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Rudolf Carnap's Pseudoproblems in Philosophy: The Case For Philosophy as Science

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"Rudolf Carnap's *Pseudoproblems in Philosophy* : The Case For Philosophy as Science"

Rudolf Carnap's *Pseudoproblems in Philosophy* embodies Carnap's attempts to divert the study of philosophy from metaphysics and direct it on the path of science. To accomplish this task, Carnap strives to incorporate logic and empirical justification as key parts of "epistemological analysis." Part I of *Pseudoproblems in Philosophy* focuses on the basics of his constructional system, including methods of justification, and lays the groundwork for the defense for his "Genealogy of Concepts." In Part II of *Pseudoproblems in Philosophy,* Carnap sets criteria for judging the meaning and validity of claims. Drawing upon these criteria, Carnap confronts the claims of realism and idealism. Finally, Carnap entreats the philosophical community to take seriously the claim that all sciences, including philosophy must use empiricism as a base in order to justify any and all knowledge claims.

Part I of *Pseudoproblems in Philosophy* begins by exploring epistemological and logical analysis as it relates to Carnap's constructional system. Carnap introduces the "problem" of epistemology as the concept of justification or how a knowledge claim can prove to contain "authentic knowledge" (Carnap, 305). Carnap argues that this problem of epistemology can be solved through the use of his constructional system. Thus, Carnap's main objective with the constructional system is to be able to logically reduce objects and concepts to the immediately given, so that all claims can be empirically verified and then deemed justifiable or metaphysical.

In order for the constructional system to work, a system of analyzing the different components of a given experience must be in place. "Logical analysis" consists of the process of "logical division," which is based on Carnap's idea of "rational reconstruction" (308). "Logical division" is the procedure in which "the theoretical content of an experience" is broken down "into two parts: one of these we call the '(epistemologically) sufficient constituent,' the remainder we call (relative to that first constituent) the '(epistemologically) dispensable constituent'" (308). In order to differentiate between "sufficient" and "dispensable" Carnap relies on the system of "rational reconstruction - an inferential procedure whose purpose it is to investigate whether or not there is a certain logical dependency between certain constituents of the experience" (310).

The procedure of rational reconstruction, according to Carnap, is not the construction of new knowledge or an alteration of previous knowledge of an experience, but simply an examination of how the knowledge can be classified,

> To say that a constituent *b* of an experience...is dispensable relative to constituent *a*...is to say that *b* does not give me any information that is not already contained in *a* together with my prior knowledge (310).

Through rational reconstruction one is able to examine an experience and determine the relative importance of certain empirically based claims. An example of rational reconstruction may be the recognition of a familiar object: if you walk into a kitchen and see a person chopping an onion (constituent *a)*, smelling the onion (constituent *b)* will give you no information outside of the experience you had when you entered the kitchen, the object of experience is still an onion. This procedure of rational reconstruction is imperative, as it is evident that the logical status of a claim must be known prior to conducting an epistemological analysis.

Epistemological analysis, according to Carnap, is a "special case" of "the logical analysis of the cognitive content of an experience" (313). The intention of epistemological analysis is to determine which constituents should be considered as a "nucleus" and which constituents should be considered as a "secondary part" of a given experience (313). In order for this to be the case,

> *b* must be a dispensable constituent relative to *a....b* must epistemically "reduce" to *a,* that is, the cognition of *b* must "rest upon" the cognition of *a, a* must be "epistemically primary" (313).

Carnap formalizes these requirements into two criteria for determining if certain constituents are considered to be the nucleus or the secondary part of an experience: "justification" and "possibility of error" (313).

Carnap asks the right question of justification, "if I have had experience S, what reasons can I give for my (alleged) knowledge of the content of b: how can I justify it against doubts?" (314). Instead of referring to his own system of rational reconstruction Carnap refers his readers to their specialized sciences for full answers:

> the epistemological decision is dependent upon the procedure of a special science, that is to say, this procedure is presupposed as epistemologically unobjectionable; on the other hand, epistemology will gradually construct a system from which the procedures of the individual sciences will be critically surveyed (314).

Carnap's assumption that all sciences contain an "epistemologically unobjectionable" justification method is risky at best and highly damaging at worst. By using this criterion, as opposed to something he created and mandated, Carnap leaves this method open to subjective interpretation. In opening this up to each individual science, Carnap risks the discreditation of not only this criterion, but of his whole system.

Carnap's second criterion, the "possibility of error," rests entirely on empirically based justification and fits within Carnap's own system, instead of looking to specific sciences. Carnap maintains that through epistemological analysis, in any given experience, if there is no possibility of error in constituent *a* or *b* because full information is available on both of them, then the constituents are logically independent of one another. This obviously foregoes any possibility that

there is a "nucleus - secondary part" relationship between *a* and *b* because of the epistemic boundaries of a "nucleus - secondary part" relationship previously stated. Using the aforementioned example of seeing and smelling an onion, the possibility of error does exist because what may have been assumed to be an onion could have been an apple, and the smell associated with an onion may have come from another source. The possibility of error allows a nucleus-secondary part relationship, which is the backbone of Carnap's epistemological system.

Using his logical and epistemological analysis, Carnap attempts to explain the "knowledge of the heteropsychological." Through his logical and epistemological analysis system, Carnap sets out to prove that:

> the epistemological nucleus of every concrete cognition of heteropsychological occurrences consists of a perception of physical phenomena, or...the heteropsychological occurs only as an (epistemologically) secondary part of the physical (316).

Using rational reconstruction, Carnap asserts that a "logical dependency" exists between the heteropsychological and the actual physical occurrence (319). The end result of Carnap's logical analysis is simply that knowledge of the heteropsychological is dependent upon the sufficient constituent of "perceived physical occurrences" and possibly prior knowledge (319). Using epistemological analysis, as outlined previously, Carnap concludes the perception of the physical is "the epistemological nucleus" while, the heteropsychological "is the secondary part" (319). The function of Carnap's discussion is to emphasize that his methods of analysis lead into a conceptual framework, in which all claims are ultimately accountable to empirical scrutiny. The details of the specific process that Carnap employs to come to these conclusions is not the most significant point of this section of his work, rather it is how he draws on these conclusions to create his "genealogy of concepts" (321).

The results of Carnap's logical analysis and epistemological analysis of our understanding and perception of the physical and heteropsychological is his "genealogy of concepts":

4. Cultural objects
3. Heteropsychological objects
2. Physical objects
1. Autopsychological objects (321)

Carnap considers this "genealogy" as the natural progression of the logical and epistemological analysis. Carnap successfully maintains that "cultural objects...are epistemologically secondary relative to the heteropsychological and physical," and that "any recognition of heteropsychological occurrences goes back to a recognition of a physical event" (321). As the cornerstone of his argument, Carnap goes on to state that all of these perceptions are embedded in the fact that "physical objects are epistemologically secondary relative to autopsychological objects, since the recognition of physical objects depends upon perception" (321). Through this

genealogy, Carnap professes to having achieved his goal of finding a basis for a system of analyzing knowledge claims for all sciences, including philosophy, "The final result is a system of scientific objects or concepts which, from a few 'basic concepts', leads in step-by-step construction to all the remaining concepts" (321).

In Part II of *Pseudoproblems in Philosophy,* Carnap employs his conclusions from the previous sections to discuss possible criteria for meaningfulness. Basing his arguments on the premise that knowledge results only from concepts built ultimately on the autopsychological experience, he claims that all sentences which are to be considered meaningful must be based in some type of experience (326). Carnap states that every meaningful claim, regardless of what field it is based in,

> either goes directly back to experience, that is, the content of experiences, or it is at least indirectly connected with experience in such a way that it can be indicated which possible experience would confirm or refute it (328).

Although Carnap makes a strong case for the merits of empiricism his arguments fall short, as even he acknowledges in his preface to the second edition of *Pseudoproblems in Philosophy.* By claiming that a statement only "indirectly related to experience" can be meaningful, Carnap harms not only the validity of his "Genealogy of Concepts," but also weakens his otherwise strong argument surrounding the Realism/Idealism controversy.

In discussing the Realism/Idealism controversy Carnap defines Realism as the belief that things existing outside of one's own body and consciousness are real and "exist in themselves" (332). Idealism according to Carnap is the belief that the only things that exist are one's own "perceptions, representations...and constructions" (332). Carnap argues that there is no meaningful controversy here because "these two theses which are here in opposition to one another go beyond experience and have no factual content" (334). According to Carnap, the claims made by both the Realist and the Idealist are "merely pseudo statements, made with the vain intention of expressing accompanying object representations in the form of statements" (333).

If one is convinced by Carnap's earlier arguments in favor of the genealogy of concepts and the claim that all meaningful statements must be empirically grounded, then it becomes clear that "neither the thesis of realism....nor the thesis of idealism....can be considered scientifically meaningful" precisely because there is nothing contained in these arguments which can be empirically verified (334). It is through this argument that Carnap creates the perfect springboard for his claim that for philosophy to be a meaningful and valid science, metaphysics (because it is not subject to empirical scrutiny) must be dismantled as a legitimate form of philosophical discourse.

Carnap's guidelines for philosophy as science are functional but flawed. Carnap creates two questionable mandates in his quest for a perfect philosophy: "justification" and "criterion for meaningfulness." In defining his parameters for justification, Carnap goes outside his own system to the specific sciences. It seems plausible that the "possibility of error" criterion and the conditions detailed by Carnap for a nucleus/secondary part relationship could stand as sufficient indicators

in epistemological analysis. By remaining within his own system of justification, Carnap would further legitimize his epistemological analysis that ultimately leads to his genealogy of concepts. The second significant flaw in Carnap's work is his "criterion for meaningfulness." In this criterion, he mistakenly allows for claims that are not directly accountable to experience. If Carnap, as he claims, is striving for a unified science based in empirical knowledge claims, he must rid his criterion for meaning of the loophole of claims only "indirectly related to experience" (328).

In *Pseudoproblems in Philosophy,* Carnap adequately supports his constructional system and his "Genealogy of Concepts" and draws upon this in creating his "Meaning Criterion." Barring his correctable weaknesses, "justification" and "criterion for meaning," Carnap has succeeded in a convincing argument of the merits of empiricism as the only solid ground for knowledge claims. In doing so he not only dismisses the Realism/Idealism controversy as metaphysical and therefore meaningless, but also challenges other branches of philosophy. Although it is difficult to imagine the study of philosophy absent metaphysics, Carnap is stringent in his view that philosophy must be regarded as part of the new "unified science" and in order to do so metaphysics must be abandoned. It is impossible to deny that Carnap presents a convincing argument in favor of streamlined empirical philosophy. However, it must be asked if Carnap's conception of philosophy would still embody the study of ontology or even some types of epistemology, or would it simply become a scientific testing ground for verifiable knowledge claims? It seems as though Carnap has created an empirically sound system that may well exclude some of the most intellectually challenging questions from the discipline of philosophy. The result is a system that may serve some branches of philosophy well, but deny the philosophical existence of others that are equally important.

Bibliography

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