

Paper Title: On the Role of Different Types of Metaphysics in Science - Religion Dialog

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Paper Abstract:

The paper deals with the role of different types of metaphysics in the science - religion dialog in analytic way. Precisely, the paper is searching for a spectrum of impacts of different types of metaphysics on the science – religion dialog.

When talking about metaphysical theories, we claim that each scientific theory includes a set of elementary propositions (either explicit or implicit), which are related to the questions: what kinds of entities there could be and what natures those entities have.

When talking about a particular type of religion (e.g. Roman Catholic religion), we presuppose, it is possible to identify a set of beliefs, which by their very nature are statements of existence.

The expected conclusion claims that for the possibility of any dialog there must be no contradiction between the set of elementary propositions of concrete type of metaphysics (which forms a ground of each scientific theory) and the set of beliefs as elementary propositions of a rudimentary concrete type of religion. Finally, the measure of intensity and quality (fruitfulness) of a dialog between science and religion directly depends on the measure of adequacy between metaphysical propositions and religious beliefs, together with the measure of adequacy of their presuppositions and implications. Metaphysics intersects with each scientific theory as well as through each concrete type of religion. In this way, metaphysics and the analysis of its nature is crucial and fruitful for science – religion dialog.

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Peter **Volek** graduated from University Innsbruck (Austria) with the Ph.D. in Philosophy and a M.A. in Philosophy and from Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia) with a M.A. in Catholic Theology. He is currently the head of the Department of Philosophy at the Catholic University in Ružomberok, Faculty of Philosophy (Slovakia) where he has taught courses in epistemology, metaphysics, bioethics, philosophy of mind and medieval philosophy. His research focuses on the intersection of science and religion in bioethics and inter-religious dialogue. He has participated in many conferences and published five books, edited two books, and published a number of papers in the field of metaphysics, medieval philosophy, epistemology and bioethics. He is a chair of the LSI *Science-Religion Dialog and Critical Thinking* at the Catholic University in Ružomberok (Slovakia).

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Paper Text:

On the Role of Different Types of Metaphysics in Science - Religion Dialog¹

0. Introduction

In an analytical way, the paper deals with the issue of the science-religion dialog from the perspective of the questions: How do the individual types of metaphysics influence the science-religion dialog? What is the character and role of metaphysics in this dialog?

The article aims at a determination of the criteria (conditions) that should be met in order to avoid problems on the basic communication level in the dialog between a proponent of a particular scientific theory and a confessor of a particular religion.

The inquiry is led by the intuition that a particular type of metaphysics (particular metaphysical framework) is present in every axiomatic foundation of a scientific theory as well as in the set of basic beliefs of any particular religion. It is the non-contradictoriness of various metaphysical foundations of both areas of human life (science and religion) that determines if there will be a mere possibility of dialog or a real dialog between these two areas. If the latter is the case, also the intensity of the possible dialog depends on this non-contradictoriness. It is precisely in this sense that we can speak about the integrative role of metaphysics.

I. Metaphysical Framework

The assumption of the following chapter² is the claim that a particular type of metaphysics (a set of ontological propositions, their assumptions and the conclusions following from them) is present in every axiomatic foundation of every scientific theory. Without the processes of abstraction and idealization there would be no systematization. By means of a mere description of empirical phenomena and the experiments of natural sciences without abstraction and idealization, it is impossible to arrive at the level of general justification/explanation, to arrive at the level of modern scientific theory.

Metaphysics in its minimal form can be introduced as a categorial description that is systematizing our experience. The subject of metaphysics is comprised of the most fundamental aspects of human thinking and speaking/writing about reality, about the most fundamental features of reality. On the basis of their own lived experience,

¹ We would like to thank Ján Bañas from the Department of Philosophy at Catholic University in Ružomberok for his help with the preparation of the English version of this paper.

² The chapter is inspired by the investigations done in: B. Carr: *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, London 1997 and E. J. Lowe, "Recent Advances in Metaphysics", *Facta Philosophica* 5, 2003.

but precisely through the process thinking, human beings create model/models of the categorization of the world. Metaphysics deals precisely with this global model of our categorization of the components of the world. Basic distinctions that spring from our thinking and speaking about the reality are the subject of interest of those that deal with the categorial descriptions. In the history of philosophy, it is possible to find various models of categorization or to put it more exactly, various systematizations and interpretations of the results of the inquiries of categorial descriptions.

Aristotle's system of categories as predicables is one of the first and best-known systems. The ten predicables are ten types of things that can be affirmed of something. The usage of the term "things" should indicate that Aristotle is holding the position of speaking the language, but not speaking about the language, rather directly about the world. In scholarly literature, this position is known as categorial realism.

In opposition to Aristotle's framework of ten predicables that correspond with the structure of the world it is possible to introduce Kant's system of twelve categories. Kant's categories do not transcend thinking towards the reality. They remain the basic forms of thinking embodied in the form of judgments. It is a position known as categorial conceptualism.

It is possible to realize the minimalist concept of metaphysics through categorial description without solving the question of realism versus conceptualism. However, on the level of philosophy, categorial description, without an unambiguous view on the question of the character of categories, can be dealt with only to a particular degree. When we abandon the position of using a general terminology for the phenomenon of categorial description as a whole, we arrive at the determination of the character of individual categories also within one system. But also without philosophical reflection, human beings do commonly put into opposition, more precisely distinguish: the "things" on one hand, and their properties on the other hand; the relations, in which they exist; the place, where they exist; time, in which they exist; the process in which they come to exist and cease to exist, etc. In the history of philosophical reflection, the "thing" came to be standardly labeled with the term substance. With some generalization, it could be said that the expression "substance" usually refers to the things that exist independently, and to which properties and relations are attributed. But already in Aristotle's system, it is being distinguished between the case when the expression "substance" is referring to a particular and the case when we use the expression "substance" to refer to a kind or genus. Aristotle was treating this distinction by means of distinguishing between the first and the second substance. Contemporary metaphysical systems use the expressions "concrete particulars" or "things" instead of the label "first substance." The terms "kinds"/"abstract particulars" are mainly used for Aristotle's "second substance."

Regardless of the various divisions of the categories, in the categorial description of any philosophical (and religious, and scientific) system, there is at least one distinction according to the criterion of character and the degree of generality of individual categories. According to these categories the entities are distinguished as 1) universals [either 1a) properties, or 1b) relations], and 2) particulars [either 2a) concrete particulars, i.e. things, or 2b) abstract particulars, also called tropes].

The system of ontological four-dimensionality (objects, kinds, modes, and attributes) is used in the contemporary metaphysics. This, according to Lowe, provides space for creating a relatively sufficient foundation of natural sciences and their explanation within metaphysics. According to a E. J. Lowe's table³ modified by

³ E. J. Lowe, "Recent Advances in Metaphysics", *Facta Philosophica* 5, 2003, p. 12.

P. Volek⁴, the individual types of metaphysics can be distinguished precisely on the basis of this system of classification of categories into four types (and the ontological primariness and secundariness).

	Objects	Kinds	Modes/Tropes	Attributes	Proponet
1	R	E / R	P	R	D.M.Armstrong
2	P _P / R	S	P _M / R	-	K. Campbell
3	S	E / R	P	E	C. B. Martin
4	S	P	V	E	B. Smith
5	P	S	S	S	M. Loux
6	P	E / R	S	E	V. Ockham

- P - primary ontological category
- P_P - primary ontological category for persons
- P_M - primary ontological category for material objects
- R - reduced ontological category
- S - secondary ontological category
- E - excluded ontological category

II. Particular Type of Religion

Each individual religion contains some rudimentary set of directly stated statements, but also a set of statements that indirectly follow from the former. Although Christianity - that will be the subject of the following inquiry⁵ in as a *pars pro toto* for all the religions - can be understood as good news in the form of a story, but after a careful reflection, it is impossible to miss the force of the presence or the binding nature of its existential statements.

The self-standing quote from the Scripture, the statement: “Jesus Christ is the Lord” can be taken as the first example of a content statement. This statement, besides all the linguistic functions that it has, contains also a non-reducible ontological thesis, a thesis announcing the existence of a particular property, or more precisely the existence of relational characteristics of an object.

Let us now shortly focus our attention to a sum of expressions. It is important to realize that, for example, on the statements about the covenant between God and his chosen people, we can observe not only the force of the story through the symbolical characters in it, but also the fact that the truthfulness of the story presupposes the validity of the ontological thesis, i.e. the thesis about the existence. In this sense it is a thesis about the existence of the parties entering the covenant and about the personal nature of the relation between God and the people.

⁴ P. Volek modifies Lowe’s table with an intention to distinguish the two positions of realism, the position which considers only particulars as primary and real entities (realism), from position which considers universals as primary category, however, it admits the existence of particulars as well (extreme realism) See: “Pluralita katolíckych metafyzických koncepcií” [Plurality of Catholic Metaphysical Frameworks] In: *Studia theologica* VI, No. 4, 2004, p. 40.

⁵ The following inquiry is inspired by a couple of analytical studies published in the journal *Studia theologica*, VI, No. 4, 2004: Petr Dvořák, “O vztahu věřeného, filozofie a teologie” [On the Relationship between Belief, Philosophy and Theology], pp. 53-58 and Peter Volek, “Pluralita katolíckych metafyzických koncepcií” [Plurality of Catholic Metaphysical Frameworks], pp. 31-42.

Thus, in the content of every religion there is a component consisting of the statements of ontological (but also epistemological, anthropological, etc.) nature. These statements are co-producing the content of religion either (1) directly as explicitly stated theses, or (2) indirectly as (2a) presuppositions, or (2b) implications of the remaining statements of a given religion. It is important to emphasize, that the explicitly expressed theses that are an immediate component of the given religion's content of faith, are providing the religious meaning with validity first in the context of their own presuppositions and the implications inferred from them.

Two basic truths - that can be analyzed as binding statements of the given framework - are setting Christianity aside from the rest of the monotheistic religions. These statements also have the character of existential statements. The first is the statement about Jesus Christ's embodiment, and the second is the statement about the existence of tripersonal God. The Roman-Catholic Christianity differs from other Christian denominations with its unique and central understanding of the Holy Communion in terms of transubstantiation. At the moment of transubstantiation as defined by the Tridentine Council in the Decree on the Holy Communion on October 11, 1551, the whole substance of the bread is transformed into the substance of the Body of Jesus Christ, and the whole substance of the wine is transformed into the substance of the Blood of Jesus Christ.⁶

"Thus Catholic faith (the Roman-Catholic Christianity) presupposes that appropriate metaphysics for recognizing this truth has to accept substance or a corresponding concept for the animate and the inanimate beings, for the bread and wine as inanimate objects, as well as for God's Body and Blood as two modes of a single personality of Jesus Christ."⁷

Generally, in the same way a set of basic beliefs, that by their nature are existential statements, can be detected also in all the other religions.

III. Science - Religion Dialog Based on the Non-contradictoriness of their Metaphysical Foundations

A presupposition was formulated in the introduction that the level of intensity of the dialog between science and religion depends on the non-contradictoriness of their metaphysical foundations. In this sense one can find scientific theories, whose terminological apparatus and ontological statements (be it their necessary presuppositions, explicit theses, or their logical implications) enable for a degree of adequate explanation of religion.

For the purposes of illustration, let us now mention two examples that are exemplifying our above mentioned general statement. The first example is the need for concord in the approach to the binding nature of causal principle. The need for concord in the approach to the question of realism of ontological categories will serve as the second example.

The first example concerns the necessary acceptance of not only methodological, but also ontological bindingness of the universal causal principle. Without the causal principle being ontologically binding the thesis about the

⁶ See: H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, lat.-deutsch, ed. P. Hünermann, 37, Freiburg: Herder, 1991, 1642, p. 530; 1652, p. 534; 4410-4413, p. 1331-1332.

⁷ P. Volek, "Pluralita katolíckych metafyzických koncepcií" [Plurality of Catholic Metaphysical Frameworks] In: *Studia theologica* 6, 2004, p. 32.

existential dependence of everything on God would be false. It could be said that for Christianity the meaning of the term “creation” consists of the explanation of causality in terms of causal dependence of being on God. Philosophical or scientific framework that understands causality as mere temporal succession of phenomena would be in direct contradiction with the Christian thesis about creation. Understanding of causality as existential dependence is binding for the non-reducible content of Christian religion.

The second example concerns the issue of ontological primacy of categories in the relation to the defined truth of Catholic beliefs on Holy Communion. In the table at the end of the first chapter, we have classified 6 frameworks according to the criterion of ascribing ontological primacy or reality to individual categories: object, kind, mode, and attribute. Similarly, as it was the case in the first example, a fruitful and informal dialog between a particular religion and individual non-religious theoretical frameworks requires that their ontological theses be not in mutually contradictory. Under this perspective, only the systems 5 and 6 from the above table could be suitable for explaining the Catholic faith’s teaching on the transubstantiation. This shows that the explanation of reality on all its levels in terms of substance is adequate only for some (N.B. not all) truths of Catholic faith.

A conclusion follows from that: although particular religion (in this case Christianity of the Roman rite) cannot find philosophical or scientific framework that is able to express it adequately as a whole (after all that is the role of theology as a rational reflection of a given religion), it can enter into fruitful dialog with those systems, whose theses do not stand in contradiction to its content. Also the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* by John Paul II. states in the article 49 that the Church does not put forth its own philosophy, by which it admits a plurality of systems, that are not in contradiction with Catholic faith. The same is the case with respect to the set of ontological theses of individual frameworks and/or theories that we have taken into consideration.

IV. Consideration of the Possibility to Base the Dialog between Science and Religion on Metaphysical Relativism

Is it possible to lead a dialog also in the case when the metaphysical foundations (fundamental theses, their presuppositions and implications) of individual scientific theories and particular religions are in contradiction?

Let us try to consider such possibility. In order to lead a dialog regardless of the question of consistency/contradictoriness of the foundations of two communicating units, it would have to be realized on the basis of relativism. The framework of the position of metaphysical relativism can be introduced through Collingwood’s book *Essay on Metaphysics*⁸. Metaphysics, according to Collingwood, deals with fundamental presuppositions or postulates of scientific thought of a given period. Its role is to discover these presuppositions. The role of metaphysics is open, because science is not static and its postulates change. Even if metaphysics succeeds in discovering, record, and systematize the presuppositions, because of the progress in science it has to repeat the process. That’s why, according to Collingwood, there is no criterion for the truthfulness of a metaphysical system. There is only a particular description of metaphysical postulates of the science in a given period. This is a

⁸ R. G. Collingwood, *Essay on Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, 1940.

categorial relativism that is characterized by the conviction that it is possible to replace the categories of our thinking and speaking about reality by other, alternative categories.

If we consider this position of metaphysical relativism, and repeat the question if it is possible to lead a dialog regardless of the contradictoriness of the set of existential statements of a particular metaphysical framework (which is present in the foundations of every scientific theory) and the set of existential statements of a particular type of religion, we can respond: yes it is possible. But a dialog based on metaphysical relativism will be a reduced dialog. It will be a dialog based on the tolerance of the bare existence of various approaches, and not on the possibility of harmony between their content's statements.

V. Conclusion: Metaphysics, its Method, and Integrating Role

Metaphysics must be done according to its own specific method. The method of metaphysics depends on its role. Its method can be best determined in the comparison with the method of natural sciences.⁹ The method of natural science also depends on its role. The natural sciences inquire a specific aspect of reality. Their findings have to be confirmed by verification or falsification. They enable classification of the examined states of affairs under a general law and after the consideration of the circumstances this allows for prediction of future values. In this we can see the prognostic role of natural sciences.

But metaphysical investigations are attempting to categorize the given state affairs into the experience of the whole. In this we can see the integrating role of metaphysics. Human being's experience of the whole is created within his/her worldview. But metaphysics also attempts to find a rational justification of this view. That is, it tries to defend and justify the worldview itself. The worldview of a human being can be influenced also by religion, which could be inherited from the family, the environment, or which could be arrived at through own inquiry. Metaphysics, thus, tries to find the basic elements of the general understanding of the world, their rational core and their reasons.

The basic elements of the worldview rationality should be included also in metaphysics. There are at least four criteria of the rationality of the worldview and metaphysics, which their propositions have to meet:

- 1) The propositions should be without contradiction;
- 2) The propositions should be related among themselves;
- 3) The propositions should be explaining the givens;
- 4) The propositions should relate to all the givens.¹⁰

However, in the case of religious worldview, a metaphysics that is trying to be in harmony with this worldview has to be also in accord with the basic truths of the given religion. The method of metaphysics itself can proceed through one of the four basic methods: a) the induction, b) the deduction, c) the transcendental analysis, and d) the analysis of the language.

⁹ Some of the following views, mainly with respect to the comparison of the role of metaphysics and natural sciences are influenced by the inquiries of O. Muck. Cf. O. Muck, "Metaphysische Erklärung als ganzheitliches Verfahren". In: Akten des XIV. Internationalen Kongresses für Philosophie, Wien, 2.-9. September 1968, Wien, Herder, 1968, pp. 419-425.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 421-422.

a) The induction is a method of natural sciences. Because metaphysics in its role differs from the role of natural sciences, it has to differ in its method as well. That's why it cannot proceed through the method of induction, though there have been figures in the history of philosophy (neo-Kantians, H. Driesch) that wanted to follow this path.

b) The deduction infers further knowledge from the axioms. There is a problem in metaphysics with the justification of the axioms, and sometimes also with their universal validity.

c) The transcendental method tries to discover the implicit presupposition used by human being in his/her particular basic activity (transcendental reduction) and to show their universal validity (transcendental deduction). This method is used by some neo-scholastic philosophers (Coreth, Muck, Lotz, Lonergan).¹¹ The problem with this method seems to be in the fact that it starts in the subject.

d) The method of the language analysis tries to discover the most general presuppositions through the analysis of concepts. Because the language is commonly used, the starting point of this method is objective. In this way, metaphysics examines the conceptual framework that makes it possible to speak about real or possible beings, about all that exists or can exist.¹²

It is either the Aristotelian approach of categorical absolutism that presupposes that metaphysics speaks about the structure of things, not only about the structure of the language. The other approach is the Kantian approach of categorical conceptualism that cannot claim the adequacy of the concepts for the reality.

Among the proponents of the language analysis of Aristotelian variant in contemporary philosophy fall: G. E. M. Anscombe, P. F. Strawson, D. Wiggins, M. Loux, P. Van Inwagen, E. J. Lowe.

The Neo-Kantian approach on the other hand states that metaphysics examines only the conceptual framework, because it cannot approach the things themselves. The outstanding contemporary proponents of the neo-Kantian approach to the method of metaphysics are S. Körner, N. Rescher, H. Putnam.¹³

The problem with the neo-Kantian approach is that it remains in the subject, although it speaks about unknowable things. The concept of unknowable things itself is a problem, because already the speaking about the things requires the possibility to know them. We think that this shows the insufficiencies of neo-Kantian approach and the supremacy of Aristotelian approach to metaphysics.

Because metaphysics should include all human experience - the experience of natural sciences including - its conceptual apparatus has to enable also the expression of the explanations of natural sciences. It makes this expression possible precisely by the fact that it includes all human experience, including religious and scientific. At the same time its role is in determination of the part's relation to the whole of experience, i.e. enables the determination of the adequate place of religious and scientific experience in the whole of the experience respectively. In order to serve as such a bridge, it has to register and reflect also the most recent orientations and views in

¹¹ Cf. O. Muck, *The Transcendental Method*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1968.

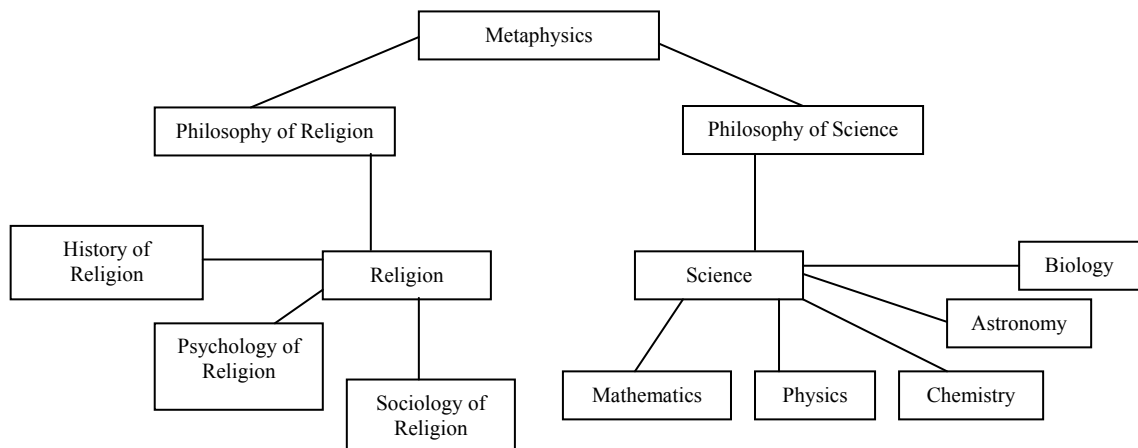
¹² "Thus metaphysics, like mathematics, does have a non-empirical subject-matter, to the extent that it is the intellectual discipline whose concern it is to chart the *possibilities* of real existence. Metaphysics is concerned to discover what the totality of existence *could* embrace: that is to say, what categories of entities could exist and which of them could co-exist." E. J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 11.

¹³ The approach to metaphysics through the comparison of Aristotelian and neo-Kantian approach was chosen by M. Loux. Cf. M. J. Loux, *Metaphysics. A Contemporary Introduction*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London - New York, 2002, pp. 6-18.

natural sciences, be it in physics, mathematics, biology, chemistry, astronomy, medicine, or further natural sciences. Through the reflections on the natural sciences, metaphysics starts building unique conceptual framework, meta-language, which can be used to speak about natural sciences. Because the reflection of natural sciences is conducted already by the philosophy of science, metaphysics has to build on its outcomes.

In the traditional Aristotelian definition of metaphysics the study of the unmoved and divine is part of metaphysics.¹⁴ Thus metaphysics is reflecting on God and all things pertaining to the divine. In the course of time, later in the Modernity religious studies evolved as a scientific discipline examining religion that includes several parts dedicated to the study of religion from a specific scientific perspective; as for example the history of religion, psychology of religion, sociology of religion, etc. Thus metaphysics should be developing the conceptual framework and the ultimate reflection of the religion as such.

On the basis of the analysis developed in the text of this chapter, the relation between science and religion and the role of metaphysics in this relation can be expressed in the following summarizing scheme.



¹⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, E 1, 1026 a, K 7, 1064a.