Folia Philosophica 34
ISSN 2353-9445 (online)
ISSN 1231-0913 (print)

Tomasz Kubalica

Critical Metaphysics in the Views of Otto Liebmann and Johannes Volkelt

Abstract: The article addresses the problem of critical metaphysics in the views of Otto Liebmann and Johannes Volkelt. Their view of metaphysics results from a compromise between science and philosophy. On the one hand, this compromise keeps metaphysics closely in touch with contemporary scientific theory, which means it can participate in the modern civilisation of science and technology, on the other though, it leads to the narrowing down of the universalist philosophical perspective to science, which means abandonment of non-scientific aspects of life. Although in principle open to metaphysical needs of humans, critical metaphysics, on this view, embodies scientific aspirations of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Metaphysical criticism entails self-imposed limits on metaphysical aspirations, but these limitations themselves must stay within reasonable limits; otherwise, it transforms into destructive scepticism.

Keywords: critical metaphysics, universalist view of philosophy, contemporary scientific theory, philosophical criticism, scepticism

The contemporary notion of philosophy understood as critical thought, though of ancient origin, was shaped above all by Neo-Kantian philosophy and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.[1] In this context, the opposition between metaphysics and cognition becomes especially significant, where cognition is usually interpreted in the spirit of positivism and scientism in the form of antagonism between dogmatic metaphysical thinking and a critical approach, which supposedly excludes the possibility of metaphysics. In this context, we must pose the question of whether

[1] Cf. K. Bormann, "Kritik," in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Bd. IV. Hrsg. v. H. Ritter (Darmstadt: Schwabe, 1976), p. 1249 *et passim*.

metaphysics really rejects critical thinking. To answer this lofty question, it is necessary to consider the Neo-Kantian concept of metaphysics against the background of Kant's metaphysical thought, which we will begin with.

The statement is true that Kant's philosophy arose during the enlightenment, when one of the key philosophical issues was the problem of the possibility of scientifically practicing metaphysics.[2] The important issues of obviousness, method, and the certainty of the foundation of metaphysics became a key subject in philosophical discussion and also inspired Kant—fascinated by the success of Newton's method in the natural sciences—to undertake an attempt at consistently applying the Newtonian principles to the field of metaphysics.[3] Criticism in regard to metaphysics was to ensure both a destructive and constructive result, that is, on the one hand, to "guard against false metaphysics," and on the other, to ensure insight into the "properties of things hidden from reason."[4] In this way, metaphysics is interpreted as criticism, and at the same time, as the science of the limitations of cognition and human reason.[5] In the understanding of Helmut Holzhey, Kant's critique was to fulfill the following four tasks:[6] (1) The critique was to define the sources of metaphysics, its methods and boundaries; (2) It was to partially encompass metaphysics, and partially its propedeutics in the area of nature and morality; (3) It was to reduce metaphysical theses and antitheses to a third thing; (4) It was to be the study of a subject, that is, to discover and prevent the mixing up of the objective and the subjective, and in this way to become transcendental philosophy.

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[2] Cf. R. Kuliniak, *Spór o oczywistość w naukach metafizycznych. Konkurs Królewskiej Akademii Berlińskiej z 1763 roku* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2003), p. 19.

[3] Cf. I. Kant, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels oder Versuch von der Verfassung und dem mechanischen Ursprunge des ganzen Weltgebäudes, nach Newtonischen Grundsätzen abgehandelt*, in: *Akademieausgabe von Immanuel Kants Gesammelten Werken*, Band I: *Vorkritische Schriften 1747–1777* (Berlin: Karsten Worm, 1998), pp. 215–368 (AA I, 215–368).

[4] "Dieser Nutze ist positiv, die Einsichten zu vermehren; negativ, die falsche metaphysik zu verhindern […]." I. Kant, "Reflexionen zur Metaphysik," 358: 05–06 (Reflexion 3943).

[5] Cf. I. Kant, "Reflexionen zur Metaphysik," 368: 09 (Reflexion 3964).

[6] Cf. H. Holzhey, "Kritik…," p. 1268.

In this context, the Kantian understanding of metaphysics presented in the *Critique* as the self-criticism of reason is key:

> I do not mean by this a critique of books and systems, but of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all knowledge after which it may strive *independently of all experience*. It will therefore decide as to the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics in general, and determine its sources, its extent, and its limits all in accordance with principles.[7]

Such self-criticism is, therefore, to evaluate the foundations of the possibility of metaphysics based on the results of an analysis of its sources and scope before the tribunal of reason. The aim of such a rational judgment is the ending of endless metaphysical debates and the shaping of metaphysics according to a mathematical or physical model, that is, the scientific practice of metaphysics. The task is the cleansing of reason of all groundless pretentions on the basis of eternal and unchanging laws "that we must never venture with speculative reason beyond the limits of experience."[8] Such an understanding of criticism is only seemingly negative, since its aim is the conflict-less functioning of the faculty of reason's complex structure. Kant assumes that transcending the boundaries of reason does not widen our metaphorical cognitive "horizon," but—to the contrary—narrows it as a result of hindering the possibility of distinction by reason.[9] The moral benefit of the transcendental critique of metaphysics is also essential; it consists in reason's self-limitation so that it does not widen the boundaries of sensuousness into the field of morality, since moral laws cannot be justified on the basis of sensuousness. Criticism understood thusly plays a policing role in the sense that it defines the general frame of the harmonious functioning of the faculty of reason's complex structure.

[7] I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), A XII.
[8] I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B XXIV.
[9] Cf. T. Kubalica, "Metafizyka krytyczna Otto Liebmanna," *Folia Philosophica* 2014, t. 32, p. 51ff.

However, along with the above desideratum of delineating the boundaries of pure reason, a metaphysical intent of a metaphysical system appears in Kant's *Prologomena*, when he proposes, "to determine the whole sphere of pure reason completely and from general principles, in its circumference as well as in its contents. This was required for metaphysics in order to construct its system according to a reliable method."[10] Therefore, criticism is also to play the role of the foundation of the system of pure reason.[11] In accordance with the accepted distinction between being and duty, its first part was to be the metaphysics of nature, and its second part—the metaphysics of morality.

Kant suggested that a system was needed, though he never achieved this goal himself. His idea was taken up by the German idealists, such as Karl Leonhard Reinhold, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, who wanted to develop the idea of critical philosophy in this way.[12] Fichte identified Kant's critical philosophy with his own theory of knowledge and developed it in the direction of a coherent, all-encompassing system, which was derived from the basic principles of all human knowledge in a strictly scientific way.[13] The reference of criticism to metaphysics, which Fichte understands as the study of the genesis of the content of consciousness, also changes, for reflection on the possibility of metaphysics, its proper meaning, and laws, is of a metaphysical character. Fichte describes the relationship of metaphysics to criticism in the following way: "Critique itself is not metaphysics, but is located above the area of the latter: critique refers to metaphysics just like the latter refers to the common opinions of natural reason. Metaphysics explains these opinions, and it itself is explain in critique. Critique, in the proper sense, critique philosophical thought, and if philosophy itself is to be called critical, then we can say that it cri-

[10] I. Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, trans. P. Carus (Chicago: Open Court, 1902), p. 8.
[11] I. Kant, *Krytyka czystego rozumu*, trans. R. Ingarden (Kęty: Antyk, 2001), A 11 / B 24–26.
[12] M. J. Siemek. "Wstęp: Teoria wiedzy jako system filozofii transcendentalnej," in: Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Teoria wiedzy: wybór pism*. Vol. I. (Warszawa: PWN, 1996), p. XI.
[13] Cf. H. Holzhey, "Kritik…," p. 1272.

tiques natural thought."[14] Thus, we are dealing with a certain hierarchy of knowledge that runs from natural thought, through metaphysics, up to criticism. The point is to, on the path of meta-reflection, grasp the supernatural, i.e. metaphysical, foundations of knowledge absent from our natural thought, and, in metaphysical thought, the even deeper critical foundations that the theory of knowledge presents; metaphysics is a critique of natural thought, and the theory of knowledge is a critique of metaphysics. In Fichte, criticism was separated from metaphysics, since a pure critique must be non-metaphysical, and pure metaphysics—non-critical.

As in Kant's thought, the Neo-Kantian critique of metaphysics served above all to guard against metaphysics' groundless pretentions. In this spirit, Friedrich Albert Lange levels both classical and materialistic metaphysics with poetry and literature, considering it a form of "conceptual poetry" (*Begriffsdichtung*).[15] Metaphysics understood thusly cannot provide theoretical explanations of phenomena, as does science, and is only able to create words that lack theoretical meaning. Metaphysics is understood in this way by Ernst Laas, according to whom metaphysical methods of explanation are "either simply the repetitions of later-adopted immanent schemes, as if they were 'in themselves,' which can only be demonstrated as the 'contentual' participation of the proper being, which is found in the area between matter and Self, or are ideals sketched according to what is needed."[16] Metaphysical views on the subject of the transcendent being are only projections of physical beings cognized within the bounds of immanence. Metaphysics idealizes the needs that exist within us. That is why metaphysics belongs more

[14] H. Holzhey, "Kritik…," p. 10.

[15] Cf. F. A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*. Hrsg. v. R. Nölle (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2008), pp. 483–484.

[16] "Und doch: wenn man näher zusieht, so sind sie [die metaphysische Erklärungsweisen—T.K.] entweder nur Wiederholungen der spät in Cours gekommen immanenten Schemata mit der Voraussetzung, als könne »an sich« sein, was man nachweisen nur konnte als Theilinhalt des correlativen Seins, das zwischen den Polen Materie und Ich liegt; oder es sind frei nach Bedürfnissen entworfene Ideale." E. Laas, *Idealismus und positivismus: Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1884), p. 248.

to the domain of literary creation and fiction than science. The anti-metaphysical position of Laas—Natorp's teacher—is shared not only by the Neo-Kantian Marburg School, but also by the Badenian School (Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert). For Windelband, metaphysical "'conceptual poetry' cannot, then, objectively fall under the category of science, but only in the subjective sense, that it would like to be scientifically conducted or considered scientifically conducted, though it cannot be conducted scientifically."[17] Thus, the scientific aspirations of metaphysics cannot be acknowledged. Rickert, on the other hand—alongside Kantianism and an orientation towards the philosophy of culture—accepted the rejection of the metaphysics of "things-in-themselves" as one of the common points connecting both schools of Neo-Kantianism.[18] In the Badenian School, the metaphysics of things existing in themselves gives way to the axiology of values, which are binding in themselves.

It is in this context of Kantian and post-Kantian thought that Neo-Kantianism as a whole must be grasped, though—despite the erroneous opinion preserved in Neo-Kantian schools—Neo-Kantianism has not completely given up metaphysics. A positive regard for metaphysics in Neo-Kantianism can be seen especially in its metaphysical trend, to which such philosophers belonged as Otto Liebmann and Johannes Volkelt, Friedrich Paulsen, Erich Adickes, Traugott Konstantin Österreich and Max Wundt.[19] What sets them apart above all is that they acknowledged the possibility of metaphysics as an empirico-hypothetical

[17] "Ihre »Begriffsdichtungen« können also unter den Begriff der Wissenschaft nicht objektiv, sondern nur in einem subjektiven Sinn subsumiert werden, daß sie wissenschaftlich leisten wollten und geleistet zu haben glaubten, was sich wissenschaftlich gar nicht leisten läßt." W. Windelband, *Präludien. Aufsätze und Reden zur Einleitung in die Philosophie*. Bd. I., 3. Aufl., (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1907), p. 26.

[18] Cf. H. Rickert, *Wilhelm Windelband*. 2. Verb. Aufl., (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1929), p. 17; cf. Ch. Krijnen, *Nachmetaphysischer Sinn. Eine problemgeschichtliche und systematische Studie zu den Prinzipien der Wertphilosophie Heinrich Rickerts* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), p. 84, footnote 27.

[19] Cf. A. J. Noras, *Historia neokantyzmu* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2011), pp. 258–312. The figure of Max Wundt remains problematic; Janina Kiersnowska-Suchorzewska counts him among the Neo-Kantian metaphysicians, while in a biographical sense he belongs to the generation of post-Neo-Kantians (Heidegger, Hartmann, Jaspers, Heimsoeth).

science about things in themselves. This article focuses on the metaphysical views of Liebmann and Volkelt, as the main representatives of this trend. The remaining philosophers held similar views regarding the interpretation of Kant's philosophy and the possibility of metaphysics.[20] Paulsen recognizes the possibility and necessity of monistic idealistic metaphysics of a panpsychic and—like Liebmann—parallelistic character.[21] Erich Adickes conducts systematic studies on the concept of the thing-in-itself. Traugott Konstantin Österreich—like Paulsen—studied the Kantian understanding of metaphysics and stated that criticism does not signify a rejection of metaphysics. Finally, Max Wundt emphasized that in Kant's philosophy, metaphysics and not methodology was most important. These thinkers deserve to be discussed separately in a different paper.

Liebmann's metaphysics

Otto Liebmann, considered a precursor of Neo-Kantianism, in contrast to other Neo-Kantian schools, takes a positive position regarding the possibility of metaphysics as a theory, which he presented in his 1884 work entitled *Die Klimax der Theorien* (*The Climax of Theory*),[22] where he distinguishes a third metaphysical level of theory next to empirical and non-empirical. Liebmann characterizes this metaphysics as follows: "The speculation, theory, or single theorem is metaphysical, which can rise above all that is relative, and so believes in the possibility of spiritually grasping something absolutely real."[23] Metaphysical theory is a reflection that is transcendent regarding experience and provides absolute principles explaining the world, which corresponds to the Kantian concept of *metaphysica generalis*. Thus, it turns out that

[20] Cf. A. J. Noras, *Historia neokantyzmu*, p. 289ff.

[21] Cf. F. Paulsen, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*. 2. Aufl. (Berlin: J. S. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1893), p. IIIff.

[22] Cf. O. Liebmann, *Die Klimax der Theorien: eine Untersuchung aus dem Bereich der allgemeinen Wissenschaftslehre* (Straßburg: Georg Olms, 1884), p. 13ff.

[23] O. Liebmann, *Die Klimax der Theorien…,* p. 38. See also: A. J. Noras, *Historia neokantyzmu*, p. 57.

the Neo-Kantian Liebmann is not only a known theoretician of cognition, but also—a metaphysician.

We can find the key concepts of metaphysical criticism in Liebmann's work *Grundriß der kritischen Metaphysk* (*An Outline of Critical Metaphysics*). Reflection on our state of knowledge is vital here:

> Unsolved, and partially unsolvable problems, unexplained, and possibly inexplicable facts surround our horizon of knowledge on all sides, so human cognition, like human consciousness in general, emerges from the dark night like a brightly-lit island, and precisely due to this brightness the darkness of the surrounding night seems all the darker.[24]

The sphere of "light" cognizable to us is limited by the completely incognizable sphere of "darkness," which despite this plays an important role for us. It is the sphere of *ignoramus et ignorabimus* that was dealt with by mythology and religion, and in our culture the universal science called metaphysics.[25] This need for reference to the "incognizable" is expressed in the immutable essence of man as a need for metaphysics.[26] It is expressed in the continual search for solutions for the contraries, contradictions, and antinomies that surround us. It is the inexhaustible source of the perpetual discussion between idealism and realism, spiritualism and materialism, and theism, pantheism, and atheism. It turns out that though the object of metaphysics is not directly accessible to our senses, it should be developed, as it is deeply rooted in human nature. The metaphysical skepticism which negates the possibility of metaphysics turns out to be a sort of inconsistent negative dogmatism, which ignores the internal need for metaphysics.[27]

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[24] "Ungelöste, zum Theil unlösbare Probleme, unerklärte, vielleicht für immer unerklärliche Thatsachen sind es, wovon der Horizont unseres Wissens allseitig umlagert wird; so daß die menschliche Erkenntniß, wie das Bewußtsein des Menschen überhaupt, einer hellbeleuchteten Inseln gleich, die aus tiefer Nacht hervortaucht und eben vermöge ihrer Helligkeit das Dunkel jener sie umgebenden Nacht um so dunkler erscheinen läßt." O. Liebmann, "Grundriß der kritischen Metaphysk," in: *Gedanken und Tatsachen*. Bd. 2, (Straßburg: K.J. Trübner, 1904), p. 91.

[25] Cf. also: W. Windelband, "Otto Liebmanns Philosophie," *Kant-Studien* 15, 1910, p. VIIff.

[26] Cf. O. Liebmann, "Grundriß der kritischen Metaphysk," p. 92.

[27] Cf. O. Liebmann, "Grundriß der kritischen Metaphysk," p. 93.

Allowing for the possibility of metaphysics does not, however, mean the acceptance of all metaphysics. Liebmann rejects dogmatic metaphysics, which wrongfully lays claim to absolute importance and inerrancy. In the spirit of Cartesian methodical skepticism Liebmann believes that metaphysics should be cleansed of the transcendental dogmatism of appearance of the road of consistent skepticism. It is only those metaphysics which have been freed from dogmatism that deserve the name of critical metaphysics. Here, we can perceive the inspiration of the Kantian critique of dogmatic metaphysics, understood as a "peremptory science of the essence of things."[28] Two moments must be distinguished in the genesis of critical metaphysics: (1) the critical appearance of Kant and (2) the discovery of transcendental philosophy. Both were highly significant in raising the awareness that nothing beyond consciousness and its content is known or can be known to us. Thus, the unexperienceable and beyond-sensory world in itself was deemed inaccessible to scientific cognition, and judgments on thing-in-themselves were given the epistemological status of hypothetical opinions. As a consequence, Liebmann limits the function of metaphysics: "Critical metaphysics […] is confined to the exact consideration of human views, human hypotheses on the nature of things."[29] Criticism in metaphysics is based on the acceptance of the hypothetical status of things-in-themselves and on the drawing of philosophical conclusions from this state of affairs, solely within the boundaries of human reason. Thus, Liebmann's approach to metaphysics is of a Kantian character, since it is characterized by tension between the authentic human need for metaphysics and the necessity of its control by reason. This is the path of compromise between metaphysics and modern science, well-understood and well-grounded in Kant's critical philosophy.

[28] O. Liebmann, "Grundriß der kritischen Metaphysk," p. 112.

[29] "Kritische Metaphysik hingegen bescheidet sich, von Kant belehrt, eine strenge Erörterung menschlicher Ansichten, menschlichen Hypothesen über das Wesen der Dinge zu sein." O. Liebmann, "Grundriß der kritischen Metaphysk," p. 113.

Though this compromise is not a final and universally-satisfying solution to the problem of metaphysics, it is not equivalent to opportunism, since it was achieved with respect for the values and primary goals of science. The metaphysical task of philosophy is to broaden the horizon of thought beyond the boundaries set by sensually-experienced facts, in order to explain the parallel relation between the mind and matter. For Liebmann, the experience given to us is essentially ambiguous, since it "teaches us [...] that matter and spirit, despite their essential heterogeneity and incomparability, are nomic coherence and a functional correlation with each other from beginning to end."[30] Liebmann accepts psychophysical parallelism, recognizing the existence of psychic and physical phenomena that appear while not affecting one another. However, this parallelism of spirit and matter cannot be demonstrated empirically and thus is only a metaphysical hypothesis.

Moreover, in Liebmann's critical metaphysics, we find the enjoinment of a teleological anthropomorphic approach with causalistic natural science,[31] for Liebmann believes that a universal finality reigns in nature as the necessary condition of its limitedness. The anthropomorphic genesis of the metaphysical concept of an end does not exclude, in Liebmann's opinion, the possibility of a teleological understanding of nature, the evidence for which—outlined by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment* and later undertaken by Jean Baptiste de Lamarck and Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, and finally by Charles Darwin—can be found in the theory of evolution (descendence), among other things.[32] Liebmann perceives in the evolutionary development of the internal needs of organisms with a formed nervous system an example of the fact that in describing the foundations of the natu-

[30] "[S]ie belehrt uns auf der anderen Seite, daß Materie und Geist trotz aller ihrer gründlichen Heterogenität und Unvergleichlichkeit doch durchgängig miteinander in einem gesetzlichen Zusammenhang und functionaller Wechselbeziehung stehen." O. Liebmann, "Grundriß der kritischen Metaphysk," p. 180–181.

[31] Cf. O. Liebmann, "Grundriß der kritischen Metaphysk," p. 141.

[32] Cf. O. Liebmann, "Grundriß der kritischen Metaphysk," p. 162ff.

ral world, efficient and final causality can be connected without falling into contradictions.

Liebmann finds justification for his convictions in the concept of the logic of facts, popularized by Ludwig Wittgenstein, which means that nature, like man, is directed by internal reason (internal logic), which he describes in the following way:

> The nature of things possesses for us, and also probably "in itself," a logical structure, since it is under the control of a system of more general, and at the same time more specific, but always the same, laws, and is respectively enslaved by these immutable laws, so as to confirm what man has logically deduced on the basis of consistent conclusions drawn from truly cognized laws.[33]

The logical character of nature is expressed in the fact that if we correctly infer on the basis of the true laws of nature, we come to conclusions that correspond to reality. The logic of facts is the metaphysical hypothesis that the logical necessity known to us is extended into nature in the form of objective necessity. It is on this logic that the parallelism of the sensually perceptible and of beyond-sensory reality is based. In contrast to the parallelism of Baruch Spinoza, Liebmann's parallelism is of a hypothetical, not absolute, character.

Four maxims of interpolation (*Interpolationsmaximen*) constitute the basis of the logic of facts: (1) the principle of real identity, (2) the principle of the continuity of existence, (3) the principle of causality, and (4) the principle of the continuity of events.[34] The principle of real identity is to guarantee the identity of objects of experience. The principle of the continuity of existence results from the first in reference to beings that exist in time and is to guarantee the continual unity of a being's existence in time. The third principle of causality signifies

[33] "Die Natur der Dinge besitzt für uns, vermuthlich also auch »an sich« insofern eine logische Struktur, als sie unter der Herrschaft eines Systems allgemeinerer und speciellerer, sich stets gleich bleibender Gesetze steht und diesen constanten Gesetzen entsprechend gezwungen ist, Dasjenige, was der Mensch durch folgerichtige Schlüsse aus den richtig erkannten Gesetzen deducirt hat, factisch zu bestätigen." O. Liebmann, *Die Klimax der Theorien…*, p. 53.

[34] Cf. H. Schwaetzer, "Otto Liebmanns kritische Metaphysik," in: O. Liebmann, *Die Klimax der Theorien…*, p. XVI–XVII.

that the universality and immutability of events' occurrence results from their submission to the hypothetical laws of nature. The principle of the continuity of events is a consequence of the third, and means that any change in space or quality proceeds in a continuous, not saltatory, manner. Though the principles cited by Liebmann are obvious, they are not based on experience, but go beyond it, and thus have the status of metaphysical presumptions. They are not, in truth, logical or mathematical axioms, but we have to presume them in all sciences. Their interpolational character signifies that these maxis, though not based on experience, allow science to determine the consequences to which the facts taken from experience lead.

Volkelt's metaphysics

Another example of the metaphysical reflection undertaken by Neo-Kantians in the critical spirit is the philosophy of Johannes Volkelt, who expressed his position regarding the possibility of metaphysics in an inaugural talk entitled *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik* (*On the Possibility of Metaphysics*) in Basil on October 23, 1883.[35] Volkelt follows Kant in asking if metaphysics is at all possible, and replies: "The answer that Kant established, as we know, is not very reassuring for metaphysics. He does, in truth, recognize the need for metaphysics as impossible to eradicate, but he fights against satisfying this need scientifically, considering metaphysics based on appearance and illusion. With the strength of his spirit and true desire for destruction, he undermines the scientific edifice of metaphysics until resorting to rational "magicianry" right in front of us. He did, however, allow a certain type of metaphysics to emerge on the basis of moral postulates, and this metaphysics was even of a quite positive nature."[36] Volkelt considers Kant's answer paradoxically negative and positive at the same time.

[35] J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik. Antrittsrede gehalten zu Basel am 23. Oktober 1883* (Hamburg und Leipzig: Voss, 1884).

[36] J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik*…, pp. 3–4.

This means that Kant simultaneously negated the possibility of the scientific practice of metaphysics in the old sense, but created the foundation for a "new, morally-grounded metaphysics," which was to fulfill the expectations placed before its old form. In Volkelt's understanding, Kant reformed metaphysics by not breaking with it and instead changing the way it is understood and practiced.

Similarly to Liebmann, Volkelt was skeptical about the possibility of finding final solutions to metaphysical problems. Yet, his was also consistent skepticism, which means that it remained open to *the need for metaphysics* that lies at the basis of metaphysical reflection.[37] Along with Liebmann, he recognizes that—despite what the Hegelians believe—metaphysics is not able to ensure absolute clarity and certainty, but only probability, since it cannot attain knowledge about the essence of things; due to this, we must come to terms with the particular relativity of our knowledge in this area. For this reason, critical metaphysics cannot be absolute knowledge, for it can only be based on subjective and uncertain elements. If we compare Volkelt's and Liebmann's conceptions of critical metaphysics, we will see many similarities that concern, among other things, the recognition of metaphysics as hypothetical knowledge about the essence of things and the presumption of a close tie between the theory of knowledge and metaphysical reflection. However, in terms of content, the following differences may be found.

In his work *Erfahrung und Denken* from 1886, Volkelt describes the object of metaphysics thusly: "by metaphysics in the broadest sense, I understand a science which takes as the object of its question and study the essence of reality."[38] The objects of metaphysics are not only the most profound matters of finitude and the absolute, reflections on what is unknowable, mysterious, and inaccessible to the senses and experience, but also the object of study of the natural sciences and of psychology. Metaphysics understood in this way deal with the essence of such

[37] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik…*, p. 12.

[38] J. Volkelt, *Erfahrung und Denken. Kritische Grundlegung der Erkenntnistheorie* (Hildesheim, Olms, 2002), p. 433.

ideas as time and space, as well as matter, force, motion, and substance, causality and the law of nature, and consciousness and the unconscious. Metaphysics is to ensure a view of reality that is holistic, primeval, and intrinsically rooted in the world of the spirit.[39]

In the context of the essence of objects studied by metaphysics, Volkelt's position towards the Kantian concept of things-in-themselves is also essential. In his interpretation, Kant does not question the existence of a thing-in-itself as the basis of phenomena, but rather accepts that this concept is problematic.[40]

As for Liebmann, the relation of metaphysics to the theory of knowledge is very important, since the possibility of metaphysics is closely tied to the recognition of a transsubjective minimum,[41] for metaphysics is possible when we can penetrate the beyond-subjective, or transsubjective. The scope of this penetration marks the limits of metaphysics.

Metaphysics, as the theory of the most general and final principles of reality, constitutes the most important field of knowledge for man, since it demonstrates the comprehensible base of the phenomenal world. The problem is that depriving metaphysics of a scientific status will lead to the loss of its persuasive power for man's will; if metaphysics had the status of a better or worse proven hypothesis, then though it would remain important for human life, it would not be as easy to oppose it to opposite aspirations stemming from an individual's character and temperament, because one cannot live on hypotheses alone. This means that metaphysical hypotheses would need to be transformed into individuals' personal, and thus subjectively certain, convictions.

Metaphysics understood in this way must be situated beyond both dogmatism and skepticism. The fact that metaphysics is inconclusive should not cause us to give it up.[42] Metaphysical skepticism opens the door to superficial religiosity, because from its perspective,

[39] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik…*, p. 5.

[40] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie nach ihren Grundprincipien analysiert. Ein Beitrag zur Grundlegung der Erkenntnisstheorie* (Leipzig 1879), p. 93.

[41] See: J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 200.

[42] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 7.

the answers to questions about life and the world can only be achieved through feelings, faith, or presentiment. This could not be deep religiosity, however, since a metaphysical infidel would not be able to fill his religious void with religious certainty.[43] Therefore, the consequences of an anti-metaphysical standpoint are atheism and amorality. Thus, the question of the possibility of metaphysics possesses not only scientific significance, but above all moral. Once again it turns out that there is nothing more practical than good, that is, critical, theory.

The problem of metaphysics should be looked at holistically in its historical context. The principle discussion in philosophy does not concern a given spiritualist or materialist standpoint, nor that of theism, pantheism, or atheism, or even dualism or monism, but rather the question of whether reflections on the most general and final questions about being can be conducted at all. The key issue, then, is that of the existence of philosophy without metaphysics, and three positions can be taken in regards to this question: dogmatic metaphysics, anti-metaphysical positivism, and critical metaphysics. The dogmatic way of practicing metaphysics concerns speculative metaphysics in the old style, which is characterized by the naïve faith that its proceedings possess the same probative power as do mathematics.[44] Such a formulation is rejected by Neo-Kantians and positivists alike, who—like David Hume, August Comte, and John Stuart Mill—"fear stalling in groundlessness, when so-called experience is no longer felt directly beneath their feet; they consider all interpretation and grasping of experience as self-deceit or recklessness."[45] Such metaphysics are also rejected by Neo-Kantians, who—in contrast to the positivists—presume the existence of a "great Unknown" (*ein grosses Unbekanntes*), that rules

[43] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…*, p. 7. Cf. also: J. Volkelt, *Die Gefühlsgewissheit. Eine erkenntnistheoretische Untersuchung* (München: C. H. Beck'sche verlagsbuchhandlung, Oskar Beck, 1922), p. 77 ff. (Polish translations of selected passages in: J. Volkelt, *Pewność uczuciowa. Wybór tekstów*, trans. B. Markiewicz [Warszawa: IFiS PAN, 1983]).

[44] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 10.

[45] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* pp. 10–11.

beyond or above the experienced world."[46] Between the positions of dogmatic metaphysics and anti-metaphysical positivism, a third position may be found—that of metaphysicians who believe that "they practice their science on the basis of, or in the sense of the critical theory of knowledge."[47] Such an approach remains under the obvious influence of Kant, since „here metaphysics is first given the task of formulating problems in the most exact fashion possible and in as close a reference to possessed knowledge as attainable, then of distinguishing various possible solutions to these problems, and [finally]—of considering arguments for and against each of these solutions from an empirico-logical perspective."[48] This type of critical metaphysics is based on our limited, unreliable, and ultimately uncertain thinking. Among the advocates of cautious metaphysical criticism Volkelt counts such thinkers as: Christoph Sigwart, Otto Liebmann, Max Wundt, Rudolph Hermann Lotze, and Eduard von Hartmann. Volkelt, in rejecting the dogmatic type of metaphysics, recognizes that the problems of metaphysics cannot be solved in one way that would be completely devoid of obscurities and contradictions.[49] At most, metaphysics can only propose a greater or lesser degree of probability, and the metaphysician cannot in his research reach the essence of things, and for this reason must be aware of the relativity of his cognition. He must admit that his solution is only symbolic and analogical, and the findings of his research do not have to incline everyone to approve: "above all, the metaphysician must explain to himself that when it comes to deeper questions about principles, individual thought will never express the absolute necessity of thought, nor any ideal or eternal logic, and the necessity of thought that reigns within man's head is always only relatively authorized and relatively correct, so in various heads the once absolute, once

[46] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 11. In this context, we can ask whether Volkelt's philosophy fulfills this criterion and can thus be considered Neo-Kantianism.

[47] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 11.

[48] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 11.

[49] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 12.

ideal necessity of thought is brought about."[50] Hypothetical reflections do not have to be universally convincing, which does not mean that clarity and convincingness should be forsaken. Metaphysics cannot be counted among the exact sciences, since its theorems are not clear enough to put undeniable pressure on the normal mind; to the contrary—they are generally vague and contradictory. That is why the concept of exactness should be broadened to include "the purest possible conceptual distinctions, logically cautious and gradual proceedings, the thoughtful consideration of all difficulties."[51] It is only when such an expanded understanding of exactness is accepted that metaphysics also becomes a critical science. In metaphysics, we must take into account in particular the limitations resulting from empirical cognition, i.e. that all metaphysical study must be confirmed within the context of the ability to experience and think. The theory of knowledge serves to do just that, and metaphysics must presuppose this theory, because without it metaphysics would fall into credulity or impertinence. However, Volkelt believes that—though metaphysics is not an exact science—"it consists in the cautious, elucidative application of logic to the facts of experience and assumes a prudent test of cognition's authority and evidentiary ability; this is why it can, in a certain sense, claim the right to be recognized as exact and exceptionally critical."[52] A critical metaphysics that proceeds in this way, as opposed to dogmatic metaphysics, can be considered an exact science.

The rejection of dogmatic metaphysics is not equivalent to the skeptical negation of all metaphysics; Volkelt anticipates a new critical metaphysics (ontology), which designates a road between dogmatism and positivist skepticism. Questioning dogmatic metaphysics does not imply the impossibility of scientifically practicing metaphysics as such, since for Volkelt "the decisive quality of scientificality is the logical description of experience, and this quality pertains to metaphysics just as much

[50] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 13.
[51] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* pp. 13–14.
[52] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 15.

as to all the remaining sciences."[53] In reality, no science exists which would completely satisfy our curiosity in an exact way. In general, a modest, but certain result of cognition suffices.

This is why not only metaphysics itself, but also its progress is possible, if by progress we do not understand its giving us a greater and greater number of truths. For Volkelt, "metaphysical thinking progresses deeper and more comprehensively through the fact that it is developed by various people in various times and in radically and principally different ways; it is precisely by virtue of these never-ending conflicts and contradictions that it pushes itself to ever richer and more exhaustive accomplishments, and takes a position towards reality that is increasingly many-sided and better adjusted."[54] Therefore, we are not speaking about new and innovative truths, but about ensuring their universality and many-sidedness. Thus, the goal of critical metaphysics is a comprehensive consideration of accepted truth, which in accordance with reality enjoins differing standpoints. Only the progress of metaphysics understood this way can lead to the continual enrichment, sharpening, and deepening of reflection.[55] It is certainly not given once and for all, but it must transform our points of view continually and in various directions. For Volkelt, the most essential thing in a metaphysician's critical approach is that he "turns his attention towards the exact continuity in the unstoppable change of his metaphysical point of view; if his sight is not weakened by skepticism too severely, he will perceive without difficulty in this continuity a progressive approach to truth, though this approach may still remain far from the goal."[56] The historical debates in metaphysics attest to its perpetual and deliberate pursuit of truth.[57] However, it is possible only when a minimum of trust is shown, which consists in avoiding one-sided evaluations and an awareness of concepts' internal dynamics. The point

[53] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 17.
[54] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 18.
[55] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 18.
[56] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 19.
[57] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 35ff.

is not to understand the development of metaphysics from an absolute perspective, as Hegel did,[58] but from the diverse perspective of the relative truths it accepts. A historically-produced metaphysical system should not be evaluated as false, but at most as one-sided and not absolute, since they certainly took into account many relative necessities of thought, which could not, however, be recognized as final.

As with Liebmann, Volkelt's position regarding the possibility of metaphysics is characterized by the search for a third way, which is why he is opposed to such a presentation of the case that forces one to take sides between false alternatives: exact science or none, progress or stagnation.[59] He views the causes of such a formulation in immaturity stemming from arrogance and one-sidedness. For Volkelt, there exists a cautious and critical road between the two extremes, on which science and progress also exist.

Volkelt perceives metaphysical components even "in the most exact and most recognized theorems, which transcend experience step by step and imagine a whole multitude of absolutely unexperienceable factors outside of experience."[60] Our daily experience is an enjoinment of the elements of empirical impressions and perception, and those that are non-empirical, having their genesis in our minds and being the products of our imagination, as well as feelings and intentions.[61] Concepts and thoughts, as well as our conviction about the existence of other conscious beings, or finally about the existence of the external world also belong to the non-empirical components of experience. Experience is made up not only of empirical factors, but also of a priori accepted presumptions, which he bluntly describes as the "misery of experience." The point is that experience never provides the basis for a conviction about the presence of causal relationships, laws (*Gesetzmässigkeit*), continuity, relations, order, unity, or regularity, because "my real conscious

[58] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 36ff.
[59] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 19.
[60] J. Volkelt, *Immanuel Kants Erkenntnisstheorie…,* p. 21. Cf. also: J. Volkelt, *Erfahrung und Denken…*, p. 294ff.
[61] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik…*, p. 22.

processes are the only thing that I experience."[62] For, we do not experience dependence as such. In our consciousness, we are only given coexistence or succession, which never have their basis in experience since we experience sensations, perception, and memories in a discontinuous way. Volkelt bases his thesis about the need for metaphysics on the conviction that all cognition, both in the empirical sciences and in daily life, must on multiple levels reach beyond experience for what is non-empirical.[63]

The basic non-empirical component of experience is the presumption concerning the (transsubjective) object of judgment, which is located outside the subject.[64] In the experience that is the basis of every empirical judgment, we have to accept the non-empirical presumption as to the independent existence of the object (i.e. independent from the subject), that it refers to real phenomena. For Volkelt, "each act of thought, each judgment directly judges or concerns the transsubjective object, thus it refers to something absolutely unexperienceable.[65] This necessary assumption about the transsubjective object of our experience is of a completely unempirical character, i.e. it is not based on experience. In this way, Volkelt blurs the boundary between metaphysics and the empirical sciences: "Essentially, metaphysics aspires to the same thing as the empirical sciences: it wants to make experience comprehensible on the basis of a logically indispensible plan and of the awareness of factors that are not experienced."[66] The task of the proposed (critical) metaphysics is, then, the study of the presumptions and premises of experiential cognition.

Volkelt also refers to the accusation of the inconclusiveness of metaphysics, namely that in metaphysics, individual orientations and views often exclude one another and are contradictory.[67] At the same time, he notes that this type of accusation is often formulated from contradic-

[62] J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik*..., p. 23.
[63] J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik*..., p. 25.
[64] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik*..., p. 37.
[65] J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik*..., p. 38.
[66] J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik*..., p. 26.
[67] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik*..., p. 27ff.

tory perspectives that exclude one another, which attests to the inconsistency of the opponents of metaphysics, who, accusing it of contradictions and nonsense, themselves commit similar mistakes. The critique of metaphysics and postulate of eliminating metaphysics reveals the inconsistency of its opponents. However, conclusions must be drawn from metaphysics' inconclusiveness, and the postulate of self-limiting metaphysics must be accepted, so that by eliminating the answers to its questions that are impossible to uphold, acceptable possible solutions may be found.

Work on metaphysics also signifies work on the explication of metaphysical problems.[68] Volkelt understands metaphysics as the science of problems and draws the conclusion that, if the logical formulation of questions is possible, then to a certain degree the logical formulation of metaphysical answers must also be possible. This requires logical discipline, however. Critical metaphysical theorems must be expressed with the stipulation that certain conclusions are logically required, but our thinking is unable to go further with the given argument.[69] Thus, the theorems of critical metaphysics are of a postulative, not categorical, character: they must take the form of conditional judgments and, at the same time, express remarks about the weak and strong sides of a given theorem. The goal is to confront convictions with various reservations in order to elicit hidden loopholes or obscurities. What is wanted is a comprehensive test of the accepted theorems from various points of view.

Volkelt's critical metaphysics does not stand in opposition to the great idealistic post-Kantian philosophers, such as Schelling, Hegel, or Schopenhauer, because its essential elements are in agreement with the intuition of these thinkers: "And so I can finally, as I am attempting to do, describe as unification and penetration the metaphysical idealistic aspirations, as memorably present in, above all, the post-Kantian thinkers,

[68] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik*…, pp. 39–40.
[69] Cf. J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik*…, p. 28ff.

as well as the skeptical-critical and epistemological spirit, as it is manifest in Hume's works and especially in those of the subtly-working, though with a flourish, Kant."[70] Thus, Volkelt sought a compromise between the extremes of idealism and criticism.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the presented compromise between science and philosophy that characterizes the critical metaphysics of Liebmann and Volkelt is, on the one hand, a great advantage, since it allows metaphysics to remain in close relation to modern scientific theory and thus to participate in modern techno-scientific civilization. The weak side of this compromise, however, may be that it narrows the universalistic perspective of philosophy to science and rejects non-scientific spheres of life. Though critical metaphysics was to be open to the metaphysical needs of man, it remained an expression of the scientific aspirations of the turn of the nineteenth century. Metaphysical criticism signifies the self-limitation of metaphysical aspirations, but this limitation must have its proper boundaries, because otherwise it will transform into destructive skepticism.

The untranscendental character of their philosophy is also essential. The role of the transcendental method in Kant's philosophy was strongly emphasized by the main Neo-Kantian schools, especially by the Marburg School, while Volkelt—and Liebmann, I presume—did not interpret it as transcendental philosophy, which is significant to their (untranscendental) way of understanding the essence of criticism. In these reflections, however, we only concentrated on the significance of critical metaphysics as metaphysics, which is why its relationship to the theory of knowledge was not properly presented. For this reason, the relationship of transcendental philosophy to the conception of critical metaphysics should become the object of further studies.

[70] "Und so darf ich denn schliesslich, was ich erstrebe, bezeichnen als eine Vereinigung und Durchdringung des idealistisch metaphysischen Strebens, wie es vor allem die unvergesslichen nachkantischen spekulativen Denker erfüllt, und des skeptisch-kritischen und erkenntnistheoretischen Geistes, wie er sich in Hume und besonders in dem subtil und zugleich gewaltig arbeitenden Kant verkörperte." J. Volkelt, *Über die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik…*, p. 31.

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Tomasz Kubalica

Metafizyka krytyczna Ottona Liebmanna i Johannesa Volkelta

Streszczenie: Przedmiotem artykułu jest koncepcja metafizyki krytycznej zaprezentowana przez Otto Liebmanna i Johannesa Volkelta. Ich koncepcja metafizyki jest wynikiem kompromisu między nauką a filozofią, który z jednej strony pozwala metafizyce pozostawać w ścisłym związku ze współczesną teorią naukową i tym samym partycypować w nowożytnej cywilizacji naukowo-technicznej. Z drugiej jednak strony prowadzi do zawężenia uniwersalistycznej perspektywy filozofii do nauki i rezygnacji z pozanaukowej sfery życia. Tak rozumiana metafizyka krytyczna choć była w założeniu otwarta na metafizyczne potrzeby człowieka, to pozostawała wyrazem aspiracji naukowych przełomu wieku dziewiętnastego i dwudziestego. Metafizyczny krytycyzm oznacza samoograniczenie metafizycznych aspiracji, lecz to ograniczenie też musi mieć swoje słuszne granice, gdyż w przeciwnym razie przekształca się w destrukcyjny sceptycyzm.

Słowa kluczowe: metafizyka krytyczna, uniwersalistyczna koncepcja filozofii, współczesna teoria naukowa, krytycyzm filozoficzny, sceptycyzm