General Introduction

The central question of moral philosophy of language actually hinges on the question: how is *'what is the case'* related to *'what ought to be the case'*. 'What is the case' is a form of descriptive statement and 'what ought to be the case' is a form of an evaluative statement. Accordingly the question again can be reformulated like this: In what sense is a descriptive statement related to an evaluative statement? More succinctly it can be said in what sense *statement of fact* is related to *statement of values.* It is important to point out here that this issue has a prolonged historical background and it has been discussing since long back. However this issue still deserves philosophical attention because traditional moral philosophy as a whole actually hinges on this central issue. Why is this issue thought to be a central issue of morality? Why ethics needs to be related to statement of fact? Why the subject matter of ethics needs to be scrutinized in terms of statements of fact? A fact is something which makes a proposition or sentence as either true or false. Thus, the concept of fact has been an important issue in philosophy. Therefore, ethics being an evaluative discipline must be scrutinized in terms of factuality. Many philosophers, in fact, have condemned ethics as devoid of *cognitive values* as they are neither true or false. The question of truth and falsity in the case of ethical statements simply does not arise. For example emotivism is a case in point. Emotive statements are nothing but the outcome of emotion in which the question of truth and falsity simply does not arise. Contrary to this, a descriptive judgment must be interpreted in terms of truth and falsity. The issue that will be addressed in this thesis belongs to moral

philosophy of language. That means the traditional *is-ought* problem is a problem of *moral philosophy of language* and it has been suggested by many that to have a clear cut vision of this dichotomy, one has to evaluate the nature of language used in moral statements. This issue is highly debatable and contentious as there we find the diametrically opposite views regarding this issue. If we look back in the history of philosophy, we find that there are a good numbers of moral philosophers who adhere to the view that an evaluative statement can be logically deduced from a descriptive statement through the process of linguistic clarification. On the other hand, there is another group of philosophers who hold that the nature of *is- statement* is completely different from the nature of *ought-statement*. Therefore, the question of deducing or having an evaluative statement from a descriptive statement simply does not arise.

One would like to say that moral judgments themselves are statements of fact. In fact the sentence "This action is right" is very like the sentence "This apple is red". Both sentences have the same grammatical structure. In the sentence "This apple is red", the sentence itself describes an apple. The question then is whether the sentence "This action is right" describing an action like the other sentence under consideration. According to some philosophers it actually does. According to them even though it would be the case that rightness is a very different sort of property than redness, both the statements under consideration are capable of being either true or false. According to them "The action is right" states a moral fact just as "This apple is red" states a physical fact. Therefore, it has been said by many that moral statements are nothing but simply a sub-class of statements of fact. It is

important to point out here that in the case of moral or ought statement there remains a hinted or an oblique force which is not there in the case of is statement. When it is said that 'this action is right', it implicitly means that the speaker in normal case desires it to be done. It is also meant that the speaker gets satisfaction by doing this action and he would equally be satisfied if somebody has done it. However, such an oblique force is completely foreign or far off in the case of descriptive statement. Thus, although the statements under consideration are grammatically as well as syntactically identical in form, the question then naturally arises whether they have precisely the same kind of meaning. The content of moral judgment is purely mental and the content of descriptive judgment is purely physical. A moral statement states what one ought to be done; whereas a statement of fact states what the case is. Accordingly, when one utters a moral judgment, he thereby sets a moral standard which belongs to mental state. That is why some moral philosophers expressed reservation by considering moral statements as the sub-class of factual or descriptive statements. As the nature of these two kinds of statement is different, the job they perform is also different. By uttering a moral statement, somebody is evaluating, prescribing, advising, and registering an attitude to that to which one applies these moral expressions. In fact Ludwig Wittgenstein warned us regarding the real and the apparent logical forms of proposition and it becomes really up-to-the-minute in contemporary moral philosophy to hold fast to the view that there really underlies a logical gulf and a radical difference of meaning between statement of fact, i.e. *is- statement* and statement of value, i.e. an *ought statement*. Even if we accept that ought-statement is one aspect of is-statement, then

there remains the question in what sense or how are moral judgments and statements of fact related to one another? In fact, in ordinary interpretation, there we seem a close proximity as far as the use of these two types of statement is concerned. However, philosophers' eyes have caught this issue from an important dimension. In any form of dialogue, it is noticed that there is considerable overlapping in between is-statements and ought-statements. Even Professor R.M. Hare in his book *Language and Morals* reiterates that in every step of a dialoguing argument there involves the application of what may be called the moral, or the practical, syllogism. We think that in the case of moral statement, there always remain some hidden follow-up statements which may be interpreted in terms of statement of fact. For example, from the statement "Religion is debatable", it is entailed that "Religion ought not to be taught in schools" and again from this statement it is generalized subsequently, 'whatever is debatable ought not to be taught in schools'. This leads us to say that an evaluative statement cannot be directly deduced from a descriptive statement, but an evaluative statement is enthymetically submerged in is-statement and this would be portrayed or manifested when it has been structured syllogistically. What has been said above is given syllogistically below:

Major Premise: Whatever is debatable ought not to be taught in schools.

Minor Premise: Religion is debatable.

Conclusion: Religion ought not to be taught in schools.   — -

In the above syllogism the major premise is a universal ought principle; the minor premise is a descriptive or is statement and the conclusion is again a particular ought-judgment. It seems clear to us that in formulating the above syllogism, i.e. a logical dialogue, there we notice a twist of overlapping

between ought and is statement. More succinctly, it can be said that in the case of a valid moral reasoning the premises must include ought statement if the conclusion is to do so. Now the central issue that needs to be addressed here is that in what sense philosophers have admitted that an 'ought' statement cannot be logically deduced from 'is' statement. Those who admit that an 'ought-statement' cannot be logically deduced from 'is-statement' have been challenged by some modern thinkers. Thus, the issue remains lively in philosophical discussion. So long moral philosophy of language survives or in short moral language remains visible in philosophy as such the problem of is-ought dichotomy remains worthy of philosophical discussion. Over the years philosophers have deeply engrossed with some key questions such as: Is the job which ought to do is logically so like or unlike that which it does? Is there really no way of deriving ought logically from is? Does moral reasoning require some logical character of factual judgments? These questions are the central issues of is-ought problem. Philosophers over the years have discussed these issues and the issues that have been discussed so far generate new dimension which will require further development. Interestingly, there we find two groups of which one holds that there underlies an unbridgeable gulf between is and ought statement and hence the question of deriving *ought- statement* from *is-statement* simply does not arise. Contrary to this view, there is another view which holds that *ought- statement* is a sub-class of *is - statement* and with proper linguistic clarification, it would be possible to derive ought-statement from is- statement.

What we can say here is that the is-ought dichotomy is a long standing debate and so long moral philosophy will survive, this issue will remain a viable contentious philosophical issue. The general propensity is that there

remains a considerable gulf between is-ought statement. However, this does not make sense to say that we rule out any sort of possibility of deriving an 'ought statement' from an 'is-statement'. In fact many philosophers, we will see in the course of our discussion, have attempted to derive an ought-statement from an is-statement. Having said this, it would be quite plausible to hold that the gulf between is-ought is prominent and vivid. We can explain in brief the is-ought gap from many philosophical contexts.

Historically, it was Hume who famously introduced or presented the is-ought gap. He at the very outset raises the question: "How do you get an 'ought' from an 'is'"[1] Hume realized that many people have prompted about *what is the case* in order to argue *what ought to be the case*. According to them what we could get *what ought to be the case* from *what is the case*. But how it could be done is not clear at all. According to Hume sentiments are not subject to truth or falsity and for him morality seems to require sentiments. As morality requires sentiments and sentiments are not subject to truth or falsity, it would be impossible to have 'ought' from 'is' because according to Hume moral endorsements would then just be an emotional reaction. What Hume insists here is that emotions are neither true nor false and moral approvals are based on emotions. Accordingly, following Hume, it can be said that there remains a considerable gap between "ought" and "is", because moral facts cannot exist. Morality, for Hume, is merely an expression of our emotions. Hume's position here appears very similar to non-cognitivists. However, Hume never has made it clear that he was a non-cognitivist. However, his moral theory apparently looks like this.

Historically, the issue of is-ought dichotomy first caught up in the philosophical writings of David Hume. In fact, Hume in his book *Treatise*

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[1] Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature,* Book III, Part I, Section I. V. 18.

sets up a standard interpretation of is-ought. This issue has come in Hume's mind from his famous doubts about induction based on the conjecture that an inference must be either deductive or inductive. Modern philosophers, however, do not find any reason for accepting Hume's dictum and as a matter of fact they have criticized Hume for making this doubt about induction. The same group of philosophers interestingly supported Hume on the point of the impossibility of deducing 'ought' statement from 'is' statement. Their point is that the impossibility of deducing 'ought' statement from 'is' statement indirectly leads to the assumption that any valid inference from 'is' to 'ought' must be either deductive or inductive. Hume's endeavour would certainly not to expose the unbridgeable gap between is-ought problem, rather Hume has attempted to show how an inference from the one to the other could be drawn. Hume at his time found some distortion in morality what he attributed at his time the **religious morality**. According to Hume morality being as a religious morality was based on the command of God. Being an extreme empiricist Hume is a disbeliever of God. Accordingly, the morality which is based on religion is not a true morality. Hume attributes it as the *vulgar system of morality*. On this morality the judgment that X ought to be done can be inferred from the belief that God has commanded X to be done. Hume, in fact, has rejected the religious foundation of morality and instead of this sort of morality Hume seeks a kind of morality that would carry out the needs, desires and happiness of humans in general.

One may raise a quip by saying that how do we know that this is exactly what Hume was trying to do? Commentator like MacIntyre responded this question by saying that Hume actually intended to say that religious morality based on the verdict of God actually fails to find its logical

foundation. Hume, in fact, was not interested to bring the role of God in dictating religious morality; rather Hume was seeking a kind of morality that would be useful to serve the common interest of man, their happiness and health. In fact, Hume does not agree with Hare's formulation of moral principles. Hare has attempted to derive a particular moral judgment from a statement of fact by following universal principles. Contrary to this, Hume was convinced by the practical syllogism as propounded by Aristotle. However, MacIntyre's interpretation had not been well supported by many. Even some commentators interpreted Hume's is-ought passage to mean entailment. Thus, we witness a high degree of controversy regarding the actual position of Hume's own interpretation of is-ought dichotomy. In the **First Chapter** of this thesis, we propose to analyze and examine **Hume's view regarding is-ought dichotomy.**

After Hume, there we find another classical thinker, namely, Moore who did not rule out 'is-ought dichotomy'. Even though Moore did not interpret the 'is-ought' dichotomy directly, but his concept of *Naturalistic Fallacy* provided sufficient clues on the basis of which one can develop Moore's position regarding this dichotomy. According to Moore, evaluative terms are non-natural. In this regard, he mentioned the concept of good. Moore interpreted good as a non-natural property. He then claimed that as good is a non-natural property, it cannot be defined in terms of natural property. Any attempt of defining non-natural property in terms of natural property invites naturalistic fallacy. We propose to analyse and examine Moore's position in the **Second Chapter** and it would be entitled as **Moore on Fact-Value Dichotomy.**

The idea that value judgments are subjective is a piece of philosophy that has gradually come to be accepted by many great thinkers. According to

them 'statements of facts' are capable of being 'objectively true' and 'objectively warranted' as well while value judgments are unqualified for objective truth and objective warrant. Value judgments are completely outside of reasoning. Accordingly, value judgments, in most cases, are purely subjective in nature. Carnap in his little book *The Unity of Science* inclines to say that all non-scientific problems are a confusion of *pseudo problems*. He writes, "All statements belonging to Metaphysics, regulative Ethics, and Epistemology have this defect, are in fact unverifiable and, therefore, unscientific. In the **Vienna Circle**, we are accustomed to describe such statements as nonsense (after Wittgenstein). This terminology is to be understood as implying a logical, not say a psychological distinction; its use is intended to assert only that the statements in question do not possess a certain logical characteristic common to all proper scientific statements, namely, verifiability; we do not intend to assert the impossibility of associating any conceptions or images with these logically invalid statements. Conceptions can be associated with any arbitrary compounded series of words; and metaphysical statements are richly evocative of association and feelings both in authors and readers."[2] According to Carnap, the dichotomy is, at the bottom, not a distinction but a thesis, namely, the thesis that 'ethics' is not about 'matters of fact'. Ethical utterances were allowed no more meaning than 'any arbitrarily compounded series of words'.

We think that when Vienna circle was formed the situation was different as it was in the time of Hume. Even though bacteria are not observables in the logical positivist sense, but still they are known to exist and although the reality of 'atoms' was denied by some of the world's best physicists prior to

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[2] Carnap, Rudolf, *The Unity of Science*, London: Kegan Paul, 1934, p.22.

Perrin's experiments in 1909, but after those experiments, it was discovered that they are perfectly real things. In fact, the logical positivists themselves were deeply impressed by the success of relativity theory, which speaks of 'curved space time', and quantum mechanics. However, after the publication of the celebrated book *The Logical Construction of the World* of Carnap in 1928, it was revealed that all factual statements are transformable into statements about the subjects' own sense experiences. Even some members of the Vienna circle insisted that a meaningful statement must be conclusively verified by confrontation with the direct experience. However, at bottom, the logical positivist's view was that a 'fact' was something that could be certified by mere observation. If this is the notion of a fact, then it is hardly surprising that ethical judgments turn out not to be factual. Thus, it can be said that logical positivists are the firm believers of fact-value dichotomy.

But the pertinent question then is: what exactly did the logical positivists, who were the most influential markers of the fact-value dichotomy, understand by fact? As far as revised logical positivism criterion of cognitive significance is concerned, it can be said that it is the system of scientific statements as a whole that has "factual content." However, the logical positivists liberalized the famous "criterion of cognitive significance" by embracing that cognitively meaningful language could contain not only observation terms, but also the so-called *theoretical terms* referring to unobservable by system of postulates, the postulates of the various scientific theories. According to Putnam, so long the system as a whole enables us to predict our experience more successfully than we could without them accept a sentence as *empirically meaningful*. However, to predict anything, according to logical positivists, means to deduce observation sentence from a theory

and again to deduce anything from a set of empirical postulates, we need not only those postulates but also the atoms of mathematics and logic.

According to logical positivists, many axioms such as "All bachelors are unmarried" do not state facts at all. They are analytic and thus empty of factual content. Thus, Putnam inclines to say that even though scientific statements by and large are scientifically significant, but not everything scientifically is a statement of fact. Accordingly, Putnam goes on to say that it would be prerequisite to search for a satisfactory demarcation of the "factual" because the search for a satisfactory way of drawing "the analytic-synthetic distinction". In this regard, Putnam mentions the name of great contemporary thinker, W. V. Quine. In fact, Quine pulls down the metaphorically inflated notion of the *analytic* as has been developed by Kant and many other great thinkers. Quine does not agree with the view that every statement in the language of science should be treated as a statement of fact. Instead of that, Quine suggests that the whole idea of classifying every statement including the statements of pure mathematics as "factual" or "conventional" what the logical positivists termed with *analysis* was an unpromising muddle. In this regard economist philosopher Vivin Walsh has said, "To borrow and adapt Quine's vivid image, if a theory may be black with fact and white with convention, it might well (as far as logical empiricist could tell) be red with values. Since for them confirmation and falsification had to be a property of a theory as a whole, they had no way of unraveling this whole cloth."[3] According to Putnam even science may presupposes values as well experiences and conventions, science of course presupposes **epistemic values.** Even classical pragmatists, such as, Peirce, James, Dewey, all held that values and normativity filter through all of

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[3] Walsh, Vivid, " Philosophy and Economics", in *The New Palgrave:A Dictionary and Economics*, vol.3, ed. J. Eatwell, M. Milgate, and P. Newman, London: Macmillan, 1987, pp.861-869.

experience. Even in the philosophy of science we sense that normative judgments are essentially to the practice of science itself. The term simplicity itself as a whole a bundle of different values is presupposed by physical science.

Likewise, the terms, such as, beauty, naturalness, etc., are also presupposed by physical science. Putnam, however, considers epistemic values as values even though he does not deny the difference between epistemic and ethical values. However, Putnam does not agree with the view as maintained by the fact-value dichotomists that scientific or factual value is objective whereas ethical or moral value is subjective. This is, according to Putnam, a mistake. For Putnam epistemic values guide us in perusing right descriptions of the world. While justifying epistemic value, Putnam here refers Roderick Firth. He says, "As Roderick Firth pointed out twenty years ago, it is not that we have some way of telling that we have arrived at the truth apart from our epistemic values and can, so to speak, run a test to see how often choosing the more coherent, simpler, and so on, theory turns out to be true without presupposing these very standards of justified empirical belief. The claim that on the whole we come closer to truth about the world by choosing theories that exhibit simplicity, coherence, past predicative success, and so on, and even the claim that we have made more successful predictions than we would have been able to obtain by replying on Jerry Falwell, or on imams, or on ultraorthodox rabbis, or simply relying on the authority of tradition...because we have been guided by the very values in question in our reflections upon records and testimonies concerning past inquiries – not of course, all the stories and myths that there are in the world about the past, but the records

and testimonies that we have good reason to trust by these very criterion of "good reason".[4] Thus, Putnam takes a different standpoint as contrary to the fact-value dichotomists and he has attempted to merge the gulf or gap between fact-value dichotomies by cognizing the epistemic value of science. In this regard, he was influenced by the image theory of W. V. Quine. In the **Third Chapter,** we propose to analyze and explain Putnam's outlook as an attempt of collapsing the fact/value dichotomy as expounded by the classical thinkers and this chapter would be entitled as **Putnam on the Fact-Value Dichotomy.**

The attempt of collapsing the fact-value dichotomy has further been extended by Prof. Max Black. Even though like many others, Black has claimed that only statements of fact can follow from statements of fact, but still he believes that there is a good sense in which some statements about what should be done do follow from factual premises. Black here senses factual statements in a very narrower sense. For Black a factual sentence is one which contains the main verb 'is' or 'is not', but under no circumstance can be expressed by sentences containing 'should', 'must', 'ought' etc. Black starts his attempt to show how 'ought' or rather 'should' can be derived from 'is' by a reference to Hume 'is-ought dichotomy' what he latter ascribes as **Hume's Guillotine'.** According to Black modern philosophers have committed two gross mistakes, such as, (i) they have presumed uncritically that no term of 'ought'- in the conclusion of a valid argument which does not occur in the premises and (ii) they have taken it that ought statements make no truth claims and presume falsely that they are therefore not qualified to serve as either the premises or the conclusion of valid arguments. In the

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[4] Putnam, Hillary, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy,* Harvard University Press, 2003, p.33.

Fourth Chapter we propose to explain and analyses Prof. Black's view regarding 'is-ought dichotomy' and also try to unveil the mistakes after Black. This chapter would be entitled as **Attempts to reduce *ought* from *is*: Black's Interpretation.**

We think that Searle's attempt of deducing an 'ought' from an 'is' deserves worthy of philosophical consideration. In fact Professor Searle's paper "How to derive 'ought' from 'is'" has been the subject of much discussion. Searle actually opens up an avenue to show that there is a passage through which one can derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. In this regard, Searle at the first sight has given an argument through which he attempts to show how does an 'ought' statement can be logically deduced from an 'is' statement in a specific way. In this regard, Searle admits that the validity of his own argument depends on some other hidden conditions. One presupposed condition is that there remain some unmanifested premises behind every premise. Secondly, and more importantly, he admits the principles of *ceteris paribus*, means 'other things are equal'. Thus, when Searle admits that an 'ought' can be deduced from an 'is', he thereby admits some concealed premises.

The other important distinctive mark of Searlian attempt of deriving an 'ought' from an 'is' is to make a subtle distinction between different kinds of facts. Searle himself realizes that his own derivation of an 'ought' from an 'is' is not universal. It is not universal in the sense that there are some kind of facts where the derivation of an 'ought' from an 'is' simply does not arise. In this regard, he distinguishes two kinds of facts, such as, *brute fact* and *institutional fact.* According to Searle those who adhere to the view that no evaluative judgment can be logically deduced from factual judgment fail to make the distinction between

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brute fact and institutional fact. For Searle the derivation does not hold good in the case of brute facts. However, in the case of institutional fact, we can show that an 'ought' can be logically deduced from an 'is'. In the **Fifth Chapter** of this thesis, we propose to analyze and examine Searle's view of 'is-ought dichotomy' and this chapter would be entitled as **Searle's View of Fact-Value Dichotomy.**

After Searle, there we notice another important philosophical approach coming from R. M. Hare. According to Hare moral statements do have descriptive contents because moral statements (prescriptive statement in the Hare's sense) like descriptive statements are universailzable in nature. Hare understands and interprets moral judgments in terms of prescriptive judgments. Here we propose to analyse and examine after Hare in what sense prescriptive statements are claimed to be universalizable. Because once the universabizability of prescriptive statements is established, the descriptive or factual contents of prescriptive statements would equally be established. Thus, Hare's position of moral universalizability will be discussed in the **Sixth Chapter** and it would be entitled as **Hare's View of Fact-Value Dichotomy.**

The **Seventh Chapter** would be entitled as **Concluding Remarks.** Here I propose to assess myself in the context of this debate and I will equally draw my own position in the context of this debate.

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