

METAPHYSICAL METHOD, PRINCIPLES, AND CONSEQUENCES

- 1) By the time of Aristotle, at least four distinct rational methods had been developed: a) analysis to simples and explanation in terms of constructions; b) arbitrary determination of an end and explanation in terms of what is necessary for it; c) acceptance of tension among the various factors in a situation and quest for a harmonizing principle; d) acceptance of factual complexity and quest for explanatory factors (Aristotle's causes).
- 2) Attempts were made to extend each of these methods to being qua being. None of these methods proved satisfactory in this job. All turn out to be incapable of yielding results that can avoid question-begging against its alternatives. A sound method should deliver principles, but must avoid begging the question, and also must avoid dogmatism. To obtain principles under these conditions, only an appeal to what the opponent--any possible opponent--would absolutely have to grant will be permissible.
- 3) Thus, legitimate metaphysical arguments must show that the principle one is trying to establish if consistency and meaningfulness are to be possible at all, is in fact implicit in the position of any possible counterposition.
- 4) We must distinguish between three things often confused: coherence of meanings, semantic meaningfulness, and self-referential consistency. The first is violated by self-contradiction or anything necessarily leading to self-contradiction. The second is violated by semantic paradox, by certain types of infinite regress, and by system-building detached from any extra-systematic subject matter. The third is violated by performative inconsistency.
- 5) One who falls into performative inconsistency says something that is meaningful, but false. The falsity is established by some aspect of the performance itself. Therefore, the falsity is necessary. Yet it is the falsity of a proposition that concerns a real subject matter (has reference). The analytic/synthetic distinction is overcome by this sort of proposition, but the alternative is not some sort of synthetic a priori.
- 6) Performative inconsistency establishes the truth of the contradictory. A proposition thus established tells us about some necessary conditions for the possibility of reality; the possibility in question here is not merely coherence of meanings, but is real possibility.
- 7) Attempts to evade the force of propositions established by the performative inconsistency of their contradictories typically take the form of setting up boundaries in a fashion that involves semantic meaninglessness of one sort or another. Or else the evasion takes sooner or later the form of breaking down necessary conceptual distinctions and leading to subtle forms of incoherence.
- 8) At least four important propositions can be established by self-referential inconsistency arguments:
 - A) Someone can be a definite body, not merely an endlessly relative process.
 - B) Someone can assert as true something necessary about the world, not merely react contingently to givens.
 - C) Someone can make really free choices, not just seem to have open alternatives.
 - D) Someone can create new meanings by using one things for an extrinsic purpose, not merely unpack meanings already in principle established.

9) The four important propositions established by self-referential inconsistency arguments are established in each case against three counter-positions, each of which would reduce reality to a single principle. Thus, the establishment of these four propositions is a metaphysically interesting result in that we can thus see at least some minimally necessary conditions for reality. No possible world can be so impoverished that these possibilities are ruled out of it altogether.

10) The "someone" in the four metaphysically interesting propositions can be the same someone, since the propositions are established by arguments which separate two of the principles from each other. This possibly same someone would be within the field of the four principles, which nevertheless would remain irreducibly distinct.

11) This someone might be me or you. Thus we need not be merely bodies, nor merely subjects of knowledge, nor merely moral agents, nor merely culture makers, nor are we merely all of these. We are something more. We are-- that is--we can be the reflexivity that makes the arguments possible.

12) There is one additional factor in reality. It is a principle that grounds the possibility of all these distinct principles, both in their interplay and in their very irreducibility. This we may call "God."

13) God is not a body nor does he fall in the field of any of the metaphysical principles. We cannot be God nor vice versa. That is to say, the self defined in terms of reflexivity cannot be identified with the actual metaphysical principle that grounds the unity and distinction of metaphysical principles.

14) One can in general understand the development of medieval philosophy into modern philosophy as a movement toward semantic meaningless^{ness} as an attempt to evade performative inconsistency in various oversimplified models of reality. Kant exemplifies semantic meaninglessness very clearly.

15) Hegel lapses into a very sophisticated incoherence. Philosophy since Hegel is trying to get over Hegel.

16) The cycles in the history of philosophy have followed the pattern of the development of an art-form, because philosophy has been more a poetic activity than a genuine science. With the development of sound method, it is not necessary that the cyclic process continue.

17) Philosophic collaboration becomes possible. Philosophic collaboration is the purpose of philosophic dialogue. Thus, philosophic dialogue remains necessary, but it can now succeed as it never could before.

18) Philosophy still is not a science of being qua being. Such a science will not be possible for us unless we can somehow come to understand what God is, not merely what he is not and how other things are related to him.

19) Yet the established principles together with the self and God set up an architecture within which philosophy of nature, of knowledge, of morality, and of culture (including art and language) can be carried on without falling into or being victimized by bad metaphysics.

20) Good philosophy tells us what can be (God apart), not what in fact is. One has to follow means of recognition to find out what in fact is. These means include empirical testing, logical intuition, moral "sounding out" of ourselves and others, and pragmatic putting to a test.

21) Analysis and phenomenology both have an important role in philosophy, but neither by itself is a philosophic method.