UNIT-1: THE NATURE OF METAPHYSICAL ENQUIRY: METAPHYSICAL ARGUMENTS

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 The Subdivisions of Metaphysics

1.4 Nature of Metaphysics

1.5 Is Metaphysics Possible?

1.6 Let Us Sum Up

1.7 Further Reading

1.8 Answer to Check Your Progress

1.9 Model Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Know what metaphysics is
- Know what metaphysical enquiry is
- Differentiate between a metaphysical enquiry and a non-metaphysical enquiry
- Answer if Metaphysics is possible
- Acquaint with some metaphysical problems

1.2 INTRODUCTION

The word "Metaphysics" is derived from the two Greek words: 'meta' (after) and 'physika' (physics). Metaphysics is a systematic study of noumena or substance or reality. It is a study that goes beyond the phenomenal world. Aristotle used the word 'first philosophy' to refer to this sort of study which is later on known as metaphysics. His first philosophy was meant for the study of the highest principles of all that exists. In it, he studied something over and above individual things. Metaphysics is about things that do not change. In the history of philosophy, this highest principle is known by means of diverse names in the philosophy of both east and west. And also there is

agreement and disagreement regarding the number of the principle from philosopher to philosopher.

The artificial derivation of the term, 'metaphysics' has a very interesting background. After the publication of Aristotle's Physics, a batch of Aristotle's writings was ready for publication. The editor in charge of the project, a librarian in Alexandria, Andronicus of Rhodes who studied Aristotle's manuscripts, gave this other work a title in ancient Greek that literally means, After the Physics. The librarian put the treatises dealing with the sphere of the so-called First Philosophy, or philosophical wisdom, after his physics, a doctrine on nature. From that time onward philosophical works as a whole were called metaphysics. The word 'metaphysics' is derived from a collective title of the fourteen books by Aristotle that we currently think of as making up Aristotle's Metaphysics. Aristotle had four names for the branch of philosophy that is the subject-matter of Metaphysics: 'first philosophy', 'first science', 'wisdom', and 'theology'. Aristotle identifies the subject-matter of first philosophy as "being as such", and as "first causes." In Metaphysics 4.1, Aristotle proposes a science of being as being, in contrast to sciences which have as their field of study only some part of being. It is a science that seeks the highest causes and principles, and these must be causes of some nature.

Aristotle describes metaphysics what he himself calls "first philosophy" (prôtê philosophia), or "theology" (theologikê) as a science of "being as being" and as distinct from those sciences which study only a part of being. Ordinary sciences give us the knowledge of the characters of existent facts only. They cannot say anything about their existence or reality itself. Ordinary science is, in fact, scientific information in descriptive statements. It speaks about what a thing is and how it is related to other things, but not about what actually it is. Metaphysics seeks the highest or most ultimate causes, principles that are eternal and unchanging. Aristotle is followed by this description of metaphysics - that it "is the science of the first principles."

The rationalists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by contrast, expanded the scope of metaphysics. They took it to be concerned not merely with the existence and nature of God, but also with the distinction between mind and body, the immortality of the soul, and freedom of the will. Kant thought that there can be a legitimate kind of metaphysical knowledge. Its aim is to delineate the most general structures at work in our thought about the world. This Kantian conception of metaphysics continues to enjoy popularity among contemporary philosophers, who insist that metaphysics has as its aim the characterization of our conceptual scheme or conceptual framework. These philosophers typically agree with Kant that the structure of the world as it is in itself is inaccessible to us and that metaphysicians must be content to describe the structure of our thinking about that world.

Metaphysics is also known as Ontology. The term 'ontology' is derived from two Greek words: 'onto' (being) and 'logos' (discourse or science). Hence, 'ontology' means the 'Theory of Being' or 'the Science of Pure Being'. It inquires into the nature of the 'reality.' It seeks to know whether reality is one or many. On the basis of this question, diverse tendencies like monism, dualism, pluralism etc have cropped up. Ontology investigates into the nature of the world which makes an investigation into matter and life, soul, God or the Absolute.

1.3 THE SUBDIVISIONS OF METAPHYSICS:

The scope of metaphysics has expanded beyond the boundaries that Aristotle drew. The traditional metaphysical studies include Philosophy of Self, Eschatology, Cosmogony, Cosmology and Ontology. The study "Philosophy of Self" deals with the philosophical analysis of self and it's relation to the body. Eschatology discusses the position of the soul without its relational to the body. It also deals with the nature of the other world if any. Cosmogony is the study of creation. It discusses the creation of the world as well as enquiries if there is any purpose of the creation of anybody's part. Cosmology enquires whether the world is one or many. Ontology is the study of reality. Since this branch deals with the science of ultimate

reality, metaphysics is also sometimes referred to as ontology.

Metaphysician seeks to provide an account of the nature of being; but there is a variety of different perspectives from which one can provide such an account, and corresponding to these different perspectives are different sub-disciplines within metaphysics. The modern subdivisions of metaphysics are found in the interpretation of A. E. Taylor's account of metaphysical enquiry in Elements of Metaphysics (1978) and Michael J. Loux's Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction (1998). Loux's account of this subdivision says that one can examine being from the perspective of its being just that - being. Since this represents the most general perspective from which one can consider being, the branch of metaphysics that considers being from this perspective was dubbed general metaphysics. But the rationalists insisted that we can also examine being from a variety of more specialized perspectives. When we do, we are pursuing this or that branch of what the rationalists called special metaphysics. Thus, we can consider being as it is found in changeable things; we can, that is, consider being from the perspective of its being changeable. To do so is to engage in cosmology. We can, as well, consider being as it is found in rational beings like ourselves. To consider being from this perspective is to pursue that branch of special metaphysics the rationalists called rational psychology. Finally, we can examine being as it is exhibited in the Divine case, and to examine being in this light is to engage in natural theology.

Again Taylor subdivides metaphysics into Ontology or the general doctrine of Being, Cosmology or the philosophy of Nature and Rational Psychology or the philosophy of Mind. He says that metaphysics is concerned with the meaning and validity of universal conceptions of the nature of the individual objects which make up the experienced physical world. It is called Ontology. In order to see the nature of an object one has to deal with the experience of an object in the form of extension, succession, space, time, number, magnitude, motion, change, quality, matter, force, causality etc. In other words, one is to see what character is to be ascribed to the whole of Being as such, before pointing out the problem of the particular

kind of Being which belongs to the various realities of common life. It is the relation of Being in general to experience. Thus, ontology enquires the sense in which Being may be said to be inseparable from and yet again to transcend experience.

Again, metaphysics has to deal with the meaning and validity of the universal predicates by which one seeks to interpret the nature of the experiencing mind itself and its relation to others. This "others" may be other objects of the physical world and other minds or spirits. The contents of the world of experience may fall into two groups of mere things and things which are sentient and purposive. The metaphysical inquiry that deals with the most general characteristics of the external nature are known as Cosmology. Again, the metaphysical inquiry that deals with the most general characteristics of the conscious mind, is known as Rational Psychology. Of course, the separate dealing of external nature and the mind does not suggest the absolute disparity between matter and mind. It is a matter of philosophical criticism to decide whether this difference may persist or not. Besides, Taylor speaks about another pre-Kantian subdivision of metaphysics, namely Rational Theology that deals with the doctrine of the existence and attributes of God since something related to God can be deduced from general philosophical principles apart from the appeal to specific revelation.

J. N. Sinha speaks about three essential parts of metaphysics, namely, Ontology of Nature, Ontology of the Soul or Mind, and Ontology of the Absolute. "Ontology of Nature" investigates the nature of matter, time, space, causality, life, evolution, mechanism and teleology. "Ontology of the Soul" investigates the nature, origin and destiny of the soul and its relation to the body. "Ontology of God" investigates the nature and attributes of God and his relation to the world and the souls. It discusses and examines proofs for the existence of God.

P. F. Strawson draws a distinction between two kinds of metaphysics: descriptive and revisionary metaphysics. Descriptive metaphysics discusses

the categorical framework within which human thinking operates. On the other hand, revisionary metaphysics is concerned with replacing our categorical framework by another categorical framework.

1.4 NATURE OF METAPHYSICAL INQUIRY:

It is not easy to say what metaphysics is. Philosophers have disagreed about the nature of metaphysical inquiry. It is a branch of study which discusses and tries to determine the real nature of the world, life, God and reality. It investigates into the nature of reality. In the sense of being a study of reality or being, in general, it is an integral part of philosophy. Our reflections show that things are not always what they seem to be. This means there is the difference between apparent and real things. Everything has two aspects: an external and an internal. The external aspect, the way a thing appears to us, is always changing. The internal aspect, the original nature of a thing remains unchanged. One is to admit the unchanging aspect of a thing as the denial of such aspect the appearance of a thing cannot be explained. The admission of some permanent, unchangeable reality behind our changing states is necessary for the explanation of the fact themselves. Thereby, for a complete explanation of the object consideration of the empirical as well as transcendental is necessary. Metaphysics is concerned with the transcendental aspect of a thing.

Metaphysical tendency lies in the fact that there lies the world that transcends sense experience. It is the study of reality or a principle that goes beyond what can be known by sense experience. In another word, it is a study of super-phenomenal reality. In order to know the world that transcends the knowledge of sense experience, one is required a non-sensous knowledge. The reason, that does not depend on sense experience and intuition which is a non-discursive form of knowledge are non-sensous faculties of knowledge. Metaphysical question enquires whether these two faculties are capable of grasping something an extra sensual world, if there really is, or not. The important features of a metaphysical enquiry are:

Firstly, metaphysics has as its goal the apprehension of truth for its own sake. Metaphysics has immaterial substance as its subject matter. The relationship between the discipline and its subject matter gives metaphysics an intriguing status. Unlike the other disciplines, it does not simply assume the existence of its subject matter; it must actually prove that there is an immaterial substance for it to be about. So the project of proving that there is an Unmoved Mover outside the world of nature is a part of metaphysics itself.

Secondly, it is an alternative way of understanding the notion of an object not as that which is the ultimate subject of a predicate but as that which persists through changes. The question what is ultimately real can be regarded as the question about the ultimate stuff of which the universe is made. Metaphysical enquiry distinguishes between phenomena and noumena, reality and appearance. A thing is not that as it always seems to be. The way a thing appears to be may not be same with its real nature. The reality is hidden behind the appearances and metaphysics enables us to see that reality and this reality is always independent of our experience. So metaphysics considers things as beings or as existents and attempts to specify the properties or features they exhibit just insofar as they are beings or existents. Accordingly, it seeks to understand not merely the concept of being, but also very general concepts like unity or identity, difference, similarity, and dissimilarity that apply to everything that there is.

Thirdly, a metaphysical inquiry is sceptical in nature. But it is different from the vulgar sceptic schools of thought both in its method and its moral purpose. A metaphysical inquiry is not dogmatic. It does not disbelieve something for no reason. A metaphysician takes scepticism only as a preliminary stage of his final objective of the attainment of determinate truth. A metaphysical enquiry is characterised by the presence of criticism. It critically examines the postulates and the results of the knowledge of the external world. It is a process of examining the postulates and conclusions of other philosophers to present a more comprehensive worldview by synthesising different philosophies. It is a critical investigation into the nature

of being and its relative issues. It's critical nature demands it to be synthetic. Fourthly, a metaphysical inquiry is speculative, not imaginative. Philosophy often takes the help of speculation in a philosophical synthesis. This process is not a putting together of bits of knowledge. In contrast, it is the formation of a worldview by the synthesis of the conclusions of diverse experiences. The Metaphysical enquiry, as such, is constructive and thereby it involves the most fundamental concepts like reality, existence, substance, causality, universals etc. It is not based on sensory experiences. It leads to an understanding of reality what lies behind appearances. It is based on rational insight or analysis. It discusses in the light of the first principle and does not take anything for granted. It is not emotional, it is fully intellectual.

Fifthly, metaphysical study has some affinity with religion and imaginative literature since it is an inquiry into the meaning of reality. Both religion and an imaginative literature aim at getting behind mere appearances and interpreting the reality that lies beneath them. Like them, a metaphysical inquiry is directly concerned with the ultimate reality. At the same time, a metaphysical inquiry is different from religion and an imaginative literature in its spirit and method. Unlike religion, metaphysics adopts a purely scientific spirit. The objective of a metaphysical inquiry is intellectual satisfaction. The method it appeals is not to go with an immediate intuition or unanalyzed feeling. Metaphysical inquiry is established on the critical and systematic analysis of our conceptions. Thereby, in virtue of its spirit and method, a metaphysical inquiry belongs to the realm of science.

Sixthly, although it is said that a metaphysical inquiry belongs to the realm of science, it widely differs from other sciences that are related to study of a particular discipline. Unlike a branch of science, it is not concerned with one particular aspect of things. Metaphysics turns out to be not another departmental discipline with a special subject matter of its own. It is rather a universal science, one that considers all the objects that there are. On this characterization, then, metaphysics examines the items that constitute the subject matter for the other sciences. What is distinctive about metaphysics is the "way" or "method" in which it examines those objects; it examines

them from a particular perspective, from the perspective of their being beings or things that exist. Since it is non-numerical and non-quantitative, metaphysics differs from mathematics. At the same time, it differs from experimental sciences as well as logic and ethics. A metaphysical inquiry does not add anything to the stock of one's knowledge facts or events. It only helps one to grasp the way in which facts or events are to be interpreted. According to Taylor, the question of a metaphysical inquiry is not what in detail we must regard as the reality of any special set of processes, but what are the general conditions to which all reality, as such, conforms.

Seventhly, metaphysics is a difficult branch of study. The first difficulty is the simplicity and generality of a metaphysical problem. It is not easy to say precisely what is the subject dealt with by the metaphysician. This difficulty arises since one cannot specify any particular class of objects as its exclusive subject matter. Moreover, a metaphysical problem, by virtue of it's nature, is cut off from the support of physical experiment. The entire system is based on the rigid and systematic mental analysis of conceptions. Taylor is of the view that "metaphysics stands alone among the sciences, or alone with logic." The result of a metaphysical inquiry is to be found only by unassisted efforts of thought.

1.5 IS METAPHYSICS POSSIBLE?

Since the time of David Hume, there have been philosophers who have proposed that metaphysics is "impossible."The impossibility is asserted either because its questions are meaningless or because they are impossible to answer. According to Hume, a proposition can either be empirical or definite. But a metaphysical proposition is neither definite nor empirical. He maintains that propositions of mathematics and science alone are possible. The Humean thesis of rejection of metaphysics aroused Kant to the need of critically examining the position of metaphysics. With regard to the possibility of metaphysics two versions are found in the development of this study of philosophy. While one is the weak version, the other is the strong version. The weak form of the thesis that metaphysics is impossible is found in the

Kantian philosophy. According to Kant, metaphysics as science is not possible. He is of the view that knowledge in the proper sense is not possible unless the impression which we receive from the faculty of sensibility are systematically arranged by the understanding with the help of categories. The categories can be applied only when sense impressions or sense materials are presented to the mind. They are valid only within the realm of experience. This is the weak or moderate version that says that though metaphysics is beyond experience, yet it is not possible. In Kantian interpretation, metaphysics is possible at least in the realm of phenomena though not in the field of noumena. Again, Colin McGinn, in his book, Problems in Philosophy: The Limits of Inquiry (1993), maintains that the human mind is incapable of a satisfactory treatment of a large range of philosophical questions. McGinn particularly mentions about one's incapability to include any sort of metaphysical questions by the limit of human minds.

The strong form of the thesis that metaphysics is impossible is held by the logical positivists. According to logical positivists, metaphysical statements are meaningless. The logical positivists maintain that the meaning of a statement consisted entirely in the predictions it made about the possible experience. They further add that metaphysical statements made no predications about the experience. They further add that the predicate of a real proposition refers to some known facts. Facts stand for what is subject to experience. Therefore, real propositions are concerned only with the subjects which can easily undergo verification on the basis of experience. Therefore, they conclude, metaphysical statements are meaningless.
According to logical positivism any sentence to be cognitively meaningful it must express a statement that is either analytic or empirically verifiable. A sentence to have "cognitive," "factual," "descriptive," or "literal" meaning, must express a statement that could be shown to be true or false by reference to empirical observations. According to the verifiability principle many sentences of traditional philosophy are cognitively meaningless for they say about some non-verifiable existence like God, soul etc. Most of the

statements to be found in traditional philosophy in the form of metaphysical judgements are not false but nonsensical. Only meaningful statements were to be permitted scientific consideration and to be conferred the status of knowledge. Meaningfulness was strictly defined as being attributable only to those statements which are either analytic or synthetic. By this measure, metaphysical statements are neither analytic nor subject to empirically verifiable. Therefore, metaphysical statements must be considered Meaningless.

The meaning of a statement depends upon verification according to positivists. But the objects to which a metaphysical statement point cannot be verified. One cannot determine the truth or falsity of such statements. Therefore, metaphysics is not possible. The positivists try to show the nonsensical character of all metaphysical statements. Since the propositions of metaphysics are pseudo-propositions, they are concerned only with pseudo-problems. The science of metaphysics is in its very nature impossibility or that, if possible, it is useless, superfluous and unprogressive. According to Ayer, metaphysicians produce sentences which fail to conform to the condition under alone a sentence can be literally significant. Ayer is an anti-metaphysician and he wants to eliminate metaphysics with the help of the verifiability criterion. According to Walsh also the metaphysical system embodies the metaphysicians' imaginative pictures of the world.

Now, point is, if we rigorously stick to the verifiability principle as the positivists point out, then many of the laws of science would be meaningless. The metaphysical statements cannot be conclusively verified by experience, but they can be verified by the facts of experience. Logical positivists unduly equate experience with sense experience alone. There are other experiences also such as moral, religious, intuitive etc. Philosophy tries to see phenomena not as phenomena but as phenomena of reality. Therefore, metaphysics is not possible. The criticism of logical positivists against metaphysics does not hold ground. Criticising the logical positivists, Weismann remarks that, "To say metaphysics is nonsense is nonsense." The argument is that the proposition refuting metaphysics itself is nonsensical proposition because

it is not subject to verification. Against Walsh's opinion it may be said that when metaphysicians claim that reality is rational, he is not merely advocating a point of view, rather it makes a claim about the way things are.

The divergent opinion related to the metaphysical argument is not the indication of the vagueness of metaphysics but of its complex and multifaceted subject matter. Each philosopher interprets a fact in the light of his own perspective.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What is Metaphysics?

.....

Q2: Who has regarded metaphysics to be first philosophy?

.....

Q3: Who thought that there can be legitimate kind of metaphysical knowledge?

.....

Q4: What is 'ontology'?

.....

Q5: Who is the author of the book 'Elements of Metaphysics'

.....

Q6: What is concerned with the transcendental aspect of a thing?

.....

Q7: What distinguishes between phenomena and Noumena?

.....

Q8: Who has written the book, "Problems in Philosophy: the Limits of Inquiry"?

.....

Q9: According whom, metaphysical system embodied the metaphysicians imaginative pictures of the World?

.....

Q10: How philosophy tries to see phenomena?

.....



1.6: LET US SUM UP

- The word "Metaphysics" is derived from the two Greek words: 'meta' (after) and 'physika' (physics). Metaphysics is a systematic study of noumena or substance or reality.
- Metaphysics is also known as Ontology. The term 'ontology' is derived from two Greek words: 'onto' (being) and 'logos' (discourse or science). Hence, 'ontology' means the 'Theory of Being' or 'the Science of Pure Being'. It inquires into the nature of the 'reality.'
- The scope of metaphysics has expanded beyond the boundaries that Aristotle drew. The traditional metaphysical studies include Philosophy of Self, Eschatology, Cosmogony, Cosmology and Ontology.
- The study "Philosophy of Self" deals with the philosophical analysis of self and it's relation to the body. Metaphysician seeks to provide an account of the nature of being; but there is a variety of different perspectives from which one can provide such an account, and corresponding to these different perspectives are different sub-disciplines within metaphysics.
- In the sense of being a study of reality or being, in general, it is an integral part of philosophy. Our reflections show that things are not always what they seem to be. This means there is the difference between apparent and real things.
- According to logical positivism any sentence to be cognitively meaningful it must express a statement that is either analytic or empirically verifiable.
- A sentence to have "cognitive," "factual," "descriptive," or "literal" meaning, must express a statement that could be shown to be true or false by reference to empirical observations.

- The metaphysical statements cannot be conclusively verified by experience, but they can be verified by the facts of experience. Logical positivists unduly equate experience with sense experience alone.



1.7 FURTHER READING:

1. Taylor, A. E. 1978. Metaphysics, London: Oxford University Press
2. McGinn, Colin, 1993.Problems in Philosophy: The Limits of Inquiry, Oxford: Blackwell
3. Loux, Michael J. 1998. Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction. New York: Routledge



1.8: ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: A systematic study of noumena or substance or reality.

Ans to Q2: Aristotle

Ans to Q3: Kant

Ans to Q4: The theory of being or 'science of pure being'

Ans to Q5: A.E. Taylor

Ans to Q6: Metaphysics

Ans to Q7: Metaphysical Enquiry

Ans to Q8: McGinn

Ans to Q9: Walse

Ans to Q10: Philosophy tries to see phenomena not as phenomena but as phenomena of reality.



1.9: MODEL QUESTIONS:

A. Very short Questions

Q1: Write the etymological meaning of the term, 'Metaphysics'?

Q2: Mention the literal meaning of the term 'Ontology'.

Q3: Who has written the book 'Metaphysics'?

Q4: What is 'first philosophy' or 'theology'?

Q5: Who is the author of the book, 'Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction'?

B. Short Questions (Write in about 100-150 words)

Q1: Why metaphysics can also be called ontology?

Q2: How Taylor subdivides metaphysics?

Q3: How metaphysic deals with the meaning of validity of the universal predicated?

Q4: What is cosmology?

Q5: What are the three essential parts of metaphysics mentioned by J.N.Sinha?

C. Long Questions (Write in about 300-500 words)

Q1: What is metaphysics? Explain.

Q2: How Metaphysics is sub-divided? Discuss.

Q3: What is the nature of metaphysics? Discuss.

Q4: Is metaphysic possible? Critically Explain.

*** ***** ***