



# Is Metaphysics Even Possible? A Discussion with Reference to the Non-Empirical Character of Metaphysics

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**How to cite this paper:** Samitharathana, R.W. (2023) Is Metaphysics Even Possible? A Discussion with Reference to the Non-Empirical Character of Metaphysics. *Open Access Library Journal*, **10**: e10735.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1110735>

**Received:** September 13, 2023

**Accepted:** October 20, 2023

**Published:** October 23, 2023

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## Abstract

The domain of metaphysics is a breakthrough discovery on the actual states of things in the world. More specifically, in line with the traditional understanding of metaphysics, it delves into the subtle nature of reality that lies upon and beyond space, time, and being. Nevertheless, there are several overarching counter-movements towards the systematic possibility of metaphysics over the last decade; this prospective study, *ipso facto*, tends to be in support of metaphysics to the extent of its conventional perception—with respect to one of the emerging challenges, viz., the non-empirical character of metaphysics. Having stated that, this scrutiny shows some spectacular findings for the legitimacy and credibility of metaphysics as it traditionally digested: a critical argument of ontology and reciprocal correlation of entities in the taxonomy—a philosophical quarrel on metaphysical claims of knowledge and mathematics in the matter of mind-independent reality, sense experience, and real existence of the world. In fact, notwithstanding these limitations, the study suggests that metaphysics is even possible, and it then stands on a defensible position in philosophical literature. However, further experiments and investigations into the non-empirical character of metaphysics and other relevant opposite arguments are strongly recommended.

## Subject Areas

Philosophy

## Keywords

Metaphysics, Mind-Independent Reality, Ontology, The Non-Empirical Character of Metaphysics, Traditional Understanding

## 1. Introduction

The conception of metaphysics is a far-reaching swathe of philosophy, where the seeds of stark reality can grow; in fact, it is neither a blinkered dogmatism nor a historical mysticism, but it should be a compatible account of departmental disciplines in philosophy. Ironically, the particular term, “metaphysics” is supposed to be referred to Aristotle’s treatise of First Philosophy or Theology in 335 BCE, because it is inevitably armed with the essentials of knowledge and wisdom (Loux, 2006, p. 2 [1]; Conee and Sider, 2014, pp. 230-231 [2]). More to the point, as traditionally conceived, metaphysics is “the systematic study of the most fundamental structure of reality” (Lowe, 1998, p. 2) [3]. Hence, the subject of metaphysics has been echoed through the ages by fleshing out a vast range of domains that exist inside and outside space and time such as identity, modality, causation, agents and actions, etc. In addition, a few thought-provoking challenges against metaphysics have arisen by its very nature. As Koons and Pickavance (2015, p. 6) [4] explore, there are several oppositions faced by metaphysicians in the early twentieth century like the challenge of subjectivist, of positivist, and of relativist, etc. However, the purpose of this study is to defend metaphysics as evenly as possible with reference to the challenge from the non-empirical character of metaphysics. *Ergo*, this paper begins by the traditional understanding of metaphysics, and it will then go on to rebut the non-empirical argument.

## 2. Contents

### 2.1. Traditional Understanding of Metaphysics

In general, metaphysics seems to be casting light on the nature of reality whereby it probes the ubiquitous principles of reality. Similarly, metaphysics, as traditionally manifested, is that “its central concern is with the fundamental structure of reality as a whole” (Lowe, 2002, p. 3) [5]. Accordingly, it does not intend to delineate the subject-matter of metaphysics in contrast with other disciplines, for instance, biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, psychology etc.—because most of those subjects are, undeniably, entailed into a certain extent of explanations in itself—but metaphysics tends to go through the roof of every piece of knowledge. Owing to this infinite access to inter-disciplinary states of affairs, metaphysics enables us to think of a widespread arena of reality. Traditional metaphysics would, *ipso facto*, argue that truth is single and indivisible; to put it bluntly, as a whole, it appears to be unitary and unavoidably self-consistent (Lowe, 2002, p. 3) [5]. The foregoing thought of metaphysics simply carries out the compelling idea of conventional metaphysics: no specific people like historians, biologists, chemists, physicists, and suchlike have jurisdiction in cases of multi-disciplinary knowledge. Conversely, one who is a practitioner of complete intellectuality cuts the edge of every discipline, which in metaphysics is fair enough to adjudicate on these disputes (Lowe, 2002, p. 3) [5]. In effect, none of us has the right to deny metaphysics at the expense of its own—because it, as traditionally convinced, will be a predominant inquiry of the universal intellec-

tual discipline.

Next, according to the traditional way of perceiving metaphysics, ontology plays an imperative role—to reveal the dramatic backdrop of the Aristotelian science of being qua being. *De facto*, metaphysics is necessarily on the threshold of ontology, which frankly states “a systematic taxonomy of what fundamentally exists, not a disordered list of existential generalizations” (Bacchini, Caputo, and Dell’Utri, 2014, p. 2) [6]; this loyally puts forward that ontology is tempted to study all sets of categorical entities while being in tune with their mutual relations to each other—since the very outset of stratification from universals and particulars. To get this idea lucidly, I would refer to the figure drawn by Lowe (2002, p. 16) [5], See **Appendix 1**. In the same vein, by dint of the above ontological interrelationship with abstract entities in the world, there are some core concepts in metaphysics that articulate a criss-crossing network of the paramount nature of reality:

1) Ontological dependency: traditionally, there is a hierarchical structure among entities; some entities exist for their own right, whilst others depend on other composites for the sake of existence—so, what is the nature of this inter-dependent relation amongst entities?

2) Identity, change, essence, and accident: to what extent can identity change and remain static as the same entity?

3) Causation: what is the nature of dependent origination, or the principles of conditionality laid upon these entities?

4) Action and event: what is the certain disparity in-between doing and happening?

5) Space and time: is there a theatre, where actions and events can occur?

6) Necessity and possibility: does it seem that some configurations are necessary to happen, while some are otherwise, or have an ontic probability to happen?

Additionally, Carroll and Markosian (2010, p. 11) [7] have placed ontology on the grounds of the theory of being or the study of existence; this, hereby, turns out to make a crucial point by analysing metaphysics: it is likely to be a conceptual investigation on a par with metaphysical necessity, or moral freedom, for example, Mars, God, ghost, New York city, Oxygen, Phlogiston, Pegasus, etc. Hence, metaphysics is traditionally often in harness with ontology in which the multitude of entities are polarised by the essential structure of reality. In all, metaphysics is prone to encapsulate that ontology significantly motivates a variety of entities divided by the ample categories to connect to one another, as a whole—then, it achieves the crystal view on the phenomenal possibility of metaphysics in line with the fundamental figure of reality.

## 2.2. The Challenge: The Non-Empirical Character of Metaphysics

The non-empirical character of metaphysics, which was one of the overriding challenges as opposed to the possibility of metaphysics, precisely determines the

all-important controversy twixt extra-mental reality and sense experience. On this view, metaphysical claims of knowledge are intensely akin to the claims of mathematical knowledge, as well as logical reasoning (Loptson, 2001, p. 19) [8]—because as Lowe (2002, p. 10) [5] investigates, putatively, mathematical knowledge is likewise referred to non-empirical evidence in order for confirmation—and, it is impossible to experience by physical senses that objects demonstrated in mathematics are real in the spatio-temporal world. Nevertheless, there is a worry as for the business of metaphysical knowledge-claims with mathematics: although mathematical assumptions would not be tangible and experienced by us, the vast majority of entities in metaphysics, more often than not, exist in space and time hierarchy to the extent that can be doable. In consequence, the fundamental structure of mind-independent reality should tacitly show a contingent relationship, rather than necessary (Lowe, 2002, p. 10) [5]; it makes it difficult to convince the contingent structure of the world as well as other systemic forms of knowledge, which do not rely on the empirical facts. Similarly, in accordance with Lopston (2001, p. 19) [8], it is worth denoting that when metaphysics comes to the stance of empirical science, it obviously takes the gesture towards the general possibility along with comprehensive understanding. However, notwithstanding these reasons, metaphysics sensibly differs from mathematics, due to the abstract nature of arithmetic, geometry, and other formulations and functions in mathematics. This would, in turn, raise a problematic issue: how can metaphysics deal with the economy of purely abstract objects in mathematics and putatively concrete entities in space and time?

Moreover, in response to this counterfactual argument, the legitimacy of metaphysics should be tailored to the actual possibility—on the trail of empirical knowledge-claims and ontological categorisation in metaphysics. According to Lowe (2002, p. 10) [5], it is worthwhile to know that metaphysicians instantaneously accept the existence of the fundamental structure of reality, which appears to be in the character of contingency (Chalmers, Manley, and Wasserman, 2009, p. 1) [9]—then, it should be acknowledged by a metaphysician as it is merely unable to be answered by empirical evidence—seemingly, the metaphysicians should have to bear it up, while showing that the absolute existence of this sheer perspective is, at least in part, possible:

1) In this respect, prior to the probing of empirical evidence, it is compulsory to establish the feature of metaphysics that needs to be the realm of possibility—this possibility would stand independently of sense experience. Consequently, if one states that reality has the contingent nature of  $P$ , one can then provide the non-empirical rationale of  $P$  that is being possible—eventually, in virtue of metaphysics, the person can establish the compelling idea that  $P$  is actual.

To put this in another way:

2) If someone wants to establish the possibility of dogs, the simplistic way of doing this is to see a dog—if I see a  $P$ , then,  $P$  is actual—similarly, if  $P$  is actual so that a fortiori,  $P$  is possible. In effect, there is a cogent hypothesis: one can imagine impossible things even though one cannot perceive impossible things by

means of empirical science.

In contrast, as Lowe (2002, pp. 10-11) [5] emphasises, personal sense experience could be part of evidence of the actual existence only if the person knows that it is a possible entity; *ergo*, sense experience is unable to establish the elegant idea of possibility *ens per se*—because it is unable to manifest the actuality of the entity by itself. With reference to the central motive, this seems to be a substantial point of the actual possibility in metaphysics caused by the subtle twist of empirical evidence:

“Empirical evidence cannot be evidence for the existence of anything which is not a *possible* feature of reality. But the existence of a certain feature of reality is *possible* is not something that can, in general, be achieved by merely empirical means of inquiry, precisely because empirical evidence can only be evidence for states of affairs that can independently be shown to be possible” (Lowe, 2002, pp. 10-11) [5].

*De facto*, these polemical strings of thoughts arguably demonstrate that metaphysics contains a scope of non-empirical characteristics like mathematics, but subject to the intellectual discipline, where the possibilities of real existence arise. Ultimately, metaphysics is intended to pinpoint the total existence of ontological taxonomy, which is to be incumbent upon the categorical co-existence of entities.

Furthermore, the possibility of metaphysics will still remain to be in the same ballpark tentatively—as on which criteria metaphysics can make justice for the incompatible possibilities *vis-à-vis* the thumbnail sketch of reality and the actual existence. As regards of the non-empirical character of metaphysics with whom natural sciences drastically argue, the realm of possibility shows a vague and ambiguous feature to the lay audience—it is strictly because of the consistent accessibility that is seen by the lens of real existence of the charted possibilities in metaphysics (Lowe, 2002, p.11) [5]; for instance, someone could come up with an arcane argument that the conclusion was invalid, or impossible to chart the actual possibility; this conclusion tends to be undermined by itself, due to the fact that the conclusion intrinsically seeks the realm of possibility, carrying out that the realm did not contain in the possibilities of charting it; it is, therefore, better enough to believe in the conclusion if and only the conclusion were false—in effect, there is no valid reason to trust it on this score. Rather, with respect to Lowe (2002, pp. 11-12) [5], to illustrate the following rationale, as a rational human being, it is not possible to concern ourselves in order to confirm the realm of possibilities, at least in part—because reasoning by definition depends upon the variable possibilities—as for a valid argument consisted of reliable premises, where the conclusion is not possible to be false if all the premises are true. The rational beings are, *eo ipso*, a sacrosanct creature in which the validity of arguments can be detected. In sum, the central role in metaphysics is to establish the thriving existence and co-existence of the possible entities in the world.

Into the bargain, there is an enigmatic dilemma betwixt the natural sciences and the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. On this account, metaphysics is

considered in the direction of possibilities, whilst the natural sciences proceed with empirical evidence. In conjecture with Lowe (1998, p. 5) [3], the doctrine of metaphysics could be subsumed under the heading, “natural epistemology” with which all human knowledge is available; it firmly speculates that scientific claims, for many if not most, presuppose metaphysics either intentionally or unintentionally—because in practice, it seems impossible to make scientific hypotheses without the aid of metaphysical assumptions, for example, quantum mechanics, Einstein’s theory of general relativity, etc. In short, in order to establish whether scientific theory is actual, it is necessary to scratch around for actual possibilities of the entity in light of metaphysics beforehand—empirical science will then grow in itself under the aegis of metaphysics.

### **3. Conclusion**

Overall, the present study was to conserve metaphysics, as it was traditionally conceived, while focusing on the non-empirical character of metaphysics which was one of the leading counterfactual arguments. In response to this, I was able to identify a few significant findings: a crucial dispute of ontology and mutual relationship amongst plentiful entities in the taxonomy—despite this, a philosophical debate of metaphysical claims of knowledge and mathematics as for the mind-independent reality, sense experience along with the real existence, aka actual existence in which the fundamental structure of reality was steadfastly driven through the natural sciences. Eventually, the evidence of this research deftly suggests that metaphysics is a defensible mechanism in philosophy, as traditionally realised, to the extent of universal intellectual discipline on which the realm of possibilities exists. However, the findings of this study have a number of important implications for future scholarly practice in metaphysics.

### **Acknowledgements**

This scholarly article is a gradual outcome of my undergraduate studies at Oxford Brookes University, UK. I would, therefore, be delighted to acknowledge this in honour of Dr Stephen Boulter, who was the module leader of Space, Time and Being during that period.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix 1

