

POSTMODERNISM, METAPHYSICS AND MYTH

Ryan C. Urbano

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of metaphysics in spite of the incessant blows it receives from thinkers who interpret postmodernism in its extreme possibilities. Though it cannot be denied that metaphysics fails in some ways to explain the whole of reality, it is also undeniable that in some other ways it has enriched man's understanding of reality, especially the reality of his own existence. In fact, metaphysics also helps create and recreate reality. The self that attempts to understand through metaphysics cannot fully comprehend reality as such because he and the language he utters are aspects of reality itself. At the same time, this comprehension enlarges reality insofar as it is enriched by that intellectual grasp. So the self is placed in a paradoxical situation wherein he seeks to know but reality eludes his intellectual grasp because the very act of knowing makes reality grow. Reality expands and is transformed as the self attempts to understand it.

If metaphysics founders in trying to come up with an all-encompassing vision of reality, does it lose its credibility and integrity as first philosophy? Metaphysics can no longer pretend to give an accurate and exact picture or representation of reality. This has been proven by the various reactions of many contemporary thinkers such as Nietzsche, Cassirer, Heidegger, Levinas, Derrida, and Lyotard, among others. What once thought to be the highest philosophy has now been radically questioned and vigorously attacked for its pretensions, dangers, and prejudices. For some postmodern thinkers metaphysical discourses can no longer be trusted or relied upon because they are only façades of something hidden and sinister intent in dominating and suppressing another and privileging something or someone. In other words, beneath or behind metaphysics lies an ideology, a power politics that controls people favoring those who conceive and impose it.

But this author contends that metaphysics can be dangerous and can be used as a tool to manipulate or control others if it is taken as absolute and uncompromising philosophy. But if metaphysics is understood as a flexible and open-ended view of reality then it will not be the sort of philosophy that radical postmodern philosophers think it to be.

Ryan C. Urbano, MA

Just like a myth, metaphysics cannot be considered as the ultimate foundation of reality. Hence, no metaphysics is final and finished. It is simply a way of seeing reality subject to improvement and revision. In a way it gives one a glimpse of and a translucent view of reality. In the discussions that will follow, the author will first map out the terrain of postmodern philosophy before he defends his claim that metaphysics remains relevant to today's philosophical mood marked by skepticism, relativism and even fundamentalism. The author will then proceed to describe metaphysics as a myth although myth is not equated with illusion or an incredible narrative. Myth unravels a reality inconspicuous to discursive thought nevertheless meaningful because it enriches man's understanding of himself and the world he lives in.

Finally, the task of philosophy in the light of postmodernism will be explored so as to show that without philosophy, particularly metaphysics, man would have no rational and ethical guide to help him live his life in this world.

What is Postmodernism?

Postmodernism, whether it indicates a new period, an economic phase, a fad, a concept or a practice, is currently in vogue in today's philosophical scene.¹ As to when it exactly began, there is no definite consensus. Postmodern thinkers themselves repulse the idea of a beginning or an origin because it connotes a foundation, the very concept they vigorously criticize and attack. However, they are unanimous in their refusal to accept as final and absolute the metaphysical pronouncements of modern philosophers.

Philosophy in the modern period which started with Rene Descartes (1596-1650) is generally characterized as dualistic, epistemological and foundationalist.² Modern philosophy endeavors to seek a foundational knowledge of reality through the self-conscious subject-- the only entity in the world-- which for Descartes is indubitable. By turning inwards, the conscious subject will discover grounds that will secure for him certain knowledge about the external world. The modern philosopher is convinced

¹ Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 2.

² G. B. Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), x.

that if he is able to organize his ideas methodically according to the laws of logic, then his ideas will form to represent reality. This is known as *representationalism*.³ Objective reality, which is present before the subject, is re-presented in his mind by means of concepts or *logos*. Thus, *logocentrism* (a term coined by Derrida), which "seeks beyond signs and representation, the real and the true, the presence of being, of knowing and reality, to the mind—an access to concepts and things in their pure, unmediated form,"⁴ is also a description ascribed to Western philosophy.

But postmodern philosophers challenge and criticize this equation of *thought* (the ideas of the subject) to *Being* (the whole of reality) or this form of Idealism in modern philosophy. With the aid of linguistic analysis, they argue that the metaphysics of modernism does not really correspond to reality. According to them, metaphysical theories are mere perspectives and interpretations of reality. Metaphysicians are not really theorizing about reality; they are simply working on an improvement of previous metaphysical theories. Metaphysicians are trapped in a language—highly abstractive and fictional— which further removes their thoughts from reality itself. Thus, metaphysics loses its credibility as a discipline that can provide one with a panoramic vision of reality.

Postmodern philosophers do not spare modern empirical science from their criticisms. Modern thinkers, in their effort to formulate a theory of reality, take science to be the model of genuine foundational knowledge. And this, says Nietzsche, is still a form of *metaphysical faith*.⁵ Modern science, largely dominated by Newtonian physics, pictures the world as governed by mechanical laws. Everything in the world is understood in terms of "the position and impulse of material atoms" and "given the present position and the forces acting on material particles, the whole subsequent future development of the world" is explainable by mechanical laws.⁶ These claims of modern science are now subjected to doubt, especially after the

³ Ibid.

⁴ E. Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), xix, quoted in David West, *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 1996), 179.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 150-152.

⁶ I.M. Bochenski, *Contemporary European Philosophy*, trans. Donald Nicholl and Karl Aschenbrenner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 12.

Ryan C. Urbano, MA

turn of the twentieth century when Werner Heisenberg developed his *principle of indeterminacy* and Albert Einstein formulated his *theory of relativity*?⁷ Matter, as it is now understood, "is not anything simple but highly complex and there are still great obstacles to its scientific formulation."⁸ If matter is highly complex, then it is difficult to locate their location in space and calculate the forces acting on it.

Aside from the intricate nature of matter which makes impossible the precise calculation and therefore explanation of reality, there are philosophers like Emile Boutroux, Pierre Duhem and Henri Poincare who argue that scientific systems are "largely subjective by nature because the man of science does not only make an arbitrary dissection of reality, but also continually employ concepts which originate in his own mind."⁹ In the end, science is still far from being infallible.

Kuhn, Popper, and Feyerabend are examples of philosophers who look at science as a discipline that provides provisional hypotheses, theories, and models of reality but not truth about it.¹⁰ To take these conceptual frameworks as permanent because of their "practical or technological benefits" is to become "vulnerable to the disease of complacency and institutionalization."¹¹ There is now a "phantom of certitude" that looms over science because what it asserts is not "reality" but mere "possibility."¹² To a certain extent, science continues to be highly speculative albeit in a sophisticated manner. Modern science, as a consequence, is still metaphysical because it remains "within the horizons of possible thought set by metaphysics itself."¹³ Jean-Francois Lyotard describes the

⁷ Regarding the debate on whether or not scientific theories refer to actual objective reality, see Theodore Schick, Jr., *Readings in the Philosophy of Science: From Positivism to Postmodernism* (Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing, 2000), 256-311.

⁸ Bochenski, *Contemporary European Philosophy*, 12-13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁰ David Wood, *Thinking After Heidegger* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2002), 53.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper* (New York: Harvest Books, 1956), 154.

¹³ Jurgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. W.M. Hohengarten (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), 29.

develop modern condition as "incredulity to metanarratives."¹⁴ By metanarratives he means modern philosophy's "explicit appeal to some narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational and working subject, or the notion of wealth."¹⁵ This skepticism towards metanarratives "is undoubtedly a product of the progress in the sciences: but that progress in science presupposes it."¹⁶ What Lyotard says is that although the sciences are responsible for the decline of faith in metaphysics, they still are metaphysical in the sense that they require justification for them to be credible and legitimate. Lyotard writes: "But to the extent that science does restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks the truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game. It then produces a discourse of self-legitimation with respect to its own status, a discourse called philosophy."¹⁷ Hence, the sciences still suffer the problem of legitimizing their status and depend on philosophy for its validity and foundation.

Postmodern thinkers deride modern philosophy for privileging the Cartesian ego and reducing knowledge into abstract concepts or categories far from the concrete reality of existence. Descartes' subject still "infects Kant, Hegel, Husserl and Sartre despite their efforts to criticize or even reject the cogito."¹⁸ Postmodernists contend that this sort of philosophy threatens philosophy itself because it will lead to its demise. For them philosophy should avoid the pitfalls of dogmatic and totalitarian thinking but it must be vigilant to and critical against naïve systems of thought or doctrines which tend to deceive, manipulate and take advantage of the ignorant, the weak and the uninitiated.

For postmodern thinkers, philosophers should abandon the enlightenment project of cultural progress which overestimates the rational abilities of man. Modern philosophy's "faith in the keystones of the

¹⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiv.

¹⁵ Ibid., xxiii.

¹⁶ Ibid., xxiv.

¹⁷ Ibid., xxiii.

¹⁸ David Couzens Hoy, *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), 1.

Ryan C. Urbano, MA

Enlightenment—belief in the infinite progress of knowledge, belief in infinite moral and social advancement, belief in teleology—and its rigorous definition of the standards of intelligibility, coherence and legitimacy¹⁹ has already gone stale and is no longer tenable in the aftermath of the holocaust, and the rise of fascist and totalitarian regimes in twentieth century Europe. This faith in the enlightenment project is doomed to fail because human reason cannot anticipate with certainty and encompass in a metaphysical system the movement of historical reality. To cling tenaciously to this belief in rationalism is to lapse into dogma, superstition and arbitrary authority which enlightenment philosophy seeks to overthrow.²⁰

Metaphysics as Myth

With this development in postmodern thought, it appears that metaphysics seems no more than a myth, one narrative among other narratives. In fact, Nietzsche has already anticipated this view of metaphysics as a myth in his *Twilight of the Idols*.²¹ The true world of the philosophers dissipates because it is only an abstraction or a thought-construct.

Jurgen Habermas asserts that metaphysics “inherits from myth its view of the whole, but it distinguishes itself from myth by the conceptual level at which it relates everything into one.”²² While myth explains the origin of the world in concrete narrative terms, metaphysics removes this origin from spatio-temporal conditions through abstraction and calls it the absolute, the infinite and the transcendent.²³ Gary B. Madison opines that metaphysics is a myth but calling it mythical is not to degrade it.²⁴ He

¹⁹ Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism*, 11.

²⁰ See David West, *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 1996), 27.

²¹ See Nietzsche's “How the Real World at Last Became a Myth,” in *Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 485-486.

²² Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 29-30.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Madison, *Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*, 125.

an C. Urbano, MA

explains that both metaphysics and myth perform related functions. They confer "some semblance of intelligibility on the chaotic reality of our lived experience" to help us feel at home in the world and "thereby serve to allay the cosmic anxiety, the ontological angst to which the human being is particularly prone."²⁵ Both metaphysics and myth are "world-constructive activities" whose purpose is "to transform chaos into cosmos."²⁶ Madison further adds that while the "shift from *mythos* to *logos* does represent a change in stylistic form, it does not amount to one in epistemic substance—*in* existential purpose."²⁷ This means that metaphysics and myth perform the same function—to confer intelligibility to this seemingly opaque world. Their difference lies only in the linguistic expression employed; myth uses figurative and poetic language while metaphysics applies logic and discursive language.

Now it seems obvious that the distinction or difference between myth and metaphysics in the postmodern world is obscured. What used to be considered as metaphysics—once privileged and overarching view of reality—has lost its prestige and is now the subject of intense and corrosive criticism coming from all angles. Metaphysics has become a *myth*.

While metaphysics has become a myth in the postmodern world, it does not mean that it is non-sensical and has no value. Thus, it does not follow that metaphysics must be abandoned. In fact, man cannot ignore his metaphysical nature, and as long as he experiences wonder he will never to cease from creating metaphysical theories. Kant writes,

... metaphysics must be considered as really existing, if not a science, nevertheless as a natural disposition of the human mind (*metaphysica naturalis*). For human reason, without any instigations imputable to the mere vanity of great knowledge, unceasingly progresses, urged on by its feeling of need, towards such questions as cannot be answered by empirical application of reason, or principles derived therefrom; and so there has ever really existed in every man some system of metaphysics. It will always exist, so soon as reason

²⁵ Ibid., 125-126.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Ryan C. Urbano, MA

awakes to the exercise of its power of speculation.²⁸

Kant suggests that man cannot curb his desire to know. He adopts Aristotle's opening line in the *Metaphysics*. To suppress this desire would spell disaster, reducing man to the level of brutes. Even questions irresolvable by empirical evidence are not exempt from man's curiosity. The human mind continues to query until it finds unity and coherence in experience. Reason always seeks explanations to phenomena in terms of fundamental causes and principles. This is what philosophy is all about. To love wisdom really means to embark on a metaphysical quest for the origin, beginning or the *arche* of all things.²⁹ This origin or beginning however must be construed less as a definite explanation of the world than a source of meaning and a conceptual map enriched by experience which serves as a guide to life.

To say that metaphysics is a myth is to imply that the former contains some truth. Joseph Campbell, a philosopher known for his intensive studies on myth, believes that myth is not a lie; rather it is the "penultimate truth."³⁰ Myths are "clues to the spiritual potentialities of human life"³¹ and it contains the mystery that every person wants to unravel about his existence. Thus metaphysics, just like a myth, is not a false story. It is only in the continuing struggle to probe and narrate the meaning of reality through metaphysics that man finds the purpose of his existence and the truth of his world.

Ernst Cassirer maintains that myth reveals the deepest aspirations of man and provides a view to man's ideal world or culture.³² Myth is one of the symbolic expressions of man's mind. It allows thinking to distantiate from itself and discovers what it can do and achieve. The mind, in trying to objectify itself in symbolic expressions (through language, myth, religion,

²⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn in *Greek Books of the Western World*, vol 42 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press and Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 19.

²⁹ Aristotle *Metaphysics* I. 1. 982^a30.

³⁰ Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 183.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³² For further details, see Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).

art, and science), is constituted by this act of objectification. In other words, man's consciousness is enriched by its manifestations. Through his power to express himself in symbols, in myths for instance, man understands himself better. So metaphysics, even if it has become a myth as many postmodern thinkers will contend, cannot just be easily dismissed as meaningless. It still plays a vital role in helping man know himself deeply. Without metaphysics, man ceases to be himself and this would be tragic to his own existence as a rational creature. Indeed, man cannot escape from his symbolic-making activities. These are his peculiar ways of relating with the world, which is not found in lower creatures. Cassirer writes:

No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experience. All human progress in thought and experience refines upon and strengthens this net. No longer can man confront reality immediately; he cannot see it, as it were, face to face. Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man's symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves, man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium.³³

Philosophy (of which metaphysics is the highest branch) and science spring from the same source. This source is language. Language, which transcends the "mythmaking phase of human mentality," accounts for the emergence of logical thought (of which philosophy is its highest development) and the conception of facts (science).³⁴ But both language and myth originate from the symbolic operations of the human mind. Language, however, which is "man's prime instrument of reason, reflects his mythmaking tendency more than his rationalizing tendency."³⁵ This connotes that even philosophical language embodies to a certain extent the mythmaking disposition of the human mind. Philosophical language, no

³³ Ibid, 27.

³⁴ Susanne Langer, "Introduction" in Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne Langer (USA: Dover Publications, 1946), ix-x.

³⁵ Ibid., viii-ix.

Ryan C. Urbano, MA

matter how coherent and logical it has become, is still figurative and symbolic. This explains why man remains oblivious to the real workings of nature.

Though philosophy still reflects the mythmaking tendency of man's mind, it still performs a very important function. Philosophy gathers and unites the different symbolizations of thought.³⁶ Language, myth, religion, art and science—all aspects of man's cultural life—are held together by philosophic thought. Thus, it is the task of philosophy to uncover the workings of the human mind expressed in the ideal world or culture.

Myths, in Cassirer's words, are *sympathetic* to nature.³⁷ Though they defy scientific explanation, myths nevertheless are suffused with meanings and insights. They are not "entirely incoherent" and "bereft of sense or reason."³⁸ They possess a conceptual as well as a perceptual structure.³⁹ While science demonstrates that laws and principles govern physical objects in the world, myths exemplify the "dramatic world—a world of actions, of forces and of conflicting powers."⁴⁰ Myths symbolize man's emotional response and affinity to nature. In them one discovers that man and nature are in harmony. Man is not above nature but the two co-exist in a harmonious state. "He does not ascribe to himself a unique and privileged place in the scale of nature."⁴¹ Cassirer further remarks that in mythical thought differences in the conception of nature and life are "obliterated by a stronger feeling: the deep conviction of a fundamental and indelible *solidarity of life* that bridges over the multiplicity and variety of its single forms."⁴²

The Task of Philosophy

If indeed metaphysics is somewhat mythical, perhaps it is about

³⁶ Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 78.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 90

⁴² *Ibid.*

that philosophers must look into the way they have painted the world their thought constructs. Perhaps the reason why violence is so prevalent in today's world is that man's thinking has become so abstract too systematic that it is no longer possible for man to think and interpret the world otherwise than the rigid metaphysical theories. It seems metaphysics has placed man in a pedestal which gives him the power to control and manipulate those beings in whatever ways he so desires. Philosophical thinking has always been metaphysical in the sense that it seeks first and fundamental principles and favors hierarchy rather than equality and harmony. Philosophers have forgotten the mythical tendency of thinking which reminds them of the need to establish solidarity with nature rather than to wage war against it. Nature is not to be subdued and destroyed. It is to be respected and preserved.

Mythical thinking venerates reality and sees it as sacred. Metaphysical thinking, on the other hand, tends to desacralize and secularize reality. The thinking subject who frames reality within a logical system assumes the place of a god who now controls everything because he is in possession of an all-comprehensive and foundational knowledge.⁴³ But neither one of these types of thinking should dominate the other. Both are important to man's well being. Each performs a specific task which helps man survive in this world. Without metaphysics, there would be no institutions and structures necessary for man's social life. Instead, skepticism, relativism, and anarchy will reign. Without myths, nothing would correct the excesses of man's tendency towards order and law. Institutions and other social structures would be too rigid and constraining that they would spell, in Nietzsche's language, nihilism and decadence.

Nietzsche's insights on the Apollonian and Dionysian dimensions of human existence can be applied to thinking. Metaphysics, since it formulates world formulas or systematizes reality through an orderly arrangement of concepts based on fundamental principles, reflects the Apollonian dimension. Here metaphysics is like a steering mechanism in a ship that enables man to maneuver and navigate through rough and stormy waters. Though there is no perfect guarantee that he will be able to survive the turbulence, at least he has something in his control to allay his fears. Mythical thinking, on the other hand, exhibits the Dionysian dimension because it immerses itself in the sea of chaos. A man thinking in this

⁴³ Emmanuel Levinas has interesting insight on this regard. See his important essay "God and Philosophy" in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 55-78.

Ryan C. Urbano, MA

manner is like a seasoned hunter in the jungle that knows the terrain well even if he is without the possession of a map. He thinks that he is in the right track because he has affinity with the environment. Here fear and anxiety do not purely grip him because he sees life as an adventure, oftentimes a mixture of fear and excitement.

The history of Western philosophy has been so far biased against pluralism or the "Many," stressing only monism or the "One." The manyness of reality has always been reduced into the "One," the ultimate universal principle from which everything is derived. This reductionist type of thinking, though it gives unity to thought, is dangerous because it would spell dogmatism, universalism, totalitarianism and fundamentalism, and it would crush, suppress and leave out those which do not fall within its purview. Levinas calls this as egology, a distinct characteristic of Western philosophy that privileges the ego. The ego that thinks assimilates, absorbs, incorporates and reduces the other to itself becomes the despotic monarch whom all others must obey. And this explains why, according to Levinas, Western metaphysics, which emphasizes the totalizing vision of the ego, has tendencies towards wars and violence.⁴⁴

Instead of thinking in this manner, Levinas proposes a kind of thinking that accentuates infinite obligation to the other. It is no longer the Cartesian ego of modernity or the humanism of enlightenment that takes precedence in metaphysics but the concrete other in his or her nudity and vulnerability. His humanism is not the one that underscores the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the self; rather he teaches the humanism of the other.⁴⁵

Levinas promotes an ethics of responsibility rather than an ontology of power and freedom. In criticizing traditional metaphysics, Levinas does not deny metaphysics but posits its real meaning—to seek and desire the Good beyond Being.⁴⁶ He does not intend to overcome or destroy metaphysics but only wishes to complete it "after a long history of

⁴⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 21-22.

⁴⁵ See Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

⁴⁶ Here Levinas develops Plato's idea of the Good above or beyond Being in *Republic* VII, 509b6-b10.

the terrain is distorted by its traditional appropriation."⁴⁷ His ethical metaphysics that he is in-erves to be read and understood especially in this age where metaphysics Here fear subjected to abrasive criticism. For him, the true meaning of metaphysics an adventur- transcendence, to move "from a world that is familiar to us... from an 'at- me' which we inhabit, toward an alien outside-of-oneself, toward a der."⁴⁸ "The metaphysical desire tends toward... the absolutely er.... The metaphysical desire...desires beyond everything that can "One." "To- pply complete it."⁴⁹ "It is like goodness—the Desired does not fulfill it, " the ultimate deepens it."⁵⁰

Conclusion

Though postmodern philosophy seems to engender a skeptical reductionist type because it would cause it would alism, and all within in- of Western es, absorbic monarchic to Levinas' he ego, has a kind of onger the hat takes idity and itonomy of the an an hysics, ek and ne or ory of

position towards metaphysics, it has somehow raised valid issues as to dangers of systematizing thought which hinders further discourses on ality. Philosophy must be critical and vigilant to the totalizing tendencies thought. "The task of philosophy is to disrupt any and every naturalization of conjunction of the concept and the world, every unreflective naivety whether it leads to fascism or foolishness."⁵¹ It must not however give up its other task of providing man a worldview, a manner of seeing the world. This is accomplished by metaphysics. Fr. Norris Clarke, SJ, has an appropriate description of metaphysics and this author thinks that this ought to be one's attitude in the postmodern age. He says:

Metaphysics is necessarily tied in its expression to finite human conceptual-linguistic framework of thought and word, which are never complete, totally adequate, or the only possible intelligible way of expressing or explaining reality. Hence, although metaphysics in its thrust or *intention*, sometimes even in its flashes of insight or intuition, can be universal and absolute, its expression will

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Kosky, *Levinas and The Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 3. In chapter one of this book, the author makes an excellent explanation of how Levinas interprets the true meaning of metaphysics and departs from tradition.

⁴⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵¹ Wood, *Thinking After Heidegger*, 1.

Ryan C. Urbano, MA

always be limited, incomplete, in a word, perspectival, from within a given culture and limited framework of thinking, speaking, imagining, feeling, within human history. Hence no definitive metaphysics for all times and culture is humanly possible. But to be fully human we must make the effort, and the effort itself is deeply enriching, rewarding and purifying, conscious-expanding.⁵²

Hence, metaphysics remains important in spite of its weaknesses. The search for an explanation of reality must not be jettisoned. Metaphysics enables man to find meaning in his existence. Through metaphysics, man is provided a perspective on how to live his life in this world.

Man may not fully understand the world but at least he is doing something to make this world comprehensible and therefore livable. What is important is that he knows the limits of his knowledge and he does not become so arrogant and pretentious as to claim that he is able to explain completely the totality of everything. Taking the advice of Lao-Tzu, Confucius and Socrates, humility is still the best way towards wisdom. And, listening also to Levinas's counsel, this wisdom must be that of goodness and love for the other.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bochenski, I.M. *Contemporary European Philosophy*. Trans. Donald Nicholl and Karl Aschenbrenner. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.

Campbell, Joseph with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. Ed. Betty Sue Flowers. New York: Anchor Books, 1988.

Cassirer, Ernst. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Bantam Books, 1970.

_____. *Language and Myth*. Trans. Sussane Langer. USA: Dover Publications, 1946.

⁵² Norris Clarke, SJ, *Central Problems of Metaphysics*, 3rd edition, ed. Nemesio S. Que, SJ. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, n.d.), 2.

- ke, Norris, SJ. *Central Problems of Metaphysics*. Ed. Nemesio S. Que, SJ. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, n.d.
- bermas, Jurgen. *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*. Trans. W.M. Hohengarten. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992.
- oy, David Couzens. *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004.
- ant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn in *Great Books of the Western World*. Vol. 42. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press and Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952.
- osky, Jeffrey. *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Krutch, Joseph Wood. *The Modern Temper*. New York: Harvest Books, 1956.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Humanism of the Other*. Trans. Nidra Poller. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- _____. *Of God Who Comes to Mind*. Trans. Bettina Bergo. California: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- _____. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.
- Madison, Gary B. *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- McKeon, Richard, ed. *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. New York: Random House, 1941.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1969.
- _____. *The Portable Nietzsche*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954.

Ryan C. Urbano, MA

Schick, Theodore, Jr. *Readings in the Philosophy of Science: From Positivism to Postmodernism*. Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing, 2000.

West, David. *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 1996.

Wood, David. *Thinking After Heidegger*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2002.

Woods, Tim. *Beginning Postmodernism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.