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“METAPHYSICS”

The origin of the word Metaphysics is in Greek. It is derived from the Greek word ‘Ta Meta Ta Phusika’ which means the things after the physics. Later metaphysics is interpreted as "the science of things which transcends what is physical or natural".

Philosophy has three branches Metaphysics, Epistemology and Ethics. But metaphysics is the primary to philosophy. It is an inquiry to the nature of the Reality as a whole. Reality can be seen from different perspectives like art, religion, science and so on. Likewise metaphysics is also a way or a strive to know and understand the Reality. Generality is the highest hall mark of metaphysics. In that sense metaphysics is a theory of Reality as an inquiry.

Philosophy originated with metaphysics both in Greece and as well as in India. There is a transition from ‘Thou’ conception to ‘It’ conception of nature. In the Thou conception, nature was the result of being presided over by some deities. Under this conception of nature the explanation were of two types.

Firstly, the goals and purposes of those who presided over the nature were teleological and secondly it was individual specific or specificity.

But ‘It’ conception of nature is free from such kind of deities and characterized by mechanistic and generality. Mechanistic in terms of causal laws, regularity and so on and because of which systematic science came to existence.

On the other hand because of Generality, metaphysical philosophy came into existence. During that period various thinkers started questioning as to ‘what is the principle which underlies everything or what is the ultimate principle?’

Now the question may arise, what is a principle? The answer to this question can be given by at first listing some defining features of a principle. A Principle is a substance which is changeless and abstract. In Indian philosophy it is called Vastu. Because it is changeless, it is beyond time and because it’s

abstract nature it is beyond space. The principle is primarily real but the empirical world is secondarily real. To understand the world we have to know the principle. Science and Metaphysics began together. Science starts with regularity and Metaphysics starts with generality.

At the beginning of metaphysical inquiry we can see a metaphysical tradition called substance metaphysics. For them the most important question is that, “what is the Ultimate principle underlying everything?” The question was at first addressed -by Thales and he himself said that water is the ultimate stuff of the world. Everything comes from water and goes back to it. But Parmenides said, it is ‘Being’ which means changeless and opposite of Becoming. It was the beginning of substance metaphysical tradition.

But on the other hand Heraclitus was concerned about the laws which governs the process called Reality and instead of accepting Being as Real, started asking “what are the laws which govern the process of Reality?” and he holds that change or Becoming is the Reality. This type of metaphysics is known as Process metaphysics.

We can see a similar kind of metaphysical speculation in Indian philosophy also. In one hand there is the Upanisadic or Brahmanical tradition which holds that the nature of Reality is unchanging and on the other hand the Buddhist philosophy or Buddhism which holds that the nature of Reality is momentary or changing. Change is the Real. For earlier Being and for the later Becoming is the nature of Reality.

There are various stages of metaphysics where it has given speculative importance in philosophical inquiry.

First stage

At the first stage of metaphysics in pre 20th century, it was Parmenides and Heraclitus who have introduced both substance and process metaphysics respectively. For one, Being is the ultimate Reality and for the other, Becoming is the Reality.

Second stage

At the second stage Aristotle was opposed to the Platonic view that Reality is changeless. For Aristotle Reality changed. For Plato, only Forms are real and Forms do not change. For Plato, the world of Forms or Universals is primarily real and the world of particular is secondarily real. He did not accept the world of change as real. But for Aristotle change is also real. He was looking for the fundamental categories of the world. He tries to understand "Being" as "Being" or "Being as qua being" or the study of attributes that belong to things merely insofar as they exist, e.g. existence, unity, sameness and difference. He said that we have to understand Being in terms of categories. For him category or kinds are very much important and these are the building blocks of the world and these are there in the world. He has identified 11 categories and accepts only two categories in Ontology -Universal and particular. In metaphysics a Universal is what particular things have in common, namely characteristics or qualities. In others words, universals are repeatable or recurrent entities that can be instantiated or exemplified by many particular things. For example, suppose there are two chairs in a room, each of which is green.

Aristotle admits God as the first mover, that which is moves without being moved. It is a primary "Cause" or "Mover" of all the motion in the universe. This is a theological view of him. So for him metaphysics has two branches, one is Ontology and the other one is Theology. But for him Ontology is the primary branch of metaphysics. It is the most general discipline which does not focus on any specific subject matter. The subject matter is that what is common to all subject matter.

Third stage

The dominant view of this stage was by medieval Christian thinkers who were influenced by biblical tradition. They were theologically oriented. For them metaphysics has two branches, one is Theology and the other one is Ontology. They have given more primacy to Theology

Fourth stage

This is the stage where modern philosophy started. It was dominated by the rationalist philosophers. For them metaphysics broadly have two branches, General and Special. General metaphysics deals with the theory of categories. But they gave more importance to the later one. They further divided speculative metaphysics into speculative Cosmology, speculative Theology and speculative Psychology. These are not usual and empirical but speculative only.

Fifth stage

Kantian philosophy has emerged at this stage. He has changed the idea of metaphysics and said that metaphysics is possible as a genuine inquiry not as a spurious inquiry. He said that it is an inquiry of our conceptual scheme which deploys to represent reality. For him to be real is to be represented. He holds that to study the conceptual scheme is the task of metaphysics. Independent of our representation there is nothing called Reality. These two are inseparable. Without representation there is no Reality and without Reality there is no representation.

Sixth stage

At this stage Hegel dealt with Heraclitus's idea of reality and agreed with him by saying that Reality is a process. For him it is a process of Spirit which seeks to realize itself as Absolute. It is possible only by reason. Therefore for him 'Real is rational and rational is Real'.

This is what pre twentieth century metaphysics was. But in twentieth century again metaphysics has got its importance in philosophy. The first half of twentieth century was dominated by anti-metaphysical trend. But in the second half was dominated by analytical metaphysics. They have divided metaphysics into two, as Descriptive metaphysics and Metaphysics as Category theory.

The idea of Descriptive metaphysics was born in Kantian thought and via Collingwood it again came into existence in twentieth century. Philosophers like P.F. Strawson, Stephan Körner, Nicholas Rescher, Hilary

Putnam, Nelson Goodman have developed it further. Among them also some have claimed that the conceptual scheme exist in our mind are static. But according to some other thinkers, the conceptual scheme changed across culture and time.

But on the other hand metaphysics as a category theory claims that, there are categories in the world outside of our mind. Those are basic and highest kind. In order to have knowledge we must conform to the categories, whereas according to descriptive metaphysics object of the world conforms to our mental categorical structure.

Though metaphysics did not get more importance in some thinkers but the metaphysical issues has been discussed with great importance throughout the philosophical tradition both in Indian and western context. It is an important branch of philosophy. Therefore, we can never reject metaphysics. In fact it is a higher level of inquiry and rational speculation.