

# The Futility of Any Anti-Metaphysical Position

**Chiedozie Okoro**

*Department of Philosophy,  
University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria.*

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## **Abstract**

*This essay explains why it is difficult or even impossible to reject metaphysics. By this we do not mean that metaphysical theories cannot be refuted; what we rather mean to say is that it is absolutely futile to deny the existence of metaphysics and its importance to human life. To do so would amount to the denial of the human capacity to go beyond the mundane, beyond the known, beyond the physical, to the transcendental, where experience is abstracted and reconstructed for the purpose of world transformation.*

## **Introduction**

We shall take as our point of embarkation and departure the Cartesian submission:

Thus the whole of philosophy is like a tree; the roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches that issue from the trunk are all the other sciences. (cited by Heidegger, 1959: 310)

Rene Descartes readily assumes that metaphysics as the queen and king of all knowledge is simply the science of the roots. But he forgot to ask about the soil or the ground which nourishes the roots and in which the tree of philosophy is rooted. This limitation on the part of Descartes is addressed by Martin Heidegger who questions as follows:

In what soil do the roots of the tree of philosophy have their hold? Out of what ground do the roots – and through them the whole tree – receive their nourishing juices and strength? What element, concealed in the ground, enters and lives in the roots

that support and nourish the tree? (Heidegger, 1959: 310)

The above questioning of Heidegger constitutes the principal task of fundamental ontology which regards Being (the very topic of ontology) as the ground of metaphysics. It is in this sense that Heidegger speaks of the way back into the ground of metaphysics. Hence, the primary aim of fundamental ontology is to ground metaphysics in Being so that metaphysics can be transformed into ontology. Once metaphysics transforms into ontology, Being, immediately becomes the ground upon which any philosophical discourse is rooted. In this essay, therefore, we shall regard metaphysics as both the “root” and “ground” of any philosophical endeavour or any act of philosophizing for that matter. This position makes the avoidance or elimination of metaphysics impossible.

The position we have adopted is opposed to the viewpoint of Rudolf Carnap, a logical positivist, who regards metaphysics as a “term which implies the field of alleged knowledge of the essences of things which transcend the realm of empirically founded, inductive science” (1959: 80). By the foregoing definition, Carnap obviously has in mind all idealist metaphysical (including transcendental) systems, such as those of Hegel and Heidegger, whose theories transgress the bounds of science. But, in adopting this position, Carnap forgets that metaphysical systems, be they materialistic or idealistic, deal essentially with first principles which though may support empirical research, but are not in any way empirical. It is in this very sense of first principles that underlie all physical/empirical activities that Aristotle regards metaphysics as first philosophy whose primary duty is to posit those primitive concepts, basic axioms or unifying principles for organizing experience and for comprehending reality in totality. Thus, whether we regard metaphysics as first philosophy or as fundamental ontology, the important thing to note is that metaphysics is a foundational activity. Meaning that at any time we posit certain grounds as operational principles for directing any activity of ours, we are deliberately or inadvertently engaged in metaphysics.

The above submission amplifies Immanuel Kant’s position that metaphysics is a power native to man; it is something ingrained in

human ontology, in the human chemistry and is therefore, unavoidable. It is in this Kantian sense that Etienne Gilson defines metaphysics as “the knowledge gathered by a naturally transcendent reason in its search for the first principles, or first causes, of what is given in sensible experience” (1959: 252). Gilson says that man by his very nature is a metaphysical animal and;

.... since man is essentially rational, the constant recurrence of metaphysics in the history of human knowledge must have its explanation in the very structure of reason itself. In other words, the reason why man is a metaphysical animal must lie somewhere in the nature of rationality (*Ibid*).

Since metaphysics is ingrained in human rationality, avoiding it becomes a futile exercise. Whichever way a philosopher chooses to embark upon the day’s task, he will, wittingly or unwittingly, end up being metaphysical. Thus, we may hate or like metaphysics, but as to whether we can ever succeed in avoiding or abolishing metaphysics remains impossible, meaning that we are either negatively metaphysical or positively metaphysical.

### **Negative Anti-Metaphysics**

In “The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language” Rudolf Carnap opines that from the time of Greek skeptics to the period of the empiricists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, oppositions against metaphysics have been rampant. Within these periods criticisms of diverse kinds have been leveled against metaphysics. For instance, “it was variously argued that given that metaphysics contradicts empirical knowledge, then its very doctrine entails a falsehood, if indeed it entails a falsehood, it also means that this very enterprise is unwieldy and uncertain, and for these reasons, the vocation called metaphysics is sterile” (1959: 60).

Anti-metaphysical trends abound in the history of Western philosophy. Such trends of anti-metaphysics can be seen in absolute and relative skepticism and in David Hume’s resolution that all books on divinity (metaphysics) be committed to the flames. When the skeptics argued that man cannot know anything for certain or that

knowledge is relative to the knower, they doubt the capacity of reason in comprehending reality. Here, the casting of aspersion upon reason, surreptitiously, amounts to a denial of metaphysics, that is, given that reason is that power of metaphysics in man which enables him to comprehend reality. According to Jose Ortega Y' Gasset (1960), the disdain against metaphysics reached its crest in 1840. This was the period when metaphysics laid prostrate from the devastating blows it suffered. With the emergence of sciences such as physics, psychology, mathematics, and geometry, that seem to offer methodological orthodoxy/precision, metaphysics was relegated to the background. In those days, Physics was seen as the ultimate science, while epistemology dethroned metaphysics as heir to the throne of philosophy. Physics threatened to become metaphysics, while metaphysics seriously groaned under the tutelage of physics. To gain relevance, philosophers abandoned the act of philosophizing and hopped upon the train of imperial science which through its garments of physics, psychology, mathematics and geometry, looked majestic.

Problem however, ensued when scientists discovered to their surprise that beyond the precision offered by the sciences, there is the need to provide theoretical bases for scientific research. Scientists realized that without the first principles of metaphysics, it will be difficult to effectively coordinate research. Upon this realization, scientists such as Albert Einstein, Henri Poincare, Mach Planck, and Pierre Duhem began developing principles for embellishing research in physics (Y' Gasset, 52). By this action, these scientists returned to metaphysics whose duty it is to build foundations (i.e. first principles) from which all enquiries about reality must begin. In the words of Ortega Y' Gasset, these scientists at last realized that: "Though science is exact but it is incomplete, while philosophy is inexact but complete. The complete knowledge must as a matter of fact be the guideline for the incomplete one. In sum, philosophy is the plan of the universe; science is part of this plan" (*Ibid.* 60). This submission of Ortega Y' Gasset is reiterated by Etienne Gilson who opines that since "metaphysics aims at transcending all particular knowledge, no particular science is competent either to solve metaphysical problems, or to judge their metaphysical solutions" (1959: 254).

Hume's suggestion that all works of metaphysics should be burnt opens the door to negative anti-metaphysics properly so-called. As he stated:

When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hands any volumes of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask: Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quality or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. (cited by Ayer, 1959: 10)

For Hume, there are only two modes of reasoning which are the mathematical and the experimental. Mathematical reasoning is meaningful because it can be verified by immediate inspection, while experimental reasoning can be confirmed or refuted through experience or observation. The same cannot be said of metaphysics. Hume goes further to debunk the concept of causality. His position on this is that we neither arrive at causality out of reason nor do we encounter it in experience. Rather, we hold in causality out of belief, custom or habit. By rejecting the principle of causality, Hume is indirectly stating that the human mind lacks the metaphysical ability for inference. Like Kant later proved, it is not the case that we come to belief in causality, but by the inbuilt laws of our minds we think causally and proceed to impose causal connection upon nature. Thus by denying metaphysics, Hume indirectly rejected metaphysics. Auguste Comte also toes this line of thought. For Comte, metaphysics like religion is only a passage way to science. Whereas religion is at the bottom of the ladder of civilization, metaphysics is at the intermediate stage. The evolution of science marks man's freedom from ignorance and the steady rise towards a superior kind of knowledge. This was how Hume and Comte laid the foundation for the emergence of logical positivism.

### **Logical Positivism**

The influences of David Hume and Auguste Comte on the logical positivists cannot be over emphasized. It is perhaps, following

Comte's positivism that Rudolf Carnap asserts that metaphysics is an expression of an attitude toward life. Metaphysics he says, originated from mythology. The daily fears of the early man he says, gave rise to mythology and from mythology into poetry which in turn transformed into theology. As time went on theology got transformed into metaphysics. The metaphysician says Carnap deceives himself by thinking that he makes assertions which can either be true or false, while in actual fact his propositions are simply meaningless. Carnap further states that the metaphysician is not different from the poet. The only difference is that while the metaphysician deals with theory and tries to reduce the whole of reality to his view, the poet specializes in arts and is not interested in criticizing the views of other poets. Thus, in Carnap's view "metaphysicians are musicians without musical ability, they have a strong inclination to work within the medium of the theoretical, to connect concepts and thoughts (1959: 80). To substantiate his point, Carnap makes reference to Nietzsche who in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* deliberately avoided the artistry of metaphysics by opting for poetry. In Carnap's view, the avoidance of metaphysics might explain why Nietzsche's language is so lucid and clear. He then submits that metaphysics is nothing but the display of beautiful array of metric lines, syntax and lyrics, while metaphysicians are basically entertainers, thereby making metaphysics a spurious and wasteful enterprise meant for the unserious mind.

Furthermore, in "The Turning Point in Philosophy" Moritz Schlick argues that human knowledge developed in stages until it matured to the empirical point. At the empirical stage of human development, the assertion that certain questions are unanswerable and that certain problems are simply insoluble, no longer hold water. The distinguishing factor of this stage is that empirical facts are given to substantiate whatever claims are made. For Schlick, this sort of attitude is opposed to that of metaphysics whose methodology transgresses empirical investigation. What Schlick means to say here is that metaphysics does not have any practical relevance to human existence. He argues thus:

Thus, metaphysics collapses not because the solving of its task is an enterprise to which the human reason is unequal, but because there is no such task. With the

disclosure of the mistaken formulation of the problem the history of metaphysical conflict is likewise explained. (1959: 57)

Schlick warns that philosophers who persist in following the obsolete path of metaphysics will soon put themselves out of job. Like amateur musicians and actors, such philosophers will only wake up to the realization of their irrelevance, when they suddenly discover that they have bored the audience stiff with uncoordinated and obsolete tunes. The result of such foolery is that at the point where people have lost interest in philosophical matters, “it will no longer make sense to speak of philosophical problems” (Ibid. 59).

Of all the logical positivists, Alfred Jules Ayer seems to be the one that descended most heavily on metaphysics. Ayer’s aim was to rid philosophy of metaphysics. In the opening chapter of his book, *Language, Truth and Logic*, he wrote as follows:

The traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part, unwarranted as they are unfruitful. The surest way to end them is to establish beyond question what should be the purpose and method of a philosophical enquiry. (1964: 33)

Ayer hotly contests the point that “philosophy affords us knowledge of a reality transcending the world of common sense” (*Ibid.*). According to him, one way of refuting this claim of metaphysics is to ask the metaphysician “what premises he deduces his propositions from” (*Ibid.*)? Better still, one can as well decide to examine metaphysical propositions with a view to seeing if such propositions make sense at all. The rigorous method of examining whether metaphysical propositions actually make sense is called the principle of verification or verifiability for short. When this principle is used in examining metaphysical propositions, it will be discovered that such propositions are neither true nor false, but simply nonsensical.

The above view of Ayer is further reiterated by Wittgenstein who in the preface to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* wrote as follows:

The aim of the book is to draw a limitation to thought or rather not to thought but the expression of thought. What lies at the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense. (cited by Lazerowitz, 1968: 53)

For Wittgenstein, the task of philosophy consists in the elucidation and clarification of language. His aim in the *Tractatus*, was to show the bound or limit within which language can make meaning. Language he argued should be used to describe things in the physical realm. To do otherwise is to take language beyond the empirical realm (i.e. the linguistic state of affairs) into the non-empirical realm (i.e. the non-linguistic state of affairs) which amounts to taking “language on holiday”. Now, since the metaphysician goes on building systems and using utterances that give rise to “language on holiday”, the best way to eliminate metaphysics is to rewrite sentences of the natural language into their proper logical form such that a sentence will depict a state of affair in the world. When this is done, quandary generating utterances will be avoided, philosophical perplexities will vanish and the metaphysician would be put out of business. In his pictorial theory of language, he posited that the world is composed of atomic facts, not of things, and that language should convey to us these atomic facts. What he means to say here is that there is a one-to-one correlation between language and the world. And since metaphysical statements tend to describe essences that transcend the world of physical experience, it (metaphysics) cannot be said to bear any relevance to human life.

### **Positive Anti-Metaphysics**

In Western philosophy, two philosophers, Immanuel Kant of the modern period and Martin Heidegger of the contemporary period, saw the need to rehabilitate metaphysics. For these two, the aspersions cast upon traditional metaphysics are well deserved. Kant for instance, reasons that metaphysical systems of the ancient and modern periods had become irrelevant to the challenges of the modern man, making it necessary for the rehabilitation of metaphysics. Hence, in Kant’s view, Hume was on the right when he called for the burning of all books on metaphysics. The principal reason for such advocacy was because pre-modern metaphysics had become obsolete. However, Kant also reasoned that metaphysics is



indispensable to human life; he reasoned that what should be done was not to abolish, but to rehabilitate metaphysics. Heidegger agrees with Kant to a large extent. His departing point is that pre-Heideggerian metaphysical systems have completely derailed from the main topic of metaphysics which is Being. He then saw it as his duty to overhaul metaphysics with a view to transforming metaphysics into fundamental ontology.

To begin with, Kant lived in a period when the philosopher was considered as the spectator of all times and existences. It seems that Kant took this challenge seriously. He saw himself as the wise judge whose duty it was to resolve the old philosophical problems which hampered the growth of philosophy and knowledge in general. He also saw this reconstruction project as an opportunity to set the stage for the emergence of a philosophical perspective which would possess the dynamisms for appropriately dealing with the problem of Being. This dream of Kant later materialized in the philosophical systems of Husserl and Heidegger. Thus, as T.D. Weldon stated:

Kant was concerned not with one question but with several and these several questions were not isolated, but the connexion between them is exactly what the *Critique* as a whole reveals. There were for Kant the problems of space, cause and free will, he believed that he had discovered a method which led to the solution of all of them and this method was employed in his transcendental philosophy. (Weldon, 1968: 74)

For instance, the pre-critical or anthropological Kant can be described as the stage when Kant grappled with the problems of religion and science (particularly physics) which interspersed into the problem of morality and the development of theories in geography, psychology, history, politics, etc. Hence, between 1755 and 1770, Kant attempted to resolve a number of problems which later became part of the central themes of his ontology. These include the doctrine of "sufficient reason", the problem of "causality", the question whether "space and time" are real or mere perceptions in the mind and the question as to the limit of human

knowledge (which made Kant to bifurcate reality into two huge and separate realms of phenomena and noumena). It is interesting to note however, that the resolution of these issues was so complicating and difficult for Kant because he was limited to the two epistemological and metaphysical alternatives available at that time; namely empiricism/materialism and rationalism/idealism.

At the critical or ontological stage, Kant dealt with a number of problems, which are at once epistemological and metaphysical. The spectacular things to note about this stage are as follows:

1. beside the point that Kant was disenchanted with the existing pre-Kantian epistemological and metaphysical theories which he (Kant) considered as being too obsolete to constitute profound foundations for science;
2. his other interest was to provide ontological justification for the claims made in his anthropology, meaning that the delineation of "pre-ontological Kant" and "the build up to the *Critique of Pure Reason* show that Kant's anthropology is preliminary to his ontology.

The fact that it is the same issues which he dealt with in his anthropology that form the central focus of his ontology amplifies the thesis that whereas Kant's anthropology is concerned with existential and historical issues, his ontology is meant to explore the ontological foundation which makes the existential and historical endeavors of man possible. In the light of the foregoing, Kant sets out to furnish us with a theory of knowledge, which is *apodictic* (metaphysical) and at the same time *propaedeutic* (scientifically logical).

Subsequently, Kant rejected all theories of idealism that tend to promote other-worldly (i.e. religious or spiritual or mystical) notion of transcendence, that is to say, metaphysical doctrines that propagate the thesis that the supernatural is the source of human inspiration and creativity. Kant rejects such metaphysical orientations on the ground that they commit the fallacy of **paralogism**. This apart, they also constitute the ground for all forms of **transcendental illusion**. By way of reconstruction therefore, Kant

embarks upon the examination of pure reason which he says is the seat of human transcendence. The essence of such metaphysical evaluation (i.e. critique) is to “determine the limit and validity of human knowledge” (Kant, 1964: 4). Thus, when Kant speaks of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he does not imply the "critique of books and systems, but of the faculty of reason in general in order to determine the possibility of metaphysics" (1970, 9). The expression “the possibility of metaphysics” shows that the human mind has the propensity for self-examination. It is this ability for self-examination that constitutes the very source and process of the critique of human or finite reason. For pure reason alone possesses this singular advantage of self-examination and also the power to examine the existence and essence of all other things through the process of transcendental judgment (i.e. transcendental time deduction) which Kant characterizes as the tribunal. In essence, the expression **critical ontology** can be said to be a synonym for the book *Critique of Pure Reason*. And as W. H. Walsh says, the word critique as used in this context means "critical examination of the powers of human intelligence, considered as operating on its own" (1975: 1).

As a matter of fact, Kant's metaphysical project was intended to answer two fundamental questions as follows: *Whether metaphysics is possible at all? And whether metaphysics is possible as a science?* These questions were inspired by David Hume's denial of the capability of the human mind to comprehend things in a causal sequence. It is this denial that woke Kant from "dogmatic slumber" (Kant, 1983: 5 - 6). Consequently, he took up the challenge to prove that metaphysically; we can comprehend causality because our minds are structured in such a way for us to “think in terms of causation, association and succession or sequence” (1983: 4 & 6). In other words, metaphysics is simply contagious and because it is a power ingrained in us, it forms part of the human chemistry. Try as we may, we can never succeed to abolish metaphysics. Indeed, it will be foolhardy to do so because to attempt such "would be like giving up breathing altogether in order to avoid inhaling impure air" (1983, 107). From the foregoing, it is clear that metaphysics is the ground of all human knowledge.

The above notwithstanding, there persists a great flaw in Kant's rehabilitation project which stems from the tendency to idolize reason as both the faculty of metaphysics and logic. Needless to say, the tendency to make reason double as both the faculty of metaphysics and logic, happens to be in line with Kant's Enlightenment project. The foregoing point is well elaborated by Karl Popper thus: "Kant believed in the Enlightenment, he (Kant) was the Enlightenment's last great defender" (1969: 176). Kant challenged men of the Enlightenment with the chant "**Sapere aude**" (*Ibid.* 177)! It means, dare to use your own intelligence to emancipate yourself from self-imposed tutelage. It is the attempt to meet up with this challenge of the Enlightenment that led Kant into the idolization of reason. Thus, the great flaw in Kant's metaphysics is that he subsumed the functions of the faculty of the imagination under the faculty of reason. The point here is that in the process of exploring the powers and functions of the mind, at the stage of the transcendental imagination, Kant realized that if he went further, he would nullify his entire project of the Enlightenment. Upon this realization, he recoiled, instead of embarking on the project of delineating the powers of the imagination, he subsumed the synthesizing function of the imagination under the faculty of reason and went ahead to label the imagination as the **Transcendental Object – X** or simply as **The Unknown Root**. This singular omission on the part of Kant made his rehabilitation project incomplete. Heidegger points out this great flaw in Kant's metaphysics in the book entitled: *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. It is on this ground that Heidegger states that Kant's metaphysics is only preliminary to the emergence of a fundamental ontology.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger says that his main intention was to destroy the existing basis of metaphysics and establish a new ground for it. He argues that traditional metaphysics has completely failed in the project of defining Being. Instead of defining Being, which is the main topic of metaphysics, traditional metaphysics has merely outlined instances of Being. In Heidegger's thinking, the obliviousness to Being on the part of traditional metaphysics warranted its rejection, if not its denial. Hence, in "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics" he states that traditional

metaphysics: “Does not induce Being to speak for itself, it does not recall Being in its truth, and it neither recalls truth in its unconcealedness, nor does it recall the nature of unconcealedness” (1959: 313). In other words, traditional metaphysics left the question about being unresolved because:

From its beginning to its completion, the propositions of metaphysics have been strangely involved in a persistent confusion of beings and Being. This confusion, to be sure, must be considered an event and not a mere mistake. (*Ibid.*)

The discrepancy in classical metaphysics led to the confusion of the categories such that *logos* was interpreted as ratio instead of discourse, thereby, making theology to be equated with ontology. “Because metaphysics represents beings as Being, it is, two-in-one. According to its nature, it is at the same time ontology and in the narrower sense theology” (*Ibid.* 319). He contends that these antinomies on the part traditional metaphysicians denied traditional metaphysics its originality. For him the antinomies of traditional metaphysics began with the Greeks who equated Being with “rational animal”. This alone has led to a plethora of interpretations of Being such that Being has been variously understood as “the will to power”, “will”, “subjectivity”, “mind”, “matter”, “the absolute”, “eidos”, “God”, “evolution”, “big bang”, and so on. In consequence of the foregoing, Heidegger calls for the overhauling of metaphysics or what he describes as the overcoming of metaphysics. By this, he means that metaphysical inquiry should describe the nature of Being which is the ground in which metaphysics is rooted and also garners nourishment. But such a venture must begin from the description of the being which possesses a vague average understanding of Being. This being who has a vague average understanding of Being is no other than human being which in German is known as *Dasein*. Thus, the overcoming of metaphysics which should crystallize into the emergence of fundamental ontology must begin from the analysis of human being or what is technically called *daseinanalytic*.

## Evaluation of the Views of Positivists

In *Language Truth and Logic* A. J. Ayer defines the principle of “verifiability” thus:

The principle of verification is supposed to furnish a criterion by which it can be determined whether or not a sentence is literally meaningful. A simple way to formulate it would be to say that a sentence had literal meaning if and only if the proposition it expressed was either analytic or empirically verifiable. (1964: 5)

What Ayer is simply saying is this – for a proposition to be meaningful, it must pass the test of verification – by which standard the said proposition must be formal, analytic and empirical, and since metaphysical assertions do not satisfy these criteria, they are neither true nor false but simply nonsensical or meaningless.

Now, let us ask one simple question and this concerns whether the principle of *verification* or *verifiability* which the logical positivists claim to be their criterion for evaluating if a proposition is either meaningful or nonsensical is in itself verifiable? The answer is no. Again, we ask whether the expression – for a proposition to be meaningful, it must be analytic and empirical; is by its own criterion empirically verifiable? The answer remains no. This being the case, we should follow Hume’s suggestion and commit the proposition of the logical positivists to the flames.

Furthermore, in *Logical Positivism – A Debate*, which is actually a dialogue between A. J. Ayer and F. C. Copleston, Ayer defines logical positivism thus:

Logical positivism is not a system of philosophy. It consists rather in a certain technique – a certain kind of attitude towards philosophic problems. Thus, one thing which those of us who are called logical positivists tend to have in common is that we deny the possibility of philosophy as a speculative discipline. (cited by Edwards & Pap, 1957: 726)

Here, Ayer renders logical positivism spurious. Philosophy and metaphysics *per se* are not just attitudes towards problems but conscious and critical inquiries into the nature of things. To inquire into the nature of things, is to strive to understand the structure and orientation of our universe and the things therein. Consequently, it would be foolhardy to dismiss metaphysics and metaphysical propositions merely as absolute nonsense or absolute nothing. And if indeed by the expression – metaphysical propositions are neither true nor false but simply meaningless or nonsensical, the logical positivists imply that metaphysical propositions say absolutely **nothing** about the world, then they must be reminded like Gilson did that: “Absolute nothingness is strictly unthinkable, for we cannot ever deny an existence unless we first posit it in the mind as something to be denied” (1959: 256). By way of emphasis, Gilson quotes J Edwards as follows:

If any man, says J. Edwards, thinks that he can conceive well enough how there should be nothing I will engage, that what he means by nothing, is as much something as anything that he ever thought in his life (*Ibid.*).

The point here is that it is absolutely difficult for a positivist to categorically assert that he/she has no faintest idea of metaphysics or the relevance of metaphysic. Perhaps, the dislike of the positivist is the name metaphysics. But rather than seek a new name for metaphysics, the positivist wants to reduce philosophy to language puzzle. Language puzzle is definitely of concern to philosophy, but philosophy goes deeper than language puzzle into the construction of comprehensive systems of thought for evaluating and resolving human problems. As E. K. Ogundowole posits: “Philosophy cannot be reduced to linguistic puzzle, it does not deal with half solutions to half problems, the concern of philosophy is to provide comprehensive solutions to existing human problems” (1988: vii). Ogundowole’s submission about philosophy is also factual of metaphysics. And it seems that Wittgenstein realized this point later in his career, because thirty years after the *Tractatus*, he came up with the “language-game” theory which he developed in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Contrary to the old Wittgenstein who sounded positivistic, monistic

and reductionistic, the new Wittgenstein has a pluralistic view. He now admits that knowledge is perspectival and as perspectival the onus falls on the researcher to investigate the context of meaning within a language-game. In the light of the foregoing, the redeemed Wittgenstein submits as follows:

When philosophers use a word – “knowledge”, “being”, “object”, “I”, “proposition”, “name” – and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? (cited by Lazerowitz, 1968: 63)

Hume is one philosopher who refused to heed this advice of Wittgenstein. Hence, in his absolute rejection of metaphysics, he forgot that his theory of “impressions” is a mere inversion of idealist principle of “ideas” into materialism. This is why E. A. Ruch (1977) dismisses Hume as a phenomenistic idealist. This apart, Jeremy Bentham describes Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* in the following words: “It is a work of a penetrating and acute metaphysics” (cited by Steintrager, 1977: 34). It is clear from the foregoing that it is wiser and easier to debunk existing theories of metaphysics by substituting them with new ones, than to completely deny the possibility of metaphysics. To do so will simply be foolhardy, because one who has decidedly embarked on such a futile project will, unavoidably, end up in a metaphysics of some sort.

### **The Futility of Avoiding Metaphysics**

In the introduction to this work, we outlined three criteria which make metaphysics inevitable. We stated that: (a) metaphysics as an enquiry into the ultimate nature of things posits first principles or primitive axioms for organizing experience and for comprehending reality in totality, thereby making metaphysics to become first philosophy (b) metaphysics is a contagion, something ingrained in the nexus of man’s ontological framework and that try as we may, we can never succeed in avoiding or abolishing metaphysics (c) metaphysics as fundamental ontology by exploring into Being establishes the ultimate grounds for the existence of things.



No field or theory of knowledge proceeds without positing as its basis and *modus operandi* some first principles for organizing experience. In the first place, first principles are derivations from the attempt to define the nature and structure of particular realities. Needless to say, delineation of the nature and structure of realities in relation the theories and fields of knowledge is essentially metaphysical. In essence, to refute or destroy metaphysical theories, one needs to establish new theories of reality as bases for evaluation. In this wise, the logical positivists' principle of verification or verifiability can be regarded as a first principle or a primitive axiom used for unifying or organizing experience. In the same vein, when Wittgenstein in his pictorial theory of language opines that "the world is a totality of facts, not of things" (cited by Stegmuller, 1969: 396), he only adopts a materialist position which is antithetical to that of the idealists.

Second, going by the Kantian assertion that metaphysics is a power native to man and that its denial is comparable to the refusal to breathe in order to avoid inhaling impure air; one would like to ask whether, without the ability to metaphysicize, if it is ever possible to think metaphysically or anti-metaphysically. By implication, it takes a metaphysician of opposing view to refute the theory of a rival metaphysician. Put differently, it takes metaphysics to refute metaphysics. Hence, when one metaphysician posits that spirit is real reality and another negates by stating that real reality is matter or when one metaphysician asserts that the world consists of essences and another negates by saying that the world is a totality of facts, both metaphysicians with rival theories have merely asserted "a" and "not a" (i.e.  $p \cdot \sim p$ ). It is in the light of the foregoing that H. A. Bradley submits that negative anti-metaphysics merely proves "a truth that the man who is ready to say that metaphysics is impossible is a brother metaphysician with a rival theory of his own" (cited by Ayer, 1964: 34).

Third, going by the criterion of fundamental ontology which establishes Being as the ground or soil of all human endeavour, we proceed to argue that all fields and theories of knowledge, insofar as they cannot embark upon the day's business without some basic axioms as their coordinating points, are rooted in Being from whence they garner support and sustenance. If we grant this truism, and also

grant another truism to the effect that the analysis of Being is a task that belongs to ontology, we will logically conclude like Aristotle, Kant and Heidegger did – that the whole of knowledge can be grouped into two which are *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*. The former portrays philosophy as the queen and king, ground and roof, and the beginning and the end of all human knowledge whose duty is to delineate Being as Being, while the latter refers to other fields of knowledge as specialized philosophies whose duties lie in the delineation of aspects or restricted spheres of Being. It follows that all fields of knowledge, be they philosophical or otherwise, are rooted in Being and are meant, one way or another, to address the question about Being, making metaphysics to become the grand theory of all human knowledge and all human endeavour. This foregoing point is reiterated by Etienne Gilson who states thus: “Since being is the first principle of all human knowledge, it is fortiori the first principle of metaphysics” (1959: 256).

Now, since it is abundantly clear that every theory of reality is a theory on Being, about Being and rooted in Being, we conclude that it is foolhardy trying to abolish or to reject metaphysics completely. To do so would amount to a denial of one’s own ability to think and through thinking formulate first principles for organizing experience. In fact, if man were not a metaphysical being, how would it be possible for him to utter the very word, let alone adopt a positive or negative position towards it? The truth remains that metaphysics is only an activity of man and there are two possible ways of reacting against it. Either we are receptive or positive towards metaphysics, or that we are negative or apathetic towards metaphysics. To sum up, we can only hate the name metaphysics, but we can never succeed in abolishing it.

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