

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is concerned with an epistemic issue. The issue is whether moral value or goodness can be cognized or not. It is true that not all things are cognizable. There may be things or properties which are not objects of cognition. The question is: How is good to be understood? Or does its ontological status determined for it is on this fact that the cognizability or otherwise of value depends? It seems that before we deal with the problem of cognizability of moral value we should determine the exact nature or the ontological status of goodness.

The discussion regarding the status of value started in a new prospective. Ethical Philosophers have attempted to find out the relation between moral value on the one hand and fact on the other. Opinions differ regarding the relation between fact and value. It is clear that the identification of moral value with fact determines the status of moral value in a way that would be different from what it would be, if the relation between fact and value is ignored. In other words, the ignorance of the difference between fact and value may lead us to the land of different type of conclusion, which is undesirable. We propose, therefore, to consider historically the opinion that we came across regarding the relation between fact and value.

The issue regarding the relation between fact and value is most clearly considered by the British Philosopher David Hume in the '*An Enquiry concerning Human understanding*.'

Hume draws a very radical distinction between fact and value. In his opinion fact constitutes the world of which we have impression and ideas. Moral value or goodness is a projection of our subjective feeling or sentiment.

Hume's attitude towards moral value is brought out in the following statement.

"Morality is more properly felt than just off."

Hume believes that moral distinctions are not derived from reason. Operation of human understanding has been divided into two kinds:

- (i) Conferring ideas and ;
- (ii) Inferring of matters of facts.¹

It has been observed by David Hume- “All the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, *Relation of Ideas and matters of Fact*. Of the first kind are the sciences of Geography, Algebra and Mathematics; and in short every affirmation which is either intuitive or demonstratively certain. *That the square of the hypotense is equal to the square of two sides*, is a proposition which expresses the relation between these figures. *That three times five is equal to the half of thirty* exposes a relation between these numbers. Propositions of this kind are discoverable by mere operation of thought without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the Universe. Though there never were a circle or triangle in nature, the truths demonstrated by Euclid would forever retain their certainty and evidence. Matters of fact, which are the second objects of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner; nor is our evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature with the foregoing. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible, because it can never imply a contradiction, and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness, as if even so conformable to reality...matter of fact, beyond the present testimony of our senses or records of our memory.”² Our apprehension of moral distinction falls into neither of those categories. So it is not the work of reason.

Morality again, is not something pertaining to matters of facts. If we consider a case of murder and if we judge it as vice, it will not be a matter of fact or real existence. Hume tells us that in whichever way we take it, we find only certain passion or motive or

volition or thought. There is no matter of fact. If we never find it till we turn our reflection into ourselves, and find a sentiment of disapprobation which arises in us towards this action. Here is the matter of fact but it is the object of feeling not of reason, it lies in ourselves, not in the object Vice and virtue, therefore may be compared to sound, colours, heat and cold, which according to modern philosophy, are not qualities of object, but perception in mind.³

The above statement of Hume brings out clearly that moral value must be different from fact. We can discover a fact by the operation of senses or of understanding. But moral value is a kind of feeling or sentiment. A fact is something which is objective and cognizable. Value constitutes a different world altogether. Our sensation and understanding do not have any entry to the world of value. Value is not something which may have an impression or an idea. Morality is nothing than a feeling. It is said by P.S. Ardal -“The essential foundation for Hume’s moral Philosophy in his insistence that men’s ability and disposition to make moral judgments depend primarily on their passions and sentiments, not on their purely intellectual faculties. Moral approval and disapproval are sentiments, not deliverances of reason. Reason... is limited to the discovery of matter. In fact and relations between ideas...Reason is inert and cannot by itself produce action, but moral judgments do influence action; therefore moral judgments cannot be derived from reason.”⁴

This bifurcation between fact and value has been characterized by MAX Black, as Hume’s Guillotine. The bifurcation also suggests that no value statement can be derived from factual statement. A factual statement speaks of a relation that is fundamentally different from the kind of a relation expressed in a value statement. So far the assertion that something is the case it is not possible to make another statement

regarding what ought to be the case. This entailment gap is something that follows from the bifurcation drawn by Hume between fact and value.

In the history of ethical philosophy Hume's sentimentalism played a very important role till naturalism came into the picture. On Hume's theory value is distinguished from fact so much so that value judgement can not be derived from factual judgement. It would mean that value judgements are neither true nor false. The reason is that ethical judgements are not factually justifiable and ethical term is effective. Naturalism goes to the other extreme and holds an altogether different view regarding the problem of meaning and justification of ethical judgements.

An ethical naturalist is a philosopher who believes that value can be identified in naturalistic terms. There is no rigid distinction between fact and value.

As a matter of fact moral value and goodness can be identified as a factual property characterising human conduct. Value properties, therefore, are natural or factual properties. Value statements are verifiable like factual statements. The presence of value properties can be ascertained by empirical tests.

In simple terms naturalistic ethics holds that moral value can be described in factual or naturalistic terms. If this be so then a value statement should be considered as descriptive in nature.

The fact- value distinction vanishes because value is identified with fact. To take an example, Hedonism as a variety of naturalism holds that pleasure can be identified with goodness. In other words, goodness is definable in terms of pleasure which is a natural property. Utilitarianism is also a kind of naturalism in as much as it identifies value with utility or greatest happiness of greatest number.