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[p.167>]

In survey. Basic problems

As we have discovered in chapter four, not only Moore but twentieth-century Anglo-American moral philosophy on the whole has struggled and is struggling with the problem of values and valuation. This being the case, prior to outlining a position designed to avoid the present impasse, it should be helpful to focus attention in more general fashion on a number of basic problems.

FACTS AND VALUES: AN UNTENABLE DUALISM

Variations on the Fact-Value Theme

A fact-value dualism can take on many forms. “Facts,” it is often asserted, stand in one way or another over against “values.” First one comes to know the facts; then, if need be, he ascertains *The Place of Value in a World of Facts*.¹ Knowing is regarded as the portion of theoretical reason, valuing the forte of practical reason. Whereas factual judgments can be true, value judgments are at best partially susceptible to such true-false designations.

Philosophically, fact-value dualisms in which objective brute facts stand over against and independent of objective absolute values are no longer in fashion. In the first place, due to increased recognition of the role of the human subject as well as a growing awareness of the worthlessness of cut-off (absolute) values, values have been more and more identified as *subjective* embodiments of human preferences, desires and idiosyncracies [*sic*]. Concomitantly, but in much slower tempo, only in the last years approaching crescendo in the English-speaking world, there arose the disturbing suspicion that *an sich*, “brute” facts are simply impossibilities. Facts only speak in context. Facts are relative to situations and viewers.² And since they are not sacred, it is as foolish as unnecessary to worship them.³ [p.168>]

All this means that more recent theories, while maintaining the dichotomy, have stressed the connection and the demand to tighten it. This is not surprising in that social, ethical, political, economic, etc. facts cannot be described apart from “values” (or, as we prefer, norms) and likewise “values” lose all meaning apart from their connection with and realization in facts.

In comparison, the latest fashion as evidenced in so-called meta-ethical theories is somewhat disconcerting. The remarkable feature is a strong emphasis on the descriptive-evaluative contrast coupled with an explicit denial of the *existence* of values, whether they be objective or subjective. Value terms and judgments of value are irreducible to matters of facts or judgments of fact, presumably because of their different logical behavior.⁴ In contrast to the descriptive theoretical nature of factual

judgments, value judgments fulfill certain practical, i.e. non-theoretical, purposes: they are action-guiding and choice-commending. The advance in respect to previous theories is obvious and immediate. Value judgments need no longer squirm under the harassment [*sic*] of the descriptive-model of language under which they could never be anything but second-rate judgments and ethics a second-rate science. With the declaration that value judgments are essentially non-descriptive, the way is open, it is said, for ethics to be a science, a *sui generis* science in the full sense of the word.

But, as we have already seen in some detail in chapter four, this novel approach to ethics is not without its own problems. Do value judgments [p.169>] possess meaning if they do not refer outside themselves? The read retort that “use” is equivalent with “meaning” is of little help. For certainly meaning is not exhausted in linguistic use—as if meaning is merely to employ words in certain ways. Can such a claim even be made in regard to linguistic meaning? Is it not rather the case that one speaks of linguistic meaning only when words are used to signify something beyond themselves?

This being the real state of affairs, the “reference” character could not be eliminated. Toulmin has his “good reasons,” Hare talks of “descriptive meaning.” Suddenly all the problems involved in the more traditional value theories make their appearance. Toulmin, for example, cannot permit his factual “good reasons” and moral conclusions to coincide if he wishes to save the integrity of the ethical language-game. Yet he cannot fulfill his purpose of enlightening mankind without fostering the impression that the reasons are the equivalents of moral judgments. In any case, as we have seen, his solution trades on the built-in ambiguity of “good” in “good reasons.” Since Hare considers that value terms themselves possess descriptive meaning, the matter of relation is even more crucial for him. Just what is the connection of evaluative and descriptive meaning in value terms? Since the descriptive meaning involved in value terms is determined by moral substantive principles acting as criteria of application (and not by factual characteristics), the fact-value hook-up occurs in some never explained way by means of individual decisions taken in the process of formulating moral principles.

At the present time ethical theory is especially concerned to repair the break between valuational and factual judgments. Nevertheless, it remains an un questioned assumption that a contrast of sorts is real. Even those who deny the existence of values have an undulled sense of the more-than-factual character of reality. (How else can one finally explain the retention of the descriptive-valuational dichotomy?) The attempts at reconstruction aim at narrowing the gap or throwing over a bridge. The gap remains—as deep, although not as wide, as ever. In the proportion that the width of the chasm is narrowed, its depth is accentuated. These on-going, in the heart of the matter dialectic efforts pressing for reconciliation are, however, shrouded in mist. For if they were to succeed, if the logical connection were firmly laid out, the dualism itself would collapse. Either “values” are merely blown-up facts or “facts” are merely emasculated, impoverished values. The very nature of the dualism demands the reality of an unbridgeable fact-value gulf.

But, and this is the thorn which rankled Moore and which chafes his epigoni: without a firm logical connection between facts and values, ethical science proper is suspended and one has to do with a disguised psychology or logic etc. It is this enigmatic character (mandatory but impossible connection) which gives the extreme positions an undeniable attraction. Here we need only remind ourselves of those who

at the present feel the urge to take the plunge into the cold but bracing waters of facticity. [p.170>]

The (Im) Possibility of a Theory of Values

Perhaps the most exasperating problem for theorists concerns the very possibility of a theory of values. Within the fact-value framework there are basically and certainly ultimately only two alternatives in relation to a science of values. *Either reason (as logical subject with its logical apparatus) must be allowed complete access or it must be allowed no access to values.* If à la Moore values are declared indefinable, or à la Hare one cannot move from a factual to an evaluative judgment, a science of ethics is per se impossible. If à la Naturalism science is permitted free entrée, a science of ethics is per se impossible. In the former case, the terrain of ethics proper remains outside the pale of scientific thought. If a science of *ethics* is nevertheless formulated, it is without fail some other discipline masquerading under the ethical banner. In the latter instance, since ethical questions are “handled” in the same way as questions of the natural sciences, ethical science is transformed into a natural science. In neither case can one speak of a real science of ethics.

At this point there must be no misunderstanding. It is not that we are forcing ethicists into a schema of our making and thereafter faulting them for failing to choose either alternative. Nor are we claiming that they wish or intend to choose between these alternatives. Indeed, it is obvious that third or in-between stances are often adopted. Rather the matter at hand is that the philosophers concerned, through their absolutization of logic, make it impossible for themselves to establish a third position without falling into antinomies. Once logic is conceived to be abstract, formal and pure, cut off from all that is non-logical, the said thinkers, their desires notwithstanding, have laid upon themselves the dilemma: Either logic is taken to be everything (cosmic diversity is reduced to logical diversity) or logic remains isolated in itself (and there is no scientific contact with reality). A third position endeavouring to avoid either horn is necessarily involved in inconsistency.

The situation becomes even more complex when one considers that the alternatives are in themselves impossibilities. If it were feasible to give theoretic thought complete access to values, theoretical knowledge as such would be unobtainable. Any attempt to logicize reality is faced with the fact that if it were successful, it has eliminated its very possibility. Only *in* a previously given diversity is one able to distinguish logically.⁵ At the same time, it is [p.171>] self-evident that if reason is permitted no entrance, there is no science of values. This being the state of affairs, it is clear that in-between positions are advocated. Since, however, a middle stance is thoroughly defined by its extremes, the besetting problem is to avoid and equally to justify the rejection of the extremes. And it is just here that the value theories have not been able to prove them selves. Although in themselves generally most instructive, these positions are unable to break through the basic problematics with its adherent dilemmas.

Although Ayer is often berated for his crudeness, it is to his credit that he realized the last consequences of considering values irreducible and unrelated to facts: ethical science is as such eliminated. Since then ethicists have labored unceasingly, as we have seen, to rehabilitate ethics as a science. One of the most attractive variations on Moore’s theme is that of Hare. What has been exposed as a dire shortcoming (no science of *ethics*) Hare parades as a virtue. Ethics is simply logic, the logical study of

the language of morals. However, since Hare is still concerned to be an ethicist, he must demonstrate that ethics does not lose out by being defined as logic. And this proved to be an impossible task. In this context it is no surprise that Naturalism, be it in new irrationalistic forms, is once again showing itself. For then an ethics with content is once again possible. But can this renascent Naturalism avoid reducing ethics once again to another natural science. It would seem, if our analysis is correct, that sooner or later another “Moore” will arrive on the scene bent on exposing the “naturalistic fallacy.”

The Form-Matter Bifurcation

The same problem comes into somewhat different focus when considered, as it customarily is, from out of form-matter bifurcation (of one type or another) in which form is considered logical and matter non-logical. If one chooses for no logical access, or if values have no opening to the logical, a formal-logicistic or content-less ethics will emerge. If one chooses for logical access, or if values have an opening for the logical, a material science of sorts will develop. Since the latter choice is excluded for one who adheres to a fact-value dualism, it is not surprising that the formal note predominates in the theories we have discussed. It is also predictable that a cry will soon be raised for a material ethics with an accompanying minimizing of the fact-value dualism. As we have noticed, the chant has already begun.

Moore attempted, we recall, to reconcile both traditions in ethics. By separating the formal and material questions, respectively, what is the meaning of good? and, what things are good and right?, he sought to give both elements a respectable place in ethics. He was thus consistent in denying logical thought access to the (formal) good (QI) and in granting it access to (material) right. Nevertheless, in line with his choice for the integrity of values, the formal [p.172>] question is the primary query and intuited answers to it (in QII) are necessary before one can answer the secondary question as to the right (QIII). The paradoxical and sterile character of this schema has already been demonstrated. In Moore’s second phase the form-matter schema rears its head in the starkest possible manner. How can one relate (formal) values to their (material, natural) content?

Post-Moorean ethicists have taken the logical inaccessibility of values as something over which to cheer rather than lament. Ethics is simply the logico lingual investigation of ethical judgments. That is to say; having witnessed Moore’s discomfort in trying to bring form and matter together under one roof, later analysts restricted ethics to formal, logical investigations similar to the ones carried on by Moore in complex QI. Material, normative answers to the “big” questions are outside the purview of ethical science. Such matters are answered by the natural sciences, in some instances by “ordinary” ethics employing the tools sharpened by the meta-ethical craftsman, and often such issues are simply left to the individual conscience of the man on the street. Meta-ethics is responsible only for the “form,” other authorities are responsible for the “content.” Ethics has retreated into a morally-antiseptic logico-lingual vacuum.

The full implications of this formalization of ethics can only be properly seen when our horizon is lifted and we discover that other socio-cultural sciences are also in many instances claiming to be only responsible for the “form.” Although this topic deserves intensive and extensive investigation, it is beyond the scope of the present work. Still, with an eye to its importance, a word or two must be said. The situation is

such that all these sciences tend to relegate the question of content and normativity to the science of ethics. But ethics itself is busy absolving itself from any obligation in regard to content. The result is as clear as it is tragic. Each of the sciences claims to be formal (and thus empirical and descriptive) and regards the other as material (and thus normative). While mankind craves answers, scientists play musical chairs.⁶

Legal theory, economics, sociology, etc., it is said, need deal only with “forms.” Any discussion of norms, goals and preferences (“content”) apart from their logical clarification is the responsibility of ethics. But now ethics too has gone “logical” and refuses to accept the onus of “telling” mankind what it ought to do. But—and this fact deserves underlining—just because *both* the legal theorist and the ethicist can construct plausible cases supporting their positions, the unsatisfactory and eventually contradictory character of the formal-material [p.172>] distinction is revealed. The “content” of, say, economic activity cannot be so *a*-economic as is supposed in “pure economics” for the simple reason that it would then be impossible for “pure ethics” (meta-ethics) to claim that it only is responsible for the form and economics for the content. To dissect an economic act into an economically-neutral material segment and an ethically-neutral formal segment is as infeasible as the reverse, dividing it into ethically-neutral content and economically-neutral form.⁷ As form and content do not exist in themselves, there is never form without content or vice versa. A denotation (form) always presupposes a connotation (content). It is always the form *of* a content. If form is separated from content, with form considered the monopoly of one science and content of another, the result is an “internally antinomic exclusivism”⁸ involving the disintegration of the respective sciences.

The antinomic results of a theory built on a form-matter distinction also imply that no theory can hold to this viewpoint. The impossibility of remaining pure and formal is intimated in the very name meta-ethics. For to move beyond (meta), one must move from somewhere. “Ordinary ethics,” whether officially recognized or not, is necessary as a foundation, or at least, as a jumping off place. But how can one draw a line between ethics and meta-ethics which will stand up? In the degree that meta-ethics maintains its ethical neutrality, it is simply a logico-lingual exercise. Only when the form-matter division is violated do the first beginnings of ethics enter the picture.

Thus it is to be expected that insofar as the theorists discussed wish to be ethicists they will, their theory to the contrary, be forced to deal with normative matters. Indeed this is the case. Despite his claims to operate in a neutral descriptive way, Toulmin in fact has read a normative principle (harmony) into the facts. At the same time, his good reasons turn out not only to be logically valid but also ethically normative. Insofar as Hare is able to mitigate substantial ethical disputes, he is forced to smuggle in material considerations under the cover of logical formality. In each case the re-appearance of the material insures that the science in question will indeed have an ethical bite. At the same time, its presence makes any claim to neutrality impossible.

A FUNDAMENTAL DIFFICULTY

A fact-value dualism entangles all who accept it in perplexing, not to say, intractable and insuperable situations. Must one then take flight and land up with an extreme position? From the argument presented thus far, the answer is short and discouraging: one can only avoid an extreme position by adopting some form of the fact-value dualism. Nevertheless there is another possibility. [p.174>]

The strangeness of this situation lifts when one understands that a fact-value dualism in some form is unavoidable for those inclined to moderation as long as they operate within the confines of a certain ontological framework. And since all the ethicists considered thus far have this framework in common, they have no choice but to adopt a version of the fact-value dualism. It is this framework, consciously or unconsciously presupposed, but seldom critically examined, which demands attention and which is in fact the fundamental difficulty.

The Subject-Object (or Noetic-Ontic) Schema

The philosophers concerned accept unquestioningly, often naively, a certain assumption: reality consists ontically of the human subject (more or less identified with the logical function) over against the world (more or less identified with the pre-logical aspects). The “subjective” *cogito* and “objective” *cogitata*, the knower and the known, knowledge and reality—the dualism constantly returns in different dress. On the one hand, the subject, free and autonomous, stands over against law-bound Nature (the object). On the other hand, the subject is inexorably bound to Nature. In the last analysis everything must find its origin and explanation in relation to the “subject” or the “object.”

This schema, the absolutization of the theoretical subject-object relation,⁹ has traditionally served as the framework in which, and the vehicle by which, the freedom-nature or autonomy-domination motive has worked itself out.¹⁰ The ethicists we have considered, driven by this motive, have *bound* their thought to the subject-object schema in a logicistic manner *as if* it squared with the states of affairs. While the autonomy drive lodges itself more or less securely in the subjective logical function (with or without another subjective function), the impulse to domination, itself especially since Kant installed in [p.175>] the subjective logical function, fixes its glance on the to-be-mastered objective pole.

The free subject is driven to master “nature” by means of theoretical thought. But the eventual result is the very intimidation of the subject itself. Under pressure, its very autonomy threatened, the subject reacts. Without the “object” the autonomy of the subject proves empty, but bound to the “object” autonomy is thwarted in its unfolding. The autonomy-drive which as a matter of course gave rise to the domination-drive must now in turn fight off domination itself. This in a nutshell characterizes the dialectic which is as native as it is problematic to the subject-object schema (in any of its forms). Just as an extreme is about to be reached, just as the science-ideal with its autonomous *rationality* is about to eliminate human freedom, or the freedom-ideal with its rational *autonomy* considers itself absolutely unfettered, a reaction sets in causing the pendulum to swing in the opposite direction. Consequently, under the pull of both poles and the concomitant ideals, there are frequent efforts to avoid one-sided theories. Even when extreme theories are projected, they are unable to do away with the opposite pole. Stronger, despite their intentions to ignore or push away the opposite pole, such constructions are only possible because they are not successful in their attempts.”¹¹

The “External Ought”

One of the persistent enigmas facing a thinker within this complex is caused by the fact that he must reckon with some kind of “external ought” in relation to the free subject. Certain heteronomous factors affect, determine and restrain human activity—

and every theory must account for them. The givenness of this situation has always been the fatal blow to any theory, for example, an existentialistic theory of freedom, which desired to make good the absolute freedom of man. Correspondingly, the reality of the freedom which man enjoys (relative freedom under the law) has always been the nemesis of any naturalistic theory (of whatever vintage) which in effect ignored or vitiated the uniqueness of human responsibility and freedom.

One way, popular today especially in the English-speaking world, of trying to account for the external ought without falling into such contradictory extremes is to talk of “values.” The difficulties arise when one sets out to explain and justify the place of value. For within the subject-object schema only two possibilities are in the last analysis available; either value must be explained in reference to the creative free subject or in relation to the static universally valid *object*. But it is just such one-sided solutions which value theories are [p.176>] intent on averting. Although a choice must ultimately be made, in general a concept of value is employed as a bridge, a point of—with or without dialectics—between subject and object. Value has the ring of normativity and at the same time it echoes all sorts of subjective associations. But must one stress the objective or subjective face of value? See here the underlying cause of the pendulum-like oscillation between “objectivism” and “subjectivism” in contemporary value-philosophy.

Impressed by their normative character, one individual is induced to assign values some kind of objective existence. The question is: what kind of objective existence? For if values enjoy a non-factual objectivity, not only is the fact-value relation a delicate matter, but the human subject himself must be called in to play a special role as the re- or per-ceiver of that which is beyond the pale of ordinary sense-perception. Thus, notwithstanding the intentions of the value “objectivist,” the existence of such values depends on the testimony of the human subject. All this we have seen in relation to Moore.

Denying the existence of values or at best considering them euphemisms denoting personal preferences, post-Moorean theorists have given more attention to the subject. But to the present the crucial complex of questions which surfaces around the subject has not received the critical attention it deserves. Granted, an “ought” cannot be reduced to an “is,” but, short of an appeal to values, how can one even talk of universally valid “oughts”? Concretely, how can Hare finally justify his separation of value judgments and personal inclinations? Why do the former and not the latter possess normative teeth? Perhaps it will be said that judgments which are so defined or which are so employed, i.e. to guide actions, are normative. But what situation made such definition possible? Why is there such a normative use in the first place? “Subjectivists” in value theory appear to have no alternative but to find the source and seat of normativity in the subject. However, can a subject, alone or in consort, justify raising his wishes to the level of norms for all? Can one even talk of an external ought in such cases? Yet, if it is not external (at least in theory), have we not ended up with an absolutization of human subjectivity which a fact-value dualism sets out to evade?

A Note on the Use of Formal Logic

The present trend to formalization in ethics has been stimulated as well as made possible by modern formal logic. Although clearly beyond the scope of the present study, the role which formal logic plays in the ethical theories discussed, as well as in analysis as a whole, makes a brief comment desirable.

Modern symbolic or formal logic, it must be noted at the outset, can play its role of “intermediary” because logic and its laws are no longer considered the attributes of being (Aristotle) or (in the post-Kantian trend) the “laws of [p.177>] thought.”¹² Logic has an exceptional position. But whether the laws or logic are the “laws of the laws of nature”¹³ or whether necessary truths are established by linguistic convention¹⁴ is still a matter of heated debate.

This ambiguous place of logical thought and its technical apparatus is clearly connected with the subject-object schema. The logical subject must maintain its autonomy even as it penetrates to the object. This dual, in the heart of the matter contradictory, desire has led to two uses of logic. On the one hand, the logical is taken in its formal-ness as the very creator of the possibilities of experience. By means of a so-called transcendental logic, the possibility of man’s freedom is created and guaranteed. On the other hand, logic is taken in its formal-ness as encompassing all material possibilities. Here by means of a so-called formal logic the significance of free decisions and new experiences is voided or at least largely obscured. Whereas in the former instance “content” is attained in arbitrary individual decisions, in the latter instance “content” is logically excluded and the peculiarly human responsibility to act and choose, formally present, threatens to dissolve into meaninglessness, it is not that the thinkers concerned fail to recognize that there is “more” to reality than the logical, but that the logical is their final criterion for determining the meaningful. Thus, even though formal logic is able to shield human subjectivity from ravishment by the natural sciences, in the final analysis this formalization squeezes the meaning, content and life out of human freedom.

As will be obvious, today the existentialist unfolds a transcendental logic designed to secure human freedom and the neo-positivist employs logic as a tool to circumscribe reality. Wittgenstein is a classic example of one who attempted to carry out the neo-positivist line to the bitter end. In the *Tractatus* he is left only with contradictions and tautologies—all the important things are “beyond,” only to be mystically pointed at.

The same problem, the relation of subject and object, is at the bottom of the continued unrest in regard to the analytic-synthetic distinction.¹⁵ The analytic [p.178>] judgment is conceived of as “pure” and “formal.” The synthetic judgment comes into the picture when content is added and contact is made with the factual world of sense-experience. Although necessary, analytic judgments can by definition say nothing (new). But can synthetic judgments be anything but contingent? If not—as current orthodoxy legislates—mankind is left without substantial necessary principles by which to guide his life. All that is certain is analytic a priori. However, aside from the hollowness of this certainty, the present Quine-White inspired attack on the sacredness of the analytic-synthetic distinction itself is a most consistent irrationalistic foray designed to deprive the philosophically engaged man of certainty even there, i.e. in his last supposed stronghold of formal logic.

Summing Up and Looking Ahead

Our investigations, brief and general as they are, are at an end. It remains only to reformulate our conclusions. Although we stand shoulder to shoulder with Moore and Hare in their repulsion of the forces of extremism, and in their awareness that there is “more” to reality than the factual and logical, we cannot (and could not) hide our fears, hardened into conviction during the course of our explorations, that fact-value dualisms of whatever calibre are finally unable to beat off the irreconcilable

adversaries. Mediation cannot furnish once-and-for-all immunity. The malaise is much deeper: the autonomy motive with its fixation for the subject-object schema. No remedy less radical than a complete rejection of the motive and framework itself can offer any hope of an eventual solution to the problems at hand. And just here arise tremendous difficulties. For, although by no means impervious to the dilemmas we have sketched, value theorists continue to presume that reality in its fullness is “subject” over against and tied to “object.” This failure to locate the main source of difficulty in the constrictive nature of this ontological schema forms, it would appear, the major obstacle to genuine advance.¹⁶ If the analysis here offered is in any way valid, the fundamental problems facing value theory will [p.179>] remain unsolved in spite of the real advances made until ethicists and philosophers alike begin to engage in a far-reaching and deep-penetrating critique of starting-points and the framework involved.

One can advocate a “revolution” of these proportions without suggesting a positive alternative. In a last chapter we intend to lay the main lines for a “new” perspective with the hope that it will provide a “way out.” Looking ahead to the last chapter, it is our conviction that a way out of the present predicament in ethics as well as in philosophy is in principle only possible if one considers (to attach to our previous discussion) the “external ought” as an irreducible “third factor.” However in the present situation, intentions notwithstanding, the “third factor” or normativity is finally accounted for in terms of subjects or objects. To put it crudely (and certainly too simply): one is forced to squeeze “three pegs” (subject, object, normativity) into “two holes” (subject, object). It just never works.

The third irreducible factor can only retain its uniqueness when recognized as a law-order which holds for subjects as well as objects. There are, so to speak, two “sides” to reality: a *law-side* and a factual or *subject-side* (including both subjects and objects). These two sides are in correlation. Without law (to condition, to determine etc.), existence is impossible. Without that which is subject to the law (*sub-jacere*), law is without meaning. The law-order is the necessary condition for creaturely existence, and, on the other hand, limits and defines that existence. Bound by the law; that is, placed in the “room” where possibilities open up, man is free to act.

Prior to developing this view in its significance for value theory and ethics in a concluding chapter, it is instructive to examine the value theories which we have considered from the vantage point offered by the “new” position.

All of the theorists concerned have felt the impinging force of the law-order. Their fall into antinomies whenever they endeavoured to ascribe this “external ought” to subject or object is explained by the basic consideration that it has its own irreducibility, in fact, it makes the existence of subjects and objects possible. In Moore’s case the “pull” of the norm-laws¹⁷ is particularly intense. Thus, he refuses to allow these norm-laws either to be presented as subjective creations or to be reduced to the “natural” aspects. Further, he sensed that the norm-laws did not “exist” in a supra-sensual realm in the same way as perceivable objects existed “below.” Goodness has its own kind of existence. But Moore is caught in a bind because despite his “intuition” of goodness, his ontological schema does not allow him the room to account rightly for this third factor called normativity. Universal validity is confused and identified with that which is objective. This equivocation alone caused him to relate goodness—despite all the problems it caused him—to the “object.” As a [p.180>] result, not only is the function and place of the subject in regard to

normativity ignored and distorted, but “goodness” cannot function properly as norm obtaining for both subjects and objects.

Having chosen to deny the existence of values, Moore’s critics are unable, beset as they are with the same confusion, to account for the element of universal validity which ensconces in value terms and value judgments. If, as in our view, universal validity finds its seat and explanation in the law-order, this situation with its dilemmas does not arise. One can recognize the indispensable function which the subject has in formulating norms and, at the same time, argue that norms have universal validity in *that* and only *insofar* as they are particularizations and positivations of the structural norm-law. The subject is not sovereign, but his key part in the process of positivation and evaluation cannot be denied or minimized. The attempt on the part of ethicists to fix the origin and seat of normativity in subject or object betrays a confusing of the two sides of reality.

In conclusion, the “objectivists” à la Moore are guilty of absolutizing the norm-laws. They cut them off from the subject, the object and the law-order itself with the consequence that the norm-laws (now called values) are value-less for life on earth. Hovering above reality, loose from the anchor-relation which gives them meaning, values are related in some way to objects. The “subjectivists” absolutize the real subjective freedom which man enjoys in positivizing. However, this element of subjective freedom and responsibility which, as we shall later explain, comes into its own in positivation and evaluation must not be taken from under the law and absolutized. In such instances the subject is elevated to the position of creator, rather than of actualizer or unfold of meaning. 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). Meta-ethical attempts by means of the techniques of formal logic to (dis)solve the problems are, as we have seen, retreats from rather than solutions of the basic difficulties involved.

The concept of “value” in contemporary ethics takes the place of structural norm-laws. Speaking of values (or of value judgments) instead of norms or laws is a modern way of accounting for the inescapable normativity given in reality. By a concept of value meaning-determining law is brought back into the picture. 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 “granted” them an a priori objective existence.¹⁸ Any absolutization is a positing (*ponere, positum*) which is in the nature of the case a subjective act. If the subject is not openly considered the law-giver, he is sure to be lurking [p. 181>] 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.” Thus, although the recognition of the law-order (in contrast to a facts-only approach) which comes to the fore in value philosophies must be applauded, as presently elaborated these theories are unable to justify or explain this recognition.

Source: James H. Olthuis, *Facts, values and ethics: A confrontation with twentieth century British moral philosophy in particular G. E. Moore*. Second edition. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1969)

ENDNOTES

¹ Wolfgang Köhler (1939).

² Generally speaking, in an attempt to retain or safeguard their universal validity, facts are drained of their non-logical content and considered strictly logical. It is logical object-function of facts (cf. ch. 7) which is relevant. Concrete facts reduced to logical abstractions. Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, to present a telling example, is not so much interested in facts as in their logical form. Others, regarding facts as “pseudoentities,” seek their point of reference in particulars or things. Thus, reversing Wittgenstein’s aphorism (*Tractatus* 1.1), Strawson declares that “the world is the totality of things, not of facts” (in *Truth*, ed. Pitcher, p. 40). However, things are also largely exhausted in their logical aspect.

³ Thus exhorted J. R. Lucas, “On Not Worshipping Facts,” *Phil, Quarterly* VII (1958), pp. 144-56. Cf. also C. Van Peursen, *Feiten, waarden, gebeurtenissen* (1965). Van Peursen rightly and clearly rejects any idea of “brute facts” as well as of a from facts to values. However, in that he neither defines “value” nor explains of “logical order,” the value of his positive suggestion (reversing the logical order, first values and then facts as restricted, trimmed values) remains problematic.

⁴ This emphasis on the logical behavior of concepts is one of the most remarkable features of this new viewpoint. In as far as possible cut off from the subject who conceives them, such concepts, the “metaphysical entities” of neo-positivism, are treated as if they have “lives” of their own. Language is regarded more or less as a natural process functioning according to rules. Cf. P. A. Verburg. *Het optimum der taal bij Wittgenstein*,” *Philosophia Reformata* XXVI (1961), pp. 169-70 and J. van der Hoeven, “Filosofie op het spel,” *Philosophia Reformata* XXX (1965), pp. 152, 155-56.

⁵ Without its coherence with the other aspects of reality, the logical aspect cannot reveal its logical sense. Logical diversity is only possible because of a prior cosmic diversity.

At the same time this implies that the analytic-synthetic distinction in the sense of (formal) logical and empirical (material) propositions is illegitimate. All scientific judgments are, one could say, both analytic and synthetic in character. Logical distinguishing always takes place in acts structurally made up of non-logical aspects in addition to the logical aspect. Even a tautology is logically meaningless if the non logical is banished.

⁶ The underlying cause of this distressing state of affairs must, it seems clear, be sought in the driving concern to keep science “neutral.” The matter has come to a head in the present time partly because new developments in logic have anew nourished the false hope that neutrality can be achieved in the humanities, the social sciences and ethics.

⁷ Cf. B. Goudzwaard, “De economische theorie en de normatieve aspecten der werkeijikheid,” *Perspectief* Eds, van Dijk, Stellingwerff *et al.* (1961).

⁸ Cf. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* II (1955), p. 209f.

⁹ The epistemological relation characteristic of theoretical thought in which the logical subjective function stands logically over against the non-logical aspects is taken out of its place and absolutized. Three comments are in order. In the first place, the human subject operating in theoretical thought is in the schema exhausted more or less in his subjective logical function. However, man has many more functions, and as a whole he is much “more” than the sum of his functions. Secondly, the separation characteristic of theoretic thought is typically logical; that is, abstract and intentional. Although this abstraction has ontic or real status *within* the act of thought, it cannot be absolutized as if this “split” were not merely logical but an original given which squares with the fullness of reality. In the third place, even if the subject = logical subject, even if the separation were more than logical, the subject could still not exist by itself autonomously. For to speak of the subjective logical function only has meaning in relation to the theoretical object. Cf. Dooyeweerd, *op. cit.* I, p. 39ff.

¹⁰ In masterful fashion Dooyeweerd has traced the influence of ground-motives in the history of western philosophy. Cf. especially the first volume of *The New Critique*.

¹¹ These basic tensions are clearly reflected in the titles of recent works in analytic circles, e.g. *Freedom and Reason* (Hare), *Thought and Action* (Hampshire).

¹² Cf. Stebbing, *A Modern Introduction to Logic* (1930), p. 471.

¹³ Cf. Frege, *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (1884), pars. 87 and 93 (Eng. trans., *Foundations of Arithmetic* 1950) and also W. & M. Kneale, *The Development of Logic* (1962), pp. 739-42.

¹⁴ Thus Strawson claims that “it is, then, our own activity of making language through using it, our determination of the limits of the application of words, that makes in consistency possible” (*Introduction to Logical Theory* 1952, pp. 9, 11-12).

The conventionalist position has been facilitated by an identification or at least a close rapprochement of logic and language. This identification has also been affirmed by certain ethicists whom we have studied. Whereas on the one hand language is reduced to logical propositions and identified with thought, on the other hand a logical thesis is widely regarded as a “thesis about the meanings of words, or dependent solely upon them” (*FR*, 30). Cf. also Montefiore, “Ought’ and ‘Can’,” *Phil. Quarterly* VIII (1958), p. 24. Cf. also Kneale, *op cit.*, pp. 628-51 for a general discussion.

¹⁵ Cf. fn 5, p. 170.

¹⁶ This failure is not simply to be written off as oversight—be it a serious case. Much rather, when one is driven by the freedom-domination motive and accepts the noetic-ontic schema, he cannot be moved to give up such a *prioris* by argumentation alone.

Although we cannot present a positive proof of the influence of pre-theoretical motives on one’s philosophizing, we can show negatively that without reference to something “beyond” or before” scientific thought, the master-key to a basic explanation of the states of affairs (continually returning dilemmas; opposing theories built on similar evidence; tenacity with which position is maintained regardless of antinomies; impossibility of communication between various schools; etc.) is never found. This state of affairs remains closed as long as philosophers continue to claim that theoretical thought is neutral. This is itself a stance with deep pre-theoretical roots.

¹⁷ In regard to norm-laws, cf. ch. 7.

¹⁸ As is also evidenced, for example, by the fact that so-called “ranges of values” are seldom in agreement.