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Approved by:

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THE FORMAL CONDITIONS OF AN  
EMPIRICAL ETHICS

A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School  
of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1940

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# THE FORMAL CONDITIONS OF AN EMPIRICAL ETHICS

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## THE FORMAL CONDITIONS OF AN EMPIRICAL ETHICS

### CHAPTER I

#### THE PROBLEM OF EMPIRICAL ETHICS

This thesis is written in agreement with Dewey's contention that ethics is "the most human of all subjects. It is that which is closest to human nature; it is in-eradicably empirical, not theological, nor metaphysical, nor mathematical."<sup>1</sup> However, no one has stated with greater clarity than Dewey the philosophical basis in terms of which the very possibility of an empirical ethics has been rejected. He has persistently pointed out that this has its roots in the contrast between the conceptions of nature held by ancient and modern science. Greek thought experienced no difficulty in reconciling or

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1. Dewey, J. Human Nature and Conduct, Modern Library Edition, 1930, p. 295.

adjusting the findings of science with the validity of ideas about value, for its metaphysics were teleological and qualitative, and its physics were in complete harmony with its metaphysics.<sup>2</sup> Nature was thought to be what it is because of the presence within it of ends, which, as ends, represented complete or perfect Being. All natural changes were conceived to be striving to actualize these ends as the goals toward which they moved by their very nature. In a context in which ens, verum, and bonum were identified there could be no separate problem of values, since what are now called values were thought of as an integral part of the constitution of nature as the object of natural science.<sup>3</sup> Modern science, on the other hand, rejected the teleology of Greek science as a futile and mischievous encumbrance; and qualities, excellences, and ends were extruded from nature to find their habitat in a spiritual realm.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Dewey, J., The Quest for Certainty, New York, Minton Balch and Co. 1929, p. 49.
  3. Dewey, J., "Theory of Valuation," International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, University of Chicago Press, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 2-3; Influence of Darwin on Philosophy, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1910, p. 6.
  4. The Quest for Certainty, pp. 50, 53.

The result which is of interest here is the sharp dichotomy between fact and value. It is argued that "what is" and "what ought to be" are two fundamentally distinct affairs, in the sense that the latter cannot be derived from the former. The former may, of course, coincide in part with the latter; for "what is" may also be good; but anything that exists and is good is not good because it exists. And while it is good because it is of a certain nature, everything that exists exists as characterized, hence some further principle of differentiation is needed, and the assertion is that this principle is underivable from any factual proposition or set of such propositions.

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This may be granted; what is important is that the dichotomy between fact and value is taken as a reflection of a similar dichotomy between empirical and normative sciences; and on this basis, the very possibility of an empirical ethics has been ruled out beforehand, for it followed that empiricism could not do justice to precisely what was unique and important in ethics. However, it would also seem to follow that no factual propositions whatsoever should be included among the propositions of an ethical system; and the formalism of the categorical

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5. However, see Vivas, E., "Value and Fact," Philosophy of Science, vol. 6 (1936), pp. 432-45, for an attempt to show that there is a sense in which judgments of value are judgments of fact. (See below, pp. 77 ff.)

imperative, which has been the object of countless castigations by subsequent ethicists, instead should have been their model. This, at least, is the conclusion of Royce, who, taking as the fundamental problem of ethics the distinction between the ideal and the real, argues that "from the world of dead facts...you can get no ethical doctrine. Physical truth never gives moral doctrine."<sup>6</sup>

The unsatisfactoriness of this conclusion for ethical theory, however, is obvious; in Dewey's words, it condemns ethics to "the circle in which the ideal has no force and social actualities no ideal quality."<sup>7</sup> This unfortunate consequence provides a motivation to the reexamination of the contention that the value-fact dichotomy necessarily rules out empiricism in ethics. This means that our problem is, not the validity of that dichotomy, nor the presentation of an empirical ethics, but rather the essential, although preliminary task of determining the possibility of such an ethics in the light of the dichotomy between value and factual propositions. Simply stated, it is the problem of the formal conditions of an empirical ethics. Such a consideration will of necessity

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6. Royce, Josiah, The Religious Aspect of Philosophy, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1885, pp. 23, 139.

7. Dewey, J., Human Nature and Conduct, p. 327.

be primarily methodological, the verification of which, insofar as any verification is possible, will consist in its supplying procedures whereby the compatibility of recognizing distinctively value propositions with the establishment of ethics on an empirical basis may be shown.

We shall proceed by assuming the possibility of ethics as an empirical science; the task being, to work out what such an ethics would be, in order to discover whether objections would occur which would prove the assumption an impossible one. And we can start with the very simple analysis which distinguishes between a science and its subject matter; and the further principle that the science has the objective of providing an understanding of the subject matter in terms of the laws which formulate the behavior of that subject matter. This implies, then, that the branches of our inquiry shall be three: (1) the nature of the subject matter; (2) the nature of ethical theory; and (3) the relationship between the two.

Our first question, then, is: What is the subject matter of ethics? In one sense, this question is unanswerable, for there is no acceptable procedure for staking claims on some segment of experience as the exclusive prerogative of a given science. But the point is not really so difficult, nor so general in the present case. We do

not need to start de novo, but can refer to historical ethical theories in order to ascertain what has been viewed as the subject matter of ethics.

A consideration of Aristotle, Kant, and Mill, as representatives of idealistic perfectionism, intellectualistic formalism, and hedonistic utilitarianism, respectively, would appear to assure us that our investigation would not overlook any dominant type of classical ethical theory. However, what is of immediate significance is that a survey of these theories is readily seen to justify the charge of the relative "impurity" of ethics.<sup>8</sup> This can be shown by reference to the different types of propositions which they contain. The next three chapters will be concerned with the presentation of this characteristic of classical ethics, and its bearing upon our problem of the nature of the subject matter of ethics.

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8. See Ayer, A. J., Language, Truth, and Logic, London, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1936, p. 150; Stocks, J. L., Reason and Intuition, London, Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 108.

## CHAPTER II

### THE "IMPURITY" OF ETHICS. PROPOSITIONS OF FACT.

The propositions of fact which have been included in ethical theories have intended to be informative about the nature of human beings. Thus Aristotle's doctrine of virtue cannot be separated from his statements about the nature of the soul, which he analyzes into the rational and irrational parts, two aspects being distinguished further in each of these: the rational is divided into the practical and the intellectual parts, and accordingly the virtues are classified as moral and intellectual, the former coming about as a result of habit, the latter owing "both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time)."<sup>1</sup> There seems to

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1. Nichomachean Ethics, W. D. Ross trans. (Collected Works, vol. IX, Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1925) 1102a-1103a.

be no cause to suppose that Royce would not apply to this his criticism of Plato, concerning whom he remarks, "Plato himself has given us as the support for his ideal, a fact, or a supposed fact, of human nature...The ideal justice has come to be founded on a bare physical fact, namely, on the constitution of the soul, which might, for all we can see, have been different."<sup>2</sup> Certainly this criticism would be applicable to Mill's consideration of "The Ultimate Sanction of the Principle of Utility."<sup>3</sup> Mill characterizes the internal sanction of duty as "a feeling in our own mind; a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violations of duty." The essence of conscience is this feeling "when disinterested, and connecting itself with the pure idea of duty, and not with some particular form of it, or with any of the merely accessory circumstances."<sup>4</sup> The ultimate sanction of all morality being a subjective feeling in our minds, the sanction of the doctrine of Utility is "the conscientious feelings of mankind." Whether the feeling of duty is innate or implanted (Mill believes the latter to be true), does not, he thinks, have to be settled; the im-

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2. Royce, op. cit., p. 37.

3. Mill, J. S., Utilitarianism, Everyman's Library Edition, 1929, Ch. III.

4. Ibid., p. 26.

portant point is that there must be some natural basis of sentiment for utilitarian morality. And "there is this basis of powerful natural sentiment; and this it is which, when once the general happiness is recognized as the ethical standard, will constitute the strength of the utilitarian morality. This firm foundation is that of the social feelings of mankind; the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures."<sup>5</sup> The social state, according to Mill, is natural to man; hence any condition essential to society is an inseparable part of every person's conception of the state of things into which he is born. People grow up, then, "unable to conceive as possible to them a state of total disregard of other people's interests." Further, cooperation with others is a familiar fact of experience. The strengthening of social ties leads the individual to identify his feelings with the good of others, until it becomes a matter of course to consider others. The conviction, then, which people have, that there should be a harmony between the feelings of each individual, and his aims, with those of his fellow-creatures, is the ultimate sanction of the greatest happiness morality.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Ibid., p. 29

6. Ibid., p. 31

The point here, of course, is not the truth or falsity of either Aristotle's statements about the parts of the soul, or Mill's assertions regarding the social sentiment in man, but the nature of these propositions, which intend to be informative as to a question of fact. The same holds true of Aristotle's analysis of the relation of moral virtue to habit. First, he points out, none of the moral virtues arise in us by nature, since nothing existing by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature, e.g. the stone by nature moves downward, and cannot be habituated to move upward. "Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature, do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit."<sup>7</sup> Secondly, of those things which come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity, e.g. we have the sense of hearing or seeing before using them. But we get the virtues by first exercising them. "For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."<sup>8</sup>

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7. Nichomachean Ethics, 1103a.

8. 1103a-b.

And this also is true of the destruction of the activity,-- both good and bad lyre players are produced by playing the lyre. Likewise, "by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of character correspond to the differences between these. It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather <sup>9</sup> all the difference."

That Mill's is a psychological hedonism is shown by his attempt to prove that "there is in reality nothing desired except happiness. Whatever is desired otherwise than as a means to some end beyond itself, and ultimately to happiness, is desired as itself a part of happiness, and is <sup>10</sup> not desired for itself until it has become so." But one

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9. 1103b.

10. Utilitarianism, p. 35.

of the more familiar arguments in ethics is that by which Mill seeks to derive an ethical hedonism from this psychological hedonism. His contention that the desirable stands in the same relation to the desired as the visible to the seen, and the audible to the heard, has been fair game since for ethicists who have been so concerned with exposing the fallaciousness of Mill's reasoning that they have not realized that at least it represents an attempt to solve a problem which they also face but which in general they ignore, namely, how to establish the relevancy between their description of human nature and their analysis of the values involved in the behavior which is the concrete manifestation of that nature. Their failure to inspect their own logic at this point is instructive. It should be recognized that, in terms of his premises, Aristotle's inclusion of factual judgments does not involve him in any contradictions. As we pointed out at the beginning, there was no separation between the normative and the factual in the nature which was thought by Aristotle to be the object of science. We may see this in its ethical context by referring to Aristotle's rejection of the political life as the happy life on the ground that honor depends upon those who bestow it rather than on him who receives it, whereas the good is something proper to a man and cannot easily be taken away from him. Now one of the basic factors in

Aristotle's analysis of the good is the function-end relationship. He points out that every action, art, or science is aimed at some good; and as there are many actions, arts, and sciences, their ends are many: as, for example, the end in medicine is health, in strategy, victory, in economics wealth.<sup>11</sup> We can see then that his criticism of the definition of happiness in terms of honor implies, not only that he proposes to determine the content of happiness by the function-end relationship, but also that involved in this notion is the idea of a proper, or appropriate, function. For his investigation proceeds by inquiring as to the proper function of man, the activity which man does not share with other beings, but is appropriate to him alone. The question is, What attribute is peculiar to man? and it is not the life of nutrition and growth, which man has in common with plants; nor the life of perception, shared by man with animals; but rather the "active life of the element that has the rational principle."<sup>12</sup>

The significance of this is to show that Aristotle, whose teleological science caused him to regard ends not as merely historical but valuational, could legitimately

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11. Nicomachean Ethics, 1094a, 1097a.

12. 1098a.

base his ethics upon propositions descriptive of the nature of human beings. But those who reject this conception of science in favor of the modern conception, and then urge the value-fact dichotomy against empiricism in ethics, have cut themselves off from this possibility. That they continue to make propositions informative about human nature a part of their ethical theory is a tribute to their instinct that an ethics which ignores such data is vicious abstractionism, rather than to the logical adequacy of their ethics.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE "IMPURITY" OF ETHICS. VALUE PROPOSITIONS.

The heterogeneous constitution of ethical theories evidences itself also in the appearance in such theories of value propositions proper. For the Aristotelian ethics, according to which happiness is defined as activity in accordance with virtue, the happiest man will be the one engaging in activity according to the highest virtue. And a survey of the relevant criteria--Aristotle argues--shows this to be contemplation.<sup>1</sup> For (1) contemplation is the best activity, since (a) reason is the best thing in us and (b) the objects of reason are the best of knowable objects. (2) It is the most continuous activity; we can contemplate truth more continuously than we can do anything. (3) It is the most pleasant of virtuous activities;

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1. Nichomachean Ethics, 1177a.

the pleasures are "marvellous for their purity and enduringness"; and certainly happiness is thought to involve pleasure. (4) It is self-sufficient; indeed, the philosopher needs the necessaries of life, as do those possessing any other virtue, but the latter need other things besides, e.g. the just man needs people towards whom and with whom he shall act justly. But the philosopher, even when by himself, can contemplate truth. (5) It is most final, most loved for its own sake, for nothing arises from it apart from the contemplating, whereas from practical activities we gain more or less apart from the action. (6) It is leisurely, and happiness is thought to depend on leisure; but political or military life, while exhibiting the practical virtues, are unleisurely. So if

the activity of reason, which is contemplative, seems both to be superior in serious worth and to aim at no end beyond itself, and to have its pleasure proper to itself (and this augments the activity), and the self-sufficiency, leisureliness, unweariedness (so far as this is possible for man), and all the other attributes ascribed to the supremely happy man are evidently those connected with this activity, it follows that this will be the complete happiness of man, if it be allowed a complete term of life (for none of the attributes of happiness is incomplete).<sup>2</sup>

Mill also enunciates actual value propositions, as can be seen in his answer to the objection, urged against Utilitarianism, that to suppose life to have no higher end than

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2. 1177b.

pleasure is a mean and grovelling doctrine, one worthy only of swine. Mill's reply is, that not the Utilitarian, but such objectors, represent human nature in a degrading light, for the latter suppose human beings to be capable only of swinish pleasures. But, Mill insists, the Utilitarians not only give to the pleasures of the intellect, and of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensations, because of their greater permanency, safety, uncostliness, and the like; but also are able to recognize that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others, i.e. there are qualitative as well as quantitative distinctions between pleasures. The criterion in terms of which pleasures are to be arranged in a scale of this sort is the competent judge.

Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the most desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Utilitarianism, p 8.

And Mill points out that the verdict of such competent judges has been given: unquestionably it is in favor of the manner of existence which employs the higher faculties. While a being of high faculties requires more to make him happy and is capable of more acute suffering than the being of lower capacities, he never will be willing to sink to the lower stage of existence. "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides."<sup>4</sup>

Kant denies altogether that happiness is the good. He argues that no organ for any purpose will be found in nature but what is also the fittest and best adapted for that purpose. In a reasoning and willing being, if the proper object of nature were its happiness, then nature would have erred in selecting reason to carry out this purpose. For the end would be achieved much better by instinct; in fact, Kant remarks that an increase of reason usually means a decrease of happiness, so that many evidence a certain degree of misery. Hence, he concludes, it seems "that our existence has a different, a far nobler

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4. Ibid., p. 9.

end, for which, and not for happiness, reason is properly intended." The true destination of reason must be "to produce a will, not merely good as a means to something else, but good in itself, for which reason was absolutely necessary. This will, then, though not indeed the sole and complete good, must be the supreme good and the condition of every other, even of the desire of happiness."<sup>5</sup>

It is "the paradox of method in a Critique of Practical Reason"<sup>6</sup> that "it is not the good as an object that

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5. Kant, I., Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals, p. 12, in Kant's Theory of Ethics, T.K. Abbott trans., London, Longman's, Green and Co., 1909.
  6. Kant, I., Critique of Practical Reason (Abbott trans.), pp. 154-5. This paradox depends upon Kant's conception of the moral law as universal and necessary. It must be valid, not merely for men, but for all rational creatures generally, and not merely under certain contingent conditions, or with exceptions, but with absolute necessity. The question then is, Are such laws possible? and this leads directly to "the paradox of method in a Critique of Practical Reason, namely, that the concept of good and evil must not be determined before the moral law (of which it seems as if it must be the foundation), but only after it, and by means of it." For the will must be determined either by empirical or by pure a priori principles. If we begin with the concept of the good, in order to deduce from it the laws of the will, then the criterion of good or evil could be placed only in the agreement of the object with our feeling of pleasure or pain. And experience alone can decide what conforms to the feeling of pleasure or pain. Therefore, the very possibility of a priori practical law is to be based on the experience of pleasure, which is always empirical. But this possibility is just what is at issue; consequently, to begin with the concept of good begs the question.

determines the moral law, and makes it possible, but...on the contrary, it is the moral law that first determines the concept of good, and makes it possible, so far as it deserves the name of good absolutely.<sup>7</sup> Nothing can be called good without qualification except a good will. Either talents of the mind, e.g. intelligence, wit and judgment, or qualities of temperament, e.g. courage, resolution and perseverance, while good in many respects, become bad if the will which uses them is bad. The general well-being, called happiness, inspires pride, even presumption, unless controlled by the good will. Some qualities--self-control, calm deliberation--have no intrinsic value, but always presuppose a good will, without which they become bad, e.g. the coolness of a villain. And a good will is good simply in itself. "A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition, that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself it is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favor of any inclination, may, even of the sum total of all inclinations." Even supposing it should achieve nothing, there remaining only the good

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7. Ibid., p. 155.

will (which is not a mere wish, but the summoning of all means in our power), "then, like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself. Its usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add to nor take away anything from this value."<sup>8</sup>

Thus Aristotle names as the best kind of activity contemplation. Mill, on the basis of a qualitative distinction between pleasures, characterizes as the best kind those involved in the exercise of the "higher faculties". And with Kant, the supreme good is pronounced to be the will which is produced by a reason originating universal and necessary laws, respect for which is the sole motive to moral action.

The problem raised here is the relationship which these ethicists conceive ethics to bear to morality. The very practical Aristotle remarks<sup>9</sup> that "the present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge...(for we are inquiring, not in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use)". Mead brings out clearly<sup>10</sup> the

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8. Fundamental Principles, etc., p. 10.

9. Nicomachean Ethics, 1103b.

10. Mead, G. H., Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century, University of Chicago Press, 1936, Ch. X, pp. 212 ff. especially.

doctrine of social reform contained in utilitarianism. In that it allowed one man to count for one and only one, and in setting up a very simple statement of the end of all institutions,--the good of the community stated in terms of an algebraic sum of pleasures and pains of the community--utilitarianism provided a method of criticizing institutions held over from the feudal period and a program to mitigate the evils of the new industrial processes set up without any realization of the human misery they involved.

Kant, in justifying a metaphysic of morals,<sup>11</sup> classifies all philosophy as either empirical or a priori, in the case of ethics the division being between practical anthropology (the empirical part) and morality (the rational part). Since the moral law carries with it absolute necessity, "the basis of obligation must not be sought in the nature of man, or in the circumstances in the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in the conceptions of pure reason." And all moral philosophy rests wholly on its pure part, not borrowing the least thing from morality, but<sup>12</sup> giving laws a priori to man as a rational being. "A metaphysic of morals is therefore indispensably necessary,"<sup>12</sup> Kant pointedly says, "not merely for speculative reasons,"

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11. Fundamental Principles, etc., preface, pp. 2-5.

12. My italics.

in order to investigate the sources of the practical principles which are to be found a priori in our reason, but also because morals themselves are liable to all sorts of corruption,<sup>12</sup> as long as we are without that clue and supreme canon by which to estimate them correctly." For an action to be morally good, it is not enough that it conform to the moral law, but it must also be done for the sake of the law; and "it is only in a pure philosophy that we can look for the moral law in its purity and genuineness (and in a practical matter<sup>12</sup> this is of the utmost consequence)."

Thus Stocks' comment, that "the moral philosopher does in fact assert ethical values, recommend lines of action, advocate reform of existing institutions--all things which as a practical man he has a perfect right to do, but none of them in themselves activities pertaining to a philosopher,"<sup>13</sup> seems to be thoroughly justified. To comprehend its importance we must recall that the question with which we are concerned--What is the subject matter of ethics?--grew out of the assumption of a distinction between a science and its subject matter. But the foregoing has shown that precisely this distinction has not been clearly made nor maintained in classical ethical theory. The

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12. My italics.

13. Stocks, op. cit.

inclusion in ethical theories of value propositions signifies a confusion of the task of the ethicist with that of the moral man. While there is a profound difference between the results of the ethicist and the moral man as to the nature of the value judgments made, the precise character of this difference should be properly understood. The moral man seeks to realize the good through right action. This imposes upon him the necessity of knowing both what the good is and the appropriate means of achieving it. However slowly he may come to recognize--not to mention welcome--the fact, he is committed to the task of reflectively examining the nature and validity of his knowledge of values, the concrete and detailed character of the good life, the organization of its elements, and the kinds of actions which will enable him to realize his ends. Because the ethicist has fulfilled the demands made by this life, in the respects indicated, to a greater extent than the ordinary person, there has seemed to be a difference in kind between their results, whereas in reality there is a difference only in degree, depending upon the nature and length of training and opportunity and flair for the continuous reflection required. The nicer subtlety of the professional ethicists enables them to rise to greater heights in their attacks upon problems which, however, are shared by every man of good will, who must also attempt

their solution, with the aid of whatever facilities he can command; unless he be one of those whose goods literally come, not out of his experience in his own sphere of action, but from the reflections of other men. But, although tradition has not put the responsibility upon economics to create wealth, or political science governments, or sociology societies, yet it has looked to ethics for the production of good men.

First, then, we must reinstate, and insist upon, the distinction between a science and its subject matter as this applies to ethics. As yet we are not, nor could we be, able to give a definitive statement as to the nature of either ethics or its subject matter, but we can say that in some sense morality is the subject matter of which ethics is the relevant science. On this basis, we can formulate a principle of great significance for our task, namely, the autonomy of morality. It will be advantageous to give this principle general consideration, as it holds of any subject matter in relation to its science, before discussing it directly with respect to ethics.

The autonomy of a subject matter relative to its science means at least two things: (1) the subject matter does not depend on the science for its existence. "Bodies in motion" were not called into existence by the science of physics, nor are they maintained in existence by that science.

(2) The subject matter does not depend upon the science for its nature. "Bodies in motion" have certain characteristics, manifest certain modes of behavior, and structures, which were not created by the science of physics. It is the task of physics to formulate the laws pertaining to this subject matter, by subjecting it to as close an inspection as possible. Two qualifications necessary to the foregoing appear at this point. (a) Physics is able to formulate such laws by means of experiments, which involve what might be considered an "interference" with the nature of that subject matter, in the operational sense that changes are introduced into a portion of the subject matter for the sake of understanding its behavior. (b) The laws, when secured, have predictive value, in terms of which control over the processes involved is established, which control is exploited in the form of our various technologies. Despite these qualifications, in a very important sense the subject matter of a science is given to that science; and this is what is meant by calling it autonomous relative to that science.

In both senses of autonomy morality is autonomous relative to ethics, i.e. the moral life depends upon ethics for neither its existence nor its nature. However, a significant difference between the subject matter of ethics

and that of the natural sciences cannot be neglected here. Employing our former example, the distinction between physics and "bodies in motion" may be stated as a distinction between two levels of theory and subject matter; and we note that reflective inquiry is present on only one of these levels, namely, that of theory. Now with regard to ethics, the complicating factor is that there is reflection on both levels of theory and subject matter. Ethics shares with the social sciences the characteristic that its subject matter is a function of consciousness. Therefore in ethics the distinction between theory and subject matter resolves itself into the question, What is the nature of the reflection on each level? And another question immediately arises: What is the relationship between the two?<sup>14</sup>

We shall have to forego, until a later time, any specific remarks on the nature of the reflection on the level of ethical theory; and also the question of the relationship between this kind of reflection and that which is involved on the level of subject matter. As to the latter kind of reflection, which we can discuss briefly, its objective is that of answering such a question as, "What

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14. These questions will be recognized as a more advanced statement of the three branches of our inquiry as formulated at the beginning (see supra, p. 4).

should I do?"--deliberation directed toward this question always having a specific locus; it is always a moral perplexity of a particular sort at a particular time. What is to be emphasized is that such deliberation never takes place in a vacuum; or, stated otherwise, it is never carried on by a monadic self. The individual is born into a group whose structure is crystallized in institutions,--religious, economic, political, and the like,--representative of the success with which it has come to terms with its environment, its history, and its aspirations. Within this framework, goods arise to be striven for, evils to be combatted. The individual is inducted into an established set of obligations, and learns what claims he may expect to make successfully on others, what duties will normally be imposed upon him, in the various specific situations in which he is an agent. In this sphere we have the primary experience of values and obligations. It has its own actuating principles, principles of which the individuals involved may be quite unaware, according to which the plastic inheritance of the individual is defined with more or less thoroughness in his milieu, his energies deployed through available avenues of activity, and his impulses concretized with respect to the dominant and compelling ideals of the group.

For example, the period loosely called the Renaissance was marked, as Randall points out,<sup>15</sup> "by the increasing prevalence of interests that had hitherto played but a minor role in the life of Western Europe," interests which "burst the bonds of the narrow if intricately carved medieval world." The forces that had created the medieval society developed until they outgrew the framework through which they functioned. These forces bore a close relation to the economic growth that made the towns and was making the nation.

A money economy, instead of the barter and exchange of the early Middle Ages, was demanded by an expanding commerce. Silver was supplied by German mines, gold by America. The merchant class grew rich; banks and bankers, and the mechanism of credit, developed. Investments in extensive enterprises of mining, manufacturing, sheep-raising and wheat-growing, created a full-fledged capitalism. Guild methods were inadequate to the large production needed by the merchants and commercial companies. The discovery of India and America caused trade to change from luxuries to staples. The unit of the town had to give way before the demands of colonial empires for trade national in scope. As the old city guilds proved inadequate, and either decayed or were

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15. Randall, J. H., The Making of the Modern Mind, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1926.

legislated out of existence, the new class of bankers and capitalistic merchants rose to power, the Church being superseded as leader in urban society by the bourgeoisie, which, needing a firm and stable government against their rivals in other lands and also freedom from the interference of the feudal nobility, built up strong centralized monarchies. The latter were thus able to develop standing armies, cut loose from reliance on feudal levies, and consolidate the national domain. The nobles were crushed, their lands taken; the church was plundered and dispossessed; the bourgeoisie used art and learning for their own glorification, and held the lower classes in subjection. On the basis of its power of money and commerce this commercial class became more and more a political and social power. The aim of society no longer was the service of God in Christian love, but national prosperity for the middle class. "This rapid growth involved fundamental readjustments in every institution of society," Randall remarks; "it also demanded thoroughgoing intellectual reconstruction. The changes that came over the mind of Europe during this period, its new knowledge and new ideals, were conditioned by a multitude of other factors, but every new belief, every changed view of man and his destiny, was worked out by men living in such a society and powerfully influenced at every turn by the forces of this society. Only against this background is

it possible to understand the new aspirations of the European nations, their achievements and their errors." <sup>16</sup>

Within such a matrix also developed the spirit which consisted in an increasing interest in human life as it can be lived on this earth, and, concomitantly, the decay of the dualism which opposed spirit and flesh and denied the "new and vital perception of the dignity of man and of the sweetness and glory of being a rational animal." <sup>17</sup> Thus the ground was ripened for the discovery of the humanity of the classics and the growth of the humanistic spirit, exemplified in its highest degree by Michelangelo and Leonardo.

Thus deliberative inquiry instituted to answer the question, "What should I do?" is always carried on within a social system in which the activities and energies of men are defined, deployed, and concretized. But in that the agent is a conscious being, by virtue of the acquisition of a language--the contribution of society to the individual which is basic to the entire process of producing a human being--and of the fact that each individual

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16. Ibid., pp. 111-14.

17. Ibid., p. 115.

18. See Mead, G. H., Mind, Self, and Society, University of Chicago Press, 1934, for an impressive attempt to conceive mind and the self as social emergents made possible through the process of linguistic communication within the social act. See also Mead, Philosophy of the Act, University of Chicago Press, 1938, Introduction.

actualizes a fresh set of relationships, he becomes able to orient himself in a critical manner to the evaluations to which he is heir, such criticism being initiated, at least in part, by the heterogeneity of social groups and the conflict of moralities consequent upon it.

Thus the moral life cannot legitimately be called autonomous in the sense that it flows free of physical and social circumstance, in which, indeed, moral reflection is firmly embedded. Its autonomy is strictly relative to ethical theory. In this sense morality is given to ethics just as "bodies in motion" are given to physics. And this provides a significant conclusion regarding the value-fact dichotomy considered as an objection to empiricism in ethics. The distinction between science and subject matter--in this case, between ethics and morality--involves the illegitimacy of including value judgments in ethics. The consequence of this is that, as far as ethics is concerned, there is no problem of "deriving values from facts." This question does not arise at all in an ethics properly distinguished from the subject matter of which it is the theory. So the value-fact dichotomy cannot function as a barrier to the possibility of an empirical ethics. The way is left open for such an ethics, although its precise nature is not yet clear. And this is

accomplished without denying the dichotomy itself. Indeed, a further test of an empirical ethics is its success in ascertaining the appropriate locus of the dichotomy.

We have been speaking of the subject matter of ethics as "morality", and have said that on this level reflective inquiry is present. This characterization is admittedly vague; the determination of the precise nature of the subject matter of ethics remains to be accomplished. This, however, cannot be done until we have examined a third type of proposition which appears in ethical systems.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE "IMPURITY" OF ETHICS. DEFINITIONS.

Definitions constitute a third, and very prominent type of proposition discoverable in ethical theories. We may attend first to Aristotle's analysis of the good, to which three factors are basic. The first, as we have already noticed, is the function-end relationship. Secondly, he argues that an "X" and a "good X" have a function which is the same in kind; for example, a lyre-player and a good lyre-player,--"eminence in respect of goodness being added to the name of the function (for the function of a lyre-player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre-player is to do so well)<sup>1</sup>". And finally, various ends are subsumed under other, and more comprehensive, ends, in the relation of means to ends; "as bridle-making and the other arts

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1. Nichomachean Ethics, 1098a.

concerned with the equipment of horses fall under the art of riding, and this and every military action under strategy, in the same way other arts fall under yet others--in all of these the ends of the master arts are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends; for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued."<sup>2</sup>

From this Aristotle proceeds naturally to the concept of the good, or "that at which all things aim." The good, he points out, is (1) final, (2) self-sufficient, and (3) most desirable. On this basis he agrees with the common idea that happiness is the good. This we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else.

"Honor, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them)," but "we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy."<sup>3</sup> Happiness no one chooses for the sake of these nor for anything other than itself. Happiness also is self-sufficient, meaning by self-sufficient, not "for a man himself, apart from everybody else," but rather "that which when isolated makes life desirable and lacking in nothing"; and this we think happiness to be. It is not one good among others, for if it were, it could be made more

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2. 1094a.

3. 1097b.

desirable by the addition of some other good. And finally, happiness certainly is the most desirable of things.

However, Aristotle recognizes that to identify the good with happiness does not get us very far, since it is not clear just what is meant by happiness. It should be remarked that his criticism of the various conceptions of happiness seems to be partly on the basis of the criteria of the good (in terms of which he has identified happiness and the good) and partly in terms of the criterion of happiness. For example, the life of money-making is not the happy life, for wealth is merely useful to something else; i.e., it is not a final end. But, again, virtue is not the end of the political life, since virtue seems compatible even with the greatest sufferings and misfortunes, and no one would call happy a man who was living so.

We have already seen that Aristotle arrives at his conception of the good in terms of an inquiry into the appropriate or proper function of man, which he claims to be "the active life of the element that has the rational principle". The function of man is an activity or activities of soul implying a rational principle, and consequently<sup>4</sup> the function of the good man is the good and noble performance of these functions. Thus "human good turns out

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4. Supra, p. 27, l. 5.

to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete."<sup>5</sup>

Aristotle defines the good, or happiness, then, as "an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue."<sup>6</sup> It is plain that an account of his analysis of the good is inadequate without reference to his definition of virtue. The first thing is to determine its genus, which Aristotle accomplishes in terms of the assumption that things found in the soul are of three kinds--passions, faculties, and states of character. The genus of virtue then must be one of these.

It is not passion; for we are neither praised nor blamed for our passions: The man who simply feels fear or anger is not praised, but the man who feels them in a certain way. And we are praised or blamed for our virtues. Again, we feel the passions, e.g. fear and anger, without choice; but the virtues involve choice. In respect of the passions (finally) we are said to be moved; in respect of virtue or vice, however, we are said to be disposed in a certain way.

Nor are virtues or vices faculties. We are not called good or bad, we are not praised or blamed, for the

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5. 1098a.

6. 1102a.

simple capacity of feeling the passions. We have the faculties by nature, furthermore; and we are not made good or bad by nature.

Thus the virtues must be states of character, of some sort. Now every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well. As the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and its work good (since it is by the excellence of the eye that we see well), so the virtue of man will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well.

Thus the differentia of virtue is the disposition to choose the mean between defect and excess. "Both excessive and defective exercise destroys the strength, and similarly drink or food which is above or below a certain amount destroys the health, while that which is proportionate both produces and increases and preserves it."<sup>7</sup> This is also true of temperance and courage and the other (moral) virtues. "For the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward, and the man who fears nothing at all but goes to meet every danger becomes rash; and similarly the man who indulges in every pleasure and abstains from none

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7. 1104a.

becomes self-indulgent, while the man who shuns every pleasure, as boors do, becomes in a way insensible; temperance and courage, then, are destroyed by excess and defect, and preserved by the mean.<sup>8</sup> And Aristotle makes clear that by the mean he is referring to the intermediate relative to us, not to the arithmetical intermediate.

Moral virtue then, as more exact and better than any art, must aim at the intermediate, which is determined by the "right rule". We may, for example, feel fear and anger and pity too much, or too little,--in both cases not well; "but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue."<sup>9</sup>

Virtue, then,

is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate. Hence in respect of its substance and the definition which states its essence virtue is a mean, with regard to what is best and right an extreme.<sup>10</sup>

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8. 1104a.

9. 1106b.

10. 1106b-1107a.

Aristotle not only defines moral virtues but also devotes considerable attention to the specific moral virtues,--courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, righteous indignation, justice, and the like.<sup>11</sup> He likewise treats of the intellectual virtues. The intellect is divided into the contemplative and the calculative parts, the object of the former being truth, of the latter, truth corresponding with right desire. There are five major intellectual virtues. Scientific knowledge is demonstrative knowledge of the necessary, eternal, and invariable.<sup>12</sup> Art is "a state of capacity to make".<sup>13</sup> Practical wisdom is a knowledge of how to secure the ends of human life,--what ensures the taking of proper means to the proper ends desired by moral virtue.<sup>13</sup> Intuitive reason is knowledge of the first principles of science.<sup>14</sup> Philosophic wisdom is "scientific knowledge, combined with intuitive reason, of the things that are highest by nature."<sup>15</sup> Three minor intellectual virtues are also mentioned,--goodness in deliberation,<sup>16</sup> understanding,<sup>17</sup> and judgment or the right discrimination of the equitable.<sup>18</sup>

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11. Bk. III 1115a-Book V. 12. 1139b.

13. 1140a 14. 1141a. 15. 1141b.

16. 1142a-b. 17. 1143a. 18. 1143a-b.

Like Aristotle, Mill is a teleologist; and like Aristotle he identifies the good with happiness. "By 'happiness'," however (he says), "is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by 'unhappiness', pain, the privation of pleasure." Pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends, and all desirable things "are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain."<sup>19</sup> His conception of the right is based upon this definition of the good. "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness principle, hold," he says, "that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness."<sup>19</sup> This conception is the antithesis to that of Kant's, of course. The criticism that the standard of utilitarianism is too high, because it is too much to require that people shall always act from the inducement of promoting the general interests of society, confuses the rule of action with the motive of it, Mill argues. Ethics tells us what our duties are; but it does not require that the sole motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty. Utilitarians, Mill points out, "have gone beyond almost all others in affirming that

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19. Utilitarianism, p. 6.

the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent. He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty, or the hope of being paid for his trouble; he who betrays the friend that trusts him, is guilty of a crime, even if his object be to serve another friend to whom he is under greater obligations.<sup>20</sup>"

For Kant, however, an action, to have moral worth, must be done from duty, rather than inclination, e.g. the maxim of a man who because of adversity and hopeless sorrow wishes death, yet preserves his life without loving it (not from inclination or fear) but from duty,--that maxim<sup>21</sup> has moral worth. And obviously duty is not an empirical notion. It is absolutely impossible, Kant points out, "to make out by experience with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action, however right in itself, rested simply on moral grounds and on the conception of duty."<sup>22</sup> Even the sharpest inner scrutiny may be unable to ascertain, under the false appearances of duty, the real secret impulse or motive of self-love; in any event, we can

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20. Ibid., p. 17.

21. Kant, I., Fundamental Principles, etc., p. 14.

22. Ibid, p. 23.

never be sure that this is not the case. However, this fact does not change the fundamental principle set out, and duty still remains duty, whether there are any cases of it or not, just as pure sincerity in friendship is required of every man, even though there might never yet have been a sincere friend, because, prior to all experience, this duty is involved as duty in the idea of a reason determining the will by a priori principles." <sup>23</sup>

An action done from duty derives its moral worth, not from the purpose which is to be attained by it, but from the maxim by which it is determined; it therefore

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23. Cp.: "From what has been said, it is clear that all moral conceptions have their seat and origin completely a priori in the reason, and that, moreover, in the commonest reason just as truly as in that which is in the highest degree speculative; that they cannot be obtained by abstraction from any empirical, and therefore contingent knowledge; that it is just this purity of their origin that makes them worth to serve as our supreme practical principle, and that just in proportion as we add anything empirical, we detract from their genuine influence, and from the absolute value of actions; that it is not only of the greatest practical importance to derive these notions and laws from pure reason, to present them pure and unmixed, and even to determine the compass of this practical or pure practical reason; and, in doing so, we must not make its principles dependent on the particular nature of human reason...but since moral laws ought to hold good for every rational creature, we must derive them from the general concept of a rational being."--Ibid., p. 28.

does not depend upon the realization of the object of the action, but merely on the principle of volition by which the action has taken place, without regard to any object of desire.<sup>24</sup> Duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the law.<sup>25</sup> I may have an inclination for an object as the effect of my proposed action; I may approve it, sometimes, even, love it; but I cannot respect it, for it is an effect, not an energy of will. "It is only what is connected with my will as a principle, by no means as an effect--what does not subserve any inclination, but overpowers it, or at least in case of choice excludes it from its calculations--in other words, simply the law of itself,<sup>26</sup> which can be an object of respect, and hence a command."

An action done from duty excludes the influence of inclination and of every object of the will, hence nothing remains to determine the will except objectively, the law, and subjectively, pure respect for this practical law, and consequently, the maxim that we should follow this law even to the thwarting of all our inclinations. In other words, inasmuch as the moral worth of an action does not lie in any effects expected from it, since these effects could

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24. Critique of Practical Reason, pp. 107, 114.

25. Ibid., pp. 164 ff.

26. Fundamental Principles, etc., pp. 16-17.

have been brought about by other causes and there would be no need of the will of a rational being, the pre-eminent good called moral consists just in the conception of law in itself, possible only in a rational being in so far as it, and not an expected effect, determines the will. There remains simply the universal conformity of the will to law in general,--the categorical imperative, which has a three-fold formulation, each of which brings out a separate and important aspect.

(1) The first places its emphasis upon form: Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law. <sup>27</sup> For example, a man finds himself forced to borrow money, which he knows he will not be able to repay. However, seeing that he will not be able to borrow unless he promises to repay, the question arises, Is it not inconsistent with duty to get out of a difficulty in this way? If he were to decide to so act, his maxim would be: When I think myself in want of money, I will borrow it and promise to repay it, although I know I never can do so. Changing the suggestion of self-love, it may be asked, How would it be if my maxim were a

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27. Ibid., p. 38. "Act so that the maxim of thy will can always at the same time hold good as a principle of universal legislation."--"Fundamental law of the Pure Practical Reason."--Critique of Practical Reason, p. 119.

universal law? It appears at once, Kant says, that it would be self-contradictory; for, "supposing it to be a universal law that everyone when he thinks himself in a difficulty should be able to promise whatever he pleases, with the purpose of not keeping his promise, the promise itself would become impossible, as well as the end that one might have in view in it, since no one would consider that anything was promised to him, but would ridicule all such statements as vain pretenses."<sup>28</sup>

(2) The question arises as to the source of the categorical imperative. Particular ends sought after by rational beings are all only relative, inasmuch as it is their relation to the particular desires of the subject that gives them their worth; hence from this source principles universal and necessary for all rational being cannot be derived. In other words, from these relative ends only hypothetical imperatives can be gained. What is necessary, Kant asserts, is something whose existence has in itself an absolute worth, something which, being an end in itself, could be a source of definite laws, and hence could afford the ground of a categorical imperative (practical law). Man--any rational being--exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means, to be used arbitrarily by this or

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28. Fundamental Principles, etc., p. 40.

that will. The principle is: "rational nature exists as an end in itself." Thus we obtain the second formulation of the categorical imperative, on the basis of the source from which such an imperative might be derived. It says: So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only.<sup>29</sup> Thus, he who makes a lying promise to another, in using that other as a means to his own ends, is violating the principle that persons as rational beings are ends in themselves, and cannot be treated as things.

(3) The third statement of the categorical imperative, which has special reference to the factor of interest, suggests: "the idea of the will of every rational being as a universally legislative will."<sup>30</sup> This means that "the will is not subject simply to the law, but so subject that it must be regarded as itself giving the law, and on this ground only, subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author)."<sup>31</sup> The function of this formulation is to bring out in clearer relief than is done in the other two "that in the case of volition from duty all interest is renounced, which is the specific criterion of categorical as distinguished from hypothetical imperatives!"<sup>32</sup>

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29. Ibid., p. 47

30. Ibid., p. 49.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., p. 50

This explains,--according to Kant,--why previous attempts to discover the principle of morality have failed; for man was conceived only as subject to a law, which required some interest--either by way of attraction or constraint--since the law did not originate from his own will, but this will was obliged by something else to act in a certain manner. On this basis, duty was not elicited, but only the necessity of acting from a certain interest; and hence the imperative remained conditional, i.e. hypothetical: the result was moral heteronomy. The principle of the universally legislating will, however, provides the basis for moral autonomy.<sup>33</sup>

Thus ethical theories have manifested a preoccupation with the definition of the good and the right. Aristotle attempted to give the differentia of the good, and sought to define moral virtue, even though he pointed out that the definition does not cover all moral virtue,<sup>34</sup> and that moral virtue is only one kind of virtue. He tried also to define both the specific moral and intellectual virtues. Mill attempted to define moral good and right, and Kant gave at least what he considered to be the essen-

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33. And for the conception of the kingdom of ends. See ibid., pp. 51-2.

34. See Nichomachean Ethics, 1107a.

tial properties of the right in the three-fold formulation of the categorical imperative.

We are now in a position to consider the precise nature of the subject matter of ethics. And since our concern here is with the possibility of an empirical ethics, our approach to this problem will be in terms of its relationship to scientific method. For by "empirical" here is meant, not the bias toward sensationalism, nominalism, individualism, and retrospectionalism characteristic of philosophic empiricism in the past, but the adoption of the methodology developed by those disciplines which give us our most assured knowledge, the natural sciences. The difference between an empirical ethics and the traditional ethical theories could not consist in the circumstance that the latter have no contact with, or temper for, moral fact. Indeed, an investigation into the empirical content of the various ethical theories would be neither fruitless nor of short enough extent to be dealt with adequately here. Rather, an empirical ethics is characterized by a clear recognition of its methodological unity with the empirical sciences. This methodology may be described very generally, as an attempt, originated by a contradiction between accepted explanations and new phenomena at variance with such explanations, to formulate and test by the use of appropriate technical methods, hypotheses as to an order

among facts within a given abstracted subject matter; an attempt which, when successful, results in knowledge in the form of generalizations that, in virtue of formulating such an order in the clearest fashion possible, have the status of laws with predictive value.<sup>35</sup> More specifically, Wolf's distinction between the logical and technical methods of science<sup>36</sup> is convenient here, if it is not taken to assert anything further about the relationship of these methods. Both the logical and technical methods, broadly speaking, deserve the name scientific. The former are methods of reasoning according to the nature of the data obtained, and as such are more or less common to all the sciences. The latter are methods of manipulation and measuring the phenomena under investigation, and differ from science to science.

The first question then is, the relationship of logical method to subject matter. In view of the actual procedures of the natural sciences it is impossible to separate the observational-hypothetical-deductive method from its achievement of generalizations which have the status of laws with predictive value. In other words, the

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35. See the admirable discussion in Mead, G. H., Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century, pp. 132 ff.

36. Wolf, A., Textbook of Logic, N. Y., MacMillan, 1930, pp. 17-18.

logical methods of science determine the kind of results attainable by their application. But it is evident immediately that logical method does not determine the kind of subject matter to which it is to be applied. Theoretically, at least,--the practical difficulties are not important here,--there is no kind of subject matter which scientific method cannot be used to investigate, if there is a desire for knowledge about that subject matter of the sort which such a method entails.

This is to say that the "empirical" character of the science of ethics is quite independent of the question of the proper subject matter of ethics, or, in other words, that we must determine this subject matter apart from the nature of logical method. Whether the same relation of independence holds between subject matter and technical method remains to be seen.

We turn, then, to a critical appraisal of the conception in traditional ethics of its subject matter, with a review of the various kinds of propositions found in the theories which we examined, viz. (1) factual propositions, (2) valuational propositions, and (3) definitions. We shall reexamine each of these to ascertain what light they throw upon the nature of ethical subject matter.

With regard to the first, it is obvious that the propositions of an empirical ethics will be informative,

or factual, in nature; the problem is, the nature of the information. The statements of fact contained in ethical theory are indicative of the conviction that the nature of human beings, and the laws of their conduct, constitute an integral part of the subject matter of ethics. This certainly is true; but its adequacy is impaired by a failure to provide the differentia which would mark off the subject matter of ethics from that of other sciences; or at least, this differentia is only implicit, and needs to be stated explicitly.

This is accomplished by reference to the second type of proposition. We saw that the inclusion of value propositions among the propositions of ethics itself was illegitimate; and this because it evidenced a confusion between ethics and its subject matter. This suggests that value judgments constitute in some sense the subject matter of ethics.

Finally, the significance of the inclusion of definitions in ethical theories is to call attention to the interest classical ethical theory has had in the meaning of moral concepts. It requires only the reflection that these moral concepts function as terms in value judgments, and that value judgments of this kind provide us with the differentia which we said was either lacking or only

implicit in the first statement of subject matter, and we may conclude that the subject matter of ethics may be most precisely characterized as moral judgments.

Such judgments represent a subject matter marked off from that of other fields of inquiry. As the issue of deliberative inquiry they are integrally related to the conditions and circumstances of that inquiry. They do not float free and high above, but are firmly embedded in, moral life; they are not phantoms, suspended inanimately in a vacuum. And the important sense in which moral judgments are objective can be readily apprehended. Not only have they received direct expression in the formulated codes of civilizations, but they are embodied in those civilizations themselves, which indubitably reveal, in a thousand ways, what goods men celebrate and what rights and virtues they honor. Further, it is obvious that this conception is in harmony with the fact of the autonomy of morality. For the subject matter, it will be noted, is, not ethical, but moral judgments. The former is either another name for the latter--and representative of the familiar ambiguity between morality and ethics,--or it is simply the name of those concepts which make up ethical theory--themselves no more "ethical" than the concepts of physics are "physical". Thus ethical theory is represented, on this view, as having

the task of studying "what is thought obligatory, not what ought to be thought obligatory; what is considered good, not what it is good to consider good."<sup>37</sup> Hence this conception of the subject matter of ethics is a guarantee against the exclusiveness of past ethical theories. The field of moral fact is seen to be enormously extensive.<sup>38</sup>

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37. Stocks, op. cit., p. 121.

38. The most impressive fact about the realm of moral phenomena is its extraordinarily variegated character, to which even a casual glance at a history of culture will attest. Here can be seen the rich and abundant forms which "human nature" can assume, all assertions as to its fundamental identity and unchangeability to the contrary notwithstanding. A list of some of these expressions of the human ethos can suggest--although only suggest--this characteristic. The Hebrew emphasis upon righteousness, obedience to the supreme law of God: hatred of injustice and zeal for the oppressed: justice and mercy. The Greek ideals of temperance and wisdom. The Christian virtues of love, humility, meekness, obedience, gentleness, compassion, resignation, and renunciation of the world. The medieval ideal of the saint. In feudal society, the knightly ideal: valor, loyalty, and liberality. The Humanistic ideal of the gentleman, ---uomo universale, the all-sided, universal, well-rounded personality, of which Leonardo is the incomparable representative. The virtues of the pecuniary class,--thrift, industry, productive labor. The ideal of power, so able ministered to by Machiavello. The Enlightenment virtues of humanitarianism, toleration, pacifism, and cosmopolitanism. The open-mindedness and receptivity to all experience exalted by the Romanticists. The middle-class virtues of respectability, self-reliance, ambition, initiative, thrift, prudence and caution, shrewdness, practicality, and worldly-success.

Here is insurance against the ignoring of one manifestation of the moral life in terms of another, on the basis of the initial acceptance of premises in which condemnation and approval are implicit. This conception of the subject matter of ethics disposes sweepingly of this procedure and promises an investigation of moral life in its entirety.

But the value of explicitly designating moral judgments as the subject matter of ethics cannot be fully established except in connexion with the question of the relation between the subject matter of a science and its technical method. It has been pointed out that the logical method of science determines the kind of results which are obtained, but that it does not determine the kind of subject matter to which they are applied. However, it is plain that, in its turn, the subject matter determines the kind of technical method which is to be employed. Tools appropriate to one material are not appropriate to another. A statue cannot be carved with a paint brush, nor a picture painted with a chisel. The microscope is useful in one science, the telescope in another. This is why technical method was said to differ from science to science; this differentiation is a function of the different subject matters of the various sciences.

We can expect the principle that the subject matter determines technical method to hold for ethics as well as for any science. Consequently the significance of the formulation of the subject matter of ethics as moral judgments should become apparent when the question is asked: What is the technical method of the science of ethics?

Since the technical method of a science must be appropriate to the subject matter of the science, and the subject matter of ethics is moral judgments, it follows that the technical method of ethics must be appropriate to the investigation of moral judgments. Now moral judgments constitute a specific case of sign functioning. Moral concepts are special types of symbols. We can conclude therefore that the technical method of ethics should be appropriate to the investigation of the functioning of signs; in short, it should be a method of meaning-analysis.

The significance of holding the subject matter of ethics to be moral judgments now becomes clearer. Explicitness here leads to an identification of the proper technical method with which to investigate this subject matter; and the suggestion of meaning-analysis as the appropriate technical method provides us with a new way of looking at moral judgments.

What is now needed, to give concreteness to the foregoing analysis, and to its future development, is some indication of the nature of the technical method which has been suggested.

## CHAPTER V

### A TECHNICAL METHOD FOR ETHICS.

That the subject matter of ethics indicates some form of meaning-analysis as its technical method does not determine which type of meaning-analysis would be most satisfactory. The working out of an adequate "theory of meaning" has been the concern of philosophers since the Cratylus, but of late the problem has assumed especial importance. It is in order to point out at the very beginning that on one theory the kind of propositions in which we are interested would be excluded entirely from the sphere of the "meaningful". Before referring in more detail to this theory, we shall first give a somewhat extended account of C. W. Morris"

"semiotic", the warrant for which is its systematic character, and its inclusion in the International Encyclopedia of Unified Science.<sup>1</sup>

According to Morris, the general desideratum of semiotic is a synthesis of the results gained by historical empiricism in its attack on rationalism from the standpoint of the theory of signs.<sup>2</sup> The basic concepts of semiotic have been named variously; the terminology is not important in itself. The structure analyzed by Morris is fairly clear.<sup>3</sup> Semiosis, the process in which something

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1. A series of monographs, the first two volumes of which are in the process of publication at the University of Chicago, and collaboratively written by those "who agree in considering the unity of science as the ideal aim of their efforts, in eliminating any form of speculation other than that recognized in science, in stressing the importance of logical analysis in various fields, and in taking into account the historical development of scientific concepts and regulative principles."
  2. See Morris, C. W., "Semiotic and Scientific Empiricism", Actes du Congres International de Philosophie Scientifique, 1-4, 1935, Section I, "Notes on the History of Empiricism," pp. 42-9. Also, Urban, W. M., Language and Reality, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1939, Chapter I, Part II.
  3. The following is based on Morris, C. W., "Foundations of the Theory of Signs," International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, University of Chicago Press (1938), vol. I, No. 2. Prior formulations also will be referred to. A brief summary, containing a diagram, is provided also in Morris' "Esthetics and the Theory of Signs," The Journal of Unified Science (Erkenntnis), vol. VIII, sec. 2, pp. 132-3.

functions as a sign, involves three(or four) factors: that which acts as a sign, that which the sign refers to, and that effect on some interpreter in virtue of which the thing in question is a sign to that interpreter. These components are called, respectively, the sign-vehicle, the designatum, and the interpretant (the interpreter may be included as a fourth factor). The triadic character of semiosis may be seen by the illustration of a traveller who prepares himself to deal appropriately (I) with the geographical region (D) in virtue of the letter (S) received from a friend. S is the sign-vehicle (and a sign in virtue of its functioning), D the designatum, and I the interpretant of the interpreter. The study of the process of semiosis is called semiotic; then semiotic is concerned, not with the study of a particular

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4. "The most effective characterization of a sign is the following: S is a sign of D for I to the degree that I takes account of D in virtue of the presence of S. Thus in semiosis something takes account of something else mediately, i.e. by means of a third something. Semiosis is accordingly a mediated taking-account-of. The mediators are sign-vehicles; the takings-account-of are interpretants; the agents of the process are interpreters; what is taken account of are designata."--Ibid., pp. 3-4.

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kind of object, but with ordinary objects in so far (and only in so far) as they participate in semiosis; the properties of being a sign, a designatum, an interpreter, or an interpretant are relational properties which things take on by participating in the functional process of semiosis. Finally, one further term must be introduced, due to the circumstance that, while a sign must have a designatum, yet obviously every sign does not, in fact, refer to an actual existent object. But the designatum of a sign is the kind of object which the sign refers to; that is to say, a designatum is not a thing, but a class of objects; and a class may have many members, or one member, or no members. The members of the class are called denotata. "Where what is referred to actually exists as referred to the object of reference is a denotatum<sup>6</sup>."

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5. The instinctively isomorphic interpretation of concepts is one of the reasons Morris gives for deliberately avoiding the term "meaning". Men "find it difficult to think clearly about complex functional and relational processes, a situation reflected in the prevalence of certain linguistic forms. Action centers around handling things with properties, and in the fact that the things and properties appear only ~~in~~ complex contexts is a much later and more difficult realization. Hence the naturalness of what Whitehead has called the fallacy of simple location. In the present case this takes the form of looking for meanings as one would look for marbles; a meaning is considered as one thing among other things, a definite something definitely located somewhere."--Ibid., p. 44. Cf. fn. 7, below.

6. Ibid., pp. 5, 25-6.

In terms of the three correlates of the triadic relation of semiosis three diadic relations become important, namely, the relation of signs to the objects to which they are applicable, the relations of signs to interpreter,<sup>7</sup> and the formal relation of signs to one another. "Thus the language symbol 'house' is correlated with, and under some conditions functionally substitutable for, certain physical objects; when used in certain ways, it arouses responses (and fulfils certain functions) of a psychological, biological, and sociological nature; it sustains certain relations with other symbols of the language of which it is a part, so that certain combinations of these symbols are substitutable for it in discourse." Each of these

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7. Cp. Peirce, C. S., Collected Works, ed. C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1932, vol. 2, #93, p. 52: "Logic is the science of the general necessary laws of Signs, and especially of Symbols. As such, it has three departments. Obsolete logic, logic in the narrow sense, or Critical Logic, is the theory of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to their professed Objects, that is, it is the theory of the conditions of truth. Originalian logic, or Speculative Grammar, is the doctrine of the general conditions of symbols and other signs having the significant character....Transuational logic, which I term Speculative Rhetoric, is substantially what goes by the name of methodology, or better, of methodetic. It is the doctrine of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to the Interpretants which they aim to determine." See also *ibid.*, #252, p. 145; Morris seems to follow Peirce in restricting the term "meaning", if used at all, to the relation of a sign to its interpretant.

relations is termed a dimension of semiosis--the semant-<sup>8</sup> ical, the pragmatical, and the syntactical. Correspondingly, the sub-sciences of semiotic are semantics, pragmatics, and syntactics.

Syntactics is the study of the logico-grammatical relation of signs to one another in abstraction from the relation of signs to objects or to interpreters. Linguistic analysis; the concern of logic with the study of the relations between certain combinations of signs within a language; the presentation of mathematics as deductive or axiomatic, with its emphasis upon the pattern of a closely knit system of signs; and the developments in symbolic logic since Leibniz by Boole, Peano, Frege, Peirce, Russell, Whitehead, and others, provide the historical background for the assertion that syntactics is the best developed of all<sup>9</sup> the branches of semiotic.

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8. "Foundations of a Theory of Signs," op. cit., p. 6. See also by the same author, "Philosophy of Science and Science of Philosophy," Philosophy of Science, vol. 2 (1935), p. 278; "The Concept of Meaning in Pragmatism and Logical Positivism," Proceedings of the 8th International Congress of Philosophy, Prague, 1934, pp.135-6; "Semiotic and Scientific Empiricism," op. cit., pp. 49-50 (from which the last quotation was taken). Instead of "syntactical" the term "formal" is sometimes used; instead of "pragmatical" "biotic"; and instead of "semantical" "existential" or "empirical".
9. "Foundations of a Theory of Signs," op. cit., pp. 13-14.

Semantics deals with the relation of signs to their designata and so to the objects which they may or do denote. Although semantics has not attained a clarity and systematization comparable to that of syntactics, semantical investigations have had a prominent place historically, e.g. in the attempt of the philosophical empiricists to determine the conditions under which a sign can be said to have a denotatum; or discussions of the term truth, which have always involved the relation of signs to things.<sup>10</sup>

There is an obvious relation between "pragmatics" and pragmatism. The permanent significance of pragmatism is taken to lie in the fact that "it has directed attention more closely to the relation of signs to their users than had previously been done and has assessed more profoundly than ever before the relevance of this relation in understanding intellectual activities."<sup>11</sup> The meaning of anything whatsoever, according to the pragmatists, is identical with the set of expectations its presence arouses;<sup>12</sup>

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10. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

11. Ibid., pp. 29-30.

12. Cp. Peirce's statement: "If one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept, and there is absolutely nothing more in it." Collected Works, V, #412, 273. See also, Morris, C. W., "The Concept of Meaning in Pragmatism and Logical Positivism," op. cit., pp. 132-3.

although James, Peirce, and Dewey are agreed upon this, James stresses the place of the private, Dewey and Peirce the social or common, aspects of meaning.

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Morris frequently refers to the fact that there have developed more or less specialized languages which follow to some extent the various dimensions of semiosis,-- mathematics and logic (syntactical), empirical science (semantical), and morality and the fine and applied arts (pragmatical). These have arisen in part because of the fact that in any given case, certain of the dimensions may actually or practically vanish. But this fact is likely to be misleading if two important emphases are not kept in mind.

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One is upon the unity of semiotic. This is expressed by the assertion that a type of translation is possible from one dimension to another. "The meaning situation can be stated from either the object pole, the formal pole, or the life pole, and all such statements prove upon

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13. "Science of Philosophy and Philosophy of Science," op. cit., pp. 271, 286; "Semiotic and Scientific Empiricism," op. cit., p. 50; "Foundations of a Theory of Signs," op. cit., pp. 12, 57-8. "Science, Art, and Technology," Kenyon Review, vol. I (1939) pp. 409-23.

14. That is, "a sign may not have syntactical relations to other signs, and so its actual implication becomes null; or it may have implication and yet denote no object, or it may have implication and yet no actual interpreter and so no expression--as in the case of a word in a dead language."--ibid., p. 7.

analysis to be equivalent in meaning." The doctrine of the unity of semiotic manifests itself in several ways, most obviously, of course, in the fact that Morris believes the "comprehensive point of view, embracing at once radical empiricism, methodological rationalism, and critical pragmatism", constitutes a distinctive position, which he names "scientific empiricism."<sup>16</sup>

The second emphasis is upon the fact that together the three dimensions exhaust the meaning of any sign.

"To specify the triple set of relations which a sign

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15. "Semiotic and Scientific Empiricism," op. cit., p. 50. Cp., "The Concept of Meaning in Pragmatism and Logical Positivism," op. cit., p. 136: "Thus if we say that the meaning of a symbol is the expectation it arouses, this is practically equivalent to saying that the meaning of a symbol is its possible extension (i.e. all the objects to which it can be applied), and this in turn is similar to saying that the meaning of a symbol is determined by the specification of those characters which an object must have for the symbol to be applied. And then since these characters must in turn be specified by the use of other symbols, we find ourselves led to the formalistic position that the meaning of a symbol is determined by its syntactical connections with other symbols (i.e. by the grammatical rules of its usage)." Also, part VI ("The Unity of Semiotic"), "Foundations of a Theory of Signs," op. cit., p. 43.
16. See "Scientific Empiricism," International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, vol. I, No.1, pp.63-75, espec.pp.68 ff.; Section III,"Scientific Empiricism," in "Semiotic and Scientific Empiricism,"op. cit.,pp.52-6; "Philosophy of Science and Science of Philosophy," op.cit.,pp. 285-6. Notice also his definition of philosophy as the "language of languages" (ibid.,p.286)and his account of the "variable a priori" ("The Relation of the Formal and Empirical Sciences within Scientific Empiricism," Erkenntnis, vol. 5 (1935), pp. 10-11.

sustains to objects, persons, and other signs is to exhaust the meaning of that sign, however difficult it may be to carry through the actual analysis"; "the meaning of a term is completely specified when it is known what objects the term designates, what expectations it produces in the persons for whom it has meaning, and what its connections are with other terms in the language of which it is a part."<sup>17</sup> In principle, at least, any sign whatever may be studied from any of the three standpoints,<sup>18</sup> and, a fortiori, moral judgments--as a specific case of sign functioning--can be studied in terms of any of the three dimensions; indeed, an analysis of the complete meaning of the moral judgment must be from the tri-dimensional standpoint,--a fact which is obscured by characterizing "morality" as one of the specialized languages of the pragmatical dimension.<sup>19</sup>

At the beginning of this chapter, we remarked that moral judgments are judged to be "meaningless" on one theory, namely, logical positivism; and obviously it is relevant to consider its criterion of intelligibility, the

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17. "Semiotic and Scientific Empiricism," op.cit., p. 51.

18. "Philosophy of Science and Science of Philosophy," op.cit., p. 278; "Esthetics and the Theory of Signs," op.cit., p. 133.

19. "Foundations of a Theory of Signs," op.cit., p. 53.

verifiability principle, of which Bridgman's operational-  
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ism is regarded as a special case, independently arrived  
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at. This principle asserts: "The meaning of a proposi-  
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tion is the method of its verification." This is not to  
say that the meaning of a proposition is its verification,  
for this would lead to the absurdities that a proposition  
could not have sense unless it was verified, and that  
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false propositions would have no sense. Schlick points

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20. See Bridgman, P.W., The Logic of Modern Physics, New York, MacMillan, 1928, p. 5; "Operational Analysis," Philosophy of Science, vol. 3 (1938), pp. 114-31.
21. See DuCasse, C.J., "Verification, Verifiability, and Meaningfulness," Journal of Philosophy, vol. 33 (1936), p. 233; Boas, George, and Blumberg, A.E., "Some Remarks in Defense of an Operational Theory of Meaning," Journal of Philosophy, vol. 28 (1931), p. 545 fn.; Black, M., "The Principle of Verifiability," Analysis, vol. 2 (1934), p. 2; Schlick, M., "Meaning and Verification," Philosophical Review, vol. 45 (1936), p. 343.
22. Schlick, ibid., p. 341.
23. See Weinberg, J., An Examination of Logical Positivism, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936, p. 178; Black, op. cit., pp. 1-2. Werkmeister so interprets the principle, and argues against it both of these "absurdities" (Werkmeister, W. "The Meaning of "Meaning" Re-examined," Philosophical Review, vol. 47 (1938), p. 263.) Concerning the issue--which is raised here, as to the relation of meaning and truth, Carnap points out that in an obvious sense the question of truth presupposes the question of meaning: we must understand, i.e. know the meaning of, a sentence, before we can try to find out whether it is true or not; but, he continues, from the point of view of empiricism there is a still closer connexion between the two questions. "In a certain sense, there is only one answer to the two questions. If we knew what it would be for a given sentence to be found

out that the criterion is not verification but verifi-  
ability, i.e. possibility of verification.<sup>24</sup>

There are problems connected with both the term possibility and the term verifiability. With regard to the former, Reichenbach finds it necessary to distinguish three kinds of possibility: technical, physical, and logical.<sup>25</sup> The first concerns facts the realization of which lies within the power of individuals or groups of men. Thus a bridge across the Hudson is a technical possibility but a bridge across the Atlantic is a technical impossibility. The second demands only that the

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true then we would know what its meaning is. And if for two sentences the conditions under which we would have to take them as true are the same, then they have the same meaning. Thus the meaning of a sentence is in a certain sense identical with the way we determine its truth or falsehood, and a sentence has meaning only if such a determination is possible."--Carnap, R., "Testability and Meaning," Philosophy of Science, vol. 31 (1936), p. 420.

24. Schlick, op. cit., pp.345,347. The interpretation of the verifiability principle as identifying the meaning of a proposition with the proposition's verification is perhaps made more plausible by the connexion of this criterion with the doctrine of methodological solipsism, which seems to involve the "here-now" fallacy. Cp. Morris, C.W., "The concept of Meaning in Pragmatism and Logical Positivism," op. cit., p. 132; Morris, C. W., "Pragmatism and Metaphysics," Philosophical Review, vol. 43 (1934), p. 550; Brandt, R. B., "On the Possibility of Reference to Inferred Entities," Journal of Philosophy, vol. 35 (1938), pp. 394-9. Weinberg, op. cit., Ch. VII, Linguistic Solipsism."
25. Reichenbach, H., Experience and Prediction, Chicago, University Press, 1938, pp. 38 ff.

fact in question be conformable to physical laws, regardless of human power. Thus the construction of a bridge across the Atlantic is physically possible, but to construct a perpetual motion machine constantly furnishing energy is physically impossible. Logical possibility demands only that the fact involve no contradiction: the perpetuum mobile is logically possible, although it would<sup>26</sup> be logically impossible to construct a quadrangular circle.

With regard to verifiability, a distinction also has been found necessary, between a strong and a weak<sup>27</sup> sense; or between verifiability and confirmability.<sup>28</sup>

In the strong sense of verifiability a proposition is

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26. The distinction between practical verifiability and verifiability in principle (Ayer, op. cit., pp.20-22) is meant also to take into account such differentiations; but Reichenbach's analysis is more precise. Reichenbach emphasizes the fact that a choice between "physical meaning" and "logical meaning" is a question for a volitional decision; it is not a question of, "What is the true conception of meaning?"--although, once the decision is made, it entails certain consequences which are not a matter of decision. It is obvious, of course, that the conception of possibility adopted affects the range of meaningful propositions which will be allowed. Reichenbach himself decides on the advisability of utilizing both physical and logical meaning (op. cit., p. 42) Ducasse (op. cit. pp. 232 ff.) insists that logical possibility must be reduced to physical possibility; and Schlick (op. cit., p. 349) interprets possibility in the purely logical sense.

27. Ayer, op. cit., pp. 22-6.

28. Carnap, op. cit., p. 425.

verifiable only if its truth (or falsehood) is conclusively verifiable in experience. But it is easy to see that on this basis all universal propositions--e.g. a law of physics or biology--must be meaningless. For, as Carnap points out, such universal sentences can never be completely and definitively established as true. Even if each single instance of the law were supposed verifiable, the number of instances to which the law refers is infinite and can never be exhausted by our observations which are always finite in number. We can only test the law by testing its single instances, i.e. the particular sentences which we derive from the law and from other sentences established previously. If in such testing no negative instance is found, and the number of positive instances increase, then our confidence in the law will grow step by step. Thus, instead of verification we should speak of gradually increasing confirmation of the law. And this holds good likewise of particular sentences; the difference between universal and particular sentences with regard to verifiability is only one of degree. In short, the

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29. The illustration Carnap gives of the verificatory (confirmatory) process is that of a singular proposition. See Carnap, R., Philosophy and Logical Syntax, London, Psyche Miniature, Regan Paul, 1935, pp. 11-12.

weakened verifiability principle states that the criterion of meaningfulness is the possibility of deducing from the proposition in question, together with previously verified propositions, some propositions about future perceptions or other experiences.<sup>30</sup>

This principle, of course, is the basis of the logical positivists' rejection of metaphysics as meaningless. What has not received so much attention is the fact that it is used, as well, to condemn ethical judgments to the limbo of nonsense.<sup>31</sup> Carnap, referring to the distinction between a norm and a value judgment, pronounces it to be merely a difference of formulation. The norm has the imperative form: "Do not kill!" The corresponding value judgment is: "Killing is evil." The practical importance of the different formulation is that "Do not kill!", having the grammatically imperative form, is not taken to be an assertion. But the value judgment, "Killing is evil", has the grammatical form of an assertive proposition, and philosophers have been thereby deceived into thinking value judgments are really assertive, hence either true or false. But the value judgment does not, in fact, assert anything,

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30. Ibid., pp. 13-14. Cp. Ayer, op. cit.

31. Carnap, op. cit., pp. 22-6.

and can be neither proved nor disproved; for, applying the verifiability principle, from the statement "Killing is evil" we cannot deduce any propositions about future experiences, thus it is not verifiable and so has no theoretical sense. Moral judgments (like propositions in metaphysics) have an emotive, as distinguished from a representative, function.<sup>32</sup>

A translation of Carnap's conclusion into Morris' terminology reveals Carnap to be asserting that, on the basis of logical analysis, it is evident that in ethical propositions the semantical dimension is entirely absent. Such a situation is, of course, admitted to be a possibility within the framework of semiotic.<sup>33</sup> For Carnap, then, the absence of the semantical dimension is evidence of the meaninglessness of moral propositions.

With regard to the verifiability criterion of meaningfulness, we may ask, first, what is the justification for ignoring the pragmatical dimension of a proposition in the consideration of its meaning? The only factor in the logical positivist analysis which would seem to be relevant

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32. For Ayer, too (*op. cit.*, pp. 149-68), normative moral symbols are "psuedo-concepts", and see Stevenson, C.F. "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms", *Mind*, N. S. vol. 47 (1937), pp. 14-31.

33. See *supra*, p. 56, and fn. 14.

to this question is discoverable in Schlick's remark that Carnap rightly stresses the fact that the question of meaning has nothing to do with the psychological question as to the mental processes of which an act of thought may consist. "Verifiability has nothing to do with any images that may be associated with the words of the sentence in question." But it is obviously possible to sympathize with an attack upon psychologism and yet insist upon the relevance, for the consideration of meaning, of the psychological, biological and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs. This, in fact, is the position taken by Morris,<sup>35</sup> who characterizes the contribution of Peirce, Mead, and Dewey, as that of recognizing the inadequacy of the psychologistic interpretation of signs. Postively, there seems to be no justification for refusing to utilize, in the interests of throwing light on the meaning of judgments, the method of looking at signs in terms of the interests which are expressed and served by the production and use of the signs in question. Our knowledge is meagre enough, in any event, and the instrumental character of signs provides a field whose riches we can ill afford to ignore.

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34. Op. cit., pp. 355, 356.

35. "Foundations of a Theory of Signs," op. cit., pp. 30,31.

Secondly, the assertion of the absence in moral judgments of a semantical dimension is--if it can be substantiated--a significant assertion regarding the meaning of such judgments. It is not irrelevant to point here to the disagreement expressed by both Dewey and Vivas, with Carnap's contention that the concept of verifiability (and hence assertibility) is inapplicable to moral judgments. According to Dewey, value propositions exist whenever things are appraised as to their suitability as means; for such propositions are concerned, not with things or events that have occurred or that already exist, but with things to be brought into existence. "The required appraisal of desires and ends-in-view, as means of the activities by which actual results are produced," Dewey asserts, "is dependent upon observation of consequences attained when they are compared and contrasted with the content of ends-in-view...Since desire and valuation of objects proposed as ends are inherently connected, and since desire and ends-in-view need to be appraised as means to ends (an appraisal made on the basis of warranted physical generalizations) the valuation of ends-in-view is tested by consequences that actually ensue. It is verified to the degree in which there is agreement upon results. Failure to agree, in case deviations are carefully observed, is not mere failure but

provides the means for improving the formation of later  
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desires and ends-in-view."

Vivas approaches the problem in terms of the relation between judgments of value and judgments of fact. Judgments of value do not differ from judgments of fact, he claims, but are judgments of fact "in the sense that they are verifiable by means of the same kind of operations which serve to verify any other factual judgment." 37  
Fundamental to his definition of objectivity is his distinction between a value in isolation and a value in system, the former being a value which does not affect nor is affected by other values of the individual holding it, the latter being one which affects and is affected by other values. "If a system actually obtains it is possible to find by empirical means 'the rule' which governs the judgments made within it. Objectivity is defined in terms of this rule. For the rule can be stated and verified; and by means of it the single concrete judgment within the system can in turn be verified and corrected. The procedure of

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36. Dewey, John, "Theory of Valuation," International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, vol. II, No. 4, pp. 51-2.

37. Vivas, Eliseo, "Value and Fact," Philosophy of Science, vol. 6 (1936), p. 433.

verification consists in finding out whether the judgment in question obeys the rule of the system in terms of which it claims validity.<sup>38</sup>

In short, for Dewey verifiability of value judgments is in terms of the agreement of a content of the end-in-view (ex hypothesi ideational) with the actual results when that end-in-view is concretized by personal effort; for Vivas, it is in terms of agreement of a specific judgment with the rule of the system to which it belongs. What is important here, of course, is the fact that each position represents an attempt to present an acceptable notion of verifiability with respect to value judgments, as opposed to Carnap's rejection of the applicability of the concept in this realm. And what we wish to emphasize in this connection is that semiotic analysis does not prejudge the issue in advance, but provides a schematism within which such disagreements may be brought to a fruitful issue.

Whether or not semiotic be adopted as a technical method in empirical ethics is not the primary question here, however. Discussion of it does enable us to see how the projected ethics might be realized and opens the way for the more concrete discussion of the objective of ethics which is contained in the next chapter.

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38. Ibid., pp. 437-8.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE OBJECTIVE OF ETHICS

We are now in a position to discuss more specifically the nature of an ethics the subject matter of which is moral judgments and the technical method some type of meaning-analysis. From the methodological point of view the utilization of semiotic would involve three types of analyses: (1) an investigation of the syntactical dimension of moral judgments, to ascertain what light can be thrown on their meaning with respect to the logico-grammatical status of value-terms appearing in them; (2) an investigation of the semantical dimension, to indicate the precise referents of the terms; and (3) an investigation of the pragmatical dimension, to determine the socio-psychological conditions under which the terms function as value terms,--what interests they express and serve.

The objective of these investigations can be stated by saying that what is desired is a formulation of the respective rules of the dimensions indicated.<sup>1</sup>

From the general point of view of syntactics, a language is any set of things related in accordance with two classes of rules. The formation rules determine permissible independent combinations of members of the set (i.e. sentences); the transformation rules determine the sentences which can be obtained from other sentences. These are brought together under the term syntactical rule. Thus syntactics may be defined as "the consideration of signs and sign-combinations insofar as they are subject to syntactical rules."<sup>2</sup> Now while it is obvious that conformity to "formation rules" is an indispensable prerequisite of meaningfulness for any kind of proposition, precisely what further intelligence can be gained as to the meaning of moral judgments by the detailed analysis of their syntactical dimension is not obvious.<sup>3</sup> However, it

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1. "...the meaning of a sign is exhaustively specified by the ascertainment of its rules of usage."--Morris, op. cit. p. 47.

2. Ibid., p. 14.

3. See below, pp.110ff. for a further discussion of the problem here.

is of interest to reexamine Carnap's argument in this connexion. For the negative conclusion which it reaches about the referents of moral judgments is an inference from the grammatical form of such judgments; in other words, a proposition about the syntactical dimension is taken to imply a proposition about the semantical dimension.

Semantical rules determine under which conditions a sign is applicable to an object or situation. Such rules correlate signs and situations denotable by the signs. "A sign denotes whatever conforms to the conditions laid down in the semantical rule, while the rule itself states the conditions of designation and so determines the designatum". This enables us to restate the distinction between the task of the ethicist and that of the moral man, and to understand the significance of the question of moral truth. The job of the ethicist is to discover what the semantical rules are which in any particular case determine the usage of moral terms. Statements about these rules would be statements of fact, and possible of verification or falsification. Thus it might be found that the following semantical rule states the conditions of designation for the term "purity": If you have gone through certain rites,

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4. Supra, p. EE. 73-4.

5. Morris, ibid., p. 23.

performed certain ceremonials, etc. you are pure. The term "certain" here indicates the necessity for further specification; the conditions may be fairly complex. This is exemplified also in another semantical rule for the same term: If you are innocent, guileless, chaste, etc. you are pure. The terms employed in the semantical rule may need further definition in order that the conditions of applying the term "pure" may be stated with the maximum exactitude. The value of semantical analysis <sup>u</sup>this is exhibited: for, roughly speaking, the first semantical rule describes the Hebrew, the latter the Christian, usage of the term "purity"; the difference between the virtues is hidden by the use of an identical term for each. In this way semantical analysis would enable us to penetrate the formal identity of moral values as expressed by the use of abstract terms to the underlying plurality of concrete values.

We have pointed out that the statements made by ethics about these semantical rules are factual in nature and verifiable at least in principle. But what of the level of the moral judgments themselves? We may suppose the individual to be born into a group which has a developed moral code, i.e. a system of judgments about good and bad, right and wrong, virtue and vice. The individual has first the task of taking over these judgments, i.e.

understanding the conditions under which the terms are applied, where acceptance and understanding,--truth and meaning,--are fused. But upon the reflective level, and in a context the complexities of which rule out the oversimplifications of childhood, the separate question of truth arises, in two forms. (1) The first is illustrated by such questions as, Is this act right? Is this end good? These problems may arise because the case involved is of such a nature that the applicability of any accepted norm is not clear. One of two possibilities then exists. It may be that a more careful analysis will result in such clarification that the applicability of some norm is finally seen. The other possibility is that reflection fails to establish such an applicability. (2) Here then appears the second type of question,--What is good? What is right? What are the real virtues? These are more fundamental questions than the former; it may be that they arise only in the minds of a few, and only at relatively rare periods,--periods which represent moral revolutions. Such a situation is dramatically portrayed in a passage in The Nazarene, through the reflections of the "Roman Hegemon Cornelius" upon Jesus. Scholem Asch represents Cornelius as asking himself, What is the goal of this man's doctrine?

And the answer was clear: He seeks to undo and wipe out everything that man has accumulated by experience, whatever has been won in the struggle for mastery and supremacy, everything that tradition has ratified, whatever custom and law have validated, everything that has been cultivated and is controlled by institutions, rulers, and spiritual leaders--and to create in their place a new world and a new order founded on diametrically opposed principles. The things that we regard as virtues, as the highest achievements of man's peculiar and separate greatness, he would condemn as vices and defects; and contrariwise, vices and defects are exalted by him into high moral commandments, the truly good which has subdued the world and laid it at the feet of man. Not dignity and pride, which have hammered out the character of man, but weakness and submission, lowliness, modesty, and softness: these will inherit the earth, and theirs will be the kingdom of heaven. Not wealth, accumulated by industry and conquest, but poverty, the consequence of neglect and surrender--that is to be the ideal of mankind. To avoid anger and hatred, which are the parents of battle and victory, to renounce, to love your foe, to fly from the battle field before you have set foot on it, to forgive your enemies their sins in order that your father in heaven may forgive you yours. Not to taste the pleasures of life and the glory and abundance of wealth, not to give free reign to the natural passions so that they may live themselves out in the fullness of their strength and marrow, but to repress and deny them, to burn them out...

Here we have an example of a struggle between values themselves, rather than merely a perplexity as to the applicability of an accepted set of values to a particular case.

The relationship between the two kinds of questions under discussion can easily be shown: "Is this a right act?" and "What is right?" have an obvious connexion. Verification of the first, if any is possible at all, is in terms of the second. The problem is, can the second be verified? It might be argued that the latter is

determined only by convention; yet it remains true that conceptions of right and good are defended by reference to propositions of fact. Thus Aristotle argues that happiness is the good because it is final, self-sufficient, and most desirable.<sup>6</sup> But the problem here is not to determine the true relation between value and factual propositions, but only to indicate that the problem of the value-fact dichotomy finds its locus in the semantical dimension of moral judgments. The problem of the "derivation of value from fact"--if such is possible--is a problem for the moral man, not for the ethicist,--although, of course, it does present a descriptive problem for the latter.

Pragmatical rules state "the conditions in the interpreter under which the sign-vehicle is<sup>7</sup> a sign." In this context, "a linguistic sign is used in combination with other signs by the members of a social group; a language is a social system of signs mediating the responses of members of a community to one another and to their environment."<sup>8</sup> The problem here is to state what psycho-

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6. And note his "proof" that the contemplative life is the happiest life. (See supra, p. 12-13) It certainly seems that he is attempting to prove that the contemplative life is the good life by reference to statements of fact, e.g. that it provides the most, and the best kind, of pleasures. In connexion with this general issue, cp. Supra pp. 76-8

7. Morris, ibid., p. 35.

8. Ibid., p. 36.

logically, biologically, and sociologically is involved in the occurrence of signs of the kind called moral. Although Vivas is concerned, in the following passage, with the practical predicaments involved in the objective verification of value judgments, he sums up with great force the task which would be involved in securing such a statement:

In a modern civilized community the systems of value in which individuals partake well nigh defy the human power of analysis. The complexity and conflicts of modern society are reflected in the individual, and his values must perforce remain inconsistent and vague, and it is often practically impossible, therefore, to discover the criteria which govern them. Were not the social scene split by conflicts of all sorts, our values would be somewhat more congruous, and a closer agreement between our judgments would be the result. But we are split and fractured into small groups, some of which have and some of which lack material loci; we share criss-crossing traditions; different religious, cultural, and political loyalties claim us; we are members of different economic classes, and these are in rapid flux; and within the same nation we are divided by regional differences. Our judgments are chaotic because they are made by men whose interests are vague and confused, inconsistent and unstable. The first and most elementary task in defining the criteria of value must therefore be the practical task of defining the groups and classes to which the individual belongs. The second would be that of finding out the particular criteria which are unconsciously used in each system, and if possible the laws of their change. This is an empirical job, and falls within the province of the sociologist, in the widest acceptation of this term. I do not know of any work in this field that begins to tackle the questions here raised. Nor do I know of other hypotheses, outside the organismic and the marxist, by means of which we could begin to tackle these jobs. But the organismic hypothesis commits the investigator, it would seem, to neglecting or underemphasizing the importance of the very divisions within society which it would be necessary to study before

the laws of social valuation could be discovered. And the marxist, so far as I know, has not been applied to the task I have in mind, though its application to the study of the dynamics of political power has been one of the major achievements of social theory in the last fifty years.<sup>9</sup>

We now can see how the adoption of sign-analysis as a method of investigation would enable ethics to make use of the social sciences. The pragmatical investigation would need to call upon all the social sciences for information which would throw light on the nature of the interpretant. In passing we can note that this obviates the difficulty implicit in Irving's rejection of moral judgments as the subject matter of ethics. "Clearly,"<sup>10</sup> he says, "we cannot take the moral judgments on the surface of consciousness, immediately given in introspection, as the objects of such a science." But all the resources of the social sciences are available for the analysis of the functioning of signs, including not only those contributions which have been made directly by psychoanalysis,<sup>11</sup> but also the social-psychological studies whose

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10. Irving, John Allen, "Toward Radical Empiricism in Ethics," p. 243, American Philosophy Today and Tomorrow, ed. H.M.Kallen, S.Hook, N.Y., Lee Furman, Inc., 1935.

11. See Eliseo Vivas, "Freud and Philosophy," Kenyon Review, vol. 2 (1940), pp. 182-5.

9. Vivas, op. cit., p. 440.

field is that broad context of forces which function in and through our responses without being present to consciousness in the case of any particular response. It is easy to see that such a conception of ethics does not fall into "the error of archaic Ethics--the error of classifying examples of these moral judgments according to types and of prescribing hierarchies of duties."

Here the interesting aspect of Irving's discussion is that he approaches the prospect of "radical empiricism in ethics" in terms of meaning-analysis, and that not only his formulation of the problem of ethics but also his general conception of the relation of ethics to the social sciences closely approximates that which is envisaged here. According to Irving the primary question of ethics is, "What is the function of the moral consciousness in a specific moral order? and an answer to this question, he thinks, "will require the mobilization of the data of psychology and of the social sciences on a large and unprecedented scale. Those who undertake this task will investigate the moral consciousness at all levels of development in the attempt to discover its function in a complex culture pattern. They will study all those elements and factors which control the origin and growth of moral practices and moral values. They will realize that all sociological facts are very complex; and that ethical science must include a

complete analysis of the moral behavior and moral ideas of men as they actually exist and function within a concrete and complex sociological context.<sup>12</sup> The problem, Irving concludes, "will be the elucidation of the elements and factors in terms of which the moral consciousness functions in a specific culture pattern. Such a study cannot be conducted in isolation from psychology, history, law, politics, economics and sociology. Ethics will in the future become the queen of the social sciences, for it will at last have been placed in that human context, foreseen long ago by Dewey, where it can illuminate and guide the life of man."<sup>13</sup> But Irving ignores the possibility of elucidating "the elements and factors in terms of which the moral consciousness functions in a specific culture pattern" by considering value terms as signs of a special order, and so overlooks the potentialities of his own orientation of meaning-analysis.<sup>14</sup>

The objective of ethics, then, is the achievement of generalizations as to the meaning of moral judgments exhaustively analyzed as cases of the functioning of signs. The value terms whose meaning is to be analyzed are taken

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12. Irving, op. cit., p. 245-6.

13. Ibid.

14. See ibid., pp. 229-33.

distributively. Different sets of operative judgments or judgment-systems are to be investigated instead of the attempt to derive the "essential nature", once and for all, of the good, the right, justice, temperance, and the like. As a consequence, specificity and concreteness of subject matter together with a unity of ethical theory is secured within the limits of empiricism, avoiding any departure from a standpoint from which generalizations may be checked within experience. This may be pointed up by a reference to Hartmann, who, although characterized by a profound sense of "the historical multiplicity of moral commandments," sees the unity of ethics to consist in a unity of values. Every age and every people, he says, has its "positive morality". "Historically, there is a morality of bravery, a morality of obedience, a morality of pride; likewise of humility, of power, of beauty, of strength of will, of loyalty, of compassion. But from every positive morality ethics, as such, is distinguished by its universal ideal challenge of the good, as it is implied and is presupposed in every special morality.

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15. See Hartmann, Nicolai, Ethics, trans. Stanley Coit, N. Y., MacMillan, 1932, vol. I, Section II, "The Plurality of Morals and the Unity of Ethics."

16. See also his classification in the section, "Further Dimensions of the manifold," ibid., pp. 77-8; also vol. II, "Moral Values."

Its affair is to show what in general is good. Ethics seeks for the criterion of the good, which is lacking in the positive moralities.<sup>17</sup> Admitting that we do not possess a unity of ends, that it is unknown, he points out that we must content ourselves with discovering a unity of system,--with answering the question, Is there a system of values?<sup>18</sup>

But an empirical ethics, while accepting as valuable Hartmann's stress upon the multiplicity of moral phenomena, would have, in common with the other sciences, the objective of a unity and simplicity of theory, of a body of generalizations, rather than a system of values. The question then arises as to whether ethics, so conceived, shares also the characteristic of the other sciences of providing controls,--a question the answer to which comprises the third branch of our inquiry.<sup>19</sup> We have seen that the distinction between a science and its subject matter may be terms a distinction between two "levels"; that in the natural sciences, there is reflective inquiry on only the one level of theory; that in ethics reflective inquiry is present on both levels; and that consequently the

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17. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 74-5.

18. Ibid., pp. 79-80.

19. Supra, p. 21, and fn.

question arises as to (1) the nature of the reflection on each level, and (2) the relationship between them. We have answered the first question; it is the second which is now being raised. To consider the problem in ethics properly we should again preface it with a consideration of the situation in the natural sciences. These are said to be "practical" in the sense that they afford us control of nature; and as such they are contrasted with the sciences of ancient times, characterized as "contemplative". An examination of this description <sup>5</sup> shows, however, the need for some distinctions.

We point out first that while science does provide us with a control over nature the scientists themselves do not have as their task the control of nature. This simple statement provides us with the distinction between science and "applied science", or technology. The ready confusion of science and technology probably is due to the fact that they both involve doing something; along with the vague impression that "we owe to science our technological civilization". But the doing of science is strictly relative to a subject matter; insofar as there is experimentation the science institutes actual changes in portions of this subject matter. That is, science is "non-contemplative" in the sense of being operational; but its operations are directed on a subject matter for the purpose of establish-

ing general laws. Now the "doing" of any given technology may be distinguished from that of science in at least three ways: (1) it presupposes the laws discovered by the relevant science or sciences in virtue of operations on a specific subject matter; (2) it involves special skill, which, in terms of the presupposed laws, (3) is used for particularistic ends. Thus (1) physical laws (2) may be utilized by engineers (3) to build a bridge. That is, technology is utilitarian.

Turning, then, to ethics, conceived as an empirical science, we note again, as characteristic of its subject matter (in contrast to that of the natural sciences), the presence of reflective inquiry. The moral judgments which constitute the proper subject matter of ethics are the issue of this inquiry. We thus recognize the deliberation of which the judgments are the result to correspond to the technological aspect of the natural sciences. It presupposes (1) generalizations informative about past evaluations, and (2) special skill (the truth of the ancient contention that "virtue is hard"), which, in terms of

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20. Of course, the making of the distinction involves showing the relationship, and this distinction does not preclude either that a science may have arisen out of technological problems or that technology may not contribute to a science by providing it with problems. Neither of these possibilities, however, invalidates the distinction.

the presupposed generalizations (3) is used for particularistic ends,-- the desire is to answer such a question as "What should I do?" in a specific situation.<sup>21</sup>

Insofar as ethics has failed it is in the sense that it has not provided the generalizations in terms of which moral reflection could be carried on with greater adequacy. As we have already pointed out, what it did offer to the moral man was often only further--and conflicting--value judgments themselves. The objective of empirical ethics is that of providing such knowledge, and it is thereby that it may contribute to the control of conduct. We have said that the object of its analysis is moral

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21. This view does not correspond exactly to Morris' interpretation of morality as a "technology of technologies." Morris, "Science, Art, and Technology," *op. cit.*, section #6, pp. 417-18.) In the first place, he does not seem to distinguish between moral deliberation, which I refer to as "technological" and the moral judgments which are the issue of that deliberation and which constitute the proper subject matter of ethics. Secondly, I would only say that such deliberation is analogous to technology; it seems very strange to call it technology. One interesting consequence of the view I am defending is that, while it seems possible for the natural sciences to exist without technology, it would be impossible for ethics to do so, inasmuch as, in the case of ethics (as contrasted with the natural sciences), its subject matter, as the product of moral reflection, is inseparable from its "technology", which is precisely that moral reflection; and no one has ever held it possible for a science to exist without a subject matter. This integral relation between moral reflection and ethics may be the cause of the confusion of the two, or at least of the view that the ethicist must be a "good man"; the foregoing analysis shows that this does not follow.

judgments, its objective to provide knowledge about these judgments in virtue of an exhaustive analysis of their meaning,--concretely, in terms of the tri-dimensional analysis of semiotic. To say that such knowledge can assist in the making of further moral judgments is simply to recognize the fact that "past experience, when properly analyzed and ordered, is the sole guide we have in future experience!"<sup>22</sup> As Dewey points out,<sup>23</sup> "on account of the continuity of human activities, personal and associated, the import of present evaluations cannot be validly stated until they are placed in the perspective of the past valuation-events with which they are continuous." An organized body of knowledge about valuations means the bringing to bear upon present problems of evaluation intelligence rather than the sanction of custom and special interest. And by means of the service performed by ethical analysis, along with, perhaps, certain additional techniques, an alteration of the system<sup>24</sup> of judgments may be effected.

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22. See Dewey, J., "Theory of Valuation," op. cit., p. 58.

23. Ibid., p. 59.

24. Cp. Vivas, "Value and Fact," op. cit., p. 443, and Dewey, ibid., pp. 59-60: "Suppose, for example, that it be ascertained that a particular set of current valuations have, as their antecedent historical conditions, the interest of a small group or special class in maintaining certain exclusive privileges and advantages,

Thus the question, "Can the ethicist determine the good?" can be answered in the negative, but not unambiguously. The ethicist does not have the task of making value judgments but rather of following out the meaning of the preexisting value judgments of moral men. Ethics is not prescriptive; in the direct, creative sense, it can neither provide ends of action nor supply sanctions for such ends. Or, stated otherwise, it is post-normative: as Vivas puts it so well: "The normative aspect of the act of valuation is found in the will itself that chooses this way or that; not in the theory, but in the actual

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and that this maintenance has the effect of limiting both the range of the desires of others and their capacity to actualize them. Is it not obvious that this knowledge of conditions and consequences would surely lead to revaluation of the desires and ends that had been assumed to be authoritative sources of valuation? Not that such revaluation would of necessity take effect immediately. But, when valuations that exist at a given time are found to lack the support they have previously been supposed to have, they exist in a context that is highly adverse to their continued maintenance. In the long run the effect is similar to a warier attitude that develops toward certain bodies of water as the result of knowledge that these bodies of water contain disease germs. If, on the other hand, investigation shows that a given set of existing valuations, including the rules for their enforcement, be such as to release individual potentialities of desire and interest, and does so in a way that contributes to mutual reinforcement of the desires and interests of all members of a group, it is impossible for this knowledge not to serve as a bulwark of the particular set of valuations in question, and to induce intensified effort to sustain them in existence."

urgent aims and needs of social animals." And this normative will is presupposed, if the knowledge of empirical ethics is to be put into effect, just as a similar will is presupposed for the knowledge of the natural sciences to be put into effect. However, this will, insofar as it is affected by such knowledge, is a rational will, which effects a reconstruction in the moral environment; and in this sense--and in this sense alone--can ethics be said to "determine" the good.

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25. Vivas, op. cit., p 443.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Our problem has been to state the formal conditions of an empirical ethics. We began with the recognition that the chief obstacle to admitting the possibility of an ethics of this kind is the value-fact dichotomy, interpreted as a reflection of a fundamental differentiation between normative and descriptive sciences. What we wanted to inquire into was not the dichotomy itself, the truth of which we were willing to grant, or at least to leave in abeyance, but its alleged bearing upon empiricism in ethics. To accomplish this we determined to assume that there could be an empirical ethics; to work out what such an ethics would be; and also to establish that the success, and insofar forth the verification, of this procedure, depend on its fulfilling these requirements: (1) that

empiricism in ethics be shown to be unaffected by the value-fact dichotomy, and (2) that, on this basis, the proper locus of the problem of the value-fact dichotomy be discovered.

Assuming an empirical ethics to be possible, we began with the fact that the distinction would apply here, as in all such cases, between a science and its subject matter. This distinction meant that our inquiry must concern itself with three problems: (1) the nature of the subject matter, (2) the nature of the theory, and (3) the relationship between the two. Beginning with the first, we decided to examine three types of traditional ethical theories in order to ascertain what conception of the subject matter of ethics was contained in them. But in this we were immediately confronted with the fact of the "impurity" of ethics, i.e. the fact that the propositions in classical ethical theory are not homogeneous. We distinguished within such propositions three types, (1) factual propositions, (2) value propositions, and (3) definitions. In general the first kind provides information about human nature and conduct; the second consists of actual value judgments; and the third seeks to provide statements about the meaning of moral concepts. The inclusion of the first two types is evidence of the confusion introduced into ethics by the assumption of the

relevance to ethical theory of the value-fact dichotomy. The inclusion of the first type is dictated, not by this basis assumption, to which, indeed, it does logical violence, but by the anomalous appearance of an ethics devoid of reference to human beings. The inclusion of the second indicates a confusion between the task of the ethicist and the moral man; the significance of which is that the effect of accepting the value-fact dichotomy as relevant for ethics is to confuse a science with its subject matter, a distinction basic to any discipline, of whatever character. This enabled us to formulate the principle of the autonomy of morality, in the sense that morality depends upon ethics for neither its existence nor its nature. The inclusion of the third type of proposition--definitions--indicates the interest ethicists have had in the meaning of moral concepts, and gives a clue to the true subject matter of ethics. In that the inclusion of value propositions themselves was illegitimate precisely because they signified a confusion between theory and subject matter; together with the fact that the meaning of moral concepts--which function as terms in such value judgments--provide a distinctive field of inquiry; we concluded that the proper subject matter of ethics is moral judgments. And here our first requirement, that of showing the value-fact dichotomy to be irrelevant as an objection to an

empirical ethics, is fulfilled; value-propositions constituting the subject matter of ethical theory rather than part of that theory itself, the problem of "deriving values from facts" drops away from ethics, the propositions of which are all of a factual nature. In other words, a basis is provided whereby the factual propositions in classical ethical theory may become a logically consistent part of ethics. However, there remains the problem of stating more specifically the precise locus of the problem of the value-fact dichotomy.

The second part of our inquiry--the nature of ethical theory--follows from the dependence of technical method in science upon the nature of the subject matter of the science. The technical method must be appropriate to the investigation of the subject matter; moral judgments constituting a special case of the functioning of signs, the technical method must be fitted to investigating sign-functioning; in short, we concluded that it must be some type of meaning-analysis. Such is Morris' semiotic, which we discussed in order to make possible a more concrete exposition of the nature of ethical theory. If semiotic were to be adopted, the objective of ethics would be that of arriving at generalizations informative about moral evaluations, which generalizations would be derived by a tri-dimensional analysis of moral judgments, their

syntactical, semantical, and pragmatical dimensions. A discussion of the nature of such analyses, the end of which is to formulate the relevant dimensional rules, enabled us to locate the value-fact dichotomy in the semantical dimension of moral judgments. And the way is left open to ethics for appeal to the resources of the social sciences in order to throw light on the nature of the interpretant (pragmatics).

The third branch of our inquiry is the relationship between ethical theory and its subject matter. We stated this distinction once more in terms of the natural sciences, where, on the two levels of theory and subject matter, reflective inquiry was present only on the former. This reflective inquiry is operational, involving the experimental institution of changes in the subject matter, for the purpose of achieving laws with predictive value. Distinguished from science as operational is technology as utilitarian, which, presupposing the laws discovered by the relevant science or sciences, applies them in terms of a special skill for the sake of achieving particular ends. In applying this analysis to ethics, an important difference was noted at the beginning, namely, that reflective inquiry was present at both the levels of theory and subject matter. We took the reflective inquiry of which moral judgments--the proper subject matter of ethics

--are the result, as analogous to the technological aspect of science, in the sense that such inquiry presupposes the laws of evaluation discovered by empirical ethics, for the sake of solving moral problems in a specific context, a process which involves a special skill,--differing, for example, from that demanded in the production of a beautiful object. A final statement of the objective of empirical ethics then becomes possible, as that of securing, by careful analysis of past evaluations, generalizations which can be called upon for guidance by moral agents, as the laws of physics are called upon for guidance by the engineer.

It seems appropriate to extend this summary to include a reference, however brief, to the contribution ethics has to make to general theory of value. The conception of ethics developed here does not depend upon the prior acceptance of any particular theory of value. Rather, the relation is the reverse: empirical ethics would provide material for a theory of value. This material is in the form of the results of a number of investigations into judgments of the specific kind called moral. Obviously ethics itself cannot coincide with value theory, since it studies judgments which involve only one type of value. But an empirical theory of value becomes possible in the sense of being the result of abstraction from precisely the sort of material which the science of ethics can give

it. This abstraction of the generic characteristics of the moral judgment from the data provided by ethics would be neither the function of ethics nor would it complete the task of value theory, which would have as further data the results of investigations by other disciplines the subject matter of which would involve other types of value e.g. esthetics.

This can be stated more specifically by reference, again, to semiotic. One of the important issues in value theory has been the "objectivity" or the "subjectivity" of values. In Morris' terminology, this problem can be stated as arising from a disagreement as to the relative importance of the semantical and the pragmatical dimensions. Subjectivism, for example, may be defined as the view which asserts that the pragmatical dimension is the sole dimension of value judgments. What is important here is to recognize what contribution empirical ethics, within the restrictions imposed upon it by its subject matter, could make to the treatment of such an issue by value theory. It would provide, first, painstaking analysis, from the point of view of all three dimensions, of actual moral judgments. Perhaps the point should be made explicitly here that the pragmatical investigation, while it is concerned with explaining the origin, character, and mode of change of interests, in so doing is not necessarily giving

aid to, and certainly is not presupposing, the interest theory of value. That interests are involved in the value situation, no<sup>one</sup> denies; the question is their status and character; and satisfactory conclusions on this head require the kind of analysis which a pragmatic investigation would undertake to carry out. Likewise of the semantical dimension; moral judgments--like all value judgments--do seem to have objective reference; and to determine what it is, or whether it is only illusory, would be a problem for a semantical investigation.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, and consequently, empirical ethics would provide the possibility of assessing more carefully the relative importance of each dimension. It might thus show the inadequacy of any theory which stressed one dimension to the exclusion of the rest, and so secure the basis for a more balanced statement of the nature of moral judgments as a whole.<sup>2</sup> In any event,

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1. In this connexion, the concept of "levels of semiosis" is relevant. See Morris, "Foundations of a Theory of Signs," op. cit., pp. 28, 39.
  2. Thus Britton believes that moral judgments are informative as well as emotive,--"they make statements about the relation between the interests of the audience and certain events or objects and they make them in such words that the audience is moved immediately to feel in a certain way towards or against the objects concerned." --Britton, Karl, Communication, New York, Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1939, pp. 8-10, 213. Cp. Morris, ibid., p. 58: "The maxims of the applied arts rest on true propositions relevant to the accomplishment of certain purposes ('to accomplish x, do so and so'); moral judgments

generalizations in value theory as to the nature of its subject matter could not fail to gain an advantage from the accessibility of material obtained from concrete and detailed studies of at least one type of value judgment.

The question naturally arises as to what steps would be taken if an attempt were made to explore the fruitfulness of the conception of ethics which it has been the purpose of this thesis to expound. We may try to answer this query in at least an elementary way. The first problem is that of choosing a specific method of meaning-analysis. Semiotic has been discussed here, as a possible answer to this problem, the precise nature of which becomes clearer in the light of Morris' statement that logicians "have for the most part restricted their attention to the language of science," <sup>3</sup> i.e. in general, theories of meaning have been elaborated within the context of those statements which are utilized by scientists. This Morris admits to be true of semiotic; it is obviously true of the logical positivists' criterion of verifiability. And it holds true likewise for the empirical theory of meaning advanced by

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may similarly have an empirical component, but, in addition, assume the desirability of reaching a certain end and aim to control conduct ('You ought to have your child vaccinated', i.e. "Taking the end of health for granted, vaccination is in the present situation the surest way of realizing that end so have it done.')."

3. Morris, "Science, Art, and Technology," op.cit., p. 411.

Benjamin, as can be seen by a brief examination of the three assumptions basic to it.<sup>4</sup> (1) Symbols which are precisely defined are to be preferred to symbols which are either undefined or defined inadequately. This is to formulate the task of a theory of meaning as that of showing how symbols take on a maximum degree of precision in significance. Examining any symbol from this point of view, Benjamin says, we see that it has two very important relations, both of which contribute to its meaning, namely, the relation of the symbol to its referent (its extension), and the relation of the symbol to other symbols in the system (its intension). Symbols whose meanings are determined essentially by extension Benjamin calls descriptive, those whose meanings are determined essentially by intension he calls suppositional,<sup>5</sup>--since their referents are not given clearly. Since the meaning of a descriptive symbol is a function of its referent (and also of the operational route followed in passing from the referent to the symbol), if the meaning of such a symbol is vague we should turn

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4. Benjamin, A. C., "The Operational Definition of Suppositional Symbols," Actes du Congres Internationale de Philosophie Scientifique, 5-8, 1935, p. 18; "Concept of the Variable-Given," Journal of Philosophy, vol. 33 (1936), p. 230; "Outlines of an Empirical Theory of Meaning," Philosophy of Science, vol. 3, (1936), pp. 250, 264.

5. Ibid., pp. 251-2; "The Operational Definition of Suppositional Symbols," op. cit., p. 9.

immediately to that which is presumed to be its referent. Therefore: (2) wherever possible, symbols are to be defined through the extensional route. But the denotative method is obviously inapplicable to intensional symbols. However, such symbols have precise intensional relations to other symbols in the system, and may take on meaning through this route. Therefore (3) where symbols cannot be defined through the intensional route, viz. through their relations to symbols which can be defined through the extensional route. Benjamin makes the point that this does not lead to a division of symbols into two sharply differentiated groups, extensional and intensional: for intensional symbols are simply extensional symbols whose "distance" from the "given" is great instead of small.<sup>6</sup> Thus an empirical theory of meaning has the task of arranging all symbols into a series, on the basis of their "operational distance" from certain clearly given entities which may be called empirical data.<sup>7</sup>

That the elaboration of theories of meaning has been restricted for the most part to the language of science is shown in particular by the fact that, as Morris points out,

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6. For an account of the "given", as Benjamin uses this term, see "Concept of the Variable-Given," op. cit.

7. Ibid.; "Outlines of an Empirical Theory of Meaning," op. cit., p. 265. Compared with Morris' sign-analysis,

logical syntax (from which originate the names "syntactics" and "the syntactical dimension") "has limited its investigation of syntactical structure to the type of sign combinations which are dominant in science". And he adds that there are, then, "syntactical problems in the fields of perceptual signs, aesthetic signs, the practical use of signs, and general linguistics which have not yet been treated within the framework of what today is regarded as logical syntax, and yet which form part of syntactics as this is here conceived." This no doubt is the reason why it was so

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Benjamin's empirical theory of meaning represents the meaning situation as a two-dimensional affair; for Benjamin expressly neglects the pragmatical dimension. "I shall consider symbols only in their function as conveyers of meaning," he writes. "That symbols have emotive and volitional properties as well, that they have elaborate and complicated relations to the self which uses them...these facts I recognize but choose to neglect." (*Ibid.*, p. 250) It thus is less adequate in this respect than the view formulated by Morris; but a further aspect is also worthy of notice, namely, the relationship between "extensional" and "intensional" symbols. As Benjamin expresses it, the difference between them is simply in terms of distance from the "given". In other words, "intensional" symbols, relative to "extensional" symbols, only represent a higher degree of abstraction. Hence Benjamin's distinction between extensional and intensional symbols cannot--as might at first appear--be said to correspond to Morris' distinction between the semantical and the syntactical dimensions. On Morris' account of syntactics, what is taken note of are all the formal properties involved in the relationship of symbols to another, abstraction from referents and users being made for all such symbols. Thereby the variety of such formal characters may be taken into account and their full influence upon the meaning of the judgment may be assessed.

8. Morris, "Foundations of a Theory of Signs," *op. cit.*, p.16.

difficult to see<sup>9</sup> the precise way in which a syntactical analysis might aid in throwing light upon the meaning of moral judgments. Involved here is the distinction between pure and descriptive semiotic,<sup>10</sup> --a distinction which applies as well to each of the sub-sciences of semiotic; thus syntactics has a pure and a descriptive part, the former elaborating the language in which to talk about the syntactical dimension of moral signs, the latter consisting of any actual case of analysis of this dimension of a moral judgment. The difficulty with which we are here concerned is, then, a difficulty in pure syntactics. In speaking of esthetic syntactics, Morris claims it to have the relation to esthetic discourse that logical syntax has to scientific discourse, both being subdivisions of the still more inclusive field of syntactics concerned with the syntactical relations of all forms of discourse, art and science being only two such forms. And he remarks that logical syntax, being the best developed part of syntactics, offers a fertile field of suggestions in this respect: the concepts of logical syntax (such as formation and transformation rules, primitive terms and sentences, consequence relation, probability relation, demonstration, derivation, valid,

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9. Supra, p. ~~XX~~. 80

10. See Morris, ibid., p. 9.

contravalid, synonymity) can be regarded as special cases of even more general concepts which equally well find special exemplifications in other forms of discourse (aesthetic, technological, etc.).<sup>11</sup> Thus the task of ethical syntactics is to arrive at those special exemplifications of logical syntax, if any such exist, with which to<sup>12</sup> investigate the syntactical dimension of moral judgment.

It may, or may not, be of some significance, with regard to the relative importance of the various dimensions of moral judgments, that a systematic approach to the pragmatic investigation of the functioning of signs in such judgments can, in outline at least, be most readily envisaged. It should be the virtue of the pragmatic analysis

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11. Morris, C. W., "Esthetics and the Theory of Signs," op. cit., p. 142. He continues, with regard to esthetics: "Thus in any work of art (say a piece of music) there are only certain sign vehicles which are used ("primitive terms"); these are initially combined only in certain ways ("formation rules"); from certain combinations other combinations are obtained, or the range of combination obtainable is at least limited in certain respects ("transformation rules", "consequence relation", "probability relation"); certain combinations are congruous or incongruous with other combinations ("valid", "contravalid")."

12. If the first problem is that of selecting a specific method of sign analysis, then this would be a special problem implicated by the selection of semiotic. That is, if semiotic were chosen as the technical method, in that it is oriented to the analysis of "scientific discourse" one of the problems which would devolve on the ethicist would be that of working out a language to talk about the syntactical dimension of moral judgments.

to provide a corrective for the scandalously thin conception of human nature which has characterized too many ethical theories in the past.<sup>13</sup> The suggestion here is that pragmatics would require at least three types of information: (1) information which is formal in the sense that it describes in general the factors which would be referred to in any genetic account of human nature. This is needed in order to know both what sciences give us relevant knowledge, and with regard to these, the relative importance of the factors which are the objects of study of the various sciences. (2) Information which is material, in the sense that it provides heuristic concepts, the character of which is determined by the results of the first type of analysis (e.g. the social-psychological approach will provide a different set of concepts than the psychologistic or biological). Such concepts will constitute a more or less flexible schematism for the purposes of (3) information which is concrete in the sense that it is composed of the results gained by particular investigations indicated by the second type of analysis and carried out by means of whatever methods have been developed in the relevant fields.

Doubtless there would arise out of the pragmatic analysis a recognition of the lacunae in the knowledge

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13. Curiously enough, this indictment holds true very often of so-called "empirical" theories of ethics.

provided by the social sciences upon the correction of  
which a successful investigation would depend.<sup>14</sup> For  
example, until there is a unified psychology, fruitful in-  
vestigations of the pragmatical dimension will be delayed;  
since, obviously, this is a case in which the philosopher  
must wait upon the psychologist.<sup>15</sup> However, in clarifying  
the need for information, and the corresponding failure  
of any particular science in this respect, empirical ethics  
may perform the traditional function of philosophy of  
stimulating the sciences.

In a sense the conception of ethics for which at  
least a suggestion as to a program has been made, involves  
a task of real enormity. It takes all moral experience  
for its province, promises a close study of it as it is  
brought to a focus in the moral judgments of mankind, and

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14. Cf. Lynd, R., Knowledge For What? Princeton University Press, 1939, for a critical consideration of the present status of the social sciences.

15. Cf. Woodworth, R. S., Contemporary Schools of Psychology, New York, The Ronald Press Co., 1931. Parenthetically, it would appear that the fact of a lack of a unified science of psychology should curb, to some extent, at least the dogmatism with which ethical theories make psychological pronouncements; but such dogmatism appears even in the case of avowedly "empirical" treatments of ethics (see, e.g. Schlick, M., Problems of Ethics, New York, Prentice Hall, 1939).

seeks after generalizations which may serve a reconstructive function in the life of the moral man. From another point of view, however, such an ethics has taken upon itself the vow of humility, insofar as it genuinely embodies the methodological outlook of the empirical sciences. Its conclusions must eschew the absolute certainty for which its past ambitions have entertained a desire. And while it has a basis in the achievements of past ethicists, yet it is sufficiently altered in viewpoint and orientation as to involve the undertaking of it in some risk. Whether it would fulfil the promises envisaged here can be discovered only by an attempt to carry out the procedures to which it directs us.

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