

## STUDY SESSION 3

### METAPHYSICS AS A BRANCH OF PHILOSOPHY<sup>1</sup>



#### 3.1 Introduction

In this study session, you will appreciate studying metaphysics not just as a main branch, but a core discipline of philosophy. Unfortunately, this core aspect of philosophy has suffered neglect and damaging criticism from positivism which is the view that only the specialized sciences that deal with fact can provide real knowledge of the world. This study session will examine the claim that philosophy suffered an eruption in the course of the development scholarship which made the relegation and neglect of metaphysics inevitable. The eruption of philosophy means its division into the positive sciences. The first question of philosophy “what is what is?” or “what is real reality?” was treated in Greek cosmology. Each science developed to deal with an aspect of what-is is a profile of reality. In the course of the development of the sciences, philosophy lost its bearing. It began to tag along with the sciences.

Consequently, philosophy lost its independent status and became subservient to the specialized, positive sciences, like a weak man who must depend on his children for sustenance. We must separate issues here. There is a legitimate sense in which philosophy, as a parent discipline, must continue to nourish the positive sciences. But it must not do so by being a weak, senile Methuselah looking for relevance in the activities of the children (the positive sciences).

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1. <sup>1</sup>The unabridged version of this chapter has appeared in J. I. Unah, *Metaphysics, Phenomenology and African Philosophy*. (Ibadan: Hope Publication, 1996).

The proper way that philosophy can play the role of nourishing the sciences is to do so in a sagely, oracular manner, that is, by constantly raising and renewing the question of reality in general. In every age, the rejuvenation and reinvigoration of the question of reality of the problem of being would always provide new guidelines for the positive sciences. The task of philosophy is to provide these guidelines at every point in time because the sciences need them to achieve security, acquire character, stature and maturity. Thus, a constant analysis of Being or reality in general is the dignified way that philosophy can remain relevant in the scheme of things.



### **3.1.1 Learning Outcomes for Study Session 3**

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

1. Define and conceptualize metaphysics;
2. Analyse metaphysics as the ground question;
3. Show how metaphysics is linked to science and goes beyond science;
4. Evaluate the limitations of traditional metaphysical thinking; and
5. Show what it means to be metaphysical as different from being a metaphysician.

## **3.2 The Scope of Philosophy**

Metaphysics is a core area of philosophy and the ground of the positive sciences. It is also the ground of our being. So, it is fitting that we should begin our study of metaphysics with a brief introductory survey of the scope of philosophy. Philosophy, broadly speaking, is an intellectual concern with the ultimate nature of things. For the purpose of scholarship, it has been split into the quest for the ultimate nature or ground of reality, truth and value. Indeed,

any genuine concern with the ground of things is subsumable under reality, truth and value.<sup>2</sup> Even when philosophy investigates other disciplines or areas of study, it is usually concerned with the ground of the disciplines or areas of study in question.

A concern with the intimacy of things or what has been regarded as the ground of Being<sup>3</sup> is the distinguishing feature of philosophy. It is what makes philosophy different from other disciplines. When a philosopher interrogates other disciplines, he does so, not to compete with specialists in these disciplines, but to provide a clearing, a ground, for them to achieve security, acquire character, stature and maturity.

The regional specialties (i.e. specialized disciplines) raise the question of the ground of their being. Whenever they do so, they invariably abandon their primary assignment to the jurisdiction of the philosopher. The abandonment of duty-post by the regional specialties to the jurisdiction of the philosopher is not to be construed as an illicit transition. The transition is inevitable in the scheme of things; to assist the disciplines to achieve security, acquire character, stature and maturity.

There is an iota of truth in the claim that to define philosophy is to narrow it down to the area(s) perspective of philosophy. However, care should be exercised, especially in these days of accreditation of academic departments and rationalization of courses not to give the erroneous and dangerous impression that philosophy (as a discipline) has no exclusive subject matter which distinguishes or which ought to distinguish it from other areas of study in a tertiary school setting. The exclusive subject-matter of philosophy comprises ontology, epistemology and axiology.

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<sup>2</sup> This point is made in K. C. Anyanwu, "The African worldview and Theory of Knowledge" in *African Philosophy: An Introduction to the Main Philosophical Trends in Contemporary Africa*. (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1981) p. 77-99.

<sup>3</sup> See Martin Heidegger *Being and Time*, trans by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962) p. 25

Ontology is a special branch of metaphysics called Metaphysical General. Strictly speaking, it is the science of being, a discipline which studies being precisely as being (not as this or that being). A metaphysical specialist treats aspects of being in response to the question, what is reality? Thus, metaphysics deals with the question of reality, of first principles or of ultimate nature of things.

Epistemology (theory of knowledge) studies the claims to knowledge. It evaluates whatever we claim to know and how we come to know. Five important questions, among others, are raised and answered in epistemology. First, can we know reality? Second, by what medium can we know reality? Third, can we be certain that we know reality? Fourth, to what extent can our claims to know reality be valid? Fifth, what is the foundation of human knowledge?

Axiology is the theory of value. It deals with the value we can confer on human conduct. In determining the value to be placed on a work of art and human conduct, it stipulates standards to which works of art and human actions should conform. In the realm of human conduct, axiology branches off into ethics which is simply defined as moral philosophy. Ethics determines and prescribes the fundamental principles of morality. It studies the norms of human conduct and sometimes the language of morals. In determining and prescribing the norms of human conduct, ethics also studies the ultimate nature of human actions.

Furthermore, axiology branches off into aesthetics in the realm of the creative process, that is, in the realm of the work of arts, its appreciation as well as criticism. A work of art is normally appreciated or criticized in terms of beauty or lack of it. But in what does beauty consist? Is beauty in the visual disposition of the beholder or is it in the object, in the work of art? What is the standard to which all things beautiful must conform? All these are some of the questions you are likely to encounter in the philosophy of value:

In addition to the subject areas of ontology, epistemology and axiology, philosophy deals extensively with logic. It may indeed be said that logic is the soul of philosophy. To deny any piece of philosophical work of logic is to disembowel such a work. Logic is philosophy's instrument of action. It is an indispensable tool of philosophy.

A piece of philosophy may deal only with metaphysics or epistemology or ethics, it would still be treated as philosophy. In academic or professional philosophy, it may not be convenient to deal with the three basic subject-matters of philosophy at any given time. For the purpose of scholarship, it is proper for philosophy to be differentiated as metaphysics, epistemology and ethics or even logic, history of philosophy and philosophy of other disciplines.

Nevertheless, a system of philosophy usually embodies metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Primacy may be given to one of them than the others. There may not be an interlocking theory of reality, knowledge or ethics. A system of philosophy may be more of ethics than metaphysics, more of metaphysics than epistemology or of epistemology than either metaphysics or ethics. The point of interest here is that for a system to qualify as a philosophical system, it must deal explicitly with questions of reality, truth and value, that is, with what there is, the question of which access to what there is and how man should act in community.

Consequent upon the foregoing, one begs the question if one merely resolves the problem of the definition of philosophy in the claim that to define philosophy is simply to express one area perspective of philosophy. Those who veer radically away from the understanding of philosophy as an intellectual pre-occupation with the ultimate principles of being, truth and value do so mainly because of the haste or pressure to establish the immediate practical

relevance of their discipline. In some cases too, it is the consequence of a rather poor orientation in philosophy.

Whoever calls himself a philosopher, especially a professional philosopher, should first of all have an orientation of Being, that is, a theory of reality, truth and value in order that he may have a sharp perspective in whatever area of intellectual transaction he might wish to focus his attention. The question of basic orientation of being or knowledge of the idea is so absolutely warrantable for the philosopher because it is the pivot on which a whole range of intellectual transactions can resolve. In other words, an orientation of being equips the philosopher with the ontological telescope to execute a comprehensive ordering or re-ordering of experience, of the world. It is clear from all this that the primary task of the philosopher is the provision of a comprehensive and consistent worldview. This can be achieved only if the philosopher is thoroughly grounded in theories of first principles, that is, if he has had a radical exposure to Being in his pupilage.<sup>4</sup>

A radical exposure to Being by which is meant a thorough grounding in questions of intimacy or first principles is further facilitated by orientation in informative and interrogative or investigative philosophy. Informative philosophy is conventionally treated as history of philosophy. Interrogative or investigative philosophy is the philosophy of other disciplines. Informative philosophy is an indirect exposure to Being. It acquaints the new comer with what preceding philosophers have said since the inception of scholarship, about the world, about reality, about truth and about value. In other words, informative philosophy provides the answer to the question concerning what philosophers have done in the ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary periods of human history.

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<sup>4</sup> See Jim Unah, *Essays in Philosophy*, (Lagos: Panaf Press, 1995), p. 29

Informative philosophy teaches that Western scholarship emerged from Greek cosmology, Greek search for reality, Greek quest for certainty and Greek desire for perfect happiness and social harmony. All these are collapsible into ‘a concern with reality, truth and value’. The summary of it is a pre-occupation with the problem of Being. Greek cosmology dealt with the constituents and the ultimate nature of the universe. Greek metaphysics dealt with the principles or categories of reality that governed the world. Greek epistemology dealt with the problems and ultimate nature of knowledge and the certainty of our claims. Greek ethics dwelt extensively on the notion of justice and how man can achieve mental, emotional and social stability.

The method of dialectics employed by the Greeks as exemplified in ‘the Socratic-Platonic dialogues’ as well as Aristotle’s *Organon* makes a case for logic as an indispensable tool of philosophy. In raising the question of what-is or the ultimately real, critical reasoning is imperative. Thus, criticism of received ideas is an age-long and exciting aspect of philosophy. But criticism is not an exercise in hopeless and purposeless devastation. In the tradition of the Greeks, especially Plato, criticism always gravitated towards synthesis.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, with the emergence of logical positivism criticism has become an excessively catastrophic and purposeless enterprise, the target of the most devastating activities of positivism is metaphysics. The positivism of the Vienna Circle of the 1920s and Ayer’s logical empiricism, for instance, made no pretence that metaphysics was the disease of which philosophy and the positive sciences must be cured. But when the alleged therapy turned out to be a fresh disease of its own, then, it became manifestly evident that any therapeutics (i.e. science of cure) of metaphysics is a metaphysics of its own, in which case the therapy is a rejuvenation and a reinvigoration of the ailment.

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<sup>5</sup> Jim Unah “Disguised Denials of African Philosophy” in *Journal of African Philosophy and Studies*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1 & 2 (1988), p. 54

The point to be made hereafter is threefold: First, that any positive science that embarks on the task of determining the nature of its methodology of inquiry is entertaining the ground question which is undeniably metaphysical; second, that any project to exterminate metaphysics is a metaphysics; and third, that the reductionist and dogmatic mien of man in the mass constitute the metaphysics of positivism which can be checked by the inculcation of the phenomenological attitude.

### 3.2.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

Metaphysics can be seen as a core area of which discipline?

### 3.2.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

Philosophy

## 3.3 Metaphysics as the Ground Question

In academic philosophy our understanding of metaphysics is so radically different from what it is taken to be in common parlance that we require conceptual clarity in order to establish how it is ingrained in human nature and how it furnishes the ground of our commerce in the positive sciences. Even in academic circles, especially with the emergence of positivism, metaphysics has been a subject of much misunderstanding. It has been argued, for example, that metaphysics deals with an imaginary universe populated by imaginary and ‘peculiarly mysterious entities’ and that the whole enterprise is a product of a misuse of language.<sup>6</sup>

In our own environment here, metaphysics has been so banalized on the pages of newspapers that people now associate it with witchcraft or occultism and now goes with the label of

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<sup>6</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*. (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1964), p. 43-44.



‘African Science’, the type that Godspower Oyewole brandishes about. People can call anything any name they like. But it is muddle-headed to suppose that professional academic metaphysics can be reduced to any of those. Metaphysics is not a preoccupation with peculiarly mysterious entities. It is not witchcraft. Much less is it occultism or voodooism.

By metaphysics we mean a comprehensive account of experience, of the world, of the universe. Every comprehensive account of experience, of the world, of the universe is informed by a theory of being or a principle of reality. A metaphysician is one who adopts a position or a principle or who furnishes a ground and proceeds to reduce all reality, all experience, to the adopted position or furnished ground. The metaphysician may be more aptly described as the editor of reality because he seeks to determine the principle or category of reality that governs the world, that grounds experience that explains the universe.

Differently stated, every comprehensive account of reality implies a transcendence of, or a going beyond reality to the reason by which it comes to be and have meaning. The positive sciences in the preoccupation with different regions of reality or different aspects of what-is do engage in this transcendence or voyage of the beyondness of being. Every science justifies its existence, its methodology of inquiry and makes a show that it is well grounded, that is, that its foundation is secured. Thus, every science deals with the problem of the ground of its being. This transcendence of the sciences, this voyage of beyondness of the regional ontologies in the determination of the ground of their being is undeniably metaphysical.

Philosophy as metaphysics and not philosophy as metaphysical thinking<sup>7</sup> has two broad aspects. The first is *metaphysica specialis* and the second is *metaphysica generalis*.<sup>8</sup> The former, metaphysical specialist, is the fragmentation of philosophy into the regional

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<sup>7</sup> Philosophy as “metaphysical thinking” is different from philosophy as metaphysics and being metaphysical is different from being a metaphysician. Clarifications of these terms will be made in the last part of this study session.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. By J. S. Churchill. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1962) p. xv.

ontologies or specialised sciences which deal with beings or particular aspects of what-is such as History, Literature, Theology, Sociology, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, Geography, Psychology, Economics, Political Science and Anthropology, among others. *Metaphysica generalis* is what is left of philosophy after the fragmentation and it deals with Being in general, reality in general or what-is in totality. So, we have specialized ontology which pertains to the positive sciences and generalized ontology which is “transcendental philosophy”<sup>9</sup> properly so-called.

Since *Metaphysica generalis* is what remains of philosophy after it has shed its burden to the positive sciences, then the proper function of philosophy is the analysis of Being, that is, the study of what belongs to things in general.<sup>10</sup> Again, since every study of Being must take root in man’s essential nature,<sup>11</sup> ontology should have to reach out to the study of man’s essential characteristics. Hence ontology will crystallize in a fundamental ontology, that is, a phenomenological ontology of man. Hence also, philosophy should have to graduate from the search for the ultimate nature of things to a ‘universal phenomenological ontology’ of man.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.3.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

Name two broad aspects of Philosophy as metaphysics

### 3.3.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

The first is metaphysical specialis and the second is metaphysical generalis.

## 3.4 How Metaphysics Affects the Positive Sciences

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<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (London, 1929), p. 662

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* Trans. by Fred Wieck and Glenn Gray, (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 79

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 62

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30

But what pattern did the eruption or fragmentation of philosophy into independent disciplines take? Was it an unfortunate accident which happened to philosophy? The fragmentation which we take to be the shedding of a disabling weight by philosophy that resulted in the birth of the positive sciences is by no means an accident or a regrettable incident. It was warranted by the need for division of labour. The positive sciences should investigate different and particular aspects of what-is, different and particular profiles of reality, different and particular dimensions of Being, exhaustively, painstakingly, in order that we may understand and appropriate them effectively for the active realization of our projects. Philosophy should investigate the general ground of Being to provide the clearing for and to illumine the positive sciences. By interrogating Being, by investigating what-is in general, philosophy provides the ground, the clearing or the guidelines for the specialized ontologies with a view to assuring them of security and assisting them to acquire character, stature and maturity.

The sciences do gravitate towards philosophy for succour and security when they suffer a crisis of foundation. The question of ground, of which way of access to the object of inquiry or of which methodology best renders entities transparent in their own light, constitutes the metaphysical foundation of the positive sciences.

The sciences are specialized metaphysics or regional ontologies. They are what have been traditionally labelled as *metaphysica specialis*. Metaphysics is the study of Reality. Every science emerged to develop an aspect of what-is, an aspect of Reality. It is precisely because of this that we say that every science proceeds primarily as a metaphysics. In dealing with an aspect of what-is or an aspect of Reality, every science develops conceptual tools with which to order experience in its region of Reality. Again, the development of conceptual tools to organise experience into stable regularity, into meaningful units, is executed metaphysically through the mind's active categorising. Through the schematizing or image-forming faculty

of the mind, both empirical and non-empirical concepts are designed for the ordering of experience. This means that the mind has a power of forming “horizons,” “relations,” “connections”<sup>13</sup> antecedent to experience. Any science that performs this task is invariably being metaphysical.

Besides, the sciences do sometimes entertain the ground question in their quest for a functional understanding of Reality. The question, “what are the fundamental assumptions and presuppositions of biology?” for instance, is no longer biology but meta-biology. In the same way, the question whether history can be studied objectively or subjectively, empirically or supra-empirically is not history as history but a meta-historical inquiry of the methodology of history. The positive sciences do raise these questions and whenever they do they are being metaphysical. Of course, there are several other ways in which the positive sciences can be shown to be infected by the metaphysical contagion. The point here is that every science prostitutes with metaphysics but like the hapless prostitute, almost everyone (including those who employ her services) vilifies it. Paradoxically anyone who tries to establish that metaphysics is an unworthy enterprise invariably finds himself in the metaphysical arena. To repudiate metaphysics is to dig away the ground on which we stand. Many have and would continue to embark on such a task out of ignorance. But we need no prophetic talents to teach us that such a project is a misadventure.

### 3.4.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

Other than specialized metaphysics, the sciences are also known as what?

### 3.4.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

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<sup>13</sup> See Heidegger, Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, p. 99-104

Regional ontologies

### **3.5 Being Metaphysical and Being a Metaphysician**

By stating the case that positivistic thinkers use the drag-net of metaphysics to secure the achievements in their regional ontologies, we do not in any way suggest that being metaphysical is the same thing as being a metaphysician any more than being legalistic implies being a lawyer. Suffice it to say that whenever we employ metaphysical concepts to organise experience or to establish a case in any field of intellectual transaction whatsoever we are being metaphysical. This is to say that in responding to our natural propensity towards metaphysics we are being metaphysical.

But being a metaphysician is a different matter altogether. A metaphysician is one who boldly confronts the problem of Reality in general and works out a comprehensive ground for particular aspects of what-is. In other words, a metaphysician is one who furnishes the ground for all other ontologies, that is, where metaphysics is taken in its strict sense of metaphysica generalis (ontology). Traditionally, that is, as an academic classification and as a branch of the philosophical system the term “metaphysics” has been associated with the search for the double underlying the appearance of things or the ultimate principle that informs palpable reality. This understanding of metaphysics is Platonism, Plato calls the hidden double of Reality, that is, real Reality ideas and becoming, appearance, or palpable reality a mere shadow or illusion.

It was Aristotle who sketched the task of professional academic metaphysics as the study of being qua being, that is, the study of being precisely as being, not the study of aspects of being or the search of a hidden double of palpable existence. Thus metaphysics properly conceived is the study of pure Being or the analysis of what it means to be. Understood in this light, metaphysics is pure ontology — the study of pure Being. As the study of pure

Being, ontology is the analysis of what belongs to things in general, not the search of a hidden double of existents. The problem here is that rather than concern itself with the analysis of Being, which prepares the ground for all the other sciences traditional metaphysics has concentrated its efforts on determining the hidden reality underlying the appearance of things. It is because of this derailment of metaphysics that some professional academic metaphysicians such as Heidegger would rather prefer to be called ontologists.

To make matters worse, in developing societies such as ours, occultists, witches and wizards and all those who profess to possess the power to generate electricity from a bucket of sand now go by the name of metaphysicians. This state of affairs has led to disenchantment with academic metaphysics with the result that many young researchers in philosophy are unwilling to do research in this area of philosophy. Surely, the road-side mechanic, by his mode of dressing, has made it a herculean task to distinguish the lunatic from a sane person.

Although it is arguable that since the obscure arts and sciences of occultism, witchcraft, sorcery and parapsychology deal with supra-empirical reality in some ways it would not be out of place to regard them as forms of metaphysics, the truth of the matter is that professional academic metaphysics, as the analysis of the general structures of Reality, is distinguishable from these various ways of actualizing metaphysical propensities. Professional academic metaphysics, strictly speaking, is ontology. Ontology is the study of Being and being, according to Heidegger, is always the Being of some entities. Consequently, professional academic metaphysics as ontology is the exhibition of the general structures of the world which renders entities transparent in their own Being. It follows, therefore, that the analysis of what belongs to thought in general, for example, is ontology while the analysis or description of mental acts is psychology. Mental acts or acts of consciousness are of particular types and of various sorts. Any description of acts of consciousness as posited by the existing, valuing self is a psychology whereas a description of the structures of the acts of

consciousness necessary for the constitution of knowledge in general is an ontology of mental acts.

Thus, laying the ground, exhibiting the general structures of the world, from which other sciences can take their rise, is metaphysics in the strict sense (ontology). In other words, the metaphysician, strictly so-called, is an ontological researcher. He researches on the general profiles of Being or the general structure of Reality in order to provide the ground and security for every other transaction. But in all fairness, we seem to have ignored the problem of traditional metaphysical thinking.

### 3.5.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

State what Aristotle meant by his claim that metaphysics is the study of being qua being

### 3.5.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

He meant that metaphysics is the study of being precisely as being.

## 3.6 Traditional Metaphysical Thinking

Greek cosmology introduced water, earth, air and fire as the elementary stuff of the universe in competition for predominance. Each of the four substances was conceived by its purveyor as the one basic element of Mother Nature that permeated every other thing. Greek metaphysics arose with Parmenides insisting on the “One,” the “It is” as Being and Being as permanence. In the Parmenidean system, non-being, change, alteration and plurality are illusory features of Reality. This is opposed to Heraclitan thesis (among other theses) that Being is impermanence, that is, that Reality is in a perpetual state of flux or constant change.

Protagoras of Abdera introduced a human dimension and assigned primacy to human subjectivity – of things that are that they are, of things that are not that they are not.

After the Pre-Socratic thinkers there emerged Platonism - the prototype of all metaphysical systems. For Plato, the principle that governs Reality is the Idea. Idea things are real while non-Idea things are unreal. Aristotle holds that Reality is primarily informed by mind or matter informed by the Idea. Ever since, the controversy surrounding the category or principle of Reality that governs the world remains unabated.

The fall-out of the claims and counter-claims revolving around the nature of Reality is the development of a form of thinking which identifies a principle and reduces all Reality to that principle.

With the Greeks and all the cultures and civilizations they have profoundly influenced, the mind-set has crystallized that Reality must be one and knowable by a single knowing subject. The crystallisation of this mind-set led to the absolutization of Reality. Almost every thinker in the history of Western scholarship managed to produce his own absolute. Almost every thinker could lay claim to a “God’s” eye perspective of Reality. Reality thus becomes my perspective over against nothing. Almost every traditional metaphysician recited Parmenides inadvertently with a glee. “Being is, non-being is not”. My position, my perspective, is absolute and every other opposed perspective would count as nothing. Echoing Parmenides, for example, Being- the Idea - is, non-being - becoming, appearance -is not, for it is a shadow or mere illusion.

When this sort of temperament, characteristic of traditional metaphysics, is injected into the social sphere you have the following-modes of conviction:



- (i) Christ is the only way, the absolute access to divine salvation. Consequently, all non-Christian things (beliefs and convictions) are condemned to eternal damnation. Christianity thus becomes a regime of the absolute.
- (ii) There can be no secular state. Islam is the true religion and Mohammed the only prophet of Allah cannot have a successor. There can be no other prophet like him for he is the Last of all the prophets. In any community where there are non-Muslims preferably called infidels only Muslims should rule. The affairs of the children of Allah cannot be presided over by infidels. Muslims should obey only the precepts of the Quran and disregard secular constitutions whenever they run against the grain of Islamic teachings. In this way a Muslim state of absolute norms and values emerge and take root.

Now since Christian principles are at variance with Islamic precepts, have we not, by our regimes of the absolute, prepared a fertile ground for discord? Do we need to be reminded that the conflicts and clashes between Christians and Muslims all over the world are a product of the metaphysical spirit by the insistence on a cherished perspective over against nothing?

Similarly, the attitudes of dictators in modern states, which have produced catastrophic consequences, are no less metaphysical. A one-party state in which I can lord it over the rest of the people, where almost everyone would submit to my point of view is the true state. What I do and say as a sovereign is not subject to question, not subject to debate, not subject to negotiation for as sovereign, I am the Law, the absolute! All oppositions are swept underground.

But since high-handedness begets high-handedness the putative peace achieved by violence begets violence by way of vengeance Metaphysical thinking repudiates and sows the seed of

its own repudiation. Dictatorship oppresses and suppresses and sows the seed of its own oppression and suppression. That is why there is no pensioned dictatorship. The dictator must be paid back in his own coin of repudiation, oppression and suppression.

### 3.6.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

Who introduced a human dimension to Greek cosmology assigning primacy to human subjectivity?

### 3.6.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

Protagoras of Abdera.

## 3.7 Neo-Metaphysicism and the Phenomenological Temper

The ubiquitous metaphysical spirit moves away from positivistic (metaphysical) thinkers, social regimes and political leaders to our quotidian existence. As civilized cultures announce the collapse of regimes of the absolute in their domains, the average man in our nascent societies has congealed into a dogmatist and a fanatic in his daily commerce with fellowmen. Even amongst our scholars and teachers it is now a mark of intellectual sobriety and distinction to hold extreme views or hardened positions. Such ones call themselves neo-radicals. We call them neo-metaphysicists.

Neo-metaphysicism is the know-it-all, superior-holier-thou attitude. It is the habit of holding doggedly and dogmatically to a point of view even in the face of over-whelming counter-evidence.

It is the unequivocal condemnation of all points of view that are antagonistic to one's cherished point of view. Neo-metaphysicism is critical excess and the insistence on the absolutes of being. It does not recognize alternatives but insists on either this or that.

Extremism – the hardening of position – as a form of metaphysicism makes man the master, the repudiator, the overlord his fellowmen, on the one hand, and a pathological reactionary, on the other hand.

Philosophy in its ultimate essence, in the view of Professor Martin Heidegger, is a universal phenomenological ontology of man, but is a radical understanding of the Being-process, a glorious articulation of chaos and the fulfillment of nihilism. It is the orientation or habit of letting things stand out clearly as they are without prior conceptual prejudice or reification, that is, the habit of letting things in their natural light regardless of whether they make us happy or sad. By culturing us to let things be and by teaching us to show respect for every existent and every point of view, phenomenological ontology provides the intellectual ground for the blossoming of the liberal temper which in turn is the ennobling of man.

The liberal temper makes man the shepherd of Being or the guardian of his fellowmen. The ideological warfare is borne of the metaphysical spirit. But there is beauty and vigour in the ideological struggle if it is situated within the neighbourhood of Being. Man in his ultimate essence, is a homo viator, a wanderer, an eccentric, a finder and a pointer of the way. He is not overlord; he is not the ultimate initiator.

Autocrats, dictators, and despots who cannot accommodate alternative principles and perspectives to their cherished position are men of the metaphysical era whose subduing, repudiating overlordship breeds extremism on the part of the subdued, the repudiated and the relegated. Extremism, therefore, begets extremism. As neo-metaphysics, extremism engenders the attitude of vengeance and to that extent it is nihilistic. The liberal,

phenomenological temper is the transcendence of extremism the way that a radical understanding of the Being-process is the overcoming of the metaphysical spirit.

We enjoin radical faith, or rather the Jasperian philosophical in the transcendence. But radical faith should accommodate alternative perspectives and acknowledge that there is being everywhere. Radical faith should not subscribe to the either-or syndrome because it is an intellectual canopy for extremism. A radical faith that does not subscribe to a middle course is sheer extremism. Nowadays, socialist countries are getting more and more capitalist and capitalist countries are getting more and more socialist. What this shows is that man is becoming more human in mind and spirit and that society is becoming much more humane. It shows, in fact that man has come to the startling realization that there is being everywhere.

What we are is being. What we see, say, feel or imagine is being. Everything we talk about, think about, dream about is being. There is being everywhere, not just this or that being. One who steers a middle course is one who speaks the language of Being. The radical thinker and commentator should be careful in the use of language. The insistence on the either-or approach to social discourse and social criticism is a mental relapse into archaism and a hopeless surrender to vituperative elitism. It is a betrayal of an evident lack of circumspection and a loss of the capacity for pragmatic compromise.

The either-or perspective is neo-metaphysicism. It is a modern day version of the metaphysical temperament whose overcoming resides in the deliberate and careful cultivation of the phenomenological attitude, that is, in the internalizing of the liberal temper, letting beings be and in living and letting others live. Radical faith for us means holding a compelling point of view, appreciating the value of antagonistic points of view and showing why your point of view is a better approximation of reality. That is the flourishing of the liberal temper. That is the ennobling and empowerment of man.

From the foregoing, the point has been driven home that to the extent that every science investigates an aspect of reality, every science proceeds primarily as metaphysics. Besides, since every science thinks<sup>14</sup> out the meaning of the concepts it employs to comprehend reality and since every thinking-out of the meaning of a concept is philosophy or metaphysics, every science is invariably metaphysical.

Having set the sciences in motion metaphysics began to receive a bashing from the sciences which now clamour to extricate themselves from the mother discipline. The sciences, especially natural science began to conceive “reality as a system of processes governed everywhere by the law of causality”<sup>15</sup>. The conspiracy to expunge metaphysics from the sciences crystallized in positivism. But by making a definitive pronouncement on reality, that is, by insisting that reality is a “system of processes governed everywhere by the law of causality,” positivism elevated itself to the rank of classical metaphysics. Without realising it, this is how positivism becomes the metaphysics of science.

What this simultaneous rejection of and return to metaphysics by positivism signifies is that the sciences are threadbare without metaphysics. Insofar as they clarify concepts and employ them to organise the chaos of experience into connectedness and universality and in as much as they raise the question of the ground of their being, metaphysics remains the foundation of the sciences. Thus, rather than resort to the wild goose chase of trying to exterminate metaphysics, we should settle down to rejuvenate it.

We should explore<sup>16</sup> phenomenologically those elements of finite human mind which make it possible for us to metaphysise. Such exploration would not entertain a patchwork on traditional metaphysics much less the positivistic thinking to which it gave rise. The

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<sup>14</sup> See R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*. (London, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 196

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184

<sup>16</sup> The exploration of phenomenological metaphysics has been executed by this writer in *Heidegger: Through Kant to Fundamental Ontology*, (1996) and *On Being: Lectures on the Ontology of Man*, (2001).

rejuvenation exercise, if it is to be sufficiently radical, must go down to our interiority to uncover what Heidegger calls the source of the objectivity factory – that without which objective knowledge of all sorts would not be possible, of which Kant intimated that every man has a natural propensity to actualize in some form or other. Since no rejuvenation exercise can throw the whole concept of metaphysics overboard, the new project being proposed here will crystallize in a phenomenological metaphysics.

### 3.7.1 In-Text Questions (ITQs)

What is the know-it-all attitude that involves holding a view doggedly and dogmatically?

### 3.7.2 In-Text Answers (ITAs)

Neo-metaphysicism

## 3.8 Summary of Study Session 3

In this study session, you have learnt what metaphysics is as a core branch of philosophy. You have learnt what metaphysics means, the major concepts that makes up the study of metaphysics and the problems in philosophy that metaphysics tries to raise and resolve. The session has introduced you to the link between metaphysics and the sciences, as well as what it means to being metaphysical and being a metaphysician. This study has been able to help you understand the traditional metaphysical thinking and the phenomenological temperament that reacts to it.

### 3.8.1 References / Suggestions for Further Reading

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