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Le conventionnalisme et la théorie de la signification

Dans l'École de Lvov et de Varsovie

THESIS

Review

Conventionalism was one of important philosophical trends in the 20th century. Its main representatives were H. Poincaré in France and Ajdukiewicz in Poland. Some conventionalist elements can be found in positivist philosophy: Mach, Carnap, but the core of this trend is represented by Poincaré and Ajdukiewicz. Thus I would appreciate the choice of the topic by Mr. Černý (the “Author”).

The Thesis is divided to two parts. In the 1st part we find an analysis of the notion ‘conventionalism’ and definition of two forms of c.: instrumentalism and constructivism. Discussing the distinction the Author emphasizes (and rightly so) the role of language: passive for instrumentalists, active for constructivists.

The relation between meaning (znaczenie, der *Sinn*) and knowledge(s) becomes now an important one: is there a distinction? Knowledge is dependent on meaning but there is the problem of justification. The question ‘What is the character of *facts*?’

Such problems return in the IIth part of *Thesis* Les langues et les connaissances. Le cas de Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, where Ajdukiewicz’s attempt at defining meaning and his way to radical structuralism is described. An essential point leading to this anti-realist conclusion is A-’s orientation to ‘closed and connected languages’, where any change (introduction of a new expression) means that we have got another language. A. moreover has to accept

consequences of non-translatability of such languages, viz. to Kuhnian incommensurability.

Meaning is defined as what is given by meaning-rules. What makes A.'s theory a kind of anti-realist theory is that determining the meaning we avoid mentioning Reality. Any changes, corrections are done by changing meaning rules or axioms (this is a kind of Quinean holism): we have to change the given conceptual apparatus, language and we are free to do it. A. emphasizes however that being free in this respect does not mean that we can do *arbitrary* changes: he even adduces four concrete criteria of choosing new preferences. This a-semantic approach to meaning leads to counterintuitive consequences like definition of synonymy (not taking into account that synonymous expressions have (among other things) to denote one and the same object. Thus A. has to meet Tarski's criticism of such a definition of synonymy and try to modify his definitions.

These – and many other – points have been dealt with in the THESIS.

Mostly it is clear what the Author claims and what is claimed by the philosopher who is referred to by the Author. This is not so very clear in the Conclusion (p.175-179), where some claims look like Author's summarizing what conventionalists like Ajdukiewicz would say while one could interpret them as the views of the Author.

In my opinion more could have been said about the conventionalist or positivist illusion that no reference to reality is needed when semantic problems are solved. This concerns also Ajdukiewicz with his meaning-rules: language expressions are defined as being not only grammatically ruled sequences of symbols / sounds: they are expressions only if they possess meaning (but this is something what Ajdukiewicz knew and himself formulated, only what is the meaning?) That meaning (Ajdukiewicz quotes Frege's *Sinn*) is not 'reference' (or denotation) everybody knows, only Frege has not defined it. Today we know more.

In any case the way the Author has elaborated the chosen topic indicates that he is able to cope with a rather complex problem and find essential points that enable us to formulate interesting generalizations supported by deep study of source and secondary

literature. Furthermore, he demonstrated his philosophical competence, using apt concepts characterizing respective problems.

I am convinced that the THESIS is good and should be defended in usual way.

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