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## UNIT 3 METHOD

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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Just as the notion of being underlines, penetrates and goes beyond all other notions, so also metaphysics is the department of human knowledge that underlines, penetrates, transforms, and unifies all other departments. So it is very important to look at different methods this particular branch of philosophy uses. In this unit, you are expected to understand the most important methods used by metaphysicians. Some of these methods are also in common with methods used in other branches of knowledge. These methods are:

- Speculative method
- Dialectic Method
- Retortive Method
- Induction
- Deduction
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Reflection
- Intuition

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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The term ‘method’ is derived from the Greek ‘methodos’ (‘road to’). Hence etymologically the term refers to the way of doing something, the system of procedure to obtain or reach the end intended. It is the way of procedure from the known to the unknown, from a given starting point to final propositions in a determined field of knowledge. In speculative sciences it indicates the road to propositions concerning that which exists or is thought to exist; whereas in normative sciences it indicates the road to the norms governing the doing of something. In the sciences, the use of correct methods is most important in order to make certain that the conclusions are correctly connected with the starting point and the foundation. Every scientific method is the road from the known starting point to a result which in one or the other is linked to this starting point. This connection can be established through logical reasoning or deduction, or through induction, synthesis, or analysis. The characteristic feature of the discipline of philosophy is the existence of different methods in it. When there was no distinction between science and philosophy and all knowledge was philosophy, it was thought that the task of philosophy was to give a complete and coherent account of the universe as a whole. This view originated in ancient Greece and lasted for several centuries in the West until alternatives to it were developed. A method is a set of directives that serve to guide the process towards a result. Metaphysical claims can vary in their model status: some are contingent truths while others are necessary truths. One would expect that quite different methods must be employed in these different cases. In fact, the variety is considerably greater than what it appears.

The metaphysical methods are not exclusively employed by philosophers only. Every human at some time or other utilizes metaphysical methods in one’s thinking on philosophical problems. However, these methods are mainly utilized by the philosophers. Secondly the metaphysical methods are not absolutely different from scientific method. It has much in common with scientific methods. We can very well say that in solving its problems concerning science, the metaphysicians utilize the same methods of induction and deduction as used in scientists. Thus, in order to understand the philosophical and the metaphysical methods these two methods must be discussed.

This Unit includes brief overviews of a few of the prominent Western and Indian metaphysical methods.

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### 3.2 SPECULATIVE METHOD

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The intellectual development reached its climax in Athens as the various streams of Greek thought converged there during the fifth century B.C. The age of Pericles saw Athens at the peak of its cultural creativity and political influence. The development of democracy and technical advances in agriculture and navigation encouraged humanistic spirit and speculative method. Pre-socratic philosophers had been relatively isolated in their speculations. Now in Athens such philosophical speculation became more representative of the city’s intellectual life as a whole, which continued to move toward conceptual thought, critical analysis, reflection, and dialectic.

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### 3.3 DIALECTIC METHOD

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Dialectic method of Socrates and Plato was essentially a method of discussion and debate in which the participants progressed from one point to another, each one

disputing the point of the other until they could reach an undisputable point. It consisted in reasoning through rigorous dialogue as a method of intellectual investigation intended to expose false beliefs and elicit truth. The strategy was to take up a sequence of questions with whomever one was in discussion, relentlessly analyzing one by one the implications of the answers in such a way as to bring out the flaws and inconsistencies inherent in a given belief or statement. Attempts to define the essence of something were rejected one after another as being either too wide or too narrow. Often such an analysis ended in complete perplexity. Yet such times it was clear that philosophy was concerned less with knowing the right answers than with the strenuous attempt to discover those answers. To practice philosophy in the dialectic method was continually to subject one's thoughts to the criticism of reason in earnest dialogue with others. Genuine knowledge was not something that could simply be received from another, but was rather a personal achievement, won only at the cost of constant intellectual struggle and self-critical reflection. Dialectic takes a different turn in Hegel. Hegelian dialectic is not merely epistemological, but ontological too. The method of dialectic involves thesis-antithesis-synthesis in which thesis, antithesis and synthesis are only different 'moments' in the movement of thought resulting in both continuity and difference. The very birth of the thesis is the birth of the antithesis as well as the synthesis. The thesis carries the seeds of the antithesis within itself and the two together carry in them the seeds of synthesis. Dialectic is not a one time movement. It does not stop once a synthesis is reached out of a thesis and an antithesis. It moves on to a higher level in the next stage to a new moment when the synthesis of the previous level itself becomes the new thesis which generates its antithesis and from which yet another synthesis emerges. In this new synthesis, something of the previous synthesis remains, but with something from its antithesis added on. This novel synthesis again becomes the thesis for the next level of dialectical movement and it goes on like this.

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### 3.4 RETORTIVE METHOD

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Towards the end of the patristic period, St Augustine tried to answer the problem of certainty with his method of retorsion. He held that the skeptics are mistaken in assuming that certainty of knowledge is impossible and that human can achieve only "probable knowledge," i.e., ideas whose validity is highly probable. Since any degree of probable knowledge implies an approach toward completely certain knowledge, the assumption of probably valid truths presupposes the existence and attainability of absolute truths. If the skeptic argues that no real objects of his sensory experience exist, nevertheless he cannot doubt the fact that his perception does exist. The person who doubts all truths is caught in a logical dilemma, for one must exist in order to doubt; in fact, no matter what else one doubts, one proves one's own existence through the act of doubting. Nor is it of any use to suggest that one might err in thinking that one exists, for 'even if one errs, one exists' (*Si fallor, sum*).

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### 3.5 INDUCTION

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The principles of different sciences are arrived at by means of inductive process. For example in psychiatry some general principles concerning mental disease are discovered by observation of the behavior of mental patients, its recording, its analysis, classification and finally generalization to arrive at certain common principles. This is the method of induction. It is surely very true that many important metaphysical propositions concerning contingent matters of fact are such that they cannot be known in non-inferential way: they must be justified on the basis of other justified beliefs. Consider, for example, the

thesis that humans have immaterial immortal souls, or the thesis that the mind is identical with the brain, or the thesis that the theoretical entities postulated by physics are real. How do metaphysicians proceed in such cases? It is hard to see any alternative to the inductive methods employed within science where one employs such notions as hypothetico-deductive method, crucial experiments, and inference to the best explanation.

### 3.6 DEDUCTION

Deduction is the process of reasoning from a known principle to an unknown. Deduction can be of two types, Logical deduction and transcendental deduction.

**Logical deduction**

Logical deduction is the process of reasoning from one or several logical content to its or their logical implications.

**Transcendental Deduction**

Transcendental deduction is the process of justifications of the necessity of some conditions of a fact. Metaphysics, like other sciences, will use logical deduction when it will group premises to come to further conclusions. But it will use transcendental deduction to show the necessity of certain conclusions. In the measure in which the facts to be explained will be necessary, in that measure their conditions will also be necessary.

**Check Your Progress I**

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

- 1) Explain briefly Dialectic Method.
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- 2) What do you understand by Induction?
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## 3.7 ANALYSIS

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Analysis is the discovery of the parts of the whole. One fundamental method for establishing metaphysical truths that are necessary is by showing that they are analytically true statements, where this is a matter of showing that they follow from logical truths in the narrow sense via substitution in accordance with relevant definitions. But how are the definitions to be assessed? Here there are at least two fundamental criteria: one positive and one negative. As regards the negative criterion, a definition must not be exposed to counter examples, so a very important task in evaluating a definition is to see whether it is possible to construct counter examples to the definition. If it appears to satisfy this negative criterion, then the next question is whether the definition enables one to derive what seem to be the fundamental necessary truths involving the concept in question. Analysis can of different types.

### Logical Analysis

Logical analysis is the discovery of the parts of an explicit content of knowledge, e.g., analysis of a concept.

### Transcendental Analysis

Transcendental analysis is the discovery of the a-priori necessary conditions of a given experience. (here transcendental means ‘going beyond’ thus ‘transcending ‘ the particularities of the objects of the experience to concentrate on the experience itself and on its conditions).

### Analytical Judgments

Analytical judgments are those which express what the analysis has revealed. (If the analysis was true, to deny these judgments means to introduce a contradiction.) Analytical judgments can be divided again into two as, Analytical judgments in the strict sense and Analytical judgments in the broad sense

#### Analytical Judgments in the strict sense.

Analytical judgments in the strict sense are those which express what the logical analysis has revealed (those who deny such true judgments put a contradiction between terms of contents of judgments.)

#### Analytical Judgments in the Broad Sense

Analytical judgments in the broad sense are those which express what the transcendental analysis has revealed. (Those who would deny such true judgments formed on the basis of the analysis of the experience of judgments itself would put contradiction between the terms and the exercise of the denial).

Metaphysics, as the other sciences, will of course use logical analysis in the frequent definitions of its terms. But its proper method will be the ‘transcendental analyses. It will try to discover the a priori conditions of its starting point, i.e. our sensitive-rational experience. Thus it will discover the nature of the agent, the structure of the primary object of the knowledge, the existence and the nature of the agent’s ultimate end.

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### 3.8 SYNTHESIS

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Synthesis is the putting together of parts to compose or re – compose a whole. Metaphysics will use synthesis, first in so far as it rests on the direct judgments which imply several syntheses and the exercise of the first principles. Metaphysics will further aim at synthesis in as far as it will try to synthesize all its discoveries and put them into complex conclusions, theses, group of theses, sections and parts so as to form a complete treatise of metaphysics. It can be of two types. A posteriori synthesis and a priori synthesis

#### A Posteriori Synthesis

A posteriori synthesis is the putting together of parts which have been the objects of particular experience

#### A Priori Synthesis

A priori synthesis is that union of parts which is always taking place in a certain experiences, thus the data of that experience may vary, e.g. the direct judgments implies always a concrete and objective synthesis.

#### Synthetic Judgments

Synthetic judgments are those which express what experience reveals to be one. There will be definitions in metaphysics and they will fulfill the quite legitimate purpose of explicitation. But it is true that in metaphysics we want to do more than define essences. We want information about reality and judgments of existence. These will be grounded on experiences. When judgments bear on the phenomenal as phenomenal, then the judgments are synthetic a posteriori. When the experience and reflections on it manifest principles which are spontaneously operative in experience (as the principle of identity and principle of causality) then we have here a basis for what are called synthetic a priori Judgments and with the help of these we are able or may even be forced to affirm realities which either belong to the material world or transcend it.

#### Synthetic A Posteriori Judgments

Synthetic a posteriori judgments are those which expresses the unity of the particular data of experience, e.g. the judgment that “the thief is in the room” (those who deny them go against the contingent truth, but actually something else might be the case, and then the denial would not be false.)

#### Synthetic A Priori Judgments

Synthetic a priori judgments are those which express the putting together, (the synthesis), which experiences as the experiences always implies. E.g. “The first principle of objectivity” is a synthesis, always implied in all judgments. The first principle of objectivity that “there is truth” is a spontaneous primary evidence which we recognize by reflecting on what we find within us; it is even a conviction which one cannot reject without restating it. St. Thomas has well expressed this when he writes: “it is self-evident that truth exists, for even denying it would admit it. Were there no such thing as truth, then it would be true that there is no truth; something then is true, and therefore there is truth”. In fact those who deny them go against a necessary truth and thus they always commit a contradiction.

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### 3.9 REFLECTION

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Metaphysics uses reflection as its way to explore reality. Metaphysics will use reflections both in the sense of concomitant reflections on our direct judgments and other sensitive-relational experiences and of subsequent reflections on the implications of such acts. The concomitant reflection supplies the very first ground of certainty because we have here the most intimate unity of intelligibility of thing and understanding, since in ourselves we find both intelligible and intelligent. The subsequent reflections will use analyses, synthesis and deduction. These exist different forms and manners. We have explained it in detail in the above section.

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### 3.10 INTUITION

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Another important method that philosophers employ in attempting to arrive at necessary truths is that of appealing to intuitions. Where a metaphysical truth, if necessary, appears to be an analytic truth, the appeal to intuition would not seem to be a satisfactory terminus since it provides no account of why the proposition that seems to be necessarily true, whereas an analytic derivation would do precisely that.

Many philosophers hold, however, that there are a priori necessary truths that are not analytic. So, for example, there are propositions concerning apparently simple, incompatible properties, such as the propositions that nothing can be both red and green at the same place at the same time. In addition, if ethical statements have cognitive content, then it is natural to think that there are basic moral statements that would be true in any possible world and thus which are necessary such as the proposition that pain is intrinsically bad and the proposition that the killing of innocent persons is seriously wrong. But if this is right, then, if it can plausibly be argued that such propositions are of analytically true, there may be no alternative to the view that the truth of such propositions is known by means of some sort of direct, intellectual intuition, however uninformative such an account may seem.

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### 3.11 INDIAN METHODS

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Many Western scholars are of the view that Indian methods are always mystical. Although it is partially true, along with the mystical experiences the knowledge of the ultimate can be deduced through sound epistemological methods. Reality belongs to a level which cannot be attained by sense experience and by generalizations from sense perception. Thus in the Brahdaranyaka Upanishad, yajnavakya in his discussion with the priests, shows how one has to proceed from the crude material earth, through the elements of water, air and fire in the increasing order of subtlety to the general notion of being: “he who dwells in all beings, and within all beings are, and who rules all beings from within, he is the self, the ruler within, the immortal.” ( Brh. Up., III, VII, 15.).

But beyond this general aspect of material being (adhibhuta) are the levels of consciousness: one has to go up others, the internal sense of mind, and knowledge, to the inmost core of our conscious self which is the pure aspect of witness. “Hence ultimate reality has to be conceived as unseen, but seeing; unheard, but hearing; unperceived, seer but he,... there is no other knower but he. This is thy self, the ruler within, the immortal.”( Brh. III, VII, 23.). Thus the search for reality ends in the pure conscious self, which is the purest and subtlest core of all things.

The same method of procedure appears in other Upanishads also. Kena Upanishad begins with the word “kena,” by whom: “impelled by whom, at whose will does the mind move, does the vital airs act, by whose movement does the speech speak, the eye and the ear and their presiding deities attain their objects?” the answer is that the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of speech and the eye of the eye is the Real beyond, who is indicated by the key word of the Upanishad, “Tadvanam,” namely the goal and object of all aspirations. He is so subtle that none of the human faculties can grasp him.

A parable makes the matter clear: once the gods were standing together and bragging about their feats in a victory they gained against the demons. Suddenly an unknown deity appears in the vicinity. God *Agni*, fire, is deputed to find out his identity. As a contention for answering his question the stranger challenged *Agni* to prove his power by burning a straw he put forth; *Agni* failed and is turned back. Then the god of the air, *Vayu*, approached and is turned back since he failed to blow the straw off. Finally, *Indra*, the god of the sky, approached the stranger. Then suddenly the deity vanished. Uma, the goddess of divine wisdom, appearing in mid-air told him that it was Brahman, the supreme, who appeared to them, and that only through him they had achieved the victory. The lesson of the parables is that action, represented by fire, and sense experience symbolized by the god of air, cannot in any way attain ultimate reality even the intellect, symbolized by the god of the sky, *Indra*, cannot directly attain reality, unless it is manifested by divine wisdom in mid air, i.e., in the cave of the heart, by a sort of intuition.

The reality is so subtle and so beyond all sense and imagination that those who think they know it, do not know it, while those who think they do not know it may very well have attained a real knowledge of it. But the mode of procedure is clear: go beyond the senses to ultimate and immutable reality, that is, the basis of all intelligibility and consciousness.

Indian philosophers also accept six means of knowledge (*pramanas*): perception, inference, verbal testimony, comparison, presumption, and non-cognition. Prof. Srinivasa Rao, in one of his recent articles, discusses these means of knowledge showing the intrinsic relation between metaphysics and epistemology. *Pratyaksha* (perception) is sense perception including mental perception. Perception may be determinate or indeterminate, ordinary or extraordinary, or yogic. This is a method universally accepted by all schools of Indian philosophy, but with their own individually prescribed interpretations. *Anumana* (inference) is necessarily linked with a universal relation and its recognition. The universal relation must have been cognized on a previous occasion, and must be re-cognized for inferential knowledge to occur. It is a process of reasoning by which we are led to what is not given in perception, but is always based on what is given in perception. This inference may be for oneself (*svarthanumana*) as in the case of a person non-verbally inferring within oneself the presence of fire on the hill upon observing smoke there; or, it may be for another person (*pararthanumana*), expressed in language, as when one argues to prove that there must be fire on the hill because smoke is observed. *Sabda* (verbal testimony) is a means of valid knowledge that enjoys a special kind of centrality in many schools. If a person has known things as they really are, his / her testimony should be accepted as a legitimate source of knowledge until we ourselves are able to attain direct knowledge of things. In several fields of knowledge, we accept the testimony of others even without questioning the truth of such testimony. *Upamana* (comparison) yields knowledge derived from judgments of similarity. A remembered object is like a



perceived one. “y is like x,” where x is immediately perceived and y is an object perceived on a previous occasion that becomes the content of consciousness in the form of memory. For example, if someone has never seen a wild cow but has been told by others that it looks like a domestic cow, he will know that it is a wild cow when he, later on, sees a wild cow in the forest. *Arthapatti* (postulation or presumption) is knowledge obtained through postulating a fact in order to make another fact intelligible. For instance, a man fasts during the day, but continues to gain weight. Then one must assume, barring physiological problems, that he eats at night. *Anupalabdhi* (non-cognition) is the only means of the cognition of non-existence. It yields knowledge of absence where an object would be immediately perceived if it were there. However, not every instance of the non-cognition of something proves its non-existence. For example, the failure of a person to see a chair in a dark room (i.e., non-apprehension by the person) by no means indicates that the chair is not there. Hence, for non-apprehension to be a sign of absence, the attempt at apprehension must be under appropriate conditions, which are conditions sufficient to perception.

These six ways of knowing have played a very important role in the development of Indian philosophy. For example, if certain forms of verbal testimony like the Vedas were not to be allowed as sources of correct knowledge, the entire system of Vedanta would have been impossible. Besides, *pramanas* assume significance because of the inseparable relation between epistemology and metaphysics.

**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What do you understand by ‘apriori synthesis’?

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2) How do you explain Pratyaksha?

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### 3.12 LET US SUM UP

Traditionally, metaphysics was practiced as a top-down, a priori discipline, with Euclidean geometry as its model. The metaphysician begins with self-evident principle of a highly general nature, together with appropriate definitions, and proceeds to draw out the necessary consequences.

## Definition and Nature of Metaphysics

This approach is clearly exemplified in the work of two prominent eighteenth – century metaphysicians; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Benedict (Baruch) de Spinoza. Leibniz spun metaphysical gold out of the dross of the principle of non-contradiction and sufficient reason. His entire monadology (monad means a ‘unit’ or ‘one’) replete with an infinite collection of possible worlds, with the actual world (the best of all possible worlds) consisting of a myriad of mutually reflecting, simple mind like substances. Spinoza was even more self-consciously imitating Euclid, but his conclusions are almost diametrically opposed to those of Leibniz. Spinoza’s ontology comprises exactly one substance (God or nature), of which the mental and the physical realms are two aspects, and everything about the one substance is absolutely necessary – only the actual is really possible.

In the course of the history the discipline of metaphysics has been regularly contested. Empiricists, led by David Hume, have often attacked a priori metaphysics, contrasting its conflicting results with the astonishing success of empirical sciences, on the one hand, and of mathematics on the other. At the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, Immanuel Kant, in response to Hume’s critique, attempted a partial vindication of a priori metaphysics. According to him metaphysics can play a legitimate role as handmaid to science and a less straightforward role in upholding ethics. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the appetite for idealist metaphysics began to fade. A realist assault on this tradition was launched by Alexius Meinong, Bertrand Russell, Gottlob Frege, and George Moore, and their style of argumentation, as much as the content of their conclusions, was influential in shaping the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries’ more circumspect approach to metaphysics. Later a more scientifically minded thinkers, with the help of logical positivism and inspired by the Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, declared all metaphysical discourses completely meaningless. But the short-coming of the logical positivism was rapidly exposed in the course of time. Now metaphysics cautiously revived by heirs of both movements is once again a flourishing discipline in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Contemporary metaphysics is characterized by a bottom-up approach rather than the traditional top-down approach. The contemporary metaphysician begins with a problem or puzzle, often generated by some basic data or the consequences of such data. To say that contemporary metaphysics is bottom-up is not to saddle it with a crude inductivism – the fallacious inference of general theories from finite data. The task of the contemporary metaphysician is not so much to prove an ontology, either from high-level first principle or from lower-level data. Rather it aims to propose an ontology to accommodate and explain the data, to resolve apparent conflicts by explaining away the appearance of such, or explain why the data are misleading. The methodology is less like that of pure mathematics and more like that of science. Given a finite amount of data, the number of potentially adequate metaphysical theories seems limited only by the imagination of practicing metaphysicians. To decide between theories we need more than data accommodation. Metaphysicians typically subscribe to Occam’s razor – the injunction to refrain from multiplying entities beyond necessity. The upshot of these principles is then, that a theory must explain the data; and, of two theories that both explain the data, the theory with fewer ontic commitments is to be preferred.

In short metaphysics starts from experience, rests on experience and uses the reflection which accompanies it. Though metaphysics uses logical analysis, logical deduction and advances to logical syntheses, its ‘speciality’ is in the use of the transcendental analysis and transcendental deduction. It will thus come to the transcendental conclusions or synthesis. These will not simply be laws which explain particular types of facts, but the expression of the actual real conditions of the necessary experience of being, as

we have it in our sensitivo-rational experience. Thus, the synthesis will speak of real causes, of their nature, of their structure, of their relations.

Metaphysics will then be intrinsically *a priori* in so far as it will not rest on the particular data of our sensitivo-rational experiences, but on the experiences itself and its necessary conditions. Metaphysics, however, will be extrinsically *a posteriori* in as far as there must be an experience of data (whichever they are), before we can have the transcendental analysis of the experiences and the transcendental deduction of the necessity of its conditions.

In as far as metaphysics is *a priori*, it pre-exists totally and perfectly in the sensitivo-rational experiences in which it is exercised. Again metaphysics does not have, as a pre requisite, the full elaboration of scientific knowledge as some thought it had. As long as the proper standpoint of metaphysics has not been discerned, one would be inclined to think of metaphysics as a synthesis of all sciences. But once its standpoint has been discovered i.e. to explain “the science of being as being”, then we need only explore our necessary affirmation of being in its essential conditions, without having to wait for all the returns of scientific investigations.

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### 3.13 KEY WORDS

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- Dialectic** : Dialectic (the dialectical method) is a method of argument, which has been central to both Eastern and Western philosophy since ancient times. The word “dialectic” originates in Ancient Greece, and was made popular by Plato’s Socratic dialogues. Dialectic is rooted in the ordinary practice of a dialogue between two or more people who hold different ideas and wish to persuade each other. The presupposition of a dialectical argument is that the participants, even if they do not agree, share at least some meanings and principles of inference.
- Judgment** : Judgment is an act of the intellect in which we say something of an object by way of affirmation or denial.

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### 3.15 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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**Answers to Check Your Progress I**

- 1) Dialectic method of Socrates and Plato was essentially a method of discussion and debate in which the participants progressed from one point to another, each one disputing the point of the other until they could reach an undisputable point. It consisted in reasoning through rigorous dialogue as a method of intellectual investigation intended to expose false beliefs and elicit truth. Dialectic takes a different turn in Hegel. Hegelian dialectic is not merely epistemological, but ontological too. The method of dialectic involves thesis-antithesis-synthesis in which thesis, antithesis and synthesis are only different ‘moments’ in the movement of thought resulting in both continuity and difference. The very birth of the thesis is the birth of the antithesis as well as the synthesis.
- 2) The principles of different sciences are arrived at by means of inductive process. For example in psychiatry some general principles concerning mental disease are discovered by observation of the behavior of mental patients, its recording, its analysis, classification and finally generalization to arrive at certain common principles. This is the method of induction.

**Answers to Check Your Progress II**

- 1) A priori synthesis is that union of parts which is always taking place in a certain experiences, thus the data of that experience may vary, e.g. the direct judgments implies always a concrete and objective synthesis.
- 2) *Pratyaksha* (perception) is sense perception including mental perception. Perception may be determinate or indeterminate, ordinary or extraordinary, or yogic. This is a method universally accepted by all schools of Indian philosophy, but with their own individually prescribed interpretations.