

Critical Thinking: An Approach that Synthesizes Analytic Philosophy

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Critical thinking is a term that is more close to philosophy. Like philosophy, critical thinking is also a journey of human life, which makes the process of human activity more disciplined and intellectually responsible. A person guided by reason and reflective thoughts can attain an intelligent decision. Now, one can ask that 'what is called critical thinking?' and 'how does it hold the hand of philosophy (especially in analytic philosophy that I am focusing here now)?'

One can find several definitions regarding the conception of critical thinking. However, the impressive definition that touches my mind is that critical thinking is a commitment to using reason in the formulation of our beliefs, or we can call thoughts and activities. We human beings are by nature question minded. Critical thinking teaches us to think skillfully, clearly, and reasonably. Skeptic-observation, experience, reason, analysis, judgment, responsibility, rationality, and reflective thoughts generate our conceptualization that is based on critical thinking. A person whom we call a critical thinker must have the mentioned qualities. I think that a critical thinker must be a good researcher in his/her field. A critical thinker must be guided by clarity, accuracy, relevance, depth, truth and willingness to integrate new perspectives. All persons who are guided by critical thinking are regarded as a researcher in their fields. Here being unbiased and open-mindedness regulate our mind. In any writing or effective conversation, clarity does play a significant role. Clarity re-evaluates the concept of analysis. In science and philosophy, truth or accuracy is regarded as essential that is defended by justifications and authenticated by testimony. We should say only those things, which we understand clearly and accurately. While in thinking mode, we must be concerned about the fact that one must not give importance to any irrelevant problem. Only a critical thinker can review his/her course of thinking for finding out the relevant parts. Depth is a standard parameter that helps us to be a critical thinker. In the case of studying a problem, we should look 'beyond the surface'. Derek Parfit mentioned in his outstanding work, *On What Matters*, 'After learning from the works of great philosophers, we should try to make some more progress. By standing on the shoulders of giants, we may be able to see further than they could.'¹ We must encourage our colleagues or audiences to think of an alternative approach. We should respect others' opinions that will help a critical thinker to see the

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counter arguments of others against his/her thoughts. All these criteria make a critical thinker intellectually responsible, goal-oriented, and an effective thinker. Analytic philosophy accepts the analytical and conceptual methodology for conscience on critical thinking as a tool.

Let us see 'what is called analytic philosophy?' In the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Beaney writes, 'If anything characterizes "analytic philosophy" then it is presumably the emphasis placed on analysis.' But it is true that 'analysis' is also well accepted by other philosophical trends such as in continental philosophy, where Husserl is the profounder of 'phenomenological analysis' and Heidegger introduced 'ontological analysis'. The general feature of analytic philosophy is to sustain the philosophical investigation of a specific subject matter. We find various types of analysis like *decompositional analysis*, *conceptual analysis*, *logical analysis*, and *scientific analysis*. Ordinary language philosopher (especially G. E Moore) gives importance to the *decompositional analysis* method whereas Fregean and Russellian trends focuses on *logical analysis*. The elemental approach that Frege appealed for the analytic trend is called *logical analysis* that is based on a dimension called the semantic or meaning. Frege has distinguished between the study of word-world relations (theory of reference) and the study of word-meaning relations (theory of sense). However, he wants to see them as working together in a fully integrated theory of language. Frege² takes sense as the *mode of presentation of the reference*. In the case of a proper name and definite description, Frege thinks that these singular terms designate their reference not directly but indirectly, i.e., via sense. For Frege, linguistic expressions have both sense and reference. Moore has subsequently developed a theory where 'analysis' means getting clear about the meaning of philosophical questions. He never believes in a unique process of analytic philosophy that can resolve the problems of philosophy because Moore thinks that plurality governs in reality. We find different kinds of mental, abstract, material things that sometimes bring contradiction with common sense. For him, the concept of analysis is a decomposition of complex concepts. Russell in his paper 'On Denoting' tries to see the problem of meaning and reference in the light of Frege's sense or reference, but obviously in a different way. Frege believes that one can put the whole debate concisely only if we say that there is a linguistic expression of meaning besides the semantic value of an expression. Russell's criterion is a type of semantic criterion that mainly focuses on noun phrases. Russell's

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analysis is a sort of *logical analysis* that is involved in his theory of descriptions. His *logical analysis* tries to refute the decomposition method. He claims:

The present king of France is bald.

There is only one king of France, and whatever is the king of France is bald.

Russell argues that if we analyze the description, then the concept of discompositionality disappears. As there is no king of France so 'the present King of France' has a lack of meaning, so how could the whole have a meaning? Russell tries to explain the problem by analyzing the concept of the definite description as the definite description does not have meaning in itself. However, as a whole, it does have a meaning. Even a genuine Russellian 'singular term' does not lack reference rather it is related to a meaningless sentence. Therefore, the meaning has taken a pertinent part in analytic philosophy. Russell writes, 'The reason I call my doctrine logical atomism is because the atoms that I wish to arrive at as the sort of the last residue in analysis are logical atoms and not physical atoms.'³ Russell constructs language in terms of logical conditions, where each term denotes or means to the sensible objects or a set of objects. Russell concedes the atomic structure of the world in support of language and logic. For him, language consists of the atomic propositions and truth-functions that vindicate to the facts of the world. Russell also clarifies that the negative facts are non-existent facts and truth only concerns the fact-stating proposition. Russell supports the correspondence theory as a realist and rejects any sort of coherence stances.

Wittgenstein, another leading Cambridge analytic thinker, positions himself in a different row to support *the conceptual analysis* that has no relation with the scientific methods. For him, analysis refers to implication, presupposition, and exclusion. Strawson calls this approach as *connective analysis* that goes beyond the *decompositional* and *logical analyses*. Therefore, we see that analysis cannot be the sufficient criterion of analytic philosophy. Wittgenstein analyzes the Fregean assumptions regarding logic of language and sense, which stay in the third realm that relates to the various thesis of compositionality. For him, the work of analytic philosophy is to overcome the misunderstanding that occurred in natural language. Wittgenstein thinks that the meaning correlates of understanding and in the same way understanding is also connected to the explanation. Wittgenstein in his earlier period disagreed with Frege and Russell regarding the necessity of logically perfect language.

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Natural language can suit with logical analysis. Logic ripostes language to understand the world. Wittgenstein writes, 'Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world. Logic is transcendental.'⁴ This method leads to logically sustainable metaphysics that relies on *a priori* and deductive base theories. Therefore, for Wittgenstein 'the world is the totality of facts, not of things'. *Tractatus* in a very peculiar way insists that metaphysical stand and logical form are itself beyond words, so one can show these, but cannot put them into words. Later Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigation* gives more concern on the explanation of the meaning and its use rather than meaning in its different senses like the presentation of the reference as Frege proposed etc. Wittgenstein believes that philosophy is nothing but analysis and discussion of language. Language is a style of life and the activity of man is like a game. Wittgenstein's slogan is: *Don't look for meaning, look for use.*

Let me clarify that analytic philosophy is very young as it just saw a hundred springs. From Frege to Putnam many analytic thinkers have taken different styles to renovate their trends. The second methodological attempt that takes a significant role in analytic philosophy is called 'scientific spirit'. The 'scientific spirit' being an argumentative, objective, reason-based, experimental, and reflective process has been accepted by most of the analytic thinkers like Russell, Quine, Carnap, Putnam, and so on. The model of scientific way to see philosophy developed in the hand of Rudolf Carnap, who introduced formalized demand of logic and language. He clearly makes a distinction between 'material mode of speech' and 'formal mode of speech' like in the case material mode, 'The evening star is the same as the morning star' would be "Evening star" and "Morning star" are not L-synonymous but P-valid,' in formal mode of speech. Carnap's distinction aims to discard the metaphysical realm from philosophy to make it more reliable on the formal syntax of language and science. However, the problem that concerned here is the question of 'object language' or 'meta-language' dualism, as once Tarski pointed out. Though in his early writing, Tarski⁵ argues that whatever logic and 'object language' contained eventually becomes a part of meta-language. His purpose was to define truth from a formalized language model. However, later he changed his mind and tried to see meta-language in terms of natural language and its universal form. Russell in his book *Mysticism and Logic*⁶ introduces a scientific philosophy that sounds more humble, piecemeal and more capable of accepting the world without the tyrannous imposition of humans. The exceptional analytic don is Wittgenstein who claims, 'The philosopher is not a citizen of a community of ideas.'⁷ Actually, the approach of

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Wittgenstein is not to reject science but scientism from the domain of philosophy. He turns towards art based philosophical method that is more close to *conceptual analysis*. I would like to quote a wonderful thought here from Wittgenstein's well-known book *Culture and Value*, where he writes, 'I may find scientific questions interesting, but they rarely grip me. Only conceptual and aesthetic questions do that.'⁸ Wittgenstein's outstanding work *Tractatus* instigated a linguistic turn that looks after language, world, and mind together from a conceptual background. After Carnap, Harvard philosopher W. V Quine was more impressed by the logical positivists and imbibed science (natural science) into philosophy. Quine attempts to remove *conceptual analysis* from his naturalistic epistemology, as his main purpose was to refute any mentalist approach or exotic cases like fiction and imaginary world. Quine (as far as my knowledge goes) was the first philosopher who probably used the term 'naturalism' from an empiricist standpoint holding that science serves a standard paradigm for all knowledge and the commitments. Quine thinks that the idea of a *First Philosophy* is vague. It is a view on which reality can be identified and correspondingly described by 'the scientific pursuit of truth'. Quine's outlook on science and philosophy are unique. He does not inflict science upon philosophy. For him, science and philosophy can go together in a balance. Without a standard base in natural science, the philosophical method can be irrelevant. The Vienna circle and empiricist tradition had a deep influence on Quine's thoughts. What is the basic nature of natural science that Quine admitted? Quine's scientific spirit rests on an evidential checkpoint, experience, observation, and especially the idea of intersubjectivity that demonstrates a third person's point of view can be judged by the evidential checkpoint. Quine believes in the conception of analysis to an extent. For him, the systematic connection is sufficient. The positive conclusion is that what characterizes analytic philosophy is argumentation and justification. Now it would be a broad type of characterization. If we accept the characterization, then most of the philosophers need to be placed in the line of the analytic trend as all of them truly have given importance to argumentation and justification. I think that the analysis of language proves that philosophy cannot be a distinct knowledge system estranged from science. Scientific research that involves experiments, observation, empirical materials, and classification also pursues importance in the form of scientific statements that have contents. The analysis of contents takes a prominent place in logic and philosophy of language. Quine's naturalistic epistemology underpins the stand of the naturalistic conception of language. It looks amazing that he never indisposed the significance of the conceptual analysis of common sense that is

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allied to experience or pieces of evidence. However, he strongly clarifies that these types of knowledge are shoddy, piecemeal, and reasonably unsystematic means of knowledge. Quine thinks that 'Science is not a substitutive for common sense but an extension of it. The quest for knowledge is properly an effort simply to broaden and deepen the knowledge which the man in the street already enjoys...'⁹

There is another approach recommended by Oxford philosopher J. L Austin, called the *piecemeal procedure*. For him, analytic philosophy tackles philosophical problems systematically. However, Donald Davidson and Quine take an objective standard where the *principle of charity* and *indeterminacy of meaning and reference* seems noteworthy. Recent analytic thinkers like Michael Dummett and Hilary Putnam consider that analytic philosophy should mingle with natural science. For Putnam, clarity and esteem for reason are more pervasive in analytical trend and this sort of tendency make analytic philosophy more disciplined. In his book, *Origin of Analytic Philosophy*¹⁰, Dummett rightly points out a significant feature that makes analytic philosophy differ from continental philosophy or the rest. The first turn accepted by analytic philosophy is that we can attain the philosophical account of thought by language. Dummett thinks that analytic philosophy is concerned about meaning and language. Analytic philosophy not only makes an impression on the philosophy of mind and language but it makes remarkable progress in several other areas such as philosophy of science, applied ethics, pragmatism, and cognitive science, etc.

The method of analysis takes a significant role in the analytic trend that we cannot shun away. There is an agreement we find between the proponent thinkers who accept that the methods and processes of philosophy depend on analysis. Here knowledge is acquired through observation and experiences that are controlled by reason, logic, and experiment. The concepts of confirmation and verification hold a prominent step in the analytic trend. Though there is considerable disagreement regarding the term 'analysis' among the philosophers, perhaps no one is there, who tried to deny the idea of critical thinking from the analysis method. All criteria of critical thinking such as accuracy, clarity, observation, experiment, and testimony are apparently threshold into the sphere of analytic philosophy. It is very difficult to find out the demarcating line between analytic and continental philosophy, as both are impressed by each other. We found that John Searle has given an answer to Derrida regarding the conception of intentionality; similarly, Frege and Husserl have exchanged their thoughts regarding the concept of sense. Critical analysis and argumentative appeals are well

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available in both parts. Even the geographical demarcation becomes so lean now as most of the continental thinkers migrated to America and England, the two birthplaces of analytic philosophy. The overlapping strands and extended chain of influence make analytic philosophy more critical and obscure.

Vienna Circle's people like Moris Schlick, Neurath, Reichenbach, Carnap, have tried to induce scientific training in the study of philosophy. All the philosophers on analytic trends have withdrawn themselves from the concept of first philosophy. They engage themselves to understand what the theory of meaning is. Therefore, language becomes a significant vehicle in their voyage. They focused on the mind, meaning, and the world where scientific investigations mingle with the *conceptual analysis*. Here it would be pertinent to mention that one of the prominent thinkers of the philosophy of science Thomas Kuhn attacks the piecemeal view of analysis. He thinks that both scientists and nonprofessionals learn to see the world as a whole from the flux of experience. When a child learns the term 'mother,' then not only he/she learn who his/her mother is, but simultaneously learn to make a difference between male and female and his/her mother from the rest. Kuhn writes, 'Paradigm determines large areas of experience at the same time.'¹¹ For him, the *scientific analysis* approach is paradigm and community structure-based. For him, a paradigm is what a member of the scientific community share. Similarly, in community structure, scientists share a paradigm. Science cannot be isolated.

It would be very long if I see the debate in this way. Different thinkers, philosophers, mathematicians, physicists developed the hundred years' journey of analytic philosophy. Their web of beliefs is not the same. So now, one can question what makes them an analytic philosopher. Hilary Putnam says that vision and arguments are important here. What makes analytic philosophy different from other schools is that it depends on its argumentative analysis of language. For Putnam, the concept of 'knowing that' is less important than the concept of 'knowing how' in analytic philosophy. Analytic philosophy bothers about the use theory of meaning or capability of using the concept in communicative language practice. I think, 'Putnam believes that the model of the use of the language of the speaker and the hearer will be holistic, i.e. a particular word or sentence does not occur in isolation; it is dependent upon the whole program...Putnam also accepts Wittgenstein's "use theory of meaning", emphasizing that the conception of the meaning of word or sentences lies in its use in a linguistic community.'¹²

We find different conflicts in contemporary analytic philosophy. But to follow Dummett, we can claim that the fundamental feature of analytic philosophy is that 'the analysis of language is prior to the analysis of thought'. In short, I think that analytic philosophy is a vexing issue involving the vast areas that still ramifying its various conceptions of analysis like logical, metaphysical, scientific, etc. The strength of analytic philosophy coexists in a creative tension that allows accepting different elements like descriptive, empirical, linguistic, psychological, etc. Analytic philosophy is not only a method of philosophizing but a system of thoughts that construe a systematic view of the concept of language, meaning, reference, truth, and world. Since language is the sole medium of analytic philosophy, so the main focus of analytic philosophy is to understand the structure of language. One can attain the account of thought through language. To know the structure of language, what is required here is to understand the meaning, mind, and the world together. The central concern of philosophical analysis is to set the parameter of clarity in our explorations of the notion of thought and language. Because of this reason of clarity, once philosophers like Frege and Russell involved themselves in thinking about the logical syntax of language or an ideal language. One of the core problems that concerned the analytic philosophers is regarding the relationship between language, thought, and reality. Truth is another concept that construes a great challenge for analytic thinkers. Analytic philosophy is not a mere doctrine but an engaging activity that tries to study the limits of human thought. One great change that gave analytic philosophy a fresh air is a shift from formal language to natural language. From the hand of later Wittgenstein until Kripke-Putnam tradition, all the great analytic philosophers are talking about natural language that is associated with the life of humanity. Analytic philosophy pursues a critical analysis of the interface between mind and world interrelation in regards to natural language. Because the concept of an ideal language is abstract (artificial notion) whereas natural language is productive and sharable and much closer to the socio-linguistic practice. The natural language that later analytic philosophers give more importance depends on grammar and social practices. Grammar is the standard paradigm that discovers the innate based universal rules and the structure of language as invented by the MIT thinker Noam Chomsky¹³. Children have 'generative-grammar' in their brains but the grammar only helps to construct sentences and present their expressions in our linguistic communication. Quine suggests that the grammar of use takes a very important role in the language of a particular society, as we know that language is a

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primary vehicle of meaning that we can use for communication. Therefore, the linguistic practices¹⁴ or communication becomes a relevant part of analytic philosophy.

Quine tries to show the independence of manifestation of thought from the scientific methodology, where the capacity of thought recurs the capacity of manifestation of the thoughts. The ascription of thoughts depends on the identification of the thoughts. Davidson has some similar opinion but denies the conception of thoughts that is reducible to linguistic activity. For him, one cannot deny the 'conceptual ties' that encompass between thought and behavior and claims for the ascription of thought based on behavior. Quine and Wittgenstein believe that non-linguistic creatures like animals can avail thought, which can be expressed through their behavior (non-linguistic). Wittgenstein believes that a dog can think or believe that his master is waiting behind the door but cannot think or believe that his master will not come today but tomorrow. Davidson holds a more radical view on linguism that is strictly associated with pragmatism, where he tries to reluctant any sort of priority thesis to language over thought.

Ranging from Wittgenstein to Davidson and Strawson to Putnam, all concentrate on the communicative function of language and obviously for them, the communication process is successful and effective, only if the communicating beings are critical thinkers who have some reason, common sense, situation based prior experience, and especially ability that he/she achieves from his/her linguistic society. Therefore, critical thinking is an elementary route for analytic philosophy. However, I admire the words of Hilary Putnam that 'Philosophical tasks are never really completed... there are no last words in philosophy'.

Notes and References

* *To my mentor Hilary Putnam (1926-2016), an incessant source of guidance!*

¹Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, Volume One, edited and introduced by Samuel Scheffler, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 300.

² Gottlob Frege, 'On Sense and Meaning', in B. McGuinness (ed.), *Collected Papers*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1984, pp, 155-77.

³ Bernard Russell, "Philosophy of Logical Atomism", in *Logic and Knowledge*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1956, p. 179.

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F Pears and B.F.McGuinness, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, 6.13.

⁵ Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages", in *Logic, Semantics, Metaphysics*, trans. J.H. Woodger, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956, pp.166-177.

⁶ Bernard Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*, London: Longmans, Green & Co.1925,p.37

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, p.455

⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980,p.79

⁹ Quine, W.V. (1966), *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, p. 229.

¹⁰ Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytic Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994.

¹¹Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, 2nd ed., London, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 129.

¹²Sanjit Chakraborty, *Understanding Meaning and World: A Relook on Semantic Externalism*, Newcastle, London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, p.74.

¹³Hilary Putnam writes, 'The view that language learning is not learning, but rather the maturation of innate ability in a particular environment (somewhat like the acquisition of a bird call by a species of bird that has to hear the call from an adult bird of the species to acquire it, but which also has an innate propensity to acquire that sort of call) leads in its extreme form, to pessimism about the likelihood that human use to natural language can be successfully stimulated on a computer- which is why Chomsky is pessimistic about projects for natural language computer processing, although he shares the computer model of the brain, or at least the "language organ" with AI researchers.' (Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*, Cam, Mass, Lon: Harvard University Press, 1992, p.15)

¹⁴ Putnam's 'Division of linguistic labor' emphasize that language is a social phenomenon. Even the conventional meaning and folk psychology (propositional attitude in Fodor's sense) cannot be grasped through intentional thoughts or mentalese approach rather it is dependent on linguistic practices that are associated with a socio-linguistic framework.