

Philosophical Methodology

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Abstract : *It is obvious that the methods used for arriving at the philosophical knowledge come under the scope of philosophical methodology. Prior to Bacon emphasizing on the method of induction and Descartes taking resort to skepticism to arrive at certain knowledge, the methods used by Greek thinkers were never treated to be significant because of being rich with speculations. A significant change was introduced to philosophy by the logical positivists with the recommendation of verifiability theory of meaning. And following to it philosophical problems were treated to be conceptual by nature. The method of conceptual analysis has been treated as the proper method of philosophy.*

It is seen that losing interest in positivistic, linguistic and ordinary language philosophy has made room for hermeneutics, semiotics, critical and dialectical theory, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction and post- modernism. In the paper attempt has been taken to deal briefly with the three trends, namely, analytical methodology, hermeneutics and deconstruction. Between hermeneutics and deconstruction the deconstructionists hammer on undecidability and the hermeneuticians emphasise on productivity and inexhaustibility. At the end it has been pointed out that the journey of philosophy cannot proceed properly without the method of analysis. Because, this method is a generalized method of philosophy. One may opt for a specialized methodology but it has to be followed along with the generalized method that is analysis.

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It is obvious that the methods used for arriving at the philosophical knowledge come under the scope of philosophical methodology. Prior to Bacon emphasizing on the method of induction and Descartes taking resort to skepticism to arrive at certain knowledge, like that of science, the methods used by Greek thinkers were never treated to be significant. Aristotle once opined that ‘Human beings originally began philosophy because of wonder’ Finding answers to such wonders very often arm-chair thinking or speculations were used by many who are well acknowledged as philosophers. However the product of speculations or armchair thinking can never be taken as suitable methods in philosophy from rational standpoint. In this critical juncture Bacon and Descartes tried to give definite directions to philosophy through the methods of empiricism and rationalism. Kant’s attempt to emphasize on critical analysis seems to have paved the path in finding the importance of analysis in philosophy.

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Looking from the historical perspective the methods followed by the pragmatists and existentialists were found to be a departure from the usual method followed during the period. The positivistic and analytic trends are treated to be modern period’s philosophy. It is seen that losing interest in positivistic, linguistic and ordinary language philosophy has made room for hermeneutics, semiotics, critical and dialectical theory, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction and post- modernism. In this paper attempt will be taken to deal briefly with the three trends, namely, analytical methodology, hermeneutics and deconstruction.

Analytical Methodology

The method of analysis cannot be separated from doing philosophy. Method of philosophization and analysis are almost synonymous. It happens to be the primary method of philosophy. In philosophy, to the questions starting with ‘What’, ‘Why’, and ‘How’, responded with several answers. The merit of the answer is usually established through the method of analysis of the concepts involved in the questions. This method was in operation less conspicuously prior to the twentieth century analytic revolution initiated by Moore and Russell and followed by a number of leading philosophers like Wisdom, Quine, Grice, Wittgenstien, Strawson etc. . One would agree with this view of the early part of the twentieth century that the

fate of philosophy in the years to come has to face a revolutionary change in the front of philosophical enquiry which would be out and out analytical and philosophers would be engaged in finding solutions to philosophical problems through linguistic analysis. For this reason the twentieth century has been treated as the age of analysis.

Russell's attempt to search for an ideal language or logically perfect language gave birth to the philosophy of logical atomism and it was the path finder for Wittgenstein to proceed in that direction at his early stage. It is maintained that "Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts."¹ "A philosopher can help us in this important matter by showing us whether these utterances express genuine propositions and, if so, how they are to be analysed."² Wittgenstein in his later part though attacked logical atomism, picture theory of meaning, etc. but did not deviate from the view that the method of philosophy is linguistic analysis. For him philosophy is therapeutic and a philosopher is to remove the puzzlement by removing the misconceptions about language. He has said philosophical problems arise when language goes on a holiday. It is Wisdom who has said that though philosophy involves linguistic clarification but it is not enough. He considered that along with the linguistic therapy psychological therapy is also required in order to go to the root of the problems. It is seen that the Oxford group of analysts have worked upon the view of the later position of Wittgenstein, and have built up what is known as ordinary language philosophy.

Hermeneutics

If the hermeneutic movement can be thought of having several phases then the Martin Heidegger's approach would be treated as the beginning phase, which is rich in phenomenological hermeneutics. The most prominent phase would be the contributions of Gadamer, Ricoeur and Habermas. Palmer has mentioned six major features of hermeneutics in the following manner: (1) the theory of biblical exegesis; (2) general philological methodology; (3) the science of linguistic understanding; (4) the methodological foundation of *Geisteswissenschaften*; (5) phenomenology of existence and existential understanding; (6) the systems of interpretation both recollective and iconoclastic, used by man to reach the meaning behind the myths and symbols.³ Out of this Roy brings out two primary intentions of hermeneutics as: first, to ascertain the exact meaning of a text, sentence or word; secondly, to disclose and interpret the messages and significations contained in symbolic form.⁴ So far as the ongoing march of hermeneutic is concerned we

find it to be embracing many formulations, like, methodological, ontological, dialogical, dialectical, descriptive, evaluative, prescriptive, reconstructive, etc. For example, the difference between hermeneutics of Gadamer and Habermas has been treated as the differences between dialogical and dialectical hermeneutics.

Deconstruction

Jacques Derrida, mostly being taught at United States started his career at France, adopted new methodology which is known as deconstruction. At first Derrida offered a deconstructive reading of Plato and it was followed by the re-reading Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Freud, Husserl, etc. According to him, no text is fixed, stable and completely circumscribed by its predetermined standpoint. Deconstruction is an approach to reading a text that grows out of a 'contemporary epoch of post metaphysical thinking. It is concerned with posing the problem of the status of the discourse that borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself.

Derrida is concerned to radicalize a discourse and movement which has certain heritage of the age. Deconstruction is concerned with offering an account of the contention of a text, not through finding its meaning or the component parts but 'by marking off its relation to other texts, its contexts and its sub-texts.' Thus deconstruction accounts for how a text's explicit formulations undermine its implicit and non-explicit aspects. Here the task become to point out that what the text excludes by exposing what the text includes. The important aim is to highlight what remains *undecidable* in a text. Richard Rorty explained it in the manner that in case of deconstruction the 'accidental' features of a text can be seen as 'betraying or subverting' its essential message.

It is seen that sometimes the method of deconstruction is confused with the 'reader's response theory'. In the later theory a text's understanding is produced though the reader's process of encountering it. It is more important to point out that deconstruction does not aim at showing the texts to be meaningless, rather it tries to show if they are overflowing with multiple or conflicting meanings. Here it is not claimed that the concepts have no boundaries, rather there is scope to surpass it in different ways.

The emphasis on the proliferation of meaning in the process of deconstruction is related to the concept of *iterability*. (It is the capacity of signs to be repeated in new situations and be grafted to new contexts.) The insertion of texts into new

contexts continually produces the new meaning that happens to be partly similar and partly different from the previous understanding. This is how there is a *nested opposition* between them. Thus the so appeared conceptual oppositions can be reinterpreted as a form of nested opposition.

Epilogue

To find a comparison between hermeneutics and deconstruction I would like to agree with Roy, who writes “Unlike the deconstructionists who hammer on *undecidability*, the hermeneuticians emphasise on *productivity* and *inexhaustibility*.”⁵ But if it is asked to choose any one out of the two as better one it would be both arbitrary and unphilosophical. The scope of philosophy cannot and should not be restricted to any particular method. At the same time it may be pointed out that the journey of philosophy cannot proceed without the method of analysis, conceptual or linguistic what so ever. Because, this method is a generalized method of philosophy. One may opt for a specialized methodology but it has to be followed along with the generalized method, that is analysis.

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