

AYER'S CRITIQUE OF METAPHYSICS

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Introduction

Alfred Jules Ayer (1910-1989) was one of the foremost critics of metaphysics in the twentieth century. With Russell and Moore, Ayer exerted considerable influence on several generations of English thinkers. In the British context, he was the official spokesman of the movement known as Logical Positivism, a movement, which traced its origin to the Vienna circle, and had among her members, thinkers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rudolf Carnap and Moritz Schlick. The movement was known for its anti-metaphysical bias. So quite naturally, Ayer's attitude to metaphysics is negative.

Ayer's rejection of metaphysics is very much under the

influence of Hume and Kant's pioneering appraisals of metaphysics. But, as we shall see, though his position is similar to those of Kant and Hume, it is quite different from them. What sets it apart from them is the peculiar nature of the premise on which Ayer predicates his rejection of metaphysics.

Our concern is to explore this premise and then assess the adequacy of Ayer's critique of metaphysics. We proceed as follows: First, we consider Ayer's relocation of the basis for rejection of metaphysics from theory of knowledge to philosophy of language; then we explore Ayer's principle of verification and its credentials. The final step undertakes a critical assessment of Ayer's rejection of metaphysics.

From Theory of Knowledge to Philosophy of Language: *Ayer's Critique Of Metaphysics*

Of course, it is in his celebrated *Language, Truth and Logic* that Ayer articulates his criticism of metaphysics. The title of the first chapter of this book, "The Elimination of Metaphysics", already indicates Ayer's negative reception of metaphysics. He tells us in the opening paragraph that:

The traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part, as unwarranted as they are unfruitful. The surest way to end them is to establish beyond question what should be the purpose and method of a philosophical enquiry. And this is by no means so difficult a task as the history of philosophy would lead one to suppose. For if there are any questions which science leaves it to philosophy to answer, a straightforward process of elimination must lead to their discovery. We may begin by criticizing the metaphysical thesis that philosophy affords us knowledge of a reality transcending the world of science and common sense. Later on, when we come to define metaphysics and account for its existence, we

shall find that it is possible to be a metaphysician without believing in a transcendent reality; for we shall see that many metaphysical utterances are due to the commission of logical errors, rather than to a conscious desire on the part of their authors to go beyond the limits of experience. But it is convenient for us to take the case of those who believe that it is possible to have knowledge of a transcendent reality as a starting point for our discussion. The arguments, which we use to refute them will subsequently be found to apply to the whole of metaphysics.¹

It is evident from this passage that Ayer is familiar with the claims of metaphysics. He is also aware of the various ways the claims of metaphysics are received by critics such as Hume and Kant, especially the claim regarding the possibility knowledge of a transcendent reality.² In this context, the issue of the limits of possible experience and whether or not, the claims of metaphysics can be sustained within this framework is central in the controversy regarding the status of metaphysics.³ Ayer recognizes the pivotal importance of this consideration. Yet he seems convinced that this procedure does not and cannot guarantee an effective criticism of metaphysics such as to conclusively undermine its possibility. The point is that in proceeding thus, much is invested in the resources of epistemology as a means of attacking metaphysics.

Yet it is not clear, on Ayer's view, that such investment will yield the desired result. By suggesting, therefore, that "many metaphysical utterances are due to the commission of logical errors, rather than to a conscious desire on the part of their authors to go beyond the limits of experience"⁴, Ayer is advocating a revision of the basis for the appraisal of metaphysics. The revision involves a transition from the usual epistemological premise that informed that exercise to a more

linguistic basis that predicates the appraisal of the claims of metaphysics on the nature of language rather than merely the nature of knowledge.

In order to articulate this linguistic premise, Ayer begins by criticizing the prevalent epistemological approach, all in view of demonstrating its insufficiency. In advancing his argument, he tells us that,

One way of attacking a metaphysician who claimed to have knowledge of a reality, which transcended the phenomenal world would be to enquire from what premises his propositions were deduced. Must he not begin, as other men do, with the evidence of his senses? And if so, what valid process of reasoning can possibly lead him to the conception of a transcendent reality? Surely from empirical premises nothing whatsoever concerning the properties, or even the existence of anything super-empirical can legitimately be inferred. But this objection would be met by a denial on the part of the metaphysician that his assertions were ultimately based on the evidence of his senses. He would say that he was endowed with a faculty of intellectual intuition, which enabled him to know facts that could not be known through sense-experience. And even if it could be shown that he was relying on empirical premises, and that his venture into a non-empirical world was therefore logically unjustified, it would not follow that the assertions, which he made concerning this non-empirical world could not be true. For the fact that a conclusion does not follow from its putative premise is not sufficient to show that it is false.⁵

The above passage is long; but it is nonetheless instructive in exposing the nuances that define Ayer's philosophical sensitivity. It throws light on the logic that drives Ayer's projected revision of the basis for rejection of metaphysics. Anyone familiar with the history of the debate on the status of metaphysics should see immediately that Ayer is

more or less reviewing Hume's intervention in a matter that implicates several levels. Ayer demonstrates he is familiar with all the levels. Yet his ultimate concern is whether this procedure as a whole is sufficient.

Like Hume, he will recognize that a successful rejection of metaphysics cannot be predicated merely on the argument that we cannot deduce anything super-empirical from empirical premises. This recognition is in order. For, in actual fact, metaphysics claims to rely solely on pure reason, rather than the senses, so that in counter-reaction it can easily be said, in defence of metaphysics, that this argument fails to meet the matter; and so cannot furnish a credible basis for rejecting metaphysics. Hume was certainly aware of the limitations of this procedure; hence he focused squarely on the nature of reason, hoping that if he can discredit the so-called beloved intellectual intuition of the metaphysician he would have conveniently blocked the remaining path towards the legitimization of metaphysics.⁶

While Ayer does not deny the virtues of this procedure, he is nonetheless aware of its limitation, since in truth, it can always be said that failing to have intellectual access to this reality, is far from showing that such reality does not exist. Indeed it is on account of these liabilities, bedevilling the epistemological path towards the rejection of metaphysics, that Ayer canvasses for a new approach. As he says explicitly in affirmation of this point:

One cannot overthrow a system of transcendent metaphysics merely by criticizing the way in which it comes into being. What is required is rather a criticism of the nature of the actual statements, which comprise it. And this is the line of argument which we shall, in fact, pursue: For we shall maintain that no statement which refers to "reality" transcending the limits of

possible sense experience can possibly have any literal significance; from which it must follow that the labours of those who have striven to describe such a reality have all been devoted to the production of nonsense.⁷

As noted a fundamental issue that defines the debate on the status of metaphysical knowledge is the issue of whether or not it is legitimate to violate the limits of possible experience. This consideration features explicitly in Hume and Kant's appraisal of metaphysics. In each case the validity of the epistemic limit is affirmed but in different ways. Hume affirms the limits empirically, and this is why he denies that neither the synthetic nor the a priori route serve the project of legitimizing metaphysics.⁸ In recognizing the validity of the limit Kant takes issue with the skepticism that results from Hume's procedure. Nonetheless, he will enforce the limits via the route of the transcendental, by instituting what he calls synthetic *a priori*, which transcendently conditions knowledge and at the same time limits it, so that the result, as in Hume's case, is that the metaphysician's beloved transcendent reality cannot be legitimized, so far as we do not have cognitive access to it. This is the central thrust of Kant's Copernican revolution as stated in the Preface to the Second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁹

While Ayer is impressed with all these, he is not at all convinced that this procedure is effective in securing the rejection of metaphysics. Sure, he accepts the validity of the limit. But he does believe the limit can be enforced through the epistemic route that Hume and Kant pursue. On the contrary, Ayer will explore what he considers a better means of enforcing the limit that is not vulnerable to the obvious objections that can be raised about the Kantian procedure relative to the issue of the logic of limit. Thus it is clear to Ayer that an epistemological

premise, whether in the guise of Hume or Kant or whatever, will not suffice as basis for the rejection of metaphysics. In other words he will seek to replace the usual epistemic premise for rejecting metaphysics with a linguistic premise. As Ayer affirms in intimating the linguistic basis that satisfies this requirement:

We will deduce the fruitlessness of attempting to transcend the limits of possible sense-experience not from psychological hypothesis concerning the actual constitution of the human mind, but from the rule, which determines the literal significance of language. Our charge against the metaphysician is not that he attempts to employ the understanding in a field where it cannot profitably venture, but that he produces sentences, which fail to conform to the conditions under which alone a sentence can be literally significant.¹⁰

Thus it emerges that Ayer's rejection of metaphysics is based on the nature of language rather than the nature of knowledge.¹¹ In what follows, we focus on the nature of this linguistic premise and its credentials, to see how it drives Ayer's appraisal of Metaphysics.

The Principle of Verification and Its Credentials

In relocating the basis for the rejection of metaphysics from knowledge to language, the consideration that underpins Ayer's initiative is the question as to the nature of meaningfulness, or put differently, the criterion of meaningfulness, as far as language is concerned. At the back of Ayer's mind is the idea that not all utterances are meaningful. And so he is interested in demarcating meaningful utterances from those that are not meaningful. In order to do this, there is need for a standard in terms of which the separation can proceed. But to anticipate a little, it is the desire to contain the challenge of

metaphysics that motivates the initiative, for in justifying his relocation of the basis for rejection of metaphysics from knowledge to language, he says explicitly that:

The metaphysician produces sentences, which fail to conform to the conditions under which alone a sentence can be literally significant. Nor are we ourselves obliged to talk nonsense in order to show that all sentences of a certain type are necessarily devoid of literal significance. We need only formulate the criterion, which enables us to test whether a sentence expresses a genuine proposition about a matter of fact, and then to point out that the sentences under consideration, fail to satisfy it.¹²

From all indication, this criterion, which tests the meaningfulness of sentences is crucial in Ayer's agenda. Indeed, his appraisal of metaphysics is almost inconceivable without reference to this criterion; so, it is proper to ask what this criterion of meaning is? What are its credentials? As Ayer tells us in *Language, Truth and Logic*,

The criterion, which we use to test the genuineness of apparent statements of fact, is the criterion of verifiability. We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if and only if, he knows how to verify the propositions which it purports to express that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions to accept the propositions as being true, or reject it as being false. If, on the other hand, the putative proposition is of such a character that the assumption of its truth or falsehood is consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning the nature of his future experience, then, as far as he is concerned, it is, if not a tautology, a mere pseudo-proposition. The sentence expressing it may be emotionally significant to him; but it is not literally significant. And with regard to questions, the procedure is the same. We enquire in every case what observations would lead us to answer the question, one way or the other; and, if none can be discovered, we must conclude

that the sentence under consideration does not, as far as we are concerned, express a genuine question, however strongly its grammatical appearance may suggest that it thus.¹³

The Verification Principle and its Various Formulations

We should underline the distinction between literal significance and emotional significance. The distinction is pivotal in situating in focus the meaning and purpose of Ayer's criterion of verifiability. The criterion of verifiability is defined by the demands of literal significance, not emotional significance. On this view, the meaning of a statement is its method of verification, and its method of verification as defined by the criterion of verifiability is observation. Thus a statement cannot be said to be factually significant unless what it asserts can be verified by means of observation.

Consider for example the statement, "It is raining". Going by the demands of the criterion of meaningfulness according to the verification principle, this statement can be said to be factually significant only if we can confirm by means of observation that it is actually raining, otherwise the statement is devoid of literal significance. But suppose, the statement asserted that "it rained yesterday", or "it will rain tomorrow", can it be said that they are factually significant? If the meaning of a statement is its method of verification, and if this in turn is observation, it is almost certain that these latter statements cannot be said to be literally significant, since it is impossible to observe the rain that fell yesterday in the context of today. The same will be true of the rain that will fall tomorrow. It can hardly be anticipated by way of observation in the present context, so that on this principle, it surely emerges as factually insignificant

to say, "It will rain tomorrow." When we turn to mathematical statements, such as $2+2$ is 4, we are faced with a similar difficulty, for it remains to be seen how what this asserts can be observed, so that it is clear that such statements do not meet the requirement of literally significant meaningful statements.

From the few examples we have considered, it is easy to see that this condition of meaningfulness is a rigorous demand. And if followed strictly, it is bound to confront us with endless array of problems with regard to the question of meaningfulness of statements, implicating a vast area of human endeavour. Ayer is not only aware of this state of affair with regard to his criterion of meaning, but he takes explicit step to redeem it from this obvious complication, by distinguishing between various formulations of the verification principle and excluding problematic formulations.

Thus in *Language, Truth and Logic*, he distinguishes between, practical verifiability and verification in principle. While Ayer retains the position that the method of verification of a factually meaningful statement is observation, he is prepared to allow that it need not be actual observation. It will do if, given the circumstances, it will be possible to observe. This means effectively that we do not need to observe in all cases. If we were to establish that given the circumstances, what the statement asserts can be observed, then this consideration will be enough to admit the sentence into the kingdom of meaningful statements.

This emphasis no doubt redeems the excessive rigour of the strict formulation of the principle and thus gives us a glimmer of hope that all is not lost. As Ayer himself concedes in celebrating this provisional victory of the principle of verification,

Plainly we all understand, and in many cases believe, propositions which we have not in fact taken steps to verify. Many of these are propositions which we could not verify if we took enough trouble. But there remain a number of significant propositions, concerning matters of fact, which we could not verify even if we choose; simply because we lack the practical means of placing ourselves in the situation where the relevant observation could be made. A simple and familiar example of such a proposition is the proposition that there are mountains on the farther side of the moon. No rocket has yet been invented which would enable me to go and look at the farther side of the moon, so that I am unable to decide the matter by actual observation. But I do not know what observation will decide it for me, if, as is theoretically conceivable, I were in position to make them. And therefore I say that the proposition is verifiable in principle, if not in practice, and is accordingly significant.¹⁴

To broaden the scope of the criterion of meaning so as to save it from unnecessary trouble, Ayer makes a further distinction between the "strong" and the "weak" verification. What does he mean by this distinction? He tells us that "a proposition is said to be verifiable, in the strong sense of the term, if, and only if, its truth could be conclusively established in experience. But it is verifiable, in the weak sense, if it is possible for experience to render it probable."¹⁵

For his purpose, Ayer adopts the "weak" sense of verifiability, realizing of course that the "strong" sense of verifiability apparently proves too much. Again he cites an example to justify his preference of the "weak" to the "strong":

Consider the case of general propositions of law - such propositions, namely, as "arsenic is poisonous", "all men are mortal"; "a body tends to expand when it is heated." It is of the very nature of these propositions that their truth cannot be established with certainty by any finite series of observations. But if it is recognized

that such general propositions of law are designed to cover an infinite number of cases, then it must be admitted that they cannot, even in principle be verified conclusively. And then, if we adopt conclusive verifiability as our criterion of significance, we are obliged to treat these general propositions of law in the same fashion as we treat the statements of the metaphysician.¹⁶

The Verification Principle and Ayer's Rejection of Metaphysics

In view of our consideration of the various formulations of the verification principle, it is clear that Ayer remains fundamentally committed to the principle that the meaning of a statement is its method of verification, and that there is no other method than observation. All that he has done by allowing the various formulations is to equivocate what he means by observation, so as to make the principle somewhat elastic. This elasticity in turn is designed to take into account exceptional cases that will prove difficult to admit into the kingdom of meaningful statement on the terms of the rigorous formulation of the principle.

Yet it is all too easy to see that this principle, even with all its various formulations, has devastating consequence for metaphysics. Not even the elasticity of the principle, thanks to its various formulations, promises a good deal for metaphysics. Of course, Ayer understands this very well. Indeed, as suggested, the principle was designed specifically for the purpose of rejecting metaphysics. So it is not surprising that even if exceptions can be made in order to accommodate other kinds of statements which apparently emerge as problematic on the terms of the principle, Ayer will not make such exceptions for

metaphysical statements.

Indeed, that this criterion of meaning by definition excludes metaphysical statements from the domain of possible meaning is part and parcel of the design of the principle. Thus having formulated the principle, Ayer expects that it is only a matter of fact that it be seen that metaphysical statements are not meaningful. Yet, if the meaningfulness of a statement is the ground on which the status of metaphysics is decided, it is evident that metaphysics really has no case. Indeed, this is what Ayer intends to accomplish by relocating the basis for assessment of metaphysics from theory of knowledge to philosophy of language.

But it is clear that this relocation itself is driven by the ideal of empiricism. In Hume and Kant, the ideal does work in the context of epistemology in plotting the limits of knowledge. But in this relocated basis of philosophy of language the ideal now serves in delimiting the scope of meaningful utterances. Ayer's conviction is that it does better in this context than in the previous context of epistemology. In each case, however, the result is the same: a vigorous rejection of metaphysics. In Ayer's version, however, the assumption is that the rejection is re-sounding.

In applying the principle of verification to metaphysics, Ayer has no doubts regarding the impeccability of the principle. This is the impression we get as we consider the various instances of the metaphysical statements he brought before the tribunal of the verification principle. In each case, his unequivocal conclusion is that metaphysical utterances are meaningless and their nonsensical character is not as a result of

bad faith but simply the product of logical errors that can be avoided, if the limits of meaningful utterances can be observed.

The corollary of this, of course, is that metaphysics has no right to regard its statements as factually significant. They can be accepted as emotionally significant, in which case they do not make any factual assertion about the real world, but merely report the emotional or mystical feeling of metaphysicians. To this extent, such statements cannot really be admitted into the domain of factually significant utterances. To illustrate his point, Ayer takes the case of what he calls metaphysical pseudo-proposition:

“The Absolute enters into, but is itself incapable of evolution and progress.” On his (that is, the metaphysician) view this metaphysical pseudo proposition is not even verifiable in principle. For one cannot conceive of an observation, which would enable one to determine whether the Absolute did, or did not, enter into evolution and progress. Of course it is possible that the author of such a remark is using English words in a way they are not commonly used by English-speaking people, and that he does, in fact, intend to assert something which could be empirically verified. But until he makes us understand how the proposition that he wishes to express would be verified, he fails to communicate anything to us. And if he admits, as I think the author of the remark in question would have admitted, that his words were not intended to express either a tautology or a proposition which was capable, at least of in principle, of being verified, then it follows that he has made an utterance which has no literal significance even for himself.¹⁷

In another place he takes examples from the perennial problems of philosophy to illustrate the upshot of his critique of metaphysics on the basis of his linguistic premise. The conclusion he comes to is the same. Namely, that these

traditional problems of philosophy are pseudo-problems and are revealed as such when subjected to sustained philosophical analysis. They are shown to be unreal problems arising from logical confusion. Concerning the traditional problem of substance for instance, he tell us that,

It is admitted both by monists, who maintain that reality is one substance, and by pluralist, who maintain that reality is many, that it is impossible to imagine any empirical situation, which would be relevant to the solution of their dispute. But if we are told that no possible observation could give any probability either to the assertion that reality was one substance or to the assertion that it was many, then we must conclude that neither assertion is significant.¹⁸

Apart from dismissing metaphysical problems as pseudo-problems and submitting that metaphysical utterances are factually insignificant, another upshot of Ayer's appraisal of metaphysics on the terms of the verification principle is that metaphysics is excluded from the domain of philosophy, since in his view, philosophy deals with matters of fact, that is, matters falling within the scope of the world of common sense and science; matters which are verifiable through the method of verification. But he is also prepared to allow that philosophy will also engage in analysis of statements in order to expose the logical errors that might possibly bedevil them. In relation to metaphysical realities, philosophy performs this negative function. But aside from this, matters falling within the scope of science and common sense define its domain.

A Critical Assessment of Ayer's Rejection of Metaphysics

From our exposition so far, it is evident that Ayer's principle of verification is crucial for his project of elimination

of metaphysics. The transition which he purports to accomplish by relocating the base of appraisal of metaphysics from epistemology to philosophy of language is heavily dependent on the verification principle. The validity of the entire move also depends on the validity of the verification principle, since it is this that furnishes him with the criterion of meaningfulness in terms of which he rejects metaphysical statements as nonsensical. In short, Ayer's project of elimination of metaphysics stands or falls on the strength of the verification principle.

But it remains to be seen whether the verification principle can sustain the enormous burden it is made to carry. Unless the principle itself can be shown to be logically coherent, it remains doubtful whether it can serve as a credible basis for the rejection of metaphysics. It is not clear that its coherence can be demonstrated, for the question may well be asked whether the principle itself can be verified in terms of the method of verification which it upholds as standard of meaningfulness.

If the principle cannot be verified on its own terms, it is certain it cannot serve as basis for assessment of meaningful statements since on its own terms, the thesis it asserts emerges as factually insignificant. So it is as if the principle shoots itself on the foot before it is even able to shoot and kill metaphysics.

Perhaps, this is by far the strongest objection against Ayer's project of elimination of metaphysics on the basis of the so-called criterion of meaningfulness. This objection has done a lot to hurt the credibility of the entire movement called logical positivism. In its childhood and adolescence, it was easy to escape its seduction. But in the twilight of its existence, it would

seem that logical positivism itself has been disowned by its original exponents, for in twentieth century philosophy, the downfall of logical positivism is perhaps the most celebrated event in the Philosophical world. It set out to kill metaphysics, but it ended up killing itself, since it could not live up to the very standard it legislated.

Aside from this fundamental objection against metaphysics, there is also the point that the verification principle is one-sided in its understanding of the nature of meaning. For, it seems to take one expression of the phenomenon of meaning as the entire expression of meaning, without allowing that there is plurality of forms of meaning. This dogmatism explains why it can define the meaning of a statement in terms of its method of verification, and this, in turn, defined in terms of observation.

It is not that there is no point at all to this initiative. This criterion within limits can pass as criterion for certain statements but it cannot pass as criterion for all categories of statements. Ayer's effort to revise the criterion, so as to accommodate other categories of observation statements appears to confirm the one-sided nature of the verification principle. Yet, he is still prepared to use it as a standard for judging the meaningfulness of all categories of statements. This is clearly wrong-headed. It is more reasonable to say that each type of discourse will have its own standard of meaning as Wittgenstein later points out in his theory of 'meaning as use' as articulated in his celebrated *Philosophical Investigations*.

But if that is the case, the question of the nature of fact throws itself up. For it means we cannot define the notion of fact squarely in terms of what is factually significant as expressed by

the criterion of meaning. Even within the scope of observation statements, it is clear that there are various categories and they cannot be all judged alike. This is what the distinction between verification in principle and verification in practice imply.

Of course, the same is true of the distinction between "weak" and "strong" verification. They both suggest the need to broaden the scope of meaningful statements, so as not to exclude obviously meaningful statements from the domain of meaning. Of course, Ayer undertook this revision to save scientific statements from being consigned to the domain of meaningfulness. This is a laudable initiative. But the question remains why such initiative cannot be undertaken on behalf of metaphysics, since what we are confronted with here is the basic one-sidedness of the principle of verification. If the principle will be revised to allow for a broadened conception of meaning, perhaps the situation of metaphysics will look better than Ayer makes it seem.

However, there is an obvious constraint here since the verification principle itself is brokered in the crucible of empiricism. Unless it sheds its empiricist garb, it is not likely that it will yield to this plea to broaden the scope of meaning. If it yields to this plea, it will want to moderate it in terms of the empiricist ideal, so that it is no more than a family affair. But the question is: is it legitimate to envisage a broadening of scope of meaning that transcends anything that is merely locatable within the citadel of empiricism? If such an exercise were possible, then there is hope for metaphysics.

But the very hope of metaphysics amounts to the death of logical positivism, since the heart of its attack on metaphysics is

the verification principle and the rigid empiricism that drives it. But the much more fundamental question emerging from all of this is whether it is at all appropriate to judge metaphysics on the terms of this criterion?

But that is what Ayer has done. A move which raises a credibility question since the principle itself is incoherent. To be sure, no case can be mounted in favour of metaphysics if it were judged in terms of the verification principle. But since the entire move is admittedly misguided on account of the one-sidedness that bedevils it, it is evident that the attack it mounts on metaphysics cannot stand. It cannot be taken as offering a credible basis for the rejection of metaphysics. Critics of metaphysics, if they must celebrate the demise of metaphysics, it seems, must look for a better basis for prosecuting that project.

Conclusion

It is clear that the linguistic premise of Ayer as defined by the verification principle will not do the job. Indeed it is open to question that this linguistic relocation of the base for appraisal of metaphysics suffers from the same constraints that bedevils its epistemological antecedent; and the problem all the time is the rigid empiricism that constitutes its template. On this matter, Ayer appears closer to Hume than Kant. But even Kant's epistemological (transcendental) basis for rejection of metaphysics is equally dented by its commitment to empiricism no matter how residual this commitment is.

So, as in the contexts of Hume and Kant, we must ask: Have these appraisals done justice to the claims of metaphysics or they have judged these claims in terms that are alien to the

very essence of metaphysics?

ENDNOTES

¹ Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1952), p. 33

² See David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamps. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 211

³ E. J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapter 1 See Michael Loux, *Contemporary Introduction to Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-17

⁴ Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 33

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cf. Donald Palmer, *Looking at Philosophy* (London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 180-188

⁷ Ibid. 34

⁸ This is evident from Hume's famous statement in the *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* to the effect that: "When we run over libraries, persuaded by these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hands any volume - of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance-let us ask, "Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number (i.e. analytics truths)? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact and existence (i. e. synthetic truths)? No. Commit it then to flames for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 211

⁹ As Kant says, "It has hitherto been assumed that our knowledge must conform to the objects; but all attempts to ascertain anything about these objects *a priori*, by means of concepts, and thus to extend the range of our knowledge, have been rendered abortive by this assumption. Let us then make the experiment whether we may not be more successful in metaphysics, if we assume that the objects must conform to our knowledge" *Critique of Pure Reason*, Everyman edition, edited by Vasilis Politis (London: J. M. Dent, 1993), BXV; See also William H. Brenner, *Elements of Modern Philosophy: Descartes Through Kant* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1989), pp. 120-127.

¹⁰ Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 35

¹¹ This indeed is a significant development from the broader standpoint of the history of philosophy, for by so proceeding in relocating the base for rejection of metaphysics from theory of knowledge to theory of language, Ayer is doing something analogous to what happened at the start of modern philosophy, with the emergence of the idea of epistemology as first philosophy, such that it was required that we first examine the powers of the human mind to determine its capacities and limits before addressing the fundamental metaphysical questions about the nature of God, world and self. This is what is usually known as the epistemological turn, which began with Descartes and continued in Hume and Kant. In searching for a new basis for rejecting metaphysics, Ayer is more or less urging a linguistic turn in the sense that issue of the nature of language now assumes priority over the question of the nature of knowledge and reality. (See Tom L. Beauchamp, "Editor's Introduction" in David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 10-11)

¹² Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p.35

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 36

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 37

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 36

¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 39-40