

PLATO'S CONCEPT OF METAPHYSICS

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PREAMBLE

Like Aristotle metaphysics was of core importance to Plato. Plato was deeply influenced by his master Socrates whom he believed was a wise man but paradoxically executed by an unjust and corrupt Athenian society.¹ The life and death of Socrates made an indelible impression on the young Plato's mind. This eventually proved to be the catalyst that brought him to philosophy.²

Essentially, Plato was concerned about the problem of how to build an ideal society, one in which justice reigned supreme and innocent persons like Socrates did not get caught up in the contradictions inherent in a corrupt society such as the one in which Socrates lived and died.³ While these concerns are obviously political and ethical, we cannot controvert their metaphysical underpinnings; since in the final analysis, Plato's concern was not limited to the issue of justice in the society and how to secure it. On the contrary, Plato was concerned overall about the essence of justice, that is, the problem of the definition of justice.⁴

Approaching the matter in this manner immediately confronts us with the crucial distinction between universal and particular. In this context therefore we speak of just acts as particular realities in contradistinction from justice as a universal reality. Pointing to just acts, which indeed are instantiations of justice, will not do as a response to the question of the definition of justice. Indeed beyond the particular instantiations we are concerned about what justice is in-itself.⁵

METAPHYSICS, DEFINITION AND DIALECTICS

The latter consideration is obviously a metaphysical consideration, as the quest for the definition of justice takes us beyond the region of mere particulars and points us to the domain of pure universals. Indeed Plato associates metaphysics with the quest for definition of such universal realities.⁶ Thus, in the *Republic*, Plato is not only concerned to probe the essence of justice as contradistinguished from acts but he is also preoccupied with how to define such concepts as goodness, beauty, and truth.⁷ Without beauty we cannot have beautiful things nor can we have good things without goodness, since it is beauty that makes beautiful things possible just as goodness makes good things possible.⁸

Beautiful things are instances of beauty just as good things are instances of goodness. Yet no beautiful thing or good thing can by itself account for the concept of beauty or the concept of goodness, both of which belong to the domain of pure universals in contradistinction from the domain of particulars. The question is: how do we account for *beauty qua beauty* or *goodness qua goodness* and not merely beauty as exemplified in beautiful things or goodness as exemplified in good things?

As noted Plato was convinced that Socrates was a wise man. Paradoxically the wisdom of Socrates consisted in his profession of his ignorance that his admission that he did not know, albeit he was all the time searching for knowledge. The point of the celebrated Socratic dictum, "the unexamined life is not worth living" comes to the fore against this backdrop. Apparently Socrates' admission of his ignorance enables him to assume a critical standpoint in relation to any issue, so that his ignorance dialectically leads him to the discovery of truth.⁹

This dialectical approach is opposed to the dogmatic approach that assumes knowledge from the outset and as such precludes the possibility of ever discovering anything new apart from what one assumes one knows already. Whereas the dialectical approach is an open process, the dogmatic approach is close and admits of no process in the quest for truth apart from the magisterial finality of what one supposedly knows already. Later on in his account of metaphysics, Plato will associate metaphysics with dialectics, that is, an open process of investigation that enables us to be open to truth as much as possible, moving from one polar concept to another until we arrive at the truth we seek, even as we confess that what we discover does not offer us any resting place as far as the truth of the matter is concerned.¹⁰

I suppose it is the openness of this process of rational search for truth that makes Socrates to commit himself to his legendary ignorance even as others point him out as a wise man.¹¹ As the saying goes a real wise person is one who knows how little he knows within the entire gamut of what is to be known. As it were, what we do not know is far more

extensive than what we know or claim to know at any given time. Consequently within the broad circumference of all there is, to know, it is safe to profess one's ignorance than to lay claim to knowledge and to be sure such humble admission only means we are never done with the whole business of searching for truth.¹²

Indeed such was the mentality that undergirded Socrates' activities. Driven by this mentality he was indefatigable in his search for truth. Indeed it became a penchant for him while professing his ignorance to poke fun at those who claim to know or who are generally regarded as wise.¹³ His point always is to find out whether they really knew or whether they were really wise. His discovery was always that they were not really what they claimed to be.¹⁴

There are many episodes in Socrates' life as recounted by Plato in his Dialogues where Socrates is confronted with such people who thought they knew. Through the application of his dialectical method which assumes the form of cross examination of his subject, Socrates finally exposes the truth of the matter, namely, that his subject did not know what they claimed to know but are actually ignorant.¹⁵

We have cited the case of beautiful things and beauty in relation to the question of definition of beauty. One may assume one knows what beauty is. But if one cites a beautiful thing in response to the question of the essence of beauty, he clearly professes his ignorance even if he claims to know. A simple application of the dialectical method reveals subsequently that no particular thing can equate a universal thing, so that it is counter-productive to present a beautiful thing as the meaning of beauty.¹⁶

TRUTH, PROPHECY AND PERSECUTION

As effective as the Socratic Method may be in exposing the ignorance of those who claim to know, it is evident that the method is bound to be upsetting and somewhat uprooting. It is certainly not going to win Socrates many friends since it means that he is all the time embarrassing others by deconstructing their claim to know. The truth is that no one likes to be upset.¹⁷

Yet in exposing the truth, we invariably upset others, even if it is also true that as bitter as truth is, it is the same truth that sets us free in the end. The bearer of truth, no doubt, undertakes an unpleasant job and it is little wonder that prophets usually pay dearly for their commitment to truth.¹⁸ In this context Socrates' profession of his ignorance may actually be a strategy to handle the delicate situation of being the servant of truth. He may hide under his professed ignorance, but the truth is that beneath all this show of ignorance, he inevitably appears to assume a superior standpoint, since it is now his duty, as it were, to deconstruct the problematic dogmatism of the other in his *self-apotheosis*.¹⁹

In the light of the uprooting and embarrassing nature of the Socratic Method as far as the dignity of the other is concerned, it is understandable that Socrates will make many enemies for himself and these enemies in time will turn against him and in the end call for his elimination.²⁰

This is often the fate of those who tell the truth. It is as if there is something in truth-telling that pitches the prophet against his audience. This is little wonder, since we hate to hear the truth, so that in his commitment to truth, the prophet becomes vulnerable and fall victim to persecution. His situation is not helped at all by his dogged commitment to truth at all cost as evidenced by the statement "our friends are dear to us but dearest to us is truth". However, this unalloyed commitment to truth can only annoy those who do not want to hear it and intensify their opposition to its harbinger.

THE DEATH OF SOCRATES AND THE FATE OF METAPHYSICS

Given that metaphysics assumes the standpoint of reason and interrogates its other in a manner analogous to the Socratic Method which Socrates deployed in poking fun at those who claimed to know, it is evident that metaphysics will suffer the same fate as Socrates. Indeed it is arguable that it is the Socratic fate that metaphysics suffers in its contemporary setting where doubt is cast on its assumed foundational character in grounding all the sciences.²¹

Indeed one of the most celebrated events in the 20th century is the anti-metaphysical bias of contemporary philosophy which takes issue with the essentialism and foundationalism associated with traditional philosophy.²² It may have taken more than two millennia for anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism to come to full flowering. Interestingly nonetheless the embryo is already present at the very beginnings of philosophy and it is clearly exemplified in Socrates' engagement with his contemporaries and the fate that eventually befell him.

No one other than Plato understands this and more importantly, Plato is at pains to justify and vindicate the Socratic position, so that he is clearly on the side of metaphysics. He is equally opposed to all kinds of anti-essentialism as can be seen in his criticism of the sophists.²³ Indeed as Plato understands it the job of the metaphysician is to clarify the meaning of the fundamental concepts we employ in our discourse on the nature of the real.²⁴

Yet aside from associating metaphysics with the application of the Socratic dialectical method in defining the meaning of our basic concepts, Plato offers us a concept of metaphysics as the science of the supra-sensible. The continuity between both considerations should be

evident. The concern is not just to define the concepts but the concepts are fundamentally about what is real, so that it emerges in the end that the crucial issue is our concept of reality, that is, what it means for a thing to be real.²⁵

A thing obviously can be defined merely conceptually. But the truth is that there is no mere concept. Concept is always concept of reality, so that the interrogation of any concept, if done properly, will issue in the interrogation of the reality of what this concept is a concept. Thus in the final analysis, the interrogation of particular concepts will lead us into interrogation of reality as a whole. I think this is the logic at work in the Socratic Method. We find the same logic at work in Plato's association of metaphysics with dialectic and indeed his conceptualization of metaphysics as the science of the supra-sensible.²⁶

METAPHYSICS AS A SCIENCE OF THE SUPRA-SENSIBLE

The first thing we should note is that in this definition of metaphysics the supra negates the sensible. The suggestion is that metaphysics is not about the sensible but the supra-sensible. Moreover but more importantly to secure the supra-sensible the sensible has to be transgressed; it has to be transcended, meaning that it is a mistake to associate metaphysics with the sensible.²⁷ This reminds us of Aristotle's point that metaphysics is the science of being qua being.²⁸ There is no doubt that Aristotle and Plato are close here for it is the same logic of negation that both pursues. As we have seen the problem of definition of metaphysics confronts us with how to determine the meaning of the prefix "meta" in the etymology of the term metaphysics. Plato's definition, as Aristotle's, addresses arguably this concern. In the context of Plato's definition it emerges that the "meta" has to be understood in terms of that which lies beyond the sensible. In this context the supreme task of metaphysics is to interrogate and understand the being of the supra-sensible in contrast to the sensible.²⁹

In the light of this emphasis it emerges that metaphysics cannot be understood merely in terms of the definition of concept. Over and above all, it is concerned with the whole issue of clarifying or explaining the nature of ultimate reality, that is, what it means to be really real.³⁰

THE THEORY OF FORMS AND PLATO'S DEFINITION OF METAPHYSICS

To understand Plato's account of metaphysics as a science of the supra-sensible, we need to grasp the point of his celebrated theory of forms, that is, his theory concerning the nature of ultimate reality.

The background of Plato's theory of forms is the Parmenidean metaphysics of the One which favours the One over and above the

many.³¹ Indeed in addressing the vexed issue of the relationship between One and Many, permanence and change, being and becoming, Parmenides dissolves the many as non-entities and affirms the one as the only reality. The negation of the many as illusory is counter-intuitive no doubt for the reality of change is indisputable from the standpoint of common sense.³²

Indeed some will go as far as saying that change is the only real thing. It is not surprising therefore that in reaction to this counter-intuitive excessive rationalistic monism, a pluralist onslaught will arise and take refuge in the opposite extreme and proclaim the many as the only reality in complete negation of the reality of the One.³³ If change is the only reality as the pluralists maintain, it means there is nothing permanent in reality. If on the other hand, only the One is real, it means there is no room for change in reality.

THE BURDEN OF RECONCILIATION

Against the backdrop of both extreme positions, the mission of Plato was one of reconciliation. Plato's point will be to save what is true in both positions and let go of what is false in them. In other words he will affirm the unchanging reality of Parmenides. But he will also try to save the reality of change by maintaining that change is part of reality and not outside reality as Parmenides maintained. Indeed, on his view, our concept to reality will be incomplete unless we make room for change.³⁴

Plato's quarrel with the sophists must be seen in the light of the tension associated with the problem of one and many in respect of the claim of monism and the claim of pluralism. For Plato can see that exploiting the extreme position that only change is real, the sophists confront us with dangerous relativism with untold ethical and political consequences is to affirm that there is a realm of unchanging values.³⁵

So Plato's solution then is to maintain both the reality of change and the reality of permanence in a delicate balance. Plato pursues this reconciliatory agenda through the instrumentality of his theory of forms. In this sense then the theory of forms can be regarded as an account on the problem of one and many that seeks a middle position between rationalistic monism and pluralistic relativism.³⁶ How does the theory of form obtain this reconciliation of one and many.

THE WORLD OF FORMS AND THE SENSIBLE WORLD

Plato's theory of forms also known as theory of ideas pursues the task of reconciliation of one and many by dividing reality into two tiers, the world of forms and the sensible world. The two worlds exist separately, that is, they exist apart from each other and have different natures. This doctrine of separation and different nature is known as Plato's metaphysical dualism. The world of forms is the world of universals,

the world of ideal essences, prototypes, according to which particular things are modelled.³⁷

As world of universals, the world of forms is immutable and eternal. It contains ideal essences and not particular things. Such essences as beauty, goodness, truth, justice, car-ness, tableness etc. resides in the world of forms and embodies fullness of reality, compared to the partial reality enjoyed by their particular instantiations. In the world of forms, there is a certain hierarchy as all the forms are not on a par. Some contain more reality than the other depending on their proximity to the form of good which apparently is the highest in the hierarchy of forms.

Unlike the world of forms, the sensible world is a world of particulars and contains all the particular things of our everyday experience such as trees, cars, table, chair, television, etc. According to Plato each particular thing that exists in the sensible world has a corresponding form in the world of forms. The being of the particular in question is properly understood in terms of its forms, meaning that without its form, it is not. The implication is that no particular thing can account for itself nor can we account for a particular thing in terms of another particular thing. Ultimately, a particular thing has to be accounted for in terms of its corresponding form in the world of forms or in terms of other ideal essences.³⁸

Associating the reality of the particular thing with its corresponding forms means that the form has more reality than its particular instantiations. But more importantly, perhaps, any reality that the particular enjoys is thanks to its affiliation with its corresponding form. The implication, therefore, is that a particular thing will approximate its full destiny by remaining as closely associated with its form as possible. To be dissociated from its form is to suffer a loss of its inherent value.³⁹

THE LOGIC OF PARTICIPATION AND THE CHALLENGE OF METAPHYSICAL DUALISM

An obvious issue that arises in the light of Plato's metaphysical dualism is the question of the relation between particular and universal. If the world of forms is separate from the sensible world as Plato says, how is one related to the other, how is the universal form related to its sensible particular? Plato accounts for the relationship between the two worlds, world of particular and world of particular in terms of the category of participation. The particular participates in the life of its corresponding form or to put it more globally, the world of particulars as a whole participates in the world of forms.⁴⁰

Apart from using the category of participation to conceptualize this relationship, Plato uses a number of other metaphors such as imitation, resemblance, reflection. The world of particular is imitation of the world of forms in the sense that it is not the original but a derivative of

the original. It is another way of saying that the particular shares in the life of the universal.⁴¹ Same logic is at issue in other metaphors that describe the relation such as resemblance and reflection. They all tell us that the world of the particular is not the ultimately real world but participates in the real world.

While the use of the category of participation apparently circumvents Plato's metaphysical dualism by saying that one participates in the other, this does not completely remove the problem as it is difficult to understand the logic of the particular's participation in the life of its corresponding form, if both are said to reside in separate world. The problem, of course, is how one thing can participate in another thing from which it is completely separate.

Yet whether or not the logic of the particular's participation in the universal is clear, the design of the theory of participation is clear, namely, to suggest that the particular is a lower reality than its corresponding universal, so that if our interest lies in comprehending reality in its fullness our focus must be on universal and not particular.⁴²

Thus while the whole category of participation helps to secure the unification of both worlds it also serves to distinguish them; for if one participates in the other it clearly suggests there is a continuity between both. But more importantly within the continuity a certain sense of hierarchy prevails so far as the particular is a show of the universal and is better show to the extent that the particular approximates the universal.⁴³

The immediate result of conceptualizing the relationship between the two tiers of reality in terms of the category of participation is the reconciliation of the unchanging reality of Parmenides with the changing reality of the pluralists. For, by maintaining the immutability of the forms, Plato satisfies the demand of the unchanging one of Parmenides and by insisting that the particulars are real as immutable as they are because they participate in the reality of their corresponding forms, Plato satisfies the demand of the pluralists.⁴⁴

However we do notice that the rapprochement that Plato brokers between the two extremes by means of his theory of forms is not impeccable. The major problem with Parmenides' scheme is failure to grant the reality of change. To this extent the entire procedure emerges as counter-intuitive. Plato's challenge is to rehabilitate change.

We can nonetheless ask whether he has really done justice to the reality of change. We can say he has done justice to change if we consider that he does not say that change is a non-entity as Parmenides says. To the extent that he says that change is part of reality and not outside of reality, he has rescued change from the kingdom of non-entity. But we can also argue that he has not done justice to the reality of change, since he says that change is illusory although not in the sense

that it is a non-entity but rather in the sense that it embodies partial reality and not full reality.⁴⁵

So while he seems to have rehabilitated change the rehabilitation is not total. In denying that change is full reality, Plato takes a distance from the pluralists in attempt to strike a balance between monism and pluralism. Nonetheless no matter how we look at it, it is obvious that Plato's scheme guarantees a better deal for the problem of one and many than Parmenides' scheme or that of the pluralists.

PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS AND THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE

So far we have focused on the ontological component of Plato's theory of forms, namely, his general division of reality into two and his conceptualisation of the relationship that subsists between them in terms of the category of participation. As we have seen the overall result that ensues from this conceptualization is that the sensible world as real as it is, is not really real world; the really real world is the world of forms which embodies fullness of reality. The sensible world merely imitates the reality of the world of forms, so that in its derivative status the world of particular embodies only partial reality.

Apart from the ontological dimension of Plato's theory of forms, there is also an epistemic dimension which replicates the logic of appearance and reality that drives the ontological dimension. A key element that defines the ontological component of Plato's account of the forms is that they are immutable and eternal as contradistinguished from the particulars that are changing and destructible. It is precisely because of their mutability and destructibility that particulars are said to be appearance of the real and not the really real.⁴⁶

When we transpose this point from the plane of ontology to the plane of epistemology, the dualism that drives Plato's metaphysics remain influential; for, it immediately instantiates two tiers as far as the being of knowledge is concerned, what Plato calls truth and opinion.⁴⁷ Apparently the distinction is between true knowledge and false knowledge. The distinction obviously parallels the metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality.

The overall point is that on account of his metaphysical dualism of universal and particular, Plato maintains that the forms are the only object of true knowledge. Thus only the forms can lead us to true knowledge.⁴⁸ The reason is obvious from our account so far. For, if the really real is immutable and eternal, then that which is mutable and destructible cannot lead to true knowledge of reality. In other words, contemplation of particulars cannot yield true knowledge but must yield its opposite, namely, opinion.⁴⁹

It is largely for this reason that Plato maintains that perception is not knowledge.⁵⁰ It is easy to misunderstand Plato here unless we take into

account that his locution presupposes a certain hierarchy of knowledge or truth a hierarchy driven by the distinction between true knowledge and false knowledge a distinction that repeats the distinction between appearance and reality. Objects of sense perception because they are particular; to this extent mutable are not objects of true knowledge. They belong to the domain of appearance and as such cannot lead to knowledge of reality.⁵¹

Thus to be excessively preoccupied with particulars is to be preoccupied with appearances and it means we cannot arrive at true knowledge of reality. In order to arrive at true knowledge of reality we necessarily have to transcend the domain of particularity; we have to transgress the limit of appearance for it is only by going beyond appearance that we can begin to penetrate the domain of really real.⁵²

Plato's view of sense perception lacks the resources to take us beyond the domain of particularity for it is sunk in the merely particular and cannot grasp universality. We transcend the domain of particularity only by assuming the standpoint of reason dialectical reason.⁵³ It is by means of dialectical reason that we are able to go beyond the domain of appearance and concentrate our gaze on the forms. As noted already only the forms yield true knowledge, given that they are immutable and eternal. But it is only through the instrumentality of dialectical reason that the forms can be grasped and contemplated.⁵⁴ Thus the way that leads to the knowledge of reality as it is in-itself is the contemplation of the forms through the instrumentality of reason.⁵⁵

THE QUESTION OF THE VOCATION OF METAPHYSICS

Against the backdrop of the foregoing point, the vocation of metaphysics as a science of the supra-sensible emerges clearly. Metaphysics' engagement is with reality as it is in itself and not particular reality.⁵⁶ The motivation behind such engagement is to acquire metaphysical knowledge about the nature of ultimate reality through the instrumentality of pure reason or, call it dialectical reason as Plato does.⁵⁷

So when we approach Plato's account of metaphysics as a science of the supra-sensible from the standpoint of Plato's theory of forms the motivation behind Plato's account emerges clearly. In defining metaphysics as the science of the supra-sensible, Plato's concern is to clarify the sphere of reality that metaphysics preoccupies itself with. Invariably this is the whole focus of Plato's metaphysical dualism as evidenced by his distinction between sensible world and world of forms.⁵⁸

Although metaphysics' chief concern is with the world of forms this does not mean that the world of forms has no bearing with the sensible world, so long as it is understood that in its engagement with the

sensible world the point of metaphysics is to transcend the sensible world in order to realise the supra-sensible. So it is more or less the same demand we witness in Aristotle in respect of the task of grasping the universal in the particular.⁵⁹

The difference between Aristotle and Plato, of course, is that unlike Plato, Aristotle does not separate the universal from the sensible particular but insists that the universal inheres in the particular.⁶⁰ So, as it were, we do not have two worlds as Plato maintains, but one world which encompasses both the universal and the sensible particular. In other words, Aristotle replaces Plato's metaphysical dualism with a type of monism in which there is no separation between the world of universal and the world of particular.⁶¹

Beyond this difference which is legislated by Plato's metaphysical dualism the demand of metaphysics is the same for Plato and Aristotle to the extent that the basic challenge is to grasp the universal in the particular; in other words, to transcend the particular and realize the universal. This means effectively that metaphysics is preoccupied with reality as it comes to issue in the particular or appearance, if you like. Yet in preoccupying itself with appearance or particular the understanding is that particular or appearance is appearance of reality and the ultimate goal is to realize reality, even if this has to be done via appearance.

There is a second point that Plato's definition of metaphysics as science of the supra-sensible clarifies once we approach it from the standpoint of his theory of forms. This has to do with absolute importance of reason as the sole instrument that metaphysics relies upon in pursuing its vocation of achieving metaphysical knowledge of the nature of ultimate reality. Metaphysics does not depend on observation but on reason; hence Plato denies that sense perception is knowledge. Once we take into account the nature of reality that metaphysics engages with and how it engages with it, we achieve a clear determination of Plato's account of metaphysics as a science of the supra-sensible.

CONCLUSION

Without doubt Plato with Aristotle remains the two most important influences that have shaped the course of Western philosophy. It is not surprising, therefore, that both are seen as philosophical twins; for beyond the differences between them Plato and Aristotle are unanimous in projecting the image of metaphysics as the queen of all sciences, given that its principles are exemplified by all other sciences, philosophical and non-philosophical. While we cannot doubt the contemporary relevance of Plato's account of metaphysics as the science of the supra-sensible, the truth is that the foundational character of metaphysics has come more and more under attack in

contemporary philosophy. Indeed the anti-metaphysical and anti-essentialist bias of contemporary philosophy has led to a situation where the traditional concept of metaphysics canvassed by Plato is seen as unfashionable.

Yet the attempt in contemporary philosophy to tone down the claims of metaphysics in order to bring it in alignment with scientific rationality has not helped matters at all. Indeed the abandonment of the allegedly grandiose concept of metaphysics that Plato articulated in favour of more specialized studies in respect of the social sciences and the humanities has precipitated a certain crisis of value in culture and society which crisis paradoxically demonstrates the inevitability of metaphysics, so far as, again and again, we are stuck in the realm of mere particularity with a loss of sense of the whole. What is clear therefore is that the crisis of fragmentation that bedevils the social sciences and humanities, and indeed culture and society as a whole reinforce the need for a universal science that preoccupies itself with the ultimate rather merely the proximate or again, the holistic rather than merely with the fragmentary. Against the backdrop that no particular science is sufficient unto itself, the perennial significance of Plato's conceptualization of metaphysics as the science of the supra-sensible is beyond question.

ENDNOTES

¹ Cf. "Plato's Apology" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, Second Edition Vol. 1 (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997), pp. 82-99. See also W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy*, Vol. 1, The Classical Mind, 2nd Edition (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), pp. 109-118

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Alan R. White, *Methods of Metaphysics* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1987), pp. 11-14

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy*, Vol. 1, The Classical Mind, 2nd Edition (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), Pp. 109-118. See Plato, "Apology" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, Second Edition Vol. 1 (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997), pp. 82-99

¹⁰ See Alan White, *Methods of Metaphysics*, p. 15

¹¹ See Plato, "Apology" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 82-99

¹² See Plato, "Apology". This means invariably that the human standpoint is inexorably relative even as it seeks to become more and more adequate. No matter how much we try the finitude of human reason cannot be undone. This is what it means to say that dialectic is an open process of searching for the truth of being. This aspect of Plato's account of knowledge is well exemplified in Bradley's metaphysics of the Absolute according to which human knowledge is not absolute but conditional. See *Appearance and Reality*, Chapter 24. In accentuating this aspect of Plato's account of knowledge, Bradley purpose is to counter the more optimistic accounts of the dialectics we find in such thinkers as Hegel whereby the difference between thought and reality, or again between appearance and reality is finally mediated such as to guarantee the absoluteness of knowledge. In leaving the open the process, Bradley seems more faithful to the spirit of dialectics as formulated by Plato than Hegel is. As a consequence, philosophy itself is never identified with wisdom qua wisdom but is a perpetual search for wisdom. In Kierkegaard we find a more pessimistic hermeneutics of the limits of speculative dialectic. See W. G. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, translated by A. V. Miller (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969); See also *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller and foreword by F. N. J. N. Findlay, especially paragraph 10 of the Introduction in which Hegel submits that the Absolute must not only be conceived as substance but also as subject and then of course the chapter on Absolute knowledge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). See Merold Westphal, "Kierkegaard and Hegel" in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. See also, "Leap of Faith" in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. See Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ This in fact was the core of his objection against the sophists.

¹⁶ See Alan White, *Method of Metaphysics*, pp. 10-11

¹⁷ See Plato, "Apology" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 82-99

¹⁸ In this respect is instructive that Socrates and Jesus have been compared. Moreover the comparison will hold in respect of the martyrs who died for the truth they believed. Think here for instance of St Stephen the First Christian martyr. See Damian Ilodigwe, *Faith in Action*, Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2014), Chapter 10

¹⁹ See Plato "Apology", pp. 82-89

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See Alan White, *Methods of Metaphysics*, pp. 174-190

²² See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), pp. 3-13. See also Lyotard's *Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), chapters 1-3

²³ See Plato, "Republic" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 82-99. See Stumpf

²⁴ Cf. Alan White, *Methods of Metaphysics*, Chapter 1

²⁵ Plato shares this vision with Aristotle who also treats the categories of thought categories of being. See his "Categories" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 305-310; See also Damian Ilodigwe, "Aristotle's Concept of Metaphysics" in *Bodija Journal*, Forthcoming

²⁶ Cf. Alan White, *Methods of Metaphysics*, Chapter 1

²⁷ See Plato, "Republic" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 210-279

²⁸ See Aristotle, "Metaphysics" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 345-370

²⁹ Cf. Damian Ilodigwe, "Aristotle's Concept of Metaphysics" in *Bodija Journal*, Forthcoming

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See "Parmenides" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 279-286

³² Ibid.

³³ See W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy: The Classical Mind*, pp. 124-146

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Cf. Norman Melchert, *The Great Conversation, Vol. 1: Pre-Socratics through Descartes*, Second Edition (London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 109-112

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See "Theatetus" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient*

Philosophy, pp. 286-298

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Cf. Plato "Theatetus" in Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 286-298

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See Damian Ilodigwe, *Aristotle's Concept of Metaphysics*, Bodija Journal, Forthcoming

⁶⁰ See Norman Melchert, *The Great Conversation, Vol. 1: Pre-Socratics through Descartes*, Second Edition (London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 109-112

Ibid.