

An Analysis of the Phenomena That Have Led Some Philosophers to Introduce the Concept of Substance

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Abstract: *The standpoint that all observable phenomena in the universe are fitting inestimable material for science if they are studied by the scientific method is basically positivistic. All things and facts which can be immediately learned by observation, together with their relationship and uniformities which is discoverable by reason without exceeding the limit of empirical observation, are designated as positivism. In positivism the belief in the sensory observation of empirical phenomena, that is empiricism – therefore plays a predominant part. Methodologically therefore positivism is in controversial opposition to the metaphysical abstraction of traditional of traditional philosophy. The term metaphysical is applied to everything that aims to go beyond the sphere of empiricism and seek the hidden essence of phenomena or the ultimate cause of things*

Keywords: *positivism, metaphysics, empirical observation, metaphysical abstractions, and ultimate cause.*

I. Introduction

The problem which has caused ceaseless debates has been the issue of demarcation between substance and property; this in turn has given rise to the distinction between reality and appearance. These issues constitute the subject of this article.

II. Purpose of article

The purpose of this article is to state and discuss the phenomena which have led philosophers to introduce the concept of substance.

III. The phenomena that have led some philosophers to introduce the concept of substance.

Definition of metaphysics

Metaphysics is a conceptual scheme based upon the assumption that there are an *immanent* and a *transcendent* reality, that is to say, the world as it appears to us and a reality behind that world

Positivism and metaphysics

In positivism with its mainly natural scientific orientation that starting-point is that the world of phenomena, whether physical or social, forms a unity because the same methods of study are applied to all phenomena. The argument is that these methods having led to unparalleled success and results in the natural sciences must be employed in the study of social phenomena also, and that the social sciences must strive for the precision exactness and objectivity of the natural sciences.

The standpoint that all observable phenomena in the universe are fitting inestimable material for science if they are studied by the scientific method is basically positivistic. All things and facts which can be immediately learned by observation, together with their relationship and uniformities which is discoverable by reason without its exceeding the limit of empirical observation, are designated as positivism. In positivism the belief in the sensory observation of empirical phenomena, that is empiricism – therefore plays a predominant part. Methodologically therefore positivism is in controversial opposition to the *metaphysical abstractions* of traditional philosophy. The term metaphysical is applied to everything that all aims to go beyond the sphere of empiricism and seek the hidden essence of phenomena or the ultimate cause of things.

It is manifest from the positivistic definition of science that the ideal of positivism is practical knowledge and control over nature as against the mere contemplative and speculative nature and purpose of metaphysics.

Kant and his disciples contributed immensely to the development of positivism. In his critique of pure reason, Emmanuel Kant limited the domain of valid consciousness to the experimental field of phenomena and he vigorously rejected and condemned the illusion of reason which attempts to penetrate the forbidden fields of things in *themselves or noumena*

With this preliminary knowledge of the metaphysical world, let us now examine assiduously some of the phenomena that have led and still lead some philosophers to introduce the concept of substance in their philosophically metaphysical deliberations and arguments.

Things and property

When we look at an object, we establish a number of properties of that particular object. For instance, if I taste a piece of chocolate, I may make a number of statements about it. I may state that: “it is sweet”, “it is brown,” “it has a cocoa-like taste,” “it is soft” and “it melts in my mouth”

We have now a whole series of data of experience: sweet, brown, cocoa-like, taste, soft, melt. If I eat chocolate on another occasion, I shall experience the same smell and taste and so on. Since on each and every time I meet with the same group of data of experience, I make the statement that the data of experience in this group (the taste, smell, colour, etc) are *interrelated* in the same way.

Now for the purposes of description and full explanation of this interrelations or interconnectedness of data of experience, I introduce the concepts *thing and property*. I do not experience these data as properties, but I interpret them as properties the moment I introduce the concept *substance* (thing) for the purposes of explanation of the interrelatedness.

The philosophers call the thing the “*substance*” and the properties the “*accidentia*”. Differently phrased, the concepts *substance* and *accidentia* describe particular sorts of situation. In other words, they belong not to the first order of statements.

IV. Metaphysical problems

In developing these concepts, we have introduced a whole series of metaphysical problems: What is this substance? A substance units or possess the properties. But is it other than the properties? Is there a substance? Or it is other than properties? Is a substance exists? If we say “it exists”, what do we mean by existence? This is therefore the sort of question posed by the metaphysician who is a philosopher.

Ayer’s view

Ayer says that the use of the term substance provides us with a good example of the way in which metaphysics mostly comes to be written. It happens to be the case that we cannot, in our language, refer to the sensible properties of a thing without introducing a word of phrase which appears to stand for the thing itself as opposed to anything which may be said about it. As a result of this, those who, those who are infected by the primitive superstition that to every name a single real entity must correspond assume that it is necessary to distinguish logically between the thing itself and any, or all, of its sensible properties. So that they employ the term substance to refer to the things itself.

Reality and appearance

How then does the demarcation between substance and property give rise to the distinction between reality and appearance? In the substantialist, substance is that which exists indecently, and to the functionalist, that which act independently.

To be more precise the carrier of the properties that is the substance, is viewed as a reality which make itself knowable in a certain way; the reality appears in a particular manner. Does the reality possess characteristic which are common to all things? Can we assert something about reality as such?

Is reality subject to change? Reality is constant and we speak of the invariability of reality. The substance therefore stays the same, but properties may change. We have already described reality as constant. And it must also be understood that reality is totality, universality, the cosmos or absolute cause.

We have defined metaphysics as a conceptual scheme based on the assumption that there are an imminent and transcendent reality, and let us in our attempt to understand metaphysics, examine the metaphysical object for example a table. Bertrand Russell begins his analysis of the problem of appearance and reality by considering the observation of a table. To the eye, the table is rectangle, brown and shiny, to the hand, it is smooth and cold and hard. When I tap it, I hear a wooden sound. Up to this point, other observers agree with my observation, but the moment we try to be more precise, we ran into difficulties. Although we assume that the entire surface of the table is really of one and the same colour, it is the case that the more reflective parts are brighter, whilst some parts look almost white. If I move, the distribution of shades changes accordingly. It follows that then differently situated people look at the table they see different patterns of the shades. Here we have the beginning of one of the distinctions that cause most trouble in philosophy – the distinction between appearance and reality, between what things seem to be and what things are.

Russell comes to the conclusion that it becomes evident that the real table, if there is one, is not the same as what we immediately experienced by sight of touch or hearing. The real table, if there is one, is not

immediately known to us at all, but must be an inference from what is immediately known. Is there then a real table at all? If so, what sort of object can it be?

In order to answer these fundamental questions let us again go back to the term metaphysics. What is the concept metaphysics? The concept metaphysical is applied to everything that claims to go beyond the sphere of empiricism and seek the hidden essence of phenomenal or the ultimate cause of things.

Radical empiricism and radical rationalism

In *radical empiricism*, it is contended that all our concepts and knowledge are reducible to data of our empirical observation. Radical empiricism accepts the fact that all knowledge is of a hypothetical nature because each subsequent observation modifies a preceding observation.

Radical rationalism

Advances that only pure reason and thought can understand the true being and the world process of which mathematical knowledge forms the present form of knowledge. Therefore we say that radical rationalism is the theory that construction attained through thought, logical reasoning and purest conceptual analysis is the only reliable valid knowledge.

V. Conclusion

The metaphysical doctrine which is upheld by rationalists and rejected by empiricists is that there exists a supra-sensible world which is the object of a purely rationally intellectual intuition and is alone wholly real.

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