

## A Critique of Metaphysical Logical Realism

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### Abstract

This paper disagrees with Michaela McSweeney over metaphysical logical realism. Using the method of critical analysis, it compares the metaphysical ideas in McSweeney's metaphysical logical realism with the standard ideas of metaphysical realism in metaphysics to underscore the extent to which McSweeney's metaphysical logical realism deviates from metaphysical realism. The paper argues that making an imaginary mind-and-language-independent world the truthmaker of a supposed one-true-logic is a categorical mistake that gives rise to what is called the Independent-Dependent paradox. The paper submits that the independent-dependent paradox is avoidable by a recourse to logical pluralism, which better handles the description of reality as a system of complex multiples rather than a single whole. Hence, logical relativity rather than the absolutism of logic appears more tenable for logic as a descriptive tool.

**Keywords:** One-true-logic · Logical monism · Metaphysical logical realism · Mind-and-language-independence · Logical pluralism

### 1. Introduction

Logical realism is a view about the metaphysical status of logic (Tahko 2019). In this regard logical realism can be rightly regarded as a school of thought in metaphysics of logic. Logical realists are divided over what the metaphysical status of logic is. One of the most debated topic in logical realism is whether logic is one or many, single or plural. While some have argued for logical monism, that is, that there is one true logic;

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others have argued for logical pluralism, that is, that there are many systems of logic. Michaela McSweeney argues in support of logical monism and introduces metaphysical logical realism (MLR) as the conjunction of three theses, namely:

- (i) That there is ‘One True Logic’ (OTL from now on).
- (ii) That the OTL is true on account of a mind-and-language-independent world.
- (iii) That the OTL is metaphysically privileged because it is better than any other logic at capturing the true nature of reality (McSweeney 2018).

This paper expresses disagreement about McSweeney’s metaphysical logical realism, which is presented as the conjunction of the three theses (i), (ii) and (iii). Using the method of comparative analysis, attempt is made in the second section of the paper to establish that McSweeney’s use of the concept of mind-and-language-independence, discords with the standard understanding of the concept in metaphysics. The third section of the paper argues that making an imaginary mind-and-language-independent world the truthmaker of a supposed OTL, generates what is in this paper called the Independent-Dependent (ID) paradox. The fourth section discusses some of the implications of the ID paradox to *metaphysicalism* and the final section concludes the paper.

## **2. Comparing the idea of mind-and-language-independence in metaphysics and metaphysical logical realism**

In this section, an attempt is made to show that there is a standard meaning for ‘mind-and-language-independence’ in metaphysics, which McSweeney does not seem to preserve in her theory of metaphysical logical realism. The comparison between how the concept is used in metaphysics and how the concept is used in metaphysical logical realism is plausible because metaphysical logical realism can be rightly seen as a school of thought in the metaphysics of logic; and the metaphysics of logic is an aspect of metaphysics.

The idea of ‘mind-and-language-independence’ is explicitly or implicitly preserved in the works of many

philosophers. It is implied by Plato's 'world of Forms'. It is also implied by the different versions of the theory of substance that are found in the works of philosophers such as Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, John Locke etc.

In metaphysics, the metaphysical category that can be described as 'mind-and-language-independent' is reserved for the unknown or unknowable holder of the properties that the mind attain through the senses and intuition. This standard meaning of mind-and-language-independence preserves the duality of the unknown or unknowable things-in-themselves and their knowable properties. Aristotle sustained this duality as the dichotomy between substance and accidents. The British empiricist John Locke<sup>1</sup> sustained this duality as the substance-quality dichotomy (Locke 2007, book 2, chap. 23). The German philosopher Immanuel Kant also sustained this duality as the noumena-phenomena dichotomy (Kant 1999, 190).

Western metaphysics is filled with different examples of this duality (Asouzu 2007). In Plato's metaphysics, this duality is sustained as the division of reality into two worlds, namely, the world of Forms and the world of imitations (Ikegbu 2014). Another aspect of this duality in Plato's metaphysics is the distinction of the Forms as objects of the real and perfect world from their mental epistemic representations through reminiscence on account of philosophical reflection. Some logical monists believe in a single logical structure that is mind-and-language-independent. What this means is that this structure will continue to exist even if there were no minds to perceive it (Rush 2014, 15). But this is tantamount to placing whatever is meant by 'logical facts' in the same metaphysical category with Plato's Forms, substance and noumena.

Duality in western ontology is sustained as the dichotomy between reality as 'things-in-themselves' and reality as 'objects of human knowledge'. But most often, reality as 'things-in-themselves' is in metaphysics, given a supersensible or transcendental or even supernatural connotation. On the one hand, it is presented as inaccessible by sensory epistemic standards, and on the other hand, its properties are presented as accessible. The practice has been to describe the metaphysically superior 'aspects' of the dichotomy that are

believed to be inaccessible by epistemic standards, as reality per excellence; while the metaphysically inferior ‘aspects’ that are thought of as being accessible by epistemic standards are regarded as somewhat pseudo-real. However, polarizing reality in this manner does not necessarily entail that reality is thus polarized. Such polarizations are done by the mind. The idea of mind-and-language-independence hangs on such mental polarizations. That the mind can radically conceive an idea as ‘mind-and-language-independent’ does not absolutely necessitate the existence of a mind-and-language-independent world. ‘Mind-and-language-independence’ is simply a logical concept invented by critical thinking to excuse the uniqueness of reality as things-in-themselves from the varying and possible contradictory perceptions and descriptions of them.

Is McSweeney right to describe the metaphysical category of mind-and-language-independence as a world; nonetheless to think of it as the truthmaker for an imaginary OTL? To say that it is the mind-and-language-independent world that makes the OTL true is to propose some form of dependence of the OTL on the mind-and-language-independent world. This looks like Platonism.

One of the thesis of Logical realism is that ‘logical facts’ are mind-and-language-independent (LaPointe 2014). Describing ‘logical facts’ in this manner implies that it belongs to the metaphysical category of mind-and-language-independence. If the mind-and-language-independent world is what makes the OTL true, then whatever is regarded as ‘logical facts’ should be facts of the OTL. In other words, if the OTL is true on account of a mind-and-language-independent world and the OTL is at the same time the real logical structure, which is mind-and-language-independent; then the OTL is itself mind-and-language-independent or it is in the mind-and-language-independent world. This sounds paradoxical but it is a logical implication from McSweeney’s metaphysical logical realism.

Besides Platonism, the predominant view in metaphysics about things that are conceived as belonging to this category of mind-and-language-independence is that they are the unknown or unknowable holders of the properties. Since

logical realism also places logic within this category, it could be asked whether the OTL is knowable or unknowable.

It is not enough to say there is OTL, it is also necessary to say what exactly the OTL is. To say that the OTL is this or that is to claim to know the OTL. But will this amount to knowing the OTL as it really is or merely of its 'properties'? This paper does not attempt to answer this question since doing so will require an elaborate discussion for another paper.

Like many proponents of logical monism, McSweeney does not say what the OTL is but she categorically states that it is not fuzzy logic as was implied by Putnam's thesis<sup>2</sup>; however she mentions that some have identified the OTL as classical logic (McSweeney 2018). This can be seen in the work of Maddy who says the OTL is classical logic (Maddy 2014).

Classical logic has a vocabulary that is part of its structure and in this regard, cannot be said to be mind-and-language independent. However to say as Maddy does, that the mind-and-language-independent OTL is classical logic is to say that the mind-and-language-independent OTL is at the same time a mind-and-language-dependent logic. But this amounts to a paradox. The alternative will be to adopt the approach of Platonism to say that classical logic is an imperfect image of the OTL. But to hold the latter view is to admit some kind of correspondence between the supposed mind-and-language-independent OTL and its supposed mind-and-language-dependent representative. This will mean a further multiplication of metaphysical duality to include the dichotomy between the supposed one real logic as it is in-itself and its pseudo-representative.

In instances where classical logic fails to describe a given experience of reality, such as in quantum mechanics<sup>3</sup> it becomes paradoxical to reduce the OTL to classical logic. This is because another logic will be needed to do the job that classical logic is unable to do. But two conflicting logics or logical structures cannot be representing the OTL at the same time. If the instantiated OTL as classical logic cannot apply universally to all possible worlds, then its status as the representative of the OTL cannot stand either or better still, the OTL has no known real representative. This will mean that the OTL, like

substance and noumena is actually unknowable. But this will imply a movement away from Platonism, which appears to be a safe haven for logical monists and the thesis of OTL.

It should however be pointed out that the knowability of the mind-and-language-independent Forms of Plato does not communicate exactly the same meaning as the knowability of the OTL. Plato's theory of the reminiscence of the Forms does not suit the analogy of OTL because it categorically describes the reminiscing-mind as that of a soul that once pre-existed with the Forms. The place of the mind as the knowing subject is silenced both in logical realism and McSweeney's metaphysical logical realism. Moreover, a logical structure that 'belongs' to a mind-and-language-independent world cannot at the same time be described by a logic that is mind-and-language dependent, which does not belong to a mind-and-language-independent world.

Whereas, McSweeney thinks she is not inclined to reason that conceiving logic in the category of mind-and-language-independence constitutes a categorical mistake; the author of this paper is of the view that this position is unavoidable. It is the mind that creates the mind-and-language-independent world and not that the mind-and-language-independent world is what the mind has experienced. Putting logic within the category of mind-and-language-independence reflects an old philosophical tradition that supposes that the ideas of universals, universality, objectivity, and foundationalism can only be safe from the destructive lenses of skepticism by positioning them in a metaphysical category of mind-and-language-independence.

Kant used this approach extensively both in his *Critiques of Pure Reason and Practical Reason* to argue for the possibility of a scientific metaphysics as well as to establish a foundation for the metaphysics of morals that is deontological. In epistemology, the notion of 'the given' and 'objects of immediacy' are introduced to prevent hallucinations and illusions from collapsing to ontological nihilism. But this does not really mean that 'objects of immediacy' and 'the given' belong to another world where mind-and-language independent things are. This is why McSweeney's introduction of a mind-

and-language-independent world as the truthmaker of the OTL poses more problems for logical monists especially where they still have to describe the OTL as a descriptive tool for capturing the true nature of the world.

The claim that there is only one true logic is hegemonic. Questions about what truth consists in is always a dicey issue in epistemology. One does not see logical realism settling this perennial philosophical problem with the thesis of OTL. In metaphysics of logic, the emphasis should not be on the truth of logic as a mind-and-language independent entity but rather on the ontological truths in the world that different logics attempt to describe. Every true logic requires another true logic to describe it. A true logic, which describes another also needs another to describe it. If the OTL is the only true logic, it cannot be used to describe it; and the one used to describe it must as well be true. This produces a paradoxical chain. One way to avoid this seeming endless chain is cease to look at logic as a mind-and-language-independent thing in-itself, after all the job of logic is to capture reality in its plurality and complexity. But logic is the mind's tool and not something independent of the mind.

Moving away from an imaginary mind-and-language-independent world to a real mind-and-language dependent world is necessary to explain logic not only as the mind's descriptive tool but also as the product of valued ontological contexts. This direction avoids the paradoxical situation where a mind-and-language-dependent logic has to describe a mind-and-language-independent logic or where a mind-and-language-independent logic must correspond to or be instantiated by a mind-and-language-dependent logic. This independence-dependence situation is what I have chosen to call the ID paradox.

### **3. Explaining the ID paradox**

Ontological logical realism and ideological logical realism are two versions of metaphysical logical realism (McSweeney 2017, 2018). Ontological logical realists are also metaphysical logical realists. This idea is gotten from the paragraph that reads:

Ontological (metaphysical) logical realists-hereafter ‘ontological realists’ – think that the OTL is true in virtue of directly reflecting something about items in our ontology (McSweeney 2018, 4).

This means that the words ‘ontological’ and ‘metaphysical’ are used as synonyms in this context. However, the word ‘metaphysical’ has a broader meaning than ‘ontological’ in metaphysics. Coming from the tradition of general metaphysics, metaphysics is a science which investigates the ultimate ground of absolutely everything, giving a final answer to a total problem (Coreth 1968, 17). Metaphysics studies the ground basis of all reality as a whole, which comprises both the natural and the supernatural (Iroegbu 1995, 23). The standard meaning of metaphysics is about the study of reality in its entirety. One who is committed to general metaphysics, understands that the subject matter of metaphysics is not limited to the natural, the physical and the sensible, but also includes the categories of the supernatural, the immaterial, the spiritual, the supersensible, the transcendent and the transcendental. Special metaphysics limits the subject matter to exclude the supernatural and the spiritual. Both general and special metaphysics is a theory of ‘what is’ in so far as it is; however, ontology limits the class of ‘what is’ to ‘what is believed to be’. That which is ontological is also metaphysical but not all that is metaphysical is ontological. Metaphysics deals with ‘what is’ in so far as it is; ontology deals with ‘what is believed to be’.

In using the concepts ‘ontological’ and ‘metaphysical’ one should understand that metaphysical is broader. A people’s ontological worldview is a totality of what they believe exists. Two cultures can be said to have different ontologies because there are many beliefs and practices that are coloured by such beliefs, which vary from culture to culture. For instance, traditional Africans believe in the world of ancestors but western ontology does not present ancestors in this light. This means traditional Africans have a different worldview from the westerners. However, both worldviews are reflective of their respective ontologies; and but ontologies are metaphysical in the general sense.

‘What is’ and ‘what is believed to be’ are two different things because ‘what is believed to be’ does not necessarily translate to what is. Also, ‘what is believed to be’ does not mean the same thing as ‘what is perceived to be’. While ‘what is perceived to be’ can be believed to be, not all that is believed to be has been perceived to be as such. For instance, in some ontologies dragons are believed to exist even as they are not perceived to exist. Something can be believed to exist but not perceived to exist and something can be believed not to exist but could possibly exist. Therefore, ontology as a theory of ‘what is believed to be’ cannot preserve the same meaning as ‘what is’ in so far as it is.

This elaborate discussion to differentiate ontology from metaphysics is aimed at establishing that the supposed OTL thesis is better described as ontological rather than metaphysical. Apart from Platonism, the substance-noumena tradition takes the metaphysical category of ‘what is’ in so far as it is away from epistemic accessibility and settles for representational realism, that is, what is perceived to be. In western epistemology, the mind is denied the possibility of attaining ‘what is’, rather what is common among philosophers of the substance-noumena tradition is the view that the mind attains the imagery representations of ‘what is’ via the senses.

Describing the supposed OTL as a mind-and-language-independent structure places it in the metaphysical category of ‘what is’. However, the proponents of the supposed OTL do not observe it and cannot point to it. All we hear is that it is a mind-and-language-independent structure. But it is factual that the supposed OTL thesis is just what is ‘believed to be’ and not necessarily ‘what is’. The supposed OTL is a speculated idea and not a thing-in-itself in the way McSweeney’s metaphysical logical realism tends to portray it. Even if the supposed OTL is taken to mean a real mind-and-language-independent structure, it cannot at the same time be a descriptive tool for capturing the true nature of reality.

That one believes that there is a supposed OTL does not necessarily mean that there really is OTL. That one thinks or believes that there is a mind-and-language-independent world does not necessarily mean that there is a mind-and-language-

independent world in actual existence because neither the former nor the latter has been perceived to exist. The OTL thesis is simply an unverifiable belief propagated by logical monists. This is why I think that McSweeney's believe in a mind-and-language-independent-world makes the conjunction of the three thesis<sup>4</sup> ontological logical realism rather than metaphysical logical realism. Going by the standard tradition in metaphysics and epistemology, the true nature of reality is beyond the mind's epistemic reach. How can the supposed OTL capture the world's real nature when the world's real nature is actually *uncapturable*? Even if the supposed OTL were to be seen as absolutely real, it would not be capturing the true nature of the world but only a representation of it.

Many philosophers avoid naïve realism when discussing about the true nature of the world or the true nature of reality; but rather hold unto a representational realism. Why do proponents of the supposed OTL think that a naïve realist approach is possible for the OTL? This is off tradition because even if the supposed OTL is approached from a naïve realist perspective, it cannot do the job of describing its own true nature even if it were to be conceived as a thing-in-itself; some other logic will have to do the job. Therefore, the proponents of the supposed OTL cannot avoid the problem that if there is a supposed OTL that better describes the true nature of reality, there should also be another OTL that should describe the true nature of the given OTL.

#### **4. Disagreement about metaphysicalism**

In adapting Rayo's *metaphysicalism*, it appears that McSweeney was only interested in showing that Rayo is a metaphysical logical realist. However, she failed to see that Rayo's views are detrimental to the OTL thesis. Rayo mentions that:

- a) Reality has a metaphysical structure that can be divided into its constituent parts in a particular metaphysically privileged way (Rayo 2013, 6).
- b) The truth of an atomic proposition stands plausible on its correspondence between the logical form of a

sentence and the metaphysical structure of reality (Rayo 2013, 6).

- c) The true things we say about reality does not necessarily mean that we have perfectly captured the metaphysical structure of reality (Rayo 2013, 9).

The first two views (*a*) and (*b*) is what McSweeney calls *metaphysicalism*. But the third view (*c*) is the primary concern here since it summarizes what the author of this paper has to say about (*a*) and (*b*). This is the view that the true things we say about reality does not mean that we have perfectly captured the structure of reality. This is a modified version of the standard view in metaphysical realism about the *unknowability* of reality but rather of the properties mentally represented. So neither ‘the metaphysically privileged way of dividing reality into constituent parts’ nor ‘the correspondence between atomic logical sentences and atomic facts’ is tantamount to capturing the true nature of reality perfectly. However, Rayo’s view that reality is a complex multiple is acceptable. Logical pluralism best fits the idea of reality as a complex multiple than as a single whole as presented by OTL.

Rayo’s view in (*b*) places truthmakers within the world but the view in (*c*) suggests that the metaphysical nature of reality cannot be perfectly captured. Therefore, the nature of truth that arises from this context must also be imperfect. If the truthmaker of the OTL is a metaphysical structure that cannot be perfectly captured then its truth-making-role makes the truth status of the OTL less probable. If the truthmaker of the OTL is the metaphysical structure in the world that cannot even be perfectly captured; how will the truthmaker of a mind-and-language independent world fare better in the job of truth-making for a supposed OTL?

Sider thinks that logical notions are the most fundamental language that perfectly captures the structure of reality’ (Sider 2011). But if the metaphysical structure in the world is the truthmaker for atomic sentences by way of the latter corresponding to it; Sider’s view stands paradoxical to Rayo’s view labelled (*c*).

Suffice it to express disagreements about the fundamental-minima-theories of being that are mentioned by

McSweeney. Given that the true nature of reality is actually inaccessible according to standard epistemology, or that the true nature of reality cannot be perfectly captured, one can only say that each theory of reality is not a complete theory. On that note, the view that the world is just about states of affairs (Armstrong 1997) is an incomplete description of the world because states of affairs are perceived states of different physical and biological systems. States of affairs are the perceptible properties of complex multiple cosmic systems that can here be described as ontological frames of references. There is also the view that the world is all about a single structured object (Schaffer 2010). This view stands contrary to our understanding of the world as a constituent part of a larger system, which we call the universe.

Where the metaphysical nature of the world cannot be perfectly captured, then in a state of imperfect attempts to capture same, there is bound to be variances of descriptions or of perceptions or of perspectives. Placing the truthmaker of the supposed OTL in an imaginary abstract world does not nullify the imperfect subjective attempts to describe the true nature of the OTL itself.

## 5. Conclusion

Metaphysical logical realism presents the OTL as a knowable mind-and-language-independent structure, yet it does not answer the question of what system of logic explicates this structure or whether it is a mental structure or a plain physical structure. McSweeney's creates more problem by hanging the veridicality of this speculated single logic on an imaginary, unverified and unverifiable mind-and-language-independent world.

That the true nature of reality cannot be perfectly captured means that even the best of logics cannot perfectly describe the true nature of reality, not even the supposed OTL. Paradigm-shift in science and the replacement of old theories by new ones is an indication that human knowledge is hardly certain. Logic is better defined from its functional dimension rather than from an absolutist ontological dimension because the job of describing the true nature of reality presupposes both

epistemic and linguistic 'tools'. The descriptive function of logic stands plausible on mind-and-language-dependence; this is why conceiving logic without this functional perspective should be avoided. Defining logic from its functional perspective allows one to appreciate the relativity of logic and logical pluralism. Logical pluralism makes logic a product of ontological contexts. This underscores the relativity of logic. In this regard, relativity of logic presupposes ontological frames of reference (Shapiro 2014). Ontological frames of reference points to reality as multiple complexities rather than a unity of essence.

The world is made up of objects that enjoy various interrelations and dependencies between them (Ijiomah 1995, 5 and Maddy 2002, 501). Yet it is the mind that perceive these objects as related and not that *relatedness* and *dependence* are in themselves things of the sort that can be described as mind-and-language-independent. That a logic is said to correctly describe a real state of affairs does not necessarily imply that one should think of the logic as true or correct. Descriptions have a lot to do with the internal relations between individual perceptions, cultural belief-systems and value-systems. Until one is ready to accept that description is plausible within the direction of correspondence between world and mental states, searching for truthmakers outside this context of relations may be a fruitless venture.

The attempt to describe the absolute is common in philosophy-literature. It is not surprising that in the metaphysics of logic, there are scholars who think that there is an absolute logic. McSweeney's OTL thesis is a version of logical monism explicating her belief in the existence of an absolute logic. Absolutism has failed in philosophy because of the realization that the finite mind cannot attain knowledge of the infinite absolute. Absolutism in logic may be a school of thought, but as far as realism about logic is concerned, relativity and logical pluralism cannot just be dismissed with a wave of the hand. After all the richness of logic comes when we stop looking for some preconceived essence (Klima 2014).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See (Peter Macmillan 2015), (John Dunn 2003) for more on Locke's view on substance.

<sup>2</sup> Putnam once thought that since classical logic fails to explain the observations in the system of quantum mechanics, then quantum logic rather than classical logic is the true logic of the world (Putnam 1968 and 1979). This can be rightly described as an attempt to validate the thesis of OTL.

<sup>3</sup> As elaborately discussed by Hilary Putnam and Guido Bacciagaluppi.

<sup>4</sup> That there is OTL; that it is the mind-and-language-independent world that makes the OTL true; and that the OTL is metaphysically privileged because it is better than any other logic at capturing the nature of reality.

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