

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

### WHAT IS METAPHYSICS?<sup>1</sup>

THE positivist attack on metaphysics has forced philosophers to call a moratorium on system-making while they attempt to satisfy themselves, more seriously than had for some time been necessary, as to whether the word "metaphysics" stands for any legitimate enterprise or not. For two decades the debate remained for the most part on the level of pontifical repartee rather than that of constructive analysis, the primary aim of the positivists being to damn metaphysics into the Cimmerian darkness of obvious irrationality, while those in the opposite party feverishly laid about with all the weapons in their arsenal in the hope of rescuing their speculative darling from this threatened catastrophe.

Today the smoke of battle has dissipated enough so that the discussion seems capable of rising from the level of heated partisanship to that of relatively impartial clarification. It is in the hope of contributing toward such clarification that the present paper is written. From sparring with dogmatic contentions thinkers first turned to orderly debate, in which they gradually became aware of the presuppositions of their opponents. The next constructive step in dealing with this as with any philosophic issue is taken when some participants in the argument gain sufficient detachment so that their own presuppositions as well as those of their rivals become objectively visible, and can be critically analyzed in that more inclusive perspective. It seems to me that this stage has now been reached in dealing with the basic problems of metaphysics, and that the discussion initiated by modern positivism may be profitably expanded on this more promising basis.

When one views the situation in these terms it becomes tolerably

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered before the Boston University Philosophical Club, April 4, 1945. It has undergone some revision since.