

TOPIC 4

LOGICAL POSITIVISM

It was the successor of logical atomism and was also concerned with the clarification of language. It started as what was known as the Vienna Circle having so many academic members from different academic background. It was influenced by Wittgenstein's Tractatus especially by the statement that “the meaning of a proposition is a method of verification” and this statement was influenced by traditional empiricism. Some of the members of the Vienna circle include, Schlick, Carnap, Ayer, etc.

The Basic Aim of Logical Positivism

Their aim was to draw a distinction between analytic and synthetic proposition so as to be able to classify all meaningful statement into either of these categories and those which cannot be classified as meaningless. It therefore adopted the verification principle in order to be able to draw a distinction between cognitively meaningful statements, trivially meaningful ones and the meaningless of metaphysical statements.

It also sought to purify philosophy by deviating it of traditional metaphysical discourses.

It also sought the unification of science by working out a systematic and coherent logic by which all the physical science can be shown to be related.

The verification principle itself derived from the empirical philosophy of Hume and Kant.

This means that for a proposition to be meaningful, a person must be capable of verifying it and this criterion was meant to eliminated metaphysical and theological statement. A statement, e.g. that the moon is made of cheese and butter or that there one mountains on the other side of the moon are meaningful because we can imagine the circumstances under which such statements can be true even if we cannot verify it empirically. Verification principle is a product of the logical positivists these that there are two kinds of meaningful statements; analytic and synthetic statements.

The principle of identity or the Principle of Synonymity: Its paradox and possible solutions

Let us suppose that the planet Venus has a certain property, the property of being larger than the moon. Suppose also that one and the same object may be referred to by more

than one name, say, that the object called Venus is also called morning star. Then if it is true that Venus has the property of being larger than the moon; it also follows that morning star has the property of being larger than the moon since morning star and Venus are one and the same thing. This way of thinking illustrates our mathematical concept of identity that is, the idea of sameness as well as the linguistic concept of synonymy. In this context, to say that X and Y (or that X is identical with Y or that X is synonymous with Y) is to say that whatever property X possesses, Y also possesses.

This Understanding of Identity is referred to by Leibnitz as the Principle of indiscernibility of identity. According to this principle co-referential terms are interchangeable in any true statement *sava verita* i.e saving truth or without any significant loss in meaning. What makes this principle incontrovertible to say that one object has a property and that object has another name, that other property also possess that property.

Quine calls this principle the principle of substitutivity of identities. To him, given a true statement of identity, one of its two terms may be substituted for other in any true statement and the result is true. This principle is so challenging or fundamental to our thinking that one would hardly give it up as not true and or some circumstances. Yet it has certain problems. Frege identifies some problem with it.

The principle is attractive but in his (Frege's) 'On Sense and Reference', he notices that there is a puzzle about it. One puzzle is that, why is it that some identity statement one is more informative than the other. For example, morning star is morning star and morning star is evening star. Both of them are identity statement but the later is more cognitively informative than the other which is trivially informative or not informative. He also discovered that the substitution of co-referential terms fails in an intentional context which involves such terms as belief, hope, know, wish, desire, intent etc. and it also fails in modal context when is one that involved language of possibility and necessity. E.g.

Premise 1

Venus has a surface of 900° c

Premise 2

Venus = MS (Morning Star)

Conclusion

Therefore, MS has a surface temperature of 900°C

Consider the second argument

Premise 1

John believes that Venus has a surface temperature of 900°C

Premise 2

Venus = MS

Conclusion

Therefore, John believes that MS has a surface temperature of 900°C

By Leibniz principle of indiscernibility of identical, the substitution in argument B fails because even if John knows premise 2 though he may not have known it, he may not have thought about the implantation of premise 2 to premise 1 and might even be surprised to be told or hear that he John believe the conclusion.

Bertrand Russell also identify a problem. Given the true statement that

(1) Sir Arthur Scyth is the author of Waverley. In this statement, the principle of identity (substitutivity) allows it to substitute Sir Scyth for Waverley or vice-versa in any context.

2 George wishes to know whether Sir Scyth was the author of Waverley.

Hence we can infer the third statement.

3. George the IV wish to know whether Sir Scyth is Sir Scyth.

In this inference, it is clear that the truth of the second statement is not preserved in the third statement because it is questionable if George the IV had any interest in the law of identity. Hence according to Bertrand Russell, "an interest in the law of identity can hardly be attributed to the first gentleman of Europe". Thus the principle of identity fails.

Attempted Solutions

In Frege's theory of sense and reference, he draws a distinction between sense of an expression as the connotation or contextual meaning of the expression and the reference as the denotation, nomination of object named and he says that in the context earlier indicated the word obtains a new sense which is different from the original customary sense. How does Frege draw the distinction between sense and reference.

He says that the sense of a linguistic expression is grasped by everyone who knows the language or the totality of designations of which the proper name is part. So when one is familiar with a language is when one can grasp the sense of linguistic expression and every sense of an expression contains its mode of presentation. (see more explanation in Philosophy of language text).

Russell's theory of definite description is an attempted solution as well. According to this theory descriptive phrases of the form unlike proper names such as Sir Walter Scott have no meaning when taken or considered in isolation but can only be defined contextually in such a way that the descriptive phrase disappears altogether. E.g. Russell says that the subordinate clause in statement 2 above namely; 'Sir Walter Scott was the author of Waverley is an abbreviation for one and only, one individual who wrote Waverley and that individual was Sir Walter Scott'. In this context, Russell says that the descriptive phrase disappears and there is no term to be replaced by Walter Scott in Statement 2 and the puzzle of paradox is dissolved.