

Accountable Metaphysics

David Spivak

TI;dr. *Objective: To cultivate accountable thought patterns for public benefit by developing a meta-science of coordination and communication.*

Introduction

Metaphysics is the foundational inquiry into the nature and existence of reality. Aristotle proposed that any understanding—be it an understanding of life, ethics, or politics; be it an understanding of stability and change, or of potentiality and actuality; or be it any other sort of understanding—must be based on, or intimately tied up in, an underlying metaphysics. Metaphysics is a cultivated collection of thought patterns intended to serve humanity's natural wonder, its cultivation of virtue and wisdom, and its flourishing.

Navigating the world is and has always been a primary focus of living beings. Today's world is becoming increasingly complex—*anomalies are becoming the norm*—and navigating is increasingly an issue, not just for each individual person, but for the preservation of humanity's highest values and deepest cares. The nature of life on earth is evolving—especially given the advancement of technology and acceleration of effective language production—and many of us are searching for an anchor, some form of stability. How do we make sense of what's happening around us and within us? What can we count on?

Navigation—end-directed, feedback-driven behavior—is based on coordinated action within a collective: hand-eye coordination makes for a more effective gamer, task coordination makes for a more effective crew. Metaphysics offers a set of reproducible thought patterns and communicable principles. These serve coordination across various domains—ranging from academic disciplines to organizations, and extending to interactions in both tangible and digital realms. The metaphysics is intended to scaffold all of our sense-making.

However, much has changed in the 2,500 years since Aristotle. We need a metaphysics that is up to date with the principles that have been revealed as useful by our ongoing scientific, mathematical, and philosophical inquiries, as well as with the technological advancements that shape our modern experience. We need our metaphysics to actually be helpful to us.

Accountable metaphysics

In order to be helpful, to be something we can count on when handling the challenges which come up in the process of living, our metaphysics must serve and be accountable to this living process. In other words, the living process is what dictates the requirements for our metaphysics. But if metaphysics is just a cultivated collection of thought patterns, what does it mean for metaphysics to be accountable? It means it must be able to account for how the cultivation process itself works and for how the cultivated collection of thought patterns actually serves us. It also needs to respond to feedback from its living stakeholders, meaning that it should be practically useful, affording better coordination between values and behaviors at all scales: within an individual person, between people within a family or organization, among organizations, etc.

Coordination within a system requires communication between its parts, so the metaphysics should aid in communication. This is another sense of the word “accountable”: adopting this metaphysics should make us more able to give accounts of what we’re doing and why. Explaining our behaviors, our sense of things, our values, and how all these align should be made easier by an accountable metaphysics.

An accountable metaphysics focuses on ability and accounting. It should make us more able by helping us to account. And it should evolve in response to the pressures that arise from using it to navigate the world.

Proposal

I propose to develop an accountable metaphysics. Development is ongoing and never completed, but the developing form does need to differentiate and remain viable.

The development of an accountable metaphysics cannot be a solo study, but instead must be informed by discussions with people from all walks of life, because its principles should be accountable to their deepest needs. In order to show their value, the principles must be worthy of being spread: they must be both insightful and pithy, interesting to talk about, and valuable enough to be carefully communicated. An understanding of these principles at a deep level must help people articulate what they need to express in order to coordinate.

I will explore collective sense-making as a foundational principle of living systems at all scales. Each of us strives to make sense of its world, and intrinsically, we are each a collaboration of organs, tissues, cells, and more. On a broader scale, we are

constituents of larger collectives—families, organizations, institutions, societies, and so on—all aiming for coherent navigation. The rapid and intricate interactions enabled by technology further increases our need for better sense-making. So what creates good sense-making? I believe that systematic accounting—the ability for one part to communicate to another in a structured and regular way—is at the heart of this. Hence, our insights into sense-making should guide the development of technology, ensuring it augments rather than hinders our sense-making capacity.

Mathematical fields can be seen as crystalized accounting systems. I will consider ways in which an accountable metaphysics can be formulated mathematically. I will also consider ways that our knowledge, know-how, and experience of the world can be usefully represented and shared.

Deliverables

1. A research agenda explaining exactly the methodology by which I will pursue the above.
2. Documented (either video recordings, audio recordings, or summary notes of) interviews, e.g. with scientists, philosophers, and people from various walks of life.

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