A.J.AYER'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

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A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

OF

A.J. AYER'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

By

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ABSTRACT

A Critical Examination of A.J. Ayer's Moral Philosophy

Ayer's overall notion of ethics is that all normative ethical statements are cognitively meaningless. This thesis is an attempt to refute this claim. Ayer's notion is based, I think, on his following two convictions: (i) ethical statements are purely emotive, (ii) reasoning from factual premises to ethical conclusions is neither deductive nor inductive.

Ethical statements are, according to Ayer, purely emotive because they are pure expressions of the feelings and emotions of the speaker. This means that ethical statements do not even report the speaker's mental state. I have shown that there are some voluntarily uttered ethical statements which are not expressive and hence that some ethical statements are not purely emotive.

The controversy whether ethical statements can be deduced formally from factual statements is very old. I have switched the problem to a different direction by showing that the induction/deduction dichotomy is not adequate for reasoning. Other reasoning processes, like informal reasoning, allow one to deduce ethical conclusions from factual premises. It is

also shown how Ayer's criterion of meaning, namely the verification principle, renders ethical statements meaningful. Finally, I have defended universalistic act-utilitarianism as a cognitive theory of ethics.

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INTRODUCTION

In linguistic philosophy "the problem of meaning" occupies a central place. A burning question here is how a meaningful statement can be distinguished from a meaningless one. The verification principle is an attempt to deal with this problem. According to this principle, a synthetic statement is, roughly speaking, meaningful if and only if it is verifiable by sense experience.[1]

The verification principle is propounded by the logical positivists. This is the philosophy of a group of psychologists, mathematicians, scientists and other scholars popularly known as the Vienna Circle. These scholars were formally organized under the leadership of Moritz Schlick in 1928 at the University of Vienna. Other prominent thinkers of this Circle are Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, Friedrich Waisman, A.J. Ayer, et al. As the members of this Circle are

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[1]. The logical positivists' theory of meaning is based on the traditional analytic - synthetic distinction. They ascribe meaning to these two kinds of statements. Analytic statements are said to have a formal meaning because their truth or falsehood is not derived from fact, but from the logical implications of the meaning of the words. On the other hand, synthetic statements are said to have a factual meaning because their truth and falsehood are based upon the empirical observations of objects referred to in these statements.

from different disciplines, there is no complete uniformity of views among them. In spite of many differences in outlook on matters of detail among the members, they have some common notions. All of them seem to have a particular interest in science.[2] In order to defend empirical science as the only source of factual knowledge they consider only those statements as meaningful which are empirical or what they call "verifiable". Those statements which do not describe empirical facts, that is, which are unverifiable, are considered by them to be meaningless. From this standpoint logical positivists accept it as one of their basic programs to show the meaninglessness of metaphysics.[3]

Among the other things with which this school is concerned, the determination of the status of ethical statements occupies an important place. I shall be discussing the views of one member of this school, namely, Alfred Jules Ayer.

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2. Here the word "science" is used in a broad sense. Science, in this sense, embraces all meaningful statements. There are, according to Carnap, two kinds of sciences, namely, formal and empirical. Formal science consists of the analytic statements established by Logic and Mathematics. Empirical science consists of synthetic statements established in the different fields of factual knowledge.

3. Metaphysics describes a reality lying beyond experience. Statements like "The absolute is real", "Reality is one", "There is a transcendental reality", "Nothing exists" etc. are considered by Ayer as typical examples of metaphysical statements.

Ayer develops his moral philosophy in Language, Truth and Logic (first published in 1936), in the introduction of the second edition (1946) of the same book, and also in his article "On the Analysis of Moral Judgements", published in 1949.

I shall focus on two different problems which seem to me to be the central issues of Ayer's moral philosophy. The first problem is a problem of his early writing (1936). In the first edition of Language, Truth and Logic he maintains an extreme position. Here he claims that ethical statements are "purely emotive", and hence meaningless. His reason for this view is that ethical statements are purely expressive and devoid of all factual contents. Avrum Stroll rejects this claim. He raises two objections. First, sometimes ethical statements are capable of arousing belief in the hearer even though it is taken for granted that they are purely expressive for the speaker, and hence not all ethical statements are purely emotive. Secondly, when ethical statements are voluntary utterances they are not purely expressive for the speaker, and hence they are not purely emotive. I think that Stroll is right in saying that some ethical statements are not purely emotive, but I disagree with him (i) regarding the interpretation of the term "purely emotive" in terms of speaker and hearer; and (ii) with his assertion that no

voluntarily uttered ethical statements are purely expressive. I shall argue that some voluntarily uttered ethical statements are not purely expressive, and hence they are not purely emotive.

The second problem is a problem of Ayer's later writings (particularly 1949). In the Introduction of Language, Truth and Logic, and in "On the Analysis of Moral Judgements" Ayer seems to abandon the purely emotive theory. He is now convinced that ethical statements are dependent on factual statements. Still he maintains the position that ethical statements are meaningless, since such statements cannot be derived only from factual statements. Ayer's notion seems to be based on his conviction that formal or scientific reasoning is the only genuine reasoning process. I shall try to show that there are some reasoning processes, including moral, which are not formal, but genuine, and that the claims of these reasonings are not unjustifiable or meaningless.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Early Ayer

Ayer's early view on ethics was extremely radical. According to this view, ethical statements are "purely emotive" and hence meaningless.[4] The present chapter is designed to show that this claim is ill-founded.

All the logical positivists are in agreement that metaphysical statements are meaningless. But there is controversy among them whether ethical statements are meaningful. Some of them, like Schlick[5], insist that ethical

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[4]. It is important to mention here that when Ayer says that ethical statements are meaningless he means that they are devoid of cognitive (factual) meaning. He, however, admits that they may have a different kind of meaning, namely, emotive meaning.

[5]. Schlick's treatment of ethics is similar to the naturalists' position. He develops this view in Problems of Ethics. According to him, ethical questions are meaningful because they are capable of being answered as true or false. He thinks that ethical statements are reducible to factual ones. In his own words, "I ought to do something" never means anything but "someone wants me to do it". Furthermore, he uses the word "good" under the following conditions:

(a) In calling an action good, "I express the fact that I desire it".

(b) "Moral percepts are nothing but the expressions of desires of human society".

(c) That is called good which is believed to bring the greatest happiness.

statements are meaningful. A majority of them, however, reject this claim.

The controversy whether ethical statements are meaningful or not is as old as the history of meta-ethics. Cognitive theories, namely, naturalism and non-naturalism, claim that ethical terms and statements are meaningful. Ayer rejects the claims of both theories. Let us see the grounds on which these two schools base their claims.

1.2 Naturalism vs. Non-naturalism

Naturalism is ethical reductionism. It is an attempt to bridge the gap between "Is" and "Ought". According to this view, Frankena maintains, "Ought can be defined in terms of Is, and Value in terms of Fact"[6].

There are different versions of this theory. All of these versions, however, have the common feature that ethical statements are regarded as being reducible to empirical statements. An ethical statement is said to be reducible to an empirical one if it is possible to replace all the ethical terms by empirical terms without changing its meaning. The

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For details see, Moritz Schlick, "What is the aim of ethics?" in Logical Positivism, ed. by A.J. Ayer (New York: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 247-63.

[6].William K. Frankena, Ethics (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1937), p. 97.

philosophy behind the naturalists' claim is that they believe that ethical statements are actually rooted in fact. They therefore can be justified, according to the naturalists, in an objective way similar to the way in which empirical statements can be justified. Consequently, ethical statements are thought to be genuine assertions and meaningful.

The construal of a value statement like "This is good" as "I approve of this" and as "This produces pleasure", proposed by the subjectivists and the utilitarians respectively, exemplify the naturalistic interpretation of ethical statements. But the non-naturalists disagree with such types of reductionism. Against the naturalists' claim non-naturalists argue:

(a) Ethical terms and statements are not reducible to empirical terms and statements without changing their original meaning; and (b) the truth and falsehood of ethical statements cannot be justified by empirical verification. Nevertheless, non-naturalists hold that ethical statements are genuine assertions. For these statements describe facts. Besides, non-naturalists believe that ethical statements can be rendered either true or false. Their truth or falsehood can be determined by intuition. It is because of this last claim that non-naturalism is sometimes called intuitionism.

Non-naturalists seem to be influenced by Hume, according to whom, (1) factual (natural) statements are different in nature from value statements, and (2) there is an unbridgeable gap between the two. Any attempt to bridge the gap, that is, to define ethical terms like "good" in terms of natural phenomena like "pleasure" commits, as Moore claims in his Principia Ethica, the naturalistic fallacy. Moore refutes the naturalistic view that "good" is definable by his famous "open question" technique. He points out that it does not matter what set of scientifically knowable properties are ascribed to a thing, one can always significantly ask whether anything having these properties is good.

Moore holds that ethical properties are simple and unanalyzable like yellow. These properties are not, therefore, unintelligible or unknown any more than yellow is. But ethical properties are very different from all the properties described by naturalists. They are non-natural in kind. So, unlike natural properties it is not possible to confirm or disconfirm their existence by empirical observation. One can however be aware of them directly. In this way it is possible to have knowledge of ethical properties. One can justify claims about the truth or falsehood of ethical statements by intuition. Hence they are cognitively meaningful.

1.3 Ayer on Cognitive Theories

Ayer seems to be convinced by Moore's refutation of naturalism in ethics. Nevertheless, he differs in some respects from Moore. He agrees that good is indefinable, but gives a different reason from that offered by Moore. "Good" is indefinable and unanalyzable, according to Ayer, not because it is a simple notion, but because it is a mere pseudo-concept. It is unanalyzable because there is no criterion by which one can test the validity of the statements in which it occurs. Ayer says that definitions of the word "good" in terms of pleasure and happiness or in terms of feelings of approval which a certain person or a group of persons have toward it, proposed by the utilitarian and subjectivists respectively, if correct, will turn ethical statements into empirical hypotheses. But he rejects these views on the grounds that it is not self-contradictory to assert that some actions which produce pleasure are not good, or that some bad things are desired. So the validity of ethical statements is not determined by pleasure or an author's feelings. As a result "X is good" cannot be equivalent to "X is desired or pleasant". Hence these definitions fail.

Ayer's criticism of utilitarianism is based on his conviction that when a utilitarian illustrates "good" in terms

of "pleasure", he is defining the word "good", that is to say, the statement "good is pleasure" is a tautology. A utilitarian, however, can get rid of Ayer's criticism by claiming that ethical statements are synthetic, and hence their denial would, of course, not be self-contradictory.[7]

Ayer also rejects non-naturalism as a cognitive theory of ethics.

> Ayer rejects the absolutist (non-naturalist) view because it leads to a consequence which is incompatible with the general epistemological system which he [Ayer] also wishes to maintain i.e. logical positivism. The consequence in question is that there are significant synthetic statements which are not empirically verifiable. He argues that, since no judgement which is empirically unverifiable can be a genuine assertion, the absolutist analysis is mistaken and is to be rejected.[8]

Ayer agrees with Moore that ethical statements are not empirically verifiable, but he does not recognize intuition as a scientific mode of verification. Intuition, he says, "is worthless as a test of a proposition's validity" because it cannot serve as a criterion to resolve conflicts.[9] In light of this, Ayer concludes that ethical statements are not genuine synthetic statements as the intuitionists claim, but

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[7] For details see chapter four.

[8]. Avrum Stroll, The Emotive Theory of Ethics (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), p. 10.

[9]. A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 141.

rather, being unverifiable, they are meaningless pseudo-propositions.

1.4 Ayer's Emotivism

Ayer's attitude toward ethical statements is consistent with his epistemological position. His theory of knowledge is mainly based on the assumption that all meaningful statements that can be termed true or false are either (a) formal truths, or (b) statements which can be empirically verified. Ethical statements, according to him, fulfil neither of these conditions and hence say nothing as he at one point puts it.

Ayer applies the "criterion of verifiability" to ethical statements as rigorously as he applied it to factual statements. Of ethical statements, he asserts,

> In so far as they are not scientific, they are not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotions which can neither be true nor false.[10]

Ethical statements, for Ayer, are thus not in a sense statements at all, if a statement is taken to mean the utterance of a sentence in order to say something which is true or false. They are, according to him, simply comparable to cries of pain, or joy, or what he calls "ejaculations"

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[10]. Ibid., p. 136.

rather than statements of fact. Ayer summarizes, by the following passage, his central thesis that the function of the normative[11] ethical term in a statement is not to state a fact, but to express emotion.

> If I say to someone "you acted wrongly in stealing money", I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said "you stole money". In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply giving my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said "you stole that money," in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation mark. The tone or the exclamation marks, adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings in the speaker.
>
> If I now generalize my previous statement and say "stealing money is wrong", I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning - that is, expresses no proposition which can be either true or false. It is as if I had written "stealing money!!" - where the shape and thickness of the exclamation marks show, by a suitable convention, that a special sort of moral disapproval is the feeling which is being expressed. It is clear that there is nothing said here which can be true or false.[12]

Here Ayer's main contention, I believe, is that (1) ethical concepts are pseudo-concepts because they do not describe any fact; and (2) as ethical statements contain pseudo-concepts they are therefore meaningless. But it seems that he has presented the passage badly. He has not noticed

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[11]. Ayer distinguishes between descriptive and normative uses of ethical terms and statements, and insists that the former kind of statements are meaningful.

[12]. A.J. Ayer, op.cit., p. 142.

that if (a) "You acted wrongly in stealing money" is not stating more than (b) "You stole that money" then (a) becomes confined to (b), that is, (a) at least says what is said by (b). And as (b) is cognitively meaningful so, then, is (a). If (a) means the same as (b) then it is unintelligible to say that (1) ethical statements are not reducible to factual statements; and (2) ethical terms are pseudo-concepts because all terms of a meaningful statement should be meaningful as otherwise the statement would become meaningless.

Again, it is not always the case that ethical terms express feeling only. The presence of ethical terms also adds a further claim to a statement. For example, the statement "You wrongly took the money" does not simply describe the fact that "You took the money", but you took the money which you are not supposed to take. Here the term "wrongly" adds a further fact, and hence is not a pseudo-concept.

The term "wrongly" in Ayer's example "You wrongly stole the money" does not add a further fact because here its use is redundant.[13] The word "wrongly" is implicit in the word "stole". When we say that "You stole the money", it is an another way of saying that "You wrongly took the money", or

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[13]. A.J.M. Milne, "Values and Ethics: The Emotive Theory," in Logical Positivism in Perspective, ed. by Barry Gower (London: Groom Helm, 1987), pp. 96-97.

in other words, "You took the money which you are not supposed to take".

Ethical terms do not only express the feeling or emotion of the speaker. They also function, for Ayer, to produce feelings in the hearer, and so to stimulate action[14]. Sometimes they also have the effect of a command.

It is true and indisputable that ethical terms and statements express feeling, that is, they have an emotive function. But it is not their only function. More importantly, this characteristic is not unique in this respect. Let us consider the historical statement, "Sheik Mujib formed BAKSAL in Bangladesh in 1975". When an emotionally neutral historian utters this statement, his purpose is simply to reveal the fact. But when a rival politician declares the same statement from his party stage for the people, his primary purpose is to influence the people, to develop an anti-Mujib attitude among them (because when Mujib formed BAKSAL a majority of the people disliked him and his party). To serve this purpose the politician will utter the words in such a way that it is emotionally charged.

Ayer's emotive theory, which he calls at one point "radical subjectivism", differs from "orthodox subjectivism" in some important respects. The latter theory holds that

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[14]. A.J. Ayer, op. cit., p. 143.

ethical statements actually assert the existence of certain feelings,[15] the former holds that ethical statements are expressions and excitant of feeling which do not necessarily involve any assertions.[16] It follows from Ayer's argument that according to the orthodox view "X is good" is equivalent to "I approve of X" because here I express a feeling which I actually have. In this sense I am making a factual statement which is capable of being true or false. Again, if I say that "X is good" but "I do not approve of X" it will be self-contradictory. On the other hand, according to the radical view, if I say that "X is good",

> I should not be making any statement about my own feeling or about anything else. I should simply be evincing my feeling, which is not at all the same thing as saying that I have them.[17]

In this sense, it follows, that if I say, "X is good" but "I do not approve of X", I am not contradicting myself because I am not making a genuine proposition at all.

Ayer distinguishes between evincing and saying, or, in other words, expressing and asserting a feeling, as follows. Suppose that I am really bored. I may express my boredom by saying "I am bored." In this case I am expressing as well as

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15. Ibid., p. 145.

16. Ibid., p. 145.

17. Ibid., p. 144.

asserting my feeling of boredom. Suppose, on the other hand, I express boredom not by saying that I am bored, but by physical gestures or tone, or by ejaculation, etc. In this case I am expressing boredom, but not asserting that I am bored (maybe I am pretending that I am bored). It follows from this that even though the assertion of a certain feeling involves its expression yet the expression of a feeling does not necessarily involve its assertion.

Hence Ayer says that when orthodox subjectivists claim that ethical terms and statements are expressive, they are using the term "expressive" in the former sense. But when he himself claims that ethical terms and statements are expressive, he is using it in the latter sense, that is, in the non-assertive sense. And as ethical statements are purely expressive, that is, they say nothing, they are, according to Ayer, unverifiable. Like a cry of pain or a word of command, they do not express genuine propositions and as a result cannot be rendered either true or false.

> For in saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments. And the man who is ostensibly contradicting me is merely expressing his moral sentiments. So that there is plainly no sense in asking which of us is in the right. For neither of us is asserting a genuine proposition.[18]

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[18]. Ibid., pp. 142-43.

Ayer's analogy between ethical statements and cries seems to be a bad one. Cries are not generally considered as linguistic expressions in the sense that they do not have any syntax. Consequently, there can be no question as to whether they are assertive or non-assertive. Ethical claims, on the other hand, are linguistic expressions. When we make any ethical claim we do not make it by physical gestures, but by uttering words and sentences. And we have seen that Ayer himself admits that if someone expresses any feeling by "saying" that he has that feeling then that expression is equivalent to asserting that feeling.[19]

Ayer's view that ethical statements are purely expressive, that they are like commands, that they say nothing, or that they are meaningless is based on his notion that ethical statements are non-assertive. I believe Stroll is right to point out that such notions result from his excessive emphasis upon assertive language. Ayer did not notice that sometimes a particular assertion or an exclamation may have the same meaning expressed by a non-assertive statement. For example, when a person says, "I am happy", he is asserting the fact that he is happy. Again when he says "hurrah!" (exclamation), he is asserting the same fact, that

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[19]. Ibid., p. 145.

is, he is happy. Similarly when an instructor says to his student "Rewrite the passage" (command or request), he may assert that the student will revise the passage. Finally, when a person says to his friend, "You ought to follow this road to reach Dhaka from Chittagong if you want to save the maximum amount of time" (advice containing a value term), he is just expressing his belief that it is the shortest way from Dhaka to Chittagong.

On the basis of his conviction that ethical statements are purely expressive Ayer draws the conclusion that there is no real dispute in ethical matters. Ordinarily, however, it seems that people are engaged in ethical disputes. But Ayer believes that all these disputes are not disputes about questions of value, but instead about questions of fact.

> If anyone doubts the accuracy of this account of moral disputes, let him try to construct even an imaginary argument on a question of value which does not reduce itself to an argument about a question of logic or about an empirical matter of fact. I am confident that he will not succeed in producing a single example.[20]

At first sight it seems that the above passage endangers Ayer's epistemological position, namely, that ethical statements are not reducible to factual statements. For example, Stephen Satris poses the question, "if ethical statements cannot be reduced to non-ethical statements, how

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[20]. Ibid., p. 148.

can it be expected that (seemingly) ethical disagreements can be reduced to non-ethical disagreements?"[21] Satris wants to say, I believe, that if ethical disputes are reducible to factual disputes, there is no reason why ethical statements are not reducible to factual ones. But this interpretation of the above passage does not sound correct. Ayer is saying that there are no genuine ethical disputes. Therefore any alleged ethical disputes are really disputes about fact.

Let us illustrate why Ayer thinks that ordinary ethical disputes are disputes about fact. Suppose John's friend disagrees with his belief that it is better to build a hospital than a college for the poor. Under this circumstance if John wants to change the attitude of his friend, he will mention some favourable factors for building a hospital which may be unknown to his friend. Here John is not attempting to show that his friend has the "wrong" ethical feeling. Rather, what he is doing is showing that his friend is misinformed or lacks empirical evidence. He is doing it in the hope that his friend will agree with him about the facts and as a consequence will change his opinion. So the real dispute is not a dispute about value, but is instead a dispute about the facts.

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[21]. Stephen Satris, Ethical Emotivism (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), p. 70.

Now it is possible that both of them know the same facts, yet they continue to differ in their opinions. This is the nature, according to Ayer, of ethical disputes, but it is not a genuine dispute, since, there is no way to settle it.[22]

There may be some ethical disputes like the above. But all ethical disputes are not the same. In most cases it is possible to reach a conclusion. It is possible that, knowing the additional facts, John's friend will change his mind and agree with John that it is better to build a hospital than a college. Similarly, the dispute about whether Paul is honest or not may be settled by evidence about his past conduct, whether he lied, cheated, broke his promises or agreements etc. From these cases we can say that there are genuine ethical disputes and that some ethical agreements and disagreements are rooted in fact.

Ayer may say that the disputes mentioned above are not ethical disputes, since, they are rooted in fact. This type of conviction, I believe, will arise from a misunderstanding of ethical agreements and disagreements. Ethical disagreements are not purely based on the emotions of the

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[22]. It follows from Ayer's argument that there are two types of statements, namely, factual and analytic about which genuine dispute is possible because disputes about them can be resolved with reference to the facts and form of the statements respectively. Also see the passage against footnote No. 18 which supports that resolution of disagreement is the criterion of a genuine dispute.

disputants. It is possible for them to make ethical statements in a calm and unemotional state. When two people disagree with one another concerning ethical matters, it is not the case that they do so by saying that they have different feelings towards the object. They do not simply refer to their emotions or feelings. Rather they give reasons or mention facts in favour of their claim which are supposed to justify it.

However, what Ayer has said about ethical disputes can be equally applied to some disputes in other fields. Let us consider the following cases:[23]

(1) Two observers may agree about all the facts of a scientific enquiry and yet disagree in their theoretical accounts of them. Someone who accepted the facts on which Darwin's theory of evolution is based, and yet rejected the theory, would not be contradicting himself.

(2) Different historians, using the same data, may not be able to agree on what was the cause, or the main cause of a given event.

(3) Two biologists may agree about all the characteristics of a being that lives under water, even though they may disagree about their classification. One may

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[23]. Some of these examples are taken from Oswald Halfling's Logical Positivism. But here I use these examples for a different purpose.

classify it as a fish, another as a non-fish.

(4) Two physicists can agree about all the observable facts of light; still one can characterize it as wave the other one as particle, and there is no known scientific method to settle the matter completely.

Ayer is also aware of the fact that being disputable is not a unique feature of ethical claims. Their uniqueness consists in the fact that:

> in every case in which one would commonly be said to be making an ethical judgment the function of the relevant ethical word is purely "emotive".[24]

1.5 Stroll's First Objection to the "Purely Emotive" Theory

Stroll quotes the following passage from Language, Truth and Logic:

> It is advisable here to make it plain that it is only normative ethical symbols, and not descriptive ethical symbols, that are held by us to be indefinable in factual terms. There is a danger of confusing these two types of symbols, because they are commonly constituted by signs of the same sensible form. Thus a complex sign of the form "X is wrong" may constitute a sentence which expresses a moral judgement concerning a certain type of conduct, or it may constitute a sentence which states that a certain type of conduct is repugnant to the moral sense of a particular society. In the latter case, the symbol "wrong" is a descriptive ethical symbol, and the sentence in which it occurs expresses an ordinary sociological proposition, in the former case, the symbol "wrong" is a normative ethical symbol, and the sentence in which it occurs does not, we maintain, express an empirical proposition at all. It is only with normative ethics that we

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[24]. A.J. Ayer, op. cit., p. 143.

> are at present concerned, so that whenever ethical symbols are used in the course of this argument without qualification, they are always to be interpreted as symbols of the normative type.[25]

In the above passage Ayer distinguishes between descriptive and normative ethical symbols and admits that descriptive ethical symbols are not "purely emotive", but cognitively meaningful, because they may have a descriptive element. Stroll says that if this interpretation of the passage is correct then Ayer's view becomes internally inconsistent. "For the problem is whether or not all ethical symbols are purely emotive. ... he [Ayer] is holding both that all ethical judgments are purely emotive and that some are not."[26]

I believe that Stroll has misunderstood Ayer's problem. Following Carnap[27], Ayer also accepted the distinction between descriptive and normative ethics and his problem is whether normative ethical terms and statements are meaningful; not

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25. Ibid., p. 140.

26. Avrum Stroll, op.cit., p. 35.

27. Carnap distinguishes between two senses of the word "ethics". First, ethics is an empirical investigation of psychological and sociological causes of human actions. Second, ethics is a study of the norms for human actions or statements about moral values. Ethics in the first sense, according to Carnap, belongs to empirical science and, in its second sense, belongs to normative science; and it is only with the meaning of normative ethical statements that philosophers are concerned. For details see Rudolf Carnap, "Ethics", in Logical Positivism, ed. Oswald Hanfling (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1981), pp. 203-206.

whether all ethical terms and statements are meaningful.

Stroll also rejects Ayer's claim that all normative ethical terms are purely emotive. He insists that some of them are impurely emotive. In order to show this he proceeds by defining the following concepts:

(1) Pure emotive meaning: "A term will be said to have pure emotive meaning if it has emotive meaning and only emotive meaning."[28]

(2) Impure emotive meaning: "A term will be said to have impure emotive meaning if it has emotive meaning and is meaningful in some other sense as well."[29] For example, the sentence "The United States instituted rationing and price controls today" is a linguistic expression which has, according to Stroll, impure emotive meaning.

> For it has both cognitive and emotive meaning. It has cognitive meaning in that it makes an assertion; and it also has impure emotive meaning in that when the assertion is understood by hearers it will (probably) produce emotive reactions in them.[30]

(3) Emotive Meaning: "A term will be said to have emotive meaning if it is expressive of a feeling or attitude

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28. Avrum Stroll, op.cit., p. 22.

29. Ibid., p. 22.

30. Ibid., p. 22.

in the speaker, or if it is evocative of a feeling or an attitude or certain kind of behaviour in the hearer."[31]

Now, there are two senses, for Stroll, in which the term "expressive" can be used. First, a term is said to be expressive with respect to the user (speaker) when the emotion in the speaker is the cause of the use of the word. Suppose an economist, who disapproves of the United States' becoming socialistic, utters "The United States is becoming socialistic". This statement is expressive, since it is caused by an emotion in him. Here the purpose of the economist is not to communicate his belief or mental state to his hearers but to express his emotion to them. Second, a term is said to be expressive with respect to the hearer if it "reveals" the emotional state of the speaker to the hearer. For example, when one shouts "Damn", it may produce a belief in the hearer that the speaker is angry. Again,

> A term is said to be purely expressive for the user if it is produced by emotion and emotion alone. A term is said to be impurely expressive for the user if it is produced by emotions and some other type of stimulus (e.g., a belief) combined. A term is said to be purely expressive for the interpreter when it is expressive and only expressive. It is impurely expressive for the interpreter when the term is expressive for the interpreter and meaningful in some other sense as well (e.g., evocative).[32]

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31. Ibid., p. 26.

32. Ibid., p. 30.

A term is said to be evocative if it produces an emotion or sympathy in the hearer. For example, the word "ouch" may produce sympathy or even feelings of pain in the hearer. A term will be said to be purely evocative if and only if it produces an emotion and nothing else. It will be said to be impurely evocative if it produces emotions plus other types of responses (e.g., believing). What has been said above concerning the different kinds of feeling (emotion) in relation to a speaker and hearer is summarized by Stroll in the table presented on the next page.

According to Stroll, a statement will be purely emotive if and only if it is purely expressive for the speaker as well as purely evocative for the hearer. The reason is that when a statement is purely expressive for the speaker it is produced by emotion and emotion alone. Similarly, when the statement is purely evocative for the hearer it produces emotion and emotion alone. In all other cases, the statement will be impurely emotive, since it may have emotive meaning and may also be meaningful in some other senses as well. In view of the above Stroll attempts to reject the purely emotive theory as follows. Let us take the statement used by Ayer, "stealing is wrong". Suppose a moralist says the same thing to a thief. Then we can imagine the following possibilities: (a) The statement may be purely expressive (let us take it

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF THE ANALYSIS OF EMOTIVE MEANING GIVEN IN CHAPTER III

EMOTIVE MEANING
Defined as meaning in a causal sense which is
- A. Expressive
- B. Evocative

NONEMOTIVE MEANING
Defined as meaning in both causal and noncausal senses. In the causal sense it is defined as meaning which is
- A. Nonexpressive
- B. Nonevocative

Expressive Meaning
1. An emotion is the cause of the utterance of a term by the user.
2. The term causes an awareness or belief in the interpreter that the user utters the term because of a certain emotion.

Evocative Meaning
1. The term causes emotions in the interpreter.
2. The term causes emotive behavior or attendant emotions in the interpreter.

TABLE 2

A. EXPRESSIVE MEANING

1. For the User
   - *a*) Pure Expressive Meaning
     Emotions and only emotions cause the term in the user.
   - *b*) Impure Expressive Meaning
     Emotions *and* some other type of stimulus (e.g., cognition) together cause the term in the user.

2. For the Interpreter
   - *a*) Purely Expressive Meaning*
     The term is expressive for the interpreter and only expressive.
   - *b*) Impurely Expressive Meaning
     The term is expressive for the interpreter and meaningful in some other sense as well (e.g., evocative).

B. EVOCATIVE MEANING

1. Pure Evocative Meaning
   Only emotions and/or emotive behavior are produced in the interpreter by the term.

2. Impure Evocative Meaning
   Emotions and/or emotive behavior, together with some nonemotive response (e.g., believing), are produced by the term.

* *Purely* expressive meaning for the interpreter is nonemotive. The interpreter is aware of the user's emotive state, but is not aroused by the user's language. Since a term may be emotive when impurely expressive for the interpreter, purely expressive meaning for the interpreter is here classified under emotive meaning for purposes of symmetry.

as granted for a moment) for the moralist, that is, only the emotion in the moralist is the cause of uttering the statement. At the same time it may be purely evocative for the thief, that is, the statement may produce only emotion in the thief. The thief may merely feel ashamed at being rebuked.

(b) The statement may be purely expressive for the moralist. At the same time it may be impurely evocative for the thief, that is, the statement may produce both emotion and belief in the thief. Besides being ashamed he may infer that he is going to be punished.

(c) The statement may be purely expressive for the moralist. At the same time it may be purely expressive for the thief, that is, it may reveal only the emotional state of the moralist to the thief. It may happen that instead of being ashamed, the thief merely infers that the moralist disapproves of stealing.

Among these three instances the statement "stealing is wrong" is used in the purely emotive sense in (a). Here, the statement has emotive meaning both for the speaker and the hearer. In the other two instances the statement has a belief-arousing property and consequently is not purely emotive. Even though it is purely expressive for the moralist, it is not purely evocative for the thief. Hence

Stroll argues that Ayer's claim that all normative ethical statements are purely emotive fails.

Stroll also argues that sometimes ethical statements are not purely expressive for the speaker. He says that an utterance can be purely expressive for the speaker when it is involuntary. According to him, voluntary utterances are not purely expressive for the speaker in the sense that their purpose is to communicate the belief or approval of the speaker to the hearer. So no voluntary ethical statements are purely expressive for the speaker. I believe Stroll is incorrect to say that no voluntary ethical statements are purely expressive for the speaker. I shall argue in section 1.7 that as voluntary utterances some ethical statements are not purely expressive for the speaker.

1.6 Indefensibility of Stroll's First Objection

Stroll's claim that some ethical terms have belief-arousing property does not seem to refute Ayer's purely emotive theory. Stroll may be right that someone who hears the sentence "stealing is wrong" may make different sorts of inferences about many different things. But Ayer will not disagree with him. Ayer himself admits that ethical terms do serve other functions than to express feeling.[33] And arousing

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[33]. A.J. Ayer, op.cit., p. 143.

belief for the hearer, I believe, is one of those other functions.

It seems to me that Stroll's misconception arises from the following passage in which Ayer offers a definition of "emotive meaning".

> We may define the meaning of the various ethical words in terms both of the different feelings they are ordinarily taken to express, and also the different responses which they are calculated to provoke.[34]

With reference to the above passage, I believe, Stroll misleadingly defined the term "purely emotive" in terms of the speaker and the hearer. But Stroll did not notice that Ayer himself illustrates the term with reference to the speaker only. He calls a term "purely emotive" when "it is used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them."[35] In other words, we may say that a term is purely emotive, for Ayer, when it is only expressive. So if we want to refute Ayer, we will have to show that ethical terms are not "pure expressions" of emotion in Ayer's terminology, or that ethical statements are not "purely expressive for the user" in Stroll's terminology. Let us remember that Ayer considers ethical statements as expressive or pure expressions of feelings because such statements do not

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[34]. Ibid., p. 143.

[35]. Ibid., p. 143.

even report the speaker's mental state. Similarly, Stroll considers ethical statements as purely expressive for the speaker when only some emotion in him is the cause of the utterance of the statements and not the desire to communicate his belief or mental state. This is why I take the two terms as synonymous.

1.7 Rejection of the "Purely Emotive" Theory

The demand that all ethical statements are purely expressive for the speaker can be shown to be misleading. It is important to mention here that ethics is the study of voluntary human action or behaviour in a society. There are two types of human action: voluntary and involuntary. Actions are made involuntary by compulsion. These actions are the results of some external force, like fear or a threat. These are not free actions. On the contrary, voluntary actions are free actions. They are the expressions of the inner urge of a person. When under threat a president declares that "under the present situation of the country the military administration is good", the statement is expressive in Ayer's terminology, and is purely expressive for the user in Stroll's terminology. In this sense the statement is not assertive in its real sense because the president does not have the same feeling as he expresses. On the other hand,

when the president declares the same statement willingly, we cannot say that it is merely expressive. For he holds the same feeling.

Now Ayer's claim that ethical statements are merely expressive can be said to be justified about the former declaration of the president, but not about the latter. But as ethics is concerned only with voluntary action, the former declaration does not constitute an ethical statement in its true sense and hence is out of our discussion.

Let us take another example. Suppose under threat the president is asked to declare any one of the two statements X and Y, and he willingly prefers to declare Y. Yet it is not a voluntary action and hence is beyond the scope of ethics.

There are, however, some instances where people voluntarily declare a value statement, yet they do not share the same feeling, in other words, they themselves do not approve of what they are talking about. In these cases they use the statement just as a means to achieve some goals. Consider the case of a cunning politician. This politician is really a communalist[36]. As it happens he has to compete in an election for a constituency, in which the majority of the voters belong to a different religion. In order to win the

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[36] Here the word "communalist" is used in a technical sense. It has a conventional meaning in Bangladesh. A person who discriminates against people on the basis of religion is called a communalist.

election he therefore hides his communalist feeling and begins to canvass claiming that communalism is bad. Here the politician's voluntary statement that communalism is bad is purely expressive, since he himself does not approve of or believe in non-communalism.

Again under some particular circumstances a moralist may also utter an ethical statement which is not the real expression of his feeling of approval or disapproval. Let us imagine a tribal society where people are guided by their tribal leader who is a utilitarian.. It happens that some of these people seek permission from their leader to kill a man who uses contraceptives. These people have the superficial belief that birth control is wrong and that he who does it should be sentenced to death. The leader also shares the same belief. But as a utilitarian he feels that the consequence of this particular killing will be to maximize unhappiness over happiness. So to prevent the killing he decides to tell a lie. He says to the people that birth control is not wrong. Here the tribal leader's statement that birth control is not wrong is used in a purely expressive sense because it is not the expression of his real mental state.

The above examples, I believe, are some exceptions where ethical statements are pure expressions of emotion and hence, are purely emotive. But generally, voluntary ethical

statements are used to communicate a speaker's approval or disapproval of an action to the hearer. Suppose someone wants to know my opinion about a particular act of stealing. I weigh the consequences of the act of stealing and find that it maximizes unpleasure. So I sincerely tell him that this particular act of stealing is wrong. Remember that I am not using the statement as a means, that is, neither do I have any intention to achieve some benefit by disapproving of the act of stealing nor do I want to influence the hearer. The statement is the expression of my real belief concerning a certain act of stealing. In this case it would be unfair to say that I do not share the same feeling that I express, and it would also be unjustified to say that ethical statements do not involve any assertion, that they are purely expressive.[37] I believe that people frequently use ethical statements in the same manner. If so, then at least these kinds of ethical statements are not purely expressive for the speaker and hence they are also not purely emotive.

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[37]. Stevenson's emotive theory is somewhat less extreme. Ayer speaks only of the emotive element in ethical statements but Stevenson in addition to this element, admits of factual or descriptive elements in ethical statements. "Doubtless" Stevenson holds that "there is always some element of description in ethical judgement". According to him, "This is good" means "I approve of this, do so as well". Here the first conjunct makes an assertion about the speaker's state of mind and like any psychological statement is open to confirmation or disconfirmation by empirical verification. For details see C.L. Stevenson, "The emotive meaning of ethical terms", in Logical Positivism, ed. by A.J. Ayer, op.cit., pp. 264-281.

1.8 Summary

This chapter is designed to refute Ayer's "purely emotive" theory. To serve this purpose I have started with the discussion of cognitive theories of ethics. The aim of this discussion was to show how Ayer develops his emotive theory. In connection with the discussion of emotive theory I have discussed the nature of ethical disputes and have tried to show that ethical utterances are not dogmatic but rational, and that they have factual contents. After that I examined objections to the "purely emotive" view raised by Stroll. I have argued that the reason why Stroll's first objection fails is that he misinterprets Ayer's notion as a result of his failure to notice the proper passage where Ayer illustrates the meaning of the term "purely emotive" with reference to pure expression of feeling of the speaker only. As well, Stroll places undue emphasis on a wrong passage. Finally, I have argued that as voluntary utterances some ethical statements express the feelings of approval or disapproval which the speaker really possesses, and hence Ayer's claim that all ethical statements are purely emotive fails. This does not, however, mean that I am defending the subjectivist's view. According to this view, "X is good" is equivalent to "I approve of X". But I am not denying that some bad things may be approved or that many things which are approved of may not be good.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Later Ayer

Ayer came eventually to abandon the extreme view that I outlined in the previous chapter. In the introduction to the second edition of Language, Truth and Logic (1946), he grants that ethical statements contain factual elements, such as descriptions of actions or situations, and, in so far as they involve such elements, they can be the subject of reasonable disputes.[38] Again in "On the Analysis of Moral Judgements", he admits that "ethical features in some way depend upon the natural. We can and do give reasons for our moral judgements."[39] Despite these concessions, Ayer still maintains the position that ethical statements are not meaningful, since, he contends, ethical conclusions do not follow from the factual premises either deductively or inductively. He asks the question:

> In what way do these reasons support the judgement? Not in a logical sense. Ethical argument is not

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[38]. A.J. Ayer, op.cit., p. 28.

[39]. A.J. Ayer, "On the Analysis of Moral Judgements", in Philosophical Essays (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd. 1954), p. 236.

> formal demonstration. And not in a scientific sense either.[40]

2.2 Scientific Reasoning (Induction)

Why is ethical reasoning not scientific or inductive in its nature?

> For [Ayer replies] then the goodness or badness of the situation, the rightness or the wrongness of the action, would have to be something apart from the situation, something independently verifiable, for which the facts adduced as the reasons for the moral judgement were evidence. But in these moral cases the two coincide. There is no procedure of examining the value of the facts, as distinct from examining the facts themselves. We may say that we have evidence for our moral judgements, but we cannot distinguish between pointing to the evidence itself and pointing to that for which it is supposed to be evidence. Which means that in the scientific sense it is not evidence at all.[41]

Let us understand why Ayer is reluctant to admit ethical reasoning as "inductive" with reference to a murder case discussed by him in the same essay. Suppose someone has committed a murder. Now the judge asks the murderer to describe the time, place, and motive of his action. The murderer can give various reasons for his motive. He can say that the person was bad in nature; that he was a political rival of his; that he was jealous of him, etc. He can also report that it was twelve o'clock and the man was standing in

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[40]. Ibid., p. 236.

[41]. Ibid., pp. 236-37.

front of him at such and such a place when he committed the murder.

These reasons and descriptions are, no doubt, factual. It is possible to verify all of them empirically. But when the judge decides or rules that the accused acted rightly or wrongly, Ayer says, he is not describing any further fact. The claim of the judge, that the accused acted rightly or wrongly, is not subject to verification independently of the grounds mentioned by the accuser because the claim is not distinct from the facts described by the murderer.

The reason why Ayer does not regard ethical reasoning as inductive is that it fails to satisfy two conditions (criteria) which any reasoning must satisfy, according to him, if it is to be "inductive". First, its conclusion must describe a fact which goes beyond the fact(s) mentioned in the premise(s). Second, its conclusion must be verifiable independently of its premise(s). For example, consider the argument:

Mango #1 is sweet

Mango #2 is sweet

Mango #3 is sweet

Therefore probably Mango #4 will be sweet.

Here the conclusion describes a new fact which is also verifiable independently of the premises.

But not all inductive reasoning falls under the same pattern mentioned above. For example:

(a) Mango #1 is sweet

Mango #2 is sweet

Mango #3 is sweet

Therefore probably all mangoes are sweet.

(b) Mango #1 is sweet

Mango #2 is sweet

Mango #3 is sweet

Therefore all the three mangoes are sweet.[42]

Here (b) satisfies neither condition, that is, its conclusion neither describes a further fact nor is it verifiable independently of the premises. The conclusion of (a) does not satisfy the second condition because its conclusion is not verifiable independently of the premises. So if we accept Ayer's proposed criterion, it renders all arguments of the above forms non-inductive. At the same time all the general statements of science, which Ayer himself defends as meaningful, become meaningless.

It may, however, be argued that the conclusion of the argument (a) is justifiable because in these cases we can distinguish between (1) the evidence - the facts cited in the

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[42]. There is controversy as to whether this type of argument is deductive or inductive. I shall call it "induction by complete enumeration".

premises; and (2) the quite separate fact stated in the conclusion which the premises are evidence for. If so, then on the same ground we can say that ethical claims are justifiable too. In ethical reasoning one can distinguish between (1) morally relevant evidence; and (2) the moral conclusions which the evidence supports. On the basis of the factual reasons when a judge rules that the accused acted rightly or wrongly, he is describing a further fact; he is creating a new fact, namely, an "ethical fact" over and above the facts/evidence of the case.[43] We shall see in a moment that as ethical facts are not empirically verifiable like scientific facts, so the inference from factual (empirical) grounds to ethical claims is not inductive.

2.3 Formal Demonstration (Deduction)

Like scientific reasoning Ayer does not illustrate what he means by "formal demonstration". Traditionally it is said that a formal demonstration is one whose validity depends on its form ignoring the subject matter. In this sense a reasoning is said to be valid if it is a substitution instance of a valid reasoning form. All the formal demonstrations are deductively valid in the sense that their premises provide conclusive evidence for the truth of the conclusion, that is,

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[43]. See Chapter Four regarding the nature of ethical facts.

if the premises are true then the conclusion can never be false.

Ayer's argument that ethical statements cannot be derived from observational statements is similar to the arguments of those who insist that "ought" statements cannot be derived formally from "is" statements. It was probably Hume who first introduced this argument in the following passage.

> In every system of morality ... I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.[44]

It seems that the reason why some scholars think that ethical reasonings are not formal is because when an ethical conclusion is drawn on the basis of exclusively factual premises a new evaluative term appears in the conclusion which does not belong to any of the premises.

There is, however, one exception where it is possible to deduce a new term in the conclusion. This happens in one valid form, namely, addition. If so then it is also possible

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[44]. David Hume, Treatise on Human Nature (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 469.

to deduce "ought" statements from "is" statements. From any factual premise p we can deduce p\/q, where q is an ethical statement.

Again, there is some deductively valid reasoning where a new term occurs in the conclusion which is not present in the premise. Let us consider the following cases:

1. A citizen is a person; therefore a married citizen is a married person.
2. John is a bachelor; therefore John has no wife.
3. Grass is green; therefore grass is coloured.

These arguments allow us to draw a new term in the conclusion. Yet they are valid. Their validity does not depend on their form, but instead on their subject matter (or content).

In connection with a discussion of Ayer's moral philosophy, Milne[45] tries to show that ethical statements can be validly deduced from factual statements. He adopts the distinction between "brute" fact and "institutional" fact made by John Searle.[46] Brute facts are physical descriptions, like "the man is bald". The fact that a man is bald cannot, Milne says, by itself entail anything about what he ought to do and

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[45]. A.J.M. Milne, "Values and Ethics: The Emotive Theory," in Logical Positivism in Perspective, op.cit., pp. 97-98.

[46]. For details see John R. Searle, "How to derive `ought' from `is'," in The Is/Ought Question. ed. by W.D. Hudson (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1973), pp. 120-44.

how he ought to be treated. But he mentions that this is not true of institutional facts. Institutional facts are facts, according to him, about social relations and social positions including status, roles, occupations, offices, posts and the like. They are not only descriptive but also necessarily evaluative and more especially prescriptive. The logic on which Milne bases his claim that from factual statements ethical statements can be validly deduced is that institutional facts do have implicit evaluative content. It follows from the description of institutional facts, he says, that a man's being a Roman Catholic priest means that he ought not to speak about any matter of which he has knowledge only from what has been confided to him in the confessional. Similarly, being a priest implies that he ought not marry.

However, Ayer's claim that ethical statements cannot be deduced properly from factual statements is based, I believe, on his conviction that deduction and induction are the only genuine reasoning processes. But there are a number of genuine reasoning processes, e.g. legal reasoning, which are neither deductive nor inductive, but whose conclusions are said to be supported by the premises and are also called justified or unjustified.

2.4 The Nature of Legal Reasoning

At first sight, it may seem that the mechanism of legal reasoning is simple and straightforward. A legal issue seems to look like this: There is an existing law in a particular country prohibiting drinking and driving, which stipulates a certain punishment for those who violate it. Now, suppose a policeman discovers that John is drinking and driving. He files a case against John for violating the law. The court tries the case to find out the facts. If the judge becomes convinced that the accused really violated the law, he declares the accused guilty and stipulates a punishment as the law prescribes.

The above pattern seems to correspond to the deductive or what Aristotle calls syllogistic pattern. It looks as if the law will be used as the major premise, the grounds (reasons) will be used as minor premise, and on the basis of these two a claim (conclusion) will be drawn deductively.

In fact, some cases do fall into this simple pattern; but most cases do not. In order for a case to be settled in this mechanical way, both the law and the facts must be clear. But often they are not so. Laws, statutes and regulations are often vague. A law may insist that, for example, people should take "proper care" not to damage national property. In this law, however, there is no sharp line between action

that shows proper care and action that does not. There are also other problems. It is the tradition of common law that a decision be taken in the light of past decisions. The difficulty here is that sometimes past decisions are not consistent with each other, and some cases are of such a nature that they do not fit accurately with past cases. There can also be conflict between statutes and common law, between interpretations of statutes, and so on. Facts are also sometimes unclear and it frequently happens that available facts are unverifiable and not conclusive. Hence, legal reasoning is different from deduction. The main feature of deduction is that it involves the claim that its premises do provide conclusive evidence for the truth of its conclusion. In deduction some fixed rules of inference are followed to draw the conclusion from its premises. If the premises are true and the conclusion is drawn on the basis of these rules, then the conclusion must be true. In other words, the argument is valid. But this is impractical for legal reasoning. If legal discussions were to rest on formally valid arguments only, then for each set of particular facts in any dispute there would have to be a single clear rule of law to determine the resulting decision because each dispute is unique and each sets a number of different principles against one another, and also the facts must be conclusive as

well as undisputed. As a result, this is an impractical model for legal reasoning. Unlike deduction, legal reasoning does not claim to be absolutely conclusive. It gives, at best, good reasons to accept the conclusion. Even legal processes can often be declared void with a discovery of new informations.

Couple these considerations with the instability, vagueness, and variabilities of laws, peculiarity of cases, inconsistency of past decisions, and the unverifiability and unavailability of conclusive facts; it seems that it is often impossible to settle legal disputes in a mechanical way.

With all of this in mind, Levi has remarked that the basic pattern of legal reasoning is analogical or reasoning by example which is distinct from both deduction and induction. According to him,

> It is reasoning from case to case. It is a three step process described by the doctrine of precedent in which a proposition is made into a rule of law and then applied to the next similar situation. The steps are these: (1) Similarity is seen between cases; (2) next the rule of law inherent in the first case is announced, (3) then the rule of law is made applicable to the second case. This is a method of reasoning necessary for the law.[47]

The process of Levi's reasoning by analogy or reasoning by example can be illustrated as follows:

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[47]. Edward H. Levi, An Introduction to Legal Reasoning (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 1-2.

Laws and precedents favourable to A

Laws and precedents favourable to B

Fact situation

The attorney of A will try to establish the case under laws and precedents favourable to his client's side of the case. B's attorney, on the other hand, will proceed in the opposite direction. It is important to see that this debate can take place even when there is no disagreement concerning facts. By stressing certain similarities and neglecting others, each attorney will try to move the case under those laws and precedents that favour his client's side of the case. The pattern of argument here is analogical because the whole point is to get the court to agree that the particular case is more or less like one line of cases than another. The decision, on the basis of the facts, will take the following form:

The facts of this case include items a, b, and c. The facts of the precedent case also include items a, b, and c.	so	The present case should be decided in the same way as that particular case
Ground		Claim

In view of this, it seems that reasoning by analogy in law cases is similar to inductive analogy, because both the types consist of the following pattern.

1. Case x has features a, b, c
2. Case y has features a, b, c
3. Case x is of type e
4. Therefore probably case y is of type e.

But one main difference between these two types of reasoning is that the conclusion of an inductive analogy could be verified or falsified by empirical observation; reasoning by analogy in the field of law cannot be determined to be true or false on the basis of empirical observation. It issues in a decision, rather than prediction, concerning the applicability of terms, and is conceptual. Let me put it in a different way. A postman noticed over a long period of time that whenever he knocked on the door of a particular house a little girl always opened the door. On the basis of his past experience he claims that tomorrow when he will knock on the door of that house, probably the little girl will open it. Now the claim of the postman can be verified with empirical observation which will render the claim either true or false. This is the nature of inductive analogy.

On the other hand, suppose at a certain institution there is a code that specifies lying and cheating as wrong conduct.

Suppose also that it is discovered that a student has written a false cheque and used it to purchase goods from a university store. Now a question arises whether this student's conduct will be considered wrong. This issue cannot be settled by empirical verification like the former one. There may be both arguments and counter-arguments but the solution depends on arriving at a decision as to how similar or dissimilar the cases (concepts) "cheating" and "writing a false cheque" are. This similarity or dissimilarity is determined by thinking over the concepts. This is the nature of reasoning by analogy in the field of law. Sometimes it is called non-inductive analogy.[48]

Like legal reasoning, reasoning from factual statements to an ethical statement is neither deductive nor inductive. Yet there is an ethical reasoning process where it is possible to deduce ethical conclusions from exclusively factual premises. This type of reasoning process is named, by Wellman, "conduction".

2.5 The Nature of Conduction

Conduction may be defined as a sort of reasoning in which a conclusion about some individual case is drawn non-

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[48]. Stephen F. Barker, The Elements of Logic (New York: Hill Book Company, 1965), pp. 280-84.

conclusively from a set of independently relevant premises about the same case without any appeal to other cases. There are, according to Wellman, three different patterns of conductive reasoning all of which are used to justify claims about what is good or should be done.

In the first pattern a conclusion is drawn from a single relevant reason. Here other reasons are not mentioned because the given reason is obvious and seems to outweigh all the others. Reasonings like "you promised to take him to cinema; therefore you ought to take him to cinema", and "this book fails to hold one's interest; therefore this book is not good" are common examples of this pattern.

This kind of reasoning is significantly different from formal reasoning. The validity of a formal reasoning depends, as we know, on its form. Any reasoning of the form p ⊃ q, p / ∴ q is valid regardless of whatever individual constants are used for the variables p and q. On the other hand, the genuineness (cogency) of conductive reasoning relies on its subject matter. Whether or not the reasoning "You ought to take him to cinema because you promised so" is genuine depends, Wellman holds, upon the relevance of promising for obligation.

This pattern is also different from valid deductive reasonings like "grass is green; therefore grass is extended".

The difference is that in conduction the factor cited in the premise is not sufficient and other factors, not mentioned, could have been mentioned to count as well. Hence it is always possible that the additional information will render the conclusion false even though the cited premise is true. But in a valid deductive reasoning it is never possible for the conclusion to be false when the premises are true. Like deduction the premises do not necessitate the conclusion of conduction, but only supports it to different degrees.

Neither is this pattern enthymematic. The reason is that,

> If we try to turn such an argument as "you should return the book because you promised to do so" into a deductively valid argument, we will need a universal premise. Such universal premises are either false, unverifiable, or impossible to formulate in advance. That you should always keep promises is false; that you should always keep promises other things being equal is unverifiable; that you should always keep promises in circumstances of type (a b c) is impossible to formulate in advance. The enthymeme approach, here as so often, makes an inference watertight at the cost of introducing an unknowable premise. This distorts the original argument, which is typically not put forward as being conclusive, and makes the merits of the argument impossible to determine - placing the issue, conveniently, outside the area of logic.[49]

Some people may want to say that the additional (missing) major premise is true by definition (tautology). The

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[49].Trudy Govier, "Carl Wellman and the Concept of Conductive Argument," in Problems in Argument: Analysis and Evaluation (U.S.A.: Foris Publications), 1987, p. 73.

objection against this claim is that (1) the conclusion which is drawn from the premise with the help of a definitionally true statement can also be drawn directly without adding that statement, and (2) one can draw the conclusion without being aware that there is a missing premise. Hence there is no utility of such a statement in a reasoning process, that is, its use is unnecessary.

In the second pattern the conclusion is drawn from several positive independently relevant reasons. For example, "this book is interesting, organized and thought-provoking; therefore this book is good."

Even though several premises support the conclusion of this pattern yet it is not conclusive. It is possible that some additional information will make the conclusion false without showing the given premises are false or even irrelevant. Hence this pattern is non-deductive.

This pattern (as well as the first one) is also different from induction. In induction the strength (probability) of its conclusion mostly depends on the number of instances cited in its favour. The strength of the conclusion of a conduction, on the other hand, depends on the relevance of its premises to the conclusion. Where more than one premise supports the conclusion of an induction the premises are mutually relevant to one another. But the conclusion of a

conduction is drawn from independently relevant premises. Again like the conclusion of a legal reasoning the conclusion of a conduction is frequently not empirically verifiable, but conceptual.

The third pattern is a little bit complex. In this pattern a conclusion is drawn from positive and negative relevant reasons. Here probable reasons are cited which are relevant both for and against the claim. An example of this pattern given by Wellman is:

> Although he is tactless and non-conformist, he is still a morally good man because of his underlying kindness and real integrity.[50]

Two reasons are given here which would count towards a person's being regarded as good and two others are given which would count against that. But the reasons in favour of saying the person is good seem stronger than the reasons given against the same.

Whether the reasons for the claim are stronger than those against it can be determined, Wellman holds, by using a popular model, namely, "weighing,"[51] by weighing the "pros" against the "cons". In the present example the favourable reasons are supposed to outweigh the counter reasons. So the

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[50]. Carl Wellman, "Conduction," in Challenge and Response: Justification in Ethics (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), p. 51.

[51]. Ibid., p. 57.

reasoning overall presents a good reason to believe that the person is good.

The third pattern of conduction is different from both induction and deduction on the same grounds as the first and second patterns are different from them.

2.6 Informal Reasoning

Conduction is one kind of informal reasoning, that is, it is neither formal (deductive) nor inductive. Yet it is genuine in the sense that the claims of these reasonings are acceptable. It is said:

> Logic's main concern is with the soundness and unsoundness of arguments, and it attempts to make as precise as possible the conditions under which an argument -- from whatever field of study -- is acceptable.[52]

From the above claim that logic's main concern is with the soundness (a sound argument is a valid argument with true premises) and unsoundness of arguments and that it attempts to make as precise as possible the conditions (rules) under which an argument is acceptable, we can infer that the function of rules is to make the arguments sound and that soundness is the same as acceptability. Lemmon is incorrect in saying that acceptability is the same as soundness. The claims of induction are generally accepted, yet the concepts

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[52]. John Lemmon, Beginning Logic (Nelson, 1965), p. 1.

"sound" and "unsound" are not applicable to induction. Anyway if acceptability is the main concern of logic then on the same ground it can be said that conduction is genuine. When someone argues, "You ought to keep the promise because your promise-breaking will result in great harm" or that on the basis of the fact that John damaged state property unnecessarily, a judge rules that John acted wrongly, the conclusions of these reasonings, I think, will be equally acceptable to all.

Unlike formal reasoning, the acceptability of conduction does not depend upon form, but upon their subject matter (content). There are, however, some deductive reasonings whose acceptability depends on subject matter, but unlike conduction their premises provide conclusive evidence for the conclusion.

In formal logic the argument form, truth table, Venn diagram, rules of inference etc. are used to check the validity of reasoning. Wellman believes that these procedures are not applicable to conduction. Yet there is a criterion for distinguishing between valid and invalid conductive reasoning. This criterion is, Wellman holds, "thinking through the argument".[53] Wellman, however, admits that "thinking through" is a very unreliable way of judging the validity of conductive reasoning. In this process it is possible to doubt

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[53] Carl Wellman, Conduction, op. cit., p. 80.

any verdict. But to resolve this verdict, he suggests, one can think through the argument again and again to make sure that one has judged it correctly. So the validity of conductive reasoning can be judged by thinking them through carefully and feeling their logical force. If it is necessary, one can think through them again and again to be sure about their validity or invalidity.

Wellman's claim that the validity of conductive reasoning can be determined by thinking through the argument is not correct. Thinking through itself cannot be a criterion of distinguishing between good and bad, or strong and weak conductive reasoning.[54] One can think through an argument again and again, yet that may not resolve one's doubt. To resolve the doubt we need criteria other than thinking through the argument. It is true that in conduction there are no standard criteria like formal reasoning. But it is possible to formulate some criteria. Wellman himself admits that there are some existing ethical fallacies (e.g., egoistic fallacy, moralistic fallacy etc.) and it is possible, in principle, to construct a complete list of ethical fallacies.[55] Again, even

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[54] I use the terms "good and bad", "strong and weak" to distinguish conduction from deduction. The terms "valid" and "invalid" are applicable only for deductive reasoning. Conductive reasoning cannot be valid or invalid in the sense in which deductive reasoning is valid or invalid.

[55] Wellman, Conduction, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

if there are no hard and fast rules of inference in conduction, yet it is, I think, possible to lay down rules of thumb for weighing how much support the premises of conductive reasoning give their conclusion. The following are such rules:

(1) The more relevant considerations cited, the stronger the support.

(2) The fewer negative considerations cited, the stronger the support.

(3) The more frequently a case meeting the relevant consideration has the property in question, the stronger the support.

In view of the above, I conclude that there are some criteria with the help of which it is possible to distinguish between good and bad conductive reasoning. Therefore, conduction is a genuine reasoning process.

2.7 Summary

This chapter is designed to show that Ayer's claim that ethical statements are not justifiable because they are not supported by factual statements formally or scientifically is ill-founded. I have argued that there are also other types of reasoning, namely, informal reasoning, which are genuine. In this connection I have discussed the nature of legal reasoning as a good example of informal reasoning. Finally

I have shown with reference to conduction that there is a legitimate way of transition from factual to ethical statements.

Despite the fact that ethical claims may be the result of a genuine reasoning process from observational premises, a defender of Ayer may argue that this does not prove that ethical claims are meaningful, that is, verifiable. The purpose of the next chapter is to show that if verifiability is taken as the criterion of meaningfulness then according to Ayer's version of the verification principle ethical statements are meaningful.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Verification Principle

The logical positivists' main program, as we know, is to defend empirical scientific statements as being meaningful and to eliminate metaphysical statements as meaningless. To serve this purpose they use the verification principle as a criterion of meaning to distinguish meaningful statements from meaningless ones. There are different versions of the verification principle proposed by different positivists. As the main focus of this thesis is on Ayer's moral philosophy, I shall confine the discussion mainly to his notion of the verification principle. The purpose of this discussion is to examine Ayer's epistemological position, particularly the origin of his moral view and to show that ethical statements, even on his proposed criterion of meaning, are indeed meaningful.

Generally, the verification principle states that the meaning of a statement is the method of its verification. The assumption behind this principle is that verification must always rest upon empirical observation, that is, on sense experience. Any statement, therefore, that cannot be verified by the method of observation is said to have no meaning. It

is clear that, with such a rigorous criterion, metaphysical statements cannot pass the test of meaningfulness. This can be demonstrated by the following syllogism.

All metaphysical statements are empirically unverifiable.

All empirically unverifiable statements are meaningless.

Therefore all metaphysical statements are meaningless.

The second premise of the argument is the verifiability principle of meaning in negative form. The equivalent positive form is, of course, all meaningful statements are empirically verifiable.

3.2 Conclusive Verifiability

In their early writings, Waisman[56] and some other positivists held that the cognitive meaning of a statement is determined completely by conclusive verification. This means that for

> any statement P to be cognitively meaningful there must be some finite consistent set of basic observation statements $O_1 \ldots O_n$ such that P entails and is entailed by the conjunction of $O_1 \ldots O_n$.[57]

But this criterion is criticized for being too restrictive in one direction and too inclusive in another, and

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[56]. Friedrich Waisman, "Verification and Definition," in Essential Readings in Logical Positivism, ed. by Oswald Hanfling (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. 28.

[57]. Paul Edwards, ed. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 8 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 241.

for violating some fundamental logical principles. Though the aim of the positivists is to show the meaninglessness of metaphysics, yet their proposed criterion renders meaningless many other scientifically meaningful statements. Some common and well known objections to this principle are the following:

(1) This criterion rules out all statements of universal form, like (x) Px which refer to infinitely large numbers of objects because these cannot be verified by any finite set of observation data. In this sense most of the universal statements of science (laws) become meaningless because these cannot be reduced to, as the verification principle demands, any finite set of observation statements.

(2) The purely existential statement $(\exists x)Px$ is completely verifiable and meaningful, but its denial, being equivalent to the universal statement $(x)\text{-}Px$, is not conclusively verifiable, and hence is meaningless. So the verification principle would involve the rejection of a fundamental logical principle, according to which if S is false, then - S is true and if S is true then - S is false; or in other words, that $(x)\text{-}Px$ is logically equivalent to the negation of $(\exists x)Px$.

(3) It renders meaningless statements about the past and future events and statements about the experience of other persons, for such statements are not conclusively verifiable.

(4) If a statement S is meaningful by the present criterion and statement N is any meaningless statement, then the disjunction, SVN, must be meaningful, since a disjunction is true if at least one disjunct is true. So, if this is the criterion, it is too inclusive.

Concerning the last criticism, David Rynin rightly points out that SVN here is not an example of disjunction.[58] We cannot consider N as a component or disjunct of the compound statement SVN because the components of a disjunction must all be genuine statements, that is, statements possessing a truth value; but here N has no truth value. It is neither true nor false, but meaningless. As a result SVN is not an example of disjunction in its real sense.

The other issues can best be resolved by a study of A.J. Ayer's version of the verification principle. In the first edition of Language, Truth and Logic, Ayer sponsored a milder form of the principle. According to this, a statement is meaningful if it is an analytic statement or weakly verifiable.

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58. David Rynin, "Vindication of L*G*C*L P*S*T*V*SM", in Waismann, op.cit., pp. 73-74.

3.3 Strong vs. Weak Verification

Ayer distinguished between "strong" and "weak" verification.

> 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.[59]

Strong verification has all the defects of conclusive verification mentioned earlier. Ayer rejects strong verifiability on the ground that all statements other than "basic propositions" and analytic statements are probable hypotheses. By "basic propositions" he means only those statements which are infallible. Statements like "This is green", "I have a pain", etc. are christened by him as "basic propositions." These statements refer solely to the content of a single experience.

Strong verifiability clearly denies significance to general statements such as "All men are mortal", "Arsenic is poisonous", etc., and to statements about the past and future. The nature of general statements is such that their truth cannot be established with certainty by any finite series of observations. It is recognized that these statements are designed to cover an infinite number of instances. So it is

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[59]. A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic, p. 50.

impossible to verify them conclusively. Similarly, however strong the evidence in favour of historical statements (i.e. statements about the past) may be, their truth can never be more than highly probable. Likewise future statements can only be probable.

In view of the above, Ayer says that a statement is meaningful, if and only if it is logically possible that observations might be made which could be relevant to its truth or falsehood, that is, make its truth more or less probable. He formulates the weak verification principle as follows.

> It is the mark of a genuine factual proposition, not that it should be equivalent to an experiential proposition; but simply that some experiential proposition can be deduced from it in conjunction with certain other premises without being deduced from those premises alone.[60]

Ayer's proposed version of the verification principle solved the problems of conclusive verifiability mentioned above. But this version does not give Ayer as much as he wanted. His aim was to allow for cognitive meaning in the general statements of science, as well as statements about the past and the future, on the one hand, and to make metaphysical statements meaningless, on the other hand. He succeeded in the former, but failed in the latter, since, Ayer himself admits, it

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[60]. Ibid., p. 52.

allows meaning to any statement whatsoever.[61] Supposing that S is any statement whatsoever and O is an observation statement. Then

$$S$$

$$S \rightarrow O$$

$$\therefore O$$

Here O has been deduced validly from S in conjunction with the additional premise "$S \rightarrow O$". Hence, S becomes meaningful. The following example shows how this version gives meaning to metaphysical statements:

The absolute is incapable of evolution (S).

If the absolute is incapable of evolution then this is white ($S \rightarrow O$).

Therefore this is white (O).

Here the conclusion "this is white", which is an observation statement, is deduced neither from the first premise nor from the additional conditional premise alone. It is deduced from both the premises taken together. Therefore according to Ayer's view, the metaphysical statement the "absolute is incapable of evolution" is meaningful.

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[61] Ibid., p. 15.

3.4 Direct vs. Indirect Verification

To remove the above difficulty Ayer modifies his former view in the second edition of Language Truth and Logic. Here he says that a statement, which is not analytic, is meaningful, if and only if, it is directly or indirectly verifiable. In the introduction of the book Ayer writes,

> I propose to say that a statement is directly verifiable if it is either itself an observation-statement, or is such that in conjunction with one or more observation-statements it entails at least one observation-statement which is not deducible from these other premises alone; and I propose to say that a statement is indirectly verifiable if it satisfies the following conditions: first, that in conjunction with certain other premises it entails one or more directly verifiable statements which are not deducible from these other premises alone; and secondly, that these other premises do not include any statement that is not either analytic, or directly verifiable, or capable of being independently established as indirectly verifiable.[52]

If this new formulation of the verification principle is analyzed, some important changes are found from that of Ayer's early view.

(a) Formerly he had said that a meaningful statement is one which is analytic, or at least an experiential statement is deducible from it in conjunction with other premises. The modification restricts the additional premises. Here the nature of these premises is determined. Additional premises can be analytic statements. This was not mentioned in the

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[52]. Ibid., p.17.

former formulation. Analytic statements are always true, and therefore the application of the verification principle to them is unnecessary and impossible. As a result, there cannot be any objection to using them as premises. The other statements, apart from analytic ones, which can be used as premises must be observation-statements or be deduced in conjunction with one or more observation-statement. From this it is clear that in the process of deducing an observation-statement from a given statement, the meaning of which is judged by the verification principle, the additional premises must be directly or indirectly observation-statements. If so, then it is not possible, as it was under the first version, to show the meaningfulness of the statement "the absolute is incapable of evolution", because the statement "if the absolute is incapable of evolution then this is white" cannot now be used as an additional premise.

(b) In his later version of the verification principle, Ayer uses the phrase "observation-statement" in place of "experiential proposition" to designate a statement which records an actual or possible observation.

Ayer's modification restricts the additional premise. This restriction prevents obviously meaningless simple statements from being verifiable. At the same time it allows the verifiability of theoretical statements in science. Still

this modified account gives rise to some new problems. One of the major defects of this version, according to Hempel and other critics, is that it allows literal significance to any conjunction S.N where S satisfies Ayer's criterion while N is a statement such as "the absolute is perfect" which is disqualified by the criterion. Indeed, whatever consequences can be deduced from S with the help of permissible additional premises, can also be deduced from S.N by means of the same additional premises. The following example shows that in conjunction with S R (where both S and R satisfy Ayer's criterion) an observation statement R can be deduced validly from S.N (where N is any proposition whatsoever)

1. S.N
2. S→R/ ∴ R
3. S 1 Simpl
4. R 2,3 M.P.

Hence, according to this version of the Verification Principle, ethical statements are also verifiable. For example:

1. This chalk is white and stealing is wrong (S.N)
2. If this chalk is white then grass is green (S→R)
3. This chalk is white (S)

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[83]. Carl G. Hempel, "The Empiricist Criterion of Meaning," in Logical Positivism, ed. A.J. Ayer, p. 115.

4. Grass is green (R).

Here the conclusion "Grass is green", which is an observation statement, is deduced neither from the first premise nor from the additional observational second premise alone. It is deduced from both the premises taken together. Consequently the conjunction "This chalk is white and stealing is wrong" becomes meaningful by direct verification. Just as the conjunction is meaningful, so too are its conjuncts meaningful; that is, "stealing is wrong" is meaningful.

3.5 Summary

This chapter is a historical sketch of the verification principle. The purpose of this study is to see the epistemological position of logical positivists. According to the positivists, all cognitively meaningful statements are verifiable. The verification principle appears in different forms. I have examined the defects of conclusive verifiability. This is too exclusive, as it makes meaningless many meaningful statements of different fields. I have also discussed different versions of Ayer's proposed principle. We have seen how his criterion renders ethical statements meaningful.

Ayer's proposed indirect verification has been proven so liberal that it makes meaningful not only ethical statements,

but any statement whatsoever, e.g. metaphysical, aesthetic and even a combination of non-sensical words. So the aim of the next chapter is to show that ethical statements are meaningful in their own right.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 In Defence of Utilitarianism

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a positive argument in support of my claim that ethical statements are cognitively meaningful. To serve this purpose I shall argue that ethical statements are reducible to factual statements, and consequently they are meaningful. To do so I shall first give a general exposition of utilitarian theory and then shall defend it against the objections raised by Ayer.

At the beginning of chapter one I mentioned that there are two traditional naturalistic theories in ethics, namely, subjectivism, or broadly speaking, approval theory and utilitarianism which claim that ethical statements are reducible to empirical ones.

Approval theory is untenable for various reasons. As I have stated the statement "X is good (right)" is not equivalent to "I approve of X" because people sometimes approve of evil or wrong things and it is also possible on their part not to approve of many right things. More importantly, according to the approval theory, the compound statement "X is good and X is not good (wrong)" is equivalent

to "I (John) approve of X and I (Sam) disapprove of X". The statement "X is good and X is not good" is contradictory. But its reduction to "I (John) approve of X and I (Sam) disapprove of X" is not contradictory. If so, then the simple statements, "X is good" and "X is not good", cannot be equivalent to "I (John) approve of X" and "I (Sam) disapprove of X" respectively. Therefore, approval theory does fail.

Universalistic utilitarianism, as one of the theories of reductionism, is free from the criticisms raised against subjectivism. There are different versions of utilitarianism proposed by different thinkers. In spite of many differences of opinion in matters of detail, there are some agreements. All utilitarians are consequentialists. They claim that the rightness or wrongness of actions is determined by the goodness or badness of their consequences. However, "rightness" and "goodness" are two different utilitarian concepts. Actions can be right or wrong; consequences of actions can be good or bad. A right action is one which has the best consequence. A good consequence is one which produces pleasure, in other words, pleasure is good. Suppose there are three alternative actions viz., A, B and C. Suppose also that A produces 10 units of pleasure, B produces 8 units of pleasure and C produces 6 units of pleasure. Here all the three consequences are good. But only A is the right action,

that is, when someone has a choice among these three actions, the right action for him is A. If he acts on B or C, his action will be considered as wrong.

The type of utilitarianism which I shall defend here is universalistic utilitarianism. This is significantly different from both egoistic and altruistic utilitarianism. Egoistic utilitarianism considers an action right if it maximizes the pleasure of the agent. Among the alternative actions an egoistic utilitarian will choose that one which will produce his own maximum pleasure while ignoring the pleasure of others. On the other hand, an altruistic utilitarian gives more emphasis to the pleasure of others, and hence among the alternative actions he will always choose that one which will produce the maximum pleasure of others while totally ignoring his own pleasure.

Egoistic utilitarianism puts excessive emphasis on the pleasure of the self. As a result it becomes incompatible with the moral point of view. To be moral is to be somewhat impartial. An egoistic utilitarian can only consider his own point of view. When his interest conflicts with that of others, he considers his own excessively and as a result, this theory provides no rational solution for conflicts of interest.

Altruistic utilitarianism puts undue emphasis on the pleasure of others and at the same time does an injustice to the agent by suggesting that he sacrifice his own pleasure. We should remember that all men are equal; a man is not the servant of others, nor are they his servants.

Universalistic utilitarianism gives equal treatment to all people. It holds that when there is a choice to be made between a greater pleasure for the agent at the expense of others, and a greater pleasure for others at the expense of the agent, the agent should choose that one whose consequence maximizes the pleasure for the maximum number of people. For example, if an act A produces pleasure for five people and another act B produces same type of pleasure for three people, then the agent should choose A as the right action irrespective of whether he himself belongs to the former or latter group. This theory tells the agent not to ignore his own pleasure, neither does it tell him to consider himself more important than others. Thus all are equal in the eyes of this theory.

This theory also counts the pleasure of future generations. We take care of the pleasure of ourselves, our parents, children, relatives, neighbours and friends. Similarly, we should take care of the pleasure of our future children. Some of the people of Bangladesh are doing good

business by deforestation. Scientists have reported that if it goes on then in the near future there will occur serious ecological problems which will be very harmful for the future generations. The present theory holds that deforestation in Bangladesh is wrong.

It is worth mentioning here that in the above definition of utilitarianism we understand "actions" to mean "particular actions", not "sorts of actions" or "class of actions". It means that we assess the rightness or wrongness of each individual action directly by its consequences. When we say that a particular act of promise keeping, X, is right we mean that the consequence of X is the best, that is, X produces maximum pleasure. But on the basis of the evidence that X was right we cannot generalize our claim, that is, we cannot say that in every instance we should always keep our promises. This view is known as act-utilitarianism. Like act-utilitarians, rule-utilitarians do not consider the consequence of each particular action, but consider the consequence of some general rules, such as "keep promises". According to this view a rule is right if it brings the best consequence. It advocates following the right rule. Rule-utilitarianism seems to be inconsistent with the fundamental principle of utilitarianism, namely, maximizing pleasure. Suppose in a society the rule "keep promises" has

been proved to be the best alternative among her existing rules. According to the rule-utilitarians, it is always right for the people of that society to keep their promises. But sometimes promise-breaking can be right. Let us consider the well known story of the "desert island promise". This story states that only two friends survived a plane crash on a desert island. One of them is seriously injured and will die very soon. The dying man gave his jewellery to his friend to donate it to a museum. On his return the friend donates the jewellery to a research centre which is badly in need of money to invent a machine that will be very helpful for cancer treatment. As the promise is not known to any other man except for the two friends, promise breaking in this particular instance will not weaken the general confidence in the social institution of promising. Besides, it will bring pleasure for many sick people. So this promise breaking will be considered as right because its consequence is the best.

4.2 Reply to Ayer's Objections against Utilitarianism

The following are the main objections raised by Ayer against the utilitarian principle:

First, the reduction of ethical statements to non-ethical ones does not succeed. The reason is that the statements which contain normative ethical symbols are not equivalent to

statements which express empirical statements. It is not self-contradictory, Ayer holds, to say that some pleasant things are not good.[64]

I have argued (p. 10), however, that a utilitarian can reply to this objection by saying that ethical statements are synthetic, not analytic; and hence it is of course not self-contradictory to deny that some pleasant things are good.

The reason why pleasure is good is that all of us value pleasure. We, however, value lots of other things, such as health, wealth, knowledge and security. But these things are not valuable for their own sake. They are valuable because of what they lead to, namely, pleasure. On the other hand, pleasure is valuable for what it is in itself. When somebody says that wealth is good, we can significantly ask him why he values wealth. He can give many reasons e.g., improving his social status. We can again ask him why he values social status. He can give other reasons. In this way he will ultimately conclude that he values all these things for the sake of pleasure. But if we ask somebody why he values pleasure, the question might seem a bit strange, for we consider pleasure something valuable without question. In other words, pleasure is intrinsically good. What is

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[64]. A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic, op.cit., pp. 139-40.

intrinsically good is what is to be valued for its own sake rather than for the sake of something else.

If pleasure is intrinsically good then Ayer is incorrect to say that some pleasant things are not good. Pleasure taken by itself is never bad. What Ayer could legitimately say is that some pleasant actions are not right. But that would not be an objection against utilitarianism. A utilitarian also holds that some pleasant acts are not right. It was an act of pleasure for the Nazis to torture the Jews. The pleasure that the Nazis enjoyed from torturing the Jews was not bad in itself. But such types of pleasant action, a utilitarian will hold, are not right, since they resulted in unpleasure for the Jews, that is, the consequence of the action is bad. In other words, some pleasant actions can be wrong.

Like "Pleasure is good", the statement "Right actions have the best consequences" is also synthetic. It is possible to provide reason why the action that leads to the best consequence will be considered right. This statement is doubly evaluative. First, it needs to evaluate what constitutes the best consequence and second, what constitutes the right action. We have done the first evaluation and have seen that the best consequence is one which maximizes pleasure. Now it is possible that someone may agree with the first kind of evaluation, that is, that the best consequence

maximizes pleasure, yet he may disagree with the second kind of evaluation, that is, that an action is right if it maximizes pleasure. He may agree that the consequence of an action A is better than the consequence of an alternative action B. At the same time he may disagree that it would be right to do A because he may have promised to do B. I think that since we value pleasure, and pleasure is intrinsically good, there is a good reason to consider an action right if it maximises pleasure. "Any conception of the right", Scheffler says, "attempts to regulate the conduct of agents, and also to thereby regulate what happens in the world, in so far as what happens is subject to human control".[65] From this point of view, the utilitarian use of the concept "right" is appropriate, since it is an attempt to regulate human conduct in a direction that will promote the best happenings in the world, namely, pleasure.

Secondly, in connection with a discussion on Bentham's proposed utilitarianism, Ayer raises the following objection.

> Now if it is true that the only object that any person is capable of seeking is his own happiness, then clearly there can be no sense in saying that he ought to seek any other. For any individual such questions as what ought I to do? What is it my duty to do? What is it right for me to do? are all reducible to the question what will make me happiest? Which of the courses of action open to me will secure for me the greatest preponderance of

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[65]. Samuel Scheffler, The Rejection of Consequentialism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p.125

> pleasure over pain? From the point of view of the individual, therefore, there can be no distinction between morality, and expediency. If the most expedient action is defined as that which will in fact produce him the greatest measure of happiness, then it is also the action that he ought to do. To recommend him, on so-called moral grounds, to do any other would be either to deceive him about his chances of happiness, or else to bid him to act in a way of which ex hypothesi he is psychologically incapable.[66]

Ayer's objection is based on his conviction that Bentham advocated an egoistic theory of the nature of human beings, that is, every man acts only with a view of his own interest. Even if we take it for granted that Ayer is right in his explanation of Bentham's notion, yet this objection does not work against the type of utilitarianism which I am defending here, namely, universalistic utilitarianism. This theory rightly presupposes that men are capable of sacrificing their own interest for the interest of others.

However, Bentham also advocated a moderate view like universalistic utilitarianism. A person's conduct "would not be virtue - it would be folly" he holds, were it "to confer upon others a smaller portion of happiness than he himself sacrificed."[67] It implies that a man can sacrifice his own pleasure in order to promote the pleasure of others.

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66. A.J. Ayer, "The principle of utility," in Philosophical Essays, op.cit., p. 254.

67. Ibid., p. 251.

Thirdly, utilitarianism advocates that the consequence of an action is determined with reference to all of its effects (pleasure and unpleasure) both near and remote, direct and indirect. Moore thinks that we should consider all the effects of an action "no matter how indirect or remote these results may be."[68] If so then Moore's view cannot get rid of the objection raised by Ayer that "it is impossible for anyone to estimate all the consequences of any given action; they may extend over centuries."[69] A similar objection is raised by B. Williams when he states that "one would just go on for ever, and there would be an obviously hopeless regress."[70] I think that Smart rightly advocates a moderate claim that for most of the cases we do not need to consider very remote effects.

> Normally the utilitarian is able to assume that the remote effects of his actions tend rapidly to zero, like the ripples on a pond after a stone has been thrown into it. This assumption seems quite a plausible one. Suppose that a man is deciding whether to seduce his neighbour's wife. On utilitarian grounds it seems pretty obvious that such an act would be wrong, for the unhappiness which it is likely to cause in the short term will probably be only too obvious. The man need not consider the possibility that one of his remote descendants, if he seduces the woman, will be a great benefactor of the human race. Such a possibility is not all that improbable, considering the very likely vast number

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68. G.E. Moore, Ethics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 8.

69. A.J. Ayer, "The Principle of Utility," op.cit., p. 267.

70. J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, Utilitarianism For and Against (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 82.

> of descendants after a good many generations, but it is no more probable than the possibility that one of his remote descendants will do great harm to the human race, or that one of the descendants from a more legitimate union would benefit the human race. It seems plausible that the long-term probable benefits and costs of his alternative actions are likely to be negligible or to cancel one another out.[71]

Fourthly, the utilitarian theory points out that it is possible, at least in principle, to measure the proportion of pleasure produced by an action, or of alternative actions. To measure something we need a standard. Ayer states that there is no standard by which we can measure pleasure and pain in terms of mathematical calculation.[72]

Ayer is right to say that we cannot have any mathematical calculation concerning the measurement of pleasure, but that does not mean that we do not have any standard at all. A standard is used to check the correctness of some judgements. There are different kinds of standards to measure different things, sometimes different standards are used to measure the same thing. Again, one standard can be more reliable than some alternative standards. One can measure the weight of a small stone by lifting it in one's hands, but a more reliable way is to put the stone on a scale. Similarly, one can feel the heat of a glass of water just by putting a finger into the

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71. Ibid., pp. 64-65.

72. Ibid., pp. 64-65.

water, but a more accurate way is to use a thermometer. Likewise, one can judge the colour of a paper simply by looking at it, but a more reliable way is to use a colour sample.

Scales, thermometers, etc. are the reliable standards for measurement. With the help of these criteria it is possible to give an exact mathematical calculation of weight, hot over cold and vice versa. By using a thermometer we can say exactly how hot or cold something is (e.g. it is 70°F). Similarly, by using a scale we can calculate the weight of a stone (e.g. it is 10 kg.). But it is not possible to have a numerical calculation of pleasure and neither do we need such a type of calculation.

> I [Bentham] am quite prepared to admit that the notion of a calculus of satisfactions and dissatisfactions is impossible. But I cannot conceive why any philosopher should want to have one .... It is said that if you cannot make a calculation of the relative amounts of pleasure and pain which your actions will produce in the world, you cannot know which actions are good, which bad. This, however, is a very shallow argument. In the first place, even if you cannot measure pleasures and pains, this does not prevent you from knowing that some pleasures and pains are greater than others. A man does not need a thermometer to know that he is being frozen to death or boiled alive. And without any such instrument he can detect the difference between a hot day and a cold one. So too a man knows that some pains are terrible, some slight; that some

> pleasures are great, some small; although he cannot measure either the pleasures or the pains.[73]

We can decide whether an action is right or not, weighing the consequences of other actions. For example, it is wrong to visit a sick friend who is suffering from a very minor injury while neglecting one's college final examination simply because the friend wants to see one. But it is right for one to visit one's dying mother even while neglecting a college examination if one is the only available person to take care of her.

Fifthly , Ayer's claim that there are no genuine ethical disputes, does not work against utilitarianism. There are no ethical disputes, Ayer thought, because ethical disputes are not resolvable. But the utilitarian principle proposes a criterion by which it is possible to settle ethical disputes. The dispute whether it is right or wrong to kill a murderer can be resolved with reference to the consequence of the killing, e.g. if the killing prevents the murder of ten other persons then it would be considered right. Similarly, whether a particular act of stealing is right or wrong can be judged with reference to its consequences. If the consequences of stealing maximize pleasure over other alternative actions then

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73. From John Hospers, Human Conduct: An Introduction to the Problems of Ethics (Chicago: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1961), p. 58.

it is right, otherwise it is wrong. Thus utilitarianism provides us with a means to settle ethical disputes. There may, however, be some crucial disputes which are not easy to settle. But as I have shown (p. 21) this is equally applicable to the other fields including science.

Nor is Ayer right in saying that all ethical disputes are disputes about fact. It is true that when people are engaged in ethical disputes they mention empirical evidence in support of their claims. But that is not all. They also evaluate the facts, and agreement or disagreement depends on how the disputants evaluate the facts as a whole. The utilitarian principle suggests that we should evaluate the facts with reference to the total pleasure and unpleasure produced by them. So ultimately ethical disputes are disputes about value, not disputes about fact.

Sixthly, Ayer's criticism that ethical claims do not state further facts beyond the reasons on which the claim is based is doomed to failure. Let us remember the murder case cited in chapter two. On the basis of the fact that X murdered Y because (a) Y was a political rival of X; (b) X was jealous of Y; (c) Y was bad in nature and so on, when a judge rules that X acted wrongly, he is describing a further fact, namely, (d) the consequence of X's action did not maximize pleasure. Here the judge's claim is not simply the repetition

of the reasons on which he bases his claim. Rather the claim (d) is significantly different from the reasons (a), (b) and (c). The reasons are the empirical facts. But the claim is a legal or an ethical fact, and we shall also see in the concluding section that there are different methods to know the truth value of these two different kinds of facts.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to defend utilitarianism against the objections raised by Ayer. If I am successful then it can be said that ethical statements are reducible to factual statements.

But ethical facts are not like empirical facts e.g. grass is green, Y is a political rival of X, X is taller than Y, today's average temperature is 26^{0}C and so on. Therefore it is not possible to determine their truth value by direct sense experience or by using some standards like scales or thermometers.

Yet we can know whether a particular action A is right. If the consequences of A maximize pleasure over the consequences of its alternative actions then it is true that A is the right action. For example, we can collect available information regarding the effects of A, think of the tentative pleasure of every individual effect, sum them up and keep them

in mind. We can also follow the same procedure to find out the total pleasure produced by alternative actions. Finally, it is possible to reach the conclusion by comparing pleasure produced by each action. The action A is right only when its pleasure is the maximum, otherwise it is wrong. In this way we can know whether an action is right or wrong. This procedure is frequently used as a standard for the evaluation of many statements. As an example, the marking of examination scripts is done by thinking through the materials produced by the examinee. When a professor remarks that "X wrote a better examination than Y", his claim is factual and is capable of being either true or false.

In conclusion, I shall say that since ethical claims regarding the rightness or wrongness of actions are justifiable with reference to their consequences, therefore, these claims do not constitute statements about a "queer sort of fact"[74] as Ayer puts it at one point, but are statements of fact that can be either true or false and hence are meaningful.

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[74]. A.J. Ayer, "On the Analysis of Moral Judgements," op.cit., p. 233.

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