

VALUES AND VALUATION WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO ETHICAL THOUGHT IN TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITAIN

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The science of ethics, both in its philosophical and theological varieties, is caught up in the throes of transition. Under the impact of irrationalistic undermining, there is a general willingness to break away from the shackling effect of time-less maxims. But since the promised deliverance to freedom boomeranged into a deliverance to fear, uncertainty and anxiety, there is a growing hesitation to accept the appalling consequence of an “every-man-does-what-is-right-in-his-own-eyes-morality.” Ethical theories vacillate between casuistry (with its universally valid natural law) and an existentialistic ethics (with its “absolute” freedom).

In contemporary ethical philosophy, the main problems involved come to a head in the question of “value.” The same may be said for theological ethics. In fact, for a succinct statement of the central issues in ethics, one can do no better than to quote the words of Joseph Fletcher, a leading American proponent of the fashionable contextualist approach to ethics: “The basic issue at stake between situational ethics and natural law theory is the locus of value.”¹

Do “values” exist, or don’t they? Do values statements refer to “value realms” (historically, the general trend in Continental Europe), or are they to be interpreted psychologically in the behaviourist pattern (historically, the dominant tendency in the United States and Britain)? Are they objectively real, or are they non-referential in character, perhaps hallucinations or symbols of the conscious mind? Are they like psychomatic ejaculations, ceremonial utterances or mathematical formulae? Or are they simply the functions of social, economic and political situations? All of these positions have been or are held and we have not even begun to exhaust the possibilities. But enough has been said to provide a sense of the bewilderment and frustration which faces a modern ethicist.

It is in this “time or trouble” that a “new” kind of ethics has raised its head and announced itself as the way out of the *impasse* in ethical theory. In this paper we shall sketch the developments within this new approach to ethics. Our discussion of the issues involved will lead us to a concluding section in which we hope to present the outlines of yet another “new” approach. [p.2>]

Meta-ethics

The novel type of ethics to which I referred is practised in a branch of Neo-Positivism known as Linguistic Analysis (not to be confused with the “strong” Logical Positivism of the *Wiener Kreis* or the “weaker” version subsequently advocated by Reichenbach, Carnap c.s. in the United States).² The acknowledged fathers of Linguistic Analysis are Bertrand Russell (1872-), G. E. Moore (1873-1958) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951).³ With the publication in 1903 of *Principia Ethica*

¹ Joseph Fletcher, in *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World* (ed. J. Bennett, 1966) p. 327. See also p. 328,

² These labels are in many ways unsatisfactory. Vollenhoven’s Problem-Historical Method gives promise of a more meaningful classification. But that is another story!

³ One must not, however, classify Russell and Moore with the Linguistic Analysts proper. Russell has unequivocally rejected L.A. (cf. his introduction to E. Gellner’s (*Words and Things*. 1993). For Moore, at least in ethics, L.A. remained a means, never an end.

and “The Refutation of Idealism,” Moore struck what is usually regarded as the first serious blow against “metaphysics” by his whole-hearted rejection of the (Hegelian) Neo-Idealism of McTaggart and Bradley. Moore, explained Russell, was the first to climb down the Hegelian ladder, the others followed.⁴

Nevertheless, for a long period, Moore, has stood in the shadow of his friend and colleague Russell. With the end of World War II this changed. The influence of Russell and the “early” Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* (1922)—at a high point in the ’30s—waned in the proportion that the influence of Moore and the “late” Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) waxed. This is most evident in the philosophizing of J. L. Austin (1911-1959), G. Ryle and P. H. Strawson, the “therapeutic analysis” of John Wisdom c.s. at Cambridge—perhaps, with apologies to both groups, one could better speak of the Ox-bridge school—and many other related thinkers in Scandinavia, America and Italy. Linguistic Analysis is not only the dominant philosophical school in the Anglo-American world, it in at present steadily encroaching on the mainland of Europe.

Although the seed of Linguistic Analysis (L.A.) was planted and watered by G. E. Moore’s emphasis on “clarification,” coupled with his return to the dictates of Common Sense, it did not germinate until fertilized by the “late” Wittgenstein’s language-game approach in which meaning is taken as “use.” For L.A. philosophy is an *activity* as over against a *doctrine*. Here we feel the pulse-beat of the school.

Analysis does not affect the world of “facts”—positively or negatively—“philosophy ... leaves everything as it is.”⁵ There is nothing more for philosophy to say: either the natural sciences will do it, or Common Sense already knows it. At least, nothing more can be said, the rest is “ineffable” or “hidden.” Yet, something must be done—otherwise there will be “nothing” to do and philosophy [p3>] will disappear! There are two possibilities: concentrate on the “Saying” or try to *show*—in some way—what is ineffable. In general, following the emphasis of the “late” Wittgenstein, L.A. adopted the first alternative, and rejected the second as an aspect of the to-be-rejected mysticism of the *Tractatus*.

Philosophy does not explain or justify, it merely describes and clarifies. Philosophic problems arise from the misuse and abuse of language, from imagining for example, that the logical form of a sentence is the same as the grammatical form. It is not the results which are important—they will come—but the activity, usually taken as technical mastery with language as the instrument. In other words, L.A. thinks of itself as a kind of secretarial-service-for-hire, as a janitor service. It is a tool-box to be used as the occasion demands. In disarming fashion, the Analyst points out that he has “nothing” to sell, he just wants to sharpen your tools.⁶

In ethics, L.A. has given birth to an approach which was named Meta-ethics. It purports to (dis)solve the problems under which ethics is staggering by a logical clarification of the syntax of descriptive (“formal”) and normative (“material”) ethics. Since logical clarification is considered to be neutral, meta-ethics prides itself on being “objective.” It sees issues in “a neutral perspective,”⁷ it is “morally neutral.”⁸

⁴ Cf. Ved Mehta. *The Fly and the Fly-Bottle*, p. 41-42.

⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations*, para. 124 cf. also :paras. 109, 119, 125ff.

⁶ Thus most “linguistic analysts” do not consider themselves to be members of any school, they are simply philosophers. Party banners and school loyalty have no place in philosophy (cf. G. Ryle, “Taking Sides in Philosophy,” *Philosophy*, 1937.

⁷ C. L. Stevenson, *Facts and Values* (1963) p. vii.

Whereas normative ethics is concerned with formulating valid ethical precepts and justifying these principles, meta-ethics is concerned with the logical and semantical questions involved; such as, the meaning and use of key expressions (e.g. “good,” “free,” “responsible,” the nature of morality, the distinction moral and non-moral, the nature and possibility of ethical justification, etc.)⁹ Meta-ethics has approximately “the relation to normative ethics that the philosophy of science or epistemology or meta-science has to science.”¹⁰

Prior to tracing the development of meta-ethics through its various phases, it is well that we pause for a closer look at the two sides of the meta-ethical coin.

By definition, meta-ethics requires a point from which to move beyond (meta). This means that “ordinary” ethics—as this jumping-off place—fulfills a legitimate and foundational role for meta-ethics. Meta-ethics conceives of its task as a limited one: clarification and dissolution of logical syntax in order that “ordinary ethics” can get on with its task. Meta-ethics doesn’t claim to solve all problems, rather it purposively withdraws into a morally antiseptic vacuum and endeavours to absolve itself of responsibility in regard to the “big” questions of life.

Then, having thrown around its shoulders the mantle of neutrality—transforming a lack into a virtue—it reappears as the apostle of [p.4>] peace, volunteering its services to all the dissident parties. This built in “help—yes, interference—no” attitude of L.A. is the secret of what would be called the “seductive appeal of L.A.” Even a cursory glance at the extent of the dominance of L.A. in philosophy, in ethics and in the social sciences suffices to convince one of its bewitching character.

However, this overly-modest bordering on embarrassed demeanour of L.A. is only one side of the coin—a side we certainly appreciate against the background for the boastful, often blasphemous, pretensions of theoretical Reason. But there is another side to the coin—often not turned over under the “spell”—which forces one to look more closely at L.A. L.A. is convinced of its superiority in its self-appointed field. That is to say, L.A. regards itself as the lone remaining option open for philosophy. Meta-ethics is the *sufficient* as well as *necessary* panacea for all ethical ills. It doesn’t claim much, but it claims all that it possibly can.

On the one side, L.A. claims embarrassingly little, on the other it claims to be the only “way.” On the one hand, L.A. admits its limitations, on the other, it champions itself as the one and only “doctrine-less” method which can set free ethics, of whatever stripe, to genu in ethicizing.¹¹ Meta-ethics becomes the way of access to ethical reality. Meta-ethics legislates as to the nature of ethics and values.

Having received the givens, normative ethics is able to function properly. Meta-ethics, all its claims notwithstanding, functions as a “first” word (and thus also as “last” word) which you are not permitted to question, and behind which you cannot question.

I can best uncover the exclusivistic nature of the claims of L.A. (before an audience sympathetic to Christian philosophizing) by quoting from a review of Prof. H. Dooyeweerd’s *Transcendental Problems of Philosophic Thought* which appeared in

⁸ R.M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (1963), p. 97.

⁹ W. K. Frankena, *Ethics* (1963), p. 4 ff.

¹⁰ R. Brandt, *Ethical Theory* (1959), p. 7.

¹¹ “Obviously it is necessary to answer the main questions of critical ethics before we have firm grounds for constructing a system of normative ethics.” R. Brandt, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

Mind the renowned journal of L.A. edited by Gilbert Ryle. After concisely summarizing Prof. Dooyeweerd's argument and his intentions, the reviewer ends by averring:

Dr. Dooyeweerd is hardly likely to make many converts by this book, especially among those who feel that the errors in the metaphysical systems of the past and in many of the "isms" of today, are sufficiently explained as due to bad logic, misconceptions about language or mathematics, etc. without recourse to the hidden workings of religious motives.¹²

II. Various Phases in Development of Meta-Ethics

1. This over-all pattern of twentieth century philosophy has been more influenced by G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* than by any other book. It unleashed a vertical flood of publications, slowly at [p.5>] first, only now, some sixty years later, reaching crest proportions. It is not that Moore's positive constructions have been universally received or even discussed—far from that, "intuitionists" are few and far between today. Rather Moore is credited with destroying "naturalism" as a tenable position in ethical theory. But there is more: for even though Moore's critical arguments, long considered water-tight are in some circles being poked full of holes, there is a remarkable consensus that Moore's style of philosophizing and ethicizing the adumbration of all that has appeared since. In short, L.A. and meta-ethics finds its "father" in G. E. Moore.

The problems of philosophy (and of ethics) are, Moore asserts, largely caused by the attempts to answer ill-defined questions. Moore's solution has become the battle-cry for L.A.; clarification of the *problemstelling*. In ethics, Moore began the work of analysis by separating two questions often confusedly taken to be one: the formal and primary question as to the "good" (what has "intrinsic value," or is good in itself) and the secondary, material question as to what is "right" (what one "ought" to do, what is "good as mans").

Having effected this initial clarification, Moore discovered that he still could not proceed to answer the questions. Before he could determine what (kinds of) things are good, he must first know the technical meaning or analysis of the adjective "good." Here we have the beginnings of meta-ethics, the normative question is separated from the preliminary matter of analysis. "Good"—so analysis revealed—is a simple, non-natural, indefinable quality. Anyone who defines "good" by confusing it with any of the qualities in virtue of which one can call something good commits the "Naturalistic fallacy." In effect, Moore developed what Hume pointed to as the confusion of "ought" and "is." Moore proved this by the famous "open-question" argument. Take any suggested definition of good. Then ask if you could not meaningfully query an object known to have this quality (the one given as the definition of good), if it is good. If you are able to ask the question meaningfully, if it makes sense, the definition is without doubt wrong. For if the property in question is, in fact, what good means, it is pointless to raise the question. You already know the answer. For example, if good means pleasure, one doesn't inquire if pleasure is good—as in reality one does—for we would be raising the pointless query if "pleasure" is "pleasure"!

¹² *Mind*, July 1949, p. 407.

The conclusions of Moore's argumentation are substantial.

- a. "Goodness" is unique, it may not be defined in naturalistic psychological or even metaphysical terms. Ethics is "autonomous."
- b. Goodness or "intrinsic value" is conceived to have an independent "objective" existence detached from subjective feeling, willing and thinking (neo-Realism).
- c. Since, on the one hand, "goodness" cannot be logically defined, yet on the other hand, Common Sense *knows* what is good, "goodness" must be known with *intuitive* certainty (Moore's Intuitionism).
- d. Since that which is right is defined as that action which will cause more good to exist in the universe than any possible alternative, judgements of the form "x is right" are logically dependent on intuited judgements of the form "x is good-in-itself (has intrinsic value)" (Moore's Ideal Utilitarianism). [p.6>]

2. Deontology

Moore won the day with his *Principia Ethica*. Following Moore all ethical philosophers found it self-evident that they must deal with the issues and problems raised by him rather than engaging in the previously popular "metaphysical speculation." At Oxford, Prichard, Carrit, Ross and Joseph; at Cambridge, Broad and Ewing may be classed along with Moore as "objectivists" in regard to the question of values.¹³ The Oxford Group (excluding Joseph) is known for its deontologicist position. They stress *to deon* (that which is right or binding) as distinct from the good. Here it is obvious that they are leaving Moore. Moore said that one must so act as to produce the greatest good. But the deontologists assert: right is independent of its productiveness of good, sometimes one must do B (it is right) even though it produces more evil than A would produce. No justification is necessary or even possible for moral acts. Reasons for acting in a certain way are self-evident, immediate and intuitive.

3. Emotivism

Although the philosophic community—almost to the man—accepted Moore's demolishing critique of naturalism, there was hesitation bordering on doubt as to whether his intuitionism was acceptable. The "emotive" theory developed. Once launched, the idea proved most attractive to many.

Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936)—to say it bluntly—was a bombshell which buried ethics as a legitimate field of philosophic inquiry. The author pompously declares that, since statements are only meaningful if it is possible to verify them against empirical data,¹⁴ ethical concepts are "pseudo-concepts." They are neither true, nor false, they say nothing factual, they are simply "emotive." The genuine possibility of disagreement, of contradiction among people as to what is good and bad, considered by Moore and the deontologists a telling argument in favor of the

¹³ H.A. Prichard, *Moral Obligation* (1949); E.F. Carrit, *Theory of Morals* (1928), *Ethical and Political Thinking* (1947); W.D. Ross, *The Right and Good* (1930); H.W.L. Joseph, *Some Main Problems in Ethics* (1931); C.D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (1930); A.C. Ewing, *The Definition of Good* (1947).

¹⁴ Already in the second edition of *Language, Truth and Logic* (1946) Ayer was forced to tone down his thesis. In general, advocates of the verification theory of meaning are still struggling to construct a suitable version of the theory; it must not be so "strong" that it declares scientific laws to be meaningless along with "metaphysics" but neither may it be so "weak" that the "meta physics" creeps in along with scientific laws.

objectivity of “values” (disagreement or agreement is always *about* something) “goodness”) does exist. But the quarrel is about questions of fact, not of questions of value. When we say something is bad, we mean “boo.” When we say something is good, we mean “hurrah.” Today, often in [p.7>] spite, this theory is referred to as the “Boo-hurrah theory of ethics.”

After Ayer’s *succés de scandale*, philosophy was faced with the disturbing dilemma: abandon ethics or modify the emotive theory. The role of refiner has fallen to the American C.L. Stevenson.¹⁵ Ethical terms, he admitted, might not be completely without cognitive content or descriptive meaning. Nevertheless, the prima task of ethical concepts is emotive, they are to evoke favorable, or unfavorable attitudes towards objects. Whereas Ayer considers questions of validity for ethical judgments *nonsense*, Stevenson retracts and considers them of little import—after all, such judgments only indicate that which one is psychologically disposed to accept. Ethical disagreement is disagreement in attitudes (purposes, aspirations, wants, preferences). Ayer emphasized the “expressive” character of ethical concepts, Stevenson is taken up with the “emotive” aspect which is aimed at persuading hearers to behave in one way or another. “This is good” means “I approve of this, do likewise.”

4. The Linguistic Retreat

In the late 1930s and 40s emotivism was grasped as a way out of an unpleasant dilemma: naturalism or intuitionism. However, the last decade and half has brought forth a rather strong linguistic retreat from and a reaction against emotivism in the direction of increased concern for ordinary language. In retracing the contours of moral philosophy the Oxford dons ascertained to their intense relief that Moore and his successors had been guilty of a fundamental error, namely, they had assumed that ethical judgments must refer to some “object” (a value such as goodness). This is not so!

Ethical judgments do not find their meaning in reference to an object—such objective “values” do not exist—but in their *function or use* in various judgments. This was the beginning of the Oxford school of meta-ethics. Ethical utterances do not refer to objects, or state facts, or contain real knowledge. Value sentences are not primarily descriptive of anything—as are the empirical statements of science—rather they are evaluative. They exhibit a wide variety of practical uses. What, more positively, ethical statements are is the object of much discussion. Are they prescriptives (R.M. Hare)? Are they multi-functional depending on the particular context (P. Nowell-Smith)? Are they allied to acts of choice (S.O. Urmson, S. Hampshire)? Or are they like and yet unlike all of those alternatives (S.E. Toulmin)?¹⁶

The Oxford School was also dissatisfied with the place the emotivists assigned to cognition. [p.8>]

Stevenson had restored a certain cognitive element to ethics, but the relevance of factual reasons remained essentially a psychological rather than a logical concern. Could such reasons—so they queried—be declared irrelevant simply because they clashed with attitudes, feelings or dispositions? There must be a more integral connection between cognition (logic) and valuation (ethics). Value judgements can

¹⁵ C.L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (1944), *Facts and Values* (1963).

¹⁶ R.M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (1952), *Freedom and Reason* (1963); Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (1954); Urmson “On Grading”, *Mind* 59 (1950); Hampshire, “Fallacies in Moral Philosophy”, *Mind* 58 (1949), *Thought and Action* (1959); Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics* (1950).

be defended or refuted by appeal to facts and to the findings of empirical sciences. Even though one cannot logically derive an “ought” from an “is,” a “value” from a “fact,” an “ought” can be based on, or grounded in, or established by reference to factual beliefs.

Failure to distinguish these two matters has led many to consider value judgments as ultimate, irrational and literally-meaningless. Although the general direction of meta-ethical philosophy is clearly moving away from the so-called “non-cognitivist” denial of truth claims for ethical utterances towards a recognition of the logical foundations of any and all ethical statements,¹⁷ there are deep differences as to how the cognitive element is to be taken up in ethics. Are there special rules of inference for ethical discourse (Toulmin, Hampshire), or are the “ordinary” rules of logic sufficient, in which case moral judgments could be treated as deductive enthymemes (Hare, Nowell-Smith, Prior)?

5. The lack of an intramural consensus on basic issues bespeaks the crucial stadium in which meta-ethics (and L.A.) finds itself at present.¹⁸

Two matters deserve particular attention.

a. The growing concern for the logical foundations of ethical judgments is now being accompanied with the suggestion that it may be proper and even necessary to begin speaking (again) of ethical statements as valid, true, and correct. [p.9>

Not every reason is a “good reason”! Meta-ethics requires “rules to judge when a reason is valid and when not.” But this stress on the logic of moral reasoning is beginning to endanger the major thesis that ethical statements are not primarily cognitive. What now?¹⁹

h. The more or less conscious restriction of ethics (impelled by the slogan, “every statement has its own logic”)²⁰ to an analysis of ethical predicates, has terminated in a blind alley of endlessly-multiplying sub-distinctions and “senses.” To avoid such an *ad absurdum* absolutizing of distinctions, there is a conscious grouping—in various directions—for criteria to distinguish uses. Only shortly after having expelled the problems of normativity, validity and truth from meta-ethics, they are caught creeping in through a side door.

In this complex and rapidly evolving situation, various adjustments are being made. At the present moment, these adjustments seem to be going in two main directions. On the one hand, “spectator” theories are developing which, lacking any reference to a particular person and place or to the existence of actual persons, attempt to regain

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that whereas Harvey Cox perfunctorily dismisses the “cognitive” branch of L.A. in favor of the “non-cognitivist” position (cf. *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*), Paul Lehman, another leading American theologian (cf. *Ethics in a Christian Context*, 1963) argues that “non-cognitivism” is no longer a tenable position.

¹⁸ The first glimmerings of realization that L.A. is not merely a “sharpened tool” lacking all “metaphysical pretensions” is one of the striking features of the present situation. Strawson advocates a “descriptive metaphysics” which is “content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world rather than a historically popular revisionary metaphysics” which is “concerned to produce a better structure” (cf. *Individuals* (1959), p. 9ff). The emergence of a “new” metaphysics is no surprise—even from the standpoint of L.A. itself. As we have sketched, L.A. has long acted as a *meta* (physics) in ethics, thus the name, meta-ethics.

¹⁹ As a forthright example of the on-going effort to solve the problems, Paul Taylor’s *Normative Discourse* (1961) deserves attention.

²⁰ Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis* (1953) p. 79. Cf. also Toulmin, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

“objectivity” and “absoluteness” for ethical judgments. “X is right” means that an *ideal* spectator would approve X.²¹ On the other hand in direct contrast to the “spectator” approach, “agent” theories are emerging which, emphasizing that judging is a personal activity with a specific intention which gives its meaning, desire to return to the role of the wise man *doing* ethics, rather than the analyst *talking about* ethics. Meaning can never be deduced merely from the words employed; rather the agent’s intentions dictate the way a word is utilized and assign its meaning. All this implies that it is impossible to investigate the general grounds upon which some human activities are to be preferred above others.²²

III. An Apercu or “Overview”

Has meta-ethics solved the problem of values? Before drawing conclusions, let us summarize the development.

1. Moore began by denying that value-statements can be translated without loss of meaning into the factual statements of empirical science. Values have their own right of existence and it is an objective existence. Ethics is autonomous.

2. Ayer c.s. agree that values are not facts, but they declare values to be subjective preferences meaningless for scientific knowledge, rather than objective properties.

[p.10>]

3. Stevenson retracts by pointing out that fact, can be employed as reasons in support of value preferences. But value judgments remain primarily “emotive” and subjective.

4. The Oxford School denies that “values” as such exist, they do not refer to anything outside of themselves. Value-judgments have an evaluative, practical use. Nevertheless, they contain a real factual and thus cognitive aspect.

5. But how do we relate and integrate the *factual* and the *valuational*? That is still the big question! In some theories the factual is beginning to devour the valuational, result; a gain in “objectivity” at the cost of a fall into a “naturalism.” In other theories, the subjective, individual character of valuation is underlined—result: the ‘autonomy’ of ethics is saved at the cost of “objectivity.”

IV “Dilemmas”

We need waste little time on conclusions.

Everyone is conscious of the multitude of questions and paucity of answers. Theories have been unable to solve the basic problems. A more important and disturbing question demands our attention: why have the ethicists been unable to solve or even present a perspective which promises to solve the matters at issue? It is the present writer’s conviction that a fruitful development has been nipped in the bud by the presence of a persistent and pernicious dilemma. In one way or another, but in some way, “facts” are placed over against “values.” One knows, it is said, the facts: he really never knows values. Or, theoretical reason knows, practical reason evaluates! Factual judgments are true, this can not be said in the same sense for value judgments.

²¹ For example, R.B. Brands’ Qualified Attitude Method. Similar views are proposed by Roderick Firth, J. Harrison and F.S. Sharp. W.K. Frankena’s sympathies move in this direction (cf. also M. White, *Towards Reunion in Philosophy* (1956).

²² Hampshire and Urmson are the leading names to be mentioned

Or, the more modern version, the function of ethical terms is primarily practical (has to do with “values”) and not descriptive (has to do with facts as in science). In spite of the real and growing desire to repair the (logical) break between moral and factual judgments, there is still an unquestioned assumption that “facts” and “values” are in some sense antithetical.

The attempts at reconstruction concentrate on narrowing the gap, or throwing over a bridge. The “gap” remains—deep and as real as ever. In the proportion the width of the chasm is narrowed its depth is accentuated.

“Facts” as scientifically knowable, objective and intelligible are placed over against ‘values’ as non-natural intuited properties of objects, or more radically, as irrational, subjective preferences or relations.

The strange fact that contemporary value theorists find themselves unable—their intentions to the contrary—to break through the fact value dualism prompts one to probe deeper into the problematics. One discovers that the theorists concerned conceive of reality as consisting critically of the (logical) subject over against the object (the world), as the cognitive, inner world of human consciousness over against an external, objective, empirical and factual world. When one begins from this *a priori* split of reality into “subject” and ‘object’ as professors Dooyeweerd and Mekkes have repeatedly stressed, difficulties are myriad and contradictions inescapable. One is saddled, willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, with dilemmas which he is never able to [p.11] shake. The subject(exhausted, so to speak, in the logical function) is wrested out of its place in the coherence of reality; it no longer exists under the law-order of creation, it is “free.” But—and this is the crucial factor in the discussion of value theories, it is the insurmountable obstacle for subjectivism—even the most subjectivistic school of philosophy is forced to admit the existence of some kind of external ‘ought’ in relation to the subject. That is to say, although the theorists do not wish to recognize an irreducible law-order which holds for subjects as well as objects (the subject-side of reality), they must account for it in some way. One way, very popular today, is to speak of “values.”

Speaking of values instead of norms or laws is a subjectivistic way of accounting for the not-to-be-escaped normativity given in reality (the structural norm-laws). By means of such concepts, the theorist attempts to usher meaning-determining law back into the picture. Once having introduced the concept, the philosopher must account for the “new’ factor. There are in the last analysis only two possibilities available. Either the concept of value must be explained in reference to the creative, free *subject* or to the static universally valid *object*; for after all, this is the way reality “is” subject over against object. Thus begins the pendulum like oscillation between subject and object which characterizes value-philosophy.

Refusing to acknowledge the unique irreducible character of norm-laws, one is forced to look for the origin and seat of norm-activity in the subject-side, either in subject or object, thus confusing the two “sides” of reality. The result is paradoxical in the extreme: one is continually occupied in extricating himself from labyrinths of his own making. Dooyeweerd has expressed it most succinctly: “niet in de onderscheiding van wetszijde en subjectzijde van de empirische werkelijkheid, maar veeleer in de eliminerinq van deze ondoorcheiding zich in een dualistisch uitgangspunt openbaart.”²³

²³ Dooyeweerd, “Van Peursen’s kritische vragen,” *Philosophia Reformata*, XXV 3/4 (1960), p. 108.

Value theories are guilty of (mis)using the truth that norm laws are only subjectively binding when there is subjective recognition. However, this real element of subjective freedom and responsibility which comes into its own in positivation/evaluation, must not be taken from under the law and absolutised. In such instances the subject is elevated to the position of creator, rather than of actualizer, or unfolders of meaning. This ‘enthronement’ or absolutization is clear in the case of the ‘subjectivistic’ theories, it is no less true in the case of the so-called ‘objectivistic’ conceptions.

Even if the ‘values’ are termed ‘intrinsic’ or ‘objective’ they owe their very existence to a subject who ‘tore’ them out of their place in the law-order and ‘gave’ them an ‘*a priori objective*’ EXISTENCE. ‘Intrinsic value’ is a *blind* behind which hides the hidden operator, it is a subterfuge designed to conceal the subject.

In conclusion: if the subject is not openly considered the law-giver, he is sure to be lurking in the shadows calmly ‘pulling the strings.’ A concept of ‘value’ is the result of a back-door squeeze in which a new (third) element enters surreptitiously under the guise of being ‘objective’ or ‘subjective.’ Whether in its blatant subjectivistic form, or in its misleading objectivistic form, the idea of ‘value’ is a ‘creation’ of Reason. It is but another fabrication, or more suitably, machination, contrived to [p.12>] allow man to say the last Word.

As we have noticed, the concept of ‘value’ is in a real sense a *Fremdkörper*, albeit a necessary one. This implies that a value theory must cope with tensions on every side. Let me note three such complications or dilemmas.

1. A fact-value dualism is inherent in value theory. In one case the norm laws, robbed of their holding-power by being transformed into subjective creations of mankind, stand antithetically over against the ‘facts’ (natural, pre-logical, reality).

In the other case, their cosmic connections of meaning which bind them to the fixed laws severed the norm laws are assigned to an isolated non-natural realm of values over against a natural realm of facts. In theories of the first type, value-relativism is a continuing threat. But neither do theories of the second type offer a substantial guard against the dangers of relativism and historicism. The absolute values are cut off (*ab-solvere*) so completely from the earth that they are value-less for life on this earth.

2. Some kind of contrast between knowing and valuing is always part of a value theory. In ‘subjectivistic’ theories, value judgements are considered too subjective to be capable of being universally valid. They cannot be true in the same sense as facts are true. ‘Objectivistic’ theories are compelled to introduce a *special* way of knowing (often intuition, or feeling) as it is obvious that values are not known in the same way as empirical natural facts. The result is a contrast between analytically qualified acts of knowing and (usually) psychologically qualified acts of valuing or intuiting.

3. Perhaps the most exasperating problem for value theories—and they are only too well aware of its difficulty—concerns the very possibility of a *theory* of values. Within their framework of subject over against object, there are only two alternatives in relation to a science of values. *Either reason (logical subject) must be given complete access to “values:” or it must be given no access to “values.”* But both choices are impossibilities! If it were possible—it is not—to give theoretical thought complete access to the post-logical spheres, theoretical knowledge as such would be

impossible. Ironically any attempt to logicize reality is faced with the fact that if it is successful it has eliminated its very possibility. Only *in* a previously given diversity is there the possibility of *logical* distinguishing. On the other hand, it is self-evident that if reason is refused access to values, there can be no talk of *science* of...

Ultimately, even if value theories claim to refuse access to reason they end up endeavouring to gain complete logical access. They simply have no other choice within the confines of their general schema. The logical subject begins to manipulate with the “Gegenstand,” until theoretical knowledge usurps the realm of practical knowledge. (Value judgments must be scientific or they are not true, etc.) If one resists this move, value judgments are no longer considered answerable to the norm of truth (because logical correctness is identified with the Truth). [p.13>]

But now, the legitimacy and possibility of a science of values is again cast into doubt.

Reality does not allow a consistent working out of either choice. Thus, if one chooses for logical access, he is forced at some point to make a “leap” of sorts to save values from being devoured by theoretical thought. If the choice falls for no access, there is always a *shift, or leap* of sorts to enable thought to deal in some way with values.

V. Positive Considerations

As a way out of the thicket in which contemporary value theory is caught, I suggest that the *Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee* has much to offer.²⁴ Let me begin by summarizing the basic issues relevant to our discussion.

1. In order to avoid the dualisms rampant in value theory, it is necessary—as has been suggested earlier—to distinguish between the law-order of creation and that which is subject to the law (subject-side). These two sides of creation are in correlation. Without law (to determine), existence is impossible. Without that which is subject to the law (*sub-jacere*), law has no meaning. The creation-order is the necessary *condition* for our existence. Bound by the law man is free to act; this is life before the face of God.

2. The possibility of knowledge and *a fortiori* of theoretical knowledge rests completely in the given coherence of the cosmos. Access to reality is possible because man himself is part of reality. The modal aspects of reality are not alien to him, they are also his. It is a concrete act of thought, in which man is intuitively aware that reality is also his reality, that man gains access to subjects and objects. This general awareness of reality, including a general consciousness of norms, comes over men in intuitive self-reflection. Mankind’s sense of justice and morality, for example, is evidence of the everyday, concrete, non-scientific, intuitive grasp of the meaning of the ethical and juridical principles. Since man is taken up in the full, reality, he only grasps the modal aspects implicitly within the total structures which he experiences, and does not bring to conscious articulation, for example, the explicit character of ethical norms in contrast to logical or social norms. Concrete experience, only possible because of the indissoluble inter-modal coherence of the logical and a-logical aspects, functions by means of the subject-object relation.

Man’s thought has access to reality through what is called the logical-object side of reality.

²⁴ Little has been written from the viewpoint of the WDW over value-philosophies. Prof. Mekkes’ inaugural “rede,” *De Beteekenis van het Subject in de Moderne Waarde-Philosophie onder het Licht der Wetsidee* (1949), has been of tremendous help and deserves special mention.

Since all of the post-logical spheres have a logical retrocipation (analogy), the normative aspects are accessible to (theoretical) thought. In addition, since a full act has all the aspects of reality, the logical aspect itself is also present as a sub- or foundational function. [p.14>]

3. Motivated by the Central Law of Love, mankind is called to the discovery, recognition and concretization (positivization) of the structural laws inherent in the cosmos. The resulting positive laws form the “bridge” between the Central Love Command and the structural law.²⁵ The norm laws (the logical and post-logical aspects), as distinct from the fixed laws (pre-logical)²⁶ require human recognition and actualization in accordance with historical development before they are subjectively binding. All positive laws derive their validity, their compelling character, their binding force from the firmness and steadfastness (Truth) of the divide faithfully maintained by the Father in Jesus Christ. Without the anchor-relation to the law-order, positive law is adrift, and sooner or later (when the storm breaks in all its fury) would dash itself to pieces on the rocks of historicism, relativism, and subjectivism. In actual fact, this “breaking to pieces” is always hampered, and ultimately defeated by the (recognized or not) presence of the anchor. However, in the degree that theoretical accounts seek to do without the “anchor,” catastrophic upheaval is always imminent. See here the cause of the tensions in value theories.

Valuation

The element of positivizing is an inherent part of the post-historical law-spheres. It is the historical analogy of these spheres (underlining the point that positivization depends on the stage of cultural development). The logical analogy of the post-historical spheres reveals itself in the possibility of free human choice and judgment in positivization. By observing certain, shall we say, ethical *law-conformities* given in experience, we have insight—always inadequate—into ethical norm laws on the basis of which we form, positive laws.

By the nature of the case, these formulations are always open to correction.

Although this process of positivization has always been stressed in the WDW, there is no clear understanding as to its nature and scope. In positivization according to Prof. Dooyeweerd “the human formative will is then to be conceived of as a *subjective moment* on the law-side of these law-spheres themselves.”²⁷ In view of his own repeated insistence that the acting subject is always under law, it appears that this definition is open to misunderstanding. Would it not be more satisfactory to conceive of positivization as a completely subjective act? If this is indeed the state of affairs, one need not distinguish qualitatively between an act of positivization and evaluation. In fact, there is but one process. One could perhaps reserve the term positivization for the last phase or last step of a series of evaluations. That is; on the basis of knowledge gained in valuations, one decides to concretize a (positive) law. There is an [p.15>] on-going, never-ending interaction of valuation and positivization. A positive law or norm, as a specification of the structural norm law, is valid as long as it has (or is thought to have) value in relation to previously positivized norms and in the final analysis to the norm law itself. A norm has value when it is recognized as valid. When, in the anticipatory direction, it becomes obvious that a certain norm no

²⁵ D.H.Th. Vollenhoven, *Kort Overzicht*, p. 2. I find this particular way of expressing the relation, very helpful and clear.

²⁶ Only in their *retrocipatory* structure are the fixed laws independent of human formation.

²⁷ Dooyeweerd, *New Critique*, Vol. II, p. 239.

longer meets the requirements, it has lost its value and a new norm must be positivized.

Valuation is a completely subjective human act in which man enjoys freedom and responsibility under the norm laws of creation. It may not be conceived of as an act in which the autonomous subject calls “values” to being, nor may it be deprived, on the other hand, of the real element of freedom involved. Evaluation per se never takes place. It always bears a more precise qualification. One speaks of ethical evaluation, economic social, etc., there are as many qualifications as normative law-spheres.

At this stage of my thinking, I am inclined to consider the act of evaluation as such an analytically qualified act of knowing. This act of knowing is then enkaptically interwoven in various states of affairs (all bearing their own qualification) in the diverse societal relationships. The color and the tone of the evaluation depends on this further qualification.

Ethical evaluation is to be regarded as an ethically qualified act of thinking.²⁸ In the act of evaluating, one distinguishes, arranges, combines, compares, and finally judges under the *leading* of and in agreement with the norms of the sphere into which the act is enkaptically bound.

To approach the matter from another angle, logical judgments—and this is what the value philosophers often blandly pass by—contain the same subjective element, no more and no less, that is found in ethical judgements. There is no essential difference between acts of (logical “knowing” and post-logical) valuation, as if one is logical and the other a-logical. Logical evaluation and ethical evaluation differ only in the qualifying aspect of the act. Logical knowing is valuation, and inversely, ethical evaluation is knowing. A contrasting of “knowing” and “valuing” is simply an impossible division: the results of “knowing” (science) must always be evaluated in order to be used, and science is itself a responsible, thus evaluative task.

“Facts” and “Values”

Having cut through the knowing-valuing dualism, we have also “done in” the fact-value antithesis. It is impossible to ascertain *factual* ethical relations (even when the facts are in conflict with the norms) apart from ethical *norms*. There is no pure, neutral, objective knowing of the facts. “Brute facts” do not exist. Facts are only meaningful in an order, they only speak when structured. To know anything about facts one must have an awareness of *order*. Valuation is necessary in a (simple) establishment of the facts. Facts require norms for their very existence. Norms take on subjective form in facts. Apart from the normative structures, there is no way to acknowledge the constant structures one confronts in reality, such as state, church and family. The relationship or correlation of fact and norm is explicit, for example, when one talks of a *good* family. But it is just as real, although implicit, when one names a certain group of individuals [p.16>] a family. How does one know that this particular group is a family? There is only one answer: it meets the norm for the family. Insight into the facts takes place in the light of *norms*; therefore, no light, no sight!

In view of the circumstance that the terms “fact” and especially “value” are burdened by the weight of much historic ballast, it is advisable to avoid employing them as much as possible—at least until a process of redefinition has taken place. In place of

²⁸ Such an act ought not to be confused with an act of ethical knowing. The latter is an ethical act (of a retrociprocity type) in which the logical basic moment comes to the fore whereas the former is an analytical act (of an anticipatory type) enkaptically bound by an ethically qualified state of affairs.

“facts” one could speak of “states of affairs.” Facts are the states of affairs in which norms have been realized. It is permissible to speak of *having* value, or being valuable. In such cases one is observing that an object meets the demands of a norm (more or less). We must at all times be zealous to avoid giving occasion for one to think that either “facts” or ‘values’ have *an sich* existence. Extreme caution is urged lest we are trapped (once more) in the snare from which we have just been released. We ought to talk of economic, or ethical etc. norms and economic ethical, etc. states of affairs in which these norms are realized. But, I can imagine someone would object “you too pointed to the difference between saying a *good* family and simply taking note of the family’s existence. Moreover, is it not true that there is often widespread agreement as to the “facts” and complete disagreement as to their valuation?”

There is indeed general agreement about a great many things, something for which we must be extremely thankful. However, this agreement on further scrutiny is not as “deep” or as universal as first impressions mislead one to believe. Especially in the “later normative law-spheres,” it is particularly difficult to establish “facts” without being accused by another of reading—in your prejudices. This state of affairs—an insurmountable obstacle for value theories with their objective universally valid facts—underscores our contention that valuation plays a central role in the establishing of facts.

However, although valuation is involved in observing the existence of a family as well as in judging that it is a good family, there is a typical difference involved which may not be overlooked. It is this difference which provided the fact-value distinction a semblance of truth.

When one mentions a family, he is dealing with the retrocipatory closed restrictions structure. When he goes on to judge whether the family is good or bad, he is dealing with the anticipatory, opened up, regulative structure.

Validity and Valuation

The actualization of norms and the valuation of states of affairs finds its origin in the person who is the executor of the acts. This [p.17>] valuation and positivation is *unfolding*—not giving of meaning—and occurs as a necessary subjective answer to the law-order which in its revelatory, impinging character demands recognition. Acts are always answers to the Law. The human answers result in increased or arrested unfolding of the meaning of the Law. Human valuation takes place in the *givenness* of the cosmic law-order but it *begins* in (transcendental) self-reflection. This implies that the state of affairs open up to the evaluating subject in the anticipatory direction under the leading of the pistical aspect (either in belief or disbelief). For faith, as the terminal function “is driven on directly by impulses from the religious root of human existence, for good or for evil.”²⁹ Valuation receives its meaning and unity from the central choice of a man’s heart in answer to the Law of Love. This choice of Obedience or Disobedience gives the direction to the valuation. How one evaluates and positivizes depends on the central direction (Good or Evil)³⁰ which “lives” in man’s heart and which directs man’s bodily (functional) life. The validity of human

²⁹ Dooyeweerd, *op. cit.*, p. 293

³⁰ The good-evil distinction is the “derde hepaaldheid” in addition to the individual and modal distinctions. Cf. Vollenhoven *Isaoque*, p. 49ff. and Dooyeweerd, *op. cit.*, p. 148. Without awareness of the religious character of good in its full meaning, one is at a loss when he must interpret modal good-evil distinctions.

valuation, that is, whether one truly recognizes what has value and what does not, depends on its agreement with the normative law-order. Complete agreement with the law-order (in principle possible) is only possible when the evaluator stands *right* over against the Law of God and thus is *good* and *up-right*. (Since Evil lives as a parasite off the Good, there is always a fragmented and relative recognition of true states of affairs outside of a personal faith in Jesus Christ.) Since it finds or rather attempts to find certainty in cosmic reality, disbelief sooner or later strangles or petrifies the process of valuation and positivation in its dynamic directedness to the Fullness of Meaning in Jesus Christ and through Him to God the Father. This is immediately obvious when it is realized that certainly implies a *resting place*. If rest is found in some aspect or segment of reality, there is no impetus to further movement. The “complication” which shatters every such effort to find rest within reality is the fact that “nothing” in creation rests in itself, but only finds its meaning—is meaning in an interwovenness with all the Fullness of Meaning. Rest cannot be found in a restless creation.