

**Studies in the Theory of  
Human Values**

*Grounds of Value Judgments*

By

**Michael H. Mitias**

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## Preface

The focus of this book is on two basic types of value experience: the first is aesthetic experience, and the second is moral experience. The analysis of these two types of human experience is preceded by a discussion of the method employed in undertaking the analysis of the essential structure of aesthetic value that, first, exists as a schema in the mind of the artist in the process of artistic creation and comes to life as an aesthetic object in the mind of the aesthetic perceiver in aesthetic perception as an aesthetic object, and second, exists in the mind of the moral agent in the process of moral deliberation in which the moral value *qua* schema—principle, norm, or rule—is translated by the moral agent into a particular moral judgment.

This methodological strategy is based on two fundamental assumptions. First, the adequacy of the method an inquirer employs in her attempt to understand or analyze any dimension of human experience is a necessary condition, indeed an influential factor, for an adequate understanding of the phenomenon under consideration or analysis. Broadly, the kind of road one chooses to reach a certain destination, which may be rough, short, long, winding, rocky, or smooth, plays a significant role in reaching it effectively. Accordingly, how we analyze a phenomenon, be it intellectual or natural, is instrumental in the kind of analysis we perform on its essential structure. This methodological procedure is urgently needed, especially in the analysis of the various types of human phenomena, primarily because the human, as such, is not given to empirical observation and verification the way natural objects are. For example, moral, aesthetic, or religious experiences, and consequently

the values that underlie them, are not objects we encounter in the social market, the museum, the library, the temple, or the marketplace. These and similar phenomena are human creations. This is why we can justifiably ask: are they real? If they are, in what sense are they real? How can we know their essential nature? Under what experiential or logical conditions is this kind of knowledge possible? Again, how can we establish criteria for establishing the validity of the knowledge we claim about them?

In the studies that comprise the bulk of this book, I argue that (1) although human values are not ready made or natural objects, they are real, and that (2) their reality is essentially noetic in character. The basis of this assertion is that all values come into being as an existential response to peremptory demands inherent in the human essence. I argue that this essence is not only real but also a universal reality that inheres in the formal organization of the human body as a human species and as an individual human being. The reality and universality of this essence is not only the ontic basis of the objectivity of any claim we make about it, but also the objectivity of the values that emanate from its essential constitution. This fundamental assumption is an indispensable element of the method I employ in analyzing the emergence and nature of human values.

The purpose of focusing my attention on the question of the objectivity of human values is to provide an objective basis for value judgments in the domains of moral and aesthetic experience. This question is one of the most discussed and most contentious in philosophy in general and axiology in particular. I assume that the validity of the criteria of value judgment derives from the extent to which human values are grounded objectively. Although a valuable experience is undergone by a subject and is necessarily objec-

tive, nevertheless, the value judgment of the experience derives its objectivity from its conformity to the criteria that are founded on a reasonably articulated conception of value.

The analysis of value experiences advanced in this book is novel; it is based on my conception of the genesis of the human essence from the cosmic process and the genesis of human values from the human essence. The articulation of this conception is based on the most recent findings in neuroscience and philosophy of mind. It is defined in my *A Theory of Human Values* and *The Art of Human Living*. These two books do not contain an analysis of the possibility of value judgment. The present collection of essays is devoted to this question.

The cornerstone of the method I employ in this book is well known in the philosophical community; it is based on scientific and metaphysical speculation, which is one of the primary functions of reason or the human mind *qua* intellect. Many philosophers dismissed this type of speculation from the philosophical realm of discourse during the last century, in the heels of the rise of the scientific method of inquiry as the most effective means of exploring the nature of the world. Entailed in this radical shift is the dismissal of any form or dimension of human experience from the sphere of scientific inquiry, primarily because this type of experience cannot be an object of empirical observation and verification. This is a primary reason why the majority of philosophers during the past century were either language analysts or scientific philosophers. Broadly, the kind of object we seek to investigate to a large extent determines the appropriate method of its investigation.

In the first study in this book, I argue against the view that human experience and the values that emanate from it are not real or

cannot be investigated by proposing an appropriate method for analyzing their emergence and nature. My purpose in this study is to provide the conceptual guidelines and methodological framework for the analysis of human values.

The second study focuses on the task of aesthetic theory. An adequate definition of this task should proceed from a reasonable conception of the essential structure of the (1) artistic and (2) aesthetic phenomena. What is the basis, or source, of these two concepts? I propose that the task of aesthetic theory is fourfold: What is the nature of these two phenomena? How do we ground the aesthetic judgment? What is the role of art in the life of the human individual and human civilization?

In the third study, I address, in some detail, one of the perennial questions in aesthetics, viz., the grounding of aesthetic judgment: is beauty in the eye of the beholder? But first, what is beauty in fine art? What makes an artwork aesthetically beautiful? Regardless of whether the judgment of aesthetic beauty is subjective or objective, how can we justify its validity? This question necessarily leads to an analysis of “the artistic” and “the aesthetic.”

In the fourth study, I explore the possibility and justifiability of moral obligation: can a truly moral person, under duress, act immorally or take a short vacation from her moral nature or from the obligation to act morally? Well, what makes an action moral? What is the relation between the moral value—moral rule, norm, or principle qua schema-- and the particular moral judgment one makes in a particular moral situation? How can the value be translated into a valid particular judgment? Again, what is the source of moral obligation? Is it inherent in the human essence, or is it instilled by society or some religious authority?

The fifth study is a fresh visit to the problem of free will, which is a necessary condition for the possibility of moral experience. This is one of philosophy's perennial questions. The reason for revisiting it in this volume is that new arguments against its possibility are advanced from the standpoint of the latest findings of the general theory of relativity. I argue against this view. My argument is based on the fundamental assumption that free will is an indispensable condition not only for being moral but also for being human.

In what follows, I shall present a synopsis of the five studies sequentially. The purpose of this presentation is to give the reader a general idea of the general aim and structure of the book.

### **Chapter-by-Chapter Summary of the Studies**

The thesis I elucidate and defend in the first study is that metaphysical speculation, the way it was understood by the major philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Whitehead, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger, is not only a justifiable philosophical undertaking that aims at understanding the nature of human experience of the universe but also the meaning of existence in general and human existence in particular. This defense begins with a brief remark that serves as a reminder of the background against which the defense is developed; it also serves as a reminder of the historical stream of criticisms against the possibility or usefulness of metaphysics in the life of the mind. Second, I explain the sense in which metaphysical speculation was understood and the factors that prompted philosophers to resort to it in their effort to understand the meaning of human existence: what is the essential structure of the human essence—mind, psyche, spirit, reason, or soul? Why does the universe exist rather than not? Why do I exist rather than

not? How should I live, love, and die? Third, I argue that metaphysical speculation is a justifiable mode of reflection on natural and human reality, no less meaningful or justifiable than the empirical method of justification.

The second study is a reevaluation of the task of aesthetic theory in light of the development of art, science, and technology during the past century. The thesis I explain and defend is that aesthetic analysis is essentially ontological. I argue that the artistic dimension the artist creates and the aesthetic dimension the aesthetic perceiver co-creates and appreciates in the process of aesthetic perception are human realities, just as rocks, plants, and lions are. In defending this thesis, I, first, briefly highlight the current cultural states of philosophy, science, and technology, as well as the revival of metaphysics as a branch of philosophy; second, I argue in some detail “the artistic” and “the aesthetic” are real objects, in the sense that they can be objects of reflection and analysis; third, I propose that the task of aesthetic theory is four-fold: first, an examination of the nature of artistic creation and the way this creation inheres as a potentiality in the formal organization of the representation the artist creates; second, an examination of the essential structure of the process in which the artistic dimension is transformed into an aesthetic dimension; third, a discussion of the question of the grounding or establishing the validity of the aesthetic judgment; and, fourth, a detailed examination of the role of art in the development of human civilization.

The focus of the third study is the question of grounding the aesthetic judgment in fine art: is beauty, aesthetic quality, in the eye of the beholder, the aesthetic perceiver, the artwork, or both? The thesis I shall advance and defend is composed of six propositions: (1) the artist is the source of the artwork, (2) the stuff of

the artistic dimension of the artist creates is human values in their mode of existence as schemas and in their mode of existence as realized human meaning, (3) the creation of the artistic dimension is a creation human depth, which is a depth of realized values, (4) this depth unfolds in the aesthetic experience as a world of human meaning, (5) the unfolding of this depth is a disclosure of the truth of the meaning of a dimension of human or natural reality, and (6) the aesthetic judgment is an articulation of the human depth the perceiver apprehends in the activity of aesthetic perception. This depth is the basis of the evaluation of the artwork and the measure of its value in comparison to other artworks. The premise underlying this line of reasoning is that grounding the aesthetic judgment in effect grounds the aesthetic experience, primarily because the object we judge comes to life as a world of human beings within the aesthetic experience.

The question I discuss in some detail in the fourth study is whether a truly moral person can, under duress or voluntarily, act immorally. Put differently, can a moral person voluntarily, no matter the difficulty of the situation she is in, take a short vacation from her moral principles, norms, or rules? I advance a new analysis and justification of the answer to this question. My analysis is based on the most recent findings in science and philosophy, as well as the gradually emerging global orientation in the various societies of the world. The thesis I defend is that a truly moral person cannot, in principle, act immorally regardless of the severity, torture, pain, deprivation, or suffering she might face. In establishing the validity of this thesis, I, first, discuss the cultural conditions which underlie the analysis of my thesis; second, I advance a new conception of human nature; third, I provide a reasonably defensible conception of the origin of human values and their role in human life; and,

fourth, I argue in some detail that that a truly moral person cannot, in principle, act immorally, with a critical and evaluative of “in principle” or whether an exception to the obligation to act morally is justifiable.

The focus of the fifth study is whether free will is an illusion. This question arises from two sources. The first is practical and the second is theoretical. The first source is individual and communal lived experiences, and the second is intellectual. The first arises as an existential demand inherent in human nature, and the second arises as a demand to clarify the nature and implications of this demand. This is one of the perennial questions of philosophy, primarily because it underlies every meaningful goal, action, project, or plan we seek to realize in our lives, individually and collectively. This study is a response to the most recent view of the illusory character of free will advanced from the standpoint of the findings and implications of the general theory of relativity. I argue this view again. The thesis I elucidate and defend is that free will, and more concretely will as a faculty, is a primary capacity constitutive of the essential structure of human nature, or the human mind. In establishing the plausibility of this thesis, I first, present an analysis of the arguments of a contemporary physicist, Alberto Casas, who argues that free will is an illusion; second, I present a conception of the genesis of the human essence; and, third, I advance a defense of the thesis that will, or the capacity of willing, is a constitutive capacity of the human mind.

## Chapter One

# Another Look at the Viability of Metaphysical Speculation

### **Why Another Look is Needed?**

It may seem historically myopic, philosophically outlandish, and practically foolish for a contemporary philosophical critic, historian, or scholar to take seriously, much less entertain, the possibility of defending the justifiability or viability of metaphysical speculation or to indulge in theorizing on the nature of the universe as an ordered whole or any of its primary dimensions, especially in light of the past and current attacks or marginalization of the principles, relevance, or concepts of metaphysics as a branch of philosophy. The attempt to know the scheme of nature, the existential condition of human life, and the conditions of survival and progress is a daunting and intimidating undertaking; it transcends the capacity of the human mind to penetrate their magnitude, intricacy, and inner depth. The human being, *qua* mind, seems to exist as a fleeting ripple in the cosmic process or as an insignificant drop in the ocean of being. No matter the greatness of its power of intellect or imagination, how can such a mind dare to adventure, much less embark, on an inquiry into a reality that transcends its capacity of comprehension? Even if we comprehend the essential nature of physical reality, and even if this comprehension is unquestionably sound or to some extent reliable, can we grasp or know the power that underlies the existence of the cosmic process? Can the human mind jump out of the sphere of its finitude, stand

on a mountain of the sea of infinity, and contemplate the cosmic process as a dynamic reality and as a whole? Can it comprehend it in the fullness of its being? We may infer some features of this power on the basis of its concrete manifestations, but can we, in principle, grasp it? This knowledge may be helpful in our attempt to organize the project of the individual and communal life, but can it assume the status of true or valid knowledge? As the ancient skeptics argued, is a universal criterion for establishing the truth of the nature of this process possible?

The insight implicit in the preceding practical and, to some extent, theoretical line of reasoning is an expression of a sense of realism and rational humility. Both ordinary people and philosophers understand the significance and practical implications of this insight. Should people not recognize their physical, intellectual, and psychological limitations and act accordingly? In this paper, I will highlight the voices of philosophers, mainly because they have been vocal, reasoned, and documented. I cannot, in this short study, refer to any critics directly, but I shall assume, based on 55 years of teaching and writing extensively, their views and arguments. Moreover, I shall assume a general knowledge of metaphysical contemplation and the function it performed in the attempt to understand the nature of reality, especially the relevance of this explanation to understanding the meaning of human existence in particular. Finally, I will pay special attention to the dynamics that underpin the rise and development of philosophy. Some of these dynamics are religious, ideological, or political, while others are logical and epistemological in nature. However, regardless of their variance, all of them aimed to show, implicitly or explicitly, either the impossibility or irrelevance of metaphysical speculation to the enterprise of human living. This critical stance does not necessarily

imply that one cannot indulge in metaphysical speculation, since any thinking is a human privilege; it implies that any metaphysical speculation about the nature of the cosmic process or any of its manifestations cannot be considered true or false, and therefore cannot function as a reliable principle of explanation. Only valid, meaningful, or helpful ideas are candidates for this function.

## **Thesis**

The thesis I shall explicate and defend in this paper is that metaphysical speculation, or contemplation, the way it was understood by the major philosophers from Anaximander, Plato, and Aristotle to Whitehead, Bergson, Russell, Sartre, and Heidegger, is not only a justifiable undertaking, which aims at understanding the nature of the universe as a cosmos but also at understanding the nature of physical and human reality and the Platonic-Aristotelian and political empire of Macedonia. Socrates argued that the analysis of the meaning and application of human values should be the proper subject of philosophical thinking. Plato believed that Socrates's teaching, which centered on these values, implied that they are real and universal. He supported this belief with numerous arguments. How can we justify their existence? If they are real, what is the stuff of their structure? An analysis of these and related questions necessarily prompted Plato to construct the first metaphysical system in Western society. Aristotle followed suit. Soon after his death, philosophical schools based on the fundamental philosophical intuitions of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle spread throughout the Hellenistic world. The most important schools were Epicureanism, Stoicism, Neo-Platonism, Pyrrhonism, and Neo-Aristotelianism. Most of them rejected metaphysical speculation. While Stoicism and Epicureanism dismissed it on

the assumption that knowledge of the highest good is practically superior to the knowledge of the universe as an ordered whole, the Pyrrhonists dismissed it because its claims are not verifiable. However, although the Stoics and Epicureans dismissed metaphysical speculation, they assumed a metaphysical view of reality—idealism or materialism — in their endeavor to justify their concept of the human good. In contrast, the Pyrrhonists dismissed any metaphysical speculation or conception on logical and epistemological grounds. Metaphysical statements are not amenable to empirical or rational verification.

The third historical moment that witnessed an eclipse of metaphysical speculation occurred after the decline of medieval philosophy, which reached its fullest sophistication and systematic development in the works of Augustine and Aquinas. Theological knowledge was viewed as the paradigm of knowledge. The first founded his theology on Plato's metaphysics, and the second on Aristotle's. During this period, metaphysical speculation, which was the primary principle of philosophical inquiry during the ancient Greek era, was not dismissed; instead, it was employed as an intellectual tool to justify the Church's dogma. Not only metaphysical speculation, but philosophy as a way of thinking and understanding the world and human life was used as a handmaiden to theology.

The fourth historical moment in which the skeptical attitude towards metaphysical speculation found its way into the arena of philosophical inquiry emerged in the early phase of the Renaissance. Philosophical skeptics such as Michel de Montaigne, Pierre de Charron, and Francisco Sanchez, as well as theological skeptics like Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus, were, to a great extent, inspired by ancient skepticism, particularly by Pyrrhon-

ism. Broadly, they argued that metaphysical and theological statements are not amenable to rational or empirical verification. Neither reason nor empirical observation can establish a universally acceptable criterion of truth. That which lies outside the sphere of human experience or comprehension cannot be known with a plausible measure of certainty. The collapse of the Catholic Church's authority was accompanied by a decline in belief in the possibility of attaining indubitable knowledge of the nature of reality as an ordered whole. One of the prominent features that distinguished medieval philosophy and fostered its dominance was its claim to certainty. This claim was based on the assumption that the knowledge advocated by the Church is an expression of God's Word. God was viewed as perfect; accordingly, his Word must necessarily be true, indubitable. As students learn early in their philosophical studies, this new wave of skepticism was rejected with vehemence by both empiricists and rationalists alike.

The fifth historical moment in which metaphysical speculation was assailed and marginalized as a source of reliable and valid knowledge arose as an existential response to the dynamic development of philosophy itself, as a rational attempt to explain the nature of human and natural reality. The traditional method of philosophy employed metaphysical contemplation and empirical observation in the endeavor to understand human and natural reality. However, the gradual development of the empirical method, especially its remarkable successes in explaining aspects of the nature of physical reality, which reached a high level of refinement at the turn of the last century, undermined the importance, if not the relevance, of metaphysical speculation. The critical question that arose in light of this unprecedented ascendance of the empirical method played a decisive role in freeing inquiry into physical reality from

metaphysical speculation. What is the value of metaphysical speculation? No matter the degree of their prudence or realism, a large number of philosophers, mainly members of the Vienna Circle, such as Edward G. Moore and Morris Schlick, produced numerous types of refutations, critical evaluations, and, in some cases, dismissals of metaphysical speculation from the field of philosophy. The main philosophical trends, which were viewed as redefinition or re-interpretation of the vocation of philosophy were, mainly, (1) linguistic analysis, which focused attention on the logical analysis of religious, scientific, political, moral, aesthetic, ordinary, and philosophical language, and (2) positivism, and along with logical empiricism, that endorsed the principle of empirical verification as the criterion for establishing the truth or falsity of any statement about the world. Some philosophers argued that genuine philosophy should be scientific; otherwise, it is not serious philosophy. These two schools of philosophy were in, and metaphysics was out!

But not all philosophers either submitted to or were persuaded by the arguments proposed by the members of the Vienna Circle. The domain of reality or human experience extends beyond the domain of nature, encompassing physical reality. Although the empirical method, which is the methodological pillar of scientific thinking, is vital and indispensable to any attempt to explain aspects of nature, it is limited in its endeavor to understand or explain human reality and the universe as an ordered whole. What is the human as such? What is the source of the universe? Why does it exist?

Soon after the maturation of Analysis in all its types and positivism in all its applications, it became obvious to many philosophers that these new approaches to the vocation of philosophy were not only limited in expressing the nature of reality and answering the

perennial questions the human mind raises, but also deficient in expressing the essential nature of philosophy as a primary human phenomenon. Next, transmuting philosophical thinking into a form of scientific thinking, which is doubtful, or restructuring it as the analysis of language in all its manifestations, sunders it from the concerns of practical human life, which was a primary reason for its rise as a central mode of human inquiry. Moreover, even if we discover the essential nature of physical reality, and even if our knowledge of the nature of this nature is unquestionably certain, can the empirical method lead to a knowledge of the power that underlies the universe, much less its ultimate design or purpose? Can the human mind jump out of the sphere of its finitude, stand on a mountain of infinity, and contemplate the universe as an ordered whole or as a cosmic process? As I shall presently discuss, we may infer some features of this power on the basis of an experience of these emanations, but can we, in principle, comprehend it in the fullness of its being? This knowledge may be helpful in organizing our individual and communal lives, but can it attain the status of knowledge?

## **A Concept of Metaphysical Speculation**

The key to a clear and adequate concept of metaphysical speculation, or contemplation, should, I submit, begin with an understanding of the aims and principles of metaphysics as a central branch of philosophy, primarily because metaphysical speculation is its epistemological foundation. It is the rational, cognitive activity in which metaphysical statements are made and organized into an explanation or interpretation of reality. The scope of metaphysics as a type of knowledge is a correlate of the scope of the cognitive power of the human mind. It (1) sets the limits of our knowl-

edge of the world and (2) the measure of our understanding of its essential structure. Accordingly, the concepts, principles, claims, and implications of a metaphysical conception or system depend on the extent to which the mind can penetrate and comprehend the essential structure of reality. Wherefore, we should ask, what is metaphysics?

Like “science”, “art”, and “religion”, “metaphysics” is a vague, variable, and simplistic word in scientific, artistic, and metaphysical discourse. It is frequently understood as the study of a transcendental or extra-corporeal reality. However, the first philosopher who used this term was Aristotle. According to most, if not all, historians and critics of philosophy, he did not use it in a philosophical sense but to designate the row of books in his library that came after the row of physics books. The word metaphysics comes from the Greek (*ta meta (ta) physica*, “that after the physics”. Aristotle did not use or intend this word to denote the study of a supra-reality, or a reality that lies beyond the existing world. Ever since the ascendancy of Plato’s philosophy 2500 years ago to the most recent metaphysical work constructed by process philosophers such as Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne, existentialist philosophers such as Heidegger, Marcel, and Sartre, and Neo-Idealist philosophers such as Bradley, Royce, and Bosanquet, the general understanding of metaphysics that prevailed in philosophy is that “metaphysics” denotes an inquiry into the nature of reality in all its kinds and dimensions, the aporias it veils, and the questions it provokes. We encounter this traditional understanding in the philosophy of masters such as Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Russell, Heidegger, and Whitehead, to mention a few names. Although lexical, it is encapsulated in *Webster’s New World College Dictionary*: “the branch of philosophy that deals with and

seeks to explain the nature of reality (*ontology*) and of the origin and structure of the universe (*cosmology*); it is closely associated with the study of the nature of knowledge (*epistemology*)". The focus of this definition is ontology, viz., the analysis of the nature of human reality and the principles used in (1) conceiving its essential structure and (2) establishing the conditions of its justification. Broadly, epistemology focuses on the method of discovering the nature of reality, namely, ontology. The word "ontology" comes from the Greek *ontos*, preposition of *einai*, "to be", and *logy*, which is derived from *logos*, "word". The unity of these two roots signifies "existence, viz., that which exists, i.e., reality. Now, what is the signification of "reality" or its referent? What kind of objects do philosophers have in mind when they discourse about reality?

It may seem naïve to say that "reality" designates the world of common-sense experience, but it is not. It is the world that comprises the scheme of nature and the human life that thrives in it. Each of these elements is a form of order. We can distinguish between two types of natural objects: physical and biological, and between two types of human objects: human beings and human artifacts, the general achievements of human beings, and the unity of all the objects that human beings create, that is, their concrete achievements comprise the realm of human civilization. Accordingly, the structure of reality comprises physical objects, biological objects, and human objects. They constitute the essential structure of reality—that which exists. It does not matter whether we view this realm as finite, as infinite, or think about the objects that make it up in terms of the infinity or finitude of reality; this realm is the object of philosophical contemplation; it is the object we seek to understand, not merely as an "it" but as an unusually complex order. The metaphysician seeks to understand the nature of the

various parts of reality in terms of the whole, and the whole in terms of her comprehension of the parts. The flight of this contemplation begins from the earth of reality, it soars into the depths of infinity, and then returns to the earth. This intellectual journey is the ultimate source of her conception of the nature of reality or the world as an ordered whole.

As a kind of activity, metaphysical speculation, and consequently philosophy as a unique phenomenon, comes to life when the human mind, baptized with the hand of curiosity or wonderment, standing before the physical, biological, and human object that make up the world as an order, and asks, what is the nature of this order in the diversity of its constituents? "What is X?" —where X refers to objects singly or as a whole —is the birthplace of metaphysical contemplation in its role as the basis of an ontology and cosmology. This question does not arise from an abstract "look" at this order, the way people habitually cast looks at this or that object in the ordinary course of human experience, but from a look at how it exists, organized, and constituted as an order. This is an astonishingly complex look. It is patient, inquisitive, focused, penetrative, grasping, and comprehending in its looking. Moreover, it is a dynamic look, in the sense that it not only perceives the constituents that make up the object as a given spectacle of details, nor does it perceive it discretely, but in relation to the constituents in their dynamic *interrelatedness*. Every object that rises as a presence to the look does not exist to it as an inert or still object but as dynamically interrelated with the details that make up the immediate perceptual field, first, with respect for to the parts that make its structure, and second, with respect to its relation to the objects that make up the larger field of perception or the environment of which it is an integral part. We usually perceive this

dynamic interrelatedness in biological objects more readily than in merely physical objects, but in fact, which is substantiated by scientific and most philosophical theories of perception, looking at, perceiving, or observing any objects that are parts of the structure of reality as a universe are internally and externally dynamically interrelated. The point which merits special attention here is that this kind of “look”, perception or observation, which is the look of the philosopher in her endeavor to understand the nature of reality or any dimension of it, is intentional, analytical, apprehending, and synoptic in character. It seeks to comprehend the essential structure of its object in the dynamic interrelatedness of its details and the essential nature of the whole in terms of the unity of the details. As I shall momentarily emphasize, the universe is a cosmic process—a process of permanent change. Dynamic interrelatedness is a necessary condition for the possibility of process, or change in the life of the particular object and the universe as an ordered whole.

Implied in the perceiving remark is that, taken as parts or as a universe, *reality is a plenum; it is a fullness of being*. It does have, and cannot have, gaps, breaks, empty spaces, or a vacuum. As a realm of being, it is a *continuous chain of being*. Regardless of its magnitude and significance, a new discovery in any area of human life reverberates throughout the universe. The extent of the reverberation is commensurate with the measure of its magnitude and significance. For example, the impact of a pebble’s movement, a ripple in a pond, or a waft of breeze may be limited. The collapse or extinction of the sun may be monumental in relation to human events or particular natural objects, but it may be insignificant in the context of the cosmic process. Nothing in the universe exists as a discrete or completely independent reality. If this is the case, and

I believe it is, it would follow that the universe cannot come into being from nothing or from a state of infinite emptiness, but rather exists eternally. Hence, the question of who created the universe, why it exists, or what its purpose is cannot be answered by looking for a being, power, mind, or cause outside it. It would also follow that any attempt to contemplate the nature of reality or the reason for its existence, which necessarily aims to understand it in the fullness of its being, must strive to envision it contemplatively or speculatively as a plenum or to envision the most significant possible dimension the mind can comprehend in its contemplative environment. I grant that the mind cannot, in principle, comprehend it in its infinity, but it can comprehend its nature inasmuch as its inmost essence is revealed in the cosmic order that emanates from it. Human knowledge of the infinite, of the transcendent power that underlies metaphysical speculation, is always partial, relative, and limited, but it cannot be either ignored or marginalized. As a question of metaphysics, the quest for the nature or identity of the creative power of the universe, which inheres in the cosmic process, is the subject matter of cosmology. This field of metaphysics aims to understand the dynamics, especially the essential nature, of this power. The desire to realize this aim is not only a craving of the human mind, the mind that is a flame of curiosity, but also of the scientific and ordinary mind. As I shall momentarily argue, it is inherent in the human mind.

Cosmology is not merely a primary interest in religion, philosophy, or the practical mind; it is also a primary interest of physics as an empirical science. It is assumed by the philosopher and the physicist that an understanding of the creative power that initiates, directs, and energizes the cosmic process sheds light on the essential structure of the scheme of nature in all its manifestations and

on the meaning of human life. This light is indispensable for the possibility of leading a good life and human progress, materially and spiritually. What is the nature of the objects that make up the scheme of nature? Can we appropriate the natural environment for human survival if we do not possess a reasonable knowledge of the nature of the environment? Can we grow and develop as humans if we cannot adapt this environment to support human progress, both spiritually and materially? How can a human being survive in an environment that seems to be indifferent to human interests, feelings, or purposes? An answer to this question is the subject matter of epistemology. I raise it because, ever since the dawn of human civilization, people have recognized that the objects that constitute the fabric of the natural environment are not essentially what they *appear* to be to the senses. As the Presocratics realized some time ago, things change; they are continually becoming, in the next moment of their existence, different from what they were in the preceding moment. In this process, they lose certain features of their essential nature or identity and acquire new ones. Yet, they remain the same particular identity or nature. If they are in a constant state of becoming different from what they were, what is the basis of their identity despite the continuing change? How do we know the elements, or the basis, of this identity? For example, some years ago I was a boy, now I am an old person. The features by which I was distinguished as a particular reality or identity when I was a boy ceased to exist; they are completely different from the features that distinguish my present identity. The metaphysician seeks to know the nature of this basis. However, this basis is not peculiar to me as a human individual; it is common to all the members of my species. Every human being must have the same fundamental elements as the basis of their identity. What can this element be? But this question applies to

the members of all the classes that make up the structure of the universe. Ordinary people take for granted, by dint of habit, lack of interest, or overwhelming pressure by the need to survive in an unusually complex human and natural environment, that they are constantly changing yet remain the same; but the question of the essential nature, which matters to the curious or inquisitive mind, as a mind that strives to secure the conditions of human survival, cannot be erased or neglected.

The inherent desire to understand the essential nature of human and natural reality can be translated concretely into the question "What is X?" The object of this question is the essence, or concept, that expresses, or defines, the main features that constitute the identity of a class of objects. Accordingly, a concept of reality consists of the unity, or synthesis, of the concepts of the various types (or classes) that comprise the structure of human and natural reality as an ordered whole. An answer to the question of the whatness of these classes, or to the objects that compose them, is, as Heidegger strongly recommended, the central question of ontology. Implied in this assertion is that every ontology implies an epistemology primarily because any cognitive activity is, in fact, a quest for the knowledge of the whatness of a natural or human object or an aspect of reality. Therefore, the nature of the knowledge we attain of an object is, to a large extent, determined by the method we employ in the activity of knowing it. On the other hand, the kind of object we seek to know also, to a large extent, determines the kind of method we employ in the activity of knowing it. For example, the method we employ to understand the phenomenon of life differs from that used to know physical reality. I would be amiss if I fail to say that any genuinely cogent statement is a statement

about a natural or human object, or a dimension of reality; otherwise, it is either fictitious or phantastic in character.

Now the time is ripe to discuss the difference between the widely misunderstood and contentious difference (and frequently significance) between “ontology and “metaphysics”. An adequate delineation of this difference would throw light on the extent to which metaphysical speculation, whose purpose is to know the creative power of the universe implicit in the cosmic existence process, is the central question of philosophical and scientific cosmology. Soon after the recognition of the ascendancy of the empirical method of verification as a means of acquiring knowledge of natural reality, the question that was discussed extensively was, Is metaphysical knowledge possible? Accordingly, is metaphysics as a serious source of knowledge of the world possible? Is it relevant? These questions, which were raised by distinguished philosophers, to my mind committed a categorical mistake because they used “ontology” and “metaphysics” synonymously. However, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, “ontology” is a branch of metaphysics. Scientific inquiry is contemplative, and scientific knowledge is ontological because it aims to know the nature of physical reality, i.e., the nature of something that is. Since natural reality is a given fact, any claim of knowledge about it is, in principle, verifiable. Again, these philosophers argued that, since the reality of any power that lies beyond the realm of empirical observation, or of any reality that lies beyond the possibility of empirical observation, any claim of knowledge about it cannot be treated as valid knowledge. The sphere of the natural is the sphere of the factual. One can make assertions about this or that aspect of its creative power, but it cannot be viewed as valid knowledge. It may serve emotional, utilitarian, religious, or ideological purposes, but

it cannot be classified as knowledge. The assumption is that scientific knowledge is the paradigm of knowledge. But this assumption is rejected for many serious reasons, some of which I shall discuss shortly.

As I have emphasized earlier, the absence of empirical verifiability is the primary reason for rejecting metaphysics. But this rejection is unfounded. First, the activity of knowing natural objects is ontological; it is contemplative. Scientific hypotheses, or theories, do not leap into the mind of the scientist in her dreams, in moments of reverie, by accident, spontaneously, or simply because she happens to be a "scientist." It has always been the result of serious contemplation or reflection on an aspect of nature or on nature as an order. Any student of the scientific inquiry would, I submit, testify to the truth of this assertion. For example, Archimedes' principle that the buoyant force acting on a submerged object is equal to the weight of the fluid displaced by the object was not discovered by a casual observation, and the Eureka that surged from his heart and mind thunderously was not an accidental psychological eruption. He was a mathematician, scientist, and philosopher. He reflected on this phenomenon out of curiosity and a profound sense of wonder. Next, Newton did not discover his law of gravity when he saw an apple fall from a tree next to him. This discovery arose from a lengthy process of contemplating the various phenomena of motion in different natural contexts, as well as his reflection on the work of earlier physicists and mathematicians, such as Galileo Galilei, whose findings were also based on contemplating the phenomenon of gravitation. In these and similar situations, every major scientific hypothesis or theory originates from contemplating a dimension of natural reality. Sometimes an idea or hypothesis is conceived, revealed, or suddenly or

accidentally looms in the mind. Yes, but this kind of suddenness does not happen fortuitously or disinterestedly, in a vacuum, or to an uneducated mind or a mind that is not conversant in the area of scientific inquiry.

Second, science is an inquiry into and a search for the causes of phenomena—objects, events, aspects of reality—that elude ordinary understanding or explanation. These phenomena are given; they are effects, in the sense that they are not self-created or self-caused. Their existence is contingent. Broadly, the scientist investigates what we know but what we do not know. We are ignorant of a large number of causes or assumed realities that do not seem to exist in the ordinary field of perception. For example, the tree or the lion is given to our perception. Do we know fully the nature of the phenomenon of life that energizes the process of their growth? To what extent is our knowledge of this phenomenon perfect or absolutely certain? By the same token, human beings populate our realm of perception; do we fully know the element or power that makes them human (mind)? We know an existing fact when we comprehend its cause, essential structure, and implications or consequences. However, the activity involved in the quest for the cause is basically inferential. The cause is not given to immediate sensuous or intellectual perception. Again, we do not infer given facts; they are given to immediate sensual or intellectual perception. We seek to know what we do not perceive or experience, and we seek its cause because we assume that it must have a cause. We proceed from this assumption on the basis of our knowledge of the given facts, that is, we infer the existence of what we do not know from our knowledge of the existence of what we know.

The scientist proceeds in her search for the cause of a phenomenon based on her knowledge of the given effect, namely, the perceived

fact. This process is not always straightforward or linear, but it is frequently implicative, in the sense that it suggests or points to more than one possible cause, whose identification is an arduous activity of analytical thinking. The more we understand a fact, the more we comprehend it within its widest possible context or environment. The more certain or valid our knowledge is, the greater the probability of discovering the cause, inferring it, and understanding the conditions that generate the effect. The point which merits special attention here is that the distinctive feature of scientific contemplation is that (1) it is logical, that is, inductive, and (2) causal in character. First, it moves from one idea to the next, or one proposition to the next, according to the rules of inductive logic; second, this movement is directed by a desire, or purpose, to identify the kind of relation that may reveal the nature of the cause of the effect the scientist aims to discover, which may be simple or complex. The kind of activity involved in this process is synoptic vision, in which the inquiring mind comprehends every part or element of the given effect or fact in terms of the whole of which the part or element is a part, and conversely, the whole in terms of the parts that are dynamically interrelated. The inference of the cause from an examination of the given fact in its relatedness to the elements of the context of the elements within which it is situated is often probable, hypothetical, incomplete, or erroneous. The history of scientific theories is a history of rising and falling adequate and more adequate theories. For example, knowledge of the nature of matter, which began with the atomic theory developed by Democritus in the fourth century B.C. and was later refined by Newton, underwent significant modifications in the past century. No final and absolutely true conception of matter exists, so far as we know. But, although this theory is not fully verified, it has been successful in explaining many events, objects,