



Alfred Jules Ayer's Critique of Metaphysics

Zeynep BERKE

Dr. | Dr. Bursa Uludağ Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, Felsefe Bölümü, Türkiye
Bursa Uludag University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Philosophy, Türkiye
zeynepberke@gmail.com, Orcid Id: 0000-0002-1389-597X

Abstract

Logical Positivism stands out as one of the most remarkable and most controversial theories of twentieth century philosophy. Alfred Jules Ayer, one of the leading representatives of this theory, participated from the front line in the war against metaphysics waged by Logical Positivism, and his work *Language, Truth and Logic* became one of the most well-known manifestos of the theory. Although the theory has been subjected to intense criticism and largely abandoned since the second half of the twentieth century, the ideas at the core of Logical Positivism have taken on different forms and have survived to the present day. Therefore, Logical Positivism's critique of metaphysics has not only historical but also contemporary significance. The aim of this study will be to present the arguments underlying Ayer's defense of the elimination of metaphysics and then to address the main criticisms directed to this theory.

Keywords: Logical positivism, Alfred Jules Ayer, metaphysics, verifiability, Vienna Circle.

Alfred Jules Ayer'in Metafizik Eleřtirisi

Özet

Mantıksal Pozitivizm, yirminci yüzyıl felsefesinin en dikkat çekici ve en tartışmalı kuramlarından biri olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu kuramın önde gelen temsilcilerinden biri olan Alfred Jules Ayer, Mantıksal Pozitivizmin metafiziğe yönelik olarak açtığı savařa ön cepheden katılmış, yazmış olduđu 'Dil, Doğruluk ve Mantık' adlı eseri ise kuramın en tanınmış manifestolarından biri haline gelmiştir. Yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısından itibaren yoğun eleřtirilere maruz kalmış ve büyük ölçüde terk edilmiş bir kuram olmasına karşın, Mantıksal Pozitivizm yaklaşımının çekirdeğinde bulunan fikirler farklı formlara bürünerek günümüze ulaşmışlardır. Bu nedenle Mantıksal Pozitivizmin metafiziğe yönelik eleřtirisi, yalnızca tarihsel deđil güncel bir öneme de sahiptir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Ayer'in metafiziğin elenmesine yönelik savunusunun temelinde yatan argümanları ortaya koymak ve sonrasında bu görüşe yönelik temel eleřtirileri ele almak olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mantıksal pozitivizm, Alfred Jules Ayer, metafizik, doğrulanabilirlik, Viyana Çevresi.

Introduction

From the seventeenth century to the present day, the central problematic at the center of philosophical inquiry has been to resolve the incompatibilities between the propositions of philosophical theories on existence, knowledge, morality and politics and modern scientific conception of the universe put. Fundamentally, the axiomatic assumptions of modern science that the universe is composed of unconscious, aimless and lifeless atoms and that causality reigns in the universe are in clear contradiction with the philosophical teachings that there is teleology in the universe and that human beings are free, capable of making choices, and therefore moral agents. As a matter of fact, philosophical theories that have emerged over the centuries from modern philosophy to contemporary philosophy have either attempted to provide an alternative explanation of the universe or have tried to reshape philosophy in accordance with the scientific paradigm. Logical Positivism, one of the most influential philosophical schools of the twentieth century, stands out as perhaps the most radical representative of the latter approach. The representatives of this approach, in their quest to exclude from philosophy all propositions that are incompatible with the modern scientific worldview, have advocated an approach that separates philosophy from its essence, in other words, an approach that makes philosophy cease to be philosophy.

Logical Positivism is a theory put forward by a group of philosophers called the Vienna Circle and was very influential in Europe at the time of its emergence. The Vienna Circle was a collective of philosophers who, under the guidance of Moritz Schlick, convened weekly gatherings between 1924 and 1936 to explore the philosophy of science. The common goal and philosophical project of these philosophers was to completely eliminate metaphysics from philosophy and to give philosophy a content that does not violate positivist ideals.

Thus, the main aim of the thinkers of the Vienna Circle was to show that all metaphysical views were meaningless. This attitude was also supported by developments in the natural sciences, especially in physics, and by opposing everything metaphysical, the whole philosophical tradition was deemed almost meaningless (Çelebi, 2016: 71).

Alfred Jules Ayer (1910-1989) was the pioneer and most important representative of the Logical Positivism movement in England. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic*, published in 1936, when he was only 24 years old, reached a wide readership, and his harsh and brilliant criticism of

metaphysics and theology attracted great interest and attention in the intellectual world of his time. By mentioning the names of the philosophers who played a role in shaping his thoughts in the very first lines of his work, Ayer acknowledges his intellectual debt to them and clarifies the tradition to which he belongs. His views are derived from the teachings of Russell and Wittgenstein, the logical consequence of Berkeley and Hume's empiricism. Ayer remained faithful to empiricism and positivism throughout his life, although he felt the need to make some changes and corrections over time, taking into account those who criticized the arguments on which his philosophy was based as incomplete or erroneous (these criticisms and Ayer's responses to them are discussed in the last section of our study). The aim of this study is to focus on Ayer's critique of metaphysics in his *Language, Truth and Logic*.

The critical attitude that dominates Ayer's work is evident in the very first sentence of his book: "The traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part, as unwarranted as they are unfruitful" (Ayer 2001:13). Obviously, Ayer will first come to terms with the philosophical traditions that preceded him, criticize the errors he sees in them, and thus determine what his own philosophy will exclude, that is, its boundaries and basic assumptions. The idea to which he will direct his arrows of criticism is made clear in the title of the first chapter of the work: "The Elimination of Metaphysics".

1. Critique of Metaphysics and the Criterion of Verifiability

Ayer initiates his critique by disputing the notion that metaphysics affords cognizance of a reality that extends beyond the realm of scientific inquiry and everyday experience. He contends that this critique will also expose the fallacy of metaphysical doctrines that do not subscribe to a transcendent truth. In his view, the appropriate approach to refute a philosopher who purports to possess knowledge of a transcendent realm ought not to involve questioning the foundations upon which his arguments are built, as this philosopher might argue that he commences by embracing certain intuitions as premises that are indisputable. As Ayer puts it rather harshly, what is required is to show that such metaphysical propositions are utterly meaningless, and that therefore "the labours of those who have striven to describe such a reality have all been devoted to the production of nonsense" (Ayer, 2001: 14)

Alfred Jules Ayer's Critique of Metaphysics

Ayer contradicts not only all philosophers who say that transcendental metaphysics is possible, but also Kant, who says that it is not possible, because Kant attributes the impossibility of transcendental metaphysics to the mental incapacity of human beings, whereas according to Ayer, the reason for this impossibility should be sought not in the field of facts, but in the field of logic and language. In his own words;

Our charge against the metaphysician is not that he attempts to employ the understanding in a field where it cannot profitably venture, but that he produces sentences which fail to conform to the conditions under which alone a sentence can be literally significant. ... We need only formulate the criterion which enables us to test whether a sentence expresses a genuine proposition about a matter of fact, and then point out that the sentences under consideration fail to satisfy it (Ayer 2001: 15,16).

In outlining the intellectual roadmap to be followed, Ayer first proclaims the criterion to be utilized, which is the "criterion of verifiability." According to this criterion, a proposition is factual if and only if there are observations to show the truth or falsehood of this proposition. Propositions that do not meet this criterion are either tautological, i.e. analytic propositions, or meaningless, i.e. false-propositions. After defining the criterion of verifiability in this way, Ayer has to make a distinction between the practical verification of a proposition and its verification in principle, because he is aware that some propositions accepted by science cannot be verified in practice by direct observation.

Thus ... he distinguishes between, practical verifiability and verification in principle. While Ayer retains the position that the method of verification of a factually meaningful statement is observation, he is prepared to allow that it need not be actual observation. It will do if, given the circumstances, it will be possible to observe. This means effectively that we do not need to observe in all cases (Ilodigwe, 2014: 44).

For example, the proposition that there are mountains on the invisible side of the moon, where no human being had yet set foot in his time, is not practically verifiable. However, it is in principle possible to say what factual observations should be made to verify this proposition. On the other hand, it is impossible in principle to define an experiment that would verify or falsify the false proposition that the Absolute undergoes evolution and progress. From this point of view, Ayer determines that there are two senses of verifying any proposition: strong and weak.

A proposition is said to be verifiable, in the strong sense of the term, if and only if, its truth could be conclusively established in experience. But it is verifiable, in the weak sense, if it is possible for experience to render it probable (Ayer, 2001: 18).

Ayer argues that verifiability in the weak sense should be accepted as the criterion of meaningfulness. As we have already mentioned, this is the only way in which scientific propositions, especially general law propositions, can be accepted as meaningful, because general law propositions based on induction are expressed in such a way that they cover an infinite number of situations, and such a claim, which also covers the future, cannot be verified with certainty even in principle. Likewise, propositions about the past, which can no longer be directly observed, cannot meet the criterion of certainty. However, the problem of certainty does not only apply to scientific and historical propositions. A more careful analysis shows that all propositions concerning the world of phenomena cannot in principle be certain. In Ayer's words, "indeed, it will be our contention that no proposition, other than a tautology, can possibly be anything more than a probable hypothesis (Ayer 2001: 19). In other words, the certainty of a proposition also means that it does not give us any new information. Therefore, no proposition that informs us about the world of facts is and can be truly certain. Indeed, it will be our contention that no proposition, other than a tautology, can possibly be anything more than a probable hypothesis.

Therefore, the question to be asked in order to understand whether a proposition meets the criterion of verifiability should be: "Would any observations be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood?" (Ayer, 2001: 20) If our answer to this question is negative, then it will turn out that this proposition is a meaningless, false proposition. For example, propositions that assert that the entities in the world are one or many, propositions that assert that the sensible world is not real, propositions defended by idealists, or propositions involving metaphysical concepts such as 'nothing' or 'Being' are meaningless, false-propositions because they cannot be verified or falsified by any observation. In this way, Ayer lays out how metaphysical propositions are to be determined and once again states that they should be excluded from philosophy because they are meaningless. These semantic propositions may have an emotional impact on human beings, but this does not necessitate their inclusion in philosophy, and certainly not the acceptance of their assertions as truth.

2. The Function of Philosophy and the Problem of Deduction-Induction

Ayer's second criticism is directed against some false assumptions about the function of philosophy. According to him, the view that the function of philosophy is to construct a deductive system is, like metaphysics, a vain belief because it is not possible in principle to find the first principles on which deductive systems are based. Recalling his remarks on the laws of nature in the previous chapter, Ayer states that they are only possible assumptions, and therefore cannot function as first principles in the first place. As a matter of fact, philosophers who constructed deductive systems did not appeal to the laws of nature as first principles. On the contrary, they attempted to determine in a purely rational way the principles that they believed to be logically certain and beyond doubt. Ayer decides to analyze this type of system by exemplifying it through Descartes. As we know, Descartes, in order to build his philosophy on a knowledge whose certainty is indisputable and whose negation results in a contradiction, developed the method of systematic doubt, aiming to find the principle that cannot be doubted, and finally arrived at the famous proposition "I think therefore I am". However, according to Ayer, this proposition is not as certain as Descartes thought, because the equivalent of the first part of this sentence is the proposition "There is a thought at this moment", which does not logically follow from "I exist".

As Hume conclusively showed, no one event intrinsically points to any other. We infer the existence of events which we are not actually observing, with the help of general principles. But these principles must be obtained inductively. By mere deduction from what is immediately given we cannot advance a single step beyond. And, consequently, any attempt to base a deductive system on propositions which describe what is immediately given is bound to be a failure (Ayer, 2001: 31).

Another way for someone who wants to derive knowledge from first principles is to take a set of *a priori* truths and base the system on them. However, as explained earlier, *a priori* truths are mere tautologies that do not yield any new knowledge. Therefore, to say that the function of philosophy is the project of establishing knowledge from certain and unshakable first principles through a deductive system would be no different from arguing that philosophy is a branch that produces tautologies, not knowledge. According to Ayer, the mistake of those who fall into this misperception of philosophy is the unfounded and metaphysical belief that there is something outside the world of facts and human experience.

Following these observations and conclusions, Ayer once again examines the problem of induction and shows once again that no proposition arrived at by induction can be certain in principle for the reasons we have already mentioned. However, there is a question here: According to what criterion can scientific propositions that cannot in principle claim certainty be evaluated? Ayer, in the clear and sharp manner that dominates the entire work, answers this question as follows:

Actually, we shall see that the only test to which a form of scientific procedure which satisfies the necessary condition of self-consistency is subject, is the test of its success in practice. Of course, the fact that a certain form of procedure has always been successful in practice affords no logical guarantee that it will continue to be so. But then it is a mistake to demand a guarantee where it is logically impossible to obtain one. This does not mean that it is irrational to expect future experience to conform to the past. For when we come to define 'rationality' we shall find that for us 'being rational' entails being guided in a particular fashion by past experience (Ayer, 2001: 35).

Accordingly, rationality is not the search for certainty where it cannot be found, but the use of the guidance of past experience to determine which of the existing scientific propositions are most useful in practical life and make the most successful predictions. According to Ayer, the reason why this phenomenon has often been overlooked by philosophers dealing with epistemology is that they have not approached the problem of perception in the right way.

Thus it is common for writers on the subject of perception to assume that, unless one can give a satisfactory analysis of perceptual situation, one is not entitled to believe in the existence of material things. But this is a complete mistake. What gives one the right to believe in the existence of a certain material thing is simply the fact that one has certain sensations (Ayer, 2001: 35,36).

As can be seen, Ayer adopts a purely phenomenological view when it comes to the problem of perception. It follows from all this that the function of philosophy is neither to establish deductive systems nor to reach inductive certainties.

3. The Nature of Philosophical Analysis and Definitions *in Use*

After discussing what the limits and functions of philosophy are –and are not– Ayer goes on to elaborate on what he identifies as the functions of philosophy: 'definition' and 'analysis'. In this

context, he first makes a distinction between the definitions that philosophy is expected to provide and the definitions found in dictionaries. "In a dictionary we look mainly for what may be called *explicit* definitions; in philosophy, for definitions in *use*" (Ayer, 2001: 48). According to this distinction, in dictionaries, a word is explained with words that are equivalent to it in meaning. The 'definition in use' that philosophy has to make, on the other hand, is the expression of a phrase or a symbol by a phrase or a symbol that is equivalent in meaning, but without using words that are synonyms of it. One of the examples Ayer gives for this usage is the sentence "A round square does not exist" and its equivalent "No object can be both round and square".

According to Ayer, it is true that the definitions *in use* do not provide new information by expressing a sentence with its equivalent, but their importance lies in the elimination of errors and confusions caused by not understanding a sentence well. For example, this method can be used to eliminate the confusion caused by polysemous symbols in the language. For example, while the equivalent of the sentence "He is the author of that book" is "He wrote that book, not someone else", while the equivalent of the sentence "The cat is a mammal" should be "The phrase mammals includes the phrase cat". According to Ayer, the task of philosophical analysis is to extract such equivalence connections, and this is a purely logical activity.

4. *A priori* or tautology

In the fourth part of his work, Ayer reiterates and discusses in more detail the thesis that, according to the philosophical tradition he represents, empiricism, it is not possible in principle to have *a priori* knowledge. The argument he uses here is again that no proposition derived from experience, that is, no proposition concerning facts, is logically necessary or certain, and since no new knowledge can be acquired from any source other than experience, no proposition that has the value of knowledge can be *a priori*. However, according to Ayer, this determination does not lead one to complete skepticism. In his own words;

For the fact that the validity of a proposition cannot be logically guaranteed in no way entails that it is irrational for us to believe it. On the contrary, what is irrational is to look for a guarantee where none can be forthcoming; to demand certainty where probability is all that is obtainable (Ayer, 2001: 65).

At this point, Ayer points out that empiricists face a difficulty in the face of the truths of mathematics and logic. Indeed, mathematical and logical truths are not only necessary and certain,

but also meaningful and even useful. But does this mean that they are *a priori* truths? According to Ayer, the answer to this question is of course negative, and this difficulty arises because the truths of logic and mathematics are not properly analyzed. A careful examination shows that mathematical truths do not actually give any new knowledge, because they are analytic propositions or tautologies. The reason why they seem to give new knowledge and surprise us is that the human mind is limited.

A being whose intellect was infinitely powerful would take no interest in logic and mathematics. For he would be able to see at a glance everything that his definitions implied, and, accordingly, could never learn anything from logical inference which he was not fully conscious of already. But our intellects are not of this order (Ayer, 2001: 82).

Today's computer technology can help us understand this observation. A computer can do a multiplication that a human can do in minutes at almost the speed of light, because the corresponding number is already known and it takes almost no time for the computer to find it. If our minds were at the speed of a computer, it would not take us long to see that the two sides of the equation in multiplication are in fact the same number, and therefore the proposition is a simple tautology. According to Ayer, the conclusion from this proof once again supports the principles of empiricism. A proposition can be true *a priori* only if it is a tautology.

5. Validity of Empirical Propositions

After the *a priori* propositions, it is time to determine the criterion to be used in determining the validity of empirical propositions. According to Ayer, the truth or falsehood of an empirical proposition can be determined not by looking at its internal consistency, as in analytic propositions, but by whether the proposition fulfills some material criteria. The material criterion to be used here cannot be certainty, indisputability, self-evidentness, obviousness, etc. as expressed in the previous discussion of induction and deduction, because it is not possible for any empirical proposition to have these properties.

So, in this case, is there no difference between empirical propositions? According to Ayer, this difference lies in the experience itself, because propositions are differentiated according to the

benefit they provide in experience. As a result of their experiences, people begin to believe in certain determinations or propositions that have high predictive power, even if they do not carry the value of certainty. The motive here is actually a utilitarian motive. This situation is no different from that of the monkey, who keeps on pressing the red button, seeing that a banana falls on his plate when he presses the red button, and after a while assumes that there is a causal link between pressing the red button and the banana. As can be seen, Ayer follows Hume's views on causality in this regard. The function of the systems of assumptions that humans construct, then, as Ayer puts it;

...is to warn us beforehand what will be our experience in a certain field –to enable us to make accurate predictions. ... It is plain that on our ability to make successful predictions depends the satisfaction of even our simplest desires, including the desire to survive (Ayer, 2001: 97).

It is only natural, then, that we change our systems of assumptions when we come across propositions or systems as a whole that make more accurate predictions, since the only criterion by which we can test the validity of empirical propositions is their practical utility. This is nothing but another admission that human life lacks certainty.

6. Analysis of Ethical, Aesthetic and Theological Judgments

It is not difficult to guess the position of ethics, aesthetics and theology in Ayer's philosophy from the views we have discussed so far. Ayer, of course, rejects the view that synthetic propositions are divided into two groups, one concerned with facts and the other with questions of value. As he has repeatedly emphasized with different proofs in the previous chapters, all meaningful synthetic propositions must be about empirical facts. Value statements, then, must either be scientific propositions based on empirical facts, or they must be meaningless propositions that are neither true nor false, i.e. expressions of enthusiasm. Ayer will begin his analysis with ethical propositions, but he states that his findings can also be applied to aesthetics. Ayer first draws attention to the diversity of ethical systems around the world. Accordingly, it is possible to categorize the ethical content of systems into four classes.

There are, first of all, propositions which express definitions of ethical terms, or judgements about the legitimacy or possibility of certain definition. Secondly, there are propositions describing the phenomena of moral experience, and their causes. Thirdly, there are exhortations to moral virtue. And, lastly, there are actual ethical judgements. It is unfortunately the case that the distinction between these four classes, plain as it is, is commonly ignored by ethical philosophers (Ayer, 2001: 105).

According to Ayer, it is clear that it is only the first group that philosophy should deal with. The second group is the subject of psychology and sociology, and the third and fourth groups are propositions with emotional meaning that do not belong to any science. Therefore, “propositions or moral suggestions that express a moral judgment do not express moral truths, and the moral terms in them do not correspond to objective qualities.” (Cevizci, 2010: 1078) In other words, philosophy must limit itself to the meaningfulness and possibility of ethical definitions and refrain from making ethical judgments. . Ayer is contemplating the possibility of reducing the entire field of moral terms to non-moral terms. In his quest to answer the question of what it signifies when an action is deemed right or good, he finds both the subjectivist and utilitarian viewpoints to be unsatisfactory. The former relies on general approval and acceptance to make judgments, while the latter bases its judgments on the greatest pleasure. Ayer maintains that neither perspective is contradictory in and of itself. Instead, he proposes a different solution. Through careful analysis, Ayer argues that the ethical symbols in ethical propositions are actually pseudo-concepts.

The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. Thus if I say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money,' I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, 'You stole that money.' In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it (Ayer, 2001: 110).

Accordingly, ethical symbols are like putting an exclamation mark at the end of a sentence or expressing a sentence in a certain tone of voice.

Suggestions or propositions expressing a moral judgment serve to express the feelings of those who use moral terms and make the judgment. They not only express their feelings, but also function to arouse similar feelings in others, to move them to act in the desired direction (Cevizci 2010: 1078).

As all these analyses show, Ayer argues that there can be no criterion to determine the validity of ethical judgments, since they cannot have objective validity in the first place. For this very reason,

all discussions on questions of value or on whether judgments are true or not must be meaningless. Ayer describes what happens in such a debate when we are unable to convince the other person as follows:

We say that it is impossible to argue with him because he has a distorted or undeveloped moral sense. ... We feel that our own system of values is superior, and therefore speak in such derogatory terms of his. But we cannot bring forward any arguments to show that our system is superior. ... In short, we find that argument is possible on moral questions only if some system of values is presupposed (Ayer, 2001: 115).

Ayer argues that his analysis of ethical judgments applies to aesthetic judgments as well, and that aesthetic value terms such as 'beautiful' and 'ugly', like 'good', 'bad', 'true' and 'false', are words that express emotion and are used to create certain reactions and behaviors. Likewise, theological judgments, such as propositions asserting the existence of a transcendent God or the existence of an immortal soul in human beings, are characterized as meaningless because they are completely devoid of factual content. According to Ayer, the objects in such propositions are not objects of reason but objects of faith. Therefore, science and theology are on two completely separate planes and it is not even possible to say that there is an opposition between them.

7. The Existence of the Self and the Common World

In the seventh chapter of his work, Ayer tries to apply his ideas to another philosophical problem: the problem of one's own existence and the existence of others. As mentioned earlier, Ayer adopts a purely phenomenological view when it comes to the problem of perception. According to him, there is no *a priori* evidence for the existence of objects; the only evidence for their existence must be recognized as the sense-experiences that occur in the person. Ayer argues that this phenomenological view should be used to solve the problems of the existence of self and others.

Ayer begins his analysis by reminding us once again that all empirical propositions lack a basis in logical certainty. In this context,

For neither the existence of the substance which is supposed to perform the so-called act of sensing nor the existence of the act itself, as an entity distinct from the

sense-contents on which it is supposed to be directed, is in the least capable of being verified (Ayer, 2001: 129).

Therefore, Ayer argues that instead of saying that sense-experiences and their contents exist, we should only say that they 'arise', thus avoiding the fallacy that they are physical or mental things. According to him, the physical-mental distinction does not apply to sense-contents, but to 'objects', which we can call logical organizations produced through them. To say that something is physical or mental, then, is to distinguish between different logical organizations. But how can the contents of one's own and others' minds be handled? According to Ayer,

Actually, the distinguishing feature of the objects belonging to the category of 'one's own mental states is the fact that they are mainly constituted, by 'introspective' sense-contents and by sense-contents which are elements of one's own body; and the distinguishing feature of the objects belonging to the category of the 'mental states of others' is the fact that they are mainly constituted by sense-contents which are elements of other living bodies; and what makes one unite these two classes of objects to form the single class of mental objects is the fact that there is a high degree of qualitative similarity between many of the sense-contents which are elements of other living bodies and many of the elements of one's own (Ayer, 2001: 131).

It turns out that the mind-body dualism, which is based on the distinction between mind and matter and which has occupied philosophers so much, is in fact a pseudo-problem. Analysis of the concept of the self shows that all sense-experiences and sense-contents are subjective. What constitutes a self, then, is nothing but the logical sum of all the sense-experiences that make up that person's sense-history. The self can therefore be reduced to sense-experiences in the sense that something said about it is something said about sense-experiences.

What remains to be answered is whether this point of view leads one to solipsism, that is, to the thesis that there are no propositions of logical certainty that would enable one to assert the existence of others than oneself. By giving vague and evasive answers at this point, Ayer actually admits how serious and difficult the problem is. The conclusion he reaches is that the existence of others can be accepted on the basis of resemblance, that is, on the basis of the fact that they appear similar to ourselves.

I must define material things and my own self in terms of their empirical manifestations, so I must define other people in terms of their empirical

manifestations - that is, in terms of the behaviour of their bodies, and ultimately in terms of sense-contents (Ayer, 2001: 139).

However, this conclusion of Ayer's received many criticisms after the publication of the book, and he had to reconsider his opinion in the face of these criticisms and admit that he could not actually solve this problem in the chapter he added to the next edition of the book. In his own words;

More recently, however, I have come to think that this reasoning is very dubious. For while it is possible to imagine circumstances in which we might have found it convenient to say of two different persons that they owned the same experience, the fact is that, according to our present usage, it is a necessary proposition that they do not; and, since this is so, I am afraid that the argument from analogy remains open to the objections that are brought against it in this book (Ayer, 2001: 190).

As can be seen, Ayer's philosophical system is far from providing a satisfactory and convincing explanation for the problem of solipsism, and this fact is clearly stated by the philosopher himself.

Conclusion

It is not difficult to imagine how Ayer's arguments in *Language, Truth and Logic* sparked enormous debates among philosophers. To propose the elimination of metaphysics is tantamount to saying that one of the pillars of philosophy must be demolished. Indeed, many thinkers have argued that if metaphysics is eliminated, philosophy will not be able to stand; moreover, it is impossible to think completely free of metaphysical propositions. "Regardless of the skeptics' argument against metaphysics, it does not change the fact that metaphysics is the fundamental study of the ontology or being" (Osaghae 2019: 124). In this respect, one of the main points that Ayer's critics have in common is that the criterion of verifiability itself is not verifiable. From this point of view, Ayer's criterion is a self-defeating proposition that cannot verify its own criterion.

The principle claims that every meaningful sentence is either analytic or verifiable. Well, the principle itself is surely not analytic; we understand the meanings of the words in it perfectly well because we understand our own language. And we still do not think it true, so it cannot be true in virtue of meaning. And it is not verifiable either (whatever we choose 'verifiable' to mean) (Creath, 2023).

Indeed, the main argument of Karl Popper, one of the leading critics of Logical Positivism, is that the criterion of verifiability cannot be valid for any proposition due to the ontological nature of the world we live in. According to him, a proposition can be regarded as absolutely false as soon as a single fact is observed which contradicts or falsifies this proposition. In other words, certainty can only be achieved through falsification, not by verification. Therefore, a scientist should put forward scientific propositions in accordance with the criterion of falsifiability.

Theories are, therefore, never empirically verifiable. (...) But I shall certainly admit a system as empirical or scientific only if it is capable of being tested by experience. These considerations suggest that not the verifiability but the falsifiability of a system is to be taken as a criterion of demarcation. (...) (Popper 2005: 18).

Ayer, who was subjected to the criticisms of Logical Positivism, accepted that he had to revise his thinking and make some amendments. In the new introduction he added at the end of his book, he admitted that he had been left unanswered by some of the criticisms of his thought, but he did not give up his belief that his thought was correct in general terms. In his own words;

In the ten years that have passed since *Language, Truth and Logic* was first published, I have come to see that the questions with which it deals are not in all respects so simple as it makes them appear; but I still believe that the point of view which it expresses is substantially correct. ... I think now that much of its argument would have been more persuasive if it had not been presented in so harsh a form (Ayer, 2001: 171).

In fact, in a 1979 interview, when asked what he saw as the main fault of Logical Positivism, he gave the surprising answer “I suppose the most important...was that nearly all of it was false” (Hanfling, 2004: 194). Shortly after this interview, however, he said that he nevertheless continued to believe in the same general approach.

According to Passmore, “Logical positivism... is dead, or as dead as a philosophical movement ever becomes” (Passmore 1967: 57). Indeed, the idea of Logical Positivism, of which Ayer was one of the most important representatives, has been largely abandoned due to intense criticism by philosophers from various angles. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that many of the ideas at the core of logical positivism are still manifested in various forms in our time.

Even if no one today would call himself a logical positivist, some of its main positions, such as verificationism, and emotivism in ethics, are still referred to as parameters within which discussions of particular topics, such as ethics or the

philosophy of religion or of science, are to be conducted. Again, it can be argued that even if the parent plant is dead, many of its seeds are alive and active in one form or another (Hanfling, 2004: 194).

References

AYER, A. J., 2001. *Language, Truth and Logic*, Penguin Books, London, 206s.

CEVİZCİ, A., 2010. *Felsefe Tarihi*, Say Yayınları, İstanbul, 2010, 1344s.

CREATH, R., “Logical Empiricism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2023/entries/logical-empiricism/>>.

ÇELEBİ, V., 2016. “Çağdaş Mantıkçı Anlam Kuramında Dil-Dünya İlişkisi ve Metafizikğin Yadsınması”, *Kaygı. Bursa Uludağ Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Felsefe Dergisi*, 26(2), ss. 69-84.

HANFLING, O., 2004. “Logical positivism”, in *Routledge History of Philosophy Vol IX, Philosophy of Science, Logic and Mathematics in the Twentieth Century*(ed. S.Shanker), Taylor and Francis, New York,ss. 193–94.

ILODIGWE, D., 2014. “Ayer's Critique of Metaphysics”, *EKPOMA Review* 2 (2014), ss. 35-55.

PASSMORE, J., 1967. *Logical Positivism*. in P. Edwards (ed.). *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Vol. 5). Macmillan, New York, ss. 52-57.

POPPER, K., 2005. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Taylor & Francis, New York, 545s.

UEBEL, Thomas, “Vienna Circle”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/vienna-circle>.