

CHAPTER – V

THE IMPACT OF NATURALISM

In the History of Western Ethics David Hume and G.E. Moore occupy a very important position – one drawing a line between fact and value and thereby reducing ‘good’ to a subjective feeling and the other by emphasizing feeling and the indefinability of ‘good’. To the common man Hume’s position appears to be difficult to accept because that would make all moral judgements individually true which means that conflict in moral assessment is ruled out. Moore’s conception of indefinability is also intellectually embarrassing because normally we believe if something is an object of knowledge, it cannot be indefinable.

Let us examine the position of Hume. Hume refuted the claim that moral properties are not entailed by natural property because fact and value are fundamentally different. So a factual statement cannot entail a value conclusion.

This argument of Hume is analogous to his argument against induction. Hume said that in induction there is a logical gap between premise and conclusion. The premises refer to specific event but the conclusion refers to all events of a certain kind including future events. So, Hume objected to the fact that value cannot be derived from fact – ‘ought’ introduces a new relation and so it cannot be derived from ‘is’. But the point is that if Hume’s argument is correct then by the same token nearly all philosophical reasoning is defective. Because most of the philosophical arguments we derive something at the conclusion from the premises which apparently do not entail the conclusion. To take an example philosophers prove the existence of God from the orderliness of the world. This is known as teleological argument for the existence of God. Similarly, we infer the existence of mind from people’s behaviour. On Hume’s account the premises here would not entail the conclusion and therefore, will be a case of defective philosophical reasoning. This argument may be bad on the other grounds but if we rule out all of them as defective then we virtually rule out philosophizing. In all sorts of philosophical

reasoning one would be sceptic; but ‘Can we be strict sceptic?’ Scepticism is a conclusion from certain premises which means that scepticism is also the conclusion of a kind of philosophical reasoning. If Hume discovers defect in any reasoning from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ on the basis of his rejection of all such a reasoning then Hume cannot be a strict sceptic. One can also accuse him of introducing a new relation in his conclusion. The point is that Hume’s argument that the passage from fact to value is unauthorised and cannot be upholding because that would be self defecting.

It should also be noted that Hume’s ethical scepticism is a part of his general scepticism and of his empiricist epistemology and ontology. The gap which Hume imagines to hold between fact and value arises within the empiricist tradition which believes in the reality of objects which is given to our senses. Since this problem arises within the empiricist framework, it is most unlikely to solve the problem within empiricism.

As a matter of fact, values are as problematic as other minds, material object etc. We know them via certain things for example behaviour, sense data, feeling of pleasure and pain. It is understandable that there is a gap between the premises and the conclusion. The gap between sense-data and material object between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ is unavoidable. Only philosophical reasoning can bridge it. This is the attempt made by Searle by way of bringing out the narrowness of the empiricist ontology and endorsing a kind of non-empirical fact. Since, Hume discovers the gap because of his allegiance to wholesale scepticism. Searle can only solve the problem and bridge the gap by transcending the barrier of Humean ontology. There may be facts of which we cannot have an impression or idea. This is the only way to proceed from factual premises to an ethical conclusion.

Naturalism, as we know tries to bring value close to fact thereby bridging the gap between the two, created by Hume and his followers. This theory as we know has been

criticised from different points of view. We have already mentioned the criticisms of G.E. Moore particularly the difficulty of 'naturalistic fallacy'. But the disassociation between fact and value has not been really complete. Just as Humean ethics found a kind of revival in Moore, similarly old naturalism has been revived frequently with more or less success. Searle, for example, has attempted to revive naturalism. But his neo-naturalism with its crucial concept of non-empirical institutional fact has been the object of many criticisms. It seems that value cannot be derived from fact. It also seems that there cannot perhaps be a complete identification between fact and value.

We are in a dilemma – there cannot be a complete separation between fact and value; there cannot again be complete identification between the two, nevertheless, it may be that we cannot define value without making an oblique or partial reference to fact or natural phenomena.

The contention of naturalism should be clearly understood here. The contention is that fact and value cannot be completely separated. Value can be identified with fact which means that value or good can be defined in factual terms. Since fact is the basis of value, it is possible to derive an ethical conclusion from a factual premise. The thesis of naturalism may also be stated in a different way. It says that moral value or goodness does not have a factual or descriptive meaning.

We have seen that Ayer and Stevenson have attempted to show that the term 'good' is devoid of descriptive meaning. This is a clean anti – thesis of naturalistic ethics. While it seems that naturalism is not quite correct, it is also the case that the theories which emerge as its anti – thesis is not all correct.

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF INTUITIONISM

The positive thesis of Moore is known as 'intuitionism', and 'intuitionism' is a kind of anti – naturalism, since it is opposed to naturalism. Anti – naturalism holds that value is different from fact and consequently, a value term cannot be defined by a naturalistic term. Naturally, for intuitionism evaluative conclusion cannot be drawn from factual premises.

'Intuitionism' as a kind of anti-naturalism believes that the term 'good' does not refer to something which can be sensibly known. 'Goodness' is not a property which is sensible and natural. 'Goodness', therefore, stands for a non-natural property which cannot be determined by any empirical method.

For the intuitionist – 'goodness' as a property is unique and consequently it cannot be defined. As Moore said the most we can say about good is that 'Good is good'. It means that it is a property which is unobservable and unanalysable. It is a property which is present in all good things.

The problem is 'How can this property which is simple, unanalysable and non-natural be known?' 'How, again, do we know that a particular moral judgement is either true or false?' Since, a value judgement is not supported by factual evidence, it cannot be known by ordinary empirical means. Moore has claimed that moral value or goodness can be known by intuition. It is as if we directly apprehend the presence of a value property, there is no sensory experience which can deliver the knowledge of the good. But this would require that people should be in possession of a factually moral intuition which immediately makes us aware of the presence of 'goodness'. It is not mere subjective appreciation; it is a kind of knowledge brought to us factually which we all possess. Thus moral apprehension is not a subjective appreciation.

‘Intuitionism’ being opposed to naturalism may be supposed to avoid the pitfalls of naturalism. But there are certain things in it which is not easy to believe. It seems that in intuitionism there is no basis for moral reasoning and moral justification. ‘How do we justify our moral beliefs?’ The intuitive apprehension provides no justification. It is indistinguishable from mere opinion. It may be said that our opinions are sometimes rational, but that does not save it from being an opinion. An intuitionist cannot really provide justification for his moral judgement.

Moreover, if our moral beliefs are based on intuition then it is very much doubtful, for, moral disagreement can be solved. A person may claim that his moral intuition is as good as others. But actually when we find any conflict between one man’s intuition with another, we do not know how to justify the one against the other.

Intuitionism, in other words, may accommodate two assertions – one of which is opposed to the other. A naturalist may claim that as his theory moral beliefs or moral judgements can be justified, at least the naturalist may say that his theory provides the possibility of justifying moral judgements. The intuitionist, on the other hand, cannot provide us with justification and cannot prove that his moral judgement is objective.

Can the intuitionist really claim to have the ‘knowledge’ of ‘goodness’? He cannot claim that he knows the presence of moral value simply on the basis that he believes it. What we demand is that such knowledge must be justified. But the intuitionists can appeal to nothing but intuition and intuition is not capable of providing justification for a moral judgement. Intuitive knowledge does not appear to be better than belief.

CHAPTER – VI

AN ACCOUNT OF EMOTIVISM AND

ATTITUDE THEORY

Moore, however, is not a non-cognitivist. The reason is that he was of the opinion that moral value is an objective property qualifying human action, but the property is not a natural one. Good is a non-natural property, but that does not have its objectivity. If good is an objective property of human conduct; then it should be really possible that it is amenable to our apprehension. As a matter of fact, this is the reason why Moore was not a non-cognitivist; rather he believed that goodness is a property which may be discovered by intuition. There may be doubt regarding the concept of a non-natural property and also regarding the nature of the faculty of intuition which has been condemned by Mackie as a 'queer faculty'. Nevertheless Moore believed that moral judgement was related to the basic intuition of goodness. A moral judgement, in his opinion, was objective and Moore explained that they were made by intuition. So moral intuition was supposed to be the basis of moral judgement and this mode Moore accepts as ethical cognitivism. As an intuitionist Moore believed that ultimately we 'see' that certain things are good or right or obligatory. Moore had to embrace intuitionism because apprehension of a moral quality cannot be discovered in any other way.

Had it been natural, one could have cognised it with the help of ordinary faculties. Since goodness for Moore is a non-natural property, Moore had to subscribe to intuitionism. However, like other cognitivist, Moore as an intuitionist would talk about 'apprehension'. 'Seeing' or 'Cognizing' what other be the epistemological position, an intuitionist believed that he is putting forward an opinion about an objective matter.

If cognitivism is to be evaluated as a correct hypothesis, what is required at the outset is a serious consideration of the thesis that the statements of ethical value can be translated into statements of empirical fact. They are of the opinion that the value statement is translatable into factual statement. The group of Philosophers who were called non-cognitivist has considered intuitionism as a theory of moral knowledge. We can refer to

A.J.Ayer who in his book *Language Truth and Logic* has taken up the position of intuitionism for critical consideration. As he describes intuitionism, it is the view that statements of value are not controlled by observation, as ordinary empirical propositions are nothing but only a mysterious intellectual intuition. Since moral judgement depends on intuitive apprehension.¹

It is not possible to verify the statement- value. We can never ascertain whether the report of mind intuition is better than the report of other minds intuition. In fact, there is no check for ascertaining the trust work of intuitive evaluations. It seems that the intuitionists' view about apprehension is unjustified. Ayer in his book observed that it is notorious that what seems intuitively certain to one person may seem doubtful, or even false, to another. So unless it is possible to provide some criterion by which one may decide between conflicting intuitions, a mere appeal to intuition is worthless as a test of a proposition's validity. But in the case of moral judgements no such criterion can be given.²

The intuitions make clear that one's own work judgement is correct, but this is at least clear, and its an assertion which may be of psychological interest of claim to knowledge does not move the validity of any moral judgement. Another moralist may vary and claim that his moral view is correct. There are all subjective views or subjective certainties between which there is nothing to choose. When there is different source of opinion in connection with empirical proposition, we can resolve it by carrying out some empirical tests; but on the intuitionist theory there is no empirical test which proves the correctness of ethical statement. Hence, ethical statements are unverifiable.

The above conclusion proceeds from the very cardinal premise. The premises that a statement which is not analytic would be considered to be meaningful if and only if it is

verifiable in the light of relevant empirical observation. We can see and thus verify such statements as “The table is brown,” because it follows from a set of logically consistent empirical statements based on observation. A statement which is not so verifiable must be meaningless. Such statements are neither T nor F. For example, a statement like “The absolute is perfect” would be considerably meaningful because it cannot be empirically verifiable.

An ethical statement like “One should do X”, is equally unverifiable which means that an ethical statement is meaningless; it also means that an ethical concept is not a significant concept.

An ethical statement is unanalysable in the opinion of Moore. Moore thought that because of the simplicity of the ethical concept it cannot be analysed. Ayer is of the opinion that an ethical concept is not a genuine concept at all. Since an ethical concept is the presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition, it adds nothing to its factual content. In the statement “You acted wrongly in stealing the money”, we do not state anything more than that what is contained in the sentence. The phrase ‘you acted wrongly’ makes no further addition to the factual content of the proposition. The speaker is not making any further statement in saying that the action is wrong. Ayer’s idea is that in saying the action in question as wrong it gives a feeling of moral disapproval. His moral disapproval would be expressed. Just as the tone or explanation adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence, similarly the addition of the phrase “You acted wrongly” would add nothing to that what is given.

It would only show that the speaker is giving expression to a certain feeling.

It appears, therefore, that a moral statement has no factual meaning. It expresses no proposition that it is either T or F. An ethical remark would speak of moral approval or

disapproval which cannot have truth- value. Different people may have moral attitudes or sentiments regarding a certain situation, but they would not make a factual statement when they make moral evaluation. Ayer observes-“Ethical statements are simply expressions which can be neither true nor false.”³

There is an important implication of Ayar’s theory that an ethical statement is not verifiable or it is not factual. If a moral statement is not a factual statement then there is not an assertion regarding any state of affairs. Although an ethical statement is said to express the speaker’s feeling, it does not make a statement of the speaker’s mind. In making the ethical statement the speaker simply expresses his moral sentiment. In the words of Ayar, “The exhortations to moral virtue are not propositions at all, but ejaculations or commands which are designed to provoke the reader to action of a certain sort...In saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong” I am not making a factual statement not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral statement.”⁴ Ayer consequently comes to the conclusion that the function of an ethical word is partly emotive.

In this connection the view of Frankena may be observed. He told-“The most extreme of these are a number of views which deny that ethical and value judgments, or at least the most basic ones, are capable of any kind of rational or objectively valid justification. On one such view that of A.J. Ayer- they are simply expression of emotion much like ejaculation. Saying that killing is wrong is like saying, ‘killing booh!; it says nothing which is true or false and cannot be justified in a rational way.”⁵

The emotive view of an ethical word has two- fold significance. In the first place it expresses the speaker’s feeling, and in the second place it serves to arouse similar feeling of others and stimulate action. This is the reason why ethical statement sometimes takes

the form of a command. The statement 'Tell the Truth', of course, expresses the feeling of the speaker, but it is also translatable as you ought to tell the truth, which is of the nature of a command.

It has been observed by Garner and Rosen—"Very often, when non-cognitive views are criticized, the theory presented by Ayer receives much of the criticisms. According to Ayer, moral judgments must be treated as expressions of emotion and/or commands, and this view has come to be called by the name of emotivism. There are few reasons for believing that there is nothing more to a moral judgment than an expression of emotion, and many reasons for believing that when we say of something that is good, we are saying more than 'Hurrah'..."⁶

The fact that an ethical statement has emotive meaning indicates that the validity of such a statement cannot be tested in the way in which a factual or empirical statement is verified. As Ayer said that it is impossible to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgments. It is a matter of fact, according to Ayer, an ethical statement has no objective validity because an ethical judgment actually makes no statements. If a judgment or statement makes no statement, it would not be possible to speak of its truth or falsity.

That an ethical sentence makes no statement is a phenomenon which distinguished the emotivism of Ayer from orthodox subjective belief- ethical sentences express proposition about the speaker's feeling. If this be so then an ethical judgment can be either true or false.

An ethical sentence would be T if the speaker has relevant feeling; it is false if such feeling is absent. Whether the feeling is present or absent is a fact which can be

ascertained empirically i.e. on the orthodox subjectivist view an ethical judgement is subject to empirical verification and can be determined as either T or F.

Ayer, on the other hand, is of the opinion that an ethical sentence is the expression of feeling. It is true that there can be no assertion of feeling unless one expresses that feeling. I express my boredom and I make the assertion that I am bored. But this does not mean that I cannot express my boredom with a certain assertion of being bored. The point is that even if the assertion that one has a certain feeling always involves the expression of that feeling, the expression of a feeling does not always involve the assertion of feeling. This is how Ayer's emotivism differs from ordinary subjectivist theory. According to the subjectivist, an ethical sentence asserts the existence of feeling. For the emotivist ethical statements are expression of feeling which may not involve any assertion.⁷

In the light of the distinction stated above it is clear why an ethical sentence does not express a statement and this being so it is pointless to speak of the verifiability of an ethical sentence for determining its truth or falsify. Ethical judgement, in fact, has no validity. In fact, the existence of a feeling is not a necessary and sufficient condition of the validity of an ethical judgement.

Since an ethical statement does not express a proposition, it does not express incompatible or contradictory proposition. Unfortunately this has been an object of criticism. Moore remarked that if ethical sentences were statements about the speaker's feeling as the subjectivist would say, then it would be impossible to urge it about the question of value. This is an unnatural if somebody makes a statement about mentally certain thing, and if somebody refuses to agree with him then both of them would be stating their respective feeling and there is no reason why the feeling of the one would be

true and that of the other would be false. Actually expressions of feeling do not contradict one or other.

This, in fact, had been the point of Moore's criticism to which he subjected the whole school of subjectivism. However, Ayer draws own attention to a very important thing in defence of his position. He says that, Moore's argument does not damage his position because his theory is that a moral sentence expresses feeling but does not state a proposition. Consequently, there is no scope for making incompatible prepositions. Moreover, on Ayer's explanation, there is no room for dispute about the question of value since moral statement is the expression of the emotion. So if there is no room for moral disputem, Moore's criticism that an ethical theory should make provision for arguing about question of value does not effect in.

This may seem to be a very paradoxical assertion in this connection.

An explanation requires because we ordinarily are engaged in disputes which are ordinarily regarded as dispute about the question of value. But Ayer's explanation is that what is usually called disputes regarding questions of value is really dispute about the question of fact. Ayer explains the procedure of moral disagreement in the following way –

“When someone disagrees with us about the moral value of a certain action or a type of action, we do admittedly resort to argument in order to win him over to our way of thinking. But does not attempt to show by our arguments that he has the wrong ethical feeling towards a situation whose nature he has correctly apprehended. What we attempt to show is that he is mistaken about the facts of the case.”⁸

The point is that we believe that if there is an agreement regarding the nature of the situation and the agents' motive, then there is no reason why there should be disagreement regarding moral value. If the empirical fact is apprehended in the same way by different people, then all of them should adopt the same moral attitude.

A word must be said regarding this expectation for agreement of moral attitude on the fact of it, it was seen strong that moral judgements and expression of feeling and also that there is inter-subjective agreement, rather inter-subjective agreement cannot be expected. If moral evaluation is the matter of expression of people's feelings.

Hume's sentimentalism faced the same problem.

Hume explained by suggesting that all human beings are constitutionally similar and there is the reason why they mentally response a certain sensation in the same way. So Hume appeals to identical human nature and explained the phenomenon of moral agreement although he believed in sentimentalism.

Ayer also appeals to the common moral education which people usually received from his society. People who live in the same social order and who generally received the same moral education as us, our expectation is usually justified. But if some people once morally conditioned differently from ourselves, then there may be disagreement regarding moral valuation. Such people may be supposed to have a descent moral sense. They would imply a different set of value. In such a way moral argument fails.

The conclusion is that in Ayer's emotivism there is no moral dispute, although apparently we engage in dispute on Ayer's argument. If is clear that is otherwise called moral dispute, is an attempt to bring people to see the exact nature of the empirical

situation so that there is factual agreement. Once we achieve factual agreement, we shall see that there is no real dispute regarding questions of value.

As distinguished from Ayer's emotive theory, Stevenson's ethical idea is referred to as attitude theory. The theory simply says that moral judgements express speaker's attitude. The second feature of theory is that it believes moral judgement is uttered with the intention of evoking similar attitudes in others. The peculiarity of moral judgement is that it is different from factual judgement, although it is quasi-factual in character. In this connection one can see the difference between fact and value as conceived by Stevenson. According to Ayer, ethical terms lack implication in the sense that they are meaningless. They simply express our emotion. But Stevenson holds that ethical terms or statements are definitely meaningful but there are dual but interconnected meanings of ethical statements. But these two meanings of ethical terms and statements have been characterised as descriptive meaning, for, a factual statement has simply descriptive meaning, while ethical statement has descriptive and emotive meaning. These two meanings are not completely independent of each other. But their functions are fundamentally different. The descriptive meaning is the tendency of word which affects cognition. The emotive meaning, on the other hand, has the tendency of acquiring words through association in emotional situation to express emotional attitude of the speaker and to evoke emotive responses from the hearer.⁹

Ayer held that moral statement did not have descriptive component. Stevenson, on the other hand, draws our attention to the fact that there is genuine moral conflict which would show that there is not only disagreement between two people regarding facts. We find that even when people agree regarding fact, they have moral conflict.

The contention of Stevenson is that it is not possible to reduce the meaning of value statement has a descriptive component. Nevertheless descriptive meaning does not entirely displace emotive meaning. It seems that according to Stevenson descriptive plays a subordinate role in value judgement.

It would be interesting to note the difference between Stevenson's theory and naturalism. The naturalists have noticed on the descriptive element of value and ignored its emotive aspect. Stevenson on the other hand emphasised concepts of pleasure and utility have no place in concept of moral value. That is why; descriptive meaning can exhaust meaning of moral term. In the second place on naturalism the concept of moral value is absolutely clear. It is either of the nature of pleasure or of the nature of utility. According to Stevenson, moral value or goodness does not have any such permanent or unchangeable meaning and that is why; we can give persuasive definition of goodness. It seems Stevenson's theory is much closer to subjective naturalism which concedes importance of subjective attitude in the concept of goodness.

From the above point of view, Stevenson's theory comes to Hume's philosophy which says when a person judges something to be good, he expresses attitude of approval and disapproval. Stevenson also believes that moral terms have descriptive or declarative aspect which expresses speaker's attitude or desire or approval or otherwise.¹⁰

Hume said although moral expressions speak of our statement, nevertheless there may be agreement among people regarding this attitude. Hume, to be sure, admits of moral conflict but believes that it is possible to reach an agreement by the use of reasoning and through discussion. In simple terms it means if there is agreement regarding information then there may be agreement regarding moral value. But Stevenson holds that even if there is agreement regarding facts there may be conflict in emotion and attitude. Further

Stevenson holds moral terms succeed in evoking emotion in bearer similar to his own emotion and this is not endorsed by Hume.

So far as the distinction between fact and value is concerned, we can compare the thesis of Stevenson and that of Moore. Moore holds that moral value is simple and consequently unanalysable and indefinable. But Stevenson believes 'goodness' is complex concept and since it contains an emotive aspect over and above its descriptive aspect as it cannot be defined. Consequently both Moore and Stevenson have been conscious of peculiarity of value. But while Moore opposes all kinds of definition as being naturalistic and fallacious, Stevenson allows persuasive definition of good.

What is important to notice that Stevenson draws a distinction between fact and value, because a fact has only descriptive meaning while value has an emotive meaning. This is evident from the difference between functions of factual and value expressions. Hence fact is not reducible to value and no better than persuasive definition can be given of value.

References

1. A.J. Ayer: *Language, Truth and Logic*, Dover Publications, 1936, p.101.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid*, pp.102-10
4. *Ibid*, pp.103, 107
5. William K. Frankena: *Ethics*, Prentice Hall, 1963, p.88

6. Richard T Garner and Bernard Rosen: *Moral Philosophy*, Macmillan, New York and London, 1967, pp.315-316.
7. A.J. Ayer: *Language, Truth and Logic*, Dover Publications, 1936, pp.102-103
8. A.J. Ayer: *Language, Truth and Logic*, Dover Publications, 1936, p.101
9. Charles L Stevenson: *Facts and Values: Studies in Ethical Analysis*, Yale University, 1963, pp.16-22
10. *Ibid*, pp.23-27.