

• CHAPTER TWO

The Conceptualistic Interpretation of the relationship between Language and Reality after P.F. Strawson

In the first chapter we have examined the relationship between language and reality from semantic perspective and in this regard, we have chosen Wittgenstein's *Tractarian* model as the atomic interpretation of the relationship between language and reality. We think that the atomic interpretation, even though very charming and distinctive in nature, is narrow as far as its application is concerned. It undertakes a kind of language which is artificial and private in nature. It is limited in scope and application and it has attempted to find out or locate a kind of reality which does not represent the world in general. Thus, we think that the atomic interpretation of the relationship between language and reality has been narrowed down both from the nature of language as also from the nature of reality.

The pragmatic interpretation of the relationship between language and reality is an alternative proposal of the semantic approach of the relationship between language and reality. However, we do not examine it as an alternative approach; rather we consider it as a *different* approach of the relationship between language and reality. Like semantists, the pragmatic school is comprehensive in nature because many great philosophical thinkers over the history of literature have been recognized as pragmatists. Therefore, it is very difficult to incorporate the views of all those great thinkers in a particular sequel. That is why; we have chosen the view of one particular philosopher as a *model* of the pragmatic interpretation of the relationship between language and reality. In this regard, we do prefer the pragmatic interpretation of P.F.Strawson. We think that Strawson's conceptualistic interpretation of the relationship between language and reality holds the central position of pragmatic approach.

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Therefore, in this section, we propose to analyze and examine Strawson's conceptualism as the model of the relationship between language and reality from pragmatic point of view.

We think that the pragmatic interpretation takes different approach from the semantics both in terms of language and also in terms of reality. The pragmatic interpretation of language is different from the semantic interpretation of language, because unlike semantists, the pragmatists do prefer natural language instead of artificial language. Even though like semantists, some pragmatists, including Strawson and Austin, acknowledge revision of natural language, but unlike the semantists, Strawson does not find any relevance for constructing artificial language instead of natural language. According to Strawson, there persists a constant revision even in ordinary language but such revision does not require us to divorce ordinary language and thereby to construct a different form of language known as ideal or artificial form of language. Not only that, the nature of reality is different from semantic interpretation. When we have examined Wittgensteinian interpretation of reality, we have seen that Wittgenstein has understood language as the totality of facts. Even if we go outside early Wittgenstein, we notice that the nominalist interpretation of reality has a different ontological status in compare to the pragmatic interpretation of reality. Those who advocate ideal language have tried to understand reality either in terms of denotation or in terms of connotation. Those who have attempted to understand reality in terms of denotation are called nominalists and those who have conceived reality in terms of connotation are called descriptivists. However, pragmatists are neither nominalist nor descriptivist. They have questioned reality in a different sort of environment which is very much unlikely to the semantists.

Later Wittgenstein is a leading campaigner of pragmatist. His understanding of language is ordinary language. According to Wittgenstein, ordinary language is alright and there is no

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scope for revising ordinary language. Reality, for later Wittgenstein, is something known by means of ordinary language within the *form of life*. That means, reality is nothing but *stream of life* reveals in the form of life, or custom or society by means of ordinary language. Thus, it seems clear that reality is something, according to later Wittgenstein, that has been manifested by the use of ordinary language in the form of life. Thus, we have a different interpretation and approach in later Wittgenstein that has been manifested by the use of ordinary language in the form of life. Thus, we have a different interpretation and approach in later Wittgenstein where both language and reality differ from his earlier account revealed in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In fact, the later Wittgenstein does not mention logical names and was no way interested to look at the application of formal or propositional language. Even unlike the other pragmatists, later Wittgenstein does not anticipate any linguistic revision of ordinary language. His consistent philosophical position is that ordinary language is adequate and alright for fulfilling the needs of the community or society.

J.L.Austin is another leading campaigner of pragmatic interpretation of the relationship between language and reality. Like Strawson, Austin in his *A Plea for Excuses*²⁷ claims that there is a *constant revision in ordinary language*. But like Strawson and unlike the semantists, Austin claims that revisionism does not require of divorcing ordinary language. Ordinary language is adequate. Thus, for Austin natural language is alright. As far as reality is concerned, Austin brings the concept of *Speech Acts*. According to Austin, reality would be something revealed through or by means of speech acts. Austin classifies speech acts into three different categories, such as, locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. According to Austin, any meaningful utterance from the speaker is regarded as locutionary. The locutionary act generates or creates illocutionary act when the utterance of the speaker is

²⁷ Austin, J.L., "A Plea for Excuses", in *PAS*, Vol. LVII, 1956- 57.

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being communicated to the hearer. Austin gives utmost importance on illocutionary act and at times he calls it *illocutionary force* on the basis of which the hearer has prompted to do a certain action according to the desire of the speaker and thereby pass on to perlocutionary act. What Austin claims here is that reality is nothing but the outcome of speech acts performed with the collaboration between the speaker as well as the hearer. All speech acts are acts through which action can be performed. That is why; Austin conceives speech acts as performative utterances. Thus, language is ordinary or natural and language is communicated for performing acts in terms of either locutionary or illocutionary or perlocutionary. Thus, for Austin reality is not something identified by means of denotation or by means of connotation; rather reality is something conceived by means of performative utterances. Performative utterances are nothing but utterances functioning in ordinary language.

We noticed the same force in Gilbert Ryle's philosophical writings. Ryle too is a believer of ordinary language. He claims that misunderstanding of ordinary language actually occurs because of mishandling the *usage of ordinary language*. Ryle's famous concept *categorical mistake* is a case in point. According to Ryle, categorical mistake arises when one fails to understand the very nature of category and thereby uses it mistakenly in place of another category.

Having said this, we think that Strawson's position is unique in nature, as far as the understanding of the relationship between language and reality from pragmatic standpoint is concerned. That is why; we propose to choose Strawson's conceptualism as the model of the pragmatic interpretation of the relationship between language and reality.

Strawson's Conceptualism

We think that Strawson's best known book *Individuals*²⁸ actually brings a new idea as far as the relationship between language and reality is concerned. It states that any concern with logical language must include a concern with the basic operation of reference and predication.²⁹ According to Strawson, nothing could be more fundamental in speech or thought than the operation of picking out some individual item - referring to it by name or description. Therefore, one has to know about the basic or more primitive or fundamental objects or reference or subject of predication. According to Strawson, whatever the primitive or fundamental object may be, it must be spatio-temporal. That means, spatio-temporality is the essence of object. In this regard, Strawson was highly influenced by Kant.³⁰ According to Strawson, we can predicate only about spatio-temporal individuals. Spatio-temporal individuals are belonging to certain general categories and they possess certain general qualities or properties.

There is no question of doubt that Strawson's conceptualism is philosophically unique because by means of conceptualistic approach, Strawson actually brings a radical interpretation of the relationship between language and reality. In his celebrated book *Individuals*, Strawson approaches a completely different story about the nature and function of language. In this regard, Strawson envisages the phenomenon of language and discovers a world interior to us. According to Strawson, the function of language has a dual dimension of which one is the covers of other. Strawson shapes his conceptual scheme just like as a pointer which points *to the structure of the world outside as well as the structure of the world inside*.

²⁸ Strawson, P.F., *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, London and New York, 1959.

²⁹ Strawson, P.F., "My Philosophy", in *The Philosophy of P.F. Strawson*, edited by P.K. Sen & R.R. Verma, ICPR, New Delhi, 1995, p.3

³⁰ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010, 1929, pp. 67-82.

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Thus, we can say that the conceptual scheme as conceived by Strawson is comprehensive in the sense that it would reflect the world as an organic whole.

The immediate question that immediately crops up is that how does conceptual scheme relate itself to reality and our experience of it? In this regard, Strawson says that the concepts have to be related to facts in the world. According to Strawson, concepts have an application in the world and definitely concepts do represent the true picture of the world by identifying particulars through successful interpersonal communication between the speaker as well as the hearer.

According to Strawson, language is a pointer to a scheme of reality or an ontological structure. By language, Strawson means, ordinary or everyday language. Strawson does not think that ideal language is necessary for showing the relationship between language and reality. Even though he believes that ordinary language is ambiguous up to a certain level. Therefore, he shares the view with other pragmatists that ordinary language needs to be revised. Strawson says that there is a constant revision in ordinary language. However, this does not make sense to say that such revisionism leads us to a different kind of language known as artificial language. Thus, as far as the nature of language is concerned, Strawson is a firm believer of natural language. Strawson, being a pragmatist, has full faith on ordinary language. Like other ordinary language philosophers, such as, later Wittgenstein, J.L.Austin, Gilbert Ryle, Strawson believes that ordinary language is alright and sufficient for reflecting the *world or reality interior to us*.

What does, then, Strawson mean by reality? According to Strawson, reality is the totality of *particulars*.³¹ Strawson understands particulars in terms of objects. Thus, we can say, after Strawson, that reality is the totality of objects. Interestingly, Strawson here takes the common

³¹ See Strawson, P.F., *Individuals*, op.cit., p.15.

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sense view of reality. He, in this regard, differs from early Wittgenstein who in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* has claimed that reality is the totality of facts.³² According to Strawson, particulars are two types, basic as well as non-basic. As the world is the totality of particulars – basic and non-basic, identification of particular by means of language is at par with the identification of reality. Therefore, identification plays the all important role in knowing the relationship between language and reality.

The question then is: How does identification is made possible? Even if there is a process of identification, but in what sense identification can be attributed as successful identification? Is any form of identification could be successful? If it would not then on what accounts one can claim that identification is made successful? In case of identification, language is the medium and reality is the end. Identification is made possible between the speaker and the hearer. Thus, in the process of identification we do require, in Strawsonian conceptual scheme, language as a tool, the users of language, i.e., the speaker and the hearer. Here Strawson claims that if the hearer can successfully identify what the speaker being referred to, then, in such a situation successful identification is made possible and accordingly the relationship between language and reality can be established. But how does Strawson assures us that successful communication between the hearer and the speaker would be made possible all without exception? If the hearer fails to identify the particular, basic or non-basic, being referred to by the speaker, then how does the relationship between language and reality is made possible? In such a situation how can we still claim about successful communication? Strawson, however, does not rule out the failure of communication between the speaker and the hearer. In fact, it is a common phenomenon in our form of life that communication may not be successful all without exception. However, this does not hamper us in grasping reality.

³² See Wittgenstein,L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, op.cit., p.5.

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According to Strawson, there is a fair amount of possibility of failure of making successful communication between the speaker and the hearer. And that is where the relevance of revisionism comes into being. It may be the case that at times the hearer fails to identify the particular being referred to by the speaker. Keeping this possibility in mind, Strawson has classified particulars into basic as well as non-basic. According to Strawson, there are strong philosophical presuppositions on the basis of which we can claim that the hearers in most general cases successfully identify the particulars being referred to by the speakers. Strawson, in this regard, has claimed that even though the hearer, at times, fails to identify *non-basic particular* being referred to by the speaker but such non-basic particulars in some sense or other are being co-related with *the basic particulars about which the hearer cannot fail to identify*. That means, Strawson boils down or nullifies unsuccessful communication between the speaker and the hearer in case of basic particulars.

The question again raises on what basis or on what ground Strawson claims that in case of basic particulars identification between the speaker and hearer in most general cases would be successful? In this regard, Strawson would like to say that both the speaker and the hearer do possess same conceptual structure. That means, both the speaker as well as the hearer have a unified core of conceptualism. On the basis of unified conceptual structure successful identification between the speaker as well as the hearer is made possible. Strawson farther claims that even though there is a possibility of not identifying non-basic particular, but every non-basic particular is co-related with some basic particulars which can be successfully identified by the speakers. As both the speaker as well as the hearer possesses a unified conceptual scheme, they do share almost the same knowledge about the world of particulars. Thus, for Strawson, on the basis of successful identification between the speaker and the hearer the relationship between language and reality is made possible.

Call for Universal and Unified Conceptual Scheme

Strawson advocates unified core of conceptual scheme. In this regard, Strawson was indebted to Kant. In fact, Kant brings an *epistemological revolution* in the domain of philosophy by introducing the view that *understanding makes nature*. According to Kant, materials data collected by the faculty of sensibility are well-arranged by the categories of understanding and thereby makes our world possible. Strawson, in this regard, takes clues from Kant. According to Kant, the world is composed of categories.³³ In the similar way, Strawson advocates that the world is the totality of particulars. According to Kant, every individual has the fixed notion of categories. Because of the preconceive notion of categories, every rational agent can develop the knowledge of external world. Following Kant, Strawson has analyzed the phenomenon of linguistic communication through which the universal conceptual scheme has finally been displayed.

Strawson interprets his universal core of conceptual scheme with regard to two types of metaphysics, such as, descriptive metaphysics and revisionary metaphysics.³⁴ In fact, the concept of descriptive metaphysics emerges in Strawson's *Individuals* in contrast with what he calls revisionary metaphysics. To find out the distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics, Strawson in his *Individuals* says, "Descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world, revisionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure."³⁵

Even though, Strawson characterizes descriptive metaphysics, but in real sense, it is an enquiry of our *cognitive apparatus*, because it will show how the fundamental categories of our thought hand together and how they relate, in truth, to those formal notion which range

³³See Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op.cit., pp. 111-119.

³⁴ See Strawson, P.F., *Individuals*, op.cit., p.9.

³⁵Ibid., p.9...but I quoted it from *Language and Conceptual Framework*, by Kantilal Das, IPQ, Vol. XXVII, No. 1 & 2, January – April, 2000, p.3.

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through all categories. Thus, for Strawson descriptive analysis, unlike revisionary analysis, is nothing but a close examination of the actual use of words. Strawson, in this regard, says, "... the claim to clarify will be seen empty unless the results achieved have some bearing on the typical philosophical problems and difficulties which arise concerning the concepts to be clarified. Now these problems and difficulties have their roots in ordinary and constructed concept, in the illusive, deceptive moods of functioning of un-formalize linguistic expression."³⁶ Strawson farther contends that descriptive analysis is the attempt to bring out the natural foundation of our conceptual apparatus. In this regard, Strawson heavily relies on the use of ordinary language. According to Strawson, the actual use of linguistic expressions is the sole and essential point of contact with the reality what he termed as *conceptual reality*. Strawson, farther contends that the use of words in ordinary language not only discloses our conceptual scheme in terms of conceptual reality; it equally determines our ontology interior to us. In this regard, Jack Kaminsky says, "P.F.Strawson has been one of few to elaborate our ontology which involves a serious ontological commitment."³⁷ The use of words in ordinary language determines our ontology by identifying particulars. In this sense it can be said, after Strawson, that particulars compose ontology. Strawson has been established this theory with the help of reference and communication and also by means of the concept of identification. Like early Wittgenstein, Strawson, however, does not think that here underlies a structural isomorphism between the structure of language and the structure of particulars. Even though Strawson with the influence of Kant admits categories as preconceive notion but like early Wittgenstein he does not claim any structural shape regarding language as well as reality. His idea is rather that the inclusion of a particular within our ontology is determined by linguistic phenomenon. In this regard, Strawson emphasizes on successful communication. According

³⁶Ibid., p.4.

³⁷ Ibid., p.4

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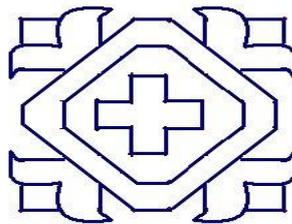
to Strawson, success in this context is determined by fruitful communication in terms of identification of particular between the speaker and the hearer. Communication in Strawsonian opinion could be fruitful only when the hearer can identify the particular which is referred to by the speaker. Strawson claims that when the hearer is successful to identify a particular being referred to by the speaker, the speaker thereby earns the right to include this particular in his ontology. This is made possible simply because of the fact that the *same sector* has been occupied by both the speaker as well as the hearer. That means, it can be said alternatively, that the sector occupied by the particular should be uniquely related to the sector which the speaker and the hearer themselves occupy.

We have already stated that identification of particular is made possible because there is a single, unified, core system of relation in which everything or event has a place. Strawson, in this regard, has claimed that there is a system of spatial and temporal relation in which every particular is uniquely related to other particular. But, there must be a *process of arrangement* of particulars in space and time. The disorganized isolated data, according to Kant, collected through sensibility would not produce knowledge unless they are categorized by the active faculty of understanding. Very similar to Kant, one may notice a similar idea when the spatio-temporal framework is discovered as a passive scheme through which we receive our experience of particulars. Strawson's point is that knowledge in the true sense requires identification. He discovers that there is a relation of dependence between the identification of one class of particular with another. In fact, Strawson does not forget to remember that one cannot identify a class of particulars without a prior identification of another class of particulars. In this sense, he brings the division of basic and non-basic particulars. According to Strawson, one class of particular may be far more basic than another class of particular. This amounts to an epistemic arrangement done by our cognitive apparatus. In this regard, it

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has been observed, “The active imposition of the category of understanding which we find in Kant is here conceived as a process of arrangement according to identifiability dependence in Strawson philosophy.”³⁸

What then are the basic particulars according to Strawson? *Material bodies and person, according to Strawson, are considered basic particulars.* They are basic in the sense that they can be identified independently. Moreover, they are called basic because they can answer perfectly to the character of the unified spatio-temporal framework. When Strawson inclines to say about spatio-temporal framework he does not take it to be a system where all particulars find their homes. His understanding of spatio-temporal conceptual scheme is predominantly linked with basic particulars by virtue of their fundamental characteristics. The framework is admitted spatio-temporal and material objects are three dimensional endured through time. Thus, according to Strawson, only material bodies meet the condition of three dimensionality can constitutes the framework. Accordingly Strawson conclude by saying that only material bodies are basic particulars (basic reality). Thus we can say that the relationship between language and reality; after Strawson, is made possible through successful communication between the speaker and the hearer. Only in the basis of successful communication the hearers can identify the particulars, basic or non-basic, which are the nominees of reality. In such a situation, the speaker can include this particular in his ontology.



³⁸Ibid., p. 6.