Metaphysical arguments

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Abstract
As reasonable beliefs are logically justifiable, they stand a better chance of being true, Metaphysicians, interested in truth, reality or existence, do not just assert their positions. They attempt to make them reasonable by giving arguments in their support and giving proofs for their conclusions. It is by virtue of the logical structure and logical validity that metaphysical theories are distinguished from mere intuitive and unformulated insights into reality. It is the metaphysician's attempt to give a proof for his conclusion, to show by logical argument, that such-and-such must be so that distinguishes the metaphysicians from the mystics and the moralists. Metaphysics, therefore, proceeds through the process of arguments and counter-arguments. Though all disciplines depend on reasoning or argument even to some extent, logical reasoning plays an especially prominent role in philosophical discipline, whose one vital part is meta- physics. The explanation for this is that philosophy strives to answer such basic and fundamental questions that it is difficult to find any specific empirical facts to resolve the issue when two people disagree about some philosophical matter, the only avenue of progress open to them is to consider and evaluate the arguments of both sides.

Keywords: Logically justifiable, interested in truth, reality or existence, arguments

Introduction

Before I come to the subject of my address, I must express my profound gratitude to the members of Executive Committee of the Indian Philosophical Congress for giving me the honour of presiding over the Metaphysics Section of the Congress. I take this opportunity to express my sincerest of thanks to them. I have chosen for my address a subject which needs special attention in view of something strange that is happening to metaphysics today. Metaphysics, as is well known, has fallen on evil days. Once the queen of the sciences' is being forced into exile. A new order, it seems, is being proclaimed in which the arguments that the metaphysicians produce do not really matter. To some recent writers, metaphysical theories and arguments are just symptoms of a kind of intellectual neurosis or mental cramp'. A metaphysician is viewed as a man with an ideefixe which he projects on the world in the form of an ambitious and distorted theory. The most thorough-going exponent of this idea is John Wisdom for whom a metaphysical statement is characteristically a sort of illuminating falsehood, a pointed paradox, which uses language in a disturbing and shoking way. Contemporary critics of metaphysics hold that just as it is no good arguing with a neurotic, so it is no good arguing with a metaphysician. What is needed, in both the cases, is not argument but cure. The critics propound a therapeutic view of philosophy and maintain that the philosopher should play psychoanalyst to the turtured and theory-ridden metaphysicians. A philosopher, they maintain, should use analytic technique to get to the roots of the metaphysician's worries and he should not care for the metaphysician's arguments in which they rationalise their worries. It is true that the critic's reaction against metaphysics is largely due to the fact that many important metaphysical arguments cannot just be accepted as valid or rejected as invalid by certain and generally agreed rules. But, nonetheless, it appears to be too much to say that metaphysics is as non-rational as to be a sort of neurosis and that the metaphysician should be handed over to the clinicians.

We know that philosophical questions grow out of a kind of thinking that we do when we ask ourselves whether something we believe is reasonable to believe, whether a good reason can be given for the belief. As reasonable beliefs are logically justifiable, they stand a better chance of being true, Metaphysicians, interested in truth, reality or existence, do not just assert their positions. They attempt to make them reasonable by giving arguments in their support and giving proofs for their conclusions. It is by virtue of the logical structure and logical validity that metaphysical theories are distinguished from mere intuitive and unformulated insights into reality. It is the metaphysician's attempt to give a proof for his conclusion, to show by logical argument, that such-and-such must be so that distinguishes the metaphysicians from the mystics and the moralists. Metaphysics, therefore, proceeds through the process of arguments and counter-arguments. Though all disciplines depend on reasoning or argument even to some extent, logical reasoning plays an especially prominent role in philosophical discipline, whose one vital part is meta-physics. The explanation for this is that philosophy strives to answer such basic and fundamental questions that it is difficult to find any specific empirical facts to resolve the issue when two people disagree about some philosophical matter, the only avenue of progress open to them is to consider and evaluate the arguments of both sides. It is an account of this that questions about the nature of arguments that we encounter in philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular become of importance, Some consideration of arguments and proofs in metaphysics, therefore, must for part of any inquiry before it is dismissed as meaningless.

Metaphysics

Metaphysics may briefly be understood as an attempt to know reality as against mere appearance. It is the study of

first principles or ultimate truths. An argument is generally a group of statements in which one, the conclusion, is claimed to follow from the others. It is an attempt to support one's position or raise one's question by a movement from premises to conclusion. Everything is caused and, that being so, no one acts freely may be taken as an example. There are, in general, two kinds of arguments, inductive and deductive. A deductive argument is said to be sound when the premises of argument are true and the argument is valid. Saying that an argument is valid is equivalent to saying that it is logically impossible that the premises of the argument are true and conclusion false. That is to say that in deductive inferences if you accept the premises, you have to accept the conclusion, or else you would contradict yourself. This means that the conclusion follows with rigorous logical necessity from the premises. Such are, for instance, the conclusions of mathematical arguments. In inductive arguments, however, there is no question of the conclusion following from its premises with absolute rigour or logical necessity as we find in the deductive arguments. In induction, if one accepts the premises, one would not contradict himself if he refuses to accept the conclusion, though he may took to be pretty silly. Inductive arguments, which constitute most of our arguments of daily life, are generalizations based on particular observations and yield only probable results.

Now, the point that concerns us here is the relation that these two sorts of arguments have with metaphysical arguments. Do metaphysicians use the deductive and inductive arguments? As a general answer to this question, it is said that metaphysical arguments are neither deductive like mathematics nor inductive like elementary natural sciences, and since it is none of them, metaphysics cannot be anything more than sophistry and illusion. The famous lines of Hume which still form part of the mental furniture of a great many philosophers run as: 'If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence, No. Commit it then to flames; for it contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. The logical positivists, in general, lamp all metaphysical arguments together and dismiss them as meaningless because they are not the same as deductive or inductive arguments. That metaphysicians do not characteristically make inductive inferences is shown by the fact that they seldom argue in the form such and such is found to be true in these cases, so it is probably true in all cases'. When the metaphysicians come to the conclusion that 'men have freedom of will', they do not come to it by inductively arguing like 'all men observed so far have freedom of will, therefore men in general have freedom of will'. The inductive arguments, as we know, lead only to empirical and probable results. The notion of probability, they say, does not play any part in metaphysical conclusions. Metaphysicians do not conclude by saying it is probably so'; they, on the other hand, conclude by saying it must be so. Metaphysicians do not seem to suggest that there was any rational alternative to their philosophy. Bosanquet used to say that it was a case of this or nothing'. The apriori quality of a metaphysical conclusion, therefore, makes inductive reasoning an inappropriate procedure. Metaphysicians do not need that kind of support from experience which induction would provide to them.

But though it is true that metaphysicians do not generally take the help of straight forward inductive inferences, it cannot be concluded that inductive arguments have no place of any sort in metaphysics at all. The metaphysicians make frequent use of analogical reasoning. The metaphysicians have a deeper eye for likenesses than most of us and they have a tendency to extrapolate from partially discerned to overall patterns. It cannot be denied that metaphysicians have employed arguments which have the remarkable look of inductive inferences. Consider, for example, the teleological arguments in its various forms. They have usually been presented as an argument from analogy. The argument, popularly known as 'Paley's Watch', compares the watch with human eye. The watch and the human eye have some characteristics in common, particularly the same adaptation of means to ends. If we come across a watch, we would conclude that it had been designed by someone, for every part is linked to every other part in such a way as to fulfill one function, that of keeping time. Similarly in the human eye there is the same complex interconnection of parts, all serving one function that of seeing. Since the watch is the result of design, it may be concluded that the eye is also the result of design. And since a design presupposes a designer, a designer must exist. Though some difficulties may be felt about an argument from analogy of this type, it is no doubt an inductive argument, for Paley's reasoning proceeds in the form!' whenever in the past we have found intricate mechanisms, we have also found a maker, so in this case, too, we can infer one. This argument from analogy, it may be said, does not serve the purpose for which it is meant. It, being analogical, makes the existence of God a probability, not a necessity. The arguer, however, would not like to make His existence less than an absolute necessity. The inductive reasoning, therefore, may not serve the purpose of a metaphysician. But that does not matter. There are metaphysicians who are not afraid of the air of probability in their conclusion. Russell, in his early writings, wrote in the vein of suggesting that one metaphysical thesis was more probable than the other. While weighing the probability of one metaphysical theory against the other Russell once said in effect:, there are arguments that try to show that external world does not exist but since these arguments are not conclusive and we have a natural tendency to believe that the external world does exist, we are probably safer in going on thinking that it does'. There are theological arguments of the cosmological type which are probability arguments for the existence of God. Instead of being offered as strict demonstrations, they can be presented as providing significant pointers, suggestive clues, probable arguments appealing not to the principle of logical entailment but to a less rigorous and more informal kind of reason able-ness. They direct attention to some aspect of the world or of human experience and conclude that this is most adequately explained by postulating a divine creator. It is not claimed that the intellectual move from these starting points to God proceeds on the ironclad rails of logical entailment. There can be no strict deduction of an infinite diety from the character of finite things. Rather these function as significant signs and clues, pointing with varying degrees of particularity and force to the reality of God. Formulated as arguments such inferences centre upon the notion of probability. Their general form is: in view of this or that characteristic of the world it is more probable that there is a God than that there is not. It is obvious that these probability inferences based on certain observations of the world are inductive in nature.

We have thus far talked of metaphysical arguments vis-a-vis inductive inferences

We have argued that metaphysics does use induction as a tool of arriving at certain conclusions. We now propose to consider the relation of deductive inference to metaphysical arguments. Deductive reasoning would appear to be a better tool for the metaphysicians for two different reasons. The first is the requirement of metaphysics and the second the generally envisaged nature of its conclusion. Metaphysics is required to yield a comprehensive and systematic account of reality. A theory about the nature of reality is said to be comprehensive if there are no elements of reality to which the theory does not apply and it is said to be systematic if the propositions comprising the theory are interdependent. That is to say that if the propositions comprising the theory rare not divisible into a number independent groups, then the theory is said to be systematic. An extreme case of something systematic, in this sense, would be a deductive system in which from a limited number of axioms one could derive, as logical consequences, the remaining propositions of the theory; and it is notable that some seventeenth-century rationalist metaphysicians thought of metaphysics as constituting a deductive system. The great metaphysicians of the seventeenth century were obsessed with the idea of demonstrated knowledge. They thought that if metaphysics was to be the queen of sciences, it must be as closely argued as mathematics and present conclusions ineluctable. As ineluctable as those of Euclid. The attempt was made by Descartes but carried out in detail only by Spinoza to present metaphysical thought in strict deductive form. Spinoza began by setting out a series of propositions described as definitions and axioms and accepted as self-evidently true and went on deducing from them or from what had been previously proved on the basis of them the main points of his philosophy. The question what the world is truely like and how the wise man should be behave in it were questions which for Spinoza could be answered with absolute certainty. As has already been pointed out, metaphysicians usually want their conclusions to be qualified with necessity and certainty. As deduction would ensure these qualities of their conclusion, it came to be maintained that the metaphysician's enter prize was wholly deductive.

Idea

But the idea that metaphysical actively consists just of making deductions has a certain problem of its own. It is the problem of getting the initial premises or primitive propositions. Descartes himself pointed out this problem when, while setting out his proofs of God's existence in the mathematical manner, he remarked that the trouble lay in establishing the initial premises of such a system. Any metaphysical system of the deductive type would assume the form of a set of propositions in which the derived propositions would have to be accepted if the primitive or initial propositions are accepted. The problem, then, of a deductive metaphysics is to select correctly the initial premises or primitive propositions. For if the primitive propositions or initial premises are self-evident but non-existential, it would be unwarranted to deduce existential conclusions from non-existential premises. In deductive metaphysics attempts have been made to deduce the existence of specific kinds of things from self-evident but non-existential principles. The ontological argument for the existence of God is an example of this. This argument attempts to deduce the existence of God from the principle that, as Acquinas puts it, that which exists actually and mentally is greater than that which exists only mentally. The most obvious remark against this type of deductive metaphysics is that there is no conceivable way in which an existential conclusion can be drawn from non- existential premises. One can easily define God as the greatest being conceivable', but from this definition or principle it does not follow that such a being actually exists. Seeing the force of this objection, some deductive metaphysicians, felt that a system of metaphysical knowledge must start from a premise which was at once a necessary truth, in the way mathematical truths are necessary, and a truth of fact. This is to say that the premise must be self-evident and existential. Descartes, it is said, found such a premise in cogito ergo sum. But critics argue that the cogito does not give to Descartes the premise he desires. The objection is that the metaphysician's existential premises are either not self-evident for no proposition which asserts that something exists can be self-evident or else collapse into tautologies. Prof. Ayer thinks that the I exist which is implicit in 'I think is a degenerate proposition, in the sense that the predicate adds nothing to what we are already committed to by the use of the subject-term. An utterance of this sort, if not literally tautological, is so near to being a tautology as to be entirely useless as a basis for metaphysical construction. (In The Problem of knowledge, Penguin books, 1956). To state the matter briefly: in so far as 'I exist' is a necessary truth it says nothing, and insofar as it says something it is not a necessary truth. The Cartesians may escape this situation by saying that the cogito is self- evidently true not in the formal but in material sense, that is, it embodies a basic intuition. But in that case they will have to specify a criterion of distinguishing between acceptable and non-acceptable intuitions in metaphysics. 'Clarity' and 'distinctness' as criteria are not themselves sufficiently clear and distinct.

What is clear from the above is that it is difficult for metaphysics to be cast into the mould of mathematics. Mathematics cannot provide an exact model for metaphysics and it, therefore, cannot be deductive like mathematics. But this is not to say that deductive argument has no place in metaphysics. Metaphysicians, like others, make constant use of deductive inference. They are constantly asserting that p being the case, and p implying a in turn implies r, we are logically committed to r, or asserting that since q is false and p implies q, then p also must be false. There are metaphysical arguments of the form! If p then q, if q, th then r, therefore if p then r. And this is clearly deductive. To illustrate our point, we may take the typical metaphysical argument from illusion. The argument from illusion begins with the assertion that there are occasions on which we are all early mistaken in our perceptual judgments and goes on to maintain that there is no intrinsic difference, at the time of their occurrence, between the perceptual experiences we take to be veridical and those we subsequently reject as illusory, and therefore, we do not know that any of our perceptual beliefs are true. This argument is based on the assertion that the experience of a person who has a true perceptual belief may be exactly duplicated by the experience of a person whose perceptual belief is exactly similar but false. Now.

If we state clearly the logical structure of this argument of the sceptics, it will assume the following form
1. If the experience of a person who has a true perceptual belief may be exactly duplicated by the experience of a person whose perceptual belief is exactly similar but false, then it is always logically possible that any of our perceptual beliefs are false.

2. If it is always logically possible that any of our perceptual beliefs are false, then no one ever knows that any of our perceptual beliefs are true.

3. Therefore, if the experience of a person who has a true perceptual belief may be exactly duplicated by the experience of a person whose perceptual belief is exactly similar but false, then no one ever knows that any of our perceptual beliefs are true.

It is evident from the above that the conclusion is deduced from the premises as mentioned above. We cannot, therefore, assert that in metaphysics, there are no deductions. There can be no deductive metaphysics all right. We cannot hope, with spinoza, to construct a philosophy more geometrico or with Leibnitz to take our pencils in our hands, sit down to our slates, and say to each other "Let us calculate", when confronted with a philosophical problem. But that is quite another matter than to say that metaphysics can have no deductive reasoning. It is true that deduction may not be as straight forward as to start from a set of premises and come to a certain conclusion as we find a normal argument in Ex Euclid to be. The Reduction ad absurdum argument, so constantly employed by metaphysicians may appear to us to be queer, we may not catch it to be deductive when we first meet it since the structure of the argument is not apparently deductive. But the Reductio ad absurdum argument is a deductive argument. An argument of this kind begins by assuming the falsity of the proposition it aims to prove, and then it tries to show that this assumption inevitably leads to a contradiction- it reduces to a logical absurdity. From this it follows that the original proposition cannot be false. Here we deduce absurdity from the falsity of the proposition we want to prove to be true, Euclid, in his Elements, uses this form of argument on a number of occasions for example, to prove that the square root of 2 is not a rational number. Even the infinite regress argument, as powerful a weapon in the philosopher's armoury as the Reductio ad absurdum, has its homel and, as Waismann shows, in mathematics (Contemporary British Philosophy -1956 Edition, p.476). As originally used in mathematics, it shares the nature of deduction since it ends with a Q.E. D. Though this argument is not as rigidly used in metaphysics and elsewhere as in mathematics and has certain peculiarity of stricture and subtlety of type, it may still be argued to be deductive in character,

Conclusion

So, deductive and inductive reasoning's have their place in metaphysics. The two basic forms of reasoning are employed in metaphysics, Metaphysics has never been tied, barring a few exceptions, to any particular reasoning procedure. A metaphysician may find it desirable to construct a proof that is mathematical in character or to engage in experimental reasoning in the course of pursuing some problem which he is trying to solve. It would, therefore, be wrong to assimilate the metaphysical arguments either to the deductive alone or to the inductive. Metaphysicians have been free to use any method in searching for the truth. "Metaphysical arguments are like trees. Their exact position and their shape, are to a certain extent matters of preference; the metaphysicians can choose where exactly to plant them, and how to trim them. But he cannot choose whether they will grow or not; some spots on the conceptual landscape are more fertiles than others." (B.A.O. Williams, Metaphysics, Macmillan, p. 59). Hume wished to commit books of school metaphysics' to flames largely because of his antipathy to the claims of metaphysicians like Descartes and Spinoza that deduction was competent to unfold the mysteries of truth, & metaphysical argument can, however, be rational and yet not deductive. Besides presenting arguments with strict logical steps, a metaphysician al so describes, classifies, defines, analyses, reminds exemplifies and raises lots of questions. All this he does with a single aim of making his position acceptable.

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