

Key

A logical analysis of the *cogito* found the latter to be meaningless due to a syntax violation: one cannot write $\exists x$, only $\exists x$ s.t. $P(x)$, for some valid predicate $P(x)$. Therefore, one cannot even “meaningfully” write “I exist”, only: “there exists a thinking thing”. One may, however, try to rescue Descartes by saying that his *sum* in *ergo sum* does not refer to metaphysical or transcendental existence at all. What if it simply referred to Schlick’s “empirical existence”? What if “I exist” means “I stand in a definite connection with the given”¹? The resulting sentence *would* be analyzable in formal logic, and would therefore be “meaningful” in the positivist sense. But in restating the *cogito*, have I robbed it of its actual intended meaning? I don’t think so. One can view the *cogito* not as asserting absolute, transcendental existence of the self, but as the exclusion of a major factor of doubt (a nefarious demon misleading the senses). Other doubts may still exist, such as doubt in one’s own rational faculties. Perhaps this reading allows us to rescue not only the meaningfulness of the *cogito* within the positivist framework, but even retain Descartes’ original meaning.

199 words

Lock

In Schlick’s account, I am struggling to understand the difference between a statement that is testable in principle and a statement that is testable in practice. This distinction is key for the positivists as meaningful statements ought to be testable in principle², even if they are not testable in practice. But to me, the boundary seems rather porous, and perhaps even theory-dependent. For example, the statement “the electron has an invisible nucleus with no outside effects” is allegedly not testable in principle. But is it *logically* inconceivable that I “cut” open the electron and “look inside”? Some would say they can perfectly imagine themselves doing this - it is not logically contradictory, only forbidden by the laws of physics. If this alleged “untestable in principle” turns out to be “untestable given our current understanding of nature”, then we have introduced theory-dependence and undermined the positivist account. On the other hand, if the stipulated nucleus is such that it *cannot be seen* under any conditions whatsoever by definition, then I can see why Schlick says it is untestable in principle and therefore meaningless in the positivist sense.

190 words

¹Schlick, p. 49

²Schlick, p. 41