

EXPLORATION OF THE PLACES OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE BETWEEN LOGICAL POSITIVISM AND LOGICAL ATOMISM

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Abstract: There has been the tendency to construe one for the other or to say that the one passes synonymously for the other, logical positivism and logical atomism. The thrust of this study is to unclad this locus that is gradually becoming widespread and accentuated. Upon a critical assessment of the main thrust of logical positivism, we find that it is a movement, which laid emphasis on language and on the elimination of metaphysics. Logical atomism however is a principle that derives from one of the members of logical positivism, Bertrand Russell. In this essay, the main occupation is to recapitulate the main kernel of logical positivism, its emphasis on language and meaning and how logical atomism crept into its discursive fray. At the end, we submit that logical atomism is a consequence of logical positivism, the converse being impossible, historically speaking.

Keywords: Logical Positivism, Logical Atomism, Vienna Circle, Bertrand Russell, Linguistic Analysis

Introduction

This essay deals with conceptual and ideological clarification within a period in the history of philosophy – the Contemporary. The contemporary era in the history of Western Philosophy coincides with the emergence of the Analytic School of Philosophy, which lays emphasis on linguistic analysis. This orientation claims that the problems of philosophy are actually the problem of language and hence, they sought to overcome these inconsistencies by articulating theories linguistic analysis. This is the main place of convergence between logical positivism and logical atomism. However, the place of divergence has been confused as the one of convergence, hence this research.

In the next section, we will look at logical positivism, the factors that led to its emergence, its main philosophic concern as well as how it no longer has supporters in today's world. After this, the main idea behind logical atomism as put forward by its main proponent, Bertrand Russell

will be given attention. At the end of these concerted efforts, it will be glaring that logical positivism and logical atomism are not in any way synonymous.

Logical Positivism: Origin, Focus, and Plummet

The Vienna Circle Or Club is another name for Logical Positivism. In the words of Princewill Alozie, “Logical Positivism is a group of scholars who were also members of the Vienna Club or Circle.”¹ Elsewhere, one of the main dogmas of the group, reductionism the view that every statement can be translated into a statement or collection of statements about sensory experiences (idealists hold this view) has been emphasized as both a method and a groundwork that is deficient.² The main critic is W.V.O Quine who considers the positivist view that each statement can be associated with a class of possible experiences that would confirm it and another class that would disconfirm it, to be a weakened form of reductionism.³ This in essence is the thread of connection between reductionism and verificationism, both one of the cardinal principles of the Philosophers of Science in the Logical Positivist Club. The same is true for Oswald Hafling who mentions, “Mental phenomena can be reduced, in some sense, to the vocabulary of the material or physical.”⁴ Another idea, which was central to logical positivism and remains of central importance today, is that philosophical questions are largely questions of language, and that theories of meaning are therefore of central importance.⁵ As we had already hinted at this in the introductory part of this study, we shall explore some other aspects of the reductionist method in the philosophy of science. It is the case that aside their method of reductionism, the group attacked metaphysics a great deal. In fact, they sought the total elimination of the metaphysical enterprise.

Various conceptions, interpretations and understanding of the term have taken hold, even before Aristotle who holds that the first principle is the ‘Unmoved Mover’, which gained popularity among prominent scholastics such as Augustine and Aquinas. Earlier philosophers before Plato

1 Princewill Alozie. *Philosophy of Physics*, (Calabar: University of Calabar Press 2004), 40.

2 Michael Huemer. *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*. (London: Routledge 2002), 128.

3 William Van Orman Quine. “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” *Philosophical Review*. 1951. (60), 20

4 Oswald Hafling. “Logical Positivism.” In: G.H.R Parkinson, S.G. Shanker (eds.) *Routledge History of Philosophy*, (London: Routledge 1996), 195.

5 *Ibid*, 194.

and Aristotle had attempted to ground the basic constituent of the universe on a single substance. Thales had opted for water, Heraclitus fire, the Stoics, Logos etc. This is why Rudolf Carnap avers that:

The sort of propositions I wish to denote as metaphysical may most easily be made clear by some examples: the Essence and Principle of the world is “Water”, said Thales, “Fire”, said Heraclitus, “the Infinite”, said Anaximander; “Number”, said Pythagoras⁶

However, the debate between what Aristotle called *metaphysica specialis* and *metaphysica generalis* is yet to be resolved in the present century despite Kant’s recommendation that *metaphysica specialis* be grounded in *metaphysica generalis*. In this connection, Immanuel Kant announces:

Undeterred by difficulty from within, and opposition from without, from endeavouring, by a method quite opposed to all those hitherto followed, to further the growth and fruitfulness of a science indispensable to human reason – a science from which every branch it has borne may be cut away but whose roots remain indestructible.⁷

However, in the early 20th century, some linguists, philosophers and scientists, called for the repudiation of metaphysics as an intellectual enterprise. Popular minds here are Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Alfred Jules Ayer, Hans Reichenbach, Friedrich Waismann, Herbert Feigl etc. These are the prominent figures in the Vienna Circle. The Circle or club was established in Vienna. The Circle was interested in demarcating science from non-science.⁸ What arguments did these minds converge against metaphysics? It should be recalled that the destructive criticisms of metaphysics might be traced to David Hume who had called for burning of books on the subject in the following words:

When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning containing quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames:

6 Rudolf Carnap. “Philosophy and Logical Syntax.” In: P.V. Inwargen & T. Zimmerman (eds.) *Metaphysics: The Big Question*. (New York Blackwell Publishing 1998), 461.

7 Immanuel Kant. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. (London: Dent 1964), 37.

8 Alozie Op. Cit, 40.

for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.⁹

In a related development, Moritz Schlick opines that the metaphysician "...seeks vain illusion."¹⁰ Rudolf Carnap exactly echoed this in the following words:

Our claim that the statements of metaphysics are entirely meaningless, that they do not assert anything,... how could it be explained that so many men in all ages and nations among them eminent minds, spend so much energy, on metaphysics if the latter consisted of nothing but mere words, nonsensically juxtaposed?¹¹

Alfred Jules Ayer one of the staunch archenemies of metaphysics had proposed the *Verification Principle*, which ruled out statements whose propositions, couldn't be observed.¹² Anthony Kenny articulates in the following words:

The great weapon in this attack was the Verification Principle. This, in its original form, ruled that the meaning of a proposition was the mode of its verification. Such a view of meaning enabled one to rule out of court as meaningless all statements which could neither be verified nor falsified by experience. Faced with a dispute about the nature of the Absolute, or the purpose of the Universe, or Kantian things-in-themselves, the Positivist could expose the emptiness of the quarrel by saying to the warring metaphysicians: 'What possible experience could settle the issue between you?'¹³

In order to deepen further our analysis of the major objective of logical positivism, and how they took seriously reductionism as the principle of verification, we shall look closely at the thoughts of Alfred Jules Ayer very briefly. This is because Ayer is one of the foremost representatives of this group. Hence, it would be very helpful if we consider his submission and contribution to the Vienna Club/Circle.

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- 9 David Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. With an Introduction by Peter Milican, (New York: Macmillan Press 2007), lvi.
 - 10 Moritz Schlick. "Erblen, Erkennen, Metaphysics." *Kant Studien*, 1926 xxxi, 117.
 - 11 Rudolf Carnap. "The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language." In: A.J. Ayer (ed.), *Logical Positivism*, (New York, Free Press 1959), 36.
 - 12 Alfred Jules Ayer. *Language Truth and Logic*, (New York: Dover Publications 1952), 20.
 - 13 Anthony Kenny. *An Illustrated Brief History of Western Philosophy*, (New York: Blackwell Publishing Co. 2006), 369.

A.J. Ayer is famous for producing the verification principle, which rules out metaphysical statements on the ground that they do not correspond to state of affairs. According to A.J. Ayer:

A statement is factually significant if he knows how to verify the proposition, which it purports to express—that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. If, on the other hand, the putative proposition is of such a character that the assumption of its truth, or falsehood, is consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning the nature of his future experience, then, as far as he is concerned, it is, if not a tautology, a mere pseudo-proposition.¹⁴

From the above proposition, which sounds more like an axiom, Ayer avers that: “A distinction must be made between ‘practical verifiability’ and ‘verifiability in principle’. Many propositions have been made, which could have been *conceivably* proven, but for some reason or another, the right conditions were not in place, making the arrangement of all possible variables impossible. However, this does not disprove the significance of the proposition because it is theoretically conceivable. This is in direct opposition to those propositions made which have no probability one way or the other, or would remain equally unprovable under *all conditions*. Therefore, we cannot count on a series of observations to conclusively support or confute our position, lest we be barred from the ability to make any kinds of purposeful statements at all.”¹⁵ The question we must ask of putative statements is simply: “Would any observations be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood?” Ayer seems to add a new portion to his principle of verifiability rather than elaborating on it here, as he goes on to explain the example that “sense-experience is altogether unreal” cannot be sensible, because although there is evidence against the claim, there can be no verifiable evidence *for* it (think Kant here; as Ayer goes on to use the same example against the debate of realism versus idealism). He gives us the fact that we “rely on our senses to substantiate or confute the judgments which are based on our sensations” as his own evidence for the side of ‘sense-experience is real’. The reason we say that it seems like he is adding a new feature to his previous argument is that it seems no longer to take into account the sole criterion of the *consistency of conditions* in evaluating factual significance. Instead, he is stating that in order for a statement to be significant, it must have shown supporting *evidence* one way or another. When we look at his original proposition again: “...if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain

¹⁴ Ayer OP. Cit, 21.

¹⁵ Ibid, 23.

conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. If [the assumption of a proposition's truth or falsehood] is consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning the nature of his future experience, then it is... a mere pseudo-proposition." Although the question he proposes seems to align with his original, the examples do not. This study interprets the propositions to state that a statement may contain factual significance to a given person if he can conceive of conditions in which it may theoretically exist, and conditions in which it may not. If there is a factual statement made in which it holds true regardless under any conditions, it is nonsensical and false. This seems to be problematic judging from the contradiction that this could lead one into in the quest of knowledge about the world.

However, Ayer further on, makes an interesting reformulation of the preceding question, which is that a statement has factual significance if experiential propositions can be *derived from it* in conjunction with certain other premises *without being deduced by those other premises alone*. This actually seems to be the example he uses to argue against the idea that 'sense-experience is altogether unreal', since he can use a fact-statement ('sense-experience is real') in conjunction with the idea that we use our sense-experience to evaluate judgments previously made with our sense-experience. This, to Ayer, now allows his argument more weight than 'sense-experience is unreal' is allowed, for the latter argument really has no empirical evidence in its court. This, again, is dependent on previous propositions and experiential evidence, rather than the consistency of conditions.

From the above propositions that serve as the premises for his position and because metaphysical conclusions are neither tautologies nor empirical sense data, they are nonsensical. This is in essence is the core of A.J. Ayer's argument against the existence of the metaphysical enterprise. But how exactly does all of the above render the metaphysical enterprise useless according to Ayer?

Anthony Kenny gives a deep answer to the above question thus: "The use of the term 'substance' is to blame."¹⁶ Those who make the mistake of arguing that the metaphysical realm is indeed logical do so simply because they have been "infected by the primitive superstition" that by naming a thing, a corresponding "substance" of it must exist. Ayer states, "We are wrong in our compulsion to think of things having a separate existence apart from its appearances, and doing so is just a result from an "accident of linguistic usage."¹⁷ What makes these things' appearances is not the corresponding entity of each, but of their relationship to one an-

¹⁶ Kenny Op Cit, 325.

¹⁷ Ayer Op Cit, 29.

other.¹⁸ Metaphysical errors therefore come not from errors of fact, but in errors of linguistic presentation.

From the exposition given to Ayer's verificationism, which is the classical representation of reductionism among the members of Logical Positivism, we recognize that one cannot refuse to see that there are problems in this approach of how we come to know.

The 'death' of the movement was due, however, not only to the dispersal of its members, but also to a widespread recognition of the defects of its ideas.¹⁹ Now in this sense, probably most of the philosophy studied in our universities is dead, for most of it is open to more-or-less fatal criticisms; and criticism is regarded as one of the main approaches to the great philosophers and movements of the past. However, what hastened the widespread rejection of logical positivism was not merely the (unsurprising) discovery that its doctrines were open to criticism, but the aggressive and even arrogant way in which those doctrines were propounded to the world. Chief among these was the 'elimination of metaphysics'.

There is the claim by members of the movement that they had noticed something about existing and traditional philosophy, which would completely overturn it and render it largely otiose. There appeared articles with such titles as "The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language" and "The Turning Point in Philosophy" from Carnap and Schlick respectively. In these circumstances, it was not surprising that critics of the new ideas were more than usually prompt, forthright and thorough in their criticisms.²⁰

Nevertheless, logical positivism has an established place in the history and continuing development of philosophy.²¹ What this depicts is that despite some of the issue that are present in the Logical Positivist framework, one may still hold onto some places of rigid studies. Oswald Hafling, in this connection, avers again that:

At least three reasons might be given for this. One is purely historical, regarding the considerable impact and influence of the movement in its heyday. A second lies in the intrinsic interest of its ideas, which I hope to bring out in what follows. A third lies in the fact that even if no one today would call himself a logical positivist, some of its main positions, such as verificationism, and emotivism in ethics, are still referred to as parameters within which discussions of particular topics, such as ethics or the philosophy of religion or of science, are to be conducted. Again,

18 Kenny Op Cit, 326.

19 Hafling, Op Cit, 193.

20 Ibid, 194.

21 Ibid, 194.

it can be argued that even if the parent plant is dead, many of its seeds are alive and active in one form or another.²²

The tendency to know that a system of thought is wrong but still applying some levels of affinity to it is very common even among the gatekeepers of truth. For instance, in an interview in 1979, A.J. Ayer, a leading philosopher who had been an advocate of logical positivism in the 1930s, was asked what he now saw as its main defects. He replied “I suppose the most important...was that nearly all of it was false.” Yet this did not prevent him from admitting, shortly afterwards that he still believed in “the same general approach.”²³

In a number of ways ‘the same general approach’ is still widespread today, and indeed was so long before the advent of logical positivism. Empiricism, in one sense or another, is a major thread running through Western philosophy since the seventeenth century, including logical positivism and much of the philosophy of today. The same is true of ‘reductionism’, and especially the assumption that mental phenomena can be reduced, in some sense, to the vocabulary of the material or physical.²⁴

Thus far, we have been able to attain the three things we set out to attain this section. Firstly, we showed the factors and concerns that led to the origination of Logical Positivism. Secondly, we talked about the main method that they employ in linguistic and propositional analysis before discussing the factors that led to the downfall. In the next section, we will consider the idea of logical atomism, which grew out of Bertrand Russell’s affinity with members of the Vienna Circle.

Bertrand Russell and Logical Atomism

Bertrand Russell was not only a great philosopher but also one of the most influential minds in the preceding century. Just like members of Logical Positivism, he calls for the simplification of statements and attended meetings with them as well. Russell is popularly known as both a mathematician and logician. His doctrine of logical atomism is one of the principles that makes him stand out. For us to appreciate the influence of Russell’s logical atomism on analytic philosophy, it is crucial to disclose how his ideas emerged to serve the analytic philosophy that was endorsed albeit, informally by logical positivism. One will easily realize how this too served as catalyst for American neo-pragmatism.

The character of philosophy underwent an important ‘sea-change’

22 Hagling Op Cit, 194.

23 Alfred Jules Ayer. *Part of my Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978), 131-132.

24 Hagling Op. Cit, 195.

that became increasingly evident from the late 1920s through the 1930s and 1940s – aftermaths of the European ‘ethnic cleansing’, they call WWI & II. These changes resulted, mostly, from the increasing interest in the sorts of logical and linguistic analyses that Bertrand Russell and others were bringing to bear on traditional philosophical problems in the light of Russell and Whitehead’s monumental transformation of logic in their *Principia Mathematica*, as well as Wittgenstein’s elusive but revolutionary work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.²⁵ It is therefore important to also disclose the twin influences of early Cambridge analysis and what Russell called ‘logical atomism’ on the one hand, and ‘logical empiricism’ or ‘positivism’ on the other, were to form the first stage for the emergence of neo-pragmatic tradition in America. Our purpose, however, is to stick to the scope of logical atomism as analysed and codified by Russell.

Russell’s logical atomism admits the understanding that words are like the atoms that make the chemical composition of the world. For him, therefore, it is possible to reduce propositions, which are composed of words into these bits, these atomic bits, in order to get nearer to the truth and logical claims of these propositions.²⁶ More so, it is pertinent to relay that Russell made use of logic as an analytical tool from the start of his philosophical career and early on adopted a metaphysics that can be called ‘atomism’ in opposition to ‘monism’. The name ‘Logical Atomism’ is nevertheless useful for identifying a distinctive combination of metaphysical and logical doctrines characteristic of Russell’s work from around 1910 to at least 1925. Russell introduced the name in his series of lectures in 1918 so characterising his ‘philosophical position’ and used it again later for the title of a 1924 essay, ‘Logical Atomism’.

He describes this philosophy as the combination of a “...logical doctrine which seems to me to result from the philosophy of mathematics...” and “...on the basis of this a certain kind of metaphysics.”²⁷ The metaphysics is not simply derivative from his logical theory resulting merely from reading a metaphysical theory off the expressions of a logically perspicuous language. In a passage of the lectures on the notion of complexity Russell describes certain definitions as “*preliminary* because they start

25 James R. O’Shea. “American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century.” In D. Moran. (Ed). *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy*. (London: Routledge 2008), 230.

26 Samuel E. Stumpf. *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*. (New York: McGraw Hill 1979), 219.

27 Bertrand Russell. “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism.” In: John G. Slater (ed.). *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism and Other Essays, 1914-1919, The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell 8*. (London: George Allen & Unwin 1986), 160.

from the complexity of the proposition, which we define psychologically, and proceed to the complexity of the fact, whereas it is quite clear that in an orderly, proper procedure it is the complexity of the fact that you would start from.”²⁸ The right way to analyse certain expressions into a logical language would seem to follow from a correct metaphysical analysis of facts rather than leading it.

Russell’s worries about propositions, in the form of puzzles about the logical analysis of belief, are a reflection of the central trend in the developments of logical views that framed this period, the move from the first edition of *Principia Mathematica* to the second. These developments are almost contemporaneous with Russell’s interaction with Ludwig Wittgenstein, which began with Wittgenstein’s arrival in Cambridge in 1911 and end. With Russell’s frequent acknowledgment of Wittgenstein’s influence both in the second edition of *Principia Mathematica* and in the philosophical writings: “Philosophy of Logical Atomism” and “Logical Atomism.”

The main idea of logical atomism is that for every proposition that is made, it can be broken down into bits for analysis. Russell seems to imply that for us to get to the truth of any proposition; we should take each of the concepts in the proposition bit by bit, get the meaning of each of them how they correlate with reality. This is the main message of logical atomism. Just like in the sciences where atoms are perceived as the building block of all there is, Russell believes that we can have ideas of propositions in this sense. However, is this the case at all times? Do we usually have fixed unchanging meanings to each of the terms used in a proposition? We will answer this question in the next section. However, for the moment, we need to make the claim that Russell’s logical atomism comes from his interactions with members of the Vienna Circle who are mainly scientists, linguists and philosophers of science.

A Critical Evaluation of Logical Positivism and Logical Atomism

Both the verificationism and reductionism that are present in logical positivism and logical atomism are the results of the deep reflections commonly shared by members of the group. However, one philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein has offered a critique of the movement, the doctrines and the method.²⁹ We will consider him briefly.

Perhaps a consideration of the one and major problem that Wittgen-

28 Ibid, 175.

29 Emmanuel Ofuasia & Babajide O. Dasaolu. “Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Critique of Metaphysics: Implication and Relevance for African Philosophy” *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*. 2017 10 (7), 68.

stein noticed when he started his philosophy could assist us. Relying on the authority of Marie McGinn:

In 1912, he presented his first paper to the Cambridge Moral Sciences Club. The subject was ‘What is philosophy?’, and it shows that from the very beginning Wittgenstein recognized the importance of understanding the nature of philosophical problems and of reflecting on the appropriate methods for approaching them. This concern with diagnosis and method remains characteristic of Wittgenstein throughout his philosophical development.³⁰

His *Tractatus* became a subject of misuse. Marie McGinn informs that:

Moritz Schlick, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Vienna and a leading member of the Vienna Circle, also studied and greatly admired Wittgenstein’s work. In 1927, Schlick persuaded Wittgenstein to attend regular meetings with him and other members of the Circle, including Friedrich Waismann, Rudolf Carnap and Herbert Feigl. The meetings were not entirely successful, as it gradually became apparent that the members of the Vienna Circle had misread the *Tractatus* as putting forward a version of their own positivist philosophy. In fact Wittgenstein did not share their attitude to metaphysics, their commitment to science, or their views on philosophy and ethics, and his own manner of doing philosophy—which Carnap thought closer to that of a creative artist than a scientist—meant that possibilities for cooperation were limited.”³¹

Anthony Kenny in the same connection, reveals that the book’s “enthusiastic admirers were the anti-metaphysical positivists of the Vienna Circle.”³² Anthony Kenny corroborates this clearly in his words that:

Like the positivists, Wittgenstein is hostile to metaphysics. But he attacks metaphysics not by the blunt instrument of some positivistic verification principle, but by the careful drawing of distinctions which enable him to disentangle the mixture of truism and nonsense in the metaphysician’s concept of mind. Moreover, the kind of metaphysics which he criticizes is one of which many positivists were themselves guilty. For Wittgenstein, metaphysics consists above all of grammar masquerading

30 Marie McGinn. *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*. (New York: Routledge 2002), 2.

31 Ibid, 3-4.

32 Kenny Op. Cit, 368.

as science.³³

The implication of the foregoing is that though, Wittgenstein was familiar with the prominent members of the Vienna Circle, his book was merely employed as a corroborator of the Verification Principle which had been adopted as their ‘Hume’s Fork.’

The *Philosophical Investigations* was published posthumously in 1953 after Wittgenstein’s death in 1951. It expresses how he modified the views expressed in the *Tractatus*. Perhaps it would be helpful to commence with his notion of philosophy. For Wittgenstein “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.”³⁴ Elsewhere, he writes, “philosophy, as we use the word, is a fight against the fascination which forms of expression exert on us.”³⁵

For Wittgenstein, language is very important and a proper comprehension and use of it can make the philosophical enterprise highly profitable. In this connection, he takes his cue from Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis and compares his system with a therapy or the treatment of an illness.³⁶ This is well captured in the words of Anthony Kenny in the following words:

The philosopher, like a psychoanalyst, encourages us to express doubts and puzzlement, which we have been taught to repress; he cures us of the confusions we nurture in our minds by encouraging us to bring them out to the light of day, turning latent nonsense into patent nonsense.³⁷

Hence, for Wittgenstein “we may not advance any kind of theory.”³⁸ He continues “we must do away with all explanations and descriptions alone.”³⁹ He submits “philosophy neither explains nor deduces anything.”⁴⁰

Wittgenstein is highly convinced that the problems that confront philosophy are not metaphysics as some are wont to state. Rather, the problems are rooted in ‘a misunderstanding of the logic of our language.’⁴¹ He construes language as the source of philosophical problems as well as

33 Ibid, 372.

34 Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*. G.E.M., Anscombe and R.Rhees, (eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell 1963), 109.

35 Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Blue and Brown Books*. (Oxford: Blackwell 1958), 27.

36 Wittgenstein 1963 Op. Cit., 254.

37 Kenny Op. Cit., 371.

38 Wittgenstein 1963 Op. Cit., 109.

39 Ibid, 109.

40 Ibid, 126.

41 Ibid, 93.

the means of overcoming them. How, in the first place did these problems enter philosophy? Wittgenstein retorts that:

Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and to answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics and leads philosophers into complete darkness.⁴²

The implication of the above excerpt is a testament to the incoherence that plagues philosophy. It is not surprising when Alfred North Whitehead hints, “philosophy has been haunted by the unfortunate notion that its method is dogmatically to indicate premises which are severally clear, distinct, and certain; and to erect upon those premises a deductive system of thoughts.”⁴³ Emmanuel Ofuasia, in this connection, relays that: “This idea is especially striking if we recall that Descartes for instance, was seeking to make philosophy have a method like mathematics and geometry.”⁴⁴ Robert Mesle corroborates this assertion when he chronicles:

If you were to look at the works of early modern philosophers like Descartes, Benedictus de Spinoza, or Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, you would easily see how much they hungered for the certainty achieved by mathematics. They modelled their systems on mathematics, beginning with definitions and axioms and building on them as if they were perfectly clear, self-evident principles beyond all possible doubt. They hoped that if, like mathematics, they started with absolutely certain truths and carefully checked each step of the argument, they could build a whole system of knowledge that would itself be certain.⁴⁵

It is not surprising therefore, that such an incoherent and illogical method of philosophizing inspired the Hume’s Fork and the call for the total elimination of metaphysics in the early 20th century.⁴⁶

Wittgenstein’s main motivation for writing the *Investigations* comes wholly from the fact that he regretted simplifying the relation of language to the world in his *Tractatus*, a charge of which other philosophers are also guilty. Anthony Kenny makes this abundantly unvague that:

42 Wittgenstein 1958 Op. Cit., 18.

43 Alfred N. Whitehead. *Process and Reality*. (New York: The Free Press 1978), 8.

44 Emmanuel Ofuasia. *Alfred N. Whitehead on the Relation between Religion and Science*. (Saarbrücken: LAMBERT Academic Publishers 2015), 29.

45 Robert C. Mesle. *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead*. (Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press 2008), 16.

46 Ofuasia 2015 Op. Cit., 29-30.

Wittgenstein thought that in his earlier work he had, like other philosophers, grossly oversimplified the relation of language to the world. The connection between the two was to consist of two features only: the linking of names to objects, and the match or mismatch of propositions to facts. This, he now came to believe, was a great mistake.⁴⁷

In *The Investigations*, he uses the metaphysician's appraisal of the problem of the 'mental' to make his arguments more direct. He accuses metaphysicians in this domain of possessing a bad metaphysical conception of the mental. Wittgenstein is of the notion that "where philosophers have gone wrong is in believing that the meaning of a sentence, and understanding of a sentence, was a mental process underlying the utterance, or accompanying the hearing, of the sentence. Reflection shows that this cannot be right."⁴⁸ Closely knitted with this idea is also the metaphysical conviction that naming is a mental act. Wittgenstein believes that such a construction of language, which is prevalent among philosophers, leads to solipsism. Private language, as Wittgenstein calls it leads metaphysicians astray from the real source of the problem that they aim to address. He believes that private definition and use of terms is no real definition, for there cannot be a language whose words refer to what can only be known to the individual speaker of the language.⁴⁹ The 'use' theory of meaning in language, allows us to decipher that when an expression is used, the meaning is already assumed in social behaviour. William Lycan informs that:

Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that words and sentences are more like game pieces or tokens, used to make moves in rule-governed conventional social practices. A "meaning" is not an abstract object; meaning is a matter of the role an expression plays in human social behaviour. To know the expression's meaning is just to know how to deploy the expression appropriately in conversational settings.⁵⁰

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that logical positivism and logical atomism are neither synonymous nor interchangeable. The latter is a derivative as a method used by the former to assess critically, the propositions in ordinary usage of language. We have also been able to show

47 Kenny Op Cit, 372.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 William G. Lycan. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*. (New York: Routledge 2008), 76.

factors that led to the decline of the former, which necessarily extends to the latter. In the end, it is the contention of this essay contra Russell that atomic concepts are not fixed ascriptions that are invulnerable to change. Wittgenstein as an instance to illustrate the shortcomings and inadequacies of logical atomism and logical positivism for this reason that we offer the ‘use theory of meaning’ initiates it.

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