8 Common Sense in Metaphysics

Joanna Lawson

Metaphysics is rife with theories about the way the world really is that seem to fly in the face of common sense.[1] Theories like mereological nihilism, according to which there are, in reality, no tables (see van Inwagen 1990; Merricks 2001). Theories like panpsychism, according to which all fundamental particles are, in reality, endowed with minds (Goff et al. 2017). Theories like modal realism, according to which there are, in reality, a plethora of concrete possible worlds, as vast as, but completely isolated from, our own (Lewis 1986). It is tempting to respond with what David Lewis calls an 'incredulous stare' (Lewis 1986: 133). After all, such theories seem completely ridiculous, completely at odds with everything we typically take ourselves to know about the world.

Lewis himself acknowledges that 'my denial of common sense is severe, and I think it is entirely right and proper to count that as a serious cost' (Lewis 1986: 135). But why is denying common sense a cost? Why think that the world as it really is accords with how we take it to be in everyday life? What is the appropriate role for common sense in metaphysics?

In this chapter I argue that common sense ought to play an important, though defeasible, role in metaphysical theorizing. This claim, however, cannot be justified in a vacuum. Rather, in order to discern the appropriate role of common sense in metaphysics one must take for granted some particular metametaphysical stance. What one believes one is doing when one engages in metaphysics will determine whether (and if so, how much) one can and should rely on common sense in practising metaphysics.

In the first section, I explain what I mean by 'common sense'. Next I discuss the contexts in which we can justifiably use common

185

sense to guide our theorizing about fundamental reality. I maintain that reliance on common sense in metaphysics cannot be evaluated on its own, but only in the context of a particular understanding of metaphysics. In the third section I articulate the appropriate role of common sense in metaphysics for a particular metaphysical approach: metaphysics as modelling. In most cases the role of common sense in metaphysical theorizing will be importantly limited for the proponent of metaphysics as modelling. However, in some important cases, such as the investigation of the metaphysical structure of socially constructed entities, common sense will play a much more expansive role.

COMMON SENSE AND THE MANIFEST IMAGE

In this chapter, when I say that a metaphysical theory is commonsensical (or not), what I mean is that the theory in question matches up with the way things seem to be. It seems that there are tables and chairs. It seems that we causally affect the world. It seems that time passes. The sum total of these seemings amounts to the *manifest image* of reality.

The manifest image is to be contrasted with the scientific image.[2] Our best scientific theories describe the world at a scientific level. The scientific image includes oxygen, weak and strong forces, protons, cells, DNA, and the like. In our everyday lives, however, we don't interact with protons and DNA, at least not as such. We interact with co-workers, books, and breakfast. The level of co-workers, books, and breakfast is the level of the manifest image. Scientifically, the colour blue has to do with the refraction of a particular range of wavelengths of light. Manifestly, *blueness* has to do with a particularly coloured phenomenal quality – that is, with the colour as it appears in our ordinary experience. The commonsensical manifest image just is the world of ordinary experience.

I take common sense, understood as the manifest image, to be *quasi-perceptual* in nature. Things appear to us to be one way or another as we make ordinary judgments about the world of

experience, as if we were simply perceiving them to be this way. And just as perceptual data are open to a certain amount of interpretation (is that a monster coming down the hill outside, or is it a fly on the windowpane?), so ordinary experience is open to a certain amount of interpretation (does time *really* seem to be A-Theoretic?). What seems to be the case is, in some instances, up for debate.

Furthermore, the manifest image, much like perception, is rooted in sensory experience. We come to the manifest image through what we see, touch, hear, smell, and taste. Raw sense-data are not all that is contained in the manifest image, however. Just as according to some views perception is richly contentful, I maintain that ordinary experience is laden with rich content. By this I mean that the manifest image presents us with more than just unprocessed sensory data.[3] When we experience the world we do experience raw seemings consisting of colours, shapes, feels, smells, etc. But most of what we experience is not raw in this way. Perhaps upon first waking, one blinks open one's eyes to see a brightly coloured, fluttering shape. After a few more blinks, the shape resolves itself into the image of a cardinal pecking at the birdfeeder outside the window. What we see, most of the time, is *the cardinal*, not just a brightly coloured fluttering shape. The world of ordinary experience is so readily intelligible to us because it is organized into conceptually accessible contentful chunks.[4]

The manifest image, then, is a quasi-perceptual, sensorily informed, richly contentful presentation of the everyday world of persons and objects. It is how the world appears to us, situated as we are in time and space, and equipped as we are with sensory capabilities and conceptual frameworks.

Understanding common sense as the manifest image presented to us in ordinary experience is helpful for understanding the constraints on what can appropriately be classified as 'common sense'. Not just anything a particular metaphysician finds intuitive ought to be included in the category. Rather, empirical data can and should

constrain what we take to be part of the content of the manifest image.

These empirical data can come in many forms. Perhaps there are linguistic data which lead us to conclude that a supposedly commonsensical position is only attractive to people repeatedly exposed to a historically contingent metaphorical turn of phrase. Here we can assume that the right-soundingness of the position in question is due to the ubiquity of the metaphor, and not to the fact that the manifest image supports it.

Additionally, metaphysicians can benefit from the evidence provided by cognitive science. While armchair theorizing can be useful, a single philosopher's opinion can only go so far. By testing subjects' responses to perceptual stimuli it is possible to discern what appears (and what does not appear) to be the case to them.[5] This allows us to distinguish between the manifest image, considered as such, and mere intuition. Intuitions vary from person to person. The manifest image, on the other hand, is robust across individuals.[6]

I should emphasize that this does not mean that we should make use of science to revise the contents of common sense. Science cannot tell us that we ought to find dark matter commonsensical, even if it can tell us that we ought to believe there is such a thing. What I am suggesting instead is that it is not always obvious from mere reflection which plausible-sounding things are in fact part of common sense, construed as I have described it above. Cognitive science can help us understand what exactly is presented to us in experience, and what is not.

Finally, although the manifest image is content-laden, we should be careful not to pretend that it takes a stance on more metaphysical issues than it in fact does. That is, we should be careful not to unnecessarily foist a metaphysical theory on an experience which is in fact philosophically neutral. Perhaps it does seem (for instance) that time passes, but maybe this apparent 'passage' supports no metaphysical theory of time over any other.[7] This sort of care is needed in assessing cognitive science research just as much as in evaluating

metaphysical arguments. It is possible to bake metaphysical assumptions into the scientific data, and so draw unwarranted conclusions from them. We should be careful to make arguments connecting the dots between what is presented to us in experience and the metaphysical question at hand. It is not feasible to assume without argument that the manifest image always takes a stand in a metaphysical debate.

So, when properly understood, common sense is not just mere intuition – our understanding of it is subject to correction, not least by empirical data. What sort of role common sense plays, however, will depend on what sort of thing one takes metaphysics to be.

METAMETAPHYSICS: JUSTIFYING THE USE OF COMMON SENSE IN METAPHYSICS

In the literature on common sense, it is often assumed that we ought to evaluate the evidential weight of common sense on its own.[8] However, the appropriate place of common sense in metaphysics depends not only on common sense, but on metaphysics itself. What are we doing when we do metaphysics? One's antecedent presuppositions about the nature of metaphysics as an enterprise are essential for determining the appropriate role of common sense in metaphysics. We cannot evaluate the viability of using common sense as a guide to metaphysics without knowing what metaphysics is attempting to do.

Taking even a cursory glance at the variety of stances towards common sense in metaphysics reveals the impact of one's metametaphysical approach. Take, for instance, deflationist ontologists of a Carnapian stripe, such as Amie Thomasson (2015). Thomasson maintains that ontological questions have 'easy answers'. All we have to do to find out whether tables exist is to look out into the world and see if there is anything that meets the application conditions for the term 'table'. Any competent language speaker, then, will be able to answer existence questions. This is because competent speakers know what terms mean and know how to make use of

their access to the manifest image (common sense) to see if there are any (say) tables, or cardinals. So for the deflationist, common sense will play an enormous role. Aside from some technical scientific terms, common sense will be the deciding factor in the majority of existence questions.[9]

On the other end of the spectrum are extreme rationalist metaphysicians, who start with one or more general principles as epistemic starting points. The most extreme of them give common sense no weight at all. The job of metaphysicians is to cast aside intuitions and common-sense beliefs and 'train their gaze on reality itself' (Della Rocca 2013: 185). If we take common sense seriously as a guide to reality, we will be constrained to conservative metaphysical systems – systems that may have very little similarity to reality as it is in itself. We should take the manifest image into consideration in our metaphysical theorizing only if we can provide some reason to think that the manifest image is likely to get things right.

It is not my aim here to argue for or against any metametaphysical stance. I wish to point out that the use of common sense in metaphysics is vindicated only within the framework of a particular metametaphysical approach. Common sense is, among other things, a tool for the metaphysician. Whether it is the right tool for the job depends on what job the metaphysician wants to do. If the project is a deflationist one, then common sense will be indispensable. An extreme rationalist project, however, will require much more robust tools than common sense to accomplish its heavy-duty aims. It is in this way that a particular understanding of what metaphysics is and what it aims to do will impact how reasonable it is to rely on common sense.

In what remains of this section, I situate my own approach to common sense against the background of a particular metametaphysical stance: metaphysics as modelling. According to this approach, common sense serves as a defeasible theoretical virtue and a starting point for metaphysical theorizing.

Metaphysics as Modelling

According to a metaphysics-as-modelling approach, metaphysics is continuous with the sciences.[10] The subject matter under investigation differs, but the methods employed by the two disciplines are similar. In general, the questions that interest metaphysicians tend to be more general than, more fundamental than, and metaphysically antecedent to, the questions that are under the purview of science. For instance, evolutionary biologists may look at what causes the proliferation of certain biological features, while a metaphysician will be interested in the nature of causation itself.

The methods employed by metaphysicians and scientists in answering the questions they investigate, however, have some fundamental similarities. Both metaphysicians and scientists construct theories about ways the world might be. Both metaphysicians and scientists conduct experiments in order to test their theories. Scientists do this in the lab. Metaphysicians, too, are constrained by empirical adequacy. If their theories conflict with scientific research, they must be abandoned. But metaphysicians also work with thought experiments. These experiments are not conducted in a laboratory (or at least, they needn't be), but they can nevertheless be an important part of the process of determining which theories stand up to scrutiny, and which do not.

It is useful to conceive of this theory-building as *model construction*. A theoretician, in considering a particular way the world might be, builds (usually figuratively) a model of it, in order to demonstrate how such a situation would work. Models are fictions which free us to tinker with constraints however we would like. They allow room to idealize and to generalize in ways that can be revelatory even if the metaphysician or scientist doesn't for a second think they are accurate. In statistical mechanics, particles are not really massless, perfectly elastic points, but it can be helpful to consider them as such in order to construct a model. In metaphysics, thought experiments are helpful for smoothing over or abstracting away from messy real-life complications.

A metaphysical theory is a model or class of models that purports to be isomorphic with the real world in some way. The class of models according to which causation boils down to counterfactuals contains one model in which JFK would not have died if Lee Harvey Oswald had not shot him, another in which JFK would not have died if the FBI had not shot him. Both, notice, represent the causation in terms of counterfactuals, although the theory remains agnostic about who in fact did the shooting.

Both scientists and metaphysicians evaluate empirically adequate theories on the basis of theoretical virtues. A good theory does well with regard to virtues such as simplicity, fruitfulness, elegance, parsimony, and explanatory power. The exact list and weighting of virtues is up for debate, in both metaphysics and science.

The job of metaphysics, according to a metaphysics-as-modelling perspective, is to generate models of the way things might be. These models might be simplified or idealized in various ways. They may purport to represent some feature of the real world, or they may serve instead to demonstrate some hypothetical or logical point. Classes of models representing metaphysical theories are evaluated on the basis of empirical adequacy, as well as how well they exemplify various theoretical virtues.

Common Sense and Metaphysical Modelling

There are at least four reasons to think that common sense will play an integral role in metaphysics for the proponent of metaphysics as modelling. First, common sense plays a significant role in current scientific practice. Second, it provides data that any metaphysical model must account for to achieve empirical adequacy. Third, it serves as a base model fortified by theoretical inertia. Finally, alignment with the manifest image is itself a theoretical virtue that metaphysical models can exhibit to a greater or lesser extent. As such, alignment with the common-sense picture of the world is one of the things that metaphysicians (especially those interested in

metaphysics as modelling) should strive to maximize when choosing a model.

An initial reason for thinking that common sense will be both important and defeasible on a metaphysics-as-modelling framework is that common sense plays such a role in science.[11] Nina Emery (2017) points out that there is a 'minimal-divergence norm' at work in the sciences. The norm is as follows:

> Insofar as you have two or more candidate theories, all of which are empirically and explanatorily adequate, you ought to choose the theory that diverges least from the manifest image.

This particular norm may seem scientifically controversial at first glance. Is it really a norm in scientific circles to prefer theories that cohere with the manifest image? However, as Emery points out, something like the minimal-divergence norm is the only thing that can explain certain features of scientific practice; namely, it explains why scientific practice rejects so-called sceptical hypotheses, including brain-in-vat, Boltzmann-brain, and Bostrom-simulation cases.[12] The best, and perhaps the only, reason to rule out these hypotheses is something like the minimal-divergence norm. So, given that these sceptical scenarios are largely ignored by the scientific community, such a norm must be in play.

This is a defeasible reason to think that something similar might be appropriate in the metaphysical sphere. Metaphysics, according to a metaphysics-as-modelling view, is continuous with science. If science is open to rejecting common sense while nevertheless deferring to it in many cases, then something similar might be right for metaphysics as well.

Second, the manifest image serves as an evidential starting point. An internally coherent model that has any hope of accurately representing the world we inhabit must make sense of the fact that we have the common-sense picture that we do. One way to do this is to maintain that reality itself resembles (or is isomorphic with) our common-sense picture of it. Another way to discharge the

explanatory burden is to provide an error theory explaining why the manifest image is at odds with the reality. So at the very least, the metaphysician must engage with common sense in order to explain how it comes to be that we have the common-sense beliefs that we do. The manifest image serves as data that any empirically adequate theory must account for.

Third, common sense serves as a theoretical starting point. The manifest image provides us with a sort of ready-made starter model of the world. This model includes objects like cars and tables; it includes persons who have minds replete with experiences, beliefs, and intentions. The model is fairly coarse-grained: there are things it doesn't take a stance on, categories that are vague, and phenomena that need fleshing out in order to be made obviously consistent.

Just because common sense is a starting point doesn't mean that we must (or even should) end up there. But starting points do matter. Descartes insisted on starting with only his thoughts and ideas, and it is a wonder that he made it out of his head. Where you start will partially determine where you go. Furthermore, starting points matter because of what I call *theoretical inertia*. Theoretical inertia maintains that one ought not to abandon a theory without sufficient reason. This is not a particularly radical principle. Consider a sister-view: doxastic inertia.

> *Doxastic inertia*: it is irrational to change your doxastic attitudes without sufficient reason to do so.

Doxastic inertia is something of a truism. It is irrational, for instance, to go from believing p to believing not-p without having sufficient reason to make the switch. What counts as 'sufficient' will differ according to one's theory of best epistemic practice.[13] But the general principle is the same. And it certainly means that one should be steadfast in one's beliefs if there is no reason at all to change one's mind.

The following is a corresponding theoretical principle:

> *Theoretical inertia*: one ought not to adopt a new theory without sufficient reason to do so.

Theoretical inertia doesn't mean that one can never adopt a new theory. It does mean that, when considering alternative metaphysical models, a new model must be sufficiently attractive to lure us away from the old, 'default' model.[14] This principle holds as much for the sciences as for metaphysics. We would never have abandoned Newtonian physics unless Einstein (and others) provided us with good reason to do so. The same holds in metaphysics: if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

'Sufficient reason' to adopt a new metaphysical theory is cashed out, on a metaphysics-as-modelling view, in terms of theoretical virtue. A theory that runs counter to common sense must not only be empirically adequate but also offer a better combination of explanatory power, simplicity, elegance, theoretical fruitfulness, etc., than the manifest image offers. From a metaphysics-as-modelling perspective, it is completely respectable practice to generate models willy-nilly, just to explore unreached corners of logical space. But when it comes to actually adopting one of these theories as best, it is important to be choosy.

Common sense does not merely serve as an epistemic and theoretical starting point, however important these considerations might be. My fourth and final contention in this section is that accordance with common sense is something to strive for in its own right. This is because alignment with common sense is itself a theoretical virtue, alongside explanatory power, simplicity, fruitfulness, etc. A model which maintains that the manifest image of the world is largely right about the nature of reality is more virtuous along this dimension than a model which, although equally empirically and explanatorily adequate, maintains that the manifest image is largely misleading.

There are both epistemic and non-epistemic reasons to think that accordance with common sense (carefully depicted, with the help of empirical research) is a significant theoretical virtue. First the epistemic reasons: according with common sense may mean that a theory is more likely to be true.

The world of everyday experience is the world of action. The manifest image is our interface with the world; it enables us to act and interact effectively. Common sense is, therefore, incredibly *useful*. We need to ask why it is that common sense is so pragmatically efficacious. One plausible explanation of this fact is that the manifest image is truth-tracking, at least to a significant extent. We can draw an inference to the best explanation here. The reason that the manifest image is as useful in our everyday lives as it is, has to do with the fact that it latches on to reality.[15]

So there is reason to think that metaphysical models that accord with common sense are more likely to be true than those that do not. It is worth pointing out, however, that many time-honoured theoretical virtues do not have this feature. It is notoriously difficult to give any good reason for thinking that the simplicity of a theory (for instance, although this goes for parsimony, elegance, and fertility as well) is a good indicator of its truth (see Foley 1993). Nevertheless, the proponent of metaphysics as modelling has no trouble accepting simplicity as theoretically virtuous. So even if we think that convergence with the manifest image does not provide evidence of truth, we might still count such convergence as a virtue of the theory. This is especially the case if there are other, non-epistemic reasons to accept it as a theoretical virtue. And there are such reasons. Here are two.

First, it is easier to maintain consistent beliefs when one's preferred metaphysical model is commonsensical. This is because abandoning the common-sense picture of the world is difficult. Moore even maintains that:

> *[A]ll* philosophers, without exception, have agreed with me in holding [common-sense beliefs]: and that the real difference, which is commonly expressed this way, is only a difference between those philosophers, who have *also* held views inconsistent with these features in 'the Common Sense view of the world', and those who have not. (Moore (1925) 1993: 118–19)

The difficulty of giving up common sense may not provide evidence that common sense is right. But we may value, and wish to promote, intellectual consistency, independently of its truth-conduciveness. If we do, then common sense is something to be taken into account in our theorizing.

Furthermore, a metaphysical theory's being consistent with common sense might be advantageous because it allows for more robust interdisciplinary interactions. The manifest image can serve as a crucial point of connection, the nexus between different disciplines' ways of getting at reality. The way a neuroscientist understands the mind is very different from the way a psychologist understands the mind, which in turn is very different from the way a metaphysician understands the mind. But collaborations are nevertheless possible. They are possible in part because of the shared language of the manifest image. The neuroscientist, the psychologist, and the metaphysician are all (in common-sense terms) trying to figure out how people think, and what thought (as an umbrella term for conscious mental life) is. If the metaphysician departs too radically from common sense, she can undermine her ability to interact meaningfully with those outside her own field. So to the extent that one believes interdisciplinary collaboration and interaction are good things, common sense will be desirable in metaphysical theorizing.

By appealing to a particular metametaphysical stance – metaphysics as modelling – we can vindicate the important-but-defeasible role of common sense in metaphysics. The manifest image is important insofar as it is valued in the sciences (an enterprise continuous with metaphysics), and insofar as it provides epistemic and theoretical starting points for theorizing. Finally, the proponent of metaphysics as modelling has good epistemic and non-epistemic reasons to count alignment with common sense as a theoretical virtue when evaluating metaphysical models.

METAPHYSICS: COMMON SENSE, CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS, AND SUBJECT MATTER

We have seen that, for the proponent of metaphysics as modelling, common sense plays an important role in the metaphysical process. But what exactly this looks like in practice requires more fleshing out. In this section, I first explore uses of common sense in combination with conceptual analysis. Second, I highlight the sensitivity of common sense's role to subject matter by considering the example of socially constructed entities.

Common sense is, first, a key resource in the metaphysically important process of conceptual analysis. For my purposes, conceptual analysis consists in the exploration of the features of our ordinary concepts, whatever these features might be.[16] Interesting features of concepts are discoverable through an appeal to the manifest image, or common sense. As was previously noted, concept deployment is a near-constant feature of everyday experience. That, there, is a cardinal; this is a book; *that* was an annoying thing to say. We are able to access facts about our concepts by appealing to common-sense uses of these concepts.

The metaphysician can use both the manifest image itself and her grasp of ordinary concepts strengthened by conceptual analysis to gain insight into the nature of reality. In what follows, I refer to the host of information contained in the manifest image as well as the conceptual schemes revealed through conceptual analysis as our 'ideas and concepts'. This should not mislead the reader, however. It is not just any ideas that are at issue here, but the common-sense ideas of everyday experience presented to us in the manifest image.

First, in order to have the ideas and concepts we have, there are perhaps necessary conditions on the nature of reality itself. What, in other words, are the metaphysical requirements for producing the sorts of concepts and ideas that we find ourselves with? Second, both common sense and our conceptual frameworks are useful for finding out what the world would have to be like in order to

correspond to the manifest image. That is, what metaphysical features would the world need to have in order to align with our ideas and concepts? Third, we can make inferences to the best explanation about the origins of both our concepts and the manifest image, which may shed light on the nature of reality. How did these particular concepts and ideas arise?

Arguments that make use of our concepts and ideas in the first way are known as *transcendental arguments.* Such arguments start with the nature of our conceptual frameworks or a feature of the manifest image, and conclude with something that must be true about the nature of reality. In terms of modelling, it is an argument to the effect that all metaphysical models containing some common-sense feature X will also share some metaphysical feature Y. This would be one way of construing the *cogito*: Descartes's recognition that he thinks, that he has any concepts at all, leads him to conclude that he must exist.

Second, by figuring out what our ideas and conceptual structures are, we can take steps towards figuring out what the world would have to be like *if* they were 'carving at the joints'. Burge (1995) does something similar when he concludes that if we are critical reasoners (in the way that it seems we are), then it must be the case that we have privileged knowledge of the contents of our own minds. Or take an alternative example: perhaps by getting a better understanding of the way that time appears to pass, we can determine what the nature of reality would have to be like if this seeming were veridical.

Finally, by understanding the particular features of our ideas and concepts we can make inferences about the genesis of such concepts. Once we know the ins and outs of our concepts of, say, right and wrong, we can with greater accuracy determine whether the source of these concepts is some non-natural moral reality, or whether it is more likely to be a by-product of natural selection (Street 2006). Or perhaps the best explanation of the fact that time seems to pass is an irreducible directionality in the fabric of space-time. Our concepts and ideas are as they are for some reason or other. If the best

explanation of a given concept is a particular metaphysical feature of the world, then we have some reason to posit such a feature.

The use of common sense as an aid in conceptual analysis and as providing resources for transcendental and conditional theorizing can therefore be very fruitful. But I must append several asterisks to this optimistic description. Despite its many uses, common sense is not indefeasible. I noted in the previous section that theoretical reasons may lead the careful metaphysician to abandon common sense, in spite of theoretical inertia.

Additionally, there may be good scientific reasons to depart from the manifest image. Perhaps the common-sense picture is inconsistent with our best scientific theories.[17] Or the evidence provided by the cognitive sciences might provide reasons for diverging from common sense. If it were demonstrated that a particular feature of the manifest image was a mere spandrel of our cognitive processes, this would significantly undercut the evidence of common sense (Paul 2016). Positing further features of the metaphysical landscape may well be superfluous if the features of experience in question are explicable in terms of a cognitive fluke. We may want to conclude, in light of such information, that some features of common sense are not themselves part of mind-independent reality, but a mere appearance caused by physiological or neurological processes.

Even given these caveats, there will still be a role for common sense in metaphysical theorizing. Not all appearances, presumably, are the mere result of evolutionary spandrels. As we come to understand our cognitive processes and our common-sense concepts better, it will become clearer which features of common sense we can rely on.

Common sense therefore plays a significant, although importantly limited, role in the metaphysical investigation of most subject matters. But for some subject matters of metaphysical investigation, a more expansive role for common sense is warranted. I conclude with an example of one such subject matter: socially constructed entities. By taking an in-depth look at a particular case, it becomes clear that

the usefulness of common sense in metaphysics depends in part on what we are theorizing about.

Socially Constructed Entities

The manifest image contains things like women, lawyers, and money. Like cardinals, tables, and chairs, they are perceived (or quasi-perceived) features of our everyday existence. They are part of the manifest image. They are, additionally, social constructs. That is, they exist in part because of our social practices, conventions, and beliefs. Our thoughts shape (and are shaped by) our behaviours and practices, which in turn result in the construction of social entities. For the present purposes it doesn't matter exactly how this happens.[18] What does matter is that these social entities are particularly dependent on how we understand and treat them.

Because of this special relationship between minds and social constructs, common sense plays a more robust role in the metaphysical investigation of such entities. For many objects of study, we can hope that our common-sense beliefs are caused by, and so perhaps are likely to be approximately true of, the things the beliefs are about. When it comes to social constructs, however, the direction of fit goes the other way around. It is partly because we have the beliefs we do that the things themselves have the features that they do.[19]

All the typical uses of common sense apply to social constructs. We can use common sense as an evidential and theoretical starting point, make inferences to the best explanation of common sense, and use it to aid in conceptual analysis. However, there are some additional ways that common sense can help in understanding social constructs. Common sense is one of the things that makes socially constructed entities have the metaphysical features that they do. A widespread belief about, or practice involving, a social construct impacts what the construct is. It is therefore crucial for understanding such entities that we understand common-sense views of them.

Furthermore, some of the caveats and difficulties that applied to using common sense as a tool for understanding mind-independent entities don't apply here. The genesis of common-sense beliefs isn't relevant, for instance. Normally, finding out that some feature of the manifest image is a mere by-product of cognitive processing would undercut the evidence provided by common sense. For socially constructed entities, however, this doesn't matter in the same way. Maybe the male/female gender binary is a cognitive fluke, or a historical fluke, or maybe it is a product of evolutionary pressures to reproduce. It might be interesting to find out which, but it won't change the fact that gender, as it is constructed in contemporary Western society, *is* binary.[20]

This doesn't mean that metaphysical investigation of socially constructed entities is easy. As always, it is important to be careful that what we ascribe to common sense really is commonsensical. What seems obvious to one person may strike another as completely unintuitive. And especially when dealing with social constructs, this is of great significance. We *collectively* determine the existence and nature of social constructs. So an unshared intuition won't tell us much about the nature of reality, even for social constructs.

Furthermore, although collective attitudes impact the nature of social constructs, they aren't identical to the nature of social constructs. We can't read what gender is off of our collective attitudes towards gender. For one thing, our attitudes may be self-contradictory, or even incoherent. For another, it may not be obvious what our collective practices and beliefs, taken together, amount to. Marilyn Frye (1983) points out that door-opening rituals (in which gallant men insist on opening doors so that women may walk through unhindered) may be attributed to and consciously understood as an act of deference and subservience. However, taken together with a host of accompanying practices (including practices surrounding social education, physical activities, household labour, etc.) this practice may well take on a different character than it did considered in isolation.

Much philosophical work is therefore needed to figure out what exactly it is that we have constructed. And common sense will be a key resource in the process of completing this work. How we see socially constructed entities impacts what these entities are. It is important to recognize why this is. Socially constructed entities are *mind dependent.* Their metaphysical structure is dependent on us, on our behaviours and our psychology. So it perhaps should not be so surprising that common sense, a core feature of our understanding of the world, plays enough of a role in how we think and behave to impact these entities' metaphysical structure.

Social constructs are not the only mind-dependent entities. There are also experiences, motivations, beliefs, intentions, thoughts, and emotions, to name just a few. All of these things are philosophically interesting topics worthy of metaphysical investigation. Of course, social construction is a particularly clear-cut case. It is an open question whether and to what extent other mind-dependent entities are impacted by common sense. Nevertheless, the case of social constructs demonstrates that a one-size-fits-all approach is inappropriate. Especially for mind-dependent entities, we ought to carefully consider the nature of the entity at hand to determine how tentative we should be in making use of common sense. We shouldn't needlessly handicap ourselves in our investigations – metaphysics is hard enough as it is.

CONCLUSION

In order to determine the appropriate role of common sense in metaphysics, metametaphysics is indispensable. Without some particular stance on what metaphysics is, you cannot determine the appropriate place of common sense in metaphysical theorizing.

Against a background of metaphysics as modelling, common sense is an important, though defeasible, tool for the metaphysician. It serves as both an epistemic and a theoretical starting point. Furthermore, accordance with common sense is itself a theoretical

virtue to be weighed against others, like simplicity, parsimony, and elegance.

In practice, common sense is often coupled with evidence provided by our conceptual frameworks. In order to determine the structure of these frameworks, common sense plays a key role in the process of conceptual analysis. By attending to our common-sense ideas and our conceptual frameworks, metaphysicians can construct transcendental arguments, appeal to interesting sets of conditional models, and make inferences to the best explanation of these ideas and concepts.

Most of the time, common sense must be handled with care. Our best scientific theories sometimes undercut the evidence provided by common sense. However, there are contexts in which we can safely disregard the warning label. In the case of socially constructed entities, for instance, common sense ought to play a more expansive role in descriptive metaphysics than it does elsewhere. This lesson may generalize to other domains of study, including various dimensions of the metaphysics of experience or the mind–world connection.

NOTES

1 I am grateful to the editors of this volume, as well as to Chris Blake-Turner, Bill Lycan, and Laurie Paul, for reading drafts, discussing ideas, and improving this chapter in other ways. Thanks also to the UNC Chapel Hill Works in Progress group for helping me think through this chapter at its earliest stages.

2 See Sellars (1962). The view I propose here is Sellarsian in spirit, though I don't aim to match Sellars's view in all its particularities. For a nuanced perspective on Sellars, see deVries (2016).

3 I take my understanding of rich content from Siegel (2010). My taking the manifest image to be richly contentful, however, does not commit me to a view about the contents of perception. It may be, as Siegel maintains, that rich content enters at the level of perception. Alternatively, it may be that perception is minimally contentful, and that the richness only enters the picture later, after being supplemented with conceptual resources.

4 I have left vague what exactly, beyond raw sensory data, is included in the manifest image. I find it plausible that our conceptual resources shape and constrain what is presented to us in experience. This, however, leaves plenty of room for debate about particulars. Does the manifest image take a stand on abstracta? On moral properties? On modal properties? This is a complex philosophical issue, and one there is not scope to delve into here.

5 For more on this, see Paul (2010).

6 At least for those individuals with comparable conceptual frameworks. The manifest image will be somewhat malleable when it comes to significant perceptually relevant conceptual alterations. For instance, a pre-literate child may see written language as mere squiggles or shapes, whereas a literate adult, by contrast, will see the words *as* words. Given that the manifest image is richly contentful, this conceptual difference may be enough to alter what is experienced.

7 See Deng (2013). Also relevant here are four-dimensionalist responses to the 'no change' objection (Sider 2001: 212–16; Sattig 2006: 108–9).

8 For some influential examples, see Reid ((1764) 1983); Moore ((1925) 1993); Ayer (1969); and Lycan (2001).

9 For an in-depth exploration of Thomasson's deflationism and its relationship to common sense, see Chapter 13 by Ranalli and De Ridder in this volume.

10 My characterization of metaphysics as modelling is drawn from Paul (2012).

11 For further defence of this, see Peels (2017a).

12 See Boltzmann (1895) (Albert 2000: chapter 4, for discussion); Putnam (1982); and Bostrom (2003).

13 The reason may be evidential – for instance, I may get some new evidence that favours not-*p*, and this is my reason for changing my belief. However, I don't wish to rule out theories according to which it can be rational to form beliefs on the basis of practical reasons (James 1897; Rinard 2017).

14 For an expansion on various versions of something like theoretical inertia as it applies to common sense, see Chapter 13 by Ranalli and De Ridder in this volume.

15 Kovacs (2019) argues that a metaphysician can, on the contrary, appeal to the usefulness of common-sense beliefs to excuse her departure from common sense. The thought is that the manifest image is the result of

evolutionary pressures which selected for the most pragmatic features to be highlighted in experience. Evolution and natural selection didn't care about truth, but about survival. So although *useful* common-sense beliefs may have been selected for, *true* common-sense beliefs probably were not. It may be that in some areas the manifest image opts for pragmatics over accuracy. But pointing out that something is useful hardly seems like reason to think that it *isn't* true. Quite the contrary – it seems like prima facie evidence for truth. What is needed is not only an explanation of the reason why the manifest image gets it wrong occasionally, but why we should think that it is wrong in *this* case, given that we have reason to think it is likely to be truth-tracking in general. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, science itself seems to rely much of the time on common sense. We need some reason to think that evolutionary science is exempt from this general pattern, or that its reliance on common sense is restricted only to certain domains, or that it can in some other way undermine common sense without thereby undermining itself.

16 Conceptual analysis is traditionally taken to be the process of examining ordinary concepts in order to determine the necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in the target category (Margolis and Laurence 2019; Chalmers and Jackson 2001). However, as Strevens (2019) points out, there simply may not be any definitions containing necessary and sufficient conditions lurking deep in our consciousness to be found. But our ordinary concepts needn't be as fine-grained as all that to be interesting. So even granting Strevens's point, conceptual analysis (undertaken on the understanding that necessary and sufficient conditions may be an unrealistic goal) can be worthwhile and productive. (Strevens himself reserves the term 'conceptual analysis' for the traditional reading, and uses 'inductive analysis' to refer to something like the weakened version I use here. I take Strevens's point on board without changing terminology.)

17 These theories will have to be fairly robustly demonstrated to warrant a rejection of common sense. It might be that the Everett interpretation of quantum phenomena (say) is our 'best' theory of quantum mechanics. Nevertheless, this theory lacks sufficient confirmation to be worth so significant a departure from the manifest image, at least at this point (Emery 2017). (It is worth noting that McQueen and Vaidman (2020) maintain that the Everettian many-worlds view of quantum mechanics is

the one entailed by common sense. However, I take it that this is hardly a mainstream view.)

18 Though see Haslanger (2012) and Ásta (2018) for two accounts of social construction.

19 It is worth making explicit the link between our everyday beliefs and behaviours and the manifest image. Our everyday beliefs, behaviours, and practices are imbued with the kind of quasi-perceptual content (conceptual and non-conceptual) that constitutes the manifest image. Alterations to the manifest image may result in an alteration of these everyday attitudes, beliefs, and practices, and these in turn give rise to socially constructed entities. Thus the manifest image, mediated by our beliefs and practices, is causally relevant to the structure of socially constructed entities.

20 This may well be changing in some parts of the world, however (see, for instance, Dembroff 2019).