

Metaphysics, by T. Adorno

a. People / Organizations:

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b. Quotes:

- **"Philosophy has the curious characteristic that, although itself entrapped, locked inside the glasshouse of our constitution and our language, it is nevertheless able constantly to think beyond itself and its limits, to think itself through the walls of its glasshouse. And this thinking beyond itself, into openness - that, precisely, is metaphysics."** - Author (pg. 67-68)
- **"...metaphysics attempts to rescue through concepts what it simultaneously calls into question through its critique"** - Author (pg. 88)
- "Those who continue to engage in old-style metaphysics, without concerning themselves with what has happened, keeping it at arm's length and regarding it as beneath metaphysics, like everything merely earthly and human, thereby prove themselves inhuman. And the inhumanity which is necessarily present in such an attitude must also infect the concept of a metaphysics which proceeds in this way. **It is therefore impossible, I would say, to insist after Auschwitz on the presence of a positive meaning or purpose in being.** Here, too, though from a totally different context, **I would like to say quite candidly that I am entirely of one mind with Sartre, from whose outlook I am otherwise worlds apart. The affirmative character which metaphysics has in Aristotle, and which it first took on in Plato's teaching, has become impossible.** To assert that existence or being has a positive meaning constituted within itself and orientated towards the divine principle (if one is to put it like that), would be, like all the principles of truth, beauty and goodness which philosophers have concocted, a pure mockery in face of the victims and the infinitude of their torment. And taking this as my reference point, I would like to reflect with you on what I would describe as the completely changed status of metaphysics." - Author (pg. 101)
- **"...I regard his [e.g., Sartre's] philosophy as very incoherent and not really adequate as a philosophical structure..."** - Author (pg. 105)
- "...it is in the nature of philosophy - and everything I write is, unavoidably, philosophy, even if it is not concerned with so-called philosophical themes - that nothing is meant quite literally. Philosophy always relates to tendencies and does not consist of statements of fact. It is a misunderstanding of philosophy, resulting from its growing closeness to all-powerful scientific tendencies, to take such a statement at face value..." - Author (pg. 110)
 - **"...there is, perhaps, a certain justification for occupying oneself with philosophy in that, as the one form of knowledge which has not yet been departmentalized, split into branches, reified, it seems to me to represent the only chance, within the boundaries of this departmentalized world, of making good at least a part of what, as I have tried to explain to you, is otherwise denied.** If one is not oneself capable at each moment of identification with the victims, and of alert awareness and remembrance, philosophy, in the necessary forms of its own reification, is perhaps the only form of consciousness which, by seeing through these matters and making them conscious in a more objective form, can at least do something, a small part of that which we are unable to do." - Author (pg. 113)
 - "The fact is that the deeper philosophy grows and the further it is removed from the surface of the merely existent, the harder it becomes to free oneself of the feeling that, through its depth and remoteness from mere existence, philosophy is also growing remote from the way things really and actually are..." - Author (pg. 114)

c. General Notes:

- Lecture 1 - What is Metaphysics? (pg. 1)
 - "It can undoubtedly be said that the concept of metaphysics is the vexed question of philosophy. On one hand, philosophy owes its existence to metaphysics. That is to say that metaphysics - if I might first borrow the standard philosophical language, although I may later replace it by something else - deals with the so-called 'last things' on account of which human beings first began to philosophize. On the other hand, however, the situation of metaphysics is such that **it is extremely difficult to indicate what its subject matter is**. This is not only because the existence of this subject matter is questionable and is even the cardinal problem of metaphysics, but also, even if the existence or non-existence of its subject matter is disregarded, because it is very difficult to say what metaphysics actually is. Today metaphysics is used in almost the entire non-German-speaking world as a term of abuse, a synonym for idle speculation, mere nonsense and heaven knows what other intellectual vices." (pg. 1)
 - "...it is very difficult even to define its subject with any precision" (pg. 2)
 - "This word ['back-world'] implies that metaphysics is a doctrine which assumes the existence of a world behind the world we know and can know. Behind the world of phenomena there was supposed to be concealed...a truly real, permanent, unchanging world existing in itself, a world of essences, to unravel and reveal which was the task of philosophy. Expressed more objectively, metaphysics was presented as the quintessence of the philosophical theory of all that pertained to the Beyond or - to use the specific philosophical term for the realm beyond experience - a science of the transcendental in contradistinction to the sphere of immanence. But at the same time, Nietzsche's term 'back-world' also poured scorn - in the spirit of the nominalist Enlightenment - on the superstition and provinciality which, in his view, automatically adhered to the assumption of such a world behind the world." (pg. 2-3)
 - "Admittedly, in genetic terms - with which we shall be concerned repeatedly in the course of our reflections - **it is undeniable that metaphysics itself is a phenomenon of the secularization of mythical and magical thinking**, so that it is not so absolutely detached from superstitious ideas as it understands itself to be, and as it has presented itself in the history of philosophy." (pg. 3)
 - **"Metaphysics - and this may well bring me closer to a definition of what you may understand by that term - always deals with concepts. Metaphysics is the form of philosophy which takes concepts as its objects.** And I mean concepts in a strong sense, in which they are almost always given precedence over, and are assigned to a higher order of being (Wesenhaftigkeit) than, existing things (das Seiende) or the facts subsumed under them, and from which the concepts are derived. The controversy on this point - the debate whether concepts are mere signs and abbreviations, or whether they are autonomous, having an essential, substantial being in themselves - has been regarded as one of the great themes of western metaphysics since Plato and Aristotle." (pg. 4)
 - "And because the concept is, of course, an instrument of knowledge, the question of the nature of the concept has from the first been both a metaphysical and an epistemological one. This may help you to understand why, for as long as metaphysics has existed - that is, for as long as concepts have been subjected to reflection - metaphysics has been entwined with problems of logic and epistemology in an extremely curious way, which culminated in Hegel's teaching that logic and metaphysics are really one and the same." (pg. 4-5)
 - "I believe it can be stated more or less as a dogma that philosophical insight is more fruitful the more it is able to differentiate within its subject matter; and that the undifferentiating approach which measures everything by the same yardstick actually embodies precisely the coarse and, if I might put it like this, the uneducated mentality which philosophy, in its subjective, pedagogical role, is supposed to overcome or, as I'd prefer to say, to eliminate." (pg. 6)
 - "Now it is certainly true that **metaphysics has something in common with theology in its manner of seeking to elevate itself above immanence, above the empirical world.**" (pg. 6)
 - "there is an element of truth in the theory of stages that I referred to, in that metaphysics in the traditional sense - and we have to start from the traditional concept if I am to make clear to you what metaphysics really means - is an attempt to determine the absolute, or the constitutive structures of being, on the basis of thought alone. That is, it does not derive the absolute dogmatically from revelation, or as

- something positive which is simply given to me, as something directly existing, through revelation or recorded revelation, but, to repeat the point, **it determines the absolute through concepts.**" (pg. 7)
- "...metaphysical systems in the precise sense are doctrines according to which concepts form a kind of objective, constitutive support on which what is naively called 'the objective world', that is, scattered, individual, existing things, is founded and finally depends." (pg. 8)
 - Lecture 2 - Doctrine of First Cause (pg. 10)
 - See text
 - Lecture 3 - History of the Concept (pg. 12)
 - **"the traditional subdivision of metaphysics...[is] (1) Ontology = theory of Being and of existing things (2) The nature of the world (cosmology) (3) of human beings (philosophical anthropology) (4) Existence and nature of the divinity (theology)."** (pg. 12-13)
 - Lecture 4 - Plato, Aristotle and Heidegger (pg. 15)
 - "When Heidegger refers to metaphysics as a kind of rationalistic decline from the original understanding of being in archaic philosophy, I cannot entirely disagree, from a strictly phenomenological viewpoint, with his characterization. On one hand **metaphysics is always, if you will, rationalistic as a critique of a conception of true, essential being-in-itself which does not justify itself before reason; but, on the other, it is always also an attempt to rescue something which the philosopher's genius feels to be fading and vanishing.** There is in fact no metaphysics, or very little, which is not an attempt to save - and to save by means of concepts - what appeared at the time to be threatened precisely by concepts, and was in the process of being disintegrated, or corroded, to use the more affective language of the ancient anti-Sophists. Metaphysics is thus, one might say, something fundamentally modern..." (pg. 19)
 - **"Metaphysics can thus be defined as the exertion of thought to save what at the same time it destroys"** (pg. 20)
 - Lecture 5 - Universal and Particular (pg. 24)
 - See text
 - Lecture 6 - Genesis and Validity (pg. 33)
 - "...the idea of unity in diversity...has its origin in ontology" (pg. 34)
 - "I think you need to be aware of this difference if you are to understand what stands at the beginning of metaphysics and has dominated it ever since. For it is precisely the notion that the idea or the noumenal, the intelligible sphere, is more real than the empirical, which really forms the core of the metaphysical tradition. And only if you are aware, from the outset, of this paradoxical quality inherent in all metaphysics, will metaphysics cease to be an innocuous subject and reveal the difficult, demanding side which you need to experience if you want to have a sense of what metaphysics really means." (pg. 37)
 - "Genetically, therefore, in terms of the advance of knowledge, what is immediate and sensibly certain is primary, according to Aristotle; in terms of validity - that is, objectively - the universal comes first. This state of affairs becomes even more peculiar and paradoxical in that Aristotle follows Plato in giving primacy to what comes first temporally, as that which we prize and rank highest..." (pg. 39)
 - "However, if one takes seriously the idea of mediation, which is sketched but not fully worked out in Aristotle, the idea that form and matter are really moments which can only be conceived in relation to each other, the question as to which of them comes absolutely first or is ranked absolutely higher becomes transparent as a false abstraction. And one will then trace the forms of the concrete mediation of these moments, instead of treating the product of abstraction which keeps them apart as the only rightful source of truth. That, really, is the connecting thread which, in my opinion, leads from Aristotle's metaphysics as a whole to the questions currently occupying the minds of philosophers in this field." (pg. 41)
 - Lecture 7 - Mediation and the Happy Medium (pg. 43)
 - See text
 - Lecture 8 - The Doctrine of Immutability (pg. 51)
 - "But first, before dealing with that question, it should be noted that this conclusion contains the implicitly dialectical view that the notion of something dynamic, of change, of becoming, is impossible without reference to something fixed. This is, I would say in passing, one of Aristotle's most magnificent discoveries, to which we are hardly able to give its due weight because it has become so self-evident to us that we no longer know what an enormous exertion of genius its attainment must have cost. The idea that there can be no mediation without the immediate - though also, of course, no immediacy without mediation - and that there is no movement which is not the movement of something which, relative to it, has a moment of fixity, later became the central proposition of dialectical philosophy, or one of its key tenets. And this idea, that we cannot imagine change except in relation to something fixed, was conceived, as far as I am aware, by Aristotle - unless one interprets certain tendencies in Plato's late dialogues in this sense, on which point, given the highly controversial character of the Parmenides dialogue in particular, I would not presume to pass judgement in face of the conclusions of conventional philologists." (pg. 57)
 - "I would say that the fact that ontology, by its nature, posits mental categories as absolutely valid is connected with this constitutive character of finitude, since these categories are themselves conceived within a finite realm, within a closed world - whereas there is no space for them in the open world, blown apart by the concept of infinity, in which we have lived, to an increasing degree, for almost four hundred years. To that extent it might be said that ontology, as the attempt to encompass something infinite with finite determinants, itself has something archaic about it; that it is something which, in some sense, has been left behind by the development of mind towards the present concept of the infinite." (pg. 58)
 - "What must be noted, therefore, is, firstly, that **one can only speak of change with reference to something fixed**; and, secondly, that the positive tendency of metaphysics stems from the fact that infinity was alien to antiquity. For this reason, relationships or categories which we can no longer imagine except in terms of the infinite, and therefore as transcendent, were turned in antiquity into relationships of finitude. I would only add that the switch to the concept of infinity in later philosophy is, of course, connected to the increased prominence given to the knowing subjectivity, the spirit (Geist), since the spirit was defined from the first as something infinite in itself - in contrast to the finitude of the diversity to which it is related." (pg. 58)
 - **"The unmoved mover is, fundamentally, nothing other than pure form existing in itself, which, as it were, draws everything up towards it. Although itself immobile, it is like a magnet of pure actuality, or pure energy, pulling up everything which is merely potential towards it and, in this way, realizing itself to an ever-increasing degree. That, really, is the core of Aristotle's Metaphysics,** if the core is defined as the point at which his metaphysics passes over into theology. The central point of any metaphysics is probably to be found where the transition between metaphysics and theology takes place. And it takes place precisely in this relationship of the immobile to motion, to which it is mediated by the fact that it draws everything which merely exists to itself. And, in a sense, motion is already latent in the merely existent, since the latter, as potentiality, has within itself the ability to move towards the most perfect and highest order of being. The idea of the *analogia entis*, the analogy between the creature and the creator, is thus already sketched out, if you like, in this theory of Aristotle. Aristotle's Metaphysics therefore raises a further question - the question of what the unchanging, or that which has not become (*das Ungewordene*), actually is. And this gives rise to two categories which have had a decisive influence on the subsequent history of western metaphysics, the concepts of substance and accident." (pg. 59)
 - Lecture 9 - Form and Matter (pg. 60)
 - "We now have to consider the question of what the unchanging, or that which has not become (*das Ungewordene*), which might be called the ontological residue in Aristotle's ontology, actually is. In seeking an answer we come across two determinants which cannot be resolved into each

- other, and which are thus the source of the dualism which has exerted a crucial influence on the whole history of western philosophy. **On the one hand we have the substrate, which is subject to change, and on the other the properties; change consists in the communication of properties to the substrate. But the properties - to make you aware of this straight away - are not regarded as something transient and secondary, but as constant, unchanging, something which has not become.** And indeed, it is on these properties that Aristotelian philosophy placed the greatest emphasis throughout its development, and to which it attached the gravest importance. That, then, is the origin of the dualism which has been predominant throughout the western tradition, which was first expressed through the concepts of the substantial and the accidental, then became central to medieval philosophy, including its terminology, and from there passed over into the rationalist philosophy of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz. We now know that these philosophers represent two things: both the nominalist protest against scholasticism, and a direct continuation of the Aristotelian-scholastic problematic. Such is the complexity of the history of philosophy, which escapes any simple formula." (pg. 60)
- "You can already find here - to draw your attention to what I regard as a crucial connection in the history of philosophy - **the principle of idealism, by which the mental appears as the truly real, while that which is given by the senses, the sensible object of experience, is seen as less real, a mere function.** The ramifications of this principle are still seen in the positivist conceptions of Hume or Ernst Mach. To this extent, therefore, Aristotelian philosophy is idealistic, in the precise sense I have just defined: that a higher order of reality is attributed to forms than to their content. But this is a very peculiar kind of idealism, in that it is really an objective idealism, an idealism conceived only with regard to the objects of knowledge, but not, or not essentially, with reference to the thinking subject." (pg. 62)
 - "At this point, therefore, Aristotle's reflections are extraordinarily complicated. On the one hand, the Platonic doctrine that Ideas or Forms have being in themselves is maintained, in the sense that reality - or at any rate, higher reality - is attributed only to them; but, on the other hand, this reality is not susceptible to thought, or only within that in which it is realized. This makes the question of the realization of form the central problem. For while form is regarded as the higher reality and that which has true being-in-itself, nevertheless, it has this being only within matter. Thus, **the truly fundamental problem of Aristotle's philosophy becomes the question of the realization of form. And this question is, at the same time, none other than the question about change, which relates both to the effect of form on matter and to matter itself, and finally, to the relation between the two.** Aristotle's position on this point is an extremely advanced one, in that he not only recognizes these two poles of being, as we might call them, but also subjects their relationship to analysis; and in that his philosophy, as a theory of invariants, now has its point of attack in precisely this relationship between its two opposite poles." (pg. 62)
 - "Now, I have mentioned these critical misgivings because **a philosophy cannot be understood without thinking it through critically. To seek to understand something in philosophy without at the same time criticizing it is, in my view, an impossible procedure;** and I suspect that whenever a distinction is made between understanding and criticism there is some kind of authoritarian demand behind it: First make sure you have understood, and by then you will be rid of all your critical quibbles. That is such folly, I think, because philosophical propositions are always put forward with a claim to truth, and can only be understood by reconstructing this claim to truth. But that can only be done by including in the analysis what I have just called criticism, by questioning their truth. The idea that one could understand any philosophical idea without criticism, without questioning its truth, I regard as methodologically quite untenable." (pg. 64-65)
 - "The fact that, just by talking about matter, one ends this matter with form - that is, conceptual form - should not be confused with the meaning of this form itself. The peculiarity of the concept of [**Greek word*], or matter, is that we are here using a concept or speaking of a principle which, by its meaning, refers to something which is not a concept or a principle. **We only correctly understand what a concept such as [**Greek word*] means if we realize that its conceptual meaning refers to something non-conceptual.** The paradox facing us here is removed if we do not allow ourselves to fetishize the language or conceptual system we use. It is true that we can only speak in a way which is mediated through language, but for that reason language itself, as one phenomenon among others, becomes a part of reality as a whole, a moment of reality, and should not be hypostatized over against it. It is in the nature of language that we can speak of an absolutely formless matter, even though speaking of formless matter is itself a form. It is as if we were in the prison of language but were able to recognize it as a prison. I have set out this dialectic for you because I believe that **philosophizing begins at exactly the point I have just shown you, where one refuses to be fobbed off with curt pronouncements such as that matter as a 'primary concept' or 'first principle' is itself a form, so that the concept of formless matter is meaningless; one actually starts thinking at such points and reflects further on them.** And if I had to characterize the difference between the kind of thinking I advocate and positivist thinking, I would say that non-positivist thinking is precisely that which is not content with the rigid logic of exclusivity - the logic of either-or: either mediated or immediate, either concept or pure non-conceptuality - but analyses phenomena in such a way that seemingly self-evident statements like the one I just mentioned grow more and more shaky. What seems to me to be unique about philosophical concepts is that, in face of the despair which philosophy can sometimes induce, they provide, if not the consolation of philosophy, then at least a consolation for philosophy. **Philosophy has the curious characteristic that, although itself entrapped, locked inside the glasshouse of our constitution and our language, it is nevertheless able constantly to think beyond itself and its limits, to think itself through the walls of its glasshouse. And this thinking beyond itself, into openness - that, precisely, is metaphysics.**" (pg. 67-68)
 - Lecture 10 - The Problem of Mediation (pg. 69)
 - "To understand Aristotle, I believe we should reflect briefly on the nature of the concept. **The concept, as we know, is a unity, the unity of the properties of the elements subsumed under it.**" (pg. 70)
 - "**The concept as such, once established, is not temporal;** it relates, of course, to something temporal, it has its temporal content, and a critical analysis will finally uncover time as an implication of its meaning. But in the first place, through its formation, **the concept is independent of time**" (pg. 70)
 - "Now it seems to me to be the case at this point - and, indeed, in the whole tendency to see ontology as a doctrine of invariants, of the timelessly abiding - that this timelessness of the concept represents a [**Greek word*], an impoverishment, a deficiency of the concept. For **this timelessness is mediated through abstraction; and that which is simply omitted from the concept, so that it can be formed and maintained as a constant, is now attributed to it as its in-itself quality, and even as its 'positivity', its superiority.** The reflection which leads to the realization that the timelessness of the concept is itself something which has become, which has arisen and is not an attribute of the concept in itself, is a very late reflection; and it has no more place in the philosophy of Aristotle, which is exemplary in this respect, than it has in that of Plato. And what could be described as the greatest paralogism of all in metaphysics, and as the crucial fallacy in traditional philosophy as a whole, is nothing other than this de-temporalization of the meaning of concepts, which is produced by the way in which concepts are formed, but is attributed as an inherent property to that which they subsume. That, I believe, is the mechanism which lies behind Aristotle's positing of forms and concepts as something eternal and immutable. **What is taken away from them by abstraction, the moment of de-temporalization, he has ascribed to them as a positive quality, as their ontological priority, their pure being-in-itself.** And it can be said that the whole of western thought has been placed under the spell of this conclusion drawn by Aristotle, and by Plato before him." (pg. 71)
 - "You cannot, therefore, understand metaphysics by finding out how the separate metaphysical themes - being, God, freedom, immortality, or whatever they may be - are treated by different philosophers. You can only understand these categories through the place they occupy in a philosophy considered as a whole. And if I may give you a piece of advice which may help your own philosophical understanding, it is that while you should always strive to understand philosophical categories as strictly and precisely as possible in terms of their meaning and effect in their particular place, you should also be aware that there is no philosophical category which does not take on a meaning that is different from its general meaning through the

- structure, the total context, of the thought in which it appears. And in understanding philosophy it is this specific meaning which matters." (pg. 76)
- Lecture 11 - Movement, Change (pg. 77)
 - "according to [Aristotle's] doctrine, **movement is caused or triggered just because matter opposes its potential, is in contradiction to it**, because any existing situation is inherently rigid; in later philosophy it was therefore called 'mere existence'" (pg. 79)
 - "there is already here, if you like, a **sketch of the dialectic**" (pg. 78-79)
 - "For [Aristotle], however, individuation itself is founded precisely on this particularization - the lack of identity, or full identity, of an existent thing with its form. Individuation thus becomes something negative in Aristotle. And that, too, is a basic thesis of all western metaphysics, as it reappears in Kant, where cognition is equated with the determining of an object in its generality and necessity, and as you find it worked through to its extreme in Hegel, where only the universal manifesting itself through individuation is the substantial - whereas anything which lies outside the identification with the universal principle is regarded as absolutely insignificant, ephemeral and unimportant. I do not think I need to elaborate here the theme which was central to my lectures in the last semester: the incalculable consequences of the elevation of logical universality as the positive metaphysical principle, and of the branding of individuation and particularity as the negative. **If the so-called great tradition of philosophy has anywhere lent its name to ideology, it is at this point.**" (pg. 79)
 - "...I am trying today to make you aware of those moments in Aristotle which have been precipitated in the general stock of ideas and have dominated the whole philosophical tradition to an incalculable degree. Its consequences were that people have forgotten, if they ever knew, that when they think of matter in general as that which is opposed to a principle of a different kind, the principle of mind, they are, if you like, dematerializing matter by turning it into a principle. **What the concept of matter points towards, the only reasonable content and meaning of this term, is the non-conceptual.** And one of the most remarkable characteristics of the concept is that, although itself a concept, it can yet refer to something which is not a concept; indeed - if one traces out the reciprocal foundation of intentions - in the end it must mean something non-conceptual. Given the direction which the whole philosophical tradition has taken as a result of the Aristotelian dualism, it is the case that through the covert substitution of the general concept of 'matter' for materials, matter has itself been turned into something which it ought precisely not to be: something conceptual. Only determinants which are really of such a conceptual kind are recognized qua matter." (pg. 80)
 - Lecture 12 - The Unmoved Mover (pg. 85)
 - "Perhaps I might remind you here that I said to you earlier that **metaphysics in the precise sense I have set out here is both a critique and a reprise, a resumption, of theology. It is a peculiarity of metaphysical thinking** - it is, I might almost say, one of the invariants of metaphysical thinking, which are repeated over and over again in its history - **that the conceptual operations it performs, which aim initially at something like a critique of mythological beings, repeatedly end in reinstating these mythical beings, or the divinity; but it no longer does so in a belief in the direct experience or the sensible perceptibility or the substantial existence of the divinities or divinity, but on the basis of conceptual thought.** What I said earlier about the rescuing intention which accompanies the critical aim of all metaphysics now takes on its precise meaning, which is quite simply that **metaphysics attempts to rescue through concepts what it simultaneously calls into question through its critique.** That is a moment which can be traced through the entire history of western metaphysics." (pg. 88)
 - Lecture 13 - Athens and Auschwitz (pg. 93)
 - "I would remark in passing that the whole of philosophy abounds with formulations such as that the highest good is at the same time the highest purpose. If you open any book on any metaphysical philosopher you will always - especially when you get towards the conclusion - hear such things as: the highest purpose is also the highest good, or: perfect beauty is also perfect truth, or: in the absolute, existence and essence prove to be the same; and so forth. For the moment I would only urge you, when you come across such general metaphysical equations in your studies of the history of philosophy, to be slightly on guard, and to derive from them a certain mistrust of metaphysics. For **if philosophy really is the capacity for differentiation, the ability to distinguish in thought, instead of reducing everything to an abstract formula, then, to be sure, one would expect philosophy to relate its highest categories to one another and not leave them isolated**; but if they are all to be one, that would give rise to something like the night for which Hegel took Schelling to task - the night in which all cats are grey. It is a kind of evidence against the substantiality of ontology - against the claim that ontology really does have access to the essences it purports to isolate - that it is never able to sustain these essences separately, but in the end posits them all as one, without being able to maintain their separateness within this oneness. One of the few thinkers of the rationalist or metaphysical type who noticed this, incidentally, was Lessing, who, as far as I know, was the first representative of that tradition to oppose, and polemically attack, this notion of oneness, this undifferentiated identity of the highest principles. Traditional philosophy gives us serious grounds to mistrust it, I believe, whenever it resolves everything into one, into identity, in a kind of grand finale, since it thereby forgoes the very concreteness which its results ought to have. And, unless I am mistaken, it was not the least of Hegel's motives in developing his dialectic that he attempted both to retain an ontological basic structure and to do justice to differences - although, in the end, everything turns out to be the same in his philosophy too. In my opinion it is **very difficult to distinguish the postulation of absolute identity from actual uniformity, indeed monotony, in which nothing differs from anything else - an all-ness of thought which actually says nothing at all.**" (pg. 96-97)
 - "Please cast your minds back to what I said earlier about the history of metaphysics, a history prefigured in Aristotle, which I presented as **an attempt to rescue categories which were originally theological, but to do so by means of a rational critique, that is, by reason. It could therefore be said that metaphysics is a translation of theological conceptions into categories of reason, that it is a conceptualization of those conceptions.**" (pg. 98)
 - "That conclusion, that metaphysics had been turned into thinking, could also be drawn from the thesis of the thinking of thinking, of metaphysics as the concept which had become aware of itself. Now, that is indeed the case, and has been the case in almost all ontologies, and is especially so in what are called rationalist philosophies, in which you can observe over and over again that **the structure of being is declared to be identical to the structure of thought.** **Ontology as the doctrine of the basic constitutive concepts of being really means only that the basic structures of thought are elevated to categories of being.** This, too, is a principle that was first expressed by Hegel, with a trenchancy and radicalism that I can indicate by citing his proposition that logic is at the same time metaphysics. But what I should like you to see is that **this hypostasis of the pure forms of thinking as the forms of being is already implied in the transition from theological thinking to metaphysical speculation.** For by attaching metaphysics firmly to the categories of thought, thought sets itself up as the justification of metaphysics and, by claiming jurisdiction over it, implicitly asserts that it is itself metaphysics - even if it does not yet overtly admit as much. So if the question of metaphysics is raised today, I would say - and this may prepare you for the matters which are going to occupy us - that **the basic question in discussing metaphysics is the one concerning the legitimacy of this equation.** If one thinks about metaphysics today - and we have no choice, we have lost our innocence: metaphysics can no longer be anything other than a thinking about metaphysics - this presupposes a kind of critical self-reflection of thought, in the sense that, **through such self-reflection of thought and of the pure forms of thought, one asks oneself whether thought and its constitutive forms are in fact the absolute.** For, overtly or latently, that is really the thesis of the whole metaphysical tradition. Perhaps it would not be immodest of me to refer in this context to the first chapter of *Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, entitled '*Kritik des logischen Absolutismus*' (Critique of logical absolutism). In it I attempt to do what I have just sketched for you, but in the opposite direction, by posing the question of the absolute validity of the logical forms themselves, and calling that validity into question in an immanent analysis carried out from a dialectical standpoint. And if the pure forms of thought, which are manifested most consummately in pure logic, are not the absolute they understand themselves to be, the conclusion to be drawn would be that **thought itself, as something conditioned and enmeshed in conditionality, cannot be made into the absolute it has always claimed to be in traditional metaphysics.** In my book I did not draw this

conclusion as explicitly as I am doing now, and that is why I am bringing that text to your attention, as a kind of transition to the matters we are about to consider." (pg. 98-99)

- "The supposition of a radical separation, *xupiouós*, between the intra-mundane realm and the transcendental, which is one of the keystones of the metaphysical tradition, is highly problematic, since it is constantly confronted with evidence showing that it has picked out its eternal values, its immutabilities, from the mutable and from experience, and has then abstracted them. And if a metaphysics were consistent, it would refrain from using apologetics to keep such evidence at bay. **A thinking which is defensive, which attempts to cling to something in the face of compelling objections, is always doomed.** The only way a fruitful thinking can save itself is by following the injunction: '**Cast away, that you may gain.**' I mean by this that a metaphysics which fulfilled its own concept, a concept which (even though this may not be admitted) always consists of constellations of forms and contents, concepts and what they comprise, would have radically to assimilate the relevance of the temporal to its own concept. It would have to realize that it has been separated only apparently and arbitrarily from its instrument, concepts, and is constantly brought back to them. I should like to say that in our time the primacy which Sartre accords to existence over being and its concept reveals an extraordinarily uncompromising awareness of this state of affairs. The only fault lies in the fact that, precisely from this precedence of existence over essence, Sartre has created a new kind of ontology, a doctrine of essences. To express it crudely in terms of the history of philosophy, he has sought to be at the same time an extreme nominalist and a Heideggerian, two things which cannot be made to agree." (pg. 100-101)
- "Those who continue to engage in old-style metaphysics, without concerning themselves with what has happened, keeping it at arm's length and regarding it as beneath metaphysics, like everything merely earthly and human, thereby prove themselves inhuman. And the inhumanity which is necessarily present in such an attitude must also infect the concept of a metaphysics which proceeds in this way. **It is therefore impossible, I would say, to insist after Auschwitz on the presence of a positive meaning or purpose in being.** Here, too, though from a totally different context, **I would like to say quite candidly that I am entirely of one mind with Sartre, from whose outlook I am otherwise worlds apart. The affirmative character which metaphysics has in Aristotle, and which it first took on in Plato's teaching, has become impossible. To assert that existence or being has a positive meaning constituted within itself and orientated towards the divine principle (if one is to put it like that), would be, like all the principles of truth, beauty and goodness which philosophers have concocted, a pure mockery in face of the victims and the infinitude of their torment.** And taking this as my reference point, I would like to reflect with you on what I would describe as the completely changed status of metaphysics." (pg. 101)
- Lecture 14 - The Liquidation of the Self (pg. 103)
 - "In face of the experiences we have had, not only through Auschwitz but through the introduction of torture as a permanent institution and through the atomic bomb - all these things form a kind of coherence, a hellish unity - in face of these experiences the assertion that what is has meaning, and the affirmative character which has been attributed to metaphysics almost without exception, become a mockery; and in face of the victims it becomes downright immoral. For anyone who allows himself to be fobbed off with such meaning moderates in some way the unspeakable and irreparable things which have happened by conceding that somehow, in a secret order of being, all this will have had some kind of purpose." (pg. 104)
 - "No doubt metaphysics has always had its ideological aspects, and it is not difficult to demonstrate in detail in what ways the great metaphysical systems have functioned ideologically. But unless I am mistaken something like a qualitative leap has taken place at this point. That is to say that **although the old metaphysical systems transfigured the existing order by insisting on this moment of meaning, they always had the moment of truth at the same time; they tried to understand that which is, and to gain certainty about the enigmatic and chaotic.** And one could always demonstrate in the older metaphysics, no less than in their ideological character, this moment of truth, this increasing power of reason to understand what is opposed to it, and not to be content with mere irrationality." (pg. 104)
 - **"perhaps I may add at this point that there seems to me to be hardly anything more contemptible, hardly anything more unworthy of the concept of philosophy, of what philosophy once wanted to be, than the mood, especially widespread in Germany, which amounts to a belief that, just because the absence of meaning is unbearable, those who point out that absence are to be blamed. This mood leads people to draw from the postulate that life in a world without meaning cannot be endured, the conclusion that (because what should not be cannot be) a meaning must be constructed: because, after all, there is a meaning.** If I may reveal to you what I really meant by the 'Jargon of Authenticity', I was not just criticizing this or that linguistic cliché - I should not have taken those quite so tragically. What I was really attacking - and if you pick up that little book I would ask you to be quite clear on this point - is precisely the supposition of a meaning on the sole grounds that there must be one since otherwise one could not live: this supposition of a meaning as a lie. And in Germany this supposition seems to me to have slipped into the language to a worrying degree, so that it is no longer made explicitly in thought. That is the reason why I attacked a certain linguistic form so energetically in that book." (pg. 105-106)
 - "For it is a lie to say that death is an invariant at all times; death, too, is a quite abstract entity; death itself can be a different thing in very different times." (pg. 106)
 - "Thus, the reconciliation of life, as something rounded and closed in itself, with death, a reconciliation which was always questionable and precarious and, if it existed at all, was probably a happy exception - that reconciliation is out of the question today. I would say that the approach adopted in *Being and Time* - and here I'd like to make a few more comments on the 'jargon of authenticity' - is perhaps nowhere more ideological than when its author tries to understand death on the basis of 'Dasein's possibility of Being-a-Whole', in which attempt he suppresses the absolute irreconcilability of living experience with death which has become apparent with the definitive decline of positive religions. He seeks, in this way, to rescue structures of the experience of death as structures of Dasein, of human existence itself. **But these structures, as he describes them, only existed within the world of positive theology, by virtue of the positive hope of resurrection; and Heidegger fails to see that through the secularization of this structure, which he at least tacitly assumes in his work, not only have these theological contents disintegrated, but without them this experience itself is no longer possible.** What I really hold against this form of metaphysics is the surreptitious attempt to appropriate theologically posited possibilities of experience without theology. I hasten to add, to avoid misunderstandings, however unlikely, that in view of the historical state of consciousness my remarks should not, of course, be construed as a recommendation of theology, simply on the grounds that, under the protection of religion, it was allegedly easier to die. Now, if one is speaking of the form of death which exists under the absolute controllability of people, including their mass annihilation, one will have to say that from an intra-mundane standpoint the change signifies that the process of adaptation to which people are subject is posited as absolute - just as torture is an extreme form of adaptation. Words such as 'brainwashing' already indicate that by these horrifying means, which include the electric shock treatment of the mentally ill, human beings are to be standardized by force. Any slight difference, any deviation they still possessed in relation to the dominant tendency - that too must be eradicated. In other words, the change that we are experiencing in metaphysics is on the most fundamental level a change in the self and its so-called substance. It is the liquidation of what the old metaphysics sought to encompass by a rational doctrine of the soul as something existing in itself. Brecht has characterized this experience, though in a very uncertain and ambiguous way, with his formula: 'A man's a man'? I would just point out (but will not be able to go into this in detail in these lectures) that it is here, in the question of the liquidation of the self or the ego, in the question of depersonalization, that the most unfathomable problems of metaphysics are concealed; for this ego itself, as the incarnated principle of self-preservation, is involved in the context of social guilt right to its innermost core." (pg. 107-108)
 - **"A situation has been reached today, in the present form of the organization of work in conjunction with the maintenance of the existing relations of production, in which every person is absolutely fungible or replaceable, even under conditions of formal freedom. This situation gives rise to a**

feeling of the superfluity and, if you like, the insignificance of each of us in relation to the whole. That is the reason, located in the objective development of society, for the presence of the feeling I have referred to, even under conditions of formal freedom. I am trying, inadequately as ever, to express these changes for you today, because I have the feeling that to speak of metaphysics without taking account of these things would really be nothing but empty verbiage. In my view, these experiences have such deep objective reasons that they are actually untouched even by political forms of rule, that is, by the difference between formal democracy on the one hand and totalitarian control on the other. That, at least, is how matters have appeared up to now. But we must also be well aware that, **just because we live under the universal principle of profit and thus of self-preservation, the individual has nothing more to lose than himself and his life. At the same time** - as Sartre has shown in his doctrine of the absurdity of existence - **the individual's life, though it is all he has, has become, objectively, absolutely unimportant.** Yet what he must know to be meaningless is forced on him as the meaning of his life; indeed, a life which is really no more than the means to the end of his self-preservation is, by that very fact, bewitched and fetishized as an end. And in this antinomy - on the one hand the debasement of the individual, of the self, to something insignificant, his liquidation, and on the other, his being thrown back on the fact that he no longer has anything but this atomized self which lives our life - in this contradiction lies the horror of the development which I regard it as my duty to present to you today." (pg. 109-110)

▪ Lecture 15 - Metaphysics and Materialism (pg. 112)

- "It should be said, at any rate, that the guilt in which one is enmeshed almost by the mere fact of continuing to live can hardly be reconciled any longer with life itself. Unless one makes oneself wholly insensitive one can hardly escape the feeling - and by feeling I mean experience which is not confined to the emotional sphere - that just by continuing to live one is taking away that possibility from someone else, to whom life has been denied; that one is stealing that person's life. Similarly, a society which in its absurd present form has rendered not work, but people superfluous, predetermines, in a sense, a statistical percentage of people of whom it must divest itself in order to continue to live in its bad, existing form. And if one does live on, one has, in a sense, been statistically lucky at the expense of those who have fallen victim to the mechanism of annihilation and, one must fear, will still fall victim to it. **Guilt reproduces itself in each of us** - and what I am saying is addressed to us as subjects - since we cannot possibly remain fully conscious of this connection at every moment of our waking lives. If we - each of us sitting here - knew at every moment what has happened and to what concatenations we owe our own existence, and how our own existence is interwoven with calamity, even if we have done nothing wrong, simply by having neglected, through fear, to help other people at a crucial moment, for example - a situation very familiar to me from the time of the Third Reich - **if one were fully aware of all these things at every moment, one would really be unable to live. One is pushed, as it were, into forgetfulness, which is already a form of guilt. By failing to be aware at every moment of what threatens and what has happened, one also contributes to it; one resists it too little; and it can be repeated and reinstated at any moment.**" (pg. 112-113)
- "One has the feeling that the depth of philosophical reflection, which is necessary as a resistance to all the illusion with which reified consciousness surrounds us, at the same time leads away from the truth, since one sometimes suspects that this same existence which it is the inalienable impulse of philosophy to penetrate and go beyond, is the only thing which exists and is worth reflecting upon at all. The considerations concerned with the crisis of the concept and of meaning, and the impossibility of restoring meaning to existence, which I set out in the last lectures, point in exactly this direction. And I believe that you need only to apply these considerations to the question I am presenting to you at this moment and you will quite easily see the problem that, **on the one hand, any construction of a meaning, however constituted, is forbidden to us, but that, on the other, the task of philosophy is precisely to understand, and not simply to reflect, what happens to be, or to copy it,** to use Kant's expression. This has placed philosophy in a true quandary. One sometimes has the feeling that the prevalent positivist science is right in capturing only the most superficial and trivial and thus the most external relationships with its classifying procedures, whereas essence, once dis-closed, aims at depth. As a metaphysical thinker, that is, someone who cannot do otherwise than seek to understand, one is sometimes overcome by the eerie suspicion that **understanding itself is an illusion that one ought to be rid of,** and that precisely the superficial mind which merely registers facts, which one resists with every fibre of one's being, may in the end be right. One must, as it were, include common sense and human triviality in metaphysical meaning; one must incorporate it in speculation as the principle which ensures that the world merely is as it is and not otherwise, if the depth of speculation is not to be false, that is, a depth which confers an illusory meaning. On the other hand, however, **the joy of thought,** which motivates us to think on metaphysical matters in the first place and to raise the questions I have discussed in the course of these lectures, **is simply the joy of elevation, the joy of rising beyond what merely is.** And one of the most painful thoughts which can afflict someone who engages in philosophy is that, in giving way to this joy of philosophizing - in refusing to be bargained out of truth by mere being - one is being lured into a demonic situation by this very truth. If the pedestrian replacement of knowledge by the mere registering, ordering and summarizing of facts were to have the last word against the elevation of thought, truth itself would really be a chimera, and there would be no truth, for truth would be no more than the practicable summarizing and arranging of the merely existent. The suspicion I am expressing here and which, I would say, is an indispensable moment of philosophical speculation, is that **trivial, positivist awareness may today be closer to the *adequatio rei atque intellectus* than sublime consciousness.** I believe that the only way out of this dilemma would be to reflect on the idea of truth itself, and to grasp truth, not as an *adequatio*, not as a mere measuring against factual circumstances, but as a procedure adopted towards a being of a quite different nature and dimension, and tied to a quite different procedure of consciousness than mere registration. But in face of this pedestrian or positivist motif that mind really consists in nothing other than counting the feet of the millipede - and I can say that everything I think is just one single resistance to that conception of mind - the impulse opposed to it can probably only survive by adopting the principle: renounce, that you may gain. That is to say, one will not survive by preserving some so-called higher spheres, or what I would prefer to call nature reserves, which reflection is not allowed to touch, but by pushing the process of de-mythologizing, or enlightenment, to the extreme. Only in this, if at all, is there any hope that the philosopher, through his self-reflection, will not end by consummating triviality, the consummation of which is absolute horror. For no matter how one may view the works of Hannah Arendt, and I take an extremely critical view of them, she is undoubtedly right in the identification of evil with triviality. But I would put it the other way round; **I would not say that evil is trivial, but that triviality is evil - triviality, that is, as the form of consciousness and mind which adapts itself to the world as it is, which obeys the principle of inertia.** And this principle of inertia truly is what is radically evil. I would say, therefore, that **if metaphysical thinking today is to have any chance,** and is not to degenerate into claptrap about a 'new protectedness' [*neue Geborgenheit*] and suchlike nonsense, **it will have to cease being apologetic and pointing to something one can hold onto and never lose, and think against itself. And that means that it must measure itself against the ultimate, the absolutely unthinkable, to have any right to be a thinking at all.**" (pg. 114-115)
- "If one realizes that **everything we call culture consists in the suppression of nature** and any uncontrolled traces of nature, then what this culture finds most unbearable are those places where it is not quite able to control natural manifestations, where they intrude persistently into its own domain, as in the case of the dark stratum I just spoke about. It might be said that culture banishes stench because it itself stinks - which Brecht once formulated in the truly magnificent and inspired statement that **humanity up to now had built itself an immense palace of dogshit.** I believe that culture's squalid and guilty suppression of nature - a suppression which is itself a wrongly and blindly natural tendency of human beings - is the reason why people refuse to admit that dark sphere. And if one really wants to cure philosophy of its ideological, dissembling character, which has reached an almost unendurable level today, then this is probably the *Tótos vontós*, the point of recognition, where that transformation should be achieved. If what I have tried to explain - in extreme terms - about the concept of culture is true, and if it is the case that philosophy's only *raison d'être* today is to gain access to the unsayable, then it can be said that Auschwitz and the world of Auschwitz have made clear something which was not a surprise to those who were not positivists but had a deep, speculative turn of mind: that culture has failed to its very core. This was also stated by Marx in the magnificent formulations in his drafts for Capital which he later suppressed, in which he spoke of the narrow-mindedness of all culture up to that time.

The same idea was, of course, expressed by Nietzsche who, because his attention was fixated on the cultural superstructure, peered more deeply into it than any other. The reason can be seen most clearly in the fact that philosophy, art and rational science have not really impinged on human beings, to whom they are necessarily addressed as their ideal subject." (pg. 118)

- Lecture 16 - Consciousness of Negativity (pg. 120)
 - "The moment one falls back on the wholly abstract notion of the world's inscrutable ways - and the attribution of inscrutable ways to anything has always been calamitous - the assumption of metaphysical meaning itself (and not just our consciousness of it) is shattered. For **I believe that we have nothing except our reason; that we have no option but to measure by our concrete experience**; and that within the constellations which now define our experience all the traditional affirmative or positive theses of metaphysics - I think I can put it most simply like this - simply become blasphemies." (pg. 121)
 - "perhaps change can only be made today through thoughts which do not directly aim at change" (pg. 126)
 - "**The spell which binds us today consists not least in the fact that it ceaselessly urges people to take action which they believe will break the spell; and that it prevents the reflection on themselves and the circumstances which might really break it.** I believe that there is a precise correlation between these two phenomena: on the one hand, the rage which comes over people in face of - shall we say? - reflection without consequences, and, on the other hand, the moment of liberation contained in such reflection. Those who appeal for action, for the sake of human beings, cheat them of their right, even if they believe the opposite - depriving them of their own possibility, their humanity. I give the same answer to those who accuse me of a 'lack of love for human beings', because I give no guidelines for praxis and offer no consolation. I warn them that when there is talk of a lack of love there is almost always a desire that this love be somehow directed towards evil." (pg. 126)
 - "But while **culture has undoubtedly failed, through its own fault**, and is being punished for that, the straightforward barbarism which is brought into being through its failure is always even worse. It is, I would say, a metaphysical fallacy into which I should like to prevent you from falling to believe that because culture has failed; because it has not kept its promise; because it has denied human beings freedom, individuality, true universality; because it has not fulfilled its own concept, it should therefore be thrown on the scrap-heap and cheerfully replaced by the cynical establishment of immediate power relationships. **One of the most dangerous errors now lurking in the collective unconscious** - and the word error is far too weak and intellectual for it - **is to assume that because something is not what it promises to be, because it does not yet match its concept, it is therefore worse than its opposite, the pure immediacy which destroys it.** On these grounds too, therefore, for reasons arising from the dialectical nature of culture, the abstract separation of culture from metaphysics which is taken for granted today cannot be endorsed." (pg. 127-128)
- Lecture 17 - Dying Today (pg. 129)
 - "I spoke in the last lecture about the interconnection of metaphysics and culture, and said that the spectacular failure of culture today had radically undermined the possibility of metaphysics. But I would now like to add - not only to prevent misunderstanding but because completeness of thought requires it - that, on the other hand, the failure of culture does not give thought a kind of free passage to some natural state. It cannot do so because **the failure of culture stems from its own naturalness**, if I might put it like that; it is the result of its own persistent character as a natural entity. This culture has failed because it has clung to mere self-preservation and its various derivatives in a situation in which humanity has simply outgrown that principle. It is no longer confined by direct necessity to compulsive self-preservation, and is no longer compelled to extend the principle of mastery over nature, both inner and outer nature, into the indefinite future. On the other hand, it is idle and futile for thought to attempt now to appropriate metaphysics as a collection of pure categories which are immediate to consciousness, since knowledge can never disown its own mediateness, or, in other words, its dependence on culture in every sense. **Philosophy is itself a piece of culture, is enmeshed in culture**; and if it behaves as if it were rendered immediate by some allegedly primal questions which elevate it above culture, it blinds itself to its own conditions and truly succumbs to its cultural conditionality; in other words, it becomes straightforward ideology. **There is no knowledge which can repudiate its mediations; it can only reflect them.** Both the alleged primal experiences, and the threadbare categories of culture as something man-made, are inalienably mediated and have their own negativity in this mediation. As long as culture lives on in a world arranged like ours, in which, whether in South Africa or Vietnam, things happen of which we know and only with difficulty repress the knowledge that they happen - in such a world culture and all the noble and sublime things in which we take delight are like a lid over refuse. But nature, in so far as we believe we can share in its original qualities independently of culture, is no more than a projection of the cultural desire that everything should remain unchanged; that we should stay in the good, untrue old days, in the 'aeon', to speak with Schelling, in which, as Kafka put it, no progress has yet taken place." (pg. 129-130)
- Lecture 18 - Metaphysical Experience (pg. 137)
 - "All metaphysical experiences - I should like to state as a proposition here - are fallible. I would say, in general, that all experiences which have to be lived, which are not mere copies or reconstructions of that which is in any case, contain the possibility of error, the possibility that they can completely miss the mark. And, in much the same way as I indicated earlier with regard to the concept of tradition, it may be one of the [**Greek word*], the deceptions in which scientific-idealist thinking has enmeshed us, that we believe a piece of knowledge to rank higher the less it is liable to failure, to disappointment. It might well be that, according to this criterion, everything which really matters would be excluded as unworthy of being known; whereas in truth - so it seems to me - only what can be refuted, what can be disappointed, what can be wrong, has the openness I have spoken of, that is, it is the only thing which matters. **It is in the concept of openness, as that which is not already subsumed under the identity of the concept, that the possibility of disappointment lies.** And I should like to say that within the meaning of these reflections on the possibility of metaphysics there lies a peculiar affinity to empiricism. For empiricism, with its emphasis on empirical sources, implies an element of metaphysics at least in the sense that the essential knowledge is seen as that which does not coincide with concepts, but which, as it were, falls accidentally into my lap, and thus always includes the possibility that it might not do so. Such knowledge therefore has an inherent fortuitousness, from which it derives an element of meaning which, according to the prevalent logic, is excluded precisely by the concept of the accidental. **Fallibility, I would say, is the condition of the possibility of such metaphysical experience. And it seems to attach most strongly to the weakest and most fragile experiences.**" (pg. 141)

d. Further Readings:

- Psychology: The Nature and Reality of the Soul, by M. Beck