

GILBERT RYLE'S CONCEPT OF PHILOSOPHY

Ryle's significant contribution to philosophy is his work *The Concept of Mind*. His thoughts were initially not appreciated by some of the philosophers. Some critics held that there is no central theme in his work and it is only a destructive one. However, these objections are baseless. Ryle's main target of *The Concept of Mind* was undoubtedly the cartesian dualism, but, at the same time, he also attempts to analyse the problem of knowledge, the concept of philosophy and provides a fresh thinking about philosophical problems. William Lyon correctly states Ryle's position when he says, 'Ryle was very much preoccupied in his early work with a single problem viz., the nature of philosophy, and in his later years mainly with applying what he thought to be the correct method of philosophising to one very definite target, cartesian dualism.'¹ Some philosophers thought that the first task of philosophers is to define the nature of philosophy. As Wittgenstein pointed out that if philosophy is not a natural science then it should be defined philosophically. According to Ryle, lot of confusions can be removed only by defining the concept of philosophy. He tries to explain the concept of philosophy in his own manner. For Ryle philosophical statements are not principally lexicographical like 'Bachelor is an unmarried man'. They are also not like mathematical propositions like $2 + 2 = 4$, but they are second-order statements. About philosophical statements Ryle writes that philosophical statements "are condemned to be uninformative

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about the world and yet able, in some important way, to be clarificatory of those propositions that are informative about the world, reporting no matters of fact yet correcting our mishandlings of reported matters of fact.”² The task of philosophy is to teach us the correct use of ordinary language, as Wittgenstein holds that it is not to ask for a meaning but to ask for use. Philosophy is a method of revising misuses of ordinary language and theories in which false conclusion is derived from the surface structure or logic and the surface meaning of ordinary language. Ryle says that philosophical problems are not of an ordinary sort but they are problems of a special sort. Philosophy, therefore, for him is the replacement of category-habits by category-disciplines. The problem of philosophy is to reduce the surface grammar or surface logical structure of ordinary language and its apparent meanings to its fundamental grammar or its ‘*true logical form*. He first attempted to clear some previously held false arguments from the field of philosophy. Like Wittgenstein he says that the task of philosophy is not to make theories but it is an activity of clarifying the meaning of ordinary language and correcting misuse of it. Whereas for Wittgenstein the task of philosophy is to free a fly from the fly bottle, for Ryle the task of philosophy is to free them from conceptual traffic jams. Both Ryle and Wittgenstein agree that the task of philosophy is therapeutic by which we can cure muddled thinking. Both say that the business of philosophy is not to discover new empirical truths but to rearrange our language and analyse it in a correct way. P. F. Strawson also accepts this positions. He says, “if there are no new truths to be discovered, there are old truths to be rediscovered.”³ According to Ryle the task of philosophers is not to say any thing about unknown objects, but to say some-thing clearly about that which is not clear in import. For him, “Philosophers do not make known matters of fact which were unknown before. The sense in which they throw

light is that they make clear what was unclear before, or make obvious things which were previously in a muddle. And the downing of this desiderated obviousness occurs in the finding of a logically rigorous philosophical argument.”⁴

In order to establish this point Ryle says that the false statements and incorrect arguments lead us to misunderstandings concerning correct meanings and contradictions. Without knowing the inner structure of the propositions and the correct meaning of the words the correct conclusion cannot be drawn. And that is the reason why some philosophers falsely believe in incorrect arguments as correct arguments and make philosophy more complicated and puzzled. Ryle tries to replace these arguments and misunderstandings with good arguments and proper understanding.

If philosophy is a genuine branch of knowledge, its meaning should be clear and apparent. For Ryle the role of philosophy is not only clarifying ordinary language propositions, but to properly categorise them. He writes, “The philosopher may, perhaps, bring by wondering about the categories constituting the frame work of a single theory or discipline, but he cannot stop there. He must try to co-ordinate the categories of all theories and disciplines.”⁵ Thus philosophy is not a scientific induction; neither is it the business of philosophy to search facts. Philosophical arguments are also not deductive. It is not deduction of theorems from axioms or postulates like geometry. Philosophical statements are also not lexicographical and mathematical. The question is, if philosophy is an activity then what type of activity is it? Ryle says that if there is any philosophical statement, it must be placed in other category. Philosophers test statements or theories not by observation or experiment, nor by analysing facts, but by showing that they contain latent contradictions or entail infinite regress. Thus, the main purpose of

philosophy, according to Ryle, is to take first of all a proposition and consider it within the frame-work of some discipline or other and then examine it whether its meaning and real logical form can be grasped or not. Philosophers seek whether propositions and their meaning or concepts 'lead directly to logically intolerable result or not.' In case meaning and theories are not grasped properly then they are certainly paradoxical and pseudo-propositions and give us absurd conclusion. Theories and concepts are logically sound if they fit in with well-established concepts and theories with which they are connected. Ryle writes, "like a geographical survey, a philosophical survey is necessarily synoptic. Philosophical problems cannot be posed or solved piecemeal."⁶ This is why Ryle's philosophical view is known as mapping the logical geography of concepts.

For Ryle philosophers work on two stages. In the first stage, they scrutinise and test a theory or concept to see whether it leads to logically intolerable results or not. In the second stage it is to make sure that in seeking out the correct logical form of the propositions or logical powers of concepts, one should not be misguided by grammar or the surface logical structure of ordinary language. In Ryle's words, "concepts and propositions carry with them no signal to indicate the logical types to which they belong. Expressions of the same grammatical patterns are used to express thoughts of multifarious logical sorts."⁷ For example, from the verb 'exist' one may deduce wrong conclusions. There are three sentences where the verb 'exist' (or is) is used: 'There exists a cathedral in Oxford', 'There is a three engined bomber', and 'There is a square number between 9 and 25'. There are three existences to which they respectively refer: a building, a brand of aircraft, and a number; but only the building exists in the sense of an observable material object in the world while the other two exist only as concepts.

As observed earlier for Ryle the philosophical statements are neither lexicographical nor analytical like mathematical statements. They are rather statements about sentences which are not known by observations, but known by reference to the logical properties of concepts and the proposition expressed in the sentences. Ryle illustrates this by giving an example. A form of a paradigm philosophical statements is, for example, 'The sentence S is misleading is that its grammar suggests that the phrase X which is in S, is an expression of logical type when it is not' Let us take a complicated sentence 'Jones hates the thought of going to hospital.' It is a sentence which misguides because of its grammatical structure. There is another sentence 'Jones hates Smith.' The phrase 'the thought of going to hospital' of the first sentence is a referring expression like the expression 'Smith' in the second sentence, but as a matter of fact it is not. In the typical philosophical statement the sentence 'Jones hates the thought of going to hospital,' should be analysed as 'whenever Jones thinks of going hospital he is distressed.' This restatement is the correct logical form of it. Thus Ryle advocates that a paradigm philosophical statements always restates the grammatical form of a statement and makes clear its actual logical form and correct logical category.

The paradigm philosophical statements are comments about the logical form of sentences and are *apriori* according to Ryle. Therefore, the paradigm philosophical statements are not statements about the world, but are statements about statements about the world, or we may say that philosophy is talk about the world. Hence, philosophical statements are second order enterprise.

For Ryle to remove contradictions and misunderstandings of the logical form of the statements and restate the logical forms by giving logical arguments is not the only task of paradigm

philosophical statements. Apart from this, these paradigm philosophical statements restate and describe the logic of concepts. Therefore, the activity of philosophy is mapping the logical geography of concepts and show their relations with other concepts in connection with the basic one.

Thus philosophy does not only deal with propositions or concepts and their logical forms but it is also searching the way of correctly handling of ordinary language which leads thinkers to believe in the entities which do not exist. In other words, ordinary language leads to incorrect ontological beliefs, and it is the task of philosophy to show dangers inherent in such beliefs.

Regarding Ryle's view about the concept of philosophy one may ask a question : Is it a descriptive thesis which shows how philosophy has been carried out ? Or is it a normative thesis which tells us not what philosophers in the past have done and now we are doing but rather the way philosophy should be done. For Ryle, as observed earlier, it is not the task of philosophy to describe. In the past Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz told that the task of philosophy is to search out the selfevident first principles from which a certain conclusion could be deduced. Locke and Hume based philosophy exclusively on empirical grounds and according to them the task of philosophy was to know the limit of human mind and its powers of knowing and perceiving the empirical objects. In the contemporary period most of the analytic philosophes believe that the task of philosophy is to describe. Phenomenologists say that the task of philosophy is to describe the phenomena, Existentialists, on the other hand, say that philosophy is neither descriptive nor analytic, but it is humanistic. According to them the task of philosophers is to know the human existence and personality through one's choice, commitments, emotions, anxiety and dread etc.

Ryle says that the descriptive enterprises are not for philosophers. For him philosophy is normative. Presently many philosophers are trying to restate the thoughts of the past philosophers. This is done more in Rylean fashion in the sense that such attempts are directed at searching out conceptual frameworks of the concerned philosophers and articulating directions of their doing philosophy. This kind of exercise may bring forth new questions and novel directions of looking at them. As Ryle himself pointed out, "Genius shows itself not so much in the discovery of new answers as in the discovery of new questions. It influences its age not by solving its problems but by opening eyes to previously unconsidered problems. So the new ideas released by genius are those which give a new direction to enquiry, often amounting to a new method of thinking" ⁸

Philosophy Department
Rani Durgavati University
Jabalpur-482 001. (M. P.)

GAYATRI SINHA

NOTES

1. William Lyons, *Gilbert Ryle : An Introduction to his Philosophy*, p. XI.
2. Gilbert Ryle, (ed) *The Revolution in Philosophy*, p. 5.
3. P. F. Strawson, *Individuals*, p. 9.
4. *Collected Papers*, Vol. 2, p. 166.
5. *Gilbert Ryle, Collected Papers*, Vol. 2, p. 195.
6. Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 2, p. 202.
7. *Ibid*, p. 400.
8. Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 2, p. 210

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