## CHAPTER V

## Quine, Logical Positivists and Kant's Thesis

### [ I ]

The question 'Does synthetic a priori propositions exist ?' may be restated as : Are all a priori propositions analytic ? Both Kant and the logical positivists recognise a relation between the concept of 'analyticity' and that of 'a priority'. Again, they admit another relation, a relation between necessity and analyticity. Inspite of their recognition of these relations, we find Kant asserting a thesis which is opposed by the positivists. We may naturally ask about the relations between :

(i) necessity and analyticity; and

(ii) a priority and analyticity,

Three possible answers are :

(a) The first and the second conjuncts in each case, i.e., (i) and (ii) are co-extensive.

(b) The second conjunct implies the first in each case.

(c) The first conjunct implies the second in each case.

Among these possible answers Kant accepts only (b), a logical positivist all the three and Quine none, for Quine does not think that there are analytic propositions. As Kant accepts (b), he is entitled to admit synthetic a priori propositions and he, in fact, asserts that there are such propositions. By accepting (a) and (c) a positivist loses his right to recognise synthetic a priori propositions and in fact he denies that there are such propositions. For Quine the question whether some synthetic propositions are a priori does not arise, since for him there is no absolute analytic or synthetic proposition at all. Here lies an important difference between a positivist and Quine. The positivists have an absolute conception of analytic or synthetic propositions. Judging by that conception they identify or reject some judgments to be synthetic. They reject, e.g., the proposition '7 + 5 = 12' to be synthetic, but by applying their own standard they characterise it as analytic.

A.J.Ayer writes, "a proposition is analytic when its validity depends soley on the definitions of the symbols it contains, and synthetic when its validity is determined by the facts of experience. Thus, the proposition, 'There are ants which have established a system of slavery' is a synthetic proposition. For we can not tell whether it is true or false merely by considering the definitions of the symbols which constitute it. We have to resort to actual observation of the behaviour of ants. On the other hand, the proposition 'Either some ants are parasistic or none are' is an analytic proposition. For one need not resort to observation to discover that there either are or are not ants which are parasistic"[1].

Quine, on the other hand, refuses to call the judgment' '7 + 5 = 12' synthetic or analytic, for he does not recognise any 'analytic-synthetic' distinction among propositions. This theory of Quine, of course, may be interpreted as an opposition to Kant's thesis that some propositions are synthetic a priori.

[ II ]

Let us take up logical positivism first. Logical positivism is a brand of the Philosophy of Analysis. It

owes its origin to, what is more popularly known as, the the Vienna Circle which consists of some students and teachers of the University of Vienna[2]. The philosophy of the Vienna Circle, logical positivism, is also characterised as logical empiricism; and the fact that it is a combination of 'the empiricism of the nineteenth century and the logical' methods that were developed, since that time' is quite clear from this characterisation. The function of philosophy, logical positivism holds, is the logical analysis and clarification of meaning. It may be noted that the positivists' dissatisfaction with Kant's distinction between synthetic and analytic propositions lies on their analysis of the notion of 'necessity'. The major motive behind their philosophy of analysis is the elimination of metaphysics, the checking of the unlimited victory of speculative philosophy. The principle that helped them in this elimination is called 'the principle of verification' which means that a sentence to be meaningful must be empirically verifiable.

The principle of verification has sometimes been used in the 'strong' sense and at some other times in the 'weak' sense. 'A proposition is said to be verifiable, in the strong sense of the term', says A.J.Ayer, 'if, and only if, its truth could be conclusively established in experience. But it is verifiable, in the weak sense, if it is possible for experience to render it probable'.

This principle of verification is believed to owe its origin to L.Wittgenstein who holds that 'to understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true'[3]. Meaning is treated to be something not different from truth-value, and the logical positivists refer only to extensional logic in their arguments. The principle of verification, the positivists believe, compel them to admit only two kinds of propositions, viz, analytic and empirical. In other words, they had to reject Kant's thesis of synthetic a priori propositions.

With reference to Kant's thesis 'some judgments are synthetic a priori' the discussion of positivism is very much relevant, though it is, perhaps, true that there is no form of empiricism which does not go against Kant's thesis of 'synthetic a priori'. Positivism does not present just an alternative thesis to that of Kant, it rather goes to the extreme position that synthetic a priori propositions are logically impossible. M.Schlick, a leading member of this brand of empiricism holds"... as a matter of principle, all propositions are either synthetic a posteriori or tautologous; synthetic a priori propositions seem to it to be a logical impossibility"[4]. Thus if logical empiricism is true, Kant's thesis loses all possibility of survival.

For the sake of convenience we may split up the thesis of logical positivism into four sub-thesis, as done by B. Blanshard, viz, (i) all necessary statements are reports of linguistic usage; (ii) they represent conventions; (iii) they are analytic and (iv) they do not say anything about fact.

These sub-theses are inter connected and they are, I think, so much inter connected that anyone of them may be derived from the rest.

(i) To see that a necessary proposition is a report of linguistic usage let us consider the proposition 'all bachelors are unmarried' which will be recognised by all as necessary, though not as analytic. Quine, for example, is not ready to characterise this proposition as analytic. Unlike the rationalists, the positivists hold that necessary propositions do not reveal relations between things, but between our own ideas or meanings. In the proposition 'all bachelors are unmarried' we do not claim, the positivists hold, to have any insight of a relation between two attributes, referred by the expressions 'bachelor' and 'unmarried'. What the proposition really declares is that we are using these two expressions with the same reference. This will be

clear if we universally quantity this proposition as '(X)(Bx⊃ux)', which means that if there is anything 'X' to which we apply 'B' then we should not deny the application of 'u' with reference to that 'X'.

In the same way, the positivists hold, the proposition 'A material thing can not be in two places at once' expresses the conditions under which we should be prepared to use the words 'material thing' and not 'a profound and universal insight' into what being a material thing entails. 'The question, "what is the nature of a material thing ?" says Professor Ayer, 'is, like anyother question of that form, a linguistic question. And the propositions which are set forth in answer to it are linguistic propositions, even though they may be expressed in such a way that they may seem to be factual. They are propositions about the relationship of symbols, and not about the properties of things which the symbols denote'[5]. Thus a necessary proposition states about the usage of linguistic expressions.

(ii) The necessary propositions are linguistic conventions. A necessary proposition, as stated above, does not express a relation between things, but a relation between symbols or linguistic expressions. As symbols have no meaning of their own, the relations between the symbols can not be something unalterable or fixed. The relation between,

say, 'bachelor', and 'unmarried' will hold good so long we stick to our determination to use these symbols in the fashion we now actually do. Thus if we try to deny the proposition 'all bachelors are unmarried' without altering our determination or convention regarding the use of these expressions, we will be contradicting ourselves. And it is to this fact, the positivists hold, that the necessary propositions owe their necessity. Conventions have no intrinsic necessity of their own, they are man-made. The necessary propositions are conventions and this is true, so the positivists believe, even about the principles, of 'logic and mathematics'. 'The principles of logic and mathematics', Ayer holds, 'are true universally simply because we never allow them to be anything else'[6].

The theory that necessary propositions are linguistic conventions admits of two versions, an extreme and a moderate. According to the extreme version, a necessary proposition states just the rules for the transformation of one set of symbols into another. The necessary propositions, are verbal propositions and this surely amounts to saying that the necessary propositions are empirical statements about how words are actually used. This is definitely a major defect of this version of the linguistic thesis. It abolishes the distinction between the necessary and the empirical propositions, a distinction that is asserted by the positivists themselves. Ayer, when he first expressed his linguistic

theory of necessary propositions, was a supporter of this extreme version. But latter on he modifies his earlier version and adopts a moderate one instead. He now holds that necessary propositions are not themselves linguistic rules but are rather consequences of linguistic rules, i.e., conventions. 'Just as it is a mistake to identify a priori propositions with empirical propositions about language', Ayer holds, 'so I now think that it is a mistake to say that they are themselves linguistic rules'[7].

This linguistic thesis of the positivists is an attack on Kant's thesis that some a priori propositions are synthetic. But any philosopher who attacks Kant's thesis does not necessarily entertain this linguistic thesis of necessary propositions. Lewis, for example, denies the existence of synthetic a priori propositions but he holds that the necessity of an analytic proposition is not grounded in linguisticconventions, for if the truth-value of a statement is affected by the change of linguistic rules, the statement is not necessary but empirical.

(iii) The necessary propositions, the positivists hold, are analytic. By characterising necessary propositions as analytic they want to mean that such propositions do not state anything new but simply explicate what we already mean. Here the expression 'nothing new' refers to logical novelty and so psychological novelty is beside the point[8]. The

conclusion of a deductive inference is Psychologically new to the person who makes the inference, for otherwise he would not need infer at all. But this does not mean that the conclusion is not contained in the premises. But what is the test of this lack of logical novelty, i.e., of analyticity ? As the positivists are conscious of the fact that all propositions are not of the subject-predicate form, they generally prefer to say that a proposition is analytic if its truth follows simply from the meaning of the terms. But a more formal test of analyticity, used by them, is that a proposition is analytic if the denial of it results in a self-contradiction. This test, it may be noted, has been used by Kant also. We can not deny an analytic proposition, says Kant, without self-contradiction.

Being influenced by Wittgenstein, the positivists identify analytical propositions with tautologies. As distinguished from a 'synthetic sentence', which communicate a state of affairs 'an analytic sentence, or to put it more clearly, a tautology', writes Schlick, 'has a quite different function; it represents only a purely formal transformation of equivalent expressions, and serves, therefore, only as a technical device within a proof, a deduction, a calculus'[9].

A tautology has been taken by the positivists to mean a statement which is composed of some simpler statements in such a way that its truth-value is not affected by the

truth-values of those simpler ones. The proposition 'either it is raining or it is not raining' is a tautology in this sense, and this is an analytical proposition also. But this definition of tautology does not adequately apply to all analytical propositions recognised by them, e.g., to the proposition 'all bodies are extended'. But the positivists never say that some analytical propositions are not tautologies. They rather use the term 'tautology' in another sense also to make the expressions 'analytic' and 'tautologous' co-extensive. In this second sense, a proposition is a tautology if it is true under every possible circumstance. In other words, the truth-value of a tautology is not affected by any possible change in the circumstances.

The positivists hold that if any proposition is really a priori, it must be analytic or tautologous. A proposition is a priori if its truth-value can be determined without any appeal to experience. And we are not required to appeal to experience in determining the validity of that proposition which does not state any fact of experience. The propositions that do not state any fact of experience, i.e., which are true under all circumstances are tautologies. Thus the positivists maintain that all a priori propositions without exception are tautologies or analytic.

The positivists argue that "while it is true that we have a priori knowledge of necessary propositions, it is

not true, as Kant supposed, that any of these necessary propositions are synthetic. They are without exception analytic propositions, or, in other words, tautologies"[10].

(iv) Necessary propositions, the possitivists assert, are non-factual, they state nothing about the realm of existent things and events. No necessary proposition, Ayer holds, 'provide any information about any matter of fact. In other words, they are entirely devoid of factual content. And it is for this reason that no experience can confute them'[11]. From the last statement of Ayer it is clear that he can not think of any explanation of the fact that 'the necessary propositions are not confuted by experience' other than the hypothesis that such propositions are factually vacuous. But what can or can not be that can not be settled by what the positivists can or can not think. We may, for example, say that a given necessary proposition is not confuted by experience for the simple reason that it is one of the conditions that make experience possible. This, of course, does not mean that the thesis that the necessary propositions are non-factual can not be justified by other means.

## [ IV ]

Both Wittgenstein and the positivists are of the opinion that no a priori propositions are synthetic, i.e.,

all a priori propositions are analytic. Let us present their argument in a series of four statements, all of which are shared by them.

(1) All a priori propositions are necessary.

(2) All necessary propositions are factually vacuous, i.e., lack in factual content.

(3) No propositions which lack in factual content are synthetic.

(4) No a priori propositions are synthetic, which may be restated as 'all a priori propositions are analytic', provided we accept the expressions 'analytic' and 'synthetic' to be contradictory terms.

The premises of this argument and the way in which they are arranged are such that anybody who accepts the premises is driven thereby to accept the conclusion also. The second point to be noted about this argument is that Kant accepts all the premises save (2), and ultimately he affirms a statement which is not simply different from (4), i.e., the conclusion but contradictory to it.

Thus the second premise of the above argument, 'all necessary propositions are factually vacuous' creates a major difference between Kant and the positivists. In connection with this proposition we may ask two relevant questions :

(a) The first question is about the status of the proposition. Is this proposition (i) analytic a priori, (ii) synthetic a priori, (iii) synthetic a posteriori or (iv) simply an arbitrary convention ?

(b) The second question concerns the justification or basis of it. Why should we accept it to be true ? If we can not justify it, it can not be used to justify the conclusion also. But why do we accept it to be true ?

Let us take the second question first. The logic of the positivists is this. If a proposition states any situation or state of affairs, a change in the state of affairs or facts will make a change in the truth-value of the proposition also. But the truth-value of a necessary proposition, say, 'it is either raining or not raining' remains unaffected in all circumstances. Hence, it states nothing at all about the circumstances.

Let us take this argument for granted. Here the positivists are affirming two propositions to be always true. One is that 'a necessary proposition does not change' and the other one is that 'circumstances may change'. The second proposition is expected to cover all possible circumstances, and thus it is always true, no matter what circumstance it is we are referring to. In other words,

this is a necessary proposition, but about circumstances. But this is self-defeating, for the second premise, i.e., (2) asserts that all necessary propositions are factually vacuous. Thus the argument does not establish what it intends to establish.

It is, of course, to be noted here that in case of causal relations it seems reasonable to hold that if a proposition states any situation or state of affairs, a change in thestate of affairs or facts will make a change in the truth-value of the proposition also. A supposed cause of a given event is rejected in favour of another on the plea that the absence or presence of that event does not make any corresponding change in that supposed cause.

But what is true in connection with causal relations may not hold good with reference to necessary propositions. And the empiricists, in fact, do not identify causal relations with the necessity of necessary propositions, which are, as stated by the positivists, identical with analytical propositions.

Let us take up the first question now, the question regarding the status of the proposition 'All necessary propositions are factually vacuous'. This proposition should not be an arbitrary convention, for an arbitrary convention, lacking in truth-value, can not be put in support of any truth. Thus if the second premise is an

arbitrary convention, the conclusion of the argument will be rendered unwarranted.

The proposition can not be synthetic a posteriori also, for in that case it is admitted that it may not be always true, and with such a premise, if we can at all arrive at any truth, it can not be more than a contingent proposition. But the conclusion of the above argument is intended to be always true.

It can not be analytic a priori, too. Because in that case it is useless in establishing the desired conclusion. An analytic a priori proposition, according to the positivists, is uninformative, but the conclusion of this argument has been intended to convey information. A proposition which itself does not convey information can not make any proposition, sustained by it, any more informative.

We are thus, left with the last alternative that the proposition in question is synthetic a priori. If I am not mistaken in including all the possible alternatives, we are to accept this last alternative, whether we like it or not. But it will be suicidal for the positivists to accept it, for this is what they try their best to avoid. They can not expect to establish the conclusion 'no a priori proposition is synthetic' by already recognising the existence of, at least, one such proposition.

[ v ]

The difference of opinion between Kant and the logical positivists regarding the existence of synthetic a priori propositions seems, to some extent, due to an ambiguity in the meaning of the expression 'to know'. Unlike the synthetic-analytic distinction, the a priori-a posteriori distinction is an epistemological one. To know a proposition a priori is to know it to be true independently of experience. But what do we mean by 'to know' ? To know and to imply are not exactly the same. If any proposition 'P' implies another proposition 'q', the implication certainly holds good whether we know it to be the case. Can we not claim to know something without knowing all the implications of it ? Do we know the meaning of '7 + 5' without knowing that it implies '12' ? If we do not then the positivists seem to be justified in asserting that the proposition '7 + 5 = 12' is not synthetic a priori. But if we answer the question affirmatively, Kant's thesis will be more plausible; and there are philosophers, like Ewing, who accepts Kant's thesis that some propositions are synthetic a priori. Ewing[12] does not accept it to be true that all a priori propositions are based on linguistic conventions and so are analytic in character. He criticises the positivists by holding that the very assertion that 'there are no synthetic a priori propositions' can convey any information

only if it is not a mere consequence of certain linguistic conventions, only if it is synthetic a priori.

Again, there are philosophers, like Quinton, who will argue against Kant, Quinton[13] holds that synthetic propositions can not be a priori. He explicitly states that if a proposition is true, it must be true either by virtue of definition or by virtue of experience. Synthetic propositions are, he holds, non-analytic propositions, and as an analytic proposition is true by virtue of its meaning or definition, a synthetic proposition is true only by virtue of experience. Again, an a priori proposition is non-empirical and as non-empirical propositions are true independently of experience, no a priori proposition can be true by virtue of experience. Thus an a priori proposition, so Quinton believes, can never be synthetic.

We may not agree with Quinton on the point that any proposition is true either by virtue of its meaning or by virtue of experience, for this point has not been established by him. But one thing is clear enough. Once we give our consent to it, Kant's thesis can not but be rejected, since his synthetic a priori propositions are neither true by definitions nor by experience. Kant's thesis may, however, survive if he no more claims that his synthetic a priori propositions are really propositions. Walsh, for example,

holds that synthetic a priori judgments are not judgments at all, for they are prescriptive in nature and so they are neither true nor false.

We may at this point, however, note Blanshard's objection against positivism[14]. He argues that if all logical laws are linguistic conventions and so arbitrary, we shall fail to explain why we do follow one kind of logic rather than another. Modern logic, I think, is not an alternative to the Traditional one, though it is more general than the latter in application. There can be different alternative linguistic rules but not different alternative logic. The law of contradiction, for example, is a condition of the possibility of intelligibility itself. We can have an alternative to it only at the cost of intelligibility.

## [ VI ]

Kant makes the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions in such a way that a priority ceases to be the monopoly of analytic propositions. The positivists find fault with this way of making the distinction and consequently they discard Kant's thesis that there are synthetic a priori propositions.

W. Quine goes a step further. He finds fault not only with the Kantian way of making the distinction but with any

possible effort in this direction. If, as Quine holds, no satisfactory distinction can be made between analytic and synthetic propositions, the question of subscribing to the thesis of 'synthetic a priori propositions' does not arise at all. Let us see how Quine proceeds.

Quine attacks the notion of analyticity. To make his point clear he makes a distinction between two types of analytic statements. Some analytic propositions are such that they are true and remain true under all reinterpretations of their components, other than logical particles. In other words, the truth-value of these propositions remain unaffected in all possible interpretations of the constituents. These analytic propositions are logically true. The proposition 'No unmarried man is married' or the proposition 'All birds are birds' is an example of this type.

Analytic statements, Quine writes, 'fall into two classes. Those of the first class, which may be called logically true, are typified by :

(1) No unmarried man is married.

The relevant features of this example is that it is not merely is true as it stands, but remains true under any and all reinterpretations of "man" and "unmarried". ...

But there is also a second class of analytic statements, typified by :

(2) No bachelor is married.

The characteristic of such a statement is that it can be turned into a logical truth by putting synonyms for synonyms; thus (2) can be turned into (1) by putting "unmarried man" for its synonym "bachelor".'[15]

The first type of analytic propositions is not a problem to Quine because it is explained by him with reference to logical truths, and he derives the notion of logical truth simply from a list of logical particles and the notion of truth itself. But the analytic propositions of the second type, Quine hold, are not by themselves logical truths, though it is possible to turn them into logical truths by simply substituting synonyms for synonyms. The proposition 'No bachelor is married' is an example of this type. The problem concerning the notion of 'analyticity' crops up at this point. How is this concept of 'synonymy',i.e., cognitive synonymy, which depends on words having the same meaning for thought rather than on words having simply the same denotation, to be explained ? In order to clarify the notion of analytic proposition we must explain the notion of 'synonymy'. But how are we to determine that the expressions, e.g., 'bachelor' and 'umnarried' are synonymous ? It is, of course, true that these two expressions are used as interchangeable expressions. But

synonymity, Quine holds, can not be explained as interchangeability. Interchangeability is a wider expression than synonymy. The expressions 'creature with a heart' and 'creature with kidneys' are interchangeable but they are interchangeable not because of any sameness of meaning but because of an accidental factor that they happen always to apply to the same thing. But the notion of snyonymy or, more precisely, cognitive synonymy does not depend on accidental factors. If the synonymy of 'bachelor' and 'unmarried' were dependent on accidental factors, the analytic proposition 'No bachelor is married' could not have been turned into a logical truth.

It might be suggested that the two expressions 'bachelor' and 'unmarried' are synonymous if the proposition 'No bachelor is married' is an analytic proposition. Synonymity may be explained, Quine holds, with reference to analyticity, but in that case our explanation will be something like circular, for we have taken the notion of synonymy to explain that of analyticity. Thus Quine is of the opinion that no satisfactory distinction can ever be made between analytic and synthetic propositions.

Quine's second thesis in connection with analyticity is that even if a distinction is made between analytic and synthetic propositions, the distinction could not be made

absolute. A proposition is analytic or synthetic only with reference to a particular system, certain contexts. Thus a proposition, as such, is neither analytic nor synthetic. This thesis is based on Quine's repudiation of the dogma of reductionism, which makes a sharp distinction between statements. There are no statements, it is said, 'that depend for their truth on a direct confrontation with experience'. Any distinction between different kinds of statements can, at best, be relative.

[ VII ]

A similar view is also held by Waismann. The proposition 'I see with my eyes', he maintains, may be interpreted as an analytic proposition and it may also be interpreted, with equal plausibility, as a synthetic one. If whatever I see with are called 'eyes', the proposition becomes an analytic one. Again, as it is a matter of fact that we see with our eyes and not with any other organs, the proposition should be taken to be synthetic. Thus waismann denies any sharp distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions.

If Quine is right, we can no more extent support to the thesis that there are synthetic a priori propositions. If no proposition is absolutely synthetic or if the analytic

-synthetic distinction is not at all tenable, Kant's thesis that some judgments are both synthetic and a priori can not be sustained.

It is, of course, not the case that Quine's theses have received general acceptance. Against both the theses of Quine objections may be raised. His first thesis is based on the failure to define the notion of synonymy. This failure, Grice and Strawson hold, is due to Quine's refusal to understand. The notions of analyticity, necessity and cognitive synonymy, they maintain, belong to the same family of terms. As we can not adequately explain any of these terms with reference to another term belonging to a separate family, we must take recourse to another term of the same family. But Quine will not accept 'as explanations of any one of them, accounts which involve reference to other members of the family'[16].

As regards Quine's second thesis it may be said that the rejection of the dogma of reductionism, by itself, does not make a sharp distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions impossible. Even if we accept the view that there is no statement which depends for its truth on a direct confrontation with experience, statement in which the factual component is everything, it does not follow that there is no statement in which the linguistic component is everything.

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