

# On the permanence of metaphysics

KATIA SANTOS

## §1. Introduction

S OF 1960, A REDISCOVERY OF METAPHYSICS in the analytic tradition has begun, with a large number of works dedicated to the discussion of its problems being published in England and the United States<sup>1</sup>. It is interesting to observe, however, that they all point to an investigation taken in the same direction, namely what is understood as a systematic study of the fundamental structure of reality. Edward J. Lowe, for example, in *The possibility of metaphysics: substance, identity and time*, writes: «Traditionally, metaphysics has been thought of as the systematic study of the most fundamental structure of reality — and, indeed, that is the view of it which I should like to support» (2001, p. 2). The same conception is defended by several other contemporary exponents, who have made a concentrated effort to identify metaphysics with ontology, thus reducing its scope to the investigation of the foundations of natural science.

From our point of view, the fundamental theses of the analytic conception about nature and the possibility of metaphysics are untenable. They are, in fact, anti-metaphysical. Their origins lie in the great detractors of metaphysics of the last century, among which the most fierce was the Vienna Circle. The attacks, exacerbated and ferocious, in which it was claimed that metaphysical propositions and issues were meaningless, being considered pseudo-proposition without meaning, are well known<sup>2</sup>. There was a project to eliminate metaphysics, which nodal point was that it would accept as significant terms that have no reference in experience, such as «absolute», «thing-in-itself», «unconditioned». Its salutary opposite would be the science of nature, which

<sup>1</sup> There are several works on contemporary ontology published by Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Routledge, The MIT Press, Blackweel, Clarendon Press and others.

<sup>2</sup> See Carnap. R. (1932). «Überwindung der Metaphysik durch Logische Analyse der Sprache». *Erkenntnis*, II, 1932, pp. 219-241.

propositions would be guaranteed by verification criteria that would link them to statements derived from observation. Although today the Logical Positivism is considered dead and its theses indefensible, the contemporary analytic ontology, which main founders are W. V. O. Quine and P. F. Strawson, preserves the same world view. Actually, these philosophers were interested in a metaphysics that could be done «in good conscience», that is, by maintaining the positivist assumptions. When explaining the origins of analytic ontologies, Loux and Zimmerman state, in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*:

They had their roots in the anti-metaphysical traditions they helped undermine. Quine came out of the tradition of the logical positivism, and Strawson was originally a representative of the ordinary language tradition. Both attempted to show that there is a project in metaphysics responsible philosophers can in good conscience undertake (Loux and Zimmerman, 2003, p. 2).

Philosophers of analytic ontology claim that the anti-metaphysical assumptions of their tradition have been eliminated today and that their investigation resumes the Aristotelian project of transcendent metaphysics. They consider that Kant was wrong and that it is possible to know things in themselves, which would be in fact being achieved by contemporary ontologies. However, as we think, several aspects of this conception reveal that its foundation is the positivist vision of the world and not the Aristotelian one. In the first place, to the extent that it endorses the perspective of a metaphysics that can be done «in good conscience», what is being said is that it intends to adhere to the research that is allowed by an implicitly accepted positivism. Secondly, the reduction of metaphysics scope to what is understood as the fundamental structure of reality is an attempt to cling to something supposedly solid and safe, that would not be reached by the censure that, after all, points to the lack of concrete reference and the experience detachment. Furthermore, the refusal of Kant's philosophy and what is understood to be the result of his critique of transcendent metaphysics is a continuation of the same anti-metaphysical spirit that animated the early analytic philosophy against Idealism.

In the sequel of this article, we will expose and criticize some recent texts by Michael J. Loux and Edward J. Lowe, in which they try to establish the nature and the possibility of metaphysics in the analytic conception. Thereafter, we will present our position, raising and discussing two fundamental characteristics that do not fit in the vision of contemporary ontologies, namely, the meaning of the term «meta», as discussed by Paul Gilbert in the article «*Permanência da metafísica*», and the existence of impregnable and genuinely transcendent

problems, which are the reason for metaphysical reflections and the origin of all theories, transcendent or immanent. In our conception, metaphysical problems necessarily involve dilemmas, paradoxes, and antinomies and can be understood in a new light based on Newton da Costa's conception of paraconsistency.

## § 2. The nature of metaphysics in analytic conception

Several books on the market bring an introduction, a chapter, or an item in a chapter, in which the nature and the possibility of metaphysics in the contemporary world are discussed<sup>3</sup>. On the one hand, the nature of metaphysics is identified with the investigation of the fundamental structure of reality; on the other hand, the establishment of its conditions of possibility is circumvented, as we will show in the §4. For us, it is an effort to make metaphysics palatable and acceptable, in a historical context and in a tradition in which the ideology of empirical and concrete science dictates the rules of what should be taken as true. This can be seen in attempts to associate research with supposedly safe, uncontroversial conceptions, in order to circumvent the bad will of our *Zeitgeist* with theories that transcend the empirical. In the aforementioned work, Lowe states that

Metaphysics is under assault from many sides, both from within the ranks of philosophers and from various external forces. Despite these attacks, metaphysics has been enjoying something of a revival amongst so-called analytic philosophers, after a barren period during which first logical positivism and then ordinary language philosophy prevailed, both of them hostile to metaphysical speculation. Analytic philosophers are no longer antipathetic to arguments concerning the nature of substance, the reality of universals or the existence of abstract entities. So we need to understand what can legitimate such inquiries and what epistemological status their conclusions can justifiably lay claim to. As a preliminary, we need to fix upon some reasonably uncontentious characterization of what metaphysics should be understood to have as its main concern (Lowe, 2001, pp. 1–2).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Laurence, Stephen and Macdonald, Cynthia (eds.) (1998). *Contemporary readings in the foundations of metaphysics*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell; Pestana, Mark (ed.) (2012). *Metaphysics*. Rijeka: In Tech; Loux, Michael J. (2006). *Metaphysics: a contemporary introduction*. Londres: Routledge; Loux, Michael J. and Zimmerman, Dean (2003). *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Lowe, Edward Jonathan (2001). *The possibility of metaphysics: substance, identity and time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Lowe, Edward Jonathan (2002). *A survey of metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In the same line of reasoning, Michael J. Loux dedicates the introduction of his book *Metaphysics: a contemporary introduction* to a historical reflection on the nature of metaphysics (2006, pp. 3–11). He observes that, throughout its more than 2000 years, metaphysics has been understood as the study of many different objects, carried out with different methods. In Aristotle's work, he states that we have at least two characterizations of metaphysics, namely, the science of the first causes and that of being *qua* being, which could not identify a single discipline. In his words, «But descriptive or normative, these characterizations give such different accounts of the subject matter and methodology appropriate to metaphysics that the neutral observer is likely to think that they must be characterizing different disciplines» (2006, p. 3). The investigation of the first causes would turn to God or Unmoved Mover, with the identification of a particular study object with a particular method. The investigation of being *qua* being, in turn, would be a universal science, which takes into consideration the objects of study of other sciences in its own way, that is, as beings or things that exist (2006, p. 4). In this last perspective, the Aristotelian study of the categories would resume the project of analytic ontology: «In discussing Aristotle's conception of metaphysics as a perfectly general discipline, I said that a central aim of such a discipline is the identification and characterization of the categories under which things fall. It would not be far off the mark to say this is what metaphysics as it is understood these days aims at» (Loux, 2006, p. 13).

Therefore, to establish the categories and relations that connect them with each other would be like providing a map of the structure of everything there is, and a complete metaphysical theory would be the one that offers a catalog of all the categories in which things subsume themselves and the relations between them. In Loux's words,

These are the highest or most general kinds under which things fall. What the metaphysician is supposed to do is to identify those highest kinds, to specify the features peculiar to each category, and to identify the relations that tie the different categories together; and by doing this, the metaphysician supposedly provides us with a map of the structure of all that there is (Loux, 2006, p. 4).

With the same convictions, Lowe criticizes various anti-metaphysical positions, as well as the descriptive metaphysics and the one that appeals to semantics, highlighting the insufficiency of all (2001, pp. 3–8). For him, too, metaphysics is restricted to the study of the fundamental structure of reality:

My view is that it is indeed possible: that is, I hold that it is possible to achieve reasonable answers to questions concerning the fundamental structure of reality — questions more fundamental than any that can be competently addressed by empirical science. But I do not claim that metaphysics *on its own* can, in general, tell us what *there is*. Rather — to a first approximation — I hold that metaphysics by itself only tells us what there could be [author's emphasis] (2001, pp. 9–10).

According to this, metaphysics should say what can exist, and empirical science will say what really exists, among all the alternative possibilities. In accordance with Lowe, natural science would presuppose metaphysics, since only through it the truth of scientific theories could be evaluated, that is, only through metaphysics could science determine what is actually real. There would be certain transcendental notions necessary to interpret what the experience says about reality, namely, the categories, as thought by Aristotle, but different from those of Kant. In Lowe's words, the categories are «[...] genuinely applicable to reality and not merely to our *thought* about reality. They are not categories of thought, but categories of *being*» [author's emphasis] (2001, p. 10).

In the article «Recent advances in metaphysics: ontological categories and categorial schemes», Lowe states that ontology is the «heart of metaphysics» and that theories on categories are examples of «science of being» (2014, p. 91). This text is interesting because in it we can appreciate the products from the promises of analytic ontology, that is, what it delivers as the heart of metaphysics and as the science of being *qua* being. Since reality is one and indivisible, says Lowe, only the study of categories can encompass it because empirical science can only portray parts of this reality. As he writes,

But the various portrayals of different parts of reality must, if they are all to be true, fit together to make a portrait which can be true of reality as a whole. No special science can arrogate to itself the task of rendering mutually consistent the various partial portraits: that task can alone belong to an overarching science of being, that is, to ontology. But we should not be misled by this talk of «portraits» of reality. The proper concern of ontology is not the portraits we construct of it, but reality itself [author's emphasis] (Lowe, 2014, p. 91).

According to Lowe, the task of ontology is divided into two parts, one *a priori* and the other *a posteriori*. The *a priori* part would investigate the realm of metaphysical possibility, seeking the kinds of things that can exist and coexist in the constitution of a single world. The empirical part would establish, based on the most successful scientific theories, which in fact exists in the present world (Lowe, 2014, p. 92). But, he states, there is a dependence of empirical science

on metaphysics, because, in his words, «We are in no position to be able to judge what kinds of things actually *do* exist, even in the light of the most scientifically well-informed experience, unless we can effectively determine what kinds of things *could* exist because empirical evidence can only be evidence for the existence of something which existence is antecedently possible» [author's emphasis] (Lowe, 2014, p. 92). In explaining what he understands by «kinds», Lowe states that it is the same that Aristotle calls «categories», and by «things» he wants to mean «entities» or «beings», in the more general sense of the term, but with the exception that it is about beings, not thoughts about beings.

Aiming to clarify what they are and which categories they are, Lowe supports the idea that they are hierarchically organized, and are detailed by distinct existence or conditions of the identity of their members (Lowe, 2014, p. 94). He exemplifies with the case of sets, which would be a subcategory of objects, that is, abstract objects which existence and identity would depend entirely on the existence and identity of their members. In his words, «And thus we see here too how the category of set is individuated in terms of the existence and identity conditions of the entities that belong to it» (Lowe, 2014, p. 94). The categories themselves would not be entities, that is, one could not think of categories of categories, but they would not be categories of thought either. According to Lowe, to say that they are categories of being does not mean to say that they are beings (2014, p. 94).

As a result, metaphysics would have progressed with the development of new theories and new arguments regarding existing categories and the hierarchical relations between them. Lowe states that three fundamental categories were then identified, namely, object or individual substance, universal and trope. The object would be a particular property bearer that would not be a property of anything else. A universal would be a property conceived as a «repeatable» entity, that is, as something that can be the property of different individuals, in different spaces and times. Finally, a trope would be a «non-repeatable» private property, which can be the property of only one object. Starting from these three categories, the discussions of contemporary ontologies would revolve around knowing the entities that correspond to them and the hierarchy between them: «Current ontological theories differ both over the question of the very existence of entities belonging to these three categories and over the question of which of the categories are fundamental» (Lowe, 2014, p. 98).

### § 3. Objections to the nature of metaphysics in analytic conception

The analytic conception merges two heterogeneous visions, namely that of the foundation for contemporary natural science and that of Aristotelian categories. By affirming that its research turns to being *qua* being, the analytic ontology claims Aristotle's inheritance without adhering to the foundation of his metaphysics. What is, in fact, the metaphysical vision that is at the base of the categories of analytic ontology? Is it possible to connect Aristotle and his «Primary Philosophy» to contemporary science? Can Aristotelian categories be detached from Aristotle's metaphysics in order to be associated with the «fundamental structure of reality» in the sense explained above? The negative answer to the last two questions is a truism of historical knowledge, so the mention of Aristotle seems to be a case of appeal to authority. Contemporary realism is replete of scientificism and positivism, a vision that cannot ignore centuries of development and transformation in the history of ideas to return, simply and immediately, to Aristotle's completely different realism. Because of this, we understand that it is necessary to discuss the cutout that analytic ontology performs in Aristotelian metaphysics, in order to show that it cannot do without the investigation of the first causes and the first principles and that, therefore, one project cannot be juxtaposed to another.

The studies of Aristotle's work have advanced a lot and achieved a great specialization today. The discussions are currently quite profound and based on accurate historical, philosophical, linguistic and philological questions. Without intending to go too far into these discussions, we will bring up some points that seem to contradict the pretension of using Aristotle's metaphysics as a basis of the contemporary ontological project. To do so, we will resort to some considerations of Aristotle in book *IV* (*Γ*) of *Metaphysics* and some classic commentators of the philosopher.

Aristotle presents «Primary Philosophy» as the science that unites research on the essence of substance, its causes, and the axioms and first principles of knowledge. According to him, the science of being *qua* being, which investigates the nature and attributes of substance, is the same that will focus on the first causes and the fundamental logical principles, with emphasis on the principle of non-contradiction. Aristotle has held that the being can be said in many ways, but they all refer to a central point, to something defined, which is the substance. As he writes,

in the same way, the being is also said in various ways, but everything that is a being is so-called in relation to a single principle. Actually, certain things are called beings because they are essences, others because they are affections of essence, others because they are paths to essence, or corruptions or privations or qualities or factors that produce or generate essence or some item that is said in relation to essence, or denials of some of these, or of essence. (Aristotle, Book IV, 103a 33).

Primary Philosophy is the science that is dedicated to the study of essences, on which depend the remaining attributes and relations of substance, and from which the study of its first causes and first principles cannot be separated. In Aristotle's words, «In all cases, science is preponderant of the first item, that is, of that on which others depend, and of that through which they are called. Now, if this is essence, the philosopher must hold principles and causes of essences» (Book IV, 103b 16). Therefore, in addition to substance, its causes and its attributes, Primary Philosophy must also consider principles and axioms of logical reasoning. In fact, in accordance with Aristotle, these principles are valid truths for all things because they relate to being *qua* being:

We must discern whether it is up to a single science, or distinct sciences, to study the so-called (in mathematics) axioms and the essence. It is evident that the research about them is under the responsibility of a single science: that of the philosopher; for they are attributed to all beings, and not peculiarly to one genus apart from others. And all men use them because they are attributed to the being *qua* being, and every genus is a being (Aristotle, Book IV, 105a 19).

The principle of non-contradiction is, in conformity with Aristotle, the most fundamental, which is at the basis of logical reasoning, because it relates directly to substances. This principle, as writes the philosopher, is the condition for dialogue and understanding since «[...] it is impossible something to be attributed and not to be attributed at the same time to the same subject, and according to the same aspect (consider delimited, in addition, everything we would add against argumentative contentions); [...]» (Book IV, 103b 16). The principle of non-contradiction is then the first axiom, the starting point of further axioms and all demonstrations, to the extent that one could not affirm or think contradictory things about the same substance, namely that it is and it is not, at the same time and in the same sense. Precisely for this reason, because of its relations with substance, the principle of non-contradiction would be the best established of all, according to Aristotle since «it is impossible to be and not to be simultaneously [...]» (Book IV, 1005b 35).

Aristotle differentiates in the beings what is essence and what is accident, or concomitant, and this difference is also at the basis of the principle of non-contradiction<sup>4</sup>. The being of the thing, which he understands in *Metaphysics* as «being *qua* being», can be seen in the following passage:

And denoting essence is to mean that the *being of the thing itself* is no other. But the *being of the thing* would be another if what precisely the *being for man is* were for it what precisely the *being a not-man is*, or what precisely *the not being man is*; consequently, it would be necessary for them to affirm that there is no such definition of anything, but that everything happens by concomitance; in fact, essence and concomitant are distinguished between each other in this: white happens as concomitant to man because he is, in fact, white, but it is not what precisely white is [author's emphasis] (Aristotle, Book IV, 1007a 20).

The principle of non-contradiction, as an axiom of knowledge, is also related to being as actuality and potentiality. According to Aristotle, from the point of view of being as potentiality, something could contain contradictory determinations simultaneously, but the being in actuality cannot. While it has not yet been concretely realized, a potentiality could perhaps be considered as being able to update itself in any of the possible opposite directions, but this, in fact, does not occur (Book IV, 1009a 30). Moreover, it is important to remember that the quintessentially object of the Primary Philosophy are the immovable, unbegun and incorruptible essences, among which are the Unmoved Mover, the intelligences and human reason.

For many years, Charles Kahn dedicated himself to the study of the verb «*einai*» and its relations with ancient Greek ontology. He focused the philological basis of Greek ontology, as he writes, on «[...] the raw material that has been provided for philosophical analysis by the ordinary use and meaning of the Greek verb *εἶναι*, “to be”» (Kahn, 1966/1997, p. 1). His researches revealed that there are several uses and meanings, in which the verb articulates the question of existence, the theorization on the proposition and the definition of the principles of true knowledge. The pre-philosophical use of the verb to be, according to Kahn, provides the basis for the formulation of ancient doctrines and concepts, including those of Aristotle. It is not necessary for us to go through all of Kahn's grammatical and linguistic discussions, nor the interpretative debates that they raise for researchers of Aristotle's work. What is

<sup>4</sup> For a defence that the principle of non-contradiction does not depend on essentialism, see Zingano, M. «Notas sobre o princípio de não contradição em Aristóteles». *Cadernos de História e Filosofia da Ciência*. Campinas, Série 3, v. 13, n. 1, p. 7-32, jan-jun., 2003.

interesting to us is to highlight the arbitrariness that means transpose a vague and unexplained contemporary idea of «being *qua* being» to the Greek way of thinking about being.

In this sense, Kahn presents some distinctions that the contemporary worldview realizes in the meaning of the verb «to be» and that are not present in the Greek language, among which is the differentiation between predication and existence, which has become a unanimity for current thinkers. In Kahn's words, «It is not that the Greeks lack this notion of existence, but rather that they lack our sense of the distinction of existence in relation to the essence, or in relation to the being–so of fact and predication. This is true not only for metaphysicians but also (as we have seen) for a commonsense philosopher as Protagoras». (1966/1997, p. 26). According to this researcher, it was precisely this indiscriminate use of the verb that allowed Greek metaphysicians to ask the question of being by relating truth, reality, fact, and existence to the more general question «What is Being? That is, What is the object of true discourse, the basis of true discourse?» (1966/1997, p. 27)<sup>5</sup>.

In *Aristotle*, David Ross explains that the philosopher is interested, in *Metaphysics*, in the knowledge that he understands as the most important of all, that is, wisdom (1995, pp. 162–193). This knowledge would be superior to a simple memory, experience, and art, for its specific characteristic of being based on pure knowledge of causes, especially the most universal causes. As Ross writes,

"Wisdom" must be not only science or knowledge of causes but knowledge of the first and most universal causes. For this satisfies most completely the criteria of wisdom we should naturally use. It is the most comprehensive knowledge; the knowledge of what is hardest to know, since its objects, being the most universal, are the farthest from sense, the most precise knowledge since its objects are the most abstract, the least complex; the most instructive; the most self-contained or independent; and the most authoritative, since it will be *inter alia* knowledge of the final cause of all things [author's emphasis] (Ross, 1995, p. 162).

According to Ross, the first fundamental question that guides Aristotelian metaphysics, and to which the philosopher answers affirmatively, is whether it can exist as a unique supreme science, capable of explaining the nature of the universe, based on the principle of non-contradiction and of excluded middle. In accordance with Aristotle, metaphysics would relate to the broader notions of

<sup>5</sup> For more on Kahn's studies, see Kahn, Charles, H. (2003). *The verb "be" in ancient greek*. With a new introductory essay. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett.

unity and good, insofar as Ross says, «‘Being’ and ‘unity’ are terms standing above the distinction of categories and applicable in every category. To these we must add ‘good’; but ‘good’ is not on quite the same footing. It is applicable in every category, but not to everything that is; Aristotle’s view is rather that ‘good and evil’ is an opposition which may be found within each category» [author’s emphasis] (Ross, 1995, p. 164). Moreover, the substance object of metaphysics is the being in the fullest sense, which has a separate existence and is free of change, so that researching the being *qua* being is the study of substance understood in this sense:

[...] if there is any unchangeable substance, the study of it will be first philosophy, and universal just because it is first. In studying the primary kind of being, metaphysics studies being as such. The true nature of being is exhibited not in that which can exist only as an element in a concrete whole, nor in that which is infected by potentiality and change, but only in that which is both substantial and unchangeable (Ross, 1995, p. 164).

Aristotle’s second fundamental question, according to Ross, is whether there are non-sensitive substances other than sensitive ones and which are their types. Aristotle denies that the universals are separate and outside the world entities, denying with this the existence of platonic forms and mathematical objects. However, for the philosopher, God, the intelligences that move the universe and human reason, would exist as non-sensitive substances. In Ross’s words: «There is in the first place God, the unmoved mover of the universe, and in the second place the intelligences which, moved by God, move the planetary spheres. And thirdly he indicates that the human reason (or the ‘active’ element in it) is, on the death of the individual, capable of existing apart from anybody» [author’s emphasis] (1995, p. 167). In this sense, the highest science of all is theology, because it refers to the autonomous and immutable substance.

In fact, in the context of *Metaphysics*, substance is presented as the most important category, prior to all others. Together with its qualities, the essence of substance is formed by its totality. Genus and species would be second substances, universals, without existence apart, because they are dependent on individual beings. As Ross explains,

A qualityless substance is as impossible as a quality which does not presuppose a substance. The substance is the whole thing, including the qualities, relations, etc., which form its essence, and this *can* exist apart. It implies qualities but these are not something outside it which it needs in addition to itself. A quality on the other hand is an abstraction which can exist only in a substance. Obviously, if this is his meaning, Aristotle is thinking of substance as the *individual thing* [author’s emphasis] (Ross, 1995, pp. 172–173).

And what is knowing substance? The distinction between matter and form helps to understand what it means to know the essential nature of a substance. About this point, Ross states that Aristotle «[...] proceeds to enquire what it is in individual substances that makes them substances — whether it is matter, or form (or essence). This opposition, and that of potentiality to actuality, form the leading features of Aristotle’s metaphysics». (1995, p. 174). Thus, all the objects that compose the world would be complexly formed by matter and form and there are different proportions of each one in different objects. Some would have more form and less matter, like celestial spheres, and others would have more matter than form, like terrestrial objects. The layers of matter that are present in individual substances would correspond to degrees of potentiality, understood as the possibility of suffering a change in four directions: generation and corruption, change of location, change of quality and size (Ross, 1995, pp. 174 and 184–185). The form would be constituted of combinations of characteristics, which would compose the center of the individuals where it appears (Ross, 1995, 176), and the pure form would be found when abstracting all matter, including extension. The Aristotelian world, in this way, is hierarchized, from the simplest and most material terrestrial objects to the Unmoved Mover, which moves the universe through love and desire (Ross, 1995, pp. 185–192). The highest stages are then human reason, intelligence, and divine substance:

Finally, in man, the most highly organized or formed of the animals, there is superadded a form which is not the principle of the structure of the body or of any part of it, uses no bodily organ and can survive the body. This is the reason, or, more precisely, the active reason — that mysterious entity that supports the thinking of the passive reason. One stage higher come to the intelligences which move the planetary spheres — pure substances not united with the body at all but operating on their respective spheres *ab extra*. And highest of all is the pure substance which is God (Ross, 1995, p. 176).

Therefore, knowing substance is knowing its form, which Aristotle associates with causes or finalities. The essence is what makes things what they are, precisely because the form originates the substance providing its cause or finality. It is important to add that form is never in potentiality, but always in act, and that it is the final cause that represents the ultimate explanation of substance. In Ross’s words,

It is the answer to the question ‘why?’, e.g. ‘why does it thunder?’ or ‘why do these bricks and stones make a house?’ In all such cases we are looking for a cause which is — to speak

abstractly — the essence but is in some cases, as in that of a house (or generally of *artefacta*), the end to be subserved, and in some (as in that of thunder) the moving cause. Our question always is, what makes the matter into a particular thing? The answer is, the presence of the essence of the particular thing, which is not another element in the thing alongside of its material elements, nor anything compounded out of elements. This it is that makes certain elements into flesh and certain others into a syllable [author's emphasis] (Ross, 1995, p. 178).

In the classic text «Logic and metaphysics in some earlier works of Aristotle», G. E. L. Owen explains how logical studies shaped the philosopher's view of nature and the possibility of the science of being *qua* being (1960/1986, p. 180). Owen discusses the widespread conception that after disconnecting himself from the Platonic project of metaphysics, Aristotle would have devoted himself to the departmental sciences, among them theology, having then discarded transcendent forms. His studies brought to light that, differently, when the philosopher wrote the book *IV* of *Metaphysics*, he returned to a project of general metaphysics in the Platonic sense (Owen, 1960/1986, p. 181). In Owen's words, «Seen in this perspective the kind of inquiry that is introduced in the fourth book of the *Metaphysics* looks more like a revival of sympathy with Plato's aims (or what Aristotle took to be those aims) than like a new departure from them» (1960/1986, p. 181). Aristotle's basic concern would have been to solve logical questions of the ambiguity of words, in the different uses they could have in categories, such as the meanings of «being» and «good» in distinct categories. Thus, the purpose of book *IV* would have been to point out the focus of all those senses, the common element to which they all refer (1960/1986, pp. 182–183).

Owen asserts that Aristotle solved the problems concerning the ambiguity of the senses of «being» in book *IV* with the ideas of logical priority of substance and of recognition of the focal meaning (Owen, 1960/1986, p. 185). The argument in book *IV* would be based on the logical ordering between the different categories and different senses of «being» (Owen, 1960/1986, p. 185–186). As this author writes,

The claim of *IV* that «being» is an expression with focal meaning is a claim that statements about non-substances can be reduced to — translated into — statements about substances; and it seems to be a corollary of this theory that non-substances cannot have matter or form of their own since they are no more than the logical shadows of substance (1044b8–11) (Owen, 1960, p. 192).

In that sense, the investigation about substance will be the investigation about

everything that exists, including non-substances, which will be referred, as their attributes, to substances. In short, in Owen's words,

To explain what it is for there to *be* qualities or relations one must explain what it is for to *be* (in a prior sense) substances having qualities and relations. And from this Aristotle concludes at once that there *is* a single science of being *qua* being, and this is universal in scope and not another departmental inquiry [author's emphasis] (Owen, 1960/1986, p. 183).

Finally, Jonathan Barnes presents an interesting discussion in the text «Metaphysics», published in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*. In this text, Barnes mentions the wide modern debate on whether Aristotle would have professed a general or specific discipline, which would focus on all beings or only on the divine beings (Barnes, 1995/1999 / p.106). According to him, it is false to say that Aristotle changed his mind and embraced one perspective, then another. In his words,

For in Book Epsilon he makes it quite clear that he holds both views at once — he sees that there is a difficulty in his position, and he thinks he has a solution. Here's the solution: «... if there are no substances other than those formed by nature, then natural science will be the primary science; but if there are immovable substances, the science which investigates them must be prior and it must be primary philosophy; and it is universal inasmuch as it is primary. And it will be its task to consider beings *qua* being — both what they are and the attributes which belong to them *qua* being» (Barnes, 1995/1999/ p.106).

As can be seen, treating Aristotle's metaphysics as a separate theory of categories is completely arbitrary. In fact, in this procedure is implied a judgment about all the rest of Aristotelian thought exposed in the other books of *Metaphysics*.

Returning to the objection to which we started this section, we understand that analytic ontology deviates from Aristotelian metaphysics in a crucial way. The true foundation of its categories theories is the contemporary natural science, from which they draw their usefulness (Lowe, 2014, p. 105). Being useful to natural science is, after all, all the role reserved to metaphysics, and for this reason it is identified with an ontology that would serve only for physical objects. In fact, it is very difficult to imagine how Biology and Chemistry can subsume their study subjects under the analytic categories of object, property and trope. Lowe states: «That *some* metaphysical framework is necessary for the success of that enterprise and that its formulation is not the business of any special science, but only that of the general science of being, or ontology, I

hope to be by now beyond dispute» [author's emphasis] (2014, p. 109). However, as it is well known, contemporary natural science is the result of developments initiated with the reaction to the influence of Catholic Church and Aristotelianism in the investigation of nature, as of the Scientific Revolution from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The vision of nature and method was radically transformed, among other things, by the elimination of the final causes and essences of scientific research. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that analytic ontology is placed as the propaedeutic of natural science, and that it excludes the causes and principles from its categories theories. In fact, the project of analytic ontology and contemporary natural science is completely symmetrical. From another perspective, it is totally averse to Aristotelian metaphysics, because it excludes from it, to say the least, God, the intelligences and human reason. From *ancilla theologiae*, in the Middle Ages, metaphysics becomes *ancilla scientiæ*, in contemporaneity.

Although they are not exhaustive or very detailed, we believe that the considerations made above are enough to exhibit that the project and results of the analytic metaphysics are completely heterodox with respect to those of Aristotle<sup>6</sup>. But since the Aristotelian world cannot serve as foundation for it, it remains to be explained what is the status of contemporary categories. Lowe claims that they are not entities, nor thoughts about entities. What is the «being» of the categories then? In what way do they differ from a mere empiric concept like any other? It is not enough to simply state that they are categories of «being» that refer to what is real, and not merely to thoughts. It is necessary to explain what reality is and what being real is. Then, one must demonstrate how the categories express real beings in themselves.

#### §4. The possibility of metaphysics in the analytic conception and some objections

In the movement of refounding metaphysics there is also a reference to its conditions of possibility. The analytic philosophers insist, as already mentioned, that their ontology does not refer to the concepts we have of beings, but to the beings themselves. It was expected that there would be, then, a discussion of the ways that we have at our disposal and that give us direct access to things as they are in themselves. The Kantian legacy and Idealism are rejected, but there is no

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the notions of substance and essence in Aristotle, see Angioni, Lucas. (2008). *As noções aristotélicas de substância e essência: o livro VII da Metafísica de Aristóteles*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp; Aubenque, Pierre. (1977). *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote*. Paris: PUF.

new critique of reason, no analysis of intellectual faculties that would justify the assertion that Kant was wrong and that we can know things as they are. The strategy used is to point out what are considered to be weaknesses of a position attributed to Kant, a caricatured position that does not correspond to Kantian idealism. That is why we state before that the discussion of the conditions of the possibility of metaphysics is circumvented.

In *The possibility of metaphysics*, Lowe identifies Kant's analysis of reason with a position he calls neokantism. It is noteworthy that Lowe treats both as if they could be exchanged, when in fact what he is attacking is rather a debatable interpretation of the results of Kant's criticism of dogmatic metaphysics. This deceptive procedure has allowed Kant's thought to be identified with a naive and unsustainable conception, which does not justify the historical importance of this philosopher. About this point, Lowe writes:

The third response to our question 'How is metaphysics possible?' is, unlike the first two, genuinely philosophical, drawing its inspiration from Kant—whence I call it *neo-Kantian*. According to this view, metaphysics does not and cannot tell us anything about objective reality 'as it is in itself' if indeed the notion of such a reality even makes sense. But it *can* tell us something about certain fundamentally necessary features of our *thought* about reality. For instance, it may be able to establish that we must think of the objects of perception as being situated in space and time and as being related causally to one another—perhaps because, as Kant himself held, a recognition of ourselves as self-conscious beings whose thoughts and experiences are ordered in time requires us to make reference to such a world of perceptible objects [author's emphasis] (Lowe, 2001, pp. 5–6).

Loux, in turn, claims that Kant criticized Aristotelian metaphysics and the rationalist of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries for trying to go beyond the limit of possible experience and answer questions that they would not actually be able to answer. So, to transcendent metaphysics, Kant would have opposed critical metaphysics, understood as follows:

Critical metaphysics, he tells us, is a perfectly respectable, legitimate enterprise. Whereas transcendent metaphysics seeks to characterize a reality that transcends sense experience, critical metaphysics has as its task the delineation of the most general features of our thought and knowledge. It seeks to identify the most general concepts at work in our representation of the world, the relationships that obtain among those concepts, and the presuppositions of their objective employment. The project set by critical metaphysics is precisely the project Kant takes himself to be carrying out when he gives us his own account of the conditions for human knowledge (Loux, 2006, p. 8).

Thus, Kant's critique of the limits and possibilities of pure reason would have resulted in a conception according to which what metaphysicians can legitimately do is investigate the conceptual structure that we use to describe the world. And this structure according to Loux consists of a unified body of representations, which constitute an image of how things are, a story that has a typical structure, organized into very general concepts regulated by principles of framing (Loux, 2006, p.8). As he writes, «Kant's conception of a metaphysical enterprise which task it is to identify and characterize the most general features of our thought and experience is one that continues to find defenders in our own times. These philosophers tell us that metaphysics is a descriptive enterprise which aim is the characterization of our *conceptual scheme* or *conceptual framework*» (Loux, 2006, p. 8). Kantian idealism is also identified with a «*conceptual scheme*» for which the only real would be certain «stories» that human beings build. Critical metaphysics would be the investigation of the structure of the description we make of the world.

Loux criticizes this conception stating that it is evidently false, inasmuch as, by admitting the conceptual scheme, one must necessarily admit, at the same time, the existence of the beings who tell these stories, that is, the existence of something beyond the stories themselves (Loux, 2006, pp. 9–10). From another perspective, he continues, to deny that the world can be known in its reality would imply denying, for the same reasons, that the conceptual scheme about the world can be so. He points to the deepest lesson to be learned:

But traditional metaphysicians will insist that there is a deeper moral here. That moral is that there is something self-defeating in the conceptual schemer's account of conceptual representation. If the conceptual schemer is correct in claiming that the activity of conceptual representation bars us from an apprehension of anything we seek to represent, then why should we take seriously the schemer's claims about conceptual representation? (Loux, 2006, p. 10).

Similarly, Lowe understands that Kantian philosophy results in the assertion that we have access to our own thinking about reality, but not reality itself. And Lowe states one falls into contradiction when one thinks one can say something about our conceptual scheme, at the same time that one does not admit the reality of the one who possesses his own scheme and that is part of reality (Lowe, 2001, p. 6). In his words,

For *we*, if we are anything, are part of reality ourselves, as are our thoughts, so that to purport to make claims about allegedly necessary features of *our thoughts* while

simultaneously denying that anything is being claimed about the nature of 'reality' is to contradict oneself. Trying to make metaphysics safe by drawing in its horns in this way is an exercise which is doomed to failure [author's emphasis] (Lowe, 2001, p. 6).

These would be the reasons why we should admit that Idealism is false and that things are accessible in themselves. There are, however, two main problems with these ideas. First, there is a reduction of Kant's conception of metaphysics to a «conceptual scheme» that does not correspond to his thinking. With this, the Kantian argument is transformed into a scarecrow<sup>7</sup>, so that its refutation appears as a substitute for a demonstration of the possibility of metaphysics and of direct access to things themselves. Secondly, there are flaws in the reasoning that contests the vision falsely attributed to Kant.

Regarding the first problem, at first, it calls attention to the fact that «concept» in Kant's metaphysics and the notion of «conceptual scheme» are not equivalent. Metaphysics, according to Kant, is formulated with synthetic *a priori* judgments that refer to the pure concepts of understanding and reason. The concepts to which Loux and Lowe refer appear in «stories» that human beings tell about the world, in descriptions, therefore, are abstractions of empirical contents and not conditions of possibility of experience. Consequently, what Kant understands by metaphysics and what he does by the way of metaphysics is something very different from pointing out general concepts present in the descriptions of the empirical world. In the preface of the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, he exposes as clearly as possible what he understands by metaphysics:

For it is nothing but the inventory of everything we know for pure reason, systematically organized. Nothing here can escape from us, because what reason produces completely from itself cannot hide itself, but must have brought to light by reason itself, once its common principle has been discovered. The perfect unit of this kind of knowledge, in fact arising from the highest pure concepts, without anything of experience or even a simple intuition that may lead to a determined experience, have an influence upon it to increase or multiply it, makes this unconditioned integrality not only possible but necessary (Kant, 1781/1903, XX25–30).

<sup>7</sup> In the introduction of his work *Kant et le pouvoir de juger. Sensibilité et discursivité dans l'Analytique transcendentale de la Critique de la raison pure*, Béatrice Longuenesse also draws attention to this procedure, which seems to be standardized among analytic philosophers: "Instead of accepting to follow Kant in the field that is his, very often arguments of astonishing fragility, and even frankly unsustainable, are attributed to him, such as the famous «*non sequitur of numbing grossness*» denounced by Strawson regarding the *Second analogy of experience*," p. 13.

It is a fact already quite detailed that Kant starts from the reality of synthetic knowledge *a priori* in pure mathematics and physics, and researches the structures and intellectual conditions that make its existence possible. In his study of the human knowledge issue, he exposed the minutiae of the mechanism by which the intellect transforms sensory data, without form or unit, into objective cognition of the world, that is, the activity by which objects themselves are constructed. It is important not to lose sight, therefore, of the fact that Kantian philosophy does not turn to concepts extracted from experience, to abstractions made from contents known *a posteriori*, but to *a priori* mechanisms of construction of real and ideal world. In this sense, Ernst Cassirer states, in *The problem of knowledge*:

The content of the Kantian doctrine is not formed by the self nor by its relations with external objects since it deals primarily with the laws and the logical structure of *experience*. The objects, both «inner» and «outer», do not exist in themselves and by themselves, but are born in us in the process of experience. This process must be understood, developing its norms and rules before one can say a word about the being of things [author's emphasis] (Cassirer, 2000, p. 613).

Kant himself emphasizes that metaphysics is absolutely not about the decomposition of pure concepts *a priori*, what will he say then about unveiling the structure of abstract concepts of experience, of stories that human beings tell? In his words:

3. In metaphysics, even if it is considered to be a simple attempt, but seen as an indispensable science according to the nature of human reason, there must be synthetic *a priori* judgments. And it has nothing to do with merely decompose, in order to analytically explain them, the concepts that we create *a priori* of things; but, yes, we want to broaden our knowledge *a priori*, for which we must use principles that can add to the concept due to something that was not contained in it, and by synthetic, *a priori* judgments go so far that not even the experience itself can follow us. For instance, in the sentence: the world must have a first beginning, etc. And so, metaphysics consists of pure *a priori* propositions, at least in its ends. (Kant, 1787/1904, B18)

In accordance with Kant, metaphysics is possible as a critique of the faculty of reason, precisely what he calls critical and propaedeutic metaphysics, and as a system of all knowledge derived from pure reason (Kant, 1787/1904, B869). In the first case, what it does is to investigate the limits and possibilities of reason with respect to pure knowledge. In the second case, it covers the metaphysics of nature and the metaphysics of morals and has to elucidate the pure knowledge

that governs what it is, in the natural world, and the pure principles that determine what it should be, in morality. It is important to stress here that even in cases of the metaphysics of nature and morals, Kant does not refer to conceptual schemes, to stories we tell about the universe or human life, but to principles of pure reason that conform experience, principles *a priori*. Therefore, the conception of metaphysics that arises from this cannot be associated with something like a conceptual framework. In Kant's words,

Metaphysics is divided into the speculative and practical use of pure reason and is then metaphysics of nature or metaphysics of morals. It contains all the principles of pure reason, derived from simple concepts (therefore excluding mathematics) of the theoretical knowledge of all things; it contains the principles that determine *a priori* to do and not to do and make them necessary (Kant, 1787/1904, B870).

For these reasons, it makes no sense to attempt to refute Kant with attacks to conceptual schemes. With this procedure, the Kantian argument about the impossibility of knowing things as they are in themselves is not touched, not even from afar.

But there is still the second problem we have indicated above, concerning the failure of reasoning which contests the false view attributed to Kant. Loux and Lowe affirm, on the one hand, that admitting the conceptual scheme necessarily leads to the admission that there is something beyond the stories themselves, that is, the beings who tell them. On the other hand, they affirm that denying that the world can be known in itself would imply to deny, in the same way, that the conceptual scheme can be known in itself. As for the first point, if it is true that the only things that exist are stories about the world, nothing prevents that the beings that tell the stories being stories. It is paradoxical, but it is not contradictory or impossible. In the admission of the contradiction pointed out by Loux and Lowe there is a series of assumptions that do not need to be accepted by those who maintain that the only thing that exists are stories about the world. As for the second point, one must consider that, in knowledge about the world, there is a relation between the subject and the object mediated by the intellect, and what is discussed in Idealism is exactly the legitimacy of this mediation. Therefore, denying that the world can be known in itself and in a completely diaphanous way has no relation with denying that the conceptual scheme can be known in itself. The conceptual scheme, whether or not it refers to something outside the subject, can always be known in itself: it is what it is, because is immediate to the subject.

In addition to the criticism to Kant, Lowe also tries to substantiate the

possibility of metaphysics by another method, in the first chapter of *The possibility of metaphysics*, which is totally dedicated to the discussion of this point. In this text, he states that metaphysics is possible as a study of the fundamental structure of reality, but it cannot say what exists. This answer is reserved for natural science, which should point out, among the various alternative metaphysics, which one actually explains what exists. But science can only say what exists after metaphysics says what there may exist. In Lowe's words,

The point is that although what is actual must for that very reason be possible, experience alone cannot determine what is actual, in the absence of a metaphysical delimitation of the possible. In short, metaphysics itself is possible — indeed necessary — as a form of rational human inquiry because the metaphysical possibility is an inescapable determinant of actuality (Lowe, 2001, p. 9).

Lowe then explains that he will research a link between the possibility of metaphysics and the metaphysical possibility. However, his argument is unusual because it unites two very different notions of possibility, and by mixing them he commits the *quaternio terminorum* fallacy. In the first place, he affirms that natural science will choose, among different possible metaphysics, the one that corresponds to the real world: the possibility here is construction of different metaphysical systems. Secondly, the metaphysical possibility is presented as the determination of what is possible in concrete reality, without which the experience itself cannot say what is real. On the one hand, natural science has at its disposal several different metaphysical systems, each one presenting its possible entities, among which scientists will choose after research the one that best suits the empirical studies. On the other hand, metaphysics is the determinant of the effective reality, that is, it is necessary to present before what science, only after, would say is real. Therefore, it is not clear if it is the science that determines the correct metaphysics by choosing it, or if it is metaphysics that determines what science will have to take for real. In the first case, the existence of different theories about the categories will be a favorable point for science, because it will be able to choose whatever it wants. In the last case, differently, the existence of different theories on the categories will be an additional problem for science because it will deal with an object concretely determined in multiple ways. In fact, as it is evident, the metaphysical possibility of the empirical world, in the sense that objects can exist, does not imply the possibility of a metaphysical theory.

But, Lowe continues, the domain of metaphysical possibility must be explored before any effective truth can be legitimized in experience since

empirical sciences presuppose metaphysics<sup>8</sup>. The metaphysical possibility is the possibility of a state of things or similar notions such as object, property, relationship, among others (Lowe, 2001, pp. 9–10). They are transcendental notions because they do not derive from experience, but rather they are used to say what is in experience. He warns:

This is not, however, to say that the applicability of a given category to reality can, in general, be determined wholly *a priori* — only its *possible* applicability may be thus determinable. For instance, we may not be able to establish *a priori* that there actually are any *substances*, only that there *could* be. Only by recourse to experience, perhaps, can we have reason to believe that there *are* [author's emphasis] (Lowe, 2001, p. 10).

As one can easily perceive, possibility means here virtuality, eventuality, not the condition that makes possible an object. However, if one does not use *a priori* concepts to say what is possible in the experience, one does not actually establish the possibility of an object; what one does is only to list abstract concepts, extracted from experience and contingent. In this way, how to maintain that not being *a priori*, they are transcendental notions that do not derive from experience and on which experience itself depends? The refusal of Kant's philosophy leads to such an unusual conception, in which the terms of the inquiry founded by this philosopher on the limits and possibilities of metaphysics are placed but, at the same time, it becomes evident that the issues involved in it are not understood. At this point, we have to state again with Otto Liebmann: «*Also muß auf Kant zurückgegangen werden*» (1912, *passim*) From another perspective, in what sense is this metaphysics transcendent? In fact, it is completely immanent to the empirical world understood in the specific sense of contemporary natural science. This brings an additional difficulty to Loux and Lowe to explain the metaphysical status of analytic categories and how access to the thing itself happens. As a corollary of the above, Lowe affirms that, from a rigorous point of view, it is evident that the possibility and the metaphysical necessity are inter-definable (Lowe, 2001, p. 13). Nevertheless, he does not

<sup>8</sup> This argument is unusual, for the naivety with which it conceives the relations between science and metaphysics. Some classic works of the Philosophy of Contemporary Science, among them *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and *The essential tension: selected studies in scientific tradition and change*, by Thomas Kuhn, are enough to convince that scientific research is complexly influenced by several sociological, historical, philosophical and even psychological factors. Especially interesting is the essay «The Historical Structure of Scientific Discovery», contained in the last mentioned work, in which Kuhn brings out the cumulative character of the processes and historical interactions involved in scientific research and discovery. There is nothing in the History of Science nor in the Philosophy of Science that endorses a thesis like Lowe's one.

inform how nor why.

## § 5. Greek term «meta» and transcendent problems

In Paul Gilbert's article «Permanência da metafísica», there are very interesting ideas about what metaphysics means and a critique of the analytic view. In this text, Gilbert writes that «The analytic philosophy — which origin, today already distant, is recognized in the neo-positivism of the Vienna Circle, has abandoned the anti-metaphysical vision of the that circle. However, it remains attentive to the superior rights of experience, no longer purely sensible, but of a common language» (2016, pp. 167). Claiming a long heritage that would go back to Aristotle, the analytic philosophers added to ontology a scientific view and an intention to promote progress in metaphysics. The ontological research method takes on the features of contemporary scientific research, thoroughly done in collaboration with disciplined languages and technical formalisms: «The analytic philosophy consequently submits itself to the winning model of doing science today» (Gilbert, 2016, p. 168). Regarding the content, metaphysics is reduced to ontology.

Gilbert raises awareness of the differences between the concepts of ontology and metaphysics. Ontology would be a certain description of the world, the one that would allow us to know the existing things in a very abstract and therefore vague and imprecise way (Gilbert, 2016, p. 161). As this author states, the term was created at the emergence of modern sciences and, in his words,

«Analytic ontology is intended to be descriptive and defines itself by inspiration from Aristotelian enunciation: “ontology is the doctrine that studies the being *qua* being and its essential properties”<sup>9</sup>. It should be remembered that the term “ontology” is from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and that, therefore, the authors of the definition transcribed here read Aristotle with decidedly modern eyes» [author's emphasis] (Gilbert, 2016, pp. 161–162).

The term «metaphysics», in turn, although often confused with ontology, has another history and meaning. In Aristotle, metaphysics deals with realities that are not physical, that go beyond the physical world, so its task is always ambiguous between the study of being *qua* being and the investigation of intelligible beings, among them, God (Gilbert, 2016, p. 163). As Gilbert explains,

<sup>9</sup> Gilbert quotes in this passage the work Runggaldier, E.; Kanzian, C. (2002). *Problemi fondamentali dell'ontologia analitica: cura di S. Galvan*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero. Note that the authors use exactly the same formulation of Loux and Lowe.

The ontology considers our discourse or *logos* about what it is and its most essential structures. In turn, metaphysics considers what is transcendent, «meta» to physics. It is obvious that there is a continuity between the two directions — we cannot reap what is (metaphysics) without some means of intelligibility (ontology); a category of reason (ontology) without corresponding reality (metaphysics) would be empty. However, it is convenient to distinguish the two tasks that arise from two levels of knowledge: ontological forms are not, by themselves, indicative of real things. Therefore, metaphysics supposes the overcoming of ontology, that is, «the» end of ontology [author's emphasis] (Gilbert, 2016, pp. 163–164).

The preposition «meta», in «metaphysics», was initially referred to what comes after physics and found an echo in Aristotelian epistemology, according to which knowledge starts from the sensible experience and then goes on to the intelligible. The intelligible objects, those that are separate and immobile, would, therefore, be the objects of metaphysics quintessentially. In this sense, the meaning of «meta» refers to a movement of differentiation, of detachment from physical reality, giving the objects of metaphysics a different status because they «come out» of that. This meaning can be referred to three aspects: «after», already exposed above, «with» and «over». «Over» refers to the Platonic project that illustrates, in a spatial sense, the Aristotelian «after» (Gilbert, 2016, p. 170). «With», in turn, also brings internally the same aspect of differentiation as the other two prepositions. In Gilbert's view, to the extent that this is ignored, the vigor of metaphysical thought is lost, constituted by the synthetic presence of thought in his analytical constructions (Gilbert, 2016, p. 172). In his words, «The activity of reflection supposes a prior taking of distance, an exile of the mind from the immediate data. The absolute originality of metaphysics comes from this very human capacity to place oneself at a distance, to be free, and, moreover, to be open to values, to God — however, the reflection about it would give rise to another discourse» (Gilbert, 2016, p. 172).

The conception we defend harmonizes with Gilbert's one, although it cannot be entirely derived from it. We approach metaphysics from the points of view of its foundation and its History and present a possibility of interpretation of its problems. From the perspective of its foundation, we draw inspiration from Kant's formulations regarding the pure reason and his inclination to search for the unconditioned. In relation to the history of metaphysics, our vision approaches Charles Renouvier, for whom it is the realization of the antinomies of pure reason and necessarily presents itself as the exhibition of dilemmas, aporias, contradictions, and paradoxes. As a possibility of interpretation of these problems, we understand that a different and prolific

way is found in the development of the paraconsistent logics, formulated by the Brazilian thinker Newton da Costa.

According to Kant, the reason is responsible for the highest unity of intuition and performs two distinct activities. The first is formal, merely logical, in which it carries out mediate inferences, independently of the content of knowledge. He explains the way in which reason operates its reasoning<sup>10</sup>, in a process in which it aims to reduce and unify the diversity of understanding to a minimum number of rules and principles. The second activity of reason is transcendental, to the extent that it contains concepts and principles of its own, and also produces concepts from itself. In this last sense, Kant defines it as the faculty of principles, understood as that which enables the knowledge of the particular in the universal and the unification of phenomena through rules (Kant, 1787/1904, B355). In both perspectives, therefore, the reason is not concerned with objects but is destined to shape the understanding of them based on certain logical and transcendental principles, by which the ordering of the knowledge of understanding and the hierarchization of rules are given. As Kant writes,

If understanding can be defined as the faculty of unifying phenomena by means of rules, then the reason is the faculty of unifying the rules of understanding under principles. Therefore, it is never directly addressed to the experience nor any object, but to understanding, to provide *a priori*, through concepts, to the diverse knowledge of that faculty, a unity, which may be called the unity of reason, and it is of a totally different type than the one which may be realized by understanding (Kant, 1787/1904, B359).

The activity of reason can be summarized from a more radical perspective to the search for the general rule to subsume the reasoning condition of the conclusion, in its own reasoning. In this process, it is led, from condition to condition, to search for the unconditioned to the conditioned knowledge of understanding, by which unity is completed (Kant, 1787/1904, B364). Thus, according to Kant, it is a principle of reason to admit that the conditioned implies the whole unconditioned series of conditions, a principle that should be understood as synthetic, since the conditioned has as reference its condition, but never the unconditioned. Moreover, from this principle, other *a priori* synthetic propositions could be derived, based on the distinction between the conditioned and the unconditioned. The maximum principle of reason is, therefore, strictly transcendental, to the extent that it never applies directly to

<sup>10</sup> See Kant, 1787/1904, B360-362.

phenomena (Kant, 1787/1904, B365). Therefore, the concepts of reason are transcendental ideas that are not limited to experience, since the knowledge to which they refer postulates the totality of possible experience, which experience can never offer. In Kant's words,

The concepts of reason serve to *comprehend* [*begreifen*], like those of understanding to *understand* (the perceptions). If those contain the unconditioned, they involve something to which all experience belongs, but which in itself is never the object of experience: something to which reason leads in its conclusions from experience, and according to which it evaluates and measures the degree of its empirical use, but which never becomes a member of the empirical synthesis [author's emphasis] (Kant, 1787/1904, B368).

In the case of the understanding, Transcendental Analytic presented the logical form of reasoning as to the source of pure concepts *a priori*, responsible for the synthetic unit that allows the representation and empirical knowledge of objects<sup>11</sup>. In the case of reason, too, it is the logical form of reasoning that applies to the synthetic unit of intuition, originating pure concepts of reason, or transcendental ideas, that determine the use of understanding in relation to the whole experience. In fact, in deductive reasoning reason infers, from a universal proposition, the major premise, and from a particular proposition, the minor premise, the subsumed case, that is, the conclusion. The understanding, in this process, provides the rule and the series of conditions in which the given cases will be framed: for example, the premises «Every compound is changeable» and «Bodies are composed» are the conditions for the inference of «Every bodies are changeable», as a conclusion (Kant, 1787/1904, B387). In this reasoning, the series can be extended infinitely both in the direction of the conditions and in the direction of the conditioned. In the first case, which Kant calls chain or series of pro-syllogisms (*per prosyllogismus*), the conditioned is given as the conclusion of the ascending series of conditions, so that it must be assumed that all members of the series were given (Kant, 1787/1904, B388). Only by assuming that all the premises are given, it will be possible to realize the reasoning that subsumes *a priori* a condition to a rule. In the second case, the descending series of reasoning, or epi-syllogisms (*per epysillogismus*), the reason considers the development as potentiality, because it is not a complete sequence already given before.

<sup>11</sup> About the controversy surrounding the derivation of categories from the logical forms of judgement, see Longuenesse, Béatrice. (1993). *Kant et le pouvoir de juger. Sensibilité et discursivité dans l'Analytique transcendantale de la Critique de la raison pure*. Paris: PUF.

According to this, the conclusion of a syllogism promotes the determination of an object, the application to it of a certain predicate that was universally thought of in the major premise. According to Kant, universality as regards extension corresponds to the totality of conditions in the synthesis of intuitions, so that the transcendental concept of reason is the concept of the totality of conditions in relation to a given conditioned. In Kant's words:

This complete magnitude of extension in relation to such condition is called universality (*universalitas*). To this corresponds, in the synthesis of intuitions, the *totality* (*universitas*) [or *Totalität*] of conditions. Thus, the transcendental concept of reason is none other than the one of the *totality of the conditions* of a given conditioned. As only the *unconditioned* makes possible the totality of conditions and, reciprocally, the totality of conditions is always in itself unconditioned: then, a pure concept of reason in general can be clarified by the concept of unconditioned, insofar as it contains the foundation of the synthesis of the conditioned [author's emphasis] (Kant, 1787/1904, B379).

It follows that the totality of conditions, *a parte ante*, will always be taken as given by reason, even if it cannot find the first term in the sequence. Transcendental ideas make the conditions rise to the unconditioned, and from this activity arises a transcendental dialectics, which seems to be a correct reasoning (Kant, 1787/1904, B394). Dialectics does not derive from the logical form of reasoning itself, but from the origin, from pure reason, of concepts and knowledge totally out of the reach of understanding and experience. To the extent that they refer to the unconditioned synthetic unity of conditions, transcendental ideas are of three types: «[...] the *first* contains the absolute (unconditioned) unity of the thinking subject, the *second*, the absolute unit of the series of conditions of the phenomenon, the *third*, the absolute unit of the condition of all objects of thought in general» [author's emphasis] (Kant, 1787/1904, B391). Kant has held that these ideas manifest themselves in coherence and unit and make the knowledge of pure reason systematic, which would naturally advance from the soul to the world, and from these to God, in the same way that one passes from the premises to the conclusion (Kant, 1787/1904, B395). The search for the unconditioned is, therefore, in the very nature of reason. Although they cannot be concretely used and are always transcendent, Kant considers that ideas are useful as an attempt to unify the knowledge of understanding in the direction of the totality of conditions, and should remain as regulative principles, as a canon for the expansion and better use of understanding.

We maintain that the Kantian conception of reason helps to understand where the need to overcome the experience comes from, that is, in our

conception it explains the origin of the metaphysical impulse and its most fundamental characteristic. The reason, as Kant describes it, is not satisfied with the conditions given by understanding, the faculty of empirical knowledge of the world, and look for the unity and totality of phenomena. It is the search for unity and unconditioned concerning the empirical conditions of phenomena that makes it possible to elaborate metaphysical theories, because these are not mere abstract descriptions of physical objects neither categories extracted *a posteriori* from things. Metaphysical theories research principles or concepts that can provide an ultimate explanation for the concrete cases to which they apply, since the enumeration and description of these do not provide a satisfactory clarification, but only represent a «go up from condition to condition». That is why it will always make sense to reflect on the «second navigation» as described by Plato<sup>12</sup>, because without it, that is, without a metaphysics, we only turn in false around sensible phenomena and efficient causes.

The Kantian argument is useful, too, because it is not limited to speculation about the physical world, but also covers morality, where the absence of an ideal that transcends the concrete world is harmful and dangerous. According to Kant, ethical conduct is based on compliance with universal and necessary moral laws, derived *a priori* from the principles of pure reason. For him, it is perfectly correct and coherent to understand ideas as archetypes and models of actions, in the fields of morality, religion, and politics. The concept of virtue, for example, could not be extracted from experience, because that way it could not be a model of knowledge and practice, but only an imperfect, equivocal and variable sample, which could not serve as a rule (Kant, 1787/1904, B372). Therefore, the experience can offer examples of the ideas of virtue and freedom, but it cannot be its model. And the reality of these ideas will be in their causality in relation to experience, as perfect archetypes from which concrete examples should try to approach, although the approach can never be complete.

With regard to the history of metaphysics, Charles Renouvier's research provides guidance in the long and complex tradition of the dilemmas it has presented. Renouvier understands that, insofar as they refer to absolute beings, metaphysical problems are beyond the reach of human knowledge and any possibility of demonstration. In his work *Les dilemmes de la métaphysique pure*, published in 1901, he analyzed five dilemmas and formulated theses, in which he defended the impossibility of solving metaphysical questions through

<sup>12</sup> See Plato, *Phaedo*, 99d-102a.

rationality. According to him, nothing absolute or unconditional can be known, since all knowledge is based on the principle of relativity, according to which each every object is a system of relations (Renouvier, 1899, pp. 1–19). The theses that Renouvier formulates start from this principle and the antithesis denies it, regarding the fundamental notions of metaphysics, namely, the notions of condition, quality, quantity, causality, and personality or consciousness (Renouvier, 1901/1927, p. 255). At the basis of the dilemmas would be the fundamental opposition between realism and neocriticism. For realism, it would be necessary to affirm the reality of abstract ideas of unconditioned, substance, infinite, as well as impersonalism and determinism. For neocriticism, in turn, only the notions of conditioned, finite, personalism and freedom can be defended. The perspective that Renouvier adopts is the one of neocriticism, because, as we said, he is opposed to the idea of the Absolute and to everything that cannot be a member of any relation.

Renouvier has held that in the History of Philosophy metaphysical theories contradict each other and themselves. In *Les dilemmes de la métaphysique pure*, is possible to analyze the transcendent problems which are at the base of the metaphysical notions previously mentioned<sup>13</sup>. We think that each of these dilemmas is related to a question that goes beyond the limits of experience in the sense of the unconditioned and which is, however, impregnable. In the first dilemma, the matter is the determination of the nature of the first entity on which all conditioned beings depend (Renouvier, 1901/1927, pp. 50–54). The world seems to us to be precarious, transitory and lacking a fixed point of support, which must then be unconditioned, so that it is not itself precarious and transitory being then useless as a foundation. In the second dilemma, the transcendent problem refers to the intrinsic nature or constitution of the phenomena, beyond their concreteness and visible changes. Theories about the substance aim to find the essence of the objects that compose the world, often understood as something indefinable and unknowable, approaching the Absolute (Renouvier, 1901/1927, pp. 91–98).

In the third dilemma, the question refers to the application of the notion of infinity to the material world, which seems to us to be finite in time and space, but which limits we do not find. As a determined totality, the parts of the world must be real and distinct, therefore, finite, but we cannot eliminate from it the notion of infinity (Renouvier, 1901/1927, pp. 122–125). In the fourth dilemma,

<sup>13</sup> See Renouvier, Charles. (1901). *Les dilemmes de la métaphysique pure*. Nouvelle Édition. Paris: Felix Alcan, 1927; Santos, Katia. *Os dilemas da metafísica segundo Charles Renouvier*. *Cadernos de Filosofia Alemã*. v. 25, n. 1, jan.-jun. 2020, pp. 80-104.

the question is whether contingency can exist in a world where causality is universal. The experience witnesses the determination of all phenomena, but at the same time it does not exclude the possibility of some that are not totally determined by their antecedents nor of causes that are not effects of previous causes (Renouvier, 1901/1927, pp. 172–183). In the fifth and last dilemma, admitting that the world has origin and finality, it is sought to know whether the original being is conscious or unconscious. The basic question is whether conscience and human person can be the result of unconscious material processes, or whether they require an origin with will and intelligence (Renouvier, 1901/1927, pp. 238–246).

In our conception, the reflections of Kant and Renouvier point to a fundamental aspect of metaphysics, which is its ambiguous relations with what is beyond the sensible experience. It does not worry us, as Kant is concerned, the fact that the metaphysical entities thought in the ideas of reason cannot be empirically given, nor, as was the problem for Renouvier, that the metaphysical notions point to absolute beings and notions out of any relation. For us, the main question is that there is, at the origin of all metaphysical investigation, an imbrication of two antagonistic perspectives, which at the same time is excluded and demanded for the understanding of problems to which they refer<sup>14</sup>. When Kant talks about the need that reason has to postulate the unconditioned, this need is to understand the conditioned itself, which without that reference is not satisfactory for the human search for knowledge. For a complete understanding of empirical phenomena, the intellect requires a stopping point in the search for conditions. Similarly, the five metaphysical notions that are on the base of the dilemmas discussed by Renouvier reveal the same relations of antagonism and the mutual requirement that connect conditioned and unconditioned. Renouvier also allows us to understand a realization of dilemmas in opposing theories in History of Philosophy and contradiction as a basic characteristic of it (Renouvier, 1901/1927, pp. 2–3).

We state that history of metaphysics is indeed full of dilemmas, paradoxes, and aporias, and this is not necessarily due to the incompetence or error of philosophers, but to the nature of human reason, which is not satisfied with the empirically conditioned. The spheres of empiric and metaphysics, however, are antagonistic, have different structures, follow different laws and orientations, but must be harmonized in some way if we want to understand any of them

<sup>14</sup> The ideas presented here are a generalization of the doctoral thesis that we defend regarding the Schopenhauerian philosophy, that was recently published. See: Santos, Katia. (2020) *A antinomia da teoria do conhecimento de Schopenhauer*. São Paulo: Loyola.

satisfactorily. In fact, the knowledge of the empirical world — and here we refer not only to the natural world but also the human world —, if it does not want to remain a mere description of phenomena and laws, will have to refer to a broader vision of the universe, which points to unconditioned units and totalities. In the same way, metaphysical knowledge, if it wants to mean something to humanity, must clarify the concrete world in which we live. A metaphysical theory that does not explain the world as a whole nor the big questions of humanity has no relevance, it has no reason to be. It is in this sense that we talk about transcendent problems: the truly metaphysical issues are those in which the metaphysical is required for understanding the empirical and vice versa, that is, in which both spheres demand each other to be apprehended. However, this leads to perplexities which, if not carried out properly, prevent the understanding of the issues themselves and the possible solutions.

This is why we understand that the comprehension of metaphysical issues needs to be based on a basic logic that does not exclude contradiction, that does not consider the principle of non-contradiction an immutable and impregnable law. With the advent of the paraconsistent logics, created by the Brazilian philosopher Newton da Costa, there was the opening of a very promising research perspective for us. Newton da Costa is one of the most important logics of today, recognized worldwide for the development of logical systems in which the principle of non-contradiction is not valid, contemplating, among others, propositional calculi, predicate calculi with or without equality, calculi of descriptions and set theories. In the classical logic, the absence of consistency always implies triviality, that is, the possibility of inference of any formulas in a deductive system, even if they are contradictory or absurd<sup>15</sup>. This would mean that, in a contradictory theory, we could not distinguish the true from the false and, in the end, it would not fulfill its purposes and should be abandoned. In the hierarchies of  $C_n$  calculi, however, inconsistencies may be accepted, for they do not necessarily lead to triviality. Our intention is not to formalize metaphysical questions or theories, although we may eventually make use of some symbology if it is interesting in view of the clarity of the exposition and the argument. We will always choose the simplest and most intuitive possible.

Within the  $C_n$  calculi hierarchies, the  $C_1$  will be our starting point because it is the simplest, the strongest and because it covers the classic logic.  $C_1$

<sup>15</sup> Based on the addition,  $\alpha \vdash \alpha \vee \beta$ , and of disjunctive syllogism,  $\neg \alpha, \alpha \vee \beta \vdash \beta$ , the contradiction leads to the explosion, i.e., it can be deduced  $\alpha \wedge \neg \alpha \vdash \beta$ .

corresponds to what would be the sentential calculus of traditional logic, and the use we intend to make of it is similar to what is normally made of the traditional logic, a use that is intuitive and informal, but in which we have a certain awareness of its rules in practical use and, as far as possible, we adapt to them. The difference in the present case is that the rules of the  $C_1$  system are distinct, in some points, from the traditional logic, which is why they will be exposed so that it can constitute our basic logic, instead of that one. When it comes to following traditional logic, no one needs, when writing an essay or treatise in any area, to describe the logical system on which they build their argument. We, however, because of characteristics that we notice in our field of study, need a logic that contains contradictions, without leading to trivialization. If it proves necessary in the future, we can migrate to the other more advanced calculi of the hierarchies, like the  $C_1^*$  (first order predicate calculi),  $C_1^=$  (first order predicate calculi with equality), or even advance to the calculi  $C_w$ ,  $C_w^*$  ou  $C_w^=$ . At first, however, some basic features of  $C_1$  are sufficient, as we will briefly expose<sup>16</sup>.

A formal system  $S$  is inconsistent, if there is a formula  $A$  of  $S$  such that  $A$  and its negation,  $\neg A$ , are both theorems of this system. A system is trivial if all its formulas are theorems (Da Costa, 1974, p. 497). In  $C_1$ , Newton da Costa adopts the connectives, the schemas and as much as possible of the usual deduction rules of the classic propositional calculus, separating the propositions among the «well-behaved» ones, that is, which work in the calculus obeying the principle of non-contradiction, formalized  $\neg (A \wedge \neg A)$ , and those that are not well behaved, which may be valid the form  $A \wedge \neg A$ . Da Costa establishes the following conditions, which the calculus attends: «I – In  $C_1$ , the principle of non-contradiction should not be valid, in general. II – From two contradictory propositions, it should generally not be possible to deduce any proposition» (Da Costa, 1993, pp. 8–9). The satisfaction of conditions I and II is proven by the demonstration of the non-validity of the schemes of Theorem 2, in *Sistemas formais Inconsistentes*. Among them, we will highlight 5.  $A \wedge \neg A \vdash B$ , 6.  $A \wedge \neg A \vdash \neg B$  and 11.  $\neg (A \wedge \neg A)$ . Another point to note is that, according to Da Costa's terminology,  $C_1$  is finitely trivializable by formulas such as  $\alpha \wedge \neg^* \alpha$ , where « $\neg^* \alpha$ » represents the classic, strong negation, introduced by definition:  $\neg \alpha \wedge \alpha^0$  (1993, p. 11 et. seq). Thus, taking this logic as a basic logic in our researches, we will

<sup>16</sup> More details about the calculi can be checked, among others, in the following works by Newton da Costa: *Sistemas formais inconsistentes*, *Ensaio sobre os fundamentos da lógica*, *Paraconsistent logics and paraconsistency*, the latter written together with Décio Krause and Otávio Bueno, and in the article «On the theory of inconsistent formal systems».

not worry in an excessive way about the elimination of contradictions, which may appear. Triviality will not necessarily be linked to the presence of contradictory sentences in our discourse, which is guaranteed by the second condition of the calculus. In all the rest, in questions and consistent aspects, we can proceed normally, because by adding the principle of non-contradiction in  $C_1$ , we obtain classic propositional calculus (Da Costa, 1993, Theorem 4, p.13).

This conception opens an unprecedented perspective of consideration of the dilemmas of metaphysics, which can be understood as constitutive of this field, and not necessarily as problems to be eliminated. In fact, it is not necessary to suppose that the junction of the conditioned and unconditioned perspectives of the intellect has as a necessary consequence that any proposition can be derived from it, or that we cannot distinguish the true from the false, within the assumptions of an inconsistent metaphysics. The world is not understood only by the investigations of empirical science, nor only by metaphysical investigations, but by both at the same time. Empirical science, even the most perfected and enhanced, can say little about the meaning of phenomena since it focuses essentially on material conditions and singular experiences. It stays on efficient causes for principle. Metaphysics, in its turn, wants to escape to material conditioning, to go toward the unconditioned, formal causes and the suppressible, but it cannot do so in absentia of the concrete world, or it will become an empty discourse, without support in nothing real. However, from the junction of conditioned and unconditioned perspectives it does not arise that causality or empirical phenomena can exist without any determined orientation. Although the world is inconsistent, it is not a heap of rubble nor the result of a heap of random events. In fact, from «It rains» and «It does not rain» it is not possible to deduce that «The moon is made of cheese», and the imposition of this conclusion, based on a formal aspect of classical logic, does not need to be accepted in the metaphysical sphere.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I especially thank Newton da Costa for the dialogue, for the indications and for all the kind support he offered me regarding the paraconsistent logic. His collaboration was invaluable.

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### On the permanence of metaphysics

In the last decades, we have witnessed a renaissance of discussions on metaphysics within the Analytic Philosophy. Nowadays, philosophers of this tradition started a refoundation movement, in which they try to establish its concept and possibility. Concerning the concept, metaphysics is identified with ontology, which objective would be to outline the fundamental structure of reality. They believe that it retakes the Aristotelian project of searching for being and, at the same time that refuse the Kantian Idealism, they believe they are founding the possibility of a transcendent metaphysics. In this article, we have three objectives. In the first place, we raise some questions that arise regarding this concept of metaphysics. Second, we criticize the arguments about its possibility. Finally, we present our own position about its nature and possibility, in dialogue with Paul Gilbert's discussion, in «*Permanência da metafísica*». Gilbert defends that metaphysics remains alive in the sense of the Greek term «meta», not contemplated by the technical and scientific perspective of analytic ontology. Considering his conception as correct, we add that metaphysics is constituted by transcendent problems, which are the reason for the reflections of this field, and responsible for the effort to overcome the empirical towards metaphysics.

**Keywords:** Analytic Ontology · Nature of Metaphysics · Possibility of Metaphysics · Metaphysical Problems · Paraconsistency.

### Sobre la permanencia de la metafísica

En las últimas décadas, hemos visto un renacimiento de las discusiones sobre la metafísica en la filosofía analítica. Actualmente, los filósofos de esta tradición han iniciado un movimiento de refundación, en que intentan establecer el concepto y la posibilidad de ella. En cuanto al concepto, ellos la identifican con la ontología, cuyo objetivo sería esbozar la estructura fundamental de la realidad. Creen retomar el proyecto aristotélico de buscar el ser en cuanto ser, y al rechazar el idealismo kantiano, creen fundar la posibilidad de una metafísica trascendente. En este artículo, tenemos tres objetivos. En primer lugar, planteamos algunas preguntas que surgen con respecto a este concepto de la metafísica. En segundo, criticamos los argumentos sobre la posibilidad de ella. En último, presentamos nuestra posición sobre su naturaleza y posibilidad, en diálogo con la discusión de Paul Gilbert, en el artículo «*Permanência da metafísica*». Gilbert defiende que la metafísica sigue viva en el sentido del término griego «meta», no contemplado por la perspectiva técnica y científica de aquella ontología. Acordando su concepción, añadimos que la metafísica se constituye de problemas trascendentes, que son la razón de las reflexiones de este campo y responsables del esfuerzo de superación de lo empírico hacia lo metafísico.

**Palabras Clave:** Ontología analítica · Naturaleza de la Metafísica · Posibilidad de la Metafísica · Problemas Metafísicos · Paraconsistencia.

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**KATIA SANTOS** is a PhD in Philosophy at Universidade de São Paulo and a professor at UFERSA, Brasil. Main research objects: theories of knowledge, fundamental questions of metaphysics, realism and idealism, relations between logic and metaphysics, principle of non-contradiction, dilemmas, antinomies and metaphysical paradoxes. Author of *A antinomia da teoria do conhecimento de Schopenhauer*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2020.

**INFORMACIÓN DE CONTACTO | CONTACT INFORMATION:** Departamento de Ciências Sociais Aplicadas e Humanas, UFERSA. BR 226, Km 405, São Geraldo, Pau dos Ferros/RN, CEP: 59900-000, Brasil. e-mail (✉): [katiasantosfilo@gmail.com](mailto:katiasantosfilo@gmail.com) — **iD:** <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1608-4582>.

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**HISTORIA DEL ARTÍCULO | ARTICLE HISTORY**

Received: 26-March-2020; Accepted: 15-June-2020; Published Online: 20-December-2020

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**COMO CITAR ESTE ARTÍCULO | HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE**

Santos, Katia (2020). «On the permanence of metaphysics». *Disputatio. Philosophical Research Bulletin* 9, no. 15: pp. 53–89.

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