



An analysis on the view of Kant and Ayer regarding synthetic-analytic distinction

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Abstract

The distinction between synthetic and analytic judgment has been treated as one of the central issues in the history of Western Philosophy. Although, Kant makes a clear distinction between these two types of judgment, some other philosophers like Ayer or Quine criticize. It is true that Quine tries to abolish this distinction whereas Ayer tries to fix up another criterion accepting the distinction between these two types of judgment. This paper is an analysis on the re-establishment of Kant's doctrine by rejecting the notion of Ayer.

Keywords: distinction, synthetic, analytic, judgment

Introduction

In the history of Western Philosophy although Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his 'Critique of Pure Reason' (1781) makes a clear distinction between synthetic and analytic judgment, it has an important role since the predecessors like Hume or Leibniz and the ancestor of Kant like Ayer (1910-1989) or Quine (1908-2000). It should be mentioned here that Quine in his 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' (1951) tried to prove that the distinction between synthetic and analytic judgment is nothing but a dogma i.e. the theory which is based on wrong reason. Ayer, being a logical positivist allows this distinction in a different way but the main contention always remained the same. Kant makes this distinction in such a way that the possibility of synthetic a-priori judgment remains intact, because the focal point of Kantian philosophy is correlated with the possibility of synthetic a-priori judgment. On the other hand Ayer believes that there are only two types of judgment—synthetic and analytic, that is why he proposes the basis of the distinction between these two types of judgment as inferred by Kant should be rejected. But the questions are—Does Ayer become successful to do so? Or Does Ayer successfully reject Kantian notion of the distinction between synthetic and analytic judgment?

The answer of the above mentioned questions are the topic of my paper. For the sake of clarity this paper will be furnished with the following sub sections:

Kantian doctrine of synthetic-analytic distinction in Section-I,

Ayer's objection in Section-II,

Ayer's alternative definition of synthetic analytic distinction in Section—III,

Lastly,

A defend Kantian doctrine again by rejecting Ayer's doctrine of the distinction between synthetic and analytic judgment Section-IV.

(Section—I)

In course of making a clear distinction between synthetic and analytic judgment Kant progresses with the help of two

criteria. One of which is known as the containment criterion the other is known as contradiction criterion. Following the first criterion i.e. the containment criterion an analytic judgment is that in which the predicate concept is already contained in the subject concept. On the other hand, a synthetic judgment is that in which the predicate concept lies outside of the subject concept.

Either the predicate B belongs to the subject A as something contained (though covertly) in the concept A; or B lies outside the sphere of the concept A, though somehow connected with it. In the former case I call the judgment analytical, in the latter synthetical^[1].

The predicate concept in an analytic judgment the predicate is contained in the subject does not mean as like as the tea is contained in the cup. Tea is a material object and it can be contained in the cup which is also a material object. But the concept of an object cannot be treated as the object itself. That's why an analytic judgment the predicate is contained in the subject means the predicate concept is contained in the subject concept which means the predicate concept is identical with at least one of the logical constituents of the subject concept. For example— 'All bodies are extended.' is an analytic judgment, because the analysis of 'body' yields two simpler concepts the concept of extendedness and the concept of substantiality. The predicate concept of extendedness is identical with one of this i.e. with the concept of extendedness. On the other hand, in the synthetic judgment, the predicate concept lies outside of the subject concept. For example, 'All bodies are heavy.' is a synthetic judgment, because the concept of 'heaviness' lies outside of the concept of 'body' as the 'body' yields two simpler concepts—the concept of extendedness and the concept of substantiality and the concept of 'heaviness' is not identical with anyone of these logical constituents of the subject concept. So, it is synthetic.

Following the other criterion i.e. the contradiction criterion, an

analytic judgement is governed purely by the logical law of contradiction. Thus it can be said that a judgment is analytic if and only if the opposite of which is self contradictory. Whereas corresponding to it, a synthetic judgement is one the opposite of which is not self contradictory. 'All bodies are extended.' is an analytic judgement because the opposite of this judgement is 'Some bodies are not extended things.' and leads to self contradictory in this way—'Some extended things are not extended things.' (bodies = extended things.), because it is in the form— $P. \sim P.$ But the opposite of 'All bodies are heavy.' is 'Some bodies are not heavy.' which cannot be reducible into a self contradiction and so, it is synthetic.

(Section—II)

Ayer in his "language, Truth and Logic" maintains that the Kantian criteria of the distinction between synthetic and analytic distinction cannot be acceptable, because this criteria is infected with some difficulties. According to him, there are two difficulties arises in the Kantian criteria of the distinction between synthetic and analytic distinction.

The first is related with the meaning of the term 'concept'. The term 'concept' is indistinct. He remarks,

"...the difficulties which arise out of the use of the vague term concept" [2].

The term 'concept' raises difficulties because this term has been used by different philosophers in different sense. Lock has used this term 'concept' to denote the idea where Hume has used it to express an impression.

Ayer thinks that this difficulty is not major one. The main difficulty is that of Kantian criteria violates the principle of division. He says,

"...he gives two distinct criteria, which are by no means equivalent [3].

Violating of the principle of division means a judgment is synthetic through one criterion and analytic through another criterion that is to say a judgment which is synthetic through containment criterion and analytic through contradiction criterion.

Kant gives two criteria, which are distinct to each other. He maintains that the first criteria i.e. containment criterion is psychological and the other criterion i.e. contradiction criterion is logical because it depends on the logical law of contradiction. Following the first criterion, the predicate concept lies in the subject concept means the thought associated with the predicate concept lies in the thought associated in the subject concept.

' $7+5 = 12$ ' is synthetic because the thought associated with the predicate concept 12 i.e. the immediate successor of 11 does not lies in the thought associated with the subject concept i.e. the union of 7 and 5.

But ' $7 + 5 = 12$ ' can be proved as analytic by the logical law of contradiction if Leibnizian conception of 'Synonymous' is applied.

Two symbols belonging to the same language can be said

to be synonymous if and only if, the simple substitution of one symbol for the other, in any sentence in which either can significantly occur, always yields a new sentence which is equivalent to the old. If ' $7+5$ ' is substituted for 12 then ' $7+5=7+5$ ' will be the result which is same as the old sentence ' $7+5=12$ ' [4].

It can also be said that the denial of this new sentence ' $7+5=7+5$ ' leads to a self contradiction. So, it is analytic.

The sentence which is synthetic according to the psychological criterion has now become analytic by another criterion. That is why these two criteria violates the principle of division.

(Section—III)

Before explaining Ayer's own criteria it should be mentioned here that Ayer does not reject the distinction, what he rejects, is the criteria which has been given by Kant. He also demands that he has kept the spirit of Kantian criteria of synthetic-analytic distinction.

According to Ayer 'a proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains and synthetic when its validity is determined by facts of experience.' [6] 'There are ants which have established a system of slavery.' is a synthetic proposition, because we cannot tell whether it is true or false merely considering the definition of the symbols it contained. We have to observe the actual behaviour of ants. On the other hand, 'It is either a table or it is not a table.' is analytic, because of this judgment the factual observations are not needed. If one knows the function of the words 'either' 'or' and 'not' then one can see that any proposition of the form 'Either P is true or P is not true' is valid independently of experience. Accordingly, all such propositions are analytic.

(Section—IV)

But Ayer's criticism of Kant is based on a total misunderstanding. Ayer has shown that the judgment ' $7+5=12$.' is synthetic by the application of Kantian containment criterion and analytic by contradiction criterion. Kant would not admit that ' $7+5$ ' and '12' are synonymous. According to him, ' $7+5$ ' and '12' are extensionally identical. But these are not identical intentionally because their connotations are not the same. In view of their extensional agreement, these are no doubt inter-changeable. But Kant does not take this view. So, it is proved that Ayer's criticism is based on total misunderstanding.

Ayer tries to reject Kantian doctrine of synthetic and analytic distinction, because according to him, it violates the principle of division. But Ayer's own criterion has committed the same fallacy as he finds out in Kantian doctrine of the distinction between synthetic and analytic judgment. Ayer's own account of synthetic-analytic distinction proceeds according to two principles. These two principles are, as Richard Robinson calls them 'definitional principle' and 'experience-principle' [12].

An analytic proposition is defined by Ayer according to the definitional principle thus; a proposition for him is analytic if its validity is determined solely by the definitions of terms. A synthetic proposition, however, is defined by him according to

different principle, namely, the experience principle thus; a proposition for him is synthetic if its validity is determined by the facts of experience. Now this undetected duality of Ayer's principle of distinction does indeed generate confusion that is to say violates the principle of division.

Following Robinson, again, it may be represented the proposition 'An apple should be juicy and sweet.'⁸ This proposition is not an analytic proposition because the truth value of this proposition cannot be determined by the definition of the symbols i.e. "apple", "sweet" etc. it contained. So, this is synthetic according to Ayer's experience principle, however, this proposition is not synthetic (and so is analytic), since this proposition, being a normative are (i.e.—a should proposition), cannot be determined as true or false by appealing to the facts of experience.

Thus we see that Ayer's own criteria violets the principle of division. Again, it should be mentioned here that Ayer demands that he has maintained the spirit of Kantian doctrine of synthetic-analytic distinction. But Kant gives his doctrine in such a way that the possibility of synthetic a priori statement could be explained. But Ayer's doctrine has failed to do so.

References

1. Maxmuller F. (Tr.): 'Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason', The Macmillan company, London, 1922, 48.
2. Ayer AJ. Language Truth and Logic, Penguin, London, 1936, 104.
3. Ibid, 104.
4. Ibid, 80.
5. Richard Robinson, 'Necessary propositions' in the first critique; Reflections or Kant's critique pure Reason, Belmont, Calif., Wadsworth Pub. Co, 1969, 29-30