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Dave Seng
davideseng@email.arizona.edu

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IN DEFENSE OF METAPHYSICS

Attempts to define metaphysics have not as a rule been very helpful. There is no aspect or area of nature that can be marked off and called the province of metaphysics; the name covers a wide assortment of problems that look as if they had little relation with each other. What unites them is no single subject of concern, but their position in the large enterprise of making the world intelligible. They are the final roadblocks in the journey of understanding. Start anywhere and try to understand the thing or event before you; ask yourself what it is, and why it should be as it is; press the inquiry; and sooner or later you end in metaphysics. Let us take a few examples, and for brevity's sake, problems that arise sooner rather than later.

You look at a pebble. It is smooth, round, and hard. It may occur to you to wonder whether there is anything to it except this collection of qualities. Surely, you reflect, there must be something more; when we say the pebble is smooth, round, and so on, we do not mean that it *is* these qualities; we mean that it *has* them; there must be an "it" to own them, over and above the qualities themselves. Very well, what is this "it"? You are in metaphysics already, and confronting the ancient problem of substance.

This may seem a rather verbal approach to pebbles, and you may prefer the solid sense of the physicist. If you were to ask a physicist what a pebble really is, he would answer that it is a mass of such things as

protons, electrons, and positrons; these are what the pebble is made of. You then ask him what an electron is made of. He will probably decline to say, remarking that he is concerned, not with what it is, but with how it behaves. You answer that if there is something that behaves, there must be something to do the behaving; what is this? Russell has said that matter has now resolved itself into "waves of probability undulating in nothingness." But must there not be something more than probability to undulate? There cannot be motion without something that moves. Or can there? This is metaphysics; the ancient problem of the nature of matter is breaking out again.

Or you begin to think about the curious difference between what the physicist says the pebble is and what it seems to be. It looks round; it feels hard, cold, and smooth. The physicist says these qualities do not belong to the pebble he is talking about. Then just where do they belong? In our own minds or out there in space? And if the latter, how is the space of the cold, smooth pebble related to the space of the electrons, where there is nothing smooth, cold, or hard. That is metaphysics again, the problem of the status of sense data.

But what about this suggestion that the space of physics is not the space we see? Can there really be more than one space? And if only one, how far does it extend? It seems to have no boundary in any direction, and therefore to be infinite, but does that make sense? It seems to have parts, since it is made of smaller spaces. Does it have ultimate parts? If so, how small are they? Infinitely small? We are deep in metaphysics again, probably over our heads.

Or suppose you ask what is really happening when you see a pebble. You would probably begin with the standard answer: the pebble, i.e., the physicist's pebble, gives off light waves; these light waves cause changes in one's retina; these cause changes in one's optical nerve and brain, and these in turn sensations in

one's mind. That seems straightforward enough. But are we not skating over cracks? How do we *know* what the outward causes are of our sensations and perceptions? The physicist admits that he has never felt or seen them. For that matter, how can he be sure that these causes exist at all? *Must* every event have a cause? And what is this about changes in the brain causing sensations? Where are these sensations and ideas of ours? In our heads? If so, how much room do they occupy there? If not, how can something in space interact with something not in space? It seems as absurd that a purpose should push electrons about in our head as that it should wield a hammer. We are off into the metaphysical problems of causality and the relation of body and mind.

There is no need to go on. Metaphysical problems lie round us on all sides, and usually just a few steps away. There is nothing artificial about these problems; they arise naturally in the reflection of any thoughtful man; indeed many of them are questions that a child could ask, though the most determined of metaphysicians might find it hard to answer them. We stumble into them, no matter what direction our thought takes; and because they have no single subject matter, they are hard to lump together in a definition. If I were asked, then, for a definition of metaphysics, I should prefer to answer by giving a few examples of metaphysical problems and saying that it deals with problems which, like these, arise at the end of the road if we go on asking what or why?

Regarding these old problems there has of late been a strange development. Although they have seemed natural and inevitable questions to both plain men and philosophers for some thousands of years, there has been a movement to rule them out as meaningless and a waste of time. Of course this has been a shock to those who were brought up to think of philosophy as the crowning achievement of man's intelligence and of metaphysics

as the crown of philosophy. Perhaps the shock was overdue. To be sure, it is not easy to believe that minds as acute and self-critical as Plato and Aristotle, Aquinas and Spinoza, McTaggart and Alexander, were merely beating the air in what they supposed to be the most important part of their thinking. But it is also hard to believe that such critics of metaphysics as Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Freud, are themselves merely beating the air when they say that metaphysics has had its day and should cease to be. We must do the best we can in a small space to assess their criticisms. They offer four very different kinds of arguments against metaphysics, which I shall describe as the historical, the pragmatic, the psychoanalytic, and the positivist arguments. We shall look at them in turn.

I

The historical argument is the easiest to state. It is simply the argument from the futility of metaphysics as proved by its record. Has it solved any single one of its major problems? Take a few of these at random: the mind-body problem, the nature of causality, the problem of freedom, the relation between fact and value, the existence of God, the status of sense data. Every one of these issues was raised and discussed by Greek philosophers of the fourth century B.C., and they have been canvassed more or less continuously ever since. Have the philosophers of the twentieth century reached a consensus on any of them? On the mind-body problem there are still behaviorists like Ryle, denying the distinct existence of mind; there are epiphenomenalists like Santayana, admitting its existence, but making it a by-product of body; there are dualists like Broad and Lovejoy, arguing for interaction. On causality we have Humeans like Braithwaite and necessitarians like Ewing. On freedom we have the extreme determinism of McTaggart and Ross and the extreme

indeterminism of the existentialists. On values some distinguished thinkers like Urban, Hartmann, and Dean Inge, have held that values are objective and eternal, while others like Ayer and Carnap hold that no value outlives the brief attitude or utterance that expresses it. Does God exist? Sartre and Heidegger say no; Tennant and Gilson say yes. On the status of sense data, we need not go beyond one man: Bertrand Russell in 1914 held that every such datum is independent of us just as we experience it; by 1948 he had come round to agree with Berkeley that everything immediately experienced is mind-dependent; and he has found many to agree with him in both positions. On every one of these problems the solution advocated by one authority of eminence may be balanced by its contradictory advocated by other eminent authorities, who may, indeed, be the same authority. Two thousand years of thought on these problems by acute and devoted minds have ended in establishing what? Nothing, nothing at all.

The philosopher may wonder defensively whether metaphysics is worse off than other disciplines. Unfortunately, comparison only makes the record look blacker. No one doubts that in the physical sciences there has been advance, advance immense and accelerating. Every considerable biologist in the world would now agree that the theory of evolution has broadly made out its case. There is no disagreement among physicists about Ohm's law or Boyle's law, and none of consequence, I gather, that Einstein's theory was nearer the truth than Newton's, and Newton's than Ptolemy's. Medicine has found the causation of nearly every major disease of man, and in the course of a mere fifty years has added some twenty to our length of life. And while this has been going on, what have the metaphysicians been doing? Sitting like beatniks in cobwebby corners, spinning new webs or brushing down those of others with futile and febrile cackles.

It is a dreary picture. What are the metaphysicians to say in reply? They must begin, if they are honest, by admitting frankly that they have not achieved agreement in the solution of their problems, as the scientists in general have. But the critic is not merely pointing this out as a fact; he is drawing certain inferences from it. He is inferring—if we may read a little between the lines—(1) that if such agreement has not been reached, there has not been progress, (2) that the rate of advance in science is a fair measure for the advance of metaphysics, (3) that it is time the whole enterprise were handed over to science. Do these inferences follow?

(1) As for the first, it is surely clear on reflection that there are other forms of progress than achieving agreed upon solutions of problems.

(a) One is the sealing off of blind alleys. Exposing error is progress, and sometimes as valuable progress as the discovering of new truth. If metaphysics cannot point to triumphant solutions, it can at least look back on a winding trail crossed by many seductive by-paths that have been found by patient exploration to lead nowhere. Is there any philosopher who would now seriously defend Socrates' theory of recollection, or the argumentation of the *Phaedo* for immortality, or Democritus' theory of perception, or Descartes' *cogito* or ontological argument as he offered them, or Geulincx' occasionalism, or Mill's or Spencer's account of a priori knowledge, or the realism of E.B. Holt, or the humanism of Schiller? These were ingenious theories, ably presented, carefully discussed, and decisively rejected. Surely it is an achievement of some importance to put up signs at the entrances to a hundred deadends: "No road this way."

(b) For every mistaken theory held by metaphysicians, there are many more held by crackpots. These crackpots have often been able to claim revelation, intuition, tradition, and public opinion on their side, even if their theories have been

social perils. They have been especially conspicuous in certain times and places—in the Paris of St. Bartholomew's day; in the Salem of the witches; in Dayton, Tennessee; in Fascist and Nazi halls. The hallucinations that haunted these places vanish into thin air when looked at dispassionately and rationally. But to look at them so is harder than it seems. It requires a profound respect for reason, and it needs examples. And of this attitude of dispassionate and rational reflection on ultimate problems the metaphysician is the best exemplar. The scientist exemplifies it too, but about many problems on which fanatics flourish, those of religion, for example, he feels no professional concern. They can be effectively dealt with only by an exercise of reason focused on ultimate speculative issues, and carried through with determination and detachment. This is the special business of the metaphysician. It has been done at times with great and lasting effect. The rationalism of Descartes echoed for centuries down the corridors of French life; one can hear it in the *écrasez l'infâme* of Voltaire. Neither the Declaration of Independence nor the campaign against slavery would have been what it was without the continuing and pervasive reasonableness of John Locke.

(c) Again, progress may be achieved through defining problems more sharply. G.E. Moore used to maintain that much of the confusion in philosophers' minds arose from their failure to make clear to themselves what question precisely they were asking. Surely he was right. Many discussions about determinism have gone off the rails because they assumed that the crucial issue was whether one must accept fatalism or predestination, or whether one can do what one chooses, or whether one is under constraint from without, or what is meant in ordinary language by the word "can." Just to get the issue clear, let alone to solve it, may call for much hard thinking, though sometimes clearing it up may solve it too. I do not see how it can be denied that in

this business of defining its issues metaphysics has made progress. If one compares the treatment of freedom in Aristotle or Augustine or Aquinas or even Kant with that of, say, Broad in his inaugural lecture, one feels a marked advance in clarity, even though the intractable old problem still shows areas of deep opacity.

(d) The answer now given to a metaphysical question, though not a final answer, may be more subtle and sophisticated than any given by earlier thinkers. It is tempting to classify a philosopher as holding a certain "ism," and then by identifying his ism (as the pun goes) with a certain "wasm," to charge him with dittoing old dogmas. *X* is an idealist. How boring. Did not idealism have its day with Berkeley, and get buried with all due rites? This attitude is inept. McTaggart was an idealist, but to say that the idealism of *The Nature of Existence*, with both Berkeley and Hegel absorbed into its blood stream, is the same as that of Berkeley's *Principles* hides a deep difference under a word. Hobbes was a behaviorist; Watson was a behaviorist; Ryle is a behaviorist. Is Ryle therefore merely repeating Hobbes and Watson? Clearly not. He may be less remote from them than he thinks, but it remains that his behaviorism is of a new variety, which is different partly because he is standing on their shoulders and trying to avoid their crudities. The realism of Russell's *Human Knowledge* is in a way a return to Locke. But to equate its elaborately guarded isomorphism with Locke's simple account of the resemblance of our ideas to the primary qualities would again be inaccurate and unjust. Whitehead has said that western philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato; but then a footnote, like a post-script, may change the tenor of the text.

(2) As for the criticism that the rate of advance in metaphysics may be measured by that of science, and condemned by it, this too hardly stands up under reflection. It is true that scientific inquiry, once it got under way in the seventeenth

century, marched forward with impressive speed, securely occupying its new territory as it went, while the metaphysicians conducted a series of brilliant raids whose gains were never consolidated into recognized conquests. But when used as a ground for indictment, the comparison is unfair. It is unfair because metaphysical problems are so unlike those of physical science.

(a) For one thing, a problem of natural science can usually be isolated and settled by itself, which is seldom or never possible in metaphysics. What is the cause of yellow fever? That is a difficult problem, as Major Reed discovered, but there is no need of mixing it up with other problems of science, let alone with those of religion or ethics; the disease must be caused by one or other of a limited number of factors which can usually be isolated and experimentally tested till the right one is hit upon; and then the problem is solved.

It is far otherwise in metaphysics. Probably no one of its major problems can be solved short of something like a system of thought; if you propose a certain answer, you find yourself committed to a whole range of implied answers to affiliated questions, with whose truth or falsity your original answer must stand or fall. We remarked just now that you could deal with yellow fever without dragging in religion or ethics. Try to do that with free will and you will find it impossible. Suppose you accept the hypothesis that determinism is true; you are obviously involved with religion, for you are saying, for example, that all crime is necessitated, and then to those who believe in a Creator, you seem to be attributing this issue to him. You are involved in ethics, for if the criminal had to act as he did, how can you call him responsible for it, or justify blaming or punishing him? You may have plausible answers to these questions, but you can hardly dodge them. Again, is the causality that governs choice the same kind as governs billiard balls, and if not, how do

they differ? And if the choice is made by a self, do you mean a set of passing experiences, or something that lies behind them? These questions arise directly out of your attempt to deal with freedom. Thus the major problems of theology and morals, the knotty problems of causality and the self, and indeed many others are tied up in this one package. Try to untie it and they all spill out on your hands. It is no wonder that the great metaphysicians have all been system builders; they had to be. And obviously it is a far more difficult matter to think out a speculative system than to answer a question which you can separate out and deal with by itself.

(b) Again, the march of metaphysics is always open to attack from the rear. The scientist sets out with large assumptions, about which he does not worry. He is concerned with what is true, but not with what is truth; about what causes what, but not about what causality is; about what he can verify, but not about the theory of verification; about arguing logically, but not about whether logic holds of reality. These problems are left behind by general consent, and no doubt rightly. But the metaphysician cannot afford to leave them behind. If he did, he would find himself attacked unmercifully from his unprotected rear. If Bradley is to show Dewey the unsoundness of his instrumentalist theories, he must not only show their falsity, but also establish an alternative theory of truth and of proof, for otherwise, with his rationalist arguments, he will be begging the question at every step. If a rationalist wants to prove to an existentialist that the world is not a wholly nauseating place, since it is at least intelligible, he will have to begin by showing that the logic he employs in his proof is really applicable to that world, a point the existentialist denies. The metaphysician, then, must always be prepared to fight on more fronts than one. He will be attacked not only for his arguments, but for the logic implicit in them, not only for the conclu-

sions with which he ends, but for the assumptions he starts with. And it is unreasonable to ask of persons thus under attack from both front and rear to advance at the steady pace of those who can leave behind them the most difficult problems of all.

(c) "The most difficult problems of all"; this suggests a further reason why the metaphysician must be content with inching along. That these problems are difficult from their complexity we have just seen. They are difficult too by reason of their abstractness. Most people find mathematics difficult because it requires them to leave the solid footing of perceptible things and deal with such intangibles as numbers or the still more elusive x 's that may stand for any number. Similarly, there are persons, who in fact include all of us, who find philosophical abstractions far harder to lay hold of than the things out of which they are analyzed. For the most part we know just acts when we see them, but when some Socrates comes along to ask us what justice is as such, we stumble awkwardly about. Now metaphysics is preoccupied with as suches. It wants to know what matter and mind and cause and self and time and value are, in themselves or as such. There are no sense impressions against which one can test one's answer, as one can in biology or chemistry. Nor can we fall back on introspection; we can know by introspection that we are now thinking of causality, but not that *our* thought of causality is correct. No satisfactory analysis of the sort of analysis that goes on in defining fundamental ideas seems yet to have been made; even Moore, one of the most expert of its practitioners, admitted that here he was baffled. Whatever such analysis is, one thing about it is clear: it is inordinately difficult. It requires a focusing of the mental eye on invisible and impalpable essences, and a patient, persistent fixity of gaze that can stay with them as they develop themselves into implications and contradictions. There can be no reason-

able doubt that the process brings us truth, truth as objective as that of the pyramids or the multiplication table. Yet it is not truth that can be checked by observation; it must be tested by each mind for itself and by repeating the analysis. To expect of metaphysicians that they should march swiftly and abreast when they are making an ascent toward summits that are shrouded always in cloud suggests that the real nature of their problems has not been understood.

(3) "There you go," says the critic, "you admit frankly enough that metaphysics is a marching into the clouds, yet that seems to stir no doubts. You remind us of the old saying that God gave the land to the French, the sea to the British, and to the Germans the clouds. Well, let the Kants and the Hegels and their *aufgehoben* kind stay in the clouds. We have no wish to climb up after them. Even if speculative philosophers have made some slow advance, it is because they have occasionally used scientific method. Newton called himself a natural philosopher, but his great result was achieved not by philosophy, in your sense, but by mathematics and physics. Hume called himself a philosopher when he laid down the laws of association, but these were purely empirical laws that he hit upon in his capacity as psychologist. Indeed, you can draw a line through speculative philosophy, and say that whatever lies on the speculative side is the region of the unprogressive, the unprofitable, the insoluble, and that on the other side lies science. And science no longer needs to be eked out by mumbo jumbo. Russell has put it pithily: 'What is knowledge is science, and what is not science is not knowledge.' Once we see that clearly, the day of metaphysics will be done."

I must admit to some sympathy with this attitude. There has been too much pontifical mumbling and fumbling among philosophers and such impatience is natural. Still, the argument here offered does not seem very convincing.

(a) It is not convincing, for one thing, because it is not true that science is self-sufficient. It generates problems that it cannot handle. In the spectrum of knowledge science is both preceded and followed by problems to which its own methods are inadequate. That is why critical and speculative philosophy, to use Broad's terms, must be retained, and the major problems of both are metaphysical.

Critical philosophy is an examination of the concepts and postulates with which science starts. Science, as we have seen, does not feel called upon to examine these; if it waited till it achieved agreement upon them, it might never get on to its proper work. Nevertheless, they surely need examination. As for concepts, consider the following, which science uses constantly: cause, continuity, time, truth, identity, change, implication, life, memory, disposition. These terms mark thickets of difficulty. The scientist does not normally halt his professional work to examine them. If they are to be properly examined at all, it must be by the critical philosopher or nobody. And to say that they should be examined by nobody is obscurantism.

Much the same must be said about the postulates of science. No medical man questions that for every disease there is a cause, which under like conditions always acts in the same way, but if someone protests that this arbitrarily rules out chance and miracle, who is to answer him? Physics proceeds on the assumption that we can learn about the physical world through perception, but we never find in physics books a section reserved for perceptual epistemology. No sociologist doubts that there are other minds, though if he did, it would take more than a sociologist to set him right; no psychologist doubts that conclusions can be reached by rational inference, his own, for example, but this certainly calls for justification if mental processes are governed by purely empirical laws. In short, the scientist goes to his work in a suit of untested assumptions. The suit may

be made of the stoutest nylon or of shoddy that will not stand wear. He does not worry over which it is. But someone should, and the most natural nominee is the critical philosopher.

Critical philosophy precedes science in the sense that it deals with the ideas and assumptions that the scientist brings to his work. Speculative philosophy comes after science, in the sense that it attempts to put the results of the various disciplines into a consistent view of the world. (Probably the name metaphysics means nothing more originally than that Aristotle's treatise on it came *after* (meta) his *Physics* in the canon, but it is symbolically significant, even so. Critics would scornfully say this also of the schoolboy's remark that the metaphysician comes after the physician, and is therefore the mortician of thought.) The most exciting of speculative problems are those that arise out of the apparent clash of general truths. For example, all the natural sciences agree that the world is governed by causal law; popular ethics holds, as we have seen, that many moral judgments would lose their meaning if that were true; which side is right? Physics holds that for every physical effect there is an exclusively physical cause; moralists hold that when they give gifts, and poets that when they write poems, their ideas make a not unimportant difference to what they do. Looked at in isolation, both views are convincing, yet both cannot be right. To the mind that approaches biology from physics, it seems reasonable to hold that the behavior of the solitary wasp is that of a complex mechanism, though that makes its provision for unhatched offspring an all but incredible performance; to the mind that approaches the same science from psychology, such behavior suggests purpose; but does it make sense to call this purposive if there is no conscious purpose? No one has yet succeeded in building a clear road from physics through life to mind. The theologian commonly believes in a Providence that presides and is good. If

the historian finds, as Gibbon did, that history is "little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind," how is that record—as regards misfortunes at least—to be reconciled with the goodness that governs the world? Here are four old problems of metaphysics—those of freedom, body-mind, teleology, evil. All arise from conflicts between established disciplines. None of them can be solved by specialists from one field alone. All require reflective arbitration in the light of human knowledge as a whole. It is hard to see how any existing science, committed to its own methods and presuppositions, could perform such arbitration. This has been traditionally done by metaphysics. Perhaps it has been done badly. But if so, that is a reason rather for improving metaphysics, than for replacing it by a less impartial arbiter.

(b) "But if the arbiter never comes up with solutions that satisfy the parties," it may be asked, "why keep him on? By all means encourage the people who are getting results, and let the 'featherbedders' go." But it is not quite as simple as that. It may be that metaphysicians stay about because man will not let them go. I do not mean merely that men have a stake in these problems—though if they could be assured of one kind of answer to the problem of the existence of God or the relation of mind and body, it would be of more practical importance to them than protection from the bomb. It is also the fact that they are *interested* in these questions, irrepressibly interested. There is such a thing as wonder, and whether or not it gave birth to philosophy, as Aristotle supposed, it is what nourishes it and keeps it alive. Men know that, lurking behind the cosmic curtain there are answers to their questions about where they came from, about their place in the strange world of stars and atoms, about their destiny. While they know that this treasure is there, they can no more forget about it than Arthur's knights could forget their grail.

Seek it they must. Their interest is too much a part of their human nature to die out. If anyone tried to abolish sex or religion, we should not have much doubt as to the outcome. He might drive the impulses underground or divert their expression, but as long as there is an infinite universe on which man is dependent, and an Eve for an Adam, these impulses will live on. So of man's thought about ultimate things. It has been thwarted in every generation; it will probably be thwarted indefinitely; but that does not mean that it makes no progress at all, or that repeated failures extinguish hope. The business of metaphysics, as Stevenson said of life, is to continue to fail in good spirits.

II

The historical argument against metaphysics seems less than decisive. Let us turn to the pragmatic argument. This is a more radical kind of assault. It holds that metaphysics is an abnormality of the spirit, a wasteful diversion of energy, a channeling of the impulse which we have just described as the vital force of metaphysics into an unprofitable wasteland. You cannot abolish sex, Professor Dewey would agree, but you can see that some apparent expressions of it are really perversions or sublimations, and these at least can be abolished to the better health of all. Now the metaphysical interest is similarly a twist in a fundamental human activity, that of intelligence. It has diverted intelligence to problems for which it was not made and which it cannot hope to solve. In this famous little book on *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey tried to set out the cause and cure of what he regarded as a kind of intellectual disease.

The cause of the disease may be seen most clearly if we look at the rise of philosophy among the Greeks. We can discern in their thought, as we can in that of all peoples emerging from primi-

tive life, two strata of ideas. On what they regarded as a "higher" level is a mass of myths, folktales, and religious beliefs which we can now see to be the products, not of rigorous thinking, but of imagination in the service of desire. At a lower level is the mass of humdrum, common sense knowledge by which men conduct their ordinary life. This knowledge is tested daily. The other and supposedly higher knowledge is not; yet it is so bound up with immemorial beliefs, old rites and customs, revered priesthoods and castes, as to have a secure hold on popular belief and respect. Sooner or later, however, as common sense knowledge refines itself into science, the lower order presses against the higher and threatens to overturn it. It is at this point, says Dewey, that speculative philosophy appears on the scene. To anyone committed to the myths and ideals of an old tradition, it is intolerable that they should be dismissed as an insubstantial pageant; can it not be shown that, in essence at least, they are as sound as the more prosaic knowledge that is challenging them? Here is the chance of the metaphysician. He first stepped forward as the rationalizer of tradition.

The great example of the process is Plato. He did not accept Greek religion or ethics at its face value; he was far too subtle for that; yet his work was a defense of both, for what he sought to establish was an ethico-religious view of the world, in which reality consisted of a hierarchy of concepts dominated by the idea of the good. And by something more than a coincidence, this hierarchy of ideas, says Dewey, corresponded to the social hierarchy of the Greek state. At the top were the free citizens, who were at liberty to pursue disinterested thought and art, and who felt manual work beneath them. The hewing of wood and drawing of water were left to the people at the bottom, the artisans and slaves. It was implicit in Plato's view that the more one was engrossed with material things, the further one was from reality;

on the other hand, the more completely one could live in the world of changeless ideas, the closer one was to reality. The noblest life was that of the philosopher, who in the *Republic* was at the head of the state. Because his hands are uncaloused and his mind unsoiled by servitude to material things, his soul has the freedom of an eternal city, which is none the worse for having never been built. And his knowledge is intellectual or contemplative. It is a dwelling by the eye of the mind upon the timeless linkages among eternal things.

Metaphysics was thus for Dewey a social product. It came into being as an apology for tradition, elaborated in self-defense by a leisure class. In substance this has always been its role. The greatest metaphysician of the medieval period used it to justify the absolutism of the Church; the greatest of modern metaphysicians used it to justify absolute control of the state. But it has been increasingly under suspicion since the time of Francis Bacon, who led the revolt against Greek metaphysics and its barren scholastic heritage. The knowledge of nature, he insisted, is not a matter of contemplation, but of observation and active experiment, and it is to be judged by its fruits. Knowledge is power.

In this controversy, Dewey is of course on Bacon's side, but he goes on to give the Baconian tradition a most original twist. That tradition may be developed in either of two ways. One is Macaulay's way, in which speculation is abandoned for science, not because there is any inherent impropriety about it, but because it is a waste of time, because it is of so little practical use. Sometimes this is all that Dewey too seems to be saying, but if that were really all, his reconstruction of philosophy would have been a tame affair. In fact it was revolutionary. What Dewey was saying was that the whole tradition of contemplative metaphysics was a mistake, that thinking was really an instrument of action, directed not at timeless truths but at future consequences. He writes:

an idea or conception is a claim or injunction to *act* in a certain way as the way to arrive at the clearing up of a specific situation. When the claim or pretension or plan is acted upon *it guides us truly or falsely*; it leads us to our end or away from it. Its active, dynamic function is the all-important thing about it, and in the quality of activity induced by it lies all its truth and falsity. The hypothesis that works is the *true* one; and *truth* is the abstract noun applied to the collection of cases, actual, foreseen and desired that receive confirmation in their works and consequences.¹

Here was something arrestingly radical. Dewey was reconceiving the very nature of thought. Under the influence of Darwin he had gone back to its biological origin, which he found in a threat to the life or safety of the organism. Confronted by such a threat, the organism developed a new mode of response, distinct from walking, swimming, and climbing, but the same in purpose, namely to enable it to adjust itself and survive. To think in such a crisis meant to adopt a plan of action. The truth of the thought, then, really meant the success of the plan. That was the essence of Dewey's instrumentalism. It discredited the metaphysician by making him the idle singer of an empty day. He was trying to do something with his instrument that it was not qualified to do. He took the activity of thought to be that of a searchlight playing on a cosmic curtain of changeless concepts, whereas the searchlight, the curtain, and the concepts were none of them there. Thought is an instrument not of passive contemplation, but of the active remaking of one's environment in the interest of a safer and richer life. Metaphysics has ¹ see this. From the beginning ¹ on a misconception, ¹ time of day is grandiose, unconscious ¹.

The chief counts in this indictment are two: a historical one to the effect that metaphysics has in fact been the apolo-

¹ *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, Inc., 1957), p. 156.

getic of a social class, and an analytic one, to the effect that a judgment is the adoption of a plan to act. Let us look at these two counts.

(1) Is it true that Plato's metaphysics is essentially a defense of conservatism? The most effective part of his thought is that which comes to us through Socrates. Now it is notorious that Socrates was an innovator who not only attacked popular belief but paid for it with his life. Dewey summarizes Socrates function as follows:

The unquestioned life, said Socrates, was one not fit to be lived by man, who is a questioning being because he is a rational being. Hence he must search out the reason of things, and not accept them from custom and political authority. What was to be done? Develop a method of rational investigation and proof which should place the essential elements of traditional belief upon an unshakable basis; develop a method of thought and knowledge which while purifying tradition should preserve its moral and social values unimpaired; nay, by purifying add to their power and authority. To put it in a word, that which had rested on custom was to be restored, resting no longer upon the habits of the past, but upon the very metaphysics of being and the universe. Metaphysics is a substitute for custom as the source and guarantor of higher moral and social values—that is the leading theme of the classic philosophy of Europe, as evolved by Plato and Aristotle. . . .²

Now if the charge is that Socrates forged a link between metaphysics and ethics, that is no doubt true. But this is not the same as using metaphysics as a base for "custom" and "the habits of the past." Yet according to Professor Dewey, this last was the main function of the man who showed a high respect for established customs. It is not true that a popular belief in the death for conservatism is a habit of the past. It is not true that a popular belief in the death for conservatism is a habit of the past. It is not true that a popular belief in the death for conservatism is a habit of the past. This is a very odd kind of conservatism. It may be replied that the religion and morals that Socrates employed his metaphysics to defend were not those actually held by the Greeks, but

rather a moral law that lay behind these and was only imperfectly realized in them. This, I think, is true. But in such a view there is nothing reactionary. It can be used as readily to criticize conservatism as to defend it and has often been so used by prophets and reformers. Furthermore, it may be held with equal propriety by any social class, and it redounds to the interest of no one class as opposed to any other.

Indeed, Professor Dewey's attempt to make metaphysics in this rather Marxian fashion the expression of a class interest would be hard to sustain by historical fact. One point we may grant to it: Since speculation bakes no bread in the literal sense and requires a measure of freedom from immediate cares, it is more likely to be cultivated by persons who have some leisure. But that such speculation is therefore an apology for a leisure class and a defense of the *status quo* would be very hard to make out from a roster of the great philosophical names. Metaphysicians have belonged to no one level of society; some of them have lived in garrets, like Spinoza, some have been noblemen, like Descartes. Their speculations have led them in the most diverse directions; some of them have been absolute rationalists, some extreme empiricists. Among the rationalists, some have been conservatives, like Hegel; others, probably more numerous, have been liberals, like Green and Bosanquet; rationalism was mixed with the seed of the American, French, and Russian revolutions. On the other hand, some empiricists, like Hume, have been conservatives, and others, like Dewey himself, reformers. The suggestions that speculative thinking is confined to one social soil, that it has favored conservatism rather than change, and that it is committed to the advantage of any one social class or political faction fall down very quickly before a little historical inquiry.

(2) The other pragmatic criticism is analytic rather than historical. It holds that reflection is one step in the process of practical adjustment, that far from

² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

being vision or contemplation, it is the initiation of a process of activity directed toward future results, an activity whose success in gaining these results is truth and whose failure is falsity. The metaphysicians have been either engaging in such activity without knowing it—bolstering the *status quo*, for example—or have been beating the air with meaningless gestures.

Whether this account is correct must be settled by each man for himself through looking into his own mind and asking himself whether, when he is engaged in speculative thought, this is what he is really doing. I may, of course, suffer from some defect in self-understanding, but I can only report that the account is strangely remote from anything I seem to be doing. It is true, of course, that one's thinking is often aroused by practical need. When one is lost in the woods—to take an example of Dewey's own—one may wonder anxiously where a certain faint path leads, and turn to thought as a means of escape. But even here I think Dewey's account confuses two aims that are clearly different. One is the interest in gaining some future satisfaction—in this case in getting out of the woods. The other is the interest in grasping fact—in this case, in knowing whether the faint path does in fact run to the edge of the woods. Dewey tries to resolve the second into the first, the interest in knowing into the interest in doing, and suggests that since I resort to thought as an instrument of escape, the truth of my belief lies in the success of my attempt to escape.

Now this clearly will not do. One cannot dismiss in this way the common sense kind of truth which lies in conformity with fact. Suppose I made the judgment, "this path leads to Smith's farmhouse on the border of the woods," and was straightway gathered to my fathers by a bolt of lightning. My belief would not have achieved success, and if its truth lay in its success, we could no longer call it true. But it seems to me

self-evident that, if true at all, it was true at the time I made it, whether I lived to act upon it or not.

How inescapable this conclusion is will be clear from two further considerations. One is the difference between the truth of a judgment and its verification. All pragmatists and many positivists have persistently confused the two. In a passage we have quoted from Dewey, he says: "*truth* is the abstract noun applied to the collection of cases, actual, foreseen, and desired that receive confirmation in their works and consequences." Now we may readily agree that if a belief does not receive confirmation, we cannot *know* that it is true, but is this the same as saying that it cannot *be* true? Dewey seems to be saying just this. But surely no one can consistently hold to it. If someone suggests to you that you went to bed about 11 o'clock ten years ago today, you may find yourself both utterly unable to verify the suggestion and at the same time utterly confident that either the suggestion or its contradictory is true. The truth of a belief and its verification are two different things. Its truth is its accordance with reality; its verification is the process of *assuring ourselves* of that accordance. To confuse the two is disastrous.

That they really are different is made still clearer by a second consideration. The *antecedent* truth of a belief is, as a rule, the very condition of its being verified; that is, only if it is true in a non-pragmatic sense could it ever become true in a pragmatic sense. There is a report that when Dewey lectured at Smith College, the girls raised the question whether Columbus's judgment that the earth was round must not have been true before anyone confirmed its truth by sailing round the globe. The question goes to the heart of the matter. Unless the belief that the earth was round was true in advance of its testing, there would have been no round earth to circumnavigate. No doubt Columbus made his judgment with a

dominantly practical interest in mind; he wanted to get to India, on the other side of the earth. In order to achieve that end, he needed to know something about the earth's shape. His interest in knowing that shape was no doubt the by-product of his interest in getting to India. This we freely admit. Still the cognitive and practical ends are sharply different. To identify them muddies things hopelessly.

Our line of reply to the pragmatic criticism of metaphysics will now be clear. If even such practical thinking as that of Columbus or the man in the woods is not reducible to the planning of action, still less is this true of metaphysical speculation. When we puzzle over such questions as whether space has a limit, or whether our choices are determined, or whether the universe was created at some point in past time, we are not trying to decide how to *act*. We are trying, however fumblingly, to find out the truth about something, and, as we have seen, this interest in knowing is stubbornly irreducible to the interest in doing things. When the instrumentalist tells us that only such thinking as finds its issue and test in action is really thinking at all, and therefore that metaphysical thinking—unless indeed it is an attempt to bolster old ways of living—is only pseudo-thinking, we are not disturbed. It is he, not the metaphysician, who is misconstruing the nature of thought. The ordering of behavior is one aim of thought, but it is not its distinctive or primary aim. That primary aim is to know; and in the past, the thought of the metaphysician has been regarded as the purest expression of this aim. In its depreciation by the instrumentalist we find another instance of the curious a priorism that seems to haunt empiricist philosophy. It is only too likely first to lay down a generalization as to what thinking is like, adapted over the dissenting murmurs of thought itself, and then on the strength of this to rule out as illegitimate even thinking that the keenest

minds of the past have regarded as thinking *par excellence*. If metaphysics is to be eliminated, it must be by a more searching insight than this.

III

So we turn to the third line of criticism, which claims to express such insight. It is the insight of a man who, according to a fellow psychologist, McDougall, has contributed more to his science than any other man since Aristotle, namely Freud. Freud never, so far as I know, worked out in any systematic way the implications of his work for speculative thought, but they have been stressed by many other writers—by James Harvey Robinson, for example, in an influential book of the twenties, *The Mind in the Making*, by a German psychologist named Herzberg in a book on *The Psychology of Philosophers*, and more recently by a group of trained philosophers themselves, including the two *Wisdoms* in England and Morris Lazerowitz in this country. I shall not follow any of these writers exclusively, but shall rather try to state the gist of the criticism in my own way.

It runs as follows. People used to suppose that the beliefs of philosophers were arrived at by severely rational processes. This view was confirmed by the great show of rigorous reasoning that was generally made in their pages. No one could follow the subtleties of the Platonic dialectic, for example, or the quasi-mathematical deductions of Descartes, or the arduous windings of the Hegelian trail up to its Absolute summit, without being impressed by the immense care being taken to develop the argument logically, to keep hold, at all costs, of the tenuous thread of reason. But even in the rationalistic French mind there were misgivings as to whether men could, or perhaps should, follow their reason so bleakly; does not the heart too have its reasons that mere reason does not know?

In Germany even the prodigious Hegel had his contemptuous detractors in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, both of them Freudians before Freud. Speculative philosophers, said Nietzsche, "all pose as though their real opinions had been discovered and attained through the self-evolving of a cold, pure, divinely indifferent dialectic. . . whereas in fact a prejudiced proposition, idea, or suggestion, which is generally their heart's desire abstracted and refined, is defended by them with arguments sought out after the event." Nietzsche goes on to scorn "the Tartuffery of old Kant" and to exclaim about the rigorous demonstrations of Spinoza, "how much of personal timidity and vulnerability does this masquerade of a sickly recluse display."³

This notion that speculative beliefs are as much the functions of desire as of reason was not popular among philosophers. But it gained more attention when it received a kind of imprimatur from a philosopher who was also a psychologist of the highest discernment, William James. "The history of philosophy," said James, "is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments."⁴ Whether a man accepts one view of the world or another depends more on whether he belongs to the tough-minded or the tender-minded type of personality than on any evidence he may adduce; in the past we have failed to recognize this; and "there arises thus a certain insincerity in our philosophic discussions; the potentest of all our premises is never mentioned."⁵ In a book of essays on James, one of his students, the philosopher E. B. Holt, who himself wrote a striking book on *The Freudian Wish*, bettered his master: "The entire history of philosophy is little else than a tiresome and futile series of pictures in which each philosopher has imagined what he most yearned to have in his own 'best of all possible worlds.' This is levity." But it is a form

of levity that, if we are to believe James Harvey Robinson, has been very widely indulged. After devoting much of his life to the history of ideas, Robinson concluded that "a history of philosophy and theology could be written in terms of grouches, wounded pride, and aversions, and it would be far more instructive than the usual treatment of these themes."⁶

The contribution of Freud to this issue consists mainly, I suppose, of two things. First, he woke men up to the volume and power of the subconscious. The activities of the reasoner seem to be carried on in full daylight where they are open to ready inspection; Freud insisted that this daylight or conscious mind is only that part of the iceberg which is visible above the water, and that its movements are really controlled by the far larger part hidden below the surface. The power to abstract and to reflect explicitly is a relatively late acquisition, of which we are still in imperfect command, and it is all but helpless against those ancient feelings and impulses that are rooted in our animal history. Philosophers may attempt to defy such feelings, forgetting that this defiance is itself an emotional attitude, but they cannot unload their past. Our philosophical and theological conclusions are in truth a set of Punches and Judys, controlled by invisible strings. A scholar who knew the human mind well, W. MacNeile Dixon, said: "There never yet was a philosopher, whatever they may have said, no, nor man of science, whose conclusions ran counter to the dearest wishes of his heart, who summed up against them, or condemned his hopes to death."⁷ Speculative reason, Freud maintained, for all its brave show of independence, is really the puppet of man's desires.

Secondly, Freud described the technique of control by which the nonrational part of us pulls the strings. In dealing with speculative issues, its favorite

³ *Beyond Good and Evil*, Chap. 1, Sec. 5.

⁴ *Pragmatism*, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶ *The Mind in the Making* (New York: Harper & Row, Inc., 1921), p. 45.

⁷ *The Human Situation* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1938), p. 17.

method is rationalization. We like to think of ourselves as governed by reason, as neither running impetuously beyond the evidence nor churlishly holding back, but as following the argument where the evidence leads. At the same time there are many things that we passionately want to believe, whatever the evidence may be. We want—and very much need—to believe in our own decency; we want to believe that our personality will not shortly be snuffed out like a candle; we want to believe that we do not live in an indifferent or hateful or hostile universe. Rationalization is the process by which we justify such beliefs when they are threatened. How far this process can go in the face of the evidence is to most of us astonishing; as F. C. Sharp remarked, “we are past masters in the art of throwing dust in our own eyes.” “I have never delivered a firebrand speech”; try guessing who said that. The speaker was Adolf Hitler. “We rule by love and not by the bayonet”; that is Joseph Goebbels. Further, these men may have been sincere in saying such things. If questioned, they would have produced a spate of reasons for them, all plausible in their own eyes. These specious and makeshift reasons are the props with which rationalization bolsters self-respect.

The mechanism is similar in religion. Russell has remarked about the belief in immortality that the evidence for it is so slight that its widespread acceptance is unaccountable apart from the wish it wears on its face. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud assigns the belief in God to a like irrational root. We usually set out on the journey of life under the protective eye of a father, who seems to us strong and wise and kind; if anything goes wrong, he will set it right. We grow up; we lose him; we are out in the world on our own; we cannot tell what a day may bring; we are playthings in the hands of the inscrutable power that controls the course of things. What is this power like? It is intolerable to turn from a father's face and see nothing in the

world but a blank. So we fill in the blank. If thought cannot fill it in, fear and longing will; they furtively borrow the brush of thought and paint a picture on the sky. It is a picture, disguised enough to hide its origin, of the lost father, become now far wiser and stronger and kinder. Of course it is all a trick we have played on ourselves, a pathetic and intellectually shabby trick. Still, it does not seem like one, any more than the stuffed bear does to the tearful child who misses it and wants it and, once it is there again, can go off to sleep without bad dreams.

If we can account in this way for religious belief, there would seem to be no great difficulty in extending the account a little to take in metaphysical belief. It is true that metaphysics is less patently bound up with desire and fear than religion, but mental analysis has taught us that the actual motive may be buried deep below the words or symbols overtly used. Take the proposition that has been accepted by many metaphysicians from Parmenides to Bradley: Change is unreal. This may seem neutral and colorless enough. But to the person who is insecure, who is apprehensive about his health or his means or his life, the word “change” may be a symbol of evil and a trigger of fear. Professor Lazerowitz writes:

We may be reasonably sure that a philosopher who unalterably and with complete assurance maintains that change is unreal is, under the guise of making a scientific statement, covertly reassuring himself against certain feared changes and giving expression to the wish that certain things or conditions remain as they are. . . . Its function is to ward off anxiety by strengthening an unconscious belief that threatening changes will not happen in our lives. . . . For some people the word “change,” in addition to its ordinary meaning, . . . has the private meaning of “catastrophic change.” They make the unconscious equation

Change = dreaded change. . . .

The hidden sense of the philosophic statement,

Nothing really changes,
is

No changes which would create anxiety
in me are real. . . .

Without seriously misrepresenting what holding the view comes to, we may say that it is a verbal means of protection against frightening possibilities.⁸

The belief, then, is as truly a rationalization, as truly an attempt to give a dignified and rational coloring to an essentially irrational belief, as religious superstition itself.

There are many philosophers, however, who would hold that there is great difference between the propositions of religion and those of metaphysics. Religious propositions, they would say, hardly even profess to be based on reason; they are accepted on faith; and faith is notoriously susceptible to influence from the nonrational sides of our nature. But it is the office and pride of metaphysics to be guided by reason alone; and to suppose that metaphysicians are as much the dupes of desire as religious devotees is surely not very plausible. Such an imputation, if applied to natural science or mathematics, would not be taken seriously. Why should it be accepted when applied to metaphysics?

At this point Professor Lazerowitz has made an interesting suggestion. The reason why metaphysical propositions are so open to control by desire is that they are not open to control by evidence; they are in truth not propositions at all, but disguised recommendations regarding the use of words. Consider the proposition: Change is unreal. If this is a meaningful assertion, it must be either empirical or a priori. Is it empirical? No. If it were, it would be so implausible that not even a metaphysician could believe it; one could disprove it at once by pointing at any speeding cloud or car. But this sort of evidence does not move the metaphysician in the least, for part of what he is maintaining is that such observed changes

are illusions. Is the proposition then a priori? No again. For it pretends to be a statement about reality, and no a priori proposition can say anything about the world; "it can give us no information," writes Professor Lazerowitz, "about the existence or nonexistence of anything or about the nature of anything. It states nothing whatever about reality."⁹ It can be neither confirmed nor refuted by any actual or imaginable observation. The proposition, then, that change is unreal is neither empirical nor a priori. And since a proposition must be one or the other, it cannot be a proposition at all. But if not, what is it? Professor Lazerowitz answers that it is a proposal regarding usage.

When a metaphysician declares and proves that nothing really changes or that an effect cannot have "more reality" than its cause or that all relations are internal, he imagines himself, and is thought by others, to be announcing the discovery of an important fact about things, effects, and relations; whereas what he is actually doing is introducing a linguistic innovation the contemplation of which gives him and others pleasure. . . . Metaphysics is linguistic play with a deep purpose.¹⁰

The apparent assertion that change is unreal is thus in fact the expression of a wish, a wish that the danger implicit in change may be removed, a longing to control and banish a threat, expressed through manipulating the word that names it.

In this theory of metaphysics there are two major points: (1) that statements in this field are not truly statements but verbal proposals; and (2) that the character of these proposals is determinable by desire. What are we to say of these contentions?

(1) As for the first, that metaphysical statements are proposals about usage, I find it hard to verify in my own philosophizing. Even after my suspicions have been duly aroused by this account, I still

⁸ *The Structure of Metaphysics* (New York: Humanities Press, 1955), pp. 69-70.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

seem to myself to be making judgments, asserting something to be true. If it is said that such assertions can be neither empirical nor a priori, I can only reply that I often seem to make metaphysical assertions of both kinds. Our present type of critic would count as empirical all assertions regarding which empirical evidence can be adduced. The statement that God is good would then surely be empirical, as would the statement that the human will is determined. Those who disbelieve in the existence or goodness of God most commonly argue against it by pointing to the strange distribution in the world of happiness and unhappiness, and the facts of needless animal pain. Such evidence is obviously both relevant and empirical. How do people argue the issue of free will? Sometimes, of course, by laying it down as self-evident that all events have causes, or that responsibility implies freedom, but if such initial moves are not accepted, they go on to argue the matter on grounds that are clearly empirical; the determinist argues from the widening area of events found to be governed by law, or from the Freudian discoveries regarding the influence of the unconscious. I do not think that either the determinist or the indeterminist thesis can be *proved* by empirical evidence, but to say that such evidence is not even relevant is to rule out a vast mass of argumentation that has been accepted as relevant by both sides. This seems arbitrary.

Professor Lazerowitz is no doubt right, however, that most metaphysical statements are of an a priori, not an empirical, kind. These too are to be rejected. Why? Because they pretend to assert about reality, whereas anyone who is up to date in philosophy knows that a priori statements never do so. Of course Bradley thought he was talking about reality, as indeed the whole succession of metaphysicians did, from Plato to McTaggart; but they all suffered from a curious blindness that has at last been cured by linguistic analysis. A priori statements

express conventions about the use of words.

I cannot accept this view. I believe that when Bradley said that the world was a consistent whole, he meant precisely what he said, and moreover that he was right about it. Why should anyone deny that he could have meant this? The chief argument I can discover is that if he had meant to report something about the constitution of the world, he must have been denying that it had some alternative character, but since he is quite unable to describe or specify what he is excluding, he is *including* nothing definite either. Now of course Bradley cannot specify what a world would be like that contradicted itself; he would admit that a surface at once black and not black is not only nonexistent but inconceivable; that is involved in calling the law of contradiction necessary. But granting that the phrase "black and nonblack" applies to nothing that exists, why should that prevent the phrase "not both black and not-black" from applying to what does exist? If there is an answer to this question, I do not know what it is. When one says that a shoe at a given point cannot be both black and nonblack, one is saying something that one takes to be true, and how could it be true without being true of something? A linguistic philosopher may say: "No, you misunderstand your own meaning. What you are really doing is announcing your intention not to use the word black of something to which you also apply the word 'nonblack.' You are adopting a verbal convention." To which the natural answer is, "why adopt this particular convention?" And to that the only plausible answer is "because I can see that a thing cannot be both black and nonblack, and I want my speech to accord with fact." To say that our statement about the shoe is a convention implies that I have an alternative to it, that I could take the shoe, if I wished, to be both black and not-black. But I cannot do this if I try. The statement, therefore, is not a convention. It is at once neces-

sary and true of the nature of things.¹¹

To say, then, that metaphysical statements are not propositions at all, but recommendations about usage does not seem very plausible. Why does Professor Lazerowitz think it is? Partly at least because he thinks that if they were really propositions, they would be so plainly absurd. Who in his senses would say that change is unreal, if that meant that nothing moves? To say such a thing while you are aware at that very moment of moving your tongue or your pencil would be so preposterous that even a metaphysician would be hardly capable of it. But this is not as strong an argument as it appears. There is something odd, to be sure, in denying what we seem to perceive so plainly, but it is not a wanton or willful denial. When the philosopher sets out to understand his world, he assumes that if something is self-contradictory, a round square for example, it is not to be accepted as real. Indeed he could not say anything else, for if the real were self-contradictory, there would be no point in trying to understand it; the postulate that what is real is consistent is imposed by the attempt to think at all. Very well, suppose one tries to think as clearly as possible about some aspect of the world, such as space or time or change; and suppose one finds that it has two characters which seem equally essential but are incompatible with each other. What is one to say? Zeno saw, as clearly as he saw anything, a ball moving from point to point. He also thought he clearly saw with the eye of his mind that the distance it moved was divisible infinitely, that to traverse this distance it had to complete an infinite series, that this meant reaching the end of what was endless, and that this was nonsense. Which was he to retain—the clear perception of his senses or the clear insight of his intelligence? He chose the latter. There was nothing

arbitrary about this. Indeed his ground for it was so strong that many people, myself included, are in doubt to this day whether he has been effectively answered. Bradley thought, rightly or wrongly, that he had grounds of similar strength. To say that in thus “going against common sense” these men were saying something so absurd that we can understand it only by supposing that they were engaged in something totally different from what they thought they were, namely preserving their peace of mind through new and bizarre verbal usage, seems to me far less probable than their own straightforward account.

To this Professor Lazerowitz would reply, I think, that the course taken by Zeno and Bradley was more absurd than I have represented it. One can see with the smallest thought that you cannot get rid of perceived motion by calling it illusory. For even the illusion of motion is still motion in the sense condemned. If motion is impossible logically, then it is impossible that anything should *seem* to move. In denying what their senses revealed, these metaphysicians were thus committing themselves to irredeemable absurdity. I do not think Zeno and Bradley would have been much perturbed. They would no doubt reply that the choice between absurdities confronts us still. It is absurd to deny that we have even the illusion of motion; granted. It is also absurd to say that even in that illusion we are experiencing the ending of an endless series. Forced to choose, these men think it more credible that we should be deluded about sense experience than that it should really elude the law of contradiction. They may of course have been mistaken that motion does violate that law. But this is not at the moment the point. They thought they saw clearly that it did, and if one does think this, what other course can one take as a philosopher? It is surely a hard fate that an uncompromising devotion to reason should incur the charge of psychopathology.

¹¹ That a priori statements apply to what exists is argued in fuller detail in my *Reason and Analysis* (La Salle, Ill.: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1962), Ch. X.

(2) It is time we turned to that charge. I think we must agree with Professor Lazerowitz that if metaphysical statements are really recommendations to use words in ways outrageous to common sense, there would be some point in the charge. But we have found no reason to think that they are anything but what they pretend to be, namely assertions about the world. The question of interest for us, then, is whether propositions of this kind are under the constraint of emotion and desire in a way in which those of science are not.

On this head there seem to me three important things to say. (a) First, the objectivity varies in degree with the subject matter and the thinker. Consider the subject matter. No one doubts that objective thinking is possible in mathematics. No one doubts that it is possible in physics and astronomy, though one sees the law of increasing entropy to entail the extinction of all life, one may feel an inner tension rising. In biology the road is harder; the theory of evolution was for long an emotional storm center. The difficulty increases as one moves along the spectrum of disciplines toward the relatively concrete and personal, like religion, ethics, and aesthetics. Now metaphysics shares some of the difficulties of religion. Some metaphysical propositions are in fact religious dogmas, and these notoriously engage our hopes and fears. Even when metaphysical issues are not directly religious—the issues, for example, whether our wills are free or whether our minds are by-products of our bodies—they may implicate our self-respect. The statement that change is unreal clearly has for some persons an emotional tone, as Professor Lazerowitz says; it carries a promise, however vague, that they will never be blotted out or “cast as rubbish to the void.”

Now what this series of disciplines suggests is not that at one end there is complete objectivity and at the other mere emotional indulgence, but that objectivity varies in difficulty, that it is relatively

easy at one end and relatively hard at the other. No thinking, even the most abstract, is safe altogether from the intrusion of desire. It is said that when Newton was nearing the end of those calculations by which he established the inverse square for the attraction of the earth for the moon, he could no longer trust himself in his excitement, and gave them over to another hand. Still, no one doubts that he could and did think objectively in astronomy. Darwin admitted, with characteristic candor, that for a long time the thought of the development of the eye, which seemed to push forward regardless of survival value, almost made him sick; but his handling of the evidence is highly objective nevertheless. When one comes to issues where one's own fortunes are directly involved, objectivity is hardest of all. We have noted Russell's remark that the belief in immortality is rooted in passionate desire. Yet even on this subject objectivity has been achieved in the sense that firm verdicts have been given in the teeth of desire. T. H. Huxley hated and dreaded the thought of extinction, but was convinced, notwithstanding, that extinction lay in store for him. On the other hand, C. D. Broad dreads the thought of surviving death in the fragmentary forms suggested by psychical research, but thinks it probable, nevertheless, that he is doomed to some such survival. What all this suggests is indeed increasing difficulty as one moves toward the disciplines with keener emotional involvements, but no sheer helplessness anywhere.

Just as objectivity varies in difficulty with the character of what is thought about, so it varies with the character of the thinking mind. It does not indeed vary, as one might suppose, inversely as the emotion with which the thinking is done. One may think with much feeling, and also with much clearness of head, as Mill did in his *Liberty*, and it is to be doubted if the “passionless sage” of the Stoics really did better. No one's thinking is wholly uninfluenced by desire and emo-

tion, and the only emotion not dangerous to thought is the love of truth itself, which Housman called "the faintest of human passions." The business of the thinker, whether in science, theology, or metaphysics, is surely to follow the evidence as singlemindedly as may be. Where thinkers differ is in the clearness with which intruding emotion is recognized and the firmness with which it is excluded.

I must confess to certain antipathies and admirations in this matter. My antipathies are for the person who offers himself as a philosopher and therefore a lover of truth, but who obviously thinks with his blood, habitually overstates his case, and is not above shouting down those who try to think and talk with quiet reasonableness; I have most imperfect sympathies with the Luthers, Kierkegaards, and Nietzsches of the world. They may be courageous prophets and rousing agitators, but they are intellectually somewhat contemptible. Carlyle described Mill as "sawdust to the masthead." As one looks back on their main points of difference, Mill now seems usually prosaic and right, and Carlyle eloquent, dogmatic, and wrong. The thinkers I find myself admiring more and more are the masters of self-criticism and self-restraint, the line of sober truth-lovers that runs from Aristotle through Locke to Sidgwick. Such people are likely to seem dull, and really to be so if it is dull to eschew rhetoric, to be wary of pre-judgment, and to keep one's eye single for fact. But they wear better than their more colorful competitors. They show that men can think with detachment about issues of the highest human moment. Not that they are without prejudice; nobody is; but their thought at least proceeds on Butler's curiously difficult principle: "Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why should we wish to be deceived?"

(b) I turn to my second remark on the thesis that thought in metaphysics is

under nonrational control. Freud, who has exposed the depth of our irrationality, also indicated the line of escape from it. Indeed he was primarily a therapist. Following the Socratic injunction, know thyself, he showed how, by bringing our complexes to light, we could understand them, circumvent them, and lead ourselves back into rational courses. A man who knows that his religious belief is based on fear has already begun the criticism of that belief; so far as one realizes that one's belief in the unreality of change is in fact the product of insecurity, one is on the road to an amended metaphysic. Freud's therapy has been the means of bringing people round to more reasonable beliefs in a great variety of fields, and it is hard to see why it should not have a similar effect in metaphysics.

(c) A third reflection—like the second, familiar—is this: the thesis that metaphysical speculation is wish fulfilment is self-refuting. Those who propose the thesis are usually asserting two things: first, something about the truth of metaphysical statements, namely that they are generally false (a commoner position than that they are recommendations about words), second, something about the causation of such statements, namely that they are produced by desire. Consider these two assertions. According to the first, such propositions as that change is unreal or that matter does not exist are false. This can only mean that their contradictories are true, i.e., that change is real and that matter does exist. Now if the propositions denied are metaphysical, their denials must be metaphysical too. Hence if all metaphysical propositions are the product of desire, so are these. And if propositions produced by desire have no claim on our belief, these also have no such claim.

Now consider this second assertion, that metaphysical statements are produced by desire. It may be held that, though it is a statement about metaphysical statements, it is not such a state-

ment itself, and so is immune from self-criticism. What sort of statement is it? If it is empirical, it runs far beyond the evidence, since no one has examined all the metaphysical statements made in history and found them to be caused by wish fulfilments. We could know it to be universally true only if it were an a priori proposition. But a priori propositions, we are told, never say anything about fact at all, and perhaps no one would hold in any case that there is something in the nature of metaphysical statements from which it follows necessarily that they are produced by desire. This assertion, then, being neither empirically verifiable nor a priori, looks suspiciously like an assertion that the critics themselves would call metaphysical. And if it is so, it stands self-confessed as a product of desire. Why, then, should it be thought reliable while others of the same class are not? It appears to be self-refuting.

(d) We now come to the fourth and last line of attack on metaphysics, that of logical empiricism or positivism, an attack that is in my opinion the most effective of all. It has two main prongs, the verifiability theory of meaning and the analytic theory of a priori knowledge. Positivists have used the first of these theses to show that metaphysical statements are meaningless, and the second to show that the speculative method in philosophy can achieve no new knowledge. Let us look at these contentions.

The best-known formulation of the first is that of Moritz Schlick: The meaning of a proposition is its mode of verification. What was Schlick trying to do in offering this thesis? He was trying to squeeze the excess water, so to say, out of both philosophy and science, to free them from irresponsible theory. The positivists were in active rebellion against the sort of speculation that prevailed among German philosophers. In the misty pronouncements of Hegel about being and nonbeing, and the opaque pontifications of Heidegger about how "nothing no-

things," the positivists thought philosophy was on the very threshold of charlatan-ism. Is there no standard, no criterion or test, by which we can distinguish the meaningful from the meaningless? Schlick thought he had found one. Whenever we make a meaningful statement, he contended, there must be something in sense experience, which we should accept as attesting its truth. If we can point to no such experience, then we do not know what we mean by its truth as opposed to its falsity; it has, in fact, no meaning. With this insight we have all that is necessary to separate propositional sheep from goats. Someone says, for example, that daffodils are yellow. Is that meaningful? Of course it is, because you can look and see. Someone says that atoms collide with each other. Is that meaningful? Yes, because we can point to intersecting tracks in a Wilson cloud chamber and say that this is what we mean by the atoms colliding. Someone says that there are things-in-themselves behind phenomena. Is this meaningful? No, it is not; for we can point to nothing in our sense experience which would distinguish the truth of this proposition from its falsity. With the aid of this sharp weapon, we can proceed to eliminate the loose metaphysical talk that has prevailed so long about things and selves in themselves, eternities and infinities, material and mental substances, causal necessities—even God, freedom, and immortality.

As positivists further applied this criterion, however, ambiguities came to light. Was it practical verifiability that the test required or merely theoretical verifiability? Suppose someone said that the temperature at the center of the earth was 1000° centigrade. There is no practical way of verifying the statement, but is it therefore to be put down as meaningless? This is surely extreme. The criterion must be read as rejecting only what is *theoretically* unverifiable, that is, what I could not conceivably verify. When this was cleared up, however, another ambiguity appeared. Must a proposition, to

be meaningful, be *conclusively* verifiable; must we be able to show that it is *certainly* true? If so, no physical law will be meaningful, for we can never verify that there are no exceptions to it. Even the statement that this is the pail or the poker I saw yesterday will be meaningless, for I can never exclude all possible substitutions or errors. The verifiability required must then be less than conclusive; it must be the weak verifiability that would give to a proposition not certainty, but some degree of probability.

The interpretation of their test that thus commended itself to the positivists was a combination of theoretical with weak verifiability: Only those propositions are meaningful, which one might in theory support or oppose by relevant sense observations. So interpreted, the test was liberal, since it required neither practical nor conclusive verification; yet it was thought to be rigorous enough to exclude metaphysics once for all.

Alas, even in philosophy there are slips between the cup and the lip. The test, even when thus refined, remained open to three objections which were extremely damaging. In the first place it dismissed as meaningless many statements that it was quite absurd to describe so. The statement that you are now thinking of your last holiday would have to be called meaningless, since it is not possible, even theoretically, for me or anyone else to verify in his own experience that you are now having a certain thought. I could, of course, observe your words or expressions, but these are not what I am referring to. If it is replied that there are empirical laws correlating outward expressions with inward thoughts, and that I can fall back on these to show a probability that you are thinking thus and so, the answer is that these laws themselves could not be established if the references to others' thoughts, which are themselves unobservable, is disallowed. Again, it would be meaningless to talk of this table as existing unobserved, since no one could observe an unobserved table.

But the fact is that I can think with perfect clearness of the table as standing there observed by no one. Between the existence of a thing and its verifiability in sense there is no necessary connection.

Secondly, the criterion not only excludes propositions that are clearly meaningful, but admits others that are clearly metaphysical. It will be remembered that a statement is to be accepted as meaningful if empirical evidence can be adduced for or against it. In the light of this criterion, consider the old metaphysical problems of God, freedom, and immortality. There is empirical evidence for and against all of them. The distribution of pain in the world is relevant to the existence of God; the discoveries of Freud are relevant to the existence of freedom; the findings of psychical research are relevant to the claim to immortality. One can adduce empirical evidence against even the propositions that change is unreal and that the Absolute is timeless, since they are at least at odds with ordinary perceptions; and hence, by the test, are meaningful. Countless other propositions of a metaphysical stripe would likewise pass the test. In short, under the very auspices that were supposed to rule it out, metaphysics comes pouring back.

Thirdly, as was speedily pointed out, the criterion rules *itself* out as meaningless. It tells us that no statement can be accepted as meaningful that cannot be verified in sense perception. But how can you verify *that* statement in sense perception? You cannot examine all the propositions in question or even any definite fraction of them, and if you did, how could *sense* detect a lack of meaning? Indeed even the assertion that meaningful statements *are* verifiable is not strictly verifiable in sense. To "see" that a statement has been verified is not to have a sensation of sight or any other sense; it is to apprehend by intelligence the relation between a proposition and the evidence for it, and such weight is not a matter of observation at all.

The first positivist line of attack on metaphysics, the appeal to the verifiability theory to show that its propositions were meaningless, thus proved largely nugatory. I say "largely" because the criticism was not made wholly in vain. It forced philosophers to a closer scrutiny of their own statements; it sensitized them to the vagueness and emptiness of much that would once have passed muster. The contrast in clearness of thought and expression between those areas of the world where positivism and its successors have done their work and those where existentialism prevails is plain and striking. If the appeal to verifiability failed to eliminate metaphysics, it did at least help to make metaphysics responsible.

We now come to the second positivist line of attack. It is an attempt to show that the sort of reasoning on which metaphysics has chiefly relied cannot supply us with new knowledge. That most speculative philosophers have relied heavily on a priori reasoning will hardly be disputed; they have not been content with empirical or probable argument; they have sought to demonstrate their conclusions, to prove them by necessary reasoning. Aquinas thought he could prove the existence of God; Descartes took as his ideal of philosophical reasoning the demonstrations of Euclid; Spinoza expounded his system in geometrical form, deducing it throughout from a set of definitions, axioms, and postulates which he regarded as self-evident; Leibniz thought that if our intellects were penetrating enough, we could deduce from the "essence" of Alexander everything that happened to him in the course of his life. Most rationalists have been fervent admirers of mathematics, and till the time of Kant there was little question that mathematics supplied not only certain knowledge but a new and ever-expanding knowledge about the nature of things. Kant did at last bring this into question; he devoted the great *Critique* to an in-

quiry into the nature and kinds of a priori insight. One distinction of much importance he laid down at the outset, the distinction between a priori insight that was analytic and that which was synthetic. An analytic proposition is one that merely sets forth in its predicate all or part of the concept that stands as its subject, for example, "all matter is extended." A synthetic proposition is one whose predicate follows from the subject but is not contained in it, for example, " $7 + 5 = 12$." He was convinced that mathematical propositions generally were of this latter type, and hence that new knowledge could be achieved by pure deduction.

Now this the positivists denied. They held on the contrary that all a priori knowledge was analytic merely. Take some necessary propositions at random. "A straight line is the shortest line between two points." Yes, of course it is; that is part of what you mean by calling a line straight, as is shown by the fact that you would take it to be self-contradictory to call it straight if it were not the shortest line. "A material thing cannot be in two places at once." Obviously again; if something could be in two places at once, a universal, for example, it would not be called a material thing; the proposition merely sets out in part what we mean by a word. "Nothing can be colored in different ways at the same time with respect to the same part of itself." Of this statement Professor Ayer said: "I am expressing an analytic proposition which records our determination to call a color expanse which differs in quality from a neighboring color expanse a different part of a given thing." Similarly, when we say " $7 + 5 = 12$," we are reporting that we use, or propose to use, " $7 + 5$ " and " 12 " of the same objects. For the positivist, to say that a necessary proposition explicates our meaning and that it reports our usage come to the same thing. Such statements express no new insights into the nature of things; they simply make

clear to ourselves and others how we are using certain terms. The ancient notion, therefore, that thinking of this kind can carry us to fresh and profound knowledge turns out to be a pathetic delusion.

Revolutionary as this theory is, it has carried conviction to a large part of the philosophic community; many analytic philosophers think of it as established beyond dispute. Nevertheless it seems to me a mistake. I will state very briefly two or three reasons for thinking so.

The most obvious reason is that there is much deductive reasoning that resists all attempts to construe it as analytic. This is true of much of the thinking in geometry. Professor Langford supplied a well-known example when he cited the reasoning by which we deduce the properties of a cube. Of course one can define a cube in such a way as to include any given property, for example its having twelve edges. But one need not do so; one can start equally well with the conception of a solid whose faces are squares, or a regular solid with six faces, and arrive at its having twelve edges by deduction. And this insight is, or may be, genuinely new knowledge. A common reply is that it is psychologically new, that is, new to the thinker, but not logically new because it is contained in the subject concept. But if one defines a concept as "containing" all its implications, the question is being begged at the outset. The fact is that one can conceive with perfect clearness a solid whose faces are squares, without any reference to its having twelve edges; one concept necessitates the other, but without including it in any ordinary sense. There are plenty of examples of this relation. Whatever is blue is extended; whatever is red all over is not green all over; whatever has shape has size; whatever has quantity is divisible without limit; whatever is an integer is odd or even; if *A* has a right to the payment of a debt by *B*, *B* has a duty to pay the debt to *A*. In all these cases, one is arriving at a new fact or property en-

tailed by what one starts with, but not included in it.

Again, the plausibility of the new doctrine is partly purchased by sweeping into one bag, labelled "necessary," propositions that differ widely. "All bachelors are unmarried men"; that is clearly necessary; subject and predicate are names for the same thing. "Gold is yellow"; that too is necessary if one has decided to include yellowness in one's definition of gold, though of course we can see no necessary connection between the other qualities of gold and its being yellow. "Blue is a color." Necessary again; color is essential to blueness; indeed we should begin any attempt at definition with "blue is a color which" But there is clearly nothing arbitrary in saying that blue is a color, as in saying that gold is yellow; there is a clear "must" in the first case which is absent from the second. That is true again when we pass to the judgment, "whatever is colored is extended," though here the necessity is synthetic. The positivist has thrown all these propositions indiscriminately into one class, that of necessary truth. And so far he is right. But he has failed to note that they are necessary in deeply different senses. The first two are necessary only because one has arbitrarily associated certain properties in the thought of the subject class; the others are necessary because of a linkage in the attributes themselves. To read the second pair in the light of the first is to confuse a necessity that does indeed depend on our own usage with a necessity in the nature of things.

One final comment. When the positivist tells us that all a priori propositions are analytic, what kind of statement is he making? It is clearly not meant as an empirical generalization, since then, for all we know, the next proposition we find may be an exception to it. It must, then, on the positivist view, be an a priori proposition. Is it analytic? If this means that it states all or part of what

is commonly meant by the term, it is a mistake, since many philosophers would disclaim this as their meaning. If it means merely a proposal to define the term in this way, it places no constraint on others, for they are free to propose otherwise. It looks very much as if the proposition that all a priori propositions are analytic were itself being offered as a synthetic a priori insight. One is reminded of Royce's remark, "I am very willing to hear people condemn the a priori, for I notice that they do so on a priori grounds."

We have completed our review of the main arguments employed in recent years against metaphysical thinking. They have missed their mark with a uniformity that is surely significant. The historical argument proves that the advance of metaphysics has been disappointingly slow; it proves nothing more. The pragmatic argument shows that thinking probably originated in a practical interest; it fails to show that thinking must be dominated by that interest now. The psychoanalytic

argument shows illuminatingly that some conclusions are the products of repressed desire; it does not show that theory generally, even in metaphysics, must be controlled by such desire. The positivist argument reveals some deplorably cloudy meanings and some uncritically dogmatic reasoning among metaphysicians; but in trying to confine them to the sensibly verifiable and the deductively analytic, it is contriving a cage of straw.

We cannot, of course, show that metaphysics is a profitable or even a valid enterprise by showing that these criticisms miss their mark. But after all, they have been urged by names that stand for much learning and much acuteness. If they all signally fail, as I think they do, if so much learning, acuteness, and determination have proved of so small avail to lay this ancient and stubborn ghost, there seems to be only one prospect open to us. We shall have to suffer with metaphysics for a long time to come.