

**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, ABUJA**

**COURSE GUIDE**

**COURSE CODE**

**PHL 201**

**COURSE TITLE**

**INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS**

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**COURSE GUIDE FOR PHL 201**  
**INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS**

This course is written with one assumption in mind: that you are a stranger to metaphysics and thus needs to have metaphysics introduced to you. The essence of introduction is acquaintance. Essentially, the course acquaints you with the basic claims of metaphysics. The idea of basic suggests that there is also a superstructure that lies on top of the basics. You will encounter this later in a course entitled Advanced Metaphysics. Metaphysics has such a superstructure but at the moment we are concerned with acquainting you with the basics without which you will not be able to proceed with the superstructure.

This is an introduction to metaphysics. Metaphysics is philosophy and philosophy is metaphysics. This is the understanding of a number of great philosophers who used the term metaphysics and philosophy interchangeably. Heidegger is a very good example. Metaphysics is traditionally a branch of philosophy. It is so fundamental a branch that without it other branches of philosophy and indeed even the sciences will not have existed. This is because metaphysics serves as grounding or, if you prefer, foundation to them all. It examines their suppositions and even its own suppositions.

We attempt to settle the most basic arguments about anything at the level of metaphysics. In philosophy it does not matter whether that is in the field of ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of education, philosophy of mathematics, Logic, Aesthetics, etc. Even the great sciences like Mathematics, Physics, Astronomy, and Chemistry, all look up to metaphysics for some guide. The same is true with disciplines in the Arts and Social Sciences. Do not be discouraged if during the study you discover that nothing is settled to the great shame of metaphysics. At least be consoled that metaphysics always seeks the best possible explanation.

But the essence of introducing you to philosophy and to metaphysics is to conscript you into becoming part of the quest to settle the most basic arguments about anything. As you turn the pages of this study material, you will encounter philosophical data generated by thousands of years of hard work by philosophers. If the discipline of metaphysics exposes you to them it is for two reasons: (1) to bring you up to date to the state of research in the

field; and (2) to acquaint you with the spirit and tool of research in philosophy and metaphysics.

As a discipline in philosophy, the question metaphysics wants to answer is about what constitutes the fundamental structure of reality. Thus, we ask the questions: what is? What type of beings exist? And in what way do they exist? These are no small questions, as you will discover yourself. The good thing is that you are now being inducted into the hall of fame of truth seekers.

Welcome to Metaphysics.

### **Objectives of PHL 102: Introduction to Metaphysics**

To achieve the primary aim of this course, the following objectives have been set:

- To help you understand the meaning and nature of metaphysics.

- To expose you to the fundamental ontological questions of metaphysics

- To lead you to examine some critical topics in special metaphysics like theology, cosmology, and philosophical anthropology

- To show you the level of interaction/relationship that exists between metaphysics and science

### **Working through this Course**

For maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity in this course, you are required to have a copy of the course guide, main course material, and other necessary materials required for the course. The university has provided opportunities for interaction between learners and facilitators. Thus, we shall also engage in eight weeks facilitation of this course to enable you prepare for exams in the course. The invitation link and time of facilitation will be sent to your personal portal before the facilitation begins. It will do you a lot of good to participate in the facilitation exercise. To have the best of the facilitation, read through the topics before the dates of their facilitation.

### **Study Modules and Units**

This course has four modules of 5 units each making it a total of 20 study units. The Modules and the Units are as follows:

## **Module 1: The Nature of Metaphysics**

Unit 1: The Meaning of Metaphysics

Unit 2: The Divisions of Metaphysics

Unit 3: Methods of Metaphysics

Unit 4: Metaphysics and Other Branches of Philosophy

Unit 5: The Value of Metaphysics

## **Module 2: Ontological Issues in Metaphysics**

Unit 1: The Problem of Being

Unit 2: Substance

Unit 2: Matter and Form

Unit 4: Universals and Particulars

Unit 5: Appearance and Reality

## **Module 3: Issues in Special Metaphysics**

**Unit 1: Necessary and Contingent Beings**

**Unit 2: Mind-Body Problem**

**Unit 3: Freedom and Determinism**

**Unit 4: Immortality**

**Unit 5: The Best Possible World**

## **Module 4: Metaphysics and Science**

**Unit 1: Ontological Realism**

**Unit 2: Causality**

**Unit 3: The Problem of Induction**

**Unit 4: Space and Time**

**Unit 5: Metaphysical Foundation of Mathematics**

## **References and Further Reading**

Ando, T. (1974). *Metaphysics: A critical survey of its meaning*. Martinus Nijhoff

Benneth, K. (2016). There is no Special Problem with Metaphysics. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 173(1), 21-37.

Carroll, J. W. & Markosian, N. (2010). *An introduction to metaphysics*. Cambridge: University Press

Gracia, J. E. (2014). The Fundamental Character of Metaphysics. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 51(4), 305-317.

Loux, M. J. (2006). *Metaphysics: A contemporary introduction*. Routledge.

Lowe, E. J. (2001). *The Possibility of Metaphysics Substance, Identity, and Time*. Oxford: University Press

Reale, G. (1980). *The concept of first philosophy and unity of metaphysics of Aristotle*. State University of New York Press.

Sarlemijn, A. (1975). *Hegel's Dialectics*. Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company

Smith, J. E. H. (2019). *Irrationality: A history of the dark side of reason*. Princeton University Press.

**The following links can be used to access philosophical materials online:**

[Voice of the Shuttle: Philosophy Page](#)

[Episteme Links](#)

[The Philosophers Magazine](#)

[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

[Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

[A Dictionary of Philosophical Terms and Names](#)

[Dictionary of Philosophy, ed. Dagobert D. Runes](#)

### **Presentation Schedule**

This course has two presentations; one at the middle of the semester and the other towards the end of the semester. At the beginning of the semester, each student undertaking this course will be assigned a topic by the course facilitator, which will be made available in due time, for individual presentations during forum discussions. Each presenter has 15

minutes (10 minutes for presentation and 5 minutes for Question and Answer). On the other hand, students will be divided by the course facilitator into different groups. Each group is expected to come up with a topic to work on and to submit same topic to the facilitator via the recommended medium. Both attract 5% of your total marks.

Note: Students are required to submit both papers via the recommended medium for further examination and grading.

### **Assessment**

In addition to the discussion forum presentations, two other papers are required in this course. The paper should not exceed 6 pages and should not be less than 5 pages (including references), typewritten in 12 fonts, double line spacing, and Times New Roman. The preferred reference is APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition (you can download a copy online). The paper topics will be made available in due time. Each carries 10% of the total marks.

To avoid plagiarism, students should use the followings links to test run their papers before submission:

<http://plagiarism.org/>

<http://www.library.arizona.edu/help/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html>

Finally, all students taking this course MUST take the final exam which attracts 70% of the total marks.

### **How to Get the Most Out of this Course**

For students to get the most out of this course, she/he must:

Have 75% of attendance through active participations in both forum discussions and facilitation;

Read each topic in the course materials before it is being treated in the class;

Submit every assignment as at when due; as failure to do so will attract a penalty;

Discuss and share ideas among his/her peers; this will help in understanding the course more;

Download videos, podcasts and summary of group discussions for personal consumption;

Attempt each self-assessment exercises in the main course material;  
Take the final exam;  
Approach the course facilitator when having any challenge with the course.

**Facilitation**

This course operates a learner-centered online facilitation. To support the student's learning process, the course facilitator will, one, introduce each topic under discussion; two, open floor for discussion. Each student is expected to read the course materials, as well as other related literatures, and raise critical issues which she/he shall bring forth in the forum discussion for further dissection; three, summarizes forum discussion; four, upload materials, videos and podcasts to the forum; five, disseminate information via email and SMS if need be.

# **PHL 201: INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS**

## **MODULE 1: THE NATURE OF METAPHYSICS**

Unit 1: The Meaning of Metaphysics

Unit 2: The Divisions of Metaphysics

Unit 3: Methods of Metaphysics

Unit 4: Metaphysics and Other Branches of Philosophy

Unit 5: The Value of Metaphysics



## **UNIT 1: The Meaning of Metaphysics**

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Immanuel Kant, one of the big names you will discover in the course of your study, regarded metaphysics as the queen of the sciences. In that light, I welcome you to your first lecture on the queen of all sciences. This unit aims to introduce you to the nature of metaphysics. It starts by exposing you to the various misconceptions about metaphysics. It will also expose you to the etymological definition of metaphysics, as well as philosophical attempt at defining the concept. The intended learning outcomes below specify what you are expected to learn after going through this unit.

### **2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)**

By the end of this unit you would be able to:

1. Distinguish between metaphysics and non-metaphysics
2. Discuss the etymological meaning of metaphysics
3. Trace brief history of the development of idea of metaphysics
4. Give philosophical definition of metaphysics

## **3.0 Main Content**

### **3.1 Defining Metaphysics**

Before your admission to study philosophy, it is likely that you have heard about metaphysics. At those times when you used the term or when you heard it used, what did you understand it to mean? What imagery did it create in your mind? Compare that image with the meaning of metaphysics that you learnt in the course, Introduction to Philosophy. Did they match? Whatever your response is, the term, metaphysics does not enjoy a generally accepted definition. Worse still, what non-philosophers regard as metaphysics is unrecognizable from the branch of philosophy that goes by that name. In the same vein, philosophers themselves do not agree on any generally acceptable definition of metaphysics. One hundred philosophers will likely give one hundred definitions of the term. There is also an argument that due to its nature, metaphysics cannot be defined. [Click here](#). For the purpose of this introductory course in metaphysics, we shall start by identifying some misconceptions about metaphysics, then we shall trace the etymological meaning of the term, and then end with few definitions of it as given by philosophers.

#### **3.1.1 Misconceptions About Metaphysics**

The need to highlight the misconceptions about metaphysics arises because many people give the title of metaphysics to so many things that are not metaphysics. In this section we will attempt to separate metaphysics from non-metaphysics. The only way of doing this is by calling your attention to certain practices which are regarded as metaphysics even though they are not metaphysics.

##### **3.1.1.1 Occultism is not Metaphysics**

A Philosopher, Frederick Nietzsche, a major critic of metaphysics, is reported to have referred to metaphysics as otherworld, and metaphysicians as other-world-men. He implies by this that metaphysicians are concerned with a world different from the one everybody knows about, a hidden world. This hidden world is in essence, an occultic world. Many non-philosophers, taking a cue from Nietzsche, assume wrongly that metaphysics is occultism. And some known occultic associations regard themselves as metaphysical associations. Occultism entails access to some secret knowledge hidden from everyone but a select few of the initiated. The knowledge which the occults pursue is said to be inaccessible to the ordinary senses. In this case metaphysicians are seen as no more than eopots. Although this concern with realities that are hidden is a characteristic which occultism shares with metaphysics, religion and even science. You must note immediately that this shared characteristic does not mean that occultism is the same with them. Like metaphysics, occultism involves knowledge of being but unlike metaphysics which deals with beings whose knowledge is open to everyone, the beings which concern the occults

are unknown, their language is esoteric, and their methods are not open to scholarly discourse. While metaphysics is propelled simply by the desire to know, occultism's interest in knowledge is power to control nature for the benefits of the occultic.

### **3.1.1.2 Magic is not Metaphysics**

Another fallacy held about metaphysics is that it is a sort of magic. People who possess magical powers can bring about extraordinary, at times, inexplicable things, through their interaction with the supernatural. Metaphysics has no such ambition. Its interest is simply to know things as they truly are without any recourse to supernaturalism. Non metaphysicians who view metaphysics as magic think that those who study metaphysics are deeply involved in a study of magic and are learning how to perform miracles, alter nature or in the least control it.

### **3.1.1.3 Mind Reading is not Metaphysics**

There is also another misconception of metaphysics as mind reading. Mind readers claim to be able to decipher the thoughts of other people. They see through their bodies and penetrate deep into their minds and soul to see the activities going on there. Many non-metaphysicians think that metaphysicians have the capacity to read other people's minds and decipher not only their motives but also their actions even before they occur. This is not true of metaphysics.

## **3.1.2 Etymology of Metaphysics**

Understanding the etymology of the term, will help shed light on the meaning of metaphysics. Also, you must always bear in mind that while undertaking the etymological definition of any word or term you are expected to look out for the root or origin of that word or term. This is necessary especially when a word is being used by a language or a period different from the one it first emerged. Often, such words acquire meanings different from the one they had in their places or times of origin. Thus, when we define a word by its etymology we are simply studying “the origin of words and the way in which their meanings have changed throughout history.” (Cf <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/etymology>).

By popular claim, the term, metaphysics, came from two Greek words, *Meta* which means “After” and *Phusika* which means “Physics”. The two words when put together in Greek Language yielded a compound word *Ta Meta ta phusika*. Rendered in English as Metaphysics, the term simply means “The one after the Physics.” or “the post-physical”

Philosophers do not agree on the meaning of the term metaphysics translated in English to mean “the one after metaphysics.” That is, in which way, is metaphysics, the one after

physics? Three schools of meanings emerge on this. For the purpose of this lecture, we shall proceed to name these schools as follows, the bibliographical school, the transcendental school, and the fundamental school.

**3.1.2.1 The Bibliographical School of Meaning:** This school holds that the usage, “the one after the Physics” was a consequence of an editorial process involving Aristotle’s books. Aristotle had written so many books on many subjects. But two of these books are of special importance to us here. One of the books he entitled *Physics* and it was supposed to deal with issues that appear in nature. The other he left without a title. These books were to be published in the 1st Century AD (about 300 to 400 years after Aristotle) in Alexandria. According to the story, after publishing *Physics*, the editor, Andronicus of Rhodes, set to work on the book without a name (Aristotle actually had some names for the book but he seemed undecided on which one to choose; Wisdom, First Philosophy, Theology etc. were titles being considered by Aristotle and they left the impression that Aristotle did not complete the work before his death and therefore could not settle for any of the titles he considered for the book). Thus, since Andronicus couldn’t publish a book without a name and since he felt that none of the three titles proposed by Aristotle covered the topics discussed in the book in its entirety, he decided to give it a new title *Metaphysics*, intending it to mean a book published after publishing *Physics* (Carroll & Markosian, 2010). There have been many oppositions to this. Ando (1974) writes emphatically that “the word 'metaphysics' did not originate from somebody's being at a loss as to what to call a book.”

**3.1.2.2 The Transcendental School of Meaning:** The school of meaning which we call the transcendental school holds that the bibliographical school arose because of misrepresentation. Its argument is that the origin of “the one after the physics” as described by the bibliographical school was due to chance as it derived metaphysics from mere editorial sequence. Philosophers who make this point hold that metaphysics is such an important discipline to be left to the arbitrariness of chance. They reasoned that the usage “the one after the Physics” was chosen by Andronicus to reflect the fact that the subjects of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* are beyond or transcend the physical things as discussed in Aristotle’s *Physics*. In *Physics* we learn about things that appear in nature, about experimental science, and things as perceived by the senses. But in metaphysics the subjects of discussion are mostly transcendental, and they extend beyond the senses and the physical.

### **3.1.2.3 The Fundamental School of Meaning**

This school which is rooted in the Medieval era holds that “the one after the Physics” refers to the order of knowledge or educational order. Prominent proponents of this school include Avicenna, who translated *Metaphysics* into Arabic, and Averroes. They hold that *Metaphysics* is so chosen as title for Aristotle’s book simply because it is expected that to study the book in question one ought to have first studied Aristotle’s *Physics*.

#### **3.1.2.4 From Book Title to Branch of Philosophy**

It is important for you to always remember that the term, metaphysics, was not used by Aristotle, the author whose book would later be called *Metaphysics* hundreds of years after his death by Andronicus of Rhodes. During the Late medieval period philosophers felt that the title given to Aristotle's book would be suitable for a branch or discipline of philosophy. You must also note that before Aristotle earlier philosophers had also considered the fundamental topics which are considered in the *Metaphysics*. Worthy of mention are important speculations of the earliest Greek Philosophers, namely, Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Protagoras, Parmenides, Pythagoras, Democritus, Plato, and so on. This made metaphysics the oldest branch of philosophy.

You should also remember that the etymological definition is no longer sufficient in defining metaphysics. This is because metaphysics has grown beyond the book published after *Physics*. It has become a name given to a certain branch of philosophy.

#### **3.1.3 Philosophical Approaches to Defining Metaphysics**

This section considers the fact that philosophers differ in their understanding of metaphysics. In what follows we shall look at the various understanding of the term among philosophers.

##### **3.1.3.1 The Big Picture Approach**

This approach defines metaphysics from the perspective of the commonality of the topics which metaphysics deals with. The idea here is that metaphysical topics like identity, universalism, freedom, determinism, etc. have something in common. Accordingly, the big picture approach advances a definition that will take this commonality into account. An example of the big picture approach definition is rendered thus: "metaphysics is the branch of philosophy concerned with fundamental questions about the nature of reality." (Carroll & Markosian, 2010). A major critique of the big picture approach is that metaphysics is not the only discipline interested in the nature of reality. Religion, biology, are examples of other disciplines that consider the nature of reality. Essentially, this definition of metaphysics is not able to distinguish metaphysics from them.

##### **3.1.3.2 The First Philosophy Approach**

This approach simply defines metaphysics as the first philosophy. Aristotle is responsible for this approach as he used the term first philosophy many times in the *Metaphysics*, and you must note that First Philosophy was one of the names Aristotle called the book we now refer to as Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The other names include *Theology*; *Wisdom*; and *First Science*. Metaphysics as first philosophy is understood in two ways and both capture the meaning of metaphysics as understood by philosophers till today. Thus, Aristotle's conception of first philosophy, and therefore of metaphysics, is as follows:

1. "An inquiry into the principles and causes, or more precisely, an inquiry into the causes that are more primary and the principles that are highest." (Cf: Reale, 1980,

p.1). Scholars have approached this very definition from two perspectives, namely, the logical and metaphysical perspectives (Gracia, 2014). Emphasis on the logical perspective targets the discovery of what may be considered the highest principles. And in your Logic class you would have read about these principles. Some of them include the principle of identity, principle of noncontradiction, principle of excluded middle and so on. [Read about them here](#). These principles, also called Laws of Logic, apply to every other field of study and they are necessary for the truth of those disciplines. Thus, since the principles are fundamental to all other disciplines, Metaphysics in discovering them is said to be fundamental to all other disciplines, and is therefore, the first philosophy.

On the other hand, the metaphysical perspective focuses on discovering what the first causes or fundamental causes are. By fundamental causes, Aristotle means those from which things ultimately flow, their origins. You must note that a thing has many origins. To trace the fundamental origin of anything, Aristotle insists we must begin with our suppositions, our beliefs. That is, what do we believe, or think is the cause of the object under consideration. We then proceed to match our belief with the information provided to us by nature since nature holds more information than we do. We can move further in exposing the causes until we get to the final cause beyond which we cannot move. Take the shirt you are putting on as an example. The tracing of the primary causes of the t-shirt will take note that your t-shirt is made from knit fabrics. We take this to be your belief which may match or not match with information available to nature. Let's assume they match, in which case the knit fabrics are the primary causes of the t-shirt, but there is another cause that is primary to the knit fabrics, we may call this cotton. And we proceed further to inquire into the cause that is first to cotton and so on. This search continues until we get to the final cause beyond which we cannot deduce another cause. And since Aristotle interprets the final cause of anything to be God, the uncaused cause, the unmoved mover, this aspect of metaphysics is also described as the study of God or theology. In the end, there is a single subject matter, God. Because of this, metaphysicians view this aspect of metaphysics as specialized science whose subject matter is God. From this perspective therefore, metaphysics is defined as "an exploration beyond the scope of scientific observation and experiment, into the first causes of scientifically observable phenomena." (Smith, 2019, p.85).

The argument against this approach is that metaphysics is not the only discipline concerned with studying fundamental reality. Other disciplines like Geology, Biology, are equally interested in discovering the first causes. Despite this criticism, metaphysicians hold that even though these other disciplines study the first causes they do so from a limited lens (Biology, for example is concerned only with origin of life) whereas metaphysics does so in a more general manner, having all reality under it. And since it does this in a more general manner, metaphysics is able to establish the unity that exists among all existing things.

2. “A theory of being qua being.” (Cf: Reale, 1980, p.1). This definition understands metaphysics as science of being; a study of being in its absolute sense. Here the challenge is to discover what constitutes being; the essence of being. This challenge rests on the fact that things are not exactly as they appear or as we perceive them with our senses. Unlike in the other definition where metaphysics studies the first causes or principles, which in the final analysis is God, the object of metaphysics as being qua being is all reality, that is everything that exists. Nothing is outside of it including God. And this gives metaphysics its reputation as a universal science. Thus, when you say that a person is a child, metaphysics wants to know what childhood consists. If you say that you are good, it also wants to know what goodness means. Metaphysics does this by deciphering what properties or characters its subject matters have that make them what they are (Loux, 2006). It establishes the commonalities between a subject and other subjects as well as the differences between it and others. Based on this, philosophers hold that it is the duty of metaphysics to provide us with the map of all that exists. Metaphysics, understood as this is regarded as ontology, a theory of being.

A major ground for criticizing this view stems from the fact that going behind appearance to study reality is not an activity peculiar to philosophy. Science is involved in the same activity as well as police, census takers, and insurance appraisers (Benneth, 2016). As we noted earlier metaphysics derives its importance in the general way it deals with issues which differs from the way others undertake the same study.

### **3.1.3.3 Metaphysics as Critique of Knowledge**

The view of metaphysics as critique of knowledge was championed by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). According to Kant the previous understanding of metaphysics as inquiry into first causes and as study of being qua being arose because of man's inborn desire to gain insight into God, world and soul (Sarlemijn, 1975). Kant holds that this type of knowledge is impossible. We cannot know anything a priori (that is beyond what we can experience). Take God for instance, Kant says we have no way of knowing about Him and so we cannot say anything about Him. You must note that Kant is not saying that there is no such a being like God, he is only saying that given our limited nature as finite beings we cannot have knowledge of an infinite being like God. And since we cannot pursue knowledge of this type, metaphysics as the study of the transcendental is impossible. Now a redefinition is necessary and Kant offers it by calling metaphysics a critique of knowledge. And we can say that the essence of this critique is to examine the conceptual system with which we describe the world and guide us against wandering into the world of impossibilities.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

We have attempted an understanding of the meaning of metaphysics. And as you might have noticed, defining metaphysics is not an easy exercise. As a student of philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular, you are now involved in the attempt to generate meaning and definition for metaphysics.

#### **5.0 Summary**

In the unit, we have demonstrated the difficulty in defining the term metaphysics. You also learnt about the various misconceptions people have about metaphysics. You equally studied a brief history of the origin of metaphysics as well as the original meaning ascribed to the term by the ancient Greeks who invented it. We equally looked at how philosophers view metaphysics irrespective of misconceptions about it and the epistemological meaning associated with it.

#### **6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMA)**

1. Is Metaphysics occultism? Give strong reasons for your answer
2. Metaphysics is “an inquiry into the principles and causes, or more precisely, an inquiry into the causes that are more primary and the principles that are highest.” Show your understanding of the logical and metaphysical implication of this statement.
3. Differentiate between the transcendental and fundamental schools of meaning of

#### **7.0 References/Suggestions for Further Readings**

Ando, T. (1974). *Metaphysics: A critical survey of its meaning*. Martinus Nijhoff

Benneth, K. (2016). There is no Special Problem with Metaphysics. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 173(1), 21-37.

Carroll, J. W. & Markosian, N. (2010). *An introduction to metaphysics*. Cambridge: University Press

Gracia, J E. (2014). The Fundamental Character of Metaphysics. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 51(4), 305-317.

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Smith, J. E. H. (2019). *Irrationality: A history of the dark side of reason*. Princeton University Press.

## **Unit 2: The Divisions of Metaphysics**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Intended Learning Outcome
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 General Metaphysics
  - 3.2 Special Metaphysics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References and further reading

### **1.0 Introduction**

The dominant division of metaphysics is the one undertaken by Christian Wolff (1679-1754). According to this tradition, there are two main divisions of metaphysics; General metaphysics and Special Metaphysics. While general metaphysics is also known as ontology, the special metaphysics are further divided into three, namely; natural theology, cosmology, and rational psychology (studied today under the heading of philosophical anthropology).

Besides the Wolffian division there are other divisions of metaphysics undertaken by other philosophers. For instance, Charles Sanders Peirce, the American pragmatist philosopher divided metaphysics into three, namely ontology or general metaphysics, psychical or religious metaphysics, and physical metaphysics. However, we consider all non-Wolffian divisions as mere rehearsal or modification of the Wolffian paradigm.

### **2.0 Intended Learning Outcome**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Learn about the divisions of metaphysics
2. Differentiate between general and special metaphysics
3. Explain the meaning and subject of ontology
4. Discuss the aspects of special metaphysics

## 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 General Metaphysics (Ontology)

General metaphysics addresses the question of being in a broader, general, universal sense. General metaphysics is said to include the object of all the sciences, and it is in regard to this that it is said to be omni-science. (Jaroszyński, 2018). This is in line with Aristotle's conception of metaphysics. To aid with easier understanding of general metaphysics, we shall treat it with its other name, ontology.

#### 3.1.1 Etymology, History and Meaning of Ontology

Etymologically, ontology is derived from two Greek words; *on* and *logos*. While *on* means "being" in English *logos* means "science", "theory" or "study". If we couple the two words together, it will yield ontology and will mean science of being, theory of being or study of being.

The term ontology was first encountered in the work of a German philosopher, Rudolf Goclenius (1547-1620). [Read about him here.](#) Goclenius defined ontology to mean the doctrine of being and treated it as a field of study different from metaphysics. Philosophers after him used ontology interchangeably with metaphysics, regarding it instead as another name for metaphysics (Bigaj, 2012). However, Christian Wolff pioneered the current view of ontology as another name for general metaphysics and as a branch of metaphysics.

However, despite the varying relationship with metaphysics which philosophers assigned to the term, its meaning has remained constant. As a science of being or theory of being, ontology studies the general characteristics of being. Being is philosophers' way of depicting what is. Thus, ontology asks the general question about being; what is? What does it mean to be? What are the modes of being? Can a being be and not be? Is there a middle ground between being and nonbeing? Do beings become or are they eternal? If beings become, from where do they become? If they are eternal, why do they die? Do every being die? What sorts of beings exist?

#### 3.1.2 Being as Being as the Object of Ontology

Parmenides first posed the question of being in Western Metaphysics. Aristotle toed the same line if construing being as the major problem of western metaphysics. In the *Metaphysics*, he posed the question of "being qua being" and writes that "there is one science which considers being as being and the attributes which it has as such. This science differs from all particular sciences." (Metaphysics IV. 1. 1003a21). It studies being in its absolute sense. Here the challenge is to discover what constitutes being; the essence of being. This challenge rests on the fact that things are not exactly as they appear or as we perceive them with our senses. The object of ontology as being qua being is all reality, that is everything that exists. Nothing is outside of it including God. And this gives ontology its reputation as general metaphysics. Ontology is different from special metaphysics only as a result of the vast nature of its subject matter. Thus, while the special metaphysics seeks

knowledge of what it is for particular kinds of things to be, ontology asks what it is for being to be. While they study the being of God, human person, the natural world, ontology studies the being of beings. (White, 2019). The challenge here is to determine the universal defining character of being.

Essentially, it can be said that the questions that ontology considers are those of general existence. What exists? The answers metaphysicians have given to this question are as varied as there are metaphysicians. Some metaphysicians say that what exists are only spiritual objects. This is the view held by Berkeley. Others say that only physical objects exist. The logical positivists hold this view. There are others who also hold that both spiritual and physical objects exist? Arendt is of this view, and she holds further that both physical and spiritual beings depend on each other for continuous existence. Some even hold that only one single object exists in the world. This is the view of Leibnitz.

Again, If something exists, in what way does it exist? As a proposition? A fact? A state of affairs? A number? A spiritual being? An ethical value? A purpose? Swartz (2020) demonstrated how ontological study works especially in mapping out the category or nature of being. He holds that at “one level of analysis, tables and chairs might be considered to be distinct kinds of things; but for the purposes of ontology, tables and chairs are (usually regarded as being) the same sort of ‘ thing ’, namely physical (or spatiotemporal) entities.”

### 3.1.3 The Senses of Being

Aristotle in Book 4 of the Metaphysics stated unequivocally that “Being is said in various ways.” Franz Brentano (1838-1917), a German philosopher, did the task of reducing the various ways of being into four. They are (1) Accidental being (2) Potential and Actual Being (3) Being true (4) Categories.

1. **Accidental Being [*on kata symbebekos*]:** Accidental being, rendered in Latin as *on kata symbebekos*, is one of the senses of being. An accidental being is one that derives its being from another being. It depends on a prior/primordial being to exist and the being upon which it is dependent upon can be or exist without it being regarded as privation. A man can be without a hand but the absence of hand is a privation since having a hand is necessary to man, part of his essence. A brain tumor grown in the body of the same man can be said to be an accidental being. It depends on the man to be and the man can be without it. However, the brain tumor disappears if the man dies or undergoes successful surgery. Thus, accidental beings have dependent existence. It exists mainly as attributes, and many of such attributes can be found in one independent being. Your being a philosophy student is accidental for there are many other courses you could have registered for. And you can still be without being a philosophy student. But you wouldn't have been a philosophy student if you did not exist. As described by Brentano, “something has accidental being by virtue of the being of that with which it is accidentally conjoined. By contrast, independent being has being because of its peculiar essence.” (Brentano, 1975, p.6). In terms of

existence, the independent existence is prior for it must exist before the accidental being can exist.

- 2. Potential (on energeia) and Actual Being (on dynamai):** Aristotle introduces this subject by highlighting the character of actual being. It is either pure form or is actualised by form. It is what we might call a real being in action. The only reason why the idea of actual being is introduced here is because it plays important role in understanding potential being. The actual being is prior in both essence and substance to potential being. This is because in actuality the range of capacities has been established and realised. It is, therefore, important to understand the character of actual being if one is to understand the character of potential being for potential being possesses the capacity of becoming that which actual being is. Thus, the fact of actuality (also used interchangeably with entelechy by Aristotle) is action, derived from the verb to act. Thus, an actual being is a real being already in action whereas a potential being is a real being capable of certain action but not yet acting in that certain manner. A new born child has speech capacity but does not exercise that capacity yet. Thus, in relation to speech we say that the newborn is a potential being. On the other hand, the newborn's father who exercises this capacity is termed an actual being.

The idea of being by Parmenides simply holds that being is, non-being is not. The character of Parmenides' being is such that it is immobile and unchanging. It always is. Aristotle introduced the idea of potency to refute the Parmenidean notion of it. He thought that this is important in order to account for change, for movement, for becoming, and for death which we always witness. Parmenides wrongly thought that movement would always entail moving from non-being to being which is impossible. It is this impossibility that led him to deny the mobility of being. But a being moves in the way described by Aristotle from potentiality to actuality.

- 3. Being in the Sense of Being True (on hos alethes):** Being true, with Greek translation given as *on hos alethes*, identifies the beings that are, that truly are. The earliest expression of this is found in Parmenides who holds that being is and non-being is not. Thus, the being true is contrasted with beings which are not, with non being. The non-being is so because it is false. A dream, for instance is a non-being because the impressions it creates are false, they do not exist. Statements can also be true or false depending on whether it expresses state of affairs or not. If it expresses state of affairs it is true. If it does not it is not.
- 4. Being According to the Figures of the Categories (to on kata ta schemata ton kategorion):** Aristotle identified ten categories of being, namely; (1) substance (ousia), (2) quantity (poson), (3) quality (poion), (4) relation (pros ti), (5) place (pou), (6) time (pote), (7) position (keisthai), (8) possession (echein), (9) action

(poiein), and (10) passion (paschein). The categories are one of the ways in which a being can be. As such it can be a substance (substantial being); or a quantity or a quality or a passion and so on. (*Metaphysics* VII. 4. 1030b 11).

### **3.2 Special Metaphysics**

The special metaphysics is a study of a specific kind of being. It is a restricted metaphysics in the sense that it chooses a particular being and studies it in order to gain insight and understand about it. Thus, while general metaphysics or ontology studies being as being, that is, that by means of which anything called being is being, special metaphysics studies the nature of particular beings. Its interest is in discovering that by which a particular being is that kind of being. We regard it as a restricted metaphysics purely on account of its subject matters.

Wolffian division recognises three aspects of special metaphysics which correspond strictly to the three special beings it studies. They include (1) Natural theology (2) Cosmology, and (3) Rational Psychology. Apart from these three divisions other philosophers have expanded the aspects of special metaphysics. A major example of this is Immanuel Kant's metaphysics of morals. However, since this is an introductory course to metaphysics, we shall

#### **3.2.1 Natural Theology**

This is one of the aspects of special metaphysics. We shall consider it in details in what follows.

##### **3.2.1.1 Etymology and History of Natural Theology**

The term theology is an amalgam of two Greek words, namely; *Theo* meaning "God" and *Logos* meaning "Science" or "Study". When combined, the two words yield Theology etymologically rendered as Science of God or Study of God. The theology with the qualifier, natural, is a special kind of theology due mainly to its method and tool of inquiry. As a way of definition, natural theology is a study of God through the instrument of reason. It differs from supernatural or revealed theology which relies on sacred scripture and divine revelation.

Ancient Greek philosophers regarded their philosophising about God as theology. Plato, however, felt that theology properly speaking should be the concern of poets. He was led to this conclusion by the fact that the writings of ancient Greek authors/poets, like Homer and Hesioid, discussed the Olympian gods. Aristotle, on the other hand, equated the first philosophy with theology. He problematized the ultimate question of metaphysics as being qua being as having theological meaning and not just the ontological one. The ontological implication as we examined in 3.1 above seeks to discover the character of being in general; that is, that which constitutes being, by which a thing is said to be. In its theological character, Aristotle's being as being is also a reference to the being having the highest distinction attributable to being (Grondin, 2012). In holding to this position, proponents

point to Aristotle's reference to the being qua being as the "highest cause" and the "first principle." In the final analysis, the search for the first cause, the uncaused cause, terminates in God. Indeed, Aristotle regards metaphysics as the first philosophy as such it must study the first and the highest Being.

However, the emergence of Christianity in the 1st Century CE saw the adoption of the term by Christian apologists who construed it as an instrument of defending their new religion thereby giving theology a religious meaning. [Read here](#). The Enlightenment era, reputed for its opposition against religion and valorisation of reason, saw the restoration of theology to the domain of philosophy. Christian Wolff, particularly, put up an argument that certain truths about God and morality, can be attained rationally without reference to religion. Wolff was exiled by the Prussian emperor in 1723 for holding this view and similar ones. It was while in exile that Wolff wrote *Preliminary Discourse on Philosophy in General* (1728) where he effectively distinguished natural theology from sacred theology. Natural theology is rooted in the domain of philosophy, of metaphysics. Wolff's motivation was his conviction that a sound knowledge of God based on natural reason will provide a major foundation for morality. (Corr, 1973). Today, a more recent field of philosophy known as philosophy of religion studies in more detail those questions that were traditionally entertained by natural theology.

### **3.2.1.2 The Subject Matter of Natural Theology**

God or the Supreme Being is the ultimate subject matter of natural theology. In studying God, the metaphysician is interested in establishing His existence, His attributes and operations that are consequence of His attributes. Aristotle established the existence of the Supreme Being following his quest for the cause of things. He is the necessary being without whom nothing would have existed. Thus, all such quests terminate in God as the first cause, the uncaused cause. From this point onwards, all subsequent metaphysicians have proved the existence of God a priori by analysing the essence of a necessary being. It is from this analysis that we arrive at the attributes of God.

A number of characters are listed as constituting God's attributes. They include God's eternity, His omniscience, His benevolence, His omnipotence, His infinite, and His absolute goodness. God is also above all things. He is the true substance on whom everything depends without Him depending on anything.

### **3.2.2 Cosmology**

As a special metaphysics, cosmology is simply a science of the universe. Its interest is in discovering the nature, origin and necessary structure of the universe.

#### **3.2.2.1 Inquiry About the Origin of the World**

The earliest response to the question of the origin of the universe was mythical in nature. Individual ancient cultures around the world, trying to make sense of the world in which they lived, came up with myths in order to explain their origins. All known such myths

made reference to a world created by a supernatural being.

Genesis, the first Book of the Holy Bible, also referred to a universe created by God. According to the Book of Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The reference to how God created the heavens and earth is found in 2 Maccabees 7:28: “Look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed.”

The Biblical account is called creationism. It views creation as the manifestation of God’s omnipotence. The creative Being of the Bible is God who created the world out of nothing - *creatio ex nihilo*. By this account, the creation of the universe was an event that happened in time. As such, the Bible also anticipates that the universe would one day cease to exist just like every other thing that emerged in time. This is also the view held by Muslims in the kalām argument for the existence of God.

The Ionian philosophers championed the materialistic origin of the universe. Thales, for instance, held that the universe, just like every other thing, originated from water; and that the earth was floating on water. Seneca reports Thales’ point thus:

Thales' . . . theory is . . . that the Earth was supported by water, and that she was swimming on it like a vessel; and it is owing to the movability of the water that she fluctuates when she is said to quake. (Seneca, DK 11A15 as translated by Popper, 1998, pp. 57-58.)

Anaximander, a student of Thales and the first person to undertake critical philosophy, disagreed with Thales’ notion of the world. First he agreed with Thales that the universe was not created but held that Thales erred in holding that the earth was suspended by water. His reason was that holding that the earth was held in its place by water would entail an infinite regress where we must find something that would hold water and keep finding something that must hold another (Popper, 1998). Anaximander, therefore, attributed the origin of the world to the everlasting motion of that which has no limit, “the limitless or the infinite.” (Seligman, 1962). He held that the:

Earth was (of drumlike shape, a short circular column; DK 12A10, 11) was not supported by anything: it was freely suspended in the centre of things and kept there by a symmetrical attraction exerted by all things, in empty or almost empty, infinite space - somewhat like our ether or 'empty' space - which he called the Apeiron {apeiron - 'infinite'}. And he replaced Water as the principle and origin of all things by this Apeiron (= the Unbounded), an infinite fine substance that fills the entire infinite space (with which it is, indeed, identical), that Apeiron which is eternal and out of which all other substances emerge. (Popper,



1998, p.36).

Popper excitedly called Anaximander the first inventor of a technical term. While his contemporaries, Thales and Anaximenes, were describing the origin of the world with familiar terms he invented *apeiron* as a technical word to explain his belief. If in more recent times, certain philosophers have defined the task of philosophy as production of concepts they are only extending the tradition inaugurated by Anaximander. Some other ancient philosophers like Democritus (460-370 B.C.); Epicurus (341-270 BC) and Lucretius (99-55 BC) with the exception of Parmenides (515 - 445 B.C.) held that the universe was not created, is eternal and has neither a beginning nor an end.

It was not until the 20th century that a clearer idea about the origin of the world emerged. This followed the discovery by a Catholic Priest and astrophysicist, Georges Lemaître (1894-1966). He posited that the world came about as a result of the explosion of a primeval atom. One of the critics of the explosion argument, in the 1950s during an interview, sarcastically referred to the explosion hypothesis as “the Big Bang.” And it is the name with which we refer to the phenomenon (Holt, 2012). The Big Bang is dated 13-15 billion years ago. An important conclusion of Lemaître’s discovery is the claim that the universe was continually expanding and increasing in size. At the end, Lemaître’s finding can be said to have drawn from all theories of the universe starting from the myths of different peoples to arrive at his conclusions.

### **3.2.2.2 The Nature of the Universe**

Xenophanes, a student of Anaximander, was among the earliest Greeks to contemplate the nature of the universe. He held that the universe and god are one, and was the first to put up an argument that the earth was spherical. This theory would finally be proven right by the works of Galileo Galilei.

The geocentric (earth-centred) theory of the universe propagated by Ptolemy (85-165 AD) claimed that the earth is at the centre of the universe with the sun and the moon revolving around it. This was also the position believed by Aristotle before him. At the time of Ptolemy, only six planets (Mercury, Earth, Venus, Saturn, Mars and Jupiter) had been discovered and all the others were believed by Ptolemy to revolve around the earth.

Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), pioneered a rejection of the geocentric theory of the universe. He postulated that rather than the earth, the sun was at the centre of the universe and that the earth and other planets revolve around the sun. This view is called the heliocentric theory of the universe and it was hugely opposed by both Catholic and protestant authorities at the time. It brought about what is called scientific revolution since it brought a total change to the way we view the world. Copernicus arrived at his position by the power of human reason alone. The empirical proof in support of his conclusion came many years after his death when Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), with the aid of a telescope

demonstrated that Copernicus was right whereas Aristotle and Ptolemy were wrong. The sun is at the centre of the universe.

### 3.2.3 Philosophical Anthropology (Rational Psychology )

Rational Psychology was a term used by Christian Wolff in the 17th Century to describe an aspect of special metaphysics whose subject matter is the human soul or the human mind (*De Psyche* in Greek). As etymologically conceived, psychology means science of the mind. However, the 20th century saw the change of name and broadening of the subject matter of this special metaphysics. Thus, instead of rational psychology we now call the subject philosophical anthropology. It is under this current name that we will treat this special metaphysics.

Etymologically, the term anthropology emerged from two Greek words *anthropos* meaning man or human; and *logos* meaning science or study. The adjective “philosophical” attached to the term is intended only to differentiate it from the other disciplines which also study anthropology. For instance there is psychological anthropology, sociological anthropology and theological anthropology, among others. (Darowski, 2014).

Philosophical anthropology, on the other hand, reflects upon man in order to understand him in his entirety, grasping the fundamental principles of his existence in the world and his behavior (Lombo & Russo, 2017, p.).

Philosophical anthropology is a metaphysical study of the human person. In all the other aspects of special metaphysics other beings were the object of study whereas the study is undertaken by the human person. However, in philosophical anthropology both the object of study and the subject of study correspond. Thus, it is about the human person studying himself using the tools of philosophy. Darowski (2014, p.10) lists some of the questions which philosophical anthropology tackles to include:

- What is the nature and essence of man and his mode of existence?
- What place, and position does a man take among other existing beings?
- What is the reason for a man to take such a position in the world – what creates it, what constitutes it and what is its final condition going to be?

It is in the type of question it asks that philosophical anthropology distinguishes itself from other forms of anthropology and indeed from scientific anthropology. Its major concern is the **who** and the **why** of the human person.

## 4.0 Conclusion

The divisions of metaphysics is about the subjects which metaphysics studies. While other subjects and sciences may be interested in these subjects, they lack the tool and the method

to study them in the deepest manner in which metaphysics does. While other sciences employ empirical tools, limited as they are in penetrating the inner recesses of being, metaphysics by means of speculation arrives at knowledge of reality as it is.

## **5.0 Summary**

In this unit, we have examined the divisions of metaphysics. We learnt that the two broad divisions are general metaphysics and special metaphysics. We learnt also that being qua being is the object of general metaphysics. We examined the senses of being according to Aristotle. We considered the various aspects of special metaphysics. They include, natural theology, cosmology and philosophical anthropology.

## **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

1. Highlight the core reason that differentiates general metaphysics from special metaphysics.
2. Discuss the idea of accidental being
3. In what way can a being be said to be in potency?
4. Demonstrate your understanding of the subject of natural theology
5. Show the major difference between the heliocentric and geocentric theories of the universe

## **7.0 References and Suggestions for Further Readings.**

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## **Unit 3: Methods of Metaphysics**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Intended Learning Outcome
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Aporetic Method
  - 3.2 A priori Method
  - 3.3 A posteriori Method
  - 3.4 Analogy of Being
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References and further reading

### **1.0 Introduction**

I like viewing method as a toolbox. Recall the toolbox which you see in your local mechanic's workshop or in your local carpenter's workshop. In the carpenter's toolbox, for instance, you would find such things as nails, chisel, saw, hammer, etc. It is with these tools that the carpenter does his job of making and repairing furniture. In the same way, metaphysicians have toolboxes with which they do their job.

By way of simple definition, let us say that the method of metaphysics is a procedure for pursuing and discovering metaphysical knowledge. Non-metaphysicians and indeed non-philosophers find it difficult to understand how philosophers do their job and arrive at knowledge of reality. This unit is devoted to exposing you to some of the methods of metaphysics.

Before proceeding, you must note that other branches of philosophy, even non-philosophical disciplines, in one way or the other, also employ the methods which we shall discuss below. Thus, the methods are in no way exclusive to metaphysics.

### **2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this unit, you would be able to:

1. Discuss some methods of metaphysics
2. Differentiate a priori and a posteriori metaphysics
3. Apply the various methods of metaphysics in your study
4. Determine the type of methods suitable for your metaphysical inquiry

### 3.0 Main Content

#### 3.1 The Aporetic Method

This is one of the oldest methods of metaphysics. It could be found in the metaphysics of Zeno, Heraclitus, Protagoras, Gorgias, Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus among other ancient philosophers. As a term, aporetic is derived from a simpler word, apory. Apory on the other hand, is an English rendition of the Greek word, *aporia*. The English words closest in meaning to Greek *aporia* include, culdesac, impasse, trapped, blockage, among others. In English, an apory is a difficult situation, person etc. By way of definition “an apory is a collection of contentions that are individually plausible but collectively inconsistent.” (Rescher, 1987, p.283). When used in philosophy, it also means a problematic issue, a perplexity (Rescher, 2009). In philosophy, therefore, apory is a state of mind; a state of being perplexed or puzzled. It is also the object and cause of the state of mind, of cause of perplexity. The two meanings correspond to what can be regarded as subjective apory and objective apory, respectively (Karamanolis & Polis, 2018). Book Beta of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* is said to contain 15 aporias.

The aporetic method in metaphysics entails generating puzzles and resolving them through philosophising. The method has to do with clearing seeming confusion that exists between related concepts, ideas, or situations. The aim is to solve a metaphysical problem. In using the aporetic method, the metaphysician generates a state of *aporia* by introducing philosophical situations. These philosophical situations are some sorts of hypotheses. Aristotle, holds that to qualify as *aporia* the philosophical situations which are resolved by aporetic must be opposites that are equal or apparently equal in strength. This equal opposites, the philosophical situation is what constitutes philosophical problems to be resolved by metaphysics.

Aporetic method highlights the two equal opposites, drawing out the strength and the weakness of both of them and finally arriving at conclusion. A modern *aporia* situation was created by Bertrand Russell who intended it as a proof that appearance is deceitful; that the senses cannot always be trusted. It was recast as follows by Rescher (2009):

1. What the sight of our eyes tells us is to be believed.
2. Sight tells us the stick is bent.
3. What the touch of our hands tells us is to be believed.
4. Touch tells us the stick is straight.

The philosophical situation presented above captures what happens when a stick is meant to stand in a stream. The stick cannot be bent and straight at the same time. It is a contradiction to hold that it is so. The *aporia* situation is that the two positions are both strongly recommended by the senses. This type of situation perplexes the mind. At first sight it knows not what to do. This is a situation of *aporia*. If you are an empiricist who holds that sensory data provides ground for certain knowledge, you will notice that there is

no way of choosing the two positions at the same time without being trapped in contradiction. Both of them are grounded by sensory experience. Faced with this type of aporia, people say nothing; they are at a loss about what to say. They become numb and trapped.

The metaphysician, on the other hand, seeks to escape from this entrapment. His philosophising is indeed an attempt to escape the aporia. Aporetic aids the metaphysician's escape. It cures his mind of this numbness, this perplexity by arguing through the contradictory positions in order to select the most plausible position. It was in this regard that Arthur Schopenhauer (2012) regards the aporia (wonder) as the mother of Metaphysics. The entire outline of the aporetic method is laid by Aristotle thus:

For those who wish to get clear of difficulties it is advantageous to state the difficulties well; for the subsequent free play of thought implies the solution of the previous difficulties, and it is not possible to untie a knot which one does not know. But the difficulty of our thinking points to a knot in the object; for in so far as our thought is in difficulties, it is in like case with those who are tied up; for in either case it is impossible to go forward. Therefore one should have surveyed all the difficulties beforehand, both for the reasons we have stated and because people who inquire without first stating the difficulties are like those who do not know where they have to go; besides, a man does not otherwise know even whether he has found what he is looking for or not; for the end is not clear to such a man, while to him who has first discussed the difficulties it is clear. (Metaphysics, Book Beta, 995a 27-995b 2).

Thus, the condition set by Aristotle above is first to state the problem you are faced with. A proper statement of the problem is an important step for it demonstrates one's knowledge of subject matter and issues relating to it. After this one begins to untie the knot (resolving the contradictions) which proper definition has made clear. At the end one of the positions is choosing whereas the others are abandoned. The aporetic method therefore pushes the metaphysician into a forced choice. He or she must choose between the options.

### **3.2 The A priori Method**

The a priori method is the method through which metaphysics gain knowledge of reality without reference to experience. Aristotle would have set the stage for the use of the a priori method in metaphysics when he holds that philosophy like poetry captures the realm of the plausible, that is the realm of what may happen "according to the laws of probability or necessity." (Smith, 2016, p.5). This is against the physical and natural sciences which capture the realm of what has happened. Truths of Mathematics, Logic, Moral propositions and epistemic principles are all discoverable through the a priori method.

The adoption of the a priori method in metaphysics is due to the nature of the subject matter

of metaphysics which has been said to include universal reality and production of concepts. As a science of being in general, metaphysics considers reality in all ramifications. It considers both the actual and potential being. With regard to potential being, they cannot be studied by empirical tools since they are inaccessible to the senses. Spiritual entities like God, the mind, beauty, happiness are also studied through the a priori method. We can refer to these spiritual entities as the concepts we also saddle metaphysics with the responsibility of producing. Rene Descartes for instance arrived at the knowledge of God by means of a priori method alone. In his methodic doubt, he established the existence of God as a necessary Being. Descartes distrusted ideas that arose from his senses. Only the existence of God whose nature would not allow him to be deceived by his senses would permit him to rely on knowledge gotten through the senses. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) also established certain moral codes, example of which is the categorical imperative, through a priori method without any appeal to experience. Kant's categorical imperative is rendered thus: "**Act as you would want all other people to act towards all other people.**" This is an a priori universal command which all rational men will recognise. It is axiomatic and cannot be contradicted by any experience or evidence. [Click here to learn more about Categorical Imperative.](#)

Thinking and intuition play important roles in a *a priori* method. It is by means of the two that *a priori knowledge* is obtained. The two faculties, thinking and intuition, are innate in man. In gaining knowledge through the *a priori* method one goes inward into oneself and tasks these two faculties to provide answers to questions that cannot be answered by reference to mere experience. Hannah Arendt (1978, p.162) describes the process in which thinking grasps a priori knowledge thus:

Thinking leaves the world of appearances. Only because thinking implies withdrawal can it be used as an instrument of escape. Moreover, as has already been emphasized, thinking implies an unawareness of the body and of the self and puts in their place the experience of sheer activity, more gratifying, according to Aristotle, than the satisfaction of all the other desires, since for every other pleasure we depend on something or somebody else." Thinking is the only activity that needs nothing but itself for its exercise.

Empirical methods yield knowledge of beings that are particular and contingent, a priori method yields knowledge of universals, and necessary beings. It is suited for discovering what Arendt again gave different names as "Kantian thing-in-itself, the Being behind the appearances, the world's "inmost nature," its "core,\* of which "the objective world . . . [is] merely the outward side." (1978, p.20).

### **3.3 A Posteriori Method**

The a posteriori method of metaphysics is always contrasted to a *a priori* method. And it



refers to the empirical method which we referred to earlier. It relies on the senses to arrive at knowledge of reality. While a priori method looks inward the person to gain knowledge of reality, the *a posteriori* looks outside the person for knowledge. Also, when knowledge is gotten through the a posteriori method such knowledge can be said to be probable, contingent, accidental, hypothetical, and usually confirmed by empirical data.

The method of metaphysics of pre-Socratic Greek philosophers was mainly a posteriori. Their concern was knowledge about what occurs in nature.( Lutz & Tuboly, 2021, p.7). The metaphysics of Thales, Anaximander, Democritus, Leucippus, Heraclitus, Anaximenes, and so on were all a posteriori in nature. They were interested in discovering knowledge about the natural world. Thales' water, Anaximander's boundless stuff, and Anaximenes' air were all grounded in a posteriori method.

Unlike in the *a priori* method where intuition and reasoning (thinking) play important roles in gaining knowledge, the a posteriori method relies on the human senses. You must remember the five senses you learnt in your elementary science. They are very important in gaining knowledge *a posteriori*. Thus, a posteriori method is about empirical realities; that is, realities that can be touched, smelled, heard, seen, and tasted; in a word things that can be perceived. In a posteriori method, metaphysics pursues knowledge that can be verified. One who, for example, wants to confirm whether the water in a bucket is hot or cold can simply feel the cup by touching it. The act of feeling the cup alone tells one immediately that the water is either hot or cold. This knowledge is obtained through a posteriori method.

### **3.4 Analogy of Being (*Analogia Entis*)**

Analogy of being is one of the earliest methods of western metaphysics. This can be found in the philosophy of ancient philosophers like Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plato and Aristotle among others. Philosophers deploy analogy in order to express the idea of likeness in difference, that is, to show some relatedness between things that seemingly differ. [Click here to read more about analogia entis.](#)

A German Catholic Philosopher, Eric Przywara (1889-1972) used the expression *analogy of being* in his attempt to reconcile the difference between the thoughts of two giant Church fathers, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas who were identified philosophically as Platonist and Aristotlean respectively. He demonstrated that the method of *analogia entis* was not a new philosophical method since even the Greek thoughts can be said to have been analogical haven considered the question of unity in view of the patent diversity of being as expressed in the problem of the One and the Many.

In further demonstration of the method Przywara created a bridge between the realm of worldly existence as projected by Aristotle and the realm of Being in its fullness and purity as championed by Plato. His analogy of being resolves the tension that exists between existence and essence, between immanence and transcendence, and between two giants of

ancient Greek philosophy. Also, Przywara was the first to call attention to the manner in which metaphysical concepts are formed by means of analogy of being (*analogia entis*). Even metaphysics as a term, when understood as transphysics (beyond physics) was an analogical invention where metaphysics is derived from physics.

Supersensory reality, the being-qua-being which we hold is the subject of metaphysics is only reachable by means of analogy. And this entails abstracting from the qualities of particular beings. Thus, we access the scope of the real by means of analogy. Even the notion of God as an infinite and omnipotent Being derives from analogy. What is given directly to us by our senses is the man as a living being, in flesh and blood. It is by means of analogy that metaphysics transcends the sensory data to establish the idea of the supreme Being. This also applies to other metaphysical concepts like Beauty, Happiness, Death, etc. We are not able to see any of these concepts rather what we see are instances of them. For instance, we see beautiful people but no one can claim to have encountered Beauty. It is from this sight of beautiful people that we arrive at the concept of Beauty through analogy.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The methods of metaphysics are about the tools which metaphysicians employ in their pursuit of knowledge. It is with these tools that they pursue their study of reality. The methods may not be entirely peculiar to metaphysics but they nevertheless form the core of the method of metaphysics. There is no doubt that some of the methods discussed above may be simultaneously applied in one study.

#### **5.0 Summary**

In this unit we studied some of the different methods of metaphysics. The aporetic method is employed in the treatment of aporia, that is in resolving perplexity. The a priori method is deployed in the course of studying non-material, non-experiential objects. The a posteriori method is deployed to study sensible objects.

#### **6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments**

1. Differentiate between a priori and a posteriori method
2. What do you understand by aporia?
3. In which method of metaphysics will you assign roles to reasoning? Discuss the role.
4. Discuss the manner in which metaphysics attain knowledge through *analogia entis*

#### **7.0 References and Suggestions for Further Reading**

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## **Unit 4: Metaphysics and Other Branches of Philosophy**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Intended Learning Outcome
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Relationship Between Metaphysics and Axiology
  - 3.2 Relationship Between Metaphysics and Epistemology
  - 3.3 Relationship Between Metaphysics and Logic
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References and Further Reading

### **1.0 Introduction**

Axiology, Logic, Epistemology, and Metaphysics are the four major branches of philosophy. There are also sub-branches of philosophy like Political Philosophy, Philosophical Anthropology, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Gender, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Development, and so on. These sub-fields can be studied under one of the major branches. Political Philosophy, for instance, is assumed by many Philosophers to be a sub-field of Ethics which in its own is a sub-field of axiology. Aristotle warns us that the various divisions of philosophy are related. This could also explain why Plato made no effort to distinguish between the branches of philosophy. It is in their relationship with metaphysics that this relatedness of branches of philosophy is most visible. In what follows we shall consider the nature of this relationship.

### **2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

1. Discuss the relationship between Metaphysics and Axiology.
2. Differentiate between Metaphysics and Epistemology.
3. Explain the interconnection between Metaphysics and Logic.
4. Discuss the relationship between Metaphysics and Ethics.

### **3. 0 Main Contents**

#### **3.1 Metaphysics and Axiology**

We have so far established the meaning of metaphysics as the study of reality. In studying reality, you must have learnt, entails seeking knowledge of what exists. What does it mean to exist? What are the kinds of things that exist? Are there levels of existence? Why do things exist? Does nothing exist? Are things that exist the only things that could exist or could other things have existed? These are some of the questions that interest metaphysics.

Axiology on the other hand, is a branch of philosophy that studies values. [Click here to learn more](#). Though the invention of the term, axiology, is a recent one, appearing for the first time in 1902 in the writings of Paul Lapie and in 1908 in the writing of E. von Hartmann, the philosophical study of values is as old as ancient Greek philosophy. Both Plato and Aristotle were engaged in the study of values. Values are described as things of worth or things that are good. Thus, the ultimate axiological question is: Can we know the good? Socrates attached great importance to this question believing that ignorance of the good accounts for why people engage in evil activities. From Socrates' point of view, evil is a result of value misjudgement. The evil doer misjudges a bad act to be good and engages in it.

The relationship between axiology and metaphysics can be said to be mutually complementary. There is a claim that:

The quest for values, for things and events which are conducive to survival and the enhancement of life, engendered the quest for knowledge of reality. By his very nature, man has been primarily interested in how things and events administer to- his basic and derivative needs, how they satisfy or frustrate him, how to preserve and promote the good things of life and curtail and erase objects which stifle his zest for living.” (Hart, 1971, p.29).

From the quote above, metaphysics, understood as knowledge of the fundamental structure of reality, owes its origin to axiology. Man needed to discover in nature the things that are good for his survival and continuous thriving on earth. Knowledge of good, of course goes hand in hand with knowledge of evil or the harmful. While he may need to cultivate and maximise the good, he must also work to eliminate or avoid the evil on discovering them if he would succeed.

#### **3.1.2 Metaphysics and Branches of Axiology**

Philosophers distinguish between two branches of axiology, namely, Ethics and Aesthetics. We shall take a look at the individual relationship which metaphysics holds with the two branches of axiology.

### **A. Metaphysics and Ethics**

As a branch of axiology ethics is also called moral philosophy. It is concerned with determining good and bad conducts, separating rightful behaviours from wrongful ones and demanding that the right acts are performed while we avoid the wrong ones. Metaphysics, on the other hand, is concerned with being qua being; with the ultimate aim of discovering the nature of reality.

Philosophers have demonstrated that there is a crucial relationship between metaphysics and ethics (MacIntyre, 2009). This is firstly visible in the ancient works of Plato. In Plato's philosophy, metaphysics cannot be imagined without ethics and ethics can never be imagined without metaphysics. (Rowe, 2007). Thus, Plato's metaphysics of the world of Form, provided a solid foundation for the erection of his ethical theory. Apart from providing a general theory about the structure of the world, the theory of world of Form also discussed certain Forms necessary for upholding the ideal world. If those ideal Forms like Justice could sustain the World of Forms they can also sustain the physical world. Thus, the human person as a being in the world must strive to cultivate them. He does this by ensuring that individual behaviour and actions conform to the ideal forms as revealed in the theory of the Forms. According to Plato still, the world is an ordered whole where individuals have specific roles. The just ensures strict adherence to this division of labour and therefore maintains a good and orderly world.

Essentially, ethics is meant for the human person as a being in the world. Thus, any ethical discussion presupposes knowledge of the world and knowledge of the human person. It also presupposes knowledge of certain ethical ideals that are only discoverable by metaphysics. It is at the level of metaphysics that we determine what it means to be in the universe, to be a human person and to be a moral agent. The treatment to be meted out to the human person, the nature of the relationship to enter with him, the expectations to be made of him all would rest on this determination of his being. This takes into account the nature of the human person. Who is he and what is he? What are his capabilities and limitations? What is the source of morality? And why should we obey moral injunctions? Socrates posed a question like this in [The Euthyphro Dilemma](#).

Thus, we can say that metaphysics serves as a foundation to ethics. It demarcates the range of being to which ethical responsibility can be attributed. It also establishes the limit of the universe in which human persons act as ethical beings. Ethics, on the other hand, guarantees the care of the universe and seeing to its continuous well-being. It does this by prescribing the right course of action in relation to the universe, to human persons, to the environment and to individuals.

### **B. Metaphysics and Aesthetics**

Aesthetics is a sub-division of axiology and it is concerned with beauty and taste. It is simply a science of the beautiful. [Read more about aesthetics here](#). The various fields of Arts (painting, photography, drawing, architecture, etc) are the grounds of aesthetics. It

examines the arts in order to discover the condition by which what is said to be beautiful is truly beautiful. What is the source of beauty identified in a beautiful object? Is beauty truly in the eyes of the beholder, as they say? Or is it a thing in the mind? Or is it in the object being admired? Do we mean the same thing when we say that a piece of drawing and a book are beautiful? The question is about whether the beautiful is visual or mental or both.

Aesthetics is all about philosophical interpretation of the arts. This exercise is metaphysical in nature. Philosophers, since Plato, go beyond the facade of the visible beautiful things to discover Beauty itself. According to Plato, Beauty is an ideal form living in the world of form. Thus, particular beautiful things as in the arts mirror Beauty existing in the world of forms. The beautiful things can be defaced, destroyed, and even die, but Beauty is an eternal, unchanging being. The human Soul is acquainted with Beauty having existed with it in the world of forms (the soul is also a form) before being united with the body.

Art interpretation is a subjective experience (Hein, 1996). However, it is metaphysics that sets the objective criteria of what constitutes Arts and the reality which Arts interpret. The importance of Aesthetics derives from the fact that Arts which it studies is a representation of reality which is of fundamental importance to man in the sense that it has importance to man's ultimate destiny (Kuhn, 1950). It is the role of metaphysics to delineate what constitutes human destiny and to determine what reality is. Arts, as we said earlier, is representational. What does it represent? It could be a man. It could be God. It could be man's relationship with God. Whatever it is, these are issues that are of fundamental importance to man. Thus, Arts represents man's conception of himself as a being in the world as well as all that this being in the world entails. This conception is engendered by metaphysics; and metaphysics in some sense is also engendered by the representation which the Arts make. Thus, we can adduce a symbiotic relationship between Aesthetics and Metaphysics where "we sometimes allow our idea of reality, reached intellectually, to dictate our interpretation of beauty and, then, sometimes allow our experience of beauty to rule our understanding of reality." (Chaudhury, 1965, p191). According to Chaudhury the two approaches correspond to the Western and Indian approaches to the relationship between metaphysics and aesthetics. In the Western approach, metaphysics precedes aesthetics whereas metaphysics flows from aesthetics in the Indian approach.

### **3.2 Metaphysics and Epistemology**

Epistemology as a branch of philosophy is also known as theory of knowledge. Its concern is the nature and scope of human knowledge (Carter & LittleJohn, 2021). Questions to which epistemology is interested in include: what is knowledge? What can we know? How do we know? How do we know that we know? Can we know everything?

On the other hand Metaphysics, as we have shown many times, is concerned with the nature of ultimate reality. It tells us:

About the metaphysical nature of our world: under what

conditions composition occurs; how objects persist through time; whether properties are universals or tropes, and so on. It is widely held that these kinds of first-order metaphysical truths are not just truths about our world, but are truths about every world: they are metaphysically necessary (Miller, 2009, p.29).

Thus, if epistemology is concerned about knowledge, metaphysics establishes the object that is to be known, Being.

We may illustrate this with an example from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The metaphysics of Immanuel Kant establishes two worlds that constitute reality. First he talks about the world of phenomenon which corresponds to the physical and experiential world as known to us. He also discusses the transcendental world which he called the world of noumenon. This world is the abode of the spiritual entities, it is the world of things as they truly are. In Kant's metaphysics, the world of phenomenon, the experiential world is knowable to man. It is the world of the senses and sensual beings. We possess the capacity to know about it and about the beings in it. However, the world of noumenon, the transcendental world, is unknowable to us. We lack the capacity to gain any knowledge about it even though metaphysics has established its existence.

In a nutshell, we may say that while Metaphysics is concerned with establishing what constitutes reality, epistemology is concerned with how to know reality. It asks deep questions about what it also means to know reality. It also offers the method of metaphysics. For instance, the method of metaphysics which we studied in unit 2 are all epistemological topics detailing how we arrive at metaphysical knowledge.

### **3.3 Metaphysics and Logic**

Logic as a branch of philosophy is defined as science of right reasoning. According to Bencivenga (2014). "A logic is a theory of the logos, of meaningful discourse: a theory of how discourse acquires the meaning it does." The concern of logic is correct reasoning. It insists that whatever can be said about anything should be said in a meaningful manner devoid of ambiguity. In this sense, it sets out rules and principles which must govern human reasoning. These rules are not always available to the ordinary man and their absence accounts for why the ordinary man always finds himself falling into fallacies. Fallacies are injurious errors of thought and logic assumes the responsibility of safeguarding our thoughts from them. The philosopher to whom thought is the major instrument of his trade does not have the liberty of the ordinary man to fall into fallacies. This explains why logic is of importance to him.

Some 20th century philosophers, including W. V. O. Quine, Rudolf Carnap, Bertrand



Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, etc perpetuated a claim which denied any connection between metaphysics and logic. Logic, they hold, operates independent of metaphysics and cannot make metaphysical assumptions. And that metaphysics has a superior standing in relation to logic. (Harris, 1983). The major ground of their argument is that metaphysical truths cannot be proven. But the proponents have since been shown to be wrong having been found to be confusing provability with truth. Kurt Godel, the Logician who once sat at meetings with the Vienna Circle, an organized association of intellectuals led by Rudolf Carnap, successfully demonstrated to them that mathematical numbers, we can say the same of metaphysical truths, though true cannot be proven. Godel's conclusion that all the truths of mathematics cannot be captured by any logical system led to a new theorem called the first incompleteness theorem. (Holt, 2018). Metaphysicians have since argued that the same thing is applicable to metaphysics.

However, the fact that not all truths of metaphysics can be captured by logic does not mean that no relationship exists between the two branches of philosophy. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* was the first to draw attention to a relationship between Metaphysics and Logic. In this relationship, Aristotle assigns to Metaphysics the task of discovering the laws of Logic like that of contradiction, excluded middle, and so on. The laws are discovered a priori purely by human reasoning unaided by experience. They exist at the level accessible to metaphysics alone and they foreground all logical thinking.

Thousands of years after Aristotle, Frederick Hegel, the German idealist philosopher, also held at one time that logic is nothing but an introduction to metaphysics. At other times, especially in his later years, he viewed logic as metaphysics (Pippin, 2019) and declared that Being is the starting point of logic. Recall here that Being is the subject matter of metaphysics. And in saying that logic will begin with Being, Hegel does not mean that logic will rediscover Being rather he means that logic will proceed in its work using the discoveries made by metaphysics on the subject of Being. In this sense, metaphysics can be said to be a foundation for logic and provide logic with its first subject matter. It is from this subject matter that logic will start before digressing into others.

The relationship cannot be said to be one-sided in any way. Logic also plays an important role for metaphysics serving as a light for the queen of all sciences. In this guise, logic is the tool for ensuring the validity of metaphysical statements. Every metaphysical statement is a claim about reality, and most of the reality about which metaphysics make claims are not directly verifiable by the senses. It is only by means of logic, through logical inferences, that such statements are verified. Thus, the arguments about metaphysical claims must also be logically valid and must contain good premises. The demonstration of this can be found in the category of beings which we term logical entities. A good example of this can be found in metaphysics' postulation of necessary beings. The existence of such beings cannot be verified by any empirical method. But it can be verified logically by examining the thought process through which we arrive at them.

## 4.0 Conclusion

As the queen of all sciences, metaphysics has relationships with all the branches of philosophy. It is a mutually influencing relationship whereby metaphysics positively affect the other branches of philosophy and they in turn influence metaphysics. In most of the relationships, metaphysics provides the grounding for the other branches of philosophy. It supplies them the basic preposition of their being and their relevance.

## 5.0 Summary

In this unit, we have been able to establish the relationship which metaphysics shares with other branches of metaphysics. Starting from the two subdivisions of axiology (ethics and aesthetics) to epistemology and to logic, metaphysics has proven to run a long thread across the branches.

## 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)

1. Explain how axiological reasons led to the emergence of metaphysics
2. Discuss how western philosophy differ from Indian philosophy in terms of the relationship between aesthetics and metaphysics
3. Disprove the claim that metaphysical truths cannot be proven logically.

## 7.0 References and Suggestions for Further Reading

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## **Unit 5: The Values of Metaphysics**

### **Contents**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Intended Learning Outcome
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Some Major Arguments Against Metaphysics
  - 3.2 Some Importance of Metaphysics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References and further reading

### **1.0 Introduction**

What is the importance of the hair splitting discussions about metaphysics? Why do you need to worry about particulars and universals, for instance? Why is it important to study about beings? As observed by Hofwebber, there is a “long history of worrying about whether or not metaphysics is a legitimate philosophical discipline” (2009, p.260). At the core of this worry are the questions of meaning and truth of metaphysical propositions; that is, do statements about metaphysical reality mean anything? And, can we really know anything about metaphysical reality? Questions like this were initially asked by non-philosophers. However, it took centre stage once philosophers started questioning the legitimacy of metaphysics regarded as the foundation of philosophy itself. While the questioning of metaphysics has lost its attractiveness and metaphysics having taken center stage once again, it is still important to emphasise for you the importance of metaphysics. We shall do so in this unit. We shall start with the position of critiques of metaphysics who thought that metaphysics is of no importance. Afterwards, we shall also take a look at what we consider as the importance of metaphysics.

### **2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this unit, you would be able to:

1. Evaluate some of the major arguments against metaphysics
2. Discuss the importance of metaphysics; and
3. Assess the values of metaphysics

### **3.0 Main Contents**

#### **3.1 Some Major Arguments Against Metaphysics**

The history of attack against metaphysics is long. Even in ancient Greek, schools of metaphysics were closed for challenging received religious, moral and epistemological dogmas. In fact, Socrates, the earliest teacher of metaphysics of morals before Kant was killed because of his teaching. Even Medieval Islamic monks undertook a ferocious attack against metaphysics by persecuting great Islamic philosophers that metaphysics' only savior was its reintroduction into Christian Europe through the works of Aristotle. Christian Europe was no different. Christian Wolff, the great German Enlightenment philosopher, was exiled on the behest of Church authorities for his metaphysical claims that morality can be derived by means of reason alone without any reference to Christianity. Up to this point, the attack against metaphysics was driven by powerful religious men and theological authorities.

The Enlightenment philosophers themselves would later take over the attack in a suicidal attempt to bury metaphysics. Their onslaught was so ferocious that, as Adorno (2002, p.1) observed, metaphysics especially in non-German speaking societies was “used ... as a term of abuse, a synonym for idle speculation, and mere non-sense”. Such attacks on metaphysics stem from questions about its usefulness and relevance in the world. In what follows, we are going to expose some of the criticism/arguments which philosophers have presented against metaphysics.

##### **3.1.1 Relativism**

The relativist argument against metaphysics upholds the impossibility of metaphysics. It argues that metaphysics wastes its time in the search for objective truth which exists nowhere. In traditional metaphysical context an objective, universal truth exists. It is not constrained by time and space as its origin and existence extend beyond the world of appearance. In Plato's philosophy, this objective truth exists in the world of forms. Relativists argue against this notion of a universal and objective truth. They hold that truth is a culture-construct. As such each society creates its own truth, its own reality and they all exist to serve some purposes in those societies they are created. Relativism in this way denies the possibility of any standard rationality against which truth can be measured. Jacques Derrida invented the idea of deconstruction just to prove that metaphysical truths were a social construct discoverable through a deconstructive effort which involves the unbundling of the construct. It is left for the deconstructionists to demonstrate how, for example, the principle of contradiction is a construct of Greek society and does not submit to any universal rationality and purpose.

##### **3.1.2 David Hume's Critique of Metaphysics**

Hume was a 17th century English philosopher. He is often regarded as the father of empiricism. This is because he inaugurated the empirical method of study which scientists use today in their studies. A major component of Hume's empiricism was his critique of

metaphysics. He argued that what exists is only what can be observed. No new knowledge can be gained through reason as claimed by metaphysics. Hume holds that what metaphysics regards as ideas are nothing but reflections of impressions. He holds that impressions are real and not ideas as propounded by early Philosophers like Plato. To demonstrate this, Hume claims that the blind man has no impression of colour or of light. Consequently, he has no idea of light or of color in his head. Hume's argument, therefore, is that if ideas are real, the blind man who has no impression of colour will have an idea of colour. But the fact that he lacks this idea means that impression is what is real. Thus, only things that can be felt by the senses can be said to exist. And since metaphysics deals mainly with entities that are beyond the senses, Hume regards it as a waste of time.

Again, Hume attacks the metaphysical ideas of cause and effect holding that there is no proof to show that a thing is caused by another. What we regard as cause and effect are mere regularity occasioned by the fact that we see one action following another. Hume's argument is that we need to observe one event causing the other to truly believe in the idea of cause and effect.

### **3.1.3 The Neo-Kantian Critique of Metaphysics**

This takes its origin from the German Philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who offered strong criticism of metaphysics. Kant's critique of metaphysics is divided into two phases: the precritical and the critical Kant (Arendt, 1978). At the precritical phase, Kant though still an admirer of metaphysics, regards it as possessing a "bottomless pit", a "slippery ground", as 'utopian "land of milk and honey" where the "Dreamers of reason dwell" as though in an "airship" so that "there exists no folly which could not be brought to agree with a groundless wisdom." (Cf Arendt, 1978, p.9). By describing metaphysics in these words, Kant demonstrated the uselessness of metaphysics.

The critical Kant is seen in the book *The Critique of Pure Reason*. He is said to have discovered the scandal of reason in this book. The scandal of reason is expressed in the idea that the human mind possesses not adequate and verifiable knowledge about the ultimate questions which confront us; about God, freedom, the soul, immortality and so on. Thus, Kant's criticism, therefore, stems from his argument that metaphysics errs in claiming to pursue knowledge that goes beyond sensory experience. We cannot know anything about things as it is in itself. About God. We also cannot know anything about the soul, about freedom and so on. Kant hinges his argument on the ontological difference between these entities and the human person. Whereas they are infinite beings, the human person is finite and is limited by time and space. He equally lacks the proper concepts to describe such entities. The type of metaphysics Kant proposes is one that will only concern itself with the study of phenomena, the noumena are way beyond human reach.

### **3.1.4 Fredrich Nietzsche's Criticism of Metaphysics**

Nietzsche takes off his critique of metaphysics with the claim that metaphysics is a product of "passion, error and self-deception." (HH, 5). He ascribed the emergence of metaphysics

to man's tendency to import the content of his dream into the real world. Thereafter, man assumes that the images encountered in his dream exist elsewhere, in the ideal world different from the sensory world. And he goes ahead to elevate this dream world far above the real world. (HH, 5). Thus, Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics rests on metaphysics' focus on supersensory reality and the otherworldly.

Accordingly, Nietzsche holds that metaphysical claims are deceitful. He argues that everything relating to man-in-the-world, be it values, ideas, and so on emerged in time. As a product of time they would also cease to exist in time. He critiques metaphysics for presenting these ideas and values as infinite ideals that exist in a world different from our world, a backworld regarded by metaphysicians as better and more real than the world of phenomena. For the Christian and Muslim this other world or in Nietzsche's word, this backworld (*Hinterwelt* in German) is heaven and it is assumed to be an eternal abode of the eternal values. (Houlgate, 1987). This is against the run of Nietzsche's thought. Nothing is eternal, he argues. Everything in the world will pass away. It is the trick of metaphysics that made us believe that certain things will last forever and are as such essential or substantial to man.

Take for instance, the human soul which philosophers argue is an essential aspect of the human person, and is therefore unchanging and eternal. Given their conception of the soul metaphysicians hold that man does not become. He is and his origin has nothing to do with time. His source is in an eternal world controlled by an eternal being. His appearance in the world only masks his true source which is the hidden God, "the being-in-itself". Nietzsche protests the metaphysicians' projection of the otherworld, the eternal world as the true world and the physical world as we know it as ephemeral and unreal world. This is the truth turned upside down, he argues. According to Nietzsche the truth is that what is real, what exists, and what is true is the physical world as known to man. And this includes becoming. There is no world beyond time, and no Being beside the beings we experience in the world. All reality is about this world and nothing to do with the world beyond this. The metaphysicians invented the fictional idea of the world beyond our world, the non-temporal world in order to protect us from the suffering which temporal existence causes. Essentially, he submits that there is no spiritual dimension to man, to the world and to reality. Such words as soul, spirit, free will, ego, conceived by metaphysicians as spiritual entities have no meanings. If the soul, for instance, exists it must be as a physical entity like one's heart or even the eyes. He claims to possess not an immortal soul but many mortal souls in him.

### **3.1.5 Logical Positivists**

The logical positivists also known as logical empiricists were a group of Western philosophers who regarded all metaphysical knowledge as nonsense and meaningless. Rudolph Carnap, one of the most prominent logical positivists, holds that what we call metaphysics arises from the distortion of language by philosophers. There are three ways in which philosophers do this. First, Carnap holds, they introduce new words into the

lexicon without supplying clear meanings to them thereby introducing confusion which they now regard as metaphysics. “Ego”, “emanation”, “existence” are some of the philosophical terms introduced by philosophers which, according to Carnap, are meaningless. Secondly, philosophers take a word with a clear meaning and assign it ambiguous meaning. Third, philosophers combine words in such a way that sentences they compose with those words lack meaning. A statement made by Martin Heideger in a 1929 lecture is taken by Carnap as a perfect exemplification of this. And it goes thus: “*Das Nichts selbst nichtet*” (translated into English to mean “The nothing itself nothings.”). While Heideger held that the above statement is true, Carnap ridicules it as a meaningless statement that exemplifies the third point above. [Click here to read further https://blog.oup.com/2015/10/nothing-nothings-philosophy/](https://blog.oup.com/2015/10/nothing-nothings-philosophy/)

Thus, the logical positivists hold that to be regarded as meaningful or true, a statement must be verifiable. To say that a statement is verifiable is to say that there is evidence which can be used to show that the statement is true. (Creath, 1982). The character of evidence sought by the positivists is observational. Thus, the evidence must be observed. Metaphysical statements are not verifiable in this sense, and are therefore considered meaningless. Carnap, therefore, concludes that a logical analysis of language will successfully eliminate metaphysics.

Of course, logical positivism has since been discredited. The proponents were found to have erred in confusing provability with truth. They assume that whatever cannot be proved is not true. The converse is always the case. Kurt Godel, the Mathematician who once sat at meetings with the Vienna Circle, an organised association of intellectuals promoting logical positivism, successfully demonstrated to them that mathematical numbers, we can say the same of metaphysical truths, though true cannot be proven. Godel’s conclusion that all the truths of mathematics cannot be captured by any logical system led to a new theorem called the first incompleteness theorem. His second conclusion that no logical system for mathematics can be shown to be free from inconsistency, is known as the second incompleteness theorem. (Holt, 2018).

### **3.2 The Importance of Metaphysics**

Despite his harsh criticism of metaphysics, Immanuel Kant at the twilight of his life prophesied that mankind would still “return to metaphysics as one returns to one’s mistress after a quarrel.” (Arendt, 1978, p.9). Kant has been proven right as all efforts to dismantle metaphysics, bring it into disrepute, bring an end to it, have only succeeded in strengthening it. Indeed, the conclusion today is that “‘dismantling of metaphysics’ is no simple operation, because inherited philosophical categories continue to determine the way in which we see the world in fundamental ways.” (Swift, 2009, p.19). Also, logical positivism, which had dismissed metaphysics as nonsensical, became “defunct by the 1960s, a victim of its own inability to arrive at a workable distinction between sense and nonsense. In its wake, metaphysics—the project of characterizing reality as a whole—has seen a revival.”



(Holt, 2012).

All these alert us to the importance of metaphysics in today's world. The following are some of the reasons why metaphysics is of great importance.

### **3.2.1 Extension of Knowledge**

What do we know about reality? Are things as shown to us by the senses or even as captured by the sciences a true picture of the world? Historically, the senses have been shown to err in mapping out spheres of reality. A good example is Anaximander's ancient metaphysics which rightly holds that the earth floats in the universe unsupported by water, stone or any other thing. The prevailing thought at the time was that the earth rests on water. Anaximander's questioning extended knowledge about the nature of the earth. In the light of this example, we can argue with Kolakowski that one of the most important functions of metaphysics is not to:

“Deliver truth but to build the spirit of truth, and this means: never to let the inquisitive energy of the mind go to sleep, never to stop questioning what appears to be obvious and definitive, always to defy the seemingly intact resources of common sense, always to suspect that there might be "another side" in what is taken for granted, and never to allow us to forget that there are questions that lie beyond the legitimate horizon of science and are nonetheless crucially important to the survival of humanity as we know it.” (Kolakowski, 1984, p.234).

Thus, there is no gainsaying that the scientific and philosophical progress recorded in the world would not have been possible without the critical contribution of metaphysics. As far as metaphysics is concerned no question is settled, everything is under question in order to discover the reality behind them.

### **3.2.2 Establishing the Fundamental Structure of Reality**

Another importance of metaphysics is that it offers us “the systematic study of the most fundamental structure of reality.” (Lowe, 2001, p.2). This function without stating it makes a general distinction between metaphysics and other disciplines. We shall demonstrate this with a building, a house. Thus, if reality is to be a house, other disciplines can be said to study the visible parts of it. While a particular discipline would be interested in studying the roof, another would study the raw materials used to construct the building and so forth, another would study the painting, etc. Metaphysics, on its own is interested in studying the foundation of reality, of the building. Like in building, the foundation of everything is always hidden from our eyes but it is the most important aspect of the structure for without it no structure will be erected and it is the foundation that holds the structure together.

Thus, as a systematic study of the most fundamental structure of reality, metaphysics is said to be the foundation of all other disciplines as they rest on some metaphysical

presuppositions. It is the duty of metaphysics to clarify the meanings of those other disciplines. It sets their boundaries to them and equally determines their various methods.

### **3.2.3 Satisfying Human Curiosity**

The human person is a curious being. He desires to know, as observed by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*. Man is astonished by so many things around him; about the world and about himself. Imagine wondering why the innocent suffer. This sense of astonishment often leaves the human heart restless and forces him to seek to make sense of the perplexing situations around him. The role of metaphysics in the face of this perplexity is curative and is focused on “bringing being from a perplexing and equivocal indeterminacy toward more and more univocal determination.....The end of metaphysics seems to lie in the absolute determinability of being, and with this the dissolution of the original astonishment.” (Desmond, 2020, p.17). Essentially, metaphysics gives us answers to those nutty questions whose answers no other science can provide. Arthur Schopenhauer makes a distinction between the way metaphysics and physical sciences approach this question of astonishment. According to him, the physical sciences “marvel only at selected and rare phenomena” whereas metaphysics marvel at “commonplace thing of daily occurrence, whereby we are induced to make the *universal* of the phenomenon our problem.”

### **3.2.4 Necessary for Human Development**

One of the most important questions of metaphysics is the question of our identity as human persons: who am I? This question has no satisfactory answer outside metaphysics. And it is very important that it be answered in order to chart a proper part for human development. Thus, knowing who we are will play an important role in fathoming our purpose in life. No other discipline answers this question apart from metaphysics.

### **3.2.5 Knowledge of Principles Guiding Human Actions**

Immanuel Kant once asked why the metaphysics of morals is “indispensable”. The answer provided by Kant is not only relevant to metaphysics of morals but also to other metaphysics. The first reason given by Kant is that metaphysics provides us with a source for the principles that guide our actions and thoughts. Consider for instance the principle of contradiction, of excluded middle without which logic and certain sciences would not be possible.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

Metaphysics is of great importance in today’s world. Its importance has contributed to its survival in the face of massive attacks unleashed on it across the centuries. Rather than diminish metaphysics the centuries of attacks have strengthened it. Indeed, some of the critiques of the discipline have formed major parts of its canon. A student of philosophy who pays special attention to the importance of metaphysics will discover in it powerful guides of action and intellectual development.

## 5.0 Summary

In this unit, we examined the value of metaphysics. We did this by taking a look first at the various criticisms/arguments against metaphysics. We demonstrate that metaphysics remains undiminished today and still waxes stronger than ever. We equally considered some of the importance of metaphysics.

## 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments

1. Discuss Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics
2. What are the core arguments of relativist thinkers against metaphysics
3. Demonstrate your understanding of the manner in which metaphysics study fundamental structure of reality

## 7.0 References and Suggestions for Further Readings

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## **MODULE 2: ONTOLOGICAL ISSUES IN METAPHYSICS**

In Module 1 we attempted to define metaphysics. The essence is to understand the subject which we set out to study. Having done that, we are going to examine some of the unresolved issues in metaphysics in this module. Our concern here is basically ontological issues. The following topics shall be considered.

**Unit 1: The Problem of Being**

**Unit 2: Substance**

**Unit 3: Matter and Form**

**Unit 4: Universals and Particulars**

**Unit 5: Appearance and Reality**

## **Unit 1: The Problem of Being**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Intended Learning Outcome
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Problematizing the Problem
  - 3.2 Parmenides' Permanent One
  - 3.3 Aristotle Substantiates the Problem
  - 3.5 Heidegger's Dasein as Route to Being
  - 3.6 Quine's Predicament
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References and Suggestion for Further Reading

### **1.0 Introduction**

Earlier in unit 1 of module 1 we defined metaphysics as science of being qua being. What do you understand as being qua being? Bravo, if you answered that it means being as being. But the question is still not settled. The unsolved question is: what is Being? This is no easy question. And metaphysicians recognise it as the most important question in philosophy and in science. This is because it is a question that captures the entire universe as Being is one word that defines the universe. Now that you know this, can you attempt an answer from your head about the meaning of Being? Philosophers have offered different answers to this question. In what follows we shall examine the various answers given by philosophers on the question of what is being.

### **2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to

1. Articulate the problem of Being
2. Discuss Parmenides' notion of Being
3. Compare Aristotle and Heidegger's notion of Being
4. Explain Quine's position on What is.

### **3. 0 Main Content**

#### **3.1 Problematizing the Question: What is Being?**

The first place to begin to answer this question is to look inward of oneself. You are a human being. The next question will now follow: What is a human being? Can we separate the idea of human from being? That is, does the idea of human always invoke the idea of being? Philosophically, the two ideas of human and being can be separated. When we do this separation, we will be able to determine what makes you human in the first instance. We will also be able to determine what makes you being in the second instance. In the third instance, we will now return to our original question: what is a human being which will entail merging solutions to the questions in first and second instances.

In the first instance, we seek to know that which makes a human human. Whatever this is, we must be able to find it in all entities which we call human. You may be shocked to discover that this includes corpses, skeletons, and remains of former human beings, thus human corpses, human remains, human skeletons. The same is true in answering the second instance question. Here, we discover that any taxonomy of being will also include God, stones, mathematical formulas, trees, UFOs, cups, screwdrivers, insects, even faeces, and so on. We share the quality of being with them. The special addition of “being” to human is probably a special advantage due to the fact that we are the naming agents. Were stones to name, they would probably have called themselves stone beings. And that’s what they are, instances of being, just like human beings.

The problem of Being has to do with finding a common characteristic which all the kinds we call being share. This problem is exacerbated by our common sense which tends to see a wide gap between two instances of Being. Faeces and human beings, God and stones, elephants and quadratic formulas; how on earth could common sense be wrong if it sees them as widely different? Thus, the problem of Being is the question of unity of Being, of one and the many. Philosophers over the years have tackled this question and it is what has come to be known as the problem of Being. So, we still return to our original question: what is Being. Martin Heidegger offers a direct answer to the question. According to him, Being is “that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities are already understood.” (Heidegger, 1962, p.17).

Heidegger has not answered our question. He rather gave us what to look out for whenever we are considering the question of Being; that which makes being being. The importance

of Heidegger's definition lies in the fact that it alerts us to the difficulty in defining Being. But the difficulty has not deterred Western Philosophers. In what follows, we shall take a look at the various responses to the question of being offered by Philosophers across the ages.

### **3.2 Parmenides' Permanent One**

The problem of Being was of utmost importance to ancient Greek philosophers. It is said that this question of being was the origin of western philosophical and scientific thought. They also considered the question of Being as the most universal, and therefore the most rational of all inquiries. (Grondin, 2012). In this section, we shall consider the ontology of Parmenides.

Parmenides of Elea was responsible for the problematising of Being in Western Philosophy. His definition of Being was in two words; "Being is." He distinguishes this Being which is, from non-Being by holding that Non-Being is not. He characterised Being as one, permanent, and unchanging. Non-Being on the other hand is many and always becoming. Parmenides states this point as follows:

Listen! And carry away my message when you have grasped it!  
Note the only two ways of inquiry that can be thought of: One is the way that it is\ and that non-being cannot be king. That is the path of Persuasion, Truth's handmaid; now to the other! This path is that it is not\ and that it may not be being. That path - take it from me! - is a path that just cannot be thought of. For you can't know what is not: it can't be done; nor can you say it. (The Two Ways of Parmenides as translated by Popper, 1998, p.71)

Being in Parmenides is materialistic in nature and we derive this view from the characteristics which he attributes to Being. They include: "taking up space' or 'filling space'; 'impenetrable'; 'capable of stopping anything that touches it'; therefore it is unmovable in bulk, unchanging, uncoloured, limited, spherical, hard, dense..." full, and lacking in space, motion and change (Popper, 1998, pp.57 & 86).

How did Parmenides arrive at this knowledge of Being? As was traditional with the age, Parmenides distinguished between real knowledge (alethia) and opinion (doxa). Whereas

real knowledge, a divine property is domiciled in the abode of the gods, and is revealed by the gods to whoever they wish (in Parmenides' case it was a goddess that revealed this truth of Being to him), opinion, the property of the mortals, exists in the physical world and reaches us through sensation. The creator made the Non-Being to imitate Being; What is not, to imitate what is. Thus, true knowledge consists in knowing Being while false knowledge consists in knowing the Non-Being. Therefore, we gain knowledge of true Being by means of reason alone which comes as a sort of revelation from the gods. (Plato's *Timaeus*, 27e-50c). The ultimate example for Parmenides was the waxing and the waning of the moon. In his time, the dominant belief was that the moon moves and changes as shown by its observed waning and waxing. Parmenides held that men were deceived by appearance into believing this. What was real was that the moon does not move and does not change but that the light and darkness which we associate with it derive from the play of reflection of the sun which impacts on it.

Parmenides' idea of Being is often said to be a response to Heraclitus (no convincing proof of this has ever been offered by anyone) who had earlier held that flux is all that is. Of course, common sense shows us that things change when they move. We also see them change their quality. Everything we experience seems to conform to this idea. Parmenides did not argue that things did not change. He knew that they did. His argument is that the changing objects are not Being. They merely imitate Being in the sense of your many pictures imitating the real you. Non-Being does not change. It is. And by Being, it is permanent, One, unchanging and immutable. The things in the world are changing and are many but they are only an imitation of the One.

### **3.3 Aristotle Substantiates the Problem**

Aristotle assigned the problem of Being - being qua being - a pride of place in his philosophy. He designates it as the subject of a new branch of philosophy which he proposed and labeled *First Philosophy*. This is because he considers Being as the most fundamental discourse and the discipline that studies Being studies the underlying principle of all that is. (Grondin, 2012). Plato, whose student Aristotle was, identified the Forms as the underlying principle of all that is. Platonic Forms has the character of Parmenides' Being despite major differences about them. They are both created, both are immutable, immobile, and are considered by both men as true reality. However, the true reality is One in Parmenides whereas they (the Forms) are many in Plato as there is a different Form that corresponds with the different types of objects we see in the world.



Aristotle is famous for rejecting the position of his teacher on the nature of Being which he describes as being qua being. The term being qua being captures all sorts of beings in so far as they are beings. It differs from the particular beings captured by special sciences or special metaphysics. It examines everything that is. (Shields, 2012). Here there is no distinction between types of beings. Everything in so far as it is being is studied by First Philosophy.

Aristotle is also interested in identifying a feature of being which constitutes being qua being or according to our usage so far, Being. He identifies substance (ousia) as that aspect of Being that is definitive of Being. He writes about it thus:

Indeed, what was sought of old and is sought at present and always, and what is always a matter of difficulty, namely what is being? (ti to on) is this: what is substance? (tis hê ousia) (Met. 1028b2–4).

The allusion to substance entails the baring of Being. The substance is not predicated on any other thing as it does not need any other thing to exist and it is the property of particular beings. It is the immediacy. (Adorno, 1965). It is just like what remains when a person undresses. Before the undressing, one who points at the person will still regard him as the person with all the clothes, all the trinkets, all the hairs and make ups. But when all these external additions are removed, the real person stands before you, naked. The substance has this type of life in relation to Being. It is Being in itself without any qualification. It is a quality which must belong to any existent thing. (Barnes, 1982).

According to Aristotle, knowledge of anything is knowledge of its causes. In this light he identifies the cause of substance as that which is changeless and self-subsistent the study of which he termed theology. Theology studies the unmoved mover, the primary substance. So in the final analysis Aristotle's quest for knowledge of Being terminates in the discovery of God as the unmoved mover and as the primary substance. Indeed, by arriving at God as the ultimate Being, Aristotle merely re-echoed his teacher Plato who taught in his *Phaedo* that Being is the same thing with the being with "the most real Being and the principle of all that is." (Grondin, 2012, p209).

Historically, some criticisms have been made against Aristotle's notion of substance as Being. Adorno (1965) notes some of these criticisms. (1) Hegel for instance, criticises the notion of the substance as the immediacy. He holds that there is no unmediated immediacy.

We may deduce the truth of this from the fact that the substances which are said to be immediate need particular things to exist. (2) Hume also argues that Being, constituted as a thing-in-itself, does not exist. What exists are particular things. (3) Kant, deriving from Hume, holds that the substance is a mere creation of the human mind which the mind produces in particular objects.

### **3.4 Heidegger's Dasein as the Route to Being**

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was influenced by Aristotle in conceiving his idea of Being. He regretted that the question of Being, the most important question in philosophy, has been forgotten since Aristotle. Thus, we assume that we know the meaning of Being whereas we lack all understanding about it. The blame for this is placed at the feet of Medieval philosophers who promoted dogmatic metaphysics controlled by ecclesiastical theology. Thus, Heidegger's great book, *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit)*, among his other writings were intended to revive the question of Being and to end the problem of being once and for all. The goal of Heidegger's book is to demonstrate how being is presented to the conscious being. (Jaroszyński, 2018).

His concern was not with beings which refer to individual particular things. His interest was with Being which he holds is indefinable. Thus, Being can only be understood by understanding Human Being - *Dasein*. (Heidegger, 1962). The human being, therefore, is the starting point of any inquiry about Being. Heidegger thinks that this is so since the human being is the only being that poses the question - What is Being? He is also the only being capable of grasping Being. Thus, we arrive at the answer to the question of what is Being by merely reflecting on what it is to be a human being, a *Dasein*.

Only as long as Dasein is (that is, only as long as an understanding of being is ontically possible), 'is there' being. When Dasein does not exist ... even entities within-the-world can neither be discovered nor lie hidden. In such a case it cannot be said that entities are, nor can it be said that they are not. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 255/212).

Heidegger's method of inquiry is phenomenology. In phenomenology, objects of inquiry are allowed to open up themselves. They sort of speak to the inquirer. In answering the question - what is Being? - beings open up themselves to the inquirer (Tombra, 2019). Now

disposed to transcend the revelation of particular beings the inquirer is now able to grasp Being which is a unity of all the beings. This knowledge of unity of beings is labelled ontological awareness by Heidegger and is peculiar to humans alone. It differs from ontic awareness, described by Heidegger as awareness of particular beings. A camera for instance can have this type of awareness. An animal can also have it in so far as it recognises that a particular being is in front of it. However, both camera and the animal lack the capacity to aggregate particular beings into Being. Only *Dasein* is capable of this.

The *Dasein* is a being-in-the-world. By this Heidegger means that *Dasein* exists in the midst of other beings and encounters them. However, the relationship of these other beings with the world differs from the human being's relationship with the world. Heidegger makes this distinction thus:

What about the other beings which, like man, are also part of the world: the animals and plants, the material things like the stone, for example? Are they merely parts of the world, as distinct from man who in addition has world? Or does the animal too have world, and if so, in what way? In the same way as man, or in some other way? And how would we grasp this otherness? And what about the stone? However crudely, certain distinctions immediately manifest themselves here. We can formulate these distinctions in the following three theses: [1.] the stone (material object) is worldless; [2.] the animal is poor in world; [3.] man is world-forming. (Heidegger, 1962, p.177).

The grasping of Being is made possible by attunement. Humans attune themselves to Being through their moods. In a number of his writings Heidegger lists the moods to include joy, boredom, anger, anxiety, etc. What finally is the Being grasped by *Dasein*? Heidegger holds that It is the “‘transcendent’ pure and simple”. (Grondin, 2012, p.

You must note that time plays an important role in Heidegger's ontology, hence the title of his book *Being and Time*. In Heidegger's estimation, earlier philosophers have presented Being as something in opposition to time. Remember that Aristotle's substance, Plato's Forms and Parmenides' One are all eternal and permanent. This attitude to time and

clinging to eternity, Heidegger regards as flight from self, from its mortality and flight from time. *Dasein* runs away from temporality which is its nature. (Grondin, 2012). He is scared of death and projects an eternity for himself. This is the origin of the idea that Being is permanent and it arises from *Dasein* inauthentic relation with its temporality. It is as it flees from its temporality that it forgets about its Being.

According to Heidegger, *Dasein* is aware of its finitude, of its death and prepares itself for it. The project of Care for its own Being which *Dasein* engages shows a being that is aware of its own finitude. It knows the end stares directly at him. Thus, *Dasein* is a being-towards-Death.

### **3.5 W. V. O. Quine's Predicament**

We shall conclude this unit with Willard Van Orman Quine (1908-2000). Quine is important because he exposes the challenges associated with the type of investigation we have undertaken in this unit. Quine went back to the heart of Parmenides' ontology: "What is there?" He provides a simple answer to his own question; "Everything." (Quine, 1948). But what is everything? Does it also include imaginary beings like flying horses? While the proponent of an imaginary flying horse may be able to defend her argument that it is, the opponent would not be able to do so. This is because, to formulate her answer she must first of all articulate the issue she is opposing. In doing so she also helps to perpetuate the existence of a flying horse. Quine therefore holds that in attempting to disagree over ontological issues opponents find themselves in a predicament.

Ontological problems arise due to this predicament. Quine hold that proponents of ontology hide under it to propound the existence of some non-existing beings. "It is some such line of thought that leads philosophers ... to impute being where they might otherwise be quite content to recognize that there is nothing." (Quine, 1948, p.22). Another cause of the problem is also our tendency to assume that naming and meaning correspond; that anything that has meaning names something. A flying horse has a meaning but in reality it names nothing.

What Quine attacks is the tendency of metaphysicians to introduce non-physical entities like substance (Aristotle), soul (Thales, he even said magnets have souls which move them to attraction), forms (Plato) and possible entities and so on and argue that they exist. Metaphysicians, in doing this, misuse the word to exist and in doing so overpopulate the

world. Thus, only physical entities can exist and not mental ones. To eliminate non-physical entities from our language, Quine adopted Bertrand Russell's theory of description and proposed a descriptive approach to the identity of beings. We must be able to describe a particular flying horse and identify it and not just lump the general idea of flying horse together. This is the only way to overcome the predicament and arrive at ontological commitment. Quine's ontological commitment, holds that "expressions other than singular terms, such as predicates and functional expressions, are not ... vehicles of reference, so that their use imports no commitment to properties (or attributes, as he usually calls them), relations, or functions." (Hale, 2020, p.59). With this, Quine declares that "to be is to be the value of a variable." (Hale, *ibid.*).

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The problem of Being is a major problem in Western Metaphysics. The fact that philosophers of all ages have pursued the question of Being alerts of its importance. Its importance stems from the fact that as an ontological issue it grounds all other sciences as it pursues what constitutes the fundamental reality of all beings.

#### **5.0 Summary**

The problem of Being is a major topic in the history of Western Metaphysics. We have been able to establish what constitutes this problem. It is essentially the problem of how to answer the question of One and the many. We have undertaken a historical route to the question by presenting the views of philosophers on the meaning of Being. The views of Parmenides, Aristotle, Heidegger and Quine were presented. However, they are in no way exhaustive. There are many other philosophers who considered the question of Being but whose works we did not consider due to space. You may do well to check their views out.

#### **6. 0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

1. Discuss the characteristics of Being in Parmenides.
2. What is Aristotle's conception of Being
3. Explain the role which Heidegger assigned to flight from temporality in Western Metaphysics
4. Discuss Quine's predicament.

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## Unit 2: Substance

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### 1.0 Introduction

In unit 1 of module 2 we took a look at the problem of Being. We particularly examined the various ways in which western metaphysicians have considered the question of Being. There we encountered Aristotle who designated substance as Being. This would have alerted you to the importance of substance in philosophy. What did you understand as substance in the last unit? In this unit, we are going to provide answers to the question. We are also going to consider the various dimensions of substance.

### 2.0 Intended Learning Outcome

At the end of this unit, you will be able to;

1. Explain the meaning of substance
2. Distinguish between types of substances
3. State the characteristics of substances

### 3.0 Main Contents

#### 3.1 The Nature of Substance

Substance is said to be so important in philosophy that Immanuel Kant holds it is impossible for human beings to conceive of any reality without substance. We trace the origin of the term substance (*ousia*) to Aristotle. The Latin attempt to translate the Greek word, *ousia* gave rise to the Latin word, *substantia*. The English, substance, was a translation of the Latin form. More and more philosophers have argued that the Latin and the English translations do not capture the kernel of Aristotle's word *ousia*. However, for want of a widely accepted alternative we shall stick to substance. You saw in the previous unit that Substance (*ousia*) is used by Aristotle to designate Being in his metaphysics. Ever since, philosophers have attempted to study and understand the meaning of substance. We shall examine just two of the many definitions of the term offered by philosophers.

For a start, a substance is defined as "that which has qualities and is related, without being itself either a quality or a relation, or having qualities or relations among its parts. (McTaggart, 1924, p.254). What is McTaggart saying? He is saying the following: (1) That a substance is something that exists. And I think that this is the only thing that can be said directly about a substance without reference to other things, that it exists or that it is. (2) That substance has qualities and differs from these qualities. Thus, in defining a substance the qualities are extracted and what remains is just bare substance. A car as a substance can take many qualities. This includes colour, in which case we can say that it is red, blue, black, yellow etc. We can also look at its size as another quality which it possesses in which case we can say that it is big, small, medium-sized, and so on. We can also look at its motion as another quality which it possesses in which case we can say that it is fast-paced, slow-paced and even stationary. The point is that the car remains a car in spite of any of these qualities. The stationary car is no less a car than the fast-paced one. And the yellow car is not said to be the same thing with a yellow house for example simply because they share yellowness. Thus, our car remains a car irrespective of any quality it has at any point in time. (3) That a substance has relation and that it differs from the relation it has. Our car does not cease to be a car simply because it is parked in a neighbour's house or because the colour has changed from blue to red. It also does not cease to be a car when it is hanging on a tree as opposed to standing on its tires. (4). That the substance cannot be related to qualities even though those qualities can relate to it. The sense of this can easily be seen in the way in which the qualities are predicated to the substances in our speech. In this way we say (1) (2) Socrates is dead. The table is neat. Here qualities of death and neatness are



predicated on Socrates and table at the same time. However, we cannot predicate the table on anything, the same is true of Socrates. Thus, we cannot say, (1) Death is Socrates (2) Neat is table.

From this we go to another definition of substance, one which views it as “a particular which does not depend for its identity upon—or 'owe' its identity to—the identity of anything other than itself.” (Lowe, 2001, p.158). This definition entails that a substance is (1) something (2) self-identifying (3) self-contained. Thus, it is that on account of which a thing is said to be that thing. In another word, substance is what a thing is.

### **3.2 Aristotle’s Ideas of Substance**

We noted earlier that Aristotle was the first person to use the term *ousia*. Aristotle’s *ousia* is what has been given the English name, substance. However, there is an argument that the word substance does not capture the full meaning of Aristotelian *ousia*.

Perhaps the closest English counterpart to *ousia* is ‘being’. One can talk about a being or beings; one can talk about beings that are the basic constituents of the world; and one can talk about the being of certain things, including that of the various things that have then thought to be basic constituents or the being of things. (Dahl, 2020, p.6)

You must bear this in mind as we study Aristotle’s idea of substance. We believe that a good way of understanding the meaning of substance is to return to the source; to go back to Aristotle. That is what we shall do in this section. Metaphysicians identify three meanings of substance in Aristotles’ usage of substance.

#### **A. Substance as a Basic or Fundamental Constituent of the World**

Here Aristotle views reality as resting on substance. It is foundational to anything in the world and everything depends on it to exist. Thus, we can say that the relationship between substance and other things in the world is the fact that they inhere or perch on the substance. “This is the use Aristotle employs at Categories 2b5–6 where he says that if primary substances didn’t exist it would be impossible for anything else to exist. He also employs it in Meta Z.6 1031a29–31 where he speaks of substances to which no substances or natures are prior, as some think Platonic Forms are.” (Dahl, 2020, p.5).

## **B. Substance as the Essence of a Thing**

The idea of substance as the essence of a thing was used by Aristotle in his book *De Anima* II.1 412a8–9 and II.1 412b10–17. Essence is understood to be the heart or the soul of a thing. It is what a thing is. To understand what substance means in this sense we must invoke the idea of change and say that substance is what remains after the changes have taken place. It is that which never changes and which remains when all the changes have taken place and makes it possible for us to still recognise an object as what it is after undergoing numerous instances of change. When a thing is defined it is the substance that is targeted.

Let's illustrate this with an example. You were named at birth by your parents. At your current age you have changed tremendously from that child named by your parents. Let us assume your name is Umar. One looking at Umar of 2021 would no doubt know immediately that a great change has taken place; that the Umar of today looks too different from the Umar that was named many years ago. In spite of the changes, it is still the same Umar we are dealing with. The substance is what makes it possible for Umar to remain Umar in spite of the temporal changes that have taken place in him.

## **C. Substance as Matter, Form and Composite of Matter and Form**

The view that matter, form and composite of matter and form are substances is expressed by Aristotle in *De Anima* II.1 412a6–9, II.2 414a14–16, and *Meta* H.1 1042a26–32 1028b8–13, and H.1 1042a6–11. We shall offer little explanation of this point. (1) Matter refers to anything that has weight and occupies space. Example of this is your computer. Your computer is matter, and because we say that all matter is substance, your computer is a substance. (2) The Forms are non-material substances. Saying that the forms are non-materials tells us immediately that they differ from matter. We take Plato's definition of forms as unchanging, eternal, and non-physical, spiritual entities that exist in an extraterrestrial territory (World of Forms) as our guide. The soul, for instance, is a form and if Forms are substances, it means the soul is a substance. (3) Composite of matter and form refers to unity of matter and form in an entity. A human person is a perfect example of this. He or she is made up of matter (body) and form (soul). Thus, as a composite of body and soul, the human person can therefore be said to a substance. A substance can also be a composite of two or more matters without the forms.

### 3.3 Characteristics of Substance

Aristotle discussed some of the characteristics of substance. They are as follows:

#### 1. Ability to Persist through Change

By this, Aristotle means that a substance can withstand all changes that take place around it without being changed, remaining the same throughout the periods of change and after the periods of change. Thus, a substance is constant and unchanging. Aristotle expresses this point as follows:

It seems most distinctive of substance that what is numerically one and the same is able to receive contraries. In no other case could one bring forward anything, numerically one, which is able to receive contraries. (*Categories*, 1:7).

You may have noted at once that even the act of receiving contraries implies change in the condition of the substance. I can be sick as well as healthy. These are contrary dispositions and they appear in me taken as an example of a substance. To escape from this argument we may put up another argument that Aristotle only meant that substance is able to withstand change without being affected intrinsically. The change, which my being sick entails is peripheral and temporal. It does not define me permanently.

#### 2. Never Said of a Subject Nor in a Subject

The second characteristic of a substance according to Aristotle is that it is that which is never said of a subject nor in a subject. This point is made in the *Categories* as follows:

A substance—that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all—is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, for example, the individual man or the individual horse.

To understand Aristotle here, we must go back to the categories which we studied in unit 2 of module 1. There we listed the categories of being, namely; (1) substance (*ousia*), (2) quantity (*poson*), (3) quality (*poion*), (4) relation (*pros ti*), (5) place (*pou*), (6) time (*pote*), (7) position (*keisthai*), (8) possession (*echein*), (9) action (*poiein*), and (10) passion (*paschein*). You must note that substance is topmost on the list of the ways in which a being can be. In saying that a substance is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, Aristotle is demonstrating the nature of substance's relationship with the other categories.

Thus while the other categories can say something of or in the substance, the substance cannot say anything of or in them. Let's demonstrate this with one of the categories; passion. Example of passion is anger, while an example of a substance is Chinenye. While it can be said that Chinenye is angry, it will be out of place to say that angry is Chinenye. Thus, in a logical sense, the substance cannot serve as predicate to the other categories. The other categories also depend on the substance to exist. There cannot be anger if there is no man to be angry.

### **3.4 Divisions of Substance**

Aristotle identified two types of substances. They are (1) primary substance and (2) secondary substance. In what follows, we shall examine the two divisions.

#### **1. Primary Substances**

Aristotle conceives the primary substances in three ways. And we may have to examine two of his books, the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics*, to have a glimpse of the three ways. In the *Categories*, Aristotle identified individual entities in so far as they are natural kinds and not man-made as primary substances. This includes Socrates, Mutar, Stephen, Uche, Gboyega, etc. in so far as they are names of concrete individuals. It also includes Prado (my dog) and your individual horses, cows, goats, etc. One of the characteristics of primary substances conceived in this way by Aristotle is their equality. According to this, the individual man, say, Socrates has no more primary substance than an individual dog, say Prado, and Prado has no substance than an individual rock (say Zuma rock). Another characteristic is that the primary substances cannot serve as predicates.

The other two ways of conceiving primary substances are found in Aristotle's the *Metaphysics*. The first of these conceive the fundamental or basic being as the primary substance. We have earlier identified God as the basic being in our search for the final cause of all reality. God is the unmoved mover who constitutes all that is, and He persists eternally. He is "a substance par excellence, the ground of all being" (Rea, 2021, p.103).

Aristotle's metaphysics also considered forms or essences as primary substances. Here you will notice a big departure from the position held in the *Categories* where primary substance denotes particular individual entities. These particular individual entities are now described as composite beings. They are said to be composed of matter and form. Why did Aristotle vary his identification of primary substances?. "This supposed change of

doctrine is sometimes put down to the need to provide a satisfactory account of change, one that is consistent with the belief that nothing is ever either created from nothing or wholly annihilated.” (Lowe, 2001, p.190).

## 2. Secondary Substance

Secondary substances depend on the primary substances for their existence. But more importantly, they are definitive of primary substances and therefore are what the primary substances are said to be. President Buhari is an individual man. Any definition of president Buhari will say that he is a man (species) and will also say that as a man he is an animal since all men belong to the genus called animal. Thus, species and genera which primary substances belong to are what is called secondary substance. This represents a movement from individual entities to their aggregates. This point is aptly captured by Aristotle thus:

It is reasonable that, after the primary substances, their species and genera alone among other things should be called secondary substances (δεύτεραι οὐσίαι). For [iv] only they, of things predicated, reveal the primary substance ( ). For if one is to say of the individual man what he is, it will be in place (οἰκείως) to give the species or the genus (though more informative [γνωριμώτερον] to give man than animal); but to give any of the other things would be out of place (ἀλλοτριώς)—for example, to say ‘white’ or ‘runs’ or anything like that. So it is reasonable that these should be the only other things called substances. Further, [v] it is because primary substances are subjects for everything else that they are called substances most strictly (κυριώτατα οὐσίαι λέγονται). But [vi] [a] as the primary substances stand to everything else, so the species and genera of the primary substances stand to all the rest:

〈for〉 [b] all the rest are predicated of these. For [c] should you call the individual man grammatical, it follows that you call both a man and an animal grammatical; and similarly in other cases. (2b293a6, following Ackrill)

We can demonstrate this further with an example thus:

Miss Sherifat is an individual woman = primary substance.

Miss Sherifat belongs to a species called man = secondary substance

Man belongs to a genus called animal = secondary substance.

In the example that we have given above, both man (species) and animal (genus) are secondary substances. They are both abstractions definitive of a particular individual woman (Sherifat). But there is also a gradation of them according to their relation or closeness to the primary substance. In this case, Aristotle holds that the species possesses more substance than the genus.

Of the secondary substances the species is more a substance than the genus, since it is nearer to the primary substance. For if one is to say of the primary substance :what it is, it will be more informative and apt to give the species than the genus. For example, it would be more informative to say of the individual man that he is a man than that he is an animal (since the one is more distinctive of the individual man while the other is more general) ; and more informative to say of the individual tree that it is a tree than that it is a plant. Further, it is because the primary substances are subjects for all the other things and all the other things are predicated of them or are in them, that they are called substances most of all. But as the primary substances stand to the other things, so the species stands to the genus: the species is a subject for the genus (for the genera are predicated of the species but the species are not predicated reciprocally of the genera) . Hence (or this reason too the species is more a substance than the genus. (Cat. 2b7 following Ackrill).

### **3.5 Attack on the Idea of Substance**

A number of philosophers have criticized the idea of substance. The first in the list is David Hume. According to Hume, substances do not exist. What exists are nonsubstances whose clusters or bundles are erroneously referred to as substances. (Hoffman & Rosenkrantz, 1997). Hume rooted this theory in experience and writes as follows:

As our idea of any body, a peach, for instance, is only that of a particular taste, odor, figure, size, consistency, etc., so our idea of any mind is only that of particular perceptions without the notion of anything we call substance, either simple or compound. (Hume, 1955, p.194).

Accordingly, Hume gives pride of place to qualities which Aristotle regarded as dependent on substance. He holds that these are what we experience and not any substance whatsoever. This view of Hume is called the bundle theory of substance.

Also, Martin Heidegger attacks the notion of substance. He holds that substance viewed as an entity understood by reference to no other other than itself can only apply to God. Besides God, other substances cannot be understood by reference to them alone. [See other critiques of substance here.](#)

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The idea of substance occupies a pride of place in Western philosophy. It is one of Aristotle's major contributions to metaphysics. It extends the discussion about the quest for the fundamental structure of reality, examining in detail what it means to be and weeding off competing ideas in the study of being.

#### **5.0 Summary**

In this unit we have examined the nature of substance. We have also examined the characteristics of substance, the divisions of substances, Aristotle's view of substance and few criticisms of the idea of substance.

#### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

1. A substance is that which has qualities and is related, without being itself either a quality or a relation, or having qualities or relations among its parts. Discuss
2. A substance is that which is never said of a subject nor in a subject. Explain.
3. Distinguish between primary substances and secondary substances

#### **7.0 References and Suggestions for Further Readings**

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### **Unit 3: Hylomorphism (Matter and Form).**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

In unit 2 above, we encountered two new terms; matter and form. What do you understand about them? Well, we merely learnt in that unit that Aristotle holds particular individual entities as composites of matter and form. The scholastic philosophers, following Aristotle's lead, were also said to have seen everything hylomorphically. In this unit, we are going to have a more detailed discussion on matter and form. Yes, matter and form; that is what hylomorphism is all about.

## **2.0 Intended Learning Objectives**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

1. Give the epistemological meaning of hylomorphism
2. Differentiate between traditions of hylomorphism
3. Describe the difficulty involved in defining matter
4. Establish the characteristics of matter and form
5. Discuss the idea of materialism
6. Explain physicalism

## **3.0 Main Content**

### **3.1 The Etymological Meaning of Hylomorphism**

The term, hylomorphism (also spelt as hylemorphism), arose in the 19th century as a new name to an old problem. The old problem being referred to here is ancient western philosophers' search for the constitutive principles of nature. Recall that in [PHL 102](#) you learnt about their various answers to the question. Thales, for instance, posited water and Anaximander posited the apeiron as the constitutive principles of the universe. Aristotle continued this quest in his *Physics* and he posited that the world is constituted by two principles, matter and form.

Etymologically, the term hylomorphism is a combination of two Greek words; *Hyle* meaning Matter and *Morphe* meaning Form in English. By way of simple definition, hylomorphism is the philosophical belief that particular existing entities in the physical world are made up of matter and form. The use of the term, hylomorphism to indicate that the universe is composite of matter and form was first found in the work of German Jesuit priest, Tilman Pesch. (Manning, 2013). Ever since the term has stuck both among philosophers and scientists as an explanation about the composition of the physical world.

### **3.2 Aristotle's Understanding of Hylomorphism**

However, despite the newness of the term that describes the theory of matter and form, the question of hylomorphism is an ancient one. Aristotle ignited it when he wanted to account for the phenomenon of change in the natural or physical world. Things change and still remain the same. Something must account for this. Thus, Aristotle states that there are three principles of natural things, matter, form and privation. Privation, since it is an accidental principle, was dropped along the line even by Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas re-echoes the existence of the principles thus: "There are two *per se* principles of the being and becoming of natural things, namely form and matter, and one *per accidens* principle, namely privation." (Aquinas, 1995, p.59). There are two major issues of hylomorphism; (1) the nature of the relationship between the two *per se* principles, matter and form. (2) the properties of the two *per se* principles, matter and form.

To understand the nature of the relationship between matter and form, we turn to the physical world. The world in which you and I live is what is regarded as the physical world. It is also the world where we can find other entities like goat, sheep, insect, table, ball, book, magnet, oil, etc. Hylomorphism holds that these objects, and indeed other countless ones I couldn't mention, are composed of matter and form. To put it in real philosophical terms, worldly things are composites of two essential principles, one material and the other

substantial form. Nothing can exist in the world if it does not contain these principles. Thus, all reality of the world is said to be an informed matter. (Ariew & Marjorie, 1997).

The essential point being made, and it is worth repeating in as many words as possible, is that all physical reality is composed of matter and form. Every physical reality is said to be made of parts and that the parts in themselves are made up of matter and form and the parts are also in turn made of other parts. (Sharma, 2015). To understand this, let us take a human person as an example of an existent entity in the world. Here we construe him or her as a composite of matter and form. But he has parts like his right hand, his head, his legs, etc. When taken individually, these parts are also made of other parts which are equally made of other parts and so on. The important claim here is that each of the parts is made of matter and form; is an entity in itself. With this view in sight, every physical object is a unity, a conglomeration of entities. Another important point conveyed by hylomorphism is the fact that neither matter nor form has the capacity of separate existence in the physical universe. Thus, reality as we experience them in the world is in the form of the composite. [Click here to read more](#)

### **3.2.1 The Nature of Matter in Aristotle**

The reality of matter seems so obvious. As I write this study material I have my chromebook placed on the table. On the same table is an empty can of water, a phone and a remote control. These are material objects. We seem so sure of this. But our problem starts when we want to discover what constitutes the materiality of the material objects, that is, when we raise the question, what is matter? The question is made difficult by the fact that, according to our theory of hylomorphism, material objects are made up of matter and form. This means that the objects you see are already composites. Thus, despite what common sense tells us about matter and its concreteness, the reality is that matter is a metaphysical construct that cannot be proven scientifically (Gabriel, 2015). Even scientists' claim that quark is the fundamental building block of matter is a position arrived at rationally without any empirical proof as quarks have defied empirical verification. [Read more about quarks here.](#)

Does this mean that matter is non-existent? No. It rather means that the quest to pinpoint and isolate it in the universe continues. Both philosophers and scientists are united in this quest. To attempt what looks like an understanding of matter we shall follow Lowe's (2001) example in discussing the three senses of it which he holds are derivable from Aristotle's

works. According to Lowe, Matter is understood in the following three ways.

1. **Proximate Matter:** This understands matter as something a thing is immediately made of. It is like saying that my table is made of wood. Here it is possible to distinguish between the project from the material it is made of.
2. **Matter as Kind of Stuff:** This understands matter as a space-filling material which has separable parts capable of filling different parts of space. Lowe holds that the parts could be of the same material (homoimerous) or of different materials (heteromerous). While Aristotle believed that some material reality like water is homoimerous modern science has proven that water is actually a compound of H<sub>2</sub>O, and therefore not made of the same stuff. So far what we have are heteromerous stuffs. A gold for instance is made of gold particles (stuff) which consists of neutrons, electrons and protons -- particles of gold. The meaning here tends to overlap with the first one, but we must note the difference. In **proximate matter** a thing is made of another thing but in **matter as kind of stuff** a thing is made of certain stuff.
3. **Matter as Material Substratum:** Here matter is seen as a thing that provides ontological support for an entity's properties. It is on matter that the properties of things inhere. Thus, to say that the ball is red is to say that the property of redness inheres in the matter of the ball. Thus, properties, seen as other categories identified by Aristotle, depend on matter for their existence. Lowe holds that the problem with this idea of matter is that it presupposes a featureless matter which he considered an impossibility.

The above points are efforts to capture the nature of matter. Our doubt about the nature of matter did not affect our understanding of its properties. To begin from our elementary knowledge, we say that matter has weight and occupies space. Aristotle tells us that matter cannot be generated and can also not be destroyed. Matter is shapeless and this accounts for its ability to malleability and ability to receive any shape we give to it. This act of receiving shape is another way of saying that matter receives form. Though we say that matter has weight, it does not retain the same weight all time. It can change in weight and volume. Matter has a potential existence and is only actualised by form. Accordingly, Aristotle holds that matter has no essences since it is not determined prior to its contact

with form. While matter accounts for individual particular things form accounts for universals. Later philosophers have countered Aristotle's position that matter has no essence, for if this were to be true we would not be able to identify the properties of it which we just listed (Cf Bostock, 2006).

### **3.2.2 The Nature of Form in Aristotle**

Also called substantial form, form is said to be the principle of actuality as it actualises the potentiality in matter. (Rea, 2021). The form of anything is said to be what that thing is, its essence or its nature. Essentially, the form of a thing is the meaning which we target when we define a thing.

The nature or essence of a thing, in the Aristotelian tradition, is very roughly, a complex property which explains a large number of scientifically interesting features of the objects that have it—i.e., features of their outward appearance, behavior, natural development, and so on—and provides a basis for classifying those objects together as members of a kind. (Rea, 2021, p.114).

Just like matter, pure forms do not exist in the physical universe. Rather the forms unite with matter to form concrete individual entities. However, since form is also said to be potentiality, it is a pointer that pure form subsists. The forms are also said to determine the type of object an entity is. Thus, it is the form of humanity which inheres in matter that makes Socrates the human person that he is instead of a dog. In *De Anima*, Aristotle holds that the soul is the form of a human being. It is the soul uniting with matter that causes a human being to emerge. In the same vein, it is the form of caninity of Prado (my dog) that makes her the dog she is. Therefore we can regard the form as the principle of identity. It is responsible for all the functions which we (per)form. Without form matter is docile, and is not actualised even though it has potentiality.

The relationship between form and matter is dissolved at the moment of death. This means that neither matter nor form is present. Physical entities are said to be made up of parts, and the form as principle of unity is said to hold the parts together. Also, the forms are said to be: "indivisible, not capable of more or less, and not possessing contraries, and thus they cannot be acquired successively and piecemeal." (Ariew & Marjorie, 1997, p.301).

### **3.1.2 The Aristotelian Scholastics' Understanding of Hylomorphism**

The scholastic Aristotelians accepted the existence of matter and form but had major disagreements regarding their properties. These disagreements led to the multiplicity of the concept of hylomorphism. For instance, Aquinas held that the substantiality of forms entails their capacity to exist without matter. The human soul is cited as the perfect example of a form existing without matter.

Duns Scotus, on the other hand, does not deny the capacity of form to have independent existence, rather he believed that matter -understood as prime matter- also exists outside the composite and is a formless and undifferentiated condition for change. (Manning, 2013). Scotus' position is said to have been informed by his quest to preserve God's omnipotence:

Every absolute thing that God produces among creatures by the intermediary of a second cause, he can create without this second cause, which is not part of the effect. Now, the form that confers existence on matter is a second cause and is not part of the essence of matter insofar as it is matter. Hence God can create the matter without the form. (Scotus as cited in Ariew & Marjorie, 1997, p.303).

The argument was long and other scholastic thinkers took sides. However, Dupleix who tended to support Scotus' claim of the existence of a prime matter did so for a different reason. His argument goes as follows:

Form is not only that which gives being to things, but also that which diversifies and distinguishes them from one another. Thus, nature, which is pleased with diversity and variety, cannot allow there to be a form common to all matter, as there is a matter common to all forms; if there were only a single form, as there is a single matter, all things would not only be similar, but also uniform and even unitary. Dupleix, 1990, p.135).

Dupleix inverted Aristotle. While matter was the principle of individuation for Aristotle, Dupleix transfers that role to the form. This he did to account for plurality and diversification of objects in the world. For instance, matter as a principle of individuation cannot explain the existence of non-material beings like the human soul and angels.

### **3.1.3 Rene Descartes' Understanding of Matter and Form Relationship**

The contribution of Rene Descartes, the 17th Century French philosopher is epochal. Of course, he is not called the father of modern science for no reason. Influenced by the scholastics who initiated another way of looking at hylomorphism, he rejected hylomorphism by denying that matter and form are present in all things found in the physical world. Descartes begins by holding that there are three substances. Among the substances is matter regarded now by Descartes as a full fledged finite substance not needing form to exist. Matter becomes the body in Descartes. He calls the body *res extensa*-extended substance - signifying its property to stretch indefinitely though not infinitely. By extension Descartes means that the only properties of matter are to occupy space, the capacity for motion and the capacity to be divided into parts.

The second substance, according to Descartes, is the finite thinking substance - the mind. The third is the infinite spiritual substance, God. Note Descartes' use of terminologies and observe that body replaced matter and mind replaced soul as substances. The human being provides the only instance of unity of mind and body and they operate as two separate substances forming a complex substance, the human being. Outside human beings, there is no unity of body and mind. Matter exists independently in the world as *res extensa* not needing any form as proposed by Aristotle. Descartes finds a new meaning for the term form, holding that it only means shape, size and arrangement of parts of inanimate bodies. The form, understood as shape, size and arrangement of parts of matter, must accord to the law of motion decreed by God - the spiritual substance.

### **3.1.4 Rene Le Bossu Reconciles Descartes and Aristotle**

Do you think that Descartes has solved the problem of hylomorphism especially as regards the delineation of matter, and the nature of interaction between matter and form? Fr. Rene Le Bossu (16 March 1631 – 14 March 1680) was surprised that philosophers could view Descartes' position as in disagreement with Aristotles'. He holds that the two giants were in agreement. He begins by showing that the teaching of Aristotle and Descartes were influenced by their audiences. While Aristotle taught beginners, Descartes' audience were advanced philosophers. Thus, as a teacher of beginners, Aristotle could refer to proximate matter as what a thing is made of. What is the statue made of? Bronze, Aristotle taught. What is a table made of? Wood, he would also have said? However, Descartes did not need to point out proximate matter; he only needed to move straight to what is common of all

proximate matter be it bronze, wood, cotton, etc., and this is the fact of their extension due to the advanced level of his audience. From this point, Le Bossu demonstrates that the principles are not different in Aristotle and Descartes. Aristotle recognised three principles - matter, form, and privation- as we showed earlier in this unit. According to Le Bossu, privation is what happens when one peels off form in order to directly get at matter (Ariew & Marjorie, 1997). This is exactly the strategy of Descartes.

### **3.4 Non-Hylomorphic Ideas About the Composition of the World**

Descartes seems to have set the stage for major critique and rejection of hylomorphism. Despite his efforts, scholars believe, as demonstrated by Fr Le Bossu, that Descartes' theory is in some sense a form of Aristotelianism. Others hold that Aristotle is a Cartesian of some sort. The point made is that Descartes' is not a complete departure from Aristotle's theory of hylomorphism. However, some totally different ideas about the composition of the world have been offered. We shall consider materialism and physicalism as representatives of these competing theories about the composition of the world.

#### **1. Materialism**

This is the belief that all existing things are solely made of matter. Thus, matter is all that exists. Democritus and Leucippus were the earliest philosophers to hold this view. According to them, atoms and the void surrounding are the only things that exist. In the materialist world, even memories and images are material in nature and are regarded as brain states. However, critiques of materialism point out immediately that by accepting the existence of brain states which are different from the brain itself, materialists affirm the existence of non-material reality.

#### **2. Physicalism**

Physicalism is the claim that the physical universe contains all existing reality. Tim Crane expresses the central belief of physicalism thus: "Physicalists might differ in their. . . metaphysical commitments. . . But common to all forms of physicalism is the view that whatever exists is in some sense physical" (Crane, 1994: p.479). As such all existing reality can be captured by the laws of physics. Anything that does not exist cannot be captured. Physicalists admit that not all the existing things have been captured by these laws but believe that future laws will be able to capture what has not been captured. Thus, what physicalism is protesting against is the existence of matter, form or any other spiritual substance as understood by Aristotle. In rejecting physicalism, hylomorphists argue that



physicalists err in assuming that all reality is explainable by physical laws. They hold that even at the scientific levels some realities yield biological and psychological explanations and not physical ones. (Jaworski, 2016).

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

Hylomorphism is a philosophical discourse on the composition of the world. The positions taken by philosophers on this are as many as there are philosophers. We have taken note of a few of them. In general, hylomorphism has provided ideas to philosophers and scientists alike on how to view the world.

#### **5.0 Summary**

In this unit, we have attempted to understand hylomorphism. We looked at the etymological meaning of the term. We also discussed Aristotle's understanding of it and the complexities involved in it, especially in understanding matter. We also examined the scholastic and modern understanding of the term. We concluded by taking a look at two of the most prominent arguments against hylomorphism.

#### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

1. Describe the three senses of matter in Aristotle
2. Show your understanding of the major point of disagreement among scholastics thinkers on hylomorphism
3. Discuss Descartes position on the nature and the relationship between matter and form
4. Demonstrate your knowledge of Aristotle's conception of hylomorphism

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## **Unit 4: Universals and Particulars**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

In the previous unit, we studied the theory of hylomorphism. We exposed you to important terms like matter and form. These two terms as we understood them from the previous unit, gave rise to the problem of particulars and universals. In this unit we are going to examine the nature of universals and particulars. Our real target is their ontological status. That is, we would examine issues concerning their being and their existence.

## **2.0 Intended Learning Objectives**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

1. Articulate the problem of universals and particulars
2. Discuss the various philosophical positions about the existence of universals and particulars
3. Take a personal philosophical position about the existence of universals and particulars.

## **3.0 Main Content**

### **3.1 Problematizing the Question of Universals and Particulars**

What exists? This two word question is at the heart of what we regard as the problem of universals and particulars. It was not just from Plato and Aristotle that we learned that individual particular entities exist. Even common sense teaches us this too. Thus, nobody needs an Aristotle or a Plato to know that he exists as an entity in the world or that a particular tree exists. We experience these as we make our way through the world. But philosophy is so distrustful of the senses. It stands in perpetual interrogation of the senses. Thus, Aristotle alerted us that besides the particular individual entities (primary substances) that we know that there are species and genera which he classified as secondary substances. Thus, while the primary substances as described above are particulars, the species and the genera which constitute the secondary substances are regarded as the universals and according to Aristotle can be predicated on the particular individual entities/objects.

Our topic is at the intersection of metaphysics and epistemology. When we know a thing for instance, is it the universal that we know or the particular? I can sit in my office and say that I know what an aeroplane is? When I say this, am I referring to a particular aeroplane or the idea of aeroplane? If I am referring to a particular aeroplane, probably the only one I have seen, does it not seem that I may not be able to recognise another aeroplane when I see it? But thankfully, my mind was able to extract “aeroplaness” (universal) from that single aeroplane I have seen such that I would be able to carry along with me an idea of “aeroplaness”. Thus, even if the one aeroplane I have seen is no more, I still have the ideas of aeroplane with me such that once I see another aeroplane of different size, colour, model, and so on, I would still be able to say, this is an aeroplane. The problem of particular and universal is the problem of establishing which of the two instances of aeroplanes qualify as the real aeroplane. Which knowledge of the aeroplane that I have qualifies as true knowledge?

In a way, philosophers conceive the universals as properties of the objects (particulars). In another way they tend to claim that the properties have more ontological existence than the objects. But this is against common sense. Therefore, the problem of universals and particulars “first is a problem about the ontology of properties; the second is a problem related to explaining something about having properties.” (Hofweber, 2016). It is about the nature of the universals and the particulars, on the relationship between universals and the particulars, and the ontological status of universals and particulars. We may couch our concern as questions thus: Are universals real? If yes, are universals the only real? Are

particulars real? If yes, are the particulars the only real? Are particulars and universals real at the same time? If both are real what is the true relationship between them? The answers which philosophers have given to these questions may surprise you. It is another battleground for philosophical ideas.

### **3.2 The Ancient Origin of the Problem of Particulars and Universals**

Plato is said to have originated the problem of universals and particulars. It arose following Plato's attempt to delineate the meaning of everyday words we use. Particularly, Plato was concerned with the meaning of words like Justice, Beautiful, Goodness. He would want to know what constitutes goodness, for example. Accordingly, Plato holds that the first place to begin with is to identify individual objects, acts, persons and so on that can be said to be good. We can then abstract the qualities by which they are said to be good, that is, that which make the good object good, the good act good, and the good person good. This abstracted common good by virtue of which all the things said to be good are good is regarded by Plato as goodness. This goodness is regarded as the essence of all the good things.

Plato regards such essences of things as ideas or forms. He holds that they live in the world of forms and that they are the real whereas particular objects participate in them. "It is something other than particular things, which particular things partake of. Not being particular, it cannot itself exist in the world of sense. Moreover it is not fleeting or changeable like the things of sense: it is eternally itself, immutable and indestructible." (Russell, 2008, p.43).

However, it was Aristotle who coined the term, universals. He goes ahead to offer the first ever definition of it thus: "By the term 'universal' I mean that which is of such a nature as to be predicated of many subjects, by 'individual' that which is not thus predicated." Cf Mumford 2003, p.145). It was from this definition that the understanding of universals as properties of particulars emerged. The terms which are regarded as universal, according to Aristotle cannot serve as subjects in a sentence. He holds further that universals are not substances.

It is a "such", not a "this" , a kind, not an individual thing. "It seems impossible", he says, "that any universal term should be the name of a substance. For ... the substance of each thing is that which is peculiar to it,

which does not belong to anything else; but the universal is common, since that is called universal which is such as to belong to more than one thing". (Cf.Mumford, 2003, p.145).

Aristotle's idea of universals differs substantially from Plato's. Plato believed that universals exist in the world of forms and that particulars take their existence from the universals. Aristotle on the other hand, believes that universals derive their existence from particulars.

### **3.3 Making Sense of the Particulars**

Bertrand Russell is famous, among other things, for offering us the operative definition of particulars and universals. Every other definition of the terms is a mere modification of Russell's efforts as we shall show immediately with the example of the definition offered by Fraser MacBride according to which "Particulars are entities whose embodiment is restricted to a single location at any one time." (MacBride, 2005, p.567). The definition above emphasises the nature of the relationship which an entity holds with space and time as definitive elements of particulars. And given that the elements are also descriptive of matter, it is easy to see that particular refers to material objects that exist in the physical world. Bertrand Russell, in making a distinction between universals and particulars, holds that particulars are concerned with percepts, that is with the objects of acts of perception. Thus, the particulars are what we perceive with the senses; the objects of sense experience.

One who wants to make a list of particulars will include in his or her list, names of ordinary objects and things we see in the world. There would be a table, spoon, plate, book, pot, car, chalk, soup, water, tissue, curtain, and so on. These constitute material objects in the physical world. These objects can only be in one place at a time. It has the capacity to be in another place different from where it currently is but at a different time. Thus, I can take my chair to my office today. This chair which I sit as I write can only be in one place at a time.

### **3.4 Making Sense of the Universals**

Universals are defined as "entities unrestricted in the number of distinct locations at which they may be simultaneously and wholly present." (MacBride, 2005, p.567). Again relational disposition towards space and time plays a role in the definition of universals. This definition which emphasises relation with space and time can suffice if only we are

considering universals as properties of objects. Like when I say: the spoon is white. The property of white can be said to exist on many other objects and at the same time. Thus we can at the same time say: the spoon is white; the phone is white; the computer is white; the car is white; the cup is black and so on. Notice that the quality or property of whiteness can be in the various particular objects listed at the same time. However, this fact is not true of the other type of universals - relations. It was Bertrand Russell who first held that universals also appear as relations between two objects. We may give an example of this thus: Abuja is the capital of Nigeria. The expression, *capital of*, connects Abuja and Nigeria. It is what Nigeria and Abuja share. Relations as universals exists nowhere and at no time because it transcends space and time. In the example we gave capital is no known location. The same is true when I say: Paul is taller than Peter. The relational proposition, taller than, does not exist anywhere in the world, or in the mind.

Russell, in making a distinction between universals and particulars, holds that universals are concerned with concepts, that is with the objects of acts of conception. Thus, the universals are what we conceive as opposed to the percepts, what we perceive with the senses. Bertrand Russell is also interested in finding the universals as they appear in our everyday speech. He holds that a sentence cannot be made which does not contain at least one universal. He opines that proper names are particulars while pronouns are ambiguous particulars. Other parts of speech like verbs, common nouns, adjectives, adverbs, propositions, and so on are universals. Russell demonstrates that in speech adjectives and common nouns express properties whereas prepositions and verbs express relations among things (Russell, 2008).

The universals are opposed to particulars in so many ways. The universal has the capacity of being shared by so many particulars at the same time. Remember the example of goodness we gave earlier. Many objects, acts and even people can share in it. Let's take the colour black which can also be shared by many particulars as an example. Thus we can speak of a black phone, a black man, a black board, a black car, a black bag, and so on. All the particular items mentioned share in one universal blackness. It is universal that we target when we give definitions of terms. In definitions we identify universal which particular circumstances, acts or objects will partake in.

Particulars exist in the physical world, in the world of senses. Where do the universals exist? One may say that they have their residence in the mind but Russell offers a strong

argument that dissuades this point. To say that they reside in the mind or are mental means that they depend on thought for their existence. And if this were to be the case it may not be possible for two persons to have the same thought about the same universals. They appear in the mind only as objects of our thinking. What this means is that the universals have existence outside of the mind, and outside of the physical world. However, it is with the mind that universals are grasped. Universals persist. According to Russell, existence is temporal in nature, things that exist do so in time. We can point at a time when they begin to exist and in most cases when they cease to exist. The same thing cannot be said of universals. So we do not say that universal exists. They persist and the place they persist is in the world of beings. It is in this same world that numbers as you know them exist. “The world of being is unchangeable, rigid, exact, delightful to the mathematician, the logician, the builder of metaphysical systems, and all who love perfection more than life.” (Russell, 2008, p.47).

### **3.5 Disagreements About the Universals and Particulars Among Medievals**

Medieval philosophers introduced a major divide concerning the status of universals and particulars. This divide is captured as the realist and nominalist schools of thought. The realist school of thought upheld the reality of universals. In doing this they hold that universals are the only things that exist. The most prominent realists was Avicenna. According to Avicenna, particulars are not real. He hinged their unreality to their changing nature. If the changing things are real we may not be able to know anything about anything. Avicenna also held that the universals were what God created. Essentially, God knows the universals and could not in any way have known the particulars. His argument is that the universals do not change and given the nature of God as an unchanging being it would be a contradiction for God to know things which change, for if God were to know changing things it would also mean that God himself has changed. This is because God would have to adjust himself to conform to the new change of particular things. (Adamson, 2005).

Nominalists on the other hand hold that universals are unnecessary. They derive their name, nominalists, from the Latin word *nomen*- meaning name in English and accounts for their belief. The nominalists believe that universals exist only in Language, in the words we say, like goat, man, horse, tree, and so on. In real life, they hold that universals do not exist. (marenbon, 2016). Among the most important nominalists was William of Ockam. He held that by invoking the concept of universals, philosophers were unnecessarily introducing useless concepts. Thus, a saying that emerged from his position is famously referred to as



Ockam's razor which simply states that one should not multiply entities unnecessarily. [Read more about nominalism here.](#)

### **3.6 The Nominalism of John Locke in the Modern Era**

The modern era is reputed for its self-acclaimed break with the medieval era, and rejection of Aristotlian and Ptolemaic explanations about the world. Locke rejected the independent existence of universals. He presented an argument that cast the universals as a creation of human understanding in efforts to grasp truth. "It is plain [ ... ] that general and universal belong not to the real existence of things, but are the inventions and creatures of the understanding, made by it for its own use, and concern only signs, whether words or ideas." (Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, III, iii, 11).

Locke affirms particulars as the things that exist. When we use words that tend to suggest universalism they merely reference particular things. For Locke, therefore, universalism exists as ideas and has no life outside the mind. What is real must be able to exist outside the mind, independent of it.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

The problem of universals and particulars is one of the oldest problems of western philosophy. Its essence is to delineate the zone of the real and to determine for us what exists and in what sense it exists. Philosophers are content to argue that things exist as universals and particulars, highlighting the manner in which they exist as such.

### **5.0 Summary**

In this unit we have considered the problem of universals and particulars. We started by stating the nature of the problem which is of concern to us. We also studied the ancient origin of the problem in Plato and Aristotle by examining their views about the problem. We also attempted an understanding of Particulars and universals. We also took a very short look at the manner in which the medieval and modern philosophers considered the idea of universal.

### **6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments**

1. Discuss the problem of universal

2. Compare and contrast Aristotle's and Plato's notion of universals
3. Distinguish between particulars and universals
4. Explain what led to Ockam's position that entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily

## **7.0 References and Suggestions for Further Reading**

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## **Unit 5: Appearance and Reality**

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### **1.0 Introduction**

In the previous unit we studied the problem of universals. We told you that the problem of universals is essentially about the problem of what exists. The discussion was whether what exists is universal or particulars. One problem that would have struck you in considering the problem of universals and particulars is the fact that you lost confidence about whether you know what is real from what appears. You are not alone. In considering the question of appearance and reality we shall operate at the intersection of metaphysics, epistemology and natural philosophy (known today as physics). So tighten your belt for a very interesting trip. In what follows we shall take a brief look at the problem of appearance and reality in Western Philosophy.

### **2.0 Intended Learning Objectives**

At the end of this unit, you will be able to

1. Trace the history of problem of appearance and reality

### **3.0 Main Content**

#### **3.1 The History of the Problem of Appearance and Reality**

We first encountered the problem of appearance and reality in Unit 1 of Module 2 of this course. If you recall it was introduced in our discussion of Parmenides' notion of Being. Thus, Parmenides could be said to have originated the philosophical idea that things are not really as they appear. His take off point was the waxing and waning of the moon. The moon appears to us to be waxing and waning at different times where the waxing generates light which we see and the waning dims the light and therefore brings darkness. Parmenides was the first person to reason that the moon, though it appears to wax and wane at different times, does not change in reality. Indeed, the moon has no light in it but it appears to us as if it gives out light.

So all reality, all being, the All, the real world is unchanging: the firm, the lasting, the everlasting, hard firm matter. But what about appearance? It is unreal, it is nothing: it is no thing. It is, like a shadow, both light and night: a mere contrast, rather than a thing. And indeed, the waxing and waning of the Moon is exactly a shadow - a play of shadows of 'light and night', as Parmenides says again and again. Everybody knows that a shadow is unreal, deceptive, untrue. And if this is what a shadow is, then light must also be untrue. (Popper, 1998, p.100)

As a result, Parmenides holds that true knowledge of reality which is unchanging and eternal is gained only by reason whereas sensation only delivers opinion to us. The Greeks of Parmenides' era believed that only the gods possessed true knowledge whereas men possessed false knowledge which he also called opinion. The consequence of regarding men's knowledge as false is the origin of philosophy's distrust of experiential knowledge. Plato, who regarded Parmenides highly, would later secure his philosophy firmly beyond the reach of the senses in the world of forms. For Plato, reality cannot be found in things as they appear in this world. The ancients' concern with appearance and reality intensified with Aristotle who disagreed with Parmenides and Plato. For Aristotle, the world of the senses is the real world and not the world of ideas as promoted by Plato.

There are also modern examples to this. Matter provides a ready example to us. In unit 3 of Module 4 above we treated matter as an existing reality of a sort and a large chunk of science is built on the belief that matter is real. In the mid 19th Century, Michael Faraday, working in the field of physics, held that matter could only be recognized by the forces acting on it and is not perceptible as initially thought by Descartes. On the basis of this,

Faraday argued that no reason exists to believe that matter exists. The Physical reality on which we have rested our belief on the existence of matter does not consist of matter but rather what he called fields which are mathematical structures defined by points and numbers. (Holt, 2012). Thus, in the face of the role mathematical numbers play in delineating reality, Frank Tipler holds that “at the most basic ontological level, the physical universe is a concept.” (Tipler, 1997, p.209)

Distinguishing what is real from what appears, you will learn, is a serious philosophical business. It is necessary if we must build our knowledge on a solid foundation.

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**MODULE 3: ISSUES IN SPECIAL METAPHYSICS**

**Unit 1: Necessary and Contingent Beings**

**Unit 2: Mind-Body Problem**

**Unit 3: Freedom and Determinism**

**Unit 4: Immortality**

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**MODULE 4: METAPHYSICS AND SCIENCE**

**Unit 1: Ontological Realism**

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**Unit 5: Metaphysical Foundation of Mathematics**