

Lifeworld and Science

A systematic proposal between anthropology and transcendental philosophy

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Outline

1. Motivation: Lifeworld and the Scientific Image
2. Anthropological vs. Transcendental Accounts of the Lifeworld
3. Arguments for a metaphysically substantive account:
Epistemological, Semantic, Metaphysical, Pragmatic
4. A minimal, substantive proposal

What I will say:

- There are metaphysically inert and metaphysically ambitious ways of thinking about the relation between lifeworld and scientific image.
- I conclude for the metaphysical relation between lifeworld and scientific image:
 - Epistemological considerations are irrelevant
 - Lifeworld as a transcendental aesthetic seems too ambitious
 - Most semantic arguments require (controversial parts of) Husserl's theory of meaning
- But promising for priority of the lifeworld:
 - One semantic argument (occasional meanings in scientific representation)
 - One pragmatic argument (presupposed possibility of objective justification)

Motivation: Lifeworld and the Scientific Image

The manifest image is the framework in which '*man came to be aware of himself as man-in-the-world*' (SPR, 6). Its basic unit is the *person*.

The scientific image is a *postulational* conceptual framework. Its basic units are imperceptible entities.

These are conceptual *frameworks*, they cannot be translated piecemeal into each other.



- How should we understand the *metaphysical* relation between the objects of lifeworld and scientific image in this framework? Three options:
 1. Priority of the Manifest Image (instrumentalism)
 2. Priority of the Scientific Image (scientific realism)
 3. Reconciliation
- Sellars argues that for all questions of existence, we have to refer to the scientific image. This leads to the philosophical task of finding the role of intentionality and normativity in the scientific image.
- Christias (2023) *explicitly* argues from the Sellarsian picture that the Husserlian lifeworld has to collapse into (sophisticated) instrumentalism.
- How can we think about the lifeworld and avoid such a collapse?



Anthropological Accounts of the Lifeworld

The lifeworld is full of contingencies: the traditions of a local culture, personal idiosyncracies and habits, simple perceptual objects but also the rich layers of meaning in religious objects, technological artefacts, or works of art.

Anthropological accounts use the concept *lifeworld* to collect all the contingencies that characterize a group of people.

Anthropological Accounts of the Lifeworld

This version of the 'lifeworld' concept is readily available and easy to use outside of phenomenology.

But it seems to be irrelevant in its relation to scientific theory:

People who wish to explore the ways in which the habitual or intuitive anthropological conceptual space is structured are invited to explore social phenomenology. We can say 'go in peace' to Heideggerians, noting that it was entirely appropriate that Heidegger did not attempt to base any elements of his philosophy on science, and focused on hammers [...] rather than atoms. [...] We, however, are interested in objective truth, rather than philosophical anthropology.

(Ladyman et al. 2007, 5)

Lifeworld *in* empirical science?

Husserl's account of the lifeworld seems more ambitious.

Die Welt, das ist nicht eine Hypothese in dem Sinn, wie für positive Wissenschaft allein Hypothesen Sinn haben, etwa als Hypothesen über die Struktur der Milchstraßensysteme — alle Hypothesen der Positivität sind eben Hypothesen auf dem Grund der “Hypothese” Welt, für die in gleichem Sinn positiv wissenschaftlich eine Begründung zu suchen ein Widersinn wäre. (Krisis [1936b] 1976, §72, 265)

The world is not a hypothesis in that sole sense in which hypotheses have meaning for positive science—for example, hypotheses about the structure of the galaxies of the Milky Way; all hypotheses in the positive sphere are hypotheses upon the ground of the “hypothesis” of the world, and to seek a grounding for this “hypothesis” in the same sense, in the positive scientific way, would be absurd [Widersinn]. (my translation)

Transcendental Accounts of the Lifeworld

Kant's suggestion is that transcendental cognition is about the 'mode of cognition of objects' (KrV/CPR, B25). Transcendental accounts of the lifeworld tell us something about scientific modes of cognition.

For the purpose of contrasting with the anthropological notion:
Call a notion of lifeworld *transcendental* if it implies a restriction on the scope of scientific posits.

What would support such a metaphysical interpretation of the relation between lifeworld and scientific image?

Epistemological Priority?

- The role of the lifeworld for science is often described in terms of justification.
- The ‘doxa’ of the lifeworld is suddenly taken to be the foundation for the ‘episteme’.
- It has been argued that the lifeworld adds a coherentist notion of justification to Husserl’s previously foundationalist project (Føllesdal 1988, 1990; Bell 1990; Beyer 2012, Erhard 2012, Berghofer 2018).
- But this only concerns *how* scientific claims are justified, it does not result in any limits to *which* scientific claims can be justified

Transcendental Aesthetic?

Transzendente Ästhetik im weitesten Sinne ist transzendente Lehre vom Apriori des wahrgenommenen Realen und seiner Erscheinungsweisen; transzendente Ästhetik im engsten Sinne <ist> transzendente Ästhetik der sinnlich erfahrenen Welt, der Natur. (Husserl Manuscript D 2/2b, cited in Sowa 2008, LIII)

Transcendental aesthetic in the broadest sense is transcendental doctrine of the a priori of the perceived real and its modes of appearance; transcendental aesthetic in the narrower sense <is> aesthetic of the sensorily experienced world, of nature. (my translation)

How does this put a limit on scientific knowledge?

The scientifically described world can inherit the conditions of possibility of the sensible world.

Metaphysical: Rejection of Critical Realism

That a transcendental aesthetic is relevant to the metaphysics of science presupposes a rejection of critical realism, like Helmholtz'. Husserl:

Das Ding, das [der Physiker] beobachtet, mit dem er experimentiert, das er beständig sieht, zur Hand nimmt, auf die Wagschale legt, in den Schmelzofen bringt: dieses und kein anderes Ding wird zum Subjekt der physikalischen Prädikate, als da sind Gewicht, Masse, Temperatur, elektrischer Widerstand usw. (Ideen I, §52)

The physical thing which [the physicist] observes, with which he experiments, which he continually sees takes in his hand, puts on the scale or in the melting furnace: that physical thing, and no other, becomes the subject of the predicates ascribed in physics, such as weight, temperature, electrical resistance, and so forth.

If scientific theories apply to the *objects* of the lifeworld, they cannot declare them a mere 'sign' for a deeper reality that is only scientifically accessible. (e.g. Zahavi 2017, 197-199; Trizio 2020, 116f.)

Semantics: Straightforward World-Perception

Weltbewusstsein ist Weltapperzeption.
Schlichte Weltapperzeption ist
Apperzeption der Umwelt, der Lebenswelt,
die, im Strömen sich wandelnd in ihren
individualtypischen Dingen, immerfort eine
vertraute feste Struktur, eine
individualtypische, hat. (Hua39 [1933], 64)

Consciousness of the world is world
apperception. Straightforward world
apperception is apperception of the
environment, the lifeworld, that in its
changing flow in its individually typical
things, steadfastly has a familiar fixed
structure, that is individually typical [for the
world]. (my translation)

Semantics: Indexicality

More promising is a consideration that Husserl makes in the context of occasional meanings (see Dzwiza-Ohlsen 2019).

In the preface of the 1913 edition to the *Prolegomena*, Husserl suggests that *all* empirical statements have an indexical component (okkasionelle Bedeutung).

What completes the meaning of particular utterances is a horizontal relation to the shared lifeworlds of speaker and listener. (FTL §80)

Semantics: Indexicality (ctd.)

Van Fraassen (2008, 71f.) finds a similar incompleteness in scientific representation. What determines whether a mathematical structure approximately represents a galaxy cluster or the distribution of sesame seeds in a bread roll?

Scientific representations alone are underspecified. The shared lifeworld of users can distinguish the intended from unintended domains of application.

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2. The intersubjective community of *everyone* can constitute a shared lifeworld.
- 3. The posits of scientific theories are valid for *everyone*.

A minimal, substantive proposal

- In conclusion, I propose the following characterization of how the scientific image presupposes the validity of the lifeworld:

[LW-Min] The reality of the lifeworld cannot be globally undermined by a scientific theory.

- Minimal insofar as it is less prescriptive than other transcendental interpretations
- *Substantive* insofar as it limits what scientific theories can represent. In the sense used here, it is still a *transcendental* conception of the lifeworld.