CHAPTER 1

PHILOSOPHICAL PROPOSITIONS: ARE THEY EMPIRICAL?

This chapter will aim at outlining the philosophical setting of Morris Lazerowitz's metaphilosophy.

Philosophers from the beginning have held different views on the nature of philosophical propositions. These propositions appear to be a priori in nature, and at the same time they present the appearance of being empirical generalisations with a high degree of probability. It will be useful to examine these two diverse accounts of their nature, as it will enable us to find the causes for the upsurge of interest in the metaphilosophical question posed by Morris Lazerowitz: What is the nature of a philosophical statement - whether it occurs in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics or aesthetics?

In light of the fact that philosophical statements are expressed in an idiom which makes them appear to be empirical, while also appearing to be necessary (since no fact is used either to support or refute them), let us examine first of all whether a necessary proposition can at the same time assert a fact about things. It is requisite to set out clearly at least some essential features of necessary propositions before proceeding to treat this question.
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A logically necessary proposition, one which has its truth-value by inner necessity (Kant’s phrase) is such that its actual truth-value is its only theoretically possible truth-value. The negation of such a proposition results in a proposition which is logically impossible. When people talk about the nature of necessary propositions, there is a tendency to say that these propositions describe necessary features of the world. I intend to maintain the view that necessary propositions are not about things, or about the world.

Let us consider Zeno’s claim that motion does not exist, which is supported by a non-empirical demonstration: a moving body must go half of a distance before it can traverse the whole distance, and the same for each half of half the distance ad infinitum hence, since it is impossible to complete traversing an infinite number of distances, however small they become, motion is impossible. Now, what is interesting is that the disputes over such claims as ‘motion is impossible’ are not empirically resolvable, that is, by observation or experimentation. If it were, then Diogenes standing up and walking across the lecture hall, as reportedly occurred, would have refuted Zeno’s claim. But
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Zeno was aware of the appearance of motion presented by Diogenes; he saw what the audience say. That motion appears to take place does not show that it really takes place, Zeno's argument remained untouched; no flaw in it was shown, and what is equally important, nothing would be accepted as refuting the thesis that motion is impossible—neither flying birds nor galloping horses. This is an important feature of any necessary proposition, that no fact will upset it. That is* its truth-value remains truth, no matter how much the world changes or even though the world goes out of existence. To quote C.I. Lewis, "That only can be a priori which is true no matter what."

Further* it can be seen that an a priori claim cannot have non-a priori consequences* that is* it cannot by implication be about the world. To hold that it can* e.g., that motion is impossible implies that motion in fact does not occur. This I shall maintain* involves us in a contradiction. To show this* consider the following argument.

Suppose* as G.H. von Wright (by implication) held* that \( \neg \neg \varphi \) implies \( \varphi \) is true as a matter of fact,

\( \neg \varphi \) implies \( \varphi \) is false as a matter of fact.
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If p is true (or false) as a matter of fact, then it is in principle possible for p to have the opposite truth-value to the one it possesses. If p is true, this fact does not eliminate the possibility of its being false; and if p is false this fact does not eliminate the possibility of it being true. Now if ϕψϕ implies that p is true, then it implies that p could be false, i.e., ϕψϕ implies ωψp and ωψϕ also implies ωψϕ. The absurd consequence is, p is necessarily true, and at the same time, possibly false.

Since philosophical views appear to many philosophers to be a priori, the nature of a priori proposition needs a thorough investigations. Three main questions arise.

1. Can an a priori proposition entail an empirical proposition? That is, can a proposition which has only one possible truth-value entail a proposition which has two possible truth-values?

2. Can an a priori proposition be entailed by or be deducible from, an empirical proposition? That is, can a proposition which has
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two possible truth-values entail a proposition which has only one possible truth-value?

3. Can a proposition which has only one theoretically possible truth-value present a claim about things?

On question 1, I have already argued against the special cases $\land \phi \lor p \rightarrow p$. Hume made the general claim that nothing contingent can follow from what is necessary. The following brief argument supports Hume's point.

Suppose $p \rightarrow q$, where $\phi \land p$ and $p \rightarrow q$ is replaceable by $\phi \land \phi(p)$. Since the impossibility of the conjunction cannot be due to $p$, which is necessary, it must be due to $\phi q$ i.e., $\phi q$ is impossible or $\phi \phi(\phi q)$.

That is, $q$ is necessary. There will be no circumstance under which $q$ could be false, which contradicts the assumption that $\phi \phi \lor \phi q$.

Since Hume's claim is of great importance to philosophy,
an additional argument by Morris Lazerowitz, may be

\[ p \rightarrow q \wedge \neg \phi \]

may be replaced by:

\[ (p \land q \lor \neg q \lor \neg p) \]

since \( \neg \phi \neg p \) the last two dis-

juncts are eliminated, and

\( q \) remains, from which

follows.

Let us examine question 2, Can an a priori proposition be deduced from an empirical proposition? In

order for a proposition \( p \) to imply another proposition

\( q \) (such that \( q \) is deducible from \( p \)) there must be an

inconsistency between \( p \) and \( \neg q \) (where the inconsistency is not merely repeated in \( \neg q \)). If the antecedent is empirical, the only inconsistency that will occur will lie in the negated consequent. Then the claimed implication between a contingent proposition and an a priori proposition will fail to meet the condition that there be an inconsistency between \( p \) and the negated consequent.

To illustrate, take Lewis' claim that a tautology is implied by every proposition: 

\[ q \land (p \lor \neg p). \]
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The inconsistency here does not lie between the antecedent and the negated consequent, but lies in the negated consequent itself, viz*, in \((p \lor \neg p)\) which is self-inconsistent. Again, there is a useful point to discuss in connection with the cosmological argument. The latter seems to violate the principle that an \textit{a priori} truth cannot have \textit{non-a priori} consequences.

To give a corrected version of the cosmological arguments Every contingent thing must have a cause; if this cause is itself contingent, it must have a cause. Now there cannot be a consummated infinity of causes going back in time. This implies there must be a \textit{first cause}, which is not itself contingent, i.e., is a being which necessarily \textit{exists}. The propositions that contingent thing exist, will have to be contingent, such that it could in principle be \textit{false}. Now to say a contingent thing is brought into existence implies that it is caused by the \textit{first cause}, which itself has necessary \textit{existence}. The proposition that a \textit{first cause} necessarily exists will be \textit{a priori} and simply restated in propositional terms a \textit{claim} apparently made about the relationship between a necessary existent thing to contingently \textit{existing thing}. 
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As to question 3, whether a proposition having only one theoretically possible truth-value can make a claim about things, consider the notion Kant brought to philosophy the notion of a synthetic a priori proposition. Kant regarded synthetic a priori propositions as a very important class of a priori propositions. Their distinguishing feature is that their predicates are neither identical with nor conjunctive part of their subject terms. Unlike analytical propositions, their negations are not self-contradictory, although they have in common with analytic propositions the feature that no other truth-value than the one it possesses is possible for it. Kant held that these synthetic a priori propositions are about things. For since the predicate of a synthetic a priori proposition is not wholly contained in its subject, it gives new information about what is referred to by its subject term. To take an illustration from Kant, "Every occurrence has a cause" was held to be synthetic a priori. To quote:

Let us take the proposition, 'Every thing which happens has its cause'.

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In the concept of 'something which happens' I do indeed think an existence which is preceded by a time, etc** and from this concept analytic judgements may be obtained. But the concept of a 'cause' lies entirely outside the other concept, and signifies something different from 'that which happens'* and is not therefore in anyway contained in this latter representation... the concept of 'cause', though not contained in it (the concept of something which happens), yet belongs to it...(the principle that everything that happens has a cause) is completely a priori and on the basis of mere concepts.

Let us examine the proposition considered in this quotations 'All occurrences have causes'. If the claim that all occurrences have causes is logically necessary then it has only one theoretically possible truth-value* and this implies that no conceivable change in the world could change the truth-value of the claim. If the proposition is not determined by what the world is like. It can tell us nothing about the relationship between occurrences and causes. For the proposition 'All occurrences must have causes' would reduce to a tautology.
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This we can see from the following:

All occurrences must have causes
means
All occurrences are caused occurrences
(by logical necessity)*

If this were the case "caused" would not have a use
to distinguish between occurrences. "Caused occurrences"
would then shrink into "occurrences": the denotation of
"causal occurrences" would necessarily coincide with
"occurrences". Thus the word "caused" becomes descriptive! functionless. As a result, we have

'All occurrences are occurrences',
which is a empty tautology. As a further example, consider Berkeley's statement*

'Everything is a perceived thing'*

or

It is inconceivable or logically impossible* for there to be an unperceived thing.

Therefore* 'unperceived thing' has no descriptive function* Just as "round square" does not serve to describe
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a figure. According to Wittgenstein, if one of a pair of antithetical terms is stripped of its use in the language, the other also loses its use. When a philosopher says 'sense—experience is vague' or 'everything is in flux', we are using the words 'flux' and 'vagueness' wrongly in a typically metaphysical way, namely* without an antithesis, whereas in their correct and everyday use, vagueness is opposed to clearness* flux to stability* inaccuracy to accuracy* and problem to solution.

Just as "every occurrence is a caused occurrence", reduces to "Every occurrence is an occurrence", so 'everything is perceived thing' conveys no more information than 'everything is a thing'. The word 'perceived' loses its function since Berkeley's claim implies that its antithesis* "unperceived" has no correct use.

The proposition* Everything is a thing obviously gives no information about things. It says nothing about what a thing is like* not even whether it exists. In this respect it is like the truth-table
tautology "\( p \lor \neg p \). Of the special case of \( p \lor \neg p \), namely, "It is raining or not raining" Wittgenstein commented in the *Tractatus* that it gives no information about the weather. It is "unconditionally true". A "tautology" he said "has no truth-conditions". It should be noted that Wittgenstein was of two minds on this point. The truth-table he constructed for \( p \lor \neg p \),

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<thead>
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<th></th>
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<th>( p \lor \neg p )</th>
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| T | T | T
| F | T | T

suggests that \( p \lor \neg p \) has truth-conditions listed on the left in the table, and that each of these makes it true. But it is clear that "it is either raining or not raining" is true no matter what the state of the weather is, no matter which truth-condition obtains. What happens in the world is not a condition for its being true. This, then, is my answer to the question whether logically necessary propositions are about things, or events, or states of affairs.

It has been claimed, however, that they must be about something. Conventionalists have held that necessary propositions are "really verbal"; they see about the actual use of terminology. As A.J. Ayer put it,
"they call attention to the implications of a certain g
linguistic usage". The source of a priori necessity is said to be language. This position needs careful exa-
mination.

What conventionalists have seen is an important similarity between sentences expressing necessary pro-
positions and sentences about the use of words. Whether this similarity supports the conventionalist position that a necessary proposition is verbal must now be ex-
a mined. Consider the sentence (a) "a cat is an animal", which in English expresses the necessary proposition

(b) that a cat is an animal/ The fact that (a) does express this necessary proposition is an empirical fact about English usage. That it does so is equivalent to the following (empirical) fact; that "animal" in point of usage applies to everything "cat" applies to. (Note that the latter fact is not about cats, but about the words "cat" and "animal") we can then writes

A cat is an animal expresses a neces-
sary proposition. "The sentence, 'ani-
mal' applies to whatever 'cat' applies
to" expresses a fact about usage.

But this does not allow us to write
A cat is an animal is a necessary proposition. The word 'animal' applies to everything "cat" applies to.

The fact that a proposition is necessary is not to be equated with any verbal fact, since a proposition about the actual use of terminology could be false. This is to say it is empirical. Clearly, an empirical proposition about words cannot be equated with an a priori proposition which makes no mention of words.

Nevertheless, an a priori statement in an oblique way conveys information about the use of nomenclature in the language. This is plain when one considers how one would justify the claim that a cat is an animal is a necessary propositions one would not turn to observation of cats but would cite the fact that the proposition is "true by definition" of the words occurring in its expression. The proposition is not equivalent to any statement about usage, but the only information it conveys is verbal.

In understanding a sentence which expresses an a priori proposition, what we know, and all that we know, is a fact about the use of terminology in the language, although that fact is not expressed by the sentence.