

Chapter 28

Linguistic Turn in British philosophy and Russell's Logical Atomism

Key Words: Linguistic turn, linguistic meaning, analytic philosophy, logical analysis of language, surface grammar, depth grammar, atomic fact, logical atomism, molecular proposition.

Introduction

The linguistic turn in British philosophy primarily assumes that all philosophical problems can be understood as problems about linguistic meaning and their proper understanding and solutions can be arrived at with an analysis of language. This approach to philosophy is also known as analytic philosophy, as it underlines the importance of the analysis of language in philosophy. In other words, philosophy is identical with the analysis of language.

It is often stated that analytic philosophy began with the works of G.E.Moore and Bertrand Russell, who initiated a criticism of the dominant idealistic thought that rejected all plurality and conceived the entire reality as consisting of one absolute spirit. Russell's works were definitely more influential and significant, as the logical foundations of analytic philosophy were laid by his phenomenal work on mathematical logic, the *Principles of Mathematics*. Russell was influenced by the works of logicians like Peano and Frege and was engaged in a project that seeks to define all arithmetical concepts in terms of logical ones and seeks to show that all arithmetical truths were provable from logical ones. In short, following Frege, he too was attempting at a reduction of Mathematics to Logic.

The fashion in which these endeavours were pursued—through an analysis of language—inspired many other philosophers to explore the possibilities of such formal-logical analysis in other areas of language use as well. The logical positivists who developed an independent approach to philosophy and metaphysical problems are thinkers who were encouraged to pursue the style of philosophising adopted by Russell. G.E.Moore also has significantly contributed to this movement, not only with his philosophy that emphasized on a common sense approach to philosophical problems, but also with his analysis and examination of the philosophies of other thinkers, exposing the ambiguity in their statements.

Apart from Moore and Russell, another important thinker who had influenced the formation of analytic philosophy and linguistic philosophy in the Anglo-Saxon world was Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose book *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* was widely read in various philosophical circles and thoroughly discussed. Even Russell himself was influenced by Wittgenstein's early writings and thoughts, though Wittgenstein distanced himself from many of these important philosophical developments which were inspired by his work, as he considered them as misinterpretations or misreadings of his thoughts. Wittgenstein adopted a position which primarily viewed philosophy as an activity of critiquing language and affirmed that its purpose is the logical clarification of thoughts. He asserted that philosophy is not a theory but an activity.

With the works and teachings of all these thinkers, analytic Philosophy has emerged as a method and approach to philosophical thinking that emphasises mostly on the analysis of language. Thinkers who belonged to this group have conducted rigorous examination of philosophically important concepts with a focus on the language in which they are expressed.

Bertrand Russell's Philosophy

Bertrand Arthur William Russell was born on 18 May 1872 to a very reputed family in Britain. Lord John Russell, who was twice Prime Minister of UK and who introduced the Reform Bill of 1832 was his paternal grandfather. In his formative days he was influenced by the philosophies of René Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, George Berkeley, David Hume, Peano, Gottlob Frege, G. E. Moore and A. N. Whitehead. It was in the Trinity College, where he joined in 1890 to study mathematics and he worked with eminent philosophers of that day like A. N. Whitehead, Henry Sidgwick, James Ward, and G. F. Stout. He was also influenced by the Hegelian philosopher J. M. E. McTaggart and took the idealism of Kant and Hegel seriously.

His initial philosophical allegiance was to a kind of idealism, highly influenced by the thinking of Hegel, but more specifically by the neo-Hegelian Oxford philosopher F. H. Bradley, who advocated a version of idealism that reduced all reality into one single spiritual entity. He later rebelled against idealism and abandoned his idealistic phase and along with G.E.Moore, initiated what is known today as analytic philosophy. Russell and Moore carried out detail analysis of the philosophical theories advocated and position adopted by many of the traditional

philosophical schools, particularly idealism, with an intention to expose the linguistic confusions from which they had emerged. They held that such philosophical theories were the result of certain fundamental linguistic confusions and a proper logical analysis of language will make things clearer.

The real turning point in Russell's intellectual life happened when he engaged himself reading mathematics and got interested in logic. He thus began to work on a problem that occupied him to a major part of his career; to see whether mathematics can be supplied with logical foundations. Many people have influenced him in this endeavour, including the Italian logician Giuseppe Peano, whom he met in 1890 and Gottlob Frege, who was also engaged in a very similar kind of exercise. As a result of his work on the topic he has published the important book *The Principles of Mathematics* in 1903.

Along with these excursions into the realm of mathematical logic, Russell was also developing a philosophical position that would later supplement his logical works. This is known as logical atomism, where he construed certain very basic and elementary statements which he called atomic propositions, as constituting language. The structure of language is reflected in the structure of atomic propositions. This structure of elementary linguistic expressions is incidentally identical with the structure of reality as well. These major intellectual developments happened during the period 1899—1900, a period in which certain important changes happened in his academic pursuits, which Russell himself calls a revolution.

Russell's Refutation of Idealism

Idealism is the view, which proclaims that reality is fundamentally mental. Russell's refutation of idealism is unique, as he applies the method of language analysis in order to expose the flaws of idealism as a philosophical position. Incidentally, he himself was under the influence of German idealism during the 1890s and advocated a kind of Hegelian and Bradelian view that asserted that all reality is mental and conceived the universe ultimately consisting of a single Mind which experiences itself.

Since idealism asserts a form of monism—all reality is a single spiritual entity—it rejects the plurality of things, which we normally experience as mere appearance. According to the

idealistic, everything is related to everything else in the universe and the universe is ultimately a single thing. Russell, on the other hand held a realist view, which affirmed that objects of experience were independent of the experience of them. This view ultimately leads to pluralism, which asserts that there are many independent things in the world. In order to establish his view, he pursues to refute the fundamental doctrine of idealism; its monistic outlook. According to him, the basis of idealism is the idea that all relations are internal. They affirm that the relation of experience to its objects are internal and hence in reality there are no such relations and therefore, all relations are unreal.

Russell initiates a linguistic analysis of this idealistic view in order to refute it. He holds that both idealism and monism are the results of a linguistic confusion. The idealist holds a fundamentally mistaken view about relations. They thought that all propositions are of the subject-predicate form, where we predicate something to the subject. For example, when we say sugar is sweet, we are predicating sweetness to the object sugar. Hence in this sense we can argue that it is the nature of sugar to be sweet and hence the relationship between sugar and sweet is internal. Consequently, the relationship between them is not something between two things. In other words, they are not different from each other and hence the so-called relationship is unreal.

From this simple fact the idealist argues that every proposition constitutes a predication on reality as a whole. Since all relations are internal and therefore are unreal, the relationship articulated by all propositions is unreal. There exists only one entity, which is homogenous and spiritual. Russell argues that, the mistake of the idealist is to consider all propositions, including relational propositions as possessing a subject-predicate form. Russell seeks to demonstrate that this is not the case. For instance, the proposition, “A is to the left of B” which expresses a relationship which cannot be internal. We cannot say that it is internal to the nature of A to be the left of B. The relation “to the left of” does not belong intrinsically to any spatial object. In other words, no spatial object must of necessity be to the left of other things.

Again, for A to be the left of B there should be two separate entities of A and B. This refutes the fundamental position of idealism and advocates pluralism. Hence Russell’s approach is characterized by the method of language analysis. He approaches the philosophical position of

idealism from the point of view of language analysis and examines how legitimate is their monism and idealism, so that they can logically argue for pluralism. Russell seeks to expose the logical contradictions inherent in this view and argues that by analysing the structure of the propositions held to be true by the idealists we can expose these logical contradictions. The logical analysis of language will bring out this structure. From these basic aspects of language analysis, Russell moves on to develop his theory of logical atomism.

To Logical Atomism

Russell initially adopted a form of phenomenism, which held that perceptual knowledge could be analyzed in terms of our acquaintance with the fundamental data of sensory experience. His book *Our Knowledge of the External World* and his paper “The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics” advocate this position. In his 1927 book, *The Analysis of Matter* Russell analyses the chief concepts of physics, such as force and matter, in terms of events and here he had adopted a realist position. He holds that, in order to analyze the basic concepts of physics one has to admit that certain entities exist independently of our perception of them. This is to go beyond mere phenomenism.

Logical atomism is a philosophical view about language, which aims at explaining the relationship between language and the world. It was primarily developed in order to resolve questions about the nature of perception and its relation to physics. It aims at establishing the empirical basis for physical science. Hence it comes up with a theory of the world. Russell thus initiates a metaphysical theory about the physical world and tries to give an account of the nature of reality by exposing its logical structure. His idea of logical analysis is founded on the contention that mathematical logic is the essence of philosophy. In his classic paper “On Denoting”, Russell describes the process of analysis, where he examines the structures of propositions and facts. In this process of language analysis he distinguishes the surface grammar of propositions, which is misleading, from the depth grammar, which refers to the essential logical structure of language.

Russell argues that all propositions are not of the subject-predicate form. According to him, the surface grammar of statements may often mislead us. We may take descriptions and ordinary names to be denoting expressions, while on several occasions they need not do so.

Russell proposes a logical analysis of language in order to resolve such confusions. Such an analysis can bring this out by revealing the structure of propositions. In the above-mentioned paper “On Denotation” Russell takes up an expression “The present King of France is bald” for analysis. His analysis shows that this statement asserts three things:

1. There exists at present at least one person who reigns in France.
2. There exists at present at most one person who reigns in France.
3. Whoever reigns in France is bald.

Now Russell proceeds further and tells that the statement “There exists at present at least one person who reigns in France” is false, as France is not a monarchy. Therefore, concludes Russell, the conjunction of the three statements is also false. It is imperative that, in order to be either true or false the subject of a proposition must refer to something. But since the expression “present King of France” has no reference in the world, the expression is meaningless.

Russell thus affirms that the logical structure of the world and of language is revealed in the proper logical analysis of language. He conceives the world as consisting of facts, which are things with many qualities related in different ways. Russell contends that, a fact can be analyzed into its constituents like things, qualities, and relations. Now, corresponding to facts in the world, there are propositions in language and the former are expressed by propositions, which are forms of words asserted as true or false. By comparing the propositions with the world of facts we assert their truth or falsity.

From these basic contentions Russell examines the basic features of language that are revealed in its logical analysis. The analysis of propositions brings out their logical structure. We can analyze propositions into more and more elementary forms of propositions, which express basic facts and Russell calls them atomic propositions. An atomic proposition asserts that a thing has a certain quality or stands to some other thing in a certain relation. By combining atomic propositions by means of logical words such as and, or, and if—then, we derive a complex or molecular proposition. Russell affirms that, if all the atomic facts are known, and that they are all the atomic facts, we could infer all other truths from them, as they are the most elementary forms of expressions that represent facts in the world.

Therefore, the logical analysis of language exposes the ultimate simple units of linguistic expressions that have immediate acquaintance with the world of facts. Atoms are the last residues of logical analysis. All complex propositions we employ in various fields can be logically analyzed in this fashion. If they cannot be analyzed, if we find any of the expressions lacking a referent in the world, then the proposition in which it appears needs to be treated as meaningless. We can thus proceed to more and more precise, clear and definite knowledge from the obvious and vague ordinary beliefs about the world. We thus arrive at the simple symbols, which immediately refer to facts from the complex symbols or propositions, which we analyze. Through analysis we can reach the point of direct acquaintance with the objects. These objects, according to Russell, are the meanings of simple symbols.

The very idea of logical analysis of language presupposes that there is a hidden structure in language, which is not always obviously visible. In other words, the apparently visible structure need not be the real one and hence it may mislead us. Russell's analysis of the statement, "the present King of France...." Reveals this. Russell thus makes a distinction between the surface grammar of linguistic expressions from the depth grammar. While the former is more visible, it is also misleading. The latter, may lie hidden, but does represent the real structure, which is revealed in logical analysis. Logical analysis thus shows how misleading the surface grammar can be.

Our ordinary languages have misleading structures. The logical structure of linguistic expressions is not apparent from the surface grammar of ordinary languages. Hence they should be logically analyzed. The ambiguous, misleading expressions of ordinary languages can be logically analyzed through descriptions. This according to Russell will reveal the logical structure. This possibility suggests that an ideal language can be developed, which does not have the limitations of ordinary languages. Such an ideal language will be free from all possible logical errors. It thus brings out the logical structure or the depth grammar of linguistic expressions and leaves no room for doubts or confusions. In such a language, each word will have an object to represent and an object will have one and only one symbol. This notion of an ideal language is not Russell's creation, as it has been existent in philosophical circles since long. But Russell's idea of logical analysis had given it a new life. Many philosophers, particularly the thinkers of the logical positivism movement were inspired by such Russelian ideas.

Russell is a very important thinker in the history of western philosophy, as his endeavours, along with G.E. Moore had opened a new way of philosophizing in the beginning of 20th century. He has influenced and inspired many different movements in 20th century Anglo-Saxon philosophy. Arguably his most important contribution is *The Principles of Mathematics*, which laid the foundations of mathematical logic. This book and many other writings of Russell have significantly contributed to the development of symbolic logic.

Quiz

1. What was the primary objective of Russell's work on mathematical logic?
[a] Reduction of mathematics to logic [b] Reduction of logic to mathematics
[c] Reduction of philosophy to logic [d] Reduction of metaphysics to logic.
2. G.EMoore's philosophy emphasized on?
[a] Logical analysis of language [b] Common sense [c] Metaphysical problems [d] Propositions of natural sciences.
3. According to Russell, both idealism and monism are the results of?
[a] A metaphysical error [b] A logical impossibility [c] A logical contradiction [d] A linguistic confusion.
4. Idealism essentially asserts?
[a] Pluralism [b] Dualism [c] Monism [d] Materialism.
5. Which according to Russell does an idealist not hold?
[a] All relations are internal [b] There are many entities which are related to each other
[c] All propositions possess a subject-predicate form [d] All relations are unreal.
6. How do we logically analyze the ambiguous, misleading expressions of ordinary languages?
[a] Through descriptions [b] Through mathematical logic [c] Through explanation [d] Through syntactical analysis.

Answer Key

1. [a]
2. [b]
3. [d]
4. [c]
5. [b]
6. [a]

Assignments

1. Explain the important features of linguistic turn.
2. Describe logical atomism.

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Chapter 29

Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy

Key Words: Picture theory, meaning, proposition, object, state of affairs , metaphysical self, logical structure, semantic analysis, atomic facts, elementary propositions, sense, seeing and showing, surface grammar, depth grammar, transcendental subject, silence.

This chapter addresses certain important aspects of the conceptions of language, meaning and reality and their interrelationships, as discussed in Wittgenstein's early work, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*. It will start with an examination of the picture theory of meaning, which exposes the logical structure of language with an analysis of the concepts of word, meaning, sense, logical form and the forms of propositions. It then examines the questions, how do philosophical problems arise and how do we solve them. The *Tractatus* is also concerned about very profound philosophical problems like the nature of the self, which is immortal. It concludes with a notion of silence, which will be examined in this chapter.

Introduction

Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein was born on April 26th 1889 in Vienna, Austria. He studied mechanical engineering in Berlin and in 1908 went to Manchester, England to do research in aeronautics. There he became interested in logic, as the study of mathematics, led him to do further explorations into the foundations of mathematics. The most important event in his intellectual life during this period happened when he met Gottlob Frege, who is arguably the founder of modern logic as we understand it today. Frege suggested Wittgenstein to meet Bertrand Russell in Cambridge. Wittgenstein eventually went there and worked with Russell and G.E. Moore, the two great thinkers of 20th century British analytic philosophy, who were also known as the philosophers who have initiated this new way of philosophizing in 20th century Europe.

Wittgenstein, though earned the reputation of being an original thinker at a very early age in Cambridge, was a very different kind of person and entertained very unconventional ideas. In 1914, when the First World War broke out he volunteered for the Austrian army and left his research. By 1922, he has completed writing his first book *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which was subsequently published with a preface by Russell. This book incidentally is the only one he published during his lifetime.

After writing the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein thought that he had solved all the problems of philosophy and hence he decided to leave philosophy. In any case, he was not prepared to take up a conventional university teaching job, as philosophy was for him not an enterprise that would enable one to advance one's knowledge; nor can one teach philosophy, he thought, as there is nothing to be taught by a philosopher. He thus took up the vocation of an elementary school teacher in rural Austria.

Later in 1929, he returned to Cambridge and to philosophy and resumed his investigations into the nature of philosophical problems and their possible solutions. He became professor of philosophy at Cambridge in 1939. During this period he advocated a characteristically different philosophical position from his early work. In 1947, he resigned his professorship in order to concentrate on writing. Wittgenstein died of prostate cancer in Cambridge in April 1951.

The Philosophy of the *Tractatus*

Wittgenstein affirms that the main point of his book is ethical, which according to him, does not belong to the realm of the sayable. Reflecting the spirit of the philosophy of language analysis propagated by Russell, Wittgenstein too problematizes the language-world relationship and explores the problem of meaning. According to him, philosophy is a critique of language. It performs a logical analysis of language, which will bring out the essential logical structure of all linguistic expressions.

In other words, according to Wittgenstein, philosophy tries to identify the essential logical structure of language, a structure which it shares with the world and with our thoughts. In this sense, philosophy sets limits to what can be thought and in doing so what cannot be thought. But this is a task which is very similar to the one advocated by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, this is not an easy task, as Wittgenstein says, in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable, which is absurd. Here the philosopher of language turns to the expressions of thoughts, which share with the later a common logical structure. In other words, the limits are drawn in language.

Wittgenstein's examination of language had revealed that the language we use in our day-to-day life has an essentially misleading structure. Language disguises thought, says Wittgenstein, so much so that, like the cloths we wear, which disguises our body, language

too essentially covers thoughts which leads to several misunderstandings. Nevertheless, language is an expression of thought, which need not always be visible from the outset.

The problems of philosophy are posed as a result of the misunderstanding of the logic of language. He thus advances a critique of language—which resembles Kant's critique of thought—that would enable us to see the mistakes we commit. The analysis of language will bring out the real, logical structure of language. It reveals the depth grammar of language, which is different from the surface grammar. While the ordinary structure of language is determined by the syntactical structure, the real structure is discovered by the semantic analysis of language that brings out the essential logical scaffolding of language. The syntactic structure is misleading, as it never reveals the essential word-meaning connection. But the logical analysis of language brings this out. This analysis thus brings out the depth grammar of linguistic expressions as different from the surface grammar and helps avoiding the confusions in language use, which is ultimately responsible for philosophical and metaphysical worries.

The Philosophical Orientation of the *TLP*

The basic philosophical orientation of the *TLP* can be understood by explaining the fundamental approach it adopts while dealing with traditional philosophical and metaphysical problems. The solutions to philosophical problems are suggested by articulating the sense-nonsense distinction. By outlining how philosophy is preoccupied with language and its analysis—as it has been conceived as a critique of language—Wittgenstein demonstrates that philosophy does not and cannot deal with the so called problems of life. He then develops his transcendentalism, primarily by referring to the metaphysical self, which is the limit of the world, and not part of it. His transcendentalism also mentions about the domain of silence, which is an extremely important aspect of his early thought.

Wittgenstein thus asserts that philosophy is not a theory, but is an activity. The function of philosophy consists in carrying out a critique of language, which involves an analysis. This analysis will bring out the logical structure of language, which corresponds to the logical structure of our thoughts and the world. There exists a one-to-one correspondence between the three realms of language, thought and the world.

The World, Thought and Language

Tractatus begins with the proposition, “The world is all that is the case”, which is followed by another one, “The world is a totality of facts and not of things.” Wittgenstein’s conception of the world does not exhaust with the physical world we live in and experience. It also deals with the logical possibilities of the states of affair. Reality is constituted out of the world and objects in it and facts and atomic facts. According to him the world is facts in logical space, which is the totality of existent atomic facts. This conception of atomic fact is also a combination of objects in definite ways, each combination is independent of the other. Wittgenstein then affirms that the existence and non-existence of possible and actual atomic facts is the reality.

Thought is described, as the logical picture of the facts and Wittgenstein holds that an atomic fact is thinkable or we can imagine an atomic fact. The world is nothing but a picture of the totality of true thoughts. The thought contains the possibility of the state of affairs, which it thinks and thoughts are expressed through propositions. Wittgenstein calls the sign through which we express the thought a propositional sign and holds that the proposition is the propositional sign in its projective relation to the world. Here the notions of logical structure and logical form are important. Language shares with the world and thoughts the same logical form. As mentioned above, there is a one-to-one relationship between the three realms that is brought out in analysis.

The domain of language is more philosophically important and interesting, as in the analysis, which the philosopher performs, language is the focal object. Language is the domain of propositions and according to Wittgenstein, there are fundamentally two types of propositions; those that are true for all possible states of affairs, and those that are pictures of reality. The propositions of logic and pure mathematics, which are called tautologies, belong to the first group and they give no information about the world. On the other hand, the propositions that picture or represent possible states of affair in the world are either true or false. We compare them with reality. They tell us something about the world. They do that with their structure. As mentioned above, they are either true or false. According to Wittgenstein the totality of true propositions constitutes the propositions of natural sciences.

Wittgenstein categorically affirms that apart from these two, there is no other class of propositions. There are no philosophical or metaphysical propositions. He thus views language as the totality of propositions. He says that a proposition is a picture of reality, for I know the state of affairs presented by it, if I understand the proposition. Hence there is a very

intimate relationship between language and reality. He asserts that the picture is linked with reality as it reaches up to it. It is like a scale applied to reality. Every picture should correspond to reality and there are no pictures which are *a priori* true.

The most important feature of a picture or a proposition is its sense. According to Wittgenstein, every picture represents its sense and whether a proposition is true or false is decided on the basis of the agreement or disagreement of its sense with reality. The picture theory of meaning is introduced in this context. According to Wittgenstein, the propositional sign consists in the fact that its elements, the words, are combined in it in a definite way. (*TLP*. 3.14). Hence it exhibits a definite structure and order. In other words, the proposition is not just a mixture of words, just as the musical theme is not a mixture of tones. He argues that only facts can express a sense, a class of names cannot. This also points to the importance of structure.

The proposition is a picture of reality, asserts Wittgenstein. Hence in propositions thoughts can be so expressed that, to the objects of the thoughts correspond the elements of the propositional sign. (*TLP*. 3.2) This affirms the picturing relationship language has with the world. In other words, there is a structural isomorphism between language and world. In language we have names, which stand for the objects in the world. He asserts that the name means the object in the world and the object is the meaning of the word in language. (*TLP*. 3.203) According to Wittgenstein, to the configuration of the simple signs in the propositional sign corresponds the configuration of the objects in the state of affairs. (3.21) A proposition in language is thus a picture of a fact in the world and language can picture facts because it can articulate their structure. Propositions in language do this by articulating how objects are correlated in the world. The elements of picture correspond to the objects in facts. In the proposition there must be exactly as many things distinguishable as there are in the state of affairs, which it represents (4.04). In this way the propositional structure corresponds to the structure of the fact. This structural isomorphism makes the former a picture of the latter.

The picturing relationship of language with the world is central to Wittgenstein's conception of language and philosophy in the *TLP*. The picture, which is a proposition, presents the facts in logical space, which is the existence and non-existence of atomic facts. (*TLP*. 2.11). The following propositions of the *TLP* further affirm the picturing relationship.

- 2.12 The picture is a model of reality.

- 2.13 To the objects correspond in the picture the elements of the picture.
- 2.131 The elements of the picture stand, in the picture, for the objects.
- 2.14 The picture consists in the fact that its elements are combined with one another in a definite way.
- 2.141 The picture is a fact.
- 2.15 That the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents that the things are so combined with one another.

The Structure of Proposition and Picturing

Wittgenstein holds that a proposition about a complex stands in internal relation to the proposition about its constituent part. This affirms the picturing relationship language has with reality. A proposition, which is a picture, stands for a fact or a state of affairs in logical space. Wittgenstein affirms that the picture contains the possibility of the state of affairs which it represents (2.203). All pictures may not agree with what is the case in reality. One may assert that the cat is on the table, while the cat actually is on the mat. Yet it is a picture, as the proposition, “the cat is on the mat” is a possible state of affair. It is a picture, and therefore, a sensible proposition, but a false one. On the basis of a proposition’s agreement with reality we judge it as either true or false, either right or wrong. (2.21)

Propositions are linguistic expressions that have sense. The sense of a proposition depends on the state of affair it actually or possibly represents. In other words, the sense of a proposition consists in the picturing relationship it has with the world. Hence we may say that a picture or proposition represents its sense. (2.221)

The picture theory not only elucidates the nature and structure of propositions which are pictures of reality, but also enlightens us about the limits of language. Wittgenstein says that a proposition presents the existence and non-existence of atomic facts (4.1). Here Wittgenstein holds that not all propositions are true, or not all propositions represent actual state of affair in the world. But some of them represent actual facts and hence are true. Wittgenstein adds that, the totality of true propositions constitute the totality of the natural sciences (4.11). All sensible propositions are therefore, either true or false, depending on whether they correspond to actual state of affairs or not. All those propositions that fail to picture a fact in the world are neither true nor false, but are nonsensical.

This enlightens us about the limits of language. Wittgenstein says that the limits of my language mean the limits of my world (5.6). All those propositions that are neither tautologies nor pictures of the world are nonsensical. The so called metaphysical propositions are examples. For instance, when we say, “God is omnipresent”, we do not assert any fact in the world, as the constituents of the statement do not correspond to any objects in the world and hence their constitution does not articulate anything meaningfully. They neither represent the world nor do they articulate any necessary truths. It is not possible to think about anything that contradicts the laws of logic. He argues that, “to present in language anything which “contradicts logic” is as impossible as in geometry to present by its co-ordinates a figure which contradicts the laws of space; or to give the co-ordinates of a point which does not exist.” (3.032)

Limits of the World: The Transcendental

One section of the *TLP* is dedicated to the logical and structural relationship between language and reality. It deals with what can be said. But *TLP* is also concerned with what cannot be said. This realm of the unsayable is rather more important than what is sayable. Wittgenstein says that there are things that cannot be said but only be shown. The metaphysical subject is such an entity. This subject is different from the empirical self, which is a part of the world. This subject does not belong to the world but it is the limit of the world. He says that the “I” occurs in philosophy through the fact that the “world is my world”. The philosophical I is not the man, asserts Wittgenstein, it is not the human body or the human soul which psychology treats, but the metaphysical subject, the limit—not a part of the world.

The role of philosophy is also peculiar. Wittgenstein says that philosophy is not one of the natural sciences. According to him, the word “philosophy” must mean something which stands above or below, but not beside the natural sciences. He maintains that the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. (*TLP*. 4.112). It is not a theory but an activity. For him a typical philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations and hence the result of philosophy is not a number of “philosophical propositions”. It rather makes those propositions clear. It should make clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred.

This logical clarification of language ultimately suggests that philosophy has no role to play in developing theories of any sort that deal with the ultimate nature of things and their essential relationships. It affirms that philosophy cannot deal with those issues. Nor can it

address the problems of life. The logical analysis reveals that ultimately the so-called problems of life are not genuine problems and hence it is not possible to find answers to them. This is not to deny the significance and value to things that are not empirical (as the logical positivists did it). Wittgenstein only says that philosophy, as a critique of language cannot say anything about it.

After providing such elucidations about the nature and function of philosophy, Wittgenstein says that, philosophy is not intended to solve the problems of life. Nor can it do that. It only shows that they are not genuine problems that can have solutions.

Quiz

1. According to Wittgenstein, the main point of his book *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* is?
[a] Logical [b] Ethical [c] Linguistic [d] Syntactical.
2. Philosophy, which is a critique of language, brings out of linguistic expressions.
[a] Grammatical structure [b] Semantic content [c] Logical structure [d] Real ideas that lie behind.
3. The problems of philosophy are posed as a result of
[a] Our metaphysical propensities [b] The misunderstanding of the syntactical structure of language [c] The unintelligibility of linguistic expressions [d] The misunderstanding of the logic of language.
4. What is philosophy according to Wittgenstein?
[a] An activity of language analysis [b] An analysis of reality [c] A theory of the world and language [d] A doctrine of the self.
5. According to Wittgenstein, an object is the?
[a] Sense of the word [b] Meaning of the word [c] Component of the world [d] Essence of the word.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [c]
3. [d]
4. [a]
5. [b]

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Chapter 30

Wittgenstein: Language-Games and Forms of Life

Key Words: **Key Words:** Family resemblance, meaning as use, forms of life, language games, meaning, private language, rule-following.

This chapter discusses the important features of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. As we have seen in the previous chapter, after writing the *TLP*, where he outlined a very peculiar conception of philosophy—which conceived philosophical problems as pseudo problems, which have no solutions—Wittgenstein left philosophy, concluding that all the important issues with regard to philosophy are resolved and there was nothing more to be explored. But later he changed his mind. After engaging himself with many things, including the vocation of a school teacher in Norway, Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge and to philosophy in 1929 and till 1935 he entertained very unconventional ideas about philosophy. This period was also a transitional period in his intellectual life. The important concerns of these days include philosophy of mathematics, language and meaning, psychological concepts, and the concept of knowledge.

An important work during this period is *Philosophische Bemerkungen* (English translation *Philosophical Remarks*) written in 1932, but published posthumously in 1964. Afterwards the *Philosophische Grammatik* (English: *Philosophical Grammar*) was written, which questions the view that understanding language is a mental process. The idea of family resemblance which occupies a central place in his later works, particularly the *Philosophical Investigations* makes its first appearance in *Philosophical Grammar*. Another important work during this period is *The Blue Book*, which refers to the theory of meaning as use, which is central to his later philosophy.

View of Language in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy

During his later period, Wittgenstein rejects what constitutes the core of his early view about language; the picturing relationship. Consequently, he also opposes the view that language has only one logic, or there is only one single essence of language. Instead he emphasizes the diverse and multiple ways in which we use language. Accordingly he holds that, meaning does not consist in the picturing relation between

propositions and facts, but in the use of an expression in the multiplicity of practices, which go to make up language.

As mentioned above, according to this later view, we will not be able to discover a single essence of language, as the latter is intrinsically connected with all human activities and behaviour, our practical affairs and relations, personal and public activities, relationship with others and the world. In other words, it is related to the diverse forms of life in which we participate as human beings living in a society. Despite the obvious differences from his early view, the later philosophy shares with the former certain common features concerning the nature of philosophy. In the *Tractates*, Wittgenstein rejected many traditional conceptions about the nature and function of philosophy and held that, philosophy is not a theory or a science. He was of the opinion that philosophy does not propose any theories, nor does it solve any problems, but is only a critique of language. In his later period also he subscribed to some extremely unconventional views about philosophy. Here too he held that philosophical problems are not empirical problems and rejected the possibility of formulating philosophical theories and conceiving it as a science. Here he proposes that, philosophical problems are solved by looking into the workings of our language. He believes that philosophical problems will vanish when the workings of language are properly grasped. His latter view holds that, in philosophy we should not seek to explain but only to *describe*.

Again, his early view of conceiving language as a representation of reality is replaced in favour of a notion that emphasizes on the diversity of uses language has in our life. Here Wittgenstein no longer advocates the idea that language has a universal logical structure. The idea of meaning he advocates in the early thought, which holds that a name stands for an object, and language as a whole is a picture of the world is replaced with the notion that meaning of a word is its use in the language.

Though Wittgenstein continues to preoccupy himself with language, the later view does not conceive language as a field of inquiry in its own right. He now holds that philosophical problems arise when we use language in inappropriate and unusual manners. But here too he believes that much of our confusions and riddles are the result of the misuse of language. One may wonder why there is a breakdown of the machinery of language, as Wittgenstein conceives the ordinary use of language is a domain which does not generate any such problems. Certain other questions like,

"What is language?", "Does language have an essence?" and "What is meaning and is it the essence of language?" can also be raised in this context.

The Concept of Meaning

Contrary to the early view, Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* (*PI*) holds that every word is not a name and the object corresponding to the word is not the meaning of the word. Wittgenstein writes:

Let us first discuss *this* point of the argument: that a word has no meaning if nothing corresponds to it.—It is important to note that the word "meaning" is being used illicitly if it is used to signify the thing that 'corresponds' to the word. That is to confound the meaning; of a name with the *bearer* of the name. When Mr. N. N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say that, for if the name ceased to have meaning it would make no sense to say "Mr. N. N. is dead." [*PI*: 40]

Wittgenstein now claims that the concept of meaning is related to the public practice of utterance, and all that makes this practice possible. Hence it is not just a logical exercise, which relies on abstract and a priori norms, but a dynamically interactive process which relates individuals with each other and their natural and artificial environments.

Different people employ language for different ends. Scientists, poets, politicians, engineers, workers etc. all employ language and conduct their lives through it. Hence it is the instrument of human purposes and needs. The philosopher's concern is with the instrument, with language, where he examines the workings of language. Wittgenstein opposes the possibility of arriving at a unitary account of language, which explains the whole working of a language in terms of a single theoretical model. He attempted something similar during his early period, where he envisaged discovering the essence of language by exploring its logical structure. On the other hand, the later view conceives language as a multiplicity of different activities. It thus opposes a theory of language which was subscribed to by the *Tractatus* and many other mistaken views about language.

The *Philosophical Investigations* discusses many such views of language, which Wittgenstein holds as mistaken in his later period. It begins with a critique on

Augustine's conception of language, which is a commonly held view and which is very close to the *Tractatus*'s view. According to this view, the essence of language lies beneath the surface and this hidden essence needs to be discovered by means of the analysis of language. Hence this view holds that there is something like a final analysis of our forms of language. This view also holds that the major function of language is representation of reality. Again since it believes that the learning of a language is done by making associations between words and objects, it is possible to have a private language, as such associations are made privately by each individual. The *PI* opposes all these views and presents a very different idea about the nature and philosophical significance of language. He thus advocated a unique conception of philosophy, which had exerted tremendous influence on the development of 20th century and contemporary European philosophy.

As mentioned above, the *PI* starts with an examination of Augustine's conception of language, where each word's meaning is fixed to an object and one learns language by learning to associate words with things, which are their meanings. Opposing this view, which is closer to his own view held in the *TLP*, Wittgenstein proclaims that language is not one uniform thing, defined in terms of an essence or universal logical structure. Instead, it is a host of different activities, as we use language to do many things in life. Wittgenstein here introduces the simile of games in order to elucidate this aspect. He compares these different activities with different games we play in language. The concept of language-games is introduced in order to account for the multiplicity of uses and the relationship with the different contexts of their uses.

Again, Wittgenstein subscribes to a view which identifies language with an essential human capacity or potential. He says that language belongs as much to our natural history as walking, eating or drinking. It is part of the social behaviour of the species and it evolves like an institution with the various things we do with it. We employ language for different purposes for carrying out the various life activities in different situations and circumstances. Hence the background of human requirements in the natural environment has a vital role in the evolution of Language.

As mentioned above, the approach in the later period is characteristically different from the early philosophy of the *TLP*. Instead of looking for the essence or universal structure of language, Wittgenstein here focuses on its ordinary functioning. He examines how language normally functions in the various contexts in which people actually employ it; for narrating, questioning, describing, preying, expressing gratitude or anger, reporting, affirming or denying etc. we have to examine how people use them in these contexts. "Do not explain, just see how it actually works, as meanings have to be found in its use", says Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein's method consists in invoking certain artificial examples of patterns of linguistic activity. For example, he analyses the language of the builder and his assistant, as an elementary model of a working language. The builder makes some utterances which in other contexts need not make any sense. He but perfectly communicates with his assistant, as both of them are conversant in the language game they participate. Both of them know the rules to be followed and they hardly make mistakes. Certain utterances of the builder evoke definite forms of responses in the assistant in a particular context. They both have no doubts about what is stated and what is expected to be done.

Wittgenstein here compares language use with a game. The participants in a conversation are compared to players who perform certain tasks and make certain types of moves based on certain rules that are publically agreed upon. The context in which people use language is crucial here, as the rules as well as the game change according to the context. The things participants do and achieve by engaging in conversation have to be examined and Wittgenstein says that we here come across the immense diversity exhibited by our usages. Wittgenstein adds:

But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command?—There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call "symbols", "words", "sentences". And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. Here the term "*language-game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. [PI 23]

Language-games

Wittgenstein conceives language by comparing it with a toolbox. In a toolbox there are several tools like the hammer, square and gluepot. Similarly words have a multiplicity of different uses. He gives examples of primitive forms of languages and calls them language-games. We have already cited the example of the language game of the builder and his assistant. He also cites the example of a child learning the usage of words. Such primitive forms of languages are cited in order to remove the mental mist surrounding our ordinary usage of language. In such primitive forms thinking appears less confusing. Wittgenstein points out that these simple primitive forms are not completely different from the complex natural languages, as they are only different in kind. They help us to understand how our language functions.

Wittgenstein repeatedly asserts the diversity of language use depending on the contexts in which we employ them. Unlike his early view which looked for the universal structure of all linguistic expressions, here he emphasizes on diversity and conceives the early approach as an instance of craving for generality. This tendency to search for the common essence of all expressions is a metaphysical concern, as it seeks to identify the common feature of all particulars of the same kind. The metaphysical notion of the general idea originates from this concern.

This metaphysical propensity often construes that the meaning of the word is an image or a thing correlated to that word. This is to associate meaning with an extralinguistic entity, which is either physical or mental. According to this view, words are proper names and we confuse the bearer of the name with the meaning of the name. Wittgenstein reminds us that there is something fundamentally wrong about this craving for generality. He argues that not all meaningful uses of language are meaningful in the same way and not all words are names. To elucidate this point further, he cites the example of the name of a person. We have seen this above. According to Wittgenstein, the thing or person that is the bearer of the name is not the meaning of the name. As he says, when a person named Mr. N.N. dies, we say that, such and such a person had died or the bearer of the name Mr. N.N. died and not the meaning of the expression Mr. N.N. died.

The craving for generality had resulted in many metaphysical confusions and has generated many philosophical problems. For instance, the problems related to abstractions (abstract entities) and mental representation. As a result we assume that there is a separate and hidden realm of reality, where we encounter the meaning of words. Countering this approach, Wittgenstein urges us to look how these words are used in actual language. The idea of language games elucidates this further. Wittgenstein says:

Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,— but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language". [PI : 65]

There are different things we designate as games. For example, there are board games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games etc. Wittgenstein argues that, if we seek to know what is common to all these different types of games, we have nothing specific to point out. There are some similarities, as in some games we use balls, some are played indoor, some are played individually and some others in groups. For instance, both football and volleyball games use balls. But the ways they are used are different. There are of course some similarities, but there are also important differences between each game. These similarities do not warrant us to identify the "essence" of all games. Wittgenstein characterizes such similarities as family resemblances, indicating that they are comparable to the resemblances between the different members of the same family. Some may have similar noses and some others may have similar foreheads and so on and so forth. But such similarities and resemblances do not warrant us to construe an essence. In Wittgenstein's own words:

And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.

The diverse ways in which we use it makes it impossible to identify a single essence. It is a rule-governed activity that cannot be defined in exact terms. It lacks exact boundaries and hence the same concept may have a range of different applications in our use. The meaning and significance of linguistic usages depend on the context of life of their application. Here Wittgenstein introduces the notion of "form of life." According to him, every form of life is a context of life where people are bound to each

other and to the life context by means of conventions and rules. The metaphor of game helps us to understand this aspect. Let us take the example of a game of chess. Here simply naming the various pawns is not enough. One has to learn how the figures can move on the chessboard. This is to know about the rules of the game of chess, which actually regulate these movements. The core of Wittgenstein's argument consists in the assertion that meanings are hidden. They are not to be found in any curious unknown territory; in the mind or in a supra-natural realm. Instead, they have to be located in the day-to-day usages. Wittgenstein argues that, like games, the rules of language use are also public, conventional and customary. These rules are regulative mechanism of a community. People follow them, without contemplating about them or raising questions or doubts about their legitimacy. Wittgenstein says that "obeying a rule" is a practice. We learn a rule by following it and by participating in the form of life. Wittgenstein categorically affirms that rules cannot be observed privately, as they presuppose a context of life, which is public.

The Concept of Private Language

Since words acquire meanings in the public activity of using them, language is essentially a public activity. Wittgenstein thus opposes the idea of a private language. The idea of a private language, where a person expresses his inner experiences like feelings, moods etc. which he alone can understand is contested here. The individual words of this language are said to be referring to private sensations, which the person who has them alone can understand.

Countering this view, Wittgenstein asks; how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations? He considers the word "pain", which actually is a private sensation. Now assume that he gives a name to his private sensation, which he alone can relate to the latter. Wittgenstein here reminds that when someone gives a name to his sensation, we should not forget that a great deal of stage- setting in the language is presupposed. Only then the act of naming makes sense. Wittgenstein says that when someone indicates a private sensation he has with a word and notes down this word whenever he has that sensation, that word lacks any meaning. This is because, though a note has a function and therefore, a definite meaning, the note this person makes when he has a private sensation, which no one else understands, has no meaning, because unlike usual notes people make, this note does not have a function

in the public activity of using language. A word, which we use to indicate a sensation, should be intelligible to others as well, and not just to the user alone. The use of a word for that person's sensation stands in need of a justification which everybody understands. It becomes a note only when it is used according to certain rules which are public. In other words, it is the rule-governed act that makes such moves significant and meaningful. Wittgenstein continues:

And it would not help either to say that it need not be a sensation; that when he writes "S", he has something—and that is all that can be said. "Has" and "something" also belong to our common language.—So in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound.—But such a sound is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language-game, which should now be described. [PI: 261]

Wittgenstein underlines that language is a public and socially-governed activity and therefore, a rule governed activity. Linguistic expressions and usages make sense only if they are used in a rule governed manner. This shift to rule-governing act emphasizes the importance of publicly shared intersubjective conventions in the formation and evolution of human languages. Wittgenstein here does not discuss the logic of language, as he did in the *TLP*, but instead focuses on the grammar of language that constitutes the norms for meaningful language use. With this emphasis on grammar he highlights the phenomenon of rule-following that humans observe when they communicate with each other in their day to day life.

The Role of Philosophy

Wittgenstein says that the typical philosophical problems that are commonly found in the history of philosophy, are the result of linguistic confusions. They arise when we use language not in the usual sense in which it is used. Wittgenstein says that philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday. They originate when language is used in an unusual sense.

But philosophy has a positive and an important role to play as well. Here his view resembles his earlier view, which conceived philosophy as a critique of language and treated its major function as a logical analysis that leads to logical clarification. Here too he says that philosophy helps us to get rid of our confusions and the idea of language analysis is crucial here as well. But here philosophy brings out the

confusions, not by the logical analysis of propositions but by pointing to the reality of language, which consists in its use in ordinary life.

The new approach to language analysis urges to do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place. Here too philosophy is not a science and hence does not give rise to theories. It has an entirely different function. Wittgenstein writes:

Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us. One might also give the name "philosophy" to what is possible before all new discoveries and inventions.

The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose. [127]

Hence, philosophical problems are not treated as empirical problems that can be solved adopting a definite methodology. Wittgenstein says that, philosophical problems are solved by looking into the workings of our language. Philosophy makes us recognize those workings of our language, despite of an urge to misunderstand them. He asserts that the problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known.[*PI*: 109]

Quiz

1. Which does Wittgenstein not hold in his later period?
 - (a) Philosophical problems are solved by looking into the workings of our language
 - (b) philosophical problems are solved by a logical analysis of language
 - (c) Philosophical problems will vanish when the workings of language are properly grasped
 - (d) Philosophy we should not seek to explain but only to *describe*.
2. Which of the following is held by the Augustinian view of language?
 - (a) Essence of language lies beneath the surface
 - (b) Meaning of a word is determined by the context in which it is used
 - (c) Language is not one uniform thing
 - (d) Language has a universal logical structure.
3. Which of the following does Wittgenstein's later philosophy hold?
 - (a) Philosophy consists in the logical clarification of language
 - (b) Philosophy deals with the theories of linguistic understanding
 - (c) Philosophy explains the nature of the world and language
 - (d) Philosophy neither explains nor deduces anything but simply puts everything before us.
4. Why did Wittgenstein reject the possibility of private language?
 - (a) Because we can never express our inner experiences
 - (b) Because we can never name a private sensation
 - (c) Because there is no one to one correspondence between word and meaning
 - (d) Because words acquire meanings in the public activity of using them.
5. The model of language analysis in Wittgenstein's later work emphasizes on:

- (a) Philosophical problems are treated as empirical problems (b) The logical analysis of propositions (c) Doing away with all explanation (d) Arriving at a scientific conception of language.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [a]
3. [d]
4. [d]
5. [c]

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Chapter 31

Logical Positivism and the Scientific Conception of Philosophy

Key Words:

Vienna circle, verification principle, positivism, tautologies, factual propositions, language analysis, rejection of metaphysics, practical verifiability, verifiable in principle, strong verifiability, weak verifiability, unified science

This chapter discusses one of the very significant developments the 20th century European philosophy has witnessed; logical positivism, which is also known as neo empiricism. Again, like many other such initiatives in philosophy like existentialism, logical positivism is not a school of philosophy, with certain central doctrine, a definite conception of reality or a theory of knowledge. It is rather a movement that reflects the dominant scientific outlook of 20th century European civilization and its extension to all spheres of life. The logical positivists thus advocated a unique conception of knowledge which considered the scientific model as paradigm. They thus opposed metaphysics which aims at going beyond the sensible world and contemplating about transcendental realities. According to them metaphysics is a bad science. They were tremendously influenced by many philosophical approaches, notably, the positivism of Augustine Comte, the logical atomism of Bertrand Russell, and most significantly, by the peculiar conception of language and meaning developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his early work, the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*.

The fact that almost all major advancements in knowledge have been in the field of natural sciences have prompted the logical positivists to consider scientific conception of knowledge as paradigmatic. They found that the theories of speculative philosophy advocated by different thinkers were merely personal interpretations about reality. Most importantly, these theories were not empirically verifiable and hence it is impossible to establish their truth or falsity. The logical positivists affirm that these theories are not more than poetical or emotional reactions to the world and none of them represent knowledge like science. On the other hand, science

provides a totally different picture. It approaches reality and life from a different perspective. The story of humanity has never been the same after enlightenment, which had witnessed the emergence of modern science. Ever since renaissance and scientific revolution happened in modern Europe, the applied sciences have tremendously changed human life.

Following Wittgenstein who declared that philosophy is not a science, and there are no philosophical theories, the logical positivists too have affirmed that philosophy does not contribute to the increase of human knowledge. 20th century philosophy was characteristically different from the philosophical thinking of early centuries. Earlier, philosophy was the handmaid of theology and with the civilization turning more and more towards science, the 20th century philosophy has become a handmaid of science. In this context, the major task of philosophy consists in the logical clarification of language. The philosopher is concerned with the clarification of the meaning of words and is also keen to show what words denote in terms of immediate experience.

Logical positivism was a prominent philosophical initiative that took 20th century thinking in this direction. There are several factors—historical, cultural, intellectual—that contributed to the development of logical positivism. We shall now examine some of them.

The Emergence of Logical Positivism

After the World War I, a group of intellectuals comprising of mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers, began meeting in Vienna under the leadership of the German philosopher and physicist, Moritz Schlick. They primarily discussed the implications of recent developments in logic initiated by many thinkers like Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein. The advancements modern science made too had impressed them. They began contemplating about the possibility of a systematic reduction of human knowledge to logical and scientific foundations, as they believed, science alone is capable of providing universal and certain knowledge. Since they were guided by the methodological approaches adopted by the natural sciences, they emphasized materialism, empiricism, philosophical naturalism and the scientific method. The most notable members of the Vienna Circle were Moritz Schlick, Hans Reichenbach, Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl,

Philipp Frank, Kurt Grelling, Hans Hahn, Carl Gustav Hempel, Victor Kraft, Otto Neurath and Friedrich Waismann.

Logical Positivism formally began in 1929 with the publication of a manifesto entitled *The Vienna Circle; Its Scientific Outlook*, jointly written by Carnap, Neurath and Hahn. This pamphlet gave a brief account of the philosophical position of the thinkers associated with the group and a review of the problems in the philosophy of mathematics and of the physical and social sciences that they were chiefly concerned to solve. One of the most important features of logical positivism was the advocacy of the principle of verification, which states that, in order to be meaningful a statement needs to be empirically verifiable, though ironically, this statement itself is not verifiable.

As mentioned above, the logical positivists were influenced by many factors that contributed in determining the social and cultural life of 20th century Europe. One of the primary influences was the empiricism of Hume, Comte, Mill, Avenarius and Mach. The modern developments in formal logic were another significant intellectual inspiration as the logical techniques developed by Frege, Peano and Russell were widely employed by the logical positivists in their analysis of language. Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum mechanics were other factors that influenced their thinking. But the single most important influence was Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, to which they developed their own unique reading and interpretation.

The logical positivists adopted uncompromising positivism and proposed a blanket rejection of metaphysics. They had immense respect for scientific method and logical analysis, and they believed that in so far as philosophical problems are genuine at all they can be definitely solved by logical analysis. Being faithful to the empiricist tradition, it was natural for the logical positivists to be influenced by the radical empiricist philosophy of David Hume. Subsequently, they have rearticulated Hume's division of Relations of Ideas and Matters of Facts as tautologies and factual propositions. They maintain that all sensible propositions fall under these two categories. Therefore, according to the logical positivists sentences that are neither tautologies nor factual are not propositions. The theory of verifiability is proposed in this context, which came to be identified as the hallmark feature of the logical positivists.

Logical Positivism and the Question of Meaning

Like many others who consider language analysis constituting the core of philosophy, the logical positivists too have treated language analysis as vital. According to them, there are different types of meaningful statements. There are analytic a priori statements that are true or false by virtue of their meaning or logical form. When the truth and falsity of statements are ascertained by experience, they are known as synthetic a posteriori. Therefore, they contend that the meaning of a proposition is known if we know the method by means of which we verify it. In other words, we know the meaning if we know the conditions under which the statement is true or false. This is the celebrated verification principle. Logical positivists carry out their rejection of metaphysics by employing the verification principle as a criterion for meaningfulness. Metaphysical propositions, obviously are not verifiable, as they are not about what is the case in the world.

Subsequently, they argue that many metaphysical utterances are due to the commission of logical errors. They begin their analysis with an examination of statements that express the so-called metaphysical truths. They explore from what premises the metaphysicians deduce their propositions, as they too need to begin, as other men do, with the evidence of their senses. Accordingly, the logical positivists wonder what valid process of reasoning can possibly lead the metaphysicians to the conception of a transcendent reality. As A. J. Ayer says, the traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part, as unwarranted as they are unfruitful. He then asserts that the surest way to end them is to establish beyond question 'what should be the purpose and method of a philosophical inquiry?' [*Language Truth and Logic*, p.1]

Rejection of Metaphysics and Language Analysis

The logical positivists reject metaphysics in a characteristically different manner than many others who ventured doing so. For instance, Immanuel Kant had demonstrated that metaphysics as a science is impossible. He treated the impossibility of metaphysics as a matter of fact and he attempted to draw a limit to our thinking. On the other hand, Wittgenstein, who followed a method rooted in language analysis attempts to draw the line in language. He maintains that, in order to draw a limit to thinking, as Kant did, we should have to think both sides of this limit, which is absurd. Following Wittgenstein, the logical positivists too try to demonstrate the

impossibility of transcendent metaphysics, not as a matter of fact, but as a matter of logic. They intend to show how metaphysics is impossible by a criticism of the nature of the actual statements which comprise metaphysics. Applying the verification principle as a criterion for meaningfulness they assert that statements that transcend the limits of all possible sense experience have no literal significance. As the so-called metaphysical propositions transcend such limits, they are bound to be meaningless.

As mentioned above, the rule which determines the literal significance of language is the criterion for meaningfulness. But metaphysicians produce sentences, which fail to conform to the conditions under which alone a sentence can be literally significant. About the peculiar feature that makes the approach of the logical positivists different from others who oppose metaphysics, A.J. Ayer observes:

The originality of the logical positivists lay in their making the impossibility of metaphysics depend not upon the nature of what could be known but upon the nature of what could be said. Their charge against the metaphysician was that he breaks the rules which any utterance must satisfy if it is to be literally significant. [*Logical Positivism*, p.11]

The logical positivists thus maintain that all propositions about God or absolute, transcendent entities, substance, destiny of man, meaning of human life, goodness etc. are metaphysical. These propositions look like other meaningful propositions that are about matters of fact. They pretend to be cognitive. But with a language analysis rooted in the principle of verifiability, the logical positivists affirm that they are actually literal nonsense and meaningless, though they may have emotive or poetic value.

Employing the method of the logical analysis of language in order to demonstrate the meaninglessness of metaphysical propositions, the logical positivists were influenced by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein talks about those elementary propositions which a logical analysis of language may expose. These elementary propositions have direct correspondence with facts. They are direct reports of observation and hence are the touchstones by reference to which all other statements were empirically verified.

We may need to examine a little more the important features of the principle of verification in this context. As indicated above, this principle asserts that the meaning of a proposition is its method of verification. Therefore, verification is the criterion by which we test whether a sentence expresses a genuine proposition about a matter of fact. They argue that all meaningful statements can be ultimately analyzed to the elementary statements which stand for observable events. This is applicable to the most abstract scientific hypotheses as well.

According to A.J. Ayer, the principle of verification affirms that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express - that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. Ayer discusses different types of verification such as practical verifiability, verifiable in principle, strong verifiability and weak verifiability. Practical verifiability is possible in the case of propositions which can be confirmed as either true or false on the basis of actual observations. On the other hand, those propositions for which we do not have a practical means of verification may still be meaningful if we can theoretically verify them.

The criterion of strong verification insists that a statement is meaningful if and only if, its truth could be conclusively established in experience. But such a strong criterion becomes difficult to hold as many statements we hold as true like all men are mortal, and bodies expand when heated, are not verifiable in the strong sense. Such general propositions of law are designed to cover an infinite number of cases. They are therefore, not conclusively verified. On the other hand, the criterion of weak verification states that a statement is meaningful if it is possible for experience to render it probable. The important question in this context is, "would any observations be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood?" In the weak sense a genuine factual proposition need not be equivalent to an experiential proposition, or any finite number of experiential propositions. It only says that if some experiential propositions can be deduced from it in conjunction with certain other premises without being deducible from those other premises alone, then it is meaningful.

The very idea of conceiving verifiability as a criterion for meaningfulness encounters several difficulties. The idea of verifiability is based on the notion of elementary statements which are

direct observation statements. But these elementary statements themselves are not infallible, as they may not refer to anything other than the private sensations of the speaker. They may not be anything more than mere records of the subject's immediate experiences. Again, an overemphasis on observation may pose the threat of solipsism as well. A transition from the subject's private experiences to the experiences of others and to the public world is always problematic. Ironically, as mentioned above, the principle of verification is not itself verifiable.

Logical Positivism and the Idea of Unified Science

The logical positivists have advocated an idea of unified science, which affirms that all genuine knowledge can be equated with scientific knowledge. They thought that they could materialize the unity of all sciences by developing a common language in which all scientific propositions can be expressed. All knowledge can be codified in a single standard language of science. This is done by carrying out several reductions or explications of the terms employed in the language to more fundamental expressions that stand for observations.

The logical positivists maintain that scientific theory represents an axiomatic system, which is not directly verifiable. It is an abstract formal system. Any empirical interpretation is possible only by means of those statements that establish a correlation between real objects and the abstract concepts. Scientific theory needs such rules of correspondence for empirical interpretation and verification. The language of scientific theory, according to the logical positivists, consists of three types of terms: logical, observational and theoretical. While logical terms form logical statements, the observational statements are formed out of logical terms and observational terms. Theoretical statements are formed out of theoretical terms and logical terms. The logical positivists thus hold that all sciences share a common language and all scientific terms could be restated as, or reduced to, a set of basic statements, or protocol sentences, describing immediate experience or perception. In other words, the logical positivists envisage a reduction of all scientific terms into terms of physics. They argue that the procedures for testing statements in the various sciences are basically the same.

Inspired by Wittgenstein, the logical positivists argue that the primary function of philosophy is not to propose basic principles of knowledge. Philosophy does not aim at constructing a deductive system of meaningful propositions by offering the consequences of basic principles of knowledge as a complete picture of reality. They affirm that philosophy clarifies the logical relations of empirical propositions.

Like most other philosophical movements, historical and cultural factors have played a crucial role in the emergence of logical positivism. The beginning of 20th century was an era of reason and scientific rationality. The impact of scientific developments in philosophy has inspired many thinkers to conceive a philosophy also as a scientific; a scientific philosophy. They have adopted the method of rigorous logical and linguistic analysis for this purpose and combined with it the spirit of empiricism and positivism.

Though the logical positivists have generated a lot of interest from different quarters, they failed to sustain and consolidate as a movement. Their theories derived a lot from the thoughts of Russell and Wittgenstein. Yet neither of them have associated themselves with the movement. Wittgenstein was even critical about their project and has complained that they have misunderstood his philosophy. They have attracted criticism from later philosophers of analytic philosophy like Hilary Putnam and W.V. Quine. Putnam has demonstrated that the distinction the logical positivists made between "observational" and "theoretical" statements is meaningless. W. V. Quine has criticized the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, and the reduction of meaningful statements to immediate experience. Further Thomas Kuhn has demonstrated the impossibility of providing truth conditions for science, independent of its historical paradigm.

Quiz

1. According to the logical positivists, which of the following was not a reason for rejecting metaphysics?
 - (a) Metaphysical theories are proved to be false
 - (b) They are not empirically verifiable
 - (c) They are not more than poetical or emotional reactions to the world
 - (d) They are not more than mere personal interpretations about reality.
2. All the following have influenced the logical positivists, except?

- (a) Empiricism (b) Modern developments in formal logic (c) Idealism
(d) Developments in modern science.
- 3. According to the logical positivists, which type of statements are true or false by virtue of their meaning or logical form?
(a) Analytic a priori (b) Synthetic a priori (c) Synthetic a posteriori (d) None of the above.
- 4. According to the logical positivists, on what does the impossibility of metaphysics depend upon?
(a) On the nature of what could be known (b) On the nature of what could be imagined
(c) On the nature of what could be contemplated (d) On the nature of what could be said.
- 5. According to the logical positivists metaphysical statements are not.....
(a) Proved to be false (b) Literal nonsense (c) Meaningless (d) Have only emotive value.

Answer Key

- 1. [a]
- 2. [c]
- 3. [a]
- 4. [d]
- 5. [a]

Assignments

- 1. Discuss the way in which logical positivists have rejected metaphysics, bringing out its peculiar features.
- 2. Describe the theory of meaning advocated by the logical positivists.

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Chapter 32

Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology:

The Principle of Intentionality and the Methods of Reduction

Key Words:

presuppositionless philosophy, consciousness, phenomena, intentionality principle, intentional in-existence, essences, natural attitude, bracketing, *Epoche*, phenomenological-psychological reduction, eidetic reduction, transcendental reduction, transcendental ego.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is widely known as the founder of modern phenomenology, a highly influential movement in 20th century western philosophy. Husserl was one of the prominent European thinkers of 20th century and the movement has inspired thinkers from different streams. Though we consider Husserl as the founder of phenomenology, the approach and method we call as phenomenological are not his exclusive invention. Many thinkers and philosophers like Kant, Fichte, Hegel and Mach have referred to the term phenomenology in their writings before Husserl used it in a more systematic way. But it was Husserl who developed it into a systematic philosophical approach and method with certain definite goals. All major contributions in this area are from Edmund Husserl in whose writings it appears as a philosophy and as a method. Husserl further conceived phenomenology as a foundational science and as a presuppositionless philosophy.

Husserl was primarily a mathematician and logician. He was the student of the great German philosopher and psychologist Franz Brentano, who had famously reintroduced the intentionality principle. Husserl was also influenced by the empiricism of David Hume. He found the predominant naturalism and historicism in German thought objectionable and became interested in exploring the foundations of mathematics. This interest has led him to study logic and finally epistemology and philosophy.

What is Phenomenology?

Husserl conceived phenomenology in three important ways. Firstly, it was conceived as the science of sciences, which endeavoured to discover the basis of

consciousness. In the second view, phenomenology was conceived as a first philosophy and therefore, it is coextensive with philosophy, as traditionally it was the latter which had been enjoying the status of first philosophy. The third conception of phenomenology is the most important one, where it is conceived as a transcendental idealism. This view conceives the transcendental ego as the source of all meaning.

As a philosophy, phenomenology initiates a break from many traditional concerns and inaugurates a new way of thinking. It was one of the most influential philosophical movements of 20th century western philosophy, as it inspired the emergence of many other movements in philosophy like Existentialism and Hermeneutics. Phenomenology was introduced at a time when philosophical thinking was facing a crisis and it has given a new life to German philosophy, which had lost its glory with the decline of the great idealistic tradition.

As the name indicates, the subject matter of phenomenology is the idea of phenomena, which according to Husserl, refers to ourselves, other people and the objects and events around us. It also includes the reflection of our own conscious experiences, as we experience them. According to Husserl, phenomena constitute the things *as they are given to our consciousness*, whether in perception or imagination or thought or volition. The fundamental objective of phenomenology is to study the phenomena, which is experienced in various acts of consciousness.

In this sense there are two types of phenomena; mental and physical. Mental phenomena constitute of what occur in the mind when we experience something. They also include the acts of consciousness, or its contents. On the other hand, physical phenomena include the objects of external perception starting with colors and shapes.

Phenomenology envisages isolating phenomena by suspending all consideration of their objective reality or subjective association. Here the phenomenologist is involved in a search for certainty. In this sense by equating phenomenology with philosophy, the latter is conceived as a rigorous science dealing with ideal objects or essences of things originating in the consciousness.

In developing the concept of phenomena, Husserl was influenced by Brentano, who made a distinction between psychological phenomena from physical phenomena. Brentano found that the psychological is different from the physical, as the former is characterized by what is known as intentionality. Brentano says that the mental phenomena exist intentionally in acts of consciousness, a phenomenon which is known as intentional in-existence.

Brentano and Husserl maintain that every mental phenomenon, or act of consciousness, is directed toward some object. They are about something that lies outside. While for Brentano, this is the feature of all psychological phenomena, Husserl replaces psychical phenomena with experiences or intentional experiences. The thesis of intentional directedness constitute the core of Brentano's descriptive psychology and according to Husserl, our consciousness is always intentional and it aims at or refers to something objective

The Principle of Intentionality

The phenomenological account of experience asserts two things. Firstly, it claims that everyday experiences are intentional. Secondly, it affirms that experiences always reveal their objects from a perspective. Hence the phenomenological account of intentionality reconciles the objectivism of intentionality with perspectivism of empiricism.

The principle of intentionality asserts that consciousness is always 'consciousness about' something. This aboutness of consciousness points to something outside the mind which is conscious of the object. The intentionality principle underlines the fact that our everyday experiences are directed towards objects, properties and states of affairs. At the same time, objects are revealed from definite perspectives. There seems to be a contradiction between the definite directedness of consciousness and the perspectivism of experiences. Husserl argues that, though experience reveals its object from a perspective, we are intentionally directed toward a full three-dimensional object. The different modes of consciousness we may have when we love, hate, desire, present, wonder etc. are all about something. Hence all objects of experience are presented to consciousness as transcending. They are presented as going beyond

the experience we have of them. Though all our experiences are perspectival, they also present their objects to us as transcending the perspective. For instance, when we see a tree, we do not see a mere image of the tree or a packet of sense data, but we see the tree itself. Of course the tree is seen from a definite perspective and only those parts of the tree that are visible from our perspective are seen by us. But Husserl asserts that, the whole tree is given to the consciousness as an intentional object. Hence phenomenology goes beyond mere empiricism. It goes beyond the image theory proposed by empiricism.

Husserl argues that perception enables us to go beyond the image, which is present to us. We relate ourselves to the object itself as an image to a certain extra conscious object. Husserl claims that in intentional experiences, we do not get raw, uninterrupted images in consciousness. Instead, we get the data that are already interpreted as images of some objects or other.

Brentano, while introducing the notion of intentionality had asserted that consciousness was essentially intentional and argued that every mental phenomenon was characterized by the intentional inexistence of an object. It is directed toward an object or immanent objectivity. According to Brentano, every mental phenomenon contains something as an object within itself, although not everyone does so in the same way. This object, argues Brentano, is the reference to a content. Brentano's intentionality principle thus aims at distinguishing the psychical from the physical. Brentano thus initiates a study on the nature of consciousness and also on the phenomena as they are directly given to consciousness. He argues that every mental state contains its object completely within itself as an intentional object is immanent to the mental state.

While adopting the principle of intentionality as a central doctrine in his phenomenology, Husserl proposed some crucial changes in its conceptualization. According to him, experiences are directed towards entities which are both mental and non-mental. He argues that in the experience of colour, we see coloured things and not mere colour sensations. He maintains that, entities like physical objects, persons, numbers which are not spatio-temporal, particulars like the patch of blue, universals like blueness, states of affairs, mental entities like thoughts, images and feelings, etc., can become an intentional object. In this

sense he takes phenomenology and the principle of intentionality beyond what Brentano intended it to be.

Husserl's Phenomenology

Husserl's phenomenology is not confined to a mere philosophical doctrine about the nature of consciousness and the essences that are directly given to it. Instead, it proposes a method to isolate this directly given essences. The central concern of phenomenology aims at isolating the essential aspects which constitute meanings. In other words, it seeks to isolate the essences. Everything perceived is bound up with the essence of perception which is different from the object that exists in nature.

Husserl argues that every intentional experience gives meaning. In other words, intentional experiences have the essential characteristic of giving some meaning. The fundamental aim of phenomenology is to grasp the perceived as such. It tries to grasp what is essentially given. The task of phenomenology is to capture the phenomenon as meant. Phenomenology searches for essences in the consciousness, which is the domain of essences. It searches for pure mental processes which are immanent to the sphere of consciousness that investigates them. The ultimate focus is on pure consciousness.

The various mental processes like remembering, imagining, judging, willing, describing, feeling, perceiving etc. have their own essences. The phenomenological method examines these essences, by excluding what do not lie in the mental act itself. It thus builds a science of essences. In order to find the essence of consciousness, phenomenology excludes what is non-essence. For this the major hurdle is the natural attitude, which a phenomenologist has to overcome.

The natural attitude is characteristic of both our everyday life and ordinary science. The natural attitude is the taken for granted attitude we adopt in our day to day life and in our scientific theorizing endeavours about the world. This is our usual way of existing, by believing and taking for granted the reality of the objects of our experience such as physical objects, other people, and even ideas. We simply believe in their existence and never question this belief. We take

them as “just there” and do not question their existence. In other words, we view the objects of consciousness as factual items. According to Husserl, the genuine philosophical attitude opposes this view. While the natural attitude accepts the possibility of knowledge as a self-evident fact, philosophy raises doubts about such assumptions. It affirms that the self-evident givenness of objects of our natural attitude can be questioned.

Husserl proposes to overcome the natural attitude by suspending the spatio-temporal world and focusing on pure mental processes. This process is called the phenomenological reduction, which involves a process of bracketing or *Epoche* which is the Greek word for cessation. This process of reduction aims at excluding all that is not genuinely immanent from the sphere of absolute data. What is intended is adequately given in itself.

The process of bracketing involves a suspension of inquiry. It suspends the object’s status as reality and therefore, involves a neutralization of belief. It sets aside everything that is external, and the prejudices that we associate with the reality of the world. The phenomenological method thus concentrates only on the inner content of our conscious acts. It tries to isolate what is remembered in the act of remembering, imagined in the act of imagination, perceived in the act of perception etc.

According to Husserl, the process of reduction has two broad phases: phenomenological and transcendental. The phenomenological reduction attempts to focus on pure consciousness and it describes objects not in their natural causal relations, but as they appear in the consciousness. Hence it is called phenomenological. Transcendental reduction on the other hand deals with the conditions that make any knowledge possible.

According to Husserl, there are three types of reduction: the phenomenological-psychological reduction, eidetic reduction and transcendental reduction. The phenomenological-psychological reduction is conceived as the gateway to the right form of phenomenological attitude from natural attitude. The natural attitude is bracketed at this stage and it contains the description of mental acts free of theories and presuppositions. It also refrains from taking any natural-objective position.

The second type of reduction is eidetic, where the individual existence of the object in question is bracketed, since phenomenology is interested only in the essence. The *idos* or essences are evaluated at this stage. The focus here is on properties, kinds, or types and the ideal species that entities may exemplify. This process involves a free variation of the individuals in our imagination. With this it finds out what characteristics these things have in common. It locates the invariant forms which are essences.

These two stages of reduction together set the stage for what is described as the ultimate goal of phenomenological method; the isolation of the Transcendental subjectivity. As Speigelberg observes:

It indicates that reduction has the purpose to inhibit and “take back,” as it were, all references to the “transcendent” as the intentional correlate of our acts and to trace them back to the immanent or “transcendental” acts in which they have their source. [Vol. I, p. 136]

Husserl observes that without consciousness there would not be a world at all and according to him, phenomenology has to study the realm of pure consciousness and the essential formations found there.

The Transcendental Reduction and the Transcendental Ego

Husserl argues that since the basic approaches of the reductions that involve suspension or bracketing are negative—in psychological-phenomenological and eidetic reductions—we need to adopt more positive approaches. We need to specify in what direction the reductions head to. The first two reductions move away from the natural world, and do not specify what phenomenological reduction ultimately heads to. Husserl here affirms that transcendental subjectivity is the ultimate goal of the phenomenological method.

Since isolating the transcendental ego is the ultimate goal of phenomenology, Husserl argues that a proper understanding of the ego is essential in carrying out the phenomenological exercise. He says that there is a fundamental problem with our understanding about the ego. The ego is usually conceived as the essentially nonphysical entity, which is causally interacting with the physical. We often understand the ego and its acts in naturalistic terms. The talk of the ego and its experiences presuppose the natural attitude, which

phenomenology tries to overcome. Hence it is important that we should bracket to the ego as well. This happens in the third stage of reduction, which is known as the transcendental reduction.

In transcendental reduction, we bracket the ego and its intentions. We then cease to affirm the existence of the ego as a psychological reality. In other words, the empirical or psychological ego has to be set aside. Husserl writes:

By phenomenological *epoché* I reduce my natural human Ego and psychic life - the realms of my *psychological self-experience* – to my transcendental phenomenological Ego, the realm of *transcendental phenomenological self-experience*. [Cartesian Meditations, p.26]

The transcendental reduction proceeds with a bracketing of the ego and its intentions. This stage ceases to affirm the existence of the ego as a psychological reality. With this we may get access to the transcendental subjectivity or the transcendental ego. Husserl believed that the *epoché* that brackets the empirical elements in consciousness would finally leave only the transcendental ego and its pure acts. According to him, the reflection on these transcendental elements of consciousness is pure or transcendental reflection. He thought that we have direct access to this transcendental subjectivity through a transcendental experience and *epoché* is a form of transcendental experience. The transcendental ego and its pure acts are the residue of transcendental reduction.

Husserl says that, while every *cogitato* come and go, the pure ego appears to be necessary in principle. It remains absolutely self-identical in all possible changes of experience. Husserl asserts that the pure Ego is the necessary prerequisite for experience to occur. With the transcendental reduction of the empirical ego, we enter into the domain of meaning, not the consciousness of an individual human, but the essence of all meaning-making.

The notion of transcendental ego and the idea of transcendental reduction are the most interesting and the most problematic aspects of Husserl's philosophy. Though Husserl considered these ideas as the most important constituents of his philosophy, none of his disciples have shown interest in further developing them. Husserl was reported to have stated once that even after his death, his transcendental ego might exist, as it is eternal. In this sense phenomenology is ultimately a philosophy of the self.

Quiz

1. Which among the following is not the way in which Husserl has conceived phenomenology?
(a) As epistemology (b) Science of sciences (c) First philosophy (d) Transcendental idealism.

2. According to Husserl, experiences are directed towards entities which are.....?
(a) Mental alone (b) Non-mental alone (c) Neither mental nor non-mental (d) Both mental and non-mental.

3. Which of the following statements are true about Husserl's concept of phenomenology?
(i) It grasps the mental concepts
(ii) It grasps what is essentially given
(iii) It captures the phenomenon as it is stated by the sciences
(iv) It searches for concepts in the consciousness
(v) It searches for pure mental processes.
(vi) Its ultimate focus is on pure consciousness.
(a) (vi) alone (b) (ii), (v) and (vi) (c) (i), (ii) and (vi) (d) (ii), (iii) and (vi)

4. Which of the following is not involved in the process of bracketing?
(a) Suspension of inquiry (b) Takes for granted the existence of the world and its objects (c) Suspends the object's status as reality (d) Neutralization of belief.

5. What happens during eidetic reduction?
(a) Freedom from natural attitude (b) Description of mental acts free of theories and presuppositions (c) locates the invariant forms (d) Refrains from taking any natural-objective position.

Answer Key

1. [a]
2. [d]
3. [c]
4. [b]
5. [c]

Assignments

1. Describe the principle of intentionality and its role in phenomenology.
2. Discuss Husserl's notion of phenomenological reduction.

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Chapter 33

Phenomenological Reduction and Transcendental Subjectivity

Key Words:

Science of essences, phenomenological reduction, pure mental processes, invariant forms, ideal species, transcendental subjectivity.

The Method of Reduction

We have seen an outline of Husserl's phenomenology and his method in the previous lecture. Now we shall examine his method in detail and also the ultimate goal of his method. We shall discuss the three types of reduction in detail with a special focus on the notion of transcendental subjectivity.

Phenomenology was also conceived as a method to build a science of essences. We have already seen how phenomenology tries to exclude what does not lie in the mental act itself and thereby aims to find the essence of consciousness. This is done primarily by excluding what is non-essence. Accordingly, phenomenology proposes a method that helps us overcome the natural attitude, which considers consciousness as a thing among many other things in the world. In other words, phenomenology aims at isolating the immanent data of consciousness.

The immanent is understood as the adequately self-given pure phenomena in the consciousness. It is the indubitable absolute data, which does not point to anything outside itself. Husserl says that, what is intended is adequately given in itself and this immanent is beyond all epistemological questions. The process of reduction is proposed in order to isolate this immanent data. We arrive at them by bracketing the empirical data away from consideration and also by refraining from making judgments upon them. We have seen in the previous chapter that, the pure phenomena, and the pure Ego are the residue of phenomenological reduction. Phenomenology thus urges to concentrate only on the inner content of our conscious acts and distinguish the immanent object of the act from the actual object. As observed by Martin Heidegger, who was a disciple of Husserl and a prominent thinker of 20th century European philosophy, phenomenology is to let a thing show itself from itself the way in which it shows itself from itself.

Nature of Phenomenological Method

The phenomenological method is neither empirical nor deductive. It consists in pointing to what is given and elucidating it. It focuses directly upon whatever is presented to consciousness and excludes all that is not genuinely immanent or adequately self-given. Husserl introduces the idea of phenomenological reduction in his 1906-07 lectures on Logic and Theory of Knowledge. He says that his purpose is to find a radically presuppositionless science.

We have already seen in the previous chapter that there are different stages of reduction, each confining to certain limited objective. But these different stages are not clearly articulated in Husserl's work. He employs the process of bracketing in all the stages and according to him the ultimate aim of phenomenology is to expose the transcendental structures of consciousness.

The phenomenological reduction in general suspends the spatio-temporal world and focuses on pure mental processes. It employs the process of bracketing in order to see the origin of our knowledge, which has been lost sight of. Bracketing is not just a method adopted by the phenomenologist. It is a form of experience, which ultimately culminates in a transcendental experience.

What Happens in Bracketing?

One may wonder what happens to the world of objects when we bracket them in the process of phenomenological bracketing. For instance, when we see a beautiful painting, the phenomenologist insists on suspending all our beliefs about it and go beyond the taken for granted attitude of the natural world thesis. But Husserl assures that nothing is lost in phenomenological reduction. All those characteristics, with which the painting was appearing in our perception, remain the same even after bracketing. Nothing happens to the world after reduction and the reduced objects are still taken to be out there. Only our attitude towards the world is changed.

This change in attitude is what the phenomenologist intends to attain. Instead of naively positing the world around us, we focus on how the things are given to us. To clarify this aspect, Husserl distinguishes between appearances and appearances of. He says that the perceived object appears in several modes to us. There are fluctuating

multiplicities of modes of appearance. And each mode of appearance is an “appearance of”. Each appearance synthetically produces the consciousness of one and the same thing. In other words, though the mode of appearance may vary, they are all appearances of the same object.

The concept of phenomenological reduction amounts to giving a description of mental acts free of theories and presuppositions. It insists to refrain from taking any natural-objective position and focuses our attention on consciousness and its experiences. It further refrains attention from the various external objects with which consciousness is normally occupied. Hence the first step in bracketing is the bracketing of natural attitude. Nature is the universe of spatiotemporal objectivity, which is given to us constantly. Bracketing alters this attitude and it puts nature out of action. We cease to take part in it. All presuppositions about the world must be suspended, or set aside. The bracketing of the natural attitude begins with bracketing the assumption of a real, natural world to which our intentions relate. Our beliefs about particular objects and all the theories of natural science are bracketed. The search for evidences centers, not on the objects that we ordinarily intend, but on the intentions themselves and the ego who undergoes them.

But this process has certain inevitable limitations. The phenomenological reduction at this stage achieves only the broad, rudimentary form of phenomenology and it is not distinguished from psychology. Hence this process of reduction is not completely free from the natural world thesis. The natural attitude is bracketed only as it applies to the objects of our everyday intentions and not as it applies to our experiences and to ourselves. Even after this stage we continue to affirm our belief in the existence of ourselves as natural persons. We conceive ourselves as psychologically functioning conscious egos. We continue to treat our intentions as natural events making up this ego's psychological reality. Hence the phenomenologist has to take the bracketing to the next level; eidetic reduction.

In the second stage the phenomenologist moves from fact to essence in a positive sense. This stage elevates the *idos* or essences. As we have discussed earlier, when we perceive an object the object is perceived from a perspective, but the whole object is given to our consciousness. In other words, the unity of the object is maintained in the consciousness. The different views of the object are given to consciousness as continuous, as views of *one* thing. The phenomenologist conceives that the essences give themselves

to consciousness all at once. In order to grasp the essence, phenomenology urges to eliminate all individual features of the experienced object. In other words, phenomenology places itself in the presence of pure essence and ignores all other sources of information. What we intuit is not limited to perceivable individuals, but includes forms as well. These forms are the invariable structures that reveal themselves in the process of intuiting.

Phenomenology also explains how to locate the essences. When we intuit a group of things we can intuit necessary similarities between them. Through free variation of the individuals in our imagination, we have to find out what characteristics these things have in common. We thus locate the invariant forms, which are ‘essences’. The eidetic phenomenology therefore, constitutes a method for turning the focus of any study from the concrete to the general, from individuals to their essences. Essences or *eidos* are properties, kinds, or types—ideal species—that entities may exemplify. The properties of the individual that cannot be so “varied” belong to that essence. In eidetic reduction we have to turn our attention to the type, or essence, itself and to what is necessarily true of all individuals.

The eidetic stage is definitely a higher stage than the previous one, which is largely a form of psychological reduction. But it too has certain limitations. First of all, it only describes what is given to us and never tries to reach out to the ego to which things are given. Husserl reminds us that phenomenology is not just the study of essences, as the ultimate goal of reduction is reaching transcendental ego.

Transcendental Subjectivity: The Ultimate Goal of Reduction

It indicates that reduction has the purpose to inhibit and “take back,” as it were, all references to the “transcendent” as the intentional correlate of our acts and to trace them back to the immanent or “transcendental” acts in which they have their source. [Speigelberg, Vol I, p.136]

The processes of bracketing and reduction are expected to conclude with the discovery of the transcendental ego as the ultimate source of all meaning. The process of reduction has to progress from the eidetic level to the transcendental level. The transcendental reduction is the only means to uncover hidden intentional acts that project transcendent objects. It amounts to a complete overcoming of naturalism, as even after the eidetic reduction natural attitude prevails. It helps us to have a better understanding about cognitive process

and enables us to realize the absolute existence of consciousness as different from the existence of things in nature. Husserl affirms that without consciousness there would not be a world at all. Phenomenology in this sense has to study the realm of pure consciousness and the essential formations found there.

But what is the transcendental subjectivity, which is considered as the real ego? There are several misconceptions about the ego. Husserl says that, our usual talk of ego brings the natural attitude into picture. We conceive the ego and its acts in naturalistic terms, as we treat it as an essentially nonphysical entity which is causally interacting with the physical objects. In other words, the talk of the ego and its experiences presuppose the general thesis of the natural attitude. Hence Husserl urges to extend the method of bracketing to the ego and to its intentions.

The transcendental reduction thus brackets the ego and its intentions, not to affirm the ego as an empirical or psychological reality, but to get access to the transcendental subjectivity or transcendental ego through a transcendental experience. Here the *epoché* is a form of transcendental experience. The transcendental reduction thus brackets the empirical elements in consciousness in order to access to transcendental ego and its pure acts. By describing consciousness independently of naturalistic affirmations it reveals the inner life of consciousness. It is therefore, a reflection on the transcendental elements of consciousness. The transcendental reflection describes the intentions of the transcendental ego.

The transcendental Ego is attained as a result of the transcendental reduction. It is free from all assumptions about what the ego is in fact like as a natural, an empirical, reality. Here Husserl claims that he learns from Descartes' mistakes. Descartes, through his skepticism, brackets the natural world, but concludes his exploration with the attainment of the cogito, which actually is the empirical ego. He misconstrues the cogito as the thinking substance. The pure Ego remains absolutely self-identical in all possible changes of experience. It is not a real part or phase of experiences. As Dermot Moran observes, our ordinary acts of perception has a temporal structure of retentions and anticipations and the unity of the ego's psychic life suggest that there is a unifying factor underlying the temporal spread of consciousness. [p. 138] all our experiences belong to the ego and the ego belongs to these experiences and all of them belong to one single stream of experience.

The experiences of an object have different modes; being-directed toward an object, being occupied with an object, adopting an attitude, undergoing something etc. All these acts necessarily involve the ego and are something from the ego. In other words, the pure Ego is the necessary prerequisite for experience to occur. It is not just one more thing in the world, as a mere agent of intentional life. In this sense it is essentially differentiated from the empirical ego, which is a thing in the world. The empirical ego is an entity that occupies space, endures through time and has physical and psychic features. On the other hand, the transcendental ego is the center of disclosure to whom the world and everything in it manifest themselves. It is the agent of truth, which is responsible for judgements and verification. It constitutes the world for me and is the absolute being which the natural world's being presupposes. It is also the source of all meaning.

Since phenomenology primarily and fundamentally deals with the ego, it is essentially an egology. It is a study of the ego and its self experience. Hence the true focus of philosophy is the region of self-experience, the transcendental ego. Husserl writes in *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*:

The Objective world, the world that exists for me,.....this world with all its Objects . . . derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, from me myself, from me as the *transcendental Ego*, the Ego who comes to the fore only with transcendental-phenomenological epoché. [p. 26]

In *Ideas I*, Husserl further asserts the absolute status of the pure ego and argues that we can undertake the thought experiment of imagining the very destruction of the world - the world annihilation – yet we can see that consciousness survives as pure, absolute being. [Moran, p.151]

The transcendental ego therefore, is the realm of necessary existence. The existence of the world and its objects are contingent, but consciousness is absolute. It constitutes the world as a world of meanings and a world of objects. Husserl even conceives the pure ego as eternal. Dermot Moran cites Alfred Schutz who recalls that, Husserl in their last conversations had mentioned that, though he would die, his transcendental ego would live on. [p. 169].

Quiz

1. Which of the following matches with Husserl's understanding of the notion of the "immanent"?

- (a) It points to something outside itself (b) Raises epistemological questions (c) Is adequately given in itself (d) Represented by mental images.
2. What happens in bracketing?
(a) Objects are reduced to essences (b) The world no more exists (c) The qualities of objects disappear (d) Beliefs about the objects are suspended.
3. Which of the following is characteristic of the phenomenological method?
(a) It is empirical in nature (b) It elucidates the given (c) It is deductive in nature (d) It employs inductive generalization.
4. Which of the following does not belong to the *eidos* of an object?
(a) All the properties of a particular object (b) that is necessarily true of all individuals of the same type of objects (c) The types that entities may exemplify (d) The invariant forms.
5. Which of the following description is appropriate for the pure ego?
(a) An agent of intentional life (b) It is the necessary prerequisite for experience to occur (c) It occupies space and endures through time (d) It has physical and psychic features.

Answer Key

1. [c]
2. [d]
3. [b]
4. [a]
5. [b]

Assignments

1. Discuss the three stages of reduction in detail indicating the limitations of the first two stages.
2. Describe the salient features and objectives of transcendental reduction.

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Chapter 34

Martin Heidegger: The Question of Being

Key Words:

Phenomenological ontology, descriptive psychology, forgetfulness, *Dasein*, fundamental ontology, Being, destruction or dismantling of the tradition.

This chapter introduces the philosophy of the great 20th century German thinker Martin Heidegger. He was born on September 26th, 1889. During his early days he was influenced by Franz Brentano's descriptive psychology. But the most important influence was from Edmund Husserl with whom he worked several years as an academic assistant. Husserl encouraged him to turn his attention to mathematics and philosophy and since 1919 he worked very closely with the former and everyone considered Heidegger as Husserl's intellectual heir. During this period Heidegger carried out Husserl's original project of getting back to things themselves, but with the publication of his *Being and Time*, he deviated from Husserl's project and developed his independent philosophy which treated the question of being and its forgetfulness as the most significant philosophical problems of 20th century European thought. Heidegger wants to employ phenomenology in order to overcome this forgetfulness of Being and he developed a phenomenological ontology, which would clearly distinguish Being from entities. He complained that western metaphysics failed to make this distinction and proposes a destruction of this metaphysical tradition that would eventually conclude in the regaining of Being.

Heidegger was no doubt one of the most important philosophers of 20th century European philosophy. Politically he supported the National Socialist Party of Hitler and though he disassociated with it later, never apologized for his involvement in its political programmes. Nevertheless, he was widely respected in the academic circles as an original thinker, who has substantial contributions to the history of European philosophy. His thoughts influenced many important philosophical developments in 20th century like existentialism, post structuralism and even postmodernism. Heidegger died in Friburg on May 26th, 1976.

Heidegger affirms that phenomenology is much older than Husserl and was essentially a Greek way of thinking. The early Greek thinkers have encountered and framed the question of being for the first time during their philosophical contemplations and this problem remained at the core of the Greek philosophical thinking. This problem was raised by Parmenides who eventually distinguished being from non-being. He claimed that Being is one and non-being is impossible. Afterwards, in Plato's idealistic thought we come across a distinction between the being which is known by rational thought and beings which are objects of opinion we derive from the senses. Aristotle maintained that there was a special science that studies being and its properties, which is different from other sciences.

Husserl and Heidegger

Heidegger, though begins his intellectual career as a phenomenologist who shared the Husserlian objectives that aim at getting back to things themselves, later deviated from this and pursued a different path. Phenomenology, according to him, is not a mere study of the intentional structures of consciousness. Though Heidegger acknowledges Husserl's role in shaping his ideas he was not satisfied with Husserl's characterization of phenomenology as a study of the objects of consciousness and also in the latter's transcendental project. According to him phenomenology is a fundamental study of the relation between *Dasein* and Being. While Husserl emphasized on transcendental reduction and the concept of pure ego in his transcendental phenomenology, Heidegger's primary objective in philosophy dealt with a concern with Being and instead of Husserl's pure transcendental subjectivity, he focused his attention on the being of man which is a being-in-the-world. He replaced Husserl's transcendental phenomenology with a form of anthropology that would approach the question of being by relating it with the being of man. Husserl in his *Ideen III* says: "The wonder of all wonders is the pure ego and the pure consciousness." Heidegger on the other hand affirms in his *What is Metaphysics?* that "Man alone of all existing things... experiences the wonder of all wonders: that there are things-in-being." [Spiegelberg, p.87 and p.284]

Heidegger considered answering the question of Being as his lifelong project. But this necessarily involves another exploration; the being of man. In order to understand Being, one must first understand the being of man, the *Dasein* or the being-in-the-world. This is because, *Dasein* is the kind of Being who raises the question of Being. But to even ask the question implies that at some level the answer is already understood. Hence as a prelude to the question of Being the ontological structure of *Dasein* needs to be uncovered. Again, the study

of Being should primarily differentiate Being from beings. Therefore, the study of Being is an ontology, which will distinguish Being from beings.

Heidegger says that phenomenology is the only method by which to do *ontology*. He complains that Being has been concealed from us, which has amounted to a kind of forgetfulness of it. Hence Being has to be uncovered from its forgetfulness with phenomenology. Its primary task is to uncover Being. Heidegger affirms that the essence of truth is the disclosing of the meaning of that which we call Being.

Etymologically, the German word *Sein*, which is translated as being, corresponds to the English expression *to be*. It stands, either for the being of something in particular and in this sense refers to its existence or for its essence, in the sense for the being of something. For example, of *Dasein*. We can also speak of Being in abstract, as being in general. In this sense we cannot specify it as What or That-being. It is simply Being, and therefore, the most general feature of everything that is. It is thus the most universal concept, which is indefinable in terms of other concepts. It is thus a self-evident concept, which is mostly taken for granted. Heidegger then says that the meaning of Being is veiled in darkness and hence the question of the meaning of being needs to be restated. It has to be brought out of its forgetfulness.

QUESTION OF BEING AND ITS FORGETFULNESS

Heidegger complains that traditional metaphysical approaches have resulted in a forgetfulness of Being, which is the primordial topic of philosophical and other intellectual reflections. Metaphysics misunderstood the nature of beings by understanding them as things, as that which is simply there, as present at hand. Heidegger stresses the need for overcoming this attitude. Being has to be distinguished from the thing-in-being or what has being or beings.

According to Heidegger, in the metaphysical contemplations of the medieval and modern philosophers the meaning of Being was covered up, as they failed to recognize the important ontological difference between Being and thing-in-being. Instead of a contemplation of Being traditional metaphysics has initiated a study of the technical use and subjugation of the things-in-being. In other words, the great metaphysical tradition neglects the fundamental ontological difference between Being and the thing-in-being, between Being and entities. It is this failure that primarily resulted in a general forgetfulness of being. Heidegger maintains

that this forgetfulness is responsible for the decline of western civilization and the crisis of man. He suggests a phenomenological ontology in order to overcome this forgetfulness.

This phenomenological ontology deals with the study of Being. This is different from metaphysics that deals with the study of things in being. Heidegger complains that, we have neglected this fundamental ontology in our encounters with Being and endeavours like metaphysics, science and technology that deal with entities take the place of ontology. He was of the opinion that their domination in history and culture leads to the above-mentioned forgetfulness and crisis. Modern philosophy too had forgotten the question of Being, as it has become concerned with the *ontic* i.e., on beings. Modern sciences also fail to give an account of Being. Phenomenology is therefore expected to delineate the structures of Being and explicate its meaning. Heidegger says that phenomenology primarily involves ontological analysis and it intends to return to the original data of man's experience. Phenomenological ontology thus does two things. On the one hand it reveals the essential structures of Being and on the other hand it also involves an analysis of *Dasein*, to the being of man to whom the essential structures of Being are revealed.

As mentioned above, there is a fundamental distinction between Being and entities, a fact which is not properly recognized due to forgetfulness. This can be elaborated with an example. When I listen to music, read a book, perceive an object, I relate myself to something and comport myself to it. In this context, it is the music or the object I perceive. I comport myself to them as an entity. It is something that is there. Heidegger now says that, what it is for something to be is not itself an entity. In other words, the Being of entities itself is not an entity. But any form of comportment to anything presupposes an understanding of Being, as without such an understanding there cannot be a comport to entities as entities. Before we raise the question of Being we have an understanding of Being. This Being is neither an entity, nor a class of entities. It is not even the most general or universal concept. The question of the meaning of Being is raised in this context. This primarily involves two things. Firstly it involves the phenomenological project that involves a destruction of the metaphysical tradition that had led to the forgetfulness of being and secondly an ontological analysis of the being of man to whom the meaning of Being is unraveled.

The Phenomenological Project

Heidegger underlines the need for strictly adhering to the phenomenological formula, back to the data themselves. This is important for overcoming all abstract constructions and formulations that many mislead us. It is also important for us to avoid positing of pseudo-questions. Heidegger writes:

If the question of Being to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being – the ways which have guided us ever since. [*Being and Time*, p.44]

The phenomenological project therefore, involves the destruction or dismantling of the tradition of the history of philosophy. Since the understanding of Being belongs to the being of the entity, which we ourselves are, it is important to analyze the specific thing-in-being – the human being or *Dasein*. Here too Heidegger proposes a returning to the tradition in order to regain the original attitude. We have to recover the original existential ways of conceiving of phenomenon of human existence and for this we have to go back to the Greek roots. We have to set aside the Kantian and Cartesian elements that dominate the history of philosophy and metaphysics. The destruction of the metaphysical tradition therefore, involves the destruction of tradition, by means of a proper analysis of the traditional metaphysics.

Heidegger thus proposes to discard all the traditional ways of asking questions. What is required is a radicalization of ontology. Since the tradition conceals real issues, we have to destruct it and go back to the origins. In *Being and Time* Heidegger asserts that the traditional content of ancient ontology has to be destroyed until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being. Here Heidegger thinks much in terms of the spirit of the phenomenological tradition advocated by Husserl. He adds new dimensions to the phenomenological project with this approach, but of course, does not subscribe to its transcendentalism.

This destruction will also involve a rejection of metaphysics, as metaphysics approaches the question of Being in wrong ways. According to Heidegger, metaphysics has understood the nature of beings by understanding them as things. It simply describes things as they are. Here he reminds us that the approach of metaphysics is not pure but is based on

certain assumptions. Metaphysical understanding is affected by the way we are drawn down into everyday existing. In metaphysics the everyday set of assumptions about reality dominates and it misconceives reality as present at hand. Here too Heidegger's approach does not contradict Husserl's project, which insists on overcoming the natural attitude. But Heidegger carries this out in a different manner. He begins his phenomenological explorations with an analysis of the ontological structure of the being of man. The right method, according to Heidegger, consists in exploring the question of human existence and trying to understand it in its own terms. The method of fundamental ontology is expected to facilitate this. He says that, since the phenomena of existence require interpretation, its method should be phenomenological as well as hermeneutical. The meaning of being is therefore explored with a focus on the etymology and grammar of the word *Sein*, which is the sense or final end of Being or the destination of Being. It is the final end of a thing that makes it intelligible. Hence the meaning of Being or its destination needs to be found in the being of man. This is because, only human existence can be with or without meaning. Being has meaning only insofar as it has import for a human being or *Dasein*. Hence Heidegger proposes an existential analytic of *Dasein*. The structures of Being are revealed through the structures of human existence. Heidegger's method is therefore, phenomenological, ontological, existential and hermeneutical. It is phenomenological, because it looks for the directly given, ontological: as it distinguishes the ontology of Being from the realm of things, existential: as it explores the existential structure of man and hermeneutical, as it involves interpretation.

Quiz

1. What according to Heidegger was the primary reason behind the general forgetfulness of being?
 - (a) Failure in distinguishing between metaphysics and ontology
 - (b) Failure in recognizing the ontological difference between Being and the thing-in-being
 - (c) Failure in recognizing the ontological difference between Being and *Dasein*
 - (d) Failure in differentiating between philosophy and religion.
2. Which of the following is among one of the major concerns in Heidegger's project?
 - (a) Destruction of the ontological question
 - (b) Radicalization of ontology
 - (c) Reviving the Cartesian and Kantian elements in philosophy
 - (d) Reviving the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition.
3. What according to Heidegger has not done by metaphysics?

- (a) Approached the question of Being in wrong ways (b) Understood the nature of beings by understanding them as things (c) Simply describes things as they are (d) Explores the question of human existence and tries to understand it in its own terms.
4. What is the subject matter of phenomenological ontology?
(a) Study of Being (b) Study of things in being (c) Study of being-in-the-world (d) Study of metaphysics.
5. Where does Heidegger locate the destination of Being?
(a) In the world (b) In the being of entities (c) In the being of man (d) In human social relationships.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [b]
3. [d]
4. [a]
5. [c]

Assignments

1. What does Heidegger mean by the forgetfulness of being?
2. Discuss the destruction of the metaphysical tradition.

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Chapter 35

Martin Heidegger: The Ontology of *Dasein* and the Concept of Truth

Key Words:

Phenomenological ontology, Destruction of tradition, *Dasein*, thrownness, being-with, authentic existence, in authentic existence, disposedness, fallen-ness, *aletheia*, forestructures of understanding, phenomenological hermeneutics.

In the previous chapter we have seen the two important aspects of Heidegger's phenomenological ontology, which were proposed as a means for overcoming the forgetfulness of Being; the destruction of the tradition and the recovering of the original existential ways of conceiving of the phenomenon of human existence. Heidegger conceives *Dasein* as the destination of Being and hence its existential analytic is important in the phenomenological ontology proposed by him.

The term *Dasein* refers both to the human being and to the type of being that humans have. The root meaning of the noun is "being there" or "being here". According to Heidegger the primary objective of phenomenology of *Dasein* is a *hermeneutic* in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting. It is through this interpretation the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which *Dasein* itself possesses, are *made known* to *Dasein*'s understanding of Being. (*Being and Time*, p. 62) It explores where experiences occur and for whom they occur and all these come under the scope of an existential analytic of *Dasein*.

The analytic of *Dasein* is a central feature of Heidegger's thought. *Dasein* becomes important because of its peculiar ontological structure. It is characteristically different from other entities, as it has an understanding of Being and can raise the question of Being. In other words, in its being, this being itself is an issue for it. Heidegger says that *Dasein* understands itself in its being. Another feature that distinguishes *Dasein* from other entities is the fact that it is a being-in-the-world. *Dasein* finds itself in the world, but in a very different way than other entities are in it.

Dasein's comporting to the world is different. It understands the world as a range of possibilities and it always has understood itself in terms of its possibilities.

This factor makes *Dasein*'s engagements with the world and its entities very different. It cannot escape from the world, as its facticity and thrownness are inevitable and inescapable. But again, as mentioned above, its relationship with the world is also different. Unlike other entities it needs a world populated with entities for it to engage with. Heidegger says that *Dasein* is constantly more than what it factually is. He adds:

The essence of *Dasein* lies in its existence. Accordingly those characteristics which can be exhibited in this entity are not 'properties' present-at-hand of some entity which 'looks' so and so and is itself present-at-hand; they are in each case possible ways for it to be, and no more than that. . . . So when we designate this entity with the term 'Dasein', we are expressing not its 'what' (as if it were a table, house, or tree) but its Being. [*Being and Time*, 67]

Again by being-in-the-world and engaging with the entities in the world, *Dasein* is essentially Being-with-others. This aspect is therefore an ontological component of *Dasein*. *Dasein* and the world are internally related. Heidegger says that the fact that the world is not created by *Dasein* and it is not merely a factual world that exists independent of us, but we too are contributing to its creation, *Dasein*'s relationship with it is significant. It is a world, which is created by others as well. Other people have a role in deciding the structure of the world. Hence others play a very crucial role in deciding what I am. *Dasein* inhabits the world along with other beings like itself. Heidegger says that "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself. [*Being and Time*, p.165]

Others thus play a crucial role in *Dasein*'s constitution. What *Dasein* works upon is provided by others. What it produces is destined for others. We shall elaborate this with an example. If I am a painter, the institution of the art of painting is produced or sustained by others and my painting is for others to appreciate. The "where-of" and the "towards-which" aspects of my engagements with the world are necessarily related to the work-world of other people. Again, the readiness-to-hand of objects for me is not merely their readiness-to-hand for my *Dasein* alone. It is a world, which is outside there as a common platform, with which others also engage them in their day-to-day life.

All these factors determine *Dasein*'s ontological constitution and *Dasein* is essentially a being-with. Its orientation towards ready-to-hand objects is characterized by concern or solicitude for others. All kinds of relating with the world, its entities

and other people reflect this concern, which is rooted in *Dasein*'s ontological constitution. According to Heidegger, even attitudes like indifference, hostility etc., reflect this solicitude.

A close examination of *Dasein*'s ontological constitution brings out its essential structure, which is determined by the aspects of "there-being" and "being-with". On the other hand, there is the aspect of "mineness" as well. *Dasein* is at the same time mine and being-with, or subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The *they*, according to Heidegger, is therefore, ontologically relevant in determining *Dasein*'s existential structure. In *Being and Time* [27: 165-6], Heidegger says that, the "....."they", which supplies the answer to the question of the "who" of everyday *Dasein*, is the "nobody" to whom every *Dasein* has already surrendered itself in Being among-one-another".

This structure implies that the social world is a world of both others and I and the essential intersubjectivity of *Dasein* in its everydayness characterizes its subjectivity. The relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity determines *Dasein*'s everyday mode of existence, which can either be authentic or inauthentic. The loss of authentic individuality is a possibility in average everyday existence, because *Dasein* is determined by both "being with" and "mineness".

Dasein's Existence in this World

As mentioned above, according to Heidegger, *Dasein* has possibilities of both authentic and inauthentic existence. The word authentic is derived from the Greek word *autos*, which means, done by one's own hand. In this sense, to be authentic is to be something of its own. Since being authentic and inauthentic are *Dasein*'s possibilities, it is important to find out how man attains the possibilities of authentic existence.

To understand Heidegger's position we need to understand how Heidegger ontologizes the idea of authenticity. It basically deals with the question of "being in a certain way". Heidegger says that, to be *Dasein* is to ask certain questions concerning the problem of Being and also of one's own existence. These questions become issues only for an authentic Being. Hence to exist authentically is not to exist as an ontic entity among other entities. It is not to be a static being, but to be a being who constantly asks, searches, and becomes.

The German word *eigentlich*, which is the equivalent of the English word authentic means real or proper and the German word for inauthentic is *uneigentlich*, which means not literal or figurative. Since both are *Dasein*'s possibilities, *Dasein* is sometimes authentic and sometimes not. Heidegger says that, *Dasein*'s authenticity is hidden but nonetheless given beforehand, as it is not a substance with an essential nature and with properties or accidents and its potentiality or possibility is prior to its actuality. In other words, *Dasein* is not a definite actual thing, but the possibility of being something. Hence, it is affirmed that *Dasein*'s way of being involves the capacity to choose among several possible ways of being.

Another important feature of *Dasein* is that, it needs to be addressed with a personal pronoun, you or I. Therefore, Heidegger asserts that, “*Dasein* is mine”. It's being is different from the being of other entities, which according to him, are merely present at hand. Owing to this unique feature of its being, *Dasein* can take charge of its own being. In other words, we may say that the being of man is whatever it decides or has decided to be. Such decisions or choices of man are based on one's possibilities of being. Therefore, asserts Heidegger, *Dasein* is its possibility. Hence, to be authentic is to have a room of one's own, have a mind of one's own and being one's own master. This is to be true to one's own self, to be one's own person and to do one's own thing.

But interestingly, Heidegger never equates *Dasein* with human being. He says that there is a *Dasein* of man. The meaning of the term *Dasein* is relevant here. The *Da* in *Dasein* refers to the disclosedness of Being. To understand this, we need to examine the other possibility of *Dasein*; of inauthentic existence. Inauthenticity refers to the average everyday mode of *Dasein*. Here the “mineness” of *Dasein* takes the form of the “they”. Hence the self is a they-self and consequently, *Dasein* loses in the they.

The implication of this loss is that, it prevents man from relating with the world and understanding it in its own ways. Instead, man understands the world in the way the “they” make it available to it. This will also take away from man the possibilities of authentic self-understanding. Consequently, man accepts the prevailing opinions and conforms to what the *they* does and thinks. As a result, one's own *Dasein* gets completely dissolved into a kind of Being of the others.

The possibilities of authentic human existence are to be explored and this amounts to the regaining of one's authentic being. Heidegger here reminds us that this

regaining needs to be materialized, not by isolating oneself from others, as “being-with” is not a limitation or a constrain, but the very way of man’s being. Being-with is therefore, a typical human way of being. Here to be authentic is to relate oneself with others and with the world differently.

Heidegger further explicates how authentic human existence needs to be attained. He affirms that, since *Dasein* is essentially a being-in-the-world, the “being-with” aspect is inescapable and it has to be with others. It has to occupy with others in a practice and will have a definite role in the practice, which happens in a context where others are constantly encountered. Heidegger says that, these practices are not *Dasein*’s creations, but are socially defined and culturally inherited. To participate in such a social-cultural world and engage with several tasks in it are necessary for us as human beings. We need them for realizing our possibilities.

Dasein is therefore, placed in an interpersonal context of various practices. This context is impersonal because, others can also occupy definite roles and engage in such practices. Heidegger stresses that one’s self-understanding starts with understanding oneself by relating to such impersonal contexts. I relate myself to a function that anyone can perform, in order to understand myself, for example, the function of a poet. This function presupposes a socially created and culturally inherited institution, which is created and shared by the “they”. In other words, the “they” creates these practices and roles. I can attain my possibilities as a poet only by participating in this institution. In other words, I can attain it only with the “they-self”.

Heidegger thus argues that authenticity is an achievement. *Dasein* has to attain it by discovering the world in its own ways, different from the they-self. Its understanding of the world as well as self-understanding are related to its possibilities of authentic and inauthentic ways of existing. Since to be inauthentic is also *Dasein*’s possibility, Heidegger says that I also own my inauthentic being. In inauthentic existence I refuse to take responsibility of my actions.

Dasein's Ontological Structure and the Question of Truth

Contrary to the dominant traditions of modern philosophy, Heidegger proposes a conception of truth, which can be understood not by explicating the epistemological structure that defines normal human cognition. Instead, he does this with an account of the ontological structure that determines human situatedness. This ontological shift

radically differentiates Heidegger's account of the nature of truth and knowledge from the account suggested by the dominant paradigm of modern philosophy. It understands truth as a process of unconcealment.

Before we try to understand this concept of truth we have to reflect upon the ontological structure of *Dasein*, which differentiates Heidegger's concept of truth from other notions. The ontological structure of *Dasein* is primarily understood as disclosedness or care. Heidegger asserts that temporality is an existential feature of *Dasein*. Therefore, *Dasein* is interpreted in terms of the three temporal dimensions of past, present and future. The past is important because of the aspects of thrownness or disposedness that determines *Dasein*'s being. The present is characterized by fallenness and the future by projection or understanding.

Heidegger says that, *Dasein* is characterized by its thrownness. This is because, it finds itself always in a world. The aspect of disposedness too is crucial, as Heidegger says that *Dasein*'s receptiveness is manifested in different moods. Accordingly, the world discloses to me differently. Every concrete situation, states Heidegger, offers a range of possibilities for acting in which *Dasein* projects itself in the light of its different possibilities. In such projections of possibilities, *Dasein* comports itself to the world of objects and in understanding *Dasein* projects itself onto such possibilities. Among these possibilities lie the two fundamental possibilities of authentic existence and inauthentic existence.

The possibility of authentic existence lies in the fact that whatever is grasped by *Dasein* results from an act of comporting. The specificity of *Dasein* is important here. *Dasein*'s ability to realize its genuine possibilities from the context of the average everyday existence decides the nature of its existence in the world. Heidegger talks about the feature of "fallen-ness", that is characteristic of the existence of all *Daseins*. Each individual *Dasein* is fallen into the world and is fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for being its self. The possibilities of inauthentic existence are manifested in idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity and they involve a closing off or covering up of any real understanding of the world. In other words, both these possibilities—of authentic as well as inauthentic existences—are rooted in *Dasein*'s ontological structure, which enables it to comport with the world in different ways.

Heidegger thus makes this ontological structure as a determining feature of the being of man. To further clarify the importance of this concept, he elaborates his concept of truth, where the latter is conceived as a process of unconcealment.

Heidegger argues that the ancient Greek philosophers conceived truth in this sense. It was the Scholastic and modern philosophies who have corrupted this original notion.

According to the traditional concept, which is mostly Scholastic and modern, Truth is conceived in terms of the conformity between our judgments and facts. It is a notion attached to propositions and their correspondence with states of affairs. Heidegger states that, this traditional understanding of truth is derivative from a more fundamental understanding of truth as self-manifestation, revelation, disclosure etc., as according to him, such a correspondence between propositions and states of affairs presupposes a field of intelligibility within which entities may be found. In other words, prior to all cognition and assimilation of truth, there exists in us a horizon of meaning that facilitates their cognition. Such a prior field of intelligibility establishes the essential element of unconcealing present in all cognition and assimilation of truth. In other words, according to Heidegger, unconcealing is an a priori, transcendental condition for propositional truth.

The idea that truth is to be primarily understood as unconcealment is justified by citing the ancient Greek conception of truth, where the term for truth is *aletheia*. The Greek word *aletheia* means dis-closing, un-covering, dis-covering, revealing or making manifest that which in some sense lies hidden. Such processes require a pre-given context to which things are disclosed or unconcealed. Heidegger says that *Dasein* with its peculiar ontological structure is that context. It thus becomes the source of intelligibility. Therefore, truth is not a transcendentally given reality in his framework. It presupposes a background of intelligibility in *Dasein*.

Hence, truth as unconcealing is possible only because there is *Dasein* and without *Dasein* there would be no truth. Entities require *Dasein* in order to be intelligible; in order to be recognized as entities that are capable of entering into states of affairs that may correspond to propositions. Hence the propositional conception of truth—the representationalist ideal—is derivative of the more fundamental notion of truth as unconcealment.

In the process of *Dasein's* comporting with things, the latter are made intelligible and they acquire meaning. Things show themselves in many ways, depending on the modes of access we have to them. In other words, they acquire meanings through *Dasein's* acts of comporting to them from its ontological rootedness. Hence according to Heidegger, philosophical enquiry is both ontological as well as phenomenological. It should begin with an examination of the ontological

structure of *Dasein*, as it is in this context things acquire meaning and appear as meaningful. Heidegger argues that, meaning is located in the entity's mode of appearing, as things do not appear themselves, but are always uncovered to someone. In other words uncovering presupposes not only what is being uncovered, but also another being to which this being is uncovered. This being is the being of man or *Dasein*.

Since truth is unconcealment and things acquire meaning in *Dasein*'s mode of accessing them, meaning is understood as involving interpretation or meaning is interpretation. Hence Heidegger links phenomenology with hermeneutics. He says that, before the questions of Being can be answered, one needs to ask who or what is raising the questions of Being in the first place. This leads to the analytic of *Dasein*.

Heidegger says that, things present themselves to us and such presentations happen in a manner, which is self-concealing. We encounter entities as beings that are in the world within which they can be encountered. *Dasein* understanding them in their process of unconcealment. Unconcealment happens to *Dasein*. It is not only part of the world but also the human condition itself. Things are not encountered as they are but always from the mode of being *Dasein*. Uncovering is a way of Being-in-the-world and is the way *Dasein* is disposed.

As mentioned above, when we comport ourselves and relate ourselves to the world, disposedness play a role. For example, when I relocate a book, which was lost long back, I feel happy and relieved. I relate myself to this book in a very different way than other people who may relate with it. The world is different for me in that mood, as it decides how I stand with respect to the world.

These moods, according to Heidegger, are not mere subjective feelings, as they are not the product of my purely subjective mind. The world of things outside too has a crucial role in the production of meaning here. But, it is not purely objective either, as the book which I relocated does not arouse the same feelings I have in everyone's mind. Heidegger in this context argues that this disposedness is a kind of submission to the world and it discloses *Dasein* as a whole. But we have no choice over our disposedness, as it is not under our control.

This scenario makes the process of understanding extremely important in determining *Dasein*'s structure. Heidegger contends that understanding is a mode of *Dasein*'s existence, as it decides the structure of *Dasein*'s being. When we understand something we understand it always "as" something, as it reveals to us in accordance

with our relating ourselves with it. The above-mentioned example of the book clarifies this point further. In the context where I have relocated it, it is not just a mere book, but it has a definite meaning for me, which I alone have and hence its mode of appearing to me is also unique. My whole being is involved in my understanding of it.

This is because, as indicated above, understanding presupposes a background of pre-understood meanings, which Heidegger conceives as the forestructures of understanding. He adds that, without this preexisting context of meaning the world looks confusing. This context offers possibilities and it also imposes constraints. In short, understanding is related to us, our life, the way we use the world and hence to our ontological horizon. Here understanding is not conceived as a cognitive act. Instead, it is projection; a projecting upon possibilities. To understand something is to grasp the possible ways that it can be used. In this sense, the perspective of my preunderstood meaning is extremely significant.

With this phenomenological ontology and phenomenological hermeneutics, which respectively explores the ontological structure of *Dasein* and ties to analyze *Dasein*'s existential structure in terms of understanding, Heidegger presents a unique and different concept of the being of man. It is presented as an antithesis to the epistemological ideal that dominated modern philosophy. *Dasein* is never equated with a knowing mind, nor with the thinking substance. It is not separated from the world, as it is essentially a being-in-the-world. With this unique conception of man's being and his notions of meaning and understanding, Heidegger introduces novel problems into philosophical thinking. He is undoubtedly one of the most important philosophers of 20th century and has influenced the thoughts of many philosophers including existentialists like Sartre, postmodernists like Foucault and pragmatists like Rorty.

Quiz

1. What does the term *Dasein* mean?
(a) The essence of man (b) Universal human nature (c) The type of being humans have (d) Humankind in general
2. To exist authentically is?
(a) To exist as an ontic entity (b) To be a static being (c) To assert one's "there being" (d) To be a being who constantly asks, searches, and becomes.
3. What does the expression "Dasein is mine" mean?

- (a) Its being is present at hand (b) It can take charge of its own being (c) It can exist without others (d) It is autonomous.
4. What happens in inauthentic existence?
(a) Dasein exists in the world and engages with others (b) *Dasein* realizes its mineness (c) *Dasein*'s self becomes a they-self (d) *Dasein* takes wrong decisions.
5. Which of the following is not part of the meaning of the Greek word *aletheia*?
(a) Unmanifesting (b) Dis-closing (c) Un-covering (d) Revealing.

Answer Key

1. [c]
2. [d]
3. [b]
4. [c]
5. [a]

Assignments

1. Discuss the ontological structure of Dasein.
2. Explain the notion of truth advocated by Heidegger.

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Chapter 36

Existentialism

Key Words

Existence, essence, Personal choice, aesthetic stage, ethical stage, religious stage, metaphysical conception of truth, death of God, freedom, existential situation, authentic existence, inauthentic existence, thrownness, existence precedes essence, *Dasein*, contingency.

Though the intellectual background for existentialism was created in the later years of 19th century, it was more appropriately a 20th century philosophy, as it reflects some of the most prominent features of the cultural, social and political environment that determined the destiny of people who have undergone the traumas, uncertainties and enigmas of the two world wars. The following observation of Charlsworth appropriately describes existentialism.

It was, one could say, more an intellectual mood or atmosphere than a coherent creed or body of doctrine; more an outlook or "mind-set" than a philosophical "partyline"; more a method or approach than a school of thought. And it was very much a creature of the Waste Land that was Europe during and after the last world war. [p.1]

Existentialism initiates a new style and method of philosophizing with new objectives and goals. The talk about existentialism begins with the often-quoted slogan; existence precedes essence. Existentialists seem to be arguing that philosophers and philosophical traditions so far have been concentrating on what is common to all human beings. In other words, there is an overemphasis on what constitutes the essence of man, which is understood in various ways. While the religious and theological literature links it with God, the secular and rational traditions have been emphasizing on human nature which was often identified with universal rationality. Opposing this prevailing trend the existential philosophers stress on the problems concrete human beings encounter in their life. They prefer to understand the concrete man and his problems, without isolating him/her from his/her social, political and cultural contexts. They raise several issues pertaining to the concrete human existence. In general most of them emphasize on the finiteness and situatedness of human existence

As Mounier and Blow point out, existentialism is characterized by a reaction of the philosophy of man against the excesses of the philosophy of ideas and the philosophy of things. It attempts to understand existence in a concrete sense of living or lived reality, by focusing on the individual and concrete manifestations of human existence. As mentioned

above, it accuses philosophical traditions of the past of ignoring the concrete man and his problems. In its approach, it tries to understand human existence not in terms of some fundamental rational concepts, as it was done by many past masters like Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hegel etc. It shows no interest in an *a priori* and impersonal conception of human reality. Instead, it focuses on the concrete living individual in his actual preoccupation with himself and the world. Existentialism broadly tries to derive the meaning of the individual man from living or lived experiences of concrete individuals and their surroundings.

Existentialism is not a philosophical school like rationalism or empiricism. It is hard to isolate common doctrines from the writings of the various existential thinkers, who subscribe to diverse views. Yet we may identify some common themes and concerns. Most of the existentialist thinkers emphasize the importance of an individual man living his own life, rather than just being a member in the crowd. They all consider existential questions like death, meaning of human existence, God and man, values in life, nature of relationships etc., as important. In their attempt to emphasize the concrete human reality, they suspend all questions on the universal and objective values such as the essence of man, value and meaning etc. They rather give importance to questions concerning human freedom and choices and other issues related to this like dread, anxiety etc., Jaspers and Grabau make the following observation about existentialism:

Already in the nineteenth century, movements with this turn of mind kept recurring. People wanted "life," wanted "really to live." They demanded "realism." Instead of wanting merely to know, they wanted to experience for themselves. Everywhere, they wanted the "genuine," searched for "origins," and wanted to press on to *man himself*. Superior men became more clearly visible; at the same time, it became possible to discover the true and the real in the smallest particle.[*Philosophy of Existence*, p.4]

There are atheistic and theistic strands of existentialism. The theistic existentialists like Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers do not deny the existence of god and consider man's relationship with god as an important philosophical problem. On the other hand the atheistic existentialists like Jean Paul Sartre, Simon de Beauvoir and Martin Heidegger either explicitly deny god's existence or do not consider it as posing any serious philosophical problem. For them either god does not exist or they do not problematize god. Hence they deny the possibility of any value or meaning that are transcendental. Some thinkers like Albert Camus even treat the essential human reality as absurd.

Some Characteristic Features of Existentialism

As already mentioned, existentialism was not a rational philosophical system. Unlike other prominent schools of philosophy, not all the proponents of existentialism were philosophers. Existentialist ideas were popularised through art and literature as well. Hence they Philosophized not with reason alone. Again, existentialism was a movement, which was inspired not only by philosophers and their writings, but artists, novelists and poets have also influenced its development.

Most of the existentialists consider man as an existent subject and not just a thinking subject. They stress on the man who feels, wills, loves, hates and do many other things in the world. Yet one may not find any common doctrine that was advocated by all existentialists. The philosophers who were identified with it were very different from each other. There were theists, atheists, phenomenologists, hermeneuticians, absurdists etc. But most of them were opposed to abstract metaphysical speculations and also to the systematization of reality. There was an explicit emphasis on individuality.

Another very important feature of existentialism is that it was a reaction and response to certain important historical and political developments occurred during 19th and 20th century Europe. It was also a response to certain dominant approaches in ancient and modern philosophy, which according to the existentialists have given importance to essence over existence. As observed by Vergilius Ferm, existentialism was a reaction against the totalizing philosophy of Hegelian idealism. Ferm adds that, by conceiving becoming as a passage from non-existence (notBeing) to existence (Being) Hegel advocates the absorption of existence into essence. [p. 407]

The Social and Historical Factors

Existentialism was an offshoot of certain social and historical developments Europe had witnessed in the 19th and 20th centuries. As Nietzsche—who was a prominent 19th century thinker and who exerted significant influence on many of the existentialists—observed, the death of god was one major characteristic feature of 19th century Europe. By this metaphor, Nietzsche was pointing to the declining influence of religion in the life of people. There was a visible loss of faith in the society. Religion had provided a unity of all aspects of life, which

became a chimera with the advent of modernity. With societal modernization, social life and the individual himself encountered a fragmentation.

Moreover, 20th century in the beginning had witnessed a world war, which was followed by another more devastating one that killed millions of people. During this period Europe had witnessed unparalleled cruelties. All these have given rise to feelings of despair and disbelief in all established social, political and moral order. Again, the rise of totalitarian ideologies like Fascism, Nazism and Communism too had made the individual human being helpless and voiceless. None of them have reserved a space for the individual. In philosophy, Hegelianism had dominated European culture with its all-absorbing absolutism. The industrialization and urbanization that emerged with the advent of modernity made man a mere tool.

The existential thinkers maintain that traditional and modern philosophical categories are inadequate to understand human reality. Man has been viewed differently by different philosophical systems in the history of European thought. While some thinkers like Plato had emphasized on the rational aspects, thinkers like Descartes had associated the capacity to think as the essence of man. For certain others man constituted a unity of mind and body and for some others the essence consists in the material aspects. Accordingly there were various reductionist views about the nature and essence of man. As observed by Vergilius Ferm, contrary to all these approaches, the existentialists have stressed on the uniqueness of the concrete and real as against the abstract and possible. But they do not focus on existence as such, but have given importance to our way of encountering existence. According to Ferm, what makes the existentialists different from other thinkers is that, it was not an objective interest in an existence which is indifferent in regard to the multiple existents but a subjective interest in that peculiar existent which every one of us is. And it is in the concrete human selfwhere the locus existence is discovered. [p. 408]

The 20th century existentialism, as mentioned above, draws its inspiration, not only from philosophers, but also from poets and novelists. The first and foremost influence upon the existentialist philosophers was the philosophy of the Danish thinker Soren Kierkegaard [1813-1855]. The writings of Friedrich Nietzsche [1843-1900] also had phenomenal influence on their thinking. Again, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky [1821-1881] and the German writer Franz Kafka [1883-1924] too have influenced them. We shall now

examine some of these aspects which have contributed to the development of existentialism as a philosophical movement.

The Philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard's philosophy was a reaction against the Hegelian Absolute System which absorbs all individualities and particularities. He is widely regarded as the founder of existentialism, as it is in his works we find a systematic exposition of the existential themes for the first time. The relationship between man and God occupied a central place in Kierkegaard's theory. Since he was against all abstract theorization and absolutism that abolished the concrete individual, he opposed the rational explanations past philosophers had given in order to justify God's existence. Christian theologians and philosophers have always tried to do this. As Susan Leigh Anderson observes, according to Kierkegaard, faith constitutes a sphere all by itself and every misunderstanding of Christianity may at once be recognized by its transforming it into a doctrine, transferring it to the sphere of the intellectual. (pp. 51-52)

The subjective experiences of the concrete man gains supremacy in his framework. Man in relation to his destiny and his relationship with God gains an important place in his philosophy. The personal choices man makes in his actual life is an important philosophical issue for him. Therefore, subjectivity and personal choice are central themes in his thought and subjective and personal things are more important than objective and universal realities. Everything is subjective and personal and objectivity is a myth. He repeatedly asserts that subjective and personal choice is the crux of human existence. In this connection he talks about three major spheres of existence an individual can choose to live in; aesthetic, ethical and religious. In the aesthetic sphere, one lives for physical or intellectual pleasure and seeks the most immediately pleasing. In the ethical level, one accepts moral responsibility and leads a life of duty to the moral law. The third stage is the highest one, where one devotes one's life to God. Here one gives up everything; ethical standards and even the idea of universal good.

Each of these spheres of existence stands for a stage in life, with each containing its own system of values. The evolution from the lower to the higher is not natural or logical. Instead it is a matter of individual choice. The individual just decides that he has to move to

the next. Hence Kierkegaard emphasizes the role of choice, which nevertheless is always a personal choice which is not guided by any meta-principle. The individual has to make an a-rational leap of free choice which cannot be further defended. Kierkegaard narrates an individual who is passionate and discontinuous and is proceeding by sudden leaps and crises.

Influences of Dostoevsky, Kafka and Nietzsche

The great Russian novelist, Dostoevsky had problematised human limitations, agonies, anxieties and helplessness in his novels and stories and also raised the important question regarding man's relationship with God. In his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, one of the characters, Ivan observes that, what is strange and what would be marvelous, is not that God should really exist, but that such an idea and the idea of the necessity of God, could enter the head of such a savage, vicious beast as man. Again, on another occasion, Ivan retorts:

And so I accept God and am glad to, and what's more, I accept His wisdom, His purpose which are utterly beyond our ken; I believe in the underlying order and the meaning of life; I believe in the eternal harmony in which they say we shall one day be blended.....Yet.....in the final result I don't accept this world of God's, and, although I know it exists, I don't accept it at all. It's not that I don't accept God, you must understand, it's the world created by Him I don't and cannot accept. [*Brothers Karamazov*, Ch. 3]

The novel as a whole and many other works of Dostoevsky problematize God and man's relationship with God. Moreover, Dostoevsky had also discussed in detail several other philosophical issues that concrete human beings face in their life; issues pertaining to human interrelationships, questions of greed, anxiety, death and destiny etc.

Franz Kafka's writings had dealt with the problems the individual human being faces in the modern, industrialized world. He primarily addressed the isolation of the individual in the world which becomes increasingly strange to him due to various factors. The individual's place in the world, the anxiety and guilt experienced by him are also dealt with by Kafka.

Nietzsche's philosophy was arguably the greatest influence among all. His thought had inspired the atheistic existentialists substantially. Nietzsche has shown that truth, which the European philosophical and moral traditions have treated as a concept with paramount importance, was perspectival. We have already discussed his contributions in detail in an early chapter. He discussed about the death of God and the nihilism of morals proposed by

him, envisages a situation where everything is permitted in a Godless world. Knowledge and truth are provisional and they change over time and with the ruling class. He therefore, describes Truth as an edifying name given for what are really vital lies. The *Will to Power* declares that there are many kinds of ‘truths,’ and consequently there is no truth.

The concept of Truth, which had been the most important and most edifying concept in the history of metaphysical traditions, had been challenged by all the existential thinkers. Kierkegaard has asserted that objective truth is existentially irrelevant and Sartre rejected all conceptions of universal truth. The rejection of the metaphysical conception of truth therefore, is a central theme in existentialism. We shall now discuss some key themes of existentialism.

Existentialism: Key Themes

Here again, if we try to identify commonalities we may not be successful, as there are hardly any theory or doctrine which all the existentialists subscribe to. Yet certain concepts like freedom, responsibility, individuality etc. appear in the writings of many of them. Though not everyone conceives these concepts in the same manner, almost all of them problematize them. For instance, while Sartre conceived freedom as an inevitable feature of human existence and asserts that, “man is condemned to be free”, many others do not adopt such an extreme stance on human freedom. The idea of responsibility is a derivative from the notion of freedom. It can be argued that, since we have freedom in our fundamental projects and attitudes we are responsible for the people we become. The existentialist thinkers have emphasized on individuality, rather than on the abstract universal idea of man in general. Hence the problems faced by the concrete individual and his/her search for authentic self-hood are important for them. The ideas of self-creation and authentic existence were dealt with utmost importance by these thinkers.

The focus on the concrete individual and his/her problems prompted these thinkers to analyze concepts like angst, dread, anxiety and anguish in relation with concrete human existence. When we reflect on our freedom we realize that we are responsible for whatever happens to us and this results in a form of anxiety to which there are no metaphysical solutions offered. This dreadful situation constitutes our existence. In other words, it is our

existential situation from where there is no escape. According to many existentialists, man is bound to face this, as devoid of any religious and metaphysical consolations, he has to cope up with it and find his own solutions.

There are various possibilities for man to cope up with his existential situation. He may either try to escape from it taking recourse in religious or metaphysical doctrines about universal human nature, or simply by running away from it and remaining unreflective about his life and his destiny. Or he may face it and try to make sense of what he does with a conscious awareness about his limitations and freedom. Hence, in a broad sense, there are authentic and inauthentic ways of existence. According to Sartre, those men who refuse to take responsibility refuse to accept that they are free. They wish to believe that they are conditioned by factors which are not under their control. Sartre calls this bad faith. This is to exist inauthentically. One has to accept one's existential situation, which consists in realizing one's finitude on the one hand and freedom on the other.

Such concepts like finitude, guilt, alienation, despair, death etc., were not topics of discussion in traditional philosophy. By focusing attention on the individual, the existentialists isolate the concrete human being from all those factors that connect him to the totality, to the universal human nature. The political reality of early 20th century had prompted such isolation. It was an era of wars which killed tens and thousands of innocent human beings. The totalitarian regimes justified their repressive rule by the ideologies of Nazism, Fascism and Communism and all these made the individual totally helpless. The existentialists thus had acknowledged the tragic elements of human existence. Some like Camus have proclaimed that life is absurd, while some others were hopeful about human destiny.

Existence Precedes Essence

This is an expression coined by Sartre, which nevertheless represents the spirit of the entire existentialist movement. With an emphasis on the concrete human existence, Sartre has challenged the long tradition in philosophy that had always prioritized abstract universal and impersonal essence over actual human existence. It amounts to a rejection of the universal human essence, which would make all human beings mere copies or shadows of this universal essence. By conferring precedence to essence the existentialists thus proclaims that we do not have a “standard” existence or are created in accordance to a universal standard.

Instead, we create ourselves through the exercise of our personal freedom. Unlike other entities where their essential properties are fixed a priori, human beings make themselves through their choices and actions. Therefore, there is no a priori essence like human nature or essence that determines man. They have no model, blueprint, no ideal essence, or perfect nature to which all of them would subscribe to or participate with (Plato).

In the process of self-creation, man makes his/her essence. Man first exists, then through his actions creates his essence. Since the individual man's being and existence are treated as important, his passions, emotions and instincts are also to be treated as philosophically relevant. Nietzsche's concept of will to power was a great inspiration to many existential philosophers, as it highlighted the passion for life with all its intensity and concreteness. Kierkegaard talks about the passion to exist, while Heidegger talks about authentic and inauthentic existences of man.

The essence of a thing is normally understood as what that "thing actually is". That which is definable in a thing is called its essence. It is what is intelligible about an object. The history of philosophy has predominantly treated essence as superior to existence and many like Hegel have even absorbed it into essence. On the other hand, the existence refers to what the thing is. It is not easily definable. Existentialism gives priority to existence over essence. It is characterized by concreteness and particularity and it implies the givenness of a fact. For instance, we say that the computer exists. Here the existence of the computer is not my creation. The computer exists as something. We can simply say that, "it is".

The word "to exist" is derived from the Latin word *ex-sistere*, which means to stand out or emerge. It thus implies the negation of nothingness. It suggests that a thing now stands out from nothing. To exist is to have a place in the real world and therefore, concreteness is asserted. Existence is concrete and particular. On the other hand, essence is abstract and universal. Essentialism is a central idea in traditional philosophy. Under the aegis of essentialism, philosophical systems have always contended that existence is illusory, while essences are universals and are unchangeable and real. For instance, Plato conceived only essences as realities and treated existence of particulars as illusory, contingent and changeable. In modern philosophy we find in Hegel a total dissolution of existence in essence. Hegel's totalizing philosophy, which advocates absolutism makes individual human

existence an unreal and illusory postulation, which will vanish with reason where everything is unified with the absolute.

Criticizing this totalizing philosophy of traditional thinkers, the existentialists have emphasized the concrete human existence. They intend to distinguish the unique way in which man exists in the world. They thus attempt to highlight the ontological peculiarity of man's being which is characterized by facticity, thrownness and particularity. Hence man's exercise is characterized by these limitations and they define him. Existentialism also focuses on the scope and purpose of human existence and therefore highlights aspects like freedom and contemplates about the possibilities of authentic existence.

Almost all of the existentialist philosophers highlight the importance of individuality, particularity and subjectivity. While Kierkegaard emphasizes the contingent and the particular features that refuse to fit into some system constructed by rational thought, Heidegger characterizes man's being as a *Dasein* or a being-in-the-world. Sartre particularly highlights the aspect of freedom and contingency. None of them talk about any truth which is objective or universal. Instead, there is an emphasis on subjectivity, disclosure and unconcealment. The lived experiences of individuals with passions, emotions, fears, anxieties, confusions etc. are stressed upon.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is emphasized by Existentialism?
(a) The common element in all humans (b) The essence of man (c) The concrete existence of man (d) The ultimate destiny of man.
2. An existentialist would not emphasize on?
(a) The finiteness of man (b) What is a priori in man (c) The situatedness of man (d) The agonies of the individual
3. Which of the following is important for Kierkegaard?
(a) Logical evolution from the lower sphere to the higher spheres of life (b) Individual is morally responsible on all occasions (c) Arational personal choices made by the individual (d) Explain God's existence rationally.
4. Which is not important for Kierkegaard?
(a) Objective and universal realities (b) The personal choices man makes in his actual life (c) Man in relation with his destiny (d) Subjective experiences of the concrete man.
5. Which of the following is not true of our existential situation?

- (a) It is often dreadful (b) Man cannot escape it (c) It is uncertain (d) Man can escape it through rational planning

Answer Key

1. [c]
2. [b]
3. [c]
4. [a]
5. [d]

Assignments

6. Discuss the unique features of existentialism.
7. Explain some key themes of existentialism.

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Chapter 37

Sartre's Conception of Human Existence

Key words:

Human existence, bad faith, essence, freedom, responsibility, consciousness, ego, phenomenology, existence precedes essence, universal human nature, abandonment,

This chapter will particularly focus on the conception of human existence advocated by Jean Paul Sartre and this will be explained with an examination of his rejection of essentialism and his advocacy of human freedom. Sartre has famously stated that man is Condemned to be Free. In many sense Sartre's philosophy is peculiar, as it advocates an unconditional atheism and individualism, but also accounts for concepts like responsibility. He was also a writer of short stories and novels and used the medium of literature and art in order to advocate his philosophical perspective.

Sartre affirms that human existence is characteristically different from the existence of other things in the world. He uses the term being-for-itself to distinguish human existence from other things, the existence of which can be understood as being-in-itself. Unlike other things, man's existence emerges and comes into being by negating its essence; by negating the being-in-itself. Hence according to Sartre, freedom and negation are central to the conception of man.

Sartre on Human Existence

Sartre in his monograph *Existentialism and Humanism* announces that *existence comes before essence*. As stated before, there are many factors that differentiate existential philosophers from each other. But this doctrine is acceptable to almost all of them. Both the Christian existentialists and the existential atheists subscribe to this fundamental doctrine. But Sartre's position is unique. He develops an extreme atheistic existentialist position from this basic premise.

In the development of his thought, many thinkers like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger influenced Sartre. Kierkegaard with his idea of "truth as subjectivity" has protested the omission of man by philosophers in their

systems that emphasized on essence or totality. His philosophy has endeavoured stressing the individual man here and now and viewed man who has passions and anxiety. He has emphasized on personal experience.

Nietzsche's influence was arguably more significant than anyone else's in Sartre's intellectual development. Sartre says that Nietzsche was an existentialist in his almost romantic emphasis upon the passion, anxiety and decision of individual man and had a sense of the tragic predicament of humanity in modern civilization. He was particularly fascinated by Nietzsche's criticism of religions in general and Christianity in particular. Sartre says that, he was inspired by Nietzsche's conception of the transcendence of passion and intellectualism through the power of some purely inward integrity of mastery. Again, Sartre who refuses to accept the validity of any transcendental values, finds in Nietzsche's approach which estimates values based on purely subjective criteria the essential attitude of an atheist existentialist.

Sartre in *Existentialism and Humanism* observes that, though Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are poles apart, the world of ideas, which their relative positions define is recognizably the same world. Sartre adds that, Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity with regard to its negative bearing upon man's complete individuation, has points of relation to Kierkegaard's sublime anti-clericalism. Nietzsche's Superman and Kierkegaard's Knight of-Faith, according to Sartre, are both conceptions of the transcendence of passion and intellectualism through the power of some purely inward integrity. [*Existentialism and Humanism*, p.9]

Another important thinker who has influenced Sartre is Edmund Husserl. Husserl's Phenomenology has introduced a new method, style and approach of philosophizing in European thought. Husserl starts with the observation that the European sciences are encountering a crisis as it advocates reductive scientism and naïve empiricism (Moran, 180). Husserl's phenomenology suggests an understanding of consciousness from a totally different light by arguing that consciousness is essentially intentional in nature; every consciousness is first and foremost a consciousness of something. Consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than

itself. Consciousness is always about something. This aboutness points to an existence other than its own and to its own existence as a question.

Husserl then goes on proposing a method of reduction, by means of which initially the natural world is bracketed and set aside and afterwards with a series of reductions finally isolates the consciousness with all its pure contents. There the contents are those things, which are directly and immediately given to it in its encounter with the world. Husserl's project envisages a transcendental reduction, where the pure consciousness—the transcendental ego—is isolated at the end.

Sartre accepts Husserl's intentionality principle but argues that the latter has mystified consciousness. He thus tries to demystify it by rejecting the transcendentalism proposed by Husserl. According to Sartre, consciousness is nothing but a consciousness of being conscious of the object before it. It is a being, the nature of which is to be conscious of its being. If there is anything as knowing consciousness, then it is knowledge of an object. He opposes the abstraction and the isolation of consciousness from the world of objects about which it is conscious of and elevating it to a transcendental realm. According to Sartre, the individual finds himself in the world of objects, which constitute the unity of his consciousness. The "I", or the ego appears indistinct through consciousness and is not a pure transcendental ego. He does not entertain an ego-consciousness distinction. When I am conscious of an object, for instance of a pen, I may express it in two ways.

- (a) There is consciousness of the pen
- (b) I have consciousness of the pen.

When I say (b), I separate or isolate my ego from the "consciousness of the pen" and from the actual pen that exists in the world. But (a) implies that there is no ego that can be isolated or abstracted from the process of being conscious of a pen or any other object in the world. Sartre affirms that the phenomenon of being is disclosed to consciousness. He here introduces the concept of the "being in-itself", in order to distinguish the being of objects in the world like pen and knife. The being of phenomenon, according to him, is radically different from the being of consciousness, which he designates as "being-for-itself."

Another important thinker who had exerted significant influence in shaping Sartre's ideas about existentialism is Martin Heidegger. Though the problem of being occupies the central place in Heidegger's scheme of things, even this central problem has the source of its meaning in the being of man, which according to Heidegger is a being-in-the-world or *Dasein*. Heidegger had contended that there is nothing beyond man himself that can solve the problem of man's existence. The concept of being-in-the-world and the question of *Dasein's* authentic existence therefore, occupy very significant places in his philosophy. Heidegger even says that *Dasein* is Being's destiny. Truth and knowledge are possible because of *Dasein*.

Existence Precedes Essence

Sartre was specifically influenced by the account of human existence as both free and situated. His account of the being of man asserts particularity, individuality, concreteness and contingency. He thus rejects the Platonic idea of an ideal human being, which determines what we are. Hence man is free from any pre-given models or archetypes that would shape his destiny. Man first is, asserts Sartre, and then he makes his essence through the choices he makes. Man is what he conceives and wills himself to be. Hence it is impossible for Sartre to conceive a God who is man's creator. If there is a God, then man is not free. Atheism is natural for such an existentialist like Sartre. *Existentialism and Humanism* affirms the first principle of existentialism in the following manner:

"Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. And this is what people call its "subjectivity," using the word as a reproach against us. For we mean to say that man primarily exists--that man is, before all else, something which propels itself towards a future and is aware that it is doing so. Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life, instead of being a kind of moss, or a fungus or a cauliflower. Before that projection of the self nothing exists; not even in the heaven of intelligence: man will only attain existence when he is what he purposed to be." [p. 28]

As mentioned above, the being of man is not just a being-in-itself, whose essence is externally fixed by some metaphysical principle like universal human nature or a divine creature like God. Man is a being-for-itself, who is free. The human individual is a subject rather than an object. He is a person rather than a thing.

Since as Heidegger stated, man's being is a being-in-the-world, once he comes into being, he and others will start defining him. In other words, he is not created according to any pre-given metaphysical model. He does not have a fixed and predefined essence in terms of which he understands himself. Hence his being is different from the being of a pen or a table. Sartre affirms that man makes himself through his choices and actions: he creates an essence for himself.

In the case of man, it is existence that precedes his essence. Essence is a product of a person's mode of existence. One may say that man makes his essence. Sartre asserts that each man is different and there is no common essence pertaining to all men. The essence of man therefore, depends on his subjectivity.

As mentioned above, the existence of things in the world is of different nature than the existence of man. Objects like a paper-knife has been made by an artisan who had a conception of it. The paper-knife's essence, which is the sum of the formulae and the qualities which made its production and its definition possible precedes its existence. If there is a God who had created man, then he is like this artisan who made the knife. Then God's relation to man would be comparable to the artisan's relation with the knife he had made. He would have defined its uses and in this sense its essence. God would have made man according to a procedure and a conception and out of a blueprint that existed in his mind. Under such circumstances the essence of man would precede his existence. God can be conceived here as supernatural artisan. When God creates he knows precisely what is he creating and each individual man is the realization of a certain conception, which dwells in the divine understanding.

Similarly, the idea of universal human nature suggests that there is a conception of human being found in every man and each man is a particular example of this universal conception. If such an essence exists, then it precedes his existence. Sartre opposes such suppositions and envisages demonstrating that there is no such universal human nature. He categorically asserts that human beings are different from other entities like the paper knife. He intends to show that while entities like paper knife have a creator, an idea before its production, man does not have a creator. Sartre outrightly rejects the existence of God and affirms that human beings have no model or blueprint. God does not

exist and hence in the case of the being of man existence comes before its essence. Man is understood as a being, which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it.

The implications of this atheism and rejection of essentialism are existentially significant. It underlines the absence of a model, which further suggests the absence of norms, standards, values and any pre-given meanings. While describing his existential position Sartre observes that the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is. It places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. Sartre adds that, all the actions a man may take in order to create himself as he wills to be, there is not one which is not creative, at the same time, of an image of man such as he believes he ought to be. [*Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 29]

According to Sartre, man makes himself through his choices. When we make a choice between alternatives, we are affirming that what we have chosen is valuable, as we cannot choose the worse. What we choose is always the better and nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all. This implies the aspect of responsibility that is attached with the choices we make in our life. Since the choices we make are our own choices and since we always make the better among the alternatives, we are responsible for them and for what happens to others and us as a result of making those choices. We are responsible not only for our own individuality, but also for all men, as when we choose, we choose for everyone.

This situation causes anguish and anxiety. The awareness that our responsibility concerns mankind as whole results in anguish. When I know that I have to act in such a manner that humanity regulates itself by what I do, I become aware of my huge responsibilities. But Sartre reminds us that this is not an anguish that leads to quietism or inaction. This freedom, responsibility and anguish do not separate us from action. Instead, Sartre observes that anguish is a condition of action itself.

The freedom man enjoys is the cause of terrible anxiety and dread. It results in the experience of abandonment. As Dostoevsky says, "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted". Since we live in a Godless world—a world devoid of any transcendental values, meanings and guidelines—we have to find

or create our own values and meanings. The sense of abandonment is therefore, the starting point of existentialism. With the disappearance of God all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven too disappears. Sartre declares that there can no longer be any good *a priori*, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it [*Existentialism an Humanism*, p. 33]. Since there exists no “transcendental goodness” the so-called universal or social values have no sacred or metaphysical binding on us. We are therefore, not bound to follow any given moral imperatives or guidelines. Instead, we have to make choices that are individual and concrete.

Sartre thus proclaims; “man is condemned to be free”. We humans are completely free as there is no God who has given us any fixed essence. Hence we have to create our own essence. In this process of exercising freedom and by making free choices, we are completely responsible for our actions and as mentioned above, are responsible for everyone else’s too. Because we are free to create our values and our world, we must exist in anguish, forlornness, and despair. Hence freedom is not a pleasant gift, but is felt as a condemnation.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is not true of Sartre’s views about Husserl’s phenomenology?
(a) Accepts intentionality principle (b) Accepts the ego-consciousness distinction (c) Rejects transcendentalism (d) Opposes the abstraction and the isolation of consciousness from the world of objects.
2. Which of the following is true of Sartre?
(a) Essence is a product of a person’s mode of existence (b) Man’s essence depends on objective human nature (c) Existence of all men are of the same nature (d) Man is essentially a product of his circumstances.
3. Which of the following is not an implication of Sartre’s atheism?
(a) Rejection of essentialism (b) Absence of norms, standards and values (c) Man’s existence comes before his essence (d) God is a being-for-itself.
4. Which of the following more appropriately reflects Sartre’s view about responsibility?
(a) Man is responsible for everything that happens around him (b) man is responsible for everything that happens in his life (c) Man is responsible for what happens to him as well as to others as a result of making choices (d) Man is responsible for what happens to him as a result of making choices, but not to what happens to others.

5. Which of the following would Sartre advocate?
(a) We have to do our duty (b) We have to exercise our freedom while making choices (c) We have to be practical while making choices (d) We have to make choices that would benefit the society.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [a]
3. [d]
4. [c]
5. [b]

Assignments

1. Explain the nature of human existence according to Sartre.
2. Discuss the statement, “existence precedes essence”.

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Chapter 38

Jean Paul Sartre's Concept of Human Existence

Key Words:

Existence, being-in-itself, being-for-itself, being-for-others, subjectivity, consciousness, facticity, givenness, being, subjectivity or consciousness, transphenomenality, nihilation of the in-itself, freedom, responsibility, anguish, authentic existence,

Introduction

This chapter will elaborate the three important concepts in Sartre's philosophy: being-in-itself, being-for-itself and being-for-others. We have already discussed the first two briefly in the previous chapter. We shall now examine them in detail along with the third concept, being-for-others. Philosophically, the most important influence on Sartre has come from the German phenomenological tradition and the two philosophers Husserl and Heidegger who have been the greatest inspiration for him, both in identifying the central themes of his philosophy and in adopting a peculiar approach to them.

The problem of being is the centre of phenomenological explorations of Heidegger and Sartre too begins his philosophical investigations with this problem. We have already seen in the previous chapter that how Sartre had critically appropriated Husserl. He criticizes the Husserlian project that aims at uncovering the meaning or essence of phenomenon through phenomenological reduction. Instead, Sartre is of the view that phenomenon has no meaning or essence. He maintains that being is only the ground upon which objects can reveal themselves to consciousness. According to him, what is important is consciousness and hence man's being.

While discussing the important features of man's being, Sartre identifies three constituents of being; being-in-itself, being-for-itself and being-for-others. The being-in-itself refers to the objects that are just there. These objects have no awareness of or value for themselves. On the other hand being-for-itself refers to the being of man. Sartre reminds us that contrary to other things, human beings are aware of themselves and their consciousness of their own existence is central in their being. Again, while the being-in-itself is the principle of objectivity or facticity, the being-for-itself stands for the principle of subjectivity or consciousness. The being-in-itself refers to the being of things i.e., to their essences which are fixed and hence are neither active nor

passive. The being-for-itself refers to the being of individuals and their existence. Man defines his own essence and gives meaning to his own existence through the choices he makes.

Sartre argues that, though the being-in-itself and being-for-itself mutually exclude, they are nevertheless combined in human being. Man is both being-in-itself and being-for-itself. These two aspects of being—in-itself and for-itself—represent facticity and transcendence respectively. Facticity stands for the givenness of our context, which we cannot change and transcendence refers to our ability to transcend facticity through our choices. We humans are always “more” than our situation. Sartre maintains that, though the being of man is characterized by facticity, it nevertheless does not prevent us from being free and exercising this freedom.

Another important feature of man’s being is its essential temporal nature. Man exists in time; past, present and future. The aspect of facticity refers to our past, which remains without any change. Future becomes relevant only for man, as he projects himself to the future. In this sense, man’s essence is never completely fixed. He is yet to be. Let us now discuss the three aspects of being in detail, which is present in the being of man.

Being-in-itself

With the concept of being-in-itself, that which is defined by facticity and an essence, Sartre rejects Aristotle’s doctrine of potentiality, where things are conceived as potentially evolving to higher and higher points of realization of their essential nature. Aristotle has cited the example of a seed evolving into a tree in order to highlight this evolutionary aspect of reality. Contrary to this Sartre claims that, whatever is, manifests itself in actuality and there cannot be any potentiality for other than itself. Accordingly, an object is no more than what it is in itself. The idea of being-in-itself refers to the being of objects and entities other than humans.

Sartre says that the being-in-itself is neither passive nor active, neither an affirmation nor a negation. It is massive, rigid and still and is that which it is. Therefore, it excludes other being and is unrelated to other beings. It is a synthesis of itself with itself, fully positivity, dense, massive and is beyond time. It is radically contingent, inexplicable and absurd and there is no ultimate ground for the existence of a being. [Bochensky, p. 175]

On the other hand, being-for-itself or the being of human beings suggests the presence of a free and knowing being such as a man in a rigid, immobile and deterministic universe. [Bochensky, p. 175] But Sartre says that man is both in-itself and for-itself. Hence there is an ambiguity surrounding man's being. It involves both facticity and freedom. Men are both physical objects—and hence Being-in-itself—and self-consciousnesses--and hence Being-for-itself. But the fact that the being of man is always a subject, and never an object affirms that man is a fundamentally different kind of being.

Sartre on Consciousness: Reversal of Husserl's Absolutism

Consciousness is related to the things in the world, which constitute the being-in-itself in a peculiar way. It reduces the being in-itself to what it is *for* consciousness. Till this point Sartre is in agreement with Husserl, who proposes the intentionality principle in order to characterize consciousness. But unlike Husserl who isolates the transcendental consciousness from the rest of the things in the world, Sartre conceives the subject as ontologically united to the things in the world to which it is present to. Since consciousness is a being to which things are present to, it cannot be an in-itself and passive. Sartre thus maintains that, consciousness could not be what it is unless it is related to a being, which is distinct and independent of it. This being is in no need of consciousness, as it is independent. On the other hand, consciousness is entirely dependent upon it. This is therefore a reversal of Husserl's absolutism, which asserts that the entire world owes its being to the ego.

Husserl confers a transphenomenality to consciousness and asserts that it is for consciousness or ego the world exists. Contrary to this, Sartre confers transphenomenality to being and argues that being does not exhaust itself in its appearing. The being of that which appears does not exist only in so far as it appears. Therefore, according to Sartre, consciousness is consciousness *of* something as it appears to it, for example, a pen or a table.

Consciousness must be other than being and its activity and hence Sartre contends that it is a process of nihilation. It arises through a negation or nihilation of being in itself. For instance, while I perceive a pen, I am also conscious that I am not the pen. Hence every instance of being conscious of something involves a nihilation. But this is not a complete negation. Since everything which is must be a being, man

cannot be a complete non-being. Therefore, man is also a being-in-itself. Certain things are fixed for man like the body, place of birth, historicity, facticity etc. But man is more than these fixed certainties. Man's being is not just that fixed sum total. He is not just his facticity. Sartre says that man has the ability to project himself to the future. Hence he is not a mere being-in-itself. He is not just a thing among other things, but is consciousness. Since man lacks any particular definite essence, apart from the ways he has created himself through the various choices he makes, we may say that man is not any particular thing or object; man is "no thing".

This aspect of man's being brings man in connection with nothingness in a peculiar manner. Man's being can only be non-being and therefore must consist in nothing. Sartre says that nothing comes into the world through man. The human self is both itself and not itself. Sartre holds that it is paradoxically present to itself in the mode of negation. According to him consciousness, which characterizes man's being, is distantiation or separation from being. Hence man is the being through whom nothingness comes into the world. Man is the being-for-itself. But without being the nihilation of the in-itself, there can be no for-itself. Sartre says that its nothingness places it in a perpetual struggle towards the in-itself.

Sartre holds that nothingness becomes apparent in man's freedom. As Heidegger points out, temporality is a feature of man's being. Again, man projects himself to the future. By doing this, he refuses to get freezed in his past. If we are determined by our past, we would not be able to choose. But man makes choices and defined his essence through that process. Hence he negates his past. Man projects himself to the future by virtue of negation of facticity and freedom.

Freedom has been a central theme in Sartre's existentialism. It is a fundamental fact concerning the being of man. Because man is not a being-in-itself, and hence is separated from being, he is not determined by being and is essentially free. Sartre says that human freedom precedes the essence of man and makes it possible. Man makes himself through his choices and therefore, he is nothing else but what he makes of himself.

In a sense Sartre proposes an inescapability of freedom. But his theory of man's being is not a metaphysical theory of human subjectivity. He conceives freedom as an actual feature of lived human experience. Again, the concept of freedom does not suggest a metaphysical theory of human nature. Inescapability of freedom does not mean that each individual can choose whatever he wants. Sartre

argues that, freedom is inescapable as it determines the nature of our being. This inescapability suggests that we have to make choices with responsibility. Even when we do not make a choice, we are exercising our freedom and are actually making a choice. Even to choose to be a slave of someone else or blindly imitating others are all instances of freedom.

But the idea of freedom also calls for the notion of responsibility. If we are free to make choices in our lives, we are also responsible for those choices. Hence freedom is linked with the possibility of authentic or truly human life. Sartre affirms that, what is important is not what is chosen, but in what manner it is chosen. Hence in order to have an authentic life one has to recognize the inescapability of freedom and accept the responsibility associated with it. Since responsibility is associated with freedom, one cannot escape the anguish that may follow the inescapability of freedom. Anguish therefore, is a condition for freedom and action.

Freedom is the freedom to make choices in life. It also implies that there are no eternal guidelines or norms that have any transcendental validity which would help us while encountering alternatives. Hence there is uncertainty about the future. Each choice will have consequences, on which we have no control. Some of these consequences are better than others, but we can never know which choice leads to better consequences. Our existential situation is our objective situation and it leaves us as free individuals who have no objective guidelines. The choices we have are not dependent on circumstances external to us. By choosing we make ourselves.

To exist authentically is therefore a challenge. It is to live with the realization that our freedom is boundless and we have no option but to make individual choices. In the absence of transcendental norms and guidelines, it is bound to encounter anguish and we have to accept this as a fact. It is part of our existential situation. We have to act based on the choices we make and should not blame external factors or circumstances. We have to take responsibility for choosing them as we are free.

Being-for-others

The third dimension of being is called the being-for-others, which become relevant in the contexts where human beings encounter each other. When we encounter other people, we realize that we are not encountering mere objects, which cannot react, but

subjects who are conscious agents. We have to explain how do we understand the other? Here we need to explain the bridge from consciousness to consciousness.

Modern philosophy had widely adopted an epistemological explanation in order to account for the encounters of the subject or consciousness with the rest of the animate and inanimate world. But according to Sartre this is inadequate for explaining the relationship between human beings. He says that being is the ground for our relationship to others and hence ontology which deals with the disclosure of being is important.

Sartre further contends that our relations to other people are of the very essence of man. Unlike our encounter with objects, we here experience the other and encounter the subjectivity of the other. The realization that the other we encounter is a subject posits a potential threat to our own subjectivity, as it raises the possibility that we may become an object to the subjectivity of the other consciousness. One experiences oneself as being subjected to the objectification of another subject. In order to explicate this further Sartre describes the phenomenon of shame consciousness.

Sartre cites the example of a voyeur who peeps through a keyhole and suddenly realizes that another person is looking at him and judging him. This experience of shame consciousness is analogous to the pre-reflective consciousness of the consciousness of objects. The voyeur here experiences the subjectivity of the other. This is characteristically different from the experience of objects. The recognition of other's subjectivity forces certain modifications in our existential structure. It suggests that my self-conception does not depend solely on me, as others can potentially objectify me. The other-as-subject turns the voyeur in a being-as-object.

This aspect reveals a potentially conflict-ridden relationship we have with others. The fact that others can objectify me forces me to see others as objects by denying them their subjectivity. We want to make the other support our own self-conceptions. This may lead to conflicts and in his play *No Exit* one of Sartre's characters proclaims that other people are hell. But there is no ultimate solution to this situation. Such conflict-ridden relationships with others are also part of our existential situation which we cannot overcome. This will never be stabilized, as we cannot find ultimate and absolute solace in any metaphysical principle.

Sartre's philosophy tries to present a picture of individual man and human reality as such with an emphasis on concrete human beings and their problems. He presents a picture of human reality, which does not claim that ultimate solutions are possible for all human problems. Instead, his existentialism encourages man to accept his facticity and inescapability of freedom and urges him to lead a reflective life with awareness by taking responsibility. He does not propose a metaphysical theory of human destiny with a conception of *summon bonum*, but instead reminds us the importance of living an authentic life without quietism and pessimism. Existentialism, claims Sartre, is humanism.

Quiz

1. According to Sartre, man's being is.....
(a) Being-in-itself (b) Being-for-itself (c) Both being-in-itself and being-for-itself (d) Neither of the above.
2. Which of the following is not an aspect of man's being?
(a) Temporality (b) Facticity (c) Transcendence (d) Boundedness.
3. Which of the following is essentially true of the being of man?
(a) Is being-in-itself (b) Is being-for-itself (c) Is a subject (d) Is an object.
4. Which of the following is not held by Sartre?
(a) Transphenomenality of consciousness (b) Transphenomenality of being (c) Consciousness is dependent upon being (d) Consciousness is a process of nihilation.
5. Which of the following is implied by the notion of freedom?
(a) Freedom precedes the essence of man and makes it possible (b) Freedom to choose the alternative that has desirable consequences (c) Relieved of facticity (d) Certainty about the outcome of our projects.
6. In the example of shame consciousness cited by Sartre, what does the voyeur experience?
(a) The other as an object and himself as a subject (b) The other as subject and oneself as being-as-object (c) The other and oneself as subjects (d) The other as well as oneself as objects.

Answer Key

1. [c]
2. [d]
3. [c]
4. [a]
5. [d]
6. [b]

Assignments

1. Explain Sartre's concept of freedom and its importance in his existentialism
2. Explain in detail the three aspects of the being of man.

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Chapter 39

Postmodernism

Key Words:

postmodern, progress, reason, metanarrative, antifoundationalism, idea of progress, universal rationality, value-neutrality, structuralism, poststructuralism, unified self, presence, origin, unity, transcendence of norms, fractured self, discourse,

In this chapter we shall examine the major characteristic features of postmodernism. We shall first of all examine the concepts of the human self advocated by the proponents of postmodernism and then try to understand the different approaches adopted by some of the postmodern thinkers. Stuart Sim observes in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*:

In a general sense, postmodernism is to be regarded as a rejection of many, if not most, of the cultural certainties on which life in the West has been structured over the last couple of centuries. It has called into question our commitment to cultural 'progress' (that economies must continue to grow, the quality of life to keep improving indefinitely, etc.), as well as the political systems that have underpinned this belief. [p.vii]

We may observe that, it is easier to give an account of what postmodernism is not, rather than positively articulating what it is. It is not just a philosophical school or system but refers to various developments that happened in culture in general and particularly in the realms of literature, film, architecture, art etc. To highlight its negative features, it is characterized by scepticism, antifoundationalism and a dislike of authority. It radically questions the Enlightenment project and its associated notions of progress and emancipation based on reason. In this sense, it can be conceived as a reaction to modernism. Postmodernism raises its voice against the liberal humanist ideology that had dominated culture since the eighteenth century.

General Features of Postmodernism

As mentioned above, the term postmodernism refers primarily to a variety of responses towards life, culture and values and therefore, it is easy to conceive it as a reaction against and rejection of some long established assumptions, particularly those which became prominent with the advent of modernity. It questions the enlightenment concept of progress and affirms a disbelief in the purity of knowledge. It proposes to

examine the goals and aspirations of modernity and is visibly anti-authoritarian. As Jean-François Lyotard says, it is a reaction against the universalizing theories or grand narratives/metanarratives. In his influential book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* Lyotard opposes the totalizing nature of metanarratives and their reliance on some form of transcendent and universal truth. He defines postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives. [p. xxiv] As Hugh J. Silverman observes, postmodernism tries to marginalize, delimit, disseminate, and decenter the primary (and often secondary) works of modernist and premodernist cultural inscriptions. [p. 1] Postmodernists thus attempt to re-read the texts and traditions that have made premodernist and modernist writing possible. They thus oppose the basic assumptions of modernist thought. Mary Klages has listed out a few premises which are central to humanism/modernism. We shall examine some of them. There is the concept of an autonomous self with its ability to know itself and the world through reason. Based on this assumption, modern philosophy had tremendous faith in the power of science. It believes that science provides unbiased, objective and universal truths that lead us toward progress. Reason is here taken as the ultimate judge that decides what is true, what is right, and what is good and language, which is the distinctive human capacity, is considered as the representation of the world.

The Modern and the Postmodern

Modernity was a reaction against the inadequacies of traditional worldviews. The modernists contended that all the traditional ways of understanding the world and society have become obsolete and there was an urgent need to come up with new moral, philosophical, cultural or political principles to understand and deal with the changing world. The (re)emerging idea of reason had provided them the hope for building a new world on universally objective foundations.

The postmodernists in turn have argued that these modern attempts to reinvent humanity are insufficient and futile. They have contended that reinventing new and absolute principles amount to newer forms of authoritarianism and have concluded that all such hopes are false. In this context the postmodernists have urged the abandoning of all metanarratives that are foundational principles. This they thought would expose the infinite field of differences within humanity. The idea of constitutive otherness is derived from this insight. Through their critical approaches,

the postmodernists have attempted at exposing the mistakes of modernity and have declared that modernity has come to an end.

The two most important features of postmodernity are their opposition to the idea of progress and their rejection of metanarratives. By opposing the idea of progress they have questioned the modernists' conviction that reason and science would lead to progress. Based on this optimism all the so-called modern institutions aim at this rational ideal. The idea of universal rationality itself is a metanarrative and modernity has many such metanarratives which consume different local narratives. For instance, with its notion of universal rationality, modernity has its idea of human welfare, which it blindly applies to all possible situations and all human communities. In this process it neglects the ideas of welfare nourished by different societies and communities in relation with their local surroundings. It thus pretends to send out a universal message and often forcefully suppresses or consumes the local narratives.

By advocating the idea of a concept of universal knowledge, the modern West committed a major mistake. It contended that such a notion of value-neutral, objective knowledge could be discovered by the human mind and the modern West did possess it. Correspondingly, it had assumed the possibility of a disinterested knower who possessed such knowledge. It also believed that the entire humanity was benefited by this knowledge. The postmodernists assert that this supposition is a myth. They thus proclaim that modernity has ended.

In one sense, ruptures were already present in the Enlightenment concept of rational modern society. Kant's rational project had exposed the fragmentation of the modern society and self into three different and autonomous domains of reason; pure, practical and aesthetic rationalities. Kant had attempted to reunite this with aesthetics, but the problem of fragmentation persisted. This has been recognized as a problem of the Enlightenment project in general; the central unity underlying all aspects of human experiences Vs. fragmentation of the self and of society. Hegelian idealism and many other philosophies of modernity tried to find a solution to this problem, but had failed to achieve complete success. In Nietzsche's writings we find an ultimate proclamation of this fragmented society that was devoid of any universal sacred values and meanings. Nietzsche's Zarathustra preaches the death of God and the coming of the Superhuman. As Sim observes:

Postmodernism has drawn heavily on the example set by antifoundationalist philosophers, perhaps most notably the iconoclastic nineteenth-century

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, whose call for a 'revaluation of all values' constitutes something of a battle-cry for the movement. [p. 3]

Different philosophies like Marxism, existentialism, Phenomenology and psychoanalysis also depict the estrangement of the individual from his or her authentic modes of experience and being and the experiences of fragmentation and meaninglessness in an increasingly technologizing and industrializing world. The post World-War II France had witnessed the emergence of many new philosophical approaches like structuralism and poststructuralism. Thinkers like Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, who have later contributed significantly to the postmodern philosophy, initially belonged to the structuralist tradition.

The Roots of Postmodernism

The term postmodernism was first used by the German philosopher Rudolf Pannwitz in 1917, while he was referring to the nihilism of twentieth-century Western culture. In literary criticism it appears as a reaction against aesthetic modernism during 1950s and 60s and in philosophy it was associated with French poststructuralist philosophy. The important 19th and 20th century intellectual and philosophical movements like Marxism, existentialism and Phenomenology and their methods consider the notion of self as central to their framework. They all consider the alienation of the self as an important philosophical problem and have discussed the possibilities of authentic and inauthentic human existence. What is common to these philosophical approaches is their dislike toward abstract theorization. As we have seen in some previous chapters, existentialism particularly stresses on the individual man and his/her problems in the world.

Structuralism on the other hand, focuses on culture and hence on structures like language, ritual and kinship that creates the self. But this does not amount to a natural scientific enquiry of the individual subject. Yet, it does not adopt a purely subjective approach, but concentrates on language which is thought to exhibit a relative stability in the production of meaning. Structuralism holds that culture decides the nature of language-world relationship. Hence the word—object connection is arbitrary and conventional. Nevertheless, it is not merely subjective. They maintain that language is a system of signs, which induce a predictable response on the part of the linguistic community. But the stress on language and the attention it

gives to the aspects of conventions and customs make structuralism a unique philosophical approach that is different from many modern philosophies.

Poststructuralism, on the other hand rejects structuralism and its methods. Like structuralism, here too language is considered philosophically significant, but the poststructuralists have opposed the scientific pretensions of structuralism. Their approaches were influenced by the idea of constructed self. They have adopted a more radical approach to the conceptualization of language and have challenged the possibility of rational inquiry into truth. They have opposed the idea that the world is knowable with the methodology suggested by structuralism.

Poststructuralism was a reaction against modern rationalism and all forms of foundationalism. It originated in France in the 1960s and rejected many fundamental intellectual pillars of modern Western civilization. The poststructuralists have challenged the conceptions of objective knowledge of the real world. They have opposed the idea of one single textual meaning and have challenged the conceptions of a historical human subjectivity. In this sense, the poststructuralists vehemently criticized the notion of universal truth. The influence of this anti-foundational approach was visible in the fields of art, literature, politics and culture in general. The emphases on multiculturalism, feminism, identity politics etc., which are features of postmodern scenario, reflect this poststructuralist temperament.

Following these insights, the post-modern period witnesses an opposition to all concepts of a unified self. The postmodernist thinkers criticize the concepts of objective and unquestionable meaning. They too emphasize the importance of language, culture and discourse, but categorically assert the decentered aspect highlighted by many others.

As mentioned above, postmodernism is not just an intellectual reaction against modernity or a philosophical school that opposes modernism. It is a movement which has contributed to the evolution of a cultural and intellectual environment which stresses decentering, opposes all kinds of metanarratives and criticizes the conception of a unified self and the idea of a common rational ideal for all men. Along with philosophers, writers, artists, painters and architects have participated in this radical reaction against and rejection of modernism. With postmodernism, art became more and more eclectic. The postmodernists have challenged all traditional distinctions in art are like high-low, fine-commercial, truth-seeking modern avant-garde-superficial, classical-popular etc. Hence the impact of postmodernism is felt more intensively in

the domain of art and culture and the difference between the two approaches of modern and postmodern can be brought out by highlighting how modern and postmodern artists have approached their profession

The modern artist is a person who has materialized a break with tradition and with the past. He offers a critique of the conditions of his own culture and society, as he takes a privileged view of the social and the psychological concerns of the day. The example for such a modern artist is Charlie Chaplin in the movies *Modern Times*, and *The Great Dictator*. In these movies we see the artist as a visionary, who has a grand dream for the entire humanity. He is critical about certain practices of the industrial society. He has a universal message to all humans, which ensures humankind emancipation. On the contrary, the postmodern artist does not have any privileged status. He never claims to be an authority of meaning and value. Unlike the modern art, the text in postmodernism is decentered. It has no intrinsic value or meaning, but it acquires value in its intertextual relations with other texts.

Several social and political developments witnessing 20th century have significantly contributed to the development of the postmodern condition. It was a period that has witnessed the end of European colonialism. The development of mass communications and media culture has suggested drastic changes in the ways humans perceive things in the world and live in it. Changes in the global economic sphere and the growth of international marketing have suggested radical changes in culture. The end of cold war has opened up the possibilities of new alliances in international politics and trade, but has also led to the possibilities of new hostilities and polarization. The decline and fall of Marxism was arguably the most significant political event of post WW II Europe. All these developments have created new global equations at the economic, political and social realms, which ultimately led to the emergence of a post-industrial society, which made old meanings and values irrelevant

The post-industrial society is characteristically different from the modern industrialized world, as with its emergence, knowledge and information have become crucial for economic and cultural survival. This period had witnessed a revolt against many existent forms of authority and it challenged the rationalism and liberal individualism that were the hallmarks of modern societies. As Sim would put it:

One of the best ways of describing postmodernism as a philosophical movement would be as a form of scepticism-scepticism about authority,

received wisdom, cultural and political norms, etc.-and that puts it into a long-running tradition in Western thought that stretches back to classical Greek philosophy. [Sim. 3]

Some Postmodern Themes

Let us now discuss some important postmodern themes. We shall focus on four of them here.

1. Presence or presentation Vs. representation and construction
2. Origin Vs. phenomena
3. Unity Vs. plurality
4. Transcendence of norms Vs. Immanence of norms.

1. Denial of Presence

The idea of presentation refers to what is directly and immediately given in experience. For example, the epistemological tradition of modern philosophy has treated the perception or sensation or sense data as the directly given, which is more reliable or certain. Counteracting this, the postmodernists have emphasized the notion of representation and affirm that everything is mediated by the human factor. We employ the mediation of linguistic signs and concepts in order to construct them. They thus argue that nothing is immediately present.

2. Denial of the Notion of Origin

Both traditional and modern philosophies have subscribed to this notion of origin. In the modern period we have a rational and secular interpretation of this notion of origin. This refers to the idea of the ultimate source of meaning, of selfhood, of life, of reality found by reason. There is an attempt to understand the deeper realities of the phenomenal world. Many philosophies and theoretical approaches that were dominant during the first half of 20th century like existentialism, psycho-analysis, phenomenology and Marxism attempt to discover the origin of the self. In early hermeneutics, particularly in the works of Schleiermacher and Dilthey we find an approach that tries to locate the meaning of the text in the author's intentional life, which they believed was an historical sphere from where it needed to be discovered using a method. Contrary to this postmodernism has proclaimed the death of the author.

3. Denial of Unity

The postmodernists have challenged the idea of unity manifested in the notions of meanings and conceptions of self. They assert that all cultural elements like words, meanings, experiences, human selves, societies etc. are constituted by relations to other elements. They maintain that nothing is simple, immediate or totally present. They also oppose the possibility of a complete analysis of anything and therefore argue against the idea of absolute meaning.

4. Transcendence of Norms Vs. Immanence of Norms

The postmodernists have opposed the notion of transcendence of norms and have argued that values like truth, goodness, beauty, rationality, etc. are not independent but are products of and are immanent in the processes they find application as norms. Every such norm is conditional to the time and place and serves certain interests. They depend on certain social contexts.

From this radically different idea about meaning, the postmodernists have derived another important theoretical insight; the idea of constitutive otherness. They categorically affirm that all normative claims are problematic and hence there are no fixed norms or guidelines to decipher the meaning of the text. In this context, the postmodernists suggest textual analysis through constitutive otherness. As Cahoon says:

The apparent identity of what appear to be cultural units — human beings, words, meanings, ideas, philosophical systems, social organizations — are maintained in their apparent unity only through...an active process of *exclusion, opposition, and hierarchization*. A phenomenon maintains its identity...only if other units are represented as foreign or “*other*” through a hierarchical dualism in which the first is *privileged* or favored, and the other is *deprivileged* or devalued in some way. [p. 11]

They deny the idea of textual unity and argue that every text needs to be understood in terms of the dependency of its elements to others. They then emphasize on the excluded or "marginalized" elements of the text and argue that it is the margins that constitute the text. Accordingly, we must be sensitive to the elements that are not mentioned or devalued in the text explicitly. In other words, they claim that every text implies a repression and the privileged theme of the text depends on the marginalized, which will be brought out in the analysis.

The Postmodern Subject

Since the postmodernists oppose all kinds of unity, they reject the idea of a unified subject with a self-sufficient agency. They refuse to identify anything universal or a-historical in the conception of the self. They also deny the idea of one-dimensionality associated with the notion of self and argue that the subject is necessarily fractured and indefinite due to the complex social relationships it enters into and the multiple ways it interacts with the world.

This idea of a fractured self is directly in contradiction with the idea of self, advocated by modern philosophers. The modern self is the autonomous knowing subject for whom the world is an object of knowledge. They have contended that the perceptions of the self are representations of an external world and knowledge is based on representations. The Cartesian-Kantian ideals of the self posit a rational, universal, knowing subject as the human self.

Contrary to this, the postmodern view of the subject is conditioned by several factors. As Foucault observes, our subjective experience is socially and historically constituted by factors that we unconsciously internalize. He emphasizes the social aspect of discourse in which the self is situated and formed. Fredric Jameson presents another very interesting idea of the self. He presents the picture of a subject that lacks cognitive maps, which allow us to position ourselves in this world and to know where we are. The post-industrial postmodern scenario forces us to have serious rethinking about subjectivity from the context of humans-technology interfacing. This is because science and technology have drastically altered the subject, its interactions, its potentials and its self-conceptions. It is a fact that certain drugs can significantly alter our behaviour and thereby our subjectivity. As Deleuze and Guattari observe in *A Thousand Plateaus*: Cybernetic and informational machines form third age that reconstructs a generalized regime of subjection: recurrent and reversible "humans-machines systems" replace the old nonrecurrent and nonreversible relations of subjection between the two elements; the relation between human and machine is based on internal, mutual communication, and no longer on usage or action. [p. 458]

This novel conception of subjectivity has very important social and political implications. With its rejection of universalizing theories, it opposes oppressive ideologies like Fascism and Communism. Various political initiatives like the

feminist movement, racial equality movements, homosexual rights movements, peace movements, anti-globalization movement etc., have also gained importance with the postmodern era. Here too, like its theoretical position, postmodernists do not postulate any ideal for all humanity, but criticize and oppose the existing structures that are oppressive and exploitative.

Quiz

1. Which of the following was opposed by postmodernism?
(a) Liberal humanist ideology (b) Capitalistic ideology (c) Industrial rationality (d) Secularism
2. Which of the following is not a feature of postmodernism?
(a) The disbelief in the purity of knowledge (b) Opposition to the enlightenment concept of progress (c) Advocacy of the concept of an autonomous self (d) Rejection of the idea that reason is the ultimate judge.
3. Which of the following did Structuralism emphasize?
(a) Universal rationality (b) Culture (c) Literary works (d) Human existence
4. Which of the following is not a feature of poststructuralism?
(a) Language is philosophically significant (b) The idea of constructed self (c) Belief in the possibility of rational inquiry into truth (d) Opposes the scientific pretensions of Structuralism.
5. Which of the following is not implied or suggested by the idea of constitutive otherness?
(a) The excluded or marginalized elements of the text are more important
(b) Every text exhibits an internal unity (c) Every text implies a repression
(d) The privileged theme of the text depends on the marginalized.
6. Which of the following is not applicable to the postmodern notion of subject?
(a) Rejection of self-sufficient agency (b) Autonomy (c) Rejection of universal human nature (d) Essentially fractured

Answer Key

1. [a]
2. [c]
3. [b]
4. [c]
5. [b]
6. [b]

Assigements

1. Discuss the postmodern conception of the subject.
2. Discuss some of the key features of postmodernism.

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Chapter 40

Deconstruction, Feminism and Discourse Theory

Key Words:

Deconstruction, structuralism, *différance*, conflictual nature of language, layers of meaning, extra textuality, surface meaning, interminable analysis, feminism, sexism, sexist oppression, gender justice, gender equality, discourse, social constructivism, discursive formation, power, knowledge, subject,

Introduction

Deconstruction has originated in France in the late 1960s, when structuralism and existentialism were still intellectually active. In a fundamental sense, deconstruction is associated with certain techniques for reading texts developed by Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man and some other thinkers. Another important thinker who was associated with deconstruction is Foucault, though many will not consider him as a deconstructionist in the strict sense of the term, as he was more than that. There is a wide consensus on the fact that Jacques Derrida is the chief proponent of deconstruction.

From its very outset, deconstruction challenges some fundamental assumptions of the Western metaphysical tradition. It can also be seen as a response and reaction against some important 20th century philosophical movements like the phenomenology of Husserl, structuralism of Saussure and psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan. Derrida himself affirms that deconstruction is not a method, but an activity of reading as it refers to certain new strategies for interpreting literary texts. It is also conceived as a way of criticizing political institutions.

While we discussed Heidegger's philosophy earlier, we have discussed the notion of the "destruction" of the metaphysical tradition. The idea of deconstruction owes immensely to this Heideggerian notion, though it is also substantially different from the former. While Heidegger's destruction has a definite objective—to arrive at the primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—deconstruction is envisaged as an ongoing process, which has no such definite end point, where things are neither analyzed completely nor the final meanings are reached. Again, as Barbara Johnson observes:

Deconstruction is not synonymous with "destruction", however. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word 'analysis' itself, which etymologically means "to undo" -- a virtual synonym for "to de-construct." ...

If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. A deconstructive reading is a reading which analyses the specificity of a text's critical difference from itself. [*The Critical Difference*]

The approach of deconstruction towards the notion of meaning is also relevant in this context. Deconstruction asserts that, texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices do not have unambiguously definite meanings, as they do not have very strict and rigid boundaries. To deconstruct, as Nancy Holland observes, "...is to take a text apart along the structural "fault lines" created by the ambiguities inherent in one or more of its key concepts or themes in order to reveal the equivocations or contradictions that make the text possible. [Holland] Before we examine these more vital features of deconstruction, let us examine the historical context that witnessed its emergence.

As mentioned above, the intellectual environment of post World War II Europe was dominated by various philosophical approaches like structuralism, phenomenology, existentialism and psychoanalysis. Structuralism was the leading cultural theory, which exerted significant influence on other social sciences. Unlike existentialism, which focuses the individual, structuralism emphasizes on the structured system and considers the latter as the locus of the real and the meaningful. As Cantor observes, this transference of meaning and authenticity from the individual to the system makes structuralism a theory that rebels against the anthropomorphism of existentialism. By giving priority to universal structures that subsume both the individual and the society, it envisages to transcend the conflict between them [Cantor, p.346] Deconstruction agrees with structuralism on this aspect. It also shares some of the political concerns of structuralism. For these reasons, deconstruction owes a lot to structuralism.

Nevertheless, there are important differences. Deconstruction is critical about the idealistic overtone of structuralism, which subscribes to the notion of common universal structures. In their search for deep universal structures, the structuralists fail to see the possibilities of critiquing and transforming the society and tend to consider the world as it is given as legitimate. Deconstruction is therefore, more radical in its approach than structuralism. Cantor adds that

deconstruction is a radical variant of structuralism: a culturally and, to some extent, politically left-wing offshoot of structuralism. [p.357]

Key Themes in Derrida's Theory

Derrida advances certain very important concepts while elucidating his theoretical position. Some of them are listed below.

- There is nothing outside or beyond the text.
- The notion of *différance*
- Every text deconstructs itself.
- The essential oppositional and conflictual nature of language.
- There is not one canonical signification to a text: there are several simultaneous layers of meaning.
- The nature of language is such that it conceals meaning.
- There are infinite meanings in the text.
- The necessity of an interminable analysis

One primary feature of deconstruction is to reject the idea of extra textuality; the notion that meaning or significance lies in some definite platform outside the text. It also asserts that one always access the text from a context. But this context nevertheless does not suggest any fixed boundary for the text. The text, asserts Derrida, is not a finished corpus of writing. He conceives the text as a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. (Derrida, Living on: Border Lines, pp.83-84).

The notion of *différance* does not mean just "difference", but it indicates a combination of differences. It also indicates how the structure of the text is constituted. It suggests that the text possesses intrinsic oppositions within itself. There are different elements in any text, which prevent it from forming a unitary significance or meaning. These elements are not just different from each other but are in perpetual conflict. Such oppositions or internal conflicts are at work in each signifying text, as such conflicts or oppositions constitute the very nature of language. With these conflicts constantly at work, each text undergoes a constant deconstruction.

Deconstruction thus overthrows many traditional conceptions about textual meaning. The internal conflicts embedded in language and the text

ultimately creates ruptures in the surface meaning of the text, which leads to its immanent disintegration. Derrida argues that, due to this, the text breaks down into several layers of meaning, where none can claim prominence. Hence, the text has no single meaning. Instead, it has infinite meanings or layers of meaning. One has to be sensitive to this fact about the not apparent and unconscious multiplicity of meanings that lie behind the immediate and apparent surface.

Hence, along with the immediate message a text gives out on its surface, it also projects conflicts, which bring out the immanent gaps in the text. Such conflicts eventually unsettle any attempt to fix textual meaning to any single point. Derrida affirms that, one should focus these gaps, which according to him can be found in the margins of the text. He says that in reading he deconcentrates on those points that appear to be the most important, central or crucial and instead focus the secondary, eccentric, lateral, marginal, parasitic, borderline cases. (Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, p.44-45) there is a constant focus on what is marginal and peripheral.

He also stresses on the idea of interminable analysis. The deconstructionist criticism is an endless process, which never reaches any final goal. He conceives the perpetual overturning of meaning as the very nature of language. Since it is the nature of language, the text deconstructs itself to the reader. One important aspect of deconstruction is the fact that it is not a method that aims at finding the meaning of the text in the sense in which phenomenological analysis engages itself with things. It stresses on the infinite possibilities of reading the text and opposes any fixation of meaning. Deconstruction is one of the prominent postmodern approaches, which opposes the sanctity of metanarratives.

Feminism

Feminism can be understood as a form of resistance against all forms of patriarchal domination in all aspects of life. In other words, it aims at ending different forms of sexist oppression. It has very strong social and political implications, as it raises very important questions concerning equality and justice in human societies, most of which traditionally follow the patriarchal social order.

Historically, most human societies considered women as subordinate to men. And many religious traditions have provided theological justifications to this subordination and discrimination. Philosophical traditions were also directly or

indirectly promoting male domination. Many thinkers like Aristotle considered women as inferior to men. Feminism as an intellectual, ideological and political movement was aware of this historical context and tries to posit counterarguments by proposing theoretical frameworks that support gender justice and equality.

Historically, feminism is associated with several movements of political activism originated in different parts of the world that ultimately tried to gain equality and justice for women. The woman suffrage movements in Europe and the US during the late 19th and early 20th centuries are examples. The Women's movement of the 1960s explicitly demanded equal legal rights and political participation. In this sense, feminism defines itself positively as a movement that aims at establishing more justice and equality in human societies, which are constitutive of several forms of hierarchies. Hence, different forms of feminisms are not anti-male or mere political initiatives that seek gender equality. But feminists consider the question of gender equality as primary and envisage to create gender justice and ensure equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes. Bell Hook states that feminists are made, not born.

This insight is important to understand feminism. In other words, it tells us how our societies are patriarchal and how both men and women contribute to the sustenance of the status quo. Hence feminism cannot be anti-male, as it is not men alone who are responsible for the male-dominant and patriarchal social system. It is the way our societies are economically, politically and culturally formed and organized. As Bell Hooks observes, females were as socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males: hence before women could change patriarchy they have to change themselves. Hence, as Bill Hook observes, to end patriarchy we need to realize that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism. Feminism therefore, has to begin with women changing themselves and not just expecting men to change their attitudes.

Though women are oppressed in human societies since time immemorial, feminism as an active ideology has originated only in recent times. Many historical and political factors are responsible for this. With the enlightenment, Europe had witnessed the emergence of liberalism, which emphasized concepts like equality, personal autonomy, rights of individuals etc. 20th century had witnessed the spread and popularity of democratic institutions and governments all over the world. All such developments prompted the development of various rights groups that argues for

justice in terms of the idea of race and gender equality. During their early phase, many feminist groups were visibly anti-men. But they soon overcame this phase and developed their respective ideologies and many of them do not consider gender equality as a matter of concern for women alone. They treat it as problem facing humanity in general.

But there are several complex challenges feminist movements face in today's world. For instance, class differences and race discriminations add new dimensions to the fundamental issue of gender discrimination and gender justice. There are differences among women in terms of economic status, education, and race etc., where all these factors determine the power relationships that permeate in the society. Again there are feminists who advocate reforms and argue for gender equality, while some others aggressively propagate social transformation through revolutionary measures. Often many of these initiatives remain within the elite classes. As Bell Hooks observes, evolutionary feminist theory was not made available to the public, as it remained as a privileged discourse available to those among us who are highly literate, well-educated, and usually materially privileged. [Hooks, p.5]

Again, there are different types of feminisms; liberal, radical, diversity, socialist, Marxist, postmodern, lesbian, eco-feminists and existentialists are a few. The liberal tradition plays a vital role in the creation of the feminist sensibilities, as they advocate values like equality and autonomy, which ultimately argue for universal human rights. The socialist feminists believe that gender and sexuality are social constructs and they argue for their transformation. While the Marxist feminists consider capitalism as the major factor in women's oppression, the lesbian feminists challenge the conception of normalcy centering around the idea of heterosexuality. The diversity feminists believe that the problems women face are different in different cultures and times and the existentialists argue that the construction of women as man's other leads to inauthentic existence. The radical feminists maintain that women's oppression can be considered as the conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression and the eco-feminists adopt more a spiritual approach.

In spite of these different approaches and theoretical frameworks, almost all groups of feminists oppose oppression, exploitation and discrimination on the basis of gender. They are all concerned about the injustice fostered by a patriarchal/hierarchical society and suggest gender equality and gender justice as

means to overcome the various problems facing, not only women but also the society in general.

Discourse Theory

Jørgensen & Phillips state that a discourse can be understood as a particular way of talking about and understanding the world or an aspect of the world. [*Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p, 1] they treat discourse analysis, as just one among several social constructionist approaches—a range of new theories about culture and society—but it is one of the most widely used approaches within social constructionism. (p.4) From the outset, the notion of discourse is based on the assumption that language is structured according to different patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life. Accordingly we have “medical discourse” or “political discourse”, representing different domains. Discourse analysis is the analysis of these patterns. [*Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 1]

While discussing the fundamental aspects of various social constructivists, Vivien Burr formulates four premises shared by all social constructionist approaches. [pp. 2-5, referred by Jørgensen & Phillips, p. 5] Burr states that all of them adopt a critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge. Secondly, that all emphasize on historical and cultural specificity. Their approach establishes a link between knowledge and social processes and finally they all stress on the link between knowledge and social action. The social constructionists therefore, deny the idea of a reality out there and consider that the world is accessed by us only through our categories. They further acknowledge that, since we are historically and culturally situated, our knowledge about the world is also determined by this situatedness. They affirm that discourse is a form of social action that plays a part in producing the social world and our ways of understanding the world are created and maintained by social processes. [Burr, p.5]

In a basic sense, discourse theorists understand discourse as something, which is produced by social actors through their practices and are shaped by social structures. Discourses are thus consumed and monitored in this manner. The meaning of objects and actions is determined by historically specific systems of rules. As indicated above, discourse theorists do not conceive any object existing independent of discourses. The condition of the meaning of any object depends on the socially

constructed system of rules. In this sense a discourse represent a system of social relations and practices, which are nevertheless, embedded in various power relations.

As mentioned above, the discourse theorists subscribe to the view that our access to reality is always through language. Here they are in agreement with structuralism and poststructuralism. Things in the world gain meaning only in the context of a discourse. Language thus constitutes the social world, along with social identities and social relations. Therefore, the changes in the discourse are reflected in the social world.

The French philosopher Michele Foucault's contributions in the development of discourse theory and analysis are seminal. Foucault's critical approach challenges the conception of truth advocated by traditional philosophy. He views truth as a discursive construction and therefore, conceives that different regimes of knowledge determine what is true and false. According to him a discourse is a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation. He maintains that a discourse is made up of a limited number of statements and is essentially a fragment of history. [*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.117]

Foucault also advocates a theory that links power with knowledge, which explains how power is spread across different social practices, as it does not belong to particular agents such as individuals or the state or groups with particular interests. [p.13] He holds that power constitutes discourse, knowledge, bodies and subjectivities. It is responsible both for creating our social world and for the particular ways in which the world is formed and can be talked about. Therefore, power is both a productive and a constraining force. [p.14]

Another very important aspect of Foucault's discourse analysis is his theory of subject, as he argues that subjects are created in discourses. He thus questions some fundamental assumptions of the subject the Western tradition advocates. By demonstrating how the subject evolves through discursively formed social practices, Foucault shows how decentered the subject is.

Discourse theory and analysis exert significant influence in the course of the development of many philosophical theories in 20th century. Particularly, Foucault's influence was phenomenal. This method has remarkable contributions to research in the field of many social science disciplines and it has significantly influenced social and political theory.

Quiz

1. Which of the following statements are true of deconstruction?
(i) There is a definite goal for analysis (ii) It has no definite end point (iii) It aims at arriving at the primordial experiences (iv) It is an ongoing process (v) Things are analyzed completely.
(a) all the above (b) (ii), (iii) and (iv) (c) (i), (ii) and (iv) (d) (ii) and (iv)
2. Which of the following is not a concern of deconstruction?
(a) An activity of reading (b) A method of reaching the real meaning of the text (c) Strategies for interpreting literary texts (d) A way of criticizing political institutions.
3. Which of the following is done by deconstruction?
(a) Focus the central meaning of the text (b) Interminable analysis
(c) Stresses the final reading of the text (d) To reach a final analysis of the text.
4. Which of the following do the socialist feminists advocate?
(a) Capitalism is the major factor in women's oppression (b) The problems women face are different in different cultures and times (c) Gender and sexuality are social constructs (d) The construction of women as man's other leads to inauthentic existence.
5. Which feminist group believe that women's oppression can be considered as the conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression?
(a) Radical (b) Eco-feminism (c) Marxist (d) Socialist.
6. Which of the following is not a view held by discourse theory?
(a) Emphasizes historical and cultural specificity (b) Link between knowledge and social processes (c) Link between knowledge and social action (d) Emphasizes universal structures that constitute knowledge.

Answer Key

1. [d]
2. [b]
3. [b]

4. [c]
5. [a]
6. [d]

Assignments

1. Discuss the idea of difference advocated by deconstruction.
2. “Feminists and made and not born”. Explain.
3. Explain the concepts of discourse and discourse analysis.

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