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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON AYER'S MORAL CONCEPT

By:

TEKLEHAYMANOT TSEGAY

JUNE, 2016

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Abstract

Ayer is prominent thinker in his ethical theory, that is, emotivism. Normative moral propositions are, according to Ayer, cognitively nonsense but they are emotively meaningful. This means that they are not factual rather they express emotion or feeling. In this thesis, I would argue that moral propositions are not only emotively meaningful but also they are cognitively meaningful. Moral statements are not only contains emotion but also reason. Reason and emotion are inseparable. The thesis also shows that Ayer's principle of verification is inconsistent. The reason is, if verifiability is taken as criterion of meaningfulness, ethical propositions are cognitively meaningful. In defense of utilitarianism, I argue that moral judgments are verifiable in terms of their consequences. What I have defended is universalistic act- utilitarianism.

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INTRODUCTION

Logical positivism as an organized philosophical movement was started in the early 1920s at the University of Vienna. The founder of logical positivism is Moritz Schlick. Other prominent scholars are Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Fiegl, Hempel, Friedrich Waismann, A. J Ayer etc. The Vienna circle philosophy was formed not only by philosophers but also by scientists, mathematicians, physicists, psychologists, and other scholars. Logical positivism is known by various names such as logical empiricism, Vienna circle philosophy, scientific positivism, linguistic empiricism, analytic philosophy and the like (Udefi, 2009: 7).

The objective of logical positivism is to distinguish genuine knowledge from false ones. For logical positivism meaningful statement is either analytic or synthetic. Accordingly, the problem of meaning is central to their philosophy (Shieh and Keupink, 2006: 4). Logical positivism tries to solve the problems of meaning by logical analysis (Weinberg, 1936: 1). For logical positivists the foundation of science and the refutation of metaphysics are accomplished by logical analysis. Therefore, logical analysis plays a vital role to their philosophy (ibid: 23).

Logical positivists influenced by Hume's verification principle that a proposition is cognitively meaningful if it is either confirms to reason or to sense experience (Funmilayyo, 2015: 153). Logical positivists were also influenced by the early Wittgensteinian philosophy. They adopt Wittgenstein's verification theory of meaning to distinguish scientific (meaningful) statements from purely metaphysical (meaningless) statements. For Wittgenstein, the meaning of a statement is determined by its method of verification (Weinberg, 1936: 28). And in his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein develops a referential theory of meaning. According to this theory a statement is meaningful if it refers to certain object. Hence, philosophical statements are non-sense because they do not have objects to refer to (Funmilayyo, 2015: 153). According to the verification principle propositions are meaningful only if they can be verifiable by sense experience (Weinberg, 1936: 28). This implies that, statements have cognitive meaning or objective meaning if they are confirmed or falsified by sensory experiences. As a result, for logical positivists empirical science is cognitively meaningful while traditional metaphysics are cognitively meaningless (nonsense) (Shieh and Keupink, 2006: 4).

One of the principal aims of logical positivism is to show the meaninglessness of metaphysics. They think that “metaphysical assertions are not simply useless or indemonstrable. They are nonsensical” (Weinberg, 1936: 6). The idea that metaphysical statements are meaningless because they cannot be verified by sense experience is not a new to logical positivism because it has already been stated by Hume. In his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), Hume argues that:

It seems to me, that the only objects of the abstract sciences or of demonstration are quantity and number... all other enquiries of men regard only matters of fact and existence; and these are evidently incapable of demonstration which he claims should be committed to flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion (quoted in Funmilayyo, 2015: 152).

Hume believes that only the propositions of mathematics and empirical science are meaningful and that all other propositions are meaningless (Funmilayyo, 2015: 152).

For the early positivists, conclusive verifiability or testability is the demarcation criterion to differentiate false proposition from genuine ones. But later positivists argue that conclusive verifiability is wrong and unnecessary because it marks statements of universal form as meaningless. Later positivists such as Popper suggested that since conclusive verifiability excludes general laws from the universe of cognitively significant hypotheses, it is not compatible with a philosophical position which describes to analyze the statements of science. Popper argues that the criterion of demarcation to differentiate scientific statement from nonscientific one is not verifiability rather falsifiability. It is true that Popper’s criterion does not exclude statements of universal form as cognitively nonsense. However, as Ayer suggested, it excludes existential hypotheses as meaningful (Caldwell, 1980: 56-57). Ayer says “one cannot say that there are abominable snowmen, for this cannot be falsified; the fact that one had failed to find any would not prove conclusively that none existed” (quoted in Caldwell, 1980: 57). In order to solve this problem Ayer proposes weak sense of verifiability (Caldwell, 1980: 57).

Logical positivism also challenges traditional morality by saying that it is non-cognitive, and hence meaningless. In order to show the meaninglessness of morality logical positivists introduce a distinction between “existential meaning” and “cognitive meaning”. The former is related to the question of importance, while the latter related to the question of truth status. Put it in other words, when we say that a statement is irrelevant it has no existential meaning.

Consequently, it is senseless. On the contrary, if we assert a statement is neither true nor false, it has cognitive meaning. So, existential meaning is different from cognitive meaning for logical positivists (Funmilayyo, 2015: 152).

According to logical positivists anything that cannot be verified or confirmed by the method of science is pseudo. In spite of differences on many matters, they have common notions (ibid: 151). They have “interest in science and deep skepticism about the theological and metaphysical knowledge” (ibid). Therefore, the older and contemporary positivism defends empirical science as the only sources of factual knowledge or truth (Weinberg, 1936: 7). All analytic philosophers agree that the task of philosophy is clarification of language. In his early work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein, argue that “the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts” (Funmilayyo, 2015: 151). For him, the discovery of unique forms of information or facts about the world and humanity is not the task of philosophers rather the tasks of scientists (ibid).

Finally, Positivists agree that philosophical disputes are irresolvable disputes (Shieh and Keupink, 2006: 4). Using their verifiability principle they conclude that “philosophy is subordinate of science” (Udefi, 2009: 8). They argued, metaphysical statements do not convey information about the existence or character of a particular entity. The same is true to all moral judgments. Only science can give us that sort of information (Passmore, 1967: 3). Therefore, for them, metaphysical, ethical, theological and aesthetical statements fail to pass the test of empirical verification criterion. Since such statements have emotive meaning, void of cognitive meaning, they are to be regarded as nonsense (Udefi, 2009: 9).

As mentioned above, logical positivists try to apply the principle of verification to different branches of philosophy such as ethics, metaphysics and aesthetics. In this thesis I am concerned with the view of one of the members of logical positivism, namely, Alfred Jules Ayer’s concept of morality. Ayer, (1910-1989), a twentieth century British philosophers, was well known in his view of emotivism. In this thesis I will explore and critically examine his assessment of morality on the basis of his works: *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), the second edition of the same book (1946), *Philosophical Essays* (1954) and others.

In his earlier work, Ayer maintains that ethical propositions are “purely emotive” and therefore nonsense. When Ayer argues ethical propositions are nonsense, he means that they are devoid of “cognitive meaning.” Ethical propositions have emotional associations. For instance, the statement “stealing is wrong” is not nonsense because it expresses feeling (Passmore, 1967: 3). The central point of Ayer’s critique of ethics is that all normative ethics are devoid of cognitive meaning. Thus, Ayer advocated ethical emotivism, non-cognitivist understandings of the meanings of moral terms and functions of moral judgments. For ethical emotivism, the role of moral judgments is to express emotions, not to describe moral reality (ibid). Regardless of this, Ayer is right when he said ethical statements have emotive value. However, he is wrong in saying that they are cognitively meaningless. Therefore, I argue that ethical judgments have both emotive and cognitive meaning.

The objective of this thesis is to refute the emotive theory of ethics, and, in particular, the version of that theory proposed by Ayer. And it also shows that his principle of verification cannot mark that ethical statements are meaningless. In order to achieve this task I accept and base my arguments on the theory of ethics proposed by utilitarianism. According to utilitarianism an action is right if it maximizes pleasure. I believe that the acceptance of such theory makes ethics meaningful. I argue that the rightness or wrongness of moral action is justifiable with reference to its consequence.

The thesis contains three chapters. The first chapter of this thesis will discuss Ayer’s principle of verification in his early work: *Language, Truth and Logic* and his improved work of the same book. According to him, the principle of verification is a demarcation criterion to differentiate genuine knowledge from pseudo ones. Related to this, my thesis will discuss his argument on metaphysics and how does he mark it as meaningless. The second chapter deals with the application of his principle of verification to moral issues. Ayer begins his critique of ethics by considering the two meta-ethical theories: naturalism and non-naturalism. Consequently, he develops his ethical theory of emotivism. Furthermore, critical reflection will be made in chapter three. Finally, there is a conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

VERIFICATION AND TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY

1.1 The Principle of Verification

Before discussing Ayer's concept of morality, it is important to show the principle of verification. The major objective of Vienna Circle's philosophy is to distinguish meaningful assertion from meaningless ones. To meet this objective, the positivists introduced the criterion of verification to philosophy. The concept of verification is a fundamental point for the logical positivists in general and for Ayer in particular. Using this criterion, they concluded that empirical scientific statements are meaningful whereas philosophical statements are meaningless (Shieh and Keupink, 2006: 4).

Although the positivists used the criterion of verifiability, it does not necessarily follow that they had the same account of verification. They rather proposed it in different style. Positivists disagreed on the criterion to be used to distinguish metaphysical propositions from empirical propositions. Some said empirical or synthetic propositions can be conclusively verified. However, Ayer discarded this because for him all synthetic propositions are highly probable, we can argue that such a proposition is not verified conclusively even in principle. That is why he adopts weak criterion of verification principle (Ayer, 1936: 147). As the main concentration of this thesis is on Ayer's morality, I shall restrict the discussion primarily to his idea of the principle of verification. In his book entitled *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), Ayer proposed his own form of verification principle. He offers his principle of verification in different versions. He begins his analysis of the verification principle with the following passage:

A sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express—that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. If, on the other hand, the putative proposition is of such a character that the assumption of its truth, or falsehood, is consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning the nature of his future experience, then, as far as he is concerned, it is, if not a tautology, a mere pseudo-proposition (Pojman, 2003: 352).

The above extract shows a sentence is factually significant if it is true by definition or if it is empirically verifiable. A sentence that does not meet the criteria of verifiability principle is

meaningless. This led Ayer to conclude that metaphysical, ethical and aesthetical assertions are meaningless. Any statement, therefore, that cannot be verified either analytically or empirically is said to have no meaning. According to the principle of verification a sentence is said to have meaning if it is empirically verifiable or analytically true (ibid).

The implication of this principle destroys metaphysical claims about the existence of entities such as God, soul, free will and so forth, because they cannot pass the test of meaningfulness. Analogously, the principle of verification has excluded moral and aesthetical claims as cognitively meaningless, because they are neither analytically true nor empirically verifiable. If a sentence is out of tautology and empirical data, we must conclude that it does not express genuine question. So, according to him, meaningful knowledge depends on logical reasoning and empirical verifiability (Miller, 1984: 352). In order to understand his principle of verification, it is relevant to attend practical vs. theoretical verification, strong vs. weak verification and direct vs. indirect verification.

1.1.1 In-Principle vs. Practical Verification

Ayer tries to differentiate practical verifiability (statements which have been examined via observation) from verifiability in principle. Ayer says,

...we all understand, in many cases believe, propositions which we have not in fact taken steps to verify. Many of these are propositions which we could verify if we took enough trouble. But there remain a number of significant propositions, concerning matter of fact, which we couldn't verify even if we chose; simply because we lack the practical means of placing ourselves in the situation where the relevant observations could be made. A simple and familiar example of such a proposition is the proposition that there are mountains on the farther Side of the moon. No rocket has yet been invented which could enable me to go and look at the farther side of the moon, so that I am unable to decide the matter by the actual observation. But I do know what observations would decide it for me, if, as is theoretically conceivable. I were once in a position to make them. And therefore I say that the proposition is verifiable in principle, if not in practice, and is accordingly significant. On the other hand, such a metaphysical pseudo-proposition as 'the Absolute enters into, but is itself incapable of, evolution and progress,' is not even in principle verifiable. For one cannot conceive of an observation which would enable one to determine whether the Absolute did, or did not, enter into evolution and progress (Ayer, 1936: 16-17).

The above quotation indicates that, a statement is meaningful if and only if, it can be verified either practically or in principle. For example, we can practically verify the statement “that is a blue flower” because we can test it in reality. Conversely, metaphysical statements are not verifiable either practically or theoretically. Therefore, propositions for which we do not verify practically may still be meaningful if we can verify them in principle.

1.1.2 The Strong Sense of Verifiability

Ayer tries to show the difference between “strong” and “weak” verification. He says “a proposition is said to be verifiable in the strong sense of the term if and only if, its truth could be conclusively established in experience” (ibid: 18). In other words, according to the principle of strong verification a sentence has meaning if it is conclusively verified through experience and observation. It implies that, strong verification contains the faults of fully conclusive verification. For instance “this is a car”. It would be possible to test by referring to it. According to some positivists such as Schlick, the cognitive meaning of a statement is determined by conclusive verification. This means the finite set of observation is the criteria to distinguish meaningful statement from meaningless ones (ibid). Schlick defended the strong sense of verifiability. But this criterion is criticized by other positivists. (Katen, 1973: 189). As Ayer notes, there is a problem with this view.

It seems to me that if we accept conclusive verifiability as our criterion of significance, as some positivists have proposed, our argument will prove too much. Consider, for example, the case of general propositions of law – such propositions, namely, as ‘arsenic is poisonous’; ‘all men are mortal’; ‘a body tends to expand when it is heated.’ It is of the very nature of these propositions that their truth cannot be established with certainty by any finite series of observations (Ayer, 1936: 18).

Here, the idea looks to clarify conclusive verifiability renders meaningful statements about general proposition of laws, for such statements are not conclusively verifiable. Because these claims are meaningful through infinite set of observation, conclusive verifiability is unacceptable.

Ayer asserts that “besides, the difficulty is not confined to the case of general propositions of law, though it is there revealed most plainly. It is hardly less obvious in the case of propositions about the remote past” (ibid: 19). This shows that, conclusive verifiability marks statements of

the past as meaningless because these cannot be verified by finite set of observation. Consequently, if we accept conclusive verifiability, historical statements must be marked as nonsense. Ayer gives still other reason for the rejection of conclusive verifiability. He upholds "... historical statements may be, their truth can never become more than highly probable" (ibid). Therefore, Ayer rejects strong verifiability because it denies many areas of knowledge such as the general statements and statements about the past. His idea is if we accept strong sense of verifiability, it is impossible to talk meaningfully about the past history and general statements because no sense of observation can confirm those areas of knowledge.

In his analysis of strong verification, he rejects conclusive verifiability as mentioned above. Besides, he criticizes Popper's conclusive falsifiability. Ayer puts Popper's view as follows: "...a sentence should be allowed to be factually significant if, and only if, it expresses something which is definitely confutable by experience" (ibid). The proponent of this principle believes that finite series of observation is not adequate to distinguish meaningful statement from meaningless ones. However, they said "there are crucial cases in which series of observations can definitely confute it" (ibid). This hypothesis is not correct for Ayer because he believes that "a hypothesis cannot be conclusively confuted any more than it can be conclusively verified" (ibid). According to Ayer, it is true that any hypothesis is not definitely confuted or falsifiable. Accordingly, the genuineness of a proposition does not depend on the possibility of its definite confutation (ibid: 20).

As stated above, in his first edition, Ayer advocates that no proposition is conclusively verifiable. However, in his later edition, he amends his idea by saying there are class of empirical propositions which are conclusively verified, that is, "basic propositions" (Ayer, 1946: 10). He said "...they refer solely to the content of a single experience and what may be said to verify them conclusively is the occurrence of the experience to which they uniquely refer" (ibid). Ayer and other contemporary positivists have implemented weak verification in order to solve the failures of conclusive verifiability and conclusive falsifiability mentioned above.

1.1.3 The Weak Sense of verifiability

In the first edition to the book (1936), Ayer formulates weak verification as follows: "... it is verifiable, in the weak sense, if it is possible for experience to render it probable" (Ayer, 1936:

18). This indicates that, the weak sense of verification is most probable because it is not directly verifiable. Since it is highly probable, it cannot be applied to any thing that can be verified conclusively by observation and experience (ibid).

In other words, as Katen has suggested, for Ayer a statement is meaningful in the weak sense of verifiability if and only if, any observation whether actually made or not could be appropriate to determine its truth or falsity (Katen, 1973: 190). Therefore, in the weaker sense of verifiability, the truth of a proposition cannot be definitely established in experience. For further illustration let us see the following quotation.

...it is the mark of a genuine factual proposition, not that it should be equivalent to an experiential proposition, or any finite number of experiential propositions, but simply that some experiential propositions can be deduced from it in conjunction with certain other premises without being deducible from those other premises alone (Ayer, 1936: 20).

From this we can understand that strong verification fails to mark whether statement is meaningful or not because it focuses on an experiential proposition. Nevertheless, weak sense of verification is more appropriate than strong sense of verification. The reason is that it does not depend on the finite number of experiential propositions.

The idea that the world of sense experience was unreal is nonsensical, according to the criterion of weak verification. It is true that our senses may do mistake (deceive us). Because our perceptual judgments may do wrong action, it does not follow that sense experience is unreal. Series of observations are inadequate to prove the claims that sense experiences are unreal. Thus, according to the criterion of weak verification condemning the sensible world as mere appearance is literally nonsensical (ibid: 21).

The reason why he proposes the weak sense of verification is to mark metaphysical sentence as meaningless and to show the cognitive meaning of general statements, as well as statement about the past. But he is not successful to mark metaphysics as meaningless because his criteria have many deficiencies. To begin with, in his later view Ayer said “what I seem, however, to have over looked is that, as I represent them, these are not two genuine alternatives” (Ayer, 1946: 9). This implies that both strong and weak senses of verifiability are inadequate to distinguish meaningful from meaningless ones. So, Ayer himself admits the deficiency of weak verifiability in his later work by saying “I say of this criterion that “it seems liberal enough,” but in fact it is

far too liberal, since it allows meaning to any statement whatsoever” (ibid: 11). Furthermore, in his later edition in order to show the deficits of this criterion Ayer himself uses the following example.

...the statements "the absolute is lazy" and "if the Absolute is lazy, this is white" jointly entail the observation-statement "this is white," and since "this is white" does not follow from either of ' these premises, taken by itself, both of them satisfy my criterion of meaning (ibid: 11-12).

The above quotation has two premises and one conclusion. The conclusion “this is white” is inferred neither from premise one nor from premise two alone but from both premises taken together. Thus, for Ayer any statements including metaphysical statements are meaningful according to the weak verification. That is why he proposes other criterion. Consequently, in his later edition, Ayer tries to meet the difficulty still by another formulation of the verification principle, that is, direct and indirect categories.

1.1.4 Direct vs. Indirect Verification

To remove the problem with strong and weak verification especially for his serious objection, that is, weak verification gives meaning to any statement; Ayer amends his idea in the second edition of the book (1946). In other words, he gives a new account of the principle of verifiability. Ayer distinguished between direct and indirect verification. He described as such:

...a statement is directly verifiable if it is either itself an observation - statement, or is such that in conjunction with one or more observation - statement which is not deducible from these other premises alone; and I propose to say that a statement is indirectly verifiable if it satisfies the following conditions: first, that in conjunction with certain other premises it entails one or more directly verifiable statements which are not deducible from these other premises alone; and secondly, that these other premises do not include any statement that is not either analytic, or directly verifiable, or capable of being independently established as indirectly verifiable (ibid:13).

As the above points clearly indicate, Ayer believes that a statement is directly verifiable if it is observable statements and a statement is indirectly verifiable if and only if, other verifiable statements can support it. Therefore, a sentence is meaningful if and only if it is either directly or indirectly verifiable. The above new formulation of the verification shows some important changes. In his later work, he replaces the phrase “observation- statement” by “experiential proposition”. He puts it in the following manner:

...I put forward a second version of my principle, which i shall restate here in slightly different terms, using the phrase “observation statement” in place of “experiential proposition” to designate a statement which records an actual or possible observation. According to the critics this revised principle gives rise to some new difficulties (ibid: 11).

1.1.4.1 Hempel’s Objection

As I stated in the previous section, in order to solve the difficulties of weak sense of verification, Ayer proposes direct and indirect verification in his revised edition. However, his revised edition is also not satisfactory because positivists themselves reject his idea. For instance, Hempel’s opposition is indicated in his article entitled *The Empiricist Criterion of Meaning* (1950). He argue that Ayer’s new criterion, like popper’s criterion of conclusive falsifiability is wrong because both criterions give factual meaning to any conjunction S.N where S fulfills Ayers criterion whereas N is a sentence such as “the absolute is perfect” which is eliminated by the criterion. By S.N he means the expression obtained by connecting two sentences by the work ‘and’ (Hempel, 1950: 50). Furthermore, Hempel illustrates as follow:

...whatever consequences can be deduced from S with the help of legitimate subsidiary hypotheses can also be deduced from S.N by means of the same subsidiary hypotheses, and as Ayer's new criterion is formulated essentially in terms of the deductibility of a certain type of consequence from the given sentence, it countenances S.N along with S (ibid).

1.1.4.2 Church’s Objection

Moreover, in his *Review of Ayer’s second edition of Language, Truth and Logic*, Church proposes another difficulty which is substantially similar with Hempel’s objection. So again the formulation of the principle of verifiability leads to the result that all sentences are meaningful. Church displayed that if there are at least three observation sentences o, p, q, none of which involves either of the others. Then it follows the possibility of verification for any sentences S whatever that either it or its denial (Church, 1949: 53). He gave the following example.

Let O_1 and S be the negations of O_1 and S respectively. Then (under Ayer's definition) $O_1 \vee O_2 \vee O_3$ is directly verifiable, because with O_1 it entails O_3 . Moreover S and $O_1 \vee O_2 \vee O_3$ together entail O_2 . Therefore (under Ayer's definition) S is indirectly verifiable-unless it happens that $O_1 \vee O_2 \vee O_3$ alone entails O_2 , in which case S and O_3 together entail O_2 , so that S is directly verifiable (ibid).

1.2 Criterion of Meaning

Now that we have seen earlier about the principle of verification, we can focus further on the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions. As mentioned elsewhere above, there are two kinds of statements closely related with the principle of verification. Any proposition that does not fulfill one of the two conditions is a pseudo or meaningless proposition.

To begin with, in his preface to the first edition, Ayer said “like Hume, I divide all genuine propositions into two classes: those which, in his terminology, ‘concern relation of ideas’ and those which concern ‘matters of fact’ (Ayer, 1936: 9). Propositions of logic and pure mathematics are classified as propositions that concern relations of ideas. In contrast, propositions that concern matters of fact contain empirical or a posteriori propositions. Propositions that concern relation of ideas can be shown to be necessarily true and certain, says Ayer, because the truth of such proposition is analytic, not empirical. He claims that, on the contrary, propositions that concern matters of fact are not certain and necessarily true rather probable, because they may be disproved by further empirical experiment (ibid). As a result, Ayer concludes that meaningfulness depends on analytic and synthetic propositions. Therefore, Hume’s division was restructured by Ayer and other logical positivists.

1.2.1 Analytic Propositions

According to Ayer, analytic propositions say nothing about empirical situation because they have no referent in the experienceable world. That is why he says that analytic propositions are devoid of factual content. At this point, it is important to make clear that Ayer does not mean that analytic propositions are meaningless in the way that metaphysical expressions are meaningless (Hanfling, 1997: 38). Empiricists reject the view that the truth of logic and mathematics are necessary truths. In adopting the view of analytic proposition, Ayer discards the empiricist view that no knowledge of a priori proposition is possible and no distinction is possible between analytic and synthetic propositions. Nevertheless, he says empiricists are right when they argue that a statement merely had factual meaning if it was empirically provable (Ayer, 1936: 64-65).

Ayer also disagrees with those rationalists who uphold that empirical truths are deducible from a priori propositions. According to Ayer, a priori propositions may have a literal meaning, but

they do not have a factual meaning. In this connection, his aim is to distinguish factual meaning from literal meaning. A proposition has literal meaning if it is true by definition (analytic) while synthetic propositions have factual meaning. Propositions that are factually meaningful cannot be deduced from propositions that are not factually meaningful. They can only be deduced from the facts of experience or from other propositions that are deducible from the facts of experience. Moreover, Ayer discards the rationalistic assertion that there are some truths about the world which we can know independently of empirical experience. He argues, if we accept the rationalistic idea, we can conclude that metaphysics is meaningful. Therefore, the idea of rationalism is mismatched with the tenet of Ayer: a sentence is cognitively meaning less if it is not empirically verifiable (ibid: 66).

As Ayer suggested, Mill maintained that truth of logic and mathematics “were inductive generalization based on an extremely large number of instances” (ibid: 67). Consequently, for him, the truths of these propositions are not necessary or certain. However, Ayer opposes the empiricist view with regard to the proposition of logic and mathematics. In order to defend his argument he accepts the idea of Kant. For Kant, even if knowledge arises from empirical experience, it does not mean that all knowledge arises from experience (Pojman, 2003: 820). Propositions of logic and mathematics are known independently of experience, and yet for Ayer, it does not follow that we are born knowing them. Put it in other words, we can learn the propositions of logic and mathematics in similar manner like other disciplines such as biology and history. Ayer, like Mill says that the proposition of logic and mathematics are depend on the inductive procedure. But he also argues that we cannot determine the validity of the proposition of logic and mathematics with empirical hypothesis in the same manner (Ayer, 1936: 67-68). He further explains:

We may come to discover them through an inductive process; but once we have apprehended them we see that they are necessary true, that they hold good for every conceivable instance. And this serves to distinguish them from empirical generalization (ibid: 68).

From this idea one can understand that for Ayer the propositions of logic and mathematics do not depend on empirical procedure because they are independent of experience. Consequently, these propositions are universal and necessary. Thus, he considers them as analytic or tautologies (ibid: 71). Ayer notes “the most familiar definition of analytic proposition or judgment, as he

called it is that given by Kant” (ibid). Therefore, Kant distinguishes analytic proposition from synthetic proposition. According to him, the predicate of analytic judgment is already contained in the subject because they tell us only what is already known or it is another way of saying the same thing. Kant holds that the proposition “all bodies are extended” is an example of analytic proposition because the predicate ‘body’ is already contained in the subject. The truth of analytic statement is a matter of certainty not mere probability. We can be certain about the proposition that all bodies are extended because asserting the opposite would result in a contradiction. That is why he says no knowledge is extended in the analytic propositions. By contrast, Kant argues that because the predicate of synthetic proposition add something to the concept of the subject, we can say that they give us new information. In this connection, one example he gives is the statement “all bodies are heavy”. Another example he gave is the proposition $7+5=12$ (Pojman, 2003: 827).

However, Ayer has argued that Kant’s distinction between analytic and synthetic proposition is unclear and unacceptable. As discussed above, Kant wants to claim that every proposition contains predicate and subject terms. But it seems unacceptable, for Ayer. Because Ayer says “...he gives two distinct criteria, which are by no means equivalent” (Ayer, 1936: 72). The reason is Ayer thinks that proposition which is synthetic according to the psychological criterion may very well be analytic according to the logical criterion. Ayer notes that when Kant said the proposition $7+5=12$ is synthetic proposition, he use psychological criterion. In contrast, he use logical criterion in his example of the proposition that all bodies are extended. Thus, Ayer modifies Kant’s criterion by saying that the logical criterion is more workable than psychological criterion (ibid).

As I tried to mention above, Kant believes that the proposition of mathematics are synthetic propositions. On the contrary, Ayer argues that they are analytic propositions. What Ayer wants to claim is that, if the validity of analytic propositions depends only on the definitions of the symbols it encompasses, we can hold that pure mathematical propositions are analytic. In other words, Ayer asserts that “our knowledge that no observation can ever confute the proposition ‘ $7+5=12$ ’ depends simply on the fact that the symbolic expression ‘ $7+5$ ’ is synonymous with ‘ 12 ’...” (ibid: 81).

However, the question is whether mathematical propositions of geometry are synthetic or not. One might assume that they are synthetic propositions. To understand this, we have to make clear the concept of geometry. Kant defines geometry as “the study of the properties of physical space” (ibid: 78). So, since geometry is under the category of synthetic propositions, it follows factual meaning, for Ayer. Ayer stands against the definition of Kant’s geometry by saying that “axioms of a geometry are simply definitions, and that the theorems of a geometry are simply the logical consequences of these definitions” (ibid). From this, therefore, we can recognize that “geometry is not itself about physical space” rather it is pivotal “to reason about physical space” (ibid). Thus, Ayer claims that mathematical propositions of geometry are true and certain because they are tautologies. Therefore, geometry is purely analytic propositions (ibid). Ayer further explains:

It might be objected that the use made of diagrams in geometrical treatises shows that geometrical reasoning is not purely abstract and logical, but depends on our intuition of the properties of figures. In fact, however, the use of diagrams is not essential to completely rigorous to geometry (ibid: 78-79).

This led Ayer to discard Kant’s views that “geometry deals with the form of intuition of our senses” (ibid: 79). Ayer does not deny the claim that we have a priori knowledge of necessary propositions. However, he opposes Kant’s idea that some synthetic propositions are necessary. In adopting the view of analytic proposition, Ayer rejects the empiricist view that no knowledge of a priori proposition is possible. Summarily speaking, Ayer tries to show the criterion for the validity of analytic propositions, that is, by the definition of the symbols they contain not by empirical verifiability. In this discussion of analytic proposition, Ayer, therefore, seems to embrace that even if a priori or analytic proposition have no information about matter of fact, it is wrong to conclude that they have not any purpose. When we examine our empirical fact a priori propositions are essential as guidance. In other words, the whole function of analytic proposition, according to Ayer, is to offer information in the sense of linguistic usages. For this reason, analytic propositions are not meaningless (ibid: 80-83).

1.2.2 Synthetic Propositions

We have already discussed with the validity of analytic or a priori propositions, it is essential to proceed to the validity of synthetic or a posteriori propositions. Ayer begins by saying that

speculative philosophers try to ask questions regarding the concept of truth without giving a satisfactory answer. He notes that no genuine problem or question is possible concerning the idea of truth because it is unverified, and hence it has no reference to empirical object (ibid: 84). Ayer says “we conclude, then, that there is no problem of truth as it is ordinarily conceived” (ibid: 87). According to him, since the word truth does not refer to any synthetic proposition, we can say that it is not genuine question. A proposition is genuine if it has reference to the empirical object.

Ayer strongly urged that all propositions are not validated in the same way (ibid: 87). Consequently, “the criterion by which we determine the validity of a priori or analytic proposition is not sufficient to determine the validity of an empirical or synthetic proposition” (ibid: 88). He maintained that the method we use to determine the validity of analytic proposition is not the same with synthetic propositions because when we validate analytic proposition we use purely formal method whereas synthetic proposition do not use purely formal method. What Ayer wants to claim is that like all a priori propositions, a posteriori propositions are also not validated in the same manner. However, challenge is raised by other philosophers regarding synthetic propositions. Logical positivists disagree concerning certainty of basic or ostensive propositions (ibid: 87-88). Some logical positivists stated as follows:

...among empirical propositions, there was a special class of propositions whose validity consisted in the fact that they directly recorded an immediate experience. They maintain that these propositions, which we may call ‘ostensive’ propositions, are not more hypothesis but are absolutely certain (ibid: 88).

From this it is quite possible to understand that no ostensive propositions are verified by subsequent experience because these propositions are certain empirical propositions. Basic propositions directly record an immediate experience. However, Ayer condemns the certitude of basic propositions by saying no synthetic propositions are “purely ostensive” or they are false philosophical doctrine (ibid). In other words, he asserts as follows:

A proposition would be ostensive only if it recorded what was immediately experienced, without referring in any way beyond. And as this is not possible, it follows that no genuine synthetic propositions can be ostensive, and consequently that none can be absolutely certain (ibid: 89).

Since ostensive proposition are beyond immediate experience, Ayer concludes that synthetic propositions are not purely ostensive. It is true that he denies the possibility of ostensive

propositions. Even in his recent essay, Ayer concludes that like any other empirical proposition basic propositions are hypothetical (Ayer, 1946: 10). Thus, for him like other factual propositions it is possible to accept or reject basic propositions through decision. Here it is important to be clear that even if Ayer rejects basic propositions, he does not deny our sense experiences. He says,

A sensation is not the sort of thing which can be doubtful or not doubtful. A sensation simply occurs. What are doubtful are the propositions which refer to our sensations, including the proposition which describe the qualities of a presented sense-content, or assert that sense-content has occurred (Ayer, 1936: 92).

Ayer thinks that it is true to consider analytic proposition as absolutely certain because they are not confirmed by our sense experiences. But we cannot say that they can give us any new information. By contrast, Ayer argues that no final proposition is possible in empirical hypothesis because we may use different observation which is relative from time to time. Hence, empirical propositions are never absolutely certain but are probable. The truth or falsity of synthetic statement is more probable than being certain. For him, the validity of any hypothesis is determined by more than one hypothesis. Thus, no single hypothesis is sufficient to disgrace or to confirm any observation, says Ayer (ibid: 92-94). What he means by hypotheses is that they are “rules which govern our expectation of future experience” (ibid: 97). This implies that they are essential to make fruitful prediction of future experience.

Ayer declares that the criteria by which we check the validity of empirical proposition is “by seeing whether it actually fulfills the function which it is designed to fulfill” (ibid: 99-100). In other words, the validity of synthetic proposition is established by its empirical verifiability. The truth of synthetic proposition is confirmed if and only if, a given proposition has important conforms to our forecasts. Ayer believes that, if the observation is antagonistic to our expectation, we can say that it is probably invalid. But if it is compatible with our expectation, it is validated probably. Put it in other words, if an observation confirms our expectation, the probability of our original hypothesis increased while if the observation is dissimilar, the probability is decreased. Indeed, what Ayer wants to assert is that even if a proposition is not discredit by our observation, we cannot say that it has been validated absolutely. And analogously, no proposition is invalidated absolutely because future experience may disprove it (ibid: 100).

To understand this, we have to make clear the concept of probability. What can probability mean in this context? When Ayer refers to the term probability he is not referring “to an intrinsic property of it and also he is not referring “to the unanalyzable logical relation which holds between it and other propositions” (ibid). Ayer defines the term probability as follows:

...we mean by saying that an observation increases probability of a proposition is that it increases our confidence in the proposition, as measured by our willingness to rely on it in practice as forecast of our sensations, and to retain it in preference to other hypothesis in face of a favorable experience. And, similarly, to say of an observation that it diminishes the probability of a proposition is to say that it decreases our willingness to include the proposition in the system of accepted hypotheses which serve us as guides to the future (ibid).

According to him, no absolute standard of rationality is possible. The reason is standards of rationality changes from time to time. The belief which is rational at one time may not be rational at another. And analogously, he believes that there is no absolute method of hypotheses. This implies that even if we accept the method of science by observing its successfulness in practice, it does not mean that they are absolute. The reason is they may be changed by new methods of observation. Consequently, his definition of rationality led for the amendment of his original definition of the term ‘probability (ibid: 101). He modifies as follows:

To say that an observation increases the probability of hypothesis is not always equivalent to saying that it increases the degree of confidence with which we actually entertain in the hypothesis, as measured by our readiness to act up on it: for we may be behaving irrationally. It is equivalent to saying that the observation increases the degree of confidence with which it is rational to entertain the hypothesis (ibid: 101-102).

Finally, he says the probability of a proposition is determined both by nature of our observations and by our conception of rationality (ibid: 102). So, he modified his definition of probability as rational belief. Ayer concludes then that unlike analytic proposition, its validity is depending on the meanings of the words, and the validity of synthetic proposition is determined by empirical testing. He says empirical knowledge or synthetic proposition can never produce certain truth but only probability. In summation, there are debates between philosophers regarding the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions. Ayer asserts that the distinction between such propositions is possible while as we shall see below Quine says such distinction is wrong or not legitimate.

1.3 Critique of the Analytic/Synthetic Propositions

As we have seen in the previous section, the analytic/synthetic distinction and the principle of verification are central for the philosophy of the logical positivists in general and for Ayer in particular. However, Quine in his article *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* (1951) has condemned the following two dogmas:

- Analytic- synthetic distinctions
- Reductionism (Quine, 1951: 20).

For our purpose here, we shall focus on the first dogma. As we know some logical positivists argue that the analytic/synthetic distinction exists. They hold that the truth of analytic propositions depends on the virtue of their meanings. By contrast, synthetic propositions are considered as true depending on the matter of fact. Nevertheless, Quine claims such distinction is impossible and he considered it as “dogma” (ibid). In order to attack such distinction Quine makes division between two different types of analytic statements.

(1) "No unmarried man is married"

A statement with this arrangement is logically true under all reinterpretation of its components, that is, ‘man’ and ‘married’ other than the logical particles (comprising ‘no’, ‘un’, ‘if’, ‘then’, etc.). However, his target is not on the first arrangement rather on the second.

(2) "No bachelor is married"

He thinks that most people urged that such arrangement is analytic because the terms used are synonymous. In other words, arrangement (2) can be exchanged with arrangement (1) by interchanging synonyms with synonyms, that is, "bachelor" with "unmarried man". This implies that bachelor is defined as unmarried man. Thus, these components have the same definition, and hence are interchangeable (ibid: 23). Nevertheless, Quine has rejected this kind of analytic arrangement. He asks, “How do we find that 'bachelor' is defined as 'unmarried man'? Who defined it thus, and when? Are we to appeal to the nearest dictionary, and accept the lexicographer's formulation as law?”(ibid: 24). Quine undercutting this view says that we cannot refer to dictionary or a lexicographer’s report because their definition already depends on their

belief that they are synonyms. In other words, their definitional activity is limited to the reporting of pre-existing synonymies (ibid).

Besides, Quine tries to see the definitional activity of Carnap's "explication". Quine says it is true that explication is different from the definitional activity of dictionary and lexicographer because it does not limit itself to the reporting of pre-existing synonymies (ibid: 25). However, he states "even explication, though not merely reporting a pre-existing synonymy between definiendum and definiens, does rest nevertheless on other pre-existing synonymies" (ibid). Therefore, such definitional activity is also depends on the pre-existing synonymies. Finally, he recommends that the distinction between analytic and synthetic proposition is an illegitimate one.

1.4 The Refutation of Metaphysics

Having proposed the principle of verification, Ayer applies it to various branches of philosophy. The major areas he looked at are metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics. Let us begin with metaphysical proposition. As Fields point out, "from the time of Plato to Descartes, the study of speculative philosophy, or metaphysics was respected discipline" (Fields, 2000: 3). However, Hume, in agreement with other empiricists believes that metaphysics is meaningless and not certain. Thus, Hume's refutation of speculative philosophy influenced many philosophers. Following from this, the school of logical positivism is advanced in the 20th century (ibid: 4-5). Logical positivists argue that the proposition of metaphysics is meaningless because they are unjustifiable through experience (Passmor, 1967: 3). As a member of logical positivism, Ayer condemns metaphysics as follows:

The traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part, as unwarranted as they are unfruitful. The surest way to end them is to establish beyond question what should be the purpose and method of philosophical inquiry. And this is by no means so difficult a task as the history of philosophy would lead one to suppose (Ayer, 1936: 13).

From the above quotation, it is clear that no problem of philosophy is solved because until now philosophers try to ask questions without giving conclusive answers. Accordingly, philosophy is fruitless. Ayer says the solution for the philosophical dispute is changing the subject to something meaningful. In other words, it is vital to replace the claim that knowledge is possible beyond human experience by something empirical (Hanfling, 1997: 3).

Ayer rejects the metaphysical view that philosophy can give us knowledge of a transcendent reality. He discharges metaphysical arguments as nonsense, because they cannot be justified empirically. He urges that metaphysical statements have no literal meaning, and they are neither true nor false (Griffiths, 1991: 4). In this respect, Ayer asserts that "...many philosophical utterances are due to the commission of logical errors, rather than to a conscious desire on the part of their authors to go beyond the limits of experiences" (Ayer, 1936: 13).

As mentioned in the previous discussion, Ayer formulates the criterion of verification to distinguish genuine proposition from pseudo one. Using his criteria he considers metaphysics as pseudo proposition because they are neither tautology or being verified in principle, nor synthetic or being verified practically. That is why he seems to reject the meaningfulness of metaphysics (Pojman, 2003: 1226). Thus, Ayer categorized the following metaphysical statements or debates as pseudo proposition. First, Ayer rejects the view that the world that we experience is not real. Such view is the metaphysical doctrine which is maintained by rationalists. As Ayer notes, for rationalists supersensible world alone is real. But since no empirical observation has proved the super sensible world, as Ayer says, it is logical to deny the possibility of such world as nonsense (Ayer, 1936: 145). According to him, the idea of metaphysician that the sensible world is unreal is the result of committing errors of reasoning, or from being deceived by grammar. So, our metaphysical researches follow from misunderstanding the working of our language (ibid: 28-29).

Secondly, he condemns the debate between monism and pluralism. Unlike monists that regards that reality is a single substance, for pluralism reality is composed of different substances. Hence, Ayer holds that neither the assertion of pluralists nor monists are meaningful because it is impossible to give any observation to prove whether reality is a single substance or many. In other words, the debate between them regarding the number of substance is unfruitful. Thirdly, Ayer discards the debate between realism and idealism. For realism ordinary objects are real while for idealism ideas in the mind of the perceiver are real. This debate is also fictitious according to Ayer's criterion. Yet, Ayer says the debate between idealism and realism concerning the analysis of existential propositions can be solved, and it cannot be considered as meaningless. What is meaningless according to him is that when they give metaphysical interpretation. Consequently, the metaphysical dispute whether an object is real or ideal is

fictitious. Since the debate of metaphysician is devoid of both a priori and a posteriori propositions, it follows their idea is meaningless (Pojman, 2003: 1230).

Ayer has argued that a proposition is meaningful if it has reference to the sensible object. Metaphysician uses the term “substance” which has no reference to any sensible properties of a thing. In order to reject the term substance as meaningless, he tries to differentiate reference to “the thing itself” from reference to the “sensible properties.” What Ayer wants to say is that the term substance refers to the substance itself rather than to the sensible properties. Like the term substance, the metaphysical concept of “Being” is devoid of reference to the sensible properties (Ayer, 1936: 24). “So that those who raise questions about Being which are based on the assumption that existence is an attribute are guilty of following grammar beyond the boundaries of sense”(ibid: 26). Hence, Ayer underlines, it will be erroneous to accept the view that existence is an attribute. In order to defend his argument he refers to Kant. According to Kant, since existence is not an attribute, it is reasonable to suggest that all positive existential propositions were not tautologies and all negative existential propositions are not self-contradictory (ibid: 25-26).

Also, Ayer condemns the view that “fictitious objects have a special non empirical mode of real being” (ibid: 26). He says, because it is the result of superstition; it follows that it is devoid of literal significance. Therefore, metaphysical problems are fictitious and they are not subject to any criteria of truth or falsehood. Generally, in his discussion of metaphysics, he seems to hold that no possible experience is solved for the debate between monism and pluralism on the one hand and the debate between realism and idealism on the other hand (ibid: 26-27). As Cruse writes, the main aim of Ayer regarding metaphysics is not to solve philosophical debates and questions by answering them rather by categorizing them as pseudo problems (Cruse, 2004: 1). Finally, Ayer declared the function of philosophy is to analyze and clarify words (Hanfling, 1997: 4).

CHAPTER TWO

AYER'S CONCEPT OF MORALITY

We have seen, issues regarding Ayer's principle of verification in relation to metaphysics, in the first chapter. A further area in which Ayer applies the principle of verification is in ethics (Ayer, 1936: 104-118). Therefore, in this, chapter; we are going to discuss his principle of verification integrating with his moral philosophy. As I stated in the previous chapters, all logical positivists agree that metaphysical propositions are meaningless. However, there is disagreement among them regarding the meaningfulness of ethical assertions. Most of them maintains that ethical statements are pseudo propositions, and hence meaningless. On the contrary, Schlick discard this argument by saying ethical propositions are meaningful. He upholds that propositions about ethics are descriptive, not normative (Passmore, 1967: 54). Nevertheless, according to Ayer ethical propositions are neither synthetic nor analytic (Cruse, 2004: 3) and hence, they are cognitively meaningless. And Ayer undermines the two meta-ethical theories such as naturalism and non-naturalism (Ayer, 1936: 106-110).

2.1. Naturalism vs. Non-Naturalism

In the contemporary period being a naturalist is not being a cognitivist because there are naturalists who are not cognitivists. For instance, as Lahti notes, Micheal Ruse is a naturalist but he rejects the cognitive meaning of ethics by saying that "no ethical statement is true" (Lahti, 1998: 4). Analogously, being non naturalist is not being non cognitivist because there are non-naturalists who are cognitivists. In this connection, we can take Moore as an example of non-naturalist and cognitivist (ibid).

Since both naturalist and non-naturalist believe that ethical statements are verifiable, they are cognitivists. Moral cognitivist stands in opposition to non-cognitivist, which denies that the truth value of moral properties. Cognitivism upholds the descriptive nature of ethical language. For ethical cognitivists, therefore, it is conceivable to be tested whether ethical propositions are true or false. This can be validated by the following syllogism.

Statements could be evaluated as true or false, if they are verifiable.

Ethical statements are verifiable.

Therefore, ethical statements could be evaluated as true or false (ibid).

From this we can recognize that both meta-ethical theories assert that moral propositions have truth value and they are descriptive. Therefore, despite their differences, naturalism and non-naturalism asserts that moral propositions are meaningful. That is why they argue for the possibility of moral knowledge. However, Ayer in his *Critique of Ethics and Theology* undermines the view of both meta-ethical theories. Let us begin by clarify the two views.

2.1.1 Naturalist Account of Ethics

There are different versions of naturalism regarding ethics. In spite of many differences, they have common notions. The philosophy behind the claims of naturalists is that ethical propositions are reducible to propositions about natural realities. It seems then that, ethical propositions about good and right are natural properties (Rechels, 2000: 75). Ethical naturalism rejects the “is”-“ought” distinction or “fact”-“value” distinction (Tanner, 2006: 4)

There are disagreements among naturalists regarding the justification of morality. Consequently, as Lahti has recommended, there are three levels of justification of naturalistic views.

1. Logical naturalism
2. Semantic naturalism
3. synthetic naturalism

The above two levels can be categorized under analytic propositions because both of them appeal to logic and the meaning of words. One employed on the logical naturalism argues that we can derive moral terms from non-moral terms. Regardless of this, someone justifying naturalism on the logical level might say that non-moral premises can be used to derive moral conclusions. According to logical naturalism the derivation of moral terms from non-moral terms is known as logical progression (Lahti, 1998: 12-13).

As Lahti notes, Anscombe also argues that it possible to derive moral conclusions from non-moral premises. In order to show the possibility of proceeding from non-moral facts to moral statements, she uses the following example:

P1: we are under certain social institutions which prescribe, among other things, the payment of debts.

P2: I have knowingly received goods in an ordinary marketing situation from a grocer (in the context of said social institutions).

C: I ought to pay the grocer the cost of the goods (ibid: 17).

This argument shows that premise one and premise two are non-moral terms because they are sociological facts and scientific data respectively while the conclusion contains the moral term 'ought'. Based on logical naturalism's point of view, therefore, moral conclusions are drawn from non-moral premises (ibid: 17-18).

A naturalist, who believes that the meaning of moral words can be defined by non-moral words, is a semantic naturalist. For instance, the meaning of the moral term 'good' is defined by non-moral terms such as "minimizing of suffering" or "productive of the greatest happiness". In logical naturalism when we define moral terms by non-moral terms we can appeal to logical conventions while in semantic naturalism moral terms are defined by appealing to the meaning of the words used (ibid: 18-19).

And synthetic naturalism in ethics appeals to the facts or nature of reality. They believe that morality is reducible to concrete natural realities (ibid: 24). It is obvious that synthetic naturalism involve conventions of logic and it also uses ordinary language in order to express information, it does not follow that it makes its final appeal to the conventions of logic and its grounding in the function of ordinary language because it "appeals beyond our logical and linguistic conventions, to something that is held to be true independently of these things" (ibid).

It is not doubtful to say that science is the information bases for logical, semantic and synthetic naturalism. Besides, it also "acts as the bridge between non moral and the moral" (ibid: 26). This bridge is neither logical nor semantic rather "an interpretation of moral principles, properties, or terms in those non moral terms that are deemed appropriate with regard to science" (ibid). For synthetic naturalism, therefore, "moral experience is explained in terms of scientific

information” (ibid). In other words, ethics is explained in terms of natural facts, not in terms of definition or logic (ibid: 28). To sum up, even if they have common definitions, naturalism in ethics argued “either on the basis of its logical form, or on the basis of the meanings that certain words have for a competent user of the language, or on the basis of factual evidence” (ibid: 30).

2.1.2 Non Naturalist or Intuitionist Account of Ethics

We have been discussing ethical naturalism in the above. Out of this, it is also fundamental for our venture to observe non naturalism responses on naturalism. Naturalist ethics has been refuted by non-naturalist ethics from so many angles in the twentieth century. As mentioned in the previous section, ethical naturalism argues that no distinction is possible between “ought” and “is” statements or “fact” and “value” statements. However, Hume said since fact and value are entirely different, normative claims (value) could not be deduced from statements of fact. Hence, according to Hume, it is logically mistake or fallacy to derive moral terms (ought) from non-moral terms (Radcliffe, 2008: 517-518). Therefore, as Lahti has suggested, Hume’s fact-value dichotomy is an argument against naturalism on the logical level (Lahti, 1998: 38).

Moore also identified naturalism as the fundamental philosophical mistake. He agrees with Hume’s view by saying associating facts with value statements leads to commit a “naturalistic fallacy” (Sylvester, 1990: 158). In order to understand his naturalistic fallacy it is important to understand his concept of good. Moore thinks that before we decide whether an action is right or wrong first we have to understand the meaning of good (ibid: 35). He writes:

If I am asked, what is good? My answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked How is good to be defined? My answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it. But disappointing as these answers may appear, they are of the very last importance (Moore, 1903: 6).

From this, then, the first definition, that is, “good is good,” is incorrect according to him because it commits circular fallacy. Good is indefinable is the correct one. In his analysis of the concept of good, he considered good as simple, primitive, indefinable, non-natural and irreducible (Tanner, 2006: 1).

To make the concept of good clearer, Moore draws an analogy with yellow. He claims that good is simple and unanalyzable like yellow. They are simple in that they cannot be defined in

terms of any other concept (Sylvester, 1990: 5). According to Moore, for example, the term good cannot be defined by virtue. And analogously, it is impossible to define the term yellow by the term green. Therefore, good is good, just so with yellow. The term yellow cannot reduce to simple part; the same applies to the term good (Tanner, 2006: 1). However, complex objects can be analyzable by listing their parts. For instance, we can define a horse because a horse has complex properties or entities, not simple notions. Even if they are the same in terms of simplicity, they have substantial difference. Hence, yellow is natural while good is non-natural. According to Moore, natural properties are independent of human consciousness. Nevertheless, unlike natural properties, non-natural properties are not outside of human consciousness. Because of this, therefore, we can say that natural propositions describe in the form of 'is' while ethical propositions prescribe in the form of 'ought'. As a result, Moore categorized good as non-natural property which have no physical features such as size, shape, color etc. (Sylvester, 1990: 5-6). Moore maintains:

...far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good; that these properties, in fact, were simply not "other," but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness. This view I propose to call the "naturalistic fallacy", and of it I shall now endeavor to dispose (Quotes in Lahti, 1998: 61).

Accordingly, non-naturalist maintains that morality has no link with nature. For example, Moore in his *principia Ethica* urges that moral properties such as goodness and badness, rightness or wrongness have no relation with natural objects. This means that, we can explain one moral term in terms of another moral term not in terms of natural properties, just so with natural properties. The property of goodness and the property of natural objects are quite different from each other. So, for him, to try to define the simple notion that is, good, in terms of other naturalistic concept commits of the naturalistic fallacy (Lahti, 1998: 65). The point here is for Moore goodness and natural properties could not be correlated at all. If we mixing up ethical and natural proposition we could commits a mistake (Tanner, 2006: 3). As Lahti states, Moore's objection seems against the semantic naturalism. According to Moore, all semantic naturalism commits the naturalistic fallacy (Lahti, 1998: 58-59).

All those who agree with the possibility of fact and value dichotomy believe that ethical propositions have no factual contents. Yet, non-naturalists say it is possible to evaluate moral propositions as right, or wrong, true or false. Their truth and falsity cannot be justified by

empirical observations rather by intuition. It is therefore clear that, we can know the term good through acts of direct awareness (intuition). It is because of this claim non naturalism sometimes called intuitionism. Intuition is the exercise of direct cognitive awareness of something without the help of sense faculty and reason. So, it is possible to aware ethical propositions directly. Consequently, ethical propositions are cognitively meaningful (Sylvester, 1990: 35-37).

According to Moore, through intuition it is possible to decide whether an action is good or bad. He also holds that ethical disputes can be subjected to the faculty of intuition, not to logical reasoning (Singh, 1998: 480). Singh asserted that “Moore’s use of the term ‘intuition’ makes us arrive at the conclusion that at least in his *Principia Ethica* stage he is inclined to maintain that an ethical disagreement is mainly a disagreement in belief” (ibid). Like naturalistic account of ethics, Moore believes that ethical disagreement is disagreement in belief but the disagreement cannot be granted a natural status (ibid). However, as Singh has suggested in an article entitled, *Moore’s Arguments against certain forms of Ethical Naturalism*, Stevenson says Moore’s former position in his *Principia Ethica* is changed. Therefore, as Singh note, in the latter view, Moore’s position on the matter of ethical disagreements seems “intuition is not the only thing but feeling and attitude have also some place in it” (ibid).

To sum up, as what has been said so far, non-naturalism believes that ethical concepts such as good are not analyzable. They cannot be reduced to small parts. But according to ethical naturalism ethics is reducible to something else. As we have seen, some naturalists think that ethical terms, such as good can be defined in non-ethical terms. They believe that ethical statements directly follow from facts. Naturalistic philosophers refute the naturalistic fallacy because they argue that facts are not different from values. Hence, no fact value distinction is possible (Tanner, 2006: 4).

2.2 Ayer’s Refutation of Ethical Naturalism and Non-Naturalism

In the previous section we have discussed the view of traditional alternatives: naturalism and non-naturalism. In this section we proceed to show whether these theories are cognitively meaningless or meaningful. As I pointed out in the above section, Ayer rejects both theories as cognitive theories of ethics. He says naturalism and non-naturalism are wrong when they argue moral statements are cognitively meaningful.

Before turning to his refutation of traditional alternatives, however, it is important to see the four kinds of ethical philosophy. For Ayer, traditional practice of ethical philosophy was far from being a “homogenous whole”. The reason is that not only it covers piece of metaphysics and the analysis of non-ethical concepts but its actual ethical contents were very different kinds. Therefore, Ayer asserts that there are four classes of ethical sentences.

1. Definitions of ethical terms.
2. Descriptions of moral experience.
3. Exhortations to ethical virtue.
4. Ethical judgments.

According to Ayer, only the first class could be said to contain the subject matter of ethical philosophy. The second class he allocated to psychology and sociology; the third class is clearly not entertained as propositions; they are, rather, commands. Thus, they did not belong to any branch of philosophy or science. Finally, the fourth class is neither definitions, nor quotations; they did not belong to ethical philosophy (Ayer, 1936: 104).

As noted before, naturalists stated that moral statements can be reduced to empirical statements. Thus, moral propositions are synonymous with natural propositions (Nobis, 2004: 63). The two kinds of naturalism Ayer discusses are utilitarianism and subjectivism. Both subjectivists and utilitarians argue that it is possible to reduce ethical propositions to non-ethical propositions (Ayer, 1936: 106). In other words, ethical values can be changed in to empirical terms: “ ‘good’ can be defined in terms of ‘right’ or ‘right’ in terms of ‘good,’ or both in terms of ‘values’ ” (ibid).

Utilitarianism is a branch of normative ethics. Its modern form is proposed by Bentham and Mill. Despite their differences, utilitarians have common beliefs. They suggest and defend the “greatest happiness principle”, according to which an act is morally right, if it tends to promote happiness; wrong if tends to produce pain. That means, an action is right, if it brings greater amount of pleasure over evil. If the favorable effects are greater, then the action is morally right. If the unfavorable effects are greater, then the action is morally wrong (Scarre, 1996: 2). Since utilitarianism urges that consequence is essential to distinguish moral action from non-moral

action, they are consequentialists or teleologists. For them, the moral worth of an act is judged according to the goodness and badness of its consequences. In other words, moral goodness and badness is about goodness and badness of the action. Hence, utilitarian naturalists claimed that it is possible to determine the rightness of an action by referring to its end or consequence (Gensler, et al, 2004: 196).

As Singh notes, cognitivism maintains that because ethical proposition are descriptive, it follows disagreement in belief (Singh, 1998: 478). “A disagreement in belief is a matter of dispute as to how a thing is to be described” (ibid). Mill argues that ethical disagreement have direct connection with psychological state of mind, that is, enjoyment of pleasure or happiness. Singh states that “Mill’s utilitarianism has not been styled in a meta-ethical frame work, but still we can say that according to him ethical disagreement is a disagreement in belief” (ibid). And Bentham as a utilitarian accepted the view that “the greatest pleasure for the greatest number.” As Singh points out, for Bentham, when two or more persons disagree on moral matter, the disagreement is factual one consisting disagreement in belief (ibid). Therefore, for naturalist account of ethics, ethical disagreements are mainly disagreement in belief and the disagreement can be granted a natural status. Thus, for utilitarians the rightness of an action is determined in terms of pleasure and moral disagreements are mainly disagreement in belief. This line of thought shows that according to utilitarianism moral propositions are verifiable. However, Ayer refutes utilitarianism account of ethics as follows:

We cannot agree that to call an action right is to say that of all the actions possible in the circumstances it would cause, or be likely to cause, the greatest happiness, or the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, or greatest balance of satisfied over unsatisfied desire, because we find that it is not self-contradictory to say that it is sometimes wrong to perform the action which would actually or probably cause the greatest happiness, or the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, or satisfied over unsatisfied desire (Ayer, 1936: 107).

Ayer thinks that the utilitarianism’s analysis of ethics is unsatisfactory. He rejects all variants of utilitarianism by saying it is not self-contradictory to declare that some satisfied things are unsatisfied. Consequently, for him utilitarianism is not analytically true, true as matter of definition (Cruse, 2004: 3). According to him, utilitarianism are wrong when they define “good” in terms of “pleasure,” or it is wrong to argue that “the sentence ‘x is good’ is equivalent to ‘x is pleasant’ or to ‘x is desired’ ” (Ayer, 1936: 107). It is erroneous to define right action as an action which

produces good consequence. So, for him, the validity of ethical propositions is not determined by the consequence of an action, or it is impossible to calculate the validity of ethical judgments through pleasure (ibid).

The basic thought behind Subjective naturalism is the idea that our moral issues are referring to our feelings, beliefs, etc. This indicates that, moral opinions are based on likes and dislikes of the individuals. In this regard, morality is subjective; no objective morality is possible (Gale, 2006: 375). Subjective naturalists define the rightness of moral actions “in terms of the feelings of approval which a certain person, or group of people, has towards them” (Ayer, 1936: 106). This implies that, the rightness of an action is determined by appealing to judgments of individual or collective approvals (Nobis, 2004: 63). For example, when Henok argue that marriage is right, he is not stating a fact about marriage. Instead, he is simply arguing something about his feelings toward it. For subjective naturalism, since no universal form of moral proposition is possible, it is wrong to say one person is right and another one is wrong. However, Ayer rejects subjectivist analysis of ethical terms. He undermines ‘group subjectivism’ as follows:

We reject the subjectivist view that to call an action right, or a thing good, is to say that it is generally approved of, because it is not self-contradictory to assert that some actions which are generally approved of are not right, or that some things which are generally approved of are not good (Ayer, 1936: 106-107).

In the above quotation, the phrase “generally approved of” means that an action is right if it is asserted by the majority of certain action, not individual action. Ayer also rejects ‘individual subjectivism’ as follows:

And we reject the alternative subjectivist view that a man who asserts that a certain action is right, or that a certain thing is good, is saying that he himself approves of it, on the ground that a man who confessed of what was bad or wrong would not be contradicting himself (ibid: 107).

By “he himself approves of it” implies that an action is right if an individual person approves the action, not approved by the majority. So, Ayer rejects both group and individual subjectivism.

According to Ayer, we can say that ethical propositions “must be regarded as ‘absolute’ or ‘intrinsic’, not empirically calculable” (ibid). What Ayer denies is not the possibility to “invent a

language in which all ethical symbols are definable in non-ethical terms” (ibid). He says “...it is desirable to invent such language and adopt it in place of our own” (ibid). However, he denies the view of subjectivism and utilitarianism that the “reduction of ethical to non-ethical statements is consistent with the conventions of our actual language” (ibid). Hence, having rejected subjectivism and utilitarianism on these grounds, Ayer says “...we reject utilitarianism and subjectivism, not as proposals to replace our existing ethical notions by new ones, but as analyses of our existing ethical notions” (ibid: 107-108). In other words, as Wilks note, Ayer was not rejecting them as normative proposals, but their descriptive account of ethics (Wilks, 2002: 5). Therefore, Ayer’s argument is that “in our language sentences which contain normative ethical symbols are not equivalent to sentences which express psychological propositions or indeed empirical propositions of any kind” (Ayer, 1936: 108). To clarify this point, Ayer advised that

It is only normative ethical symbols, and not descriptive ethical symbols, that are held by us to be indefinable in factual terms. There is a danger of confusing these two types of symbols, because they are commonly constituted by signs of the same sensible form. Thus, a complex sign of the form ‘x is wrong’ may constitute a sentence which expresses a moral judgment concerning a certain type of conduct, or it may constitute a sentence which states that a certain type of conduct is repugnant to the moral sense of particular society. In the latter case the symbol ‘wrong’ is descriptive and expresses an ordinary sociological proposition; in the former it is used normatively, and the sentence in which it occurs does not, we maintain, express an empirical proposition at all. It is only with normative ethics that we are at present concerned; so whenever ethical symbols are used in the course of this argument, without qualification, they are always to be interpreted as symbols of the normative type (ibid).

Ayer tries to differentiate descriptive ethical symbols from normative by arguing that the former is not purely emotive while the latter is purely emotive. Hence, normative ethical symbols are cognitively meaningless. However, since descriptive ethical symbols have descriptive element, they are cognitively meaningful.

Then, Ayer suggested that naturalistic analysis of ethics is not empirically verifiable. The validity of ethical statements is not determined neither by the consequence of actions nor by the nature of people’s feeling. Indeed, Ayer claims that reductionist view of utilitarianism and subjectivism analysis of ethical terms is incorrect. Finally, according to Ayer’s argument, both subjectivism and utilitarianism analysis of ethics is not justifiable, because they cannot

differentiate ethical propositions from factual propositions. Hence, they are neither true nor false (ibid: 106-107).

Ayer also discards non naturalism (absolutist) as cognitive theory of ethics. For non-naturalist analysis of ethics, statements of value are not verified by “observation, as ordinary empirical are, but only by a mysterious ‘intellectual intuition’ ” (Wilks, 2002: 5). Therefore, for the absolutist the validity of ethical judgments are not determined by empirical test, rather by intuition. So, since ethical propositions are intuitively verifiable, we can say that they are genuine synthetic propositions. This line of argument is mismatched with logical positivism’s philosophy in general and for Ayer in particular. That is why Ayer said the view of absolutist is mistaken (ibid). To put it in Ayer’s words:

Considering the use which we have made of the principle that a synthetic proposition is significant only if it is empirically verifiable, it is clear that the acceptance of an ‘absolutist’ theory of ethics would undermine the whole of our main argument (Ayer, 1936: 109).

Ayer suggested that intuition marks “statements of value unverifiable” because “what seems intuitively certain to one person may seem doubtful, or even false, to another” (ibid: 108-109). Furthermore, he says,

Some moralists claim to settle the matter by saying that they ‘know’ that their own moral judgments are correct. But such an assertion is of purely psychological interest, and has not the slightest tendency to prove the validity of moral judgment (ibid: 109).

The point here is that, for Ayer, if differences of opinion are arising in connection with moral statements, it is not possible to resolve them by appealing to empirical experience because certainty of moral proposition is subjective. However, the differences of opinion in connection with empirical statements can be solved by referring to empirical test. Therefore, according to Ayer, no empirical test is possible in non-naturalist theory with regard to moral propositions (ibid).

Thus, Ayer undermines the view of non-naturalists that ethical propositions are synthetic but they could be not verified by empirical experience rather by non-empirical faculty (intuition). (Nobis, 2004: 64). Non naturalist philosopher claims that it is conceivable to understand moral terms intuitively. This implies that, for them we can express moral facts through intuition. Yet,

Ayer argues that intuition expresses a feeling, not a fact. Ayer says through appealing to intuition it is awkward to prove moral terms empirically. Consequently, intuition is useless because it cannot solve the problems regarding moral propositions (ibid).

Both Moore and Ayer negate the view of naturalism that moral terms are definable in terms of non-moral terms. Besides, like Moore, Ayer believes that good is indefinable. Despite of their similarities, they differ in some respects. As we have seen so far, according to Moore since good is a simple notion, it is indefinable and unanalyzable. Nevertheless, for Ayer the reason why good is indefinable and unanalyzable is that because it is a “mere pseudo concept”, not because it is a simple notion. In other words, because there is no criterion to test the validity of moral terms, they are unanalyzable for Ayer. So, unlike the intuitionists, Ayer argues that sine ethical propositions are unverifiable; they are not genuine synthetic propositions. From this, he concludes that they are pseudo propositions (Ayer, 1936: 109-110).

2.3 The Origin of Emotivism

The evolution of emotivism begins with David Hume. According to him, reason has no role in motivating moral actions. For example, if we take the statement “killing is morally wrong,” nothing is wrong with killing because there is no wrongness and rightness with the action. This means, wrongness and rightness are the result of our feeling. What Hume tries to say is that moral propositions are not the result of reason rather the result of emotion. In other words, Hume claims that moral judgments are not real but a matter of emotion. Inspired by Hume, Ayer also argues that moral statements are not factual descriptions. Because of this, therefore, we can say that Ayer’s theory of emotivism was influenced by Hume (MacIntyre, 2007: 49).

As Wiggins has suggested, Ayer also influenced by Ogden’s and Richards's *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923). Like Ogden and Richards, Ayer declares that ethical assertions are literally nonsense but are emotively meaningful. Hence, they are neither true nor false (Griffiths, 1991: 181). According to Mahon, Ayer is not the originator of emotivism. In their book, entitled *The Meaning of Meaning*, Ogden and Richards “advanced a distinction (which itself was not wholly original) between the symbolic, or referential, use of words and the emotive, or non-referential, use of words” (Mahon, 2005: 15). As mentioned so far, for Moore, good is simple, unanalyzable

and non-natural property. But Ogden and Richards recommend that the word good did not refer to any property. Rather, it gives “emotive use” (ibid: 16). Ogden and Richards says,

...when we so use it in the sentence, 'This is good,' we merely refer to this, and the addition of 'is good' makes no difference whatever to our reference. When on the other hand, we say 'This is red,' the addition of 'is red' to 'this' does symbolize an extension of our reference, namely, to some other red thing. But 'is good' has no comparable symbolic function; it serves only as an emotive sign expressing our attitude to this, and perhaps evoking similar attitudes in other persons, or inciting them to actions of one kind or another (Ogden and Richards, 1923: 125).

Accordingly, the sentence, ‘This is good’ has emotive function while the sentence, ‘This is red’ has symbolic function because it has reference. Hence, according to them, even if the word good did not refer to anything, we can say that it gives emotive use, not symbolic function.

Therefore, Ogden and Richards try to show the word good in ethics “in the purely emotive use (and not meaning)”. In this regard, for them, “the speaker expressed an attitude, and evoked a similar attitude in their listener...” (Mahon, 2005: 16). Motivated by Ogden’s and Richard’s emotivism, Ayer develops his meta-ethical theory. In his essay, entitled *Are There Objective Values?* (1984), Ayer acknowledges the earlier versions of emotivism as we can see in this quotation

This [chapter 6 of *Language, Truth and Logic*] was one of the earliest attempts to develop in any detail what came to be known as the emotive theory of ethics. I say ‘to develop in detail’ because the theory had already been suggested by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards in their book *The Meaning of Meaning*, of which the first edition appeared as early as 1923. It was from them that I borrowed the word ‘emotive’ which they used to cover all aspects of language other than what they termed referential or symbolic... I must confess that I had read *The Meaning of Meaning* some years before I wrote *Language, Truth and Logic*, but I believe that my plagiarism was unconscious. If I had realized how closely I was following in the footsteps of Ogden and Richards, I think it very unlikely that I should not have acknowledged my debt to them (Quoted in Mahon, 2005: 17).

As Mahon puts it, Ayer is not the only philosopher who borrowed his emotivism from Ogden and Richards. Duncan-Jones also plagiarized his idea from them (Mahon, 2005: 17). As Mahon suggested, for Duncan-Jones “moral pronouncements were expressions of emotion rather than statements of fact” (ibid). Based on Mahon’s point of view, therefore, Ayer is not the originator of emotivism rather developed it in detail. Therefore, he is influenced by the earlier versions such as Ogden and Richards and Duncan-Jones. Even if, Ayer borrowed his idea of emotivism

from the earlier versions mentioned above, it does not follow that there is no difference among his idea and theirs (ibid: 19).

According to these earlier versions, ethical judgments were expressions of emotions that evoked the same emotions in others. But... the emotions expressed and evoked were common-or-garden emotions. They were the sort of emotions that were expressed by such Interjections as ‘Blast!’ and ‘Hurrah!’. This is not what Ayer argued in 1936 in *Language, Truth and Logic*. Ayer argued that ethical judgments were expressive and evocative of ethical or moral emotions. Ethical emotions were sui generis emotions, entirely distinct from other kinds of emotions. An ethical emotion could not be reduced to a non-ethical emotion, such as aesthetic pleasure, or anger (ibid).

The point here is, for the earlier versions it is possible to reduce ethical emotions to non-ethical emotions while for Ayer it is inconceivable.

As Mahon describes, Like Ayer, Stevenson also borrowed his emotivism from the earlier accounts. In his dissertation, entitled *The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms* (1935), Stevenson acknowledges Ogden and Richards, Broad, and Duncan-Jones. Therefore, Ayer and Stevenson copied their emotivism from the same source, that is, Ogden and Richards and others. (ibid: 23-24). So, according to Mahon, Stevenson “named Ogden and Richards as the original emotivists” (ibid: 24-25). He thus writes:

In the past decade or two philosophical analysts have given increasing attention to emotive meaning, and several have emphasized it in ethics. Their views have found some adherents, but a rather larger number of opponents. A. J. Ayer’s analysis has provoked heated discussion. Bertrand Russell, whose most recent views on ethical analysis are almost identical with Ayer’s, has not, in this connection, been so widely discussed – perhaps because the old-school moralists, after their previous attacks on him, have become too exhausted to repeat them. Rudolph Carnap has devoted several brief pages to the imperative and expressive functions of ethical statements; and C. D. Broad has summarized an emotive view, drawing from an unpublished paper of A. E. Duncan-Jones. An earlier account was given by Ogden and Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning*, and several others have contributed to the view in this or that detail (Quoted in Mahon, 2005: 24-25).

2.4 Ayer's Theory of Ethics: Emotivism

Having exposed the fundamental mistake of naturalism and non-naturalism, Ayer proposes emotive theory of ethics which was compatible with his radical empiricism. Ayer belongs to the school of thought called logical positivism, which holds that moral propositions are cognitively meaningless. Even if the logical positivists assert that moral statements have no literal meaning, they believe that they have emotive meaning. This implies that, ethical statements are emotively meaningful because they evoke our feelings, cannot be said to be true or false (Funmilayyo, 2015: 152). Consequently, emotivism as theory of ethics develops.

There are different logical positivists who defend ethical emotivism such as Stevenson, Carnap, Ayer, and so forth. But in this thesis I intend to examine and explore the theory of emotivism put forward by A.J. Ayer. Ayer's Emotive theory of values is a logical outcome of his fundamental tenet, that is, the principle of verification. Now let us see the emotive theory of values and its relation to the verification principle. Ayer developed his emotivism in chapter 6 of *Language, Truth and Logic*, entitled *Critique of Ethics and Theology* by saying that judgments of value are "not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false" (Ayer, 1936 : 104). So, for him the function of ethical statement is not to state a fact rather to express emotion (ibid: 110). To illustrate this point, Ayer uses the following example.

...if I say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money,' I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, 'You stole that money.' In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, 'you stole that money,' in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks. The tone, or the exclamation marks, adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings in the speaker. If now I generalize my previous statement and say, 'Stealing money is wrong,' I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning - that is, expresses no proposition which can be either true or false. It is as if I had written 'Stealing money!!' - where the shape and thickness of the exclamation marks show, by a suitable convention, that a special sort of moral disapproval is the feeling which is being expressed. It is clear that there is nothing said here which can be true or false (ibid).

This passage is the summary of his view that the function of ethical term in a statement is to express emotion, not to state fact. As it can clearly be seen from this quotation, Ayer shows that

the presence of ethical terms does not add a further claim to a statement. Ethical statements or terms are not statements of fact rather they express feeling. So, the statement “you acted wrongly in stealing that money” does simply describe the fact that “you stole that money” because it is another way of saying it. Here the term “wrongly” does not add a further fact because it is implicit in the word “stole”. In other words, the function of ethical terms is emotive and they are neither true nor false. From this, we can understand that ethical concepts don not describe any fact, and therefore they are pseudo concepts. As a result, ethical propositions are meaningless.

Peoples may disagree about the wrongness or rightness of an action because they may not have the same feeling about it (Gensler, et al, 2004: 102). Ayer holds that when we say that something is wrong or right we are not making any factual proposition but we are “merely expressing certain moral sentiments” (ibid). So, it is impossible to decide whether an action is right or wrong in a factual manner. Hence, no moral proposition is genuine. It is true that ethical terms express feeling, that is, they have an emotive function but Ayer says it is not their only function because they also have the function to “arouse feeling, and so to stimulate the action” (ibid: 103). Some ethical terms also have the effect of a command (ibid). For example, according to him “the sentence ‘It is your duty to tell the truth’ may be regarded as both the expression of a certain sort of ethical feeling about truthfulness and as the expression of the command ‘Tell the truth’ ” (ibid). Ayer argued that:

We can now see why it is impossible to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgments. It is not because they have an ‘absolute’ validity, which is mysteriously independent of ordinary sense experience, but because they have no objective validity whatsoever. If a sentence makes no statement at all, there is obviously no sense in asking whether what it says is true or false. And we have seen that sentences which simply express moral judgments do not say anything. They are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood. They are unverifiable for the same reason as a cry of pain or a word of command is unverifiable—because they do not express genuine propositions (Ayer, 1936: 110).

Ayer acknowledged his emotive theory, which he described as “radically subjectivist,” differed from “orthodox subjectivist”. For the orthodox subjectivist view, ethical terms or sentences express genuine proposition. They hold that ethical statements express about the talkers feelings (Wilks, 2002: 7). According to orthodox subjectivist, ethical propositions

“would be true if the speaker had the relevant feelings, and false if he had not” (Ayer, 1936: 112). That means moral sentences are empirically verifiable in principle. Thus, we can determine the truth and falsity of ethical statements. For the orthodox subjectivist view, If Mr. ‘X’ says, ‘tolerance is a virtue’, which is his own feeling of approval regarding tolerance; and Mr. ‘Y’ may disapproves of it by saying ‘you don’t approve of it’. Based on orthodox subjectivist point of view, therefore, contradiction is possible in ethics by approving or disapproving of something. However, on Ayer’s radical subjectivist view, when we say that tolerance was a virtue we are not expressing statement at all rather we are simply evincing our feelings. That is why for Ayer’s radical subjectivist view; contradiction is not possible (Wilks, 2002: 7). In order to clarify this idea, Ayer distinguishes between the expression of feeling and the assertion of feeling. Ayer does so as follows:

... I may simultaneously express boredom and say that I am bored, and in that case my utterance of the words, ‘I am bored,’ is one of the circumstances which make it true to say that I am expressing or evincing boredom. But I can express boredom without actually saying that I am bored. I can express it by my tone and gestures, while making a statement about something wholly unconnected with it, or by an ejaculation, or without uttering any words at all. So that even if the assertion that one has a certain feeling always involves the expression of that feeling, the expression of a feeling assuredly does not always involve the assertion that one has it (Ayer, 1936: 113).

What Ayer tries to say is that, on the one hand, when Ayer expresses his boredom by saying “I am bored,” he is expressing and asserting his feeling of boredom. On the other hand, when he expresses it by physical gestures, or ejaculations, he is only expressing his feeling of boredom, not asserting that he is bored. Thus, it is true that the assertion of certain feeling always involves its expression of that feeling but the expression of a feeling does not necessarily involve its assertion of that feeling.

The validity of moral judgment is controlled by the nature of their author’s feeling. This is proposed by the ordinary subjectivist theory (orthodox subjectivist). Ayer suggests that, his radically subjectivist theory escapes such view. Because his radical subjectivism implies that the existence of any feeling is not a necessary and sufficient condition to determine the validity of moral judgments. For Ayer, therefore, moral propositions have no validity at all (ibid). But Ayer notes that there was one more argument which is pointed out by Moore against orthodox subjectivism even his own radical subjectivism did not escape, namely, that “if ethical

statements were simply statements about speakers feeling's, it would be impossible to argue about questions of value"(ibid: 113-114). As Ayer notes, according to Moore, it is possible to argue or to dispute about questions of value. Accordingly, for Moore, the view of subjectivism is false (ibid).

Ayer argues that Moore's argument is not refuted orthodox subjectivism and his radical subjectivism. The reason he gives for his denial was people never really dispute about questions of value. He asserts that when we are engaging in an ethical disagreement we are in fact disputing over facts, not over values (ibid: 114). On the orthodox subjectivist theory, "if a man said that thrift was a virtue," it is impossible to dispute the question of value by replying "it was a vice" (ibid). This means "one would be saying that he approved of thrift and the other that he did not; and there is no reason why both these statements should not be true" (Gensler, 2004: 103-104).

Like orthodox subjectivism, Ayer's radical subjectivism also asserts that there is no real dispute in ethical matters. Ayer maintains that the statement "Thrift is a virtue" and "Thrift is a vice" do not express propositions because they are not contradictory propositions (Ayer, 1936: 114). According to Ayer, the idea that there is no dispute about questions of value seems to a very paradoxical assertion. Ordinarily speaking, when peoples disagree about moral value of certain action, it seems disputes about question of value but as Ayer acknowledged, the dispute is not really about a question of value, rather about a question of fact. Thus, dispute about question of values is pointless (Griffiths, 1991: 190). Ayer illustrates his central thesis that there are no genuine ethical disputes by the following passage.

When someone disagrees with us about the moral value of a certain action or type of action, we do admittedly resort to argument in order to win him over to our way of thinking. But we do 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. We argue that he has misconceived the agent's motive; or that he has misjudged the effects of the action or its probable effects in view of the agent's knowledge, or that he has failed to take into account the special circumstances in which the agent was placed. ...we do this in the hope that we have only to get our opponent to agree with us about the nature of the empirical facts for him to adopt the same moral attitude towards them as we do. And as the people with whom we argue have generally received the same moral education as ourselves, and live in the same social order, our expectation is usually justified. But if our

opponent happens to have undergone a different process of moral 'conditioning' from ourselves, so that, even when he acknowledges all the facts, he still disagrees with us about the moral value of the actions under discussion, then we abandon the attempt to convince him by argument. We say that it is impossible to argue with him because he has a distorted or undeveloped moral sense; which signifies merely that he employs a different set of values from our own. We feel that our own system of values is superior, and therefore speak in such derogatory terms of his. But we cannot bring forward any arguments to show that our system is superior. For our judgment that it is so is itself a judgment of value, and accordingly outside the scope of argument. It is because argument fails us when we come to deal with pure questions of value, as distinct from questions of fact, that we finally resort to mere abuse (Ayer, 1936: 114-115).

Thus, if a person said that "common needs precede common goods," and another replied that it was wrong. In this regard, if the former wants to alter the approach of the latter, he will refer to various favorable factors or reasons to defend his argument which may be unknown to the latter person. Thus, the aim of the former person is to show his opponent's view has misinformed empirical evidence, not to show that his ethical feeling is wrong. By doing this he changes his opponent's opinion, and they may agree about the facts. This shows that, for Ayer, no real dispute about value is possible rather a dispute about the facts. Ayer holds that, because ethical propositions (values) are not facts, it is impossible to reach moral agreement or disagreement by discussing facts. From this, therefore, we can understand that moral words are not factual.

When peoples disagree on some ethical problems, meta-ethicists have tried to treat from different angles. We have in the previous section tried to discuss the view of cognitivist that an ethical disagreement is mainly a disagreement in belief. However, as Singh noted, non-cognitivists reject this view particularly those who defend the theory of ethical emotivism by saying ethical disagreements are disagreement in attitude. For example, Singh states that in his *Critique of Ethics and Theology* and *On the Analysis of Moral Judgment*, Ayer says when peoples disagree on moral matter, the disagreement cannot be said to have a factual basis consisting in a disagreement in belief. For him, there is no factual or descriptive content of ethical proposition (Singh, 1998: 481). Furthermore, Ayer claims that "the moral judgment expresses the attitude in the sense that it contributes to defining it" (Quoted in Singh, 1998: 481). This implies that "...attitude is a defining characteristic of moral judgment..." (Singh, 1998: 481). Consequently, ethical disagreements are disagreements in attitude. As a result,

emotivism does not allow room for moral disagreement. So, no moral reasoning is possible because disagreement on moral issues is a matter of personal attitude, and personal attitudes cannot be considered as true or false (ibid).

Ayer challenged anyone who doubts its accuracy to construct even an imaginary [rational] argument on a question of value which did not reduce itself to an argument about a question of logic or some empirical matter of fact, and confident that no such counter-example could be produced, went on to assert that we must therefore recognize that its involving the impossibility of purely[rational] ethical argument is not a ground of objection to[the Emotive Theory of Ethics], as Moore well have supposed, but a point in favor of it (Wilks, 2002: 9-10).

As Wilks describes, by rational argument he means an argument “where there is at least some prospect of resolving the issue in question by empirical or logical means” (ibid: 9). According to Ayer, there is no rational argument about ethical claims. He has stated that it is true that people argue in a non-rational sense about questions of value but what the dispute in moral claims is not moral arguments proper because there is no formal contradiction (ibid). Accordingly, ethical statements are not reducible to factual statements.

In his preface of the second edition, Ayer recognizes that the ethical theory he developed in the first edition was not only designed to maintain the consistency of his general position, but to be consistent in itself. This means that, his ethical theory has internal consistency apart from his principle of verification (Ayer, 1946: 20). As we have seen, Ayer’s former view on ethics shows that ethical statements are “purely emotive” and hence meaningless. Though in the introduction to the second edition of *Language, Truth and Logic* (1946), he argues that “a great many ethical statements contain, as a factual element, some description of action, or situation, to which the ethical term in question is being applied” (ibid: 21). This means that, ethical statements contain factual elements and we can argue or dispute about them. Even if Ayer says there are a number of cases to understood ethical statements descriptively, he argues that it is not always possible to understand these statements descriptively (ibid). To illustrate this point he insists that not only descriptive ethical statements but “there are also many statements in which an ethical term is used in a purely normative ways” (ibid). So, he acknowledges that his emotive theory is not proposed to apply descriptive ethics but normative ethics. According to Ayer, normative ethical symbols have not factual meaning, but they have emotive meaning (ibid).

One might argue that if Ayer's emotive theory was correct, contradiction between peoples about questions of value is not conceivable (Griffiths, 1991: 190). Ayer replies by saying "what seem to be disputes about questions of value are really disputes about questions of fact" (Ayer, 1946: 21). What Ayer wants to be clear is that though disputes on question of value is impossible, it does not follow that significantly there is no disagreement between peoples regarding questions of value (ibid). He maintains:

... any dispute about a matter of taste will show that there can be disagreement without formal contradiction, and that in order to alter another man's opinions, in the sense of getting him to change his attitude, it is not necessary to contradict anything that he asserts (ibid: 21-22).

Therefore, Ayer asserts that it is possible to influence other people's opinion through various ways: by call his attention to certain facts that one supposes him to have overlooked, and by justifying normative expressions of value through a suitable choice of emotive language (ibid: 22). Finally, the expression of value judgment is not a proposition, and hence the truth or falsehood is impossible. And, *On the Analysis of Moral Judgment*, Ayer says,

when someone characterizes an action by the use of an ethical predicate, it is quite good usage to say that he is thereby describing it; when someone wishes to assent to an ethical verdict, it is perfectly legitimate for him to say that it is true, or that it is a fact, just as, if he wished to dissent from it, it would be perfectly legitimate for him to say that it was false. We should know what he meant and we should not consider that he was using words in an unconventional way. What is unconventional, rather, is the usage of the philosopher who tells us that ethical statements are not really statements at all but something else, ejaculations perhaps or commands, and that they cannot be either true or false (Ayer, 1954: 232).

Thus, according to Ayer, we can say ethical utterances are not really statements because they cannot be either true or false.

For Ayer, it is incorrect to say that the moralist does make statement of fact because ethical judgments are not being counted as proposition at all. In other words, they do not express propositions. Hence, there are no ethical facts. The word fact and proposition exclude ethical judgments (Hanfling, 1997: 48-49). In his essay entitled, *On the Analysis of Moral Judgment*, Ayer tries to discuss a murder case. Suppose that someone has committed a murder. Then the judge asks the murderer to say something about where and how the killing was happened. Following the murderer can give numerous reasons for his motive to commit a murder such as

the person was jealous of him, pursuing some political end, etc. From this we can understand that for Ayer the murderer's description is factual because we can verify them through observation (Ayer, 1954: 233-234). To put it in Ayer's words:

It is a matter of fact, in my usage of the term, that the victim was killed at such and such a place and at such and such a time and in such and such a manner. It is also a matter of fact that the murderer had certain conscious motives (ibid: 234).

However, Ayer argues that:

Suppose that instead of asking what it was that really happened, or what the agent's motives really were, we ask whether he was justified in acting as he did. Did he have the right to kill? Is it true that he had the right? Is it a fact that he acted rightly? (ibid: 235).

The point here is that for Ayer when the judge decides that the murderer acted rightly or wrongly, or his motives were good, or bad, he is not describing any fact. According to him, since the decision of the judge that whether the murderer acted rightly or wrongly depends on the grounds mentioned by the murderer, it is not verified. In order to clarify this view let us consider the following case: two observers may agree about all the circumstances of the case, even though they may disagree in their evaluation of it. Since the use of the ethical term is repetition of the circumstantial description, no contradiction is possible. Ayer argued that ethical predicates are not verifiable independent of the natural features of the situation (ibid: 235-236). Consequently, he says "...the ethical features in some way depend upon the natural" (ibid: 236).

In his analysis of moral judgment, Ayer maintains that ethical conclusions do not follow from the factual premises either from formal demonstration or in a scientific sense. He asks "in what way do these reasons support the judgments? Not in a logical sense. Ethical argument is not formal demonstration. And not in a scientific sense either" (ibid). He tries to show the nonscientific nature of ethical reasoning as we can see in this quotation

...the goodness or badness of the situation, the rightness or wrongness of the action, would have to be something apart from the situation, something independently verifiable, for which the facts adduced as the reasons for the moral judgment were evidence. But in these moral cases the two coincide. There is no procedure of examining the value of the facts, as distinct from examining the facts themselves. We may say that we have evidence for our moral judgments, but we cannot distinguish between pointing to the evidence itself and pointing to that for which it is supposed to

be evidence. Which means that in the scientific sense it is not evidence at all (ibid: 236-237).

To put it in other words, Ayer does not regard ethical arguments as scientific because the rightness or wrongness of the action does not describe a fact which goes beyond facts mentioned in the situation and the rightness and wrongness of the action is also not verifiable apart from the situation. This means, they do not convey any propositions other than the factual propositions that are already involved in the situation.

I think Ayer does not demonstrate what he means by formal demonstration. Ordinarily speaking, it is related with deductive reasoning. In deductive reasoning the conclusion follows necessarily from the premise. In other words, if the premises are true the conclusion must also be true (Hurley, 1994: 31).

2.5 The End of Moral Philosophy

Having proposed emotive theory of ethics, the only alternative meta-ethical theory, Ayer tries to demise moral philosophy. However, he says that: “I am not saying that morals are trivial or unimportant, or that people ought not to bother with them” (Ayer, 1954: 245). Ayer here does not undermine ethics as he did the elimination of metaphysics. Because he did not deny the role of ethical language, that is, they express emotion (Wilks, 2002: 2). As we have said so far, using his principle of verification, Ayer attacks metaphysics as meaningless. Analogously, because of his criterion, Ayer argues that moral assertions are literally nonsenses. They might have no truth value just as exclamation points have no truth value. Ayer claims that since moral utterances are not either analytic or observation laden, they are to be dismissed as meaningless (Cruse, 2004: 3).

For Ayer, ethical propositions are not analyzable, and hence they are pseudo concepts. Some moral philosophers believe on the possibility of science of ethics. However, logical positivism attacks moral science (Ayer, 1936: 116). For example, Ayer as logical positivist doubted that there could be a science of ethics, “if by ethical science one means the elaboration of a ‘true’ system of morals” (ibid). As we have seen, since ethical sentences are mere expression of emotion or attitudes, we can argue that it is no conceivable to determine the validity of ethical system. Therefore, he really doubted whether any such system of morality is true (ibid). Ayer

suggested that "...ethics, as branch of knowledge, is nothing more than a department of psychology and sociology" (ibid: 117). In other words, in the eye of Ayer ethical theory is either simply a branch of psychology, or it is nonsense. And also, Ayer replies for those who accused him of overlooking the existence of casuistry as follows. "...casuistry is not a science, but is a purely analytical investigation of the structure of a given moral system. In other words, it is an exercise of informal logic" (ibid).

Regarding the theory of hedonistic, one may argue that the moral code of a society is determined by encouraging or discouraging a given type of conduct, or by the condition of its own happiness. Therefore, according to hedonism, the validity of moral action is determined by observing the relation between the action and its happiness (ibid). Also, for Kantian views "moral percepts have for some people the force of inexorable commands" (ibid). Ayer criticized both Kantian and hedonistic theories of morality. He has argued that the main problem of these theories is that "they treat propositions which refer to the causes and attributes of our ethical feeling as if they were definitions of ethical concepts" (ibid: 117-118). For him, their fault is they fail to know that ethical statements are pseudo statements and indefinable (ibid: 117). So, definability is not a relevant criterion for Ayer.

Ayer claims that the purpose of ethical words such as right and wrong are not to make statements of fact, but simply to express certain feeling and evoke a certain response. This implies that they are persuasive expression of attitudes and not descriptive. Hence, they are neither true nor false. In ethics, there is no objective validity, and no possibility of arguing, but only about question of fact. Therefore, for him ethics is not embodies a unique type of knowledge. Finally, for Ayer, Philosophical theories such as intuitionist, naturalistic, objectivist, emotive, and the rest, are neutral as regards actual conduct. In other words, they do not belong to ethics proper but to meta-ethics (Ayer, 1954: 246). Summarily speaking, in his latter view, Ayer seems to change the view that ethical statements are purely emotive. But still he maintains that ethical statements are meaningless.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Problems with the Principle of Verification

Until now, we have discussed Ayer's principle of verification in relation to metaphysics and morality. Now it is time to reflect on how his principle of verification is justified to mark metaphysics and ethics as meaningless and whether his emotivism is a plausible theory of ethics. However, before we evaluate Ayer's argument, we shall first review his principle of verification. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Ayer developed a criterion for meaningful statements, and called it the principle of verification, which enabled him to reject traditional debates as meaningless. The principle of verification states that a proposition only has meaning only if it is either analytic or empirically verifiable.

From Schlick and Popper through Ayer, we have seen the principle of verification grows in a more complex manner. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Schlick adopted the strong sense of verifiability (conclusive verification) while Popper adopted definite falsifiability. However, Ayer argues that there is problem with conclusive verifiability because it marks statements about general propositions of law and propositions about the past as meaningless. He says since empirical propositions are highly probable, they are not verified conclusively even in principle. So, in order to remove this problem, Ayer has selected a weak sense of verifiability. In his first edition, Ayer thinks that weak verification is the correct one. Nevertheless, weak sense of verifiability is also insufficient to distinguish genuine knowledge from pseudo ones. In his improved view, Ayer himself claims, since it allows factual significance to any statements including metaphysics and ethics, it is "far too liberal." I think this shows that Ayer is not confident about his own argument. Still Ayer tries to solve this problem by proposing the two categories: direct and indirect verification. However, as Hempel and Quine have suggested the revised alternative is also problematic.

Cruse observes two difficulties with Ayer's principle of verification. As he points out, the first difficulty is that Ayer "doesn't provide us with any reason to think it is true" (Cruse, 2004: 6). It is true that Ayer's overall project depends on his criterion. Accordingly, as Cruse said, I also believe that "if the principle of verification is true then it is clear that his overall strategy is

a coherent one” (ibid: 4). But Cruse argues that Ayer’s principle of verification is not essentially true. In order to show the problems behind Ayer’s principle of verification Cruse quotes the following paragraph from *Language, Truth and Logic*

As to the validity of the principle... a demonstration will be given in the course of this book. For it will be shown that all propositions which have factual content are empirical hypotheses; and that the function of an empirical hypothesis is to provide a rule for the anticipation of experience. And this means ... that a statement which is not relevant to any experience is not an empirical hypothesis, and accordingly has no factual content. But this is precisely what the principle of verifiability asserts (quoted in Cruse, 2004: 5).

The point here is that the function of an empirical hypothesis is to forecast experiences. Since empirically unverifiable statements are not empirical hypotheses, then they will forecast no experiences. Thus, they are cognitively meaningless. But the question I realize legitimate to raise here is that: is it logically true to say that hypothesis is formulated only to forecast experience? We cannot doubt that we formulate a hypothesis to forecast experiences. However, like Cruse, I believe that it is wrong to conclude that the only reason why we formulate hypothesis is to forecast experiences (Cruse, 2004: 5). For example, metaphysicians undermine this view by arguing “one important reason for forming hypothesis about the world is simply to try to acquire knowledge of the truth, whether or not doing so helps us predict experiences” (ibid).

The second problem regarding the principle of verification is that the statement itself is “not only does it lack justification, but it is actually incoherent” (ibid: 6). As we have seen, the principle of verification states that all meaningful propositions are either analytic, or empirically verifiable. Therefore, in order to justify his argument Ayer uses either analytic or synthetic reasons. Then he tries to apply this principle to metaphysical, ethical, aesthetical and all other propositions (ibid). Nevertheless, his justification of the principle of verification seems to have problems. The point here is that the principle should not only applicable to all propositions but also to itself. In other words, it should itself be either empirically verifiable or analytic. However, as Cruse describes, the proposition itself is neither of them, and hence it is meaningless (ibid). On this view I agree with him because Ayer’s criterion fails its own test. Consequently, Cruse is right to reject Ayer’s criterion because if the principle of verification is neither verifiable nor analytic how can we apply to other propositions?

So far we have been discussing the principle of verification is the core of his philosophy. But I am not familiar with Ayer's principle of verification. Because I strongly argue that if the criterion itself has no logical correctness, it cannot mark philosophical disputes as nonsensical. The question here is that if we cannot use sense experience to test the validity of Ayer's principle of verification, how we can say that the application of the theory is logical one. Besides, unlike Ayer's conception, I strongly argue that the criterion to distinguish meaningful knowledge from pseudo ones must not be restricted to the analytic and synthetic reasons. In this sense, I believe that his theory is not appropriate.

Accordingly, due to the above two objections raised by Cruse, Ayer's project is unsuccessful and wrong. Nevertheless, Ayer tries to defend for the objection that since the principle of verification classes itself is meaningless, it cannot consistently be held (ibid). As Cruse describing, in his introduction to the second edition *Language, Truth and Logic*, Ayer defends the consistency of his criterion in the following way:

While I wish the principle of verification itself to be regarded, not as an empirical hypothesis, but as a definition, it is not supposed to be entirely arbitrary. It is indeed open to anyone to adopt a different criterion of meaning and so to produce an alternative definition which may very well correspond to one of the ways in which the word 'meaning' is commonly used...nevertheless I think that, unless it satisfied the principle of verification, [a statement] would not be capable of being understood in the sense in which either scientific hypotheses or commonsense statements are habitually understood (quoted in Cruse, 2004: 6-7).

Consequently, on the one hand, the principle of verification is proposed as a definition, not as an empirical hypothesis (Cruse, 2004: 7). As it is explained by Cruse, this view seems that "the principle is supposed to be a recommendation about how to talk about meaning, rather than a statement about what meaning is" (ibid). On the other hand, Ayer claims that the criterion is not arbitrary one, and intended to understand and clarify certain statements and words. On this view, as Cruse suggested, Ayer seems to show that the principle of verification should be considered as an analytic truth (ibid).

According to Cruse, the idea that the principle of verification is primarily a recommendation about the way we should talk about meaning has some advantages. For instance, if someone rejects Ayer's view by saying the conclusions Ayer draws from the criterion regarding metaphysics, ethics, and the rest, are not intuitively true. Then Ayer can merely reply that he is

describing how we should talk about such entities, not how we do understand statements about them (ibid). Therefore, “it’s irrelevant if his conclusions are not intuitively true – he is not describing them but proposing how they should be reformed” (ibid). However, in this regard, as Cruse has recommended, there are two difficulties. The first difficulty is that the view that a statement is meaningful if it meets the principle of verification is unjustifiable (ibid). For instance, metaphysician rejects this idea by arguing “Ayer’s proposal is a very bad way to talk about meaning” (ibid). According to Cruse, the second difficulty is that

Ayer’s theory about ethical statements says that a statement like ‘you should do X’ just means something like ‘X – Hooray!’. If this is so, then the statement ‘you should only regard statements as meaningful when they meet the principle of verification’ just means ‘the principle of verification – Hooray!’. But if this is true, we would have to interpret the whole book as being devoid of arguments, and merely expressing Ayer’s approval of the verification principle and his disapproval of metaphysics (ibid).

3.2 The Principle of Verification and the Refutation of Metaphysics

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, Ayer tries to apply the principle of verification to metaphysics in order to see whether or not it would pass the test of empirical verifications. According to Ayer, metaphysics is neither verifiable proposition nor a tautology, then it is pseudo proposition, and therefore factually and literally meaningless (ibid: 1). Nevertheless, as Udefi puts “it seems that there are some conceptual and linguistic confusion surrounding the principle itself. It is not entirely clear how to verify the principle or what kind of observations would show that it is either true or false?” (Udefi, 2009: 9). I think Ayer is right when he argues metaphysical statements are unverifiable. However, Can we say that the human spirit can dismiss all questions concerning being, man or God? I believe that since human beings always try to search truth, it is impossible to dismiss such questions. In his second edition of *Language, Truth and Logic* Ayer says

in putting forward the principle of verification as a criterion of meaning, I do not overlook the fact that the word "meaning" is commonly used in a variety of senses, and I do not wish to deny that in some of these senses a statement may properly be said to be meaningful even though it is neither analytic nor empirically verifiable (Ayer, 1946: 15).

As Cruse says the above paragraph lacks any effective detailed analysis. In this sense, I could say that Cruse’s criticism of Ayer is appropriate because Ayer does not clearly show us what

kind of proposition is neither synthetic nor analytic, and hence meaningful. Thus, I argue that even if metaphysical statements are neither analytic nor synthetic, we cannot say that they are meaningless. I realize that, since his principle of verification is problematic, we cannot say his rejection of metaphysics is supported by strong argument. Therefore, I believe that the threat posed by Ayer against metaphysics is not successful.

Even if there is no empirical answers for the questions about God, the soul, moral good or evil but we can say that peoples try to solve these problems in different manner. However, here I am not arguing that there is no communality between different peoples regarding such problems, rather what I am saying is that even if metaphysical problems are unsolvable problems of men even today, it does not follow that they are meaningless.

In addition, Udefi argued that “metaphysics is still receiving adequate attention by philosophers and non-philosophers alike and as Jim Unah says while re-echoing Heidegger that the problem of metaphysics is the problem of a fundamental ontology” (Udefi, 2009: 9). To support the meaningfulness of metaphysics, Udefi states that at this time the issue metaphysics focuses on are discussed not only in the areas of philosophy but also in other fields such as science, anthropology, culture, religion etc. Hence, it is significant and meaningful (ibid: 10). Moreover, as *Udefi suggested, Ayo Fadahunsi argue that*

both science and metaphysics, as a human activity, attempt to explore and explain the universe as a whole, although, metaphysics goes much deeper than science in raising more general questions bordering on human life and God’s existence and man’s purpose and relationship with his creator (ibid).

Metaphysics is necessary for different disciplines such as ethics, aesthetics, religion, economics, abstract sciences and others (ibid). Ayer argues that metaphysics is unverifiable, and hence meaningless. However, I believe that he is not successful because metaphysics is not the only discipline which is unobservable. To support this line of thinking I would quote Udefi, for he argued that

Even science or scientific knowledge cannot be said to be totally experiential. For there contain, within its system, certain unobservable entities like proton, electron, electromagnetic waves etc. So the rejection of metaphysics or the attempt to purge it of all spiritistic and supra-sensible entities that are not accessible to empirical verification or scrutiny is preposterous since both attempts to explain reality by a priori principles (ibid).

So, Udefi's view seems the principle of verification is not only destroys metaphysics but also science. Summarily speaking, despite of many problems, I think Ayer's principle of verification has brought important achievements in the contemporary philosophical debates.

3.3 The Principle of Verification and the Elimination of Ethics

As we have seen so far, Ayer proposes his emotivism which is consistent with his principle of verification. In addition to metaphysics the other branches of philosophy ruled out as meaningless by the principle of verification are ethical statements, that is, statements of right and wrong. Ayer tries to differentiate moral from factual propositions. Factual propositions are empirically verifiable, are true or false. However, moral propositions are expressions of one's feelings or emotions, and hence they are neither true nor false. Thus, moral propositions do not state truths, and are therefore cognitively meaningless (MacIntyre, 2007: 12).

Ayer argued that ethical propositions express our feelings of approval or disapproval, not cognition of value. This implies that, value does not exist independently of our feelings. For instance, for Ayer, if someone said 'abortion is wrong,' he is simply expressing approval of it, no reasoning at all (Adams, 1949: 549). However, my question is can we approve something without reason. Ayer's reply is we can approve or disapprove an action only based feeling. In this regard, the question which I realize legitimate to be raised over here is that: Is it possible to approve or disapprove something only through emotion? Can we separate emotion from reason and vice versa? What are the demarcations when we say a person is emotional or reasonable? In my opinion Ayer's argument is misleading because I believe that emotion contains reason or emotion laden reason.

As it is explained by Adams, Ayer's view is problematic because "in practice, if ethical words were used consistently to express the approval or disapproval of the speaker, they would, in time, come to mean descriptively the speaker's approval or disapproval" (ibid). So, I argue that when I say abortion is wrong, I am expressing the belief that there are facts about abortion that make it wrong. Regardless of this, I strongly argue that even if I am expressing my disapproval towards abortion, it does not follow that there is no reason. When we approve or disapprove moral actions we cannot use only emotion but also reason. Unlike Ayer's view, I argue that the meaning of ethical judgments must not be restricted to emotion or feeling alone. I believe that we can decide whether an action is right or wrong based on reason. Thus, moral

actions can be either true or false. I think Ayer does not discuss the relation between emotion and reason. In this case I would say that moral propositions are not necessarily based on emotion, and they are also not necessarily based on reason.

The other point I want to critically examine is about disagreement and objectivity of morals. As we have seen in the previous discussions, Ayer claimed that since moral judgments are expressions of emotion, they cannot contradict each other, and no reasoned way of disputing is possible about them. In other words, there are no disagreements about moral matters because “we do not and cannot argue about ...the validity of ... moral principles. We merely praise or condemn them in light of our own feelings” (quoted in Nobis, 2004: 74 -75). The point here is that disagreement about questions of value is inconceivable (Nobis, 2004: 75).

Therefore, according to Ayer, the proposition “this is red” seems factual while the proposition “this is wrong” is not factual. And also Ayer argues we dispute about facts such as whether the combination of $H+O_2$ is H_2O or not but in ethical judgments when a person might claim “this is wrong” and another “this is right,” such dispute is emotive, not factual. Does that seem right? I believe that Ayer is wrong when he argues moral propositions are not based on reason because it is possible to argue whether something is right or wrong based on reason. We can use reason to discuss whether killing is wrong or right. For example, when we decide whether abortion is right or wrong it is not only based on emotion but also based on reason. As one critic suggests, emotivism has the following consequences.

If we accept in bitter earnest the theory that all differences of opinion about what is morally good and morally evil are merely differences of personal taste, we shall find ourselves driven to the unhappy conclusion that it is impossible to justify on rational grounds the conviction that any particular form of conduct is really better than any other, however barbarous that other may be. In short, we seem to be driven to accept the motto of all dictators, “Might is right” (Wilks, 2002: 37).

It is good point that Ayer was not dismissing ethical propositions as irrelevant (ibid: 38). Nevertheless, his problem is when he argues no rational ground is possible in ethical matters. If Ayer’s argument is legitimate how we can judge whether democracy is better than dictatorship. I could say that we can decide something is good or bad based on reason. For instance, we can argue that democracy is right in comparison to the other system of government, based on reason. Besides, as Wilks points out, for Blanshard if we accept emotivism, all assumptions of

law and international law are dismissed as superfluous (ibid: 61). I think we can judge that there is something globally wrong and right ethical rules based on reason. Accordingly, Ayer's solution to the moral problem is very unsatisfying.

As we have seen, Ayer claims that since ethical disputes are unresolvable, it follows no genuine disputes are conceivable. However, in defense of utilitarianism, I argue that it is possible to resolve ethical disagreements with reference to the consequence. Whether a particular act of killing is right or wrong can be judged via its consequence. For instance, if the killing of ten peoples avoids the murderer of hundreds of other persons then we can say that the action is right.

I believe that not all ethical disputes are solvable but through reason it is conceivable to reach a conclusion on some of them. So, since ethical disputes are genuine, we can resolve them. Even if ethical disputes are solvable in terms of consequence, it does not mean that all of them are solvable. The reason is not only in ethical judgments but also in science there are crucial disputes which are not easy to resolve. I strongly argue that in ethics it is impossible to find single and complete answer. This indicates plurality. However, more or less thorough reason we can settle and agree on some of the ethical arguments. Therefore, I argue that Ayer is mistaken in thinking that all ethical disputes are disputes about facts. The reason is, ethical disputes are not disputes about facts rather disputes about values.

In addition, Dinneen reject the idea of emotivism that no objective ethical matter is conceivable. He states it thus:

...if there is no objective right and wrong, if moral judgments are mere expressions of emotions, why disapprove of Nazi concentration camp practices, of Communist torture and brain-washing, why execute the murderer, why speak of the rights and obligations of labor and management, why uphold the civil liberties of negroes? Should someone contradict my condemnation of theft, obscene literature or narcotic peddling, we really could have no argument. If both of us are merely expressing our moral sentiments, "there is plainly no sense in asking which one of us is right. For neither of us is asserting a genuine proposition". All phases of human activity--from private and family life, to the fields of business, education, national and international politics--must necessarily suffer the repercussions of the positivist "science" of ethics (Dinneen,1956: 56).

In this sense, Dinneen is right to reject for Ayer (in particular) and emotivism (in general). I believe that it is conceivable to distinguish morally bad action from morally wrong. For

instance, we disapprove the practices of Nazi and Hitler as morally bad thing, while approving Mother Teresa's contribution to the society as morally good.

According to emotivists, because moral judgments are the result of emotion, we can say that there is no objective view about them.

...moral judgments...will vary, not only from one culture to another in the same historical period, and within the same culture from one historical period to the next, but from one person to another within the same historical period and culture, and within the same person from one historical period to the next (Wilks, 2002: 48).

Like emotivists, I believe that there are variations in moral philosophy. However, I argue that despite their differences, it is possible to find common ethical judgments. In this connection, Rawls argues about the objectivity of ethical judgments. Rawls evidence for the objectivity of ethical judgments is:

Despite the divergence in their beliefs about the world, all reasonable persons agree on at least some ethical judgments. His idea was to appeal to judgments that are shared by all reasonable persons, "irrespective of [their] other beliefs," and explicate them in terms of "higher-order principles" that were true (Gališanka, 2012: 20-21).

Furthermore, in his *After Virtue*, MacIntyre tries to criticize emotivism. The argument in his writing that concern with Ayer's emotivism is that

'Moral judgments express feelings or attitudes,' it is said. 'What kind of feelings or attitudes?' we ask. 'Feelings or attitudes of approval': is the reply. 'What kinds of approval?' we ask, perhaps remarking that approval is of many kinds. It is in answer to this question that every version of emotivism either remains silent or, by identifying the relevant kind of approval as moral approval-that is, the type of approval expressed by a specifically moral judgment-become vacuously circular (MacIntyre, 2007: 12-13).

Like, MacIntyre, Therefore I strongly believe that Ayer's reply is not strong to defend his emotivism.

As noted earlier, for emotivists, ethical propositions are simply expressions of emotions. As Wilks suggested, MacIntyre's aim is not to undermine the truth value of emotivism rather its social consequences (Wilks, 2002: 39). In this regard, MacIntyre ask the question "what then would the social world look like, if seen with emotivist eyes? And what would the social world be like, if the truth of emotivism came to be widely presupposed?" (MacIntyre, 2007: 24). In answering these questions, he claims that emotivism leads to the degeneration of moral

judgments because it “undermines shared ideas and accepted functions” (Wilks, 2002: 39). Since emotivism support liberal individualism, it follows that disagreement is the distinguishing characteristics of modern moral discourse. Hence, no rational conflict resolution is possible between them (ibid).

To solve modern moral problems MacIntyre appeal to the Aristotelian virtue tradition, it shows shared vision of good and unity of human life. According to him, the nature of moral judgments is not a matter of expressing of emotion rather to serve as source of unity and integrity in human life. He asserts that in order to have a good relationship we must develop virtuous activity. Thus, if the reason of all peoples including philosophers is based on such virtue it is possible to remove the catastrophe of modern life (ibid: 43).

MacIntyre claims the evaluation of moral action in emotivism could not promote common good while virtue ethics supports social relation. That is why MacIntyre prefers the Aristotelian virtue ethics. However, as Wilks suggested, MacIntyre’s argument is problematic because there is no background of fundamental evaluative belief which modern human shares (ibid). In this sense, I would say that Wilks is wrong when he argues totally there is no communality in modern life. I strongly argue that we cannot totally say that no common ground is possible because in spite of many differences, it is conceivable to find communal attachment among modern society. Here it is important to be clear that I am not saying that Aristotle’s virtue ethics is important to solve the problem of modern society, rather what I am arguing is that even if there are many differences among modern societies, it does not follow that no shared judgments are possible.

Emotivism defined moral values as means of emotion. In this regard, MacIntyre argues that emotivism failed to define the proper language of morality or the proper meaning of morality because “we use moral judgments not only to express our own feelings and attitudes, but also precisely to produce such effects in others” (MacIntyre, 2007: 12). Therefore, the failure of defining the proper meaning of moral judgments leads them to describe the function of moral judgments wrongly (ibid). In this sense, MacIntyre insists that ethical emotivists do nothing to solve the contemporary moral problem rather they tell us the actual situation of modern human life.

As mentioned above, MacIntyre argues that emotivists are neither able to define the true source of morality nor describe the proper function of moral judgments. Rather, they describe

the situation of contemporary human life. I am convinced by the claim that emotivism undermines social order and common good but I do not support the claim that Aristotle's virtue ethics is important to solve moral crisis. In this connection, I would say that MacIntyre's idea is also not helpful to solve the problem of modern society; rather he describes the situation of ancient human life. My question is what is virtue? Does it have an objective validity? Is Aristotle's virtue emanates from the culture of ancient Greece or from the culture of humanity? In this connection, even if there is variation in religion, culture, philosophy and others, it is possible to find some overlapping ideas about virtue but it is wrong to conclude that Aristotle's virtue in particular and virtue in general is objective all over the world.

Having critically examined the main arguments against Ayer, I shall try to show that ethical propositions are verifiable in terms of consequence. In order to meet this objective, I shall defend universalistic act- utilitarianism. I argue that since ethical judgments are verifiable in reference to the consequence of the action, they are cognitively meaningful.

Before we proceed to universalistic utilitarianism, it is important to critically examine some ideas about Ayer's criticism of utilitarianism. First, as we have seen in the previous chapters, that Ayer refuses the idea of utilitarianism, which is the reduction of ethical statements to non-ethical ones. According to Ayer, it is not self-contradictory to say that some pleasant things are not good (Ayer, 1936:107). However, in defense of utilitarianism, I argue that ethical statements are verifiable, and therefore it is not self-contradictory to deny that some pleasant things are good.

To understand the idea of pleasure, it is essential to distinguish intrinsic good (things that are valuable for its own sake) from instrumental good (things that are valuable for the sake of something else). Health, wealth, knowledge and security are related with the former while pleasure is linked with the latter. For instance, when I say security is good, somebody asks me why *I* value security. I can give many reasons, for example, by saying to create peace. And he can again ask me why I do value peace. I can give other reason. In this way I will conclude that the reasons why I value these things are for the sake of pleasure. The point here is pleasure is intrinsically good. This implies that, for utilitarianism, pleasure is never bad. If so, it is correct in denying Ayer's view that some pleasant things are not good. I believe that if pleasure is intrinsically good it is mistaken to say that some pleasant actions are not right.

Secondly, Ayer rejects Bentham's utilitarianism as follows "...if it is true that the only object that any person is capable of seeking is his own happiness, then clearly there can be no sense in saying that he ought to seek any other" (Ayer, 1954: 254). In this sense, I believe that Ayer's objection against Bentham is right because Bentham advocated the view that every man acts only in his own interest. From this, it is logical to assert that Bentham is wrong in thinking an egoistic theory of the nature of human being. Consequently, I strongly argue that we need a middle way between egoistic and altruistic way of thinking.

Thirdly, according to utilitarianism, at least in principle, we have a standard by which we can measure an action, that is, with reference to its consequence. Yet, Ayer rejects this idea by saying no standard is possible to measure moral actions. In other words, Ayer argues that we cannot measure pleasure and pain via mathematical calculation (Smart and Williams, 1973: 64-65). However, even if pleasure is immeasurable through mathematical calculation, it does not follow that we do not have any standard to measure moral judgments. I believe that there are different kinds of standard to measure things. For instance, the measurement of temperature is thermometer whereas the measurement of moral judgments is in terms of consequences. It seems to me that measurement must not restrict to mathematical calculation. Because of this, therefore, we can say that ethical judgments have their own measurement.

There are varieties of utilitarianism, namely, egoistic, altruistic, universalistic, rule-utilitarianism, act-utilitarianism, and so forth. Despite their differences, they agree that consequence is the criterion to determine the rightness or wrongness of action (Brandt, 1992: 111).

The type of utilitarianism I am to defend is universalistic utilitarianism. Universalistic utilitarianism is to be contrasted with egoistic and altruistic utilitarianism. For egoistic utilitarianism actions are right if, and only if, they motivate self-interests without the consideration of damaging the interests of others. That means, one's own happiness is primary but the interest of other is taken as secondary (Miller, 1984: 381). On the contrary, altruistic utilitarianism promotes the pleasure of others by ignoring their own pleasure (ibid: 388). Nevertheless, I believe that egoistic utilitarianism is not appropriate theory because it ignores the interest of other. And I argue that altruistic utilitarianism is also makes injustice when it ignores self-interest. Regardless of this, as mentioned above, I would say that the intermediate between egoistic and altruistic theory of utilitarianism is plausible. Unlike both egoistic and

altruistic utilitarianism, in universalistic utilitarianism the agent ignores neither his own pleasure nor considers himself more impartial than the other. This shows that all peoples are equal in such theory (Brandt, 1992: 115).

In order to defend my argument I accept act- utilitarianism. Act-utilitarianism is to be contrasted with rule-utilitarianism. Act- utilitarianism is the view that an action is right if it can be judged by the consequence of the action itself. This means, we evaluate the rightness or wrongness of an action by the effect of each particular action. For act- utilitarianism, therefore, rightness of an act is not fixed by general rules (ibid: 114). For instance, act- utilitarianism does not consider the consequence general rules, that is, “telling the truth”. The point is such rule is not important in every instance (Miller, 1984: 408). In contrast, rule utilitarianism maintains that the rightness of an action is judged by the “utility of having a relevant moral rule.” In this regard, the rightness of an act is fixed based on some general rules. Accordingly, for rule utilitarians all members should follow the general rule in every instance. Rightness of an act is not fixed by its relative utility, but by conformity with general rules (ibid).

According to rule utilitarians, killing is always wrong. Regardless of this, I strongly argue that an action must not be limited to the general rules. Nevertheless, here I am not arguing we have not any general rules, rather what I am saying is that in order to maximize our pleasure it is legitimate to change our general rules. I believe that if an action does not maximize the pleasure of the majority it is not right. One might say that do all actions that maximize the pleasure of peoples can be considered as right thing. My reply is if it is not right how the actions can maximizes our pleasure. As mentioned above, rule utilitarians say we can decide whether an action is right or wrong based on general rules. If so, who is the originator of these rules? Is it something super natural power or human being? I believe that we are the creator of our general rules. Therefore, modification is significant to maximize our pleasure. Like constitution, in order to maximize the pleasure of the majority it is logical to amend our general rules in a contextual manner. Thus, Context is very important. The reason is all general rules are not always right because sometimes killing can be right.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen throughout this thesis, several topics that examine Ayer's morality have been explored. It is unfair to consider that his philosophy is totally invalid and at the same time to think that it is free from inconsistency. It is true that his work contributed to the development of philosophical inquiry particularly with reference to moral conceptions. Agreeing with Cruse, however, I argue that Ayer's principle of verification is inconsistent. I believe that, though metaphysical statements are neither analytic nor synthetic, we cannot say that they are meaningless. The reason is not only in metaphysics but there are certain unobservable entities, as Udefi says, even in science. The point here is that if the principle of verification is conclusively true it destroys not only metaphysics but also science. Accordingly, these problems show that Ayer does not have a sufficient reason to defend his principle of verification.

Besides, Ayer argues that, moral propositions are not the result of reason, and hence they are cognitively meaningless. For him, since ethical judgments are based on emotion, there is no objective morality. Here, it seems to me that Ayer is right in thinking that ethical judgments have emotive meaning. Because when we argue about ethical matters we may have some sort of emotion. Nevertheless, can we find reason dealing with moral issues? In this regard, it is legitimate to challenge the non-rational conception of morality. Because, I have argued that reason is an indispensable element of morality in particular and of philosophy in general. I do believe that morality is highly and deeply interwoven with reason and it is even impossible to think morality without reason. Hence, moral judgments are cognitively meaningful and in spite of many differences; it is possible to find common moral judgments.

In defense of utilitarianism, I argue that ethical statements are reducible to factual statements in terms of their consequences. I strongly believe that it is possible to evaluate moral propositions with reference to their consequences. If verifiability is taken as criterion of meaningfulness, we can say that ethical propositions are cognitively meaningful because we can verify them in reference to their consequences. So, Ayer is mistaken in claiming that we do not have reference for moral judgments. I shall say the rightness or wrongness of an action is verifiable with reference to its consequence. That is why I believe that it is possible to distinguish morally good action from morally bad one. Thus, moral claims can be either true or false, and therefore are cognitively meaningful.

Moreover, according to Ayer, we cannot resolve moral disagreements either by empirical or logical means, and therefore no genuine dispute is possible in moral judgments. However, I have already said that we can resolve ethical disagreements with reference to their consequences. And we can determine the validity of these propositions via consequences. I argue that ethical disputes are rational. Consequently, they have factual contents. I can construct my argument in the following way:

P1: Any plausible ethical theory must make ethical disagreement.

P2: Utilitarianism can make sense of ethical disagreement.

C: Utilitarianism is a plausible ethical theory.

In summing up, Ayer claims that no knowledge of ethics is possible. However, I believe that it is possible to distinguish right action from wrong action based on reason. For example, the proposition “killing human being should be abandoned” has truth value. Consequently, we have knowledge of ethics, and we can say that morality is not pseudo rather genuine. Therefore, arguments that Ayer uses, in his early and later views, to prove ethics as cognitively meaningless are problematic and inconsistent.

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