

## Chapter Seven

### Concluding Remarks

It seems clear to us that the philosophical implication of is-ought dichotomy is immense in the field of moral philosophy. This classical distinction was the central or focal point in the past, it equally remains the central point at present and it will remain forever so long moral philosophy will survive as an independent branch of philosophy. We have examined the views of different philosophers in this thesis. Since the very nature of descriptive and evaluative judgments is different, it would be very difficult to deduce an ought-statement from an is-statement without begging questions. Truly speaking the *is-ought* dichotomy is very distinct and forceful and there are many aspects through which the distinction between 'is' and 'ought' can be established. Thus, to establish the difference between 'is' and 'ought' is not so philosophical important as to show how does an 'ought' can be logically deduced from an 'is'. We have seen in the course of our discussion that there are various perspectives through the dichotomy between 'is' and 'ought' can be judged. In this regard, we have examined the classical views of Hume and Moore.

In fact Hume's position holds the centrality of this dichotomy. There we have noticed some overlapping reflections regarding Hume's position about 'is-ought' dichotomy. Many ethicists have reflected on Hume's famous passage as mentioned in my thesis. Hume approaches morality as the *vulgar system of morality* because being an empiricist Hume does not want to presume the asylum of God in morality. For Hume, the problem with morality is that it eventually approaches the role of

invisible God. In fact, Hume was not against morality, but he was against the vulgar system of morality where the role of God is immense. Hume, in fact, approaches a kind of morality which would be autonomous. Hume rules out the derivability of ought from 'is' on the following grounds:

Firstly, to assume that an 'ought-statement' is deduced from an 'is-statement' actually means to say that it would be either deductive or inductive. Hume being an empiricist does not admit deductive argument because deductive argument is based on the principle of entailment which would equally be universal and necessary. Hume does not admit the principle of universality and necessity. Thus, for Hume deductive argument is not tenable. Hume was equally skeptical about the authenticity of inductive argument. For Hume as the nature of 'is-statement' is completely different from the nature of 'ought-statement', there is no point of relevance of deducing one from the other.

Secondly, Hume elsewhere in his *Treatise* uses the phrase 'the autonomy of morality'. By certifying morality as autonomous, Hume, in fact, wants to establish that 'no set of non-moral premises can entail a moral conclusion'. Thus, by denying the logical deduction of an 'ought-statement' from an 'is-statement', Hume actually opposes the non-moral foundation of morality. As morality for Hume is based on sentiments of mankind, there is no point of claiming that an 'ought-statement' can be logically deduced from an 'is-statement'.

Thirdly, the interpretation of Hume's famous passage of *Treatise* is a mix-bag and it would be very difficult to assess which was actually the position of Hume. We think what Hume clearly suggests is that moral

judgments are not statements of either logically necessary truth of facts about the universe around us. Unlike factual statements, morality depends upon our sentiments. Elsewhere in the *Treatise*, Hume considers 'ought-statement' is the sub-class of 'is-statement' and therefore the question of deducing an 'ought-statement' from an 'is-statement' simply does not arise.

We think that Hume stands in favour of 'is-ought' dichotomy because of the very nature of these two kinds of judgment. Moreover, the logical derivation of 'ought-statement' is linked with some inherent logical principles which do not match up with his empiricism. Hume's empiricism does not accept the principle of universality and necessity, principle of entailment etc., which are the genesis of deductive logic. Considering all these issues, we think that Hume does not admit the possibility of deducing an 'ought-statement' from an 'is-statement'. Thus, the 'is-ought-dichotomy' holds in Hume's empiricism.

Like Hume, Moore too has defended the 'is-ought dichotomy' in a different manner. Moore was not concerned about the 'is-ought dichotomy' directly. His interpretation is indirect. He was vocal about the *naturalistic fallacy*. As a non-naturalist, Moore claims that non-natural property cannot be defined in terms of natural property. For him the term 'good' is a non-natural property. Accordingly, good cannot be defined in terms of natural property. As every non-natural property is unanalysable, simple, any attempt to define them in terms of natural property would lead into *naturalistic fallacy*. Following the concept of naturalistic fallacy, we can say here after Moore that an ought-statement cannot be logically deduced from an is-statement or an evaluative statement cannot be logically deduced from a descriptive

statement because any attempt of deducing such statement involves into a *naturalistic fallacy*. Thus, we can defend the classical is-ought dichotomy after Moore by interpreting naturalistic fallacy. Here we assume, though relatively, that moral judgments are non-natural in general and descriptive judgments are natural in general.

Thus, we can say that both Hume and Moore admitted the gulf between is-ought statement. Hume considers ethics or morality as the vulgar system and thereby rules out the logical deduction of one from the other. Moore brings the concept of *naturalistic fallacy* and attributes moral terms as *non-natural* and descriptive terms as natural. He then spells out the subtle distinction between natural and non-natural terms by bringing the concept of *naturalistic fallacy*. His conclusion is that there is no point of deducing one from the other because any attempt of deducing one from the other leads into *naturalistic fallacy*.

In contemporary philosophy, we find a stiff resistance of deducing one from the other from the logical positivists. According to the logical positivists the question of deducing an *ought-statement* from an *is-statement* simply does not arise because the very nature of *ought-statement* is different from the very nature of *is-statement*. According to the logical positivists *is-statements* do have cognitive value; whereas *ought-statements* do not have any cognitive values. Secondly, *is-statements* state something or describe something about the world in which we live. *Ought-statements* do not state anything at all about the world in which we live. As the nature of 'is-statement' is completely different from the nature of 'ought-statement', there is no point of upholding the view that an 'ought-statement' can be logically deduced from an 'is-statement'. Thus, the classical thinkers such as Hume and

Moore and the logical positivists' stand in favour of the 'is-ought dichotomy'.

We think that Hume, Moore and the logical positivists are right in saying that 'no set of 'ought-statement can be logically deduced from an 'is-statement'. We agree with such proposals. In fact, we have stated above that it would really be difficult to establish that an 'ought-statement' can be logically deduced from an 'is-statement' or a set of 'is-statements'.

However, there are some philosophers who have said that there are means through which one can show that an 'ought-statement' can be logically deduced from an 'is-statement'. In this regard, we have explained the view of Hillary Putnam in great detail. Putnam in his book *The Collapse of fact/value Dichotomy* explores various grounds on the basis of which he has claimed that an 'ought-statement' can be logically deduced from an 'is-statement'. What Putnam intends to say here is that facts and values are totally disjoined realms and accordingly he not only criticizes the view of classical thinkers and logical positivists' that 'no set of 'ought-statement' can be logically deduced from a number of 'is-statements'. Putnam, on the contrary, insists that a statement can be both a fact and a value. Thus, Putnam attempts to break the grip of the classical thinkers of the 'is-ought dichotomy'. He does not agree with the view that 'no statement is both evaluative and factual'. In this regard, Putnam has provided the counter-example against Hume's law that 'there is no logical connection between a pure evaluative statement and a pure descriptive statement'. In fact Putnam interprets the truth of the factual statements in the sense of acceptability

or justifiability under certain conditions. In this regard, Putnam says that truth is an idealization of rational acceptability.

We think that when Putnam has claimed that values are embedded in fact, he thereby understands fact in terms of epistemology. More precisely, it can be said after Putnam that values determine facts on the basis of epistemology. For Putnam truth is internal to the conceptual scheme and it would be determined on the basis of *epistemic justified conditions*. Accordingly, values can play role in the determination of facts on the basis of epistemology. As values are intimately associated with description, a descriptive statement is no longer different from an evaluative statement. Putnam claims it was the mistake of the logical positivists and the classical or traditional thinkers of not conceiving the fact that valuation and description are interdependent and entangled. Putnam opines that there are many terms available in the usage of language possessing twin concepts such as descriptive as well as evaluative. In this regard, he has mentioned the terms, such as, 'self-respect', 'well nourished' etc. where descriptive terms involve evaluative connotative meanings. We think unlike Putnam, logical positivists failed to grasp the epistemic value in the evaluative statement. According to Putnam every description represents an evaluation because evaluation is based on the empirical fact. Hume was wrong in conceiving morality as the vulgar system of morality. Hume rules out the role of God in traditional morality and he wishes to establish morality as an autonomous discipline. In this regard, Hume perhaps would be close to Moore. Because Moore gives moral terms a special privilege by conceiving them as non-natural properties. That means, by conceiving Good as non-natural property. Moore gives an

independent privilege to morality. That is why Hume and Moore do not admit any kind of merger between 'is-statement' and 'ought-statement'.

According to classical thinkers value judgments are subjective in nature and hence they cannot be treated at par with factual statements. Moreover, value judgments are not the outcome of reason like factual statements. Therefore, deducing a value statement from a factual statement simply does not arise. Putnam, however, thinks the other way round. According to Putnam value disputes are rational disagreements and very often such disagreements often are pointing to higher values and in this process it is directed towards objective facts. This standpoint of Putnam even has been well supported by Amartya Sen. Sen in this context remarks that not only reason but scientific evidence can also be brought to bear profitably in value discussion. Putnam further contends that moral values can be objective if they are transcendent of the individual. For example, the values of justice, fairness, etc., are objective because they are universalizable or nearly universal. Thus, Putnam differs from the classical thinkers in many ways. Unlike the classical thinkers, Putnam inclines to say that facts and values are often entwined. Secondly, values are essential to the realm of facts. Thirdly, evaluation, for Putnam, is an essential part of description. Fourthly, like facts, values are also rational assessment. Fifthly, value judgments like factual judgments are objective. Considering all these points, Putnam then draws the conclusion that it would be a dogma of philosophy in drawing the conclusion that no set of evaluative statement can be deduced from factual statement.

Like Putnam, Professor Black also attempts to deduce an 'ought-statement' from an 'is-statement'. In this regard, he attributed Hume's position as **Hume's Guillotine**. In this regard, Black examines various arguments through which he eventually has drawn the conclusion that the 'is-ought' dichotomy as conceived by the traditional thinkers is not conclusive. For Black it would be a logical dogma in conceiving that in the case of a valid argument the conclusion is logically contained in the premises. While defending his position against Hume, Black takes the help of Austin's theory of speech act. Even though Austin in the earlier stage anticipated the distinction between performatives and constatives on the basis that a constative is either true or false unlike a performative, but in the later stage, he ruled out such classification of speech act. He perhaps would realize that within the speech act mechanism such classification would no longer persist in the true sense of the term. What Black lessons from Austin is that even though there remains a considerable gap between 'is' and 'ought', but such gap cannot persist in the process of the functioning of language. There we notice a considerable process of overlapping and criss-crossing relation in language. Therefore, it would be very difficult to maintain the gulf between 'is' and 'ought'.

It is important to point out here that Professor Black interprets 'ought' and 'should' in the same way. Black claims that there are some words used in natural language having both factual and evaluative forces. For example, words such as, 'must', 'should' etc., are cases in point. Having said this, Black however does not rule out the gap between 'is' and 'ought'. Instead of this, he has attempted to minimize the gap. The classical thinkers actually supported the gulf between 'is' and 'ought'

and they saw that there was no point of reducing the gap between 'is' and 'ought', because of the very nature of such statements. But philosophers like Putnam and Black do not agree with the classical thinkers that such gap cannot be minimized. Contrary to this, they have attempted to show that there are ways through which one can anticipate a weak form of 'ought' from an 'is'. What is most important to observe here is that if the philosophical position of Putnam and Black holds then definitely the philosophical position of the classical thinkers regarding the 'is-ought dichotomy' does not stand. We think that the gap between 'is' and 'ought' cannot be ruled out, but such gap can be narrowed down with the help of linguistic presuppositions. However, whether presuppositions can be taken into account is again a matter of philosophical inquisitions.

We think besides Putnam and Black there we notice a proposal – an important proposal in the context of the issue as propounded by Searle, where attempts have been made meticulously to deduce an 'ought' from 'is'. I think in the context of this debate Searle's proposal deserves philosophical worthy. Searle was critical against the classical thinkers who adhered to the view that 'no set of statements of fact by themselves entail any statement of value'. In this regard, he has examined an argument consisting of a series of factual statements of which the conclusion is an evaluative statement. However, in this derivation he anticipates some hidden premises and principles. In this regard, he at first specifies the phrase 'under certain conditions'. He then specifies the phrase 'an act of placing oneself under an obligation'. More importantly, his attempt of deducing an 'ought' from 'is' is

predominantly based on the principle known as 'ceteris paribus', i.e. other things are equal.

I think that there is a lot of presuppositions underlying in the derivation. The most one, of course, is *ceteris paribus*. In fact this is the principle of morality by virtue of which moral statements or judgments are claimed to be universalizable. Such moral principle actually rules out the possibility of Moral Luck as expounded by Nagel and his followers. In fact, the concept of moral universalizability would be vitiated if the principle of *ceteris paribus* is being ruled out. We think that by incorporating such principle, Searle has attempted to nullify or boils down the possibility of moral deception in the case of promising. Searle elsewhere claims that the *ceteris paribus* clause is must for moral decision, because this is the main clause on the basis of which one can have an evaluative statement from a descriptive statement. Searle in this regard classifies two types of ought, such as, categorical ought and tautological ought. He then claims that when 'ought' can be logically entailed from 'is', it actually means categorical ought. I think that categorical ought is far more epistemological than logical whereas tautological ought is far more logical than epistemological. In this sense, Searle's position is very close to Putnam. Because Putnam has attempted to derive an 'ought' from 'is' in the epistemological sense.

What we have observed here is that Searle's derivation of 'ought' from 'is' is based on so many other hidden issues. In this sense, we can say that Searle's famous argument is enthymematic in nature. Does it then lead us to say that Searle's position regarding the derivation is uncritical? Certainly, it is not. Even no proposal regarding this issue would be uncritical because of the nature of this issue. Searle himself

anticipates the problems and possible criticisms that may be raised against his standpoint. In this regard, he considers three possible objections that might have been raised against him. What Searle insists here is that he does not think that any form of 'ought' can be logically deduced from any form of 'is'. In this regard, he distinguishes two kinds of fact, viz., institutional fact and non-institutional fact. Some other philosopher distinguishes as brute facts and other than brute facts. Searle understands non-institutional facts as brute facts. According to Searle, no 'ought' statement can be logically entailed by 'is' statement. However, he claims that an 'ought' can be entailed by an 'is' if the supposed 'is' is an institutional fact.

In this regard, Searle again refers Austin's ideas of regulative rules and constitutive rules. Regulative rules are those kinds of rules which regulate antecedently existing forms of behavior. On the contrary, constitutive rules actually constitute the game. Thus, when Searle inclines to say that an 'ought' is deduced from an 'is', he thereby conceives an 'is', not in terms of non-institutional fact or brute fact, but in terms of institutional fact – a fact that is associated with constitutive rules. Searle in this regard comments that it is the institutional form of obligation where one can derive an 'ought' from an 'is'.

Thus, it seems clear to us that there are some similarities between Searle and Putnam. Both of them have adopted the same standpoint. They have attempted to deny the classical standpoint as expounded by Hume and Moore not by establishing the position that any 'ought-statement' can be logically deduced from any form of 'is-statement', but by establishing the philosophical position that there are some cases in which one can derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. In this regard, Putnam

distinguishes brute facts from non-brute facts and he then interprets other than brute facts in terms of epistemic justified conditions on the basis of which one can derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. Likewise, Searle has admitted the clause *ceteris paribus* as the main principle of morality. He then distinguishes between institutional and non-institutional facts and interprets institutional facts in terms of constitutive rules and eventually acknowledges that one can derive an 'ought' from an 'is', when the 'is' is conceived in terms of institutional fact. Thus, we can say that the derivation of an 'ought' from an 'is' as propounded by Searle and Putnam is partial in nature. They have attempted to minimize the gap between 'is-ought dichotomy', but certainly, they could not succeed to overcome such dichotomy.

Finally, we have examined the philosophical position of R. M. Hare in this regard. We think Hare's position is equally relevant in context of this issue. In fact, Hare introduces an innovative moral interpretation as far as the nature of prescriptive judgment is concerned. Hare does not tell us the possibility or impossibility of deriving an 'ought' from an 'is'. He rather justifies such moral dichotomy in a different manner. At the very outset Hare specifies the nature of prescriptive judgments. According to Hare, all imperative judgments, such as, 'Shut the door', 'Please bring a glass of water for me', etc., are prescriptive in nature. Whatever is prescriptive in nature would equally be evaluative. The other important feature of Hare's morality is that he was vocal in acknowledging the view that prescriptive judgments are universalizable. In this regard, Hare mentions the name of Kant. In his article 'Moral Universalizability', Hare has attempted to establish in

what sense imperative moral judgments are claimed to be potentially universalizable.

Our object of contention is not to establish or analyse Hare's theory of moral universalizability, but to show in what sense Hare's theory of moral universalizability is particularly relevant in the context of the classical philosophical debate moral philosophers have been rolling of. In this regard, we have shown at the very outset after Hare in what sense imperative judgments are evaluative in nature. Then we have examined Hare's position of moral universalizability in great detail. Then we have examined Hare's view that prescriptive judgments like descriptive judgments are universalizable. It is important to point out here that universalizability is the sole criterion of descriptive statement. When descriptive statements are formalized in the logical manner and accordingly construct a valid argument, it is then claimed as universal. That means the concept of universalizability is associated with descriptive statement. Now, a descriptive statement is a factual statement or a statement of fact. Accordingly, if a prescriptive statement is claimed to be universalizable like a descriptive statement, then on the same ground it can equally be claimed that like a descriptive statement, a prescriptive statement contains factual content. If this would be the case, then one can assume that an 'ought' can be logically entailed from an 'is'. Hare has done this. He has shown us step by step systematically that like a descriptive statement, a prescriptive statement is universalizable.

In this regard, he has considered the following argument as stated earlier on

Take all the boxes to the station.

This is one of the boxes.

Therefore, take this box to the station.

In the above argument, the conclusion is a prescriptive statement that has been on the principle of entailment. That means, here the conclusion is logically entailed from the premises. Anyone who affirms the meaning of the premises but denies the conclusion involves into a contradiction. This is the genesis of the principle of entailment. Hare in this regard, introduces two important concepts, such as, *phrastic* and *nuestic*. According to Hare, in the above argument, both the imperatives and indicatives have the same *phrastic* element and this *phrastic* part is related to the possible state of affairs, such as: You're taking the box to the station in the immediate future.

If we carefully scrutinize the Searle's argument stated above, we will see that in the above argument the first premise is prescriptive and the second premise is factual and again the conclusion is prescriptive. Accordingly, in this case we cannot say that a prescriptive statement is logically entailed from a set of statements which are purely descriptive or factual in nature. Following Hare we can say alternatively, that a prescriptive statement can be logically entailed from a set of statements as premises of which at least one must be prescriptive in nature. Accordingly, we cannot say that Hare is right in claiming that an evaluative statement can be entailed from a descriptive statement. Hare, we have seen, has tried to establish that every prescriptive statement must have descriptive content and even though the premise of the argument under consideration is a prescriptive statement in nature, it contains descriptive or factual content. In this sense, Hare perhaps would claim that an evaluative statement can be entailed from a set of

statement having descriptive or factual content. In such a case, we can say that Hare attempt of deriving an 'ought' from 'is' again partial and based on qualification, condition or presupposition. In this sense, Hare too belongs to the group of Putnam and Searle.

After examining the philosophical positions of all great thinkers contributed on this issue, I am now in a position to draw a few comments on my own rationale in the following ways:

1. There are distinctive marks on the basis of which one can conclude that the very nature of 'ought -statement' is different from the very nature of 'is-statement'. In this regard, the classical position and the standpoint of logical positivism holds good.
2. Hume's famous argument appeared in the *Treatise* is ambiguous. It does not reflect the actual position of Hume. In fact subsequent commentators had been misinterpreted it. We think Hume's position of sensing morality as autonomous is rigid. However, if his position of morality as a free vulgar system of morality stands, then his follow-up position will stand.
3. We think that Moore's position of non-naturalism is again a rigorous standpoint as far as understanding of morality is concerned. If Moore thinks that non-natural property is very distinct from natural property, then it would be considered as an over-simplified theory. It would be really difficult to separate naturalism from non-naturalism in the way Moore had anticipated. However, Moore, of course, is right in saying, if his theory of non-naturalism holds good, that an 'ought' statement without naturalistic fallacy can be logically deduced from an 'is' statement.

4. Logical positivism was distrusted by the nature of morality. For them morality is the outcome of sentiments, emotion, etc. Therefore, the question of verifying or falsifying moral statements in terms of observational data simply does not arise. Their interpretation of factuality is different from others. Perhaps, they anticipated factuality in terms of brute facts and thereby claimed that no value-statement could be logically deduced from factual statement.
5. We think that the position of Putnam is radical. It is radical in the sense that he first foresees that there remains possibility through which one can derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. In this regard, he brings the concept of epistemic truths based on justified conditions. He perhaps classifies epistemic truth from logical truth because unlike logical truth, epistemic truth is the outcome of justified conditions. Moreover, he claims that epistemic truths are very much part of descriptive statement. Even though, Putnam enables to show a specific kind of derivation of an 'ought' from an 'is', but his position would be sufficient to deny the classical position. In this regard, Putnam holds an important position in the ongoing 'is-ought dichotomy'.
6. Searle's position is equally important. In this regard, he stands with the deontological position as far as his introduction of the clause *ceteris paribus* is concerned. He denies the concept of **Moral Luck** which would particularly relevant in the case of contextual ethics. He then classifies facts in terms of institutional and non-institutional. He then claims that institutional facts are guided by constitutive rules and eventually draws the conclusion that only

in the case of institutional fact, one can show that an 'ought' can be logically deduced from an 'is'. Thus, Searle's position is again partial and again based on qualifications. However, Searle's position again can stand as a severe blow to the classical position because if Searle's standpoint holds good, then the classical position will not stand.

7. Hare also contributed a unique philosophical theory as far as the understanding and scrutinizing the traditional 'is-ought dichotomy' is concerned. Here we have interpreted Hare indirectly and eventually enabled to show in what sense he has been anticipated the view that an 'ought' can be logically entailed from a set of statement of which one is prescriptive. We think, Hare position here would be relevant if we have accepted his view that all prescriptive judgments must be universalizable like descriptive statements and all prescriptive judgments must have factual contents like descriptive statements.

At the end, I conclude by saying that the philosophical debate of 'is-ought dichotomy' persists so long moral philosophy as an independent branch of philosophy will survive. However, keeping the nature of the debate and the literature of the theme in mind, I will favour the modern interpretation of 'is-ought dichotomy' instead of the classical or traditional interpretation.

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