

TOPIC THREE

LOGICAL ATOMISM

This is wildly associated with Bertrand Russell and early Wittgenstein. Its concern was to analyse thought and discourse into logical atoms which are indivisible components of complex thought. The goal was to understand the world through the medium of language for it is only through language that we talk about the world.

The method of logical atomism is referred to as Logical Analysis of language for the purpose of understanding the world. There was emphasis on the use of a perfect formalized artificial or axiomatized language of the kind which we find in *Principia Mathematica* written by Russell and Whitehead. In other words, the goal of logical atomism was to event an ideal artificial language which unlike ordinary language will be able to reveal the logic of thought and language and its result that is clear. Rudolf Carnap's "The Logical Syntax of language" was an early attempt to construct such an artificial language. This is why for him, philosophy must be replaced by the logic of science or the language of the principia, i.e by the logical analysis of the concept and sentences of the sciences. This means that the logic of science is same as the logical syntax of the language of science.

Logical atomists assume that the structure of our language and the structure of reality are similar. This is to say that the structure of language can lead to the knowledge of the world and vice-versa. Consequently philosophy is seen as the critique of language.

Factors for the Decline of Logical Atomism

1. The illusion of a perfect language that eliminate emotions, having no other connotation apart from what it was said to represent. It was assumed that the symbolic logical calculus of Russell and Whitehead's **Principia Mathematica** provided an ideal language with which reality can be grasped. This assumption was debunked or refuted by the fact, that alternative system of calculus were easily constructed by other philosophers like Rudolf Carnap and the new logical models appeared more appealing to most philosopher than that of Russell and Whitehead. Besides, while most philosophers in U.S.A and Germany followed Russell and

thought that a perfect language was what was needed to express reality, the British philosophers followed G.E. Moore whose thought analysis should be of common sense believes expressed in ordinary language.

- 2. Solipsism:** This is the theory that only the self, its mental states and thought are real. Logical atomism falls prey to these theory because it maintains that there are propositions which are about private sense data and experiences which may or may not be intelligible. If this is true, then communication between individual could be impossible. In fact, Wittgenstein explicitly endorsed solipcism when he said:

in fact what solipcism intends is quite correct only it cannot be said but it shows itself; that the world is my world shows itself in the fact that the limits of language is the limit of my world.

- 3.** The concept of what is meant by atomic propositions is not only difficult to fix, examples are also difficult to provide. They are supposed to be some ultimate, i.e irreducible form such as name which designate particulars and proposition which correspond to fact. Yet we know that the phrases e.g. say, “This being red” or just “being red” referred to a range of indeterminate colours in reality. This makes it clear that a perfect language is an illusion because actual examples of atomic propositions are difficult to find.
- 4.** The logical atomist has maintained that there is a one to none correspondence between true propositions and the facts they picture. This means that there is a structural similarity between facts and propositions about them. Still we cannot find such resemblance between facts and proposition. Besides, the illegal isomorphism (one-to-one correspondence) presumes that there is only one perfect language which pictures reality and that all natural languages one mere conventional variances of that language.
- 5.** Logical analysis was proposed by atomists with view of eliminating metaphysical discourses from philosophy. But analysts themselves soon discovered that logical atomism was itself founded on a difficult and impracticable metaphysics. This finally led to the abandonment of logical atomism. Reductive analysts was difficult to

practice as most of the proposition in the logical atomism failed the verification principles