The Critique of Metaphysics: Carnap and Wittgenstein

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Abstract

Logical positivists and Wittgenstein contended Philosophy' s metaphysical function. Carnap based his critique on the criterion of the non-verifiability of metaphysical sentences, while Wittgenstein accentuated the prevalence of ordinary language. Carnap's and Wittgenstein's main arguments are thoroughly examined. What is being shown, is that neither Carnap nor Wittgenstein considered seriously the exegetical dimension of metaphysical ideas and their hermeneutical meaning.

Keywords: Carnap; Wittgenstein; Metaphysics

Introduction

I am referring to the criticism of the philosophical past by the Logical Positivists and Wittgenstein. They questioned the metaphysical function of Philosophy, i.e. the production of thoughts– principles a priori. Even though these thoughts cannot be considered, literally, irrelevant to experience, the fact remains that they neither derive from experience as such nor refer directly to specific experiences. In philosophical research, since then, the standpoint has been crystallized that Philosophy, as Metaphysics, cannot produce knowledge, at least not in the way that the positive sciences do. No matter how relativized, meanwhile, the intensity of this "condemnation" of Metaphysics, the shadow still exists.

Here I will be concerned with key aspects of Wittgenstein's and Carnap's critique of Metaphysics.[1] I will focus on the reflection concerning the deprivation of meaning of metaphysical propositions. I will argue that metaphysical thoughts and formulations make sense, and constitute a kind

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1   Important for the discussion that takes place, in relation to how Carnap's thought is connected with that of Wittgenstein in terms of criticism of Metaphysics, is the article – response of P.M.S. Hacker to J. Conant. See. P.M.S. Hacker (2003). As far as I am concerned, I keep their positions distinct, and I demonstrate their complementary dimension, at least on the subject that interests me here: the criticism of the meaning of metaphysical sentences.

of knowledge. Neither Carnap nor Wittgenstein adequately argue the opposite. Carnap bases his critique on the criterion of non-verifiability in the experience of metaphysical propositions, while Wittgenstein on the priority of the everyday versus the metaphysical use of words. Neither of them takes into account the explanatory dimension that metaphysical ideas take on, the meaning they thus acquire, and any consequent cognitive weight. I will examine, first, Carnap's view, and then focus on Wittgenstein's reasoning.

Rudolf Carnap

In his text entitled "Philosophy and Logical Syntax", Rudolf Carnap says the following: "Let us now look at this kind of propositions in terms of their verifiability. It is easy to see that such propositions are not being verified. From the sentence: "the beginning of the world is Water" it is not possible to deduce a proposal that assures any sensory perceptions or feelings or experiences that we can expect in the future. Therefore, the sentence "The beginning of the world is water" tells us nothing at all.

… Metaphysicians cannot avoid making unverifiable propositions, for if they made them verifiable, the realization of the truth or falsehood of their theory would depend on experience and, therefore, would belong to the area of

empirical science. But they want to avoid this consequence because they claim to give us knowledge that belongs to a higher level than empirical science. So they are forced to cut off all contact between their suggestions and experience. But it is precisely by this method that they take away all meaning."[2]

We must ask ourselves here: do metaphysical propositions really make no sense? Why does Carnap claim that some sentences attest to experience or are verified by experience?[3] For, for Carnap, "the reality of any object is nothing more than the possibility of placing it in a certain system, ... in the spatiotemporal system of the natural world."[4] This, however, I must stress, is a general claim, which has characteristics of a metaphysical proposition.[5] Isn't Carnap talking about the substance as well? Doesn't he, in this respect, make a fundamentally metaphysical suggestion? Moreover, the error, in my opinion, with regard to the essence of Carnap's thinking, lies in the following: it makes the reality of the object dependent on how we place it in any system. In this regard, because the example of Carnap, earlier in the text, was the kangaroo, the system is the space-time of the natural world. That goes without saying. However, any such positioning, in any system, bears the stamp of the one who carries it out, that is, the cognitive subject, who classifies everything as his perception allows.

On the contrary, a metaphysical position of the type used by Carnap as an example, namely Thales' axiom that "the beginning of the world is Water", does not depend on the reality of any object, on how and where we place it, but concerns an element of the real, water, which is inherent in the constitution of many things. It goes without saying, of course, that experience cannot verify this principle in every case. Thales refers, metaphysically, to the beginning and not to the reality of the world or to the reality of individual objects that do not contain water. The principle, of course, that made and makes possible the existence of the world cannot be the object of empirical observation. But in relation to the meaning of this and any other metaphysical proposal

I will speak below.

What I am still interested in here is to understand how Carnap has in mind the empirical and verifiable propositions. I will examine the example he brings to the chapter on ethics from the same text: "Philosophy and logical syntax." He writes: "From the sentence 'murder is evil' we cannot infer any suggestion related to future experiences. This proposition is therefore unconfirmed and has no theoretical meaning. The same applies to all other evaluative propositions."[6]

Why does Carnap say that? Could it not, in fact, be verified in the experience that "murder is a bad thing?". How, in fact, could this proposition be refuted? In cases, possibly, where the murder would turn out to be a good thing? Well, even in this case, 'murder could be something good from time to time and something bad in some cases, possibly more bad than good'. Why such a sentence is a-priori deprived of verifiability?

The problem in this respect, I believe, not just of distrust but of the denial of Metaphysics, was substantiated by a narrow meaning of the concept of "knowledge". Philosophy as Metaphysics, in the spirit of the Vienna Circle and Wittgenstein, does not produce new knowledge.[7] This, of course, to the extent that the only identifiable knowledge is considered to be the one derived from experience. But knowledge, I argue, is not only ensured by empirically verifiable propositions. Cognitively adequate can also be considered an explanatory principle of experience, which, already, could be enriched or disproved, cases in which, also, the a priori principle becomes cognitively productive.[8] In any

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2   R. Carnap (1975), 34-35.

3   In relation to the precariousness of the principle of verifiability, M. Black was observing in 1934 already: «Logical positivism differs from the cruder empiricism of Hume and Mill in making serious efforts to invent a technique for the scientific investigation of syntactical structure, and may in this field make lasting contributions to philosophy. But the attempt to provide a short cut by the use of hopelessly vague terms like observation or verification in formulating an empirical criterion of meaning is a regression to more primitive modes of thought.» See. M. Black (1934), 6.

4   R. Carnap (1975), 37.

5   In the same vein, referring to the «aversion» of the Logical Positivists to metaphysical propositions, G. Baker comments on the paradox, that I also identify, as follows: «they, however, used the principle of verification as the criterion of significance.» G. Baker (2002) 291.

6   R. Carnap (1975), 43.

7   For Carnap, «metaphysical propositions – such as lyrical verses – perform only an expressive function, but not a 'representational' function ,... Metaphysics «gives the illusion of knowledge, without actually offering any knowledge.» Carnap, as is well known, considers that «the only competence of philosophy is logical analysis.» R. Carnap (1975), 49,51. It is worth asking, however: does this kind of philosophy, that is logical analysis, produces knowledge? Descartes is categorical on this issue: «as for logic, its reasoning and most of its other precepts serve to explain to others what is already known, or ... to speak uncritically about the unknown, rather than to learn anything.» R. Descartes (1976), 18.

8   The metaphysical propositions, in this respect, have a theoretical content, something that they are categorically denied by Carnap, who claims that they seem to have such a content, without actually having it. Thus, he argues, the metaphysical philosopher is deceived. Carnap probably thinks so because, I interpret, the explaining principle that the metaphysical philosopher arrives at, he verifies it theoretically every time he thinks in the terms he used to formulate it. It is not, however, necessary to verify every metaphysical principle. This is why metaphysical philosophers engage in dialogue, and criticize each other, something about which Carnap is equally sceptical, and finds, in it, the only difference that Metaphysics supposedly has from lyric poetry: "But one poet does not claim that someone else's lyrics are wrong; he is usually satisfied with describing them as bad ones." R. Carnap (1975), 49. As far as the dialectical character of metaphysical thought is concerned, D. F. Pears' observation is well formed: "Metaphysics

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case, the human mind works with explanatory principles as well. Those who work systematically in this direction are, by definition, the metaphysical philosophers.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein, now, in the text 116 of his Philosophical Investigations, declares his idea of the purification of language from its metaphysical dimension. "When philosophers," Wittgenstein writes, "use a word – 'knowledge', 'is', 'object', 'I', 'proposition', 'name' – and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: Is the word ever really used likewise in the language to which it belongs?"[9]

Not without serious reflection, I think, we need to think about this question. What does it mean, in this regard, that any word "belongs" to a language? In this light, language is a closed system, in which words are managed in a fixed way, and words are included in sentences from beforehand.[10] However, in another respect, language remains constantly open for original sentences, even for original words. In the formation of language can contribute potentially words and sentences substantiated by the creative mood of some speakers, who are not speakers of a ready-made language only, but speakers of the language they co-shape. This is an image of a desirable dimension, but also a depiction of a dynamic reality.

Besides, writers and philosophers, among others, as creative users of language, contribute not only to the legacy of the works of the human spirit, but also to the level of "reading" of the common experience, since the formulations of their ideas, at some point, become functional when they intrude into the verbal and rationale of all those who read or hear works of speech. Therefore, words do not simply belong to a language, but create language. If that is the case, then the reverse of what Wittgenstein thinks is true the other way around: language too belongs to words. Words, primarily, belong to the sentences in which they are used, but the composition of sentences is also a matter for the speaker - creator. It goes without saying, in this respect, that the use of words made possible in any sentences, which are common to everyday experience, is not deprivation of the ability of the same words to belong to any other sentences, less common property of speakers of a language.

This, I think, is not taken into account by Wittgenstein, who, at the end of text 116, writes: "What we do is to drive words back, from metaphysics to their everyday use."[11] Based on what we have said above, the possible metaphysical use of words does not deprive them of their daily use. Far from it, it makes their everyday use more distinct. The philosophical use of words in metaphysical research also, it needs to be made clear, it does not concern every word of the language we use every day. That is, it does not concern words that name accidental properties, which, as Aristotle defines, are not amenable to theory in any science or practice, poetic or theoretical.[12]

In this respect, Metaphysics selectively uses words, which in everyday language are allowed to be used in any way, as the speaker wishes, while in philosophy their use is limited by the metaphysical intention of the philosopher. Every word that the philosopher chooses to use, in order to explore its essential meaning, it goes without saying that semantically it will be reduced to the philosophically signifiable and to the non-reducible. This, of course, does not occur in the daily use of language, in which the semantic reduction refers to the specificity of experience, as it is objected in the perceptual consciousnesses of empirical subjects. While, in the case of philosophical-metaphysical reduction, it is precisely a question of reducing not to the consciousness of the empirical subject, but to the idea of the object itself.

We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that the metaphysical dimension is also implanted in the common use of words, which proves that, even in its everyday use, language refers to the essence. For example, when someone says: 'the bottom line, in this case, is that I, as who I am,

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has never been without its critics. Metaphysical writing, at its best at any rate, is both unique and peculiarly striking; it powerfully invites the taking of sides." See D. F. Pears (1957), 124.

9   L. Wittgenstein (1977), 76. The impression is given here that the use of words in everyday language is a model of linguistic use. If, however, the meaning of a word concerns its use in language, as Wittgenstein defines in text 43 of the Philosophical Investigations, why not accept metaphysical use as a particular use, instead of questioning it as incompatible with the common use of language? In any case, the words in their daily use do not change. So, what is the benefit of this particular Wittgensteinean project? Do Philosophy and philosophers benefit? Why? If philosophers want to use language metaphysically, how do they benefit from Wittgenstein's view?

10   Words, therefore, are supposed to have a certain «meaning of use» in everyday language, which Wittgenstein and philosophers who share his idea of philosophical work ought to discover, as part of the «therapeutic program» of purification of language from the metaphysical use of certain words. G. Baker, however, referring to Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, rightly observes in this regard: «No attention whatever is given to the possibility that prejudices may interfere with one's perceptions or descriptions of how words are used (cf. && 5, 304, 340, 363).» See G. Baker (2002), 292.

11   L. Wittgenstein (1977), 76. An attempt to clarify the distinction, here, between metaphysics and the everyday use of words, makes G. Baker, in his article titled «Wittgenstein on Metaphysical
/ Everyday use». Baker argues – subversively, as he claims, for the traditional interpretation of text 116 - that everyday use means non-metaphysical use, and that Wittgenstein, with the term «metaphysical», refers to the attempts of philosophers to define the essence of things by referring to the necessary and the impossible. As far as I am concerned, I do not see how Baker is, in this case, injecting a really subversive interpretation.

12   Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1026b, 5-7.

cannot do otherwise'. Of course, this phrase is not formulated as a distillate of philosophical research. In the context of the use of the everyday language, it can be formulated by anyone who wishes to define himself in his essence, but without, like a metaphysical philosopher does, researching the terms he uses.

Let us see, however, in this sentence, whether the daily use of language is sufficient to carry out the reduction to the substance. What does it mean, for the one who says: "I, as who I am"? Rather, it does not mean anything. This is tautology. What matters, in this sentence, is the phrase: 'I cannot do otherwise'. The phrase "I, as who I am" stands for an explanatory statement in the basic statement, which states the inability of the subject to do otherwise.

The philosopher in this case, and in order for the sentence to be able to have a basis as a causal proposition, would ask, "what is the ego that this person invokes when he claims that because of this he cannot do otherwise?" In this respect, research on the substance serves the best possible understanding, in the direction of highlighting the causes that can explain the subject of philosophical research.

Let us consider, however, one by one the words that Wittgenstein mentions in text 116 of the Philosophical Investigations, as candidates for a philosophical – metaphysical use of language. First the word "knowledge." Take, for example, a common, everyday sentence, in which we use the word 'knowledge'. "My knowledge of this incident is unclear." A metaphysical search for knowledge, in this case, would pose the primary question: "what is knowledge?". The reason is that the metaphysical philosopher would like to know why the knowledge that someone has of anything, is unclear. If I know what it is to have the knowledge of anything, I can possibly understand why it is unclear. But when I don't know what it is something to be unclear as knowledge, I limit myself to declaring my ignorance. The question, however, that seeks to limit ignorance is, in fact, the question concerning the cause of the deprivation of knowledge. Such a question, in its metaphysical dimension, is analyzed as follows: "what is the essence of the knowledge I should have about this particular event, and why do I not have such knowledge?"

The next word is "is." All the sentences we form, in the everyday use of language, contain or imply the verb "is". One sentence, for example, would be this:
'it is not what it seems'. This example, after all, is typical of how philosophical language exchanges with everyday expressive ways. This phrase is philosophical and can be everyday as well, or it is everyday and it is philosophical too. It makes no sense, in this regard, to ask what is first or foremost. It depends on its use. If it is used in everyday language, then it is daily. If we find it in a philosophical context, then it is

philosophical.

More specifically, in this case, the metaphysical philosopher questions about the essence of the "being", in order to understand why what is seen is not as it seems, as well as what it is the thing that is not what it seems or what it is, in general, something that appears, that is, what it is that we would call real or phenomenal being. In this way, at the same time, the philosopher will diagnose the "being" of the thing or event to which he refers.

The same with the word "object." When the metaphysical philosopher refers to the "object" and seeks its essence, he does not do so because he does not know how to use the word like any human being. The philosopher as well, for example, can formulate a sentence of the type: "I do not know the particular object." In the present case, however, what matters as a working hypothesis for him is, for example, that each object is the object of a subject, and not only an object as what it is itself. In this respect, too, any object becomes non-self-evident but understandable as dependent on a subject. Thus, the philosopher who would name or characterize any object, event or situation, knows that the existence of the object does not consist in its name, which, so to speak, makes it autonomous in relation to the subject, because its name is the same for more than one subjects, or for any particular subject for whom the object in question becomes an object, but in what the subject understands about the object, regardless of the name and common definitions of the object.

The previous remarks take on meaning in the cases of the words "sentence" and "name" as well, since the philosopher is not content to make sentences or use names, but considers it important to know exactly what he is doing when he does this. In addition, what interests the philosopher is the reason he uses his words, as thought and speech, in any particular way, and what it means to name and talk about anything.

In this respect, in all the previous cases, when the metaphysical philosopher seeks the essence of the words we have mentioned, he does not do anything different from what a positive scientist does, who, too, is looking for the causes of the phenomena he is studying. Searching for the essence, in this case, means investigating the causes that words under metaphysical research with their meanings become objects of philosophical questioning. These causes, of course, relate to the reality of the meanings to which the philosopher gives metaphysical content.

Also, without falling within the everyday use of language, such research demonstrates, with the use of words by the metaphysical philosopher, the reason why words are used in the way they are used in their common use. The philosopher does not find the words under metaphysical research "free of

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use". He finds them in the language in which they are used, and, because of their use there, he is interested in getting to know the reality that words echo. However, in this case, as far as metaphysical research is concerned, the philosopher is not interested in the meaning of words within each specific sentence and in each specific case. This, after all, would not be possible to do, because, theoretically and practically, the use of a word in everyday language is unpredictable, and therefore its uses are not a priori known how many they are. This, as is easily understood, is not consistent with the a priori character of metaphysical propositions.

The words, for example, mentioned by Wittgenstein, and we demonstrated their metaphysical use earlier, are used with a certain necessity, because they are constantly used, as if we cannot avoid their use: the words "I", "object", "is", "name", "knowledge", etc. This is why, in metaphysical philosophical work, the philosopher tries to grasp the reason for the universality of the necessity of using the specific, under metaphysical "evaluation", concept, asking for access to its universal meaning. This means that, precisely because metaphysically usable concepts are widely and universally used with an absolute necessity, the philosopher is concerned with precisely this: with the meaning that makes one word or another, metaphysical reference, available and useful for universal and multiple use.

Now, I think, it is important to ask the question, in the spirit of Wittgenstein's criticism, whether the philosophical work of the metaphysical philosopher, as we define it, can have any negative impact on the use of language in everyday life. That, in my opinion, is not likely. The results of philosophical-metaphysical researches are not, and cannot be, imposed on the consciousness of the user of everyday language. The ideas of philosophers, like the scientific theories of scientists, are deposited in texts that do not know wide dissemination. Metaphysical theories do not affect "public opinion."

This concern, however, would be of particular importance if, for some reason, we took it for granted that the daily use of language would be impaired by the intrusion of philosophical ideas into everyday thought. But why take this for granted? Why, that is, should philosophical thoughts of metaphysical reference not be worthwhile thoughts, and therefore thoughts of particular importance to everyone who uses the words to which metaphysical research relates?

A crucial question in the present case is as follows. Wittgenstein and Carnap believe that human consciousness can be deforested from metaphysical principles?

If the answer is "yes", then a second question follows: "why?". If we assume, as we have said, that these principles are not cognitively accurate, then they are rejected. But why not exist at all? If they succeed and explain a part of reality, then they have cognitive value. If, in fact, we take into account that the explanatory value of metaphysical propositions concerns a large part of reality, if Metaphysics actually succeeds in its explanatory function, the findings of metaphysical research may have a cognitive value greater than empirical observations which, in order to be verified, must be checked each time in specific, new cases.

Besides, if we limit thought to the function of empirical consciousness, as it takes content from everyday language, then we limit and deprive reflection of its evaluative function, which is necessary for the process of judgment and decision.[13] However, we are not entitled to do so in the name, only, of the absolute reference to knowlegdeability, in terms of verification of experience.

The necessity of Philosophy as Metaphysics

Philosophy, I would like to believe, like everyday language, in everyday life, is not exclusively a matter of academic research limited to itself. It is faced with the obligation to have a social reference, which it should fulfill in the same way as medicine, which, as a positive and humanistic science, is constantly confronted with its duty to the everyday person.

In any case, after all that has preceded, we must recall the following: philosophers know that Philosophy itself has, among other problems, the serious problem of its definition. Seemingly, only, the etymology of the word takes us out of trouble: philosophy is the "love of wisdom". Man, in fact, wishes to know what makes him wise: this is the conceptual essence of the word "philosophy." Nevertheless, it is not self-evident what makes someone wise.

Since the object of Philosophy is not easily defined, could the philosophical knowledge, or the contemplative experience of Philosophy, exclusively concern anything in particular? Obviously not. Philosophy is primarily a research on the essence, i.e. Metaphysics, and on knowledge itself, i.e. theory of knowledge. The ontological reason is concerned with the conditions of the existence of existing things, and in theory of knowledge the philosophical discourse concerns the conditions of knowledge of the existing things and their essence. In both these cases, the philosophical reason examines the prerequisites of humanistic as well as several positive sciences' research, both at the existential and cognitive level.

Philosophy, therefore, poses questions about the being

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13 Carnap himself acknowledges that metaphysical propositions «do not express so much temporary feelings but rather lasting emotional or volitional states.» R. Carnap (1975), 49.

and the composition of knowledge. This questioning is embedded in all branches of philosophical research. Thus, for example, even when a philosopher deals with the definition of the moral principle that ought to govern human behavior in order to be considered correct, he also wonders about the being of human action, that is, what human action is. He also deals with the way our cognition influences our decisions to do anything.

But what form does knowledge take in the theory of knowledge and ontology? It takes the form of axioms which are logically sufficient, that is, which do not suffer from the point of view of their logical obviousness. So to speak, what we know is what we construct as knowledge, and not something that we find out after empirical research, and which we are supposed to be finding out by referring to experience each time. Theory of knowledge defines the terms that govern our cognitive projects and cognitive states. Ontology, on the other hand, makes sense of the real things, in the way, of course, that the human mind can understand the Being.

In this context, the doubt about whether what we know is true or not is limited, since our definitions create what we define. The philosophical act of metaphysical definition may become logically adequate, since one defines everything from the outset.

This reflective tendency, as I pointed out, does not concern a problematic function of thought or the falsification of linguistic normality. It's a thought pattern typical of the way language is used beyond its everyday use. Besides, I have tried to show, in everyday language there is also talk about substance. Philosophy as Metaphysics consolidates this existing tendency of thought and, at the same time, ensures its control, since critical thinking and critical dialogue are inherent in philosophical Metaphysics.

Conclusion

My critique of the criticism of Metaphysics, as formulated by Wittgenstein and Carnap, aimed to demonstrate that metaphysical propositions have meaning, and that, without them, and through everyday language alone, consciousness does not have sufficient cognitive access either to substance or to experience, which, in the mere empirically derived and empirically verifiable propositions, remains partially diagnosed. Metaphysics, in a sense, testifies that the human mind does not compromise with the precarity of experiential knowledge. In any case, neither Wittgenstein nor Carnap sufficiently substantiate that metaphysical research and the pursuit of metaphysical understanding of the reality are harmful or futile functions of thought.

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