

IS METAPHYSICS A FEASIBLE PHILOSOPHICAL OPTION?

A. Kadir Çüçen

Uludağ University – Turkey

Abstract. Before attempting to answer our primary question “is metaphysics a feasible philosophical option?”, I believe that it is necessary to explain and to discuss what the nature of philosophy is, and how it differs from science because my assumption that metaphysics is a feasible philosophical option will get its meaning by showing that metaphysics differs from science as well as philosophy differs from science; furthermore, it would be shown that metaphysics differs from the other options of philosophy. Therefore, in this paper, three concepts will be examined and compared with each other: Philosophy, science, and metaphysics.

Keywords: Philosophy, metaphysics, ontology, science, Being, tradition

1. Philosophy and Science in General

In the general definition, both philosophy and science seek a systematic inquiry for the truth. In the broadest sense, philosophy is a science. Their purposes are the same and one. However, in the narrower sense, they are different from each other. Their nature, method, concepts, facts, etc., are different. As I try to show that philosophy is not a science, and science is not a philosophy, but that philosophy is broader than science.

I understand that the term ‘philosophy’ is broader in meaning than the term ‘science’. I understand by ‘science’ that one means empirical science which seeks to answer factual questions about man and the world. In this sense, philosophy is not a science, since it is not an empirical science.

Historically speaking, in the ancient Greek, the same person tried to solve philosophical problems as well as the scientific problems without distinguishing between them. In other words, the philosopher is also a scientist and that the scientist is a philosopher. From the seventeenth century to the present, it can be seen that the same thinker is functioning both as a philosopher and as a scientist in his work. However, it is very difficult for the person to master all fields of knowledge; so specialization became increasingly necessary.

Although some thinkers assert that philosophy should deal with conceptual and linguistic problems or that philosophy disappears among the various empirical

sciences, I think that philosophy still deals with its major problems such as being, reality, the knowledge of reality, ethics, etc. In other words, in a general sense, philosophy can deal with everything; for example, philosophy of....

Science (in my understanding, empirical science includes both physical (natural) sciences and social sciences) is dealt with in answering questions about man and the world by using the methods of observation or experimentation. Scientists seek to discover the laws of man, society and the world. Scientists assert some hypotheses, and by testing them by observation or experimentation, scientists find the laws of the subject matter.

On the other hand, philosophy deals with answering questions about man, the world, God, being, reality, values, and relations to one another by a critical reflection on the experience available to the philosophers. Therefore, philosophy is not factual like empirical science. The method of philosophy is not experimental but is critical and conceptual.

The methods of science and philosophy are different. The scientist uses the inductive reasoning which goes from individual case to the general. The scientist observes the measurable factors in his inquiry, and he tries to state his result in either mathematical form or by an experimental test. Unlike the scientist, the philosopher uses the deductive method which is reasoned from the general case to the particular case. In the deduction, a conclusion is the necessary result of the premises which are true; so deduction is a kind of reasoning from which the conclusion is necessary and true.

The scientist proves his hypothesis and results in various ways. The scientific results can be retested, and every time they are the same under the same conditions. However, the philosopher persuades his ideas by using reasoning. His ideas cannot be retested in empirical ways, but the ideas of a philosopher can be accepted or rejected or criticized by another.

2. The Meaning of Metaphysics in the History of Philosophy

The Greeks think that metaphysics is the science which investigates the ultimate ground of absolutely everything. In Aristotle metaphysics is the science of the causes of all things.

For St. Thomas, metaphysics is the science of God or theology. In the Seventeenth Century metaphysics has become a major part of philosophy. For Christian Wolff, metaphysics is a theoretical philosophy which is also called ontology, that is, the basic philosophical discipline. Wolff maintains that the real task of metaphysics is to deduce, from clearly defined concepts and axioms, the statements which apply to every possible object of thought. In this way, metaphysics is no longer a real study of being, but a more formal doctrine of axioms or principles. As a result of Wolff's understanding of metaphysics, it has become a science of being in general, and metaphysics is the science of the possible but not the real.

Kant made metaphysics impossible for theoretical reasons, but he made it possible for practical reason. He maintains that there are no synthetical a priori judgments in metaphysics, i.e. metaphysics is not a science in general. Some basic metaphysics asks questions such as the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and freedom; it can be concerned with practical reason, so Kant sees a difference between theoretical and practical reason. For Kant, metaphysics is possible for practical reasons.

Hegel criticizes Fichte's and Schelling's intellectual intuition, and for him, the phenomenology of spirit brings him to absolute knowledge where logic turns into metaphysics. Therefore, there is only an embodied logic which determines the forms of thought through the agency of the contents of thought.

At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, a number of thinkers have turned to the ontological problems again; for example, Edmund Husserl returns to ontology and speaks of regional ontologies. By his phenomenological reduction he seeks the mere essences, but without a connection with being.

3. Metaphysics and ontology in Heidegger's Philosophy

It must be explained that metaphysics as the traditional philosophy is different from the fundamental ontology for which Heidegger is seeking the ontology of Being. After differentiating fundamental ontology from traditional metaphysics, let us examine what Heidegger means by metaphysics. The history of philosophy is metaphysics; it is concerned with the difference of Being and beings; so, Heidegger's primary concern is to show the history of Being as metaphysics. In other words, metaphysics in the traditional sense is seen as the history of Being i.e., the history of ontology.

Heidegger maintains that in all aspects of metaphysics, Being is separated from beings, and existence is separated from essence, but that they are not explained clearly and remained the unexplained presupposition. The separation of Being from beings is obscured because Being as such is thought exclusively with respect to its relation to beings as the first cause. On the other hand, in the distinction between essence and existence, essence takes priority over existence. Thus, the priority of essence over existence leads to an emphasis on beings. The primordial meaning of existence as *physis* is lost; consequently, it is thought only in contrast to essence.

Heidegger states that "metaphysics has distinguished for ages between what beings are and that beings are, or are not." In this sense, Being is divided into "whatness" and "thatness". The history of Being as metaphysics in the traditional sense begins with this distinguishing and its preparation. Therefore, metaphysics as traditional philosophy is based on the distinction between "beings and Being" and "essence and existence."

For Heidegger, the Pre-Socratics are in some way more significant, while Plato, Aristotle and Descartes manifest a decline when the separation between Being and

beings had begun. The Platonic separation of a world of Ideas or Forms from a world of opinion or appearance opens the gap between Being and beings, and it destroys the fundamental ontological inseparability of the Being and beings.

Heidegger sketches the basic form of Being in the history of traditional philosophy as the One, the Logos, Idea, Ousia, Energeia, Substance, Activity, Perception, the Monad, Objectivity, the being posited, Love, Spirit, and Will to Power. However, Heidegger thinks that all these meanings of Being do not explain the most primordial ontological meaning of Being. They cover up the primordial ontological meaning of Being which was seen by the Pre-Socratics. For Heidegger, metaphysics in the traditional sense must be reexamined and reinterpreted; so, it has to be redirected and reoriented towards its new original meaning because Heidegger thinks that traditional metaphysics has its end with the philosophy of Nietzsche. Heidegger makes a turning point and is overcoming the tradition of metaphysics. This does not mean that traditional metaphysics should not be a subject for studying or should be forgotten or should be thrown. The history of ontology as traditional metaphysics was not concerned with Being which is understood as temporality, because all understood Being as timeless or out of time. If the basic problem of ontology is the problem of the meaning of Being in general, then ontology must only be the temporality of Being because, for Heidegger, fundamental ontology as the existential analysis of Being (Dasein) is a temporal science which opens a path toward Temporality as a transcendental horizon.

Heidegger believes that the fundamental philosophical question of Being is prior to psychology, anthropology, all ethics, sociology, history, and all natural science. In other words, philosophy as the fundamental ontology is prior to everything including the sciences. Therefore, only philosophy can grasp the whole totality of the meaning of Being in its ontological context.

The aim of Heidegger's inquiry is to re-interpret the principal problem of the question about the multiplicity of ways of Being and the unity of the concept of Being. He is aware of Aristotle's thesis that Being is said in many ways. If a being in its Being can be expressed many ways, then how can one think of the unity of the manifold meanings of Being? One of the expression of the manifold meanings of Being is the sense of Being-true. How is "what it means to be" understood in terms of the meaning of Being-true in Heidegger's thinking? Because Dasein as Being-in-the-world is disclosedness, (i.e., truth) Heidegger must explain what it means to be Being-true as disclosedness, and he must show the relationship between Being and Truth.

Heidegger thinks that the Pre-Socratics, as mentioned previously, see Being as unconcealment, *aletheia* in its primordial meaning. However, with Plato and Aristotle philosophy turns from Being to beings as the fundamental question of metaphysics.

However, Martin Heidegger maintains that the whole of western metaphysics has always been concerned with beings, never Being itself, i.e. it has been concerned

with being, but not with Being of beings. Therefore, Heidegger separates ontology from ontic. Heidegger thinks that metaphysics has forgotten Being in itself of the beings. For Heidegger, the question of Being must first turn towards the man as Dasein, since just Dasein has asked the meaning of the question of Being. By Heidegger, the ontological investigation of metaphysics becomes an existential analysis of Dasein.

The purpose of these brief historical explanations of metaphysics shows that the problems of fundamental ontology have always been a lively inquiry into the history of metaphysics. Therefore, traditionally and classically, metaphysics is the science of Being as Being; and metaphysics is the basic or fundamental science, since it investigates the basis, ground, or foundation of reality.

4. Metaphysics, Philosophy, and Science

The purpose of science and philosophy is, in the general sense, the same, but the nature and method of both are different. It was shown above that philosophy is not a science. Philosophy can also include science, and it is more than science. It can be a philosophy of science or a philosophy of any special science.

In the traditional sense, philosophy has three major branches: Metaphysics (ontology), epistemology (theory of knowledge), and ethics (theory of moral). If philosophy is not a science, as I explained, then none of its branches is a science. Here, I will try to explain and discuss that metaphysics as a branch of philosophy is not a science; that it is a feasible philosophical option; that it is different from the other branches of philosophy.

The name of the subject is the name given to a treatise by Aristotle. Aristotle describes the subject of his treatise as the science of Being as such which is distinct from any of the special sciences. The general understanding of metaphysics is an attempt to know reality as against mere appearance, or the study of first principles or the universe. I can completely agree with Aristotle's definition of metaphysics. Metaphysics as the science of Being as such differs from any special sciences in which we, today, refer to them as empirical sciences. Therefore, as it was seen at the origin of metaphysics and as it was seen in the previous paragraphs, metaphysics is different from the sciences, and it belongs to philosophy.

If one looks at the nature of metaphysics, he may maintain that metaphysics is not concerned with hypothesis nor with any specific factual event as the sciences are, but it is concerned with finding a ground for the hypothesis and in explaining the whole reality in a systematic way. Such questions as the following are raised: What is the real nature of things? What is the difference between appearance and reality?

It is said that inquiries in the special sciences are carried out under assumptions which are the business of metaphysics to make explicit and either to justify or to correct. Metaphysics, by contrast, proceeds without assumptions and is, therefore,

fully self-critical. Therefore, metaphysics is both beyond and before the special sciences.

The reasoning of a metaphysician is deduction, and he tries to find a priori axioms of a systematic account of reality. The nature of metaphysics is deductive and a priori. The methods of science are quite different from the methods of metaphysics. The scientific method is experimental, a posteriori, and inductive, and its language is mathematical. However, the methods of metaphysics are deductive, conceptual, and a priori.

The object of metaphysics is never an object in the sense of a doctrine of sense experience. The object of metaphysics, Being as Being, is no where available except in the mind of the metaphysician, since one can have being in everyday life, but never Being as Being. The object of metaphysics is a transcendental object, and the method of metaphysics is a transcendental method. The transcendental method of metaphysics uses the analytic-deductive reasoning because only such reasoning can grasp Being as Being.

The starting point of reasoning must not be a demonstrative principle, but such a point must be a self-evident and unhypothetical principle. The starting point of metaphysics cannot question itself, but it can question its method and contents. Its method, as it was said before, is transcendental, deductive, and also reductive. All of these methods are a logical process. However, logic cannot justify itself; metaphysics comes logically and metaphysically first, and it justifies both itself and logic. The starting point of metaphysics is circular; e.g. the Cartesian circle of a starting point (Cogito, the existence of God, and the existence of the physical world) or the Hegelian movement of Geist.

Although some philosophers made metaphysics an impossible or meaningless study, I think that most of them also fall into metaphysical thought. For example, Kant's purpose is to show that synthetical a priori judgments are possible, and that they exist in the natural sciences and in mathematics. They do not exist in metaphysics. Therefore, Kant denied the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. However, some of Kant's predecessors maintained that Kant's synthetical a priori judgments are metaphysical judgments because they do not exist anywhere. Another example can be Galileo's presupposition. Galileo says that the universe is written in the mathematical language. It has been argued that this expresses part of Galileo's metaphysical presuppositions of science. In the history of human thought, sometimes what was thought as a metaphysical idea became later a scientific fact. For instance, the theory of atoms was considered as metaphysical object by some physicists such as the famous Ernst Mach. After Einstein's proof, it became a scientific theory. Sometimes what was considered as a scientific law later became a non-scientific law. For example, according to Newtonian physics, there are laws in nature. Max Planck shows that there is no law in nature with his quantum theory. He says that "we have no right to assume that any physical laws exist, or if they

have existed up to now, that they will continue to exist in a similar manner in the future.”¹⁾

Strict positivists like Ernst Mach and other logical positivists maintain that metaphysical truth is tautological, purely formal and abstract. Its truth cannot be verified by sensation, observation, and experimentation. For the positivist, only truth which can be tested by experimental facts is the subject of science. I think that the positivists are wrong because the positivists reduce everything to the level of experience which is called objective experience in nature. On the other hand, I showed that philosophy is not a science which I described before; metaphysics as a branch of philosophy is not a science, so metaphysics is possible in the philosophical sense but not in the empirical sense. It is a feasible philosophical option but not a feasible scientific option.

Consequently, my acceptance of the feasibility of metaphysics is based on the distinction between science and philosophy. In the philosophical, abstract, conceptual, and thought level, metaphysics is a workable or feasible option.

This maintenance, furthermore, can be shown in the history of philosophy. Plato’s theory of ideas or form, Aristotle’s theory of form and matter, Spinoza’s theory of substance, Leibniz’s theory of monads, Hegel’s theory of absolute spirit and also Marx’s theory of materialism showed that in the history of philosophy, metaphysics was a feasible philosophical option because at least the above philosophers did metaphysics in their philosophy.

Consider the present time. Is metaphysics still a feasible philosophical option? I will say “yes”. As long as man lives, metaphysics will remain as a feasible philosophical option, and as long as man philosophizes, metaphysics will remain as a feasible philosophical option because of the nature of philosophy and metaphysics.

I think that metaphysics today is not concerned with the ontology. Metaphysicians are interested in epistemology and ethics rather than ontology. For this reason, ontological metaphysics seems to disappear, but there are still metaphysicians and metaphysics in a different sense of the traditional meaning.

NOTES

1. Planck, Max, *The Universe in the Light of Modern Physics*, George Allen And Unwin Limited. London, 1931, p. 63.

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✉ **Prof. Dr. A. Kadir Çüçen**
Uludag University
Özlüce Mh.
16120 Bursa, Turkey
E-mail: kadir@uludag.edu.tr