Metaphysics & Epistemology

A.   Metaphysics
This is the first of three lectures on general metaphysics or the philosophy of empirical science.

The term "metaphysics" is understood for our purposes as the "meta-science" of physics in the very broad Aristotelian sense in which it embraces the study of everything that exists, occurs and is as a matter of fact the case, including everything that has existed, occurred and been the case in the past and everything that will exist, occur or be the case in the future. It is evident that the scope of physics in this sense coincides with that of the empirical sciences including the empirical study of history.

As a meta-science metaphysics is concerned with the kinds of question which are distinctive of physics in this very general sense, with the methods appropriate to answering such questions, the distinctive truth conditions which apply to proposition in the field and the analysis of those concepts which are peculiar to and distinctive of it. The distinctive feature of physics in this very broad sense is that it is concerned with what exits and does not exist as distinct from what is logically possible or conceivable.

Metaphysics, therefore, is primarily concerned with the analysis of the concept of existence, with the truth conditions which apply in the case of existential propositions and other propositions which presuppose existential propositions. For our purposes Metaphysics may be conveniently divided into three divisions. (a) Metaphysical Epistemology concerned with the truth conditions applying to existential propositions and propositions with existential presuppositions (Lecture 2). (b) Ontology, concerned with nature and meaning of the term "exist" and the classification of different types and degrees of existence or "reality" (Lecture 3) and (c) Cosmology, concerned with the types of explanation appropriate to explaining the existence or non-existence of something (Lectures 4, 5 & 6)

B.   Epistemology
Epistemology is concerned with evaluating the claims that we make to know certain things and, since what we claim to know is the truth of certain propositions, with evaluating the claim that certain propositions are true. Since there are many true propositions which are neither existential propositions nor propositions presupposing the existence of anything, it follows that epistemology is concerned with knowledge and with propositions which fall outside the scope of physics in the sense in which we are using that term and hence that there is a part of epistemology which lies outside the scope of metaphysics. But although we are here concerned primarily with metaphysical epistemology, it is not possible to evaluate the claims that we make to existential knowledge without considering its relationship to the theory of knowledge in general.

Examination of the grammar of the verb "to know" shows it to be a propositional attitude i.e.: a mental attitude whose object is a proposition or set of propositions. It is distinguished from another propositional attitude that of believing by the fact that in the case of knowing the proposition believed or asserted is true. Hence to evaluate the claim that someone knows something is to evaluate the claim that a certain proposition or set of propositions is true. Consequently epistemology i.e., the theory of knowledge, is indistinguishable from philosophical logic which is concerned with the nature of truth and the truth conditions of propositions.

A proposition is a linguistic entity, related to and defined in terms of the concept of a sentence. Sentences may be classified according to their standard function as indicative, interrogative, imperative and expletive.

It is the function of an indicative sentence to express a proposition. However, a form of words constituting an indicative sentence in accordance with the rules of grammar does not by itself express a proposition. In order to express a proposition an indicative sentence must be uttered by a particular individual on a particular occasion and in a context such that it acquires a definite meaning for any native speaker of the language in question. The utterance of such a meaningful indicative sentence I call a statement. The utterance of a statement with commitments to its truth constitutes an assertion. Two or more statements whether made up of the same or different sentences which have the same meaning are said to express the same proposition. If two meaningful indicative sentences (statements) express the same

proposition, they necessarily have the same truth value - if one is true the other must be true, if one is false the other must be false.

Although meaning is a wider concept - since it applies to other kinds of sentence besides indicative sentences, whereas truth and falsity apply only to statements and propositions - the meaning of a statement is closely bound up with the question of its truth value.

In discussing the meaning and meaningfulness of propositions and descriptive expressions we need to distinguish, following Frege (3),

(a) its reference - the feature of the world to which the propositions and in particular its subject term draws attention and is about.

(b) its sense - the concepts or descriptions under which the referent is brought either for purposes of identifying the referent or for the specific purpose of predication (saying something about it).

(c) its use - those conventional features of the words used in framing the sentence which are contingent upon the circumstances of its utterance (who says it and when and where it is said).

Two different sentences can be said to express the same proposition if they have the same referent and the same sense. They need not have the same use.

A concept, as understood by logicians and philosophers, is a linguistic entity which stands to a word or expression (phrase) as a proposition stands to an indicative sentence. Two words or expressions having the same meaning stand for or express the same concept. Having the same meaning here is to be understood as having the same sense. Hence not all words and expressions can be said to stand for concepts. Nouns and noun phrases, adjectives and adjectival expressions, verbs and verb phrases, adverbs and adverbial expressions can be said to have a sense and thus stand for a concept. Conjunctions, prepositions, logical words, have neither sense nor reference; pronouns and proper names have a reference and a use, but no determinate sense and therefore cannot be said to stand for concepts.

Classification of propositions

Principle of classification Kind of Proposition =>	Particular Proposition	Accidental Generalisations	Laws of Nature	Necessary Truths
Quantification (grammatical)	Particular	Universal	Universal	Universal
Quantification (logical)	Particular	Particular	Universal	Universal
Ontological Commitment	Existential	Existential	Quasi-Existential	Non-existential
Relation to Law of contradiction	Contingent	Contingent	Contingent	Necessary
Information Content	Synthetic	Synthetic	Synthetic	Analytic
Verification	Empirical	Empirical	Empirical	*A priori*

Truth

Two opposing theories of the nature of truth are traditionally recognised (a) the correspondence theory according to which the truth of a proposition consists in the exactitude with which it depicts or corresponds to the state of affairs in the world to which it refers, (b) the coherence theory, according to which the truth of a proposition depends on and consists in its logical coherence with other true propositions. In general the coherence theory seems to account for necessary truths like those of mathematics, while the correspondence theory makes better sense of contingent/empirical truth. It is argued, however, that in settling the issue we need to distinguish the question "what is it for a proposition to be true?" from the question "how do we show that a given proposition is true?". In the case of necessary truths the same theory (the coherence theory) answers both questions. In the case of contingent/empirical truth the correspondence theory explains what it is for an empirical proposition to be true, but in demonstrating that such a

correspondence obtains in the case of a given proposition we have to demonstrate its logical coherence with other true propositions in particular its coherence with <u>immediate observation statements</u>.

In the light of Wittgenstein's private language argument (9), it must be accepted that such immediate observation statements are statements about the intersubjective reality which provides the common environment shared by the speaker and his audience whose immediate observations statements confirm one another by their logical coherence. This view implies a philosophical/epistemological (as opposed to a psychological theory) of empirical observation or sense perception which combines the virtues of <u>naive realism</u>, the view that we directly perceive an external world of material objects (substances), with a form of the <u>representative theory</u> of perception according to which sense perception consists in the acquisition by virtue of sensory stimulation and the resultant sensory experience of the knowledge that a certain proposition about the current state of the individual's sensory environment corresponds to or accurately depicts the relevant environmental state of affairs and is therefore true. N.B. It is the proposition which the individual is disposed to assert which accurately represents the environmental state of affairs <u>not</u> the sensory experience or sense on which the assertion of the proposition is based.

References
General:
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Specific:
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(4)   I. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*
(5)   B. Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz,* London, Allen & Unwin 1900
(6)   J. L. Mackie, "Counterfactuals and causal laws" in *Analytical Philosophy,* ed. R. J. Butler, First Series, Oxford, Blackwell 1962.
(7)   W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object*, Cambridge, MIT Press 1960.
(8)   Wittgenstein, L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans D. F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961.
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