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Immanuel Kant's Metaphysical Perspectives: Innovative Insights

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Abstract

What is metaphysics? It is not easy to say. If we look to work in metaphysics, we will find different characteristics. Sometimes it seems that metaphysics is descriptive in nature and sometimes they are normative. However, disagreements about the nature of metaphysics are associated with its long history. Metaphysics has been practiced for more than 2000 years. As a result, there is a problem in defining the subject matter and methodology of metaphysics. Similarly, there is ambiguity about the origin of the word 'Metaphysics'. By collecting Aristotle's untitled writings, his later thinker Andronicus accidentally named it Metaphysics. Aristotle called it First Philosophy, Theology. The aim of metaphysics is to attain knowledge or wisdom. From that on time, we understand by Metaphysics whatever is discussed in this book. The subject matter of metaphysics is the search for the first cause of reality. However, this first cause is at the same time the prime being and unmoved mover, which is non-cause itself, the cause of all driving forces. On the other hand, Metaphysics as a general being or being qua being which is the first cause of the world. Aristotle's metaphysical ideas also influenced later philosophers. According to the medieval philosopher Saint Augustine, God is the metaphysical principle. God is Immanent and transcendent in the soul. Everything which is related to God is true. According to Anselm, God is the highest being, which is nothing greater than its thought. He believes that the real existence of God is derived from the idea of God. Aquinas criticizes and says that the existence of ideas can be derived from ideas, not real existence. Like Aristotle, he refers to God as the first cause and unmoved mover of the world. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, metaphysics is not limited to the discussion of first causes or the general being of the world, but also includes the mind-body problem, freedom of will, immortality of the soul, etc. Kant criticizes this type of metaphysics and says knowledge is the result of the combined process of experience and intellect. The aim of my article is to discuss how Kantian metaphysics to open a new door to us.

Keywords: Metaphysics, Being, Substance, Form, Matter, Transcendent, Immanent

In the etymological sense Metaphysics derives from two Greek words Meta and Physics. Literally Metaphysics means after the physics. According to Aristotle,

"The study of being qua being turns out to be the same thing as the study of the primary cause and principles, which has previously been said to be the

tasks of philosophy, because the primary cause and principles are the cause and principal of being qua being.”¹

In other words, Metaphysics is the inquiry for the first cause and discussion of the general structure of the world. Metaphysics does not mean first in terms of text, but rather metaphysics is the discussion of the foundation of all existence or the highest level of being.

“... but this does not mean the branch of philosophy that should be studied first. Rather, it concerns issues that are in some sense the most fundamental or at the highest level of generality.”²

The study of being qua being refers three things: first, the study, second, the subject matter of metaphysics or being, and third, the method of metaphysics or qua being. Study means acquiring knowledge and wisdom. The subject matter or being which is not something changeable, not true or false, it is the being of substance and being in actuality and potentially. The Latin word ‘qua’ means as beings in so far as they are beings. Metaphysics studies the nature of being itself. The subject matter of metaphysics is eternal, unchangeable, self-existence substance, which is one or unity. Here, the argument is that there are multiple entities or existences in the world. All these existences have a common ground, which is substance. It is both form and reality, which governs all knowledge and being.

“Metaphysical science is there for concerned with being and it studies being primarily in the category of substance not ‘accidental being’, which is the object of no science, nor being as truth, since truth and falsity exist in the judgment, not in things (it also established the first principle or axioms specially the principle of contradiction which do not of course did you say well is the ultimate principle of governing or being and all knowledge).”³

In other words, the substance is the essence, i.e., which remains after we have eliminated the elements of our experience; the universal predicate, that is, to speak of something else, we must speak of it, but to say something about it, nothing else is needed; it is the genus or the subject. Therefore, other things are predicated it, but itself is not predicated of anything else.

According to Aristotle, substances are categorized into three kinds. The first type is sensible and impermanent, such as plants and animals. The second type of substances is sensible and eternal, such as stars. The third type is non-sensible and eternal, such as the soul and God. Sensible and impermanent substances are typically discussed in the context of physics, whereas non-sensible and eternal substances are the subject matter of metaphysics. Notably, Aristotle's categorization suggests that metaphysics focuses on the study of non-sensible and eternal substances.

¹ Hugh, Lawson, Aristotle the metaphysics, 79.

² S. Marc, Cohen, and Reeve, C. D. C. , "Aristotle's Metaphysics", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2025/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/>, 2

³ F., Copleston, History of Western Philosophy, Vol. I, 291.

"... distinction between the practical, productive and theoretical science and further subdivided the last of these in physics, which is concerned with separately existing entities which naturally have both matter and movement, mathematics, which is concerned with non-separable entities which do not have movement, and the third and highest theoretical science which is concerned with things that are separable but immune to movement and process. This science is called theology, but it is also to be identified with First Philosophy."⁴

Notable,

"... if there is an unchangeable substance then metaphysics studies unchangeable substance, since it is concerned with being qua being, and the true nature of being is shown in that which is unchangeable and self-existence, rather than in that which is subject to change."⁵

Aristotle's metaphysical ideas also influenced later philosophers. According to Saint Augustine, God created the world from nothing. Plato and Aristotle's God are not the creator of the world, but only the architect. He supports the Bible and says that both the matter and the form of the world are created by God. The world as God's creation is dependent on God, but the world and God are not one and the same. God transcends the world. No one can fully know God from the world. In this context, it is notable, all that one can say that he apprehends God, but cannot comprehend Him.

God possesses supreme authority, omnipotent and unrestricted freedom. He is eternal, transcendent being and the supreme good. He creates this world through His will, but all laws of nature are also eternal, unchangeable. Through his creation, He sustains the world. The entire creation points to the living God. Augustine's arguments for the existence of God are internal arguments of thought. The mind always desires the necessary and unchangeable truth. Truth is unchangeable and eternal, which does not vary from person to person. This truth always remains the same regardless of place, time or person. This truth cannot be formed by the mind and cannot be destroyed. Therefore, truth is greater and superior to the mind. The argument here is that if truth were inferior than the mind, then truth could constitute and change by the mind. And if truth were equal to the mind, then the nature of mind or the changeable properties of mind would be in truth. So, truth would change like the mind. Since the mind cannot change truth or truth is immutable, then truth must be said to be superior and absolute than the mind. In this context, it is notable here,

"The mind varies in its apprehension of truth, apprehending it now more clearly now less clearly, whereas truth remains ever the same. Hence if truth is neither inferior nor equal to our minds, nothing remains but that it should be superior and more excellent."⁶

According to Anselm, existence is necessary condition of perfection. Something that does not exist cannot be considered perfect. God is absolute perfection. Therefore, God must exist. In other words, God is that being than which nothing greater can be thought.

⁴ Hugh, Lawson, Aristotle the metaphysics ,153.

⁵ F., Copleston, History of Western Philosophy, Vol. I, 291.

⁶ F., Copleston, History of Western Philosophy, Vol. II, 68.

That which nothing greater can be thought must have real existence. Therefore, God has real existence. It follows from the first premise that anyone who has the idea of God can never deny the existence of God. From the second premise it follows that since the mind can conceive of God as the greatest being. Therefore, God exists not only in thought but also in reality.

Thomas Aquinas rejects the ontological arguments of God. He thinks that an actuality cannot follow from an idea. By having a thought of money, actual money cannot be found in pocket. He presents five arguments for the existence of God. First, God is unmoved mover, the cause of all moving forces. Everything in the world is dynamic, to explain this change and motion, must accept an unchanging, motionless ground, that is God. God is the ultimate source of all change and movement in the universe without being moved otherwise there is infinite regress. Second, every action has a cause, and there must be a primary cause or root cause behind all effects. Therefore, God is the self-existent and primary cause of all things. Third, everything in the world is contingent or dependent, and there must be an uncaused cause, who is the cause of all contingent beings. Fourth, there are less or more perfection in the world. A complete perfect Being is necessary to explain these various forms of perfections. Therefore, that absolute being is God. Fifth, the world's design suggests a final designer, and that designer is God.

From Aristotle to the medieval period, the main concern of metaphysics was to investigate the first cause, an eternal and unchanging being, as the essence of the changing world, and to study being qua being. However, the question arises: How can a being be both the divine substance and the general structure of the world?

“Aristotle is himself aware of the appearance of tension here, and takes pains to show that the tension is only apparent. On the one hand, he suggests that a science of first causes will identify the cause underlying the primary features of things, those features that are presupposed by any other features they may exhibit; and he seems prepared to say that since the being or existence of a thing is primary in this way, the Science that studies first causes will just be the science that investigates qua being. On the other hand, he seems to hold that any discipline that examines everything insofar as it is a being will number God among the items it seeks to characterize.”⁷

However, metaphysics in the 17th and 18th centuries was not entirely like Aristotle's thought. The agreements lay in the fact that the subject matter of metaphysics involves identifying the general structure of the universe and the divine substance in its causal role. The disagreements, on the other hand, concerned topics such as the relationship between living and non-living things and the unique characteristics of human beings, which were considered part of physical science rather than metaphysics. Rationalists, nonetheless, included these topics in metaphysics by applying mathematical and experimental analysis. According to rationalists, the subject matter of metaphysics encompasses not only the existence and nature of God but also the distinction between mind and body, the immortality of the soul, and the nature and extent of freedom of the will. The question arises, however, as to how such different subjects can be related to the concept of metaphysics, given that these discussions seem disparate. In this respect, rationalists argue

⁷ Michael, J., Loux, *Metaphysics a Contemporary Introduction*, 3.
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that it is desirable to have a unique subject matter for metaphysics, which is being. Thus, metaphysics concerns the nature of being, and although discussions of being progress into various sub-disciplines, the main subject matter of each discipline remains being. For example, the discussion about the nature of being is called general metaphysics, while specific fields of metaphysical discussion are referred to as special metaphysics. The investigation of being as the essence of changeable things is called cosmological metaphysics, and the study of human beings as rational beings is termed rational psychology. The metaphysical discussion about divine being is referred to as natural theology. The rationalist views on general metaphysics and natural theology are identical to Aristotle's discussion of being qua being and his systematic discussion of the first cause. In contrast, cosmological metaphysics and rational psychology are entirely rationalist contributions to metaphysics. Although Aristotle's metaphysical thought differs significantly from that of the rationalists, it remains consistent with common sense, particularly his thoughts on God and the causal structure of the world. However, the metaphysical views of rationalist thinkers, such as Spinoza and Leibniz, are abstract and inconsistent with common sense. For instance, Spinoza derives thought and extension from the concept of infinite substance, and Leibniz posits that the world is created by windowless monads. Another goal of rationalist metaphysics is to refute empiricism, which holds that the source of all our ideas is experience and that knowledge must be justified by experience. According to this view, metaphysics cannot be justified by experience and is therefore meaningless, amounting to mere sounds without sense.

According to Kant, metaphysics was once considered the mother of all knowledge. However, it has now become a subject of controversy. The reason is that no one has been able to arrive at a conclusive solution in metaphysics, as philosophers consistently disagree. Since metaphysics cannot be known through experience, it poses a significant challenge. When based on reason alone, metaphysics often leads to skepticism and dogmatism. To avoid these extremes, some adopt indifferentism, which views discussions of metaphysics as a waste of time. Kant thinks that rationalists discuss the theory of knowledge without determining the limits of knowledge. Although empiricists, such as Locke with his physiological perspective and Hume with his psychological perspective, believe that there is a limit to knowledge, they still discuss metaphysics from an empirical standpoint. According to Kant, transcendent metaphysics that goes beyond the world of experience is not possible. He argues that the scope of knowledge is confined to possible experience, and without experience, there is no knowledge. Since there is no experience regarding the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, or the freedom of the will, there can be no knowledge about these topics. This kind of metaphysics is therefore confused and fallacious. When thought ventures into areas beyond experience, it becomes muddled. Kant distinguishes between transcendental and immanent metaphysics, advocating for a more experientially grounded approach. Metaphysics provides knowledge about the world and is a priori. The task of metaphysics is to discuss the a priori conditions of knowledge, aiming to discover the conditions of our thought and experience. Kant approaches this topic from a transcendental point of view, providing a structure of thought equivalent to the Copernican revolution. According to him, all knowledge begins with experience, but it does not follow that all knowledge arises out of experience. In other words, experience initiates knowledge, but the mind also contributes

to it. The first statement indicates that experience precedes knowledge, while the second statement highlights the mind's role in shaping knowledge. By making these statements, Kant shifts away from both the rationalist view of innate ideas and the empiricist view of knowledge about the external world.

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