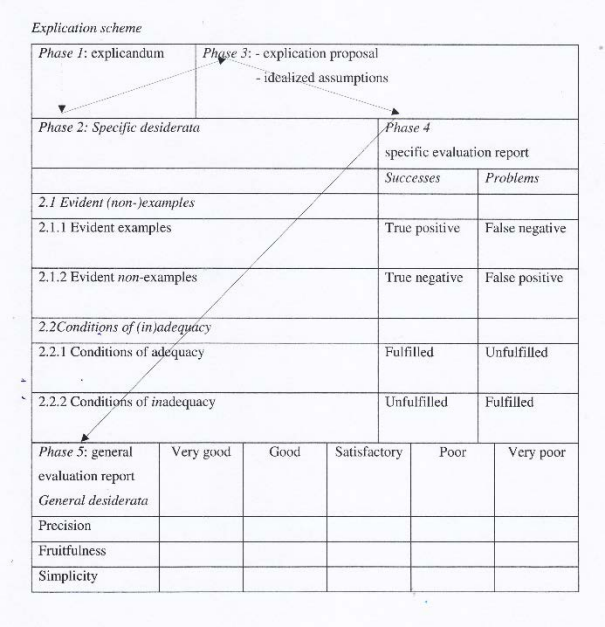
It is important to note that conceptual concretization may not only occur in the original, constructive phase of concept explication, of which Example 1 is a typical case, but also in the reconstructive phase for didactic purposes, exemplified by Example 2. In my own work it played almost always a role, either purely reconstructive or at first constructive, and later of course also reconstructive.

I conclude with a schematic recipe, in two rounds, for concept explication in general and for conceptual concretization in particular. The ordered checklist is phrased in constructive terms, but can be adapted for reconstructive purposes.

First Round, in 5 phases, see the explication scheme

1) Choose the explicandum, the concept to be explicated
2) Determine the specific desiderata in terms of evident (non-) examples and conditions of (in-)adequacy

3) Propose a first (idealized) explication (E_1), the *explicatum*, and try to make explicit as many as possible idealized assumptions, due to neglected relevant factors
4) Evaluate it in terms of successes and problems relative to the special desiderata
5) Evaluate it in terms of the general desiderata: precision, fruitfulness, simplicity



Explication scheme

Phase 1: explicandum	*Phase 3*: - explication proposal - idealized assumptions				
Phase 2: Specific desiderata			*Phase 4* specific evaluation report		
			Successes	*Problems*	
2.1 Evident (non-)examples					
2.1.1 Evident examples			True positive	False negative	
2.1.2 Evident *non*-examples			True negative	False positive	
2.2Conditions of (in)adequacy					
2.2.1 Conditions of adequacy			Fulfilled	Unfulfilled	
2.2.2 Conditions of *in*adequacy			Unfulfilled	Fulfilled	
Phase 5: general evaluation report *General desiderata*	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Precision					
Fruitfulness					
Simplicity					

Second Round

6) Evaluate it in terms of unintended consequences (successes or problems)
7) Update the specific desiderata, in particular regarding unintended consequences and neglected factors, and update (the relative weight of) the general desiderata
8) Try to improve the first explication, notably by concretization, i.e. by taking a neglected factor into account

9) Evaluate the concretized explication (E_2) along the same lines as in the first round

10) a) Check by comparison whether progress has been made according to the following definition[4]:

E_2 is a *strictly better explication* of a concept than E_1 if and only if:

1. E_2 satisfies the updated general desiderata at least as well as E_1
2. E_1 and E_2 share all questioned (non-)examples and conditions of (in-)adequacy
3. E_2 includes (excludes) all evident (non-)examples included (excluded) by E_1
4. E_2 fulfils (does not fulfil) all conditions of (in-)adequacy (not) fulfilled by E_1
5. E_2 includes (excludes) some more (non-)evident examples and/or fulfils (does not fulfil) some more conditions of (in-adequacy)

b) Conclude that E_2 is a *successful concretization* of E_1 if and only if it is a strictly better explication than E_1 and if E_1 is an extreme special case of E_2 relative to the neglected factor(s).

The above checklist and the scheme turn out to be a useful tool for exercises in concept explication in general and conceptual concretization in particular.

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[4] Adapted version of the definition in (Kuipers 2007b, p. xiv).

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Organon F 30 (2) 2023: 160–162
https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30206
ISSN 2585-7150 (online)
ISSN 1335-0668 (print)

DISCUSSION NOTE

Comments on Borbone's *The Relevance of Models*

Adolfo García de la Sienra*

Received: 16 February 2022 / Accepted: 16 March 2022

Abstract: After a brief comment on the historical importance of the Polish School of Logic, actually the cradle of structuralist philosophy of science, I discuss a problem in the notion of idealization, which usually is seen as a mere dropping of nullifying assumptions in order to obtain a more general theory-element.

Keywords: Idealization; Leszek Nowak; polish school of logic; Poznań School of Methodology.

Let me start by regarding what has been done by the Polish supposedly "minor" national culture in the field of philosophy of science (Borbone 2021, 63). If we consider only the work of Alfred Tarski, they did set the foundations of the modelistic branch of the philosophy of science started at Stanford University by John Charles Chenoweth McKinsey, Patrick Suppes and Kenneth Arrow. The structuralist view of theories finds its origin in what Muller (2011) has called "the Stanford Revolution." Hence, it is not exaggerated to say that Polish logic and philosophy is the cradle of the most important developments in the philosophy of science, and many of us consider ourselves to be children (or grandchildren) of the Polish Lvov-Warsaw school. Nowak's views in the philosophy of science also have their origin in

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that great school indeed. Tarski's notion of set-theoretical structure gave us the tools to express mathematically the idealizational conception of science.

Borbone's book provides us with a rich view of the work of the Polish logicians and philosophers of science and explains quite well, in my view, the doctrine elaborated by Nowak on idealization. I would like to comment especially upon his work on Marxian economics, on his view of concretization.

Borbone distinguishes strict from approximate concretization, "since it will not be possible to determine exactly the type of modification to be applied to the law to be made concrete, but it will only be possible to establish the admissible field of deviations from their real values of the theoretical values of the numerical functions examined" (Borbone 2021, 66).

What I want to stress now is that the tilde hides a very complex relationship. Wade Hands has pointed out that

> Often theoretical progress occurs just in the reverse manner; the theory is made not more specific, but more general. Much of the history of general equilibrium theory can be characterized as a search for increasingly more general conditions which preserve the basic properties of the theory. This type of 'generalizing' theoretical progress is outside the standard structuralist view of theoretical progress and thus represents one more way in which the fit seems less than perfect. (Hands 1985, 330)

Nevertheless, the structuralist view is particularly suited to explain this process. It consists of postulating a theory-element T_0 of which the given, more idealized theory-element T_1 would be a specialization (in the usual structuralist sense). I claim, by the way, that this is the most important sense of concretization. Nowak's view can be seen as a case of concretization in which the special conditions defining T_1 are isolations. But sometimes concretization is not merely de-isolation: it must also figure out the form of the fundamental law defining the theory (and hence also T_0). All my effort in (García de la Sienra 1992) was devoted precisely to a task of this type, namely to find a more general form of the law of value in order to generalize the (then) standard model systems of the labor theory of value, taking into

account very general productive structures with heterogeneous labor (for a more recent version of this, see García de la Sienra 2019).

De Donato proposes understanding idealization "basically as a relation between theory-elements just as any other intertheoretical relation" (De Donato 2011, 83). I think he is right, but his explication only accounts for the case in which idealized theory-elements are obtained by means of nullifying assumptions. Thus, it would seem that concretization consists simply of dropping the nullifying assumptions in order to obtain a more general theory-element. But, as I have been trying to stress, finding more general versions of the fundamental law implicitly involved in the definition of the idealized theory-element can be harder than what such a description suggests, as it may involve unsuspected conceptual transformations of the given notions. Finally, Marx's idea of raising from the abstract to the concrete cannot be explained by means of Nowak's idea of concretization, as it is not an intra or inter-theoretical relation. Rather, it consists of describing a real-concrete economic system out of abstract determinations (*Bestimmungen*) yielding a non-idealized description of the same. The construction of idealized models of the system starts after this description has been given; this description is a way of fixing the reference for further investigation on the system.

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Organon F 30 (2) 2023: 163–164
https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30207
ISSN 2585-7150 (online)
ISSN 1335-0668 (print)

DISCUSSION NOTE

Comments on Giacomo Borbone's Book *The Relevance of Models. Idealization and Concretization in Leszek Nowak*

Igor Hanzel*

Received: 9. January 2022/ Accepted: 9 February 2022

Abstract: Chapter II of Borbone's book addresses Nowak's innovative views and reconstruction of the methods used in Marx's economic works, namely, Marx's delineation of the law of value, as well as Marx's explanation based on this law as performed by the method of gradual concretization. In Chapter III, Borbone provides a comparison of Nowak's approach to scientific laws and scientific explanation with that of Hempel. From that comparison Nowak's approach comes out as superior to that of Hempel due to the former's ability to reconstruct laws containing equations, the possibility to address the issue of the explanation of a scientific law from other scientific laws, as well as a more fine-grained view on the very nature scientific explanation.

Keywords: Explanation of scientific laws; Hempel; idealization; law of value; Leszek Nowak; Marx.

For me the most interesting parts of Borbone's book were Chapter II: "Science and Marxian Method" (Borbone 2021, 46-86) and Chapter III:

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"Leszek Nowak and the Idealizational Conception of Science" (Borbone 2021, 287-165). Chapter II addresses Nowak's views on methods used by Marx in his "mature" economic works. Borbone shows Nowak's innovative reconstruction of Marx's delineation of the law of value, as well as Marx's explanation based on this law as performed by the method of gradual concretization. In Chapter III, Borbone presents in detail Nowak's idealizational conception of science. For me as most important appears here Borbone's comparison of Nowak's approach to scientific laws and scientific explanation with that of Hempel. From that comparison Nowak's approach comes out as superior to that Hempel in at least the following four issues. First, Nowak — contrary to Hempel — choses a richer model language that, in turn, enables to deal with equations stated in the context of scientific laws. Second, in this context Nowak can provide a richer—compared to Hempel—typology of conditions that are relevant for scientific explanation. Here I mean Nowak's introduction of the concept of secondary (modification) conditions that, contrary to the so-called "initial/boundary" conditions, are stated in the structure of scientific laws. Third, based on that concept of condition, Nowak—again contrary to Hempel—is able to reconstruct the explanation of scientific laws based on other (idealized) scientific laws by the method termed by Nowak as "explanation by gradual concretization." Fourth, and finally, Nowak provides—compared to Hempel—a more fine-grained view of scientific explanation. For Hempel explanation involves two steps: subsumption of the explanandum-event to be explained under the respective explanans-laws and (deductive or inductive) inference of the explanandum-event. In Nowak's approach explanation involved not two, but three steps: subsumption, concretization of the idealized law to the modification conditions of the explanandum-event or explanandum-law, and only then inference of these explananda. In sum, I view Borbone's book as a successful and valuable analysis and reconstruction of the works of Leszek as one of the most important representative of the Poznań School of Methodology.

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Organon F 30 (2) 2023: 165–170
https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30208
ISSN 2585-7150 (online)
ISSN 1335-0668 (print)

DISCUSSION NOTE

Nowak, Models, and the Lessons of Neo-Kantianism

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Received: 12 December 2021 / Accepted: 10 January 2022

Abstract: Models are the coin of the realm in current philosophy of science, as they are in science itself, having replaced laws and theories as the primary strategy. Logical Positivism tried to erase the older neo-Kantian distinction between ideal constructions and reality. It returns in the case of models. Nowak's concept of idealization provided an alternative account of this issue. It construed model application as concretizations of hypotheses which improve by accounting for exceptions. This appears to account for physical law. But it raises the problem of uniqueness: is the result unique, as physical law should be? Neo-Kantianism failed this test. Its solutions were circular justifications for claims of uniqueness. Nowak inherited the problem without resolving it.

Keywords: Ideal-types; idealization; Leszek Nowak; models; neo-Kantianism; Poznań School of Methodology; underdetermination.

Over forty years ago, in 1979, I was in a seminar with Richard Rorty, who rather startlingly described (and dismissed) Logical Positivism as "late neo-Kantianism." He had previously published a collection of these writings under the title "The Linguistic Turn," and I, and the other members of the

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seminar, assumed that the change from "ideas" to "language" was revolutionary and definitive: that the muddles of neo-Kantianism over concepts and their relation to the world had been replaced by considerations involving the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of assertions. This transformation gave rise to its own issues, but they were, it seemed, quite different issues than those of neo-Kantianism, with its odd Kantian view of logic as conceptual dependence rather than formal logic, and its very different view of the relations of concepts to reality and of concepts to one another.

I needn't bother to show that the problem with this transformation was that it didn't work, and that from the start elements left over from neo-Kantianism crept back in under different guises. There were issues that other thinkers, such as Karl Pearson: particularly the issue of whether the laws of physics, or any such laws, were anything more than approximations of relations which were, at the level of data, variable, so that all scientific laws were idealizations. Other elements proved to be more relevant to actual problems in science. The problem of conceptual change, for which Logical Positivism had no space—by design—was what eventually killed it, or transformed it into conventional analytic philosophy, which brought metaphysics back and ignored science. Writers like Hanson argued that perception was theory-impregnated. The idea of conceptual schemes was used to make sense of radical historical changes: this was the constitutive side. Toulmin introduced the notion of ideals of natural order: the regulative side.

Where does Nowak fit into all of this? What does idealization mean? In my crude way, I will try to make sense of it, as an approximation. I take it that Nowak was pursuing a variant on, and solution to, the issues left behind by neo-Kantianism, which was novel and sensitive to several of these issues, but worked in a different way. The core problems with neo-Kantianism were the problem of underdetermination and the secondary problem that resulted from attempts to solve this problem, circularity. This takes some explanation, which will be cryptic. But I take it that idealization is a variant of what Cassirer's teacher Hermann Cohen invented as the transcendental method. The "method" was to take a body of intellectually organized material and to identify the necessary presuppositions of the concepts and conceptual relations in this body, whether it was law or physics,

or something else. The problem with the method was underdetermination: it produced too many results, meaning "necessary presuppositions" that differed, and therefore could not each be "necessary." One could thus not permit underdetermination without abandoning the transcendental method itself.

The fatal problem of underdetermination was solved in a backhanded way in particular cases by redefining the subject matter in such a way that only one result fit. This produced a new problem of circularity, because now one had, for example, multiple accounts of what law was, each with its own necessary presuppositions. The only grounds for accepting one account over another was the fact of law corresponding to the definition of law that had been invented to identify the content that was supposed to have necessary presuppositions. The result of the procedure thus was multiple conflicting accounts of law, or history, or whatever subject one was subjecting to this method. There was a solution to this problem: to identify a non-circular fixed point to define the subject to be analyzed. This is what Hans Kelsen did in identifying "positive law," i.e. the actual law, as the subject, rather than an essence of law intuited by the analyst.

As Borbone presents him, Nowak is instead concerned with a different circle: one in which a hypothesis of a simple law is idealized (and not inductively derived or abstracted) from a limited set of facts, and then concretized by successive additions which allow the exceptions to be accounted for in less general terms, to the point that it is closer to reality, meaning without exceptions. Rather than transcendentally necessary presuppositions, an idealization is a simplification of a complex domain which allows the step of concretization. The notion of idealization is different from induction or from a conjecture of a true theory in the Logical Positivist or Popperian sense, because it is known not to be "true," but merely to be a good approximation to a more complex truth, which is not going to be a true theory but a version of the idealization which is modified through a process of concretization or specification with conditions which make it fit particular domains. This is presented as a general model of scientific reasoning, in conflict with falsificationism or with Hempel-like accounts of law and confirmation, which do not allow exceptions from general principles.

The idealizations we arrive at are in Nowak's account highly general. So were those that interested the Logical Positivists and Cohen's initial work in neo-Kantianism. We are transfixed in these cases by general laws of physics. This may be a bad model of science in general, and even of physics. But the idealization account closely resembles later accounts of *models*.

In these later accounts, it is fine to have a general predictive principle which one knows to be "false" in the strict sense, or "artificial," and to use this principle in a model which includes various corrections. These models do not purport to be "general" in the sense of general laws, but are predictive devices which have an "apply where they apply" character. They hold under conditions that are unknown or not specifiable. These models typically involve a scientific law or principle, or at least a known causal relation, which is grounded outside of the model, normally taken from existing science. The model is more complex, and includes other variables.

Oftentimes, the interest of the modeler is in the deviation of reality from simple forms of the model, and the additions that need to be made in order to make the model predictive for a particular domain. The process of refining the models is parallel to concretization. The modeler is also concerned to identify as much as possible where it fails to apply and what corrections or additions need to be made to make it apply in different settings. But a model can be useful for prediction in its original domain, without this knowledge, which is hard to get and normally not relevant for the purposes of the modeler.

By the concept of idealization, however, Nowak, wants to account for the laws themselves, i.e., something universally valid, not mere models. So what are idealizations? His answer is that idealization is a procedure in which we ''put in parentheses' aspects of phenomenal reality that are considered secondary, … instead operationalizing functionally those facts that are considered essential.'

Borbone calls idealizations "hypotheses," which allows us to at least focus the issue. Concretization is a procedure that does not test, but rather refines the idealization and makes it empirically relevant and more adequate. In some sense this resembles improving hypotheses. But in another sense it does not. The issue is with the truth claims, or the uniqueness claims, of the idealization. With the neo-Kantians, the issue is clear: the

transcendental method, to identify something "necessary," needed a unique result. That at least gives us a surrogate for "essential." And there is an analogue to this in Marxian talk about laws of history and their validity in "the last instance," which makes other apparent laws into merely historical or ideological constructions. In another sense they resemble laws with ceteris paribus clauses, in which concretization fills out the list of things that have to be equal. These laws are usually assumed to have some unique validity apart from their instances. But it is not clear that Nowak's idealizations need to be, or can be, unique.

Does this matter? If we abandon the quest for uniqueness, what do we have? Something familiar: an ideal-type in Weber's sense. These apply where they apply, are not unique representations of reality and only fit approximately, and allow for explanations of why they deviate from reality. Weber says, similarly to what Nowak says about caricature, that the elements are intentionally accented in these models. Nowak's model of the cycles of repression and liberalization under Communism fits this nicely. His comments on the explanation of action could have come from Weber himself. Similarly for the idea that knowing where an idealization applies is an inductive matter. The difference, as Borbone notes, is that Weber's conception is instrumental rather than essentialist or realist. So it does seem that Nowak's idealizations need to be unique in order to differ from ideal-types. And this returns us to the neo-Kantian problem: is there are way of arriving at a unique essence without circularity?

Borbone puts the issue differently when he says that

> Thanks to the idealizational approach, science abandons the dogma of objectivity and reductionism typical of the positivist image of science, since we are aware that the scientist does not aim to give us a perfectly faithful representation of what the world is, but rather an image as approximate as possible to it. (Borbone 2021, 167)

But one can get as close to faithful representation as possible from multiple directions, and from different starting points. That is the lesson of modelling. So there is something missing here: essentialism. I am skeptical about the idea of essences here. I would put things differently. Nowak gives us a rational reconstruction of the task not of discovery but of theorizing, a task

which goes beyond and to some extent against the data to produce a clearer result, which is then corrected by empirically grounded revisions.

The term essential, however, raises questions. What appears to us as essential in a model, or a neo-Kantian transcendental inquiry, seems to depend on us, on our purposes and tacit preferences as much as on the thing itself. If we are concerned with understanding, it is one thing, if we are seeking validation for our ethical or religious opinions, another, intervention, prediction, operations research yet other things, and other essences. The logical positivists, phenomenologists, and other thinkers in the fall-out from the demise of neo-Kantianism all tried to escape from this kind of relativity and undetermination. So, I suspect, did Nowak. But none of them did.

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Organon F 30 (2) 2023: 171–181
https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30209
ISSN 2585-7150 (online)
ISSN 1335-0668 (print)

DISCUSSION NOTE

The Originality of Leszek Nowak's Philosophical and Epistemological Thought

Giacomo Borbone*

Received: 30 November 2022 / Accepted: 15 February 2023

Abstract: One of the central aspects of contemporary epistemology lies in the difference between abstraction and idealization. While the former consists of the generalization of empirical facts, with the latter, those factors deemed secondary are neglected in order to operationalize instead those factors deemed essential. In the early years of the twentieth century, authors such as Cassirer and Husserl acutely pointed out the limitations of abstraction, reevaluating instead the idealizing character of scientific concepts. This distinction was also the subject of an important epistemological work published in 1980, namely *The Structure of Idealization* by Polish philosopher of science Leszek Nowak. At this point a question arises. In what does the originality of Leszek Nowak's reflection consist of? It could be said that Nowak's importance here is twofold: terminological and systematic. From the terminological point of view Nowak made a very clear distinction between abstraction and idealization, which instead in authors such as Cassirer and Husserl are much more blurred or veiled. From the systematic point of view Nowak has extensively analyzed the way mature science works. In other words, Nowak highlighted the limits – but also the values – of contemporary epistemology by comparing the latter with the idealizational approach to science.

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Keywords: Cassirer; Husserl; idealization; Leszek Nowak; Neopositivism; Poznań School of Methodology.

It is a real pleasure to discuss on the thought of Leszek Nowak with such illustrious scholars as Theo A. F. Kuipers, Stephen Turner, Igor Hanzel, Rafał Paweł Wierzchosławski, Adolfo Garcia de la Sienra, Francesco Coniglione and Krzysztof Brzechczyn. The English translation of my book on Nowak (Borbone 2021) a revised version which first appeared in Italian (Borbone 2016) is a good opportunity to address the figure of Leszek Nowak, Polish thinker and important philosopher of science. My interest in Nowak stemmed from discussions with Professor Francesco Coniglione, who was my supervisor during my PhD. I had just graduated with a thesis on the relationship between Marxism and science in the thought of Antonio Labriola, an Italian Marxist philosopher. One of the aspects I most appreciated in Labriola's thought was not only his non-dogmatic Marxism, but also his openness towards science. I had just started my international PhD in the humanities and Professor Coniglione advised me to study Nowak, if only because the latter had also dealt with the relationship between Marxism and science. In this regard, the possibility of going to Poznan at the Adam Mickiewicz University for 4 months, turned out to be fundamental, during which I was able to study closely with the main students of Nowak, including Andrzej Klawiter – my supervisor in Poznań – Krzysztof Brzechczyn, Jerzy Brzeziński, Krzysztof Łastowski and so on.

The first Nowak's book I started to read was *Property and Power* (Nowak 1983) and I must confess that I was really impressed not only by the originality of the arguments and reasoning, but also by the massive presence of formulas and schemes. After all, it is a common feature of the Poznań School of Methodology to have made use of modern tools of logic. However, the work *Property and Power* was a systematic exposition of Nowak's social theory, the so-called non-Marxian historical materialism. A good summary of this theory is provided by Brzechczyn in the following manner:

> Non-Marxian historical materialism was an attempt at resolving the contradictory nature of historical materialism. According to

> that theory, there are three independent class divisions in a society, in the realms of economy, culture, and politics. Those social divisions arise as a social minority appropriates: the means of production in the economy (which creates the division into the owners and the direct producers), the means of coercion in politics (leading to the division into the rulers and the citizens), and the means of spiritual production in culture (which results in the division into the priests and the followers). Social divisions can cumulate, so apart from class societies (with three separate classes), there are supraclass societies, in which the same social class controls politics, the economy, and culture. Real socialism turned out to be such a supraclass system, as the apparatus of the communist party controlled political, economic, and cultural life. According to that approach, the socialist system was the most oppressive social system in history because it involved a triple monopoly. The basic interest of the class of triple-lords was to maximize its political range of regulation. Therefore, the control over economy and culture was instrumentally subordinated to the maximization of power. For that reason, phenomena considered to be the 'absurdities' of planned economy were not caused by the 'unreason-ableness' of the rulers, weakness of political culture, political errors, or distortions of the idea of socialism – they were structurally determined by the realization of the political interest of the triple rule. (Brzechczyn 2022, xvi-xvii)

For a better understanding of this work – as well as of the three volumes devoted to unitary metaphysics – the preliminary study of his epistemological works was necessary. For this reason, Coniglione borrowed me Nowak's main epistemological work, namely *The Structure of Idealization* published in 1980. In this work is contained, as you know very well, the idealizational conception of science, which is mainly based on the difference between abstraction and idealization. See, for example, what Nowak writes in his *The Structure of Idealization* about the difference between Aristotle and Galilei (Nowak 1980, 36-37).

But now, allow me here a brief digression, both historical and personal. For about 6 years I have been studying the complete works and posthumous works of the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer. Both in the first two

volumes of his monumental work *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* as well as in the important epistemological work *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff*, Cassirer showed that he was fully aware of this difference. Edmund Husserl, in his *Logiche Untersuchungen* and in his *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie* also pointed out this difference (Borbone 2019). Both Cassirer and Husserl highlighted the limits of the theoretical procedure of abstraction, showing how in reality mature science makes systematic use of ideal entities that are certainly not accessible to direct observation: such as, for example, the ideal gas, a perfectly smooth plane, a perfectly elastic body, a society with only two classes, etc. As you all know, abstraction is the simple generalization of empirical facts, while through idealization one proceeds to a kind of *epoché*, that is, one puts in brackets those aspects of phenomenal reality that are considered secondary to operationalize functionally the factors that are considered essential. Well, this difference was quite clear both to Cassirer and to Husserl, who dedicated many pages to the critique of Aristotelian abstraction and to the development of a new theory of concept-formation (*Begriffsbildung*). The latter is based precisely on those concepts that Cassirer calls idealizations or limit-concepts (*Grenzbegriffe*) and Husserl ideating abstraction (*ideierende Abstraktion*). From a historical point of view, we understand therefore that the distinction made by Nowak is not new in the history of philosophy and epistemology.

At this point a question arises. In what does the originality of Leszek Nowak's reflection consist of? It could be said that Nowak's importance here is twofold: terminological and systematic. From the terminological point of view Nowak made a very clear distinction between abstraction and idealization, which instead in authors such as Cassirer and Husserl are much more blurred or veiled. The merit of Leszek Nowak, in this case, consisted in having clarified, once and for all, this difference. From the systematic point of view – which I consider the most important – Nowak has extensively analyzed the way mature science works. Nowak operates a methodological reconstruction of Marx' economic works, Darwin's biological works, and Galilei's scientific writings. Nowak shows that the advanced empirical sciences work based on the method of idealization, concretization, and

successive approximations. Another rather extensive part of the work *The Structure of Idealization* is devoted instead to the comparison between the idealizational conception of science and contemporary epistemology. Nowak highlights, for example, the limits of the neopositivists, whose epistemological dream was to reduce all the theoretical terms to what is immediately observable. There is also a vehement and strong critique of Karl Popper's interpretation of Marx' thought; in fact, Popper regarded the society with only two classes – which is an ideal concept – as something of imaginary. In other words, Nowak highlighted the limits – but also the values – of contemporary epistemology by comparing the latter with the idealizational approach to science. Obviously, we cannot find something like that in the scientific and systematic works of the already mentioned Ernst Cassirer and Edmund Husserl.

But what are these limits and deficiencies that Nowak identifies within contemporary epistemology? In the case of Rudolf Carnap, his main task is to define all the concepts of science thanks to their reduction to what is immediately observable. But such a reduction is not able, however, to account for the ideal concepts because it is impossible to reduce a concept like that of "ideal gas" to others that are equivalent to it. Between the "ideal" and the constitutive basis there is a gap that can hardly be cancelled out by a chain of reductive definitions. The so-called Standard View, restricted the field of science only to the empirical basis, thus mortifying the indispensable theoretical character of science, since it is precisely within science that we see the need for theoretical terms. The problem of the difference between observational and theoretical terms remained open and unresolved. It was Hempel who tried to deal with this question. According to Hempel, the purpose of scientific systematization is to establish an explanatory order between the "data" of experience so as to allow prediction; but if the question is so posed, then the need for theoretical terms immediately becomes obvious, given that such a task is possible to the extent that recourse is made to laws referring to objects that are not directly observable. Hempel is perfectly aware of this, but he is nevertheless convinced that one could do without theoretical terms in a theory. Therefore, it is not possible to reduce theoretical terms to the mere observative basis, since they derive much of their meaning from the theoretical context in which they are

inserted; and it is precisely this incomplete empirical definability that lies at the basis of their fertility and that allows their extension to new fields of experience. What is evident in this moderate positivism is that there is no place for idealization. Also quite relevant is Nowak's critique of Popper, especially Popper's rejection not only of so-called historicism, but also of the theses developed by Marx in his works on political economy. For example, Popper criticizes with vehemence the theory of the two classes, arguing that it was actually completely imaginary, because in reality there is not a society with only two classes. But Popper, according to Nowak, does not do anything other than completely neglect the presence, within the scientific works of Marx, of idealized statements.

In conclusion, I think that Nowak's merit consists not so much in the distinction between abstraction and idealized constructs – which, as we have seen, had already been made by Cassirer and Husserl – but in having clearly distinguished these two concepts from a strictly terminological point of view and in having compared in a systematic way the idealizational approach to science with contemporary epistemology, thus showing the limits of both neopositivism and Karl Popper's thought.

Replies to my critics

Professor Turner, in the final part of his paper, "Nowak, Models, and the Lessons of Neo-Kantianism", hints at an alleged relativity of the method of idealization in relation to concretization procedures. This is because, as he states, "What appears to us as essential in a model, or a neo-Kantian transcendental inquiry, seems to depend on us, on our purposes and tacit preferences as much as on the thing itself" (Turner 2023, 170). But here it is not at all a matter of formulating arbitrary idealizations in the derogatory sense of the term, that is, in terms of radical subjectivism. The ideal, as the old Immanuel Kant teaches us, is a perfection that, as such, does not exist, which is why any approximation we make from a model should be understood as gradually closer to reality, which is always more complicated than the model. In the construction of a model, very rigid criteria are used that have nothing subjective about them, as in the case of the H_2O water formula, which indicates pure water but nevertheless is never given in concrete

reality. Yet any chemist cannot avoid the use of this ideal formula and therefore may not be accused of relativism. In this sense, the perspective of Neo-Kantism – and of Ernst Cassirer in particular – seems to me very similar to that upheld by Nowak and his School.

As for Professor Theo Kuipers' contribution (Kuipers 2023), I will focus my attention, very briefly, on how he interprets my definition of "conceptual concretization." In fact, Professor Theo Kuipers is right when he states that in the case of conceptual concretization the initial idealized explication recurs as the extreme special case of concretized explication. This, in fact, is what he elaborates on in his contribution entitled *On two types of idealization and concretization. The case of truth approximation* (Kuipers 2007). From this point of view, it seems to me that the convergence between what I understand as "conceptual concretization" and what Kuipers explicates in his mentioned essay is remarkable.

In his writing, Professor Francesco Coniglione (2023), namely Italy's foremost expert on twentieth-century Polish philosophy and the works of the Poznan School of Methodology, believes that the cause of the failure to recognize the importance of Nowak's works was not, at least at an early stage, solely the problem of the Polish language. Coniglione, rightly, points out that by the 1980s the production of Poles in the English language had already become more conspicuous, and this should have ensured them a certain resonance in the international epistemological scene. Yet even today Nowak's name, although somewhat known and appreciated by leading international epistemologists, is not mentioned as it should be. In this Professor Coniglione is undoubtedly right and has captured with extreme lucidity a problem that still persists in the Anglo-American tradition, namely the ignoring of what is produced outside their circle because of the almost total lack of historical sense.

As for Professor Garcia de la Sienra's contribution, the latter focuses his attention on the part of my book devoted to Marx' economics, especially the notion of concretization. In the concluding part of his paper Garcia de la Sienra states as follows:

> Marx's idea of raising from the abstract to the concrete cannot be explained by means of Nowak's idea of concretization, as it is not an intra or inter-theoretical relation. Rather, it consists of

> describing a real-concrete economic system out of abstract determinations (*Bestimmungen*) yielding a non-idealized description of the same. The construction of idealized models of the system starts after this description has been given; this description is a way of fixing the reference for further investigation on the system. (Garcia de la Sienra 2023, 162)

However, I hold that abstraction as Marx understands it plays a cognitive, gnoseological function for the purpose of selecting--from the immense grid of real data--the essential, constituent, principal elements of a given phenomenon. Abstraction, of course, is not conceived as an end in itself, since at a later stage a real synthesis of the essential elements abstracted from the phenomena must be made in order to recompose them into unity, that is, the unity of the manifold. In this sense, it seems to me that the transition from the abstract to the concrete falls within the notion of concretization as conceived by Nowak.

Igor Hanzel focuses his analysis on Chapters II and III of my book, the former of which focuses on Marx' economic method and the latter on Nowak's comparison with the nomological-deductive model. I must admit that Igor Hanzel acutely grasps what I have tried to highlight about the explanatory richness of the method of idealization and gradual concretization. And indeed, Hanzel states:

> Nowak provides – compared to Hempel – a more fine-grained view of scientific explanation. For Hempel explanation involves two steps: subsumption of the explanandum-event to be explained under the respective explanans-laws and (deductive or inductive) inference of the explanandum-event. In Nowak's approach explanation involved not two, but three steps: subsumption, concretization of the idealized law to the modification conditions of the explanandum-event or explanandum-law, and only then inference of these explananda. (Hanzel 2023, 164)

In his paper, Professor Wierzchosławski (2023) raises a more than legitimate question and that is whether Nowak really drew fundamental insights from the Marxian method for the development of the idealizational conception of science or whether he was not instead almost "forced" to mention Marx because of the communist regime present in Poland. The question

raised by Professor Wierzchosławski is certainly interesting from the point of view of the history of ideas, but I find Nowak's reconstruction of the Marxian method as a paradigmatic case – along with Galilei and Darwin – of the idealizational approach to science solely for reasons of political expediency highly unlikely. Indeed, during the 1970s there were heated debates about the nature of Marxism not only in Poland, but throughout Europe. One need only think of France, Germany, and Italy, where the famous epistemological rupture in Marx or so-called Western Marxism was being discussed. In Italy, for example, the literature on Marx and Marxist thought in the 1970s is enormous and this despite the fact that there was no communist regime at all.

Professor Krzysztof Brzechczyn's (2023) contribution entitled *Leszek Nowak, Idealization and Interpretation* shows a brief but very detailed analysis of the contents of my volume. An interesting aspect of Brzechczyn's contribution concerns the question of Leszek Nowak's use of the unpublished works of Marx and Engels. As Nowak pupils and experts well know, the latter exhorted scholars to examine only an author's published works and not manuscripts. After all, if an author had decided not to publish a work, he must have had his own good reasons. Yet, as I have shown in my volume, Nowak, in his reconstruction of Marxian method, took into account works such as Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value* or Engels' *Dialectic of Nature*, both of which were published posthumously. But Brzechczyn provides an interesting explanation of this aspect:

> Nowak applied two criteria at once: the criterion of having been published and criterion of the time of creation. The second criterion was crucial for Nowak – whether the work was created in its author's youth or mature age. Of the works created in the author's youth, those which fulfill the criterion of having been published can be the subject matter of reconstruction. However, the criterion of having been published does not apply to the works written in the mature age. (Brzechczyn 2023, 150).

I must confess that this dual criterion identified by Brzechczyn proves quite convincing, as it allows us to discern why Nowak – despite his mistrust of manuscripts – in his reconstruction of Marxian method used posthumous works by both Marx and Engels.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due not only to the participants mentioned here, namely Stephen Turner, Francesco Coniglione, Igor Hanzel, Theo Kuipers, Adolfo Garcia de la Sienra and Rafał Paweł Wierzchosławski, but also to Professor Krzysztof Brzechczyn who in cooperation with the Faculty of Philosophy of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan and the Polish Philosophical Association, Poznań Division organized this online seminar on December 13, 2021.

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Organon F 30 (2) 2023: 182–220
https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30210
ISSN 2585-7150 (online)
ISSN 1335-0668 (print)

RESEARCH ARTICLE

What Is Real?

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Received: 26 July 2022 / Revised: 4 April 2023 / Accepted: 24 April 2023

Abstract: Two of the most fundamental distinctions in metaphysics are (1) that between reality (or things in themselves) and appearances, the *R/A distinction*, and (2) that between entities that are fundamental (or real, *etcetera*) and entities that are ontologically or existentially dependent, the *F/D distinction*. While these appear to be two very different distinctions, in Buddhist metaphysics they are combined, raising questions about how they are related. In this paper I argue that plausible versions of the R/A distinction are essentially a special kind of F/D distinction, and conversely, that many F/D distinctions imply an R/A distinction. Nevertheless, while this does suggest that the F/D distinction is more basic than the R/A distinction, it does not favor a particular understanding of the F/D distinction. There are many kinds of existential or ontological dependence that cannot be meaningfully combined into a single notion, and reality does not force us to accept any specific kind of dependence as more fundamental. Consequently, what we consider to be 'real', 'fundamental', or 'really existing' is not entirely given by reality, but partially up to us.

Keywords: Meta-ontology; Metaphysics; Ontological dependence; Phenomenal appearances; Reality; Svabhāva

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1. Introduction

Two of the most fundamental distinctions in metaphysics are that between things in themselves and phenomenal appearances, and that between entities that are fundamental, real, or independent (in some relevant sense) and entities that are not (or less so). According to the first distinction—which I shall call the *reality/appearances* or *R/A* distinction hereafter—there is at least a possibility that things as we experience them (or as they appear to us) are different from how they really are, independently from us. There is considerable variation in the terms used to make this distinction. The world as it appears to us (or the world of appearances) is sometimes called 'phenomenal reality' or 'conventional reality',[1] for example, leading to an apparent distinction between two different kinds or levels of reality or two realities. Alternatively, the distinction may be conceptualized as involving two perspectives on, or aspects of reality, or in similar terms. Kant's distinction between things in themselves and phenomenal appearances is, more or less, the paradigmatic R/A theory, but Thomas Kuhn's (1962) famous claim that "after a revolution scientists are responding to a different world" (111) also presupposes a distinction between some kind of independent reality and a world of experience (*i.e.,* the world scientists respond to), and further variants of the distinction can be found throughout the history of philosophy.

According to the second distinction—which I will call the *fundamental/dependent* or *F/D* distinction hereafter—not all things that can be said to exist have the same ontological status: some entities are substances, while others are ontologically dependent, or some entities are more fundamental than others, or more real (in some ontologically loaded sense of 'real'), and so forth. An event of alpha decay, for example, is ontologically dependent on the atom that emits the alpha particle, and a water molecule is ontologically dependent on the oxygen atom and two hydrogen atoms that constitute it.

On the face of it, these appear to be two very different distinctions. Although R/A theories generally (implicitly) assume that phenomenal appearances depend for their existence on the independently real things that

[1] The term 'phenomenal reality' is more common in Kant-influenced (Western) philosophy. The term 'conventional reality' is more common in Buddhist philosophy.

cause or ground them, they rarely appeal to an obvious or explicit F/D distinction to explain the relation between phenomena and things in themselves. F/D theories, on the other hand, typically assume a single reality without 'levels' or 'aspects', and thus appear to deny the R/A distinction. The water molecule and its constituent atoms in the last example do not exist in different kinds or levels of reality (or in different perspectives on reality, or different realities, *etcetera*). Rather, in the F/D perspective there is just one reality, but some things in that one reality are more fundamental or more real than others. However, despite this apparent incompatibility, in Buddhist metaphysics the distinction between ultimate reality (*paramārthasat*) and conventional/phenomenal reality (*saṃvṛtisat*) is both an R/A distinction and an F/D distinction, and this raises the question of how different these two ontological distinctions really are.

In this paper I will argue that plausible versions of the R/A distinction are essentially a special kind of F/D distinction, and conversely, that many F/D distinctions imply an R/A distinction; or in other words, that the two distinctions are not as fundamentally different as they may appear to be. R/A theories hold that phenomenal appearances depend (among others) on their independently/externally real grounds or causes. (See sections 3 and 4.) This is an existential dependence relation in which appearances are the dependent and the things in themselves that ground or cause them are the independent (or more fundamental or more 'real'). Hence, this is an F/D distinction. (See sections 5 and 7.) The other way around, many F/D distinctions involve some kind of conceptual dependence. In case of the dependence of wholes on their parts, for example, we probably would not even recognize the whole as an individual entity without a concept naming or describing it. (See section 5.) In other words, we have a phenomenal appearance of that whole *as something*, which depends (among others) on a concept and which is not (necessarily) given (as such) by the independently real thing(s) that ground that appearance. This is an R/A distinction.

Nevertheless, while the classification of the R/A distinction as a special kind (or kinds) of F/D distinction suggests that the latter is more basic than the former, it does not favor a particular understanding of the F/D distinction. There are many kinds or varieties of existential or ontological dependence that cannot be meaningfully combined into a single category,

and which specific kinds of dependence we accept or reject as metaphysically relevant is largely a matter of convention. Independent/external reality does not force a choice of F/D distinctions (or a particular conception of that distinction)—*we* make that choice. (See sections 6 and 7.) Consequently, what we consider to be 'real', 'fundamental', or 'really existing' is not entirely given by reality, but *partially* up to us.

Sections 2 and 3 of this paper give brief overviews of the F/D and R/A distinctions, respectively, followed by a deflation of the R/A distinction in section 4. After that, section 5 discusses the Buddhist metaphysical notion of *svabhāva* and how it relates to the two distinctions, and section 6 argues against combining different varieties of existential dependence into a single category. The final section 7 summarizes key findings and discusses their meta-ontological implications.

2. The F/D Distinction

In "The Question of Ontology" (2009), Kit Fine points out that "the commonly accepted view […] is that ontological questions are quantificational questions" (158), but that there is a problem with this view because the answers to many quantificational questions are trivial: "given the evident fact that there is a prime number greater than 2, it trivially follows that there is a number" (*ibid.*). However, "it is usually supposed that the answers to ontological questions are non-trivial" (*ibid.*), and consequently, something is wrong with the quantificational view. An anti-realist about numbers may very well agree that there are prime numbers greater than 2 *and* resist the conclusion that this means that numbers 'exist', and this does not imply that her view is incoherent. What she means to say is that numbers do not *really* exist, or something like that, and the key question for meta-ontology is what that 'really' means.

> The critical and distinctive aspect of ontological claims lies not in the use of the quantifier, but in the appeal to a certain concept of what is real; and it is only by focusing on this concept, rather than on our understanding of quantification, that further clarification is to be achieved … (Fine 2009, 171)

Thus, some things might be said to exist in some 'thick', ontologically loaded sense, while other things might be quantified over, and thus exist in a 'thin' sense, but do not exist in the thick sense because they do not satisfy the relevant criterion. F/D theories are concerned with this distinction, but conceptualize this criterion differently. Fine proposed a distinction between what "is constitutive of reality" and what is not, many others have used the term 'fundamental', but perhaps the most prominent collection of F/D theories conceive of the distinction as one between things that are 'ontologically dependent' (and therefore, not fundamental or thickly existing) and things that are not (*i.e.*, that are independent).

In her discussion of varieties of ontological dependence, Kathrin Koslicki (2012) uses some examples that are helpful to illustrate the notion: smiles ontologically depend on mouths, sets depend on their members, events and states of affairs depend on their 'participants', chemical substances depend on their atomic constituents, tropes and Aristotelian universals depend on their 'bearers',[2] and holes and boundaries ontologically depend on their 'hosts'. Significantly, the whole/parts relation does not occur on this list.[3] While it seems undeniable that wholes (in some relevant sense) depend on their parts,[4] this is usually not conceived of as a kind of ontological dependence, and there are other existential dependence relations—such as causal dependence—that are not typically considered examples of ontological

[2] The ontological dependence of tropes is debatable. In (Buddhist) Abhidharma metaphysics, *dharmas* are spatio-temporally atomic tropes (Siderits 2022), and these tropes are held to be ontologically independent. That is, there are no bearers of tropes, and things as they appear to us are mere bundles of *dharmas*/tropes.

[3] Except, perhaps, for the dependence of chemical substances on their atomic constituents, although the emergent properties of chemical substances suggest that this is not a mere whole/parts relation.

[4] In case of the whole/parts relation it is easy to confuse questions of identity with questions of ontology. If I have a book and rip out one page, is it still *the same* book? This is a question of identity, but this question is irrelevant here. To say that a book depends for its existence on its pages is to say that if those pages (*i.e.*, all of them) would not exist, the book would not exist, and this is true both before and after I rip out that one page. The book-before depends on *its* pages and the book-after depends on *its* pages. These are not the *exact* same pages and not the *exact* same books, but that does not matter here.

dependence either. Thus, while to say that what is causally dependent is not fundamental is making an F/D distinction, this is rarely deemed to be a kind of ontological dependence. Supervenience is another example of a dependence relation that is usually not considered to be a variety of ontological dependence, and grounding *may* be a further example, but this is more controversial. While theories of metaphysical grounding appear to make some kind of F/D distinction, this distinction is usually not framed in terms of dependence. "Grounding is understood to be a form of constitutive (as opposed to causal or probabilistic) determination or explanation" (Bliss & Trogdon 2021). If x grounds y, then x appears to be more fundamental than y, and it could be argued that y depends on x, but not everyone agrees that this dependence is properly classified as *ontological* dependence.

Ontological dependence, then, is a variety or a collection of varieties of a broader category that could be called 'existential dependence'. To say that x existentially depends on y is to say that if y would not exist, then x would not exist, but this is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition,[5] because dependence is not a purely formal notion. To see why this is the case, consider the following general, but flawed (!) definition of 'dependence':

(CD) A depends on B if and only if, if B would not be the case, then A would not be the case.

According to (CD), "precipitation in Aikawa depends on humid, westerly wind" is true if and only if it is the case that if there would be no humid, westerly wind, there would be no precipitation in Aikawa. On a glance, this may seem alright, but there is a problem. In a common understanding of counterfactual conditionals (*e.g.*, Lewis 1914), the right-hand part of (CD) is equivalent to "necessarily, if not B then not A", which is true whenever B is necessarily true (or necessarily the case, but those are equivalent expressions). And consequently, (CD) would also imply that "precipitation in Aikawa depends on the truth of '1=1'", which is nonsense—or which is not what we mean with 'dependence', at least. Similarly, if the necessary condition for existential dependence would also be sufficient, anything would

[5] I owe gratitude to this journal's reviewers for bringing this to my attention.

be existentially dependent on anything that exists necessarily (if there is anything that exists necessarily at all, of course).

Furthermore, adding a condition "and not because B is necessarily the case" to (CD) does not solve the problem, because something may depend (in the relevant sense of 'dependence') on necessary B for other reasons than B's necessity. And neither does there seem to be any other formal criterion that could be added to (CD) such that this new criterion would be jointly sufficient with the condition already mentioned. 'Dependence', then, is not a formal notion, and by extension, neither is 'existential dependence'. Nevertheless, the informal category of 'existential dependence' could be defined *loosely* as follows:

(ED) x existentially depends on y if and only if, if y would not exist, then x would not exist, and not just because x exists necessarily.

This category of existential dependence coincides with the F/D distinction. F/D theories hold that for any two things that have a relation R, one of those things is more fundamental, or more 'real', or more appropriately labeled as 'existing' than the other; and the only sensible kinds of relations R are kinds of existential dependence as loosely defined in (ED). It is not particularly difficult to come up with apparent counter-examples that do not use the *term* 'dependence', of course, but terminology is largely irrelevant here. One could, for example, say that wholes can be *reduced* to their parts (rather than that they depend on them), but that does not change anything about the fact that an ax existentially depends on its handle and its head or a tree on its roots, trunk, and branches (*i.e.,* their parts) in the sense of (ED). That is, the ax would not exist if the handle and head it happens to have would not exist, and the tree would not exist if the roots, trunk, and branches it happens to have would not exist.[6]

F/D theories differ with regards to which kinds of dependence they consider metaphysically relevant, but also with regards to the formal properties

[6] Questions about changes in the handle or head, or whether the ax depends on a *particular* handle and/or head are questions of identity, rather than of existence. What matters here is that an ax must have *some* head and handle, and that a tree must have *some* roots, trunk, and branches. (Although it could be argued that a tree could be temporarily without branches.) See also two notes before this one.

of the dependence relation(s). Ricki Bliss and Graham Priest (2018) proposed a taxonomy of these theories on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of four theses. If we read 'xDy' as "x ontologically depends on y", then these four theses are the following: antireflexivity $\forall x\ (\neg(x\mathrm{D}x))$, antisymmetry $\forall x,y\ (x\mathrm{D}y\rightarrow\neg(y\mathrm{D}x))$, transitivity $\forall x,y,z\ ((x\mathrm{D}y\wedge y\mathrm{D}z)\rightarrow x\mathrm{D}z)$, and extendability $\forall x\exists y\ (x\neq y\wedge x\mathrm{D}y)$.[7] Two to the power of four is sixteen, but Bliss and Priest show that of these sixteen hypothetical combinations, six are inconsistent, and that all of the remaining ten appear to have been defended by at least some philosophers in the Western and/or Buddhist traditions. As mentioned, this taxonomy does not just apply to theories of ontological dependence, but to other existential dependence relations as well. Whole/parts dependence, for example, is characterized by the first three but probably not the fourth. We will return to this topic in section 6 below.

3. The R/A Distinction

According to the R/A distinction, the way the world appears to us (or the way we experience the world) may be different from the way it really is. By implication, the R/A distinction involves two claims: (1) that there is a way the world really is, and (2) that this way the world really is is not necessarily the same as the way we consciously experience it. The first of these claims is external-world realism.[8] The second can be unpacked in a number of ways, depending on whether the explanation of the (potential) discrepancy between reality and appearance (also) appeals to something mind-internal or only posits mind-external distortions. The latter include

[7] The notation used here is slightly different from Bliss and Priest's.

[8] The term 'realism' is sometimes misunderstood as having epistemological, semantic, or other implications, but as John Searle has pointed out, 'realism' in the here relevant sense is just "*the view that there is a way that things are that is logically independent of all human representations. Realism does not say how things are but only that there is a way that they are.* And 'things' in the previous two sentences does not mean material objects or even objects. It is like the 'it' in 'It is raining,' not a referring expression." (1995, 155—emphasis in original)

systematic deception by something like Descartes's evil demon and brain-in-vat or *Matrix*-like scenarios, but also distortions or misrepresentations caused by the nature, limitations, or disorders of our sense organs. Most R/A theories locate the *main* cause of the (potential) discrepancy between appearance and reality within the mind, however, and thus assume some form of epistemological idealism, that is, the view that all of our experience of reality is necessarily mediated by (something in) the mind. In case of linguistic relativism, for example, that mediating role is played by language. Benjamin Lee Whorf called this "a new principle of relativity" and argued that it "holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated" (1940, 214).

Often, what plays the mediating role is called a 'conceptual scheme'.[9] According to W.V.O. Quine (1960), we can only talk about the world by imposing a conceptual scheme upon it and interpreting reality in accordance with the categories of that scheme. John Searle argued that "external realism allows for an infinite number of true descriptions of the same reality made relative to different conceptual schemes" (1995, 165). And Maria Baghramian advocates a view in which conceptual schemes are likened to maps: "We cannot *talk* about that which our conceptual schemes map outside the parameters set by the maps we currently have at our disposal, but this does not mean that there is nothing outside our maps to speak of" (2004, 319). (Notice the explicit commitment to external-world realism in the quotes by Searle and Baghramian.)

Many other terms (in addition to 'conceptual schemes') have been used—Thomas Kuhn (1962) used the term 'paradigm' for a relevantly similar notion, for example—and there is considerable variety in the terms used to refer to reality and appearance as well. 'External reality', 'independent reality', and 'noumenal reality' are among the most common terms for the first, but it should be noted that the second and third are potentially confusing. The notion of independence in 'independent reality' is not (exactly)

[9] The term 'conceptual scheme' became fashionable after the 1940s. (Before the 1920s it was very uncommon and did not seem to refer to the same idea either.) Hence, my claim that what plays the mediating role is often called a 'conceptual scheme' is only true for R/A theories dating to the second half of the 20th century and later.

ontological or existential independence, but something like independence from a conceptual scheme, independence from social convention, or mind-independence.[10] And while analytic philosophers typically understand 'noumenal reality' to refer to something like Kant's thing in itself or like World 1 in Popper's *Three Worlds* view, continental philosophers more often interpret the term to refer to something like Plato's world of ideas or Popper's World 3. 'Phenomenal reality' is probably the most common term used to refer to the world of appearances, but other terms, such as 'experienced reality' or 'the world as we experience it', are also frequently used.

In addition to this terminological variety, there is much substantial variety as well, or probably even more. Essentially, the R/A distinction is nothing but the distinction between a reality as it really is (independently from us) and a way or ways the world appears to us (or me). Hence, when a child makes a distinction between what is the case and what merely appears to be the case—a distinction that normally develops in children between the ages of 3 and 4½ (Flavell 1993)—then it is making an R/A distinction. And when Galileo, Descartes, or Locke argued that secondary qualities are not properties of things as they really are, but the way our minds represent certain effects of things, they were making a distinction between how things really are and how they appear to us, and thus an R/A distinction. Kant's transcendental idealism (*i.e.*, the paradigmatic R/A theory mentioned in the introduction), children's recognition that appearances may be deceptive, Searle's 'perspectivalism', the primary/secondary quality distinction, and Baghramian's moderate pluralism all involve an R/A distinction, but aside from that, they might have less in common than what they share.

There are significant differences between R/A theories. They differ with regards to what causes the difference between appearance and reality (*i.e.*, our conceptual schemes *etcetera*), but also with regards to the extent that

[10] I will argue below (in sections 5 and 7) that the R/A distinction (in as far as it involves something like a conceptual scheme) is typically based on a specific variety of existential dependence, which implies that independent reality is existentially independent in some particular sense after all. But this is a specific kind of dependence, and it does not imply that the term 'independent' in the notion of 'independent reality' refers to existential or ontological dependence in the F/D sense.

appearances can differ from (or misrepresent) their external, 'real' grounds or causes, and how much (if anything) we can learn or know about the latter. Kant, for example, argued for a kind of epistemological humility: there is nothing we can know about things in themselves *except* for the few things we can infer through transcendental reasoning. And skeptics might go even further than this, and argue that we cannot know anything at all. At the other end of the spectrum we find ideas like Donald Davidson's suggestion (1977a; 1999) that the differences between conceptual schemes—and thus, between alternative appearances of the same reality—are as insignificant as the choice to measure temperature in Celsius or Fahrenheit: "nothing depends on whether we use one set of numbers or another" (1999, 306).

As mentioned, R/A distinctions that do not depend merely on mind-external distortions (like evil demons, brains-in-vat, flawed sense organs, and so forth) posit something like a (mind-internal) conceptual scheme, although not always explicitly (due to an emphasis on other aspects or implications of the R/A distinction, for example). Regardless of what it is called, this conceptual scheme somehow co-determines our conscious, phenomenal experience. That is, we experience a tree *as* a tree because we have a concept of 'tree'. Lacking that concept, we might still see *something*, but not recognize it as a discrete individual belonging to a certain kind—we wouldn't see it *as* a tree, and therefore, *in some sense*, we would not see a tree. Phenomenal appearances, thus, depend on concepts, which some R/A theories describe as appearances being 'conceptually constructed'. But this raises the question of what these 'concepts' are exactly. It is important to realize that they are not *necessarily* verbal (even if they usually are). Concepts do not necessarily require words—children may learn concepts before learning words (although it appears more likely that they learn them together), and non-human animals can have concepts, but cannot use words.[11]

Concepts are mental categories used to organize the raw input of our sense organs into distinct things, features, events, and so forth, but how

[11] It could, perhaps, be argued that some primates are capable of learning word-like symbols, but pigeons can learn a concept of 'bad children's drawing' (Watanabe 2010), for example, and certainly do not have any kind of word or symbol representing that concept.

much 'organizing' needs to be done is controversial. Davidson (1974) argued that this notion of 'organizing' does not make much sense, and indeed it does not if one assumes that external/independent reality is already more or less 'organized' in the sense that it mostly consists of discrete objects and features belonging to discrete kinds. But this is a metaphysical assumption that many R/A theories reject—either it is assumed that independent reality lacks clear or sharp boundaries (between things, between properties, and between kinds), and thus that we draw those boundaries by means of our conceptual categories, or it is assumed that this is at least a possibility for significant parts or aspects of independent reality, and that we cannot *a priori* know whether our concepts 'cut nature at the joints' or in more or less arbitrary places. The aforementioned difference between R/A theories in the extent that appearances can differ from their independently real grounds or causes (or noumenal correlates) is largely determined by this kind of metaphysical assumption, which will be further explored in the next section. There is another question that needs to be addressed here first, however.

If phenomenal appearances depend on concepts, can infants or non-human animals have phenomenal appearances? Although I already mentioned that concepts do not necessarily have to be verbal and that some other animals can have concepts, there are other reasons why there is no clear answer to this question. First, phenomenal appearances are *conscious*, determinate experiences of things, features, and so forth, and it is not self-evident that infants and non-human animals are conscious in the right sense and/or to the required extent.[12] Consciousness is not a singular faculty and comes in degrees—a neonate might almost completely lack consciousness, while by the age of four or so, a normal human will be fully conscious (*e.g.*, Zelazo, Gao, & Todd 2007). Similarly, animals differ widely with regards to the extent that they are conscious. Second, there is a similar progression (in case of children) or variety (in case of animals) with regards to the

[12] This raises a question about the right kind(s) or level(s) of consciousness needed for phenomenal awareness, of course, but I do not have an answer to that question. My point here is merely that being conscious in some way or sense does not necessarily imply being conscious in the way and to the extent required for phenomenal awareness, whatever that way and/or extent may be.

possession of concepts or language and thought. Davidson once pointed out that we have no way to describe the stage between the absence of language and thought and their emergence.

> In both the evolution of thought in the history of mankind, and the evolution of thought in an individual, there is a stage at which there is no thought followed by a subsequent stage at which there is thought. To describe the emergence of thought would be to describe the process which leads from the first to the second of these stages. What we lack is a satisfactory vocabulary for describing the intermediate steps. (1997, 127)

Very much the same applies here: there is a stage (or state, in case of many non-human animals) in which both consciousness and concepts are lacking and there can, therefore, be no experience of phenomenal appearances, but we lack the tools to describe what is experienced in that stage or even to determine whether the term 'experience' is applicable at all; and there is another, later stage (in case of normally developing humans) in which consciousness and concepts have fully developed and we do experience phenomenal appearances, but we lack "a satisfactory vocabulary for describing the intermediate steps" between those two stages (or states).

So, does as an infant or a cat have a phenomenal experience of a tree when it looks at one? Assuming that it can actually see the tree, it would, of course, see something, but whatever it would be seeing would not be seen *as* a tree. It might be conceptualized otherwise—perhaps, the cat has some relevant concept—and in that case, there might be some phenomenal appearance, but it would not be a phenomenal appearance of a tree. Then what does the infant or cat experience? This question will remain unanswered for the reason mentioned in the previous paragraph: we lack the tools and vocabulary to describe (or even understand, except perhaps, from a third-person perspective) this intermediate stage between absence and presence of conscious, determinate experience.

4. Deflating the R/A Distinction

Donald Davidson famously rejected conceptual schemes and associated R/A theories in his "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1974). It has been shown repeatedly, however, that his arguments are only successful against *some* versions of the R/A distinction, and not against 'the very idea' (*e.g.,* Lynch 1997; Wang 2009; Brons 2011). On the other hand, it seems to me that Davidson made an important point when he argued that "successful communication proves the existence of a shared, and largely true, view of the world" (1977b, 201), an idea he fleshed out later in his often misunderstood theory of triangulation (*e.g.,* Davidson 1992; Verheggen 2016; Brons 2012; 2022, ch. 8). The R/A distinction—or a sufficiently deflated version thereof, at least—does not necessarily conflict with that idea, however.

Let us assume that some hypothetical R/A theory holds that mountains are not real. How could this seemingly absurd claim be defended? The R/A theorist may appeal to the fact that both the class of mountains (or the set of things called 'mountain') and individual mountains have vague boundaries. The boundary between mountain and hill (or that between mountain and not-yet-a-mountain or not-a-mountain-anymore in geological processes) is more or less arbitrarily set by us and not given by nature. And similarly, the boundary between mount Fuji or any other individual mountain and its surrounding area is just as arbitrary. Hence, there is no non-arbitrarily and non-fuzzily bounded kind of non-arbitrarily and non-fuzzily bounded things in independent reality that corresponds with what we call 'mountains'. Independent reality does not determine what is a mountain and what is not—there are no mountains *as such* in independent reality. Rather, *we* decide what is a mountain and what is not. *We* draw boundaries, cut up, classify, and label, and it is this what produces our phenomenal appearances. Our experiences of mountains *as mountains* are conceptually constructed and not given by the real world, and therefore, mountains are mere phenomenal appearances and not independently real. (Notice that this argument depends on the assumption that for some kind of thing to be real, there must be discrete, individual, and clearly identifiable entities in reality corresponding to the things belonging to that kind. To say that *X*s are real is to say that there are discrete individual *X*s in reality, and that that

discreteness and individuality are given by reality. Hence, the argument depends on something like Quine's famous dictum *no entity without identity*.)

An obvious objection to this argument is that the chunks of rock we refer to with the word 'mountain' are very real, but the same problem applies there. Sedimentary rocks (such as sandstone and lignite), for example, are slowly formed out of non-rock (sand and peat, respectively, in case of these examples) by pressure and heat, and in that process there is no non-arbitrary boundary between not-yet-rock and rock. And consequently, 'rock' and those 'chunks of rock' are mere phenomenal appearance as well.

At this point one may start to wonder, how can we talk about the things in themselves that ground or cause our phenomenal experiences of mountains if we cannot even call them 'chunks of rock'? A common, apophatic answer to that question is that we cannot, or only in negative terms (*i.e.,* we can say that they are *not* mountains and *not* chunks of rock, but that is all). This apophatic attitude does make some sense—language is a useful tool to describe things in the context in which it evolved, the world of phenomenal experience, but it may struggle if it is used to describe anything well outside that sphere, as quantum mechanics nicely illustrates. A lot of quantum-inspired pseudo-science is based on an attempt to express the equations and predictions of quantum mechanics in terms that are fine to make sense of the ordinary objects that surround us, but that may be meaningless on the quantum scale. If there is a fundamental distinction between our phenomenal experience and independent reality, then it seems plausible that language would not be able to describe the latter either.

This apophatic conclusion seems to create a fundamental problem: How do we talk about something we cannot talk about? But this question assumes that we need to, and that might not be the case. All we really need is the conceptual distinction between phenomenal appearances and their independently real grounds or causes. (Notice that this is not the same sense of 'grounding' as mentioned in section 2.) However, this distinction we can already make—I just did so by using the phrases 'phenomenal appearances' and 'their independently real grounds or causes', but as these are rather clumsy expressions (especially if we need them a lot), it would be helpful to abbreviate them a bit.

In the following, I will use floor brackets ⌊...⌋ to denote the independently real cause(s) or ground(s), or noumenal correlate(s) of some phenomenal appearance(s). So, ⌊Mount Fuji⌋ is that part of independent or external reality that causes or grounds my phenomenal experience of Mount Fuji, and ⌊mountain⌋s and ⌊rock⌋ are those parts of reality that cause or ground my experiences of mountains and rock, respectively.[13] Formally, the ⌊...⌋ operator changes one kind of predicate Φ that applies to phenomenal appearances into another kind of predicate ⌊Φ⌋ that applies to parts or chunks of independent reality as follows:

(IRCG) $\forall x\,(\lfloor\Phi\rfloor x \leftrightarrow_{def.} \exists y\,(\,\mathrm{G}x,y \wedge \Phi y\,))$,[14]

in which Φ represents some kind of phenomenal appearance (such as 'mountain', 'rock', or 'Mount Fuji') and '$\mathrm{G}x,y$' stands for "x is the independently real cause or ground of the phenomenal appearance y" or "x is the part or chunk of independent reality that causes or grounds y". (Notice that 'independent reality' is effectively a mass term, and thus that the universal quantifier does not quantify over discrete individuals, but over parts or chunks of independent reality.) Hence, (IRCG) can be read as: "any x is a ⌊Φ⌋ if and only if there is some y such that x is the independently real cause or ground of the phenomenal appearance y and y is a Φ". A ⌊mountain⌋, then, is defined (by an application of IRCG) as the independently real ground (or noumenal correlate) of a phenomenal appearance of a mountain.

According to (IRCG), while ⌊mountain⌋s are parts of independent reality, what determines their being ⌊mountain⌋s is not some feature of independent reality, but their phenomenal appearances as mountains. In a

[13] Notice that it makes a difference whether the plural suffix -s goes inside or outside the floor brackets. '⌊mountain⌋s' is a plurality of noumenal correlates of multiple, singular mountain phenomena; '⌊mountains⌋' is the singular noumenal correlate of a combination or collection of multiple mountain phenomena or of a singular phenomenal appearance of several mountains.

[14] The four-letter sequence 'IRCG', which is derived from 'independently real cause or ground', is introduced here merely for ease of reference and does not really mean anything (even if it looks like an acronym). The same is the case for 'SRA' and 'WRA' below. These three names refer to these definitions/formulas—nothing else. Other names for these three formulas would work just as well, but I find these names easiest to remember.

maximally strong version of the R/A distinction there *cannot* even be an independently real criterion for the classification of certain chunks of independent reality as ⌊mountain⌋s. In such a view (regardless of whether anyone ever seriously defended it), there would be *nothing* that ⌊Φ⌋s share that makes them ⌊Φ⌋s aside from this grounding or causing of the phenomenal appearances of Φ.[15] Or in other words:

(SRA) for any Φ, there is no non-trivial property Ψ, such that $\forall x\,(\lfloor\Phi\rfloor x \leftrightarrow \Psi x)$.[16]

(An obvious, and possibly only, example of a 'trivial' property Ψ_t such that $\forall x\,(\lfloor\Phi\rfloor x \leftrightarrow \Psi_t x)$ is "being the independently real cause or ground of some phenomenal appearance y such that Φy".)

An R/A distinction based on (SRA) is so strong that it becomes effectively indistinguishable from metaphysical idealism. If there is no independently real property that some ⌊Φ⌋s share, then there is no real property that causes their appearances as Φs either. And if there is nothing in independent reality that (co-)determines phenomenal appearance, then independent reality is causally inefficient with regards to phenomenal appearance(s), which is effectively the same as there not being any independent reality at all (as metaphysical idealism holds). If ⌊Φ⌋s have absolutely nothing in common except their phenomenal appearances as Φs, then those appearances could just as well be groundless.

Furthermore, if the independently real properties of ⌊Φ⌋s play no role in their appearances as Φs, then something else must influence or determine their appearances as such. Conceptual schemes are supposed to order, organize, cut-up, and/or classify something, and if it is not something independently real they work on, then they must organize (*etcetera*) something else. Because the ultimate grounds or causes of our phenomenal appearances

[15] This applies equally to mountains and to Mount Fuji. In the latter case, there is nothing that ⌊part-of-Mount-Fuji⌋s share that makes them phenomenally appear as parts of Mount Fuji. In other words, (SRA) implies both the arbitrary boundaries of classes of things and the arbitrary boundaries of individual things suggested in the second paragraph of this section.

[16] The expression '$\forall x\,(\lfloor\Phi\rfloor x \leftrightarrow \Psi x)$' can be read as "anything that is ⌊Φ⌋ has property Ψ and *vice versa*".

are supposed to be independently real (as this is a defining feature of the R/A distinction), this 'something else' must be some kind of intermediary between the two, that is, something like sense data. However, if the sense data that present ⌊Φ⌋s to the mind are to play the causal/grounding role in the appearances as Φs that ⌊Φ⌋s cannot play themselves because ⌊Φ⌋s have no relevant properties in common, then those sense data cannot similarly lack relevant shared properties. Or in other words, for sense data to play the role they are supposed to play, they must present ⌊Φ⌋s as something they are not—namely, relevantly similar to each other in some Φ-determining respect—and thus, those sense data must systematically misrepresent ⌊Φ⌋s. The intermediary implied by (SRA), then, is not some kind of relatively innocent causal intermediary like the nerve signals between our sense organs and brains, but is systematically deceptive. Davidson (1983) called this kind of intermediary "epistemic" because our beliefs would be grounded upon them rather than on independent reality itself, and it is such epistemic intermediaries that he rejected (*e.g.,* 1974; 1983; 1988). Weaker versions of the R/A distinction do not assume (SRA), however, and thus, do not necessarily assume such epistemic intermediaries.

There are (at least) three other problems for (SRA), moreover. First, the radical apophasis implied by (SRA) undermines (SRA) itself. If nothing can be known about independent reality, then we cannot know that all ⌊Φ⌋s lack a non-trivial property Ψ either. Second, in case of mountains, there *is* a non-trivial property Ψ such that $\forall x\,(\lfloor\Phi\rfloor x \leftrightarrow \Psi x)$, namely, "being naturally higher than 1km relative to the surrounding landscape" or something similar. (We will turn to the third problem below.)

This second problem for (SRA) can be avoided in two ways: by changing 'for any Φ' into 'for most/some Φ', recognizing that there may be some ⌊Φ⌋s that have unambiguous, independently real properties determining their ⌊Φ⌋-ness;[17] and/or by assuming that non-trivial properties Ψ such that $\forall x\,(\lfloor\Phi\rfloor x \leftrightarrow \Psi x)$ are (often/typically) vague and/or depend on more or less arbitrary thresholds that are drawn by convention rather than that they are given by anything independently real (as in case of the 1km threshold in the last example). The mapping metaphor on which Maria Baghramian's

[17] Chemical elements seem to be an example, as any chemical element has a given number of protons and it is this number that determines which element they are.

(2004) pluralism relies illustrates this particularly well. The boundaries between zones on climate maps or vegetation maps, for example, do not correspond to exact boundaries in the real world, but are drawn in gray zones. And arguably, the same is true for coast lines and many other features on maps. That they are drawn in gray zones implies that they are not completely arbitrary, but where exactly in those gray zones those boundaries are drawn is largely determined by an applicable convention.

Hence, weaker R/A theories can amend (SRA) in two ways: by changing the first quantifier, and by claiming that insofar it is the case that some ⌊Φ⌋s have a non-trivial property Ψ, this is not an *inherent*, independently real property, but it is at least partially conventional.

(WRA) for most/some Φ, there is no non-trivial, inherent property Ψ, such that $\forall x\ (\lfloor\Phi\rfloor x \leftrightarrow \Psi x)$.

A third problem for (SRA) is that it seems to make language and communication impossible, unless one makes some rather exotic and/or question-begging assumptions.[18] This is the point of the quote by Davidson in the first paragraph of this section: "successful communication proves the existence of a shared, and largely true, view of the world". If ⌊Φ⌋s have absolutely nothing in common (aside from the aforementioned trivial property), then there would be no way in which we could learn a concept and category '⌊Φ⌋'. If a language learner would repeatedly hear the word 'table' in reference to various things, but those things appear to have nothing in common, then she will never be able to work out what kinds of things tables are and form a concept of 'table'. For this reason, the fact that we have language proves that (SRA) cannot be right. It does not similarly refute the weaker (WRA), however, as the language learner does not need a complete lack of ambiguity to learn concepts—in practice, vague (or non-discrete) properties and arbitrary, conventional thresholds work just fine.

[18] *Matrix*-like brain-in-vat scenarios would do the trick. And certain assumptions about memory might seem to make solitary language learning possible, but as Verheggen (2016) has shown, such assumptions would be begging the question, as the reliability of memory is itself part of the problem.

If this argument is right (and I will just assume that it is here),[19] this has rather deflationary implications for the R/A distinction. It is indeed the case that there are no sharp, non-arbitrary boundaries between mountains and non-mountains (and between Mount Fuji and its surrounding area), and thus that our category of mountains is not given by independent reality, but we are (or can be) fully aware of all of this. Our experiences of mountains are not deceptive—⌊mountain⌋s are very much like how they appear to us. And the same is true for most of our other phenomenal experiences. There really are trees and shrubs, even though the boundary between them is vague and conventional. There really are tables and rain clouds and sunsets.

Consequently, phenomenal experience is not (and cannot be) *radically* different from independent reality. Indeed, "successful communication proves the existence of a shared, and *largely* true, view of the world" (Davidson 1977b, 201; emphasis added). If phenomenal reality is like a map, it is like a transparent 1:1 scale map overlaid on top of the terrain. But even this leaves room for (self-) deception. It would be a mistake to confuse the map for the terrain and to believe that our category of 'mountain' is given by the world (*i.e.*, to assume joints in reality that follow our conceptual categories or the lines on the map). Nietzsche once warned against our tendency to take language for granted, to think of our "concepts and names of things as eternal truths" and to mistake our conceptual description of the world for the world itself (1878, §I.11). But this is a kind of (self-) deception that can be vanquished through critical reflection.[20]

5. F/D and R/A in Buddhist Metaphysics

The Buddhist equivalent to being fundamental in the F/D distinction is having *svabhāva* (literally: 'own being' or 'self-being'). What does not have *svabhāva* is empty (*śūnya*). The closest equivalents of 'reality' and 'appearance' in the R/A distinction are 'ultimate reality' (*paramārthasat*) and

[19] For a defense of more or less this argument, see (Brons 2022, chapters 8 and 9).

[20] Vanquishing this kind of (self-) deception is aided by the advance of technology, which increasingly liberates us from the biological limitations to our perception.

'conventional reality' (*saṃvṛtisat*), respectively. R/A and F/D are not two different distinctions, however. What does not have *svabhāva* is merely conventionally real, or in other words, having *svabhāva* is the mark of ultimate reality. This puts all the metaphysical weight on the notion of *svabhāva*, of course, but unfortunately, that notion is not without its problems.

Svabhāva is existential *in*dependence (as opposed to dependence), but there are at least three kinds of dependence involved—causal dependence, whole/parts dependence, and conceptual dependence (*e.g.,* Garfield 2015)—and different schools and thinkers differently accentuated these. In the early Buddhist Abhidharma view, which emphasized whole/parts dependence and conceptual dependence, the only things that have *svabhāva* are *dharmas*, spatio-temporally atomic tropes (Siderits 2022). Nāgārjuna, the most influential philosopher of Mahāyāna Buddhism, put greater weight on causal dependence and argued that not even *dharmas* have *svabhāva* and thus that everything is empty. And the Tibetan philosopher Tsongkhapa identified emptiness with 'dependent origination', implying that *svabhāva* (as the opposite of emptiness) is (primarily, at least) causal independence.

Further complicating matters, while *svabhāva* is typically understood as a metaphysical notion, Jan Westerhoff (2009) argues in his introduction to Nāgārjuna's philosophy that it has cognitive and semantic dimensions as well. Those dimensions appear to be aspects or implications of conceptual dependence, however. Within the ontological dimension, Westerhoff distinguishes essence-*svabhāva*, substance-*svabhāva*, and absolute *svabhāva*, but he concludes that the third is an instance of the first. Essence-*svabhāva* is having an essential property, which can be understood as a non-trivial, inherent property Ψ, such that $\forall x\,(\lfloor\Phi\rfloor x \leftrightarrow \Psi x)$ as in (WRA) above. About substance-*svabhāva* Westerhoff writes that "to have *svabhāva* means to exist in a primary manner, unconstructed and independent of anything else" (24), which seems to be a description of existential independence in general, but it turns out that—at least for Nāgārjuna and his interpreters—this is primarily independence from causes and conditions, and thus causal independence.

Of the varieties or forms of *svabhāva* mentioned in the previous two paragraphs, two are relatively straightforward: causal dependence, and whole/parts dependence. It is worth noting that usually neither of these is

considered a kind of *ontological* dependence in Western philosophy, although the debate about parts, wholes, and composition could be easily rephrased in such terms. More commonly, claims in that debate are phrased in terms of existence rather than dependence. According to mereological nihilism, for example. wholes do not exist and only part-less parts exist. Peter Van Inwagen (1990) famously defends a view something like this, although he makes an exception for wholes that constitute a life. The idea in Abhidharma metaphysics is somewhat similar, even though it uses very different terms: only part-less parts have *svabhāva*, and wholes or composites are only conventionally real.

Conceptual dependence—or dependence on conceptual construction (*kalpanā*) —may seem to be more questionable as a kind of existential dependence. On the surface, conceptual dependence does not look like a kind of existential dependence at all. Rather, conceiving it as such appears to be the result of a confusion of the ontological and predicative uses of 'existence', which was common in ancient thought in both India and Greece (McEvilley 2002). To say that mountains do not exist independently from conceptual construction is to say that their existence *as* mountains—or in other words, our classification of them as 'mountains'—depends on conceptual construction.[21] It means that the phenomenal category is due to convention. What is dependent here, is the *predication* or classification, and not the *existence* of the part of reality that is classified as something.[22] This is not exactly right, however, because it ignores the difference between ⌊mountain⌋s and their phenomenal appearances. The independently real cause or ground of some mountain appearance is not conceptually constructed, of course, but the phenomenal appearance *as* mountain depends on conceptual construction by definition. A ⌊mountain⌋ can only appear *as* mountain to someone who has a concept of 'mountain', and consequently,

[21] Notice that the term 'construction' here also refers to our boundary-drawing between mountains and non-mountains and between individual mountains and their surroundings. (See section 4.) For convenience, where it does not matter I will ignore this aspect of construction in the following, and treat conceptual construction as if it is mere classification.

[22] Westerhoff (2009) calls this "notional dependence" and contrasts it to existential dependence.

that phenomenal appearance existentially depends on the process of conceptual construction (or classification) and on the concept of 'mountain'. Hence, conceptual dependence *is* a kind of existential dependence.

It is important to understand what it means for something to be dependent on conceptual construction in this sense. What it means is that ⌊mountain⌋s lack an inherent, non-trivial property that makes them ⌊mountain⌋s, and thus, that the 'mountain'-ness of Mount Fuji, for example, is not inherent or given by independent reality, because what is and what is not a mountain is at least partially decided by us. (See also sections 3 and 4.) To be dependent on conceptual construction, then, is the same as lacking essence-*svabhāva* (as roughly defined above), and this conclusion brings us back to the interpretation of *svabhāva* as three kinds of independence mentioned in the second paragraph of this section (*i.e.*, causal, whole/parts, conceptual).

However, this interpretation seems to make the notion of *svabhāva* polysemous or equivocal, while I do not think it was ever (consciously) conceived as such. An alternative interpretation that solves this problem is that *svabhāva* is existential independence *in any sense*, that is, some kind of absolute or radical independence. If Buddhists metaphysicists consider things that are ontologically dependent in some other sense than the three kinds of existential dependence mentioned above empty or merely conventionally real (*i.e.,* lacking *svabhāva*), as well (or if there would be sufficient reason to believe that they would have held that view), then this would provide strong support for this interpretation. Providing that support is well beyond the scope of this paper, but I think it is a plausible interpretation, and I find the fact that holes are a typical object for meditation on emptiness rather suggestive.[23]

Nevertheless, regardless of whether *svabhāva* comes in the aforementioned three kinds or is better understood as absolute or radical independence, it *is* a multifaceted notion. As mentioned above, Westerhoff (2009) distinguishes cognitive and semantic dimensions of *svabhāva* in addition to

[23] Recall that 'empty' means lacking *svabhāva*, and that lacking *svabhāva* means being existentially dependent (either in some relevant sense, or in any sense). Hence, if holes are empty, then this implies that they are existentially dependent (and *vice versa*).

the ontological dimension, and those dimensions are inseparable from the notion of conceptual construction. Conceptual dependence was shown to be a variety of existential dependence above, as phenomenal appearances existentially depend on conceptual construction (but also usually on their independently real grounds or causes),[24] but Buddhist metaphysicists typically held that what is merely conventionally real—and thus lacks *svabhāva*—is conceptually constructed by definition. This is essentially what the cognitive and semantic dimensions of the notion of *svabhāva* consist in. But this may also very well be one of the most problematic aspects of the notion of *svabhāva*.

In case of whole/parts dependence, it is quite plausible that the whole is only recognized as a thing if there is a concept naming or describing that thing/whole. Hence, a whole is not just existentially dependent on its parts, but on a concept naming/describing the whole as well. The same may be true for several (perhaps even most) other kinds of existential or ontological dependence. Arguably, a set is not just existentially dependent on its members, but also on some kind of concept (in a loose sense of 'concept', perhaps) combining those members into a set (*i.e.*, something like a membership function), and we would not recognize an event or state of affairs as such either without a concept classifying and/or naming/describing it. The odd one out is causal dependence.[25] Of course, if some particular fire causes smoke, then the phenomenal appearance of that smoke is conceptually constructed, but this would be the case because it lacks essence-*svabhāva* and not because it is causally dependent. Furthermore, we can talk about causality on the level of independent reality as well. ⌊That fire⌋ causes ⌊that smoke⌋, but ⌊that smoke⌋ (*i.e.,* the independently real ground or cause

[24] Notice that even hallucinations co-depend on independently real causes, such as drugs or disease, but such causes are not grounds in the sense of (IRCG). A hallucination of a dragon is not caused by a ⌊dragon⌋. This is what the word 'usually' in the parenthetical remark points at.

[25] It is not the only exception, however. The dependence of chemical substances on their atomic constituents does not involve a conceptual co-dependence. The same may be true for the dependence of tropes on their bearers, if this dependence is accepted at all, as tropes in Abhidharma metaphysics (*i.e., dharmas*) are existentially independent.

of the phenomenal appearance of/as smoke) is not conceptually constructed by definition, and consequently, causal dependence does not imply conceptual dependence.[26]

6. Misleading Generalizations

There is a further problem for *svabhāva*, but it shares this problem with other F/D theories that combine multiple kinds of existential dependence into a single category. This problem is that different kinds of existential dependence differ in their formal properties, which is summarized in table 1. These four formal properties (*i.e.,* the column headers in table 1) were defined by Ricki Bliss and Graham Priest (2018; see also section 2) as follows:

(1) *antireflexivity* $\forall x\ (\neg(x\mathrm{D}x))$—nothing is dependent on itself;
(2) *antisymmetry* $\forall x,y\ (x\mathrm{D}y \rightarrow \neg(y\mathrm{D}x))$—no two things are dependent on each other;
(3) *transitivity* $\forall x,y,z\ ((x\mathrm{D}y \wedge y\mathrm{D}z) \rightarrow x\mathrm{D}z)$—if x depends on y and y depends on z, then x depends on z; and
(4) *extendability* $\forall x \exists y\ (x \neq y \wedge x\mathrm{D}y)$—everything depends on something other than itself.

The 'xDy' predicate represents the dependence relation 'x depends on y', but it is important to realize that in all of the kinds of dependence listed in table 1 it is more specific than this, because the kind of dependence implies what kinds of things x and y are. In case of hole/host dependence, for example, 'xDy' means something like "x is a hole and y is the host of that hole and x (therefore) depends on y". Often x and y belong to different, mutually exclusive ontological categories (as in the case of holes and hosts; they are mutually exclusive in the sense that a hole cannot also be a host of a hole),

[26] If this is right, then that would obviously be a problem for interpretations of *svabhāva* that focus on causal independence, such as Nāgārjuna's and Tsongkhapa's. I am not interested in trying to refute (or support) their ideas, however, so I will ignore any exegetical implications of the arguments and findings in this paper.

which has important implications for the (possible) formal properties of these kinds of dependence.

type of dependence	anti-reflexivity	anti-symmetry	transitivity	extendability
causal	?	?	yes	probably yes
whole/parts	yes	yes	yes	probably no
conceptual	yes	yes	*d.n.a.*	*d.n.a.*
phenomenon/ground	yes	yes	*d.n.a.*	*d.n.a.*
chem.subst./ constituents	yes	yes	*d.n.a.*	*d.n.a.*
set/members	yes/no	no	no	*d.n.a.*
hole/host	yes	yes	*d.n.a.*	*d.n.a.*
event/participants	yes	yes	*d.n.a.*	*d.n.a.*

Table 1—Formal Properties of Different Kinds of Existential Dependence

Table 1 is obviously not exhaustive—many more kinds of existential dependence can be conceived than can be listed here. The first three dependences are the counterparts of the three kinds of *in*dependence that are involved in *svabhāva* (see previous section). Causal dependence is the existential dependence of effects on their causes, whole/parts dependence is the dependence of wholes on their parts,[27] and conceptual dependence is the dependence of a conceptually determinate phenomenal appearance on conceptual construction, and thus, on a concept guiding that construction (see section 3). The fourth dependence listed also has phenomenal appearances as its dependents, but what they depend on in this case is their

[27] But not dependence for their identity on a small subset of some kind of identifying parts. That would be confusing questions of identity with questions of existence. See section 2, and especially notes 4 and 6.

independently real grounds or causes (or noumenal correlates; see sections 3 and 4).

The remaining five are selected from the examples of ontological dependence given by Kathrin Koslicki (2012; see section 2). Chemical substances depend on their constituents, which could be considered a special kind of whole/parts dependence. Chemical substances have emergent properties, of course, but that probably is the case for many other wholes as well. (Otherwise there might be little reason to recognize and conceptualize them as something different from their parts.) Sets (by definition) depend on their members. Holes can only exist as holes in something, and thus depend on their 'hosts'. The same is true for boundaries, which are not separately listed in the table, but what is true for holes in this section is true for boundaries as well. Events and states of affairs depend on the things (in the broadest possible sense of 'thing') that participate in them.[28] (Notice that states of affairs are not separately mentioned in the table either.)

Most of these kinds of existential dependence are antireflexive (*i.e.*, they hold that something cannot existentially depend on itself) and antisymmetrical (*i.e.*, they hold that two things cannot depend on each other). Holes (or boundaries) cannot be their own hosts, events (or states of affairs) cannot be their own participants,[29] chemical elements cannot be their own constituents, and so forth. The two possible exceptions, set/members dependence and causal dependence, are controversial. *If* there are things that cause themselves, then causal dependence would not be antireflexive. God or the universe appear to be the most common candidates for things that cause

[28] I omitted trope/bearer dependence as I have no idea about what its formal properties could be. (Contemplating the this-trope-ness of a trope turned out not to be particularly enlightening, unfortunately.) Koslicki's first example was that of the dependence of smiles on mouths. Its values in the table would be 'yes', 'yes', '*d.n.a.*', '*d.n.a.*' for the same reasons as the other kinds of dependence with those values.

[29] A reviewer of an earlier version of this paper wondered whether fires, storms, or floods might be their own participants. What is potentially confusing in examples like these is that we use the term 'fire' to refer both to an event or process of something burning (in a particular way) *and* to a kind of reified collection of the participants in that burning (*i.e.*, the fuel, oxygen, and other molecules involved). The same applies to storms and floods. However, the reified collection of participants in the event is ontologically distinct from the event (as are the participants themselves).

themselves, but again, such claims are controversial. (Hence, the question mark in the table.) In a set theory that allows sets to be members of themselves there can be a singleton that has itself as its only member, and that set would, thus, depend on itself. However, contrary to naive set theory that allows this, axiomatic set theories typically do not allow sets to be members of themselves to avoid Russell's paradox and/or other problems. (Hence, naive set theory would have 'no' in this table cell, while axiomatic set theories would typically have 'yes'.)

The reason why most kinds of existential dependence are antireflexive was already alluded to above: the two relata belong to different, mutually exclusive ontological categories. But in case of the two possible exceptions, the relata belong to categories that are not mutually exclusive or belong to the same category. The first is the case for set/members dependence because sets can be members and *vice versa*, while in case of causal dependence both the effect (*i.e.*, the dependent) and the cause (*i.e.*, the independent) are generally assumed to be events. Furthermore, it is for the same reason that most of these dependence relations are antisymmetrical with the same two exceptions. Sets can have other sets as their members, so (at least in naive set theory) one set A can have a set B as its only member, while B has A as its only member, and consequently, A would depend on B and B would depend on A. And if it is possible that two events cause each other, then causal dependence would not be antisymmetrical either, but this is controversial as well. (Hence, again, the question mark in the table.) In all of the other cases the relation is fundamentally asymmetrical. If x is a hole and y is its host, then y cannot be a hole in x; if x is a chemical substance and y stands for its constituents, then y cannot be a chemical substance with x as its constituents; if x is a phenomenal appearance and y is its noumenal correlate (as in phenomenon/ground dependence) or y is the concept it depends on (as in conceptual dependence), then y cannot be a phenomenal appearance with x as its ground or relevant concept; and so forth.

Whole/parts dependence is also antisymmetrical, but for a slightly different reason. Contrary to the last three examples, wholes and parts are not mutually exclusive ontological categories: wholes can be parts of other wholes, and parts can have further parts, and thus, be wholes relative to those parts. The dependence is still antisymmetrical because if x is a whole

and y is its parts, then y cannot at the same time be a whole with x as its parts. But perhaps, whole/parts *inter*dependence is also conceivable, and that relation would not be antisymmetrical. 'Perhaps', because I am far from convinced that this idea even makes sense. The only apparent example I can come up with is that of an ecosystem that depends on its parts (*i.e.*, the animals and plants in it), while those parts simultaneously depend on that ecosystem.[30] However, this dependence appears to be biological rather than metaphysical, and is, therefore, probably irrelevant here. (This is debatable, of course, but the outcome of that debate is irrelevant for the arguments in this paper.)

Because wholes can be parts of other wholes, the whole/parts dependence is transitive. Although sets can be members of other sets, the set/members dependence is *not* transitive, however. If x is a member of set Y and Y is a member of set Z, then this does not imply that x is a member of Z. Causal dependence, on the other hand, is transitive. If x is causally dependent on y and y on z, then x depends on z.

None of the other kinds of dependence in table 1 is transitive, and this is the case for the same reason that they are antisymmetical: the relata belong to mutually exclusive ontological categories. In all of these cases what goes in the 'x' slot in '$x\mathrm{D}y$' cannot even go in the 'y' slot, and therefore, the antecedent in the definition of transitivity given above (*i.e.*, '$x\mathrm{D}y \wedge y\mathrm{D}z$') is fundamentally impossible. If x is a hole and y is its host, then y cannot also be a hole with z as its host. Or with any other host, for that matter—the problem is not that further host z, but that y cannot be both a hole and a host. Similarly, a phenomenal appearance cannot also be a ground or a concept (as in phenomenon/ground dependence and conceptual dependence, respectively), and the participants in an event cannot themselves be events (but events can be *parts* of other events). In all of these cases, it seems misleading to say that they are intransitive, however. What makes $\forall x,y,z\ ((x\mathrm{D}y \wedge y\mathrm{D}z) \rightarrow x\mathrm{D}z)$ false for these kinds of dependence is that the antecedent just does not and *cannot* apply. Hence, transitivity is inapplicable. It is for this reason that it says '*d.n.a.*' (*i.e.*, does not apply) in the table.

[30] A reviewer of an earlier version of this paper suggested organisms (and their parts) as another possible example.

A somewhat similar problem applies to extendability. In a kind of existential dependence in which what goes in the 'x' slot in 'xDy' necessarily belongs to ontological category Ω, $\forall x \exists y\,(x \neq y \wedge x\mathrm{D}y)$ would imply that $\forall x\,(\Omega x)$, and in many cases of existential dependence that implication is obviously false. Furthermore, in these cases it would be misleading to say that they are not extendable as well, as the main problem is not that $\forall x \exists y\,(x \neq y \wedge x\mathrm{D}y)$ itself is false, but that the implication $\forall x\,(\Omega x)$ is false. Extendability would imply that everything is a hole in case of hole/host dependence, that everything is an event in event/participants dependence, and that everything is a phenomenal appearance in phenomenon/ground dependence or conceptual dependence.[31] Because not everything is a set, extendability does not apply to set/members dependence either, but it does apply to the remaining two kinds of existential dependence in the table. In case of causal dependence, extendability means that everything has a cause (and thus, is an effect of that cause), which is probably true. It is sometimes suggested that the Big Bang is a counter-example, but that would be a mistake. The Big Bang is not necessarily uncaused and is not necessarily the first event—it is the just the fundamental limit to how far back we will ever be able to see. In case of whole/parts dependence, on the other hand, extendability is probably false as it would imply that there are no final, part-less constituents of reality. We once believed that atoms where part-less, but those turned out to consist of further parts, and in the 20th century we found that those further parts (protons and neutrons, specifically) consist of yet smaller parts (namely, quarks), but it is generally assumed that this does not go on infinitely. For all we know now, quarks do not have parts.

As mentioned, table 1 is not complete—many other kinds of existential dependence could be considered—but completeness is not the goal here. Rather, what I want to illustrate is that while *specific* existential dependence relations have certain formal properties, something like existential or ontological dependence *in general* (or any notion of dependence that aggregates or combines several kinds of existential dependence) does *not* have

[31] Metaphysical idealism holds that everything is a phenomenal appearance, of course, but not because it would accept extendability. Instead it rejects independent reality, and thus the phenomenon/ground dependence.

formal properties (or any other interesting properties for that matter), and therefore, that positing such a general notion is misleading for a number of reasons, or in a number of ways.

First, if the general category of existential dependence is broad enough, extendability becomes trivial. Everything (probably) depends on something else in *some* sense of existential dependence. What makes this especially problematic is that extendability appears to be a rather uncommon property of specific kinds of existential dependence. If this is indeed the case, then aggregating different kinds of dependence into a single category may seem to make common (or even standard), what actually is rare.

Second, the supposed properties of a general notion of existential dependence are determined by the selection of paradigmatic dependence for each of the four formal properties mentioned. Consequently, an F/D theory could, for example, reject antireflexivity because *some* kind of dependence is antireflexive, reject antisymmetry because some *other* kind of dependence is antisymmetrical, reject transitivity because some *third* kind of dependence is intransitive, and accept extendability because at least one other kind of dependence continues *ad infinitum* (or because extendability is trivial), while there might not be any specific kind of dependence with this combination of properties. Regardless of the plausibility of this particular example, the possibility of cases like this raises questions about whether and how properties of the 'species' (*i.e.* the generalized notion of existential dependence) can be inferred from its specific varieties.

Third, different F/D theories may differ in the formal properties of dependence they posit, not because of a substantial disagreement about the nature of existential dependence, but merely because they include different kinds of dependence in their general notion of existential dependence (*i.e.*, their F/D distinction). If theory A makes an F/D distinction that includes causal dependence, while theory B excludes it, then A and B will most likely differ significantly with regards to these formal properties. Furthermore, this kind of problem can arise even when theories *agree* about what counts as 'ontological dependence' and what does not. Imagine, for example, two philosophers, Thomas and Tarō, fiercely debating the formal properties of ontological dependence, even though they agree that chemical substance/constituents dependence, set/members dependence, and event/participants

dependence are the paradigmatic examples of ontological dependence. Despite that agreement, Thomas argues that ontological dependence is antireflexive and antisymmetrical because substance/constituents dependence and event/participants dependence are, while Tarō argues that ontological dependence is *not* antireflexive and antisymmetrical because set/members dependence is not.[32]

Fourth, positing properties of existential or ontological dependence in general risks rather spurious reasoning. Continuing the last example, Tarō might argue that because ontological dependence is not antireflexive and because chemical substance/constituents dependence is a kind of ontological dependence, chemical substances can be their own constituents. The fallaciousness of this example illustrates that a general notion of existential dependence employed by some F/D theory is useless because the formal properties of specific kinds of dependence cannot be inferred from the supposed properties of this generalized existential dependence. (Recall that the second point above raised a question about inference in the opposite direction.) Because of this, a general or aggregate notion of existential or ontological dependence that combines several specific kinds of dependence is explanatory useless as well. Some *specific* kind of existential dependence is transitive or antitransitive, not because existential or ontological dependence in general is transitive or antitransitive, but just because of the characteristics of that specific kind of dependence. The general notion is redundant.

Fifth, transitivity makes little sense for an aggregate or general notion of existential dependence, which further illustrates the redundancy or even vacuity of such a general notion. Let us say that x is a hole and y is its host, and that y is a whole and z is its parts; or that appearance a is conceptually dependent on concept b and that b was caused into existence by event c. It may be technically true to say that (due to transitivity) x existentially depends on z and a on c, but this 'dependence' is misleading more than informative. That the hole in my shirt existentially depends on the textile, buttons, and thread that are the parts of that shirt, and that the phenomenal appearance of an apple on my table existentially depends on the events that lead to the first formation of the concept of 'apple' by some early

[32] Notice that Tarō's theory of the formal properties of set/members dependence is (apparently) based on naive set theory.

hominids a long time ago, is simultaneously technical true and quite meaningless. It is technically true, because according to (ED), the loose definition of existential dependence given in section 2, the hole and the apple appearance indeed existentially depend on the textile, buttons, and thread and original concept formation of 'apple', respectively. But this does not reveal anything important about the relations between that hole and those parts or between that appearance and that distant event. In the contrary, it suggests that 'existential dependence' does not mean anything besides what is stated in (ED).

To illustrate the latter point, consider another example of dependence that has nothing to do with metaphysics: if Ezenwa depends on Harleen for emotional support, and Ivan depends on Ezenwa for financial support, then it could be argued that, in some sense, Ivan depends on Harleen. But what does this 'dependence' mean or amount to? What properties does this broader, more general 'dependence' relation have? How does it work? What does it do? Do these questions even make sense? This 'dependence' that is exemplified by the relation between Ivan and Harleen appears to be some kind of container category without any interesting properties of its own. The container holds various kinds of specific relations that we call or consider some kind of 'dependence'—such as emotional and financial dependence—and these specific kinds have further properties and implications, but the container does not. The point is that much the same is true in case of existential dependence. We can ask the same questions and reach the same conclusion. What properties does the general notion of existential dependence have? How does it work? What does it do? Do these questions even make sense? We can answer questions like these for various specific kinds of existential dependence, but the general category is just a bare container defined by (ED) that does not have any further properties itself. Or in other words, a generalized notion of existential or ontological dependence is meaningless.

7. Conclusions

This paper discussed two kinds of metaphysical distinctions that are used to separate what is 'real' from what is not, or what is more real from

what is less real. These two distinctions are the R/A or reality/appearance and F/D or fundamental/dependent distinctions. The former distinguishes phenomenal appearance (*i.e.*, the way we consciously experience things) from independent or external reality (*i.e.*, the way things really are in themselves; see section 3); the latter distinguishes more fundamental things from what ontologically depends on them (and what, therefore, is less 'real' or does not 'really' exist in some thick, ontologically loaded sense of 'existence'; see section 2).

Varieties of ontological dependence form a subset of varieties of existential dependence, which is loosely defined by means of a counterfactual conditional: x existentially depends on y if and only if, if y would not exist, then x would not exist, and not just because x exists necessarily. Neither existential dependence, nor ontological dependence is more than a collection of varieties, however. There is no such *thing* as 'ontological dependence' or 'existential dependence'.[33] Rather, the many different kinds or varieties of existential dependence relations have different (formal and other) properties, and combining them into a single category is more likely to be misleading than helpful. At best, such a general/aggregate notion of existential or ontological dependence is redundant because it does not explain anything. (See section 6.)

One specific kind of existential dependence is the dependence of phenomenal appearances on conceptual construction, which grounds the distinction between appearance and reality. (See sections 3 and 4.) Consequently, the R/A distinction is a special kind of F/D distinction. Furthermore, many other kinds of existential dependence imply or involve some kind of conceptual dependence, and therefore, F/D distinctions often come with (implicit) R/A distinctions. (See section 5.)

[33] It might seems contradictory to say that varieties of existential dependence have nothing in common (*i.e.*, that there is no such *thing*), while they share a (rough!) definition. (I owe gratitude to this journal's reviewers for bringing this apparent contradiction to my attention.) Sharing a definition does not necessarily imply having anything substantial or important in common, however. Think of being related, for example. One could (in principle) come up with a definition of 'being related' or 'relation', but this definition does not guarantee that all kinds of relations have anything interesting or meaningful in common (in addition to being a kind of relation).

Different F/D distinctions are different ways of thinking about what is real and what is not (or what really exists and what does not), but a conception of 'real' based on some kind or kinds of existential independence—and this includes the R/A distinction—inherits the latter's problems. If a general/aggregate notion of existential or ontological dependence does not explain anything, then neither does a conception of 'real' built upon such a notion. Hence, a notion of 'real' based on such generalized dependence would be explanatorily redundant.

If the generalizing approach does not work, the most obvious alternative is to select or prioritize one or a few specific kinds of (in-) dependence. As mentioned, F/D distinctions often come with (implicit) R/A distinctions, and intuitively, F/D distinctions that involve R/A distinctions seem to be more fundamental (*at least to me*) than those that do not, just because there are more kinds of dependence involved. For example, whole/parts dependence or events/participants dependence both involve conceptual dependence (and thus an R/A distinction), because without a concept naming/describing the whole or event, we would not (normally) recognize or experience it as such (*i.e.*, as an individual thing, in the broadest possible sense of 'thing'). If this intuition is right, then parts are more 'real' than the wholes they constitute, and endurants are more 'real' than the events they participate in. Causal dependence, on the other hand, does not necessarily involve conceptual dependence, as both cause and effect can be parts of independent reality and phenomenal appearance plays no role in their causal relation (in that case!). For this reason, whole/parts and events/participants dependence seem more fundamental kinds of existential dependence than causal dependence.

F/D distinctions in which the dependent and the (relatively) independent belong to different ontological categories also seem intuitively more fundamental (*again, to me*) than those that do not. For example, in events/participants dependence, the event and the participants belong to different ontological categories (*i.e.*, events or occurrents and endurants, respectively), while this is usually not the case for causes and their effects in causal dependence. This suggests again, that endurants are more 'real' than the events they participate in, and that effects are just as 'real' as their causes (or in other words, that causal dependence does not make something less real).

These are mere intuitions, however, and I have no good argument for either intuition. The problem is that, besides intuition, there does not seem much to go on.[34] Nothing in reality forces us to conceive of 'real' or 'exists' in a particular way, or to choose between varieties of existential dependence. What we consider to be 'real' or 'really existing' is not given by reality, but decided by us. By implication, 'real' is a relative term—it is relative to a conventional metaphysical distinction.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that we have complete freedom to decide what is real and what is not. In *Realism with a Human Face*, Hilary Putnam considers a 'World 1' consisting of three objects x_1, x_2, and x_3, and a 'World 2' consisting of those same three objects plus their mereological sums (*i.e.*, three combinations of two, and one combination of three) making seven objects in total (1990, 97). I would not call these two different cases 'worlds', but two different descriptions of the same world, and the same world could also be described as consisting of only one object, namely, the mereological sum of x_1, x_2, and x_3. (I suppose that this description could then be called 'World 3'.) However, our choice in deciding which description is the 'right' one and which of these (three, seven, or one) objects 'really' exist is limited to those three options. Saying that there really are 42 objects would be plain false. Something similar applies to our choice in deciding what is 'real' in the world we live in. We can choose to say that chairs are real or that only the elementary particles they ultimately consist of are real, for example (and nothing important might depend on that choice), but we cannot decide that unicorns are real.

Nevertheless, while independent, external reality sets limits to our metaphysical description(s) of the world (at least, in as far as we want those to make sense), the description we choose *within* those limits is largely conventional. (See also section 4.) Again, the world does not force us to conceive of 'real' or 'exists' in a particular way. The qualification 'real' is not given by reality, but relative to a convention, and lacking objective criteria to transcend that convention (*i.e.*, to objectively decide what 'real' really means), any use of the term 'real' (or 'exists' or any other variant) that does not (explicitly or implicitly) acknowledge this relativity is empty

[34] And I do not trust intuition—yours even less than I trust my own.

rhetoric. It is like claiming that the sky and lapis lazuli are really the same color, namely, blue, without recognizing that what is called 'blue' in English is at least partially conventional and that other languages (such as Russian or Japanese) have different conventions in this respect, and would, therefore, describe the colors of a cloudless sky and a piece of lapis lazuli with very different words.[35]

The answer to the question 'What is real?' then, is 'It depends.' It depends on one's conception of 'real', and there are multiple equally truthful conceptions of 'real' and no objective criterion to choose and elevate one of them as the one and only ultimate standard of reality. Nāgārjuna famously held that emptiness (*i.e.*, existential dependence) is itself empty (*i.e.*, merely conventional). We have reached a similar conclusion here—what we consider to be real (*i.e.,* not existentially dependent) is itself dependent on convention (and thus empty, in Nāgārjuna's terms)—but the argument that led to this conclusion is rather different from Nāgārjuna's.[36]

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[35] Russians and Japanese would use the words *голубой* (*goluboy*) and 水色 (*mizuiro*) to describe the color of the sky, and *синий* (*siniy*) and 青 (*ao*) for the piece of lapis lazuli, respectively.

[36] Section 5 effectively rejected Nāgārjuna's prioritizing (or even inclusion!) of causal dependence in *svabhāva*, and section 6 rejected *any* aggregate/generalized notion of existential (in-) dependence (like *svabhāva*). Hence, even if this conclusion *seems* similar to one of Nāgārjuna's claims, this paper can hardly be considered an endorsement of his philosophical views.

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