Metaphysics has come to an end. So they say. Let us assume: so they know. How do they know? And which metaphysics are they talking of? What unity are they thinking of?

Others have protested: Metaphysics is still going on—as it went on and on, in the schools. Isn’t it still being taught? It appears to survive in textbooks. And the historians of philosophy point out: contemporary thought still shows the traces of that tradition. Even when unnoticed it rolls on and on with our habits of thinking.

In that stream we are every now and then being offered an introduction to and even into metaphysics. What do we meet there? A contemporary metaphysics? A renewed First Science?

The stimulus to such introductions already suggests some modernisations on old “problems,” which are traditionally considered to be typical of metaphysics—all the more as it seems to go on itself as a problem only. Is it still going strong?

What makes it a problem is the legitimacy of its problems. Particularly after some rude remarks from respectable quarters establishing that they make no sense. Of course, the criterion of sense has duly become a problem itself. To quote “Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning service”: “the masters of the subtle schools are controversial”—even if they are not “polymath”; in the field of metaphysics, to be sure.
During the last decades the mood has swung to give the sense of metaphysical problems the benefit of doubt. Even the project of a "descriptive metaphysics" has turned up—in bold attachment to the old name, however with the security clause of its difference from "revisionary" metaphysics. To safeguard that difference even Hume, who was formerly felt to be rather sceptical about metaphysics, is given a position of ambivalence between "revision" and "description." In a fit of caution.

So we may fairly conclude that the prevailing situation for considering the end of metaphysics is rather complex, if not confused. Seriously?

I.

But why be so vague as to what we are talking about? There is the undisputed tenet that metaphysics is both ontology and theology. Someone might want to add henology. It is obvious that "rational theology" is nowadays at best a problematical case. But we are still firmly left with ontology—and, if the learned agree, with henology as well. Both may go on and on, because they thrive on an undisputed linguistic basis of investigation—however remote the ontological tradition may be that is thought to derive from Aristotle; however remote the henological tradition may be, which the renewed interest in the so-called Neo-Platonic strain has unearthed. Even if these traditions have shrunk to rivulets, how could they come to an end? Who would feel its benefit? Who would be relieved? Those who promote the respective problems? And who else takes notice?

The assumption that metaphysics has come to an end appears, however, not to be deterred by the survival of its (?) ontology, let alone by the historical revival of an interest in henology. There is no opposition, because it is unlikely that the protest against the assumption refers to the same thing. So what has the assumption in mind?

Which is the reason, that asserts: metaphysics has come to an end? Presumably it is to be understood as an historical phenomenon. Of what sort? If taken in its own right, i.e. as First Science, one would expect it to fall into the history of science. But in the contemporary reflections on such histories it goes without notice. Kuhn and his followers have not attended to the revolutionary structure of metaphysics, though prominent. But apparently it is not to be considered as a science at all, let alone as the primary science. Philosophy of science or of logic may approach such status, but not metaphysics.

When it comes to the reflection on the history of the ground for science in life, we find also metaphysics considered—not as science, but as a