

Have We Seen the Last of Metaphysical Systems?

It seems the history of philosophy has been characterized by the rise (and fall?) of overarching metaphysical systems:

Presocratics: 4 elements constitute all (with one as prime, e.g., Heraclitus & fire)
Plato: The relation of Being, Forms, and Matter (also Middle & Neoplatonists)
Aristotle: Prime mover gives rise to all things
Stoics: *Logos* permeates all, is all
Origen: Scripture : tripartite meaning, corresponding to man (body – soul – spirit)
Anselm: “that than which nothing greater can be conceived;” *fides quaerens intellectum*
Leibniz: World consists in self-contained, “windowless” units—monads!
Kant: Narrowed focus of metaphysics—science informs us where pure reason fails
Hegel: History has a progressive pattern; all is dialectic
Heidegger: We as *Dasein* are all intimately familiar with Being; all interconnected...

Yet now we seem to have entered into an epoch of uncertainty about whether metaphysics is possible at all. **Rorty** says it's all conversation, that philosophy *qua* Philosophy is meaningless, that all is relative. **Gadamer** concedes that a better hermeneutical understanding is still limited by the asymptotic impenetrability of objective truth-out-there apart from interpretation. **Randian** “objectivism” dismisses truth-out-there altogether, declaring the supremacy of sense-perception.

Now it seems we've returned to a wholly negative reworking of Socrates' method: from “I don't know (and neither do you!) but perhaps we together through dialogue can come to an agreement about the nature of reality” to “I don't know and neither do you—nor can we know—the end. Let's have a nice sit-down chat about how great America is and is not, but don't dare make any absolute claims about anything. Except not making absolute claims.”

Are we going to see a resurgence of metaphysicians? Can we make any more ontologically certain claims about the nature of reality apart from resorting to relativism, subjectivism, or other (essentially) absolute claims of ultimate ignorance? Will we (*we who?*—us, of course!) decide again that by conversation we can achieve some absolute knowledge and re-start the Socratic process over?

The beginning and the end are common on the circumference of a circle. —Heraclitus

