INTRODUCTION

by

RICHARD VELKLEY

What Is Metaphysics?

Metaphysics—the term itself appears first in late antiquity—names the investigation of the ultimate principles, causes, origins, constituents, and categories of all things. Philosophy begins in ancient Greece as metaphysics, and from thence the tradition of metaphysical inquiry continues almost without break into the twentieth century. In our time *metaphysics* is thought by many as a thinking attending mostly to the supernatural, and superseded by the modern sciences to the extent that it addresses nature. The selected readings that follow and this introduction should help to correct this misinformed view.

Metaphysics is a prime instance of the essential stance of philosophy: the habitual refusal to accept the "reduction of the strange to the familiar." It exposes a troublesome fact: the arts, sciences, and all human activities employ fundamental notions that their practitioners cannot or will not clarify and justify. For example, all the sciences save mathematics employ some idea of *cause*. But what is a *cause*? This question must be pursued by an inquiry that is logically prior to particular causal investigations. What is meant by *law of nature*? Through such terms as *cause* and *law* we seek to identify fundamental connections, or unities, within the world. But what makes anything "one"? Is nature itself a "one" and a whole, of some sort? Is nature's unity grounded in a single unifying principle, or is it a mere aggregate of parts?

Beyond these questions there is the question of the "why" of the natural whole. Why does it, or anything at all, exist? To pursue this question one must address some logically primary questions: What does it mean to speak of *being* or *existence*? Do these words denote properties of things, so that *existing* is a property like *red*? If it is a property, is it then separable from the thing, as *red* is separable from *apple*? Or is the existence of the apple simply the apple itself, and

nothing more? But if that is the case, how is it that we can think about *existence* or *being* in some universal sense? Is there a universal class or genus *being* denoting a reality that exists apart from particular beings?

There is a temptation to suppose that these notions (cause, law, unity, being, etc.) exist solely through linguistic convention, and hence it should be an easy matter to settle on agreed meanings. Yet these notions, or similar ones, do not emerge randomly and accidentally, like conventions; they naturally occur whenever humans think. Furthermore, reflection on these notions and what they mean will always, as Aristotle observes, evoke wonder: "Indeed the question which was raised of old and is raised now and always, and is always the subject of doubt—is what is a Being?" Metaphysics is not just the raising of questions about being; it is the discovery that being is questionable.

Aristotle and Ancient Metaphysics

Aristotle declares that "all humans by nature desire to know," and thereby helps justify the way that a relatively new human type, the "philosophers" or "lovers of wisdom," rank their activity: as the most choiceworthy way of life. What makes it most desirable is its contemplation of the primary objects of thought: the first causes of being that are not subject to human action but which make all human thought and action possible. To know such causes is therefore to have, in the highest sense, self-knowledge.

Beyond the "special" sciences, which examine particular regions of things, there must exist a science that inquires about their common principles and starting points. This science Aristotle terms *first philosophy* and *wisdom*; after him it is called *metaphysics* and the *queen of the sciences*. This science determines what causes the beings to come into being, and what makes them knowable. Through such inquiry it shows that the beings form various orders: (1) with respect to their causes of generation, as when lower causes, such as the generative powers in particular plants or animals, are dependent on higher causes, such as the first cause of motion in nature as a whole; (2) with respect to their purposes or finality, as when lower beings (or sciences) serve higher beings (or sciences); (3) with respect to their level of knowledge or knowability, as when a lower form of

knowledge (optics) is dependent on a higher form (mathematics).

Finally, and most difficult, metaphysics as the "architectonic science" seeks to determine how these orders relate to each other: whether they are the same order and, if not, how they can be coordinated. Let us note some difficulties in this effort. One can ask: Are *to be* and *to be knowable* the same thing? It is plain that *knowability* is a feature of anything in the universe that can enter in some way into our knowledge. (*Knowing* is the capacity to relate the thought or perception of things to general principles.) *Being* is a feature of all things that in some way exist. One can ask: is *knowability* applicable only to the beings that are knowable to humans, as the one species in the whole that—to our knowledge—has knowledge?

If, however, one argues that being and knowability must be coextensive, this may have the disturbing consequence that both being and knowability are as finite as our species. To avoid this consequence while preserving the coextension of being and knowability, one can argue that there is a divine intellect that knows all beings or (as Aristotle argues) contains in itself the principle that makes all things knowable. Metaphysics, then, culminates in an account of the divine intellect, or theology. But the divine intellect still is only one being in the whole, although it is the one that accounts for the most important features of the whole. Theology, the study of that unique being, is distinguished from the study of being as being (the study of the features common to all beings), which in modern times bears the name *onology*. Metaphysics, it seems, is not one science, but at the minimum it is two.

Another difficulty is this: beings have motions of coming into being, passing away, and generating motion in other beings. Aristotle argues that the divine being, while unmoved, is in some way responsible for the motion in all beings. But is what makes beings knowable (the first principle of knowability) the same as what gives them motion (the first principle of generation)? The attempt to answer that question in the affirmative is the very heart of Aristotle's metaphysics. His metaphysical treatises are centrally engaged in a criticism of his predecessors, who had not answered this question or even formulated it properly. Aristotle shows that they progressively discovered the essential components of the true first philosophy, but they could not formulate the principles that unify generation, knowability, and being.

The early philosophers before Socrates speculated on the causes of nature as a whole, without much attention to the constitution of particular beings (species and individuals), but with a focus on natural change in a very abstract and general sense. They tended to give accounts of a unitary origination of all things, that is, doctrines of underlying enduring substances (most famously the water of Thales), modifications of which would in principle account for the manifold changes in nature. It did not take long for the philosophers to discover that they could now address change without having another cause beside the primary substance: a cause of motion, or "efficient cause," to bring about complex entities and their changes (thus the Love and Strife of Empedocles). But these two causes still left in the dark the tendency of nature to produce things with distinctive structures and forms. (To illustrate with an example from human art: the form of the sculpture is more crucial to its being than whether it is made of stone or wood.)

Aristotle credits Socrates with having seen the necessity for two further closely related causal principles: the form, which corresponds to the question "what is it?" and which comes into view through the "looks" of a thing as whole, and the final cause or purpose, which corresponds to the question "for the sake of what does it exist?" The two causes tend to coincide since the form embodies the essence by which the being of things is measured. We look to the form when we ask to what extent things are achieving their essence: how far does a given man achieve the form of man? Thereby it becomes possible to consider the Good as an explanatory principle. Nature as ordered toward the production of things that achieve (or resemble) the forms is not a goalless and mindless process. Goodness and mind are constitutive features of the whole. Aristotle notes that the turn to form enabled Socrates to begin to account for the nature of the ethical and political life of humans.

Yet Aristotle finds that none of his predecessors made adequate use of all four causes (material, efficient, formal, and final). None of them tried to answer this question: how do all four causes work together in the production of a being? Do they work together as independent agents or as aspects of one primary reality? Aristotle famously criticized his teacher Plato for having treated the forms and the Good (the final cause) as abstract "ideas" (universals such as "justice" and "humanity") separate from the sensible beings. The

forms as prototypes were to explain the existence of the sensible beings as "imitations." But if the forms are unmoving, unchanging, suprasensible beings, how can they account for the motion and change of the sensible world? Actually it is doubtful that Plato ever held such a simplistic doctrine as Aristotle ascribes to him, and as Plato's pupil he must have known this. Indeed it is clear that Plato himself regarded the "doctrine of ideas" as a natural tendency of the human mind in its effort to solve the problem of being. For this reason the "doctrine" has to be aired and criticized.

At first Aristotle's approach to the causes of beings seems radically different from the Platonic. Aristotle underscores that the true being is not the "what" (life, justice, humanity, etc.) but the "this" (this living being, this just thing, this human being). Plato's "Good itself," the universal idea of goodness, is according to Aristotle only an abstraction Plato produced by thinking about the many kinds of concrete goodness that humans and other beings pursue. The concrete individual being, "this man" or "Socrates," has privileged ontological status. It cannot be the attribute of another being but subsists in itself. Only a "this," therefore, is a true "substance"—its attributes. Within attributes that cannot subsist on their own, but exist only in true beings (or in terms of speech, are predicated of their subjects), a distinction must be drawn. There are those that are accidental and can be removed (*white*, as in "Socrates is white") and those that are essential and cannot be removed (*rational*, as in "Socrates is rational"). Aristotle charges that Plato mistakenly treated the essential attributes as substances.

Even so, Aristotle shows he is Plato's student, for he says that among the various senses of being, the "what" or the essence most closely addressed the nature of the being. (See the reading from *Metaphysics*, Book Seven.) Competitors often note the tension in Aristotle between the priority of the "what" and priority of the "this." Aristotle is of course aware of the tension; he offers a resolution in the following way. The concrete individual ("this") is our experiential starting point, for the doctor does not treat "illness" but the patient who is ill. But the doctor approaches the individual through its essence (the "what" of humanity), for his medical art has knowledge of cures not solely for this individual, and not as separate. Indeed Aristotle goes farther: the essence or form as "immanent" is the active principle responsible for the being of the

individual, and not solely for the knowledge of it. The Platonic forms come down from heaven to Earth, as "dynamic" principles that actualize the potential in a material substrate to become a certain being. (See *Metaphysics*, Book Nine.) The active form (the "what" as individualized) is the true being. Aristotle hereby claims to do justice to the Socratic-Platonic stress on the priority of form to matter, and also to the experiential or "commonsense" priority of the concrete individual.

Still this solution contains a profound ambiguity about what has ontological priority. The concrete individual is more than the active form or essence, as having a material aspect, and is what (unlike the form) clearly exists "on its own" in the world. But if we ask about what is most responsible for the coming into being of the individual, we have to turn to the form; this is what we have to think about in making the causality of the being intelligible. Mentally we must separate the form, in order to consider its causal action. This means that what we most understand about Socrates is "humanity" and not the unique individual Socrates. In our effort to make the individual intelligible, we have to regard it as the derivative product of active form and acted-upon matter. Accordingly there are two approaches to what is prior in being: for sense perception and to a great extent for practical action, the concrete individual ("this") is prior, and for thought and for most inquiry into causes, the form ("what") is prior. The point is not that Aristotle is confused but that this ontological ambiguity is, as he sees, the very nature of things. Further study of the *Metaphysics* and other writings reveals that this ambiguity runs through his inquiries and is connected to the duality of human nature as having both practical and speculative needs and inclinations. Philosophy in the genuine sense must be able to address both sides of that nature.

Descartes and the Beginning of Modern Metaphysics

After a long period of relative neglect, the philosophy of Aristotle attained preeminence in European society in the High Middle Ages, by way of translations and commentaries from Arabic scholars. Space does not allow us to discuss the vastly important and rich developments of Aristotelian and medieval philosophy leading to

the modern period. A distinctively modern approach to questions of metaphysics and other sciences emerges in the sixteenth century. The names Niccolò Machiavelli, Martin Luther, and Nicolaus Copernicus will bring to mind that this was an era of great revolutions. Machiavelli initiates the approach to political life based on a bold unleashing of the passions and self-interest, abandoning the classical habituation of appetite to form civic virtue. His "realism" was appealing to many who sought effective means to end the miseries of conflict over religious doctrine. Sir Francis Bacon, the English philosopher and statesman, transcribes the lessons of Machiavellism into the study of nature. For just as the *politique* followers of Machiavelli seek to make the ground of political life neutral to doctrinal disputes and therefore metaphysics-free, Bacon thinks that natural philosophy can achieve hitherto unrealized certainty if "laws of action" governing natural processes can be established without the use of species and forms—those subjects of endless metaphysical perplexity.

Nature thus divested of formal perfections and ends is not primarily an object of contemplative interest. Like Machiavelli, Bacon doubts that reason has its own end, independent of the passions. Thus the new metaphysics-free "laws of nature" are viewed primarily as instruments for the practical advance of human power. Their "governance" of the phenomena enables our "mastery of nature." The rejection of formal and final causes (of "teleological" explanation) has immense theoretical and practical import. Modern physics and modern politics continue to this day to follow their parallel paths, in cooperative tandem, pursuing the satisfaction of the passions without concepts of the ultimate good and human perfection. In this we are also the heirs of Thomas Hobbes, the first thinker to develop a thoroughly nonteleological "physics" of moral and political life.

The question arose for René Descartes: what sort of metaphysics is compatible with the new account of nature? He earns the title "father of modern philosophy" through combining the new manner of investigating nature and human affairs with remarkable mathematical innovations, whereby he finds the way to new metaphysical principles of mind and body. His *Meditations of First Philosophy* (1640), written in the form of an Augustinian confessional treatise, gives the rather misleading impression that Descartes is chiefly a speculative thinker concerned with theological apologetics.

Doubtless he wanted the doctors of the Sorbonne to believe this, thereby to gain their stamp of approval for a new mode of thought whose real intent they did not see. But Descartes had given enough warnings a few years before, when he published some physical and mathematical treatises prefaced by an extraordinary autobiographical account of the origins and purpose of his philosophy, the *Discourse on Method.* Surely Descartes today would find it very amusing and even gratifying that scholars still tend to regard this *Discourse* as less "serious" philosophically than the *Meditations.* He was able to have his revolution without being seen (except by highly perceptive readers like Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Jean d'Alembert) as a dangerous revolutionary.

The *Discourse,* especially when read in conjunction with the earlier unpublished "Rules for the Direction of the Mind," enables one to approach the metaphysical arguments of the *Meditations* with certain helpful points in mind. These include the intrinsic connection between metaphysical principles and two other fundamental concerns of Descartes: (1) the reduction of natural phenomena to the language of a new symbolic and constructive mathematics, the analytic geometry that supplies the basis for mathematicization of the motions of bodies in uniform homogeneous space ("extension"), which is the core of the famous Cartesian "method"; (2) the primacy of the resolve, or the steady willing, to undertake this reduction for the purpose of increasing human power or rendering us "like masters and possessors of nature." Once again the modern move toward nature divested of final causes in (1) is related to a new moral and political approach toward inquiry in (2). Metaphysics and physics (the roots and trunk of the tree of knowledge) are pursued for their practical fruits, as Descartes asserts in his *Principles of Philosophy*: these fruits are medicine, mechanics, and moral science which teaches us how to enjoy the passions.

The *Meditations* show how a new metaphysics of mind and body will support the project described. The revolution Descartes intends requires a drastic reorientation in thinking, away from the ordinary way we apprehend the world in terms of its sensible qualities. At the same time ancient philosophy is his target—above all, Aristotle, who found the evidence for the existence of species and form from the sensible appearance of things. The first act of Descartes in the *Meditations* is to place that sensible starting point in doubt; what he

questions is the reliability of the body's mediation between thought and the world, a reliability assumed by both Aristotle and the ordinary man. This doubting is not a frivolous and gratuitous leap into extreme skepticism. It is a method for testing the reliability of beliefs and is motivated by the search for a foundation of knowledge that is immune to any possible defect: philosophical knowledge of the world and human beings must attain an ideal of mathematical certitude, an immovable "Archimedean point" forever impervious to the squabbles of disputatious metaphysicians. The presence of this ideal is indicated by the reflection on dreaming: even if Descartes cannot distinguish his waking thoughts about sensible objects from dream-images, he finds that mathematical propositions are still evidently true. Geometry can be pursued in one's sleep.

As another technique for testing the reliability of his opinions, Descartes introduces an omnipotent God who can cause him to be in error about all things, including mathematical truths. But immediately he replaces this deity with a less powerful "evil genius" who causes him to doubt all bodily things, but not mathematical truths. This is a significant shift and a clue to Descartes's purpose. Later in the *Meditations* Descartes proves the existence of God (which at one point he actually identifies with nature), whose primary function in the universe is to support Descartes's application of mathematics to the external world. Thus one can conclude that Descartes does not think there are any grounds for supposing the existence of a supreme power capable of undermining mathematical science.

Mathematical truth is "clear and distinct" knowledge, but it is not itself the end of inquiry. It says nothing about being. Descartes seeks an ontology that grounds the mathematical approach to the world as the sole legitimate approach. He needs to make propositions about "what is," propositions of a quite novel sort. It becomes evident through radical doubting that there is one proposition about being that cannot be doubted under any circumstances: "I think, therefore I exist." So long as I am thinking (even if the thinking is doubting), I as thinker must in some fashion exist. The soul—which in ancient-medieval philosophy combines cognitive, appetitive, and organic functions—is reduced to mere thinking, indeed the mere thought of "I." Yet the "I" as thinking on itself is able to generate mathematical ideas about nature. "Pure thought" reflecting on its possessions discovers the quantifiable notion of "extension" among

its ideas: the infinite homogenous continuum to which the world of concrete sensible things can be reduced, stripped of all ordinary sensible qualities such as color, texture, and taste. The pure "I" contains the resources for the mathematical science of the world. Again one sees that Descartes's concerns are not merely speculative; the "I" thinking about itself is not an end in itself but the foundation for the expansive conquest of reality by mathematics.

Although the relation of the "I" to the body is initially unclear, Descartes is not uninterested in the body. In fact the doubt of the body's reliability is proof of Descartes's interest in attaining a better hold on it and other bodies. His point is that the mind as simply receptive to form (as is the Aristotelian intellect) is subject to the vicissitudes of nature or fortune; it is not master of its fate. Descartes's pure "I" is a new sort of intelligence: one in which thinking is identical with doing, even with making. "I think, I am, is necessarily true enough each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it" (*Meditation II*). This is not timeless contemplation but temporally self-productive thinking. It is the core thought of modern metaphysics. The end or telos of thinking is not to remain separate from the world but to appropriate the world and reconstruct it on the mind's own terms. The mind superimposes on the "raw" matter of sensation its own self-generated plan of investigation. This was already Bacon's view of forcing nature to answer the questions we put to it in the "experiment"; later Kant takes this approach still farther.

Modernity, in rebellion against both Greek antiquity and revealed religion, is fundamentally seeking to free humanity from the fetters of nature, or at least to make nature's forces serve ends that humanity devises. To understand the motives for this epochal change, one must study the founders of modernity. Descartes's new account of the mind-body compound offers compensation, through its promise of mastery, for nature or God's failure to provide humankind with a good and beautiful cosmos.

Leibniz's Reform of Modern Metaphysics

Descartes's greatest critic is the German philosopher Leibniz, one of the most capacious intellects in human history. He grasps better

than anyone in his age the intent of Descartes and addresses the true source of the difficulty in Descartes's project. At the same time Leibniz appreciates the virtues of the new mathematical science of nature, which he advances through his own pioneering work in infinitesimal analysis (calculus). The problem is not that Descartes neglects the body but that he misunderstands it. It is an error, Leibniz argues, to conceive the essence of body as extension, since extension is not anything remotely like a true being. It is lifeless, infinitely divisible, having merely mathematical qualities, and thus cannot have the unity of a genuine being, which must be grounded in some formal and purposive organization. Being or substance cannot exist where there is no unifying principle, and this requires a dynamic source of unification. In sum, Leibniz rediscovers the cogency of Aristotle's arguments for active form and even employs Aristotle's term *entelechy* (possessing within oneself the end or telos) to characterize substance.

Active form has to be reconciled with the new mathematical approach to nature. Since mathematical structure fails to account for the living *dynamis* directed toward more perfect states, it must be treated as derivative, not primary. Boldly Leibniz treats the entire realm of mathematicized nature as merely "phenomenal," and he grounds it in extensionless and imperceptible atomlike substances having active force, which he names monads. The relations between these—different from the causal relations that occur in space and time—give rise to the world of extended coporeality. The monads also contain the sources of perception and thought, since their active force seeks "expression" through achieving finer perceptions of other substances. Each monad reflects the entire universe and strives perpetually to amplify its relation with the infinity of substances composing the universe. Leibniz thus sees a way to conceive the world of bodies as akin in nature to thinking—something like "soul" gives form to matter—and to explain why the universe has more than quantitative features. Order and perfection are grounded in the dynamic essence of all things.

In this way Leibniz argues for a benevolent universe, against the grim visions of most of the leading thinkers of the new science of nature. The divine ground of things cannot be accused of negligence, ill will, or indifference toward the human desires for the good, the true, and the beautiful. An excellent plan for the order of

the whole can be discerned through metaphysical inquiry (unassisted by revealed faith, it should be noted) and thus "theodicy," the justification of God's ways, is possible. "Reflections on the Common Concept of Justice" provides a popular statement of this theodicy, with a few glimpses of its metaphysical basis. Briefly it presents the central metaphysical idea: "The principle of action and of consciousness could not derive from a purely passive extended thing indifferent to all motion, as is matter. Therefore action and consciousness necessarily come from something simple and immaterial without extension and without parts, which is called the soul."

In this work Leibniz is most concerned with expounding the moral and political implications of his metaphysics. If nature or the principle that rules the whole (the "divine monarch") is not indifferent to goodness, justice has a natural ground besides the "right of the strongest." Human beings are then not, as in Hobbes, compelled by their solely self-preserving passions—the effect of nature as purely mechanical—to devise an artificial means for escaping the misery of the natural state of the "war of all against all." The rule of justice is that "one ought to prevent evil for another if it can be done conveniently." Justice includes charity as guided by prudent intellect: "Justice is the charity of the wise." In sum, Leibniz is the founder of the German speculative tradition endeavoring to reconcile the realms of matter and thought, nature and morality, and thus in important respects, antiquity and modernity.

Kant's Critical Restriction of Metaphysics

The next great metaphysical thinker after Leibniz is another German, Immanuel Kant, who is often regarded as the central figure in the entire modern philosophical epoch. Metaphysics is the problem at the heart of Kant's thought, in a peculiar double fashion. On the one hand, Kant seeks to restore the honor of metaphysics as the "architectonic science" after a series of powerful assaults on the possibility of metaphysic in the writings of John Locke and David Hume. The primary question is "whether metaphysics as a science is possible." The selected reading was written by Kant as an introduction to his great treatise on this problem, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). On the other hand, Kant's renewal of metaphysics denies

the possibility of knowledge of things in themselves, or things as they may exist apart from the framework of knowledge that the human mind supplies. This side of Kant's argument is directed against Plato and Leibniz, and denies that reason has access to any ultimate substances that ground the phenomenal world. Strictly speaking, we know only "phenomena": sensation as received by our sense organs and ordered by space, time, and categories of thought making possible the order in monadic substances Kant dismisses as illusion. Indeed all rational theology and rational psychology—knowledge of the essences of God and the soul—must be rejected as speculative failures.

Why, then, does Kant still call his inquiry a kind of metaphysics? Kant claims to have discovered that human reason possesses hitherto unknown sources for "pure" or "a priori" knowledge, that is, knowledge presupposed by any experience that makes use of notions such as space, time, causal connection, and substance as enduring substrate of change. This knowledge is grounded in something Kant terms "synthetic a priori judgments." Kant clearly distinguishes these from innate ideas, with which they are readily confused. He calls the mode of argument showing that such an a priori grounding of experience is possible a "transcendental argument."

One of the principal aims of Kant (as the reading selection makes plain) is to show that Hume's reduction of causal connection to a customary subjective association of impression is an error. Kant in opposing Hume could describe his own reasoning as a kind of metaphysics, for it establishes that causal connection, substance, and other metaphysical categories are objectively necessary, and not merely psychological facts, as they are for Hume. All the same, the metaphysics is based on a "Copernican revolution" wherein the center of cognition is moved from the object and placed in the synthetic activity of reason. "Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects," but the transcendental philosophy shows that "objects must conform to our knowledge." Kant's enlargement of the synthetic powers of the mind to construct the general features of the world is also, not secondarily, employed in the moral realm. In addition to theoretical reason's legislation of the order of the laws of nature, there is practical reason's legislation of the laws of moral freedom, the principles under which the rational will exercises free causality unhindered by the laws of nature. Freedom

is our one access to "things in themselves" ("noumena") beyond appearances. Indeed Kant claims that establishing the validity of moral reason is his most important accomplishment. Yet, as Kant avers in his personal papers, it was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who gave him the critical insight that moral freedom is the true "end of reason."

Hegel's Dialectical Completion of Metaphysics

Coming to maturity during the French Revolution and the new ascendancy of Kant's philosophy in the German universities, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, together with some illustrious friends, sought to improve on the Kantian account of the synthetic power of reason by developing a more ambitious philosophy of freedom on its basis. Centrally he denies that reason has to limit itself to the knowledge of phenomena. Reason has insight into the Absolute, which combines features of the post-Cartesian subject-centered philosophy of the "I" with a more classical metaphysics that starts from being. Nearly all the leading minds of Hegel's generation were great enthusiasts of Greek antiquity and admired the "concreteness" of Hellenic education and culture, as contrasting favorably with the mathematical abstractness of modern thought and life. Hegel's mature philosophy could be characterized as a metaphysical working out of the tension between antiquity and modernity, and remains therefore a philosophy of profound interest to all persons reflecting on that tension and its meaning. But it is also one of the most difficult of all philosophies to make intelligible in a short introduction.

In Hegel's philosophy of the Absolute the characteristically modern opposition of subject and object is progressively overcome through a temporal process that at every level makes use of the Aristotelian notions of potentiality (*dynamis*) and actuality (*energeia*). But Aristotle's concepts are now understood, in a very un-Aristotelian way, as applying to the whole historical development of humanity, and not solely to natural beings. In the last analysis the Greeks for Hegel did not appreciate the true elevation of spirit above nature, which humanity (with crucial help from Christianity) had to discover through long and painful exertions. The realization of the truth of spirit takes the form of a dialectical logic radically unlike

traditional formal logic. Its concepts unfold in a process of self-differentiation, wherein moments of experience or thought that appear initially as merely independent or immediate are discovered—through a special Hegelian sense of negation—to be actually dependent or mediated aspects of the whole. The entire development is one that moves from an abstract level of thought toward maximum concreteness. In other terms, the Absolute at the start is merely with itself in undifferentiated unity, but in producing the manifold distinction of reality in both nature and human history, it recognizes itself in the other which it has produced. When all distinctions have unfolded and the Absolute finds itself fully manifest in the world, it then fulfills its essence in "absolute knowing." No "otherness" remains outside itself to be overcome through further negations, and the complete reality of freedom—mind being at home with itself—is attained.

Hegel argues that this logical completion corresponds to the moment in human history when political and moral freedom attain stable recognition institutionally, and art, religion, and philosophy arrive at their definitive forms. This is the moment of the present age. The history of philosophy can show that all previous philosophies contribute to the completion of the system that embraces all reality. Thus in Hegel's conception of history the thought of any earlier epoch has limitations defined by its moment in the process. Hegel does not regard his own system, however, as subject to such a historical limitation, since it is the permanently valid expression of the final truth about being. All the same, Hegel's emphasis on the historical conditioning of the unfolding of truth was a major source of the historicism of many later thinkers, who no longer accept Hegel's metaphysics of the Absolute but regard all thought as bound to history without any suprahistorical remainder.

Metaphysics in the Twentieth Century

After Hegel there is no philosopher who presents such an impressive system of the whole of being. In fact, immediately after Hegel's death in 1831 German philosophy took a sharp turn toward anti-speculative and materialistic forms, a tendency that was only somewhat corrected by the revival of Kantian philosophy at mid-

century, and some renewal of Hegelianism at the century's end. Outside academic philosophy there were isolated figures, such as the Dane Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, who rejected all forms of traditional argumentative and logical procedure in philosophy. These figures proved to be decisive for the twentieth century. There arose around 1900 the movement of phenomenology under the guidance of Edmund Husserl, which sought to give new vitality to philosophy by stressing the need to turn to the prescientific phenomena of ordinary life, and to describe them without reliance on scientific assumptions. This "suspension" of scientific thought allowed a new openness to problems and traditions considered dead or irrelevant, and after the First World War it inspired many remarkable inquiries in theology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, and classical philology. But perhaps most striking and unexpected was its contribution to metaphysics in Martin Heidegger's renewal of the "question of Being." This combined in a startling fashion a deeply probing recovery of Greek philosophical texts with a radically anti-academic account of the human existential situation (as anxiety in the face of death) that was shaped by Heidegger's reading of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and by the mood of crisis following the disastrous world war.

We must limit ourselves to a few remarks on Heidegger, who no doubt is the greatest metaphysical thinker since Hegel. Heidegger understands Being in a radically temporal and historical way (recalling Hegel), but as lacking a logical and articulable structure (unlike Hegel's logic of the Absolute). As the unfolding "openness to beings" or "unconcealment of beings" constituting the humanness of human life, Being is the hidden and elusive ground of all that is speakable and thinkable. Being is the groundless ground. It is not groundable in any natures or essences of things, the emphasis on which in Western metaphysics has only concealed—or caused "forgetting" of—Being's act of unconcealment. But to the proper attunement of mind, Being is manifest in language, above all that of great poets who attest to the futility of mortal strivings—reaching their critical phase in modern technology—to ground permanent "dwellings."

We have not included any selection from Heidegger, since a short reading from him is unlikely to be very helpful. But another figure has been selected, Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose effect on twentieth-century philosophy, chiefly in the English-speaking countries, is

almost as great as Heidegger's. Indeed his affinities with Heidegger are striking, although the two thinkers had no contact. After beginning as a leading figure in the logical positivist movement, which regarded scientific thought as disclosing that all metaphysics is nonsense, Wittgenstein pursued a very different philosophical path. He turned to ordinary language as an unsystematizable, never fully clarifiable realm of ritual-like practices ("language games") that determine meaning. Rather like Heidegger, the later Wittgenstein regards truth as manifest in particular and local languages that are not explicable in terms of general laws (sciences of linguistic or mental activity). In significant accord with the phenomenological movement, Wittgenstein sees physiological accounts of the mind as a prevalent form of error, reducing the complex activity of thinking to the presence of mental entities (images, etc.). For Wittgenstein the attraction of finding causal mechanisms to account for thought is the primary source of all metaphysics. "Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does."

Heidegger and Wittgenstein have advanced our insight into the blindnesses and errors of scientific reductionism and modern thought, and they (especially Heidegger) have enabled us to read the great thinkers of the past with new questions. But it is questionable that they have also succeeded, as they claim, to overcome all previous metaphysics. Nevertheless, their thoughts have inspired the many "postmodernist" and "postphilosophical" movements of our time. We must resist the impulse to greet recent declarations of the "end of metaphysics" with approval. The questions of metaphysics remain, as ever, to be further examined. Indeed, they remain to be understood.