REFERENCE, DESCRIPTION, AND EXPLANATION.
WHERE METAPHYSICS WENT WRONG?

SEBASTIAN TOMASZ KOŁODZIEJCZYK

Jagiellonian University

Abstract. The classical arguments against metaphysics provided by Immanuel Kant, neopositivists and recently by analytical philosophers focus on the problem of meaning. In my paper I would like to shed a little bit of light on different dimensions of this problem in the metaphysical discourse and make a proposition how to overcome the difficulties that arise from this kind of discourse.

Introductory remarks

The title's question—Where metaphysics went wrong?—may be answered in many ways. It is worthy to set together two different views on the crisis of metaphysics. One the one hand Etienne Gilson in his „Introduction" to the book *Being and some Philosophers* (Gilson 1952) sums the situation of metaphysics up in the following way: „All the failures of metaphysics come from the fact that metaphysicians have replaced being as the first basic element of their knowledge with one of the particular aspects of being that are investigated by the natural sciences. The acceptance of this conclusion leads us by itself to a new problem: if being is truly the first element of acquiring knowledge why shouldn't it be included in all our representations? And if this is truly so, how is it possible that so many metaphysicians, including the very best of them, have found themselves unable to grasp it directly in its primary obviousness and preserve it in all considerations and—having made various unsuccessful attempts—have had to reject it altogether?" This diagnosis seems to be both enigmatic, and intriguing. Gilson writes these words in the times of the great success of linguistic and semantic analyses.

A couple of years earlier, in 1936, Alfred Jules Ayer did not hesitate to exclude metaphysics from the scientific domain as well as from any reasonable activity seeing the crucial problem of metaphysics somewhere else. As he says in *Language, Truth, and Logic* (Ayer 1952, p. 45): „The metaphysician, on the other hand, does not intend to write nonsense. He lapses into it through being deceived by grammar, or through committing errors of reasoning, such as that which leads to the view that the sensible world is unreal. But it is not the mark of a poet simply to make mistakes of this sort. There are some, indeed, who would see in the fact that the metaphysician's utterances are senseless a reason against the view that they have aesthetic value. And, without going so far as this, we may safely say that it does not constitute a reason for it." Where does such a strong claim come from? Metaphysics seems to be in Ayer's view a fruitless and sense-less domain of human activity. According to him it is because there is no method of verification of its assertions, neither in principle, nor in practice. Although he did not take into consideration the way of doing metaphysics that Etienne Gilson was thinking about, Ayer's thesis appears to be valid for all metaphysical types of discourse.

It was proclaimed by G.E. Moore, B. Russell, and L. Wittgenstein that the only way of doing philosophy is the analysis of language. What this means for metaphysics is that there can be no metaphysics unless a precise analysis of the language of metaphysics is performed. Although such a re-quirement was formulated in the beginning of the 20th century, D. Hume and I. Kant had already thought similarly hundreds of years earlier. I will call both of the attitudes described by the name of 'the linguistic revision of metaphysics' – „LRM." The LRM may be expressed in three central ques-tions: 1. what do metaphysical concepts refer to?; 2. what do metaphysical concepts describe?, and 3. what do metaphysical theories explain? I would like to call the answer to the first question the 'Referential Thesis'. The answer to the second one may be named the 'Descriptive Thesis' and the answer to the third question gives us a so-called 'Explanatory Thesis'. All of them were examined in detail by many philosophers in the history of philosophy. What I wish to do is to shed some light on these three theses. It does not mean that I intend to defend the old-fashioned metaphysics. My aim is slightly different. What I expect to show by means of analyzing these three theses is that if metaphysics abandoned its aspirations to provide a direct description of the world, it would preserve its explanatory func-tion (although understood in a modified way). Of course, the price for such a move would seem unacceptable for the advocates of the old-fashioned, „strong" metaphysics.

I. The Reference, stupid!

Aristotelian semantics discriminates between two crucial functions a part of a sentence can perform. The first of them is to be a subject, the second is to be a predicate (Aristotle, *Categories* 1a20): „Of things there are: (*a*) some are *said of* a subject but are not *in* any subject. For example, man is said of a subject, the individual man, but it is not in any subject. (*b*) Some are in a subject but are not said of any subject. […] For example, the individual knowledge-of-grammar is in a subject, the soul, but it is not said of any subject; and the individual white is in a subject, the body (for all colour is in a body), but it is not said of any subject. (*c*) Some are both said of a subject and in a subject. For example, knowledge is in a subject, the soul, and is also said of a subject, knowledge-of-grammar. (*d*) Some are neither in a subject nor said of a subject, for example, the individual man or the individual horse—for nothing of this sort is either in a subject or said of a subject."

The passage from *Categories* quoted above has many interpretations. One seems to be clear: Aristotle wants to establish the main function of terms in the semantics of natural language by drawing a square of possible ways of predicating about things. However, someone may tend to hold the ontological line of argumentation that there is no doubt that the phrase '*said of*' belongs to the very primitive semantic jargon. It appears that Aristotle discriminated two different functions of linguistic terms deriving them from the common practice. Moreover, this practice takes into account the basic fact that 'is said of' means pretty much the same as 'refers to'.

Whatever is being said, it is always said of a subject. In the sentence:

(α) Michael Phelps won eight times in Beijing.

It is the subject 'Michael Phelps' that guarantees that the whole structure has any sense. As for Aristotle the logical and semantic notions of a subject are fairly close, we can say that 'Michael Phelps' serves as a guarantee of both the syntactic and semantic senses. In the second case—in the semantic sense—to be a subject is to constitute the fundament for the true/false distinction. The sentence

(β) Michael Phelps won five times in Beijing.

is false but we can only tell that because of the presence of the subject which is the condition of assessing the logical value of any given sentence.

Although Aristotle may be hardly recognized as a verificationist, he was fully conscious that there is no other way to make a sentence semantically meaningful than to demand of the subject of the sentence that it refer to something (in the world). This is, I would say, the root of the referential requirement for any subject of a sentence. This is a requirement for metaphysical sentences and their constitutive parts too.

The question is 'do metaphysical concepts fulfill the requirement mentioned above?' The most popular answer to this question is 'No'. Immanuel Kant was the first philosopher to draw such a conclusion in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (and earlier in the so-called *Inaugural Dissertation*) (Kant 1965, BXIV/BXV): „Metaphysics is a completely isolated speculative science of reason, which soars far above the teachings of experience, and in which reason is indeed meant to be its own pupil. Metaphysics rests on concept alone—not, like mathematics, on their application to intuition."

The requirement of reference is formulated by Kant in the language of epistemology as well as in the language of semantics. The analytic/synthetic distinction (imposed in the later parts of his first *Critique*) with respect to judgments on the one hand and the a priori/a posteriori distinction on the other are in fact two sides of one coin. Whereas the analytic/synthetic distinction allegedly refers to the semantic features of parts of a sentence, the distinction between a priori/a posteriori judgments is justified by means of epistemology. The concept of an analytic sentence is based on the presumption that all parts of a given sentence have meanings and there exist mutual relationships between those meanings. When I say 'A table is made of spatio-temporal materials' the logical values of this sentence are grounded in the relationship between the meaning of the words: 'table', 'to be made of', 'spatio-temporal', and 'materials'. Everyone who asks about the truth/falsity of this sentence may deliver the ultimate answer on the basis of analyzing the meanings of the words that are the parts of the sentence.

However, there are cases where the intimate and mutual relationships between the meanings of the parts of a sentence are not enough. This is where Kant brings up the notion of synthetic judgments. In contrast to analytical judgments, synthetic ones acquire their logical values if and only if there is a connection between the words and the objects that these words talk about. This connection is basically the relation of reference and it might be recognized as the main truth-making semantic factor for every part of a sentence.

Kant differentiates also between a priori and a posteriori knowledge. This is an epistemological distinction and it may be treated as a way of interpreting two kinds of access to the sphere of objects which the parts of

a sentence refer to. For Kant, a priori knowledge means knowledge acquired without the mediation of the senses. It means that objects from the sphere of reference are accessible without any sensual apparatus. An example of such a domain are the inner states of a subject. On the other hand, a posteriori knowledge is mediated by the sensual apparatus of the subject and it is this apparatus that enables the subject to gain access to external objects. All spatio-temporal objects are accessible to the subject in the latter way and all knowledge about these objects is a posteriori knowledge.

Kant ensures his readers that all metaphysical enterprises grounded in *a priori* investigations are actually fatal misunderstandings (Kant 1965, BXVI): „Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *a priori,* by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure." Then is there a safe way of making metaphysical inquiries that is based on *a posteriori* experience? Here Kant's answer is clear (Kant 1965, BXVIII/BXIX): „As regards objects which are thought solely through reason, and indeed as necessary, but which can never—at least not in the manner in which reason thinks them—be given in experience…" and a few lines further „This experiment succeeds as well as could be desired, and promises to metaphysics, in its first part—the part that is occupied with those concepts *a priori* to which the corresponding objects, commensurate with them, can be given in experience—the secure path of a science. […] But this deduction of our power of knowing *a priori*, in the first part of metaphysics, has a consequence which is startling, and which has the appearance of being highly prejudicial to the whole purpose of metaphysics, as dealt with in the second part. For we are brought to the conclusion that we can never transcend the limits of possible experience, though that is precisely what this science is concerned, above all else, to achieve."

Kant proceeds to ask solemnly: if metaphysics is a science then what kind of judgments (sentences) does it produce? And his answer is clear and honest: if metaphysics is a science it has to deliver synthetic a priori judgments (Kant 19565, B18): „Metaphysics, even if we look upon it as having hitherto failed in all its endeavors, is yet, owing to the nature of human reason, a quite indispensable science, and *ought to contain* a priori *synthetic knowledge.*"

Why should its judgments be both synthetic and a priori? The answer is negative: because all metaphysical objects are beyond experience. Thus, these objects might be grasped in the a priori way. Kant focuses particularly on two objects of metaphysical investigation: God and the immortal soul.

Neither of them is empirically accessible and there is no chance to produce any synthetic a posteriori judgments about them at all. Moreover, suppose that all knowledge about these objects be expressible in analytic judgments. On such interpretation metaphysics would be a very weak science indeed because all its heuristic power would be drawn from the meanings of words. Hence, metaphysics would still remain a domain of science but its judgments would not refer to anything. Kant might ask rhetorically: would you like to recognize metaphysics as a domain whose sentences do not refer to anything?

Kant's diagnosis gives us a very clear picture of metaphysics as a human endeavor that is fundamentally flawed by the clash of great expectations on the one side and strong and realistic requirements on the other. We expect of all sentences that they refer to something in the world but we realize that in order to establish reference we need extremely precise tools. Kant realized that very soon.

God and the immortal soul are the very central objects of metaphysics but when we look at metaphysical treatises there is no doubt that they contains many words that not only appear to be ambiguous in themselves but also arouse suspicions that they may have no reference at all. Let me follow the historical path. John Locke (Locke 2004), for example, postulates an intimate and deep structure of things that he calls the substratum. Locke's substratum is a metaphysical entity that serves as a guarantee of the object's identity. David Hume (Hume 2000) destroyed this line of reasoning by showing in a convincing manner that that such entity is so mysterious that nobody really could tell what it is. Substance—says Hume—is at the most a concept created by the mind and nothing more. In sum, although this concept has no reference, it is nevertheless very useful. Kant adheres to this view and includes the good old metaphysical concepts (i.e. substance, attribute, quality, quantity, etc.) into the schema of pure concepts of understanding. These pure concepts have no reference but they play a crucial function in the processes of knowing and producing knowledge (true/false sentences).

That is the ultimate goal of all metaphysical concepts and, at the same time, that is the lesson drawn from posing the referential requirement for all sentences that has been mentioned above. As I remarked in the introduction, a perhaps more aggressive form of this view appeared once again in the mid-thirties of the XX century. Adolf Julius Ayer employed some ideas that at the time had become common among the members of the Vienna Circle in order to reject metaphysics because its concepts have no reference at all, which is the reason why metaphysical sentences cannot be verified.

The only important innovation is that while Kant had rejected the so-called transcendent metaphysics whose ambition was that its concepts refer to objects in the world, he agreed that *transcendental* metaphysics was fully justified and its subject was the set of concepts belonging to the intellect. Ayer rejects metaphysics in all its aspects.

II. To make a description but about what?

Let's come back to the sentence (α) that attributes some property to Michael Phelps. Another well known function of concepts recognized by Aristotle in *Categories* is their descriptive role. To say something of something/someone is to make a description of this thing/person. When I say that „Michael Phelps won eight gold medals in Beijing" then I add the predicate that informs my listeners what this subject is like. According to Aristotelian semantics and logic (the above quoted quartet of possibilities is still under consideration) every description has two faces. First of all it places the object in the appropriate set of entities. This is the function of general terms such as 'horse', 'plants', 'gold', etc. A typical example of a predicate playing such a function would be the predicate 'is a sportsman' in the sentence

(γ) Michael Phelps is a sportsman.

The other face of description may be clearly seen in sentences similar to the following:

(δ) Michael Phelps is 25 years old.

We may call the common feature of the above descriptions 'information'. Each of the sentences mentioned above adds something to our knowledge about the subject (in this case 'Michael Phelps'). Every one of them provides us with a piece of information. These two functions of a predicate are differentiated sharply by Aristotle (in the list of categories) for a logical reason. Only the full blooded general terms (those that play the first function) may appear as subjects in sentences. Other terms may only serve as predicates of the second kind.

On this view, to make description is either to place the subject in the kingdom of entities through the function of general terms or to supply a piece of information that adds something new to our knowledge about this subject. Aristotelian semantics seems to constitute a quite intelligible theory

of language. The function of terms that serve as subjects in sentences is to legitimate the direct reference to the objects in the world. If 'Michael Phelps' is to be the subject of a sentence in this sense, it has to refer to something in the world. This restriction enables language to „stick" to the world. Thus, it may be said that the reference of the subjects of sentences is the basic glue that connects two domains: language (thought) on the one side and the world (things, state of affairs, facts, etc.) on the other. Thanks to this glue, the predicates acquire both reference and informational power.

This model has both advantages and disadvantages. I will not analyze it in detail but I am tempted to check its explanatory power with regard to the concepts of metaphysics. Concepts like 'substance,' 'matter,' 'form,' 'cause,' and 'effect,' are traditionally considered to belong to the set of metaphysical concepts. With respect to the semantics sketched above, it should be possible to ascribe to them either the role of a subject or of a predicate. The conclusion that has been drawn from the referential requirement was devastating for metaphysical concepts. Now we may change our question. Even if metaphysical concepts have no reference at all and, further, if it implies that that they cannot stand in the place of the subject of a sentence it may still be that these concepts can stand in the place of predicate. If so, our question is 'do they constitute a description and deliver any kind of information that would widen our knowledge?'

The main goal is to shed light on the Descriptive Thesis. If all concepts (conceptual schemata) should play at least the descriptive function in sentences, then there is no choice for concepts (conceptual schemata) of metaphysics. Peter Strawson's (Strawson 1959) distinction of descriptive and revisionary metaphysics seems to be very helpful to explain what we mean here. Although at first glance Strawson does not take into consideration the semantic functions, revision and, respectively, description are the names for two different strategies that can be undertaken by metaphysicians. The first strategy—revision—is defined by Strawson in a very simple way: it is a replacing of the conceptual schemata that have hitherto been generally held. Revision is, on this definition, a synonym for „revolution". The second strategy is less ambitious. Description supplies new information about conceptual schemata that remain in use. It means that to make a description is nothing more than to give an account of the way the mind works.

Strawson choice is very clear. He rejects the first option and focuses on the second one. In his opinion, revision is theoretically useless because revisionist metaphysics is unable to explain the life of the mind. Instead, revisionary metaphysics aspires to build the ultimate and total vision of reality. Although, Strawson's veiled critique of this kind of metaphysics

does not refer to the particular function of predicates in sentences, it has great power in regard to this way of treating all metaphysical concepts. It appears necessary to come back to Kant again.

Kant's undermining of the presumption that the metaphysical concepts have reference leads to the conclusion that these concepts lose any descriptive power with regard to the world. It seems to be a very easy inference. If metaphysical concepts have no reference, then even if they are used in the descriptive mode, they do not describe anything in the world.

In the eyes of many metaphysicians who take delight in using such concepts as 'substance,' 'attribute,' 'form,' 'matter,' 'quality,' 'quantity,' etc., Kant's solution means standing metaphysics on its head. Moreover, the very same solution takes away any hope that metaphysics might be recognized as the domain that delivers answers to the deepest questions about reality and world. Even Kant's transcendental move that eventually helps to save metaphysics appears suspicious to many philosophers—including E. Gilson, quoted above. This attitude is based on the vision of metaphysics as the objective, independent, theoretically powerful, and practically irremovable domain that aims at discovering the ultimate principles and causes of reality. If this reality is understood to be the reality of human thinking (the intellectual life of the mind), such metaphysics is perceived to be painfully limited.

We should be aware of the fact that the central question regarding the descriptive power of metaphysics was primarily formulated after the so-called Cartesian revolution. It is Descartes (Descartes 1996) who proclaimed the real difference between the life of the mind and structure of the world. This difference causes us also to ask different questions about the nature of metaphysical inquiry. Science, especially physics and mathematics, has the tools that enable it to supply a reliable description of the world, while metaphysics may describe—at the most—the intellectual and volitional life of the mind.

As far as the Strawsonian concept of metaphysics is concerned, the author seems to establish a silent agreement with Kant and some of the neopositivists in rejecting reference as a feature of the conceptual schemata of metaphysics. Similarly to Kant but unlike Ayer and his intellectual predecessors, Strawson sees metaphysics as possible and scientifically justified. Its concepts, although devoid of reference in the sense of typical linguistic entities like nouns and adjectives, still have descriptive power. In this view, metaphysics eventually becomes the domain of linguistic and semantic analysis.

III. Rooting in description, aiming at explanation

If metaphysical concepts have no reference in the ordinary sense, and their only power is to describe the intellectual and volitional activity of mind, someone may consciously ask 'what is the goal of using them?'. We might even add more dramatically: 'what is all the metaphysical stuff about?' The modern concept of science gives us a very convincing picture of scientific activity. Description—even if it is very precise and it mirrors the states-of-affairs of the world in an exact manner—is not enough. It is explanation that has become the key point of the scientific endeavor. However, explanation had also played an important function in pre-modern science—thanks to Galileo and the incredible increase of importance of physics and mathematics there could be no doubt that all scientific inquiry has to aim at explanation.

The concept of explanation appears to be unproblematic on the grounds of such sciences as physics. We realize that phenomenon A, for instance *the huge downpour in Rome in August*, can be explained in scientific terms—that is, thanks to one of the many theories the range of natural sciences is able to deliver. We intuitively understand that the description of *the huge downpour in Rome in August* plays an important but still not very sophisticated role. We wish to know more and more. And what we aim at is the knowledge of the causes of the phenomenon in question. Above all, our knowledge should explain causes of various phenomena in the external world.

With respect to the sciences, the so-called 'Explanatory Thesis' is quite uncontroversial and evident. Moreover, even if some branches of science define their tasks in the language of description, there is a very well grounded belief that sooner or later a theory that has an essentially explanatory status will appear—and will make the already delivered descriptions support the right understanding of facts. We have encountered such a situation on numerous occasions in physics, biology, and other experiential sciences where description is the very basis for inventing theories.

It would be unreasonable to expect metaphysics to be different from the sciences. If all sciences have to explain facts, there is no other choice for metaphysics as well. It should legitimate itself with an explanatory power. It is typical of the modern approach that is obviously present in the Kantian understanding of metaphysics that there exists a very close net of mutual relationships between reference, description, and explanation. Which is quite unlike the approach of contemporary science that uses language in such a way that many of its terms are still waiting for their reference to be established—which still does not mean that it loses its reference at all.

Let's go back to Aristotle yet again . It is really hard to believe that when he is speaking about matter and form, we should take his view to be grounded in the belief that these terms refer to strictly determined objects in the world. Aristotle uses these phrases to direct the right understanding of the theory he is inventing. The first and foremost purpose of his theory is to explain certain facts—mainly the phenomenon of change and stability. If we look at the conceptual schemata of Aristotelian metaphysics in this way, this kind of discourse may lose its referential and descriptive power but it does not lose its explanatory power, even though this explanatory power is problematic if we compare it to the power of explanation delivered by the natural sciences.

That is the critical point of my argumentation. I would not like to convince the reader that the concepts of metaphysics have a reference that is fixed without any doubt and once and for all. It would be unreasonable to think that to build up a metaphysical description is to draw an ultimate picture of the world. But nobody can object to the view of metaphysics as a domain of science which is as explanatory as the other disciplines are. Moreover, as Strawson shows, metaphysical explanation (combined with description) is recognized to be the ultimate explanation of ways of thinking about world. This is what I wish to call the 'ultimate explanatory function of metaphysics'.

Metaphysics differs from the other sciences in many details but the fact that it defines itself as delivering the ultimate explanation is at least one of the distinct features that makes metaphysics absolutely crucial for any human scientific activity. I do not forejudge whether metaphysics really reaches the ultimate explanation it is aiming at. It is rather undisputable that metaphysics formulates its goals in exactly this manner—and that thanks to this it becomes an inalienable part of all scientific undertaking. It is worth reminding ourselves once again of Aristotle's program included in Book Four of his *Metaphysics*. The first principles and the ultimate causes belong to a set of goals that all scientific activity must strive for. There is no choice. Otherwise, truth is not achieved.

Strawson mentions Aristotle as the very first in the line of descriptive metaphysicians, Kant is the other positive character. In both cases, Strawson focuses on description that is understood in the conceptual and linguistic senses. Kant's first purely metaphysical move is made only when he invents transcendental reasoning. This argumentation turns the descriptions into the ultimate explanation of all the conceptual activity of the intellectual agent. Strawson, rooting his considerations in description, follows Aristotle and Kant in aiming at the ultimate explanation. However, it does not mean that

thanks to Strawson the first principles and the ultimate causes have been eventually revealed. It only means that philosophy has enough power to practice metaphysics even though it does not satisfy the referential requirement and seems to be very far from delivering a description of the world. Here is how it may be done.

IV. The concept of 'spontaneous metaphysics'

It is well known that Kant offers two approaches to the problem of metaphysics. Its problems, like the nature of the universe, the immortality of soul, and the existence of God, are the real challenge for pure reason. Although it is impossible to find a satisfactory answer to all of the metaphysical questions, they constitute a kind of discourse that cannot be postponed and disregarded. The source of this discourse might be regarded as different than the source of any other scientific considerations. In the latter the basis of the science—as we have already seen--is experience that is recognized as the connection of sensual perceiving and intellectual activity, whereas in the former it has roots in human nature. Metaphysics grounded in human nature may be called 'spontaneous metaphysics' (Kant 1965, B21): „Yet, in a certain sense, this *kind of knowledge* is to be looked upon as given; that is to say, metaphysics actually exists, if not as a science, yet still as natural disposition (*metaphysica naturalis)*."

Spontaneous metaphysics is considered by Kant on three different levels. He argues that it is necessary because of a *natural disposition* for asking ultimate questions and explaining things which every human being experiences. At the second level spontaneous metaphysics is the result of the activity of pure reason both within the limits of experience and beyond them. And finally, spontaneous metaphysics is the undisputed basis of any metaphysics.

These theses shed a little bit of light on Kant's concept of knowledge. If spontaneous metaphysics is treated as a science, it becomes dogmatic metaphysics and generates skepticism as its opposition. Kant rejects both these kinds of discourse. Spontaneous metaphysics needs to be critically examined and through it there is a hope of reaching knowledge in the proper sense and of avoiding the trap of skepticism. As we already know unexamined natural metaphysics is not a science because it does not use any true or false confirmed sentences referring to the world given in experience. Metaphysical sentences do not have any logical value. They look like sentences which should be evaluated but this is beyond the ability of the human mind.

That is why metaphysics seems to be a mess of ideas, views, and solutions; a field of never ending battles.

Kant's differentiation into spontaneous metaphysics on the one hand and scientific metaphysics on the other helps us to understand the unique nature of metaphysical discourse that depends on pre-scientific foundations. It is worth asking whether there is a set of spontaneous metaphysical beliefs and if the answer to this question is 'yes', to check what is the content of such beliefs. Kant suggests that reason's activity is more asking than answering. It is clear that when reason asks questions there are possible answers to them. Unfortunately, answers looking like true/false sentences have no sense because they do not meet the requirements mentioned above.

The other thesis contrary to this view may be examined: all so-called spontaneous metaphysical questions and the answers to them are grounded in a set of beliefs which are prior to any beliefs the human mind is able to support. These beliefs I will call 'basic metaphysical beliefs' (BMB). A provisional list of them may be as follows:

(1) there exists something
(2) something is recognized as a thing that has features
(3) there is more than one thing; things differ from each other
(4) things are knowable for the human intellect
(5) things are desirable for the human will

The BMBs listed above are provisional in the sense of their number and form. It is possible to imagine a more precise formulation and a longer list, e.g. with modal statements. There is no doubt that BMB's may be considered from the Kantian point of view.

V. The logical foundations of BMB

Every BMB may be analyzed from the point of view of its logical and epistemological assumptions. Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* (Aristotle 1924) presents one of the best ways to explain the logical foundations of the BMBs. His theory of first principles which are absolutely obvious and self-evident explicitly shows how the BMBs arise in the context of the usage of language. Two principles are crucial for the basic beliefs and any others: the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of the excluded middle. It is worthwhile to refer to the first of them in order to see how it becomes the governor of the BMBs.

Jan Łukasiewicz (1910) noticed three different dimensions of the principle of non-contradiction: ontological, logical, and psychological. In the primary sense, the principle of contradiction expresses the mutual relationship between a thing and its feature. It admits that a thing cannot have two opposite features at the same time and under the same aspect; this table is wooden and it is a contradictory statement to say that this table is not wooden at the same time and from the same point of view. The other type of the principle of contradiction (let's call it 'logical') says something about true/false values. It states that the same sentence cannot be true and false at the same time and from the same point of view; true sentences are not false and false ones are not true. In the light of the logical version of the principle of contradiction true/false values are established. However, according to Aristotle, the psychological variety of the principle of contradiction is a law governing the mind's activity. It does not refer to the semantic features of language but to the processes of holding and representing things in an intellectual and voluntary manner.

The principle of excluded middle--along with the principle of contradiction--indicates how the BMBs actually work. If the ontological universe included only one thing, any distinction between thing and feature as well as true and false values could not be delineated. Sometimes, logicians, e.g. Jan Łukasiewicz (Łukasiewicz 1910), argue that these two principles are derived from the most basic one: the principle of identity that expresses the simple relationship between two things of the same shape. On this view, the set of BMBs seems to shrink to only one element: the very first belief, i.e. 'there exists something'. Even though there is still a BMB that can be a ground for metaphysical discourse of any type.

A different situation arises when someone rejects the principle of the excluded middle. Someone may believe that something exists but this does not mean anything more than the fact that there is an act of believing. In short, the principle of excluded middle orders the universe of logical values and it helps us to understand the meanings of words and sentences. At the same time, it enables us to meet the expectations expressed by the Referential and Descriptive Theses.

BMBs express the most basic intuitions and are grounded in the logical structure of human thinking. This is the very first idea of the Aristotelian *Metaphysics*. Even if we deny that the principles have an obligatory sense, in the end we have to accept them. What is more interesting, these principles are intuitively grasped by the human power of thinking and are recognized as true. Aristotle is convinced, eventually, that all intellectual activities leading us to grasping the truth are founded in principles.

VI. The epistemological foundations of the BMBs

Having analyzed the logical structure of the BMBs, we still need to provide a justification for our belief that they are really true.

Let's consider the third BMB from the list: there is more than one thing (things differ from each other.) Even if someone accepts both of the Aristotelian principles, he is still not in a position to say 'I know that things differ from each other.' Asking questions about knowledge is really asking questions about facts. True/false sentences report facts but we need to know which of the two values is the unique attribute of the sentence. Getting to know it we achieve knowledge.

It is easy to notice that BMBs belong to the set of sentences whose confirmation appears to be obvious to ordinary people. Searching for confirmation *that the claim that things differ from each other is true* seems more crazy than giving away money won in a lottery. However, we have to agree that things are more complex than they are commonly thought to be. Many of us represent the Cartesian attitude. We try to prove our every thesis, deliver more or less convincing arguments—and we think that in doing so we establish the truth. In the case of the BMBs providing proofs and arguments seems to be possible. The existence of the BMBs undermines the Cartesian vision of metaphysics as geometry.

Alvin Plantinga (Plantinga 1993) presents a theory of producing true warranted beliefs which belong to the corpus of knowledge but are not justified in the internalist sense. The requirements such beliefs must meet are described in terms of the interdependency of a proper human mind's activity on the one side, and the right environment to bring this activity into effect on the other. Paradoxically, Plantinga's solution shows that both conditions mentioned above depend on deeper ontological assumptions which may be found in the set of BMBs. This theory is a good example of how to understand the relationship between epistemology and metaphysics. Neither of them can exist without the other. Asserting the existence of mind and its environment assumes that some of the BMBs are true. On the other hand, even if we accept the Cartesian view, i.e. 'there exists something and this is my mind, and there is a possibility to get to know that there is something other than my mind', we still agree that there exists something and it is conceived in some way and expressed in true statements. That is why the BMBs cannot be avoided but may be postponed and recognized as epistemologically useless.

Conclusion

Three theses have been considered – the Referential Thesis, the Descriptive Thesis, and the Explanatory Thesis – and have been found to form three necessary conditions of all scientific activities that aim at producing true/false sentences. It is hard to imagine that metaphysics could not satisfy these conditions. Moreover, it is hard to believe that metaphysics could reject all these conditions. On the other hand, it is quite intelligible that even if we deny metaphysical concepts any referential and descriptive features, we are not entitled to imply that metaphysics has collapsed. The examples of Strawson and Dummett confirm that metaphysics cannot be pursued in the old-fashioned style. At the same time, both of the philosophers mentioned convincingly show that the battle of metaphysics is going on and rumors about its death are gravely premature.

What I have tried to demonstrate is that metaphysics is finally irremovable. Even if the Referential and Descriptive Requirements remain the fundamental scientific obligations, there is no doubt that there is room for explanatory metaphysics. It is rooted in some sort of natural disposition of the human mind, it can become a valuable scientific activity that deals with the most basic and commonly shared beliefs. As these beliefs seem to determine human life, it would be irresponsible to give them up.

References

Aristotle, (1924). *Aristotle's Metaphysics.* A revised text with introduction and commentary by W.D. Ross. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press.

Aristotle, (1966). *Aristotle's Categories and De interpretatione.* Translated with notes by J. L. Ackrill. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press.

Ayer, J.A. (1953). *Language, Truth, and Logic*. New York: Dover Publications.

Dummett, M.A.E. (1991). *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Gilson, E. (1952). *Being and Some Philosophers*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.

Hume, D. (2000). *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.* Edited by Tom Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press.

Kant, I. (1965). *Critique of Pure Reason.* Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Locke, J. (2004). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Alexander Campbell Fraser with Introduction by Walter R. Ott. New York: Barnes and Noble Books.

Łukasiewicz, J. (1910). *O zasadzie sprzeczności u Arystotlesa. Studyum Krytyczne* (*On the Principle of Contradiction in Aristotle. Critical Study*). Kraków: Akademia Umiejętności.

Plantinga, A. (1993). *Warrant and Proper Function*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Strawson, P. F. (1959). *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics.* London: Methuen.