PART I

NATURE OF METAPHYSICS
Chapter I

Nature of Metaphysics: A Historical Survey

In philosophical parlance, much has been said and is being said about metaphysics in one direction or another. "Metaphysics has a unique power to attract or repel, to encourage an uncritical enthusiasm on the one hand, an impatient condemnation on the other".\(^1\) Such radically opposite reactions cannot be accounted for without the supposition of some chronic uncertainty and flexibility in the very use of the concept "metaphysics". It can be seen that not only has the concept been understood in widely divergent meanings by the philosophers of different traditions but even the same philosopher of a particular tradition has unwittingly run into somewhat varying notions of metaphysics in his statement of the problem and in the elaboration of his meaning. The upshot of all those has been that there has opened, as Kant himself in his Preface to the first edition of his *Critique* complains\(^2\), an arena of endless disputes in the final assessment of the value of metaphysical discussions. Thus, some have questioned the very possibility of metaphysics as a rational and fruitful discourse, while others have regarded metaphysics not only as philosophy - *par excellence* but also as the most basic and as the fundamental ground of all knowledge. Is metaphysics the queen of all sciences? Or is it puerile nonsense originating from sheer misuse of language? Or is it incidental to a peculiar derangement of the mind, to what one believes upon instinct, requiring psycho-neurotic treatment? Is it possible or impossible? If possible, as what? - as knowledge of reality or as a conceptual scheme of some description or a proposal for
a conceptual revision or as a body of necessary presupposition of scientific knowledge? Again, is metaphysics any accredited form of "knowledge" or a linguistic convention of some kind or an archetectonic of theoretic reason as Kant in one sense supposed it to be? Or is it a deliberate misuse of language, a body of errant nonsense? Or as wisdom would say a sort of illuminating falsehood, a pointed paradox aiming at an intelligible content which is not there? It seems that there can be no apriori decision in this matter and as David Pears observes, "a neutral and dispassionate account" of the whole matter becomes necessary. The situation presented is similar to the one that William James brings in interestingly in his "Pragmatism", the members of a camping party all debating and disputing "does the man go round the squirrel (which keeps moving all along round the trunk of the tree) or not?" The advice that James imparted in that context assumes importance here also. Philosophy runs into interminable disputes when we do not stop to enquire what we are exactly debating about. It is not for nothing that G.E. Moore on similar grounds recommended an enquiry into the meaning of what we talk about. "Whenever you meet a contradiction," says William James, "you must make a distinction" - One must settle at first the peculiar meaning or sense in which the term metaphysics is being employed by its proponents and opponents. Not only that most of the words and names used in our theoretical discussions have a wide diversity of meanings, the meanings of words have a historical process of growth and development and we would be miserably committing mistakes if we insist on a rigidly determinable and therefore, an invariable or uniform meaning. Life is a growing thing, so is also human thought and language and that being the case, no crucial word can be expected to remain uniform or self-identical in its connotation or meaning in the historical process. Most
philosophical puzzlement, says L. Wittgenstein, develop when language goes on holidays and when we fail to take note of the specific activities in which words are actually used in specific contexts. So, we shall in the first instance, investigate the peculiar affiliations and associations of the word 'metaphysics' as it has been employed by philosophers in the history of philosophical thought.

The name 'metaphysics' was for the first time introduced into philosophical literature as the name of a treatise of Aristotle, his last and unfinished work, and this was done not by Aristotle, fifty years before the birth of Christ, himself as is commonly believed but by Andronicus about the year 50 B.C. While compiling and publishing a complete edition of Aristotle's known works Andronicus placed all the writings of Aristotle on what Aristotle intended to be his 'first philosophy' under the title 'metaphysics'. These, in the arrangement provided, came to be placed after 'physics' which was regarded by Aristotle as 'second philosophy' as distinguished from his first philosophy. There are at least two important points for consideration in this place. First, can it not be that there were important elements of Aristotle's first philosophy such as we find in his Organon or Logic which should have been brought under the title metaphysics in the arrangement but could not be done because it was not Aristotle himself but only one of his commentators and compilers who gave this classification. It cannot be disputed now that there are very important strata of thought in the prior and posterior Analytics of Aristotle which are vitally connected with Aristotle's first philosophy brought under the title 'metaphysics' and that a systematic presentation of Aristotle's thought on metaphysics required as such. Secondly, can it be that the name 'metaphysics' given to these writings in the arrangements of these topics
provided by the Aristotle's commentators where these came after physics, is devoid of any specific significance - as seems to be the opinion of Stace and so a case of sheer historical accident? Aristotle, we know, was an encyclopedic writer and his primary interest was to investigate the nature and disposition of concrete particulars of this existential and empirical order. He was not a visionary as Plato was. It is not a historical accident that he became the founder and father not only of formal logic but also of the various special sciences. So, starting with investigation in the various fields of natural philosophy following an observational and inductive approach, if in course of his later discussions he settled upon generalities or principles which all belong to 'being as such' as different from any special or specific mode of beings, he must have worked under the impetus of a very different theoretical necessity. So the name metaphysics given to Aristotle's writings on first philosophy may not be accidental and devoid of some deeper theoretical motive. So metaphysics in the sense of that discipline, 'which is after physics', will have to be taken in some sense even in Aristotle as what was in Aristotelian conception 'beyond physics'. One palpable mistake, however, is to be avoided. Aristotle was not a transcendental idealist as Plato was. He was a realist and took an immanent view of things. In his conception, forms are inseparable from matter as matter is inseparable from forms. So, the principles of his first philosophy of his 'Science of being as such' are not to be treated as abstract notions or universal essences independent of the existing particulars as in Plato. They are the most general forms or features which exist in and through all particulars and are organical to them all. In this sense, the Aristotelian science of being-as-such claims to be the most general science, the most general study of reality or the real order. But its method is not the same observational and inductive
method that Aristotle appears to have followed in his treatment of the special sciences. Nor is it the deductive or the demonstrative method even though Aristotle takes the syllogistic method as the method essential for all scientific demonstration of certainties. The fact is that in his metaphysics we have a philosophy based upon critical or analytic thought, although the method for this science of being-as-such has nowhere been clearly defined or stated. The method followed was the method of speculation or logical thinking which existed in the philosophical thinking of his predecessors beginning from the early Hylozoists down up to Plato. Greek philosophy, in all its several schools, made a clear distinction between thought and sense experience as modes of knowing and maintained that while sense-experience gave knowledge of appearance, it was thought alone which gave knowledge of reality-as-such. Thought, in this context, meant speculative reasoning and philosophers down up to Aristotle used this speculative or theoretic reason in the elaboration of their philosophical themes. The only noticeable difference in the speculative method used by Aristotle in the sphere of metaphysics is this that while some of his predecessors, specially Socrates and Plato employed the speculative method in conversational or discusional mode of presentation and called it dialectics, Aristotle did not use it in that way. Nor did he call his first philosophy "dialectics". Thus, in Aristotle, we have a speculative metaphysics, but it is not speculative in the sense of being a purely imaginative and fanciful projections of ideas but in the sense of being, a reasoned account of what that philosopher believed to be the most basic feature of reality or the real order.

As regards this specific topics discussed by Aristotle in his metaphysics, we can indicate the principal items as follows: (1) a criticism of the previous philosophical systems from the point of view of the
Aristotelian theory of the fourfold causes, (2) the statement of the principle of contradiction as basic to all scientific reasoning, (3) the definitions, (4) a discussion of the notion of substance and of logical essence or of the notions of matter and forms and of the composite things that is formed by an organic union of both, (5) the notion of potentiality and actuality, (6) the idea of the unmoved mover. In addition to all these, the various categories or the predicaments, the ingredient of his logic, are also repeated in his metaphysics. Furthermore, we have in this metaphysics of Aristotle, his polemical discussions of Plato's theory of ideas which show the peculiar features of Aristotle's metaphysics, as also his distinctive view of reality. This then gives the indication that metaphysics or the first philosophy of Aristotle was intended by him to be a realistic theory as was his physics or second philosophy also, but only more general and more comprehensive than the other. It was also considered to be more basal and more fundamental as the very epithet "first philosophy" appended to it indicates. But this must not be construed to mean that our more modern notion of metaphysics as a presupposition or the ground plan of the various sciences was also mooted in Aristotle. To all purpose, metaphysics was some sort of a super-science. The science of being as such, some sort of rational ontology in Aristotle's speculation. It, no doubt, particularly in those topics which were given in logic or Organon, contained elements of the general methodology of scientific knowledge as also of the principles of meaningful discourses, but it will be too much to say that in the Aristotelian metaphysics we have a ground plan of all sciences and his metaphysics was the first philosophy in the peculiar modern meaning (Cf. Strawson's *Descriptive Metaphysics*, Introduction).
The most significant point to note in the discussion is that in this conception of metaphysics as first philosophy, as it has already been stated, the expression first philosophy does not mean the presupposition or the ground plan of all sciences and of all knowledge. The first philosophy is a distinctive kind of knowledge by itself and in itself and is conceived to be a super-science in the sense of a reasoned knowledge of widest possible generality. It is equivalent to what the ancient meant by 'philosophy' - that is, wisdom or knowledge in its greatest comprehension. The distinctive feature of Aristotle's thought is that he did not limit the term 'philosophy' to his metaphysics as his philosophy of first principles but he extended it to include also the second philosophies of lesser comprehension or compass such as the various natural sciences of his conception. In both, the first philosophy and the second philosophies (natural sciences or physics) we have knowledge that is information regarding nature of things, but the subject matter of his first philosophy is more pervasive and general than that of the other. In Aristotle, there is no attempt to denigrate the natural sciences and to regard metaphysics as the only type of true knowledge. He allows these special sciences to coexist with metaphysics, as the less general knowledge with the more general. This then distinguishes Aristotle's position from that of the contemporary logical positivists who limit knowledge and intelligible discourse within the bounds of natural sciences and reject metaphysics altogether. This also distinguishes his position from the position of the rationalist metaphysicians and the absolute idealists who regarded metaphysics as the model of necessary truths and who either relegate natural sciences to the domain of 'make-belief' or attempt to reconstruct the natural sciences on the basis of their metaphysics. The first philosophy of Aristotle does not supersede his second philosophies, does not even seek
to reinterpret them in terms of itself but allows them to remain side by side as a coexistent branch of the true knowledge. Aristotle was a great lover of the concrete. But concrete reality of his conception exhibits features or forms of different degrees of generality. Whatever enquiry enables us to discover and interpret these forms or laws is philosophic knowledge of his conception. But while physics or natural sciences are philosophies of the second grade dealing as they do with forms or principles of lesser generality, metaphysics is first philosophy or philosophy of first grade in so far as it brings into light forms or features or laws that characterise 'being-as-such', that is the entire realm of realities. It seems that in the history of philosophy we have three kinds of views; (1) there is only a first philosophy such as metaphysics which alone can pass as true-knowledge; (2) there is no such first philosophy and the very notion of such philosophy is a prejudice what is actually there, is the natural sciences of the earlier conception, the "second philosophies"; (3) there is both a first philosophy and also the second philosophy although they may differ considerably in their methods and subject-matter as also in their degrees of comprehension. But both are scientific in the sense of true and accredited knowledge. Aristotle subscribes to this third view.

In the history of philosophy, both to its proponents and opponents, metaphysics has meant or stood for this first philosophy, whether possible or impossible. But in concrete formulation, the specific nature of this first philosophy has undergone revision and has varied widely. The medieval theologians also formulated a metaphysics or the first philosophy which is an admixture of revealed dogma and strains of philosophical thoughts found in Aristotle and Plato. They regarded this as the only true knowledge and rejected whatever views came into conflict with it as wrong. The philosophy
in the so-called modern period were historically the first to insist on a certain methodology for philosophy. Bacon, we know, was the first to insist on the scientific method. His *Novum Organum* which, however, was to be an empirical and inductive method. The modern rationalists such as Descartes, Spinoza and Leibritz, however, planned their first philosophy in a different way by following the model what they understood to be the mathematical and the deductive method, since mathematics in their opinion alone could deliver a system of necessary truths. The modern rationalists pursuing their method of reflection attempted to hit upon certain fundamental notions involving indubitable certainty and, thereafter, with the help of their synthetic deductive method, to develop metaphysical systems in the way mathematical sciences, particularly geometry develop, a whole system of propositions from certain axioms and postulates. The dualistic metaphysics of Descartes, the monistic metaphysics of Spinoza and the pluralistic metaphysics of Leibritz are systems of apriori truths which follow synthetically and deductively from a group of fundamental notions such as substance, attributes and modes and the like. What is of special note in this connection is this that, these rationalists not only accepted these, their metaphysics or first philosophy, as the only true knowledge but wanted to revise and reinterpret all other forms of knowledge in the light of the basic concepts of their metaphysics. So metaphysics with them became not only the first philosophy but also the necessary foundation of all other knowledge. Rationalistic metaphysics has claimed to be the knowledge of reality as such and since its basic concepts could not be reached by any empirical mode of investigation, they regarded their metaphysics as by its very nature trans-empirical and transcendental. The fundamental assumption underlying this sort of metaphysics of first philosophy came to be rejected by Kant's criticism - the final conclusion of
which was that metaphysics as a body of scientific and objective knowledge was impossible. Hegel aimed at resuscitation of metaphysics as ulterior and transcendental science by introducing a new method and providing a new basis for it. This was the famous dialectical method of Hegel in which logic and metaphysics, became one, the gap between thought and reality was cemented and a whole system of ideas, knit together by dialectical relation, came to represent not only a system of subjective notions but also the very structure of the objective reality such as the Hegelian Absolute. This then was a new formulation of metaphysics on apriori grounds, a metaphysics which claimed to be all comprehensive knowledge and all enveloping truth. There was no attempt to enlist support for this metaphysics in the domain of science prevailing during this period. It is not a fact that much advance was not made in the direction of the scientific knowledge under the impetus of Newtonian physics and naturalistic and mechanistic trends of thought which were current in the field of scientific investigation. But a type of metaphysics like the Hegelian either ignored such development in science or sought to interpret the basic categories of science in terms of its own ideas or principles. At best, the science was regarded as an inferior kind of knowledge dealing with the partial segmental while metaphysics or philosophy was credited with what was regarded as comprehensive view of reality. The non-Hegelians, although, all of them did not take the dialectical method of Hegel as the ground plan of their metaphysics subscribed to the self same stand point. Bradley's view that "we may agree, perhaps, to understand by metaphysics an attempt to know reality as against mere appearance, or the study of first principles or ultimate truths, or again the effort to comprehend the universe, not simply piecemeal or by fragments, but some how as a whole" becomes meaningful as also relevant only in
such context. Even an anti-intellectualist like Henry Bergson who repudiated the logical method of the absolutists accepted virtually the very same distinction between metaphysical and philosophical knowledge in the one hand and science on the other, when he upheld intuition as the method of metaphysics or philosophy and downgraded intellect which according to him was the method of science. Science, according to him gives a distorted picture of things while metaphysics is the knowledge of true reality. Thus, we were to look for reality in a direction farthest away from the direction of science, common sense and ordinary experience.

The notion of reality as a transcendental and non-empirical concepts farthest removed from the world of existence accepted by science and commonsense was too artificial and spicy for some philosophers of the later period to digest. Those with realistic and empirical bent of mind openly disavowed the idealistic notion of reality as a system. There was a general reaction against absolutistic metaphysics. It became increasingly difficult for some philosophers to ignore the developments that took place in the field of natural sciences. Some attempted to remove the gap between science and metaphysics by introducing what they called "synthetic Philosophy" according to which metaphysics or philosophy is not to be regarded as absolutely independent of the special sciences but also as their sum totally giving a synthetic or synoptic view, while the special sciences gave sectional or departmental view of the very same order. Some like Russell advocated revision of philosophy (also metaphysics) by introducing the so-called "Scientific method". Some philosophers who were themselves, scientists like Professor Samuel Alexander, A.N. Whitehead propagated scientific metaphysics which brought down metaphysics to the level of current scientific knowledge prevailing under the impact of the Einsteinian
Theory of relativity. Alexander defines metaphysics as an empirical or experimental study of the non-empirical or apriori. By the non-empirical or apriori Alexander meant pervasive feature of things. The difference between sciences and metaphysics is one of subject matter only according to him. Metaphysics remained a first philosophy no doubt but its credibility had to be established, in the light of the findings of the developing sciences. This new metaphysics was realistic and empirical as different from the transcendental metaphysics which ran counter to the domain of science. Some sort of a commerce opened between metaphysics and science, and science was as much renovated in the light of metaphysical thought as in Arthur Eddington as philosophy or metaphysics was refurbished by ideas current in the field of advanced sciences. It cannot however, be said that metaphysics or philosophy has been finally drawn out of its seclusion and aloofness in recent philosophical thoughts in such contemporary trends as Phenomenology and existentialism which seemed to allocate philosophy or metaphysics a realm somewhat removed from both science and common experience. Then again, following upon the present day criticism of traditional metaphysics by the contemporary conceptual analysts and linguists, there has been an attempt to provide for metaphysics a realm and structure very much removed from the domain of natural science. This applies to the new conception of metaphysics as a conceptual framework or a meta-linguistic conceptual device which in some way becomes a presupposition of the languages of commonsense and science. The descriptive metaphysics of the present day philosophers such as P.F. Strawson is an instance of this point. This is a rough estimate of historical development of the concept "metaphysics" in the writings of its proponents from the days of Aristotle down up to our times.
We may now bring to light the characteristic features of the diverse formulation of the concept of metaphysics through the ages. In the first place, (1) metaphysics has always been regarded as a meta something, a first philosophy, something foundational in all its historical descriptions. Secondly, this foundational or first philosophy has been regarded by its proponents as necessary, in the sense of being an unavoidable branch of knowledge. Through historical criticism of metaphysics by its opponents metaphysics has not been liquidated completely and the treatise of metaphysics have not been consigned to flames as Humes once recommended. But somehow it managed to survive by changing its form and redefining itself in new terms and terminology. It also changed or reformulated its method. In Aristotle this method was speculative, yet it was realistic since the concepts and categories it used were not regarded by Aristotle as mere subjective notions but as representing the widest general features of the objective reality also. It was concerned with the very same world as that of the special sciences but that world in its most general aspects. It did not attempt to negate or reject the conclusions of the natural sciences, his second philosophies, but only to supplement them by more general and fundamental study of the objective characters of things regarded as the features of being-in general or being-as such. (2) The medieval metaphysics was a handmade of theology and was dogmatic. It attempted to run counter to science and empirical investigation. But the absence of any rational and logical method made it vulnerable. Human knowledge cannot long remain divided against itself. The medieval metaphysics reared upon both faith and reason which are logically incompatible ended in being some form of wishful thinking, a transcendental fiction. (3) Modern philosophers by their mathematical method turned it into an apriori sciences
of some kind which would not only maintain itself in supreme aloofness from
the world of concrete facts of common experience and science, but would
attempt to provide the basic concepts of the natural sciences. The British
imperialists particularly Locke and Hume undermined to a great extent the
basic concepts of this metaphysics and falsified some of its overbearing
pretensions. But a decisive thrust against the edifice of the rationalistic
metaphysics came from Kant who disproved its pretension both as science
and as a body of knowledge and objective truths. (4) Hegel resuscitated it
by providing a new basis in dialectical thought and planned an absolute
status for it by claiming it to be the only form of true knowledge that is rational
out and out and so representative of the very structure of reality, since the
real and rational are inseparable. The complete independence of Hegelian
metaphysics both of science and commonsense rendered it irrelevant and
unnecessary in the subsequent period of scientific development in biology
and physics. (5) This led to the development of scientific metaphysics which
was some sort of a general extension of scientific knowledge, some sort of
a general hypothesis regarding the nature and behaviour of the real
existential order projected form the findings of science in its various special
fields. In this movement, metaphysics seeks self-preservation by affiliating
itself to the special sciences. (6) Metaphysical tendencies such as
existentialism and phenomenology is a new attempt to break away from
science and to seek identity in a new field of experience altogether. (7)
The present day conceptualistic and descriptive metaphysics are, in the
main, a restatement of the nature and method of metaphysics in linguistic
and conceptualistic terms. So, what is common to these diverse types of
metaphysics is simply its formal character as a first philosophy of some kind,
but the nature and method of this first philosophy which constituted its real
essence varied widely and at times in opposite direction.
References:


5. Ibid.


