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# Epistemology

**SEMESTER - V**

# PHILOSOPHY

**BLOCK 2**




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## BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This block consists of seven units and starts with the unit "Scepticism". It includes the concepts like what is Skepticism? Different Kinds of Skepticism, Pyrrhonian Skepticism, and Cartesian Skepticism, and Humean Skepticism

The tenth unit is 'Criticism'(Kant). The concepts included in this unit are: What is Criticism? Kant's Preliminary Clarifications on The Kinds of Knowledge and Judgments, Kinds of knowledge, A priori knowledge, A posteriori knowledge, Kinds of judgments, Analytic judgment, Synthetic judgment, Synthetic a priori, Synthetic a posteriori, Possibility of synthetic a priori judgment, Copernican Revolution

The eleventh unit is 'Correspondence theory of truth". It deals with the issues such as Truth in Philosophy, Correspondence theory of truth

The twelfth unit is "Coherence theory of Truth". It basically discusses the concepts like Coherence theory of truth, Degrees of truth

The thirteenth unit is 'Pragmatic theory of Truth". The concepts included in this unit are-

Pragmatic theory of truth, Some other important theories of truth

The fourteenth unit is "The Referential theory of Meaning". The concepts included in this unit are Theories of Meaning, The Referential Theory of Meaning, The Naive Referential Theory of Meaning, The Sophisticated Referential Theory of Meaning, and The Picture Theory of Meaning

The name of the fifteenth unit is 'Verification theory of meaning'. It deals with the issues like Verification theory of Meaning, Elimination of Metaphysics, and Critical Appreciation

While going through this course you will come across some boxes which are put on the left side or right side of the text. These boxes will give us the meanings of some words and concepts within the text. Apart from this, there will be some broad and short questions included under Activity and Check Your Progress in every unit. Activities will increase our thinking capacity because questions put in Activity are not directly derived from the text. But answers to the short questions are put in the section Answers to Check Your Progress. Besides, there are some text-related questions which are put in Model Questions. These questions will help you in selecting and mastering probable topics for the examination so that you can prepare for the examination with confidence.

# UNIT 9: SCEPTICISM

**UNIT STRUCTURE**

9.1 Learning objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 What is Skepticism?

9.4 Different Kinds of Skepticism

9.4.1 Pyrrhonian Skepticism

9.4.2 Cartesian Skepticism

9.4.3 Humean Skepticism

9.5 Let us sum up

9.6 Further readings

9.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.8 Model Questions

## 9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- explain what skepticism is
- distinguish between knowledge skepticism and justification skepticism
- distinguish between global and local skepticism
- explain the role of skeptical hypotheses in Descartes' skepticism
- explain and evaluate different kinds of skepticism;
- analyse the role of doubt in philosophy.

## 9.2 INTRODUCTION

When we say that a person is skeptical, what is generally meant is that that person is not easily convinced and doubts any claim that is not well-founded. Skepticism is also a term which is used for a philosophical school of thought. Skepticism as a school of thought had its origin in ancient Greece. We all have doubts about some areas of alleged knowledge, although these doubts will vary among persons and groups. Accordingly, philosophers and

others have long debated the limits, the scope, of human knowledge. The more restricted we take the scope to be, the more skeptical we are. So, if we restrict knowledge claims to claim about our subjective experience, for example, we are very skeptical. Famous skeptical debates in philosophy have concerned knowledge of, among other things, the mind independent world, other minds, inductive inferences, historical events, and unobservable entities countenanced by science.

## 9.3 WHAT IS SKEPTICISM

While most of us are skeptical about some knowledge claims, skeptical arguments in philosophy try to show that we do not know or are not justified in believing many of the things we ordinarily assume we know or reasonably believe. These arguments often conclude that we do not know or are not justified in believing anything about the external world, or the past, or other minds

Skepticism comes in many forms. We may distinguish skepticism about knowledge from skepticism about justification. Skepticism about knowledge denies that people have, or can have, certain kinds of knowledge. Skepticism about justification denies that people are, or can be, justified in believing certain sorts of things. One can be skeptic about knowledge without being skeptic about justification. One might hold that people are justified in believing various sorts of things, but maintain that the level of justification people have for believing those things is not high enough for knowledge. One might hold, for example, that people are somewhat justified in believing many things about the external world, but deny that these beliefs ever reach the level of justification needed for knowledge. Similarly, one might be a skeptic about justification without being a skeptic about knowledge. Suppose, for example, one held that knowledge does not require justification, but only reliably produced true belief. One might deny that beliefs of a certain kind were justified, but still amounted to knowledge.

We can again distinguish between global skepticism and local skepticism. Global skepticism about knowledge denies that we do, or can, have any knowledge at all. If global skepticism about knowledge is true, then no one knows anything at all. But again, if global skepticism about knowledge is true, then no one knows even that this skeptical claim is true. Moreover, if global skepticism were true, then no belief in it could be based on premises which are known. In contrast, local skepticism about knowledge holds that we do not, or cannot, have knowledge about some particular domain, such as knowledge about other minds, the past, or the external world. The local skeptic need not deny that we have some kinds of knowledge. Such a skeptic might allow, for example, that we know our own mental states and some simple logical truths. Similar is the case with global and local skepticism about justification. So, for example, if global skepticism about justification were true, no one would be justified in believing it. If global scepticism were true, then no one would have any good reason for accepting it; no one would be justified in believing any premises which support it.



**ACTIVITY: 9.1**

- What is your own opinion on the concept of skepticism? Discuss

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  .....

- Distinguish between global and local skepticism. Discuss

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  .....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1: State whether the following statements are true or false**

a. Skeptical arguments often conclude that we can know or are justified in believing anything about the external world, or the past, or other minds

b. One can be skeptic about knowledge without being skeptic about justification.

c. Local skepticism about knowledge denies that we do or can, have any knowledge at all.

d. If global skepticism about justification were true, no one would be justified in believing a proposition.

## 9.4 DIFFERENT KINDS OF SKEPTICISM

With respect to global skepticism, there are various important schools. First, there is the ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism (associated with the work of Sextus Empiricus). Pyrrhonian skepticism employs techniques instead of arguments in trying to undermine claims to know. Second there is Cartesian skepticism (associated with Descartes). Crucial in this type of skepticism is the use of skeptical hypothesis to cast doubt on much of what we ordinarily think to know. Third, there is Humean skepticism (associated with the work of Hume). This kind of skepticism is put up by considerations about the limit of inductive knowledge.

### 9.4.1 Pyrrhonian Skepticism

In the Hellenistic period a kind of skepticism developed which was advocated by the Pyrrhonians (the disciples of Pyrrho of Elis, c. 360-270 B.C.E). The central claim of the Pyrrhonians was that one should not advance any philosophical thesis; they maintained that they did not know whether knowledge was possible. The most famous of the Pyrrhonian

skepticism was Sextus Empericus. According to the Pyrrhonian, we can claim knowledge only if we have good grounds for believing that what is, is exactly as we think it is or perceive it to be. But we are never aware of any object as it is independent of us. We are always aware of objects as it stands in relation to us. Therefore we cannot know how any object really is in itself. For example, when we think of an object we think of it as possessing the qualities which we have perceived. But the question remains whether the object has only those qualities or does it have additional qualities which are not known to us? It may also so happen that the object has fewer qualities than which we have perceived. There is no way of confirming which are the qualities that are really have had by the object. The senses cannot tell which qualities are really and which are not there in the object. And as the senses cannot tell, the mind too cannot tell.

St Augustine refuted total or global skepticism on three grounds: First, skepticism is refuted by the Principle of non-contradiction. According to this principle, a proposition and its contradiction cannot both be true one of the other must be true. The propositions "The stick is bent" and "It is false that the stick is bent" cannot both be true. Thus we can at least know this much that the man is not both tall and not-tall. Second, Augustine held that the act of doubting reveals one's existence as something absolutely certain: from the fact I am doubting, it follows automatically that I am. Finally, Augustine also held that sense perception itself gives rudimentary kind of knowledge. According to him, deception in sense perception occurs when one "gives assent to more than the fact of appearance." For example, in the case of perception of bent stick immersed in water, the stick appears bent at the point when it enters the water. If we agree only to the appearance of the stick and consequently say that it looks bent, we do not commit any mistake. It is only when we say that stick is actually bent that we commit error.



**ACTIVITY: 9.2**

- What is the basic claim made by the Pyrrhonian skeptics? Discuss

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- Is it possible to compare the knowledge of an object as it is and knowledge of it as related to us? Discuss

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  .....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 2: Fill in the gaps**

a. The school pf Pyrrhonian skepticism is named after ….. of. ……
b. The most famous of the Pyrrhonian skeptics is……..
c. Augustine refuted skepticism on ……. grounds.
d. The first principle on which Augustine refuted skepticism is principle of …….
e. From the fact that 'I am doubting' it follows automatically that 'I ……'

## 9.4.2 Cartesian Skepticism

Historically, Descartes' skepticism is one of the most two influential skepticisms, the other being Pyrrhonian skepticism. His doubt can be applied universally to all that can be doubted. Descartes discusses his skepticism in his book Meditations. Descartes was concerned with skeptical questions as to the possibility of knowledge. However, he was not a skeptic. In fact, Descartes' aim was to formulate a unified science of nature that was as certain as mathematics. His doubt or skepticism was methodic. It was methodic in the sense that Descartes employed skepticism as a method of

achieving certainty. He started with doubting everything. His idea was that if everything was doubted, whatever was left that could not be doubted anymore would be absolutely certain. Then he would enquire into what it is that made this absolutely certain such that it cannot be doubted. This was supposed to reveal the criterion of certainty. With this criterion than he would measure what could be accepted as truth and what would fall short of truth.

To doubt every proposition, Descartes employed two skeptical hypotheses: possibilities of error that are both incompatible with what we think to know and that cannot be subjectively distinguished from normal circumstances. The first is the dream hypothesis and the second is the evil-demon hypothesis.

One can doubt everything that has been given through the senses. Senses sometimes deceive us regarding the nature of things. However, here it can be objected that from it we are not supposed to conclude that we cannot have knowledge through senses. For, there are instances of perception, for example, regarding my knowledge about my body right now, where we do not doubt our knowledge, that is, we do not think that we are deceived. But, Descartes said, for all I know I may now be dreaming - this is Descartes' dream hypothesis. It might be the case that the perceptual experiences that I now I am having are mere dreamt experiences. This may look at the first sight to be capable of being disproved easily. But let us look into it more closely. I pinch myself to ensure whether I am dreaming or not. But the next question that would arise is whether I am dreaming that I am pinching myself. The awareness I am having that I am awake now may also be a dream experience. There is no evidence which can conclusively tell me that my experiences are not dream but real experiences; nothing to tell me that all the things that I see in front of me have existences outside my mind.

However, the dream hypothesis is not applicable in certain cases. It may be argued that even if I am dreaming, there are still many things which

cannot be doubted. For example one cannot doubt even when one is dreaming that two plus three make five; that a square can never have more than four sides. These propositions seem absolutely certain to me. In other words, such propositions do not seem to be affected by doubt as 'advnetitious ideas' (derived through the senses) seem to be. Empirical propositions, one may say are doubtful while analytical propositions are not so. But it is possible to doubt even such analytical propositions. Some propositions that have seemed absolutely certain to me on certain previous occasions turned out to be false later. So, in these cases too I cannot the possibility of the propositions turning out to be false later. For it is possible that a deceitful and all powerful intelligence has so programmed me that I find myself regarding certain propositions as absolute certainties which are as a matter of fact false. This is Descartes' evil demon hypothesis.

The two skeptical hypotheses are incompatible with ordinary experiences and Descartes was very much aware of it. In fact this is what Descartes wanted to show. Descartes was looking for that kind of certainty which will escape even the kinds of possibilities falsehood as presented by skeptical hypotheses. Descartes put to test everything he knew against these two possibilities, singly or together. When he did that he found that whatever he had been considering as certain till that time turned to be something he could doubt, except one thing: he found that he could doubt everything to save the indubitable truth of "I think, therefore I am" -cogito ergo sum.

According to Descartes, one could doubt everything but any attempt to doubt one's existence as a thinking being is impossible, because to doubt is to think and to think is to exist. What Descartes meant was that the self that doubts its existence must exist to be able to doubt in the first place. Descartes examined his single indubitable truth to find out what guarantees its certainty and saw that it is 'clarity and distinctness which lends a proposition its immunity to doubt. Descartes discovered in the certainty of

his own existence an essential characteristic of certain truth: anything that was clear and distinct as his own existence would be certain.

Descartes' approach to the problem of certainty and knowledge is characteristic of rationalism. Whatever may be their differences, the rationalists agree that sense experience is untrustworthy and that certain knowledge is to be obtained by exercise of pure reason. Descartes seems to be claiming to have discovered certainty in both 'objective' and 'subjective' sense. When he equated existence with thinking he claimed certainty in the objective sense, while criterion of 'clarity and distinctness' can be considered as an example of subjective certainty. But unfortunately Descartes' own interpretation regarding cgito ergo sum is ambiguous. If the cogito is regarded as an inference of some kind, then it can be argued that it commits the error of arguing in a circle. The 'I' of 'I am' is already pre-supposed in the 'I' of 'I think'. Any necessity it possesses is a matter of logic which has nothing to say about actual existent things.

Descartes says that as long as he is doubting (thinking) the certainty of the cogito is assured. Now there are certain occasions when he is not thinking. Does he have any guarantee that he continues to exist as a potentially thinking thing at that time? Descartes does not give any clear explanation regarding this.



**ACTIVITY: 9.3**

I Can we regard Descartes as a skeptic? Discuss

.....

.....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 3: State whether the following statements are True or false:**

a. Descartes discusses his skepticism in Meditations. (True/False)

b. Descartes' aim was to formulate a unified science of nature that was as certain as mathematics. (True/False)

c. One cannot doubt anything that has been given through the senses. (True/False)

d. 'Cogito ergo sum' means 'I am, therefore I think'. (True/False)

## 9.4.3 Humean Skepticism

Hume is one of the best known philosophers who proposed skepticism (Treatise On Human Nature; An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding). One important element of his skepticism is that it is motivated by considerations about the limits of knowledge based on induction. According to Hume, inductive arguments are never justifying and the central problem is how we can ever have a non-circular or non-question-begging justification for our use of it.

Since the time of Descartes, most philosophers have distinguished between propositions of mathematics and statements about the empirical world. Hume referred to these propositions as Relations of Ideas and Matters of Facts respectively. The first kind of propositions expresses a relation between numbers or geometrical figures. According to him, they are intuitively or demonstratively certain. Their truth can be discovered by the operation of thought - it does not depend on anything of the world. Matters of fact are quite different from them. Firstly we can deny them without contradiction (whereas we cannot deny the truth of 'two and two make four'). Secondly their truth seems to be founded on the relation of cause and effect. But how do we arrive at the knowledge of cause and effect? This truth, says Hume, is attained by experience and not by a priori

reasoning. It is true that we can trace particular effects back to general causes, for example, gravity. But common human curiosity does not enquire into these principles. What then is the foundation of all conclusions from experiences? What justifies the inference from past conjunction of cause and effect to similar conjunction in the future? The reasoning involved here is not 'demonstrative, that is, it does not involve logic. It is also not inferred intuitively. The only alternative left is that the justification lies in the supposition that the future will resemble the past. But how will we know this without arguing in circularity? To take a concrete example: Let us assume that an object, say bread, exhibiting sensible qualities like colour weight and so on, possesses 'secret powers' which nourish us. Because a cause (secret power) has always been followed by a particular effect (nourishment) in the past, we argue that eating of bread will nourish us in the future as well. There would be no contradiction in denying this as 'relation of ideas' is not involved here. now if we claim that we know that bread will nourish us when next we eat it, it is only because we are assuming the truth of the general proposition 'All future conjunctions of causes and effects will resemble past conjunctions of similar causes and effects. But how can this be known without begging the question? Thus, for Hume we do not know that the future will resemble the past. What we have is just belief.

According to Hume, we also do not have intuition of a power or necessary connection between cause and effect. The idea we have of necessary connection is derived from imagination and our experience of uniformity in sequence of events.

Hume's conclusion is that we can have knowledge of mathematical propositions to of statements derived from them by means of deductive inference and the sciences, which deal with general facts. Thus he rules out theology, ethics, aesthetic, and metaphysics as constituting legitimate fields of knowledge.

Hume himself was dissatisfied with the conclusion his arguments led him to. But still Hume's skepticism is regarded to be example of superior

argument. Hume distinguished firstly between 'antecedent' and 'consequent' skepticism. In the former we start by doubting everything and then look for some certain, infallible criterion to provide the basis of knowledge - in Descartes' case it was the cogito. Hume's position was one of consequent skepticism, which involved a thorough-going examination of the reliability of human faculties. But whether one's skepticism is of antecedent type of consequent type, Hume rejected extremism, which he regarded as self-destructive. He was aware of the consequences for the philosophers if his assumptions and arguments were followed through to their logical conclusion. Hume thought there is no answer to skepticism, but skepticism should be ignored outside the study. As an ordinary man he dines, plays a game of backgammon, converses and is merry with his friends. But when after these amusements, he returns to his philosophical speculations they appear 'cold', 'strained', and 'ridiculous.

Hume believed that we cannot help but believe skepticism to be false, even when presented with most convincing arguments. We have natural or instinctive belief in the existence of external bodies, continuous selves and real causal connections in nature. We have to believe in such entities for our daily living. But for Hume we are dealing here with probabilities: we do not have knowledge in the strict sense. The reason for this is that Hume regards belief as result of our natural impulses rather than as something regulated by reason.



**ACTIVITY: 9.4**

I What do you understand by 'antecedent' skepticism? Give your viewpoint

.....

.....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 4: Fill in the gaps**

a) One important element of Hume' skepticism is that it is motivated by considerations about the limits of knowledge based on…….

b) According to Hume, ……..are intuitively or demonstratively certain.

c) The truth of Matters of Facts seems to be founded on the relation of ……..

d) According to Hume, we also do not have intuition of a power or…… between cause and effect.

e) Hume regards belief as result of our……..rather than as something regulated by reason.



## 9.5 LET US SUM UP

- What is generally meant by skeptical is that the person is not easily convinced and doubts any claim that is not well-founded. Skepticism is also a term which is used for a philosophical school of thought which had its origin in ancient Greece.

- Skepticism comes in many forms. We may distinguish skepticism about knowledge from skepticism about justification. Skepticism about knowledge denies that people have, or can have, certain kinds of knowledge. Skepticism about justification denies that people are, or can be, justified in believing certain sorts of things.

- We can again distinguish between global skepticism and local skepticism. Global skepticism about knowledge denies that we do, or can, have any knowledge at all. In contrast, local skepticism about knowledge holds that we do not, or cannot, have knowledge about some

particular domain, such as knowledge about other minds, the past, or the external world.

- Pyrrhonian skepticism employs techniques instead of arguments in trying to undermine claims to know. According to the Pyrrhonian, we can claim knowledge only if we have good grounds for believing that what is, is exactly as we think it is or perceive it to be. But we are never aware of any object as it is independent of us. We are always aware of objects as it stands in relation to us. Therefore we cannot know how any object really is in itself.

- Descartes employed skepticism as a method of achieving certainty. He started with doubting everything. His idea was that if everything was doubted, whatever was left that could not be doubted anymore would be absolutely certain. Then he would enquire into what it is that made this absolutely certain such that it cannot be doubted. This was supposed to reveal the criterion of certainty. With this criterion than he would measure what could be accepted as truth and what would fall short of truth.

- Humean skepticism put up by considerations about the limit of inductive knowledge. It is motivated by considerations about the limits of knowledge based on induction. According to Hume, inductive arguments are never justifying and the central problem is how we can ever have a non-circular or non-question-begging justification for our use of it. But we have natural or instinctive belief in the existence of external bodies, continuous selves and real causal connections in nature. However, for Hume we are dealing here with probabilities: we do not have knowledge in the strict sense.

- Skepticism leads to criticism of knowledge. Skepticism doubts the possibility of knowledge. But, the human mind finds it difficult to go on doubting. Human mind starts enquiring into the limits and conditions of knowledge. And, enquiry into the limits and conditions of knowledge is

what epistemology does. In other words, criticism of knowledge means epistemology. As such, any system of philosophy based on epistemological reflections may be called critical.

- The way Kant presents his analysis of process of knowledge has been described as Criticism. Kant himself stated that Criticism is the philosophy which criticizes and examines everything before reaching a definite judgment and finds out the limit of knowledge before trying to know anything.

- Kant selected certain doctrines of the rationalists and certain doctrines of the empiricists and put them together into his own philosophy. He incorporated elements of rationalist and empiricist thought but he changed those views to have their meanings and implications altered and created a new approach, which he called critical philosophy.

- A priori does not mean knowledge which is explicitly present in the mind before it has begun to experience anything at all. It means knowledge which is not derived from experience though it makes it appearance only on the occasion of experience.

- The term 'a posteriori' means 'known posterior to experience', or 'known dependently on experience'.

- Analytic judgments are those in which the predicate is contained, at least implicitly in the concept of the subject. They are said to be 'explicative' judgment because the predicate does not add to the concept of the subject anything which is not already contained in it, explicitly or implicitly.

- Synthetic judgments unlike analytic judgments affirm or deny of a subject a predicate which is not contained in the concept of the subject. Therefore, they are called 'ampliative' or 'augmentative judgment', because they add something to the concept of the subject.

- In all synthetic judgments something is added to the concept of the subject. A connection is affirmed between predicate and subject but in such judgment the predicate cannot be got out of the subject by mere analysis of the subject. Now this connection may be purely factual and contingent: it is then given only in and through experience. And when this is the case the judgment is synthetic a posteriori.

- According to Kant there is a class of synthetic propositions, in which the connection between predicate and subject, though not knowable by mere analysis of the concept of the subject, is nonetheless necessary and strictly universal. These are called synthetic a priori propositions.

- Synthetic a priori are to be found, in the first place, in mathematics. Similarly the propositions of geometry are also synthetic a priori propositions. In the second place, synthetic a priori propositions are also found in physics.

- Metaphysics aims at extending our knowledge of reality. Its propositions must therefore, be synthetic. At the same time, if it is not an empirical science, its propositions must be a priori. It follows, therefore, that if metaphysics is possible; it must consist of synthetic a priori propositions. But the claim of metaphysics as a science is in doubt.

- Kant believes that the human reason is naturally impelled to raise problems which cannot be answered empirically and as such one can ask how metaphysics, considered as a natural disposition is possible. But Kant doubts whether the claim of metaphysics to constitute a science is justified - the question here is really whether metaphysics considered as a science is possible.

- Kant solved the problem of the synthetic a priori judgment by substituting a new hypothesis concerning the relation between the mind and its objects. He suggested the hypothesis: 'Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to ascertain anything about them a priori by concepts, and thus to extend

our knowledge, came to nothing on this assumption. Let us try the, whether we may not make better progress in the task of metaphysics if we assume that objects must conform to our knowledge. This at all events accords better with the possibility which we are seeking, namely of a knowledge of objects a priori, which would determine something about them before they are given to us.'

- Kant's Copernican revolution does not imply the view that reality can be reduced to the human mind and its ideas. He is not suggesting that the human mind creates things, as far as their existence is concerned, by thinking them. What he is suggesting is that we cannot know things, that they cannot be objects of knowledge for us, except in so far as they are subjected to certain a priori conditions of knowledge on the part of the subject.



## 9.6 FURTHER READING

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2) Fogelin, R. 1994. Pyrrhonian reflections on Knowledge and Justifications, Oxford: Oxford University Press

3) Hume, D. Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals ed. P. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

4) Kant, Immanuel. 1929. Critique of Pure Reason trans. Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's Press

5) Dicker, Georges. 2004. Kant's theory of knowledge; an analytic introduction. Oxford University Press,

6) Guyer, Paul (ed.) 2006. The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern philosophy. Cambridge University Press

## 9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q 1:** a) False b)True c) False d) True

**Ans to Q 2:** a) Pyrrho/ Elis b) Sextus Empiricus c) Three

a. Principle of non-contradiction b) Am

**Ans to Q 3:** a) Yes b) Yes c) No d) No

**Ans to Q 4:** a) Induction b) Relations of Ideas

c) Cause and effect d) Necessary connection

e) Natural impulses

## 9.8 MODELQUESTIONS

**A. Short Questions**

Q 1: What do you mean by Pyrrhonian Skepticism?

Q 2: Define skepticism

Q 3: What is global skepticism?

Q 4: What are the different kinds of skepticism?

Q 5: Who wrote the book Meditations?

Q 6: What are the two skeptical hypothesis put forward by Descartes?

Q 7: State the meaning of Cogito ergo sum.

Q 8: Who is the author of essay concerning human understanding?

**B. Short Questions (Answer in about 100-150 words)**

Q 1: Write a short note on Copernican revolution.

Q 2: Distinguish between analytic and Synthetic judgments.

Q 3: What is skeptical hypothesis? Explain in brief.

Q 4: Do you find any distinction between 'Antecedent' and 'Consequent' skepticism? Briefly discuss.

Q 5: Briefly explain the distinction between a-priori knowledge and a-posteriori Knowledge.

Q 6: What are the distinctions between Global and local skepticism? Explain briefly.

Q 7: What are three grounds on which St. Augustine refuted total or global skepticism? Briefly explain.

Q 8: Write a brief note on Humean Scepticism.

Q 9: Explain briefly on Synthetic a posteriori judgments.

**C. Long Questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)**

Q 1: What do you understand by skepticism? Discuss

Q 2: Explain and examine different kinds of skepticism.

Q 3: Discuss Kant's theory of Criticism.

Q 4: Is synthetic a priori statement possible? Discuss.

Q 5: Explain the Copernican revolution.

Q 6: What is skepticism? Explain the viewpoints of Cartesian skepticism.

Q 7: What are the different kinds of knowledge? Discuss.

Q 8: Discuss the different types of judgments.

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# UNIT 10: CRITICISM (KANT)

**UNIT STRUCTURE**

10.1 Learning objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 What is Criticism?

10.4 Kant's Preliminary Clarifications on The Kinds of Knowledge and Judgments

10.5 Kinds of knowledge

- 10.5.1 A priori knowledge
- 10.5.2 A posteriori knowledge

10.6 Kinds of judgments

- 10.6.1 Analytic judgment
- 10.6.2 Synthetic judgment
- 10.6.3 Synthetic a priori
- 10.6.4 Synthetic a posteriori

10.7 Possibility of synthetic a priori judgment

10.8 Copernican Revolution

10.9 Let us sum up

10.10 Further readings

10.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.12 Model Questions

## 10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- explain what is Criticism
- explain and distinguish a priori and a posteriori knowledge
- explain and distinguish analytic and synthetic judgments
- evaluate the possibility of synthetic a priori judgment
- discuss the concept of copernican revolution

## 10.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you have already learned the concept of scepticism. Now, you will study the concept of criticism.

Skepticism leads to criticism of knowledge. Skepticism doubts the possibility of knowledge. But, the human mind finds it difficult to go on doubting. Human mind starts enquiring into the limits and conditions of knowledge. And, enquiry into the limits and conditions of knowledge is what epistemology does. In other words, criticism of knowledge means epistemology. As such, any system of philosophy based on epistemological reflections may be called critical. However, this critical method was fully used by Kant in modern times. Hence the expression 'criticism', 'critical method' and 'critical philosophy' are generally used nowadays to generally signify the method and thought of Kant.

## 10.3 WHAT IS CRITICISM

Kant could not agree with Hume that knowledge is wholly built on sensations. He enquired more precisely into the conditions of knowledge. The way Kant presents his analysis of process of knowledge has been described as Criticism. Kant himself stated that Criticism is the philosophy which criticizes and examines everything before reaching a definite judgment and finds out the limit of knowledge before trying to know anything. It is on the basis of sound criticism that Kant discovered the process of knowledge and its limits. He believed that both experience and intellect played important roles in the acquisition of knowledge. Kant is generally introduced as the philosopher who synthesized rationalism and empiricism. This however does not mean that Kant simply picked up the central theses of both schools of thought, and formulated his own philosophy. For, there are fundamental disagreements between the two schools of thought. The rationalists (Descartes and Leibnitz, for example) argue that knowledge can be attained only through the exercise of the reason independently of sense-experience - which they regarded as unreliable and the source of error. Reason gives

us access to innate ideas and ultimate truths. Knowledge in the rationalist sense is often referred to as a priori, because it is logically prior to and not dependent on experience. Empiricists (Hume and to some extent Locke) on the other hand rejected these claims, maintaining that it is through senses that we acquire our knowledge and that we cannot strictly know anything beyond what our senses tell us. For them knowledge is a posteriori, that is, roughly derived 'afterwards' from the 'particulars' given in experience. Both rationalist and the empiricists claimed to have discovered a foundation of knowledge, respectively, in an 'innate intuition' characterized by clarity and distinctness (Descartes) and in 'impressions' (Hume)

Kant selected certain doctrines of the rationalists and certain doctrines of the empiricists and put them together into his own philosophy. He incorporated elements of rationalist and empiricist thought but he changed those views to have their meanings and implications altered and created a new approach, which he called critical philosophy.

According to the rationalists, it is possible for man to have knowledge of certain entities (such as God, immortal souls and substances) which are not objects of any possible experience, that is, that can never be presented to us either in sense perception or in introspection. Kant rejected this claim of the rationalists and he tried to show that there cannot be knowledge of any non-empirical reality. In this respect, Kant is as much of an empiricist as David Hume.

The fundamental principle of empiricism is that it is through senses that we acquire our knowledge and that we cannot strictly know anything beyond what our senses tell us. Kant does not accept this principle. Empiricism, especially Hume's empiricism leads to skepticism, a theory which makes impossible not only metaphysical knowledge but even scientific knowledge and everyday 'commonsense' knowledge. Kant upholds the possibility of scientific and commonsense knowledge against Hume's skeptical empiricism. In his attempt to liberate science form the skepticism of Hume, Kant posits that there are special concepts that do not originate in experience

but have what he calls 'objective validity'. Kant calls them "Pure Concepts" or "Pure Categories of Understanding". Kant's basic argument here is that all our knowledge begins with experience but is not derived from it.



**ACTIVITY: 10.1**

- Which is the point of disagreement between Kant and the empiricist philosophers? Discuss.

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- How did Kant synthesize rationalism and empiricism? Discuss

  .....

  .....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1: State whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False'**

a. The rationalists argue that knowledge can be attained only through the exercise of the reason independently of sense-experience. (True/ False)

b. For empiricist knowledge is a priori. (True/False)

c. Hume's empiricism leads to skepticism.(True/False)

d. Knowledge in the rationalist sense is often referred to as a priori. (True/False)

**Q 2: What is the fundamental principle of empiricism? (Answer in about 30 words)**

.....

Q 3: What did Kant posit to liberate science from skepticism? (Answer in about 30 words)

.....

## 10.4: KANT'S PRELIMINARY CLARIFICATIONS ON THE KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE AND JUDGMENTS

Traditionally, before Kant, philosophers had identified the a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge and had been divided over them as to the sure way of knowledge acquisition. It has been characteristic of empiricism to hold that our a priori knowledge is confined to analytic propositions. In contrast, rationalism holds that there are some non-analytic or synthetic propositions that we can know a priori. Empiricists thus hold that the scope of our a priori knowledge is narrower than what the rationalists take it to be. Kant put forward a more radical account of a priori knowledge and the nature of necessity.

## 10.5 KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Unlike the rationalist Kant denied that knowledge is wholly a priori and unlike the empiricist he denied that it is solely built on sensations. According to Kant, knowledge involves both a priori and a posteriori elements- it involves both reason and sensation. Sensations are the raw materials which are transformed into knowledge by reason with application of its inherent laws- 'The matter of our ideas is furnished by the senses; their form is the work of reason'.

### 10.5.1 A Priori knowledge

A priori does not mean knowledge which is explicitly present in the mind before it has begun to experience anything at all. It means knowledge which is not derived from experience though it makes its appearance only on the occasion of experience. Consider the oft-quoted statements: 'That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt but though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience.'

For Kant the criterion for identifying a priori knowledge is strict universality and necessity.

Necessity and strict universality are therefore secure indications of an a priori cognition, and also belong together inseparably". Necessary truths are just those that obtain in all possible worlds; the universal truths are those that express generalizations about all entities of a particular kind. To see how this criterion is supposed to work, consider the proposition "every even number is divisible by two". Its truth is necessary because there cannot be any counter examples, and strictly universal because there are not only 'are not' but there 'cannot be' any exceptions to it. Strict universality entails necessity, but not vice versa, and that necessity is the fundamental criterion. Kant's adoption of necessity as the fundamental criterion of the a priori knowledge accords with his oft-repeated and important claim that no proposition that rests on experience can be necessary. As he puts it: "Experience tells us, indeed, what is, but not that it must necessarily be so, and not otherwise".

## 10.5.2 A Posteriori Knowledge

The term 'a posteriori' means 'known posterior to experience', or 'known dependently on experience'. The phrase 'can be known only by experience' requires some clarification, for it does not mean, as one might think, 'can be known just by experience' or 'can be known by experience alone'. Kant had rejected the Humean doctrine that all our knowledge is derived from experience and so to accept the later explanation would be a contradiction. By a posteriori knowledge, Kant referred to knowledge which begins from experience and has roots in them. At least some a posteriori statements require reasoning, as well as experience, in order to be known; for example, our knowledge of scientific laws rests not only on observations but also on complex inferences or extrapolations from those observations. This point implies that all knowledge requires conceptualization, which is a form of thought that philosophers often contrast with the raw data of experience.

'There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins from experience. For how should our faculty of knowledge be awakened into action did not objects affecting our senses partly of themselves produce representations, partly arouse the activity of our understanding to compare these representations, and, by combining or separating them, work up the raw material of the sensible impressions into that knowledge of objects which is entitled experience? In the order of time, therefore, we have no knowledge antecedent to experience, and with experience all our knowledge begins'



**ACTIVITY:10.2**

I What is the difference between Kant's understanding of a posteriori and Hume's understanding of a posteriori? Discuss

.....

.....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 4: Fill in the blanks**

a) It has been characteristic of empiricism to hold that our a priori knowledge is confined to _____ propositions.

b) A priori means knowledge which is not derived from _____ though it makes it appearance only on the occasion of experience.

c) For Kant the criterion for identifying a priori knowledge is_____ and necessity.

d) Necessary truths are just those that obtain in all _____worlds.

e) The universal truths are those that express _____about all entities of a particular kind

f) The term 'a posteriori' means 'known posterior to experience', or 'known _____on experience'

## 10.6 TYPES OF JUDGMENT

Kant divides propositions into two types: analytic and synthetic. However in making the distinction, he restricts his attention to statements that are affirmative subject-predicate judgments.

### 10.6.1 Analytic judgment

Analytic judgments are those in which the predicate is contained, at least implicitly in the concept of the subject. They are said to be 'explicative' judgment because the predicate does not add to the concept of the subject anything which is not already contained in it, explicitly or implicitly. And their truth depends on the law of contradiction. We cannot deny the proposition without involving ourselves in logical contradiction. An example of analytic proposition as Kant has given is: 'all bodies are extended'. Here the idea of extension is contained in the idea of the body.

### 10.6.2 Synthetic judgment

Synthetic judgments unlike analytic judgment affirm or deny of a subject a predicate which is not contained in the concept of the subject. Therefore, they are called 'ampliative' or 'augmentative judgment', because they add something to the concept of the subject. According to Kant, 'all bodies are heavy' is an example of synthetic judgment for the idea of weight or heaviness in not contained in the concept of body as such.

Synthetic judgments are again subdivided into two types:

1. Synthetic a posteriori and
2. Synthetic a priori

## 10.6.3 Synthetic a posteriori

In all synthetic judgments something is added to the concept of the subject. A connection is affirmed between predicate and subject but in such judgment the predicate cannot be got out of the subject by mere analysis of the subject. Now this connection may be purely factual and contingent: it is then given only in and through experience. And when this is the case the judgment is synthetic a posteriori. Let us consider the proposition, 'All members of the tribe X are short', and let us suppose that this is a true proposition. It is synthetic because we cannot obtain the idea of shortness by mere analysis from the concept of membership of tribe X. But the connection between shortness and membership of tribe is given only in and through experience. And the judgment is simply the result of as series of observation. Its universality is not strict. Even if there does not happen to be at the moment any member of the tribe who is not short, there may be one or more tall members in the future. We cannot know a priori that all members are short. It is simply a matter of contingent fact.

## 10.6.4 Synthetic a priori

According to Kant, there is another class of synthetic propositions, in which the connection between predicate and subject, though not knowable by mere analysis of the concept of the subject, is nonetheless necessary and strictly universal. These are called synthetic a priori propositions. Kant gives us an example: 'everything which happens has a cause'. The proposition is synthetic because the predicate, having a cause, is not contained in the concept of what happens, that is, of an event. It is thus an ampliative and not an explicative judgment. But it is at the same time a priori for it is characterized by necessity and strict universality. The proposition, 'everything which happens has a cause', does not mean that, so far as out experience goes, all events have had cause and that it is reasonable to expect, until experience shows otherwise, that future events will also have causes. It means that every event, without any possible

exception, will have a cause. The proposition, however, is dependent on experience in one sense, namely, that it is by experience that we become acquainted with things happening, with events. But the connection between the predicate and the subject is given a priori. It is not a mere generalization from experience, reached by induction. We know a priori or in advance that every event must have a cause and the observation of such a connection in the case of events within the field of an experience adds nothing to the certainty of the judgment.

## 10.7 POSSIBILITY OF SYNTHETIC A PRIORI JUDGMENT

Kant was convinced that there are synthetic a priori propositions, that is, propositions which are not merely explicative but which extend our knowledge of reality and which are at the same time a priori. The problem how is a priori cognition possible can be expressed thus: How are synthetic a priori propositions possible? or How is it that we can know anything at all about reality a priori? This general question can be split up into several particular questions by considering where synthetic a priori propositions are to be found.

They are to be found, in the first place, in mathematics. First of all it must be noted that mathematical propositions are always judgments a priori and not empirical, because they include the concept of necessity, which cannot be derived from experience. The proposition 7+5=12 is not an empirical generalization. It is a necessary proposition. At the same time, however, this proposition, according to Kant, is not analytic but synthetic. It is synthetic because the concept of twelve is not obtained, and cannot be obtained, by mere analysis of the idea of the union between seven and five. For this idea does not itself imply the concept of twelve as the particular number resulting from the union. We cannot arrive at the notion of 12 except with the aid of intuition. Mathematical propositions are synthetic a priori for it is a necessary proposition and so cannot be synthetic a posteriori.

Similarly the propositions of geometry are also synthetic a priori propositions. For example, 'the straight line between two points is the shortest', is a synthetic proposition. For the concept of straight contains no notion of quantity, but only of quality. The concept of the shortest is thus wholly an addition, and it cannot be derived by any analysis from the concept of straight line. Synthesis is possible in this proposition with the help of intuition. But besides being synthetic the proposition is necessary and therefore a priori. It is not an empirical generalization.

In the second place, synthetic a priori propositions are also found in physics. For instance, the proposition, 'in all changes of the corporeal world the quantity of matter remains unchanged'. This proposition, according to Kant, is necessary and therefore a priori. But it is also synthetic for in the concept of matter we do not think its permanence, but merely its presence in space, which it fills. Physics in general does not consist simply of synthetic a priori statements but it contains within itself synthetic a priori judgments as principles.

Let us consider the possibility of synthetic a priori judgment in metaphysics. When we consider metaphysics, we find that it does not aim simply at analyzing concepts. It contains indeed, analytic propositions but they are not properly speaking metaphysical proposition. Metaphysics aims at extending our knowledge of reality. Its propositions must therefore, be synthetic. At the same time, if it is not an empirical science, its propositions must be a priori. It follows, therefore, that if metaphysics is possible, it must consists of synthetic a priori propositions.

But the claim of metaphysics as a science is in doubt. The question, therefore, is not so much how metaphysics as a science is possible as whether it is possible. Kant believes that the human reason is naturally impelled to raise problems which cannot be answered empirically and as such one can ask how metaphysics, considered as a natural disposition is possible. But Kant doubts whether the claim of metaphysics to constitute a

science is justified - the question here is really whether metaphysics considered as a science is possible.



**ACTIVITY:10.3**

- What, according to Kant, is an analytic judgment? Give an example of analytic judgment.

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  .....

- Why does not Kant accept the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments in metaphysics?

  .....

  .....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 5: State whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False'**

a) Analytic judgments are said to be 'ampliative' judgment'. (True/False)

b) We cannot deny analytic proposition without involving ourselves in logical contradiction. (True/False)

c) Synthetic judgments are also called 'augmentative judgment'(True/ False)

d) 'Everything which happens has a cause', is an example of synthetic a posteriori judgment. (True/False)

e) Kant accepts synthetic a priori judgment in metaphysics. (True/False)

## 10.8 COPERNICAN REVOLUTION

Kant solved the problem of the synthetic a priori judgment by substituting a new hypothesis concerning the relation between the mind and its objects.

It was clear to him that if we assume, as Hume did, that the mind, in forming its concepts, must conform to its objects, there could be no solution to the problem. Hume's theory would work for our idea of things a posteriori. But a synthetic a priori judgment cannot be validated by experience; if I say, for example, that every straight line is the shortest way between two points, I certainly cannot say that I have had an experience of every possible straight line. If as Hume believed, the mind is passive and simply receives information only from the objects, it follows that the mind would have information only about that particular object. But the mind makes judgments about all objects, even those that it has not yet experienced, and in addition, objects do in fact behave in the future according to these judgments we make about them. This scientific knowledge gives us reliable information about the nature of things. But since this knowledge, which is both synthetic and a priori, could not be explained on the assumption that the mind conforms to its objects (as in the case of how it could conform to every straight line), Kant was forced to try a new hypothesis regarding the relation between the mind and its objects.

Kant therefore suggested the hypothesis: 'Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to ascertain anything about them a priori by concepts, and thus to extend our knowledge, came to nothing on this assumption. Let us try the, whether we may not make better progress in the task of metaphysics if we assume that objects must conform to our knowledge. This at all events accords better with the possibility which we are seeking, namely of a knowledge of objects a priori, which would determine something about them before they are given to us.'

This hypothesis, Kant observes, is analogous to that proposed by Copernicus. That latter saw that though the sun appears to move across from earth from east to west, we cannot justifiably conclude from this that the earth is fixed and that the sun moves round fixed earth, for the very good reason that the observed movement of the sun would be precisely the same if it were the earth which was moving round the sun, and the

human observer with it. The immediate phenomenon would be the same on either hypothesis. The question is whether there are not astronomical phenomena which can only be explained better and more economically on the heliocentric than on the geocentric hypothesis. And subsequent astronomical investigation showed that this is indeed the case. In an analogous manner, Kant suggests, empirical reality would remain what it is on the hypothesis that for the object to be known they must conform to the mind rather than the other way about. And if a priori knowledge can be explained on the new hypothesis, this certainly is an argument in favor of the new hypothesis.

Kant's Copernican revolution does not imply the view that reality can be reduced to the human mind and its ideas. He is not suggesting that the human mind creates things, as far as their existence is concerned, by thinking them. What he is suggesting is that we cannot know things, that they cannot be objects of knowledge for us, except in so far as they are subjected to certain a priori conditions of knowledge on the part of the subject. If we assume that the human mind is purely passive in knowledge, we cannot explain the a priori knowledge which we undoubtedly possess. Let us assume, therefore, that the mind is active, this activity does not mean creation of beings out of nothing. It means rather that the mind imposes, as it were, on the ultimate material of experience its own form of cognition, determined by the structure of human sensibility and understanding, and that things cannot be known except through the medium of these forms. But if we speak of the mind imposing its own cognitive forms on the raw material of knowledge, this must not be taken to mean that the human subject does this deliberately, consciously and of set purpose. The object as given to conscious experience, the object about which we think is already subjected to those cognitive forms which the human subject imposes by a natural necessity, because it is what it is; that is, because of its natural structure as a knowing subject. The cognitive forms thus determine the possibility of objects, if 'objects' is taken to refer to things in themselves, that is, to things as they exist part from any relation

to the knowing subject, we could not, of course, say that they are determined by the human mind. The situation can be compared to a case where a person who wears colored glasses sees everything in that color. Every human being by virtue of being human possesses the faculty of thought, having which he inevitably thinks about things in accordance with the natural structure of the mind.



**ACTIVITY: 10.4**

- Which hypothesis in his philosophy, according to Kant, can be compared to the view of Copernicus?

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  .....

- Why did Kant call his view a 'Copernican Revolution' in philosophy?

  .....

  .....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q 6: a) Why, according to Kant mind cannot be accepted as passive as Hume assumed? (Answer in about 75 words)

.....

b) How does the mind impose its form of cognition on the ultimate material of experience? (Answer in about 35 words)

.....



## 10.9 LET US SUM UP

- What is generally meant by skeptical is that the person is not easily convinced and doubts any claim that is not well-founded. Skepticism is

also a term which is used for a philosophical school of thought which had its origin in ancient Greece.

- Skepticism comes in many forms. We may distinguish skepticism about knowledge from skepticism about justification. Skepticism about knowledge denies that people have, or can have, certain kinds of knowledge. Skepticism about justification denies that people are, or can be, justified in believing certain sorts of things.

- We can again distinguish between global skepticism and local skepticism. Global skepticism about knowledge denies that we do, or can, have any knowledge at all. In contrast, local skepticism about knowledge holds that we do not, or cannot, have knowledge about some particular domain, such as knowledge about other minds, the past, or the external world.

- Pyrrhonian skepticism employs techniques instead of arguments in trying to undermine claims to know. According to the Pyrrhonian, we can claim knowledge only if we have good grounds for believing that what is, is exactly as we think it is or perceive it to be. But we are never aware of any object as it is independent of us. We are always aware of objects as it stands in relation to us. Therefore, we cannot know how any object really is in itself.

- Descartes employed skepticism as a method of achieving certainty. He started with doubting everything. His idea was that if everything was doubted, whatever was left that could not be doubted anymore would be absolutely certain. Then he would enquire into what it is that made this absolutely certain such that it cannot be doubted. This was supposed to reveal the criterion of certainty. With this criterion than he would measure what could be accepted as truth and what would fall short of truth.

- Humean skepticism put up by considerations about the limit of inductive knowledge. It is motivated by considerations about the limits of

knowledge based on induction. According to Hume, inductive arguments are never justifying and the central problem is how we can ever have a non-circular or non-question-begging justification for our use of it. But we have natural or instinctive belief in the existence of external bodies, continuous selves and real causal connections in nature. However, for Hume we are dealing here with probabilities: we do not have knowledge in the strict sense.

- Skepticism leads to criticism of knowledge. Skepticism doubts the possibility of knowledge. But, the human mind finds it difficult to go on doubting. Human mind starts enquiring into the limits and conditions of knowledge. And, enquiry into the limits and conditions of knowledge is what epistemology does. In other words, criticism of knowledge means epistemology. As such, any system of philosophy based on epistemological reflections may be called critical.

- The way Kant presents his analysis of process of knowledge has been described as Criticism. Kant himself stated that Criticism is the philosophy which criticizes and examines everything before reaching a definite judgment and finds out the limit of knowledge before trying to know anything.

- Kant selected certain doctrines of the rationalists and certain doctrines of the empiricists and put them together into his own philosophy. He incorporated elements of rationalist and empiricist thought but he changed those views to have their meanings and implications altered and created a new approach, which he called critical philosophy.

- A priori does not mean knowledge which is explicitly present in the mind before it has begun to experience anything at all. It means knowledge which is not derived from experience though it makes it appearance only on the occasion of experience.

- The term 'a posteriori' means 'known posterior to experience', or 'known dependently on experience'.

- Analytic judgments are those in which the predicate is contained, at least implicitly in the concept of the subject. They are said to be 'explicative' judgment because the predicate does not add to the concept of the subject anything which is not already contained in it, explicitly or implicitly.

- Synthetic judgments unlike analytic judgments affirm or deny of a subject a predicate which is not contained in the concept of the subject. Therefore, they are called 'ampliative' or 'augmentative judgment', because they add something to the concept of the subject.

- In all synthetic judgments something is added to the concept of the subject. A connection is affirmed between predicate and subject but in such judgment the predicate cannot be got out of the subject by mere analysis of the subject. Now this connection may be purely factual and contingent: it is then given only in and through experience. And when this is the case the judgment is synthetic a posteriori.

- According to Kant, there is a class of synthetic propositions, in which the connection between predicate and subject, though not knowable by mere analysis of the concept of the subject, is nonetheless necessary and strictly universal. These are called synthetic a priori propositions.

- Synthetic a priori are to be found, in the first place, in mathematics. Similarly, the propositions of geometry are also synthetic a priori propositions. In the second place, synthetic a priori propositions are also found in physics.

- Metaphysics aims at extending our knowledge of reality. Its propositions must therefore, be synthetic. At the same time, if it is not an empirical science, its propositions must be a priori. It follows, therefore, that if metaphysics is possible; it must consist of synthetic a priori propositions. But the claim of metaphysics as a science is in doubt.

- Kant believes that the human reason is naturally impelled to raise problems which cannot be answered empirically and as such one can ask how metaphysics, considered as a natural disposition is possible. But Kant doubts whether the claim of metaphysics to constitute a science is justified - the question here is really whether metaphysics considered as a science is possible.

- Kant solved the problem of the synthetic a priori judgment by substituting a new hypothesis concerning the relation between the mind and its objects. He suggested the hypothesis: 'Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to ascertain anything about them a priori by concepts, and thus to extend our knowledge, came to nothing on this assumption. Let us try the, whether we may not make better progress in the task of metaphysics if we assume that objects must conform to our knowledge. This at all events accords better with the possibility which we are seeking, namely of a knowledge of objects a priori, which would determine something about them before they are given to us.'

- Kant's Copernican revolution does not imply the view that reality can be reduced to the human mind and its ideas. He is not suggesting that the human mind creates things, as far as their existence is concerned, by thinking them. What he is suggesting is that we cannot know things, that they cannot be objects of knowledge for us, except in so far as they are subjected to certain a priori conditions of knowledge on the part of the subject.



## 10.10 FURTHER READING

1) Descartes, R. 1975. The Philosophical Writings of Descartes. Ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoodhoff, and D. Murdoch, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

2) Fogelin, R. 1994. Pyrrhonian reflections on Knowledge and Justifications, Oxford: Oxford University Press

3) Hume, D. Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals ed. P. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

4) Kant, Immanuel. 1929. Critique of Pure Reason trans. Norman Kemp Smith. New York: St. Martin's Press

5) Dicker, Georges. 2004. Kant's theory of knowledge; an analytic introduction. Oxford University Press,

6) Guyer, Paul (ed.) 2006. The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern philosophy. Cambridge University Press

## 10.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q 1:** a)True b) False c) True d) True

**Ans to Q 2:** a) The fundamental principle of empiricism is that it is through senses that we acquire our knowledge and that we cannot strictly know anything beyond what our senses tell us.

**Ans to Q 3:** b) In his attempt to liberate science from the skepticism of Hume, Kant posits that there are special concepts that do not originate in experience but have what he calls 'objective validity'.

**Ans to Q 4:** a) analytic b) experience

c) strict universality d) possible

e) generalizations f) dependently

**Ans to Q 5:** a) false b) true c) true d) false
e) false

**Ans to Q 6:** a) Scientific knowledge gives us reliable information about the nature of things. But this knowledge, which is both synthetic and a priori,

could not be explained on the assumption that the mind conforms to its objects.

**Ans to Q 6:** b) When we speak of the mind imposing its own cognitive forms on the raw material of knowledge this must not be taken to mean that the human subject does this deliberately or consciously. It rather means that the object as given to conscious experience, the object about which we think is already subjected to those cognitive forms which the human subject imposes by a natural necessity because of its natural structure as a knowing subject.



## 10.12 MODELQUESTIONS

### A. Short Questions

Q 1: What is meant by Pyrrhonian Skepticism?

Q 2: Define skepticism

Q 3: What is global skepticism?

Q 4: What are the different kinds of skepticism?

Q 5: Who wrote the book Meditations?

Q 6: What are the two skeptical hypothesis put forward by Descartes?

Q 7: State the meaning of Cogito ergo sum.

Q 8: Who is the author of ‘essay concerning human understanding’?

Q 9: Name the philosopher who synthesized rationalism and empiricism.

Q 1O: Name the two philosophers, who are rationalists?

Q 11: What are the two types of propositions? According to Kant.

Q 12: State the kinds of synthetic judgments.

Q 13: Give an example of synthetic proposition.

Q 14: Write the name of the philosopher who brought out Copernican revolution.

**B. Short Questions (Answer in about 100-150 words)**

Q 1: Write a short note on Copernican revolution.

Q 2: Distinguish between analytic and Synthetic judgments.

Q 3: Briefly explain the distinction between a-priori knowledge and a-posteriori Knowledge.

Q 4: Explain briefly on Synthetic a posteriori judgments.

**C. Long Questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)**

Q 1: Discuss Kant's theory of Criticism

Q 2: Is synthetic a priori statement possible? Discuss

Q 3: Explain the Copernican revolution.

Q 4: What are the different kinds of knowledge? Discuss

Q 5: Discuss the different types of judgments.

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# UNIT 11 CORRESPONDENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

**UNIT STRUCTURE**

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Truth in Philosophy

11.4 Correspondence theory of truth

11.5 Let Us Sum Up

11.6 Further Reading

11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.8 Model Questions

## 11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- define truth in Philosophy
- identify what are the theories of truth
- describe 'The Correspondence Theory' of truth

## 11.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you the different Theories of truth. You know that a judgment may be true or false. But the question is how truth and falsity are known or tested in philosophy. Philosophers admit three principal Tests of truth. They are:

- Correspondence theory of truth
- Coherence theory of truth
- Pragmatic theory of truth

Realists support the Correspondence and Pragmatic theories of truth while the idealists support the Coherence theory of truth.

The Correspondence theory of truth considers correspondence to be the test of truth. It advocates that a judgment is true if there is a correspondence between the judgment and fact; otherwise the judgment will be false. The Coherence theory considers coherence to be the test of truth. It views that a judgment is true if it coheres with a system. On the other hand, the Pragmatic theory of truth considers workability or meaningfulness and utility or usefulness as the test of truth. So, the pragmatic theory says that a judgment is true if it is workable or meaningful or useful.

To sum up, correspondence, coherence and workability or meaningfulness are the three tests of Truth.

## 11.3 TRUTH IN PHILOSOPHY

Before we talk about the theories of Truth, let us think about what is truth in philosophy. Philosophers view that Truth is an attribute of beliefs, opinions, theories, doctrines, statements, etc. According to philosophers, there are mainly three theories of Truth.

- Correspondence theory of Truth
- Coherence theory of Truth
- Pragmatic theory of Truth

## 11.4 CORRESPONDENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

The Correspondence theory is the oldest among the theories of truth. It is found in Aristotle's Metaphysics. He formulates the theory as such: -'to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that is not, is true'. This formulation can be symbolically represented in modern logic as ' "p" is true if and only if p'. The Correspondence theory holds that there is a direct correspondence between judgment and reality. As for instance, 'grass is green' is a judgment. But the question is, whether the judgment is true or false. Correspondence

theory holds that there is a direct correspondence between grass and green. It is not the case that grass is not green. That is why it can be held that the judgment 'grass is green' is true.

It is a common sense theory of truth. Common sense holds that objects exist independently of knowledge in the external world. Our sense organs directly perceive that grass is green. In this context our sense organs do not depend on previous knowledge of things which idealism advocates. Therefore, this theory of truth is known as direct realism or naive realism. Common sense holds that our mind comes in direct contact with the objects. As for instance, people perceive-'The Sun revolves around the Earth'. It is indeed correct in perception. But in reality it is not correct. On the other hand, 'the Earth revolves around the Sun' is a true judgment. Therefore, naive realists view cannot be accepted which asserts a direct correspondence between judgment and reality.

Neo-realism is an improvement upon naive realism. Because neo-realists view that truth consists in the correspondence between knowledge and its object. According to neo-realism, the contents of knowledge are numerically identical with things known. As for instance, when we know a tree we say that it is the same object which is present in the external world and also in our consciousness. Some neo-realists say that it is not the case that the tree bodily enters into our consciousness, rather there is a structural identity between the tree and consciousness.

This theory is also not satisfactory. Here also the correspondence between knowledge and its object is confusing. Because we do not see in what sense we can speak of a correspondence between the two. It can be said that there is no subjective content of the mind that might correspond to the object.

Another form of the correspondence theory is known as the copy theory of ideas. It is found in Locke's book Essay Concerning Human Understanding. He says that the ideas

Constituted by the objects are the copies of objects. But this theory is also not satisfactory. Because objects are external to the mind and its ideas. So, knowledge cannot be directly known by us. Ideas are subjective in the sense that they are private. And objects are objective in the sense that they are public or can be known. Therefore, it will be wrong to say that knowledge is a direct correspondence between ideas and objects.

Another form of the correspondence theory is the logical theory of correspondence. It is advocated by Bertrand Russell. This theory holds that truth is defined by correspondence to fact and not by experience. A proposition is true when it correspond to fact. But a proposition may be true without our knowing it as true. As for instance, the proposition, 'it is raining' is true if it is actually true. It may be the case that you may be sleeping at that time when it is raining and do not realize that it is true. But that will not make the proposition any less true. If you wake up and look out of the window of your room you would know that the proposition "it is raining" is true. So, the logical theory of correspondence holds that truth depends on the character of correspondence to some real facts. And the knowledge of truth depends on its verification by experience. But it is not that all true propositions are verified. As for instance, general propositions like 'All men are mortal' are true in so far as they correspond to facts. But it cannot be verified by experience because we can have no experience of the unlimited number of instances. Hence, we conclude that the truth of a proposition does not depend on its verification by experience. Rather, we can say that truth of a proposition depends on its correspondence to fact.

Megarian "Liar Paradox": Eubulides, a member of the school of Megara, seems to have protested against the basic Platonic and Aristotelian positions. Here Eubulides has shown their position by saying about a man who says "I am lying" or "what I am now saying is false" and it is true if it is itself false and it is false if what the man is saying is not false (false if it is true). Therefore, this view leads to the position that whatever we say about the truth or falsehood of an utterance entails its own opposite. Aristotle's

one-sided view on truth and falsehood of sentences depends on the matter of fact. The sentence that deal with the fact is considered to be a true sentence; otherwise the sentence will be false. This "paradox of the liar" was much discussed by both ancient and modern medieval writers. It undoubtedly presents a serious problem to anyone by attempting to give a satisfactory account of truth and falsehood.



**LET US KNOW**

The Megarian School of philosophy, which flourished in the 4th century BC, was founded by Euclid of Megara, one of the pupils of Socrates.



**ACTIVITY: 11.1**

- Do you find any relationship between Correspondence Theory and realism? Discuss

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  .....

- Do you accept the Correspondence theory of Truth? Discuss

  .....

  .....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q 1: Name the supporters of the correspondence theory of truth.

……

……

Q 2: How do philosophers view truth? ( Answers in about 15 words)

……

……

Q 3: State whether the following statements are True or False

……

……

a. There are three principal tests of truth (T/F)

b. Correspondence theory is found in Aristotle's Metaphysics (T/F)

Q 4: What is meant by the correspondence theory of truth? (Answer in about 70 words)

……

……



## 11.5 LET US SUM UP

- Aristotle formulates the theory as such: -'to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that is not, is true'.

- The Correspondence theory holds that there is a direct correspondence between judgment and reality. As for instance, 'Milk is white' is a judgment. But the question is, whether the judgment is true or false. Correspondence theory holds that there is a direct correspondence between milk and white. It is not the case that milk is not white. That is why it can be held that the judgment 'milk is white' is true.

- It is a common sense theory of truth. Common sense holds that objects exist independently of knowledge in the external world. Our sense organs directly perceive that milk is white. This theory is also known as direct realism. Because our common sense holds that our mind comes in direct contact with the objects.



## 11.6 FURTHER READING

1) Chatterjee, S.C.(1949). The Problems of Philosophy. Das Gupta & Co. Ltd., Calcutta.

2) Patrick, Thomas White.(2006). Introduction to Philosophy. George Thomas White Surjeet Publications, Delhi, 2006

3) Datta, D.M. (1961). Chief Currents of Contemporary Philosophy. Bharati Printing Books, Calcutta, University Press.

4) Hosper, J. (1973). An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis. Edition, London Routledge &Kegan Paul.

## 11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Aristotle, John Locke, Bertrand Russell support correspondence theory of truth.

**Ans to Q No 2:** Truth is an attribute of beliefs, opinion, theories, doctrines, statements, etc.

**Ans to Q No 3:** a) True b) True

**Ans to Q No 4:** The Correspondence theory means that there is a direct correspondence between judgment and reality. As for instance, 'milk is white'. But the question is, whether the judgment is true or false. Correspondence theory upholds that there is a direct correspondence between milk and white. It is not the case that milk is not white. That is why it can be held that the judgment 'milk is white" is true.

## 11.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Very short Questions**

Q 1: Name two supporters of Correspondence theory.

Q 2: What are the theories of truth?

Q 3: What is the logical formula of Aristotelian Correspondence theory of truth?

Q 4: Define correspondence theory of truth

**B) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q 1: Briefly explain the Correspondence theory of truth?

Q 4: What is Semantic theory of truth?

Q 5: Write briefly on the deflationist theory of truth.

Q 6: What is 'megarian Liar Paradox'? Explain briefly

**C) Write short notes on (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q 1: Common sense view on The Correspondence Theory of Truth

Q 3: Neo-realists view on The Correspondence theory of Truth

Q 4: The logical theory of Correspondence

**D) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q 1: Explain the correspondence theory of truth. Is it satisfactory?

Q 4: What is the difference between correspondence theory and coherence theory? Explain

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# UNIT 12: COHERENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

**UNIT STRUCTURE**

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Coherence theory of truth

12.3.1 Degrees of truth

12.4 Let Us Sum Up

12.5 Further Reading

12.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.7 Model Questions

## 12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- define truth in Philosophy
- identify what are the theories of truth
- explain 'The coherence theory' of truth

## 12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have learned the correspondence theory of truth. Now, let us learn the coherence theory of truth. The Coherence theory considers coherence to be the test of truth. It views that a judgment is true if it coheres with a system. It entails that coherence is the test of truth. The idealists support the Coherence theory of truth.

## 12.3 COHERENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

By now you have an idea about the concept of correspondence theory of truth. Now let us look at the Coherence theory of truth.

The Coherence theory of Truth is another form of the theories of truth. According to this theory, a judgment is true if it coheres with our beliefs within a system. It is generally accepted by the idealists. Idealists like Berkley,

Hegel, Bradley and Bosanquet accept this theory of truth. It also has been accepted by logical positivists like Neurath, Hempel. But there is a difference between logical positivists and idealists.

The logical positivist theory of coherence is found among a system. It is the totality of all possible systems and is true by itself. On the other hand the Hegelian form of the Coherence theory is the theory of absolutists. It differs from logical positivists in two important ways.

- It is not the consistency of formal logic which may characterize a system and make it valid, but not true. A system of thought may be formally consistent but materially false and therefore not correct. As for instance, think about gold mountain. This example is formally and logically correct but not materially in the sense that gold mountain is not found in experience.

- The Hegelians do not advocate the view given by the logical positivists. According to the logical positivists, there are different systems of truth. The different systems of truth are inconsistent with one another. Because a proposition which is true in one sense may be false in another. Against this view, the Hegelians say that the ideal of knowledge is a 'system, not of truths, but of truth'. They advocate that truth is all inclusive and harmonius whole.

## 12.3.1 Degrees of truth

Coherence theory also admits degrees of truth. Because a judgment which is consistent and coheres with the all comprehensive system of knowledge is absolutely true. But the problem is that we cannot attain such type of absolute truth. We know that an absolute truth is an ideal truth. A judgment becomes more true if it coheres with the whole system of knowledge. So, coherence admits degrees of truth. Bradley, an absolutist idealist therefore, views that judgments are partially true and partially false.

His view is that "truth must exhibit the mark of expansion and all-inclusiveness." He through this saying admits degrees of truth.

From the ordinary view point it can be said that individual statements lead to degrees of truth in comparison to the whole system of truth. So, a judgment may be partially true or partially false. That is why all human errors may be said to be partial truths. Hence, it can be said that Coherence theory of truth admits degrees of truth.

The Coherence theory of truth is also not satisfactory. Because this theory of truth leads to relativism in the sense that it admits different degrees of truth. So, the question comes to our mind, what is the objectivity of truth then? In answer it can be said that truth cannot be varying. If it is, then telling lies by someone will be true. And as a result we fail to distinguish between truth and falsity in our practical life. But the advocates of the coherence theory do not accept this objection. Because at first people thought that 'the Earth is the center of the universe'. This was accepted as true knowledge until the truth being discovered that not the Earth, rather the Sun is the center of the universe. So, it can be said that the first view was inconsistent when the later view is being proved to be true by Galileo (the Sun is the center of the universe).



**ACTIVITY: 12.1**

- Do you find any relationship between coherence theory and idealism? Discuss

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  .....

- Do you accept the coherence theory of truth? Discuss

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  .....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q 1: Define coherence theory of truth. (Answer in about 50 words)

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Q 2: State whether the following statements are True or False

a. Coherence theory of truth is generally accepted by the idealists (T/F)

b. Coherence theory is also accepted by logical positivists (T/F)



## 12.4 LET US SUM UP

- The Coherence theory of truth holds that a judgment is true if it coheres with our beliefs within a system. It is generally accepted by the idealists. Idealists like Berkley, Hegel, Bradley and Bosanquet uphold this theory of truth.



## 12.5 FURTHER READING

1) Chatterjee, S.C.(1949). The Problems of Philosophy. Das Gupta & Co. Ltd., Calcutta.

2) Patrick, Thomas White.(2006). Introduction to Philosophy. George Thomas White Surjeet Publications, Delhi, 2006

3) Datta, D.M. (1961). Chief Currents of Contemporary Philosophy. Bharati Printing Books, Calcutta, University Press.

4) Hosper, J. (1973). An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis. Edition, London Routledge &Kegan Paul.

## 12.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** This theory says that a judgment is true if it coheres with our beliefs within a system. It is generally accepted by the idealists. Idealists like Berkley, Hegel, Bradley and Bosanquet accept this theory of truth. It also has been accepted by logical positivists like Neurath, Hempel.

**Ans to Q No 2:** a) True b) True

## 12.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Very short Questions**

Q 1: Name two supporters of Coherence theory.

Q 2: Which theory of truth advocates 'the degress of truth'?

Q 3: What are the theories of truth?

Q 4: Define coherence theory.

**B) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q 1: Briefly explain the Coherence theory of truth?

Q 2: Is Coherence theory of truth satisfactory? Discuss briefly.

Q 3: Write a short note on 'Degrees of Truth'.

**D) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q 1: Explain the coherence theory of truth. Is it satisfactory?

Q 2: Define coherence theory of truth. Explain its defects giving proper reasons.

Q 3: What is the difference between correspondence theory and coherence theory? Explain

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# UNIT 13: PRAGMATIC THEORY OF TRUTH

**UNIT STRUCTURE**

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Pragmatic theory of truth

13.4 Some other important theories of truth

13.5 Let Us Sum Up

13.6 Further Reading

13.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

13.8 Model Questions

## 13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- describe 'The Pragmatic Theory' of truth
- discuss semantic, deflationist, and the disquotational theory of truth

## 13.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have some idea about the concept of Coherence theory of truth.. Now, let us learn the pragmatic theory of truth. The pragmatic theory considers workability or meaningfulness and utility or usefulness as the test of truth. So, the pragmatic theory says that a judgment is true if it is workable or meaningful or useful. Realists support the Correspondence and Pragmatic theories of truth.

## 13.3 PRAGMATIC THEORY OF TRUTH

Now you have some idea about the concept of Coherence theory of truth. Let us know about the Pragmatic theory of truth.

Pragmatism asserts that usefulness or workability is the test of truth. An idea is true if it works. If it leads to fruitful consequence, it is true. On the other hand, if it leads to unfruitful consequence, it will be false. As for

instance, fire burns. This judgment is true if fire burns. On the other hand, the above mentioned judgment will be false if fire does not burn in experience. Therefore, the test of truth is pragmatic usefulness, successful activity, fruitful consequence or utility.

The supporters of the pragmatic theory are C.S. Peirce, William James, Schiller and Dewey.

Pragmatism is a method of philosophizing. It has been developed by C.S. Peirce and revived and formulated by William James as a theory of truth. Again, it has been further developed by John Dewey and Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller.

According to Peirce, pragmatism is not a philosophy, a metaphysic, or a theory of truth. It is not a solution of an answer to anything but a technique to find solutions of a philosophical or scientific nature.

Peirce holds that pragmatism as a method of philosophy deals with the clarification of the meaning of words, ideas and concepts. Similarly, it is also a method of clarifying and determining the meaning of signs. Peirce, in this context, holds that "All thought whatsoever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language." The pragmatic method does not apply to all the various kinds of signs and modes and purposes of communication.

The aim of the method is to facilitate communication to an extent which finally determines the relevance and justification of the method.

This aim shows us the critical nature of pragmatism. It directs us that words are being used in different ways or without meaning at all. Peirce says, "Pragmatism will show that almost every proposition of ontological metaphysics is either meaningless……or else absurd." Peirce also remarked that "Pragmatism solves no real problem. It only shows that supposed problems are not real problems."

William James in his book Pragmatism states: "Truth is a property of certain of our ideas. It means their agreement, as falsity means their disagreement with reality." By the agreement of ideas he does not mean that our ideas copy reality. It also does not mean that there is a fixed relation of correspondence between ideas and objects. Therefore, it cannot be said that ideas are true because they copy or correspond to reality. That is why it is clear that pragmatic theory goes against the Correspondence theory of truth.

The truth of ideas depends on verifiability. "True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot."(James) Ideas and judgments are not true until they are verified by their fruitful consequences. When they lead to successful activities they are true. An idea is not true by itself. This means that the truth of an idea is constituted by verifiability. William James in his book Essays in Pragmatism says: 'True ideas are those that we assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot.'

Schiller points out that the question of truth is primarily a practical one. Our success in practical life depends on our ability to predict and control the course of events in the world. We want to discover truth. The test of truth depends on our ability to predict and control the course of events in the world. Predictions which are formally valid, but practically inapplicable are only truth-claims. Truth claims are not considered as truths. So, predictions become true only when they turn to success. Here we find a distinction between positive value of successful prediction and negative value of unsuccessful prediction.

According to Dewey, truth or knowledge is the outcome of adequate enquiry. 'Knowledge is related to enquiry as a product of the operations by which it is produced.' Enquiry is a process of investigation which is evoked by a doubtful situation. It begins in doubt and proceeds to remove doubt through proper investigation. A proposition is true means it is warranted by

competent and controlled enquiry. Dewey prefers to use the words 'warranted assertability' for knowledge or truth.

The pragmatic theory has been criticized by critics. According to them, pragmatic theory reduces the true to be useful and obliterates the distinction between truth and error. It is a matter of common experience that what is not useful and what is false may sometimes be useful for certain purposes.

Again, the pragmatic theory makes truth appear as subjective. If the test of truth is utility or usefulness then the truth will depend on people's interest. That is why, it is clear that pragmatic theory cannot provide us objective test of truth. So, it can be said that pragmatic theory is not satisfactory.



**LET US KNOW**

Peirce,Charles Sander(1834-914) American Philosopher of Science and Language. He was founding figure of American "Pragmatism" best expressed in his essay "How to make our ideas clear".

Dewey, John: (1859-1952) American philosopher of 'pragmatism'. He developed the pragmatism of William James and Peirce.

Schiller,FCS(1864-1937)Philosopher of pragmatism who holds the doctrine that our cognitive efforts and human needs transform the reality we seek to describe.



**ACTIVITY: 13.1**

- Is pragmatic theory practical? Give answer.

  .....

  .....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1: Fill in the blanks:**

a. ----------is the test of pragmatic theory of truth.

b. Pragmatic theory is supported by----------.

**Q 2: State whether the following statements are True or False:**

a. James wrote Essays in Pragmatism (T/F)

b. Pragmatic theory is free from criticism (T/F)

**Q 3: What is pragmatic theory? (Answer in about 50 words)**

……

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## 13.4 SOME IMPORTANT THEORIES OF TRUTH

Besides the three theories of truth like Correspondence, Coherence, and Pragmatic theory of truth we also get some other theories of truth. They are - Semantic theory of truth, Deflationary theory of truth, and Disquotational theory of truth etc.

### I Semantic theory of truth

This theory of truth originates with the mathematician and logician Alfred Tarski. It shows that the sentence like 'Aardvarks amble' is true if and only if aardvarks amble. It holds the symbolic form of all true sentences such as 'p is true if and only if p.

Tarski shows that all true sentences must logically follow from the adequate definition in And if we were dealing with a finite language, we need all the associated T-sentences for a complete definition of truth. Tarski has dealt with the definition of truth of formal languages which are infinite. Apart from this, Tarski defined truth in terms of satisfaction. He insisted on the definition of truth for formal languages that implied the T- sentences. It can be viewed that both the Correspondence theorists and Deflationists

follow the Tarski's theory of truth. Correspondence theory holds a word-world relationship and it leads to a satisfaction when we can make a compatible relationship between a word and its objects refered to. It confirms that correspondence is no more mysterious than the semantic relations between predicates and names and their referents.

### l Deflationist theory of truth

Deflationists hold that the substantive theories like the Correspondence and the Coherence theory are not satisfactory. There is no substantive property of truth. Frank Ramsey in this context holds that truth is redundant. It is true that 'Caesar was murdered' means no more than that Caesar was murdered. Truth is less easily eliminated from generalizations like "Everything Socrates says is true." Ramsay agrees with the view. Here, the word 'true' disappears and any effort to investigate the nature of truth also disappears. The Prosentencial theory of truth, which is considered a sophisticated version of the theory of truth, views that the word true is not even a genuine predicate but a mere component of pro-sentences. If I say 'that is true' in response to a claim of yours then I have produced not a new sentence but pro-sentences by going back to the original (your) sentence just as pronouns he/she are used in lieu of nouns like Mantu, Kalpana etc. So, the word true is no longer used as a discrete property by denoting predicate. P.F. Strawson asserts that we use the word true not to mention a property but to perform speech-acts such as endorsing, agreeing, and conceding.

### l Disquotational theory of truth

The disquotational theory of truth, which is championed by W.V. Quine and further developed and defended by Field, holds that a sentence is true due to its indirect way of saying the sentence itself. That is why, the word true is not directly related to the sentence like 'Penguin waddles' which is the Tarskian T-sentence. "Penguin waddles" is true if and only if Penguin waddles. And the totality of T-sentences tells the whole story about truth.

This raises the question whether we can talk about the truth of a sentence without using truth predicate in case of direct talk about the world. The disquotationalist will reply by pointing to the general form "p or not p' is true. In this case, truth predicate can be eliminated from sentences in order to determine the truth or falsity of sentences only if we could produce an infinite conjunction of sentences of the form "p or not p". "Penguin waddles or penguin does not waddle', and "Aardvarks amble or aardvarks do not amble." Therefore, this theory of truth views that true does not denote a property or relation. It is a logical device.



## 13.5 LET US SUM UP

- According to Pragmatism, usefulness or workability is the test of truth. An idea is true if it works. If it leads to fruitful consequence, it is true. On the other hand, if it leads to unfruitful consequence, it will be false. The supporters of pragmatism are Dewey, James, Schiller.

- The semantic theory of truth originates in the ideas of Alfred Tarski. The symbolic form of the semantic theory of truth is P is true if and only if P. The truth of a sentence logically follows from the sentences. Each T-sentence is partially true because it concern with finite language. Therefore, Tarski is concerned is concerned with formal languages which are linked with infinite.

- Deflationists' theory of truth holds that truth is redundant. Truth is not even a genuine predicate but a mere component of pro-sentences.

- The disquotational theory of truth holds that truth is not directly related to the sentence, rather it is indirectly related to the sentence itself. This theory holds that truth does not denote a property, rather it is a logical device.

## 13.6 FURTHER READING

1) Chatterjee, S.C.(1949). The Problems of Philosophy. Das Gupta & Co. Ltd., Calcutta.

2) Patrick, Thomas White.(2006). Introduction to Philosophy. George Thomas White Surjeet Publications, Delhi, 2006

3) Datta, D.M. (1961). Chief Currents of Contemporary Philosophy. Bharati Printing Books, Calcutta, University Press.

4) Hosper, J. (1973). An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis. Edition, London Routledge &Kegan Paul.

## 13.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** a) Pragmatic usefulness, successful activity, fruitful consequence or utility is the test of truth

b) William James, Schiller, Dewey

**Ans to Q No 2:** a) True b) False

**Ans to Q No 3:** Pragmatic theory of truth views that usefulness or workability is the test of truth. An idea is true if it works. If it leads to fruitful consequence, it is true. On the other hand, if it leads to unfruitful consequence, it will be false. As for instance, fire burns. This judgment is true if fire burns.

## 13.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Very short Questions**

Q 1: Name two supporters of pragmatic theory.

Q 2: Define pragmatic theory.

Q 3: What are the theories of truth?

**B) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q 1: Briefly explain the pragmatic theory of truth?

Q 2: What is pragmatic theory of truth?

Q 3: Is pragmatic theory of truth satisfactory? Discuss briefly.

Q 4: What is Semantic theory of truth?

Q 5: Write briefly on the deflationist theory of truth.

Q 6: What is 'megarian Liar Paradox'? Explain briefly

**C) Write short notes on (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q 1: Pragmatic theory of truth

Q 5: The semantic theory of truth

Q 6: Disduotational theory of truth

**D) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q 1: Explain the pragmatic theory of truth. Is it satisfactory?

Q 2: Define pragmatic theory of truth. Explain its defects giving proper reasons.

Q 3: Is pragmatic theory free from defects? Discuss.

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# UNIT 14: THE REFERENTIAL THEORY OF MEANING

**UNIT STRUCTURE**

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Theories of Meaning

14.4 The Referential Theory of Meaning

- 14.4.1 The Naive Referential Theory of Meaning
- 14.4.2 The Sophisticated Referential Theory of Meaning
- 14.4.3 The Picture Theory of Meaning

14.5 Let Us Sum Up

14.6 Further Readings

14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.8 Model Questions

## 14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- analyse the meaning of meaning
- discuss the different problems relating to specification of meaning
- explain different philosophical theories that explain meaning
- evaluate the merits and demerits of different theories of meaning
- discuss the aspects of reality, communication and behaviour that different theories highlight in explanations of meaning

## 14.2 INTRODUCTION

Meaning is the feature or characteristic of words and sentences. Consider the following sentences:

1. Rotundity writes obfuscation.

2. Thirsty animals drink water.

The latter has meaning while the former doesn't. Similarly 'fastakut' is meaningless while 'fasting' of course has meaning. The etymology of the English word 'meaning' tells us that it comes the Old English mænan which is of West Germanic origin coming from an Indo-European root from which the word 'mind' is also derived. Words are scribbles or noise apart from the mental act of signifying or intending by the community of users. Again words and sentences have multiplicity of meaning for which they tend to be ambiguous. Words and sentences are used in different situations which resemble each other. When such resemblances become far fetch the words get figurative use. A knife is called sharp because it has the ability to cut the things well. Figuratively a student is said to have a sharp intellect when he has the ability to cut or analyse a difficult problems with ease. The similarity between the knife and the intellect is farfetched. What is true of the word 'sharp' is also true of the word 'meaning' as well. Let us consider the different uses of the word 'meaning' before entering into the philosophical theories of meaning.

1. Indication: A red banner in the railway track means danger ahead.
2. Result in: Rise in fuel price means price rise of essential commodities.
3. Significance: Human life has meaning.
4. Explanation: What is the meaning of such actions at this moment?
5. Implication: Early retreat of monsoon means a long dry season in the coming months.
6. Intend: I mean to lend my bicycle to him.

But when we speak about the meaning of things, events, facts or actions we are using the term 'meaning' figuratively. In the literal use of the term 'meaning' is primarily related to words and sentences. Unless they are related by some mind or a community of conscious and rational agents to



**Onomatopoeic word:** words formed by imitation of the sounds made by the things they signify. Example is 'cuckoo' which signify a species of bird which sings making sounds similar to this word.

**Pictographs:** Pictorial symbols for words are often similar to the things they signify.

signify something or to do something by their use, sounds in themselves are mere noises and words written are useless scribbles. Sound themselves are not connected to anything they signify by nature except the onomatopoeic word and similarly the written language except the pictographs.

From the examples of the uses of the word 'meaning' stated above it becomes clear that meaning is not only the feature or characteristic of words and sentences but also of things and events which are not linguistic. Here in this unit you are going to learn the philosophical problems associated with linguistic meaning i.e., meaning of words and sentences in our language.

Pragmatism asserts that usefulness or workability is the test of truth. An idea is true if it works. If it leads to fruitful consequence, it is true. On the other hand, if it leads to unfruitful consequence, it will be false.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q 1: What is meaning characteristic of?

.....

.....

Q 2: State three different uses of the word "meaning".

.....

.....

Q 3: Why do words and sentences become ambiguous?

.....

.....

## 14.3 THEORIES OF MEANING

When do we ask for the meaning of a word or a sentence? If we understand an expression, we do not bother about its meaning and we do

not we look for it. Meaning of an expression tells us how it is to be used. Meaning makes an expression intelligible, clear and unambiguous. Usually the meaning of the expression is offered in terms of another expression which is synonymous with the former. Thus meaning of an expression appears to be another expression which can replace it, serve the same purpose as it serve and make it intelligible or clear and unambiguous. If a person is not familiar with the use of an expression then we specify the meaning of that expression by stating another expression with the use of which she is familiar. But any two linguistic expressions of a language cannot serve exactly the same purpose as most of expressions have variety of uses all of which are not interchangeable. So, synonyms are not similar to the spare parts of a machine identical with what they replace and serving exactly the same purpose with what they replace. Therefore, it will be more accurate to say that the meaning of an expression is offered in terms of another expression which has approximately the same use with it.

If we state the meaning of a word W1 or of a sentence S1 by another word W2 or another sentence S2 then a philosophical theory of meaning must explain the following question:

What characteristics must W2 or S2 have in order to be the meaning of W1 or S1?

Or else

What characteristics or relation must W2 or S2 and W1 or S1 must have in order to be synonymous with one another?

Our answer to these questions is that the two must have the same use. But this has to be further clarified. Different theories of meaning offer different answer to these questions as they take different standpoint about the use of an expression. Some of the theories of meaning are the followings:

1. Reference Theory of Meaning: An expression and its meaning must refer to the same thing or object.

2. Ideational Theory of Meaning: An expression and its meaning must be associated with the same idea or thought.

3. Behavioural Theory of Meaning: An expression and its meaning must be elicited by the same stimulus and/or must generate the same response.

4. Use Theory of Meaning: An expression and its meaning have approximately the same illocutionary acts potentials.

Now let us enter into a detailed explanation of these theories.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q 4: When do we search for the meaning of an expression?

.....

.....

Q 5: What is a synonym?

.....

.....

Q 6: What do we state when we explain the meaning of expression to someone?

.....

.....



**ACTIVITY: 14.1**

I Select a synonym of any word in a dictionary. Now find out the different uses of the synonym. Check whether all the uses of the word and synonym are interchangeable

.....

.....

## 14.4 THE REFERENTIAL THEORY OF MEANING

This theory states that the meaning of an expression is its referent or referential relation it has with something other than itself. This referent is in the world or the referential relation is with something in the world but not in the language itself. This view about meaning is most commonly held by laymen and with some sophistication by some philosophers as well. A language has sentences which are constituted by words. These words are the ultimate meaningful units of language. The letters or phonemes that constitute words do not have meaning except some letters like 'I', 'a' etc which are also words. It is ordinarily believed that these words stand for something other than themselves. Some philosophers also subscribe to this view. Bertrand Russell in his The Principles of Mathematics (published in 1902) wrote:

Words all have meaning, in the simple sense that they are symbols other than themselves.

A similar view is expressed by Hilary Putnam in recent time when he stated that words by themselves do not have any magical power to refer to anything; they must have some causal link to the things in the world in order to be meaningful in the referential sense of meaning.

It appears that proper names have the most obvious referential meaning structure. For example in our language 'Fido' is the name of a pet dog. The word 'Fido' is here in our language and there in the world the animal which is a dog. 'Fido' refers to the dog and hence means that dog. It is simply because it names that animal, it has whatever meaning it has. Consideration of such proper names and their meaning leads to the conclusion that a similar example can be given about the meaning of all other expressions. So it is held that all other words are also like the proper names. They are also naming, labelling or designating something which has to be their meaning though this something which they name or label sometimes may not be a concrete observable particular thing but could be a class or kind of



**Phoneme** is a distinct unit of sound that a hearer can identify and distinguish from other similar units of sound simply by hearing. Spoken words are different and identifiable for the definite combinations of phonemes they contain.

**Bertrand Russell** (1872-1972) was a philosopher from United Kingdom. He contributed to analytical philosophy and the development of Modern Logic.

**Hilary Whitehall Putnam** (born 1926) is an American analytical philosopher, and presently

things designated by common name, a quality, a state of affair or an event, a relationship etc. For any word, whether it is a proper name or some other part of speech, its being meaningful consists in its ability to refer to something other than itself.

William P Alston makes a distinction between more and less naive versions of reference theory of meaning. Both the theories agree in holding that an expression is meaningful by virtue of its reference to something other than itself. The point of departure of the two theories lies at the identification of the point or areas of the situation of reference. The more naive theory locates the meaning of an expression in that to which it refers, i.e., its referent. The less naive or sophisticated version of the referential theory does not identify meaning of expressions with their referents but holds that meaning is to be identified with relation that an expression has with its referents, i.e., for them referential relation constitutes meaning.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q 7: What is the referent of an expression?

.....

.....

Q 8: State the two versions of referential theory of meaning.

.....

.....

Q 9: What characteristics do proper names have regarding referential relation?

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.....

## 14.4.1 The Naive Referential Theory

The naive referential theory identifies meaning of an expression with what it refers to. Words and expressions are like names or labels for

something other than these expressions. Proper names are the ideal examples of what constitute meaning. In our language we have the expression 'Fido' and out there in the world is the dog with that name. The meaning of the word 'Fido' is that particular dog.

No philosopher of repute is known to have subscribed to and developed a detailed version of the naive referential theory of meaning. Yet this theory represents the popular thinking about meaning. Therefore, it is significant to examine this theory and bring out the difficulties involved in it.

The meaning of an expression and its referent are two distinct and different things. For example, 'Sir William Scott' is the name of person who as a famous poet was well known. The name refers to that person. Incidentally it was earlier not known by everyone that Scott was also the author of the novel 'Waverly'. 'The author of Waverly' refers to the same person as 'Sir William Scott'. Before it became well-known that it was Scott who wrote the Waverly it was obvious that 'The author of Waverly' and 'Sir William Scott' have different meaning though they referred to the same person. The person referred to by the expression 'the author of Waverly' does not exist now but the expression has still meaning. A similar example is the expression 'the morning star' which refers to the planet Venus. If the planet gets exploded the meaning the expression 'morning star' will not explode.

Take the examples of indexical like 'I', 'this', 'here' etc. These words have different referents in different contexts of their use. But they have same meaning in different contexts of their uses. 'Here' has the same meaning as 'the place where I am now' when I use this word though refer to different places as I move about uttering the same. Obviously referent and meaning are distinct for these words.

Further there are many words and expression which do not refer to anything. 'Unicorn' or 'phlogiston' doesn't refer to anything but in our language these words have use and hence meaning.



**Unicorn** is an imaginary animal conceived as a horse with one straight horn on its forehead.

**Phlogiston** is an imaginary substance supposed to exist in all objects that burn and to get released when burning takes place. The word was used in the discussions of 18th century chemistry.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q 10: What is meaning according to Naive Referential Theory?

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.....

Q 11: Which part of speech can be considered to signify the meaning relation in the clearest way?

.....

.....

Q 12: Do indexicals refer to the same thing in different contexts?

.....

.....

## 14.4.2 The Sophisticated Referential Theory

Difficulties that the naive version of the theory encounters lead to a sophisticated formulation of the same. Here meaning is not identified with what an expression stand for. Rather it holds that it is referential relation that constitutes meaning of an expression. It is the peculiar relation that an expression has with something other than itself to mean that thing. In the situations where meaning varies but referent does not, like the example of 'the author of Waverly' and 'Sir William Scott', this theory can explain that in the two expressions though the referent is the same the referential relations are different. The same person is referred to by the two expressions but the way he is referred to is different in each case. The way or mode of referring or presenting the object is called sense. Meaning of these two expressions differ because they have different sense.

The referential theory presupposes that every meaningful linguistic expression must refer to something. This presupposition is questionable. Expressions like 'and', 'if', 'but', 'therefore', 'whereas' etc. are obviously meaningful but they do not refer to anything. The referential theorist may

defend herself by stating that these expressions do not refer to anything by themselves and hence not meaningful by themselves but become meaningful when they combine with other expressions to refer to something by that combination.

The theory has further difficulties with common nouns, adjectives and verbs though they appear to refer to something. A common noun like 'dog' does not refer to one definite particular thing. It is applicable to any particular thing of a class of animal. If meaning is constituted by the referential relation to the thing or things it refers then in case of the common name like 'dog' meaning has to be constituted by its relation to the class of things which it designates. Similarly, the adjective 'courageous' must refer to a quality of character and verbs like 'to run' must refer to all acts of running in order to be meaningful by referential relation. Class and qualities are not concrete particular things. But in favour of the referential theory it may be stated that the theory does not presuppose that linguistic expressions must refer to concrete particular things. They may refer to abstract entities as well. But such defence does not work. If common nouns refer to the class then why cannot we use those terms to refer to the class? We cannot express the statement that the class of dog is large by the sentence "Dog is large". Had 'dog' referred to the class of dogs then this sentence would have served our purpose. If the adjective 'courageous' refers to the quality of courage then to state that courage is a quality too rare these days we could have used the sentence "Courageous is too rare these days". Similarly if the verb refers to the class of all acts of running then it should make sense to say "what the batsman has just done belong to run". All these absurdities are due to the presupposition that every meaningful expression refers. Words like 'dog' or 'pencil' denote a class but do not refer like proper names. These terms are applicable to any single member of the class they denote. Similarly most of the words we use connote properties. If possession of the property that an expression connotes by something is sufficient condition to apply that expression correctly to that thing, then possession of this property by it implies that this thing belong to the class denoted by the

expression. This is a hypothetical relation stating that if something has a definite property then it belong to a definite class, but it is not necessary that there exist in the world something which has the property and the expression is tied to the things having that property in order to be meaningful.

There are linguistic expressions that we understand and use successfully which do not refer or denote anything. For example the word 'and' stand for the conjunctive function. It is not possible to find out the things or situations in the extra-linguistic world that it labels or refers to or denotes. Conjunctive function holds within language, i.e., between two sentences.

Thus the referential theory fails to account for the meaning of linguistic expressions. But this theory rest on an important aspect of language and meaning. This is the fact that language and its use are connected to the world or reality. No theory of meaning can be satisfactory without recognising this fact. No language that any community of speakers use can be a syntactic play of signs without any relation to the extra-linguistic world.



**LET US KNOW**

Sense and Reference are two different aspects of meaning of expressions. Gottlob Frege in his paper (published in 1892) Über Sinn und Bedeutung (On Sense and Reference) made the distinction between sense (Sinn) and reference (Bedeutung) of an expression. The reference or referent of an expression is the object to which it refers and sense is the way in which the expression refers to the object. The expression 'the morning star' and 'the evening star' has the same referent --- the planet Venus, but the expressions refer in different ways to the same object. Frege made the distinction between sense and reference keeping in mind the meaning of terms and particularly proper names and but not in the context of sentence meaning.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q 13: What constitutes meaning according to Sophisticated Referential Theory?

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.....

Q 14: Do the expressions 'author of the Ramayana' and 'Valmiki' mean the same thing?

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.....

Q 15: What important fact relating to meaning is highlighted by the Referential Theory of Meaning?

.....

.....

## 14.4.3 The Picture Theory of Meaning

In his early philosophical career Ludwig Wittgenstein maintained that propositions in language are meaningful only if they picture or depict some state of affairs when somebody assert or use them. All meaningful propositions are either atomic propositions or are molecular propositions that can be analysed into atomic propositions which contain names related to each other in some definite way. In other words, atomic propositions contain names in relation and they depict some atomic and empirical facts which are things or objects in relation. The sense of the proposition is what state of affair should obtain if the statement remains true. The world is not the collection of things but it is collection of facts which are things in relation. Similarly, propositions are not collection of words but words combined in a definite way so as to obtain one to one correspondence between objects of the world and the terms of the proposition. A picture depicts not only the things but also the way in which they are related to one another. Similarly a

proposition contains terms related in a definite way. In a meaningful atomic proposition there must be one to one correspondence between the elements of the proposition and the elements of reality. Such pictures are logical as the sense of proposition states what states of affair obtains when the proposition remains true. Meaning of a proposition depicts its condition of truth and falsity. Same words or terms combine in indefinite number of ways to generate different propositions which states different states of affairs. Language users can construct and use and understand different propositions because such combinations of words work as different logical pictures stating what states of affairs must obtain if the proposition is true. If any combination of terms cannot be analysed in such a way that it shows what states of empirical facts must obtain if they were to be true then they do not have any meaning.

Wittgenstein was opposed to philosophical theorising. Picture theory of meaning is attributed to Wittgenstein by interpreters of his works. The theory is inadequate to explain the meaning of universal propositions which cannot be analysed completely into atomic propositions. For example the proposition "All ravens are black" cannot conceivably be analysed into atomic propositions in the way required by the picture theory for being meaningful. Imperative and interrogative sentences are obviously meaningful but they are not propositions to be analysed into logical pictures. In his later philosophical career Wittgenstein realised that language is not merely picture of reality but has variety of functions and uses meaning relates to uses of language in different context and situations of our life.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q 16: In what sense propositions are regarded to be pictures by Wittgenstein? Are they spatial pictures?

.....

.....

Q 17: What is the relation between elements of facts and propositions?

.....

.....

Q 18: What is an atomic proposition?

.....

.....



## 14.5 LET US SUM UP

- Meaning is the feature of linguistic expressions as well as non-linguistic things and events.
- Specification of meaning of an expression is offering some other expression that has approximately the same use with that expression.
- The referential theory in the naive form identifies meaning of an expression with its referents. It considers words and expressions to be similar to labels.
- The sophisticated referential theory identifies meaning of expressions with the referential relation that hold between the expressions and their referents.
- The picture theory of meaning holds that all meaningful propositions are pictures of reality. Ludwig Wittgenstein maintained that propositions in language are meaningful only if they picture or depict some state of affairs when somebody assert or use them. All meaningful propositions are either atomic propositions or are molecular propositions that can be analysed into atomic propositions which contain names related to each other in some definite way.



## 14.6 FURTHER READING

1) Alston, W. P. Philosophy of Language, Prentice Hall India Ltd., 1993

2) Hospers, J., An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis, Chapter I, Allied Publishers, 1998

## 14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

**Ans to Q No1:** Meaning is the characteristic of words and sentences as well as thing, events and actions.

**Ans to Q No 2:** Indication, results or consequence, significance.

**Ans to Q No 3:** These becomes ambiguous because they have more than one meaning

**Ans to Q No 4:** We search for the meaning of expressions when we don't understand these and their use.

**Ans to Q No 5:** The synonym of an expression is another expression which approximately has the same meaning.

**Ans to Q No 6:** We state another expression which has approximately the same use with the expression of which we are stating the meaning of.

**Ans to Q No 7:** The referent of an expression is the thing or things in the world to which it refers or works as a label or name.

**Ans to Q No 8:** The Naive Referential Theory and the Sophisticated Referential Theory.

**Ans to Q No 9:** Proper names have the ideal meaning structure in terms of reference. A proper name works as a label. It identifies one definite object in the world which is its referent.

**Ans to Q No 10:** According to the Naive Referential Theory meaning of an expression is its referent.

**Ans to Q No 11:** Proper names.

**Ans to Q No12:** No. Indexicals refer to different things in different context of their uses.

**Ans to Q No 13:** According to the Sophisticated Referential Theory meaning of an expression is constituted by the referential relation that obtains between the expression and what it refers.

**Ans to Q No14:** No.

**Ans to Q No 15:** The significant fact that the Referential Theory highlights about meaning is that language is used to communicate facts about the world and hence it is latched to the world.

**Ans to Q No 16:** Propositions are regarded to be pictures in so far as they represent states of affairs in reality. In this respect they are similar to spatial pictures that represent facts or situations. But they are not spatial pictures as they show what state of affair obtains if they are true. Therefore they are logical pictures.

**Ans to Q No17:** The elements of facts and propositions have a relation of one to one correspondence. Every name in atomic proposition represents an object in reality. Relation between terms corresponds to the relation between objects in the world.

**Ans to Q No18:** Atomic proposition contains terms in relation. It cannot be analysed further into constituent other simpler propositions.

## 14.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A: Very Short Questions**

Q 1: Who is the author of Principles of Mathematics?

Q 2: What are the two versions of Referential Theory of meaning?

Q 3: From which Old English word the 'meaning' is derived?

Q 4: Who authored the book Essay Concerning Human Understanding?

Q 5: Which theory considers words to be similar to names or labels?

**B: Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q 1: What is meaning? Explain briefly.

Q 2: Can meaning be identified with referent? Give reasons.

Q 3: Are all sentences pictures of reality?

**C: Write Short Notes on:**

Q 1. Referent and Referential Relation

**D. Distinguish between (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q 1: Naive Referential Theory and Sophisticated Referential Theory of Meaning.

**E. Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)**

Q 1: What is Referential Theory of meaning? Explain the Naive Referential theory of meaning. Is the theory satisfactory account of meaning?

Q 2: Explain the Sophisticated Referential Theory of meaning. How does this theory differ from the Naive Referential Theory? Do you accept this theory? Give reasons.

Q 3: Explain and criticise the picture theory of meaning.

*** **** ***

# UNIT 15: VERIFICATION THEORY OF MEANING

**UNIT STRUCTURE**

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Verification theory of Meaning

15.4 Elimination of Metaphysics

15.5 Critical Appreciation

15.6 Let Us Sum Up

15.7 Further Readings

15.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

15.9 Model Questions

## 15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- explain logical positivism as a philosophical movement;
- describe the verification theory of meaning; and
- analyze critically the verification theory of meaning.

## 15.2 INTRODUCTION

Logical Positivism is an early twentieth century philosophical movement. The movement started in Vienna in the year 1922 under the leadership of Moritz Schlick. Schlick was a philosopher with a scientific temperament. He also inherited the anti-metaphysical view- point of his predecessor Ernst Mach. A group of scientists and mathematicians joined in Vienna and the result was the birth of the famous "Vienna Circle". Logical Positivism, or simply Positivism, is the philosophy propounded by this group of philosopher-scientists. Logical positivism may be said to be an outcome of the British Empiricist tradition. Locke's thesis that knowledge is derived from experience alone was further developed by Berkeley into subjective idealism. Then in Hume's hand it took the shape of scepticism according to which there was no sound footing for our knowledge. Hume maintained that our knowledge

of the empirical world is dependent on the law of causation. But the law of causation itself is not beyond doubt. Empiricism, was thus, started with attractive premises but ended in unsatisfactory conclusions. Therefore, the philosophers of the Vienna Circle tried to overcome the difficulties of empiricism. Logical positivism was also influenced by the logical analysis of Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein, Whitehead, Frege and others.

The school of logical positivism was started under the leadership of Moritz Schlick. Other prominent members of the circle were Otto Neurath, Rudolf Carnap, Hans Reichenbach, A.J. Ayer, E. Nagel and C.W.Morris. In the hands of these philosophers logical positivism was spread beyond Vienna to Prague, Warsaw, Berlin, Oxford and America. It became popular among the philosophers and came to be recognized as a twentieth century "revolution in philosophy".

## 15.3 VERIFICATION THEORY OF MEANING

The principal tool of the logical positivists in carrying out their philosophical activities was their theory of meaning. According to this theory, the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification. A sentence is meaningful if, and only if it is either analytic or empirically verifiable. Sentences of mathematics and logic are called analytic. These sentences are divided into tautologies, that is, those which are true under all possible circumstances, and contradictions, that is, those which are false under all possible circumstances. So, an analytic sentence is either necessarily true or necessarily false. Apart from these, the other class of meaningful sentences according to the theory are empirically verifiable sentences. A sentence that depicts an empirical situation expresses a proposition. And a proposition is true if it corresponds to the fact, and false if it does not so correspond. It appears, therefore, that the criteria of meaning for the logical positivists lies in the capacity of the sentence to be either true or false. A sentence is meaningless if it is neither true nor false.

Logical positivists have developed this verification theory of meaning in the light of the picture theory of meaning of early Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein in his Tractatus maintained that a sentence is meaningful in so far as it pictures a fact. Language for him is the symbolic representation of empirical facts. The world is composed of facts; a fact is an existing situation that makes a proposition true. The proposition "Ram is an intelligent student" is true if there is fact - a boy called Ram, who is a student and who is intelligent. The proposition will be false, though meaningful, if either there is no boy called Ram, or if Ram is not a student, or if Ram is a student but is not intelligent. But a sentence that does not depict any actual or possible state of affairs, cannot express any proposition. There is no means of ascertaining whether it is true or false. Therefore, such a sentence is meaningless according to this theory.

However, this verifiability condition does not require that a sentence should be actually verified in order to be classed as meaningful. It only means the logical possibility of verification. Sentences about remote past or future state of affairs, for example, cannot be actually verified; but we can think of situations under which they can be verified. Again a statement like "there is no life in the planet Saturn" is also meaningful in this weak sense of verifiability, because we can theoretically think of visiting the planet Saturn and verify whether there is life there or not. There is a similar problem about general propositions such as "all men are mortal". These propositions are not conclusively verifiable under any possible circumstances. Hence they are also meaningless from the point of view of verification. But since these general propositions are important, Schlick calls them an important type of nonsense.

But verifiability whether maintained in the strong sense or in the weak sense, gives rise to many problems. Because of these difficulties Karl Popper speaks of falsifiability as the criterion for distinguishing between scientific and non-scientific propositions. According to him, a proposition is scientific if and only if we can think out the logical possibility of falsifying it. This

theory can successfully accommodate general propositions under the head of scientific propositions. Because, although no amount of positive instances can conclusively verify a general proposition, a single negative instance can falsify it.



**ACTIVITY :15.1**

I Do you find any relationship between logical positivism and empiricism? If so, what?

.....

.....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Give short answer:

Q 1: What is Vienna circle?

.....

Q 2: State four supporters of logical positivism.

.....

Q 3: What is verification theory of meaning?

.....

Q 4: Define: a) Weak sense of verification

b) Strong sense of verification

c) Logical Positivism

Q 5: Fill up the gaps:

a) According to logical positivists, the meaning of a proposition is the method of its.....

b) Logical Positivism is an early.....

## 15.4 ELIMINATION OF METAPHYSICS

The principal aim of logical positivism was twofold -

1) To provide sciences with a secure foundation.

2) To show the meaninglessness of metaphysics.

For these purposes the logical positivists adopted the method of logical analysis of language. They have shown with the help of this type of analysis that the language of metaphysics does not fulfill the criteria of meaningfulness. Hence, metaphysics is, according to them, nonsense. On the other hand, with their emphasis on the verifiability criterion they wanted to provide sciences with objective foundation.

By applying their criteria of meaning the logical positivists have found only two types of sentences to be meaningful, namely those of logic and mathematics on the one hand, and those concerning empirical states of affair on the other. All other sentences, including those of metaphysics and ethics, are meaningless or nonsense, according to them. But the logical positivists are not as hostile against the ethical sentences as they are against metaphysical ones. It is because they found the ethical sentences to be practically useful, but they had a faulty conception of metaphysics. By metaphysics the positivists understood a theory of reality. The idealistic concept of reality was that of an ideal lying beyond the world of experience. Those philosophers were of opinion that reality is transcendental; and the empirical world is only an illusion. The positivist philosophers had this type of search for the reality in mind when they declared that metaphysics is nonsense. They called the descriptions about the metaphysical entities and the reality as expressed in some "sentences" which did not express any "proposition". A proposition can be verified to be either true or false. Since metaphysical sentences are about some unverifiable super sensuous entities, they are deficient of the capability of being true or false; so, they are meaningless.

The meaninglessness of the metaphysical sentences may be generated, according to Carnap, by two sources: 1) either one or more of the component words of a sentence is/are meaningless, (as for example, 'the dox is higher than the tox' where 'dox' and 'tox' are meaningless) which makes the entire sentence meaningless; 2) the constituent words are each meaningful individually, but their combination in a particular sentence fails to express any meaning (as for example, 'the book runs faster than the chalk pencil'). The metaphysician sometimes speaks the first kind, and sometimes the second kind of nonsense. When, for example, he speaks of the "absolute", he commits the mistake of the first kind as there is no such entity to be found in the empirical world to correspond to the definition of "absolute". He commits the mistake of the second kind when he says that "Reality is identity in difference". Carnap points out that the metaphysician was misled by the conception that for every word or phrase that can be the grammatical subject or predicate of a sentence, there must be a corresponding entity. If those entities are not found in the empirical world, they must be residing in some non-empirical world. Thus, Heidegger imagined that corresponding to the word "nothing" also there must be an entity.



**ACTIVITY : 15.2**

I "Metaphysical propositions are nonsense." How can you prove it?

.....

.....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q 6: What is the principal aim of logical positivism?

Q 7: What are the two types of meaningful sentences given by the logical positivists?

Q 8: State whether the following statements are True or False or false:

a) Metaphysical propositions are not verifiable (True/false).

b) Logical positivism adopts the method of logical analysis of language. (True/false)

c) Karl Popper is a critique of logical Positivism. (True/false)

## 15.5 CRITICAL APPRECIATION

Logical positivism has brought about a twentieth century revolution in philosophy. It started with the empirical outlook, but aimed at overcoming the demerits of traditional empiricism. Combined with the linguistic analyses of Russell, Moore, Wittgenstein and others, the logical positivists aimed at providing philosophy with some scientific foundation. As a reaction against the classical idealistic tradition it was a very bold step. It can be said to be successful to some extent in showing the 'meaninglessness' of scholastic metaphysics. But this enterprise proved to be a kind of over-enthusiasm when it went to deny the very meaningfulness of metaphysics in general. All the difficulties in logical positivism are generated by their theory of meaning.

The verification theory of meaning is the principal thesis of positivism. This theory maintains that the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification. But interestingly the theorist has no clear account of the principle. It is found that among the positivists there are two versions of verifiability - strong and weak. According to the strong version, a sentence is meaningful if it is actually verified in sense experience. But this strong version cannot render a good variety of propositions as meaningful. Propositions about past events, those about future state of affairs - all become meaningless in this version. But we cannot, for obvious reasons, regard these propositions as meaningless. Again propositions about general truths and those of hitherto unexplored regions are not verified. These too cannot be rendered meaningless simply because they have not been verified. In the face of these difficulties the positivists go to formulate a weaker version of the theory.

In the weak sense, verification does not require that a statement should be actually and conclusively verified. A statement is verifiable in the weak sense if we can think of a probable situation under which it can be verified. That is, a statement in this sense is meaningful if we can show that it is probable, i.e., we can imagine a situation in which it would be true. A. J. Ayer, in this connection, maintains that all empirical or synthetic propositions are verifiable only in this weak sense. Because, even a very simple proposition like "the car is red" is not as simple as it appears. To understand the meaning of this proposition it is necessary that we should classify the particular object as a car and the particular colour as red. Now 'car' and 'red' are general concepts. And the positivist maintains that no general concept can be conclusively verified.

Karl Popper is critical of positivism when it goes to render general statements as an 'important type of nonsense'. He maintains that the positivist discredits not only metaphysics but also natural sciences. Therefore, he proposes an alternative to verifiability. This alternative is his theory of falsifiability. According to Popper, a statement is significant if we can think of a situation in which it can be false. General propositions of natural sciences cannot be verified by any amount of positive instances, but can be falsified by a single negative instance. Hence, he is of opinion that no statement is scientific which is not capable of being false.

The positivistic position of denial of metaphysics with reference to their verification theory of meaning suffers from a number of defects. It has been pointed out that the theorist has arbitrarily conjoined meaning with verification. We can understand the meaning of a sentence even if we do not know whether it is verified or not. Again, Ayer has been criticized on the point when he says that empirical propositions are not conclusively verifiable. If we do not take any proposition to be certain, then the process of verification will go on endlessly. Moreover, the verification principle itself does not fall into either of the categories of analytical and empirical propositions; hence it is also meaningless. Further, it is pointed out that the positivist has a

wrong conception of metaphysics. Metaphysics does not only mean a discipline that deals with transcendental entities. Metaphysics also represents the study about our actual world, not however from the point of view of a scientist. On this account the positivist may also be said to be doing metaphysics, although of a different kind.



## 15.6 LET US SUM UP

- Logical Positivism is an early twentieth century philosophical movement. The movement started in Vienna in the year 1922 under the leadership of Moritz Schlick. Logical Positivism is the philosophy propounded by this group of philosopher-scientists. It may be said to be an outcome of the British Empiricist tradition which tried to enforce scientific foundation on philosophy employing the technique of logical analysis of language.

- The verification theory of meaning is the principal thesis of positivism. This theory holds that the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification. But interestingly the theorist has no clear account of the principle.

- There are two versions of verifiability - strong and weak. According to the strong version, a sentence is meaningful if it is actually verified in sense experience. But this strong version cannot render a good variety of propositions as meaningful. Propositions about past events, those about future state of affairs - all become meaningless in this version.

- Karl Popper, propounder of the theory of falsifiability, holds that a statement is significant if we can think of a situation in which it can be false.



## 15.7 FURTHER READING

1) Morris C.W.(1979) Logical Positivism, Pragmatism and Scientific Empiricism. Newyork: AMS Press

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## 15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** A group of scientists and mathematicians joined in Vienna and the result was the birth of the famous 'Vienna circle'.

**Ans to Q No 2:** Otto Neurath, Rudlof Carnap, Hans Reichenbach and A.J. Ayer.

**Ans to Q No 3:** This theory says that the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification. A sentence is meaningful if only if the sentence is analytic and empirically verifiable. As for instance, propositions of logic and mathematics are verifiable.

**Ans to Q No 4:** a) The strong version holds that a sentence is meaningful if it is actually verified in sense experience.

b) The weak version says that a sentence is verifiable if we can think of a probable situation under which it is verified.

c) It is an early twentieth century philosophical movement. The movement began in Vienna in the year 1922 under the leadership of Moritz Schlick. It is an outcome of the British Empiricist Tradition.

**Ans to Q No 5:** a) Verification

b) Twentieth century philosophical movement.

**Ans to Q No 6:** The principal aim of logical positivism was two fold:

i) To provide sciences with a secure foundation.

ii) To show the meaninglessness of metaphysics.

**Ans to Q No 7:** Only logical and mathematical sentences are meaningful.

**Ans to Q No 8:** a) True b) True c) True

## 15.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A. Objective questions**

Q 1: What are the two types of sentences meaningful, according to logical positivists?

Q 2: What is verification theory of meaning?

Q 3: Name three advocates of logical positivism.

Q 4: Write the name of the philosopher who formulated the picture theory of meaning.

Q 5: What is weak sense of verification?

Q 6: What is strong sense of verification?

**B. Short questions (Answer in about 100-150 words)**

**Q 1: Write short notes on:**

a) Logical positivism

b) Verification theory of meaning

c) Elimination of metaphysics

d) Two versions of verifiability

Q 2: What is verification theory of meaning? Briefly explain.

**C. Long questions (Answer in about 300-350 words)**

Q 1: What do you mean by the movement of logical positivism? Is the movement standing against metaphysics? Write in your own words.

Q 2: What do you mean by elimination of metaphysics? Explain.

Q 3: Are the metaphysical propositions nonsense? Explain.

Q 4: What are the defects of logical positivism? Explain.

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3) Hume, D. Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals ed. P. Nidditch, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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