
UNIT 3 THE LINGUISTIC TURN AND EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

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3.0. OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to familiarize the student with the trends in the language philosophy, specially after the great linguistic turn, which shifted the focus of philosophy to the language. The unit also familiarizes the student with the epistemological justification with regard to the propositions which is the main contribution to the understanding which comes as a unique contribution after the linguistic turn.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In the philosophical attempt to understand the world, man and the transcendent, there are various attempts to answer the fundamental questions. The history of philosophy shows the evidence that there are shifts in understanding the reality from various perspectives. It was from speculation through reason, to analysis of knowledge that the philosophy has grown into. On the way, it has accommodated various insights from various sciences in its attempt to understand the world. However, one of the drastic shifts in understanding the reality is through the focus on language. It can be traced to the long history but evidently, it became prominent during the 19th and 20th centuries. This major shift we are going to discuss is the linguistic turn in understanding the reality.

Every philosophy, metaphysics has its own epistemological outlook and a world view. It is based on this the philosophical body of knowledge has grown. The laying bare of the presuppositions behind a particular philosophical way of looking makes philosophical problems clear and helps in searching for the better answers. In this process the older answers seem to be opinions and newer answers are sought to replace the opinions. One of the shifts in finding a new answer to the ever new problems of philosophy is recourse to the language in which any philosophical problems are formulated. Therefore, the linguistic turn in philosophy refers to the analysis of language as the potential for providing answers to the philosophical problems. Generally, this turn has parted into two different ways in answering philosophical problems. One of the ways is the ideal language philosophy and the other as the ordinary language philosophy.

3.2. MAJOR FACTORS OF LINGUISTIC TURN

The linguistic turn in philosophy aims at arriving at truth through the analysis of language. Initially, the language philosophy school was anti-metaphysical in its outlook. It is influenced by the Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle and their scientific bent on verification. Another important presupposition in linguistic philosophy is the shift of discussion from reality to that which describes the reality, namely the language. Language philosophy assumes that the language reflects the reality. Hence, the language is the efficient tool to know, to understand the reality through its description and through the analysis of its logical syntax. Hence, the linguistic turn aims at describing the world by describing a suitable language. Language is a method according to this school of philosophy.

3.3. HISTORICAL SURVEY/ IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS

Linguistic turn in philosophy did not occur within one day. It was a longer reflection and growth in fields such as phenomenology, existentialism, logic etc. gave rise to linguistic turn. The growth of science and the scientific world view in some way helped in developing a turn towards language analysis. While science claimed that it claimed particular truths, philosophy was trying to give the most general truths about the world and reality, a universal picture of the world, a general world view, a synopsis wherein all other truths could be held together. However, previously the philosophers who were arriving at this kind of truth were distinct from each other and hence there was not one view of the world but several. How to account for such variety and multiplicity of views where in there are contradicting views from one another? In the history of the development of ideas, the linguistic turn is a profound one. However, two major trends have contributed in arriving at this turn. They can be categorized as development from Frege and Meinong who were belonging to the philosophical traditions in Germany and the other is from the English speaking traditions specially of Moore and Russell and Wittgenstein.

The contributions of the philosophers from the German speaking philosophers specially of Frege are important here. First of all, Frege held that the notion that the structure of a thought must be reflected in the structure of sentence expressing it and not mere encoding it. It meant that without reference to the linguistic expression, thought structure cannot be studied because every thought is mediated by language. Therefore, the understanding came about as the thought is grasped in grasping the semantic properties of the sentence: to speak of the structure of the thought is to speak of the semantic interrelation of the parts of the sentence. Secondly, the notion of sense and reference played a significant role in determining the truth value of a sentence and the thought. Thirdly, Frege held that an expression simply has a sense which is objective and therefore human beings have access to thoughts only as expressed in language or symbolism. At one strand of philosophy of language, these thoughts of Frege contribute to the linguistic turn.

At the other side, the Moorean emphasis on the common sense, Russell's search of logical atoms and Wittgenstein's emphasis on language game gave altogether twisted the philosophical direction and the philosophical questions. It is from here the emphasis falls on the language. The language philosophy turns to the analysis of language as the philosophical truth is expressed in language. The analysis of language here is the arriving at the meaning of the expression, the sense of it. Therefore, linguistic turn essentially presupposes a secondary reflection on language in which the world is expressed either truly or falsely. The expression therefore can represent the world through propositions which are either true or false.

In this sense, language philosophy looks at philosophy as an activity of finding meaning. Through analysis, when the meanings are found, the problems of philosophy are dissolved. When a problem is understood it no longer remains a problem. Hence, the explication of the philosophical problem through language will lead to the disappearance misunderstandings which we usually call philosophical problems. Secondly, some problems will reappear as the problems of ordinary science and not philosophical ones.

Analytically being one of the chief methods of philosophical enquiry we find that the history of the development of language analysis can be understood in four different phases. They are: Traditional analysis, analysis which leads to the construction of artificial languages, later Wittgensteinian analysis and Analysis of the Oxford school of language philosophers. Some of the important contributors to the linguistic turn and the philosophers of this school: Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, Rudolf Carnap, Gilbert Ryle, Gustav Bergmann, Norman Malcolm, Max Black, WVO Quine, Wittgenstein, Peter Geach, Donald Davidson, P F Strawson etc.

Check your progress I

Use the space provided for your answer

What is linguistic turn?

What are the main streams which helped in development of the linguistic turn?

Name a few contributors of the linguistic philosophy?

3.4. RECONSTRUCTION OF METAPHYSICS

One important point to note here is that mutual sharing has taken place between language schools of philosophy and the logical positivist school. At some points they agree and take inspiration from one another. However, there are essential differences. Language as such has been studied by philologists, aestheticians, psychologists, sociologists etc. but the type of study undertaken by the language school is unique because it tried to bring together the insights as general truths under the banner of the analysis of language. Certain presuppositions of the language school are necessary to understand the metaphysics they construct. The language school of philosophy considers that philosophical problems are not pseudo-problems but cannot be polarized into either phenomenology alone or formalism only. These problems are essentially linguistic. Secondly, the philosophical propositions are used, in the first place in the ordinary sense and secondly in their complexity in the technical sense. Therefore, in one sense, it uses common sense of the language and the other the complex ideal sense, with fixed meanings. Thirdly, language philosophy assumes that grammatical form may mislead in understanding the philosophical problems and therefore, technical symbolization can be used in the form of ideal language. Fourthly, language philosophy considers the syntax of language specially of ideal / formal language as the object of analysis which will lead to the proper meaning of expressions. (Syntax here deals with some properties of the signs and of the patterns in which these signs are arranged). Here, the syntax stands underneath the expressions and words of natural language. The elements of syntax language (can be called signs) need interpretations and they are defined in order to be arranged. Hence, the defining of the signs in the syntactic language in turn defines the undefined signs of the same language. When the words and expressions stand for such signs they give rise to meaning.

On these notions we can understand how the language school reconstructs the metaphysics. First of all, the differences of views on philosophical problems are no longer are considered incompatible but are considered to have a commonsense core. This solves the problem of understanding the reality as diverse, unified etc. by the analysis of language. The second reconstruction is regarding the notion of truth. The language school analyses the certainty, synthetic and analytic truths. The notion of certainty can be applied to the synthetic truths wherein the certainty becomes absolute regarding the objects in the world, with regard to its content. However, the notion of certainty with regard to analytic truths may not give any certainty about the contents of the world. It only works within the framework of logical language. Understanding these independently of each other blurs the understanding of certainty.

Abstract entities like relations, properties, classes, numbers, propositions etc. are problematic issues in the language when they are looked from the empirical point of view. However, language philosophy discusses them within the linguistic framework by dividing them into two categories such as internal questions within the framework and entities as whole as external questions. Based upon the language framework such as logical framework and factual framework, the questions of these abstract entities can be dealt with. Factual framework depends much on the empirical standpoint while the former stands for the logical analysis of a language. The reality of the internal questions stands out as empirical reality, having a framework of 'thing-language'. While the external question are answered from different points of view such as realism, idealism etc. because they are raised from the point of view of theoretical framework.

3.5. TWO SCHOOLS:

Ordinary Language Philosophy Of G. E. Moore

G. E. Moore is the chief proponent of ordinary language philosophy. Moore's philosophy bases itself on the commonsense view and ordinary language. Common sense view of the world and the ordinary language are closely connected in the ordinary language philosophy of Moore. The epistemology based on the empiricism is hall mark of ordinary language philosophy. Therefore, empirical statements do have a certainty of themselves. Moorean concept of certainty, knowledge and language emerge from his understanding of the sense-data theory. Idealism had emphasised on the role of mind to such a great extent that, what mind perceives, namely the

material object / reality, was reduced to mental phenomena, a thought or idea. Moore held that in any case it is through sensation and perception that we form the ideas in our minds; it is not our ideas which form the objects. Thus, there exists some sort of reality outside, beyond our mind. This reality is the content of our experience. It is through the senses that we know the material objects, and on this all other means of knowledge are based. Thus, in our experience of objects we apprehend something which is there and not an idea. This content of our experience is known as sense-data.

Moore succeeds in establishing the existence of material objects. However, he encounters the problem, that “in our direct apprehension, we directly apprehend certain sense-data and at the same time something other than sense data.” This something ‘other than sense data’ is known through the propositions, which are new class of facts in the universe. Moore classifies material entities into two. His classification is based on the knowledge of the material entities. Knowledge of material entities is derived through the propositions. What he means by proposition is, ‘a proposition is the sort of thing which is commonly expressed by a whole sentence.’

For Moore, proposition doesn’t mean collection of words, rather a sort of thing which these collections of words express, ...’mean’. Analysing the example of twice two are four and twice four are eight, in both cases, what is apprehended (Four, eight) or the ‘meaning’ is proposition. Moore concludes that a proposition has an act of apprehension and what is apprehended is proposition. The notion of logical certainty doesn’t apply to the empirical statements. According to this school, the falsity comes to surface when expressions contradict the empirical facts or when wrong language is used to describe the empirical facts. However, an ordinary expression is an expression which would be used to describe non-contradictory situation, a certain sort of situation. At the same time an ordinary expression also can construct a contradictory situation.

Ideal Language Philosophy Of Bertrand Russell

Focus being different to different thinkers in this school, ideal language assumes that the properties of language may help in understanding the structure of the world. The linguistic approach to metaphysics being an enquiry, it understands the relation between the language and world. Each of the facts of which the world is composed has a certain ontological structure. In order for a given sentence to assert a particular fact, the sentence must have a logical structure which has something in common with the ontological structure of the fact. Hence, on the not unreasonable presumption that sentences are easier to investigate than the facts they assert, the royal road to metaphysical knowledge consists of investigating the structures of the sentences. For a study of grammar will yield us knowledge of that part of the ontological structure of the world, which is common to facts, on the one hand, and sentences asserting those facts, on the other. However, natural language and its grammar have many accidental features and it can assert by several sentences and in diverse structures. Therefore, the natural language leads to ambiguity of perplexity in its expression, and hence, to gain metaphysical knowledge through investigating language one must first construct an ‘ideal’ or ‘logically perfect’ language to investigate. Logical syntax is the requirement of the ideal language in order to represent the world. In some sense, therefore, we can say that an imperfect language will have a misleading structure which will render unsound any inferences drawn from its structure to the structure of the world.

Russell’s theory of descriptions and his search for the ultimate constituents of the world need a mention here. The theory of descriptions ascribes a shadowy mode of participation and existence of the abstract and imaginative entities. Not adhering to any disputable epistemology, this theory of descriptions stands as a method of logical translation. In some sense it can be interpreted as a contribution to the reform of common syntax, improvement of the vocabulary of ordinary language is provided through theory of descriptions rather than a doctrine of logical construction theory of language.

The relationship between the logical constructions of language (ideal) and the non-logicality of the material words are based on the epistemological principle of the reducibility of knowledge to acquaintance. Therefore, the sentences of natural language are already a translation when it consists entirely of ‘logically proper names’ for they are the ultimate constituents of the world. The sentences therefore are in some sense are pictorial sentences. The logically proper names, the ultimate constituents of the world are those with which we can be acquainted. Though this view has its own defects, the theory of descriptions through the recognition of ultimate constituents of the world (sense-data) with which we are acquainted sheds its light on ideal language in which the defects of the ordinary language are removed. The ideal language therefore is a construction which removes the defects of the ordinary language using the symbols which are logically proper names denoting objects of acquaintance.

(The contributions of Wittgenstein cannot be ignored here. He has been dealt in the previous unit we don't have a detailed discussion here.)

Check Your Progress II

Use the space provided for your answer

What is the metaphysics of linguistic philosophy?

Which are the two schools of linguistic analysis?

Mention Russell's' contributions.

3.6. IMPACT ON PHILOSOPHY / EPISTEMOLOGY

The linguistic turn through its analysis has brought out some solution to the metaphysical problems, epistemological problems, and also has blurred some other problems too. In the first place, the impact can be noticed that the ordinary language is taken seriously to find out do our scientific, philosophical problems stated in them are really the problems of language or the problems of reality. Secondly, the language is understood not merely as a grammatical construct rather having a logical structure. Language therefore falls under the domain of logic. The epistemological plane too has been influenced by the linguistic turn. The epistemology of linguistic school has its basis on two fundamental views of empiricism and idealism. While the ordinary language philosophy has the foundation of empiricism, the later developments from Russell to Wittgenstein have their foundations in idealism to a very great extent. It is the later school which became prominent in its analysis of language strongly being influenced by the logical positivism of Vienna Circle. The usually considered ontology and the picture of reality is perceived through the linguistic lenses after the linguistic turn. The language itself is considered as a category and has commonality with the structure of the world. And therefore, there is a direct relationship with the world and language. The inner structure of language through the notion of proposition gets more attention as the propositional structure can be analysed through the logical tools and symbols, forming an ideal language.

3.7. EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

Epistemology in the recent times has shifted its focus from discussing the traditional questions of knowledge to the deeper areas of perception in relation to beliefs. Epistemology is the study of knowledge and the justification of belief. It tries to answer the questions such as 'which beliefs are justified and which are not? What is the difference between knowing and having a true belief? What is the relation between seeing and knowing?' etc. In this regard positions are taken as realism, idealism and others towards knowledge and the stands points of different schools pose further problems in the field of epistemology.

Knowledge And Its Relation To Justified True Belief

Knowledge arises in experience, reflection, and develops through inference. It has a distinctive structure and content. Knowledge can be knowledge of the objects which are external to us. Much of the sense-data theories and realistic theories deal with this view of epistemology. However, the knowledge is not merely of the external objects. Knowledge also can be of different kinds. It also includes the mental states, imaginations, mathematics etc. The content of knowledge becomes beliefs, propositions, which are believed to be true. Such knowledge certainly depends on the perception but is beyond perception like knowledge through memory, reflection on abstract matters etc. Therefore, the justification of belief as content of the knowledge is must. It needs some footing to hold it to be true. In this sense, a justified true belief needs to be grounded on some source which is considered as true. It usually finds itself grounded on causal, justificational and epistemic grounds. A belief is grounded on causal ground because

an experience underlies the belief, it is grounded on justification because some elements of our beliefs are related to such experience and epistemically justified because the knowledge constitutes the belief we hold in virtue of our experience.

What Is Justification?

Not all knowledge is justified true belief but all knowledge is at least justified true belief. The natural knowledge which strongly has its foundation on the sense experience doesn't need to be justified by any other kind. However, the propositional knowledge does need justification. The knowledge about the world, in its relation to truth has its basis in the world. However, the justification is related to the process inside the mind. Therefore, that which is not visible, the propositional knowledge needs to be justified for the sake of communication of knowledge.

Justification is essentially connected with the truth. Whether it is a propositional belief or empirical belief, both are connected with truth. Knowledge arises from the same sources as justification: the internal states and processes that justify our beliefs also connect our beliefs with external facts in virtue of which those beliefs are true.

The relationship between the knowledge and belief is closely connected. When the belief is not based on direct knowledge and is dependent upon indirect knowledge, the foundation of such belief needs to be closely looked into. In the long epistemic chain, the belief that constitutes knowledge might have been derived from some knowledge. In this sense, the epistemic chain may lead to infinite regress without anchoring anywhere giving any strong foundation for knowledge or it might turn out to be circular. Sometimes such epistemic chain might end in no knowledge while at times it may end with a belief that constitutes the direct knowledge.

In this connection, the epistemic justification is concerned about reaching to the direct knowledge which justifies the belief without being circular. It reaches to one of the direct or non-inferential source of knowledge like perception, memory, introspection or reason. When we say reason, it can be valid inferences. The last resort where the directly justified belief appears, that belief can be called as the foundational belief from which there is no further regress.

Theories Of Epistemic Justification

Epistemic justification is a normative notion. It is regarding the belief which leads to knowledge. The norms which govern the beliefs: rules describing the circumstances under which it is epistemically permissible to hold beliefs are called epistemic norms. Epistemic condition is necessary condition for knowledge. In other words, epistemic justification in some way hits at the foundations of knowledge or source of knowledge. In this regard, epistemic theories can be categorized as, 1. Doxastic theories which include foundation theories and coherence theories and 2. Non-doxastic theories which include internalism and externalism, which also have its subcategories like reliabilism and probabilism.

3.8. LINGUISTIC TURN AND EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

At this juncture, we can deduce and bring in the unique contribution upon which the language philosophy was built; namely the proposition. It is worth noting, how do we justify the proposition, which is according to the language philosophy is the irreducible thing. Views may differ here based on the schools of thought; however, it is worth noting that all the schools are unanimous on propositions. Going a step further we can say that, the proposition too is the possible object of belief. In this sense, the justification of proposition will lead to the understanding that epistemic justification of proposition will yield to the clarity of the knowledge of the world. According to the language philosophy, the language depicts the structure of the world through the propositions. Hence, if the propositions are epistemically justified then the belief which leads to knowledge is justified.

The Problematic

Epistemic justification of propositions leads us to the basic issue of any justification namely, how the components of the proposition are justified. Names in Wittgensteinian analysis, logical atoms in Russell, and sense-data in Moore are the objects which are the fundamental components of any proposition. In this regard, how do we justify them? Epistemically it goes directly to perception as a source of knowledge. However, perception has its own limitation and has its basis in empiricism, which has its own inbuilt drawbacks. Therefore, it is worth noting the difficulty in justifying the propositions which have been the bedrock of linguistic philosophy.

This also throws light on the epistemology they hold, namely, logical empiricism, idealism etc., for which the justification often turns out to be circular.

Check your Progress III

Use the space provided for your answer

What is epistemic justification?

Why epistemic justification is important in the language philosophy?

What is the problematic of language philosophy?

3.9. LET US SUM UP

Epistemic justification of propositions will help us to determine the aspect of philosophical truth present in the linguistic analysis. The claims after the linguistic turn through the language philosophy will enable us to understand them in their relation to epistemology. We can ascertain their validity and the claim of knowing the world better can be critically looked at.

3.10. KEY WORDS

Epistemic justification: It is concerned about reaching to the direct knowledge which justifies the belief without being circular. It reaches to one of the direct or non-inferential source of knowledge like perception, memory, introspection or reason.

linguistic turn: In the history of the development of ideas, the linguistic turn is a profound one. However, two major trends have contributed in arriving at this turn. They can be categorized as development from Frege and Meingong who were belonging to the philosophical traditions in Germany and the other is from the English speaking traditions specially of Moore and Russell and Wittgenstein.

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