

Chapter - 1

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation would study the 'philosophical relevance of language'. The phrase *philosophical relevance of language* suggests something ~~of~~ depth and expanse, since Language may be relevant to philosophy broadly in two ways. Corresponding to these two ways of relevance there develop the philosophy of language and linguistic philosophy. The former takes language as a subject of philosophical inquiry. It is true that language cannot be a philosopher's object of inquiry until it is considered as an instrument for describing the world. In philosophy of language we consider such general features of language as meaning, reference and truth. The point of course is that such a study of language does not lead to the solution of philosophical problems. It is not the case that a philosophical study of language in its various aspects has to be undertaken in the hope of solving problems of philosophy which could not be done otherwise. We use language to refer to things, to mean things, to say things about the world which we claim to be true. So philosophy of language, in dealing with meaning and reference, seeks to explain certain facts, viz., language refers to the world, and it has meaning, and says something true about the world.

Linguistic philosophy, on the other hand, is a philosophical method. It is a method of solving philosophical problems or of clearing the slum of

problems in the philosophical field, ^{since} it has been held that language to a great extent and if it is employed unguardingly generates unworthy problems in philosophy. Linguistic philosophy works for eliminating the problems or the pseudo-problems in philosophy.

One cannot sharply distinguish between philosophy of language and linguistic philosophy, because the person doing the later must be starting with a definite conception of language - about how language is related to the world, what language means.

In this project we shall be concerned with linguistic philosophy, i.e., with language as a philosophical method. We may be permitted to justify ourselves in restricting the enquiry to linguistic philosophy on the ground that philosophy of language is hardly invoked inalienably by philosophy. Philosophy may very well do without it; that would only have narrowed down the scope of philosophy. But linguistic philosophy, in our opinion, is indispensable as a philosophical method. Once philosophers have discovered that the problems of philosophy are basically linguistic, it appears that this can only be taken care of by a method which works by analysing language. Philosophy cannot get rid of its age-old problems, but they stand to be solved. And if the problems are found to have their roots in language, more precisely in the defects and pitfalls of language, then language itself must be closely attended to.

Philosophy hence calls for a method that will answer to the

contemporary demand for solving philosophical problems. Linguistic philosophy is thus an unavoidable exercise in philosophy.

Modern Anglo-American philosophy is said to have, taken a *linguistic turn*, and the philosophers are persuaded to believe that the problems of philosophy are essentially linguistic in character and these can be solved on the linguistic plane, and it is held that philosophical statements are not factual statements about physical objects or about perception or about mind.

That philosophy has to do with language may be shown in different ways. It is shown, in the first place, that philosophical statements are not results of empirical investigation. Secondly, philosophers often come to opposite conclusions although the same fact is available to them. Thirdly, it is said that philosophical theories often imply logical impossibility of what is factually possible¹. Moore also emphasised that a philosophical statement is really a recommendation of a more correct language to describe a fact. Russell made the philosophical statement: "All that one ever sees when one looks at a thing is part of one's own brain."² Moore interpreted it as meaning: "Whenever one looks at a thing it is really more correct language to say that one sees part of one's brain, than to say that one

¹Ambrose, Alice: "Linguistic Approaches to Philosophical Problems" in *The Linguistic Turn*, Edited by Richard Rorty, The University of Chicago and London; 1967, pp.147- 155.

²Ibid., p.111.

sees the thing in question ."³ If the above consideration are correct then it follows that the philosopher must engage himself in a linguistic exercise.

There is a second way in which the linguistic character of philosophical problems can be demonstrated. As a matter of fact linguistic philosophy is an aftermath of the logical positivistic movement. The philosophers who brought themselves under the aegis of logical positivism were convinced that the basic problem of philosophy is to detect meaningless statements and thereby to reject metaphysics which is a body of such statements. It was found by them that metaphysics in the desired sense, had come to be incorporated within the body of philosophy, and language rather than anything else had been at fault^{for} the alleged unsubstantiality of metaphysical locutions.

The philosophers who thus come to consider the problems of philosophy to be linguistic in this way have been under the influence of **Vienna Circle** whose motive had been to identify genuine scientific sentences, which for the circle was the model of meaningful sentences.

Thus the task of philosophy came to be identified with the act of distinguishing meaningful sentence from the meaningless ones, whereby metaphysics is eliminated. In fact the business of philosophy for the logical positivists was to destroy metaphysics - a task which required them to

³Ibid.,p.114.

examine language. This idea also finds expression in Wittgenstein's⁵ writings. In **The Blue and Brown Books**, he says that the characteristic of a metaphysical question is that we express an unclarity about the grammar of words in the form of a scientific question. Philosophy seeks to achieve clarity. The clarity is achieved if we attend to language carefully.

Since language in its original form deceives or misleads us into a false ontology, it must be revised and given such a form which would be faithful to the ontology which it promises to represent. Language is thus relevant to philosophy in two senses which are closely related. It is relevant because it must be studied if metaphysics or a false ontology is to be eliminated. It is relevant again in a second sense. It may be granted that the nature of philosophical speculation is linguistic. By this one may not mean that philosophy, or for the matter, language undertaken for philosophical investigation has no relation to fact. Language does refer to reality. But what philosophy does is to make certain linguistic recommendations. This is illustrated by the introduction of sense - data language by Ayer. He tells us that the introduction of sense - data is not an empirical discovery, but it introduces a new way of talking about the world. Philosophy thus is believed to be engaged in making linguistic recommendations.

We have seen that there is a second way of demonstrating that language is philosophically relevant. It has been found by many that language, which is believed to be intended to represent the structure of

reality actually misrepresents it. Consequently, the need is felt to look into the deficiency of language which is responsible for the distorted and misleading character of reality which it often represents. The deficiency lies in the surface structure of language which is practically adhered to when one wants to know reality through this medium. Consequently, the syntax of ordinary language has been replaced by a new syntax which is strictly logical and thus an artificial language comes into existence. The language which takes the place of ordinary language is believed to be ideal for it alone can give us a faithful picture of reality.

The efficiency of such an ideal language has not been agreed upon by all. For some philosophers it is not necessary to revise and improve upon ordinary language. Ordinary language is quite all right as it stands and is capable of revealing reality for us.

A review of linguistic revisionism would show that for some philosophers prefer to deal with the problems of philosophy through the linguistic medium that we ordinarily have. These philosophers don't recommend revision on at least two fundamental grounds: One is that ordinary language with all its meanings and nuances refuses to be accommodated within the straight jacket of artificial language. Secondly, it has been gradually found that ordinary language is all right so far as it goes and it provides a workable instrument for dealing with the problems of philosophy. The most important philosophers of this group are Austin and

Strawson. The name of Austin is particularly relevant here because he has examined ordinary language with a view to doing linguistic phenomenology. Thus although Austin is not a member of the linguistic revisionist group of thinkers, nevertheless, he shares a common idea with them, namely, that language is relevant to philosophy because it reveals ontology to us .

All this is a matter of history. What is important is to notice that the philosophers who deal with language proceed with certain convictions. For example , the point of departure of the logical positivists is that reality or ontology is basically empirical and consequently any sentence which points to entities that fall beyond the ambit of this sensible word should be rejected as non-sense. The positivist's rejection of *substance* and *being*, Ryle's reputation of Platonism, Wittgenstein's limitation of language testify their strict adherence to an empiricistic ontology.

It is in this background that the statement of Wittgenstein must be understood - "Philosophy is not a thing, but an activity The result of philosophy is not a number of "Philosophical propositions" but to make propositions clear ."4 Clarity must be sought in philosophy. Clarity is another name of understandability. Understandability in its turn is defined in terms of the relation between a proposition and matters of fact. The

⁴In The introduction of Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico Philosophicus; edited by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness; Routledge & Kegan Pal, New York: The Humanities. Press, 1961, p. XII.

concept of *Clarity* and *Understandability* are thus empirically oriented concepts.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* shows the peculiar way in which language can be relevant for philosophy. Wittgenstein thinks that the structure of language should correspond to the structure of reality on the basis of his conviction that the world divides itself into facts. The syntactical similarity expected by Wittgenstein to hold between language and reality requires him to have the conception of the world which he actually has. But it is perfectly conceivable that a philosopher would describe the world in quite a different way. Heidegger, for example, presents a picture of the world which is a totality of equipments - a conception which is meaningful in the context of the notion of *Dasein*. If the picture of the world which we find in Heidegger is accepted, it is doubtful if the *Tractarian* conception of language can be entertained.

The point is that language has often been found to be relevant to philosophy, but this relevance can be meaningful, only in the background of certain philosophical ideas. For example, it is really a matter of linguistic decision how we should define reality or ontology. That it is a genuine question is proved by Wittgenstein's wavering position in this regard. We do not know whether the words *world* and *reality* stand for the same thing. But if the relevance in question comes to depend on a decision then no solution would claim unanimity.

Further, there are philosophers who are of course exposed to a sort of arbitrariness when they limit their ontology to the empirical field. They proceed from a hypothesis that language can describe reality. When it fails, as it happens in the case of ordinary language philosophers, they escape the difficulty by constructing a new artificial language which for them would be an adequate instrument for describing reality. Language thus takes on an artificial look and thereby shows itself to have the expected isomorphism with reality. It may be possible to demonstrate a structural affinity between the structure of the constructed language and the structure of the world. Unfortunately, the language thus developed is just a replacement. Perhaps one language has little similarity to the language which it replaces. It has been gradually noticed that logical empiricism has invented philosophically irrelevant theories and works on a language which develops from a prior ontological commitment.

It may be noticed that logical positivists have been inspired in their dealing with language by the idea that a criterion for meaningfulness must be invented. The principle of verification which has been applied to language has been invented in the background of a certain notion of meaningfulness which appeared attractive to them on account of their typical scientific outlook. The question whether meaningfulness should be approached from a scientific point of view is open to criticism. The theory of meaning developed after the publication of Wittgenstein's **Philosophical**

Investigation has proved the inadequacy of the so-called scientific notion of meaningfulness.

Again, examination of language has engaged the attention of many philosophers as language is found by them to be ontologically misleading. Ryle's essay on this issue is a glaring example of this conviction. But how do we know that a language misleads? Can linguistic investigation by itself indicate that we are deceived? Do we really know simply by investigating logic that there is a difference between *existence* and properties of things? Copi remarks quite reasonably, it seems, that "no logic took its present form because Kant had already pointed out that important difference."⁵ It appears therefore that the problems of philosophy are settled on the basis of philosophical insight and not on the basis of investigation into logic. It appears therefore that language is relevant to philosophy only secondarily. It is a way of showing things which are already shown.

The construction of an artificial language disappeared from the philosophy of one who was one of its ardent advocates. Wittgenstein's **Philosophical Investigations** makes an attempt to show that language can still be relevant to philosophy even if it is ordinary language. The belief still lingers that there are such things as philosophical relevance. He holds that

⁵Copi, Irving M. "Language Analysis and Metaphysical Inquiry", in **The Linguistic Turn**, edited by Richard Rorty, The University of Chicago; Chicago and London; 1967;p131.

the most common form of philosophical non-sense arises not when a word is being used outside any language-game at all, but when it is used in a language-game other than the one appropriate to it. It seems that one has to do the language game which is appropriate to a certain word. Wittgenstein makes a painstaking attempt to give a fullest list of language game in the **Philosophical Investigations**. But there seems to be something artificial in fixing the language game in which a word is used. We cannot deny that in many cases language games are not the forms of language with which a child begins to make use of words. It is not true that the study of language game is the study of primitive forms of language or primitive language. It seems to be a study of any form of use of language against the background or a context of a form of life. Consequently, it will not be reasonable to hold that ordinary language is really more than ordinary when it is proved to be relevant to the purpose of philosophy .

Although customarily ordinary language philosophy is described as a school making use of the method of linguistic analysis, it is very much doubtful if all the philosophers belonging to this so-called school have an identical motivation in analysing ordinary language. Austin, for example, does not find ordinary language relevant to philosophy, just because it serves to dissolve philosophical non-sense. For the later Wittgenstein, the method of drawing a limit to the world is to show that there is nothing lying beyond it. Hence ordinary language is not directly exposing the world for

these philosophers. Austin, on the other hand, announces that he is doing linguistic phenomenology. ⁶ The study of ordinary language from the appropriate perspective would reveal the proper ontology. Clearly, the motivation of Austin behind the examination of language is different from that of Wittgenstein. Hence for Austin, the philosophical relevance of language is in the context of exposing reality to us.

But this again is questionable. It is doubtful if ordinary language as it stands is a sure way of exposing the structure of reality. In his essay "*A Plea for Excuses*", Austin opens by speaking of *The Crux of the Last Word*. He expresses his doubt if ordinary language is adequate enough to do the job for which it is used. He says explicitly that ordinary language "can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded."⁷ *The Snag of the Last Word* is clear enough to indicate that ordinary language is not thought to be philosophically relevant because it is not efficacious.

At the back of every theory one could notice a more crucial conviction. The conviction is that language is somehow related to reality. Now this is a proposition which is difficult to understand.

The concept of 'reality' or 'ontology' is a difficult concept. The

⁶Austin, J. L. "A Plea for Excuses", in *Ordinary Language*, edited by V. C. Chappell, Prentice-Hall, 1964, p.47.

⁷Ibid., p. 49.

word 'reality' has often been used to mean transcendental or metaphysical reality. If it be so then reality may very well be ineffable. We do not have any linguistic equipment which would be suitable to a description of such transcendental reality. If, again we choose to define reality to mean everything empirical then it may be that language reveals reality. The point is that what is to be meant by the term 'reality' is a matter of linguistic decision. As J. N. Mohanty has remarked in one of his articles "how can we discuss the relation between language and reality; if giving a meaning to 'reality' is a matter of linguistic decision?"⁸ He further remarks that " what one need ...is to get beyond language to some non-linguistic experience so that it may be worthwhile attempting to correlate that to language ".⁹

But philosophy has to start somewhere. It may not sound culpably arbitrary if one begins by defining reality as signifying this everyday world of ours. One may then start speculating about the relation between language and reality .

But the problem lies elsewhere. How should we take the world of ours? It is not always common sense that does the job. As a matter of fact when we come to philosophy we find that different philosophers have described the world in widely different ways . Wittgenstein of *Tractatus*

⁸Mohanty, J. N. "Language and Reality" in *Language and Reality*, edited by J.L.Mehta, BHU, 1964, p.2.

⁹Ibid, p.2

has described the world as a totality of facts and not of things¹⁰ and this is demanded particularly by his philosophical concept of description .

- o But when we come to Peter Strawson we get an altogether different sort of description of the world. The world for him is a totality of particulars¹¹ which we know sensibly and refer to others in an individuating way.

Why this difference in description? This variation in the description of the world is accountable by referring to the conceptual structure which a man operates in his knowledge of the world. Wittgenstein believes that the world must be describable and the limit of description is the limit of the world. We describe in language, in sentences. What corresponds to such sentence must be facts and not things. Wittgenstein's motive is individuation as we find in Strawson. But the former wants to individuate the world to distinguish it linguistically from alternative worlds. Strawson, on the other hand , wants to individuate one's expressions which are intended to refer to a particular. Of course, Strawson has succeeded to individuate particulars by relating them to other particulars through space and time; thereby he has described the world as composed of fact. But it happens when there is

¹⁰Wittgenstein, Ludwig: **Tractatus Logico Philosophicus**, edited by D.E. Pears and B. F. McGuinness; Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York, The Humanities Press, 1961, T. I. P.7

¹¹Strawson, P. F. :**Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics**; Mettuen: London; 1959; p.9.

reduplication of particulars. In other cases a particular can be known to be unique in itself and there is no difficulty in describing the world as a totality of particulars.

What we intend to suggest that the way in which a philosopher should describe the world is again a matter of decision which is not linguistic, but of course philosophical. Thus when a philosopher relates language to reality he does so on the ground of a *decision* which is particularly his and may meet with an alternative in which case the relation of language to the world takes a new character.

Does language refer? Philosophers like Frege and Quine have established that one of the essential function of language is to refer. This referring function of language relates language to extra-linguistic reality. Philosophers have constructed theories to show how language is hooked on to reality. But the more fundamental question is :Does language by itself carry any guarantee that the reference must find a foothold in reality? The answer must be given in the negative. Language refers; but whether the *intended reference* is fulfilled in reality is a question that remains undecided. The relation of language to reality is not thus established through the referring function of language. We do not really know *what nails language to reality*. The problem is genuine and must be settled before the relevance to language in describing reality is ascertained.

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Even if we grant that language represents reality, this is not the only way in which the philosophical relevance of language can be established. We find here three different ways in which language is a representation of the extra-linguistic, if we leave the word *reality* at this stage.

The first is the position of the linguistic philosophers for whom, correctly or incorrectly, language is a picture of the structure of reality.

The second is contained in the conception of Strawson's descriptive metaphysics in developing which he practically examines language with a view to laying bare the ordinary man's conceptual framework which he must operate in knowing the particulars which compose the world. For Strawson, therefore, language is philosophically relevant - the relevance being particularly *epistemological*. *His descriptive metaphysics is as he says, Kant revisited only his method is not Kantian* .

It is note- worthy that the philosophical relevance of language is conceived in such a way that it sends us back from ontology to epistemic schema.

The appearance of Chomsky in philosophical world is surprisingly novel. He considers language as worthy of philosophical attention not because it reveals reality for us or because it displays the conceptual structure which lies submerged in language, but because it goes a long way to tell us about man's innate competence for the use of language which after

all describes and communicates. Man is inconceivable apart from his linguistic competence. There is a world around him - a world which is known and described. The world, as Wittgenstein said is describable. It shows the importance of language so far as our stay in the world is concerned. This shows the importance of Chomsky's discovery of the character of man's inner - world which operates in the linguistic competence.

Summarily speaking the whole trend of linguistic philosophy has had various presuppositions, and it is these that we propose to lay bare. It appears that, linguistic philosophy has been working under the bias or pressure of certain preconceptions and predilections. There have been certain crucial *decisions* which are either linguistic or philosophical. We propose to decipher and throw some light on what seems to lie in the background of the philosopher's conviction that to talk about the philosophical relevance of language is not to talk nonsense.