

AYER, METAPHYSICS, AND BURDEN OF POSITIVISM: A DISCOURSE IN EXISTENTIAL METAPHYSICS

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ABSTRACT

The thesis of this paper as it attends to deflate the impression and supposition of Ayer is that metaphysics as a discipline has an enduring value to man basically and also to philosophy as a discipline. This stems from the fact that man practices metaphysics just as he breathes, without thinking about it. Man has often been defined as a metaphysical animal. Man, from this stand point, is of his very essence metaphysical,; which means that there is in him something incapable of expression in terms simply of nature or physics; something which always radically transcends nature and which is to be described as beyond the physical/transcendental. The above view is against the backdrop of Alfred Jules Ayer, a logical positivist, who got carried away with empty, unfounded analysis evident in the verification principle of the positivists. Ayer, though not originally one of the positivists, aligned with positivism and employed the tools of positivism in his rational endeavour and attempted to use it to discredit existence and nature of metaphysics as a discipline. This paper applies critical method of philosophising to argue that metaphysics is perennial and any attempt to reduce its potency and prowess is dead on arrival. Worse still, using the confused and unphilosophical model of the verificationists makes this endeavour unfortunate and futile.

Keywords: Metaphysics, Ayer, Positivism, Verification Principle, Existentialism

INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, Metaphysics has remained the central scheme and theme in the origin, structure and development of philosophy. It has also remained the critical discipline that all other disciplines and branches of philosophy revolve

round in their quest for relevance and authenticity. This simply explains the reason history of philosophy is characterized by the attempts by philosophers, especially metaphysicians, to provide conclusive grounds for certitude of human knowledge amidst the challenges posed by skepticism, to give meaning to ideals and ideas, and to justify the meaning and nature of human life and endeavours. It is in this regard that metaphysics as a discipline seeks to explain how authentic knowledge can be acquired by giving rational and comprehensive answers to the problems, especially pertaining to knowledge claims. This attempt was carried on till beginning of the twentieth century which emerged-with logical positivism that took the analysis of language as its primary subject matter. The movement was famous for its anti-metaphysical bias and one of its primary proponents was the young Alfred Jules Ayer. Ayer, in the spirit of logical positivism, supported knowledge acquired through the senses and rejected metaphysics as a discipline that offers knowledge at all. He believed that true and certain knowledge can be attained only through and/or with the senses. He was able to prove this through verification principle that served as criterion for the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of all human statements. Yet the criterion, while giving credence to sense perception as authentic source of knowledge, debunked and attacked metaphysics as useless and unrelated to philosophic enterprise. Alfred Ayer based his attack on metaphysical, religious and ethical claims or statements from the linguistic perceptive without recourse to the overall implication of this endeavour. It is therefore the interest of this paper to critically analyse the suppositions of Ayer to contemporary philosophy underscoring the implication of his rejection of metaphysics.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF AYER

Alfred Jules Ayer was a young British philosopher and also one of the foremost critics of metaphysics in the twentieth century. He studied at Eton and graduated in the year 1932. However, he spent some time familiarizing himself with the logical positivist movement group at the University of Vienna. Although Ayer was not a member of the Vienna circle that consisted of members such as Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, Hans Han, Alfred Tarski, Karl Popper and other leading exponents, he visited and had contact with members of the circle at Vienna (Boncheski 57). Ayer was influenced by doctrines of the logical positivist about analysis of language and authenticity of scientific knowledge. Upon his return to England, he introduced logical positivism to Britain with his Oxford lectures in 1933 and his first book *Language, Truth and Logic*, which was published in 1936 (Walsh 506). This work made an immediate impact on the British philosophers of his time and it later became one of the most influential

works in mid-century British philosophy. However, Ayer was called to the army during the Second World War but returned to Oxford University as the Dean of Waldhan College in 1945. Later on, in the following year, Ayer became Grote professor of mind and logic at the University College in London and remained there until he returned to Oxford as Wylceham professor of logic in 1956. However, it should be noted that Ayer remained special to the end of his life concerning the posing of some metaphysicians to inform us of any supra-sensible reality. His major works include *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), *The Foundation of Empirical Knowledge* (1940), *Thinking and Meaning* (1947), *Philosophical Essays* (1954), *The Problem of Knowledge* (1956) and *The Concept of a Person*.

INFLUENCES ON AYER'S NEGATIVITY TOWARDS METAPHYSICS

Though Ayer, at the beginning, was influenced by doctrines of the logical positivists as he journeyed along academically and intellectually, other scholars also influenced and richly affected his philosophical positions and submissions. So, his philosophy, most especially his critique of metaphysics, was influenced by Bernard Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein's postulation about logical atomism (Lawhead 502). More so, the pioneering analysis of David Hume and Immanuel Kant on nature of metaphysics also greatly had a mark on him. Nevertheless, it is instructive to state that he was too keen about the epistemological premises of Hume and Kant as his background and interest was a linguistic one and that was the aspect that interested him most as he made use of their positions to fashion out his critique of metaphysics. But that notwithstanding, Ayer embraced Hume's division of genuine statements into logical empiricism together with the verification principle that serves as the criterion for meaningful empirical or factual statements (Wolff 226). Meaning that the distinction of David Hume of all meaningful statement into the categories of being as either analytic or synthetic in nature is the foundation on which Alfred Ayer based his critique of metaphysics on. Though in all, it should be clearly noted that Ayer was greatly influenced by both Hume and Kant, yet the influences were from different perspectives. And, although Hume used the synthetic and analytic distinction as the criteria for the elimination of metaphysics, Kant argued from transcendental reality. Kant started from what he calls synthetic *a priori*, which transcendently conditions knowledge and at the same time limits it, so that the result, as in Hume's case, is that the metaphysician's transcendental reality cannot be legitimized, so far as we do not have cognitive access to it. In a simple sense, Kant argued that human language is only meaningful in the context of experience that can be verifiable and outside the sphere of our world as in the case of metaphysics that try to study and make statement about realities that are beyond human experiences that can be verifiable. Immanuel Kant offers an explanation for the synthetic *a priori* and his argument from transcendental when he opined that:

It hitherto been assumed that our knowledge must conform to the objects; but all attempts to ascertain anything about these object *a priori*, by means of concepts, and thus to extend the range of our knowledge, have been rendered abortive by this assumption. Let us then make the experiment whether we may not be more successful in metaphysics, if we assume that the objects must conform to our knowledge (Brenner 127).

LOGICAL POSITIVISM AND AYER'S PHILOSOPHY

The doctrine of logical positivism, which is also called *scientific empiricism*, was first developed by the Vienna Circle in its co-operative discussion meetings in the 1920s. However, its influence in Britain and America started in the 1930s. The logical positivists conceived philosophy as an endeavour in linguistic and conceptual analysis which should deal with only meaningful things that can be conceptualized in significant language. Their overriding goal is outright eradication of any meaningless proposition or statements especially those that are found in metaphysics, aesthetics, religion and ethics. To achieve this goal, the logical positivists sought to formulate and establish criterion for meaningfulness through which people can distinguish between meaningful sentences and meaningless ones and the result of this objective and endeavours is the well-known *Verification Principle*. With verification principle, the logical positivists rejected all metaphysical statements that cannot be verified by observation since they do not make any difference to the facts of the world which they purport to explain (Warnock 30).

AYER, CONTEMPORARY EPISTEMIC SCEPTICISM AND CERTITUDE

For Ayer, what we hold when we have knowledge are mere propositions. Thus, he argued that the greatest knowledge man can achieve is probability judgment based on accumulation of empirical evidence (Avrum 14). It was in this light that he criticized Leibniz's view of reason as being the ultimate source of knowledge about reality. However, Ayer held the view that testimonies of the senses are the ultimate basis for any knowledge claim about the world. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Ayer combined Hume's emphasis on the sense evidence and Leibniz's concern for *a priori* truth; though he was rather very much closer to Hume in his philosophical disposition and submissions. To further buttress his alliance with and support for Humean epistemology, Ayer was of course quite hostile to the cognitive orientation and contentions of metaphysics, religion and ethics. For Ayer, the trinity of metaphysics, ethics and religion are just meaningless. And this was based on the fact that, for him, the trinity does not make any difference to the facts that are readily available about the world. He made this famous and controversial submission of his vivid in these words; "for the admission that there were some facts about the world which could

be known independently of experience would be incompatible with our fundamental contention that a sentence says nothing unless it is empirically verifiable. And thus, the whole force of our attack on metaphysics would be destroyed" (William 614).

Basking in the euphoria of attempting to relegate and extinguish the ineffectual trinity, Ayer further reasoned that the fundamental precept of rationalism which subscribed to the fact that thought is an independent and reliable source of knowledge than experience is just a wrong position. With this, Ayer averred that empiricism appears to be more meaningful. In his famed book, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Ayer duly accepted the Humean critique of the existence of the self as nothing but ordinary bundle or series of experience. Thus, he argued that "it is logically impossible for a sense experience to belong to the sense-history of more than a single self. All sense experiences and sense contents which form part of them are private to a single self (Avrum 129)." The implication of this position for Ayer is that a person's sensations, experiences and perceptions are subjective to the individual in question (Ayer, *Logical Positivism* 239). However, concerning the issue of justification of our experiences or perceptions that formed our beliefs, Ayer asserted that "it does not normally occur to us that there is any need for us to justify our beliefs in the existence of material things" (James 309). With this Ayer seems to be pitching his tent with G.E. Moore's argument from the common sense about the existence of material things, as he stated that "I recognize indeed that people are sometimes deceived by their senses, but this does not lead me to suspect that my own sense-perception cannot in general be trusted or even that they may be deceiving me now (Ayer, *The Foundation* 1). However, the issue of sense perception has received its own critical remarks, one of which applies the example of a mirage in the desert. It is argued that in such circumstance, sense perception appears to be deceptive because the waters the person seems to be sensing does not really exist but it just appears to be there.

In response to this criticism of the authenticity of the sense in acquiring certain knowledge, scholars have argued that perceptions are of two types, namely, veridical and delusive. Perception is veridical when the sense-datum (the object one is aware of during perception) relates to the material things in question, but it is delusive if the sense-datum does not relate to the physical object in question. It is instructive to state that this notion of perception and sense-datum aligns with Lockean epistemology where ideas are seen as ordinary representations of things. It is also in sync with the Humean idea of impressions. Nonetheless, this does not seem to attend to and finally resolve this paradox. What happens rather is just the creation of a novel philosophical problem,; which is that of discovering the relationship between the sense-datum and the material things under perception. In response to this seeming setback in his postulation, Ayer argued that this problem of relation does not preclude the fact that

knowledge is gotten through sense-data, since the things in question are the things we are immediately aware of. This is achieved through his novel principle of verification.

THE PRINCIPLE OF VERIFICATION

The primary aim of the analytic philosophers is to analyse language and extirpate meaningless statements. It was in this light that the verification principle came in existence as criterion for meaning (Nye 77). According to the principle, only statements that are analytic or synthetic are meaningful; thus the claims of metaphysicians in the Hegelian tradition is seen as meaningless (Jaegwon & Sosa). From these, it is obvious that the principle is against anything that is metaphysical in nature. It is highly significant to the positivists' analysis of knowledge in the demarcation between what is analytic and what is synthetic as it concerns prepositions. It is necessary to note here that analytic propositions are the propositions that their truth value is hinged on the terms occurring in them while synthetic propositions are the propositions that refer to facts and their truth is predicated on a relation to them. Thus, the logical positivists held that "any statement without an object of reference that the sense can verify, except the case of analytic statements, is seen as only pseudo-statement, non-cognitive and nonsense (Beck 286). With this, it is now palpable that the principle of verification makes use of methods of observation and experiment in ascertaining statements and propositions that are meaningful. This takes and uses the method of science as the model for acquiring certain knowledge about the world. It makes science the possessor of true knowledge and standard for rationality. It was in this light that Henri Poincare, a physicist and philosopher, supposed that experiment is the sole source of truth and that it is only experiment that can reveal novelty and achieve certainty. This view of Poincare is in tandem with Lakatos' view on scientific method as the paradigm of authentic knowledge.

Furthermore, Karl Pearson, an English mathematician and scientist, argued that "the formal validity of a scientific conception is determined by its self-consistency and by its deducibility from the perceptions of a normal human person... [and that] all things are open to scientific inquiry (Pearson 13). On the other hand, the position that the principle of verification is the sole and surest criterion for meaningfulness has been appraised by philosophers. This position of those who thought otherwise and really lampooned the basic tenets of the principle is based on the premise that the verification principle and by extension the method of science is not based on a conclusive and reliable ground but rather on mere probability. Moreover, the problem of how to ascertain and verify past or future events or propositions that portray past or future event is another problem that this principle should grapple with. With this, it is pertinent to review also the various formations of this verification principle.

In his book *Language, Truth and Logic*, Ayer (36) differentiates verifiability in principle and verifiability in practice. Those propositions that can be verified in experience are said to be practically verifiable while those that could not be verified in experience but are matters of fact, such as past or future events, can be verified by stating the theoretical way in which the propositions can be verified. Additionally, to expand the latitude of the criterion of meaning and, most importantly, to really protect it from unnecessary pitfalls, Ayer further made a dissimilarity between strong and weak verification by stipulating that a proposition is weakly verifiable if and only if it is made probable by experience. And with this statement, Ayer adopted the weak sense of verifiability and justified his preference for this like this:

Consider the case of general propositions of laws – such propositions, namely as 'arsenic is poisonous', 'all men are mortal', 'a body tends to expand when it is heated.' It is of the very nature of these propositions that their truth cannot be established with certainty by any finite series of observations. But if it is recognized that such general propositions of law are designed to cover an infinite number of cases, then it must be admitted that they cannot, even in principle be verifiability conclusively. And then, if we adopt conclusive verifiability as our criterion of significance, we are obliged to treat these general propositions of law in the same fashion as we treat the statements of metaphysicians (Ayer, *Language* 37).

AYER'S CRITIQUE OF METAPHYSICS

From the basic precepts of the verification principle, it is lucid and pertinent to state that this verification principle seems to remain adamant in its goal of relegating and even extinguishing metaphysics as a mode of explaining and understanding reality. This is quite evident in their position that the criterion of meaning must exclude metaphysical statements. Ayer asserted that it is only a matter of fact that metaphysical statements are not meaningful. This means that if the meaningfulness of a statement is the basis for accepting, appreciating and situating the status of metaphysics, then it is evident that metaphysics really has nothing to offer. It really explains Ayer's quest for the critique of metaphysics which is obvious from his theory of knowledge to his brand of the philosophy of language. As noted earlier, Ayer was influenced by the critical remarks of Hume and Kant on metaphysics started from their epistemology; but in his case, Ayer started his own critique from the philosophy of language especially in the area of the theory of meaning. The seeming reason for this stems from the fact that Hume's and Kant's critique of metaphysics was rather inconclusive. As the critique of Hume and Kant were based on the claim regarding the possibility

knowledge of a transcendental reality (Hume 211, Jones 63). On the flip side, Kant's noumena advocated the view that things-in themselves are unknown but knowledge can only be derived from the phenomenon. But Ayer was not convinced of the critique of metaphysics from epistemology since it has only generated controversy regarding the status of metaphysics (Lowe 10-12). However, Ayer basing his critique of metaphysics from the angle of the philosophy of language asserted that "many metaphysical utterances are due to the commission of logical errors, rather than to a conscious desire on the part of their authors to go beyond the limits of experience (Ayer *Language* 33). This means that the appraisal of metaphysics, contrary to usual epistemological premise, should be on the nature of language rather than merely the nature of knowledge. Thus, Ayer began by criticizing the prevalent epistemological approach of critiquing metaphysics and provided a new approach from the linguistic analysis of statements. For him,

One cannot overthrow a system of transcendent metaphysics merely by criticizing the way in which it comes into being. What is required is rather a criticism of the nature of the actual statements, which comprise it. And this is the line of argument which we shall, in fact, pursue: for we shall maintain that no statement which refers to 'reality' transcending the limits of possible sense experience can possibly have any literal significance; from which it must follow that the labours of those who have striven to describe such a reality have all been devoted to the production of nonsense (Palmer 34).

Having established his premise from linguistic analysis, Ayer applied the principle of verification to metaphysical statements and utterances and concluded that they are meaningless. This is sequel to the premise that statements in metaphysics are neither based on facts nor on sense experience but merely on the emotional or mystical feeling of the metaphysician. Furthermore, apart from asserting the fact that metaphysical statements are meaningless, Ayer argued that metaphysics should be excluded from the domain of philosophy since philosophy in his view, deals with matters that fall within the scope of the world of common sense and science that can be verified only through the method of verification.

IMPLICATIONS OF AYER'S CRITIQUE OF METAPHYSICS

Metaphysics as Illusion and not Philosophy: The basic implication of Ayer's attempt to demolish and extirpate entirely anything metaphysics, would mean that metaphysics which is even the '*first philosophy*' and a discipline that seeks to understand and situate the basic substratum of reality and through this give a

rational and comprehensive explanation of reality, would not just be an illusion but also meaningless and useless. This is due to the fact that Ayer's submissions and argument renders metaphysics not just meaningless but also unless. And as a result not even fit to be regarded as part of philosophy. Ordinarily, this is not tenable and remains an embarrassing irony. And a scholar like Ayer is too exposed and experienced to state, align and defend such a theory like this.

Science as the Criterion for True Knowledge: Ayer's theory of sense perception, which has its influence from Hume and the logical positivists' doctrines, has a serious implication for science. In his theory of sense perception, Ayer advocated the opinion that sense experience through observation or the verification principle is the certain knowledge that man can rely on. Thus, since the verification principle in this regard is seen by Ayer as the criterion for meaningfulness, it means that science that makes use of this principle as its method of inquiry is the criterion, standard and paradigm for meaningfulness and authentic knowledge.

Emotivism: Another interesting import of Ayer's challenge of metaphysics using his famous principle of principle as the method especially as it concerns ethics, is that ethical statements are not just factual or even descriptive but they are just emotional statement, that is, emotive in nature. It even seems that it was in this light that Charles Stevenson made the differentiation between the two basic uses of languages which are; a descriptive use that express belief and a dynamical use that is related to interests, attitudes and emotion (Beck 311).

Social Philosophy: The repudiation and relegation of metaphysics, ethics and religion by Ayer and others indeed has its implication for the status and development of social philosophy. It was even based on this that Lucien Levy-Bruhl subscribed to and defended the positivistic perspective as it concerns social ideals. The argument of Levy-Bruhl is sub-divided into three parts; the first one being that the natural laws theories of ethics and justice together with a rudimentary knowledge of sociology implies that the noble ideals of justice is an offshoot of social realities. In the second, Levy-Bruhl demonstrated how the rule of justice develops in various societies. And lastly, he encourages societies to appreciate and also align with the positivists in the irratification of science as the standard. The simple implication of this submission of (Levy-Bruhl 54) is that, "to be truly rational, our action on social reality ought not be guided by any abstract ideal... but by the result of science" (Levy-Bruhl 54).

Aesthetics: Just the same way that Ayer's rejection metaphysics had implication for social philosophy, so it does too for aesthetics. This aesthetic implication was unearthed by Richard (74) as he reasoned that the basic language of value is

emotive and not cognitive and taking this as his background, he went further to distinguish pseudo-statements from statements proper. For him, statements proper is scientific and usually subjected to verification; whereas for pseudo-statements, though it has the form of scientific statements, its usefulness is just to only organize or release human attitudes, and it has nothing to do with true descriptive judgments. Morris Weitz (27-28) shared this view also.

PERENNIAL RELEVANCE OF METAPHYSICS

The Attempt to Solve the Perennial Problems of Philosophy: Philosophical problems are not problems that can be solved once and for all; they are basically conceptual and cannot be solved in a dogmatic manner. These problems such as the problem of being, appearance and reality, change and permanence, causality, started with philosophy and they will continue to be hence metaphysics remains relevant. Even those who attempt to debunk metaphysics are in themselves engaging in metaphysics without acknowledging it. In every epoch of philosophy there has been a principle that guides the philosophers of that period, there are basic issues that define its search for truth and this falls back to the root of metaphysics encompassing even the nature of philosophy itself.

The Beginnings of Philosophy were with Metaphysics: The history of western philosophy gives us a didactic account of how philosophy emerged and took its place even when it was resisted and regarded as a problem or a taboo in the ancient Greek environment. Philosophy thrived because of the human propensity to ask questions and apply reason. History records that Homer and Hesoid were the first metaphysicians of the ancient epoch. From there it was Parmenides, who was seen as the father and founder of metaphysics but he also built on the metaphysical ideas of Anaximander in his explanation of the problem of "the one and the many" (boundless or *Apeiron*). Even Thales in his own regard was a metaphysician because the nature of his enquiry was not only rationally empirical, it was also metaphysical monism by his naming of water as the *urstuff* of the world as he attacked the problem of permanence and change. These early thinkers embarked on a quest for universal principles, and rationally defensible theories as against those of earlier scholars, rather than simply making observations and collecting data, metaphysics can rightly take its place as a core aspect of philosophical foundation.

Metaphysics Shapes our Understanding of Reality: It is true that not all that appears to be real is actually real and this can be proven by the investigation and speculation in the very beginnings of philosophy. Metaphysics plays a guiding role to other sciences as well as disciplines and according to Aristotle, men are by nature eager to know, there is a natural tendency to know the world. This desire is what Henri Bergson called *spontaneous metaphysics*. Even scientific study depends on

metaphysics in some way because metaphysics gives the whole while science only gives a part or studies only an aspect of being. Since it is at the summit of knowledge in the natural order, it has the proper role of guiding human knowing, in the light of the first principles. Metaphysics also shapes our understanding through the notion of categories and causes to help us understand how reality is arranged or approached.

The Difference Between Intellect and Senses: The knowing ability that we have while limited are rich and vast and because we are in constant contact with the world therefore our bodily organs bring us in touch with reality. Yet there is more to knowledge than sensation for besides the senses man can think, he can know the meaning of things, he can reason. Perception and intellection go a long way to inform us about reality so to object to the necessity of metaphysics is to deny the intellectual prowess of man. To be able to prove otherworldliness one must be sure that he himself exists and this notion is established by Descartes, this is to say that since you cannot deny your existence without contradicting yourself your ability to prove this to yourself also follows from the laws of thought which is a metaphysical principle. Every idea must bring before the mind something and that thing is an essence or a nature (Maritain, *An Introduction* 144). When we perceive an object, we have sense perception of that particular thing, and not just that we develop ideas of them but since they are abstractive or immaterial, we act as if they do not exist. If we do so then denying metaphysical knowledge, we can never know essences or natures, principles or laws of definition. And if this is the case then one cannot tell if the universe is chaotic or ordered. One cannot also decipher whether there is a principle of unity or whether universe is chaotic or ordered. This could then make man to lose the sense of rational beings by relying alone on the idea of sense perception alone as the gateway to reality.

The Fact of Universal Ideas: Man is a substantial unit composed of body and soul, the senses belong to his body the intellect to his soul, and to this we are able to prove that metaphysical knowledge is deeply tied to the internal construct of man himself. Consider drawing different sizes or colours of triangles, we can recognize individuality in them inasmuch as they are all triangles. This points us to the essences since the same essential definition applies to them all. Triangles in the past present or future will have the same shape. This points to the fact that our ideas can be essentially universal and in this regard they are immaterial in this sense and equally the faculty possessing the ideas has to be immaterial.

The Fact of our Knowledge of Causality: The mere fact that we are able to know that an effect is implied by a cause even though it can be traced also to empirical evidences, also depicts the relevance of metaphysics. For example, seeing a moving train I cannot see the force that is necessary for it to move but I can see the cause of

its movement which is the engine, with my intellect I understand a thing cannot move on its own, there must be a cause. Also Aristotle has this to say about the four causes specifically the final cause: final cause is that for the sake which something is done, the goal towards which it tends. Men act for the sake of certain objectives which they hope to attain otherwise they would not act, therefore, the principle of the causes plays an important role in the perception of man in the world and this underscores the relevance of metaphysics.

The Schools and Movements of Philosophy: Metaphysics helped to shape the schools of philosophy, consider Pythagoreanism, Neo-Platonism Epicureanism and others whose ideas and doctrines has given philosophy the flavour it has today. And to that note it is asserted that all philosophy in this current time are only footnotes to the works of Plato and Aristotle, and they were equally metaphysicians even if not in the same regard. The schools and movements or the "isms" of philosophy all have metaphysical notions in their various doctrines. Idealist metaphysics is concerned with finding the true substance which is the source of all existence or that things owe their existence and that which does not owe its existence to any other thing. To find an answer idealists differentiate between the material and spiritual world and for them what is real is not material (matter) but Spiritual (mind). The metaphysical view of the atomists and epicureans helped to furnish science in the renaissance period. The epicureans saw purposelessness while the atomist built a deterministic theory of atom based on the physical since all things are made of atoms. Thus their reaction to metaphysics spurred the thoughts of scientists who in turn used those notions to further develop scientific principles. Existentialism is another good example of how metaphysics has affected the worldview of many towards life.

CULMINATING REFLECTIONS

The challenge of skepticism had made philosophers down the ages to attempt the endeavour of giving foundations for certain knowledge that is beyond doubt. This does not mean that skepticism as a term denotes sheer negativity but positivity as it is the systematic doubt that is aimed at critically analyzing the knowledge claims of people in order to arrive at knowledge that is certain. However, in the light of the contributions of Alfred Jules Ayer, it is very evident that his own contribution to contemporary skepticism is made towards the development of partial skepticism as seen in his critique of metaphysical, religious and ethical realities and statements. But his contribution to certitude is made in his theory of knowledge in which he advocated in the line of the positivists that sense knowledge that are verifiable through observation are the certain knowledge that can stand any doubt. It should be noted here that while Ayer was skeptical about the knowledge derived from metaphysical realities or

statements, ethical statements and religious statements due to their unverifiability he was certain about scientific knowledge that emphasized the certainty of empirically knowledge or knowledge acquired through the senses that have been verified by the verification principle. However, it is very clear that the skepticism of Ayer about metaphysics and his certitude of sense experience rest solely on the verification principle that serves as the criterion for meaningfulness. But the big question is: can the verification principle sustain the weight that Ayer has made it to carry? In his attempt to contain more meaningful statement that the principle of verification cannot solve in its original form, as in the case of verifying past and future events, Ayer introduced the verification in principle and in practice. Furthermore, he brought about the 'strong' and 'weak' sense of the verification principle and subscribed to the latter that deals with probabilities. All these invocations of Ayer were aimed to accommodate the criticism made on the verification principle and the same time criticize the existence of metaphysics.

But it should be noted that although Ayer attempted updating and upgrading the verification principle to contain a wide varieties of meaningful statements, the verification principle itself has some constraints. Does it mean that the verification principle is the real criterion of meaning in reality? Is empiricism and scientific method the only way to acquire knowledge? Is the verification principle itself even verifiable? According to A.C. Ewing, the verification principle itself is incapable of verification since no sense experience or observation can confirm or falsify it. Thus it turns out not just to be meaningless and nonsense useless (Beck 352). Although Herbert Feigl responded that the verification principle is still useful in eliminating meaningless and metaphysical statements, it does not solve the issue raised by Ewing. If the verification principle itself is not verifiable, it means empiricism or the logical positivists have as their foundation a metaphysical assumption of the verification principle. Furthermore, it would imply the death of logical positivism as it is very evident that the whole doctrines of the logical positivism rest solely on the verification principle; especially in their skeptical positions on metaphysics as seen in the works of Ayer. So, it is thus very ironic that logical positivism, instead of killing metaphysics, killed itself. In words, the logical positivists destroyed their foundations even before destroying that of metaphysics. Thus, the creditability of Ayer's skepticism of metaphysics is not coherent and tenable as the foundation on which it stands is not just feeble but defective. One can therefore say that the whole enterprise of Ayer and his contributions to contemporary skepticism and certitude is nonsense and not tenable since the very foundation on which it rests, that is, the principle of verification, is based on a metaphysical assumption. Thus, since the principle of verification can sustain the whole building of the logical positivism on which the contributions of Ayer depends, it follows that Ayer's contribution, especially his critique of metaphysics, ethics and religion as meaningless is incoherent and not tenable.

That apart, the language-game theory of Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* portrays the fact that the meaningfulness of language or statements depends solely on the linguistic or cultural background of the people that make those statements (Margolis 681). It was in the same vein that the context-dependency theories of the postmodernist such as Paul Feyerabend's epistemic anarchism (Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason* 34; *Against Method* 45), Thomas Kuhn's incommensurability (Kuhn 78) and Richard Rorty's epistemic behaviourism (Rorty 174) advocated the view that knowledge claim in epistemology should be justified according to the criteria or standard set by the people in their various contexts. From this, one can say that the claims of metaphysician to knowledge can only be understood from his metaphysical context. In the same line of thought, Lowe argued that "the existence of God is not an experimental or experiential issue as was conceived by the positivists but rather a complicated one. It is partly scientific and partly metaphysical" (Lowe 189). Furthermore, Pantaleon Iroegbu, in his book entitled *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, clearly reveals the evergreen prominence and significance of metaphysics this way:

Nature does have evolutionist cum process language, a constitutive inner-side, a spiritual aspect, an invisible or meta- empirical part that must be given the serious study that it deserves, if this spiritual part of nature, including man's soul, spiritual beings and nature Orderer or creator, is discovered to be the ultimate cause that gives rational explanation to all reality, why should metaphysics hesitate to proclaim it: rationally, powerfully and convincingly? (Iroegbu 50).

The above assertion of Iroegbu portrays the fact that metaphysics as a discipline in philosophy is concerned with the basic substratum of reality and the bid to give a rational explanation of the whole of reality. In the same vein, this paper strappingly reasons from the fact that metaphysics remains the core foundation of philosophy and even science that the logical positivists tried to raise as the standard of authentic knowledge. This is predicated on the premise that metaphysics investigates and analyses the whole of reality including both physical and spiritual reality. Without metaphysics, there is no science or scientific activities and/or postulations. However, the fact that there is no sensual evidence to support the existence of these metaphysical entities does not negate the fact that they exist. Even in science, all scientific theories are predicated upon assumptions and presuppositions that are metaphysical in nature since no sense perception can prove their validity. This submission also extends to the verification principle of the logical positivists, through which Ayer was able to arrive at the criticism of metaphysical assumption. A prove of this metaphysical

assumption that serve as the basic for the logical positivists' project of criticizing metaphysics is the unverifiability of the verification principle itself. Thus, the skeptical position of Ayer in his critique of metaphysics only ended up in the destruction of the whole enterprise of logical positivism from which Ayer's contribution to contemporary philosophy stands.

CONCLUSION

The position of this paper as it deflates the impression and supposition of Ayer is that metaphysics as a discipline has an enduring value to man. Hence, according to Regis, man practices metaphysics just as he breathes, without thinking about it. Man has often been defined as a metaphysical animal. Man, from this stand point, says Regis is of his very essence metaphysical; which means that there is in him something incapable of expression in terms simply of nature or physics something which always radically transcends nature and which is to be described as spiritual. It follows then, that if anything is certain in the history of man as a thinking being it is this universal aim of his, under the conditions of time and space, of the purely given and of entering that of the invisible and transcendent. The overwhelming relevance of metaphysics makes it unreasonable to radically reject it (Regis 13). For Jacques Maritain, in *Degrees of Knowledge* metaphysics is the foundation of all sciences. This view aligns with that of Henry Koren (7) who opines that without metaphysics, the ultimate foundations of all other sciences are left insecure. This is true for many reasons. First and foremost, metaphysics is the study of being as the totality of reality, and every other science is concerned with the study of one aspect of being or the other. The study of any aspect of being obviously presupposes metaphysics which is the study of being qua being. Indeed, metaphysics underlies every academic discipline and is presupposed by every discipline. Without metaphysics, the ultimate foundations of other disciplines are left insecure. So, those who reject metaphysics are in error. For instance, the empiricists and the positivists see man as a purely material being, forgetting that man is a multifaceted being. The perennial mark of metaphysics is that it studies anything that is. It is the study of everything, provided the thing is in existence. The implication of this is that metaphysics studies basically everything and anything you can think of. For Aristotle and also for Jacques Maritain, this all-inclusiveness marks the uniqueness of the discipline as its scope is all-embracing and encompassing too. This explains why Aristotle called metaphysics the *first principles, first philosophy* and the *science of all sciences*. The meaning of this is that metaphysics should and is definitely involved and present in the speculation and endeavours of other disciplines.

The above position stems from the fact that metaphysics arises simply out of a natural desire to understand the world. Indeed, the starting point of metaphysics is what we see and experience here in the world around us. Metaphysics springs naturally from our innate instinct of curiosity. That is why Kant, in spite of his attack

on speculative metaphysics, admits at the same time that the tendency towards metaphysics is a natural and irresistible one. It is really quite an irresistible disposition to appreciate and interrogate the beauties of metaphysics. But despite this irresistible disposition, some scholars in the history of philosophy think otherwise as their activities, disposition, theories and position seems to undermine this perennial relevance of metaphysics especially someone like Ayer whose postulation is the concern of this paper. This sound contradictory because the very act of casting aspersions on the nature and structure of metaphysics is doing metaphysics itself; that is why Kant submitted that it is irresistible, indeed it is. These scholars that have not appreciated the irresistibility of the study, the practice and the existence of metaphysics have been called the critics of metaphysics and Ayer is an unfortunate progenitor of those categories of scholars in the contemporary era.

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