CHAPTER – 1

Analytic Philosophy : A Brief History

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Section – I

The Origin of Analysis

Twentieth century, since its dawn, has been witness to the rapidly changing scenes in various fields of science, technology, mathematics, and arts, as also in the realm of philosophy. A basic movement in philosophical positions has taken place around the turn of the century and is still continuing. It is the application of the method of analysis to philosophy, which brought a revolution in the thinking of philosophers. So, it would not be unfair to characterise our time as 'Age of Analysis' in philosophy.

The philosophy, which grew up around the early works of G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, first came to be known as 'Analytic Philosophy'. The development has been ably captured in A.J.Ayer's *Russell and Moore: The Analytical Heritage*,[1] as also in J.O.Urmson's *Philosophical Analysis: Its Development Between the Two World Wars*.[2] However, it would be wrong to assume that analytic philosophy began with their writings. Philosophers have been using analysis in their speculations either unknowingly or consciously

since the pre- Socratic period. The kind of analysis Plato employed in his famous dialogues *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* bear comparison with some works of much later philosophers like Russell and his famous pupil Wittgenstein. Similarities between the works of some other analysts and the works of Aristotle or Leibnitz or Locke, Berkeley and Hume have also been found. But what is meant when it is said that the present age is the 'Age of Analysis' is that, it is only in the present century that analytic techniques have come to dominate the philosophical thinking.

It would be worth pointing out, however, that not all contemporary philosophers had the same attitude towards philosophical analysis. Initially, the significance of philosophical analysis gained popularity mainly in England, and to some extent in America and Scandinavia. At that time this method had not many advocates in countries like France, Germany, Russia or in countries of the Far East, though the utility of analysis as a method of settling problems had drawn the attention of philosophers in these countries too. Subsequently, even in the countries where analytic philosophy was popular no single school of it could be discerned. There were many who approved of approaches different from the analytic one towards philosophising. Consequently, it cannot be said that the boundaries of analytic philosophy are very strictly or well defined.

Analytic philosophy is mainly concerned with the study of language and its complexities. The 'linguistic turn' is seen as the hallmark of analytic philosophy. There are basically three areas of language to which it pays attention. First, there was the realisation that words should be used correctly so as to remove confusion and ambiguity from philosophical disputes. In order to do so one must carefully scrutinise what is being said. The second priority was the construction of an artificial language, as a result of which symbolic logic developed. The last, but not the least, was the analysis of natural language so that philosophers could use it properly and accurately.

Philosophical analysis, though it concerns language, must be differentiated from other important studies of language. First of all, the task of the analytic philosopher should not be confused with that of the speculative philosopher. The former studies language primarily to facilitate himself to clarify and settle ambiguous philosophical questions with clarity; while the latter, when he studies language, does so to engage himself in thought about the metaphysical foundations of the universe. Secondly, the task of linguists, philologists, grammarians, lexicographers etc. also concerns the study of language. Their interest, however, is primarily in empirical investigation. The linguist is interested in discovering facts about how our language is used; the philologist deals with the science of language. The grammarian concerns himself with the science of sounds, the inflexions and constructions used in language and the

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lexicographer is the maker of dictionaries. But the work of the analytic philosopher is distinct from all these. While linguists, philologists etc are involved in the scientific study of language, the analytic philosopher studies language in order to lay bare and remove its doubts and uncertainties, which help him to deal effectively with philosophical problems. For, philosophical theses are, after all, put forth in language. What distinguishes analytic philosophy is that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language.

We must here try to understand what analytic philosophers precisely mean by the term 'analysis'. Is the use of the term in philosophy, the same as it is used in the realm of science? The answer, to some extent, is affirmative. To analyse, in general, means breaking up a complex into its simple parts to have a better knowledge of what is being analysed. The chemist, for example, analyses complex physical substances into simpler parts. In the same way, the philosopher breaks up ambiguous linguistic elements and studies their interrelations to know better the problems concerning them. I want to draw attention to a point before concluding this section. Distinction is often made between (1) Philosophy of Language, which is the philosophical study of language, especially its structure, grammar, semantics, etc., so that at the deeper level it merges with linguistics, (2) Linguistic Philosophy, which is the study of philosophically important concepts by analysing the linguistic usages of the

words and phrases related with or expressing the concept under study, and (3) Analytic Philosophy, which analyses philosophical concepts, but not necessarily via language but it may undertake analysis of a different kind based on experience as in logical positivism, or based on ontological constituents of the objects or facts presented by concepts or sentences as in Frege or logical atomism. But there is a good deal of overlapping among these philosophies. It has not been possible to hold on to these distinctions. Analytic philosophy and linguistic analysis can hardly be kept separate. This applies both to the formalists as well as ordinary language analysts. Again, the systematic view of the concepts of language, meaning, reference, truth, etc. which constitute the corpus of philosophical analysis, has brought out the logical structure of language. This reveals an intimate relationship between analytic philosophy and philosophy of language.

Section – II

The Early Analysts

Let us now contemplate what 'analysis' meant to the early analysts Moore and Russell. For Moore, analysis is a form of definition of concepts or propositions. In his idea of analysis there is an underlying distinction between words and concepts or sentences and propositions. Unlike Moore, Russell never stated

clearly what he meant by analysis. But from his writings it could be understood that for him also, analysis is a form of definition, but it could be either real or contextual. It may be either ontological or linguistic. On the other hand, for Moore, analysis is either real or conceptual definition, which is always ontological, never purely linguistic.

Among contemporary philosophers, Russell's name figures as the first and foremost practitioner of analytical technique. He was the first to present analysis as the most reasonable and precise method of philosophy. Born in 1872, he studied at Cambridge University and later became a lecturer there. One of the most well known philosophers to date, Russell's primary interest was in mathematics from where he deviated to philosophy. But throughout his long life (1872-1970) he has written on a variety of subjects ranging from mathematics, philosophy, and politics to fiction.

A year later than Russell, in 1873, George Edward Moore was born in London. He was Russell's fellow student at Cambridge and started teaching there in 1911. Though Moore has been called a 'philosopher's philosopher', his early studies were in Greek, Latin and German literature. He knew nothing of philosophy till he met Russell in the 1890's. Russell's introduction of analytical technique in philosophy must be due to his mathematical background. It is said that Russell was a reconstructor of empirical knowledge. Previously,

philosophers had a psychological approach to the problems of philosophy. Russell and Moore employed a new logical approach to empiricism developing out of the empirical system of Hume and critical philosophy of Kant. It was not an isolated movement but was historically linked with what had gone on before. Previously Hume and Kant had expounded a different kind of empiricism, but their outlook had been psychological.

It is to British philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) that the analytic philosophers are greatly indebted for their systems and views. According to Hume ideas are copies of impressions – true knowledge comes only from sense experience. The impressions we receive from external world are reproduced either as ideas of memory or ideas of imagination. Here, Hume borrowed from his predecessor, John Locke's theory of *unem nomen, unem nominatum*; one name, one thing. Hume wrote :

> First, when we analyse our thoughts or ideas, however compounded or sublime, we always find that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as we copied from a similar impression.[3]

Hume's denial of the objectivity of causal connection was also in keeping with this thesis. He argued that if one phenomenon precedes another, it couldn't be deduced that there is the relation of cause and effect between them. It is only

that, certain events occur in time and space in such a way that we call one the cause and the other the effect. Hume believed that our words have meanings because they are related to impressions and ideas. The impression and ideas that occur in our minds are responsible for making our utterances expressions of thought instead of mere sounds.

Another philosopher who tried to make philosophy scientific after Hume was Immanuel Kant (1724 –1804). Kant created a revolution in philosophy by stating that contrary to the existing system of asking how knowledge conforms to its object, we should presuppose that objects must conform to our knowledge. This theory is known as, and has the status of, Copernican Revolution in science. Kant also distinguished between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge. *A priori* knowledge is knowledge independent of experience whereas *a posteriori* knowledge is empirical.

After Kant, a different kind of philosophy arose in and around Great Britain, which was critical, rather than idealist in character. Another philosopher of German origin, Gottlob Frege, who was indisputably the father of modern mathematical logic, contributed significantly to the analytic movement through his work.

Frege distinguished philosophical logic from psychology on the one hand and from epistemology on the other. He paid attention at length to such notions as names, sentences and predicates. The novelty of his work has the application of mathematical expressions to different terms of ordinary language such as 'subject' and 'predicate'. The most celebrated among Frege's theses was his distinction between 'sense' and 'reference' of an expression, which led to another controversial theory of his that the reference of a sentence was its truth–value. More space would be devoted to Frege later in the course of this work. It should suffice for the present to say that in the development of his analytic philosophy Russell had borrowed from and dwelled much on these ideas of Frege. Frege's philosophy was not much known to the world during his own lifetime. It was mainly through Russell and some other philosophers of the English-speaking world that his thesis came to be noticed and discussed. It is worth noting that Frege's view have some resemblance with and may be said to be an improvement of the subject on which Russell's godfather J. S. Mill had already written in the nineteenth century.

In his major work *A System of Logic* written in 1843, John Stuart Mill starts with an analysis of language. Russell was much influenced by Mill's philosophy, which was based on the works of Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Mill was interested in science and logic and analysis for him meant description of the process of naming. He distinguished between two kinds of words. Words, like

proper names, were such that they had meaning by themselves whereas there were also words, which had meaning only in a context. Moore and Russell were both averse to the subjective psychologism of Mill, yet Mill's theory of proper names contributed to the development of philosophical analysis for it was the drawbacks of this view which analysts like Russell were most concerned to avoid.

During the later half of the nineteenth century, the predominant philosophy in Britain was neo-Hegeleanism, which was a form of idealism having its origin in Hegel's philosophical system. The philosopher whose thinking had a commanding influence upon the British idealism of that time was F.H.Bradley. He attempted to show that though things might seem separate and discreet, they really form one unified whole, the all-inclusive Reality or Absolute.

Both Moore and Russell were initially influenced by Bradley and supported this kind of idealistic approach to philosophical questions. But soon they began to argue against this view and later rejected it completely. In his doctrine of external relations, Russell criticised Bradley's monistic views. As a true pluralist he said that things were analysable unities, which consisted of terms and qualities related externally. Russell's earliest works were in the field of Logic and Mathematics. In 1910, along with A.N.Whitehead, he published *Principia Mathematica*, a monumental work on logic and mathematics, which was of the

greatest interest to philosophers as it provided them with a more perfect and

improved tool to tackle philosophical problems. Russell's reasons for rejecting

idealism were that he attempted to view traditional problems of metaphysics

from a logical standpoint. Russell himself wrote,

> ... logic is what is fundamental in philosophy, and ... schools should
> be characterized rather by their logic than by their metaphysics. [4]

Moore also abandoned idealism but for different reasons. He advocated

common sense realism. Throughout his philosophic life Moore tried to find out

what was real. Two of his main works, *The Refutation of Idealism* (1903) and *A*

Defence of Common Sense (1925) were the result of this kind of thinking. Moore's

attack on idealism was concentrated intensely upon the *meanings* of the

metaphysical propositions, which he opined, should be clearly understood

before even considering the truth or falsity of such propositions. In this context

he wrote :

> In all ... philosophical studies, the difficulties and disagree-
> ments, of which its history is full, are mainly due to a very
> simple cause : namely, to the attempt to answer questions,
> without first discovering precisely what question it is
> which you desire to answer. [5]

Thus Moore's insistence upon detailed analysis of the meanings of words and

his repeated adherence to common sense and the way language is commonly

used, paved the way for a kind of analytical thinking which became an indispensable part of philosophising. Ammerman writes :

> By helping to turn philosophers' attention to the meanings of the questions they were asking and by discouraging speculation prior to clarification, Moore exerted an influence upon the history of analytic thought which is unparalleled. [6]

Section – III

The Later Development

As stated earlier, all analytic philosophers were in agreement that words should be used strictly and exactly so that philosophical problems could be set forth clearly. But they disagreed about the language to be used in the process of analysis and it is at this point that generally analysts split into two. Some of them held that the language we use ordinarily was not fit for philosophy, as it was full of ambiguities and inaccuracies. In order to remove the inaccuracies and to make language precise to see problems clearly, it was required that common speech be modified, taking into account both its vocabulary and syntax. It was concluded, therefore, that similar to physics and chemistry, philosophical analysis should also consist in the construction of an artificial language.

Some other analytic philosophers were of the opinion that construction of artificial languages for the purpose of resolving philosophical problems was not a very good idea. They thought that formalisation of language rather than solving, would lead us into more problems. These analysts were of the opinion that analysis and careful refinement of the ordinary, natural language was the best way to understand the problems of philosophy. On the basis of this conflict, the history of analytic philosophy can be roughly divided into five stages :

I. **Early Realism** — The two early analysts were Russell and Moore. They started their work by stating clearly the meanings of apparently confusing philosophical questions so that they could be answered properly. They rejected idealism and fought the metaphysical otherworldliness of men like Bradley and McTaggart, although they were not averse to metaphysics. However, differences in their thinking soon led Moore and Russell to divergent paths.

II. **Logical Atomism** — This was associated with the works of Russell during 1914 –19 and early Wittgenstein. The task of the logical atomist was to construct a formal language for philosophy. Russell was a champion of formalism and practised formal analysis by examining the world from a purely logical point of view. The logical atomists not only supported metaphysics, they attempted to construct one. Russell wished to advocate logical atomism as a certain kind of

logical doctrine and so set forth on the basis of this a certain kind of metaphysics. The main aim of the logical atomists, however, was to solve philosophical problems by a logically perfect language where grammar would be capable of throwing light on philosophical problems unlike that of the natural languages.

III. **Logical Positivism** — The logical positivists were also followers of formalism but abandoned metaphysics totally. Wittgenstein was the first to declare metaphysical questions as meaningless. Ludwig Wittgenstein was born in Vienna in 1889. He came into contact with Russell through his interest in mathematics. Russell influenced him enough to make him study philosophy. Conventionally Wittgenstein's philosophical life has been divided into an early and a later period, and there is a certain amount of opposition between the two. In his celebrated book *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus* published in 1921, the early Wittgenstein says that the role of analysis is to break up all complex propositions into unanalysable simples. It should make every statement a picture of reality. Wittgenstein thought of philosophy as primarily the activity of clarifying language and it cannot give us true knowledge about the nature of reality as science does. He said that a philosopher's only proper task is to enlighten other people as to the real nature of metaphysical questions, which were in fact meaningless and unanswerable. The famous last sentence of the

Tractatus, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," expresses

elegantly the essential doctrine of Wittgenstein's early view.[7]

As a result of this dramatic thesis in the *Tractatus,* around 1923, in Vienna, a

group of scientists and philosophers sharing common interests started working

together on philosophic positions and came to form the group known as the

Vienna Circle. Moritz Schlick and Rudolph Carnap were the most prominent

members of this circle. In agreement with Wittgenstein, these positivists held

that metaphysical statements were neither true nor false, but meaningless and

with little success they tried to formulate the verifiability criterion by means of

which sentences could be tested. They also attempted to construct artificial

languages, which they believed would help us to get rid of metaphysical

pseudo problems. The joint attempt of Russell and the logical positivists to

construct an artificial language which would bring about the precision and

clarity of science and mathematics to philosophy is perhaps founded upon

Leibnitz's notion of a *mathesis universalis* — a universal formal language. To

quote him :

> I truly believe that languages are the best mirror of human
> mind, and that an exact analysis of the meanings of words
> would reveal the operations of the understanding far be-
> tter than anything else.[8]

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IV. **Linguistic Analysis** — The followers of this school were interested in the analysis of what we usually say in natural languages. Moore was the first linguistic analyst. He stressed the importance of paying attention to ordinary meanings of common speech. The other main exponents of this view were the later Wittgenstein and Gilbert Ryle. The later Wittgenstein argued that language was basically imprecise but that imperfection could be removed by the clarification of conceptual puzzles. Wittgenstein's famous book during this period was *Philosophical Investigations* in which he resorts to ordinary language philosophy.

Gilbert Ryle, the Oxford philosopher, in his famous work, The Concept of Mind (1949), attempts to show that the traditional problem of mind-body dualism introduced by Descartes has its origin in the basic confusion about our use of mentalist terms. Ryle tries to show that the analysis of the various mental concepts would prove that the previous thinking about mind was not tenable.

Ryle talked about certain expressions, which he called systematically misleading expressions. These expressions do not exhibit the real form of the fact in a way in which the form will be duly exhibited. The major task of philosophy then, was to analyse these expressions so that their logical and grammatical forms could be distinguished. According to him the confusion

between grammatical and logical form was the source of so many absurd philosophical theories.

V. **Ordinary Language Philosophy** — The history of analytic philosophy also concerns an analysis of our use of ordinary language. Ordinary language philosophers opined that natural language was fully equipped to solve philosophical problems. J.L.Austin, who is an ardent advocate of ordinary language analysis, agrees with other linguistic analysts in saying that ordinary language is often misleading and confusing and sets traps for us, but his manner of removing these confusions remains unparallel and extends an influence on contemporary philosophy, which ranks with that of Wittgenstein. He placed great philosophical importance in the study of grammar and went on to trace down the subtle shades of meaning to show that minute grammatical changes resulted in different concepts. He concluded that a vast number of problems, when considered analytically, no longer existed, for being too simple. Austin died very young, publishing little and his well-known works *Sense and Sensibilia* and *How To Do Things With Words* were published posthumously.

The most prominent of recent British philosophers who have turned towards the modification of ordinary language is Peter Frederick Strawson. Strawson has attempted to show that there is no direct opposition between linguistic analysis and a certain kind of metaphysics. Strawson argues that Russell, in his

attempt to frame a formal language, creates new puzzles instead of solving the already existing ones. Strawson is of the opinion that taking into account the real nature of language can very well solve Russell's problems. Strawson is also famous as being the most vehement critic of Russell's theory of descriptions. He joins issue with Russell in this matter and their attacks and counterattacks on each other makes a very interesting reading.

We will briefly discuss here the views of two more philosophers, who just cannot be ignored, W.V.O. Quine and John Wisdom. The name of W.V.Quine deserves to be mentioned as a famous Harvard logician. Quine thought that certain general notions about language and science were based upon too strict a view. He raised a controversy in attempting to get rid of the traditional analytic-synthetic distinction because he thought that it committed the fallacy of vicious circularity and stood in the path of scientific progress.

Linguistic analyst John Wisdom distinguished three types of analysis – material, formal and philosophical. By material analysis he meant the definitions of physics, chemistry etc. Russell's theory of descriptions was cited as an example of formal analysis; whereas philosophical analysis meant, for example, the replacement of statements about mind to statements about mental states, i.e. it signified the journey from more ultimate terms to less ultimate ones.

The brief outline of the history of analytic philosophy that has been sketched out is in no way complete or perfect. The revolution that began with the works of Russell and Moore is still continuing. Philosophers have now realised the importance of language in resolving problems and they put their efforts either in the formalisation of language or in the analysis of natural language.

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Notes and References on Chapter 1:

1. A.J.Ayer, *Russell and Moore: The Analytical Heritage*, London: Macmillan, 1971.

2. J.O.Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis : Its Development Between the Two World Wars*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

3. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, L.A. Selby--Bigge (ed.), second ed., Oxford, OUP, 1902, Sec. II, paragraph 14.

4. *Classics Of Analytic Philosophy*, R.R.Ammerman (ed.), New York: McGraw –Hill, Inc., 1965, p. 5.

5. *Ibid*, p. 4.

6. *Ibid*, p. 5.

7. Ibid, p. 6.

8. Quoted as a motto in J.Katz, *The Philosophy of Language*, New York: 1965. Translated by B.R.Gross in *Analytic Philosophy: A Historical Introduction*, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. 1970, p.10.

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