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Metaphysics and finding a middle ground between The Positivists and Plato. Why experience is so important.

The Search for a Metaphysical Foundation.

Regardless of which field you find yourself in, presuppositions are generally the starting point for everyone. It could depend on the presuppositions of a particular mathematical formula in physics or on the veracity of physical principles in chemistry. How about mathematics? Still, that also suggests Logic. So, can we escape this and approach an investigation purely indiscriminate? If not, then what should we ground our metaphysics on? The problem, briefly, is one of deciding what our starting assumptions are going to be; how we choose principles with which to begin and how we make sure that these principles are adequate. It is a problem of where to begin and how to begin. I'd like to make clear It is not easy to say what metaphysics is, but Aristotles notion, which is most encapsulating posits, metaphysics is " [...]the most basic level of physical science, a true meta-physics, the most valuable knowledge of natural science, and in the latter sense – the highest and ultimate knowledge of all the existence – the true meta-physics." (Djijian & Hovhannisyan , 2020. p. 8). Metaphysics aims at the highest knowledge of the natural sciences, moving from the observable to the theoretical. (Tahko 2013, p. 50) puts it this way, "[…]first philosophy studies a certain type of being – the fundamental type, and it may also involve an account of which (kind of) things are, or could be, fundamental."

And so, it seems suiting that metaphysics ought to be grounded it the sciences? after all they are one of the most assured things we know to have a strong foundation. Well, I want to interrogate that claim further. There seems to be two problems that arise with this approach. (1) That Metaphysics in dealing with the highest principle/being cannot be grounded in the *particular* sciences as the starting principles/foundation. Since the particular sciences have a prior assured principle, it borrows from other fields and therefore are not assured in themselves but only due to prior principles. (2) If Metaphysics is grounded in the sciences, then our foundations are purely built on scientific principles, meaning when the sciences err (which they often do), we are forced to eliminate all our metaphysical inquiry since they are also built on errors. So, it seems we are left to find a foundation to build our metaphysics on something that, (1) is the same across all the *particular* fields and does not depend on it for its foundation. (2) Is also an assured foundation that cannot fail to be what it is, even when the sciences fail. Therefore, I will argue that our experience is to be considered as the best candidate for building our metaphysical inquiries.

The Error of the transcendental foundation to metaphysics

But what does that entail, what does it mean to ground our metaphysics on experience? To answer this let us begin with what it means for our metaphysical inquiry to be grounded prior to experience (A priori). Plato takes on this approach in his postulation of the *Forms* in *The Republic*, specifically in the Allegory of the Cave (Allhoff et al., 2008, p. 193-196). The cave for Plato is where we exist, and outside the cave there exists the metaphysical…the transcendentals, highest kind of *being* . The notion

of the transcendentals as A-priori, the foundational principles start with presupposed teleology of all physical objects, an ordering of some sort. And so, rather than our metaphysical being grounded in the physical, Plato first beings by reifying the existence of the Forms, in result our experience is a sort of lesser existence than that of the Forms. Because of the Forms being the presupposed foundation in which all physical things derive their existence, there is a lesser ontological commitment to our experience, and so our experience is subject to the sceptical discursiveness of the mind. This seems inadequate and counter intuitive; as a part of us realises that if the Forms are really the grounding for all metaphysics, that means our experience and so our existence is of a lesser sense, therefore demanding no definite commitment to them. But if this is true then we can never really know the foundations of Metaphysics since they are beyond us. We end up in a circular motion of trying to presuppose something we cannot experience as the foundation of metaphysics.

The logical Positivists thoughts on Metaphysics… R.I.P Metaphysics?

This is precisely what the logical positivist noted. That metaphysics simply becomes meaningless when not grounded in that which is real, and that which is real to us. (Ayer, 1959, p. 60) states that "Many had declared metaphysics false, since it contradicts our empirical knowledge. Others have believed it to be uncertain, on that ground that its problems transcend the limits of human knowledge". Quine in his famous essay *"On What There Is" (1953)* attacks the platonic impulses to overpopulate our language and metaphysics with unnecessary ontological commitments due to its lack of grounding in anything certain. And so, he posits Ockham Razor. (Dieterle 2001, p. 52-53) notes that Ockham's razor involves a value claim; that any proposition must include an argument for that value claim. He states "x" in the "necessity for x" and secondly, we ought to accept 'x' as the determiner of our ontological commitments. In this postulation, Quine aims to reduce Metaphysical claims to logical proposition that can be affirmed or denied by scientific endeavour to ensure that all claims are meaningful. By turning names such as "Pegasus" into variable "x", Quine can regiment sentences about certain entities to play a descriptive role. Sentences such as "Pegasus does not exist" are converted into "there is not x, where x is winged, x is a horse and x is magical". In this method Quine is able to make negative existential claims about ontology which are confirmed through science, without reifying the existence of thing being denied. As Bertrand Russell notes that sentences such as "Pegasus does not exist" posits an existence of Pegasus, since the things being denoted must exists in some way, or else it cannot be denied. Through regimenting sentences such as "Pegasus does not exist" to $\exists(x) (Hx \wedge Wx)$, Quine is now able to hand over these existential claims which are confirmed and denied through science, allowing no metaphysical jargon which cannot be confirmed or denied slipping in our ontological discussions using natural language. Admittedly Quines attempt to reorientate meaning into propositional claims of ontology an in doing so re-orientating metaphysics

back to something which is real, namely empiricism has major flaws. As (Greimann 2014, p. 162) points out this approach too does not get rid of presuppositions. He argues that Quines austere ontology "offends against the role ontological commitment[…]" since it denies the existence of semantic facts/structures that are presupposed for truth producing condition to be possible via semantic structures. By reducing our language to only having meaning when it is a variable irradicates the expressive power, implying a loss in the formulation of a theory.

Conclusion- The alternative

(Edo Pivčević, 2013, p. 19) points out the phenomenological constitution and the Positivist program that Quine endeavoured are designed to rid philosophy of a-priori metaphysical assumptions and that both use experience as a basis. The important thing to note here is that the Logical Positivist endeavour fails to recognise all experience as experience. While the phenomenological approach to metaphysics recognises 'intentional experience' or 'acts', every such experience is said to have property of 'being' and a consciousness of something, of being 'intentional related to something'. (Edo Pivčević, 2013, p. 21) argues that the question when endeavouring into the beginning assumptions of our metaphysics, the question should not be whether what are the real objects out there that confirm our propositions, as most Kantian and Platonic metaphysics begin with, but rather, what experiences are most fundamental? As our choice of experiences and the way we interpret them must depend on the kind of initial assumptions we make. Husserl stipulates that a purely conceptual analysis is not enough, it is not enough to interrogate and analyse our logical structures and categorical frameworks. To analyse the technical problems of construction of scientific system and the logical structure if scientific argument - all this, useful and necessary though it is not enough to enable us to understand fully the meaning of metaphysics. Therefore, there must be classification the nature and the sources of the activity which lie behind all conceptual work, one that the theoretician takes for granted. As Husserl says 'we must[…] rise above the self-obviousness of the theoretician who while preoccupies with things, theories and methods is quite unaware of the interiority of his productive thought and who while living in these things, theories, methods, never focuses his attention to his own productive activity"- Husserl re-orientates our focus to not just thoerical knowledge but the lived experience, especially that which we have direct experience to, mental activity. So, as I have argued we must not neglect the positivist concern, nor reject the platonic transcendentals, as the principles of both are fundamental to metaphysics. Rather as (Gavin, 2013, p. 67) puts it, " "pure experience" is a postulate but is so in a very real sense; it points beyond, metaphysically speaking reality is broader than the known pure experience represents an attempt […] or disclose, reality."

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