

CONCEPT OF MEANING

In the beginning of twentieth century there arose a strong reaction against speculative metaphysics. It gave rise to two important trends in philosophy such as positivism and analytic philosophy. Idealists of the past were charged that they were using words without proper meaning. The terms such as substance, thing, phenomenon, object, truth meaning, validity were used ambiguously. This objection is worth considering and there should be conscious thinking over the terms employed in philosophising. Stuart Chase wrote in his "Tyrrany of words" and expressed to the effect that words which have no correspondence in experience and the world are meaningless and therefore they should not be used in philosophy. In this context I should like to discuss in the present essay that although ambiguity is to be avoided yet significant assertions can be adequately thought and meaning required to be fulfilled in concrete situation. Words cannot altogether be dismissed but their significance and context ought to be properly cognized. This seems to be the proper import of Wittgensteinian aphorism that "Don't ask for meaning, ask for use". In the earnest zeal of defending positions philosophers have ignored the question of thinking consciously over the criterion of meaning in its significant assertive aspect and with reference to concrete situation and experience.

It is true to say that there are misleading similarities between grammatical and logical statements as "Martyrs exist" and "God exists", 'I think' and 'I exist'. But such similarities cannot prevent one to think about the possible meaning and

understanding of term 'existence'. By analysing the term 'existence' and substituting by symbols it cannot be said that term 'existence' is altogether removed. Theory of description indicates the symbolic representative value of the person designated. In its abstractive capacity of symbolisation it does not take away the potentiality and possibility of its happening and would be existing. Concrete situation can be abstracted and at times reduced to symbolic designation. It does not, however, make it devoid of possible happening. Analysts have overlooked the point of significant becoming of individual and event provided they are meaningful. The task of philosophical analysis by reduction and showing the new role of words and language does not end in verbal recommendation but it is supposed to orient the relationship between proposition and object, meaning and fulfilment.

To elucidate the abovesaid objective of orientation in the first instance, a distinction between significant and non-significant meaning of proposition is necessary. To show significance is to bring out the truth-value of proposition. Of course it should be pointed out that proposition and assertion are not the same. Assertion is the truth-claim in a proposition with reference to external concrete situation. When it is said that "Tobacco causes cancer", this proposition is significant because there is not only the sense of causal connection but the future possibility of its being true. A proposition may be provisionally true provided that there is no inconsistency or a formal contradiction between subject and predicate of the proposition. But to speak that 'Saturday is in bed' does not make sense because 'Saturday' and 'bed' refer to different objects not coinciding in natural and concrete situation. Here meaning is frustrated. Object of significant meaning and meaningful proposition is to find fruition in objective situation.

It should be borne in mind that to express significant proposition is not attributing to it its entire logical value. Logical value is beyond the grammatical determination. For instance while estimating logical value of proposition, "The present king of France is bald-headed" it is essential to take into consideration whether such a king is at present existing. In absence of such a king this proposition loses its logical value. For the important point to judge the truth-value of the proposition rests upon how such a proposition can be known properly. Such a proposition distinctly differs from "present Queen of England is married". Consideration of the problem of logical value of meaning of proposition brings before us the question of conditions of knowing the meaning. Herein it would be recognised that criterion of meaning is concerned with not only concrete situation but with what 'could have been' the meaning of the proposition.

While considering the nature of criterion of meaning it is at times supposed that it is concerned with referring to some phenomenon, event or denoting an individual. This is partly true. Question of reference and denotation leads one to think about what is actually so and what is its possible status in objective world. To know the meaning is not to describe the meaning only, it is to evaluate it in the light of objectivity. Therefore it is not proper to hold that meaning is devoid of object. Logical value of meaning is related with possible or actual object. Moreover such a value takes into consideration the procedure of adequately knowing the object of meaning. At times the symbolic, representative, emotive and reflective ways of knowing and articulating the meaning are maintained but these views do not explain the import of meaning fully. To hold that meaning is just symbolic or that it represents some phenomenon and event is not to express it for reduction to either speech, its key or to designation which may be evidently indicative. For instance, in

chemical combination a compound is symbolised by letters or keys. It, however, does not mean that original phenomena and 'things' are removed. Meanings do not cancel the objects and phenomena which they symbolise and represent.

Meaning is an intrinsic part of epistemological framework, for to fix a criterion of meaning is to understand not only the content, entire proposition but to examine the logical truth which I have called 'value' previously. Emotive meaning as maintained in Odgen's work *Meaning of Meaning* is insufficient in view of the absence of criterion of truth-value. Truth or falsity is not merely an ejaculative response in nervous system. It is related with the decision and criterion of truth of spoken word and expressed proposition. Just as there are definite conditions of hearing and understanding words and phrases of referred sentence, similarly there are knowing conditions of knower. In case of perception the perceiver is supposed to consider the possibility of mistake, illusion and hallucination in perceiving the object. Similarly, while understanding and appreciating the object possibility of conceiving its meaning ought to be considered. Epistemic conditions have an important role to play in framing the criterion of meaning. These conditions attempt to appreciate and reflect not only the phenomenon as it is but also the way it is felt, said and understood to be by the knower. It is a mistake to believe that meaning is just 'given' as words and phrases are given in sentence. It is not proper to have a fixed list of categories and classification of words and objects in the scheme of knowledge and phenomena. Truth-claim of proposition is judged in context of specific situation. Its logical value is determined after resolving error.

Objects and phenomena appear to have been given directly to our perceptual understanding. But there is a distance between the object and judging mind. Without adequate criterion

of knowing there is a failure in covering the distance. I am not holding, as Descartes did, that there is a curtain of mind between proposition and will. What I am holding is that criterion of meaning is not single but there are plural criteria of determining the meaning. Although there are plural criteria this does not mean that there could be just abstract, fanciful and dream-objects. Of course this is not to say that they are entirely sense-less. They are significant but they are not real. With regard to proposition "space and time attend horse-race" the question of fulfilling the criterion does not arise as space and time are not the objects to attend the race. But there could be criterion to decide that 'there is life on the Moon' or 'Earth is flat' although they may turn out to have no truth-value. One of the criterion for bridging the distance between object and judging mind is non-contradiction. The rule of non-contradiction is not just formal but it is concrete in the sense that what is false or partially true is to be rejected on the basis of sublation and correction. Meaning is a link between knower and known. As Husserl says that it is the intention which connects and gives meaning to the object of perception. But it should be noted that intention is liable to be false. This can be recognised by truer perception and inward correction. For instance, in case of rats perceived by a drunkard the meaning is significant as they could be perceived under certain abnormal psychological condition. It can, however, be corrected by veredical perception in the presence of external stimulation. Here it is pointed out that false rats cannot be regarded as meaningful relationship between knower and known. What is false is rejected on the basis of proper concrete condition.

The above clarification would show that there are epistemological conditions necessary to build up the relationship between knower and known. I have shown one criterion of meaning to

point out that the relation is not immediate as it appears to be. There is likelihood of distortion and misapprehension in grasping the meaning of object.

In the task of analysis of phrases and sentences undertaken to show that meaning is grammatically determined it is overlooked that there are epistemological conditions which correct and evaluate the 'given' object. Of course I have said previously that object is not 'given' as 'it is' understood at times. As soon as the object seems to be given it is instantly interpreted which creates distance between object and the knower.

Owing to the dependence of meaning upon context of situation and understanding of the knower, meaning does not become fanciful and subjective. Context and intentional understanding orient our interpretation. Logical value needs to include and take cognisance of physical object on the one hand and understanding intention on the other hand.

In the context of meaning it is essential to explicate logical value. Logical value needs to take into cognisance the objective concrete situation and the knowing conditions supposed by the knower. Cognisance of truth-value needs to admit the shades of distinction between sentence and proposition, sense-data and physical object, phenomenon and assertion.

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