POST-METAPHYSICAL THINKING : A HABERMASIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE *CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL METAPHYSICS*

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ABSTRACT

Immanuel Kant has been considered as one of the prominent philosophers that in a way put an end to metaphysics. Kant's critique of metaphysics is directed towards the totalizing unity of mythological narratives, religious doctrines, and philosophical explanations. The basic concepts of narratives, religions, and philosophy had riled upon a syndrome of validity that dissolved with the emergence of expert cultures in science, morality, and law and with the autonomy of art. Today, philosophy could establish its own distinct criteria of validity under conditions of rationality in relation to science that is fallible. Habermas puts forward that philosophy after Kant can no longer be a metaphysics in the sense of "conclusive" and "totalizing" thinking. In his communication theory, Habermas develops a theory of philosophy that is not reducible to a simple totality but has social complexity as its ground that is a number of plural language games, different

orders of power, different structures of politics constituting modern time. Habermas is thus concerned with developing a theory of philosophy in general as a discourse of social differentiation.

Keywords:

- *Paradigm shift* • *metaphysics* • *post-metaphysics* • *identity/totalizing thinking* • *situating reason* • *procedural rationality* • *discourse ethics*

Background

It has become customary to transfer the concept of "paradigm shift", stemming from the history of science to the history of philosophy and to undertake a rough division of epochs in terms of "being," "consciousness," and "language." It is also possible to distinguish them from corresponding thought such as ontology, the philosophy of consciousness, and linguistic analysis.[2] Post-metaphysical thinking brought about the horizon of modernity as a "shift" from the "one sided claim of truth" to a "multi-sided claim" based on procedural rationality, using language analysis in validating a claim as truth, truthfulness, as well as rightness.

Question about Differences

What makes post-metaphysical thinking different from traditional metaphysics? Can post-metaphysical thinking be considered metaphysical thinking? How does metaphysical discourse after Kant indicate the end of metaphysics? In what way does metaphysics after Kant indicate a return to traditional metaphysics and how can a post-metaphysical thinking reconcile the empirical sciences with traditional metaphysics?

This article seeks answers to such questions by searching for factors that characterize and lead the shift of paradigm to the establishment of the concept of a post-metaphysical thinking. The significance of establishing a post-metaphysical thinking is to relate philosophy to the empirical sciences. By examining the end of traditional metaphysics, this article aims to make a contribution to a better understanding of today's concept of

metaphysics. For this article shall simply summarize briefly the critique of the metaphysics of being (ontology) and the metaphysics of the mind (epistemology) which, in Jurgen Habermas's view, indicates a plea or a demand for change. A change from our "dogmatic position" (traditional metaphysics) toward a dynamic one (post-metaphysical thinking) is urgently needed in applying the new concept of metaphysics.

For Habermas, the lines of traditional metaphysics have lost their force not because they are not true but because they have lost their appeal in today's world of multidisciplinary interests. In this regard, he suggests new ways of applying metaphysics, as follows:

a) Post-metaphysical thinking should employ a rational procedure (critical discourse) toward the problem of truth. It means that a rational procedure can help all disciplines arrive at a valid claim to truth, truthfulness, and rightness.

b) In so doing, there must be a shift from a one sided claim, as was done by traditional metaphysics, to a multi-sided argument, as should be done by post-metaphysical thinking.

c) Post-metaphysical thinking therefore suggests the possibility of a synthesis (discursive-will-formation) among different branches of sciences.

Aspects of Metaphysical Thinking

From Plato to Hegel, metaphysics was centered on the idea of "the one" and "the many". The following are aspects of metaphysical thinking: identity thinking, doctrine of ideas, and the strong concept of theory.[3]

Identity-thinking

The roots of identity-thinking goes as far back to the ancient Greeks. For the ancient Greeks, metaphysics dealt with the idea of "the one" to which everything else is related. There is "identity" between "the one" and "the many". Because "the one" is the mirror image of "the many" then they relate to "the one" as their infinity. This infinite being stands over and above the world of finite beings. The infinite is conceived as the essential ground of nature or as a being from which finite beings come to exist.

"The one and the many, abstractly conceived as the relationship of identity and difference, is the fundamental relation that metaphysical

thinking comprehends both as logical and as ontological; the one is both axiom and essential ground, principle and origin. From it the many is derived – in the sense both of grounding and of originating. And, thank for this origin, the many is reproduced as an ordered multiplicity."[4]

Idealism

Plato's accounts of the "idea" as a unifying order or essence underlies the multiplicity of the phenomena. This unifying order is the idea which by itself is of a conceptual nature. Therefore genera and the species of phenomena necessarily follow the ideal order.

For Plato, "the idea" is the typical or the "form-giving" to everything, *formae rerum*. The ideas, therefore, build on what are materials and bring to them the promise of universal unity because all ideas are ordered and re-examined to the good as the apex of the hierarchy of ideas. What is really real is therefore the idea. The senses are the shadow of knowledge. Thus, in order to get at the truth, we have to turn from the shadow of ignorance and belief towards knowledge of the good.[5]

The Strong Concept of Theory

In the modern period, the concept of "theoria" loses its link to the sacred occurrences. Theory itself is affected by being embedded in an exemplary form of life, the life which is dedicated to contemplation – the *bios theoretikos* above the life of *vita activa*.[6] Theory demands a renunciation of the natural attitude toward the world and promises contact with the ideal world. The notion about theory has been shifted from its sacred character to today's understanding of it as an empirical privileged access to truth.

Galileo says that science presents a new look to the world. Unlike philosophy, empirical science deals with calculation, computation, and prediction about the reality by means of models and *formulae*. Accordingly, the peculiar essence of natural science is that it is "unendingly hypothetical" and "unendingly verified".[7] The scientists hypothesize the reality through a formula, albeit a good hypothesis, is not itself the representation of reality. It is only an assumption or calculation or computation. To a certain extent, hypothesis is the power of science but it cannot replace reality. At the level of the psychological model one cannot justifiably say that the measurement of IQ is the truth about human intelligence. Rather it is the psychologist's prediction about what is

supposed to be the case. So, one has to remember that models do not stand for reality, as it were. The nature of any scientific model is assumption or prediction. Therefore in order to know the essence of reality we have to deduce it from metaphysical principle.[8]

Metaphysics as the *prima philosophia* has been problematized by the historical developments of the natural and social sciences. The shift from metaphysical thinking to these sciences indicate the following characteristics:[9]

a) *Totalizing* thinking has asserted itself since the 17th century through the empirical methods of natural sciences, and since the 18th century through formalism in moral and legal theory. All through these, metaphysical thinking and the theory of natural law were confronted by *a new type of procedural rationality* which, in turn, devastated *the cognitive privilege of philosophy*.

b) *De-transcendentalizing of inherited basic concepts* through the study of humanities in the 19th century was infused with a historical consciousness that reflected the new experiences of time and contingency within an increasingly complex modern society.

c) *The reification and functionalization of forms of life and interaction* during the 19th century have promoted a criticism of the foundations of philosophy. This shift has come to be popularly known as a "paradigm shift", from the philosophy of consciousness that forces everything into subject-object relations, to the philosophy of language.

d) *Mutual dependencies between theory and praxis* give hope to a new understanding that theoretical accomplishments are embedded in the practical contexts of the everyday life experience.

Science provides us with empirical methods in dealing with new problems, particularly in solving them. In a dialogue with the empirical sciences, post-metaphysical thinking has to make a contribution to current issues regarding the attacks of the sciences on traditional metaphysics. In this regard, Habermas put his thoughts about it under the principle of communicative action. He, however, took a position neither as a scientist nor as a traditional metaphysician. He simply defined himself as a theorist, with deeply ingrained communicative rationality, by making some suggestions on how the "traditional way" of interpreting metaphysics can be replaced.

Post-metaphysical Thinking

The collective term, "post-metaphysical thinking", is raised by Habermas to make some suggestions about how metaphysics can be applied hand in hand with other branches of the empirical sciences. The following are features of the attacks on traditional metaphysics which has been characterized as the end of metaphysics:

a) Kant refutes metaphysics only in so far as it is bad metaphysics. For Kant, bad metaphysics claims that man can know the *noumenon*, the "thing-in-itself" but its claim has no basis because we can only know things that appear to us (the *phenomenon*). Since we cannot know the "thing-in-itself", then we need categories in order to know them. The categories of understanding actual experience are space and time. But the idea of God is outside space and time; therefore we cannot know whether God exists (God is outside the limit of experience). Thus, man must nevertheless believe (postulate) that God exists in order to act morally. Here, Kant makes a critical distinction between science and religion, for they have different bases or grounds for claiming the truth. Metaphysical ideas such as soul, nature, and God are not constitutive knowledge; rather they are regulative in the sense that they provide directions for knowledge. Since metaphysical ideas are outside the realm of experience, then, those are beliefs or postulations through which we aspire for moral justifications.

b) In his Zarathustra's claim of "the death of God", Nietzsche aimed to end traditional metaphysics. But he could not totally abandon traditional metaphysics. The most he could do then was to replace traditional metaphysics which relates to the notion of God with a mundane sort which is "the will to power" as the ultimate reality.

c) In the contemporary world, the attack on traditional metaphysics, as the philosophy of being (ontology) and the philosophy of the mind (epistemology), began in the empirical and analytic tradition of Russell and Carnap. Under this influence, Quine who was a student of Carnap and a member of the Vienna Circle, i.e., the logical positivists, sought to purify language and eliminate metaphysics through the verification principle, which asserted that a meaningful (true) statement is one that can be verified either empirically or logically (relations of ideas). The principle of

verification rendered metaphysical statements as meaningless because they are not verifiable.

d) Following the empirical and analytic tradition and logical positivism, there have been two kind of attack on metaphysics in this century which are American Peirce's pragmatism and Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927). According to Peirce, after Kant, meaningful ontological claims simply cannot be made, but good metaphysics, which he understood as pragmatism, is eminently possible. Peirce noticed that knowledge begins with experience. Therefore, only these that are real, hence, meaningful, can be known empirically, or have an empirical basis. Therefore, since what cannot be known empirically is obviously not real, cognitive reference to it cannot be meaningful.[10]

Regarding these attacks on metaphysics, Habermas believed that metaphysics can remain alive only if it is replaced by post-metaphysical thinking. Post-metaphysical thinking applied the theory of communicative action in the mode of exchanging perspectives toward validity of a claim about truth, truthfulness, rightness. Science therefore would no longer conflict with metaphysics because metaphysics would no longer arrogantly claim knowledge over all reality – it cannot rule out the possibility of the validity of truths produced by natural sciences. In doing so, post-metaphysical thinking remains critical by preserving the idea of reason while stripping it of its traditional metaphysical embellishments.[11] To some extent, the linguistic turn in philosophy paved the way for applying this post-metaphysical thinking.

Post-Metaphysical Thinking and Discourse Ethics

The situation of present-day philosophizing has become obscure. What has become unclear is the position taken towards metaphysics. According to positivism and its successors, metaphysics was for a long time ambiguous and had masked the question formulated about reality as meaningless and without any objective basis. According to Habermas, post-metaphysical thinking is not shattered metaphysics but rather it is a return to metaphysics as a "specific" branch of knowledge among others. What makes post-metaphysical thinking significant in the current discussion on the validity of truth claims is its assignment to dialogue. Such a dialogue, which is now assigned to it as its main course, is discourse ethics.

> Discourse ethics, therefore, appeals to a common process of discursive will formation that subjects all norms to the same standard – the capacity to command general assent – by admitting only regulations that are equally in the interest of all.[12]

Consequently, discourse ethics regulates precisely the necessary pragmatic presuppositions of communicative action from whose normative content discourse derives the basic substance of morality by analyzing the universal and necessary communicative presuppositions of the practice argumentation.[13] Method of discourse ethics is a procedure of exchange of ideas through a practical discourse in order to arrive at an agreement. This practical discourse then depends on the life world of a specific social group with real conflicts in a concrete situation wherein all participants consider themselves obliged to try to reaching a consensual agreement regarding the means of resolving controversial social matters.[14]

The focal point in post-metaphysical thinking is that of communicative action – i.e., "action oriented to reach an understanding" – the goal of which is inter-subjective recognition of a validity claim (a claim which is supported by relevant reasons).[15] We cannot deny the fact that people quarrel over moral issues all the time in every day life as if such quarrels could be resolved on the basis of good reasons. This means that that only those norms that reflect a general will are accepted as valid.[16]

Characteristics of Post-metaphysical Thinking

The following are characteristics of post-metaphysical thinking:

Procedural rationality

Various types of transcendental foundation in metaphysical thinking came about with modern empirical science, autonomous morality, and the theory of law in the modern constitutional states. On the one, hand transcendental foundation in metaphysics looks for a totality which is rational in itself. For example, *rationality* is thought *as being* (reason) that organizes the content of the world, from which it can itself be read off. Reason is of the whole and of its parts.[17]

On the other hand, both modern empirical science and autonomous morality and legal theory in modern constitutional states place their

confidence solely in the rationality of their own approaches and their *procedures* – namely, in the method of scientific knowledge or in the abstract point of view under which moral insights are possible. *Rationality* is thought of *as something formal* insofar as the rationality of content evaporates into the validity of results.[18]

In reaction to the procedural rationality, some philosophers began constructing a scientific philosophy. This attempt failed as it appeared to be purely reactionary. For Habermas, any attempt to make metaphysics assumes a new role is to set a post-metaphysical thinking that operates within different concepts of the world. Metaphysics today can no longer monopolize truth claims, rather, it has to mediate the dialogue between the expert cultures of science, technology, law, and morality, on the one hand, and everyday communicative practices on the other. Truth claims are, therefore, produced as the result of a better insight which is accepted by all disciplines.

Procedural rationality is basically a procedure of argumentation on how all disciplines can arrive at a truth claim. In posing this procedural principle, philosophy may not lay claim to a privileged access but it has to dialogue with other disciplines in setting the rules on how they can arrive at a mutual understanding. In a dialogue, philosophy can play its role as an interpreter, not in the sense that it possesses true knowledge about the good life but in the sense that it mediates the dialogue between expert knowledge and everyday practices by providing them with a critique and reflection about which rationality should be taken as an orientation toward mutual understanding.[19]

Situating Reason

Post-metaphysical thinking characterizes reason as something finite and socially constructed. The notion of truth claim is not absolute but relative as it is socially constructed by the use of language.

"Today, many areas are dominated by a contextualism that confines all truth claims to the scope of local language games and conventionally accepted rules of discourse and assimilates all standards of rationality to habits or conventions that are only valid *in situ*".[20]

This de-transcendentalized reason ends the metaphysics of absolute Spirit providing an integrating thought based on language.[21] In this respect,

Habermas accounts of knowledge as "knowledge-constitutive-interests". Therefore, the tendency of the empirical scientists to separate *theoria* from *phronesis* (theory from the normative social facts) is not only a misunderstanding but is also misleading to dogmatism and ideology. Habermas criticizes positivism by saying that positivists limit the theory in terms of potential for prognosis and technology proper. In order to redeem this positivistic dogmatism, Habermas asks for the use of hermeneutics and critique of ideology to unmask instrumental action which brings about the totalization of human life by technology. Both hermeneutics and critique ideology assert that science and technology are not "value-free". The following table shows different kinds of knowledge and type of human interests:

Type of human interest	Kind of knowledge	Research Methods
Technical Prediction: purposive- rational action	Instrumental causal explanation	Positivistic sciences/empirical-analytic: natural and social sciences aiming at knowledge of physical and logical laws
Practical communicative action: interpretation and understanding	Practical Understanding	Interpretive research: historical-hermeneutical methods (humanities, historical, and social sciences aiming at interpretative understanding)
Emancipatory criticism and liberation	Emancipation Reflection	Critical social sciences : critically-oriented sciences psychoanalysis, critique ideology, and philosophy as reflective and critical.

Post-metaphysical thinking provides a "communicative action" which is action oriented to reach a mutual understanding between science and critical morality. In order to realize this, we need a universal claim (U) articulating a requirement of the acceptance of moral principle. The (U) is a rule for situating sentences (validity) in any speech act in a particular situation as follows:

a) External: world of objects and events about which one can make *true* or *false* statements.

b) Internal: world of speaker: intentional experiences that can be *truthful* or *untruthful*.

c) Normative: reality of society: social life-world of shared values and norms, roles and rules that are fit or unfit, *legitimate* or *wrong*.

The Linguistic Turn

Habermas's contribution to the linguistic theory of meaning is his theory of knowledge as "constitutive human interests". For him, knowledge is not value free rather it is "situated" or socially constructed. Therefore, we have to distinguish three distinct validity claims in relation to three corresponding worlds. These relations are conditions of inter-subjective communication oriented toward mutual understanding.

The term validity means legitimacy (good reason) of the claim of truth, truthfulness, and rightness for every subject capable of speech and action. The following table is the *rational* basis of the testable *validity claims*.

Type	Validity Claims	Obligation	Recourse
Constative asserting, reporting	Truth	Provide grounds	Experience
Representative expressive: reveal, conceal, admit	Truthfulness	Prove trustworthy	Assurance
Regulative	Rightness	Provide justification	Norms

A keystone to the theory of speech acts is an explanation of *illocutionary force* proper to *performative* utterance. The types of illocutionary acts can be narrowed down into five different types of illocutionary points:

1) *Assertive* illocutionary point is about an *utterance*, as to whether it is true or false.

2) *Directive* illocutionary point is about *how to get the hearer to behave* in accordance the content of a given directive. This directive cannot be true or false, rather a directive can be obeyed or disobeyed.

3) *Commissive* illocutionary point is about *promises* that they cannot be true or false, rather that they can be carried out or broken.

4) *Expressive* illocutionary point is about *sincerity*; e.g., whether an apology is sincere that is if the speaker genuinely feels sorry about what he is apologizing for, etc.

5) *Declarative* illocutionary point is about *pronouncements*. For example "I pronounce you man and wife". This pronouncement actually makes a change in the world solely by virtue of a successful performance of being husband and wife.[22]

Post-metaphysical thinking pays attention to the use of language. Traditionally, language was conceived in terms of the model of assigning names to objects and was viewed as an instrument of communication that remained external to the content of thought. Post-metaphysical thinking takes language from the standpoint of the content of thought which is intersubjective rationality. Post-metaphysical thinking is sort of philosophizing "within" the linguistic turn.

The Collapse of Theory Over Practice

The claim of theory over practice, both in the metaphysics of being as well as in the philosophy of consciousness, has been deflated by language analysis in order to do justice to the pre-reflexive knowledge in the life-world. By making use of this language analysis, post-metaphysical thinking then comes to light communicative rationality, opening it to several dimensions; at the same time, this communicative rationality provides a standard for evaluating systematically distorted forms of communication in the life-world.

Post-metaphysical thinking makes use of language analysis abandoning one sided claim of truth addressed by the philosophy of being and the philosophy of consciousness, and those one sided claims made by materialistic theories.

The task of post-metaphysical thinking is therefore to reason out validity claims based on a rational procedure wherein everyone is allowed to "give-and-take" reasons. For Habermas, a good (rationally accepted) interpretation can lead people to a good solution. Since the progress of empirical science cannot be ignored in everyday life, then a rationalization process should be imposed upon the life-world, i.e., how science can be used without losing the communicative attitude of everyday life? This

rationalization process can be realized by a participatory process in decision-making, where metaphysician can take a firm stand in arguing about the meaning of inter-subjectivity in order to balance the instrumental tendency of natural sciences in the life-world.[23] Habermas seriously takes the question about human beings in the life-world in order to defend the dignity of the human person against the probability of extreme alienation at the hands of science and technology.[24]

Conclusion

What makes post-metaphysical thinking different from traditional metaphysics is that post-metaphysical thinking takes the form of discourse ethics in resolving questions over truth claims through dialogue with the empirical sciences. In this way, metaphysical ideals about truth, justice, power, freedom, etc., find a new ground to be preserved. Accordingly, post-metaphysical thinking can be characterized as both the end of traditional metaphysics and a return to it in a new guise. The former means the end of absolute claim (one-sided claim) about truth and the latter could mean the beginning of procedural rationality (a multi-sided argument) where metaphysics comes across with the empirical sciences questioning the validity of a claim based on its truth, truthfulness, and rightness.

After Kant, metaphysics in its traditional forms came to an end. However, in the linguistic sense, post-metaphysical thinking may suggest or imply a return to metaphysics in its new forms thereby repairing any damage to the fried of metaphysics wrought by the conflict between the advocates of traditional metaphysics and thereof contemporary metaphysics.

Endnotes:

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[2]   Jürgen Habermas, *Post Metaphysical Thinking: Philosophycal Essays (*abbreviated as PMT) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 12.

[3]   *Ibid.*

[4]   *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[5]   Reginal E. Allen. *Greek Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, Inc., 1985), p. 514ff.

[6]   PMT. Ibid., p. 32.

[7]   Edmund Husserl,. "Mathematization of Nature" in Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology (Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 349..

[8]   Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1977), 274, 276.

[9]   PMT. *op. cit.*, p. 33-34..

[10] Tom Rockmore, "Metaphysics at the End of the Century" in *Budhi.* 2&3, 1999, p. 116.

[11] PMT. Ibid., p. vii.

[12] Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics (*abbreviated as JA) (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 69.

[13] Ibid., p.67.

[14] Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Actio (*abbreviated as MCCA) (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 103.

[15] Baynes, Kenneth. "Democracy and the Rechtsstaat: Habermas's Faktisitat und Geltung" in *Cambridge Companion to Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 49.

[16] MCCA., Ibid., p. 63.

[17] PMT. Ibid., p. 34-35.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[22] John R. Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (New York: The Basic Books Publication, 1998), pp. 148-150.

[23] PMT. *op. cit.*, pp. 8-14.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

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