

A Critique of 'The Criticisms against Metaphysics' (*Perspective essay*)

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Abstract: This essay examines selected sentiments against Metaphysics by tracing different criticisms against metaphysics, and subsequently presents rebuttals against each anti-metaphysics argument. Auguste Comte (1798-1857AD) is herein viewed as among the first philosophers to systematically critique metaphysics with an extrapolation towards positive epistemology or empirical Science. The essay further observes that systematic critique of metaphysics by Comte led to a vehement affirmation of Science by a group of thinkers known as Positivists and logical positivist. They constricted epistemology by classifying knowledge into analytic and synthetic. Any proposition outside the dichotomy of Analytics and Synthetic such as metaphysics is consequently labeled by them as 'meaningless' chatter. The essay also presents *en passant* the internal strife of a section of Metaphysicians who oppose traditional metaphysics by appealing to a more empirical metaphysics. The peak of anti-metaphysics is discussed under Scientism which tends towards emotional and near cultic hatred towards metaphysics and Philosophy in general. The zenith of this essay is the systematic rebuttal of the anti-metaphysics sentiments using the CONPITT criteria of Science. The criteria exclude anti-metaphysics sentiments from the real empirical Science; neither does it affirm them as philosophical. The final inference is expressed in the last section in which *Anti-metaphysicism* should be viewed as an erroneous metaphysics and a *romanticisation* of empirical Science.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term metaphysics (beyond physical reality) can either refer to the rational investigation of nonmaterial entities or the examination of the nonmaterial substratum of material entities. It asserts itself as Philosophy in its purest form because its concerns, methods and aims are rational and speculative. Aristotelian conception of metaphysics as *first philosophy* or '*Philosophia prima*' is based on the same reason of it being rational and academic. The broader world of Metaphysics is divided into ontology (the study of being), cosmology (the rational study of the physical universe) theodicy (the investigation into the existence and the nature of God) and rational psychology (the investigation into the relationship between the body and the soul). While many Philosophers appreciate metaphysics for its crucial role in intellectual discourse, some thinkers believe that metaphysics is a dead discipline or at least it is on the verge of its death. Auguste Comte, the Positivists and the Naturalistic metaphysicians are among the ardent critics of metaphysics.

1.0 Auguste Comte's Critique of Metaphysics

The father of sociology, the first modern philosopher of Science and the 'the high priest' of Positivism- **Marie Auguste Comte** (1798-1857AD) was among the first Philosophers to critique pure reason and Metaphysics. Comte attempted to solve the havoc of the French revolution by breaking away from pure Metaphysics which according to him did not provide tangible solutions to the then disenfranchised French society. In his *Cours de Philosophie positive* he postulates three stages of epistemological evolution: the *theological* stage, the *metaphysical* stage, and the *positive* stage (Comte, 1835). At the theological stage humans attribute and explain all phenomena on the basis of some deity. The theological stage is divided into three sub-stages, namely; Fetishism, the stage in which people believe that inanimate objects are made up of living spirits and the subsequent worship of these objects. Polytheism is the stage that explains things through the use of many gods like the God of earth, the God of rain, the God of fire, the God of air. The final theological evolution was Monotheism or the belief in one supreme God on whom all things are attributed to. The second stage is the stage of Metaphysics which he considers as an extension of the theological stage. In this stage reality is explained using impersonal abstract concepts because it was believed that God is an abstract being. They believe that an abstract power or force guides and determines events in the world. Metaphysical thinking discards belief in a concrete God. Comte notes that the theological and the metaphysical stages have been superseded with time and to appeal to them is to be retrogressive. Metaphysics and its abstraction should pave way to a more positive stage of epistemology. The positive stage also known as the scientific stage refers to scientific explanation based on observation, experiment, and comparison. Positive explanations rely heavily on a distinct method known as the scientific method, for their justification and establishment of cause and effect relationships. With positivist epistemology, Comte fashioned philosophy of Science, sociology, comparative education and subsequent movements of Positivism and Logical Positivism.

II. CRITICISMS AGAINST METAPHYSICS

1.0. Positivists and Logical Positivists

The positivists were admirers of Auguste Comte's Philosophy and considered themselves as strict advocates of Science. Their aversion to Metaphysics, however, stemmed from the

reaction against German obscurantism which they accused of impeding rational thought. The most notable group in the positivist movement was the one based in Vienna (Austria) and which called itself the *Vienna Circle*. The original members of the Vienna circle discussion group were Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Hebert Feigl, Philip Frank, Kurt Gödel, Hans Hahn, Viktor Kraft, Otto Neurath, Freidrich Waismann, Felix Kaufmann, and Edgar Zilsel. The group also referred to itself as a Logical Positivist movement for the simple reason that they admitted Logic and Math in their pursuit of Empirical knowledge. They took a hostile stance against metaphysics considering metaphysical statements as *meaningless* statements for the reason that they are not propositions, that is, they cannot be verified or falsified logically and empirically. According to the positivists, meaningful propositions can be divided into Analytic and Synthetic propositions. Analytic propositions are analytically true or false as in the case of Mathematical and Logical truths, and their truth emanates from coherencies. Synthetic propositions, on the other hand, are those that express or purport to express matters of material fact (as in the case of History and natural sciences). To decide whether a synthetic proposition is meaningful, an investigator must ask 'What can count for or against it?' if none, then it is meaningless. Verification of such propositions is thus pegged on correspondence evidence. Therefore Metaphysical propositions like 'God exists' are *ipso facto* meaningless because they cannot be verified logically and empirically. They can only be used to express emotions but not intelligent non-tautologous propositions.

2.0 Internal Critique: Naturalistic Metaphysicians

Metaphysics has also dealt with in-house critiques, perhaps through the influence of Logical Positivism. In the early 19th century, there developed two opposing factions in metaphysics: Naturalistic metaphysics and the Non-naturalistic metaphysics. While they do not deny the relevance of Metaphysics, the naturalistic Metaphysicians opined that its time Metaphysics shade off its traditional elements, excess verbosity and abstractions. They based their argument on Linguistic dichotomy. This dichotomy divides language into the artificial language(the ideal language of Philosophy - clarified through Logical analysis) and the Natural language(the ordinary language of philosophy whose role is Functional analysis). They allege that non-naturalistic metaphysics is sterile, vague, having the propensity to fantasy, lacking in imagination and foresight and inclines itself to independence from experience. According to Feyebrand(1999) , Metaphysics should have a tinge of empiricism whose two major tenets are Reductionism(Reducing all knowledge to empirical generalisation), *verificationism* and Analytic Synthetic dichotomy (Ribeiro, 2015).

III. CRITIQUE AGAINST ANTI-METAPHYSISCS 'CRITICISM

1. 0. Scientism: The Effect of Antimetaphysics

With the advent of Comte's *Philosophie positive*, Positivist movement and natural Metaphysics, the opposition against metaphysics and Philosophy in general became vivid, fashionable and psychological. The logical positivists predicted the death of Philosophy as a discipline. To 'kill' Philosophy, the standard starting point must be the suffocation of Metaphysics- especially its sub-branch of Ontology. The Anti-metaphysicians, however, developed semi systematic attacks against metaphysics using negative psychological arguments and subsequent open hatred towards Philosophy. The semi systematic aspects primarily involved attempts to replace Philosophy with Natural Science (formerly known as natural philosophy) while the Psychological aspects preoccupied itself with emotional attacks against Philosophy. The latter approach was adopted by a spontaneous Pseudo-Scientific stance known as Scientism. Scientism is a nonscientific belief that 'Science is the **only** valid source of Knowledge'. In religion, the term *sola scriptura* was used to define the fundamentalist Christians who believed that all truth must emanate from the bible, which is a constrictive position and less logically plausible. In the same manner, in academia, the term *sola 'Scientia'* can be used to define the exclusivist and radical type of epistemology in which not just Metaphysics is rubbished but also other nonscientific epistemologies (like literature, religion, divine revelation, humanities...). Unfortunately, the Latin term *Scientia* originally referred to all forms of knowledge up to the early 20th century when it was restricted to empirical sciences by anti-metaphysics groups. Just like *sola scriptura* was a narrow way of doing theology, so is *sola 'Scientia.'*

Scientism as a manifestation of *sola scientia* can be detected through six-fold subjective criteria of *Honorificationism, Pontificationism, Demarcationism, Methodism and Denigrationism*. The criteria are by default **-isms** because of the exaggerations and extrapolations inherent in them. *Honorificationism* refers to the honorific use of the term "science" and its cognates like "scientific," "scientifically," "scientist," as generic terms of epistemic praise. In this context, therefore, to be *called* a scientist is to be elevated above all other professions. Further, it insinuates that for research to be respected it must bear the term Science. This is regardless of whether the research flaunts some scientific rules. *Pontificationism* is inappropriately borrowing scientific trappings by adopting the manners and the technical terminology of the sciences, irrespective of their real usefulness. Pontificationism of Science is a kind of dictatorship that *scientism* loads over all areas of knowledge. This would include insisting that nonscientific researches use scientific terminologies to qualify so as to be considered as coherent. *Demarcation* is the preoccupation with "the problem of demarcation". It attempts to draw a sharp line between genuine Science or the real 'thing', and "pseudo-scientific"

imposters. The Demarcationist pays little attention to content but overemphasises on whether what he or she is encountering can be labelled as Science or otherwise. *Methodism*, also known as the quest for "scientific method", preoccupies itself with identifying the "scientific method," and focuses on explaining how the sciences have been so successful in resolving human conflicts. Scientistic imperialism involves denigrating the nonscientific and looking to the sciences for answers to questions beyond its scope.

2. 0. Critique of Scientism

In as much as anti-metaphysical sentiments claim to hinge themselves on the authority of Science, it is plausible to assert that the claim is based on pseudo-metaphysics and psychological errors. They fall way below the bar of Science especially if assessed against scientific criteria of Consistency 'Observability', 'Naturalness', Predictability, Tentativeness and Testability (CONPiTT).

Scientific consistency posits that the results of observations and experiments are reasonably the same when performed and repeated elsewhere. There is no known research done by scientists that prove or act as evidence to support *Honorificationism*, *Pontificationism*, *Demarcationism*, *Methodism* and *Denigrationism*. Therefore the question of *replicability* and *consistency* do not even come in. To inappropriately borrow scientific trappings irrespective of their real usefulness does not constitute scientific investigation, neither is it consistent with scientific consistency. While it is true that Science has made remarkable contributions to human life, to elevate it beyond its scope or to deify it, is to do it injustice and to lower it to a Pseudo-discipline. Further, assuming that there was some factual *replicability* among scientists that Science is 'Omni-potent', can the same be replicable elsewhere including and amongst non-scientists? We can then infer that Scientism and anti metaphysics are not scientific assertions by virtue of lack of inherent and foreseeable consistency.

Observability: In regards to *observability*, an event or the evidence of the event should be observable and explainable. The observations are limited to the basic human senses, extensions of the senses or aided senses. The claims made by anti-metaphysics camp are not observable because they are mental constructs to be conceived, not empirical objects to be perceived. *Ipsa facto*, the over-emphasis on empirical knowledge as the only knowledge cannot be empirically proven, and even if they were to refer to principles of Science, they would still be abstracts and unobservable. The best explanation would be that these principles are referents to physical reality, but this would require *scientistic* demarcations argument should disqualify them for being non empirical.

Natural basis science: The raw material for scientific investigation and its subsequent scope is the natural world. Therefore a natural cause (mechanism) must be used to explain why or how the event happens. Genuine Science does

not claim authority over nonmaterial or supernatural realities; neither does it deny their existences because Science is not a closed discipline. On the contrary, Scientism through pontification and denigration holds that anything that cannot be explained by natural means is either meaningless or nonexistent. The position of the 'meaninglessness and nonexistence of metaphysical realities' is not scientific; neither is it Philosophical. The primary question posed in cosmology and ontology is whether there exists nothingness, or whether any *existens* can be meaningless. This question can only be answered by metaphysics and not Scientism, for its not in the domain of Science to ask in an ultimate sense why things exist.

Predictability: Specific predictions can be used to make or foretell an event. Each prediction can later be tested to determine if the prediction is true or false. The claim that Science is the only valid source of knowledge is not predictable. It may be the case that in some scientific quotas Science is considered as such but the predictability of this disposition remains shaky for the simple reason that it is more often than not a subjective opinion as opposed to being a scientific fact. Different Scientists have adjusted their positions in regards to earlier positions and, given that the immensity of untouched areas of investigation is possible and acceptable within Science, the only possible predictability in Scientism is that it will not be a static position. Further, a psychological tangent that Scientism is the only epistemological necessity points to non-uniformity and diminishes predictability.

Testability: According to Science, for anybody of knowledge to be rightly called scientific, it must be based on testable postulates churned through the processes of Science and controlled experimentation. The distaste for metaphysics may not be testable through such means because they are sentiments. Subjectivity of these judgments cannot allow them to go through scientific rigors and be measured in any objective lab. They are opinions of entitlement based on minimal observations and as such they are regarded in Philosophy as *doxa*(opinion) as opposed to *episteme*(knowledge).

Tentativeness: Scientific theories are subject to revision and correction, even to the point of the theory being proven wrong, and if disproved shifts happen. Scientistic positions, on the other hand, claim supremacy of Science in its absoluteness. It does not leave room for debate, meaning that it is not a tentative position. s absolutist, there is no way it fits into the domain of Science.

IV. CONCLUSION: ERRONEOUS METAPHYSICS AND ROMANTICISM

Scientistic stances against Metaphysics, as has been elucidated above, are first of all nonscientific and secondly un-philosophical. If scientistic stances against metaphysics are neither Scientific nor philosophical, then they are something else. It is this something else that we hereby surmise as

erroneous metaphysics and Scientific romanticism. Metaphysics simply put, is the investigation of all reality in the most fundamental way. It is all-encompassing because its object of investigation is all reality; physical, immaterial, spiritual, supernatural, abstract and mental realities including metaphysics itself. As such, for a scientist to claim that some realities do not exist, he must be making a metaphysical statement, not a scientific one. The problem is that being a non-metaphysician, the pseudo scientist makes an erroneous metaphysical postulate by admitting *some realities* instead of *all reality*. Besides, when the 'scientist' needs to order and communicate his research findings, he does not always use empirics but language, logic and mathematics, which are abstract mental realities. The '*scientist*' then ends up in self-refutation and contradictions by asserting and affirming an only sensible world. While formulating his hypothesis, the

pseudo scientist uses speculation, which is a metaphysical approach but falls short of cosmological tenets. The most appropriate metaphysics branch proper to scientific investigation is cosmology, which the pseudo scientist ignores, but it is the one that builds up the theoretical basis for scientific investigation. It is therefore plausible to indicate that the disjunctive nature of pseudoscience is an expression of warped metaphysical stance and stagnates as a *Scientific Romanticism*.

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