

AGAINST HUME'S METAPHYSICAL NIHILISM

In Defence of Metaphysics

Ejikemeuwa J. O. NDUBISI



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To
Very Rev. Fr. Dr. Samuel Akagwu
(For instilling the love for metaphysics in me)
&
All Lovers of Metaphysics

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Foreword

A cursory glance under the veneer of the historical evolution of philosophy, beginning from the ancient era to the contemporary epoch, shows that from the very foundation, philosophy has been concerned with the task of providing answers to fundamental questions, to which however, no conclusive answers are given. Within the parameters of metaphysics, a retinue of questions emerge: What is the meaning of life? What is our place in the universe? What is consciousness? Does the world exist? Why is there something, rather than nothing? Do we have free will? Does God exist? Does any of these - even my act of questioning - matter?

Over the years, building into different philosophical traditions, varied schools of thought have emerged and have attempted to solve the problems of metaphysics from their different perspectives and rich philosophical traditions. However, none of these attempts has solved the problem in toto. Various opinions from different angles have continued to emerge on the landscape of philosophy to this day. Prof. Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi in his work *Against Hume's Metaphysical Nihilism: In Defense of Metaphysics*, joins the retinue of distinguished scholars in metaphysics in the search for the truth of reality of metaphysics.

In the least, the present work is a comprehensive, lucid but eye-opening and monumental piece; it can only come from a scholar of several years of asking questions and questioning answers. Prof. Ndubisi's generosity, love for philosophy and a strong sense of industry have occasioned this beautiful book. In this work of eight chapters, he has not only made a beautiful presentation of the basic dimensions of

Foreword

David Hume's perspective on metaphysics but has critically evaluated it. It is on such critical evaluations that the evolution and future of the philosophical enterprise depend. You can only applaud at the end of each chapter of this piece and wait to applaud again at the end of the next.

It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I write the foreword to this beautiful piece. I strongly recommend this book to all who treasure good philosophical literature; and most especially to anyone who wishes to be abreast with important teachings and developments in philosophy. Teachers, experts, researchers, undergraduate and postgraduate students, beginners and casual readers within and outside the parameters of philosophy are bound to treasure the usefulness of Prof. Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi's unique contribution to knowledge.

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22nd May 2023, Feast of Saint Rita of Cascia

Introduction

The burden of this book is a critical analysis of David Hume's Metaphysical Nihilism. Many philosophers have appreciated metaphysics because of its attempt to comprehend the whole reality, both material and immaterial. It is said that metaphysics is the foundation of all sciences. Nevertheless, while some philosophers extol metaphysics as the core of philosophy, few others have come out vehemently and devastatingly to deny the reality and authenticity of metaphysics. This harsh treatment and subsequent rejections of metaphysics have their root in the philosophy of David Hume. Hume's approach to metaphysics is nihilistic. He distinguished himself in the history of metaphysics as a die-hard anti-metaphysics, a consistent and coherent radical empiricist. He drastically argued against all metaphysical realities such as substance, God, causality, personal identity, etc.

This book is set to analyze the approach of Hume to metaphysics. It seeks also to critically and transcendently examine Hume's standpoint on the enterprise of metaphysics itself. The work is further set at validating the enterprise of metaphysics as a reality that needs our utmost positive attention since its object of study is reality in its totality. In sum, this book in your hand is poised to defend metaphysics from the inimical onslaught of anti-metaphysics, especially in our context, David Hume.

Chapter One

The Big Questions

That metaphysics is the core of philosophy is not an exaggeration but a truism. Without metaphysics, philosophy in general loses its taste. Pantaleon Iroegbu discussed metaphysics as the *Kpim* (core) of philosophy in his book *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*. Aristotle described metaphysics as the 'First Philosophy'. To say that metaphysics is the first philosophy means that it is the basis for all that we know as philosophy. From the beginning of Western Philosophy until the 18th century, it was observed that the most important part of philosophy was metaphysics; other parts were subordinate to it.

Despite all the eulogistic statements about metaphysics, it has been observed that metaphysics has faced many trying moments in the hands of its critics. Some of the opponents of metaphysics are of the views that metaphysics has outlived its usefulness. Onyeocha reports that metaphysics has been attacked on the ground that “it has outlived its usefulness, and should then recede to the background in favour of more practical and productive sciences.”¹

With the increase complication of scientific knowledge in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the discovery that the world is not describable wholly in terms drawn from the experience and vocabulary of everyday life, it was perhaps inevitable that metaphysical claims should be subjected to criticisms. Some critics claimed that even if there is anything such as metaphysics, it is not in fact about being as being but about our concept of being. Other critics assert that metaphysics is highly speculative and so metaphysical statements are meaningless. The upshot of this critical movement was to topple metaphysics from

its revered place in philosophy. Metaphysical claims about the nature of reality were subjected to a critical scrutiny. For much of the 19th and 20th centuries' philosophers, metaphysics was a dirty word.

It has been observed that an early but powerful criticism of metaphysics is to be found in the writings of David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. “Hume concluded to philosophical nihilism from the fact that there are two and only two avenues to knowledge, mathematics and empirical sciences. On this basis he rejected theology and metaphysics.”²

This book is set to critically analyze Hume's rejection of metaphysics since he is seen as the ancestor of metaphysical nihilism. At this point, it is good to echo the words of Ozumba: “Philosophy without metaphysics is a corpse and any eulogy to philosophy that has been divested of metaphysics is like a requiem hymn that is sung to the corpse of the dead.”³

It is important to state at this point that what prompted me to delve into this study are notably the views of some colleagues who see metaphysics as a nonsensical and meaningless enterprise. Provoked by these fallacious statements on the most revered branch of philosophy, I was therefore moved with passion to trace the root of the problem to David Hume's rejection of metaphysics with a view to correcting the negative impression on metaphysics.

For sure, many philosophers have appreciated metaphysics because of its attempt to understand the totality of reality. It is said that philosophy actually began with metaphysics. Metaphysics is seen as the basis or the foundation of all other disciplines. Other disciplines study various aspects of reality while metaphysics studies reality in

itself. However, a very deep blow has been lashed on metaphysics in the later 18th and 19th centuries, and more vigorously in the 20th century with the coming on stage of the logical positivists. This grievous blow dealt on metaphysics has its origin in David Hume. Hume laid a drastic and critical attack on metaphysics which culminated in the total rejection of metaphysics.

Metaphysicians had argued that pure reason can give us knowledge independent of experience. They maintained that our senses do deceive us and as such, should not be regarded as sources of knowledge. On the other hand, David Hume and other empiricists assert that knowledge comes only through the senses. The human mind at birth, for them, is a blank sheet, and it acquires its knowledge through sense experience. To drive his point home, Hume affirms that:

[W]herever by any accident the faculties, which give rise any impressions, are obstructed in their operations, as when one is born blind or deaf; not only the impressions are lost, but also their correspondent ideas; so that there never in the mind the least traces of either of them.⁴

It is on the ground of this assertion that Hume rejected metaphysics in all its ramifications. He branded metaphysics as meaningless and nonsensical. As a way of follow-up, Immanuel Kant also towed almost the same line. This rejection of metaphysics saw its climax in the 20th century logical positivists. The logical positivists claimed that Hume is their ancestor. “The members of the Vienna Circle thought of themselves as the 20th century heirs of Hume's empirical tradition.”⁵ Hume drastically argued against all metaphysical reality. Now the problematic questions are:

1. Is metaphysics actually nonsensical as claimed by Hume and other anti-metaphysicians?
2. Can we say that metaphysics is mere sophistry and illusion since it makes claims beyond the sense experience?
3. Is there any way metaphysics can be rescued from the harsh attacks of its critics?

These and the related questions or problems are the thrust of this book.

This book seeks to juxtapose the opposing views of Hume on metaphysics and other views of metaphysicians in order to ascertain the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of metaphysics. As this work attempts to review the basic assumptions, beliefs and conclusions arrived at by metaphysicians, it also seeks to project metaphysics as a complementary science. The work is an attempt toward validating the enterprise of metaphysics. The most driving force of this study is my desire to contribute my own quota to the enterprise of metaphysics.

No doubt, this study is very significant because of its attempt to rescue metaphysics from the onslaught of anti-metaphysicians. The work ranks itself high as it lends its support towards validating the enterprise of metaphysics. It rediscovers the values of metaphysics and tries to persuade the reader, by way of rational argument, to accept the fact that man's nature is both physical and metaphysical. The work re-echoes the fact that many problems of the human person are beyond the empirical which implies that metaphysics must be appreciated for us to understand reality in its totality.

Endnotes

1. I. M. Onyeocha, *An Element of Metaphysics: Ontology*, (Washington DC: Paideia Publishers, 2000), i.
2. W. H. F. Barnes, *The Philosophical Predicament*, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1950), 25.
3. G. O. Ozumba, *The Philosophy of Logical Positivism and The Growth of Science*, (Cross River: Bacos Publication, 2001), 46.
4. David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, (edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 5.
5. I. M Onyeocha, *Analytic Philosophy*, (Washington DC: Paideia Publications, 2000), 30.

Chapter Two

Basic Concerns

Following the nature of this book, it will be of interest to the reader if what I considered as some basic concerns are properly explained and delineated. This is to engender proper understanding of the arguments herein and also to flow with the line of thought of this book.

The Meaning of Metaphysics

The word 'metaphysics' has been very controversial in the history of philosophy. There is no branch of philosophy that has been misunderstood for its abstract nature as metaphysics. Some people say that it is too abstract; others say that it is incomprehensible; some others say that it is beyond the comprehension of the human mind.

Etymologically, metaphysics is derived from the Greek words which mean 'that which comes after physics.' Metaphysics is traceable to Aristotle as its progenitor, though history has it that the word 'metaphysics' was introduced to philosophy by Andronicus of Rhodes when he edited the works of Aristotle. Omoregbe has this to say in this regard:

Aristotle had some treatises on physics which bore that title, physics. He also had some other treatises dealing with non-physical matters, but without a title. In his arrangement of Aristotle's works while editing them for publication, Andronicus placed the treatises dealing with the non-physical matter after those dealing with physics. He did not know what to call them, so he simply called them "after physics" – "meta Physik", that is, the treatises that come next after those dealing with physics.¹

Over time, metaphysics came to be understood as a discipline that deals with realities beyond the physical world. Nonetheless, this understanding undermines the scope or nature of metaphysics. Metaphysics does not only deal with realities that are beyond the physical world, it also deals with the totality of being. Hence metaphysics is said to be the science of being as being. Pantaleon Iroegbu has this remark to make about metaphysics. He said that metaphysics:

... is a systematic study of being in its deepest aspects. It is an ordered investigation into the inner side of existence. It unravels the most fundamental contents of being as beings. It radically probes existence in so far as these are knowable ... [metaphysics] involves the physical and the spiritual, the empirical and the super-empirical. It conceives each being, all of being and the being of all.²

Onyeocha is of the view that metaphysics “is the science of whatever is not sensible, of what lies beyond the reach of the senses as far as it is knowable by human reason.”³ For Fadahunsi, metaphysics “is a systematic study of the fundamental problems related to the ultimate nature of reality and human knowledge.”⁴

Aristotle called metaphysics “First Philosophy” since it studies the first causes and principle of reality. The name metaphysics aptly expresses the central place it enjoys in philosophy; it also differentiates it from other branches of knowledge which Aristotle called “Secondary Philosophies”. “Metaphysics is 'First' not by virtue of chronological primacy. It is first because it has a natural primacy within philosophy as a whole, and with respect to the rest of the sciences.”⁵

The Object of Metaphysics

To be precise, the object of metaphysics is “being qua being”. As a science of being, metaphysics studies being in its totality. Joseph de Torre made a distinction between the material object and the formal object of metaphysics. He stated that the material object is its subject-matter, that is, all things, and the formal object is the aspect of that material object, that is, the aspect of being. Iroegbu observed that material object of metaphysics is “whatever is, all realities, existing beings, all essences.”⁶ For him, anything that has reality comes under the material object of metaphysics. He went further to describe the formal object of metaphysics as “the act of existence, the 'to be', the being of whatever is ...”⁷ Metaphysics studies the whole of being while other disciplines study various aspects of being. So having seen the meaning of metaphysics and also knowing too well that the object of metaphysics is being, it is important for us to look at the notions of being as a metaphysical concept. But before we delve into the discussion on the notion of being it is very pertinent for us to take a look at the method of metaphysics.

The Method of Metaphysics

Most of the critics of metaphysics rejected metaphysics because of its non-empirical nature. It is evident that metaphysics does not carry out its investigation empirically as other natural and human sciences such as chemistry, physics, psychology, sociology, etc. These branches of knowledge go about their investigation through observation,

quantification and experimentation. Metaphysical investigation is beyond the realm of empirical experience. Such metaphysical concepts as being, God, soul, substance, etc., cannot be empirically investigated. This is why Iroegbu asserts that “the method [of metaphysics] must therefore be necessarily meta-empirical.”⁸

In agreement with Van Steenberghen, Onyechoa states that the method of metaphysics has to encompass the empirical, analytical and deductive methods.⁹ Iroegbu discussed the methods of metaphysics as Synthetic-Inductive, Analytic-Deductive and Transcendental Inquiry,¹⁰ He went further to say that the best method for metaphysics is the transcendental method. Transcendental method is said to be “man's way of knowing objects in so far as this is possible a priori.”¹¹ It will interest the reader to know that basically the method of metaphysics is transcendental investigation that is informed by experience and intellectual analysis.

The Notion of Being

As a metaphysical concept, being cannot be defined. It is practically beyond definition. “To define being in the strict sense is impossible, since a definition places the subject to be defined within the scope of a broader concept.”¹² Being can only be described but cannot be defined. Iroegbu puts it better when he says, “Outside being there is no other reality.”¹³ In place of definition, we can attempt a description of what a being is:

A being is whatever is, whatever exists, whatever has reality, entity or existence. This could be posited in the universe or outside it. The reality could be concrete, empirical, notional, or meta-empirical. It can be relative or absolute existence. It may be visible or invisible, potential or actual.¹⁴

Following the above descriptive analysis, it will be logical to say that whatever is, insofar as it is, whether materially or immaterially, is a being. Whatever has existence either potentially or actually, notional or concrete, is a being. To talk of anything at all either as an idea in the mind or as a concrete or physical reality is to talk about its being. Being is all there is both in the sensible and supra-sensible worlds.

It is important to note here that the term being is applied to all there is, but not in the same manner. Hence, we have Necessary Being and contingent beings. Necessary Being is a being that essentially is. It does not depend on any other being for its existence; it is its own existence. It is also referred to as the Pure Being; a being that is absolutely perfect. To conceive this being as not existing is a contradiction because the essence of its being is existence. On the other hand, contingent beings are referred to all finite beings. Their existence is not necessary; it is dependent on the Necessary Being.

It has observed that there are three divisions of being: Real, Ideal and Logical beings. Real being is referred to whatever is or can be independent of our knowledge of it. Ideal being is referred to intentional or notional being or being as it is known. When we talk of logical being, we are talking of being that exists only in the mind. This type of being has no external existences. It exists only in the mind. It is

also called mental being. With this little analysis on the notion of being, it is the belief of the researcher, that the reader is placed on a better footing to comprehend the whole lot about metaphysics as we move on in this research work.

Metaphysical Nihilism

Etymologically, Nihilism is derived from the Latin word, 'nihil' which simply means 'nothing'. Nihilism is a philosophical doctrine which states that values do not exist but rather are falsely invented. Very often, “nihilism is presented in the form of existential nihilism which argues that life is without meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value”¹⁵ According to The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language, nihilism is defined as “an attitude of rejecting all philosophical or ethical principle; the doctrine or program of a 19th century and early 20th century Russian revolutionary group which rejected all form of tradition and authoritarianism in politics, religion, moral and art.” Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed) defined nihilism as a “viewpoint that traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and that existence is senseless and useless; a doctrine that denies any objective ground of truth especially of moral truth.” One basic thing to note about this term 'nihilism' is that it has to do with either 'denial' or 'rejection' of reality.

The Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia, defined metaphysical nihilism as “the philosophical theory that there might have been no objects at all, that is, that there is a possible world in which there are no objects at

all”⁶. It is said that extreme form of metaphysical nihilism is commonly defined as the belief that existence itself does not exist.

In this book, metaphysical nihilism is seen and interpreted as any attempt to deny, reject or destroy metaphysics. Any attempt of eliminating metaphysics is seen in this work as metaphysical nihilism. Any attempt to reject metaphysical knowledge is regarded as being nihilistic to metaphysics.

Endnotes

1. Joseph Omoregbe, *Metaphysics Without Tears: A Systematic and Historical Study*, (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 1996), ix.
2. Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, (Owerri: International Universities Press, Ltd., 1995), 15.
3. I. M. Onyeocha, *An Element of Metaphysics: Ontology*, (Washington DC: Paideia Publishers, 2000), 2.
4. Ayo Fadahunsi, *Metaphysics: A Historical and Thematic Introduction*, (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2004), 10.
5. Tomas Alvira., et al., *Metaphysics*, (Philippines: Sinag-Tala Publishers, Inc., 1991), 9.
6. Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, (Owerri: International Universities Press, Ltd., 1995), 27.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 25.
9. Onyeocha gives a detailed analysis of the method of metaphysics as discussed by Van Steenberghen. See Onyeocha, *An Element of Metaphysics*, 8 – 11.

10. The three methods of metaphysics are made quite explicit in Iroegbu, *Metaphysics*, 25–26.
11. Kant, as quoted in Iroegbu, *Metaphysics*, 26
12. Tomas Alvira., et al., *Metaphysics*, (Philippines: Sinag-Tala Publishers, Inc., 1991), 17.
13. Iroegbu, *Metaphysics*, 60.
14. Ibid.
15. As quoted in <http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Nihilism>
16. Ibid.

Chapter Three

General Rejection of Metaphysics

From the time man began to inhabit the world, many problems have continued to bother the human mind. Some of them have got considerable answers while some are still being debated upon. Philosophers down through the ages have made great efforts to give answers to the human person's quest for the knowledge of the ultimate reality.

Many philosophers have deliberated on the subject matter of this book. Thinkers and scholars have their unique and peculiar ways of approaching the same problem. In this work, therefore, we rely so much on existing materials of many philosophers and thinkers on and around the subject of metaphysics.

There is no discipline which has been more uniformly denied for a longer period than metaphysics. David Hume led the campaign for the rejection of metaphysics. He was determined to bring empiricism to its logical conclusion. Hume “was the first notable critic of metaphysics in the modern period”¹. The British empiricists before Hume, Locke and Berkeley, were not consistent with the empiricist principles. They had some elements of metaphysics in their philosophy. “Locke's imperceptible and unknowable substance are metaphysical elements which are inconsistent with the empiricist principle.”² Hume disregarded his predecessors' approaches and totally rejected metaphysics as sophistry and illusion. It was in Hume's famous work *A Treatise of Human Nature* which was later re-written under the title: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* that he actually brought empiricism to its logical conclusion which led to his rejection

of metaphysics. Kant, in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* has this to say about Hume's attack on Metaphysics: "Since the Essays of Locke and Leibniz, or rather since the origin of metaphysics so far as we know its history, nothing has ever happened which could have been more decisive to its fate than the attack made upon it by David Hume."³

According to Barnes, "Hume concluded to philosophical nihilism from the fact that there are two and only two avenues to knowledge, mathematics and empirical science. On this basis he rejects theology and metaphysics."⁴ We shall discuss Hume's position on metaphysics in the next Chapter. Let us now look at the views of other philosophers.

The great German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, took the question of metaphysics more seriously than Hume. Kant, whose name is associated with the enlightenment made a lot of contributions to the development of philosophy. Some of his notable contributions include his mediation of rationalism and empiricism which led to his Copernican Revolution; his criticism of the traditional metaphysics. In his *Prolegomena* Kant made clear his attitude towards metaphysics:

My purpose is to persuade all those who think metaphysics worth studying that it is absolutely necessary to pause a moment and, regarding all that has been done as though undone to propose first the preliminary question whether such a thing as metaphysics be even possible at all.⁵

Kant's criticism of metaphysics is contained mainly in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Kant's Copernican Revolution was in a bid to reconcile the empiricists' view that knowledge comes solely from the senses with the Rationalists' idea that knowledge comes solely from reason. He was intent upon reversing the belief held generally by philosophers that in the cognitive

process, objects impressed themselves on the human mind which simply received these impressions passively. With this belief, the mind was presented as playing a passive role in the cognitive process. The consequence is that this passivity of the mind will make Kant's synthetic a priori form of knowledge to be impossible. Kant however made his Copernican Revolution by reversing the hitherto existing view. Omoregbe puts Kant's view thus:

In the cognitive process, according to Kant, the human mind plays a very active role. It imposes itself, its own structures, on objects and restructures them to conform to its own structure. It makes objects appear to us according to its own structure reflected in the categories.⁶

It is evident from Kant's view that things do not appear to us as they are in themselves but as the structures of our mind would want them to appear. The implication is that we do not know things as they are but as they appear to us. Having divided reality into the *noumena* (things as they are in themselves) and the *phenomena* (things as they appear to us), Kant established that our knowledge is only limited to the empirical. For him, any attempt made to establish the knowledge of things-in-themselves is a wasted effort. Stumpf explains:

When we experience a thing, we inevitably perceive it through the lenses of our a priori categories of thought. But what is a thing like when it is not being perceived? What is a thing-in-itself? We can obviously never have an experience of a nonsensuous perception. All object we know are sensed object.⁷

The distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal realities is only a reminder for us of the limits of human knowledge. So Kant's doctrine of the unknowableness of noumenal reality in his *Critique of Pure*

Reason, rejects metaphysics on the ground that while the immaterial does exist, it is unknown and must remain unknowable to the speculative reason. Kant maintained that all metaphysical reasoning, since it attempts by means of the speculative reason to go beyond experience, is doomed to failure. This is because the a priori forms which the understanding imposes on the empirical data of knowledge modify the quality of that knowledge making it to be transcendental, but do not extend it beyond the realm of actual sense experience.

Kant affirmed that metaphysics as a natural disposition is a possibility but metaphysics as a science, is not possible because of its attempts to go beyond the categories of human understanding. Speculative metaphysics is outside the realm of science. For Kant, “speculative metaphysics can never provide man with any genuine knowledge because it deals with realities that are not objects of sense perception and to which, consequently, the categories of human understanding cannot be validly applied.”⁸ Fadahunsi has this observation to make about Kant: “There are two opposite interpretations to Immanuel Kant's philosophy. The one takes it to be the foundation of natural science, and values it for its rejection of metaphysics; the other takes it to be a first step towards the establishment of a new metaphysics.”⁹

Since Kant was a notable professor of logic and metaphysics, there is no doubt that his main interest was metaphysics. Nonetheless, we must say that absolute denial of metaphysics was neither the intention of Kant nor the issue of his philosophy. “Kant's task as a philosopher was actually restricted to the criticism and reconstruction of metaphysics.”¹⁰

Kant's followers maintain that it is allegedly a futile effort to speak about what being is really like. This is because human beings do not have access to the nature of being. At most we can study the conceptual framework or schemes that enable us to get as close as possible to knowing reality. So Kantians maintain that the only possible metaphysics is the study of the conceptual frameworks. This goes to affirm Kant's position that we can only know things as they appear to us and not as they are in themselves.

In his *Course of Positive Philosophy*, Auguste Comte remarked that the advance of natural science is the result of a historical development of the human mind. He maintained that this process depends on man's nature and is thus necessary. In its historical development through the centuries, the human mind passes through three main stages or phases: the theological, the metaphysical and the positive.

Comte's three stages hold that the theological or religious stage is the primitive stage, a time when phenomena are explained as being caused by divine powers, and a stage at which men resorted to religion in their effort to understand the world. He further said that during this period, men invented gods and used them to explain natural phenomena. Having passed this stage, we are faced with the metaphysical stage when men resorted to metaphysics in their effort to understand the world. Stumpf relates that in this stage, "the anthropocentric concepts of divinity are replaced by the impersonal and abstract forces."¹¹

In the positive stage, the mind concerns itself with phenomena or observed fact, which it subsumes under general descriptive laws, such

as the laws of gravitation. Positive knowledge is real, certain and useful. Comte criticized religion and metaphysics on the ground that genuine knowledge can only come from positive science, and not from religion or metaphysics.

Neither religion nor metaphysics can provide man with genuine knowledge about the world because they both deal with unseen realities which are not objects of knowledge and are therefore irrelevant to our knowledge of the world or natural phenomena. Knowledge about the world must be sought from within the world with the aid of the positive method, the scientific method.¹²

Wittgenstein, who is ranked more with the linguistic analysts criticized metaphysics in his work *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*. The opening words of his book clearly exposed his stand against metaphysics. He excluded metaphysics from neither matters to be studied since metaphysics is neither mathematics nor a matter of fact. The Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* sees language as a picture of the world. Language, according to him, pictures the world. Since language is designed to be used to speak about the world (that is, the world of sense experience), it cannot be used to speak about any reality outside the world of sense experience. He therefore argued that “whatever is said about any reality outside the world of sense experience is simply nonsense. Religious and metaphysical propositions are therefore nonsensical.”¹³ He criticized metaphysics on the ground that,

Since there must be correspondence between the picture and the state of affairs it represents, our propositions are true insofar as they provide a picture of the actual facts in the case; and our positions are meaningful, insofar as they provide a picture of the possible facts in the case.¹⁴

Omeregbe observes that “the most vocal critics of metaphysics in this century were the logical positivists whose anti-metaphysical posture had its root in Auguste Comte's positivism and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.”¹⁵ The logical positivists generally rejected metaphysics. The ground for their rejection is that metaphysics does not meet their verifiability principle. The eminent proponent of this movement is Moritz Schlick. Others associated with this philosophical movement are Rudolf Carnap, Friedrich Waismann, Herbert Feigl, Otto Neurath and Kurt Godel.

The positivists' rejection of metaphysics is basically on their verification principle which states that “the meaning of a statement is the method of its verification.”¹⁶ The positivists were mainly scientists and mathematicians. They sought to employ the empirical nature of science and the rigorous method of mathematics on metaphysics. They maintain that metaphysics is outdated and also argued that its propositions are not verifiable. It is on this ground that they concluded that metaphysical propositions are meaningless and nonsensical. They held that science is the only qualified discipline capable of furnishing man with knowledge about the world. For them unseen realities are not objects of knowledge. So “any discipline that purports to furnish man with knowledge about such things [unseen realities], is a pseudo-discipline, and its propositions are meaningless.”¹⁷ In a very drastic way, Omeregbe expressed that “the logical positivists expunged metaphysics from philosophy and said that metaphysics was not part of philosophy.”¹⁸

Karl Pearson rejected metaphysics. According to him, the fields of science are unlimited. He argued that “every group of natural

phenomena, every phase of social life, every state of past or present development is material for science and if this is the case, then the unity of all science consists alone in its method, not in material.”¹⁹ The material of science, for him, is co-extensive with the whole physical universe. In arguing his case for the unlimited scope of science, Pearson used metaphysics as an example from which science is excluded “wherein its methods have no application.”²⁰ The implication of Pearson's argument is that the rules of methodical observation are not applicable to metaphysics. He therefore concludes thus: “We must conclude that metaphysics is built either on air or on quicksand, either they start from no foundation at all or the superstructure has been raised before a basis has found in the accurate classification of facts.”²¹

Pearson said that metaphysics is an imaginative activity. He compares metaphysics with poetry and said that a metaphysician is more dangerous than a poet because he makes truth claims his vision. He finally asserts that “science rather than metaphysics offers the better training for modern citizenship.”²²

Rudolf Carnap made a serious attack on metaphysics. He said that the only proper task of philosophy is logical analysis. The purpose of logical analysis, for him, is the truth or falsehood of any proposition. He went further to say that one of the major tasks of the logical analysis of a given proposition is to discover the method of verification of that proposition.

Carnap said that the method of verification of a proposition is either direct or indirect. If a proposition asserts something about a perception I am having now, for example, “I see a wall clock,” this proposition is

effectively verified or tested by my present perception. On the other hand, there are some propositions that may not be verified directly. For example, “This key is made of iron.” This proposition requires an indirect verification. One cannot by mere looking at a key know whether it is made of iron or not. One of the ways of verification is to place it near a magnet which will either attract it or not.

According to Carnap, metaphysical propositions “are not verifiable when subjected to logical analysis but if an attempt at verification is made the results are always negative.”²³ He went further to argue that it is inevitable that “metaphysics cannot avoid making their propositions non-verifiable because if they made them verifiable they would belong to the realm of empirical science since their truth or falsehood would depend upon experience.”²⁴

In his *Philosophy and Logical Syntax*, Carnap made an outright rejection of metaphysics. In chapter one of that book, he categorically argued that:

Metaphysical propositions are neither true nor false, because they assert nothing, they contain neither knowledge nor error, they lie completely outside the field of knowledge, of theory, outside the discussion of truth or falsehood. But they are like laughing, lyrics, and music, expressive. They express not so much temporary feelings as permanent emotional or volitional dispositions ... The danger lies in the deceptive character of metaphysics; it gives the illusion of knowledge without actually giving any knowledge. This is the reason why we reject it.²⁵

In another work, Carnap amplified his argument against metaphysics that since it does not assert analytic propositions, and also does not fall within the domain of empirical science, metaphysics is “compelled to

employ words for which no criteria of application are specified and which are therefore devoid of sense ...”²⁶ For Carnap, there is no sense in metaphysics and so it is a futile and wasted effort engaging in anything called metaphysics.

Alfred Jules Ayer concerned himself with language and meaning. Following the logical positivists, he asserts that for a proposition to be meaningful it must be verifiable either by sense experience or by scrutiny of the conventions governing the use of its terms. He branded as not literally significant utterances that were neither empirical nor analytic.

Ayer's critical approach towards metaphysics was made very distinct in his book, *Language, Logic and Truth*. He rejected metaphysics on the ground that its subject matter transcends the physical and as such is chiefly not concerned with the “observables”. It is the lack of observable nature that pinpointed metaphysics out for the attack. He was very suspicious of abstract entities and so he attempted to find out whether they are cognitively significant. He expressed:

... but it is to be characteristic of the metaphysician, in my somewhat pejorative sense of the term, not only that his statement does not describe anything that is capable even in principle of being observed, but also that no dictionary is provided by means of which they can be transformed into statements that are directly or indirectly verifiable.²⁷

Ayer further argues that the fact that our perceptual judgments are at fault sometimes has no slightest tendency to display that the world of sense experience is not real. He insists that we still rely on our sense experience to substantiate the judgments which are embedded on our sensations. Ayer is of the view that the mention about the existence or

nature of God is to utter meaningless words. He argues:

The mention of God brings us to the question of the possibility of religious knowledge. We shall see that this possibility has already been ruled out by our treatment of metaphysics ... For to say that "God exists" is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false ... If the assertion that there is a God is nonsensical, then the assertion that there is no God is equally nonsensical.²⁸

W. E. Kennick affirmed categorically that "metaphysics is enigmatic."²⁹ The basic understanding we usually have when something is qualified as enigmatic is that that thing is mysterious and very difficult to comprehend. Kennick is of the view that metaphysics is a mystery that cannot be comprehended by the human mind. Due to the enigmatic nature of metaphysics, he maintains that all attempts to understand it is a futile effort. In his book, *Metaphysics: Readings and Reappraisals*, Kennick argued that since metaphysics makes use of arguments as tools of philosophy, it is bound to be problematic. He contends that "argument can make one arrive at a conclusion, and that same argument, if refined in another way can make one arrive at another conclusion. This open-endedness of arguments can lead to contradiction."³⁰

Kennick seriously argues that the controversies in metaphysics are not terminated. This implies that there are so many unresolved problems in metaphysics. This does not mean that attempts have not been made to answer them, but because of its nature, all answers offered have not been satisfactory. He maintains that beginning from the time of Thales till today, the question of ultimate reality as matter or soul has not been resolved. He cited examples of the problem of

immortality of the soul, freedom and determinism, etc., to substantiate his claim of the enigmatic nature of metaphysics. In sum, Kennick is of the view that metaphysical problems have no solutions and so there is no need to engage in such an enterprise.

According to Moritz Lazerowitz, “Metaphysical theories have no truth values and controversies about them are not about whether they are true or false.”³¹ In agreement with Kennick about the enigmatic and unresolved nature of metaphysics, Lazerowitz in his *The Structures of Metaphysics*, argues thus:

Theories which are accepted as undeniably true by many philosophers are rejected as certainly false by others ... demonstration, which, according to the considered opinion of some philosophers are absolutely conclusive are, according to the considered opinion of the other and equally abled philosophers, inconclusive and mistaken.³²

Lazerowitz is of the view that philosophers disagree very often on crucial issues in their theories. He further maintains that metaphysical claim is like a verbal dream. In his words: “A metaphysical theory ... is a verbal dream, the linguistic substructure of which has been uncovered before we can see what it causes and how it provides its effects.”³³ All the explanations about the nature of metaphysics, as argued by Lazerowitz, are all incorrect. He made this claim following so many differences among metaphysicians in their age-long unresolved theories.

In sum, that nothing is absolutely new in this world is an undeniable fact. It is quite understandable that Hume is known for his critical look at metaphysics. He is not the only philosopher in that camp. There are other notable philosophers after Hume. This chapter made

considerable effort to look at the various negative positions of some philosophers towards metaphysics. It is clear that all these philosophers rejected metaphysics on different standpoints. One common thing among them is their nihilistic approach to metaphysics.

Endnotes

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Chapter Four

Hume's Theory of Knowledge

Life and Times of David Hume

David Hume, the last of the three great British empiricists, was born on 26th April, 1711 at Edinburgh, Scotland. He was born seven years after the death of Locke (1632 – 1704) and when Berkley (1685 – 1753) was a young man of 26. His mother, Katherine Falconer, a daughter of Sir David Falconer, was a woman of a singular merit. His father, Joseph Home, was a gentleman. David adopted the spelling 'Hume' when he left Scotland in 1734 to avoid mispronunciation by the English. Hume's early education was successful and he attributed his success to his mother who undertook his care. Describing his early education, Hume says: "I passed through the ordinary course of education with success, and was seized very early with a passion for literature which has been the ruling passion of my life and the great source of my enjoyment."¹

Hume's mother, Katherine Falconer, came from a family of lawyers and so the young Hume was lured toward the profession. But as it was not his fancy, Hume abandoned it for study of philosophy and general learning. He matriculated at Edinburgh University in 1723 at the age of 12. It was here that he acquired a "grounding in the classical authors, logic and metaphysics, natural philosophy, ethics and mathematics."² It is on record that Hume left Edinburgh University without taking a degree. Though Hume was not so wealthy as evidenced from his family background, he had sufficient means to support himself in his study of philosophy and general learning. Hume later went to business

at Bristol. In 1734, after unsuccessfully trying to be a businessman in Bristol, he went through an intellectual crisis and in a moment of illumination, he found his true vocation. Hume “went to France, resolved to devote himself to literary pursuits and to make a consistent frugality compensate for his lack of fortune”³

It was during these years which he spent in France, 1734 – 1737, that he wrote his famous work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. This work was published in three volumes in 1738 and according to Hume, the work fell 'dead-born from the press'. The work did not attract public applause. Hume said that the work did not elicit even “a murmur amongst the zealots”⁴ He was down-spirited and he exclaimed that “never literary attempt was more unfortunate.”⁵

In 1745, Hume applied for the chair of ethics and pneumatic philosophy at the University of Edinburgh but “his reputation for skepticism and atheism helped to make his application unsuccessful.”⁶ That same year, he landed himself into a lucrative but unsatisfactory position of a tutor to a lunatic, the Marquess of Annandale with whom he stayed one year, directing and guiding him until the Marquess became hopelessly insane. Later, Hume became the Secretary to Lieutenant-General James St Clair, and took on the rank of a Judge-advocate. It was in 1749 that Hume returned to Scotland and lived in the country at Ninewells. In 1748, Hume revised the first book of the *Treatise* under the title *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*. The second edition appeared in 1751 and Hume gave it the title which it bears now, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. This book had the effect of waking Kant from dogmatic slumber. That same year, Hume published *An Enquiry*

Concerning the Principles of Morals which was more or less a recasting of the third part of the Treatise.

In 1752, Hume published several political essays and began his celebrated History of Britain. The celebrity which had eluded him in his early literary endeavors in philosophy came to him as a historian, and by the time he had finished the *History of Great Britain* (1756), *History of England Under the House of Tudor* (1759) and *History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Accession of Henry VII* (1761), he had become a world famous figure. Hume later returned to Edinburgh in 1766, became an Under-Secretary of State in the following year and retired two years later due to ill-health. He lived in his native city for the rest of his life. In 1776, Hume died of a bowel cancer. His work, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, which had been written before 1752, was published posthumously in 1777, and under Hume's name in 1783. Hume's autobiography edited by his close friend, Adam Smith, was also published in 1777. It must be noted that Hume influenced philosophical thought in a deeper way that it is very hard to get his equal in the history of philosophy.

Background to Hume's Theory of Knowledge

To a considerable extent, the society and the environment in which Hume lived, was in no small measure responsible for his line of thought. In his days, rationalism was all over the atmosphere. The rationalistic metaphysical systems of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Malebranche based their philosophy on reason alone. It is a given among the rationalists that our senses do deceive us. And so they distrusted the senses as sources of knowledge. They maintained that

the senses cannot furnish us with reliable knowledge; only reason can do just that. These philosophers applied deductive reasoning in proving the truth of propositions concerning the nature of the universe, God and human soul. Hume was dissatisfied with the approaches of his predecessors on certainty of human knowledge. Therefore, "Hume wishes to base his philosophy on the experimental method and to study human nature by applying the empirical method of the experimental sciences."⁷

Actually the basic claim of empiricism is that all human knowledge is derived from sense perception. It must be noted that both Locke and Berkeley, the predecessors of Hume, held to the claim of empiricism but none of them was consistent with it. Locke's imperceptible and unknowable substance; Berkeley's spiritual substance is inconsistent with the claim of empiricism. Hume was influenced by the empirical school of philosophy of Locke, Shaftsbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson and Butler. These philosophers viewed with contempt the imposing system of rationalism. Another notable impact on Hume was the skepticism of the French thinkers. It is good to note Hume's contact with the works of Francis Hutcheson as related by Lavine:

Hume had discovered the works of Francis Hutcheson ... who had argued that moral principles are not based upon the bible as Christianity says, nor are they based upon reason, as Plato and Socrates had said. Our moral beliefs, said Hutcheson, rests only on our feelings, or sentiment of approval or disapproval.⁸

Hume went further to assert that moral beliefs are neither divine nor rational but that they only express our feelings to all our beliefs.

According to him, all the achievements of sciences – astronomy, physics, chemistry and physiology – are nothing but sentiments and feelings that we perceive over and over again in an orderly fashion which makes us believe them to be true. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume stated that his purpose is to “study the science of man and to explain the principles of human nature.”⁹

Hume was tremendously impressed by the achievements of Newton in the natural science. He acknowledged the extent to which Newton's success depended on his employment of the experimental method. So Hume said that the time had come to involve this same method to philosophy which he believed would record a comparable success. “Earlier thinkers, he [Hume] grants have made a start in this direction, he mentions, and has obviously been influenced by the works of Locke, Shaftsbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson and Butler.”¹⁰ These thinkers were against continental rationalism and they had made some attempt to base their theories on empirical facts about human beings. But for Hume “none had made a systematic attempt to work out an empirical science of man, and none had found any general principles by which the subject could be unified as Mechanics had been unified by Newton's Laws on Motion.”¹¹ Hume was determined to harmonize Newton's experimental method with British empiricism in order to produce a true science by which the hypothesis of rationalistic metaphysicians could be scrutinized.

Hume's particular conception of philosophy as an empirical 'science of man' is to him the true emergence of modern philosophy. The dispositions that shaped the philosophy of Hume can be summed up thus: (a) that all our ideas are acquired from impressions of

sensation; (b) that we cannot conceive of anything different from what our experience gives us; (c) that a matter of fact can never be proved a priori: it must be discovered by or inferred from experience. In order to achieve this task, Hume “proposes to do this by consulting experience.”¹² It is based on this frame of mind that Hume's extreme empiricism was developed.

Knowledge Acquisition

As a thorough empiricist, Hume traces all knowledge back to some original basis in experience. Any knowledge outside the realm of sense experience is an impossibility for Hume. According to Hume, our experience is made of perceptions, a term he employed to designate any mental contact whatever. He divided perceptions into impressions and ideas. Hume's theory of knowledge involves the method of tracing back ideas to their original impressions and that becomes for him, a logical test for the soundness of concepts. Let us now take a closer look at his theory of knowledge.

Hume sets out in Section I Part I of Book I of the *Treatise* to trace the origin of all our ideas. Hume asserts that “all the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call impression and ideas.”¹³ He maintains that everything about human perception must be based on impression and ideas. This is the foundation for his theory of knowledge. This is also for Hume, a test for a true knowledge. Any claim of knowledge that is not derived from impression is not rationally justified. Impressions and ideas have the same source, that is, sense perception. Sense perception is a direct source of impression and indirect source of ideas. They are almost the

same. The only difference between them lies in their degree of force and vivacity with which they strike upon the human mind.

Those perceptions which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions, and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning.¹⁴

During sense perception, the direct contact with the object of sense perception is what gives us the impression of the object. As I am now with my pen, I have a very strong perception of my pen. This is what Hume describes as impression. But by the time I leave my study room, I will have the idea of my study room; I will have the idea of the pen furnished by the impressions of my sense experience. This is why Stumpf in his discussion on Hume said that “The original stuff of thought is an impression”¹⁵ So the origin of ideas is nothing but the impressions we have from sense perception. Harold Noonan observed that Hume's understanding of the origin of *ideas* “intends to serve as the foundation of his [Hume's] philosophy.”¹⁶

We have noted that our ideas are characteristically less forceful than our impressions, but the question of the scope of our ideas has not yet been addressed. It is Hume's claims that when we consider this line of thought, we may likely conclude that “there are no substantial restraints on the range of ideas we can form.”¹⁷ Hume further explains:

Nothing, at first view, may seem unbounded than the thought of man, which not only escapes all human power and authority, but is not even restrained within the limits of nature and reality. To form monsters, and join incongruous shapes and appearances, costs the imagination no more trouble than to conceive the most natural and familiar objects.¹⁸

Hume said that when we carefully look at the scope of our ideas, we will observe that all the ideas we have are derived from the materials supplied by the senses. However, he notes that we do sometimes conceive an idea of a golden mountain. How come about this idea since there is nothing in real life like a golden mountain? In this particular case, Hume explains that it is likely that we must have previously seen a mountain and also a metal of gold. He went further to say that such ideas like a golden mountain or a flying horse is the product of the mind's "faculty of compounding, transposing, or diminishing the material afforded us by the senses and experience."¹⁹ This implies that it is the work of our imagination to join two ideas which we originally have through impression, of mountain and a metal of gold or a horse and wings to give us a golden mountain or a flying horse. This boils down to Hume's position that "all our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions or more lively ones."²⁰ This is also known as "Copy Principle"²¹.

In order to substantiate his claim about the origin of ideas and that there can be no idea without an impression, Hume argues:

A blind man can form no notion of colours; a deaf man of sounds. Restore either of them that sense, in which he is deficient; by opening this new inlet for his sensations, you also open an inlet for the ideas; and he finds no difficulty in conceiving these objects.²²

This line of thought of Hume is plausible when we juxtapose it with the realities of life. A person who is born blind can never have an idea of colour. One who is deaf from birth does not know what a sound is. These are some of the practical examples to show that without an impression there can be no ideas. Hume maintains that the

understanding of the origin of ideas will help us to “render every dispute equally intelligible, and banish all that jargon, which has so long taken possession of metaphysical reasoning, and drawn disgrace upon them.”²³ Hume therefore makes a recommendation:

When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion, that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea, we need but enquire, from what impression is that supposed idea derived? And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicions.²⁴

It is evident that for an idea to have any meaning, according to Hume, it must be derived from an impression or a combination of impressions. It is based on this understanding that Hume subjected metaphysical realities like substance, God, self, etc to test. Now having known that all our ideas are derived from impression, the questions now is: how can we explain what we normally call thinking or how can we explain how ideas group themselves in our minds? The answer to these questions will now lead us to Hume's discussion on the association of ideas.

The Association of Ideas

According to Hume, our ideas are not related to each other by a mere chance. There is a principle of the association of our ideas. When the mind receives impressions, those impressions can reappear in two different ways. Firstly the impression “can reappear with a degree of vividness which is intermediate between the vividness of an impression and the faintness of an idea.”²⁵ Hume said that the memory is the faculty by which we use to repeat our impression in this way.

Another faculty by which we repeat our impression is the imagination. He said that in this second way, the impression “can reappear as mere ideas, as faint copies or images of impressions.”²⁶ In the same way in which he described the difference between impression and ideas, in terms of vividness, he also described the difference between ideas of the memory and ideas of the imagination. Hume went further to make another difference. Memory “preserves not only simple ideas but also their order and position ... the imagination, however, is not tied down in this way. It can, for instance, combine simple ideas arbitrarily or break down complex ideas into simple ideas and then rearrange them.”²⁷

Even though the imagination can freely combine ideas, it does so according to the principle of association of ideas. Hume said that there is in man certain associating qualities by which one idea introduces another. He maintains that: “The qualities, from which this association arises, and by which the mind is after this manner conveyed from one idea to another, are three, viz., Resemblance, Contiguity in time or place, and cause and effect.”²⁸ He referred to these three qualities as natural relations. It is the belief of Hume that the connection of all our ideas to each other could be explained by these qualities stated above. Stumpf reports:

A picture naturally leads our thoughts to the original (resemblance): the mention of one apartment in the building naturally introduces an enquiry ... concerning the others (contiguity): and if we think of a wound, we can scarcely forbear reflecting on the pain which follows it (cause and effect).²⁹

It must be observed that among these three qualities, “the notion of cause and effect was considered by Hume to be the central element in knowledge.”³⁰ Hume therefore asserts that since the causal principle is the foundation of knowledge, any flaws in the principle goes to prove that we can have no certainty of knowledge.

The Operations of the Understanding

In Part I of the *Enquiry*, Hume began with the following words: “All the objects of human reason or inquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, Relations of Ideas and Matters of Facts.”³¹ We shall now focus our analysis on how we can ascertain the falsity or truth of our propositions; how we can ascertain the validity of human knowledge.

Relations of Ideas and Matters of Facts

The category of relations of ideas, according to Hume, covers all true propositions that cannot be denied without self-contradiction, and all false propositions that do imply a contradiction. Omoregbe observes that “the truth or falsity of the propositions which assert relations of ideas depends on the meaning of the terms employed.”³² For Hume, the assertions made in Mathematics, Geometry and Arithmetic cannot be proved nor disproved by experience nor can they be denied without involving oneself in self-contradiction. Also analytic propositions cannot be denied without self-contradiction. For instance, 'The husband has a wife'; the idea of having a wife is implied in the idea of a husband. This type of propositions is necessarily true.

Omoregbe went further to say that “the truth or falsity of propositions which assert matters of fact depends on experience. Experience can confirm or falsify the assertions made by such propositions.”³³ Hume is of the view that when we are not reflecting on a relation between ideas, any proposition we may form can be paired with an equally intelligible contrary claim. Assertions made by science are examples of matters of fact. They can be proved or disproved by experience. To deny such propositions does not involve self-contradiction.

Causal Reasoning

Hume believes that the only form of reasoning that is potentially capable of informing us of the existence of objects and powers that are not directly revealed to us by the senses and our memory is causal reasoning. In Hume's view, any time we make conclusions from what we have observed to what we have not observed, the conclusion is nothing but a causal one. As I am now sitting in my study room, I hear a sound from the neighborhood, and I conclude that it must be a car driving into my compound. I have drawn conclusion even without observing the source of the sound to determine whether it is actually a car or not. Hume explains:

The hearing of an articulate voice and rational discourse in the dark assures us of the presence of some person: why? Because these are the effects of the human make and fabric, and closely connected with it. If we anatomize all the other reasonings of this nature, we shall find, that they are founded on the relation of cause and effect, and that this relation is either near or remote, direct or collateral.³⁴

So it is quite clear that most of our everyday conclusions and decisions are based on causal reasoning. "Without such reasoning, our stock of beliefs about matters of fact would be massively impoverished."³⁵ Nonetheless, our causal reasoning, we must note, "can only be discovered with the assistance of experience."³⁶ Following this line of thought, it means that from a purely a priori point of view, it will be arbitrary and presumptuous to posit an effect without any reference to experience. Hume therefore concludes that "all our reasonings concerning matters of fact are founded on the relation of cause and effect ... all our reasonings and conclusions in respect of causal relations are founded on experience."³⁷

The Rationality of Causal Inference

Here, Hume makes it clear that the conclusions which we normally draw from our experience of the operations of cause and effect "are not founded on reasoning, or any process of the understanding."³⁸ Our causal inferences are based on the proposition that the future will be like the past; that an object which produced a particular effect will be true on future occasions with similar effects. This line of reasoning, according to Hume, "is not supported by any good argument or chain of reasoning."³⁹ It follows that for Hume, causal reasoning cannot generate rationally justified conclusions.

For us to hold to our causal reasoning, we need to justify the supposition that the course of nature will remain unchanged. This is the only way of "converting deductively invalid causal argument into arguments whose premises do entail the truth of their conclusions."⁴⁰ Now if we agree with Hume that all our causal inferences are founded

on experiential regularities, then we also have to accept that our causal inferences cannot be rationally justified unless we are justified rationally in believing that the course of nature will remain unchanged. For a person to be justified that his belief is rationally justified, he must be able to show that the belief is true or likely to be true. If this is not done, it is judged as epistemic irresponsibility. Although Hume had argued that causal inferences concerning matters of facts are not justified, it has been observed that “it is natural for us to base our beliefs and expectations on experience.”⁴¹

The Idea of Necessary Connection

Having looked at the causal reasoning and the rationality of our causal inference, let us now look at Hume's conception of the idea of necessary connection. It is obvious that our knowledge is basically on causal reasoning. We believe that the sun will rise tomorrow; we also entertain the belief that having observed that lemon tastes bitter, we conclude that the next lemon will also be better. This kind of argument presupposes a necessary connection between a cause and its effects. This is what Hume sets to investigate in Sections I, II and III of Part III of Book I of the *Treatise* and in the Sections 7–11 of the *Enquiry*.

There are no ideas, which occur in metaphysics, more obscure and uncertain, than those of power, force, energy, or necessary connection ... We shall, therefore, endeavor, in this section, to fix, if possible, the precise meaning of these terms, and thereby remove some part of that obscurity, which is so much complained of in this species of philosophy.⁴²

That right-angled triangle must be equal to the square of the hypotenuse or that bricks of certain size will break panes of glass, are

derived from causal relations. We come to these conclusions by experience of past events. It must be noted here that Hume denied that we can have a priori knowledge of causation. For Hume, we have to “turn to empirical evidence to discover the effects of particular causes and to find the sources of the idea of necessary connection.”⁴³ Hume's view on the necessary connection is a relation between cause and its effects in which the cause necessarily produces the effects. But since for Hume, all ideas are derived from impression, then, from what impression do we get the idea of necessary connection between cause and effect? To the question of necessary connection Hume explains:

When we look about us toward external objects, and consider the operation of causes, we are never able, in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connection; any quality, which binds the effect to the cause, and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other. We only find, that the one does actually, in fact, follow the other ... there is not, in any single, particular instance of cause and effect, anything which can suggest the idea of power or necessary connection.⁴⁴

The point Hume wants to make clear here is that we have no idea of necessary connection. Our idea of necessary connection is not derived from any impression but from the repeated observations of instances of the cause-effect link. “They [cause and effect] seem conjoined, but never connected.”⁴⁵ Our idea of necessary connection is not something of which we can find a priori knowledge; also it is not derived from sensory impression or from an impression gained by reflecting on the operations of the mind. Hume now decided to the imagination as the source of the idea of necessary connection. “Hume argues that the impression of necessary connection is produced by the imagination after we have experienced a constant conjunction between two types of

events.”⁴⁶ When we observe fire and heat for the first time, we do not think them to be necessarily connected. But after series of observing fire and heat together with heat preceding fire, we conclude that fire is the cause of heat. Hume said that this type of conclusion cannot be justified by reason; we just find it natural to think in this way. He argues: “Our idea, therefore, of necessity and causation arises entirely from the uniformity, observable in the operations of nature; where similar objects are constantly conjoined together, and the mind is determined by custom to infer the one from the appearance of the other.”⁴⁷

Hume points out that there is nothing in the cause that necessitates the effects. No matter how many times we observe oxygen, there is nothing in it to show that when mixed with hydrogen it will give us water. There is no analysis of fire to tell us that when a person's finger comes in contact with it, that it will burn. Hume, therefore concludes that our idea of necessary connection is derived from our habit of associating two events together.

Endnotes

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Chapter Five

Hume's Metaphysical Nihilism

Hume's metaphysical nihilism “derives from his empirical and skeptical point of view.”¹ To be precise, Hume's metaphysical nihilism can be summed up in his book-burning campaign of all metaphysical works. This campaign is evident in the concluding part of the *Enquiry* when he proclaimed:

If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask: Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.²

Before now, we have acquainted ourselves with the theory of knowledge of Hume and also his position on the origin of ideas. It is based on his epistemological background that he argued against metaphysics. We shall now take a closer look at his rejection and denial of metaphysical concepts, namely, causality, substance, personal identity, God and miracle.

Causality

In our everyday experience, we refer often to the notion of cause and effect. From our experience we have come to accept the assertion that every effect must have a cause. Every day we perceive beings that are acted upon. For instance, a stone falls into the water and gives rise to a series of concentric waves; the sun warms bodies exposed to its rays; men and women produce all sorts of artifacts. However, “some philosophers denied the most evident experience and claimed that causal influence is merely a chronological succession of phenomena.”³

Aristotle said that a cause is that which has some positive influence in the production of another. He affirmed that any effect must, out of necessity, have a cause since something cannot come from nothing. He went further to distinguish four types of causes, namely material cause, formal cause, efficient cause and final cause. John Locke said that it is through observation that we get the ideas of cause and effect. Locke “locates the idea of cause and effect within experience (sensation and reflection).”⁴ In Locke's own words, we read:

In the notice, that our senses take of constant vicissitude of things, we cannot but observe, that several particulars both qualities and substances begin to exist; and that they receive this their existence, from the due application and operation of some other being. From this observation, we get our ideas of cause and effect, that which produces any simple or complex idea we denote by the general name cause and that which is produced effect.⁵

Another British empiricist, Berkeley, undoubtedly affirms that there is a law of nature upon which the idea of causality and other phenomena in the world is explained. For him, God is the Architect of causality. “God,” he said, “is the infinite Spirit who causes the idea of what we ordinarily think of as our immediate perception of external world. But subsequent reflections on what we have perceived are caused by ourselves.”⁶

On his part, Hume defined causality twice: one as a philosophical relation and the other as a natural relation. As a philosophical relation, Hume says: “We may define a cause to be an object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former

are placed in like relations of precedence and contiguity to those objects that resemble the latter.”⁷ As a natural relation, Hume continues his explanation: “A cause is an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other.”⁸ These two definitions of cause, according to Iroegbu, is an “empiricist, not a metaphysical definition.”⁹ In the view of Iroegbu, it is quite distinct that Hume's definition of causation buttresses “a non-essential relationship of cause to the object to which it is cause.”¹⁰

Noonan observes that “there are objects in the world which are causes according to the first definition but not according to the second definition, and conversely.”¹¹ However, let us look at what Iroegbu calls Hume's methodological pioneering question: What is the origin of the idea of cause? The answer to this question leads to Hume's dead blow on causality as a metaphysical reality. Hume had argued that all our ideas come from impressions which in turn have their origin in sense perception. Since all our ideas originate from impressions, Hume, therefore wanted to investigate where the idea of cause originate from. Hume contends: “Every idea is copied from some preceding impression or sentiment; and where we cannot find any impression we may be certain that there is no idea.”¹² He emphatically maintains that we do not have any impression of the idea of cause. Nonetheless, Hume tries to give a solution: “The idea of causality derives from the frequent association of things that generally go together.”¹³

Hume observed that the principle of causality is based on the assumption that the future will resemble the past. He went further to argue thus: “that the future resembles the past is not founded on arguments of any kind but is derived entirely from habit, by which we are determined to expect for the future the same train of objects to which we have been accustomed.”¹⁴ Hume is of the view that no matter how frequent a thing is followed by another in the past, it is not enough to ascertain that it will happen in the same way in the future. When we find that particular objects are constantly conjoined, we tend to think that there is a necessary connection between them. Hume holds that the concept of cause and effect is not in any way whatsoever attained by a priori reasoning, but purely from experience.

Naturally, we tend to think that if **A** was repeatedly followed by **B** in the past, we conclude that **A** is the cause of **B** and that whenever we see **A**, **B** must follow. But Hume maintains that there is no necessary connection between **A** and **B**. Also, he observed that “we cannot validly draw the conclusion that **A** is the cause of **B** since we can observe no intrinsic connection between them, nor can we be sure that **B** will always follow **A** in the future simply because it did so in the past.”¹⁵ That two molecules of hydrogen when mixed with one atom of oxygen give rise to water in the past does not necessarily follow that it will be the same in the future. There is nothing in the hydrogen when examined singly to show that it will form water whenever the molecules are mixed with oxygen. Let us listen directly to Hume's own words:

There is nothing in any object, considered in itself, which can afford us a reason for drawing a conclusion beyond it; and, that even after the

observation of the frequent or constant conjunction of objects, we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience.¹⁶

Hume therefore concludes that the principle of causality has no rational foundation. He is of the view that “what guides metaphysical inferences is not reason, but custom, habit, and repetivity.”¹⁷

Substance

Substance literally means that which stands under or that which remains under the appearance of a thing as the permanent and basic element sustaining accidents in their being. When we observe some changes in a particular being, there is something in that being that does not change. It is because there is something that does not change that we are able to recognize it despite the observable changes. So, that thing that does not change; that thing that stands beneath change; that thing that supports the accidental changes is called substance.

Aristotle believes that “the way we know a thing provided a major clue as to what we mean by substance.”¹⁸ It is the belief of Aristotle that for a thing to really exist, it must be a substance and must have quality. Substance, according to St Thomas Aquinas, is seen as the essence to which per se existence is proper. Descartes viewed substance as a “thing which so exists that it needs no other thing for its existence.”¹⁹ Spinoza defined substance as “that which is in itself and conceived through itself, that is, the concept of which it ought to be formed.”²⁰ Samuel Stumpf observed that Locke approached the question of substance from the common sense point of view. Locke's own words are:

The idea ... we have, to which we give the general name substance, being nothing but the supposed, but unknown, support of those qualities we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist ... without something to support them, we call that support 'substantial', which, according to the true import of the word, is, in plain English, standing under or upholding.²¹

Generally, the concept of substance for Locke is something we know not what. Asserting that there are no material substances because we do not perceive them, Berkeley said that “there are spiritual substance; there are spirits and minds.”²² Berkeley, we must note, “retained the idea of spiritual substance.”²³

Having noted the positions of his predecessors, Hume continued his inquiry by asking from what impression we get the idea of substance. Popkin and Stroll observed that Hume found the idea of substance “completely unintelligible.”²⁴ In Section VI, Part I, Book I of the *Treatise*, Hume questioned: “I would fain ask those philosophers, who found so much of their reasonings on the distinction of substance and accident, and imagine we have clear ideas of each, whether the idea of substance be derived from the impressions of sensation or reflection?”²⁵

Hume argued that the idea of substance is not from the impression of sensation or reflection. He questioned to know which of the senses gives us the impression of substance. For the sense of sight, eye, it will be the impression of colour; for ears, it will be sound; for palate, it will be taste. Hume therefore points out that sound, colour and taste are not substances. He also maintains that the origin of the idea of substance is not derived from reflection. As far as Hume is concerned, we do not have any idea of substance. “What we have are perceptions. The idea of

substance does not exist. It is meaningless.”²⁶ Hume therefore explains: “The idea of substance as well as that of mode, is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assigned them, by which we are able to recall, either to ourselves or others, that collection.”²⁷ Iroegbu pointed out that Hume's rejection and denial of substance “was total with grievous consequence.”²⁸ In summary, Hume conceives substance as a bundle of perceptions and nothing more than that. Hume categorically denied the idea of substance.²⁹ This rejection of substance is a big blow to metaphysics since there cannot be any metaphysical knowledge without the concept of substance. The idea of substance is at the root of all metaphysical investigations.

Personal Identity

In Section VI of Part IV of Book I of the *Treatise*, Hume discussed the question of personal identity. But before going into Hume's discussion properly, it is pertinent that the reader should have a general idea of the whole talk about personal identity.

Richard Taylor correctly noted that “there is one metaphysical problem that seems to have resulted almost entirely from polarization, and that is the celebrated problem of personal identity.”³⁰ The question of personal identity can be expressed thus: As Ejikemeuwa, writing with my pen on this paper, can it be said that I am the same person whom my mother carried on her laps about 46 years ago and gave the name, Ejikemeuwa? Or am I a different Ejikemeuwa? Most philosophers would agree that I am the same person that was carried as an infant by my mother more than forty years ago. But come to think of

the discovery of the biologists. They tell us that every seven years a person has totally new cells. This implies that the ones he had seven years ago had been replaced with new ones. For about thirty years the whole cells of a person would have been totally changed. Now can we say that the person is still the same person when all the cells of his body must have been totally changed? If we answer in the affirmative, the next question is: What is it that remains after all the changes must have taken place? Taylor reports that: "Metaphysicians, or at least a great many of them, have supposed it to mean that there is a strict identity in something, namely, a person, over the course of time."³¹

Confronted with this problem of personal identity, Aristotle said that there are two elements in man, substance (which does not change) and accidents (which undergo changes). For him, it is the substance that constitutes the principle of continuity in a person; it is the substance of a person that is responsible for the personal identity of the individual person.³² Aristotle is of the view that both the soul and the body are essential elements of the human person. For Plato, it is the soul that is the essential part of the human person and it does not change. For Descartes, man is essentially a thinking being. This implies that man is essentially mind or soul. Descartes asserts that as long as man thinks, he maintains his identity.³³ For the materialists, "personal identity is the identity of the body, the brain, or the memory."³⁴ Omoregbe reports that both Locke and Russell maintained that personal identity is "identity of continuity of consciousness and memory."³⁵ For them, without the continuity of consciousness or memory, there can be no personal identity. Now, the paramount question is: What is the position of our dear Hume on the whole talk of personal identity?

Omoregbe rightly observed: “David Hume, the uncompromising empiricist, says there is nothing like soul or mind conceived as an unchanging entity, in the mind, apart from the series of observable psychological experiences.”³⁶ Hume is very emphatic in stating that what we call self is nothing but psychological experiences. He maintains, in the *Treatise*, that when he goes into himself, he discovers only series of perceptions and nothing more than that; there is nothing like soul, mind or any unchanging entity within him. Let us hear Hume in detail:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or another of heat or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep, so long am I insensible of myself and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions removed by death and could I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body. I should be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is further requisite to make me a perfect non-entity.³⁷

Hume went further to argue that should anybody goes into himself and carried out the same introspection as he did and comes up with something different, or even says that he discovers or perceives “something simple, continued and unchanging which he calls himself, his soul or spirit, then he must confess that such person is a different kind of being from himself, that they are not the same kind of being, and that he can reason no longer with such a person.”³⁸ It is logical enough to say that since there is no unchanging entity in man which undergoes

the series of perceptions, Hume argues that we do not have any justified reason to talk of continuity of the same person or personal identity. Copleston reports that "Hume is obviously compelled to deny that we have any idea of the self as distinct from our perceptions."³⁹

Having reached thus far in our discussion we have to be fair to Hume not to conclude this section without making reference to an appendix published later in Book III of the *Treatise*. In the appendix Hume expressed his dissatisfaction with his treatment of personal identity "but confessed that he now finds the whole matter a 'labyrinth' and that he knows neither how to correct his former opinions nor how to render them consistent."⁴⁰ Noonan observed that Hume could not put right what he discovered as objectionable in his earlier discussion on personal identity. One important thing to note in the last citation above, is Hume's confession that the difficulty he got himself into was too much for his comprehension. He was actually handicapped to explain himself out clearly on the question of personal identity. Convinced of his short-comings in the earlier work, Hume declares:

I am sensible that my account is very defective, and that nothing but the seeming evidence of the precedent reasonings could have induced me to receive it. If perceptions are distinct existences, they form a whole only by being connected together ... But all my hopes vanish when I come to explain the principles that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness. I cannot discover any theory that gives me satisfaction on this head.⁴¹

Hume went further to lament:

There are two principles which I cannot render consistent, nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz, that all our distinct perceptions are

distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct existences For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic and confess that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding.⁴²

The Existence of God

Down through the ages, many philosophers have given series of arguments to ascertain the existence and nature of God. These arguments can be summed up under five headings, namely, ontological, cosmological, teleological and moral, and arguments from design. It must be noted that the conception about the nature of God varies according to tribes and nationalities. This is known as anthropomorphic conceptions of God. The Greeks conceive God as a Greek; the Igbo people conceive God as an Igbo person; the Americans conceive God as an American, and so on. But one basic thing is that God is conceived as one who does not change but changes things.

For Aristotle, God is a Pure Act, without any potency in Him. He sees God as an absolutely perfect Being, immutable and eternal. Thomas Aquinas sees God as eternal, self-subsisting, self-sufficient and immutable Being. For John Scotus Eriugena, God is identical with nature and with everything in the universe. Descartes is of the view that God is a being which so exists such that it needs no other being for its existence. In the view of Spinoza, God is a single substance with infinite attributes. Leibniz maintains that God is an infinitely perfect being. John Locke points out that the idea of God, just like the idea of substance, is inferred from other simple ideas and is the product, not of immediate observation, but of demonstration.

Among the five arguments for God's existence, Hume focused on the argument from design because “for his contemporaries this was the chief or sole argument for a divine existence.”⁴³ It is important for the reader to note that Hume was brought up as a Calvinist but he later discarded his belief and decided to be hostile to the revealed religion. Hume was convinced that “the influence of religion was far from beneficial,”⁴⁴ and so he decided to disprove the arguments for the existence of God. It is quite distinct that some philosophers tried to prove the existence of God through a priori method. This method is not in consonance with the empiricist view of Hume. He sees the argument from design as the one that is worthy of investigation. This is the kind of argument Hume would ordinarily agree to because it has to do with the 'observables'. The argument from design, known also as teleological argument, has Thomas Aquinas as its progenitor. This argument was also popularized by William Parley, who compared the mechanism of the universe to that of a watch. Following the line of thought of Parley, assuming that a person comes to a desert and stumbles on a wrist watch, naturally, the person cannot but think that it must have been kept by a rational being. This is because the watch cannot bring itself to the desert. Also when we take a closer look at the mechanism of a watch we cannot but conclude that it must have been made by a rational being. Analogically, therefore, when we look at the order and harmony in the universe, we are forced to conclude that a rational being must be responsible for such order and harmony. This being is what we know as God. This is the summary of the argument from design.

Following this argument from design, Hume therefore questioned if the order we find in the world presupposes the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent God? The answer, for him, is 'No'. "Hume argues that the traditional God of Christianity cannot be inferred from the order we find in nature."⁴⁵ If we infer the existence of God from the harmony and order which we observed in the world, what about the disharmony and disorder that are very distinct in the world. Who is responsible for the disorder in the world? This question boils down to the age-long problem of evil in the world. Hume contends that if actually the world was designed by God, it means then that He did not do a good job. Bailey and O'Brien relate that: "There are moral evils such as acts perpetrated by murderers and tyrants throughout history, and there are natural evils: disease, famine, and disasters such as the Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. Millions therefore have a life that is poor, nasty, brutish and short."⁴⁶

Hume argues that the existence of such evils in the world is not compatible with the design plan of omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God. He further argues that if God is all-good and all-powerful, He (God) should be able to eliminate the evils in the world.

Some thinkers argue that the evil in the world is compatible with the divine design of creation. This argument is otherwise known as theodicy. Hume vehemently argued against this argument. He maintains that natural or physical evils are caused by natural laws and that God should be able to control these laws such that no evil would come out from it. Against the background of those who argue that a world containing pain and compassion is better than a world that contains neither, Hume said that such cannot be a consolation to those

who are suffering. There can be a world without suffering if God is actually an all-good God. Hume maintains that there can be virtuous men in the world without the existence of suffering and pain. As against the theodicy that focuses on free will, Hume, in the Section VIII of the *Enquiry* argues: "The ultimate Author of all our volitions is the Creator of the world, who first bestowed motion on this immense machine, and placed all being in that particular position, whence every subsequent evil, by an inevitable necessity, must result."⁴⁷

Hume states that the world is still in progress. The implication of this argument is that the world is not yet perfect. Hume is of the view that "the evil we find in the world only indicates that progress is still to be made – progress, though, that is part of God's design plan."⁴⁸ If we see, for instance, a half-finished building surrounded with heaps of sand, bricks and stone, we cannot but infer that the building is in progress and will be finished in the future. Hume maintains that even "if it is assumed that God exists, then we can infer that his world is unfinished and that his mature creation will come to fruition sometime in the future."⁴⁹

Another dimension of the argument from design in Hume's critical view is the one that has to do with constant conjunction. We have seen that our causal reasoning is based on constant conjunction of events. We associate a building with a mason because we have experienced a mason moulding bricks for building a house. We also associate fire with heat because we have experienced fire constantly conjoined with heat. In this regard, Hume argues that we have not "experienced lots of worlds being made."⁵⁰ We are only conversant with our world and no other one. Hume's argument is succinctly related by Bailey and

O'Brien: "In our experience worlds are not constantly conjoined with any antecedent events and thus we cannot conceive of the world as an effect of anything."⁵¹ For Hume, we cannot infer the existence of God from the things we observe in the world since there is no necessary connection between cause and effects. It is clear from our discussion so far that Hume's attempt is to dislodge any argument that would establish the idea of God's existence. It must also be observed that his argument is an attack against revealed religion, especially Christianity. This calls for the reason why some thinkers refer to him as an anti-Christian. Copleston reports that Hume "refused to recognize the validity of [all] metaphysical arguments for God's existence; that is, he refused to allow that the existence of God is demonstrable."⁵²

Miracle

In the Section X of the *Enquiry*, Hume tries to establish that we should not believe in miracle and also that miracle is not a reason for us to accept God's existence. Hume defines miracle as "a violation of the laws of nature."⁵³ One thing that is prominent with the laws of nature is regularities of experience. This, Hume says, is what miracle violates. For Hume, that a man suddenly dies is not a miracle; that water boils at 100°C is not a miracle; that a stone thrown up falls is never a miracle. These examples are not considered as miracles because they are in accordance with the laws of nature as we have discovered from experience.

Hume focuses on testimonial evidence as a proof for the occurrence of a miracle. He questioned whether human testimony could be sufficient enough for us to establish that a miracle had occurred. Hume

said that we should sometimes believe testimonial evidence because they have experiential support. For instance, if Jacinta had been truthful to me for the past 15 years, there is every probability that she will continue to remain truthful. This is not necessarily so but it is more probably so. Also since the sun normally rises from the east, it is not out of place to expect the sun to rise tomorrow from the east. Of course Hume had argued that there is no justification for thinking in this way but we base our conclusions on past experience. "The reason, why we place any credit in witnesses and historians is not derived from any connexion, which we perceive a priori, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them."⁵⁴

Hume noted that there are sometimes when we do not accept testimonial evidence due to inconsistencies. So he points out that this is also applicable to our assessment of miracles. We should be able to weigh the evidence in favor of a certain law of nature holding against testimonial evidence that a miracle had occurred. It is the view of Hume that whatever proof for a miracle, there must always, from the nature of the fact, be an 'opposite proof' against it. But why must this be so? Hume appears to believe that the opposite proof must exist since in order for an event to be considered miraculous, there must be uniformity in experience against the occurrence of that event. This is because a principle is not established as, or believed to be a law of nature unless there is a uniform experience of the truth of the alleged law. But if as Hume seems to maintain, that there is a uniform experience for the truth of a law, then there is a uniform experience against any event that is a violation of that law. Hume therefore concludes that there is a proof against any miraculous event.

Hume further advanced another argument against the reality of miracle. He said that the issue of miracle is generally associated with people whose education is not unquestionable such that their claims are always the result of delusions. Hume states that the tendency in human to be attracted to stories of unusual occurrences is not doubted. This strong desire for wonder and surprise inherent in human nature is being used by religious people “who indulge in telling fantastic stories of miraculous occurrences to promote the cause of their religious beliefs.”⁵⁵ “A religionist may be an enthusiast, and imagine he sees what has no reality; he may know his narrative to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intention in the world for the sake of promoting so holy a *cause*.”⁵⁶

Looking at the points Hume raised above, it therefore means that the authenticity and credibility of miracle is greatly in doubt. It is Hume's view that even if a closest friend comes to say that he has seen an angel, such claim should not be trusted. The person must have seen something like an angel but not an angel. Hume stands his ground that miraculous occurrences are generally made among ignorant and barbarous nations and if such claims are made by civilized people, it is solely because they have inherited such superstitious belief from the former. Therefore, all claims of miraculous occurrences, according to Hume, should be rejected as the product of delusion. He asserts: “We shall establish it as a maxim that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle.”⁵⁷

We have seen that the skeptical background of Hume's theory of knowledge has led him to a total rejection of metaphysics. For him metaphysics is an illusion and since for him, it does not have any

rational justification or valid foundation, it must be done away with. Metaphysics, for Hume, should be seen as a disease to be treated and never as a discipline to be investigated. Let us conclude this chapter with Hume's drastic and nihilistic conclusion in the Enquiry:

If we take in our hand any volume, of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: For it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.⁵⁸

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5. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, cited in Njoku, *The Empiricists and Causation in Law*, 57.
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9. Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy* (Owerri: International Universities Pres, Ltd., 1995), 176.

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19. R. E. McMall, "Substance" in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 13*, (New York: Mc Graw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 766.
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22. Omoregbe, *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy, Vol. 2*, 69.
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24. Richard H. Popkin and Avrum Stroll, *Philosophy Made*

- Simple*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 140.
25. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 59.
 26. Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, 178.
 27. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 60.
 28. Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, 178.
 29. For a detail analysis of Hume's Critique on substance, See Popkin et al, *Philosophy Made Simple*, 140 – 141; Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, 178 – 179.
 30. Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 4th ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1992), 126.
 31. Ibid.
 32. Omoregbe and Taylor discussed the problem of personal identity to a greater extent. Omoregbe even traced the problem to the idealist and materialist' perspective, while Taylor went as far as discussing identity over space and time. For a detail discussion, See Joseph Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction to Philosophical Psychology*, (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 2006), 53 – 61; Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 126 – 130.
 33. This position of Descartes has its flaws. If man is essentially a thinking being, then, what happens when there is a brain transplant? Should we say that Mr. A whose brain has been change with Mr. B is now Mr. B since he is thinking like Mr. B? This boils down to the age-long problem of mind and body. See Joseph Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction to Philosophical Psychology*, (Lagos: JOJA Educational

- Research and Publishers Ltd., 2006), 2 – 41, for a detailed discussion.
34. Joseph Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction to Philosophical Psychology*, (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 2006), 55.
 35. Ibid., 56.
 36. Ibid.
 37. Hume, cited in Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Mind*, 56.
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 39. Copleston, Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 5*, (New York: Continuum, 2003), 302.
 40. Harold W. Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 187.
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 42. Ibid.
 43. Bailey et al, *Hume's Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 116.
 44. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 5*, 305
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 47. Hume, *Enquires Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 99 – 100 .
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50. Ibid., 124.
51. Ibid.
52. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 5, 310.
53. Hume, *Enquires Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 114.
54. Ibid., 113.
55. Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 212.
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57. Ibid., 213.
58. Hume, *Enquires Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, p. 165.

Chapter Six

Implications of Hume's Metaphysical Nihilism

Preamble

I have noted earlier that metaphysics studies being in its totality. Any aspect of study of being by any discipline presupposes metaphysics. Metaphysics has been distinctly noted to be the foundation of other fields of study. Hume's nihilistic approach to metaphysics can be seen as a serious attack on these disciplines. It is in the light of the above understanding that we wish to state some of the implications of Hume's metaphysical nihilism. It is the belief of the researcher that the nihilistic approach of Hume to metaphysics can be interpreted to be a death sentence on science, the obliteration of ethics, annihilation of religion and epistemological uncertainty.

A Death Sentence on Science

Scientific knowledge is said to be universal. This universality is an essential character for the general acceptance of what we know as science. In *Degrees of Knowledge*, Jacques Maritain observed that “the universality of the object of knowledge is the condition of its necessity, in itself the condition of perfect knowledge or science.”¹ But since universality and necessity cannot be observed empirically, as Hume tells us, it follows that scientific knowledge has no rational justification.

We know too well that empirical sciences are characterized by their use of inductive method. Inductive method entails knowledge from particular to universal. Empirical science makes use of this method; in fact, induction is at the basis of empirical science. Hume had argued

against causality that we cannot conclude from the known to the unknown. He argues that for the fact that water boils at 100°C in the past, it does not mean that it will boil at the same 100°C in the future. This is because, for him, there is no necessary connection between cause and effect. Omoregbe contends that "By criticizing the principle of causality, Hume struck the root of modern science. His attack on the principle of causality is an attack on induction, and on modern science which is based on induction."² Since Hume argued that we have no rational justification for stating that the future will be like the past (which is the basis of the principle of causality), empirical science which is based on that same principle has been injured to the marrow. Following Hume's argument, there is no sure foundation for empirical sciences. We can say that we can begin to dig the grave for empirical sciences since Hume, the 'arbiter', has declared a 'death sentence' on it.

It is clear, according to Hume, that the principle of causality or the inductive method has no empirical foundation. If we are to take Hume seriously, it means that science is meaningless. But we know that empirical science, even though it is based on induction, is not meaningless. This is why Omoregbe stated that metaphysics is the foundation of modern sciences.³ It is only metaphysics that can rescue the modern science from the death sentence adjudicated by Hume. In this way, we can say that modern science validates the reality of metaphysics. It also points to the fact that human knowledge is not all about empirical knowledge or sense perception.

The Obliteration of Ethics / Law

In Chapter One of this work, we stated that being is the object of metaphysics. Ethics, as we know, is concerned with the good of the being of the human person. Both Plato and Plotinus identified being with goodness. From their understanding, the foundation of goodness is being. St Augustine identified being with goodness. Knowing too well that ethics is concerned about goodness, and metaphysics is the foundation of ethics, it logically follows that Hume's attack on metaphysics is also a serious attack on ethics.

Following Hume's discussion on necessary connection between cause and effect, we will observe that it deals a grievous blow on our moral judgment. People are said to be morally good or bad based on the fact that they are taken to be responsible for their actions. But since Hume said that there is no necessary connection between cause and effect, it follows that people should not be held responsible for their actions since there is no necessary connection between throwing a stone in a glass house and breaking of the glass. This is a mockery to our moral and legal laws. Take for instance, Mr. **A** shot a gun at Mr. **B** and Mr. **B** dies immediately. Following Hume's understanding, Mr. **A** cannot be prosecuted in law for murder because we have no rational grounds to justify that the gun shot by Mr. **A** is responsible for the death of Mr. **B**. The only thing we could observe is that two events happened: the pulling of the trigger by Mr. **A** and the falling down of Mr. **B**.

It can be argued in the light of Hume's position that there is no connection between our voluntary actions. All we could observe is constant conjunction which has no rational justification. It follows that nobody can be held responsible for any action. If we take Hume

seriously, it means that that will be the end of ethics. But as we stated above, ethics is concerned with the good of the human person. Our understanding of ethics should go beyond the empirical observation of constant conjunction. This is why it is said that metaphysics is the foundation of ethics.

The Annihilation of Religion

God, as we know, is the central focus of religion. There is no way we can talk of religion of any kind without reference to the idea of God. Hume 'demolished' all arguments for God's existence. For Hume, we do not have any impression of the idea of God. The metaphysical concept, God, has no rational justification and so Hume considered it as meaningless and nonsense.

Religion employs metaphysical concepts in their discussions. Omoregbe observed correctly that "it is because religion presupposes metaphysics and is based on a metaphysical foundation that theologians generally employ metaphysical concepts and terms in their exposition of religious tenets or doctrines."⁴ Since religion cannot do without metaphysics, it follows that Hume's total rejection of metaphysics can also be interpreted as the annihilation of religion. We have seen how Hume 'demolished' the arguments for God's existence. For him, we have no experience of God or even his attributes as claimed by religious people. He equally rejected all attempts to prove God's existence by the use of reason alone. Even the argument from design (which he could have accepted because of its empirical foundation) was rejected by him. The attempt to ascertain God's existence through miraculous experience has no meaning in Hume's

understanding. Looking at Hume's critical position on religion, it logically follows that religion should be exterminated from the face of the earth. A discussion about God or religious matters is purely a waste of time.

However, it has been observed that the idea of God is an essential part of every culture of the world. The fact that every tribe and nationality has a word for God cannot just be ignored. That the human person is notoriously religious cannot be empirically investigated. This fact confirms the statement that there is more to reality than we can perceive with the senses. That there are realities that cannot be perceived with the empirical senses is left to the realm of metaphysics for a proper questioning and answer.

Epistemological Uncertainty

Another implication of Hume's theory of knowledge which culminated in his metaphysical nihilism is what we refer to as epistemological uncertainty. Taking Hume's argumentations seriously means that there is no certainty of human knowledge. Generally, for us to talk of anything, we first of all ask: "What is it?" This question presupposes the knowledge of substance of the thing in question. For us to claim knowledge of anything, we must have knowledge of the substance. But since Hume rejected the idea of substance as illusory, then human knowledge can also be termed as an illusion.

Since our knowledge is generally based on experience of past events, and Hume has argued that there is no rational justification that the future will be like the past, it follows that we cannot know anything for certain. We cannot say for certain that the sun will rise tomorrow or

that an object thrown up will fall down in obedience to the laws of gravity (natural law). Our inferences are mostly based on induction. If Hume is actually correct, it means that we do not have any basis for most of our judgments. It also means that all our beliefs, all scientific knowledge, are subject to doubt. If all our knowledge is subjected to doubt, then we do not have certainty of knowledge. Hume's metaphysical nihilism is actually destructive to everything we know about human knowledge. In sum, it leads to total epistemological uncertainty.

Endnotes

1. Jacque Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1969), p. 35.
2. Joseph Omoregbe, *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy, Vol. 2*, (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 1991), 77.
3. For a detailed discussion on the metaphysical foundation of modern science, see Omoregbe, *Metaphysics*, 116 – 122.
4. Joseph Omoregbe, *Metaphysics Without Tears: A Systematic and Historical Study*, (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 1996), 104.

Chapter Seven

Critique of Hume's Metaphysical Nihilism

Preamble

Having discussed Hume's rejection of metaphysics above, this chapter is devoted to a critical look at Hume's criticism of metaphysics. We are embarking on criticism of criticism. But one thing we should note is that no being is absolutely bad or absolutely good. Since goodness is one of the transcendental properties of being, it follows that there is polarity of positive and negative in the world. No matter how most metaphysicians may frown at Hume's treatment of metaphysics, it is worthy of note to make these few commendations. Hume actually made laudable contributions in the world of philosophy.

Hume's fame is attributed to his position on man's acquisition of knowledge. He actually towed a different lane from his predecessors and singled himself out as a consistent and logical empiricist. It has been observed that his critique of causality and other metaphysical realities points to the fact that he lived as a creative thinker. His works actually influenced many philosophers after him. Notable among his influence was the exclamation of Kant that Hume woke him (Kant) from dogmatic slumber. As an extra-ordinary intelligent person, Hume is acclaimed to have brought empiricism to its logical conclusion. This was made manifest in his argumentations on the 'how' of our knowledge acquisition.

No doubt, Hume's critique of metaphysics derives from his empiricist principle that all knowledge begins with experience and is circumscribed by experience. It is partly true that we gain knowledge from experience; it is also partly true that sense experience is not the

only source of human knowledge. It is on this ground that we criticize Hume's critical position on metaphysics and also establish metaphysics as a source of human knowledge.

Kant claimed that Hume woke him up from dogmatic slumber; that same Kant turned to criticize Hume. Though Kant agreed with Hume in some areas of his philosophy, he (Kant) argued against others. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argued that empiricism is impossible without metaphysics. For him, "the objective validity of certain pure or a priori concepts [the categories] is a condition for the possibility of experience."¹ The *kpim* of this paradigmatic Kantian transcendental argument is nothing but a kind of "transcendental deduction of the pure concepts of understanding."² Kant actually made it explicit, as we shall see later, that an understanding of the sense-datum presupposes a valid existence of certain metaphysical concepts which he called categories. These categories cannot be known *a posteriori* but *a priori*. Examples of these categories include; substance and accidents, cause and effect, space and time, etc. These are pure metaphysical concepts. For Kant, we cannot know anything outside the categories of the human understanding. The categories are very essential for human knowledge; in fact, they are *conditio sine qua non* for every human understanding and comprehension.

Chappell made an acute observation about Hume's position on metaphysics. Hume is well known as a consistent and logical empiricist unlike Locke and Berkley. But Chappell said that Hume was not a consistent empiricist. He argued:

Hume's empiricism was neither strict nor pure, no more than Locke's was. This is so in part because many of the questions that Hume raises are

logical or conceptual in nature and hence do not admit of empirical answers, and also in part because some of the questions to which empirical answers might be appropriate Hume in fact answers a priori, without realizing that he is doing so.³

One would agree with Chappell bearing in mind that it needs only a metaphysician to raise a metaphysical question or even to address metaphysical questions. Hume said that all our ideas are derived from impression, one cannot but question thus: Since Hume based his philosophical investigation on experience, has he experienced all ideas to know that they must come from impression? What rational authority has Hume to conclude from the observable to the unobservable if actually he wanted to be consistent with the tenets of empiricism? This is one of the places that depicts Hume as not being consistent with the claims of empiricism. It also shows that empiricism alone, without metaphysics, cannot furnish us with authentic knowledge.

We shall now take a detailed critical look at Hume's criticism of some metaphysical realities, namely, causality, substance, personal identity, God and miracle.

A Critique of Hume's Attack on Causality and Substance

Despite the high level of intelligence depicted by Hume, his treatise on causality has been found wanting. To begin with, the definition of causality by Hume as constant conjunction has been rejected on the ground that there are many cases of constant conjunctions that are not cases of causality. For instance, night and day are constantly conjoined, but we do not take one to be the cause of the other. We must quickly note here that Hume's argument of causation as constant

conjunction does not eliminate the actual possibility that there is a necessary connection between cause and effect in reality. His conclusion, if true, could only mean that we cannot know the necessary connection and justify our belief in it. On a similar note, we could see that Hume's conclusion of causal reasoning as a habit is not mathematical or logical knowledge which relies upon relations of ideas, but a belief in matters of fact. Hume had ascertained that such a belief is always contingent. It therefore follows that his conclusion is also contingent and cannot be justified by reason. To be precise, Hume's conclusion 'No belief can be justified by reason' cannot itself be justified by reason. We could see here a similar problem with the principle of logical positivists. The verifiability principle of the logical positivists, that nothing is true unless it has been empirically verified, cannot be empirically verified itself. This is self-contradictory. We can easily relate the fate of the logical positivists to that of Hume as stated above.

In response to Hume's idea of causality as constant conjunction, Thomas Reid said that "it is a principle of common sense that each of us is a genuine cause of our actions."⁴ Reid maintains that as rational beings, we are responsible for willing our actions; we have the power to originate our actions or not to originate it. This position of Reid goes to debunk Hume's conception of causality as mere constant conjunction. In his *Wittgenstein's Metaphysics*, John Cook argued that "had Hume noted we say such things ("You can't start your car with the batteries disconnected." or "A male cat can't breed with another male cat"), he would have found this perplexing and in need of explanation."⁵ For Cook, Hume would have declared that we cannot mean what we say

from the examples cited above. This is because he could not find any impression that would give rise to the possibility of necessity in nature. Following this line of thought, Cook maintains that Hume was wrong in his doctrine of the origin of ideas.

It must be noted that Hume's discussion on causality has been critically analyzed by many philosophers. However, we may not be able to do justice to their varied views. In his book: *Nature, Knowledge and God*, Benignus said that "Hume's original error which led to his rejection of substance and causality, as valid philosophical concepts, was sensism."⁶ Benignus observed that Hume considered experience as the ultimate source of valid human knowledge, which he meant to be pure sensation and nothing more. "The data of pure sensation are as he [Hume] says fragmentary and intermittent sense impressions. But the act which he is analyzing is not an act of pure sensation. What I perceive is not these fragmentary impressions, but the things of which they are accidents."⁷ Stating that human experience includes understanding, as against the position of Hume, Benignus said that though Hume is right in saying that we do not have a sensory impression of causality or substance, but he is wrong in saying that we do not experience causes or substances.

But he [Hume] is wrong in saying that we never experience causes or substances. Efficient causes are immediately experienced every time we observe anything physically influencing anything else, every time, for example, that we see a hammer driving a nail. But the cause *qua* cause is never sensed directly; cause, like substance is only sensed *per accidens*.⁸

We know that cause as a sensible object, its movement and the subsequent movement of the objects acted upon are the immediate

sense data. This is quite understandable. But for Hume to limit experience to perceived sense data alone is to imply that we perceive without at the same time understanding what we perceive. When I perceive, for instance, a hammer descending upon a nail and also the nail moving further into the wood, I also have the understanding that the hammer is something and is driving the nail into the wood. On this note, Benignus asserts that “both perception and understanding are equally parts of the experience.”⁹ Since we cannot perceive without understanding what we perceive, Benignus further argues that “we do not perceive phenomena without perceiving them as the phenomena of something; nor do we perceive one thing acting upon another without at the same time understanding the former as a cause of the effect produced in the later.”¹⁰

Another critical look on Hume's critique of causality was advanced by Xavier Zubiri. He formulated some criticisms that are relevant for our discussion. We shall therefore follow his arguments in detail as they are in line with our line of thought. To begin with, Zubiri agreed with Hume and other British empiricists that “prior to development of any epistemology, it is first necessary to go one level deeper in order to fully analyze human intelligence.”¹¹ In agreement with Hume, Zubiri believes that causes, in some metaphysical sense, are not given in experience. Another area of agreement Zubiri has with Hume is that there is a problem with the notion of causality that needs total overhauling. However, Zubiri maintains that Hume's analysis of causality is practically a failure. In Zubiri's critique,¹² Hume's analysis of human intelligence is radically false which renders his argument against causality as constant conjunction and against metaphysics as

invalid. Zubiri maintains that Hume's analysis of causality fails for four reasons: (1) human intelligence is sentient, not sensible; (2) not all types of knowledge of the world can be collapsed to a single paradigm; (3) no clear distinction exists between truths of reason and truths of facts; (4) truth is not solely or even primarily propositional. Hume upholds the idea that intelligence is sensible, because of the opposition between sensing and intelligence. It is true that our senses give information to the mind but the mind is not just passive as Hume would want us to believe; the mind does figure out interpretation of the information given to it by the senses.

It is the belief of Zubiri that our impressions are not sensory but sentient. By sentient impressions, he meant the impression of reality. The impressions of reality have two parts: one, content (what the impression is of) and formality (its mode of being delivered to us). The two parts are very important as far as knowledge is concerned. Based on the above, it is absolutely false that all we know are ideas of things given through impressions. We also know something about reality. For Zubiri, reality is formality. This shows that Hume's assertion that impressions 'never give us the least intimation of anything beyond' is absolutely false. The content of impression does not give us anything beyond but the formality of impressions, which is reality according to Zubiri, gives us something beyond the things we experience. It is the strong belief of Zubiri that formality does not deliver the world to us intact, but it goes beyond the world as we experience it.

More still, there is no clear distinction between truths of reason and truths of facts. The analysis Hume gave on causality, as we must have observed, depends so much on this distinction. This is because he

wants to establish that there is no connection between cause and effect. If such a connection was to be, it would mean the existence of some kind of metaphysical knowledge which he was seriously against. As we noted before, Kant was against Hume at this point. Kant upholds that the human mind itself imposes the concept of necessary connection between causes and effects. For Kant, cause and effect, substance and accidents, etc., are the a priori, universal and necessary concepts of human understanding.¹³ Kant asserts that without the pure concepts of understanding, there will be no experience. So substance and accidents, cause and effect, are not given in experience.

Let us at this point consider Hume's proposition that 'all natural laws are contingent,' which is also a natural law. If the proposition is right, then all natural laws will be contingent. Since the proposition itself is a natural law, it is also contingent, and by implication, not certain. This automatically leads to a contradiction. It logically follows that the proposition 'all natural laws are contingent' must be wrong. Following this line of argument, some natural laws must be certain, not contingent. It then means that these laws have logical necessities which explain why they occur with certain regularities.

It is quite clear from our discussion before now, that Hume did not seek to connect perception to their external world causes. We know too well that without such a connection we are left with an epistemological lacuna; the veracity of sense perception cannot be established. Hume was content to investigate perception as objects of the mind without bothering himself with the larger philosophical question of how to prove the existence of an external world. Criticizing Hume's notion of substance, Benignus argued that substance is given to the intellect directly. He contends further:

We understand the cause as producing the effect: the hammer as driving the nails, the saw as cutting the wood ... We do not think that the nail will ever plunge into the wood without the hammer ... if something ever seems to occur in this way, we do not believe it, or we call it a miracle. In a similar manner, substance is given directly to the intellect in the very act of perception; the substance is grasped as the reason for the sensible phenomena.¹⁴

Though we have mentioned Kant's view on substance and causality, it is also good for the reader to take a look at the same argument as related by Benignus:

In Kant's philosophy substance and cause are pure conceptions of the understanding, not derived from experience but imposed by the mind in experience upon all possible objects of experience. Consequently, these concepts and the two principles of substance and causality are universally valid for all possible objects of experience, that is to say, all spatio-temporal phenomena.¹⁵

It must be understood that whatever exists, in Kant's view, must have a spatio-temporal existence, that is, it must exist in time and space. To understand a table, for instance, a philosopher should ask the following questions: What is it? What is it made of? How does it exist? When does it begin to exist? and so on. These questions boil down to the questions of substance. Kant had already said that substance is a priori concept for human understanding. We should also note that for us to know or to talk about anything, we must make reference to its substance. Colour, taste or smell is not a substance. These are purely properties of a substance. Hume fails to understand or to distinguish between substance and accidents. Substance is that which exists on its own. So whatever exists must exist as a substance or as a property of a substance.

A Critique of Hume's Rejection of Personal Identity

Hume had argued that we cannot talk of personal identity because he described a human person as a bundle of perceptions: distinct and disjointed perceptions. Omoregbe actually observed that “Hume is like a person who resolves to follow a blind alley to the end, to a dead-end. Empiricism led Hume to a dead-end and absurd conclusion.”¹⁶ For Omoregbe, the absurd conclusion of Hume is that there is perception but there is no perceiver. If there is perception, logically, it follows that there must be a person that perceives. For Hume, the subject of experience is not part of experience. This is quite unacceptable to any critical thinker. For there to be perception presupposes that a subject of perception exists. Hume overlooked this point because of his so-called consistent belief in empiricism.

Hume maintains that he could not find the subject or the 'experiencer' of the experience because it is not an empirical entity. If not because of Hume's uncompromising empirical belief, he would have known at this point that there is more to human knowledge than just empirical experience. Since there is perception, he should accept also that there is a subject that perceives the perception if actually there is perception. Despite this conspicuous fact, Hume still insists on his denial of the self which is the subject of perception. His denial of self is in line with his denial of substance. It is clear that “Hume's denial of the existence of the soul, self, ego, mind or spirit, in man on the ground that he does not perceive it empirically inside himself is absurd, and it is the absurdity of empiricism taken to its logical conclusion.”¹⁷ Hume fails to realize that the “idea of series of perceptions without a subject is in itself unintelligible.”¹⁸ Wondering how series of perceptions can

confuse itself with identity, John Passmore argues:

If all that happens is that a series of very similar (or causally linked) perception succeed one another, there is no possible way in which this series of itself could generate the fiction of personal identity. Nor, the fiction once generated could this ever reveal its fictional character. Both the original fictions are possible, only if there is something, which is at first misled by, and then after reconsideration can discover that it was misled by, a series of similar perception.¹⁹

Now following Passmore's line of thought, one will be forced to ask: Is it possible that a series of perceptions can be aware of itself or can a series of perceptions confuse itself with identity? Omoregbe believes that there must be something, call it 'self,' 'soul,' 'ego,' 'mind,' 'spirit,' or anything, “which perceives and is conscious of itself as perceiving.”²⁰ Hume does not want to accept this fact because the self cannot be perceived empirically. But if it cannot be perceived empirically, it does not mean that it cannot be perceived at all. It only points to the reality of metaphysics as a complement source of human knowledge. Metaphysical knowledge, we must admit, is a reality and also a possibility.

Hume denied the idea of self or soul even though he knew it to be a clear truth, because he knew that accepting this idea is equal to accepting metaphysics. But since the self exists, he cannot deny it. For Aristotle, man is a composite of body and soul. Despite the fact that Aristotle denied the immortality of the soul, he accepted the fact of the existence of the self, soul or ego. Hume cannot deny the idea of self because he too has a self. It is logical to say that Hume's denial of the idea of self is the denial of himself. Since Hume denies the idea of self, he equally denies the idea of personal identity as we saw in Chapter

Three. The question now is: Do we remember the happenings of our childhood experience? Do we remember what happened last year or even last month? Since we can remember all these, it points to the fact of personal identity as an indubitable reality. It is the belief of the researcher that Hume is wrong in saying that when he goes into himself he stumbles only on some particular perceptions; in other words, he could not catch himself. There is no way he could catch himself because self is not an empirical entity: it is a metaphysical entity that is beyond sense perception. It is pertinent to note that memory or the ability to recall past events is not the sole characteristics of personal identity, but it suffices for now in our argument.

In his critical discussion on Hume's account of the self and personal identity, Copleston said that Hume used the word 'identity' in an ambiguous way. In the foot note of the passage in question, Copleston explains that "He [Hume] seems to imply, verbally at least, that we attribute identity to our perceptions. But we obviously do not do this, even if we regard them as acts of a persistent subject."²¹ Copleston maintains that Hume did not give real and clear explanation of the function of the memory. For him, it is not easy to see how memory is possible in Hume's theory.

A Critique of Hume's Refutation of Miracle

Hume rejected the possibility of miracle because, for him, it is contrary to the established laws of nature. Since the collective experience of mankind outweighs the experience of a particular individual, such particular experience should not be trusted. But when we juxtapose this position of Hume with his analysis of the principle of causality, and the

uniformity of nature, we would observe inconsistencies. Hume had claimed that laws of nature are well established and also inviolable. He went further to make a claim that any a priori violation of these laws should be rejected as a product of delusion. At this point, Omoregbe questioned: "Is it possible to talk of inviolable laws of nature within the context of Hume's empiricism? Is such a concept of the laws of nature not a metaphysical concept which is outside the scope of man's empirical experience?"²² It is quite clear here that Hume is not consistent. Since he claimed that we have no rational justification for stating that the future will be like the past, why then does he argue against miracle on the collective experience of mankind? Is Hume trying to tell us that he has experienced all human events, the ones that have occurred and the ones that will occur in the future, in order to draw such conclusion? As we can easily notice, Hume needs to be a god in order for him to undertake such task. This shows that he is guilty of what he is criticizing. In fact, Hume could not run away from applying metaphysics in his discussion. His a priori conclusion presupposes the relevance of metaphysics.

Following Hume's' argument on causality, the fact that we observed in the past that **A** was followed by **B** does not mean that whenever there is **A**, **B** must necessarily follow. He maintains that there is no amount of repetition that would make us to conclude that whenever there is **A**, **B** must follow. For Hume, "we cannot make any inference or draw any conclusion from such a repetition."²³ If actually we cannot make any inference from past repetition, then the laws of nature, as presented by Hume in his argument against miracle, are not absolute and inviolable. The laws of Nature can also be seen as

statements of repeated events which have no necessary implication.

If, as Hume says, we do not observe strict necessity in objects, if the idea of necessity is only in the mind and not in things and if we are not entitled to draw conclusions beyond what we observe, how can the idea of inviolable laws of nature be justified? ... But a firm and unalterable experience cannot, on Hume's terms, establish that the future will resemble the past, or that there is a necessary connection between two events.²⁴

Now, since the laws of nature, in the light of Hume's argument do not tell us what will happen in the future but only how things have happened in the past, Hume cannot criticize the possibility of miracle based on such laws of nature. Miracle could also be taken as part of human experience even though it may not have pure empirical explanation. Everything about nature must not have empirical explanation. That is why metaphysics is there to complement our empirical knowledge. That a blind man later regained his sight is not utterly outside human experience. In the past, it has not been heard of that a blind man regained his sight, but with series of human experience, we observe that it is possible that a blind person can regain his sight. The question now is on the 'how'. This is where the question of God comes in. Let us take a look at this argument:

Premise 1: God created the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) and governs natural laws.

Premise 2: If God governs natural laws, God can suspend natural laws.

Premise 3: Miracle is a suspension of natural law.

Conclusion: Therefore, if God exists, He can perform miracles.

Following the above argumentation, miracle cannot be said to be a violation of natural law since both miracle and natural laws emanated from one God. Hume's argument against the possibility of miracle is not sound. Omoregbe pointed that even Hume's "definition of miracle as a violation of the laws of nature is inconsistent with his empirical principle, for his conception of laws of nature (involving as it does the idea of necessity) is metaphysical rather than empirical."²⁵ Hume's a priori rejection of miracle is not consistent with his empiricism and as such, it is an impossibility.

There is another objection to Hume's argument that miracle abounds among ignorant, uneducated and uncivilized people. We wish to say that one does not need to be educated or to be an expert in a scientific discipline for one to know that people do not rise from the dead or that water steams when it becomes too hot. In the same vein, it does not require special expertise to detect a violation of the usual course of events, even if sometimes mistakes are made by ignorant and uneducated people. It must be noted that the fact that a lot of reported miracles are false does not entail that all reported miracles are false. Although all events that are reported to be miraculous are mysterious and inexplicable, it does not mean that all inexplicable events are miraculous.

Granted that due to low level of education, the uncivilized tend to term every wonder as miraculous, it cannot negate the fact that miracle is an existential reality. There are scientists who are Christians. Some of the miracles, especially in the Catholic world, are tested by acclaimed scientists before being proclaimed miraculous. If a dead person after being confirmed dead by medical experts later comes back

to life, we cannot just ignore it as unintelligent testimony. Hume should be able to know that even though miracle seems to be recorded more among the uncivilized, the civilized are not exempted in that awesome experience.

... in the most civilized and most learned societies today, like those of America and Europe, there are reports of miraculous cures performed by preachers, evangelists, or prophets ... Yet neither the American nation nor the European nations today can be called 'ignorant and barbarous nations.'²⁶

Hume had alleged that religious people make false allusions to miracle. While we do not disagree totally with this position of Hume, we wish also to say that all religious people cannot be said to be dishonest. Despite the level of dishonesty displayed by some religious people regarding miraculous events, there are some miracles that are conspicuously clear. For instance, assuming that a person born crippled from birth, after about 30 years, begins to walk after a prayer session; this type of miraculous event cannot be said to be false. There are many ways to ascertain if the person was actually crippled from birth. One of the ways is to make inquiries from the person's parents or childhood contemporaries. The inquiry should be enough to ascertain the authenticity of the miracle. We must not experience something in order to believe in it. Thomas Reid contends that "we should always accept someone's testimony unless we have good reason to suspect that a particular report is false."²⁷

In his discussion on Hume's argument that we should have good evidence before accepting a report of miracle, Ninian Smath remarks: "Miracles do not occur in the abstract, but in particular personal and

historical situations.”²⁸ The historical character of miracle should be enough to prove its existence. Both in African and Western religious thought, miracle has the characteristics of pointing to a supernatural being which is normally called God. Miracles generally have religious significance. Since belief is more or less on individual basis, Hume is free to believe in the actual occurrence of miracle or not. But whether he accepts the reality of miracle or not, his arguments against miracle have been debunked as we could deduce from the counter-arguments stated above.

A Critique of Hume's Denial of God's Existence

Hume criticized the design argument for God's existence on the ground that we cannot infer a cause from its effects and also that evil in the world is a sure sign that God does not exist. Taking a critical look at this position of Hume, we will certainly observe some illogicalities. It is a known fact that whatever comes into being must be brought into being by another being. When we follow this argument logically, we shall come to a particular being that is in existence on its own; this being is what we call God. Whether we call this being God or nature, the fact remains that there is a higher being responsible for the being of all contingent beings. How do we know this basic truth? We got to know this from our experience in the world.

Hume had argued that we have no experience of worlds and their makers as we would have experience of a building and a builder. If the world is not a handiwork of God (or Nature as one may call it), Hume did not tell us how the world came into being. His inability to tell us

about the maker of the world is a minus on his part. Arguing from the experience of the mystics of the world, it would be observed that they all insist on one thing. Despite their different religious background and nationalities, they all affirm the existence of a supernatural being that is responsible for their mystical experience. The experience of these mystics cannot just be overlooked. No matter the name given, the fact remains that all accept that there is a higher being whom Christians call God. Hume himself cannot relegate the experience of the mystics to the background. This point shows that we can infer the existence of God from experience even though it may not be empirical experience. Human experience must not necessarily be empirical.

The argument from design is based on the fact that whatever happened must have a cause. It is from this causal reasoning that we infer the existence of God. The problem with our causal reasoning is how to move from the natural to the supernatural. But since we cannot find the answer empirically, it goes to show the limitation of our empirical knowledge; hence the significance of metaphysics. Commenting on this line of argument Copleston reports the view of Reid, "we can infer this existence of God, as Cause of contingent and mutable things, with absolute certainty."²⁹

William Dembski affirms that the "design reasoning is effect-to-cause reasoning: It begins with effects in the physical world that exhibit clear signs of intelligence and from those signs infer to an intelligent cause."³⁰ This intelligent cause of the world is what we know as God. Reid made a critical remark on this issue of design argument. In *Lectures on Natural Theodicy*, he argued thus:

No man ever saw wisdom [read “design” or “intelligence”], and if he does not [infer wisdom] from the marks of it, he can form no conclusions respecting anything of his fellow creature. How should I know that any of this audience have (sic) understanding? It is only by effects of it on their conduct and behaviour ... But says Hume, unless you know it by experience, you know nothing of it. If this is the case, I never could know it at all. Hence it appears that whoever maintains that there is no force in the argument from final causes [design], denies the existence of any intelligent being but himself ... From effects, a wise and intelligent cause may be inferred.³¹

According to Reid, we attribute design as an inference from signs of intelligence. We do not need to know a designer before attributing a design to him. Our experience in this material world should be enough to conclude that there is a designer responsible for the order and design in the world, even though we have not had any empirical experience with the designer, whom we call God. Whether we have had direct experience with him or not, the fact is that there is a designer, his existence is not doubtable. It will be fool-hardy to see the design in the world and deny the existence of a designer. Thomas Reid submits that “though signs of intelligence can be learned and confirmed by experience, our ability to recognize them cannot originate in experience. That ability is hardwired into us as part of basic human rationality.”³²

The investigation of anthropologists is very relevant in our argumentation here. The anthropologists have taken their time to find out the source of the knowledge about God which human beings have. From the investigation, they came to conclude that almost all cultures of the world have knowledge of God whom they worship as their

creator. Since Hume said that all knowledge must come from experience, the question now is: From where do people get the knowledge of God? If we cannot come to the knowledge of God through experience (following the design argument), we then expect Hume to either disprove the findings of the anthropologists (which he may find impossible) or tell us the source of that knowledge of God in all cultures of the world. But as a die-hard empiricist, Hume would not accept to make allusion to anything outside empirical experience. This is a clear sign of the limitation of Hume's philosophy and also a pointer to the fact that metaphysics is complementary to empirical knowledge.

Hume argued also that the presence of evil in the world is highly irreconcilable with the existence of an infinitely good and omnipotent God. But one can easily argue that the world is a world of opposites. We talk of tall and short, up and down, male and female, black and white, good and evil, and so on. If Hume accepts the fact that there is something like goodness, he should be able to accept the reality of evil as a complement of goodness. We talk of evil because there is good; we also talk of good because there is evil. This line of thought shows that the presence of evil in the world cannot be used to question the existence of God, but can only be used to understand the reality of the world of opposites. For Teilhard de Chardin, evils in the world can be explained as part of the evolutionary process in the world.³³ Evil for him, is essentially a disorder that is inevitable in evolutionary system. Leibniz contends that evil is part of the structure of the world.

Another explanation for the presence of evil is the fact that God, the creator of human beings, gave men and women free will. Physical evil is part of the natural order in the universe. But the moral evil is as a

result of bad use of human free will. It has been noted that “evils are entirely due to the bad, free, choices made by human beings ... It was good of God to create free beings, but bad of them to misuse their freedom.”³⁴ In the light of this argument, we could see that the good God cannot be said to be responsible for the evils in the world, and we cannot use evils in the world as an objection to believe in His existence. For St. Augustine, evil is not a being but simply a negation of good. Omoregbe reports St Augustine's view thus: “Evil was not created and could not be created. Nor can it exist on its own since it is not a being ... moral evil cannot be traced to any other source beyond the misuse of man's free will.”³⁵

Another argument for the presence of evil in the world is that God allows evil for a greater good. Jonathan Edwards argues that God allows evil “for the sake of the good of which it will be an occasion ... he does restrain it when the good is not in view.”³⁶ The argument shows that God's permission of evil is necessary to secure some greater good. On this note Wainwright contends that “evil or its permission is logically necessary, that this good outweighs the evil, there are no alternative goods not involving those evils that would have been better.”³⁷ The *kpim* of our discussion in this section is that Hume cannot just deny the existence of God from the presence of evil in the world.

In sum, this chapter fulfils John Dewey's description of philosophy as “criticism of criticisms.” It is a critique of Hume's critique. Hume, as we saw in the previous Chapter, dealt a dead blow on metaphysics. This Chapter is an attempt to counter the position of Hume on the most revered branch of philosophy – metaphysics.

Endnotes

1. Kant, quoted in Bruce Aune, "Transcendental Argument" in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (USA: Cambridge Press, 1999), 925.
2. Ibid.
3. V. C. Chappell, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, (New York: Random House Inc., 1963), xvi.
4. Thomas Reid, "Causation and Action" in http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Thomas_Reid
5. John Cook, "Wittgenstein's Metaphysics" in Bruce W. Hauptli, <http://www.fill.edu/~hauptli/selectedcriticismofhumeForPHH3402.htm>
6. Brother Benignus, *Nature, Knowledge and God*, (New York: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1953), 337.
7. Ibid., 338.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Thomas B. Fowler, "The Formality of Reality: Xavier Zubiri' Critique of Hume's Analysis of Causality" in <http://www.zubiri.org/general/xzreview/1998/humecritque.html>
12. Fowler gave a detailed account of Zubiri's critique of Hume's argument on causality. These five argument advanced by Zubiri are detailed in Fowler, "The Formality of Reality: Xavier Zubiri' Critique of Hume's Analysis of Causality" in <http://www.zubiri.org/general/xzreview/1998/humecritque.html>
13. T. Z. Lavine, *From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosopic Quest*,

- (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 194
14. Benignus, *Nature, Knowledge and God*, 339.
 15. Ibid., 342–343.
 16. Joseph Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Mind: An Introduction to Philosophical Psychology*, (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 2006), 57.
 17. Ibid.
 18. Joseph Omoregbe, *A Philosophical Look at Religion: Philosophy of Religion* (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 1996), 174.
 19. John Passmore, in Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Mind*, 58.
 20. Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Mind*, 58.
 21. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 5*, (New York: Continuum, 2003), 305.
 22. Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Religion*, 214.
 23. Ibid., 215.
 24. Ibid., 216.
 25. Ibid., 217.
 26. Ibid., 219.
 27. Alan Bailey & Dan O'Brien, *Hume's Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, (New York: Continuum, 2006), 140.
 28. Ninian Smart, (ed.), *Philosophers and Religious Truth*, (Great Britain: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 37.
 29. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 5*, 376.
 30. William A. Dembski, "Hume, Reid and Signs of Intelligence" in http://www.designinference.com/documentst/2005.11.Hume_Reid.pdf

31. Thomas Reid, cited in Dembski, "Hume, Reid and Signs of Intelligence" in http://www.designinference.com/documents/2005.11.Hume_Reid_.pdf
32. Ibid.
33. Joseph Omoregbe, *Metaphysics Without Tears: A Systematic and Historical Study*, (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 1996), 138.
34. See "Free Will Defence" in <http://www.answers.com/topic/free-will-defence>
35. St Augustine, cited in Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Religion*, 138.
36. Jonathan Edwards, quoted in William J. Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Canada: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999), 75.
37. Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion*, 75.

Chapter Eight

In Defense of Metaphysics

Selected Metaphysicians: In Defense of Metaphysics

The high level of agreement among metaphysicians of different epochs stating that in order to comprehend the universe we must go beyond the empirical, goes to show the vindication and the enduring value of metaphysics. They all accept that there is need for us to transcend the empirical in order to gain a unified knowledge of reality. This transcendence is possible through the help of metaphysics. That the sense perception alone cannot give us an objective knowledge of reality is a pointer to the fact that we have to go beyond the empirical in order to understand reality as it is in its totality.

Aristotle can be regarded without any bias as the ancestor of metaphysics. He actually stated categorically that metaphysics is the First Philosophy. He noted that there is more to reality than empirical knowledge. He believes that the senses give us knowledge but accepts also that there is more to that. It was Aristotle who systematized what we know today as metaphysics. He understands metaphysics as the science of the supra-sensible realities, including God, the science of being and the science of the primary causes. Aristotle discussed metaphysical problems of causality, matter and form, potency and act, substance and accidents, and the idea of the Unmoved Mover for God's existence.¹ St Thomas Aquinas, in his metaphysics, followed the tradition of Aristotle. His metaphysics is known as "Ontotheological Realism".² He began his metaphysics from the 'observables' to the 'unobservables'. He believes that metaphysical knowledge

complements the empirical knowledge. He discussed his metaphysics mainly in his books, *The Summa Theologiae* and *The Summa Contra Gentiles*. He is also known for his *Quinque Viae* (Five Ways) for God's existence.

Beginning from the modern period in the history of philosophy, metaphysics took a more rationalistic approach. The Continental rationalists (Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz) believe that metaphysics is the basis for understanding reality in its totality. Though they did not have a unified view about reality, they were able to tell us, from their various discussions on metaphysics, that we can gain knowledge of reality through our reason. John Locke's description of substance as 'something we know not what' is also a clear pointer to the reality of metaphysics. In the same vein, Kant's division of reality into phenomena and noumena is a clear sign that there is more to reality than what we observe with our sense perception.

A closer look at the philosophy of the German idealists shows the extent to which the seed of metaphysics could grow. Their metaphysics which began with Fichte and Schelling, got to its climax in Hegel with the idea of the absolute spirit. It is their belief that the whole of reality is the manifestation of the absolute spirit which knows itself in and through the human mind.³ The metaphysics of the Neo-Hegelians: Thomas Hill Green, Edward Caird, James Mc Taggart, Bernard Bosanquet and Francis Herbert Bradley, points to the fact that reality is a unified whole. They believe that the absolute is the fullness of truth and it is through metaphysics that we can gain knowledge of the absolute which is the totality of reality.

Another notable figure is Martin Heidegger. His major concern

was to revive the central focus of traditional metaphysics, that is, the study of being. Though an existentialist, his major task was to unravel being in its ontological nature. His metaphysics is recorded in his major works, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, *Being and Time* and *What is Metaphysics*. His metaphysics is centred on *Dasein* as the only being in the world that has relation to himself and to others. Jean-Paul Sartre was an existentialist with metaphysics as his back bone. His major metaphysical work is *Being and Nothingness*. His discussion of essence and existence and the three categories of being shows that he is a stalwart of metaphysics.⁴ An outstanding metaphysician, Alfred North Whitehead, tells us that everything is related. His metaphysics “is a new kind of metaphysics, a curious combination of elements of idealism, materialism, science, pantheism and empiricism.”⁵ His metaphysics is contained in his work, *Process and Reality*.

The central focus of the few metaphysicians highlighted above is that metaphysics is capable of furnishing us with knowledge of reality as a whole. Their position, as against that of Hume, is that the human mind has the potentiality to transcend the physical.

Value of Metaphysics

One thing we should note is that man, by his nature, is not an exclusive matter; he is a composite of material and immaterial elements, body and soul. This explains why the human person cannot run away from metaphysics. No matter how one tends to deny the reality of metaphysics, the metaphysical character in man will continue to draw him back to metaphysics. There is always that tendency in man to go

beyond sense perception. For us to understand human nature very well, it must be through the instrumentality of metaphysics. Kant, though a critic of metaphysics, accepted the fact that human beings have irresistible tendency towards metaphysics.

Experience has shown that appearance is different from reality. The problem of appearance and reality is not just a problem that can be solved by mere sense perception. Actually there is more to reality than meets the eyes. This saying is an existential fact that strongly validates the enterprise of metaphysics. The fact that we do not perceive reality as it is with our empirical senses, as Hume would say, is a pointer to the value of metaphysics. It is the character of metaphysics to go beyond the physical in order to understand reality in its totality. We should appreciate the role and importance of metaphysics in its effort to find solutions to those questions that are beyond the domain of the empirical.

Left for Hume and his fellow anti-metaphysicians, metaphysics would have been buried long ago. But they failed to realize that “it is impossible to become an anti-metaphysician without doing metaphysics.”⁶ The only difference between an anti-metaphysician and a metaphysician, in the words of Fadahunsi is that “while both ask metaphysical questions, the former [anti-metaphysician] proposes negative answers.”⁷ The fact is that there is no way human beings can run away from the reality of metaphysics. Both the literate and the illiterate, philosophers and non-philosophers, all human beings, without any exception, engage in metaphysical discussions. It is a known fact that the common man asks questions about the soul, the nature of things and what things are made of. These are metaphysical

issues. The empirical cannot give us any satisfactory answers to such problems. They are metaphysical problems and as such, only metaphysics can give us considerable answers. In our everyday experience, people engage in discussions about events that are caused by some other things. We may agree with Hume that we cannot perceive any necessary connection between a cause and its effect; this is only to tell us that cause and effect are beyond the realm of the empirical: it is the function of metaphysics to investigate such issues.

For Hume, anything outside empirical experience is not an object of human knowledge. This position of Hume is a limitation of the potentiality of the human mind. It is because of this that metaphysics took it upon itself to address most questions which most people take for granted. The questions about substance, change and permanence, existence of soul, unity and diversity, the concept of God and so on, are metaphysical in nature. It is only metaphysics that tries to give solutions to such questions. Iroegbu reflected that “Hume's lopsided view of knowledge and reality is a philosophical negativity.”⁸ For there to be a unified understanding of reality, we must move from the empirical to the meta-empirical. Metaphysics has an important role to play in the life of the human person and his quest for knowledge. The best way to solve a problem is not by running away from it. Hume and his followers should be made to realize this indubitable fact. Hume should come to terms with metaphysics in order to find solutions to those problems that cannot be solved within the domain of the empirical.

We have pointed out in our critique that this world is a world of opposites. We have up and down, tall and short, physical and

metaphysical, empirical and meta-empirical. These are complement to each other. Metaphysics should not be seen as against the empirical, but as a complement to the empirical. When we employ empirical and meta-empirical investigations in our quest for knowledge, we cannot but get to the truth or nearer to the truth of the particular reality in question. It is accepted that there are varied views as to the answers given by individual metaphysicians. This should not be seen as a reason to deny metaphysics its enduring value. The basic fact is their general acceptance that there is more to reality than we can perceive in our sense experience. This is a fact that eluded Hume and his fellow anti-metaphysicians.

We can see the relevance of metaphysics in its quest to understand reality. The object of metaphysics as we have noted earlier is being. While other disciplines study various aspects of being, it is only metaphysics that studies the totality of being. Metaphysics is seen as the foundation of every discipline since its central focus is being. Being underlies the study of other disciplines. Convinced of the metaphysical character of other disciplines, Omoregbe remarks:

While other disciplines study one aspect of being or the other, metaphysics studies Being as being in all its ramifications. This explains why there is a metaphysical element in every discipline – philosophy of science, philosophy of law, philosophy of history, philosophy of education, philosophy of language, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of the social sciences, philosophy of medicine, philosophy of religion, philosophy of politics, and so on. What philosophy studies in all the disciplines is the metaphysical element underlying them.⁹

Metaphysics, we must admit, is at the heart of every facet of human knowledge. The fact that some human problems cannot be solved only

by empirical sciences will prompt us to appreciate the value of metaphysics. The metaphysical problems, as we have noted, are real problems that disturb the human mind. In a bid to get answers to these problems, metaphysics takes us beyond the empirical experience. Therefore, Hume and those philosophers in his camp (anti-metaphysicians) should know that for us to gain profound knowledge about the truth of reality, we have to go beyond the empirical experience since experience itself has informed us that all that glitters is not gold. Why is it that anything that glitters is not gold? This question can only have its full answer in the realm of metaphysics.

Dear reader, be informed that metaphysics is a reality. Metaphysics cannot be 'killed' because of its essential character in man's acquisition of knowledge. We all must realize that metaphysics "has a right to exist in itself as a field of cognition."¹⁰ Metaphysics prevails over observation. Where the empirical stops, meta-empirical (metaphysics) takes over. In our knowledge acquisition, metaphysics should be seen as a partner in progress in human cognitive activity. Metaphysics should be highly valued because it goes beyond the empirical sciences in its search for knowledge and truth. I wish to conclude this onerous research work by stating that every human person, following the nature of our being, cannot do without metaphysics. If Hume were to be true to his being, he would have valued metaphysics as the higher source of human knowledge. You should know, dear reader, that your belief that there is more to life than meets the eyes is invariably an affirmation of the existence of metaphysics. No human person can destroy metaphysics, not even Hume. Do not be deceived, there is no way in which human beings can do away with metaphysics. There is no gainsaying that a

denial of metaphysics is a denial of human knowledge.

Dear reader, at this point, I wish to leave these questions for your critical reflection: What value is man's knowledge without metaphysics? How grounded would our knowledge acquisition be without metaphysics? Where lies the basis of our knowledge if metaphysics is allowed to be annihilated? As you deeply reflect on these questions, you are most highly invited to the world of metaphysics.

Endnotes

1. The scope of this work will not allow us to go detail into Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. For further reading on the metaphysics of Aristotle, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostles, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966); Copleston, *History*, Vol. 1, 287 – 319; Omoregbe, *History*, Vol. 1, 52 – 58; Fadahunsi, 44 – 49; Stumpf et al, 81 – 86; Iroegbu, 141 – 153.
2. Pantaleon Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, (Owerri: International Universities Pres, Ltd., 1995), 155
3. For a deeper account of the metaphysics of the German Idealists, See Copleston, *History*, Vol. 7; Joseph Omoregbe, *Metaphysics Without Tears: A Systematic and Historical Study*, (Lagos: JOJA Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 1996), 179 – 192.
4. The *Metaphysics* of Sartre is recorded in Copleston, *History*, Vol. 9, 341 – 367; Omoregbe, *Metaphysics*, 203 – 221
5. Omoregbe, *Metaphysics*, 212

6. Ayo Fadahunsi, (*Metaphysics: A Historical and Thematic Introduction*, Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2004), 161
7. Ibid.
8. Iroegbu, *Metaphysics*, 179
9. Omoregbe, *Metaphysics*, 134
10. Fadahunsi, *Metaphysics*, 159

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THE BOOK

Prof. Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi in his work *Against Hume's Metaphysical Nihilism: In Defense of Metaphysics*, joins the retinue of distinguished scholars in metaphysics in the search for the truth of reality of metaphysics ... In this work of eight chapters, he has not only made a beautiful presentation of the basic dimensions of David Hume's perspective on metaphysics but has critically evaluated it. It is on such critical evaluations that the evolution and future of the philosophical enterprise depend ... Teachers, experts, researchers, undergraduate and postgraduate students, beginners and casual readers within and outside the parameters of philosophy are bound to treasure the usefulness of Prof. Ejikemeuwa J. O. Ndubisi's unique contribution to knowledge.

Prof. KANU, Ikechukwu Anthony, OSA

Despite the critical positions of anti-metaphysicians, the significance of metaphysics cannot be denied especially with the observable relations between metaphysics and science in our contemporary society. For sure, the concrete relevance of metaphysics has been presented in this book in such a way that it is visible to the blind. It is existentially very clear that metaphysics cannot be denied without manifest contradictions. This is the central argument of this book [*Metaphysical Nihilism: In Defense of Metaphysics*]. Therefore, I strongly recommend this book to all lovers and seekers of wisdom.

Prof. Bonaventure Chike Anetoh



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