A CRITIQUE OF LOGICAL POSITIVISM

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Philosophy for our Times

A CRITIQUE OF LOGICAL POSITIVISM

by

C. E. M. JOAD

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INTRODUCTION

Occasion of Book

In the summer of 1948 an article appeared in the *New Statesman* under the signature of Oxonian on the condition of contemporary Oxford. Among other matters it drew attention to the vogue of Logical Positivism and, in particular, to the influence of Professor Ayer's book, *Language, Truth and Logic*, which, published in 1936, "has in Oxford since the end of the war acquired almost the status of a philosophic Bible".

The effect of the book is, Oxonian maintained, to discourage any probing into "deeper meanings" by its exclusion of value judgments and its dismissal of metaphysics as nonsense. It has, therefore, he concluded, engendered a negative climate of opinion which is favourable to Fascism, "since Fascism steps into the vacuum left by an abeyance of concern with fundamental human values". The article attracted a considerable amount of attention and evoked a number of letters mainly from supporters of Logical Positivism disclaiming any political or social influence for logical positivist doctrines and, in particular, repudiating the suggestion that they give indirect encouragement to Fascism by contributing to the formation of a climate of opinion favourable to its growth. For my part, I ventured to doubt whether these disclaimers were justified. I gave expression to this doubt in an article which was published in the *New Statesman* in which, without hazarding any opinion as to whether the doctrines of Logical Positivism were true—a word, by the way, which in any commonly accepted interpretation logical positivists would promptly repudiate as meaningless—I put the question whether they were calculated to have the effect which Oxonian attributed to them, a question which I answered in the affirmative.

The number of letters which the article elicited was a surprise to the editor, no less than to the writer. I doubt, indeed, if any article on a purely academic topic had for years evoked so considerable a response. It was evident that the subject of Logical Positivism, though comparatively unknown to the

intellectual public which at this time was interesting itself in Existentialism, was of immense interest to many professional and amateur philosophers, to students of philosophy and to those who dwell intellectually on what may be called the philosophic fringe.

Logical Positivism seemed to be at a stage of development analogous to that of Materialism in the 60's and 70's of the last century and of Marxism in the first two decades of this century. It was, that is to say, a body of philosophic doctrine which, already fashionable among professional philosophers, was only awaiting the appropriate exponent or, it may be, the timely occasion to capture the intellectual public at large. For there were certain respects in which, it was obvious, the doctrine was highly congenial to the climate of the times.

A University teacher is in a good position to observe that climate and to note its changes. Year after year he sees each October a fresh relay of young men and women enrolling as his students. What, he wonders, will be their intellectual orientation; wherein will lie their instinctive sympathies; what will be the arguments which will seem to them immediately appealing; what the conclusions which they will naturally tend to draw; what the positions which they will regard as old-fashioned, reactionary or palpably nonsensical? What, in a word, will be their preconditioning intellectual framework, a framework into which some considerations and conclusions will fit ready-made, while others can find no accommodation? For that there are these changes and that young men and women grow up in an intellectual climate which predisposes their sympathies in advance there can, I think, be little doubt. In the '20's, scepticism and "debunking" were the intellectual order of the day; in the '30's, the predominant sympathies were Marxist and the arguments of dialectical Materialism seemed to spring ready-made to the lips of the class-conscious young; in the '40's the background was, at any rate in England, predominantly logical positivist. Under its influence young men and women confidently affirm that there are no absolutes, that metaphysics is nonsense, that the scientific is the only method which reaches valid results and that the order of reality which science studies is the only order that there is. Such time-honoured denizens of the philosopher's world as the Forms of Plato, the traditional values, the True, the Beautiful and the Good, the

demonstrated God of Leibnitz and Descartes, the Absolute of Hegel and the subsistent objects of the conceptual realists are contemptuously dismissed.

Intolerance and Dogmatism

The doctrines of Logical Positivism are embraced with some of the fervour appropriate to a new religious creed. Two characteristics have traditionally been observed in the exponents of new revelations. First, intolerance and secondly, dogmatism. Something of both is observable in logical positivist polemics.

Intolerance is chiefly shown in a simple refusal to discuss metaphysical questions. These are dismissed as not wor[illegible] the attention of sensible men. When one remembers th[illegible] are precisely the questions which have, in fact, engr[illegible] attention of philosophers from Plato to Aquinas, from [illegible] to Hegel, and from Bradley to Whitehead, it is diff[illegible] resist the temptation of asking logical positivists with what authority they take it upon themselves so unceremoniously to dismiss the preoccupations of these great men.

As the exponents of the doctrine have grown older, the doctrine itself has grown milder and Professor Ayer now tells us[1] that it is only to *one* proper sense of the word "meaning" that the verification principle applies. There may, it now appears, be other senses of the word "meaning", and he allows the possibility that metaphysical statements may have meaning in one of these other senses. Indeed "for the effective elimination of metaphysics" the principle "needs", we are now told, "to be supported by detailed analyses of particular metaphysical arguments". (The detailed analysis by the way is far from being always forthcoming.)

But it is not the milder form of the doctrine, which allows that metaphysics may not be nonsense that interests students. What has struck *their* imagination is the grandeur of the original assertion that metaphysics *is* nonsense.

Many contemporary minds seem to have conceived a real distaste for metaphysics. Whether this distaste is a reflection of the acceptance of logical positivist doctrines, or whether *it* is the expression in philosophy of the spirit of the times and *they* are only the modes of its rationalization, it is difficult to say.

[1] In the Introduction to the Revised (1948) Edition of *Language, Truth and Logic*.

The fact is, however, undeniable, and students of philosophy are heard to echo the traditional complaint that traditional logic is word-chopping and traditional metaphysics barren and empty speculation. Some go further and intimate that the classical preoccupations of philosophers are not only time-wasting but deliberately obscurantist. Their suggestion is that philosophy, as ordinarily conceived, has turned men's minds away from the only reality that matters, the reality of the scientist's world, and entangled them in a web of word-spinning about questions that have no meaning. The time-honoured discussions of philosophy are, they intimate, eternal, precisely because they can never be settled. For the conclusions of the discussions are conclusions about nothing or, more precisely, they only report to us the ways in which philosophers have decided to use words. In dismissing these discussions and their conclusions, logical positivists speak of them with a real repugnance. Traditional metaphysics is, for them, an incubus which philosophy has carried for too long and they see themselves in the light of liberators who have come to release philosophers from their burden. Or they speak of traditional philosophy as if it were no more than a mass of superstition, which it was their mission to dispel. . . .

Their general attitude is, then, that of philosophic radicals who, conscious of a mission, share to the full the confident aggressiveness of their political prototypes.

The second characteristic which logical positivists share with the exponents of religious revelation is dogmatism. It is impossible to read logical positivist literature without being struck by the recurrence of dogmatic statements. Doctrines such as the verification principle, the "emotive theory" of ethics, or the theory of logical constructions are simply announced, as if they formed part of a revelation which, denied to all previous philosophers with the exception of Hume, in whom glimmerings of the light first appeared, has been suddenly vouchsafed to the third, fourth and fifth decades of the twentieth century. The Viennese circle were particularly given to the making of such announcements. . . .

Or there are the frequent assertions that some philosophical problem has been definitely settled. "We shall see", writes Ayer, "when we come finally to settle the conflict between Idealism and Realism", or, he speaks of, "the dispute between

rationalists and empiricists of which we have now finally disposed".

The claim to have settled once and for all a number of the disputes which for centuries have so bootlessly agitated the misguided intellects of mankind Logical Positivism shares with Marxism, as it shares its intolerance.

Heat. Intolerance and dogmatism combine to engender heat. A discussion with logical positivists offers a curious contrast between the matter and the manner—the matter so abstract and mild, the manner so eager and hot. Logical Positivism holds that most ethical judgments are "emotive"; they are not judgments to the effect that so and so is right or wrong, good or bad, they are ejaculations of the emotions of approval and disapproval. The attitude adopted in discussion to dissenters would seem to bear out at any rate the emotional part of this doctrine. Disagreement is equated with sin and is heatedly brushed aside, while failure to understand some abstruse trend of reasoning is ascribed less to the thickheadedness that cannot, than to the wilful prejudice that will not see. To venture a doubt in regard to conclusions, to point out inconsistencies in the methods of reaching them, is to assist the forces of obscurantism and to do a disservice to the cause of enlightenment.

The bewildered participant finds himself reminded of the atmosphere which pervaded the discussion of the early Christian heresies. Looking back after 1500 years, we marvel that Arian should have controverted so fiercely with Athanasian and Nestorian should have waxed so hot with Monophysite about points of doctrine whose moment is to us so small, whose content is so obscure and in regard to which the truth is, one would have thought, incapable of determination.

So, I think, in some future time philosophers may look back on our contemporary discussions of the correct analysis of sentences and the various meanings of meaning and wonder that men should have contrived to feel so strongly about matters whose theoretical import is obscure and whose practical relevance is non-existent. And then he may find significance in the resemblance of circumstances. The civilization of St. Augustine and St. Athanasius, which had continued comparatively unchanged for the best part of a thousand years, was about to collapse. In this prospect St. Augustine and those

who controverted with him betrayed in their discussions no interest whatever, nor did the matters which concerned them have any relevance to the forces of change which were about to engulf the ancient world. A similar indifference, a similar remoteness characterizes the discussions of contemporary Logical Positivism.

New Revelations

Nor is this the only point of similarity. In the early development of religious movements, history attests the frequent appearance of new revelations. Each fresh revelation claims, as it appears, to supersede its predecessors. *Their* inspiration is imperfect, suspect or out of date; *their* interpretation is mistaken; *it* and *it* alone conveys the pure milk of the true doctrine. When such claims are made, we are, it is obvious, witnessing the birth of a heresy, for, whichever of the competing claimants to be the repository of the true doctrine ultimately establishes itself as the current orthodoxy, by the very fact of its success it convicts its rivals of being heresies. It was so with the heresy of Arianism which was made heretical by reason of the victory of Trinitarianism as expounded in the Athanasian creed. It is so in contemporary Russia where interpretations of Marxist doctrine such as those of Trotsky or Bukharin were convicted of deviationism by the establishment of Leninism, subsequently transformed into Stalinism, as *the* correct interpretation of the Marxist Bible.

The condition of Christianity presents an analogous phenomenon. A number of different sects put forward competing claims to embody the true doctrine of Jesus Christ. All alike are denounced as heretical with comprehensive impartiality by the Catholic Church. This is extremely embarrassing for the critic of Christianity, since, whatever doctrine he selects for examination and criticism, a host of demurrers will always be found to insist that this is not the *true* Christian doctrine, that no responsible or authoritative body of Christians has ever held it—or has held it for at least a hundred years—and that he would be well advised to get up his subject to the extent of finding out what Christians do, in fact, believe before he ventures to criticize their beliefs. A reaction on these lines may be expected, *whatever* version of Christianity is selected for examination.

Allowing for the reduction in scale the situation which confronts the critic of Logical Positivism is not dissimilar. Having

regard to the widespread and growing influence of Logical Positivism, a critical examination of its main doctrines would, I thought, be not untimely. I wanted to find out on what precisely this widespread influence was based and to form a judgment as to whether it was merited, hoping that, if my examination showed that the influence was excessive, something might perhaps be effected in the way of diminishing it.

Where, then, was I to look for an authoritative exposition of logical positivist doctrine? The answer that immediately suggested itself was that such an exposition was to be found in Professor Ayer's book *Language, Truth and Logic*. This book had been described in the article in the *New Statesman* to which I have already referred as possessing "almost the status of a philosophic Bible" and I could myself testify to the considerable influence which it had exerted on the minds of students with whom, in the last few years, I had been in contact. I accordingly decided to take this book as my text. When, however, I came to act upon this decision, I found myself faced with a number of difficulties.

To the first of these I have already alluded. It is the difficulty which the critics of Logical Positivism share with the critics of contemporary Christianity. So soon as I mentioned a particular doctrine of Ayer's and indicated objections to which, as it seemed to me, it was exposed, voices were raised to assure me that I was wasting my powder and shot since, either the doctrine in question was not a part of Logical Positivism proper or, though it had once been held by logical positivists, it was now generally abandoned. The name of some other exponent of Logical Positivism would then be mentioned as more authoritative or more up to date. No longer Ayer's but ———'s work was, it would be intimated, now the repository of the true doctrine. In this connexion the names of Professors Ryle or Wisdom would frequently be mentioned, or philosophers in America would be invoked, or the remnant of the Viennese circle. . . . More recently my attention has been drawn to the doctrines of an Oxford teacher, whose contribution to a certain Symposium embodied a variation of logical positivist doctrine which put all the others out of court. This, I was assured, was the very latest thing. The only drawback to taking this latest version as my text, was that apart from the contribution in question, this particular teacher did not appear to have committed his views to

paper. The truth is that whatever statement of Logical Positivism one takes, one runs the risk of being told that it is out of date, or that it represents a deviationist view. Other critics have, I know, found themselves equally at a loss to discover what the doctrine is with which at any given moment what may be called the authoritative and orthodox version of Logical Positivism is to be identified.

A not dissimilar difficulty arises in regard to name. A number of allied doctrines which during the last twenty years have been fashionable in philosophy have been referred to under titles of which Logical Positivism, Logical Analysis, Metaphysical Analysis and Philosophical Analysis are the best known. Whatever doctrine a critic may single out for treatment as forming an integral part of logical positivist theory, he runs the risk of being told that whatever else Logical Positivism may maintain, this particular doctrine is *not* part of Logical Positivism, though it may, of course, be maintained by some other school as, for example, that of Philosophical Analysis.

Many of its adherents have always shown a certain dissatisfaction with the denomination of their school of thought as Logical Positivism and displayed such impatience and, as the years have passed, such increasing impatience, when the title of "logical positivist" has been applied to their doctrines as to justify the allusion of a well-known Oxford historian to "the subject . . . which now spends its time debating whether it was once correct to describe it as Logical Positivism".

Yet a further difficulty was constituted by the fact that Ayer himself had recently brought out a revised edition of his book in the Introduction to which some of the most characteristic doctrines enunciated in the first edition had been so modified that they had, as it seemed to me, lost most of what might be called their striking force. Some had even been retracted.

Finally, many of the doctrines of Logical Positivism cut at the root of traditional philosophical procedures and have therefore been subjected to extensive criticism. Hence, whatever criticisms I might myself suggest would be to a certain extent a re-statement of objections that had already been ventilated.

In spite of these disabilities I decided to go on with my original plan of subjecting to a fairly detailed examination the doctrines contained in the first edition of *Language, Truth and Logic*. My reasons were two. First, I was chiefly interested in the

effects of Logical Positivism upon contemporary thought. In particular, I wanted to satisfy myself as to whether it was, indeed, calculated to produce the effects which Oxonian had attributed to it. Now, it was Ayer's statement of Logical Positivism which, it was generally agreed, had been influential and it was the original statement contained in the first edition, not the modifications and retractions of the Introduction to the second that had attracted the attention of young philosophers or of non-philosophers. The doctrine as modified was not calculated to have the striking impact of the original statement, apart from the fact that there had not been time for the revised version to influence the thinking of non-specialists.

Secondly, although the criticisms of Logical Positivism had been numerous they had been scattered over a wide field, appearing in a number of periodicals, papers read to Societies and contributions to symposia. Most of them were, moreover, directed against some particular point of logical positivist theory. It would, I thought, be valuable to gather these various criticisms together and to present them within the confines of a single volume, so that they constituted what might fairly be called a critical examination of the doctrine as a whole. Only in this way, I thought, would it be possible to obtain a general view of Logical Positivism, of its claims and of their validity, and so to form a judgment as to whether the important influence it had undoubtedly exerted were such as it was justly entitled to exert.

That it Makes No Difference

As I indicated at the beginning, the immediate intention of this book is practical. I am concerned to enquire what effects are liable to be produced by Logical Positivism upon the minds of those who are brought into contact with it and to consider whether these are such as are desirable. The answer to these questions may most appropriately be given after I have reviewed the main doctrines of Logical Positivism more particularly as they touch upon ethics and aesthetics, and have discussed the emotive theory of value. I shall, therefore, return to the question in the final chapter of this book. Here I confine myself to one specific point. *Prima facie*, the practical effects of the wholesale repudiation of the traditional claims of philosophy might, if it could be sustained, be expected to be considerable. The dismissal

of God, freedom and immortality as the appropriate subjects of mature consideration and discussion, the abandonment of metaphysics in favour of the analysis of the meaning of words are no small matters; the change involved in substituting for the understanding of the universe the better understanding of certain sentences is no minor change. Hence, one might expect those who at an early stage of their philosophical thinking have been exposed to the impact of these modes of thought to exhibit a noticeably different cast of mind from that of most of their predecessors. I believe the expectation to be justified.

Logical positivists, however, repudiate the suggestion that their doctrines have any *extra* philosophical effect. How, they ask, can the adoption of logical positivist methods affect a man's attitude to ethics, aesthetics, politics or theology, seeing that these are expressly excluded from the scope of logical positivist discussion on the ground that no fruitful philosophical statements can be made about them? In this connexion the Berkeleyan analysis of the physical world in terms of ideas and sensations is sometimes cited as an analogy. Philosophers are agreed that Dr. Johnson's alleged refutation of Berkeley by kicking a stone is no refutation at all, because the analysis of a physical thing as a congeries of ideas does not imply that we do not experience the qualities that we believe ourselves to experience, or enjoy and suffer the sensations which we believe ourselves to enjoy and suffer. To analyse a table as a collection of ideas instead of as a collection of molecules and atoms makes no difference to our view of the table as the object at which we dine, or to our confidence in its trustworthiness as a foundation for plates, knives and forks. All that Berkeley has done is, it is said, to give to the table an analysis other than that which common sense unreflectingly accepts. This, I think, is true. But the postulated analogy between the logical positivist and the Berkeleyan analysis is misleading for two reasons.

First, as regards metaphysics, Berkeley's ideas continue to exist when the mind of the perceiver ceases to experience them; they exist in the mind of God. Now, Berkeley's God is a metaphysical entity according to the usage of the word, "metaphysical", adopted by logical positivists, that is to say, his existence is not verifiable by sense-experience; therefore, the ideas as they exist in God's mind are also metaphysical entities. Berkeley, then, did not deny metaphysics; on the contrary, a metaphysical

system formed the basis—as he believed, the necessary basis—of the empirical world. Berkeley was, then, I think, justified in claiming that the analysis of the familiar world in terms of mental ideas makes no difference to a man's practice and no relevant difference to his theological and philosophical beliefs. By "no relevant difference" I mean that men's beliefs (i) in an objective world existing independently of the perceiver's experience; and (ii) in an order of reality which exists independently of, is not verifiable by and is not, therefore, capable of being an object of *any* sense-experience remains unaffected.

Neither of these beliefs can, I submit, be validly entertained by those who take the logical positivist view. Nor is it the case that the abandonment of either of them does not, or at least ought not to make any difference to a man's outlook. On the important issue as to whether there is an order of reality other than the natural order which gives meaning to and supplies a purpose for the life of man as a member of the natural order, the difference must, I submit, if these beliefs really *are* abandoned, be crucial.

In support of this contention I call in witness the case of Hume. Pushing Berkeley's empiricist premises to their logical conclusion, he left no rational ground for believing either in an objective world existing independently of the perceiver, or in an order of reality inaccessible to sense-experience. His position is, in fact, reducible to Solipsism. Now, if one really believed that Solipsism was true, the fact would, I think, make a considerable difference to one's outlook. Hume did not believe this and was careful to guard himself against any such suggestion by affirming not that there was no independent world and no objective order of reality, but that he could find no rational grounds for believing in them. His conclusion was, in effect, "so much the worse for reason". The effect of his philosophy is, then, to belittle reason in order to exalt feeling, his contention being that our fundamental philosophical beliefs are the products of our passional rather than of our intellectual natures. This is an arguable position, but it is not the position of Logical Positivism.

The bearing of the implications of the logical positivist position upon the traditional beliefs of mankind are, therefore, more radical than the implications of Hume's. Logical positivist conclusions really do eviscerate the universe.

Secondly, as regards ethics, theology and aesthetics, Berkeley's analysis leaves traditional philosophy untouched. He does not believe and nowhere suggests that "right", "good" and "God" are meaningless terms, or that ethical judgments and theological statements are only emotive. Hence, so far as axiology is concerned, Berkeley's empiricism is compatible with a straightforward objectivism which accepts the presence in the universe both of ethical and of aesthetic values.

Berkeley also, especially in his later writings, postulated the existence of *a priori* knowledge and conceded most of what the rationalists had claimed. God, the self and ethical values were all, for him, included in that "knowledge of spirits" which he called "notional". For these reasons, I think that the analogy referred to above is misleading.

The effects of Logical Positivism will be considered in more detail in Chapter IX.

Eviscerate: Take out the viscera, vital contents

Axiology:

A priori Knowledge Berkeley called "notional."

CHAPTER I

LOGICAL POSITIVISM. ITS METHODS AND PURPOSES

The Method of Analysis

What is the aim of the body of doctrine known as Logical Positivism?

The aim is analytic; it is so to analyse sentences and to examine the usage of words that thought is clarified and a new approach is rendered possible to the traditional problems of philosophical discussion. As a result of this approach many are found to disappear, not so much because they have been solved as because they are seen to be false problems which should never have been raised. That they have in fact arisen is due to muddled thinking, but the muddled thinking is itself largely the product of the inaccurate use of language.

More explicitly, it is the purpose of philosophy to provide definitions: "It is the purpose of a philosophical definition", Ayer writes, "to dispel those confusions which arise from our imperfect understanding of certain types of sentence in our language." It is pointed out that while words are symbols, many of the words used in the English language are ambiguous symbols. Take the word "is", for example. "If", says Ayer, "we were guided merely by the form of the sign, we should assume that the word 'is', which occurs in the sentence 'He is the author of that book' was the same symbol as the 'is' which occurs in the sentence 'A cat is a mammal'." But when we have analysed the two sentences in such a way as to reveal their logical structure, we find that "is" means something different in each case. Thus, the first sentence "is equivalent to 'He and no one else wrote that book', and the second to 'The class of mammals contains the class of cats'".

Again, we normally suppose that the word "exists" is a symbol which has a distinctive meaning. But logical positivists claim to be able to show that existence is not an attribute, that its presence in a sentence adds nothing to the meaning of the

sentence, and that we have only been led into thinking that it does so by reason of the fact that "sentences which express existential propositions and sentences which express attributive propositions may be of the same grammatical form". To point out the various meanings of the word "is" is to throw an important light on the problem of universals, which the abandonment of the notion that existence is an attribute enables logical positivists to eliminate such concepts as those of Being and Reality and contributes therefore to their repudiation of metaphysics.

Similarly with regard to things: material things are represented as logical constructions out of sense-contents, in the sense that sentences which contain words which stand for material things can (and apparently should) be translated into sentences which contain words which are symbols for sense-contents.

These are examples of the way in which the doctrine that philosophy is concerned with verbal definitions and the analysis of sentences is applied and developed in practice.

Its Purpose and Intention

But to what end is it applied? This question of the end or purpose of the analysis of sentences is one to which, as it seems to me, insufficient attention has been given. Why, for example, to take the last illustrative instance, *should* sentences about material things be translated into sentences about sense-contents? What is gained by the translation? Or what is the purpose of translating "the author of *Waverley* was Scotch" into "one person and one person only wrote *Waverley*, and that person was Scotch"? The answer, presumably, is that as a result of the translation some light is thrown upon the traditional problems of philosophy. More precisely, the claim is that clarity of thought is so effectively promoted that when exhibited in the light of the logical positivist method of analysis and translation many, perhaps most, of the problems of philosophy disappear.

And so, no doubt, they do. But they disappear not because they have been solved but because they are dismissed.

A Demand for Results

Logical Positivism, as we have seen, makes extravagant claims. This time-honoured problem, we are told, is settled, that disposed of.

Let us, then, put the questions, what single problem of the kind which has traditionally concerned philosophers has been solved by the method of analysis, and what is the solution? What philosophical questions has the application of logical positivist methods finally answered; what agreed conclusions have philosophers who have followed the precepts of Logical Positivism to show? If by "settled", "answered" and "agreed" we mean settled and answered to the satisfaction of, and agreed by most other philosophers, we must, I think, reply "none".

Hence, when we are asked to consider and assess the claims made on behalf of Logical Positivism, it is, I suggest, not unreasonable of us to make some such request as the following: "Please be so good as to show us a list of the results, of the agreed results, that your method has achieved and of the answers, the agreed answers, that it has supplied." No such list is, I submit, forthcoming. If one considers the actual specimens of analysis advanced by logical positivists, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the sentences in which they issue are very different from what the ordinary man means by the common-sense statements of which the logical positivist claims that the sentences are an analysis. Thus, let us suppose that a man asserts the common-sense proposition X which, logical positivists tell him as the result of analysis, is equivalent to $Y+Z$. While believing X to be true, the common-sense man is nevertheless apt vigorously to deny that X is, in fact, equivalent to $Y+Z$ and proceeds therefore, vigorously to deny that $Y+Z$ is true.

Consider by way of illustration such a proposition as, "this is good". Now there cannot, I submit, be any doubt that when he asserts this proposition, the common-sense man means that "this" is good, whatever anybody may happen to think or feel about it. In other words, he believes that there are ethical qualities which really belong to "objects" such as people, their characters, situations and lines of conduct, and that there are independent ethical principles by which these qualities can be judged and assessed. The ordinary man in other words is an unreflecting ethical objectivist.

Now, according to the logical positivist analysis, these beliefs which the ordinary man unreflectingly entertains are wholly mistaken. If Logical Positivism is right, when the ordinary man says, "this is good", he is not asserting anything about "this"; indeed, he is not asserting a proposition at all. All that he is

doing is to express an emotion by making sounds in his larynx and ejaculating his breath. Hence, if Logical Positivism is right in the analysis which it offers of the proposition "this is good", ordinary language is grossly misleading. "There is", says a logical positivist writer in a recent symposium on *The Emotive Theory of Ethics*, "a pervasive tendency to error in our ordinary ethical language."[1] He illustrates this tendency by the common use of the word "good".

"We are", he writes, "equally deceived in our use of the word 'good'; we use it to mean an attribute entirely independent of minds, but there is no such attribute." It is hard to resist the conclusions:

(*a*) That it is not the meaning of language, *as it is actually used*, that is being analysed but the meaning of language as it *would* be used if (i) the logical positivist theory of ethics were correct, and (ii) people expressed themselves accurately in conformity with the results of the logical positivist analysis of what appear *prima facie* to be ethical situations.

(*b*) That the analysis of the meaning of ethical propositions which is offered to us differs from what the ordinary man would agree to be their true meaning and from the meaning which he intends ethical terms to bear when he uses them.

Nor is the case of ethics in this respect peculiar. I know of no instance in which the philosophical analysis of a common-sense proposition proposed by a logical positivist philosopher has been *generally* accepted as being what the proposition does, in fact, mean.

With a view to substantiating this generalization I propose to consider in a little more detail what is the logical positivist doctrine in regard to philosophical method and what are the results that are claimed for the application of the methods which logical positivists approve. I shall include in my consideration of method what Logical Positivism has to say about the aims and scope of philosophy.

The logical positivist doctrine in regard to the method, aims and scope of philosophy may be divided into two parts. There is the positive doctrine as to the method which philosophy should follow and as to the kind of result it is capable of achieving, and there is the negative doctrine as to the methods

[1] *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. XXII. Contribution by Richard Robinson to a symposium on *The Emotive Theory of Ethics*.

which philosophers have, in fact, followed, but should not have followed in the past, and the kind of conclusions which their mistaken methods have been mistakenly supposed to reach.

Positive Doctrine as to the Methods, Scope and Aims of Philosophy

Putting together a number of different statements from Ayer's book we may summarize the positive doctrine of Logical Positivism in regard to the method of philosophy as follows.

The philosopher does not, or should not, as he has been commonly thought to do, "analyse facts or notions or even things". Indeed, it is only in a Pickwickian sense that "facts", "notions" and "things" can be said to exist to be analysed. The philosopher's proper concern is with definitions, to be precise, with the "definitions of the corresponding words". But the definitions in which the philosopher is interested are not the "explicit" definitions one finds in a dictionary; they are "definitions in *use*". A symbol, that is, a word in *use* is defined "by showing how the sentences in which it significantly occurs can be translated into equivalent sentences, which contain neither the *definiendum* itself, nor any of its synonyms". Now, this process of translation into equivalent sentences is far from being the straightforward kind of activity which might have been supposed. The relation of equivalence—the kind of equivalence, for example, illustrated by the translation of "the author of *Waverley* was Scotch" into "one person and one person only wrote *Waverley*, and that person was Scotch" has to be deduced from, "the rules of entailment which characterize the English, or any other, language". Such deduction is a purely logical activity "and it is in this logical activity . . . that philosophical analysis consists". Now philosophical analysis is declared to be the main part of philosophy. The main function of philosophy is, then, to discover those relations of equivalence whereby sentences which are descriptive phrases containing symbols in use can be translated into equivalent sentences which do not contain the symbols or their synonyms. The effect of such translation is "to increase our understanding of certain sentences", and, as we have seen, the hope is expressed that in consequence we shall be able "to dispel those confusions which arise from our imperfect understanding of certain types of sentences in our language". To reveal the logical structure of language is to clarify thought and dispel confusion. It is because thought has

been clarified and confusion dispelled that we get the confident claims to have solved problems and settled disputes to which reference has already been made.

The method must, it is obvious, be judged by its results and to an examination of these much of the ensuing book is devoted. It is because the results are, after all, what matter that I asked above whether there is a single instance of an analysis effected by logical positivist methods which has resulted in the solution of a philosophical problem which is an agreed solution, or in the clearing up of a philosophical confusion which most philosophers would agree to have disappeared. It is because the results are, after all, what matters that I have ventured the opinion that instead of agreed statements and solved problems, we are presented only with theories whose status is no higher than that of other philosophical theories and with conclusions to which only some philosophers subscribe. This opinion the detailed account contained in the following chapters of the treatment by logical positivists of familiar philosophical problems seeks to substantiate.

Meanwhile, to illustrate the opinion, I cite Ayer's treatment of the problem of the so-called "real" qualities of physical things, some account of which is given at the end of Chapter II.[1] Now can it, I venture to ask, be seriously maintained that Ayer's "solution" of the problem how, if things are resolvable into sense-contents, do we distinguish their so-called "real" from their so-called "subjective" or illusory qualities, is so immediately convincing that there can no longer be room for diversity of opinion on this issue? Or is the "emotive theory" of ethics so self-evident that objectivist and utilitarian theories of ethics can henceforward be dismissed as no longer deserving the attention of sensible men. Unless all or most philosophers agree that it *is* self-evident, the status of the "emotive theory" must remain that of a theory, one among many, which there is no reason to think that other philosophers will accept as final. Yet Ayer certainly writes as if the method of analysis which entails the reduction of a physical thing to sense-contents has produced a *final* solution of the problem of "real" qualities, and as if utilitarianism and objectivism in ethics were finally disposed of.

A similar verdict must be passed upon logical positivist

[1] See ch. II, pp. 41, 42.

findings in regard to other time-honoured problems of philosophy. The theory of logical constructions, the theory of truth, the theory of the self, the theory of the nature of physical things, the verification principle itself are all put forward as if they constituted final solutions of the problems with which they are concerned. The fact that philosophers continue to discuss these problems treating them as if they were still open questions and subjects of controversy, is, it is intimated, due either to a stupidity that does not, or to a wilfulness that will not understand. Nevertheless, if there is any substance in the arguments urged in the following pages, what Logical Positivism has to say on all these topics belongs not to the category of conclusive utterances on issues which they settle, but to that of controversial contributions on issues which are still unsettled.

Negative Doctrine as to the Methods, Scope and Aims of Philosophy

But it is the critical or negative doctrines of Logical Positivism as to the methods, scope and aims of philosophy that have attracted most attention and it is to them that it owes the major part of its influence. They consist, in effect, of a series of repudiations. I will endeavour to throw these into relief by contrasting them with what may be called the traditional view of the methods and aims of philosophy.

The Traditional Philosophy of the West

The traditional philosophy of Western Europe holds that, transcending the familiar world of things known to us by our senses and explored by science, there is another order of reality which contains values. Of these, Goodness, Beauty and Truth are pre-eminent, and constitute the grounds of ethics, aesthetics and logic respectively. In other words, it is because the universe is—or contains—a moral order that some things are right and some wrong; because it contains an aesthetic order that some things are beautiful and some ugly, and because there is such a thing as truth that some judgments are true and some false. Many philosophers would add that the universe also includes deity and that deity is the source of the values, Goodness, Truth and Beauty, being, as religion puts it, the modes of God's revelation of Himself to man. Metaphysics—the study of the reality which transcends and underlies the familiar world —is, therefore, in part, the study of the values and of God.

Such, I think, is the general deposit laid down by the philosophical thinking of Western Europe, reinforced by Christianity, over the last two thousand years. Upon those who believe in it it has a practical effect, providing them, as it does, with principles to live by and purposes to live for. The principles are those of morality; the purpose is to work for the increase of what is good, beautiful and true, both in one's life and in the world.

There is, of course, another, the empirical tradition. The empirical tradition is particularly strong in English philosophy. Starting with Locke and running through Berkeley and Hume to Mill, it denies, in so far as it is consistent, the existence of first principles revealed to the eye of reason, repudiates metaphysics and holds that all our knowledge comes to us through experience, by which it means sense-experience. There is, therefore, no order of reality other than the familiar order which our senses reveal and science explores—at least, if there is, we can have no knowledge of it. Such, with reservations, was the contention of Locke, and such, maintained with infinitely greater vigour and consistency, was the conclusion of Hume to whom logical positivists look with respect as the founder of their school. In saying that the traditional philosophy of Western Europe maintains the validity of metaphysics and the existence of objective values, I am not, of course, denying the existence of this empiricist tradition. I would merely assert that it does not and never has been, even in England where its chief strength has lain, the dominant tradition.

The Impact of Logical Positivism

What is the impact of logical positivist thought upon what I have called the dominant tradition? Ayer tells us that all propositions that have meaning may be divided into two classes, those which concern empirical matters of fact and those which philosophers have called *a priori*, which concern the "relations of ideas". The former have meaning only if they are verifiable, by which he means that "some possible sense-experience should be relevant to the determination of their truth or falsehood". Thus, it is meaningful to say that the battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815 because we can conceive the kind of sense-experience which would verify the statement. The latter are the propositions of logic and mathematics; they

are certain only because they are purely analytic; analytic propositions are tautologies. Thus the proposition $2 \times 5 = 10$ is certain only because it says the same thing in two different ways.

All metaphysical assertions, that is to say, all assertions about the nature of reality or about a realm of values transcending the familiar world are, therefore, meaningless, since only those empirical propositions have meaning which are theoretically verifiable. And, since any sense-experience must, inevitably, be an experience of the familiar world, and not, therefore, of an order of reality transcending the familiar world, no metaphysical proposition can be verified. Ayer is quite explicit on this point, telling us "that it cannot be significantly asserted that there is a non-empirical world of values".

In all these respects it is, I think, clear that the main tradition of philosophy is repudiated and the historic claims of philosophy denied. Philosophy, as traditionally conceived, may be described as a sustained endeavour to understand the universe as a whole, not, that is to say, like physics or biology or religion, some particular department of it, but the whole mass of data to which the reports of the scientist, the intuitions of the artist and the religious insight of the saint contribute no less than the day-to-day experience of the ordinary man. Men have sought to achieve this understanding not only for its own sake, because man is impelled to try to find out the nature of this puzzling universe in which his life is set, but also for practical reasons, in order that light may be thrown upon the nature and purpose of human life and deductions drawn as to the best way of living it.

Philosophy has, therefore, had the dual purpose of revealing truth and increasing virtue. In this second connexion, philosophers, as I have pointed out, have sought to provide principles to live by and purposes to live for; principles and purposes which they have endeavoured to derive from an examination of the nature of value. It is partly in order that they might perform this practical office of assisting men to lead good lives, that philosophers have striven to achieve a synoptic view of the universe as a whole.

But if Logical Positivism is right, philosophy cannot perform this function. It cannot help us to understand the universe, it cannot provide us with a synoptic view of the whole whose

different departments are explored by the sciences and it cannot light up the dark places of the world. For there is no universe other than the different departments of natural fact explored by the sciences and the world contains no dark places —at least, if certain matters are still obscure, that is only because science has not yet pushed its researches far enough.

Impotent to assist us to comprehend the universe as a whole, philosophy is no better equipped to assess the status and to define the purposes of human life. It cannot, then, provide men with purposes to live for or principles to live by. Thus, ethics goes the way of metaphysics. Indeed, the two repudiations are connected. It is because there is no meaning in things, or, at least, no meaning that philosophy can discern, that we cannot ascribe a purpose to human existence; it is because the world which we know by means of our senses and explore by the instruments of science is the only world, that questions relating to the nature and destiny of man go by default. God, freedom and immortality are subjects which it is fruitless to discuss because the terms of the discussion are meaningless.

Effect upon Ethics, Aesthetics and Religion

The charge of meaninglessness is applied in detail to ethics, aesthetics and religion. In ethics, having rejected both Utilitarianism and Subjectivism, Ayer proceeds to a statement of his own ethical views. Let us, first, suppose that ethical propositions are empirical. Now, the statement, "this is wrong", cannot, Professor Ayer points out, be wholly reduced to empirical concepts, since there is no *sense*-experience of the quality of wrongness. Since empirical propositions have meaning only if they are empirically verifiable, it follows that the statement, "this is wrong", is meaningless. Nor are ethical concepts analytic, for, Professor Ayer maintains, they are not analysable being, in fact, pseudo-concepts. (A "pseudo-concept" is only a polite name for a fiction.) What, then, is the significance of saying that such and such an action is wrong? Its significance is limited to evincing moral disapproval, the word "wrong" indicating that the statement is "attended by certain feelings in the speaker". Professor Ayer goes on, "if now I generalize . . . and say, 'Stealing money is wrong', I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning—that is, expresses no proposition which can be either true or false. It is as if I had written, 'Stealing money! ! ' " To make a judgment of ethical value is, in short, merely to make an approving or a shocked noise; it is to ejaculate emotive sounds.[1]

Similarly, with aesthetic judgments. "Aesthetic words as 'beautiful' and 'hideous' are employed . . . not to make statements of fact, but simply to express certain feelings and evoke a certain response." Aesthetic judgments, then, have no objective validity; they do not, that is to say, state (whether correctly or incorrectly) in regard to a particular object that it has value; in fact, they do not succeed in saying anything about the object at all. What they intimate is that the person who makes the judgment has certain feelings. Aesthetic value judgments, being meaningless, cannot be argued about. Hence, it means nothing to say that Beethoven is a greater musician than Mr. Gershwin, and no relevant arguments can be produced to show that he is.

Similarly also with religion. We cannot either (1) prove the existence of God, or (2) show it to be probable.

As to (1), this follows from Ayer's general position. Empirical propositions are not certain but only probable; therefore, if propositions about God were empirical, were, that is to say, based on evidence, they would have no more than probability value. In so far as the *a priori* proofs, for example, the ontological proof of God's existence are concerned, these, being analytic, are only tautologies.

As to (2), if the existence of God were probable, then the proposition that He existed would be empirical. "In that case", says Ayer, "it would be possible to deduce from it, and other empirical hypotheses, certain experiential propositions which were not deducible from those other hypotheses alone. But, in fact, this is not possible." If, on the other hand, God is a metaphysical term, if, that is to say, he belongs to a reality which transcends the world of sense-experience, He comes under the general ban on all metaphysical statements, and to say that He exists is neither true nor false. This position, as Ayer is careful to point out, is neither atheist nor agnostic; it cuts deeper than either, by asserting that all talk about God, whether pro or anti, is twaddle. These are examples of the application of the methods of logical analysis to the conclusions of what I have called the dominant tradition in philosophy.

[1] The emotive theory of ethics is considered in detail in ch. VIII.

CHAPTER II

PHYSICAL THINGS AND OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THEM

AYER MAKES three kinds of statements about physical things. (*a*) They are metaphysical and not, therefore, real entities. (*b*) They are logical constructions out of sense-contents in the sense that all statements in which, for example, the symbol, that is the word for a physical thing occurs can be translated into other statements having the same meaning, which contain words which symbolize other sorts of things, namely, sense-contents. (*c*) That no such thing as a physical thing is, therefore experienced.

(1) *Element of Dogmatism Involved*

My first comment is that the assertion that a physical thing is analysable apparently without remainder into sense-contents or, more precisely, that statements about it are analysable into other statements containing words which symbolize sense-contents is a dogma for which no sufficient reasons are given. To assert that what I *mean* when I say, "this is a table", is wholly analysable into sense-contents is certainly false, if it is taken as an account of what I *believe* myself to be meaning when I make this assertion. For I am certain that what I believe myself to mean is not merely that if I were to put my hand in a certain position I should experience certain sense-contents, if I were to walk in a certain direction, others, if I were to close an eye, yet others and so on; I am certain, that is to say, that what I believe myself to mean is not *wholly* definable in terms of actual and possible sense-experiences. I am certain that I also believe myself to mean that there is a physical thing, a table, which is the cause of these sense-experiences. Nor is any purpose served by telling me that I do not mean this, when I am quite sure that I do.

But the relevant question may be not, "is this what I believe myself to mean?" but "is this what I *ought* to believe myself to mean", leading to the further question, "is this what I do in

fact mean?" Ayer's main reason for saying that I *ought* not to believe myself to mean this, derives from his ban on "metaphysical" objects, a ban which in its turn is derived from the principle of verification to be considered in the next chapter.

Now it may be the case—strong arguments can, indeed, be adduced for supposing that it is the case—that when I say "this is a table", making what is *prima facie* a statement about an external object, it is only by making certain observations, observations which may be analysed in terms of sense-experiences that I can verify my statement. But to deduce from the fact that it is only by having certain sense-experiences that I can verify my statement that the *meaning* of the statement is the mode of its verification is a dogma.[1] Nor is any sufficient ground given for identifying the meaning of a proposition as Ayer does, with "the observations which would lead" me "under certain conditions to accept the proposition as being true or reject it as being false".

(2) *Reduction to Solipsism*

If to say, "this is a table" means, "I am having and may have certain sense-experiences" or, as Ayer puts it, that I know that some "possible sense-experience" would "be relevant to the determination of the truth or falsehood" of the statement, and if this is all that it means, if, in other words, my knowledge of the table is completely analysable into actual and possible sense-contents, then I do not see how it is possible to resist a reduction of the position to Solipsism. Ayer says that he is not a solipsist and from time to time seeks to defend himself against the charge. Let us, however, consider the implications of the following propositions:

(*a*) "Material things are constituted by sense-contents", although sense-contents are not *parts* of material things. To say that "things" are constituted by sense-content entails that things are logical constructions[2] statements about which are reducible to statements about sense-contents.

(*b*) The term "sense-content" is used "to refer to the immediate data not merely of 'outer' but also of 'introspective' sensation".

(*c*) Sense-contents are parts of experience: "We define a

[1] The dogma is, in fact, the principle of verification which is examined in ch. III.
[2] See ch. V, pp. 79–86, for an account and criticism of the doctrine of logical constructions.

sense-content not as the object, but as a part of a sense-experience. And from this it follows that the existence of a sense-content always entails the existence of a sense-experience."

If in the light of these statements we put the question, "what is it that I know when I think I am knowing a material thing?", Ayer's answer is that I am knowing sense-contents which are a part of my sense-experience. Since all our knowledge of the external world is analysed in this way, I conclude that the resultant position is that of Solipsism.

(A similar difficulty attaches to Ayer's treatment of the self, a treatment which, in my view, is open to a similar criticism. I urge this criticism in another chapter.)[1]

Ayer, as I have said, seeks to defend himself against the charge of Solipsism. "It appears", he writes, "that the fact that a man's sense-experiences are private to himself, inasmuch as each of them contains an organic sense-content which belongs to his body and to no other, is perfectly compatible with his having good reason to believe in the existence of other men."

Now other men are defined "in terms of the actual and hypothetical occurrence of certain sense-contents". Whose sense-contents? The answer, presumably, is "those of the percipient"; in point of fact, Ayer specifies them as the "sense-contents" which "occur in his"—presumably the percipient's—"sense-history". I believe, then, in the existence of other people because of events occurring in *my* sense-history and when I believe myself to *know* other people, what I know are, again, appropriate sense-contents occurring in my sense-history. In answer to the question, why if this is so, we all believe ourselves to inhabit a common world and contrive to understand each other, Ayer gives as his reason for the belief that "each of us observes the behaviour on the part of himself and others which constitutes the requisite understanding". This implies that one of my reasons for believing in the existence of another person and for believing that I can communicate with him and that he understands me, is that I can observe in his behaviour the changes which are appropriate on the assumption and only on the assumption that he has a body and that he understands me. Observation of behaviour, means observation of action and speech; it means seeing what a body does and hearing the noises

[1] See ch. VII, pp. 103–105.

that it makes. What, then, is a body and what are noises? Answer, on Ayer's view, logical constructions from sense-contents. From whose sense-contents? Presumably, from my own, for it would be absurd to say that the physical things I believe myself to observe are logical constructions from somebody else's sense-contents. Therefore, the behaviour of other bodies including the noises they make when their owner's speak are verified by the occurrence—the words are Ayer's—"in my sense-history of the appropriate series of sense-contents". Hence, to know *your* behaviour in general and to know in particular the changes in it which are appropriate to your understanding of what I say is to experience *my* sense-contents. To put it tersely, to know you is to experience myself. This seems to me to be a succinct statement of the position commonly known as Solipsism.

(3) *Analysis of the Data of Perception into Sense-Contents*

The question may be asked, what reasons are given for supposing that what I call my experience of the table is an experience of or, as Ayer would prefer to put it, is the occurrence of sense-contents. The answer is none; at least none are given in *Language, Truth and Logic*. Ayer's view on this topic is, therefore, a dogmatic view. I call it dogmatic, because the question of the correct analysis of sense-perception has preoccupied philosophers since philosophy began and never more intensively than during the present century. On the whole it may be said that the dominant philosophical tradition has been idealist; that is to say, most philosophers have held that what is immediately apprehended in sense-experience is either mental or is at least mind-dependent, and is not, therefore, an entity belonging to an external physical world which exists independently of the mind's apprehension of it.

About the beginning of this century a reaction took place initiated by Professor Moore's celebrated essay, *The Refutation of Idealism*, and for the next twenty years the dominant tradition was realist.

Professor Moore to whom, in other connexions, Ayer refers with respect[1] distinguished the act of apprehension from the object apprehended, insisting that, while the first is mental, the second need not be. Ayer apparently rejects this view without

[1] "I have learned a great deal from Professor Moore."

discussion. The act itself he denies as inaccessible to observation, while the view that what is immediately given in sense-experience consists of sense-contents he apparently takes for granted. Now, without giving one's reasons it is dogmatic to adopt a particular view in regard to a controversial issue, as if it were the only view which any reasonable man could hold.

Dogma for dogma, I should reply that what I immediately apprehend in sense-experience is not a sense-content which is a part of my experience, but is an entity external to myself, a patch of colour, a shape or a sound. I should maintain that I also know—though I know this in a different way from that in which I know the patches of colour, the shapes and the sounds —that these data that I immediately apprehend stand in a peculiarly close and distinctive relation to physical objects. I do not propose to try to defend these contentions here. It is sufficient for my purpose to point out that many competent philosophers have maintained them, adducing good arguments in their support. These arguments Ayer brushes aside and rejects without discussion the position they are designed to support. Many of his conclusions on other matters depend in their turn upon this rejection, depend, that is to say, upon the dogma that what we know in sense-experience consists exclusively of sense-contents.

As to the *act* of apprehension, which he denies, this I should say is on occasion directly accessible to introspection, as when I deliberately look at and consciously take in the details of some scene that is presented to me, and that it is only the dogma that experience consists exclusively of sense-contents that blinds Ayer to this obvious fact.

(4) *Contradictory Statements*

In general I have the impression that some of Ayer's statements about the existence of material things are contradictory and that no clear doctrine, therefore, emerges. I say that "I have the impression", since it may well be that I have failed to understand Ayer's position. I propose, then, to summarize with comments some statements which bear upon this topic.

(*a*) Ayer accepts the phenomenalist analysis of a material thing. To say "this is a thing" he holds, is equivalent to saying "certain sense-contents are observed and others are in theory

observable" and means no more than this. On this I have commented: (i) That this is certainly not what I believe myself to mean when I say "this is a table". In addition to "I am having certain sense-contents" and "I shall have others, if I move my body in certain ways", I mean also "there is a physical thing, a table, which causes these sense-contents" (I happen also to believe that I have a direct and immediate acquaintance with or awareness of the table, but my own theory of perception is not here under discussion). (ii) It is difficult to see how Solipsism can be avoided, since all statements which purport to be about a public, common world turn out on analysis to be statements about sense-contents, which are, presumably, private to the self of the experiencing percipient. (This, of course, presupposes that there is a self to have the experiences, as to which see Chapter VII, pp. 101–102.)

(*b*) From time to time Ayer, nevertheless, speaks of material things, as if they existed in a straightforward sense, not, that is to say, as if they were logical constructions or as if they consisted merely of sense-contents. For example, he criticizes writers on the subject of perception for assuming that "unless one can give a satisfactory analysis of perceptual situations, one is not entitled to believe in the existence of material things". What he means is, I think, that one *is* entitled to believe in the existence of material things, even if one cannot give a satisfactory account of a perceptual situation, a presumption that is strengthened by the immediately following remark, "the philosopher has no right to despise the beliefs of common sense". Now, if there are no material things but only logical construction and/or sense-contents, the beliefs of common sense are certainly wrong and ought to be despised. Moreover, that Ayer does, indeed, think that one is entitled to believe in the existence of material things follows, as it seems to me, from his statement that "what gives one the right to believe in the existence of a certain material thing is simply the fact that one has certain sensations". We are further told that the existence of unobserved events can be inferred and that it is for physical science to say whether the correct analysis of the external world is in terms of things or of events. This seems to imply that something, whether event or thing, occurs (or exists) in the external world, the event or thing being other than my sense-contents.

The following questions arise:

(i) How can the statements under (*a*) be reconciled with those which I have summarized under (*b*)? (ii) We are told that it is by the help of principles obtained inductively that we infer the existence of things and/or events. I have summarized and criticized in another chapter Ayer's account of the principle of induction.[1] For the present, I confine myself to asking what principle, inductive or otherwise, could possibly entitle me to infer the existence of that which is not and, presumably, cannot be experienced, namely, a material thing from that which *is*, namely, a sense-content especially when the unexperienced something is conceived to be of an entirely different order from the sense-contents which are, in fact, experienced?

I suggest that Ayer's material things and unobserved events belong to the same category as Locke's substance and that all the familiar criticisms historically urged against Locke's conception may, with equal justice, be applied to them.

"*Ostensive*" *Propositions*

Connected with the questions, are there physical things and can I know them is the question, what is it that I am immediately aware of in sense-experience? Ayer discusses in this connexion the question whether there are "ostensive" propositions, that is to say, propositions which directly record an immediate experience, such as, for example, "this is white" or "this is painful". Such propositions are usually regarded as certain and irrefutable and many philosophers whose views in general follow Ayer's have held that all other empirical propositions are hypotheses deriving such validity as they possess from their relationship to "ostensive" propositions.

Now, many, perhaps most of those philosophers, who share Ayer's views on other matters have held that there are "ostensive" propositions in this sense.

Ayer, however, contended in the first edition of his book[2] that

[1] See ch. VI., pp. 89–90.

[2] This conclusion is withdrawn in the Introduction to the second edition of *Language, Truth and Logic*. Ayer now maintains, or did when he wrote the Introduction, that there are some empirical propositions which "can be verified conclusively". These he calls "basic" propositions; they are defined as referring "solely to the content of a single experience, and what may be said to verify them conclusively is the occurrence of the experience to which they uniquely refer". No examples are given but Ayer is, presumably, thinking of such propositions as, "this is white", the case he cites as an example in the text of the original edition, where "this" is a sense-content. We may, he says, be mistaken in regard to these propositions in a verbal sense; we may, that is to say, misdescribe our experience, but provided we "do no more than record what is experienced" we cannot, he now holds, be factually mistaken about it.

But to know that a basic proposition is true, is not, he points out, to know anything which is either new or important; indeed, it is to "obtain no further knowledge than what is already afforded by the occurrence of the relevant experience".

I am not wholly clear as to the meaning of this phrase. The expression "further knowledge" suggests that "the occurrence of the relevant experience" in itself constitutes knowledge. If we were to say with Hegel that all consciousness is self consciousness, the view that the having of an experience in itself constitutes knowledge might well be tenable. But this is certainly not Ayer's view nor, on his premises, is it easy to see how the occurrence of a sense-content can be described as *knowledge*.

This issue raises large questions which cannot be pursued here. The adoption in the revised edition of the view that there are "basic" propositions entails the abandonment of the view maintained in the first edition that there are no "ostensive" propositions and this view is, in fact, explicitly abandoned. However, as I pointed out in the Introduction, it is the doctrines originally stated in the first edition of *Language, Truth and Logic* that have caught the imagination of young philosophers, rather than the modifications of these doctrines contained in the second. The text is, therefore, devoted to an examination of the original denial of "ostensive" propositions.

no empirical propositions are certain and was accordingly, committed to a denial of "ostensive" propositions, to a denial, then, that there are any propositions which directly record an immediate experience on the ground that you cannot in language point to an object without describing it and that directly you begin to describe, you pass beyond the mere registration of sense-contents. He takes as an example, "this is white" and contends that what I am asserting when I say "this is white" is that this sense-content "is similar in colour to certain other sense-contents, namely, those which I should call, or actually have called, white".

On this I have two comments. First, this is certainly not what I *mean* to assert when I say "this is white" and no reason, so far as I can see, is given for supposing that that is what I am, in fact, asserting. Secondly, if to say of a sense-content (*a*) that it is white is to say that it is similar to sense-contents (*b*), (*c*) and (*d*), which I call or have called white, and to say of sense-content (*b*) that it is white is to say that it is similar to sense-contents (*a*) (*c*), (*d*) and (*e*), which I call or have called white, and so on with regard to all other so-called white sense-contents, the property of being white is reduced to a relation of similarity between sense-contents which must themselves be without the property, since the property of being white has been earmarked for the relation. If the sense-contents *are* without the property, the property, namely, of being white, they can be shown

by similar arguments to be without *any* specifiable property; but if they are without any specifiable property, by what method of selection and discrimination are they classed together in the special relation, the relation, namely, of similarity, into which the property of being white has been analysed? Furthermore, if white is a relation of similarity holding between featureless sense-contents and black is a relation holding between other featureless sense-contents, how is white distinguished from black? More generally, how is one sense-content distinguished from another. It is not clear why the obvious analysis of the proposition, "this is white", namely, that it predicates a quality or an attribute of a subject, is rejected without discussion. No doubt it has difficulties of its own, but they do not seem to me to be so formidable as those involved in the analysis of the proposition, "this is white", into the assertion of a relation of similarity between what, if I am right, are featureless sense-contents. I can only suppose that Ayer has been led to put forward this perplexing analysis of the proposition "this is white" in the interests of the preconceived dogma that no empirical propositions are certain.

Is it Consistently Maintained that there are no Certain Empirical Propositions?

Nor, I think, does he succeed in consistently maintaining the dogma. In the course of his discussion of "ostensive" propositions, he denies, as we have seen, that there are any propositions which do, in fact, record an immediate experience and deduces the conclusion that there is no certain basis for empirical knowledge. The most that we are entitled to claim for any such knowledge is that it is probable. But though apparently we cannot make any certain statement about the content of a sense-experience, we are, it seems, entitled to affirm with certainty that a sense-content occurs—"we do not deny, indeed, that a given sense-content can legitimately be said to be experienced by a particular subject"—and to make, therefore, at least one certain statement about sense-contents.

Admittedly, "being experienced by a particular subject" is analysed "in terms of the relationship of sense-contents to one another", but this analysis is required by Ayer's refusal to admit a substantial self, and is not intended to suggest a doubt as to whether sense-contents are in fact experienced. (In fact, we are explicitly told later that to say that a sense-experience exists is to say "no more than that it occurs".) However, it turns out that this is not all that we are entitled certainly to say about sense-contents, for we are, further, told "the existence of a sense-content always entails the existence of a sense-experience".

Now it might be urged that this last statement is an analytic statement and, therefore, a tautology; but whether it is so or not depends, I venture to suggest, upon the way in which the expressions sense-content and sense-experience are defined.

Ayer's definition of a sense-content is "an entity which is sensibly given" but no definition of sense-experience is offered. If I am right in supposing that there are some senses of the expression "sense-experience", such that, if the expression "sense-experience" were employed in these senses, the statement would *not* be a tautology, then the statement would appear to constitute another example of an *empirical* proposition which is certain.

Privileged Positions

Before I leave Ayer's account of perception I would like to touch upon one matter of fact. In his discussion of perception Ayer considers the question, why it is that, on his view as to the nature of physical objects, the view, namely, that a coin is a logical construction from a number of sense-contents, we all agree to call the coin round. His answer to the question is that "roundness of shape characterizes those elements of the coin which are experienced from the point of view from which measurements of shape are most conveniently carried out". Now, there are, I suggest, two and just two positions which can be occupied by eyes, from which the coin *appears* round, the position which is vertically above and the position which is vertically below the coin. (I am obliged here to have recourse to common-sense language about the coin and about eyes, not because, on Ayer's view, such language is justified, for how one wonders can a pair of eyes which are logical constructions stand in a spatial relation to a coin, which is also a logical construction, but because he himself uses such language, since he "measures" the shapes of coins just as if he supposed them to be ordinary physical things.) The question may be asked, is it, in fact, the case that these two positions are the positions from

which measurements of shape are most conveniently carried out? It is highly doubtful. I should have thought that most people when they measured a coin would put it on a table, or hold it in front of them; that is to say, they measure it from positions in which it *appears* elliptical. But how in any event is this conclusion, the conclusion, namely, in regard to what may be called the privileged position—a penny is called "round" because a round sense-content is experienced from a privileged position, that position, namely, from which measurements can be most conveniently carried out—apply to other sense-contents, to smell-contents, for example, to taste-contents, or to sound-contents? It is a commonplace that things "smell" differently at different times of the day and that their smell varies relatively to the state of the olfactory organs. What, then, on Ayer's view, is the reason for saying that honey smells sweet and vinegar sour? Again, a burgundy which tastes sour when drunk alone, or after a chocolate *mousse*, tastes sweet with *brie*. How, then, on Ayer's view, determine the taste of the burgundy? Again, what is meant by saying that a sound is loud or soft, seeing that its loudness or softness varies with the distance of its place of origin from the hearer? What, in other words, is the "privileged" position from which as a result of having most "conveniently measured" smells and sounds, we judge that honey smells sweet and vinegar sour, that a burgundy has a fine *bouquet* and that a trumpet is noisy?

I cannot explore these difficulties here. They constitute one of many reasons for thinking that Ayer's account of perception is based too exclusively upon a consideration of *visual* sense-contents.

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCIPLE OF VERIFIABILITY

Statement of the Principle

This, the most distinctive principle of Logical Positivism, asserts that the meaning of an empirical proposition is the mode of its verification. Ayer's statement of the principle is as follows: "We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express." Elsewhere he states that if a sentence expresses "a genuine empirical hypothesis" —by which, presumably, is meant *among other things*, if a sentence is to have meaning—it is required "not that it should be conclusively verifiable, but that some possible sense-experience should be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood".

Now what I think Ayer really wishes to assert is that an empirical statement has meaning, only if it is capable of being verified by a procedure of a particular kind. "A simple way to formulate the principle", he says in the Introduction to the 1946 edition of his book, "would be to say that a sentence had literal meaning if, and only if, the proposition it expressed was either analytic or empirically verifiable." By "empirically verifiable" is meant verifiable by the occurrence of certain sensory-experiences. He further calls the principle a "criterion of meaning". Ayer, then, is making an assertion about the conditions which must be satisfied, if an empirical statement is to have meaning. In point of fact, however, the distinction between assertions as to the meaning of a statement and assertions as to the conditions which must be satisfied if it is to have meaning, a distinction which, one would have thought, it was vitally important to maintain, is frequently blurred. Thus, Ayer tells us that the function of philosophical analysis is to show how statements containing certain types of expression, as, for example, table or chair, can be replaced by equivalent

statements which omit these expressions and refer only to actual or possible sensory observations. He puts this as we have seen[1] by saying that "the philosopher is primarily concerned with the provision not of *explicit* definitions", that is to say, the sort of definition, which you might expect to find in a dictionary, "but of definitions in *use*". The view that statements of the first kind are replaceable and should be replaced by statements of the second entails that the meaning of statements about material things is entirely expressible in terms of actual or possible statements of verification—to take a particular example, that the meaning of the statement "this is a chair" is entirely expressible in terms of the actual or possible sense-experiences which would verify the statement. Ayer puts this explicitly when he says: "We know that it must be possible to define material things in terms of sense-contents, because it is only by the occurrence of certain sense-contents that the existence of any material thing can ever be in the least degree verified."

Variations in Statement of the Principle

Now, to say that we can define a thing in terms of sense-contents is equivalent to saying that the meaning of any statement made about it is expressible in terms of statements about the sense-contents by which its existence is verified. Hence, although Ayer professedly puts forward the verification principle, sometimes as a criterion of meaning, sometimes as a principle prescribing the conditions under which a statement can be said to have meaning, the use to which he puts it implies that the *mode* of verifying a statement about a material thing, that is to say, the making of certain observations and the having as a result of certain sensory experiences, *is* the meaning of the statement. This I take to be the intention of the rather cryptic observation contained in the Introduction of the 1946 edition, "from the fact that it is only by the making of some observation that any statement about a material thing can be directly verified . . . it follows also that, although its generality may prevent any finite set of observation-statements from exhausting its meaning, it does not contain anything as part of its meaning that cannot be represented as an observation statement". I think we may fairly put this by saying that the

[1] See ch. I, p. 25.

meaning of any statement about a material thing consists of the observation statements by which the original statement is verified. Ayer concludes this passage by saying that he wishes "the principle of verification . . . to be regarded, not as an empirical hypothesis, but as a definition", a definition presumably, of meaning.

Now, to say that it is by the occurrence of sense-contents that the existence of a material thing is verified seems to me different from saying that a material thing can be defined in terms of the sense-contents that verify it. Without giving any explanation Ayer appears to assume that the two statements mean the same. They *may* mean the same, if the correct analysis of a material thing is in terms of sense-contents, but, as I have already ventured to suggest,[1] that this *is* the correct analysis of it is a dogma. Most people would insist that while it may be true that it is only in terms of sense-contents that a thing is *known*, the fact that it is known implies that there is also a thing to be the cause of the sense-contents.

A further distinction should, as it seems to me, be made between the conditions under which a statement can be said to have meaning and the procedure adopted for determining that meaning. Thus, if I say "this is a table", part of the meaning of my statement is, according to Ayer, that, if my body were to move in a certain direction, I should have certain specifiable experiences.

In other words, in making this statement, I am indicating some of the conditions which, on Ayer's view, must be satisfied, if my statement is to have meaning and if I am to know what it is. Other parts of the meaning of my statement would be expressed by other statements about the conditions under which I should have actual or possible experiences. But to specify the conditions which must be satisfied if a statement is to have meaning is surely different from describing the procedure for finding out what the meaning of the statement is. I make this point in passing to indicate that the verification principle, far from being clear cut and definitive, bears, in effect, a number of allied but different meanings. The effectiveness of its application to various philosophical problems depends in no small measure upon the skill with which it is made to carry whichever of these meanings happens to be most immediately

[1] See ch. II, pp. 35, 36.

serviceable for the elucidation of the particular problem under discussion.

Some Criticisms

(1) The first question that suggests itself is, what reasons are adduced in support of the principle? The answer is far from clear.

In general, the principle seems to be announced, as if it were a self-evident truth that the only possible conditions in which an empirical statement can have meaning are that it should be verifiable in terms of sensory experience. To say that a truth is self-evident does not, of course, mean that it must be evident to all people. If, however, important arguments can be advanced against it we are entitled to question its claim to self-evidence.

Not only is no sufficient evidence offered in support of the principle, but I venture to doubt whether sufficient evidence could be offered. For how, one might ask, could one ever be sure that the analysis of the meaning of a proposition about a material thing in terms of the sense-contents by which it is verified is exhaustive, unless we were in a position to compare all the relevant sense-contents with the meaning of the proposition and, having done so, decide that they did, in fact, exhaust that meaning. But, in order that we might be in a position to make such a comparison, we should require to know the meaning independently of the sense-contents which claim to exhaust it, so that it could be compared with them and the claim of the sense-contents to exhaust the meaning seen to be valid. But to know the meaning independently of the sense-contents is precisely what Logical Positivism declares to be impossible.

(2) *The Difficulty of the Infinite Regress*

The verification principle states that the meaning of an empirical statement is expressible entirely in terms of actual or possible verificatory statements, these in their turn being statements to the effect that certain sense-contents are occurring. Putting this shortly and leaving out certain not immediately relevant qualifications, we may say that the meaning of the statement, "this is a table", is expressible in terms of a number of statements to the effect that I am experiencing or could

experience certain sense-contents, or, more precisely, that certain sense-contents are occurring or could occur.

What, then, is the meaning of the statement, "certain sense-contents are occurring"? Since the statement is an empirical one its meaning is, presumably, expressible in terms of verificatory statements, that is in terms of statements to the effect that certain *other* sense-contents are occurring or could occur. The meaning of this statement is presumably expressible in terms of yet other sense-contents so that an infinite regress of verifying sense-contents is, according to the theory, involved before the meaning of any statement can be established. I do not know that the fact that it involves an infinite regress is a *fatal* objection to the theory, but it does render it highly unplausible.

An equivalent difficulty occurs in other connexions.

Material objects are, for Ayer, logical constructions.

I shall consider the theory of logical constructions in the fifth chapter. I am here concerned with it only in so far as it throws this difficulty into relief. Let e be a symbol, the symbol in the case I have just cited being the word "table". Let us, says Ayer, suppose that "all the sentences in which the symbol e occurs can be translated into sentences which do not contain e itself, or any symbol which is synonymous with e, but do contain symbols b, c, d. . . . In such a case we say that e is a logical construction out of b, c, d".

Now, b, c and d are sense-contents. (The use of the word "sense-content" instead of the more normal expression "sensation" is, I suppose, designed to exclude any necessary references to an experiencing self. The expression "sensation" conveys the suggestion of a person or self who experiences the sensation; but sense-contents may be supposed just to occur without *occurring to anyone*.)

The "table" is, then, a logical construction out of sense-contents and the same analysis may be given of any other material thing. Hence, when we say "this is a table", we are, says Ayer, making "a linguistic assertion" to the effect that "sentences which contain the symbol 'table', or the corresponding symbol in any language which has the same structure as English, can all be translated into sentences of the same language which do not contain that symbol, nor any of its synonyms, but do contain certain symbols which stand for sense-contents". This, Ayer

goes on, is tantamount to saying that "to say anything about a table is always to say something about sense-contents".

What, then, are sense-contents? They are, as we have seen,[1] "the immediate data not merely of 'outer' but also of 'introspective' sensation". They are also "parts of a sense-experience". I propose, therefore, to put the question, are these immediate data which are parts of a sense-experience, things? Ayer, presumably, would say that they are not on the ground that, if we adhere to common-sense language, only the names for *collections* of sense-contents could meaningfully occur in the propositional function; "X is a thing". Thus common sense says "an apple is a thing", but it does not say "rosy patch is a thing".

Let us suppose, first, that they are things and, secondly, that they are not and see what consequences follow on each supposition.

(i) If sense-contents are things, then, presumably, like other things they must be regarded as logical constructions. I am, we will suppose, looking at and touching a table, and I am trying accurately to describe my experiences. Using the phraseology which Logical Positivism requires, I shall, presumably, say: "a brown and a square and a hard sense-content are occurring".

Now, granted Ayer's denial of "ostensive" propositions,[2] in making this statement I am going beyond what is immediately given to me in experience. What, in effect, on his view, I am saying is that of the sense-contents which are occurring one is similar in colour to other sense-contents which I should call "brown", and another is similar to other sense-contents which I should call "hard" and so on. Now, these classifications that I make whereby I classify my sense-contents as "brown" and "hard", because of their similarity to other sense-contents may, as he points out, be mistaken. Hence, in asserting that a brown sense-content and a hard sense-content are occurring, I am going beyond the facts of immediate experience and laying myself open to the possibility of error. In short, as Ayer himself puts it, we cannot in language "point to an object without describing it", and the description may be mistaken.

It seems to follow that the fact that I use words like "brown" and "hard" in reference to my sense-contents does not necessarily mean that I am experiencing sense-contents which are *given* as "brown" and "hard". On the contrary, the use of such

[1] See ch. II, p. 33.

[2] See ch. II, pp. 38–40.

words means that I am *describing* my experience and my description may be mistaken. Hence, if I ask myself, what is the nature of X, in the case in which X is a sense-content, I must answer in terms of the formula which Ayer proposes in the case of other "things". The formula is as follows: all questions of the form, "What is the nature of X?" are requests for a definition of a symbol in use, and to ask for a definition of a symbol X in use is to ask how the sentences in which X occurs are to be translated into equivalent sentences, which do not contain X or any of its synonyms.[1] Hence, I shall answer the question, "what is the nature of the sense-content X?" by substituting sentences in which the sense-content X disappears and symbols for other sense-contents take its place. It is clear that the same procedure can be applied in the case of the "other sense-contents" and we find ourselves again confronted with an infinite regress. It would seem, then, that if we accord the same analysis to sense-contents as the verification principle requires us to accord to other "things", the principle involves us in an infinite regress before the meaning of any statement about sense-contents, that is to say, any empirical statement can be established.

(ii) Now let us suppose that sense-contents are not things and not, therefore, logical constructions, a supposition which must be made in spite of Ayer's denial of "ostensive propositions", a denial which would seem to eliminate the possibility of making any statements about the primitive data of our experience.

If they are not things, sense-contents occupy a privileged position among empirical phenomena, so that the analysis in general accorded to the ostensible objects of our experience, an analysis which exhibits them as logical constructions, is not accorded to sense data.

If this is the correct interpretation of Ayer's view, then he must be interpreted as saying something like this: (*a*) all statements about tables are translatable into statements about sense-contents; (*b*) statements about sense-contents are not translatable into statements about (other) sense-contents.

If this *is* Ayer's meaning, the following two questions suggest themselves; (*a*) Does not his declaration that there are no propositions which directly record an immediate experience require him to affirm that propositions of the type, "a brown and a

[1] See the passage quoted in p. 25.

hard sense-content are now occurring", are always in principle translatable into other propositions? (*b*) If this is so, on what ground does he exempt propositions about sense-contents from the analysis accorded to propositions about material things?

In sum, my difficulty about the status of sense-contents, which is also a difficulty in regard to the verification principle, may be stated as follows:

According to Ayer, (*a*) The meaning of an empirical statement about "things" is expressible in terms of the mode of its verification;

(*b*) the mode of its verification is the occurrence of actual or possible sense-contents;

(*c*) Since there are no ostensive propositions, the meaning of a statement about sense-contents is expressible in terms of the mode of its verification;

(*d*) is expressible, therefore, in terms of the occurrence of actual or possible sense-contents, statements about which are themselves expressible in terms of the occurrence of actual or possible sense-contents, and so on ad infinitum.

How, then, one wonders, is any statement ever verified? Also, if meaning is in terms of verification, how is the meaning of any statement ever established?

(3) *What is meant by Experience?*

I now come to the question, what is meant by "experience"? This question is fundamental, in the sense that if it could be shown that the verification principle is defective in respect of the meaning which it assigns to "experience", then the demonstration would invalidate the principle. What the principle asserts is—I take, again, one of Ayer's own definitions—"that a proposition" is "genuinely factual if any empirical observation would be relevant to its truth or falsehood". Now, the meaning normally assigned to "empirical" is sensory and that this *is* the meaning that Ayer assigns to it is, I think, clear, from his use of the words "sense-experience", when he tells us that what he requires of an empirical hypothesis is "that some possible sense-experience should be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood". It follows that intuitive and intellectual experience, in a word all the *non*-sensory experiences of the mind, if, indeed, it be admitted that there *are* such experiences, are *not* deemed to be relevant to the truth or falsehood of empirical

propositions. It is not, in other words, by means of intuitive and intellectual experience that verification is effected.

It is, of course, the case that sense-contents are defined as the data of "introspective" as well as of "outer" sensation, and it is, I suppose, possible to hold that when I know that

$$(a^2 - b^2) = (a + b)\ (a - b)$$

and know, too, by what reasoning the relation of equivalence is established, my knowledge is a "datum" of introspective sensation and this too may, I suppose, in theory be maintained in regard to my knowledge that "all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". But such a view would entail among other things that there are introspectively observable mental images of all mathematical operations and historical generalizations. Now, although I may have a mental image of $(a^2 - b^2)$ it is, to my mind, certain that I have no mental image of its equality with $(a + b)\ (a - b)$, nor can close introspection reveal the occurrences of any images of absolute power producing absolute corruption in the characters of historical personages. Moreover, I doubt whether any psychologist has been known to maintain that *all* intellectual operations are *exhaustively* analysable in terms of mental images. In any event, it seems to me nonsense to maintain that the kind of experience that is involved in doing mental arithmetic, or in reflecting upon the teaching of history, is of the same order as a *bona fide* sensory experience.

Such refinements need not, however, detain us here for the reason that, as one reads logical positivist writings, it becomes abundantly clear that the kind of experiences which they invoke as relevant to verification are *bona fide* sensory experiences.

Materialist Bias

Logical positivists writings are, indeed, pervaded by a marked materialist bias. I am not here speaking of any explicit or reasoned belief, but of a general predisposition or tendency which leads positivists to write as if they assumed, apparently without enquiry, that all mental experiences must have bodily causes and have originated in the stimulation of the sense organs. Thus, Ayer's account of the self[1] defines it in terms of

[1] See ch. VII, pp. 101–103, below for a development of this account and for a criticism.

"organic sense-contents which are elements of the same *body*" (my italics). The only experiences which on the basis of this definition can be allowed to be indubitably mine in the sense of belonging to the sense-history of the same self, which is myself, are sensory experiences, since, Ayer tells us, it is "logically impossible for any organic sense-content to be an element of more than one body". It follows that there is no reason to conclude that those experiences, if any, which I normally call mine which do *not* originate in the body really belong to or constitute me. (I am not here making the point that there *are* non-sensory experiences or that there are experiences which do *not prima facie* originate in the body, though it seems to me to be obvious that there are. I confine myself to drawing attention to the dogmatic assumption, made apparently without any enquiry, that there are not.) I now proceed to ask:

(*a*) Are there such experiences? (*b*) If there are, why should the concept of verificatory experience, which is declared to be necessary to the establishment of the meaning and the determination of the truth or falsehood of "a genuinely factual proposition", arbitrarily exclude them?

(*a*) *That there are Non-Sensory Experiences*

(i) *History.* It seems to me that I can reflect upon the facts of history. I can, for example, forget a date, try to remember it and finally establish it by relating in my mind a fact which I know to have occurred in that year to some other fact whose date is known to me, which I remember to have taken place a year later. "Yes," I say to myself, "it must have been in April 1814 that Napoleon retired to Elba because I know that it was eleven months later that he landed again in France. And he landed in France in March, 1815".

Now, this process of reflecting, calculating and relating does introspectively occur. It is an experience that I live through; the experience does not consist of images and is not sensory.

(ii) *Speculative Deliberation.* I can do mental arithmetic, working out sums in my head without the aid of pencil and diagram, paper and blackboard—without, that is to say, having sensory experience. I can mentally add up a set of remembered figures, make a calculation on the basis of the sum I have arrived at,

wonder if I have added it up wrong, and check it by adding it up again. Moreover, I can do all this in my mind. Once again, the processes involved are undoubtedly experienced; I can reflect upon them, remember them and dislike them. But, they are not sensory.

(iii) *Practical Deliberation.* I have, we will suppose, lost my spectacles. Where am I to look for them? Are they, I wonder, in the drawer? No, because I took them out, when we went for our walk. Did I leave them on the shelf of the rock where we had lunch? No, I remember putting them on during the afternoon to look at a hawk. Did I leave them at the farm-house where we had tea? No, because I put them on afterwards to look at the time-table on the station platform. They are not in my pockets because I have looked thoroughly through them, nor are they in my rucksack. "But did you," I ask myself, "look in the flap of the rucksack?" No, I forgot, to look there. I look and find them there.

Now, two separate series of experiences are here involved. There is, first, a process of deliberate ratiocination involving the elimination of one alternative after the other, until only one is left. Secondly, there is the decision to act on the non-eliminated alternative, a decision which results in the finding of the spectacles. The second set of experiences is at least in part sensory, the first is not. Similarly, in chess, I can deliberate for an appreciable space of time whether to move the bishop or the knight and finally decide to move the knight.

(iv) *Morals.* A familiar sequence of experiences is commonly described as feeling a temptation to do what one knows to be wrong, struggling against it, surrendering to it, doing the wrong action and, subsequently, suffering remorse. This sequence of experiences is at once so familiar and so interesting that the greater part of many famous novels, particularly those written in the nineteenth century, is devoted to their description and elucidation.

(v) *Aesthetics.* When a man reads poetry he undergoes a sensory experience, namely, the visual experience of seeing black marks on a white background. This, in an imaginative young man acts as a cue to other and more varied experiences. He dreams dreams, sees visions, indulges in sentimental longings and amorous raptures. It is nonsense to say that these experiences do not ever occur to young poetry-readers but only

the first experience of those I have mentioned, the experience of visual sensation, is a sense-content.

Moreover, if the cue experience is changed ever so slightly, so that instead of reading "Over the Hills and Far Away", he reads "Away and Far Hills the Over", it may well be the case that none of the previously evoked experiences occur.

Similarly, with pictures. It is a sensory experience which informs me that a picture is square, is in a gilt frame and is *of* a woman in a red dress. All these experiences are, if Ayer is right, analysable in terms of sense-contents. But the picture also moves me aesthetically. It is not easy to find epithets to describe this aesthetic effect that the picture produces, but that the effect exists, the importance which men attach to art testifies and that it can be described, however inadequately, the language of art criticism bears witness. Now, the aesthetic effect is not sensory, though the sensory experiences act as a cue for its evocation. It could not occur, unless they first occurred, but though dependent upon, it is not wholly resolvable into them. For by what sense, it may be asked, do we recognize that the picture is beautiful and with what sense do we respond aesthetically to its beauty?

Similarly, with music. My senses tell me that a particular movement is being played by a violin, and the programme informs me that it was composed by Beethoven. But that it is lovely, moving, thrilling, wistful or plaintive is conveyed to me by no sense. For my part, I should affirm that the aesthetic experience can be adequately interpreted only as a direct revelation to the apprehending mind of what is, after all, the only thing that matters about the music, namely, its beauty. But, once again, though this experience, the experience of beauty begins with our senses, it transcends its origin in sensory experience.

All these, I suggest, are examples of experience which are not themselves sensory or, at least, are not exhaustively analysable into the sensory. Now, let us see what account Ayer's principle enables us to give of them.

(*b*) *Treatment by Ayer of Prima Facie Non-Sensory Experience*

If we grant that these experiences are, at least in part, non-sensory, it follows that no sense-experience is relevant to the truth or falsehood of the statement that the non-sensory part

of them is occurring. Hence, in so far as they *are* non-sensory, the fact that they occur or rather that the non-sensory part of them occurs cannot be verified by sensory experience. Hence, if Ayer is right, to say that they occur is meaningless.

It is, in fact, considerations of precisely this order that Ayer adduces, when he wishes to convict metaphysical statements of being meaningless.

Let us see how this conclusion applies to the examples I have cited, taking them in order.

(i) *History*. History would certainly seem *prima facie* to constitute a difficulty for the verification principle. Its propositions are not known *a priori* and they are certainly not tautologous; also they are synthetic. Sometimes they are particular, as when we say, "The battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815", or that absolute power proved fatal to Napoleon; sometimes general, as when we say that absolute power always proves fatal to rulers. Now, it is extremely difficult to see what sense-observations could verify these propositions. The only *sensory* experiences involved in their apprehension are the visual sensations of black marks on a white background. But these would seem only to verify the empirical proposition, "I am reading a printed page", nor is it easy to see how a present sense-observation could verify a past event. Nevertheless, the propositions of history are not meaningless—at least, they have not usually been considered so.

What account, then, does Ayer give of them? All empirical propositions are, for him, hypotheses. The function of an empirical hypothesis is "to enable us to anticipate experience" and, he says, we test its validity "by seeing whether it actually fulfils the function it is designed to fulfil". The probability of an empirical proposition is increased or diminished by sensory observations; more precisely, what sensory observation does is "to increase our confidence in the proposition as measured by our willingness to rely on it in practice as a forecast of our sensations".[1] Every synthetic empirical proposition is distinguished in content from other synthetic empirical propositions by reason of the fact that it is "relevant to different situations". Propositions referring to the past do not, we are told, relevantly differ from other synthetic empirical propositions;

[1] This doctrine of probability, as applied to empirical propositions is considered in ch. VI (see pp. 92–8).

they, too, are essentially hypothetical and are rules for the anticipation of experience.

They are distinguished from propositions about the present and the future by the criterion of relevance to different situations. "For my own part," Ayer concludes, "I do not find anything excessively paradoxical in the view that propositions about the past are rules for the prediction of those 'historical' experiences which are commonly said to verify them."

The only alternative to his view is, he says, based on the tacit or explicit assumption "that the past is somehow 'objectively there' to be corresponded to—that is to say, it is 'real' in the metaphysical sense of the term". Now, this view of the past is, of course, ruled out for Ayer, by his rejection of metaphysics.

In the Introduction to the 1946 edition of his book Ayer modified this view, asserting that he did not and does not mean that propositions about the past can be translated into propositions about the present or future. But while the remarks contained in the Introduction to the revised edition are ostensibly designed merely to clarify the position adopted in the original edition, the account which they convey of propositions referring to the past is, in fact, a substantially different account. "They are", Ayer now says, "to be taken as implying that certain observations would have occurred if certain conditions had been fulfilled." However, the fact that the conditions cannot be fulfilled is only accidental, since it is an accident that we happen to be living when we are. Hence, past events are "observable in principle" in the same way as events which are "remote in space". Thus, the propositions that the Battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815 and that absolute power proved fatal to Napoleon have meaning because, if certain conditions were fulfilled which cannot be fulfilled in fact, but could be in principle, then the propositions in question would be verifiable.

Comments on Ayer's View of History

On this view I venture to make the following comments.

(i) When I make a statement about the past, it is certainly not the case that I am saying something which I *think* will "enable me to anticipate future experience". Ayer may assure me that the meaning of my statement is expressible as a "rule for the prediction of an 'historical' experience", but this is certainly not what I *intend* the statement to mean. What I *intend* is to say

something about the past. Moreover, I believe that if what I say corresponds with something that actually happened in the past my statement will be true; if not, not. I further believe that it is something of this kind that everybody both intends to mean and believes himself to mean, when he makes an historical statement and Ayer provides no reason whatever—unless the dogma that metaphysics must be nonsense can be accounted a reason—for thinking that we are all mistaken in this matter, falsely supposing ourselves to say something about the past, when what we are really doing is to lay down rules for the prediction of the future.

(ii) As regards the modified version of Ayer's original theory, according to which to say that the Battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815 means that certain observations would have occurred if certain conditions were to be fulfilled, which could in principle be fulfilled, although they cannot be in practice, I would suggest that it is only because we *already know* that the Battle of Waterloo was fought in June, 1815, that we are in a position to assert that the observations in question would have been made, if the conditions in question, namely, the being present on the field of Waterloo on June 18 of that year had been fulfilled. That is to say, the statement that the Battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815 must already have a meaning for us in a sense of meaning other than that which Ayer allows and we must know what the meaning is, before the statement can have meaning for us in Ayer's sense of having meaning.

Similarly with the statement that absolute power proved fatal to Napoleon. It is only because we already know what the statement means independently of observation, that we know what observations would be relevant to its confirmation, if the conditions were fulfilled under which the observations could be made.

When, however, we proceed to consider generalizations about history based on a wide survey of historical fact, such as the generalization, absolute power *always* proves fatal to rulers, I do not see how they can or could be verified in sensory experience. The generalization could, no doubt, be verified in regard to examined cases of particular rulers; but it is obvious that all the examples of absolute rulers cannot be examined, if only because some of them may occur in the future—while as regards past and present cases, one could never be sure that one had examined all of them.

We have no choice, then, on Ayer's view, but to dismiss such a statement as meaningless. (For all I know to the contrary, Ayer may have dismissed all historical generalizations of this kind as meaningless.) Yet to say that it *is* meaningless, or that I don't know what its meaning is, is plainly untrue.

(iii) But does Ayer's analysis of historical statements provide an even plausible account of what it is that most of us mean by history? History, it is obvious, is not just a record of facts; it includes their interpretation. From all the facts which are available as data the historian selects those which he thinks significant, significant, that is to say, for the right understanding of the period. Now, what he thinks significant will depend upon his view of human nature and its motivation, a view which will be at least in part the outcome of his initial temperamental make-up. Thus, in analysing the causes of such an event as the Peloponnesian War, one historian will emphasize economic factors, as, for example, the need of Sparta for outlets for trade and of Athens to provide work for the growing body of unemployed at the Peiraeus, another back stairs influences and palace intrigues, while another will lay stress upon the influence of the personalities of the leading figures of the time. Now the facts upon which a historian's interpretation of a period is based may be such as to support any one of these different interpretations. It is from such material, material subjectively selected in the light of preconceived notions as to the respective parts played in the causation of events by human will and motive on the one hand and economic factors on the other that the picture of an historical period is built up. One picture will differ from another by reason of the varying degrees of influence accorded respectively to personalities and circumstance. Now, it is upon the pictures that historians have painted that our understanding of history is based. I am stressing, then, the subjective factors in the writing of history, factors which are, for example, responsible for the totally different assessments of the character and motives of James II in the works of Macaulay and Hilaire Belloc.

Now in regard to what I have called the picture of an historical period two points may relevantly be made: first, its truth is not verifiable by any conceivable sensory experience. Secondly, its accuracy is not capable of proof or disproof. It does not, however, follow that it has *no* meaning, and it does

not follow that one picture may not correspond more closely than another to the facts, as when we say that Hume's *History of England* is now superseded in the light of more recently discovered material. Why is Hume's history superseded? Because, presumably, we now know that it gives a less accurate picture of the period to which it relates than do others that have succeeded it. But any reputable historical picture, whether it be more or less accurate, will have meaning. Hume's history, therefore, and the picture of England under the Plantagenets which it presents have meaning. Now, for neither of these two properties, the property of having meaning and the property of more closely corresponding, does Ayer's account make provision.

This failure to make provision for the greater or less accuracy of an historical interpretation, or—to put the point with greater precision—the failure to allow that the statement "X's interpretative account of such and such a period has more authority than Y's" has meaning, arises directly from the arbitrary limitation of the concept of experience to sensory experience. Whether the verification principle is true—if Ayer will allow me to use the word—in some of its applications may be open to question; but when it asserts that the meaning of *all* non-tautologous statements is expressible in terms of their verification by *sensory* experience, there can, I suggest, be no question but that it imposes an arbitrary limitation upon the concept of experience, as the result of which very few historical statements can, if the verification principle is correct, be said to have meaning.

(ii) *and* (iii)—*Speculative and Practical Deliberation.* I took as an example of practical deliberation the case in which after a period of deliberation I decided in a game of chess to move the knight rather than the bishop. When I do, in fact, make the move upon which I have decided, altering the position in space of my hand and of the piece moved, I have certain sensory experiences. The proposition that "I moved the knight" is verifiable by the sensory experience of others and it has, therefore, meaning according to Ayer's criterion. But the process of deliberation which preceded it is not sensory, nor, though the decision in which it issues is manifested in overt behaviour, is the deliberation that preceded it so manifested; indeed, the same movement of the hand and the same move of

the piece might have been made without deliberation. Are we, then, to say that the process of deliberation did not occur and is not experienced because it is not manifested in overt behaviour, cannot be observed and does not, therefore, give rise to sensory experiences? To do so would be to falsify the facts, since the experience of deliberation in such a case is a perfectly familiar psychological occurrence. Nevertheless, this, I take it, is what we must say, if we insist that statements have meaning only in terms of their verification in experience, and that the only experience which is relevant to the verification of statements is sensory.

In the case of what I have called speculative deliberation, it is not necessary that there should be any outcome of the deliberation in observable behaviour; often there is not. The process of mentally calculating a monetary amount, for example, may go on for an appreciable time without any word being spoken, nor need any symbol be written at the end of it.

It seems to me to be clear both that such a process of calculation is experienced and also that no *sensory* experience is relevant to the verification of the statement that it occurs.

It is, no doubt true, as I have already remarked, that *some* psychologists hold that the processes involved in doing what is called mental arithmetic are accompanied by images. It is also true that logical positivists show a disposition to treat mental images as if they were sense-contents. But the view that the process of working out, for example, an algebraic conclusion in the head is *exhaustively* analysable into the occurrence of a stream of mental images is, to put it mildly, controversial—I do not, in fact, know of any psychologist who has maintained it—while the classification of mental images as sense-contents has little to commend it except that Ayer's theory requires it.

Unless mathematical calculation consists wholly of mental images and unless mental images are sense-contents, the statement that the operation known as "doing" mental arithmetic occurs must, on Ayer's general theory, be dismissed as meaningless.

(iv) *and* (v)—*Ethics and Aesthetics.* I shall consider in more detail in another chapter Ayer's treatments of ethics and aesthetics.[1] For the present I confine myself to one point. The experiences which I undergo in the case of moral conflict

[1] See ch. VIII.

do introspectively take place. If the experiences result in a victory over what is known as temptation, no action may be taken and there is, therefore, nothing to observe and nothing to give rise to sensory experiences. Hence, the statement "a struggle against temptation occurred" is, on Ayer's view, meaningless in such a case, because *no* sensory observation is relevant to its verification. If the struggle is unsuccessful, action may be taken which is felt at the time to be wrong and is subsequently followed by remorse. In this case there *is* overt behaviour, giving rise to sensory experiences both in the agent and in the observer of the action. But the occurrence of these sensory experiences is relevant to the verification only of the statement "such and such an action was performed"; it is not relevant to the statement "a process of moral struggle occurred while the agent sought to resist the performance of an action which he felt to be wrong". And what *sense*-experience is relevant to the verification of the statement "remorse was subsequently felt"? Does Ayer, then, deny that moral struggles occur or that remorse is felt, or would he say that the statements that the former do occur and that the latter is felt are meaningless statements.

As to aesthetics, it is clear that our reaction to the poetry we read or to the music we listen to is far from being exhausted by the sensory experiences of seeing marks and hearing noises. In addition, there is frequently an emotional experience. But the emotional experience is also cognitive. It is, that is to say, a *knowing* of the poetry and of the music upon which the attention of the mind is directed by the marks and the noises and it is this knowing which evokes the emotion. We find it very difficult to describe what it is that we are knowing when we make use of such expressions as "sublime", "mysterious", "sombre", "gay", "delightful", "exciting", and so on, intending to designate by these words qualities in the work of art which arouse in us the emotions for which the words stand. But, it is, I think, clear (*a*) that the emotions in question are not wholly sensory experiences, (*b*) that the qualities which arouse them are not wholly sensory qualities—in the case of poetry, for example, the only *sensory* properties involved are those appertaining to the character, shape and so on of the printed letters, and the colour, shape and texture of the page on which they are printed—and (*c*) that the apprehension of them, which, I

have suggested, is essentially cognitive, is not a *sensory* apprehension.

This brief account of some of the relevant constituents of what we call aesthetic experience suggests that all of them are not sensory, and that the qualities of the work upon which aesthetic experience is "directed" and to which it is relevant are not *wholly* sensory. Nevertheless, aesthetic experience indubitably occurs, so that the limitation of the concept of experience to the purely sensory would, on Ayer's view, convict the statement that it does occur of being meaningless.

CHAPTER IV

LOGICAL POSITIVISM AND THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Leaving Ayer's account of it, I turn to consider the verification principle on merits. This consideration leads in turn to a criticism of the logical positivist theory of knowledge and suggests what seems to me to be a disabling flaw in the theory.

Prima facie we may say that there are two kinds of knowledge, knowledge of sensory facts, however analysed, and knowledge of non-sensory facts. The former is obtained through—some would maintain consists wholly of—sense-experience; the latter does not involve—or need not do so—the activity and employment of the senses. Knowledge of non-sensory facts is usually divided into two categories, analytic and synthetic. Of these, the former is regarded by logical positivists as tautologous; the latter as meaningless.

The World as Composed of Sensory Facts

For logical positivists the world consists only of sensory facts, that is to say, of the kind of facts that can be known in sense-experience and which belong to the natural world studied by science. Thus, Feigl, in an article entitled, *Logical Empiricism*, published in *Twentieth Century Philosophy* writes: "The term 'real' is employed in a clear sense and usually with good reason in daily life and science to designate that which is located in space-time and is a link in the chains of causal relations." If this is the case, all propositions which are not tautologous will be purely descriptive, descriptive, that is to say, of the world "which is located in space-time"; they will tell us what is the case in regard to that world and will, therefore, belong to the same order as scientific propositions. Most logical positivists accept this conclusion. If it is true, the only function which can be assigned to philosophy is the analysis of science. Hence, Carnap says: "Philosophy is to be replaced by the logic of science—that is to say, by the logical analysis of the concepts

and sentences of the sciences, for *the logic of science is nothing other than the logical syntax of the language of science. . . .*" "The non-metaphysical logic of science also takes a different point of view from that of empirical science not, however, because it assumes any metaphysical transcendency, but because it makes the language forms themselves the objects of a new investigation."[1]

This view of the function of philosophy is, I suppose, natural enough, if the world contains only sensory facts, since science consists of the organized knowledge of sensory facts, though whether "the concepts and sentences of the sciences" are themselves sensory facts, so that the knowledge of them is empirical knowledge of the same order as the knowledge that science gives, is far from clear.[2]

The corollary of Carnap's view is that philosophy, as ordinarily understood, consists, or at any rate in the past has consisted, very largely of knowledge of the second kind, that is to say, of non-sensory knowledge. Let us consider for a moment this kind of knowledge that philosophy has been traditionally thought to provide or, at least, has been thought capable of providing.

Philosophical Knowledge as Traditionally Conceived

Granted that the world does not consist entirely of sensory facts, granted, then, that there is a *non-sensory* order of reality, it is over against this order that, as Plato would put it, philosophy has traditionally been supposed to be set. Philosophy has been thought, in the first place, to concern itself with laws, as opposed to the phenomena that exhibit them—with the laws of thought, for example, and with the principles of mathematics. It has been thought, in the second place, to concern itself with the nature of an ideal world, by reference to which the world of sensory facts can be measured and evaluated in respect of its worth. In some philosophies, for example, in that of Plato, this ideal world is also held to be the real world, reasons being given for supposing that the actual world of sensory fact does not possess a full title to be called real. The real world, on this view, contains certain forms or principles, those of morals and aesthetics, for instance, from which those things which in the actual world we call "good" and "beautiful"

[1] R. Carnap, *Logical Syntax of Language*, p. 277 and p. xiii.

[2] I have suggested below, see pp. 81–84, that Logical Positivism accords a privileged, i.e. non-linguistic, status to words.

derive such worth as they possess and by reference to which the degree of their worth is in principle assessable. Hence, the study of the non-sensory order of reality is often termed *normative*, as opposed to the study of the world of sensory fact which is purely descriptive.

To admit that there is non-sensory knowledge entails that we know some things *a priori*; entails, that is to say, that the human mind, reasoning from premises which are taken as self-evident in accordance with laws which are intuitively perceived to be true, can obtain knowledge. Sometimes a special faculty of the mind is invoked to perform this activity of non-sensory knowing. Thus, Plato and Aristotle spoke of νοῦς and we sometimes speak of intellectual inspection. But however the faculty be described, and whatever its mode of operation, its deliverances have been regarded as essentially "cognitive". They are, that is to say, a *knowing* of something and the knowledge which they give can be stated in propositions which assert that "so and so is the case", propositions, then, which may be true or false. The knowledge so obtained may be enlarged by reasoning and reflection. Among the non-sensory "objects" which fall within the scope of the reflective mind's consideration is language, and philosophers have paid considerable attention to questions concerning its status and function.

The Status of the Verification Principle

All this is denied by Logical Positivism. I propose, then, to consider the nature of the affirmations in which Logical Positivism itself consists with a view to determining their epistemological status. More particularly, I wish to consider the verification principle, with a view to determining what *kind* of knowledge it purports to provide.

In his book, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Ayer, as we have seen,[1] divides all meaningful propositions into two classes, those which concern matters of empirical fact, and those which are *a priori*.

I. *Is it an Empirical Principle?*

Is the verification principle, in the first place, a principle which concerns matters of empirical fact? There are two considerations which at first sight suggest that it might be so regarded.

[1] See ch. I, pp. 28, 29.

(*a*) Ayer lays it down that there are no first principles, if by a first principle is meant an intuitively perceived truth upon the basis of which a philosopher proceeds to construct a deductive system. There are, he thinks, *no* "objects of speculative knowledge" which "yet lie beyond the scope of empirical science".

It would seem to follow that, if the principle of verification is not a tautology, it must lie within the scope of empirical science, and the knowledge of it must, therefore, be reached by the methods of empirical science, that is to say inductively. But no such method is, in fact, employed by Ayer, nor is it by any process of induction that he seeks to establish the principle. On the question of the "truth" of general propositions, Ayer says: "the most that philosophy can do . . . is to show what are the criteria which are used to determine the truth or falsehood of any given proposition: and then, when the sceptic realizes that certain observations would verify his propositions, he may also realize that he could make those observations, and so consider his original beliefs to be justified". I am not wholly clear as to the meaning of this statement, but its intention appears to be to lay down the criteria which justify the holding of "original beliefs". These criteria include the making of certain relevant observations. Now, I cannot myself determine what observations would verify the propositions in which the verification principle is expressed—I cannot, that is to say, conceive what kind of *sense*-experience would verify the principle that the meaning of a statement is wholly verifiable in terms of the sense-experiences which verify it—nor has anybody, to my knowledge, suggested what form such observations *could* take. I conclude that the verification principle is not a principle of the kind to which these criteria apply, and that it does not, therefore, conform to the conditions which Ayer lays down for a trustworthy first principle, namely, that it "must be obtained inductively".

(*b*) Secondly, the principle is descriptive; it purports that is to say, to provide us with a description of meaning; it purports to tell us what is the case. It certainly seems, therefore, as if it ought to be regarded as an empirical principle belonging to the same order as the principles and propositions of science. Assuming that it is empirical, there seem to be two possibilities.

(1) It might be supposed to say something about our own psychological states, states which we do undoubtedly experience,

though not, I insist, with our senses. But if the principle merely tells us how the minds of some people, namely, logical positivists, work, it would be of purely psychological significance and would not merit the attention of philosophers.

(2) The other possibility is that it tells us something about language. This is, indeed, the case, but the kind of information that the propositions of Logical Positivism give us about language, if taken as empirical, is not the kind of information that logical positivists suppose; more precisely, it is the kind of information which the premises of Logical Positivism require, but which logical positivists do not allow.

Again there are two possibilities. (i) First, the verification principle might tell us something about language in so far as language is an object of sense-experience. It might tell us, for example, about the sounds which people make when they speak language, or the marks which they make upon paper which are the written symbols of language. The first would supply us with information about aural, the second about visual sense data, but the principle, it is obvious, is not about the noises people make when they speak, or the marks they make when they write, or rather, it is not only about these, it is also about the *meaning* of these noises and marks; in other words, it is concerned with language as a symbol.

(ii) The other possibility is that the principle might give us information about the way in which a language is normally used. But if this were so, the principle would not permit us to draw any *philosophical* deductions, as for example, the deduction that metaphysics is nonsense. Nor, if this were so, would it be easy to see how the verification principle could be distinguished from the principles of grammar and syntax. It is true that Carnap, in the quotation cited above,[1] proposes that philosophy should "make the language forms themselves the objects of a new investigation", but he nowhere tells us what the distinguishing characteristics of the new investigation would be. Nor has anybody, so far as I am aware, at any time suggested how this "new investigation" would differ from philological investigations, comparative linguistics, or from enquiries into the psychology of language. If the verification principle belongs neither to psychology nor to grammar nor to philology, what alternative remains?

[1]See p. 64.

II. *Is it a Tautology?*

The other possibility that Ayer's initial classification of propositions allows, is that the principle is an *a priori* principle, that is to say, that it is a tautology belonging to that category of propositions of which those of logic and mathematics are cited as pre-eminent examples.

Now, it is clear in the first place that the verification principle is not a principle of logic or of mathematics. Nor, *prima facie*, would it seem to be a tautology. Ayer though he constantly uses, does not define the term "tautology". We are, then, entitled to suppose that he is using the word in its customary sense, according to which—I quote from the Oxford Dictionary—a tautology is a "saying again of what has been said". Now, if we were to ask the question, what is the same thing that, having been said once already, is said again by the verification principle, I do not know what the answer may be. What, then—I venture to repeat the question—is the status of the principle?

Before I suggest an answer, I must say something about the statement of the principle contained in the Introduction to the revised (1946) edition.

Treatment of the Principle in the Introduction to the Revised Edition

It is not in my general intention[1] to deal with the qualifications of and withdrawals from the doctrine of Logical Positivism, as originally stated, which are contained in the Introduction to the revised (1946) edition of Ayer's book. Since, however, the question which I have just raised, is the verification principle a genuine empirical hypothesis about "matters of fact", or is it analytic and, therefore, tautologous, is there by implication answered, I permit myself a word of comment on the answer.

The answer (by implication) is that the principle is *not* about matters of fact, since, says Ayer, it cannot "be either confirmed or refuted by any fact of experience". It follows that it is analytic. Ayer calls it explicitly a definition: "I wish the principle of verification itself", he writes, "to be regarded not as an empirical hypothesis but as a definition". Of an analytic proposition we are told that it is true "solely in virtue of the meaning of its constituent symbols". Waiving the question

[1] See Introduction, pp. 16, 17, and ch. II, p. 39 (footnote) for the reason for this.

whether the "constituent symbols" (presumably, words) of the verification principle have any meaning at all in the sense of meaning allowed by Ayer, that is, of being verifiable in sense-experience, the only conclusion which, in the light of this and other statements, we seem to be entitled to draw, is that the verification principle is after all a tautology.

(*a*) If this is, indeed, its character, the following difficulties suggest themselves. A tautologous principle does not, we are told, make any assertion about the empirical world, but merely records our determination to use symbols in a certain fashion.

Now the verification principle does purport to tell us a great deal about the empirical world, as, for example, that the meaning of the statement, "there is an empirical world", is verifiable in terms of sense-contents which themselves belong to the empirical world.

(*b*) Ayer says that "from a set of tautologies, taken by themselves, only further tautologies can be validly deduced". Since no *empirical* principle is used in addition to the verification principle as a premise of logical positivist arguments about verification, it seems to follow that the whole structure of argument and conclusion derived from the verification principle consists of tautologies. Therefore, Logical Positivism tells us nothing about the world, but only about logical positivists' determination "to use words in a certain fashion".

Traditionally philosophy has been studied because it was at least thought to be possible that it might give us information about the nature of the universe. It is, I must confess, something of a disappointment to find that it only tells us about the way in which a certain number of philosophers has decided to use words. At least it would be, if the statement was itself a statement of fact, and not, as it turns out to be, only a record of the way in which logical positivists have chosen to use words. Ayer says that "it would be absurd to put forward a system of tautologies as constituting the whole truth about the universe". Logical Positivism does not admittedly purport to tell us the *whole* truth about the universe, but I do not think that those who believe in it wish it to be thought that it tells us no truth at all, but merely records a set of their linguistic conventions. I conclude that the view that the verification principle is a tautology is one which Logical Positivism cannot maintain consistently with a claim to serious attention.

III. *That the Principle is in Fact a Philosophical Principle*

If the principle does not give us information about syntax or the sounds of language, if it does not tell us about our own psychological states, and if it is not to be dismissed as a mere tautology, the only alternative that I can think of is that the principle should purport to provide us with a real definition of the philosophical status and function of language. Nor, I think, can it be doubted that this is what logical positivists intend it to do. But if this were indeed the nature of the information that it provides, or purports to provide, the principle would fall within the category of synthetic *a priori* propositions, since it would give us information about the nature of what is, but what is nevertheless not sensory. But such propositions are declared to be meaningless by the tenets of Logical Positivism.

Let me make the point in another way. What is it that we are knowing when we know the propositions of philosophy? Logical positivists, as we have seen, deny that there is philosophical knowledge of the behaviour or of the nature of things. "The propositions of philosophy", says Ayer, "do not describe the behaviour of physical, or even mental objects; they express definitions, or the formal consequences of definitions." And, again, "we may speak loosely of" (the philosopher) "as analysing facts, or notions, or even things. But we must make it clear that these are simply ways of saying that he is concerned with the definition of the corresponding words." In other words, the definitions of philosophy are nominalist only. They give us information about the way in which language is used. When, therefore, we know a philosophical proposition which appears *prima facie* to tell us something about *things*, what we are, in fact, knowing is "the definition of the corresponding words"; we are knowing, then, something about the way in which language is used.

Let us review the verification principle in the light of this account of the content of philosophical knowledge. Is it purely linguistic? By this question I mean, is the proposition that the meaning of an empirical proposition is the mode of its verification purely linguistic in the sense that it only tells us something about the way in which words are used? The answer, I think, is "No". What the principle purports to do is to tell us something about the criterion of meaning in the case of empirical propositions. It further goes on to state that those

propositions to which this criterion is not applicable are either tautologous or meaningless. It is clear that this criterion of meaning is now an "object" of knowledge which the verification principle seeks to define, and that metaphysical propositions are a further "object" about which it gives us information, the information, namely, that they are tautologous or meaningless. The principle, in other words, tells us something about the nature of these "objects", treating them as if they are real and can be known. As the result of our knowing of them, we obtain information about them which is new, the information, namely, that Logical Positivism seeks to convey. What kind of objects, then, are these, and what kind of knowledge is it that we are supposed to have of them? The knowledge, it is obvious, is not empirical nor, I think, would logical positivists regard it as tautological. I see no answer, then, to the question, except that the knowledge is philosophical, while, as for the "objects" to which the knowledge relates, these, it is obvious, are not sensory but belong to a non-sensory order of reality.

Hence, for the verification principle there is claimed, by implication, a status which is not only denied to all other principles, but which is expressly declared to be mythological by the principles of Logical Positivism. Not to put too fine a point on it, the verification principle is a metaphysical statement and, therefore, if Logical Positivism is to be believed, meaningless.

Similarly with the statement that whatever can be known apart from tautologous propositions is sensory, from which it is deduced that there is no non-sensory order of reality or that, if there is, we cannot know anything about it. What possible grounds could there be for making such an affirmation, which did not entail some kind of knowledge of or insight into the nature of reality? It could only be such insight, or rather, the knowledge which such insight purported to provide, which could inform us that there is no non-sensory order of reality. Is, then, this proposition, the proposition, namely, that there is no non-sensory order of reality, linguistic? Is it, that is to say, merely a statement about the way in which words are or should be used? I think not. Once again, it purports to tell us something about the nature of what is. And one of the things that it tells us is that the nature of what is is such as to exclude the non-sensory. Once again we are presented with what is, in effect,

a real definition; it is also a synthetic proposition; yet it is not empirical and it is not tautologous. Furthermore, it tells us something about reality and is, therefore, metaphysical. Finally, it is cognitive in the sense that it has reference to and tells us about what is other than ourselves and this something which is other than ourselves turns out to be non-sensory. In all these respects, therefore, such statements as that there is no non-sensory order of reality, or that all knowledge is of the same kind as scientific knowledge, or that metaphysical propositions are meaningless, or that the meaning of an empirical proposition is the mode of its verification offend the fundamental principles of Logical Positivism.

Summary

The foregoing criticisms point to the same conclusion. Logical Positivism accords to its own propositions a privileged position which exempts them from the strictures which it brings against other philosophical propositions. Emphatically it does not do unto others as it would itself be done by. It purports to give us cognitive knowledge which is not purely descriptive; it makes statements about the nature of things which are not purely empirical statements, and while it purports to be a theory of language, it is, in fact, a theory of metaphysics. Thus it stigmatizes all metaphysics as nonsense, only that it may set up a particular kind of metaphysic. The fact of the matter is that Logical Positivism fails to give an account of its own activity and in so failing, cuts the ground from under its own feet. It can only substantiate its conclusions at the cost of stultifying itself for if it is correct in all that it asserts, then its assertions, being metaphysical, must be nonsensical.

Carnap unconsciously exposes this situation when he tells us that "metaphysicians cannot avoid making their propositions non-verifiable, because if they made them verifiable the decision about the truth or falsehood of their doctrines would depend upon experience and, therefore, belong to the region of empirical science". We have only to apply this dictum to the propositions of Logical Positivism and the self-contradictory nature of its philosophy stands revealed.

That what exists is confined to the sensory, that all knowledge is of particular facts, that all propositions are either empirical or tautologous, that the meaning of an empirical

proposition is the mode of its verification—all these are propositions which are non-verifiable. Therefore, if the conclusions of Logical Positivism are to be adopted, they are meaningless. Wittgenstein, more logical than Carnap, has had the wit or the courage to disclose this predicament. He tells us that his own writings are nonsense, though he adds that his nonsense is important.

Note on a Proposal

This is, of course, not the first time that criticisms of this kind have been urged. Indeed, the self-contradictory nature of some parts of the logical positivist philosophy is sufficiently glaring to render such criticisms inevitable. To meet them, some logical positivists have re-interpreted the verification principle in such a way that the criterion of meaning in terms of verifiability shrinks into a proposal or recommendation that philosophers should enunciate only those propositions which are capable of being empirically verified. Thus, in the Introduction to the revised edition of *Language, Truth and Logic*, Ayer so reduces the claims of the verification principle that it becomes no more than a definition of *one* proper use of the word "meaning", with the corollary that it is possible for metaphysical statements which have no meaning in the sense allowed by the verification principle to have meaning in some other sense. "Although", he writes, "I should still defend the use of the criterion of verifiability as a methodological principle, I realize that for the effective elimination of metaphysics it needs to be supported by detailed analyses of particular metaphysical arguments." The principle, in fact, has now become a recommendation that philosophers who desire to produce fruitful work should confine their attentions to propositions of a certain type, that type, namely, which interests logical positivists, and should ignore others. This modest re-statement of the principle concedes to critics of Logical Positivism most of what they would wish to claim.[1] Anybody can issue a proposal or make a recommendation, but whether the recommendation is to be accepted and the proposal adopted by philosophers will depend upon considerations which are independent of the verification

[1] In the Introduction to the revised edition of Ayer's book, most of the distinctive doctrines of Logical Positivism referred to in this and the immediately preceding chapters are either abandoned or so emasculated as to cease to be either harmful or distinctive.

principle, and, more particularly, upon the philosophers' *antecedent* views of the status of metaphysical propositions. If *on other grounds* philosophers find difficulty in sharing Ayer's view that metaphysics is nonsense, they will not adopt the proposal; for the proposal is, after all, quite arbitrary, being no more than a reflection of the interests and a projection of the tastes of logical positivists. There can, it is obvious, be no objection to their confining their attention to these topics, if these are what happen to interest them. But they are not entitled to prescribe their predilections for others and those who do not share their interests or tastes will feel under no obligation to adopt the proposal, but will continue to consider the problems that interest *them*, undeterred by the logical positivists' refusal to take part in their discussions. (Though why logical positivists *should* persist in this refusal when, if they follow Ayer, they are now required to allow that metaphysical statements may have meaning in some one of the other senses of the word "meaning", is not clear.)

Non-Sensory Constituents of Scientific Knowledge

I have so far confined myself (i) to citing obvious examples of what is *prima facie* non-sensory knowledge, and (ii) to showing that the kind of knowledge which logical positivists claim in respect of their own propositions, as, for example, the knowledge which they claim to have when they know the verification principle, is included among these examples.

I propose now to consider in some detail a particular example of non-sensory knowledge. The case I propose to consider is the non-sensory element which is necessarily involved in scientific knowledge. If the world consists entirely of sensory facts, then the only knowledge which it is possible to have is the purely descriptive knowledge which the sciences give. Science is a kind of cosmic geography; it tells us what are the sensory facts which constitute the empirical world, how they are arranged and what relations they have one to another. According to Logical Positivism, all knowledge which is not tautologous conforms, as we have seen, to this type. All genuine knowledge is for Logical Positivism like scientific knowledge in that it is a knowledge of sensory facts.

I venture to make three points. (1) There is a difference between how things are and how they look. The stick in water

looks bent, but, we say, it *is* straight; the polished surface feels smooth, but examination through a microscope discloses that it *is* uneven; the earth's surface may look flat but we know that it *is* curved, and so on.

Now, when we formulate scientific laws we intend them to apply to the behaviour of natural objects, to natural objects, that is to say, not as they appear to be, but as we know them to be, natural objects *as we know them to be* being other than natural objects as we actually experience them. Take, for example, a square block of wood. I never *see* it as square simply because I cannot *see* all its sides at once; nor do I *feel* it as square. Again, I never *see* the molecules, atoms, protons and electrons of which, if I am a physicist, I *know* the block of wood to be composed. What, then, is the relation of the information yielded by my sense-experience to the order of nature that science explores and describes?

The answer to this question is controversial, but *prima facie* we may say that our visual impressions are taken as clues to an order of events of which they supply evidence but which is other than they. It follows that the order of my actual experiences is different from the order of natural objects and events which science describes.

It is, of course, true that when we say that the stick seen in water *is* straight, we correct our visual impressions by evidence derived from touch, and that when we say that the surface *is* uneven, we correct our tactile impressions by evidence derived from sight. But the inference is, once again, forced upon us that the natural order of events about which science gives us information is neither the same as the order of our visual impressions nor the same as the order of our tactile impressions. Both are clues to what is other than they, but clues of varying degrees of accuracy. In the first instance, the tactile, in the second, the visual clue is taken to be the more accurate. My conclusion is that the kind of knowledge that science gives is not wholly empirical; for it is not sense-experience alone that assures me that the stick is straight, the surface uneven, the earth curved and the block square. I know these things as the result of a process of reasoning which is based upon an *interpretation* of my sense-experience.

(2) Secondly, the fact that we make the distinction between what seems crooked and is straight, seems two-dimensional but

is three, seems flat but is curved, taking the contents of our sensory experiences as clues to something else of which these are an appearance, has an important bearing upon the phenomenalist analysis of perception. For what the fact implies is not only that we take our perceptions—and I am here using the word "perception" in what I take to be its original and correct sense to denote our acts of sensing or perceiving—as relevatory of what is other than themselves, but that we take the immediate content of what they reveal to us to be a clue to something other than the content. We know, then, that the physical world is other than it seems on perception to be. But if this is so, no analysis of the physical world in terms purely of sense-contents can ever be exhaustive, since sense-contents only give us information about what *seems* to be the case. I conclude that the purely phenomenalist analysis of perception which Logical Positivism adopts fails to cover the facts. It fails in particular to account for the fact referred to in a previous chapter,[1] that when I make contact with the table, I not only receive a number of sense-impressions but I *know* that there is an object, the table, to cause the impressions which is other than they. It is for this reason that I ventured to stigmatize the purely phenomenalist analysis as a dogma, since it dogmatically refuses to take this admitted fact—that I not only have sense-impressions but know that there is a cause for them which is other than they—into account.

(3) Thirdly, when we say that our sensory experiences are taken as clues to a natural order of events which is other than they, we are implying that they supply knowledge of that order. Hence, our perceptual experiences belong to two different kinds or orders of fact. As members of the first order, they figure as events in our minds which may well be linked with events in our bodies and brains, which are themselves causally dependent on the structure and stimulation of our sense-organs. In this context the events which are my experiences are members of the natural order of events which science studies. In so far as they are events in a mind, the science which is relevant to their study is psychology; in so far as they are linked with events in my brain and body, they are causally dependent upon the natural order of events which falls within the scope of physiology, while the events which stimulate our

[1] See ch. II, pp. 32, 33.

sense-organs belong to the natural order of events studied by physics.

But these events which are my experiences are also a *knowledge* of other events, these other events being those which science studies and the knowledge of them which my experiences supply being the kind of knowledge of which science is constituted.

If the events in our own minds were not also a knowledge of events other than themselves, there would be no science. Yet this fact, the fact, namely, that the events in our own minds are also a knowledge of other facts is not itself a scientific fact, since it is not accessible to observation by any sense-organ and no science is relevant to its study.

Thus scientific knowledge entails the existence of one fact which is not an empirical fact, the fact, namely, that the events in our minds are also a knowledge of empirical facts.

Now, this twofold character of the events in our minds, which are at the same time events belonging to the natural order and also a knowing of other events, escapes the notice of scientists whose attention is concentrated upon the external world. In so far as they concern themselves with events in minds, they think of them as mental processes, think of them, that is to say, as occurrences which belong solely to the natural order of events. But this fact to which I have drawn attention, the fact that an event in the natural order is also at the same time a knowledge of other events, should not escape the attention of philosophers; nor, indeed, has it done so in the past, as the voluminous writings on the nature of knowledge, which go by the name of epistemology, bear witness. As Plato pointed out in the *Theaetetus*, while my eye is in a place and, therefore, accessible to scientific study, and the table is in a place and, therefore, also accessible to scientific study, the awareness of the table which follows upon the stimulation of my optical nerve is not in any place. Therefore, it is not describable by science. Yet the awareness is certainly a fact, a fact which, incidentally, is the pre-supposition of our knowing any scientific fact.

When the dimensions of what is are arbitrarily limited to the sensory sphere, this fact comes to be overlooked, precisely because a theory of knowledge which, like that of Logical Positivism, countenances only scientific knowledge, that is to say, knowledge of sensory facts, can make no provision for it.

When confronted with an experience which is at once a fact belonging to the natural order of events and also a *knowing* of other facts, Logical Positivism takes account of it only in the first of its two capacities and overlooks its second. It seems to me that this failure to realize the significance of the knowing of one event by another, and so to allow for the fact that the knowledge of sensory facts is not itself a sensory fact, invalidates all purely empirical theories of knowledge. It also invalidates the proposition that all knowledge is of the kind exemplified by the sciences.

CHAPTER V

LOGICAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Definition and Statement

In the previous chapter I considered the question what, for Logical Positivism, it means to *know*; I turn now to the question what, for Logical Positivism, it means to *be*. The two enquiries are, indeed, continuous and the account of logical positivist epistemology given in the preceding chapter leads naturally to an account of logical positivist ontology.

With the possible exception of sense-contents[1] to be, for Logical Positivism, means to be a logical construction. I have already quoted a brief statement of Ayer's account of logical constructions.[2] For purposes of easy reference I give it in full here:

> " . . . When we speak of certain objects, b, c, d . . . as being elements of an object e, and of e as being constituted by b, c, d . . . we are not saying that they form part of e, in the sense in which my arm is a part of my body, or a particular set of books on my shelf is part of my collection of books. What we are saying is that all the sentences in which the symbol e occurs can be translated into sentences which do not contain e itself, or any symbol which is synonymous with e, but do contain symbols b, c, d. . . . In such a case we say that e is a logical construction out of b, c, d. . . . And, in general, we may explain the nature of logical constructions by saying that the introduction of symbols which denote logical constructions is a device which enables us to state complicated propositions about the elements of these constructions in a relatively simple form."

(1) *Inaccuracies of Statement*

The definition is, I think, carelessly worded. What Ayer implies is that the *symbol* "e" is a logical construction out of

[1] I say, "possible" having regard to the doubts raised in the discussion in ch. III, pp. 46–50.

[2] See ch. III, p. 47.

symbols "b, c and d". What, I think, he *means* is that *object* "e" is a logical construction out of *objects* "b, c and d", where the objects "b, c and d", which he refers to as elements of "e", are sense-contents. His account is also misleading in another way. He goes on to suggest that such an "object" as "the average Englishman", is a logical construction out of Tom, Dick and Harry; but these names do not, in fact, appear as elements in the translation of sentences in which the symbol "the average Englishman" occurs. What does appear as an element in such sentences is the symbol "Englishmen".

These, however, are minor inaccuracies, although the first springs from a confusion between symbol and things symbolized which runs, as I think, through much of logical positivist thought.

(2) *What is Gained by the Translation?*

A question which immediately presents itself is, why should this translation of statements about the table into statements about sense-contents be made? As a common-sense man as, that is to say, a man who is not philosophizing, I know the table very well and believe myself to be in a position to make statements about it. What is more, I think that I can make these statements because I believe myself to be directly acquainted with the table's characteristics; with, for example, the fact that it is square, brown and hard. It is, of course, true that I have sense-experiences of the table but I don't know very much about them. Certainly I do not know them with the same certainty and exactitude as I know the table and I have, therefore, great difficulty in describing them. If I try, I find that I must have recourse to such expressions as a feeling of pressure when I touch the table, a visual sensation of brownness which grows gradually lighter in shade as my eye travels towards what I take to be the edges of the table when I look at it, a sensation of a sharp rapping sound when I hit it with my knuckles, and so on. These sense-experiences of mine are vague and indefinite. Their most noticeable characteristic is perhaps their transparency; they are, as it were, the windows through which my awareness becomes focused on the table. Moreover, whatever characteristics I find myself able to ascribe to them are, I should say—and I am still voicing what I take to be the assumptions of common sense—palpably bestowed upon them by the table; my

visual sensation is of brownness because the table is brown; I have a feeling of pressure because the table is hard, and so on. Hence, to translate the table which is obviously given and directly known into terms of sense-contents which are obscure, hard to introspect and, therefore, comparatively unknown, seems to me to be an act of gratuitous obscurantism.

What, then, is the purpose of the translation? Is it, for example, supposed that when symbols that stand for things are translated into symbols that stand for actual or possible sense-contents, we are effecting a translation from the less known and the less verifiable, to the more? Not only does introspection suggest the contrary to be the case, but, as I have already pointed out,[1] a well-known theory of perception suggests that we are in sense-perception directly aware not of sense-contents, but of data which are not parts of our experience though the act of apprehending them is. I fail, then, to see what advantage is secured by the translation of statements about the table into statements about sense-contents or to understand what the purpose of the translation may be.

(3) *The Difficulty about Words*

The theory of logical constructions raises a difficulty to be developed in the next chapters in regard to the status of words. It is because things are proclaimed to be logical constructions, that metaphysical propositions, as for example, that "God is Love",[2] or "the universe is a unified whole", or "the real is rational", are regarded as being merely verbal. They tell us, that is to say, about the ways in which words are used. Thus, Ayer says that the question "'What is a universal?' is not, as it has traditionally been regarded, a question about the character of certain real objects, but a request for a definition of a certain term. Philosophy, as it is written, is full of questions like this, which seem to be factual but are not." This mode of treatment is extended from metaphysical to physical objects. "To ask what is the nature of a material object is to ask for a definition of 'material object', and this . . . is to ask how propositions about material objects are to be translated into propositions about sense-contents." The conclusion is that descriptive statements are not about truths or facts or even about material objects, as they purport to be and as those who make them

[1] See ch. II, pp. 35, 36.

[2] See ch. VI, pp. 98–100.

intend them to be; they are about words and about the way in which words are used. When the philosopher thinks he is enquiring into the nature of things and their relations, whether non-sensory and metaphysical or sensory and material, he is deceiving himself. What he is doing is defining words: "We may speak loosely of him as analysing facts, or notions, or even things. But we must make it clear that these are simply ways of saying that he is concerned with the definition of the corresponding words."

The Status of Words

Now, Ayer clearly means this to be a factual assertion in the sense in which, as he tells us, "the assertion that tables were fictitious objects would be a factual assertion, albeit a false one". It is a factual assertion about words and the definitions of words. What, then, are words? *Prima facie* words are things. They are assemblages of letters, marks on paper, sounds. Now *things* are logical constructions. Therefore, to ask "what is a word?" is not to ask "a question about the character of certain real objects" but to make "a request for a definition of a certain term". More precisely, to ask the question, "what is the nature of a word, (X)?" is to be "concerned with the definition of the corresponding words", which words, I propose, to indicate by the symbols X_1, X_2.

To complete our summary of Ayer's account of the things which are words, we must add that words are also symbols and symbols are definable in terms of sense-contents. Thus, "sentences which contain the symbol 'table' or the corresponding symbol in any language which has the same structure as English, can all be translated into sentences of the same language which do not contain that symbol, nor any of its synonyms but do contain certain symbols which stand for sense-contents." Hence, Ayer continues, "to say anything about a table is always to say something about sense-contents". Hence, to say something about a word is to say something about sense-contents.

I cannot pretend that I have found my way successfully through this tangle of definitions.

I think, however, that Ayer's various statements may be not unfairly summarized in the following propositions:

(1) Things are logical constructions out of words which symbolize sense-contents.

(2) Words, being things, are also logical constructions out of words which symbolize sense-contents.

(3) To ask, "what is a thing?" is to make "a request for a definition of a certain term" and to analyse a thing is to be "concerned with the definition of the corresponding words".

(4) Hence, to ask, "What is a word?" is to make "a request for a definition of a certain term" and to analyse a word is to be "concerned with the definition of the corresponding words".

(5) On Ayer's view, the answer to the question, "What is the nature of a thing?" takes the form of a definition. Hence, the statement that a thing is a "so and so" is an analytical proposition, so that the answer to the question, "what is the nature of a thing?", "simply records our determination to use words in a certain fashion".

Now let us suppose that I ask, "what is a table?" According to (3), I am asking for a definition of a certain term, that term, namely, which is "the corresponding *word*", "table". It turns out, then, that to ask something about a thing, table, when I ask, "what is a table?", is to ask something about the word, "table".

What, then, I repeat, is the word, "table"? I will, first, give my own answer. Words are universals which are exemplified by particular instances. Thus, if I write the word, "table", in pencil, I make black marks on a white background. If I write it in ink, or print it, I am still making black marks on a white background. The three sets of marks are numerically distinct and may, in fact, look different. Nevertheless, they all have something in common, the something in question being the fact that they are instances of, or exemplify, the universal which is the written word, table. Similarly, every time the word "table" is *uttered*, there occurs a different particular instance of the universal which is the spoken word, table, of which each uttered word is a particular instance. The universal, which is the written word, table, and the universal which is the spoken word, table, are themselves particular instances of the universal which is the word, table.

Hence, if I ask the question, "what is the word, table?" I may be referring either to the universal which is the word, table, or to one of the particulars.

Logical positivists dismiss universals as metaphysical entities, analysing them into classes of particulars which are similar to a given particular. The question which I am asking when I

ask, "what is the word, table?" must, then, presumably, for logical positivists, be a question about one of the particulars of the word, table. Now such a particular is, it is obvious, a thing. If written, it occupies a position in space; it can also be seen, since the black marks of which it consists stimulate my sense-organs and provide me with visual sense-contents. Again, it can be heard, when, as a result of being spoken, it sets going waves in the atmosphere which stimulate my aural sense-organs.

Since it is a thing, to ask "what is the nature of the word, table?" which word I have indicated by the symbol X, is to ask for a definition of a certain term or, more precisely, to be "concerned with the definition of the corresponding words". What, then, is the term and what are "the corresponding words"? Presumably, they are either the words which correspond to the word, "table", words which I have indicated by the symbols X_1 and X_2 or they are some other "corresponding words". What these other corresponding words may be, I do not know, but I will call them Y and Z.

The Infinite Regress Again

The conclusion is that to ask "what is the word, X?" is to get an answer in terms of other words, either X_1 and X_2, or Y and Z.

Similarly, to ask, "what are the words X_1 and X_2?" is to obtain an answer in terms of X_3 and X_4, or of P and Q.

The process, it is obvious, can continue indefinitely, so that when we ask the question, "what is a word?", an infinite regress is involved in the answer. Since the definition of the nature of things is in terms of words, an infinite regress is involved whenever we ask, "what is a thing?"

Now whatever may be the correct answer to the question, "what is a table?" I feel reasonably convinced that it is not an answer which takes the form of giving a verbal definition, which has meaning only in terms of another verbal definition, and so on indefinitely, the presumption being that the question, "what is a thing?" can never be answered.

But Ayer suggests another answer to the question, "what is the word, table?" where the word, table, is a particular thing. It is that it is a logical construction out of words which symbolize sense-contents.[1] In other words, if to say "this is a table" is (to

[1] See (2), p. 83.

put it shortly) to say that, if I make certain movements certain sense-contents will occur, to say, "this is the word, table", is to say (I am again putting it shortly) that if I make or somebody else makes certain movements with his fingers, certain sense-contents will occur, and that if I make or somebody else makes certain movements in his larynx and with his tongue, certain other sense-contents will occur. Hence, to ask, "what is the word, table?" is to obtain an answer in terms of sense-contents.

(As I have already pointed out[1] a similar answer must be given to the question, "what is a sense-content?" so that another infinite regress lurks here.)

Since to ask, "what is a table?" is to ask for a definition of "the corresponding words", we get the curious result that the answer to the question "what is a table?" will take the form of a statement to the effect that certain sense-contents are occurring, or might occur, not, as one would suppose, *those sense-contents which would be normally said to verify the statement*, "this is a table", as for example, sense-contents which are hard, square and black, but *those sense-contents which would normally be said to verify the statement* "this is the word, table", these being the sense-contents appropriate to or connected with black marks on a white background and noises in larynxes.

Now, this anomalous result arises, I suggest, from the fact that words are not treated by logical positivists as other "things" are treated, but are accorded privileged treatment. Words are not treated as logical constructions but as real things, so that, while the thing, table, is regarded as being only a symbol which we require to translate into other symbols which stand for sense-contents, no such translation is felt to be necessary in respect of the word, "table". Logical positivists, as it seems to me, overlook the fact that words, too, are empirical phenomena, and that, when we know what words occur in a sentence, what we are knowing is a non-verbal fact about things. If it be admitted that we know at least one non-verbal fact, that is to say, one fact about the world which is neither translatable into sentences about the knower's sense-contents nor reducible to logical constructions, it seems unnecessary to elaborate ingenious and dubious theories to explain away our apparent knowledge of physical things such as tables and chairs which certainly *appears* to be a knowledge of non-verbal facts,

[1] See ch. III, pp. 46–50.

a knowledge, therefore, of the nature of what is, as being merely verbal. If our knowledge of words is treated as if it were not merely verbal, why should it not also be possible for our knowledge of other facts, to be not merely verbal? For it would, indeed, be odd if the analysis accorded to a particular class of things, namely, words, was totally different from that accorded to things belonging to all other classes. But such a conclusion would invalidate both the view that metaphysics is nonsense and the view that all physical things are logical constructions.

CHAPTER VI

GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND THEORY OF TRUTH

Statement of View

The view that there are certain first principles which are intuitively perceived to be true, and that by reasoning deductively from these principles it should in theory be possible to reach certain truths about the nature of reality is repudiated by Logical Positivism. General principles, to be fruitful, must, Ayer declares, be obtained inductively. Many philosophers, he points out, have accepted as first principles a set of *a priori* truths; but these, as we have seen, are, on Ayer's view, tautologies and from them only further tautologies can be deduced. First principles and general principles are, then, to be obtained inductively. The following questions suggest themselves.

COMMENTS

(1) *By What Methods is Ayer's General Principle Reached?*

This declaration is itself a declaration of first principle. It is a premise from which many conclusions of importance to Logical Positivism follow. How, then, is it obtained? There seem to be two alternatives: (*a*) that it is obtained by induction; (*b*) that it is regarded as a "self-evident" principle. As to (*a*), it is difficult to see what kind of inductive process could be relevant to the establishment of such a principle; none at any rate is offered. As to (*b*), the principle is by no means self-evident to all or even most philosophers.

The difficulty raised by this principle is similar to that which we have already encountered in connexion with the verification principle. How, I asked in Chapter IV, is the verification principle known? It is not established empirically—it is not, that is to say, the evidence of any one of our senses that assures us that the meaning of a principle is the mode of its verification, nor, I argued, was it a tautology. My conclusion was that the principle of verification did not conform to the general

requirements laid down by Ayer for the establishment of meaningful propositions. A similar verdict must, I think, be passed upon the principle that general principles must be obtained inductively.

Similarly, with regard to Ayer's treatment of the principle of implication, which he states as follows: "If *p* implies *q*, and *p* is true, *q* is true", a principle which he describes as a tautology. Is, then, the principle that the principle of implication is a tautology inductively arrived at? I cannot see that it is; it is simply announced. Indeed, the structure of Logical Positivism is studded with principles which may be termed first principles, in the sense that all manner of consequences are deduced from them, which are themselves simply announced. Yet we are told that all first principles must be obtained inductively with the exception of those which are tautologous, from which only other tautologies follow.

(2) *Logical Positivism and Induction*

From first principles, however obtained, logical positivists proceed by inductive reasoning to reach certain conclusions.

The question may be asked, what justification have they for proceeding by induction, unless they know that the inductive principle is true. And since it is not by induction that the truth of the principle is established, what right have they to assume it to be true? These are familiar difficulties and Ayer, who is, of course, well aware of them, says: "There is no possible way of solving the problem of induction, as it is ordinarily conceived." This is not to say that Ayer conceives the problem differently; he leaves it unsolved, contenting himself with pointing out that induction is continually used in science and that "what justifies scientific procedure, to the extent to which it is capable of being justified, is the success of the predictions to which it gives rise". In other words, provided that "the necessary condition of self-consistency" is satisfied, success in practice, success, that is to say, in enabling us to anticipate our experiences, is all that we are entitled to demand of the propositions which make up the so-called truths of science. As for the philosophical problem touching our *grounds* for relying on the process of inductive inference by means of which the conclusions of science are reached, no more is said about it. Perhaps it is dismissed as a pseudo-problem, or as meaningless.

This is fair enough—we none of us know how to solve the problem of induction—provided that one does not go on to say that first principles, including, therefore, the principle of induction, must be reached inductively; provided also that one does not imply, as Ayer does, that it is induction and only induction that justifies us in believing in material things.

Induction and Material Things

Ayer's various statements in regard to the existence of material things are, as we have seen, confusing.[1] Sometimes they are treated as logical constructions; sometimes they are analysed into sets of sense-contents—"we know" says Ayer, "that it must be possible to define material things in terms of sense-contents". There are, however, other passages in which Ayer seems to imply that they do, indeed, exist in the sense in which in ordinary life we suppose them to exist. I have, for example, quoted on a previous page[2] a passage in which he rebukes writers on perception who "assume that, unless one can give a satisfactory analysis of perceptual situations, one is not entitled to believe in the existence of material things". He goes on to assert that "what gives one the right to believe in the existence of a certain material thing is simply the fact that one has certain sensations". Similarly with events which we are not actually observing; their occurence may, he says, be inferred by the help of general principles obtained inductively, among which, presumably, must be included the principle of induction itself.

But how can we know inductively that we are entitled to infer the existence of material things which are not and never can be experienced from the occurrence of sense-contents which are experienced? And how can we know inductively that we can infer events which are unobserved from sense-contents which, presumably, are observed? It is not merely that the material things are unexperienced, the events unobserved; more serious is the fact that material things are totally unlike anything which on Ayer's view ever has been or can be experienced, since they are material, and unobserved events are totally unlike any events such as sense-contents that are or can be observed; or, rather, since they *are* unobserved, we have not the faintest notion what they are like. My questions are, then,

[1] See the discussion in ch. II, pp. 36–38. [2] See ch. II, p. 37.

what sort of general principle is it that entitles us to postulate the existence of these unexperienced material objects and unobserved events, by what method is it obtained and how is it known?

(3) *Analytic Tautologies*

My third comment on Ayer's treatment of general principles relates more particularly to those general principles which are *a priori* and, therefore, on his view, both analytic and tautologous.

Ayer's doctrine in regard to these is that, in so far as they can be said to be about anything, they are about the use of language. They "record our determination to use words in a certain fashion". Now, it is, of course, the case that some definitions in logic and mathematics are preferred to others. Indeed, cases have occurred in which one definition has been discarded and another substituted precisely because the second was thought to be better than the first. What does "better" mean? More "useful", says Ayer, and more "fruitful".

What do "useful" and "fruitful" mean? The answer is, more liable to draw our attention to truths: "A well chosen definition will call our attention to analytic truths which would otherwise have escaped us." What are these "truths"? Are they further tautologies? Presumably they must be, since they are qualified by the word, "analytic". For my part, I find it difficult to ascribe meaning to the conception of a fruitful "tautology" or to see how one tautology can be more fruitful than another, especially as we are told that from a tautology nothing but other tautologies can be validly deduced.[1]

I shall proceed in a moment to consider Ayer's treatment of truth, and to point out that he eschews the word "truth", stigmatizing it as meaningless, and substitutes the word "validity", whenever he can. However truth will "out" as it has done here, the word "truth" slipping out, inadvertently, as it were, because, try as he may, Ayer cannot entirely eliminate the concept for which it stands. For what is the position which he is asking us to accept?

(i) All logical and mathematical propositions are (*a*) analytic, (*b*) tautologous and (*c*) verbal, in the sense that they "merely record our determination to use words in a certain fashion".

[1] One is tempted to wonder whether all tautological principles should not, on Ayer's premises, be accounted equally "fruitful" in that from any one of them all other tautologies could in theory be validly deduced?

(ii) Some logical and mathematical definitions are to be preferred to others.

(iii) They are preferable, because, more fruitful, that is, they call our attention to "analytic truths which would otherwise have escaped us".

(iv) Analytic truths according to (i) are (*a*) tautologous, and (*b*) linguistic, that is, they "record our determination to use words in a certain fashion".

(v) Hence, in saying that some definitions are better than others, what we must mean is that when we are enunciating tautologies, some of them draw our attention to our determination to use words in a certain fashion more efficiently than others do.

I have two comments. (1) Why should we use words in one fashion rather than in another, if the preferred fashion turns out to be only a way of drawing attention to our determination to use words in one way rather than in another? (2) A well chosen definition is only a tautology and analytic truths, even those which might "otherwise have escaped us", are only tautologies. From tautologies, Ayer has already told us, nothing can be inferred but other tautologies. Why, then, one wonders, should some tautologies be preferred to others?

An adequate answer to these questions would, I suggest, require us to give to the phrase "analytic truths" some meaning other than a purely linguistic one. But such a meaning would entail the use of the word "truth" in its old-fashioned sense of correspondence with fact, a "useful" or "fruitful" definition being one which corresponds to the nature of the things defined more closely than one which has been found by experience to be "useless" or "fruitless".

This brings me to Ayer's treatment of truth.

Ayer's Account of Truth

Ayer begins by dismissing the notion of truth, in the sense in which the word is used when questions are asked of the type, "what is truth?" or "what is the meaning of truth?" To ask, "what is truth" is, he says, to ask for "a translation of the sentence '(the proposition) p is true' ".

In sentences of this kind, however, the phrase, "is true", is, he points out, superfluous. Thus, to say that the proposition, " 'Queen Anne is dead' is true", is merely to say that "Queen

Anne is dead". Hence, "the terms 'true' and 'false' connote nothing, but function in the sentence simply as marks of assertion and denial. And in that case there can be no sense in asking us to analyse the concept of 'truth'."

Instead, then, of vainly discussing the nature of "truth" and the meaning of "true", we are asked to consider how empirical propositions are validated. Our question, in Ayer's words, becomes, "What is the criterion by which we test the validity of an empirical proposition?" It is to this question that all the theories and speculations about the nature of truth which have for so long occupied the attention of philosophers fine themselves down. To be able to answer it is, Ayer intimates, to be in a position to dispose finally of the philosophical problem of truth. Now, Ayer gives a quite definite answer to this question. He says that "We test the validity of an empirical hypothesis by seeing whether it actually fulfils the function which it is designed to fulfil. And we have seen that the function of an empirical hypothesis is to enable us to anticipate experience." To anticipate experience means to enable us to predict what sensations or sense-contents we shall have in a particular situation. Empirical propositions are, then, of the nature of hypotheses which "are designed to enable us to anticipate the course of our sensations".

Now, such propositions have, he holds, only probability value. Further observations by which their validity is tested, may and, indeed, will, if successful, increase our confidence in them, but they never establish them beyond the possibility of doubt.

Hence, in saying, "that an observation increases the probability of a proposition", what we mean is "that it increases our confidence in the proposition, as measured by our willingness to rely on it in practice as a forecast of our sensations".

Putting this shortly, when we say that a proposition is true, what we mean is that it has enabled us in the past to predict our sensations with success, and that we rely upon it to enable us successfully to predict our sensations in the future.

(1) *Comments on the Theory*

I venture, first, to raise a verbal point. When embarking on an analysis of the word, "truth", Ayer substitutes the word, "validity". For the question, what is meant by saying that

'p is true'? he substitutes the question, by what criterion is p validated?

What, then, is the purpose of the substitution of the words "validity", "valid" and "validated" for the words "truth", "true" and "shown to be true"? Further, what is the ground for the substitution? Are the two sets of words synonymous, or is there some subtle difference of meaning between, how is p known to be true? and how is p validated? which causes the latter expression to be preferred? If so, what is the difference? We are not told.

(2) *Some Necessary Distinctions* (*a*)

One would have thought *prima facie* that the procedure which I adopt for determining whether a proposition is true must be different from the meaning which I have in mind when I say that it is true. Thus, if I say that there are a hundred people in the room, what I mean to assert is the co-existence of a number of physical facts, or, more precisely, of a pattern of physical facts, standing in a certain relation to each other. It is to this pattern of facts that my statement purports to refer and it is with them that, if it is true, I believe it to correspond. The fact that if Ayer is right, I ought not to mean anything of the kind, does not alter the fact that it is this precisely that I do mean. The procedure I adopt for finding out whether my statement is true is to go through the room counting the number of people in order to find out how many there are. But to recognize that *this is the method by which I find out* whether my statement is true does not in the least entail that this is what I *mean when I say that it is true.*

Moreover, Ayer, as we have seen, gives, in the case of analytic propositions an account of what it means to say that they are true which is notably different from his account of the meaning of the truth of empirical propositions. To say that twenty plus thirty equals fifty means, for him, no more than that we have decided to use words in a certain fashion. But to say, 'here are two boxes of apples, there are twenty apples in the one box and thirty in the other; therefore, there are fifty in all' is to make a statement of empirical fact; it is, in fact, to say something about the world. Now, in the case of this latter statement, the meaning is not, according to Ayer, that I have decided to use words in a certain fashion, but is the procedure

which I adopt for testing its validity, is, that is to say, proceeding on the assumption that the statement, 'there are twenty apples in the one box and thirty in the other', is true, anticipating future experience by entertaining an expectation as to the occurrence of certain sense-contents which are appropriate on this assumption, and then finding that the sense-contents expected do, in fact, occur. For my part, I find it difficult to believe that the meaning of the two statements I have cited should be so totally different, difficult, that is to say, to believe that, when I say that thirty and twenty make fifty, I am making a statement about my determination to use language in a certain way, and that when I say that the thirty apples in this box and the twenty in that make fifty in all, I am making a statement about certain sensations that I expect to obtain as a result of making certain movements with my hands and eyes. It is certainly not *apparent* to me that the meaning of my two statements is so completely different.

Ayer seems to overlook the consideration which lies at the basis of Kant's epistemology, that many empirical propositions entail either explicitly or implicitly the intrusion of mathematical concepts, for example, in measuring and counting, and that the rules of logic and mathematics are, therefore, applicable to the world of physical things which is empirically observed. This consideration seems to point to the fact that logic, mathematics and the empirical sciences all refer to a common world which transcends the province of each. Logical Positivism, so far as I can see, is forced either to deny any such common world transcending the provinces of the special sciences, or to deny that, if it exists we can make meaningful statement about it. For it, there is only the world of science. But if Kant is right—and I think that he is—our ability to make meaningful statements about the world of science implies the existence of a world which transcends that of science, a world which contains laws, general principles and numbers and to which logic and mathematics belong. Admittedly, the account which should be given of this common world is open to doubt, but Logical Positivism, by so sharply distinguishing between the meaning of truth in its application to analytic and empirical statements respectively, does, by implication, deny it. For my part, I should maintain that there is no knowledge of matters of empirical fact that does not entail the occurrence of

mental activities and the recognition of relations which transcend empirical fact.[1]

(3) *Some Necessary Distinctions* (*b*)

So far I have sought to distinguish between the meaning of truth and the procedure which we adopt for finding out whether a particular statement is true. But a further distinction should, as it seems to me, be drawn between what we mean when we say that a belief is true and what causes us to think it true. The logical positivist definition of the meaning of "true" —or perhaps I should say "valid"—in its application to empirical propositions, namely, the property of enabling us to anticipate future experience, springs from an ambiguity in the use of the word "means". In one of his earlier philosophical phases, Bertrand Russell was at pains to distinguish between two relevant senses of the word "means". We can, he pointed out, say either (i) that "cloud means rain", or (ii) that "*pluie* means rain". Now the sense in which "cloud means rain" is different from that in which "*pluie* means rain". We say that a "cloud means rain" because it possesses the causal properties and characteristics of being liable to produce rain; we say that "*pluie* means rain" because the words "*pluie*" and "*rain*", both of which are symbols for communicating what is in our minds, happen to be symbols for communicating the same thought in the minds of two different people. Now, the sense normally given to the word "means" is this latter sense, and the question, "what is the meaning of truth?" can, therefore, be paraphrased, "what is it that we have in our minds when we say that a belief is true?"

Now let us consider the logical positivist definition of truth in the light of these two possible meanings of "means".

Logical positivists begin by enquiring what it is that causes us to believe a proposition to be true. Their answer is that we rely upon or have confidence in a hypothesis which enables us to anticipate future experience; in other words, it is the fact that they have been found over a considerable period to enable us successfully to anticipate future experience which leads us to rely upon propositions and so (in common-sense language) to regard them as true.

Now, it is probably the case that, so far as empirical matters

[1] See ch. IV, pp. 74–78, for a development of this view.

of fact are concerned, a proposition which enables us successfully to anticipate future experience is a proposition which we tend to affirm to be true. It is probably also the case that the fact that belief in a particular proposition has in the past enabled us to anticipate future experiences *causes* us to affirm the proposition to be true. These, however, are psychological considerations. They are the sort of considerations which one might reasonably adduce in answer to the question, what is it that causes a human mind to affirm a belief to be true.

Now, as I have pointed out, there is a sense in which, if A *causes* B we may affirm that A *means* B, and in this sense we may say of a consideration that causes us to affirm a proposition to be true that that consideration is what the proposition means. But having noticed that there is a sense in which if A causes B we may affirm that A means B—the first sense of the word, "means", distinguished above—logical positivists proceed to apply this sense of the word "means" to the *definition* of the meaning of truth, and proceeds to deduce from the proposition, "the property of enabling us to anticipate future experience causes us to think the proposition which possesses the property true", the further proposition "enabling us to anticipate future experience is what truth *means*".

Having established this conclusion, logical positivists appear to think that they have satisfactorily "defined" the meaning of truth. But they have "defined" it only in terms of the first sense of the word, "means", referred to above, the sense, that is to say, in which a cloud "means" rain, because a cloud causes rain. But this, as I have pointed out, is not the sense which we commonly have in mind when we use the word "means" and, in particular, it is not the sense which we have in mind when we ask, "what is the meaning of truth?" If, then, it is conceded that there is a distinction between (*a*) what we have in mind when we say that a belief is true, and (*b*) what causes us to say that a belief is true, it would seem to follow that the logical positivist definition of the meaning of truth, which may conceivably be a correct account of (*b*), is not the correct interpretation of (*a*).

(4) *Correspondence with Fact*

Ayer's account of truth in the case of empirical propositions may be shortly formulated as follows: an empirical proposition

is a hypothesis which we frame in order to perform a certain function. This function is to enable us to anticipate future sense-experiences, and when we say that a proposition is true, what we mean is that it does, in fact, enable us to predict our experiences, being progressively validated as its success in this respect continues.

Now, the question may be asked, why do some hypotheses enable us to forecast the course of future sensations with substantial accuracy, while others do not? Is the fact that one hypothesis does so, while others do not, a purely arbitrary fact? If, for example, I am told that there are a hundred people in the room by somebody whom I think to be trustworthy and whose word I believe, and proceed subsequently to count in order to make quite sure that he is right, my initial confidence in his statement that there are a hundred people in the room does, no doubt, enable me successfully to forecast my future sensations when I come to count them, whereas belief in the propositions that there are ninety-nine or one hundred and one, would enable me to anticipate my sensations less successfully. If I believed that there were a thousand, my future sensations when I started to verify my belief by the process of counting would, no doubt, surprise me considerably. But the fact that of all the propositions which I could have enunciated, one and one only enables me to predict my future experiences, while none of the others would have been successful in this respect, cannot surely be quite arbitrary. There must be *some* reason for it. And what can the reason be except that one of the propositions correctly states or corresponds to a fact which is what it is independently of the proposition, while none of the others do so? And what can the fact be, except that there are, indeed, a hundred people in the room? Just as, in the case of logical and mathematical propositions, there must be *some* reason why some are preferred to, because they are more fruitful than, others, and just as the only plausible reason why this should be so, is, as I suggested, that those which are more fruitful are true in the old-fashioned sense of corresponding with fact,[1] so with regard to empirical propositions, the fact that some are more reliable forecasters of experience than others is, I am suggesting, susceptible of the same obvious explanation.

To sum up, I am suggesting that the difficulty in Ayer's

[1] See p. 91, above.

account of the truth both of analytical and of empirical propositions is that it provides us with *no* reason why some one proposition should be believed to be true and not others; or—to put the point in Ayer's terminology—no reason why the result of acting upon the believed truth of one hypothesis should be to enable us to anticipate experience by furnishing us with the appropriate sensations, but not the result of acting upon some different hypothesis. It is, I think, clearly the purpose of most of the propositions which we assert to refer to and, if possible, to correspond with the world outside us. But if they are to do this, there must be a world outside us for the propositions to correspond with. For Ayer, as far as I can see, there is no such world, or, rather, it is meaningless both to say that there is and to say that there is not, since empirical propositions have meaning only in terms of the sense-contents which verify them. Being unable, therefore, to have recourse to the obvious explanation of what it is that we mean when we say of a statement or belief that it is true, which is that it corresponds with the world outside us, he is driven to have recourse to such expressions as, "a well chosen definition" which "will call our attention to analytic truths, which would otherwise have escaped us", or a hypothesis which has the characteristic of "enabling us to anticipate experience". But what Ayer does not do is to suggest any reason why, if the characteristic of being "well chosen" and the characteristic of "enabling us to anticipate experience" are both the meaning and the criteria of truth, some definitions should direct our attention fruitfully, should, that is to say, direct it to analytic truths which would otherwise have escaped us, while others do not. On his view these, I suggest, are facts which are purely arbitrary facts.

(5) *The Re-ification of Words*

A further criticism may, I suggest, be levelled against Ayer's theory of truth on the score of its treatment of words. His general view, broadly, is that we know only linguistic facts and facts about sense-contents. About the structure of a world which consists neither of linguistic facts, nor of sense-contents, we can, if he is right, know nothing.

I will state what I take to be the contrary and traditional view, as follows: (i) We can infer a great deal about the world from the properties of language, as used, for example, in the

propositions of logic. (ii) In perception we can know directly physical facts which are not parts of our sense-contents.

Logical Positivism may be described as a sustained attempt to discredit this normal view. The attempt seems to me to break down by reason of the circumstance to which I have already drawn attention in another connexion,[1] that a word is not a verbal but is an empirical fact, is, indeed, from this point of view, analogous to any other empirical fact, as an empirical fact is commonly understood. Hence, when we know what words occur in a sentence, what we are knowing is not a linguistic but is a non-verbal fact, a fact, moreover, which we are knowing as the result of the stimulation of our visual sense-organs, when the word is written and of our aural sense-organs, when it is spoken.

If it be admitted that we can know at least one non-verbal empirical fact, it is, as I have already suggested, unnecessary to explain away our apparent knowledge of other non-verbal facts, as, for example, that here are a hundred people and that this is a room, by treating the propositions which apparently express the facts, not as telling us something about people and rooms, but as making assertions (i) about actual and possible sense-contents and (ii) about the way in which we have chosen to use words, in this case the words "room", "hundred", and "people". Moreover, once the point is conceded that words are being treated as physical things which exist in the straightforward sense of the word "exist" and which can and do stimulate our sense-organs, I can proceed to make the further point that it must be possible to make statements about them which describe their physical structure and the arrangement of their constituent letters. The question can then be raised, are these statements true? Is, for example, the statement that the word, "mode", succeeds the word, "meaning", in the sentence, "the meaning of an empirical statement is the mode of its verification", true, or the statement that it precedes it?

This seems to me to be a question which can quite meaningfully be asked and answered, the answer being that the former statement is true and the latter false. But in saying this, I am using the word "true" in the old-fashioned sense of correspondence with fact, the fact being the order of words in a sentence and not in the sense ascribed to it by Logical Positivism,

[1] See ch. V, pp. 81–86.

the sense, namely, in which to say that an empirical statement is true, is to say that it enables us to anticipate future experience.

The repudiation of the traditional conception of truth as correspondence with the order and arrangement of *things* follows naturally from the logical positivist denial of material things and the substitution for them of symbols standing for sense-contents. And, indeed, on their view, it is difficult to see with what a statement *could* correspond. But once the existence of some physical things, namely, words, be admitted and once it is admitted that we can know them and their order in the straightforward sense in which we would normally be said to know physical facts, it is difficult to see why a true statement about words should not be one which correctly describes their character and arrangement, should not, in fact, be a statement which corresponds with what is. Nor is it easy to see what other meaning could be plausibly assigned to the word, "true", in this connexion. But if this is the meaning of the word, "true", when it is applied to propositions which assert something about those physical things which are words and about their arrangement, it is difficult to see why the word, "true", should be used in an entirely different sense when it is applied to propositions which make assertions about other physical things.

CHAPTER VII

ANALYSIS OF THE SELF

Ayer's Account of the Self

Ayer's account of the nature of the self follows Hume in denying the existence of what he calls "a substantial self".

The lines of his treatment are as follows: (1) All "things" are logical constructions from sense-contents. Therefore, the self is a logical construction. (2) We distinguish one object from another by reason of the fact "that it is constituted by different sense-contents, or by sense-contents differently related". (3) The terms, mental and physical, belong only to "things" which are logical constructions from sense-contents; but sense-contents are not themselves either mental or physical. Since the mind and the body are "things", the so-called mind-body problem is a pseudo problem. (4) The question is raised, can a sense-content occur in the sense-history of more than one single self? The answer which Ayer gives is that it cannot, since sense-experiences are constituted by sense-contents and "for any two sense-experiences to belong to the sense-history of the same self it is necessary and sufficient that they should contain organic sense-contents which are elements of the same body". Now, "it is logically impossible for any organic sense-content to be an element of more than one body". Thus personal identity is defined in terms of bodily identity and "bodily identity is to be defined in terms of the resemblance and continuity of sense-contents".

Criticism of Ayer's Account

(1) Objects or "things" are, we are told, logical constructions. Their elements are sense-contents related in a certain way. Let us call this relation X. Now, we distinguish sense-experiences belonging to the "self" by reason of the fact that they contain "organic sense-contents which are elements of the same body". The way, therefore, in which the sense-contents of which a self consists are related is the way in which elements

of the same body are related. These elements, then, are sense-contents between which the relation X holds. But, (*a*) what is this relation? We are not told. (*b*) What we are told is that sense-contents may be members of two different "objects". "It is, indeed, not impossible", says Ayer, "for a sense-content to be an element both of a mental and of a physical object." How, then, do we know that the relation is such as to exclude the possibility that sense-contents which are elements of the logical construction which is a body are also elements of the logical construction which is some other body.

If all sentences referring to the body are translatable into sentences referring to sense-contents, and if the same is true of sentences referring to the mind and if, in the case of sense-contents, the distinction between mental and physical does not hold, then this distinction in its application to body and to mind may legitimately be described as "pseudo". But if the distinction between mental and physical "objects" is "pseudo", then in saying that it is not impossible for a sense-content to be an element of a *mental* and a *physical* object, we are not excluding the possibility that it may be an element of *two physical* objects. But if this possibility is not excluded, the concept of the separateness of bodies, from which the separateness of selves is derived, breaks down.

The Body Reintroduced as a Physical "Thing"

Ayer, as we have seen, denies that this is possible, since he says that "it is logically impossible for any organic sense-content to be an element of more than one body". But in the light of the foregoing considerations, I find it difficult to avoid the conclusion that in making this statement Ayer has inadvertently reintroduced the familiar notion of the body as a physical thing. It is because one physical thing cannot *be* another physical thing, that he tells us that "it is logically impossible for any organic sense-content to be an element of more than one body". In other words, it is not so much a logical impossibility that is involved here, as a *physical* impossibility. But the notion of a physical impossibility entails the notion of a body as a physical thing. And, indeed, it is precisely this notion, the notion of the body as a physical thing to which Ayer's remarks, when he is off his guard, seem to point. Thus, he tells us that his reason for believing that other

people understand him is that "his utterances have the effect on their actions which" he "regards as appropriate". Now, actions entail bodies which act unless, which I take to be improbable, it is held that logical constructions can act? If, however, the actions of other people's bodies are to be interpreted solely in terms of the sense-contents of those who observe them, these afford us no reason to believe in anything but the occurrence of the observer's sense-contents, no reason, therefore, to believe in other people's bodies, and no reason to believe that the owners of those bodies understand Ayer's utterances.

(2) Ayer's analysis of the self is in terms of those sense-contents which are elements of the same body. This either presupposes the dogma that all experiences are sensory experiences which originate in occurrences in the body, or, if other kinds of experiences are admitted, excludes them from the series of those experiences which constitute the self.

Now, the view that all experiences are sensory is, as I have already suggested,[1] both unverified and unverifiable.

Let us suppose for the sake of argument that there is such a thing as a non-sensory experience; we will suppose, for example, that my experience of reflecting on Lord Acton's dictum to the effect that all power corrupts is what it *prima facie* seems to be, a non-sensory experience. It follows, presumably, on Ayer's view, that it does not belong to the self which I regard as mine, since it does not "contain organic sense-contents which are elements of the same body". Hence, the self which Ayer concedes is a self which eats and sees but is not a self that calculates and thinks. This view seems to contradict the testimony of all those who have seemed to enter most fully into themselves in the experience of active moral struggle or of meditation and contemplation. To exclude such experiences from the definitions of the self seems to be wholly arbitrary. It also excludes the self which thinks Ayer's thoughts and expresses them in his books.

The Existence of Other People

(3) Ayer, aware that his account may be deemed by some to be solipsistic, seeks to rebut the charge. I considered this rebuttal in Chapter II in relation to the account there contained

[1] See ch. III, pp. 50–56.

of our knowledge of physical things and gave my reasons for finding it unconvincing.[1]

I propose now to consider whether Ayer has any better justification for claiming that his account of our knowledge of other people succeeds in avoiding Solipsism. He defines other people "in terms of their empirical manifestations—that is, in terms of the behaviour of their bodies, and ultimately in terms of sense-contents". The question arises, whose sense-contents? Certainly not somebody else's, for it would be absurd to say that I know that A exists because his bodily behaviour is manifested in the sense-contents of B. The sense-contents which are relevant to my knowledge of the existence of other people must, then, be my own. The claim is, then, that I know that there are other people because "my hypothesis is verified by the occurrence in my sense-history of the appropriate series of sense-contents". How, one wonders, does this view escape the charge of Solipsism? The escape is made via the assumption that to say that I know that another person exists is equivalent to saying that I know that I have certain sensory experiences. But this, again, is pure dogma. If, as seems on Ayer's view to be the case, I never know anything but my own sense-contents, what possible right have I to take their occurrence as indicating or as being caused by or as being equivalent to somebody or something else.

The position stands thus. I know sense-contents and only sense-contents. If I follow Ayer, I say that these sense-contents stand for or are caused by or indicate or are equivalent to—I am not sure which is the right expression—the existence of other people who are also defined in terms of my sense-contents. But if I never know anything but my own sense-contents, I cannot know that they are equivalent to or are caused by or indicate or stand for other people. I could only know this, if I knew the sense-contents which are elements of the logical constructions which are other people's bodies independently of those sense-contents which are elements of my own body. And this, we have been told, is impossible, since I can only know those sense-contents which are elements of my own body and "it is logically impossible for any organic sense-content to be an element of more than one body". Hence, the fact that my own sense-contents are equivalent to or stand for or are caused by

[1] See ch. II, pp. 33–35.

or indicate the presence of other people must remain a hypothesis which, from its very nature, is unverifiable.

Summing up we may say that, on Ayer's view, we live in a world of sense-contents, some of which stand in a mysterious relation to what are called other people. But the reference to other people must remain an act of faith or, rather, two acts of faith; first, that our sense-contents emanate from or originate in or are somehow related to another person's body, this being like Locke's substance an "unknown somewhat" and, secondly, that they entitle us to conjecture the existence of other people's minds, which are in some undefined way related to the bodies to which those sense-contents of mine which entitle me to infer other bodies *themselves* stand in relation.

Thus the only function which, on this view, we are entitled to predicate of another mind is that of being an agency for the projection of sense data which become, or are somehow connected with, the sense-contents which form part of my own sense-experience. Even if this were a tenable view of what another mind is, such projection of sense data does not constitute communication since in the form in which *we* are aware of them, the form in which they figure as *our* sense-contents, they are irremediably private.

Return of the Old-fashioned Concept of Self

(4) Ayer denies that the self is "substantial" on the familiar ground that it is analysable into a number of sense-experiences "in the sense that to say anything about the self is always to say something about sense-experiences". No grounds are given for this assertion which, presumably, is taken to follow from the general pre-suppositions of Logical Positivism. Its acceptance, however, brings up the difficulty constituted by Ayer's denial that "the sense-experiences which constitute the self are in any sense parts of it". It is not clear to me in what sense the expression "part" is here used. If I am told that X is reducible to A, B, C, D, either in the physical sense, in which a machine is reducible to nuts, bolts, levers, screws and so on until all its constituent parts have been enumerated, or in the logical sense in which to say something about X is always to say something about A, B, C, or D, or about all of them, I feel justified in concluding that A, B, C, D, are all parts of X. I do not press this point, as it may well be that I have misunderstood Ayer.

What, however, is clear to me is that just as the old notion of the body as a physical thing creeps back unnoticed, so does the old notion of the self as a single, unifying activity. Thus, we are told that all "sense-experiences and the sense-contents which form part of them, are private to a single self". If the self is a logical construction out of sense-experiences, it follows that some sense-contents, those, namely, which form part of the set of sense-experiences which "are private to a single self" belong to that set and of no other set. Assuming that the word, "belong", here means "are elements of", what are we to make of the assertion that a sense-content may be an element of more than one object? And why should those sense-contents which form part of the particular set of sense-experiences which "are private to a single self" be distinguished from others by reason of the fact that they can belong to *one* object, the self, and one only? The answer, I suggest, can only be that they are so distinguished because they are related in a particular way, in that way, namely, which would be described by saying that they belong to a self in the *ordinary* sense of the word, "belong", and the *ordinary* sense of the word, "self", the sense in which the self can be said to *have* experiences. And that this is precisely the way in which Ayer *does* think of the self, when he forgets the preceding analysis, is indicated by such phrases as "the activity of theorizing is . . . a creative activity" and "scientific laws are often discovered through a process of intuition". What, then, creates, what intuits? A set of sense-contents? I find the notion difficult to entertain. Is it not obvious that these expressions of Ayer's pre-suppose the ordinary notion of a self or mind as an activity which *does* something, which creates, which intuits, and not of mind which is only a logical construction out of sense-contents?

Self-Consciousness

(5) A similar conclusion is thrust upon us by the account given of self-consciousness. "All that is involved in self-consciousness", Ayer says, "is the ability of a self to remember some of its earlier states." Again, no reasons are given for this analysis which is announced dogmatically. Now, when I am aware of myself as writing at a table, I do not *prima facie* appear to myself to be remembering anything. Moreover, it seems to me that my experience is not confined to being aware of the hardness

of the table and the whiteness of the page, and so on. I experience myself, or can do so, as feeling the one and noticing the other, and in saying this, I am saying that I am conscious of myself. Now it seems to me clearly false to say that all I am doing in being thus conscious of myself as feeling and noticing is remembering my earlier states. But, even if this account were true, what is it that does the remembering? Does a sense-content remember anything?

Conclusion

The suggestion that underlies this question is that Ayer is mistaken in denying the existence of an underlying, unifying self. This denial is, of course, consistent with his general ban upon unobservable metaphysical entities. Admitting that the self cannot be observed in the sense in which a sense-experience can be observed, I should reply that, just as our perceptions of a table are taken as clues to the existence of an underlying something to which the perceptions point and which is the cause of our having them,[1] and just as the observations of the scientist are taken as clues to a reality which is, in fact, observed only partially and often misleadingly, as when a scientist sees a stick bent and says that it is straight, or sees two faces of a cube and knows that it has six, or photographs a streak on a misty surface and infers the passage of an electron, so, I should say, the experiences of which we are conscious are all of them clues to a reality, the reality of the self, which has the experience and unites them, conferring upon them that special relation to each other which I describe by saying that all of them are mine. Hence, the mistake which, as it seems to me, Ayer makes in seeking to deny the continuing, metaphysical entity which is the self, is analogous to his mistake in denying the entity which is the table and the order of reality which is the world that science studies.

[1] See ch. IV, pp. 75–78.

CHAPTER VIII

THEORY OF VALUE

THREE MAIN theories, or types of theory are commonly maintained in regard to value:

(*A*) The Subjective;
(*B*) The Emotive, and
(*C*) The Objective.

In this chapter I shall be mainly concerned with (*B*), the emotive, since of all the doctrines of Logical Positivism this has attracted the most notice, as it has certainly exerted the greatest influence. I shall indicate at the end of the chapter certain considerations which tell in favour of theories of type (*C*).

(*A*) SUBJECTIVE THEORIES OF VALUE

(1) *Direct Subjective Theories*

These need not detain us as they are explicitly rejected by Ayer on two grounds: (*a*) He holds that what I mean when I call an action, "right" or a thing "good" cannot be, as direct Subjectivism asserts, that I or most people approve of it, since it is not self-contradictory to say that some actions which are approved of either by me or by most people are not right. (*b*) According to Subjectivism, ethical judgments express propositions about people's feelings and can, therefore, be either true or false. On Ayer's view, ethical judgments do not express propositions at all, and cannot, therefore, be either true or false; they merely give vent to feelings.

There is, however, a particular argument, not given by Ayer, against Subjectivism which may conveniently be mentioned here, since it has relevance to Ayer's own theory. The argument is this. According to Subjectivism, "X is right" means X is approved of by me, or by my society because—I am stating the most common form of the view—it is expedient for, or conduces to the advantage, or contributes to the happiness

of me or of my society. In other words, *prima facie* ethical statements are analysed into non-ethical statements. Accounts are, then, furnished of the way in which my emotions of approval were originally aroused by X and reasons are brought forward to explain why it is that I approve of what I do. Some of these accounts take cognizance of considerations derived from anthropology and call in witness the habits of primitive tribes; others, of considerations from sociology which stress the effects of social conditioning in determining our likes and dislikes; others, of considerations from psychology in general and psychoanalysis in particular. Perhaps the commonest form of explanation is that which maintains that I approve of actions of the type X now because their performance was conducive to the safety of the social group to which my ancestors belonged.

The argument which I wish to advance against this view is this: if to say "X is right" or "X is good" means "I approve of X", and if I approve of X because it now, or was once expedient for my social group, why did such expressions as "right" and "good" come to be used?

The meaning of right is, on this view, exhaustively reducible to the meaning of expedient; that is, the word "right" has no distinctive meaning which is not covered by the meaning of the word, "expedient". Why, then, was the word "right" invented, and how did it come to be used *as if* it meant something different from expedient? Generalizing the question, we proceed to ask how, on this view, the whole body of ethical notions with their apparently distinctive implications came to be distinguished from the notions conveyed by the word "expediency"?

If there are *bona fide* ethical sentiments, we can see why exhortations couched in ethical terms should appeal to them. But if there are not, if there are only self-interest and social conditioning, why should specifically ethical expressions be regarded as having meaning and why should they produce a hortative effect, since there is, after all, on this view, no specific ethical sense or sentiment for them to appeal to? Hence, my questions are, first, if there is no such thing as a specifically ethical sentiment, how did ethical terms come to be invented, and, secondly, granted that for some unexplained reason they were invented, how did their employment serve the purpose which, on this view, led to their invention, the

purpose namely, of securing the performance of activities which were useful to the social group.

Granted in a word that ethics is a delusion or a rationalization, why was it thought necessary to invent the delusion and perform the rationalization? And wherein did their practical usefulness originate.

My suggestion is that even if ethical expressions are meaningless and moral judgments baseless, being only disguised forms of non-ethical expressions and factual judgments, Subjectivism fails to account for the fact that ethical expressions and moral judgments present themselves for analysis on subjectivist or on any other lines.

(2) *Indirect Subjective Theories. That Values are "Human" and are "Created"*

Many writers speak of values as being "created", presumably by us. They also refer to them as "human". This position is far from clear. What does the phrase "human values" mean? Values belonging to human beings? Presumably not; nobody, I take it, wishes to maintain that there is some absolute and intrinsic value attaching to the mere fact of being a human being. Nor, I imagine, does anybody suppose that the fact that I perceive truth or enjoy beauty makes me either truthful or beautiful, any more than the fact that I perceive squareness makes me square. It is probable, then, that the expression "human values" means nothing more than "values" created by human beings.

The question arises, is the creation of these values arbitrary, in the sense that we create precisely what values we please without let or hindrance from the nature of things, the universe being itself without value, a clean slate for the value-writing of the human mind, or is it to some extent determined by the nature of the environment in which the human mind develops and to which it reacts?

(i) *Implications of the View that Value-Creating is Arbitrary.* If it is arbitrary, then no one set of values possesses more validity than another. When we ascribe value to anything, saying, for example, that one action, political system, poem or work of art is better than another, we are merely giving expression to our own preferences, preferences which, on this view,

are without authority or justification. For even if we say that one action or system is more liable to promote happiness than another, happiness which is itself, on this view, merely something that some or most human beings happen to desire, has no authority to command men's actions. Happiness is not, that is to say, something that *ought* to be pursued, because it is desirable as well as desired.

There is, then, no *ground* for preferring kindness to cruelty—one's actual preference for the former is on a par with one's preference for asparagus over artichokes—and no rational justification for objecting to the Nazi theories of politics or the horrors of the concentration camps which were the instruments of their application. There are many objections to this view, but the most potent is that nobody really holds it.

Alternatively, it might be held that to say of something that it was "right" or "good" or "beautiful" means merely that *most* people prefer it, "right", "good" and "beautiful" being values which we have invented to commend and to dignify what *most* people happen to like. The implications of this view are revolting. Most people prefer the music of Gershwin to the music of Bach, just as most people prefer to act in accordance with the dictates of egoism rather than in accordance with the doctrines of Christ. If this view were true, in so far as the word "better" could be said to have any distinctive meaning, we should be driven to say that the music of Gershwin is "better" than the music of Beethoven, and the ethics of self-interest "better" than those of the Sermon on the Mount. This, once again, is a conclusion which few, if any, really believe.

Nor, I venture to add, is the meaning which this view attributes to the word "right" one that anybody really believes it to bear. For to say that "right" is a "human value" means presumably that "right" is a label which men have invented to attach to the things of which most of them approve. Hence, to say, "X is right" is, as Hume maintained, merely to say that most men do or have approved of it. This makes rightness (and wrongness) a matter of statistics to be established by the process of counting heads. It follows that if a discussion arises in regard to two actions, X and Y, as to which of them is in the circumstances right, the discussion really turns upon a matter of fact and could theoretically be settled by an appeal to fact. If 51 per cent of those who are acquainted with the

two actions approved of X and only 49 per cent of Y, then X would *ipso facto* be right. Now, whatever view in regard to ethical matters may be correct, this view as to what the word "right" means is, I think, clearly incorrect. Nor, I think, does anybody seriously hold it.

(ii) *Implications of the View that Value-Creating is* NOT *Arbitrary.* Now let us suppose that the human creation of values is *not* purely arbitrary. The implications are that in creating value the human mind is responsive to or subject to something other than itself to which it is meaningful to say its deliverances can conform, and to which, if they are correct, they do conform. A man, we must suppose, can make an infinite number of computations as to the degree of worth to be attributed to an action, a character, or a work of art. But he can make one, and only one, correct computation. Of a correct computation we can say that it is one that "conforms to the facts", or "reflects the situation" or "faithfully represents what is". This is not to say that a man's mind is constrained by the facts—if it were, it would not be possible to make mistakes—but merely that its computations are not necessarily arbitrary, seeing that one of them and one only will conform to the facts, and that this is the one that a morally good man, or a man with aesthetic sensibility will do his best to make. What is more, if he has been well trained and properly instructed as a youth, and remains as a man subject to the influences of a morally good and aesthetically harmonious environment then, as he grows in practice and experience, his computations, both in ethics and aesthetics, will approximate to the facts with ever-increasing closeness. Now this, I suggest, is precisely what is meant by saying that a man's moral judgments and tastes are good and that they are improving.

To put the point differently, if the creation of value by the human mind is *not* arbitrary, it would seem to follow that the external world has an objective structure, such that one set of "created" values reflects the structure more accurately than another. Nor from this point of view is it material whether the objective structure is itself conceived as a value structure or whether, from the point of view of value, it is conceived as objectively neutral, and value as created by the mind which responds to it. For the distinguishing characteristic

of the view is to be found less in its affirmation that reality contains features and factors of value, than in its insistence that reality does contain independent features, determinate marks, articulations—call them what you will—such that the human mind when confronted with them responds to them by the creation of values. And, as the computation-view, so too on this view it will be meaningful to say that some of the values which are created, some of the value judgments which are made, will correspond to the features of what *is* more accurately than others.

It is not my purpose here to develop the implications of these views. Let me, however, briefly recapitulate what they have in common: (*a*) The nature of the non-sensory world is structurated, that is to say, it contains features in its own right. (*b*) These features may be axiologically neutral or they may be values. In either event, they are objectively embedded in the structure of reality. (*c*) The human mind intuits[1] the presence of these features by an act of rational insight. As a consequence it either becomes aware of values, if the features are themselves values, or creates values, if reality, though structurated, is itself valueless. These created values correspond to or reflect, with a greater or less degree of accuracy, the features whose apprehension by the mind stimulates it to the act of creation. On either view, the mind's activity when it knows or is aware of value is a response to something which is given to it and which it apprehends. Hence the knowledge of values is either an activity of awareness, whereby value is directly revealed to the mind, or an activity of creation stimulated by and conforming with more or less accuracy to features of the giver which are presented to the mind and stimulate it to the activity of value creation. Such a view would concede most of what an objective theory of value requires and is, in fact, logically reducible to the type of theory described in (*C*).

(*B*) THE EMOTIVE THEORY OF VALUES

(1) *Ethics*

Ayer distinguishes his view both from subjectivist and objectivist theories of ethics. Subjectivism is, as we have seen,

[1] I do not venture to define the word, "intuit". I mean by it an activity of the mind which combines the immediacy of sense-perception with that characteristic of intelligence, which is its capacity to be aware of the non-sensory. Intuition is, then, the immediate awareness of the nature of the non-sensory.

rejected, (i) because it is not self-contradictory to say that we sometimes approve, or that most men sometimes approve, of what is bad and wrong; and (ii) because it holds that what are *prima facie* ethical judgments express genuine propositions, that is to say, propositions to the effect that I, or some or most, people approve of so and so, whereas, on his view, they express no propositions of any kind. As against Subjectivism, he maintains that, "the validity of ethical judgments . . . must be regarded as 'absolute' or 'intrinsic' and not empirically calculable". This does not, however, mean, as one might be tempted to conclude, that Ayer believes in objective or absolutist ethics and holds that ethical judgments uniquely refer to and report the objective and independently existing features of ethical situations.

Indeed, he is precluded from adopting such a view by his general repudiation of metaphysics, since judgments that "so and so is good and right" are not empirically verifiable, and are, therefore, consigned by Ayer's general theory to the category of metaphysical, that is to say, of meaningless, statements. "Considering", Ayer writes, "the use which we have made of the principle that a synthetic proposition is significant only if it is empirically verifiable, it is clear that the acceptance of an 'absolutist' theory of ethics would undermine the whole of our main argument." His position is, indeed, nearer to that of the subjectivists than to that of the absolutists in that what avowedly interests him is "the possibility of reducing the whole sphere of ethical terms to non-ethical terms. We are enquiring" he says, "whether statements of ethical value can be translated into statements of empirical fact."

The conclusion which the enquiry reaches is that they can, indeed, be reduced to non-ethical terms, though scarcely to "statements of empirical fact", since they are for Ayer merely verbal ejaculations of emotion and though emotions are empirical facts to make noises which ejaculate them is not to state them. His view briefly is that "sentences which contain normative ethical symbols are not equivalent to sentences which express psychological propositions or, indeed, empirical propositions of any kind". For ethical concepts are pseudo-concepts; that is to say, the presence of an ethical symbol in a sentence adds nothing either to its factual content or to its meaning. Thus, if I say, " 'you acted wrongly in stealing that money'," what I am saying is equivalent to the factual statement, "you stole that money", plus an ejaculation of disapproval: "It is as if I had said, 'You stole that money', in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks. The tone or the exclamation marks add nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings in the speaker." When the sentence is generalized into an ethical statement which purports to have universal significance, it is declared to have no factual meaning of any kind: " 'Stealing money is wrong'," is equivalent to " 'Stealing money!!' —where the shape and thickness of the exclamation marks show, by a suitable convention, that a special sort of moral disapproval is the feeling which is being expressed. It is clear that there is nothing said here which can be true or false." It follows that sentences "which express moral judgments do not say anything. They are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood", the correct definition of the meaning of ethical words, when used normatively, being in terms of, "the different feelings they are ordinarily taken to express, and also the different responses which they are calculated to provoke".

Such is the emotive theory of ethics. It may be summarized in the statement that the ethical terms which occur in sentences which would commonly be said to express ethical judgments are purely "emotive", that is to say, they are "used to express feeling about certain objects but not to make any assertion about them".

The difference of this view from Subjectivism now clearly emerges. According to Subjectivism, the validity of ethical judgments is determined by the feelings of some person or persons. On Ayer's view, they have no validity, and are incapable of being either true or false. In the light of this conclusion, it seems to me a little disingenuous for Ayer to defend himself against the charge which he conceives Oxonian to have made in the article referred to in the Introduction to this book,[1] by saying—as he did in a letter to the *New Statesman* —"I do not 'exclude' value judgments. What I do is to distinguish them from judgments of fact." The interpretation of this statement depends, no doubt, upon what is meant by the

[1] See Introduction, p. 9.

word, "exclude", Ayer, in fact, pronounces value judgments to be meaningless; they are for him noises expressive of emotion. This is assuredly "to distinguish them from judgments of fact", but most people would take the view that it is also to "exclude" them. If to declare a statement to be meaningless is not to "exclude" it, it is difficult to see what meaning the word "exclude" can bear.

(2) *Theology*

It is not necessary to follow in detail the implications of the emotive theory as regards theology, since *mutatis mutandis*, they are the same as the implications in regard to ethics. It is worth while, however, in the light of our concern with the effects of the spread of logical positivist doctrines upon contemporary thinking, to state clearly what the implications are.

Granted the assumption that experience means only sensory experience, no statements that can be made about God are empirically verifiable. God, therefore, is a metaphysical term; therefore, He falls under the general ban on metaphysical terms, and all statements about Him are dismissed as being meaningless. In fact, they are nonsensical—Ayer explicitly says, that "all utterances about the nature of God are nonsensical". Hence, it cannot meaningfully be said either that God exists or that He does not. "For to say that 'God exists' is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false. And by the same criterion, no sentence which purports to describe the nature of a transcendant god can possess any literal significance."

Ayer is at pains to distinguish this view both from atheism and from agnosticism. Atheism holds that it is improbable that God exists. The atheist is, therefore, stating a meaningful proposition, "it is improbable that God exists", which he holds to be true. The agnostic also maintains a proposition about God, the proposition, namely, that the existence of God is a possibility which there is no good reason either to assert or to deny and this proposition, which is meaningful and which is capable of being either true or false, he believes to be true.

But Ayer's view cuts at the root of both these positions. If no meaningful statements can be made about God, it is meaningless to say that it is improbable that He exists and meaningless to say that there is no good ground either for

asserting or denying His existence. In short, "the notion of a person whose essential attributes are non-empirical is not an intelligible notion at all". The conclusion that theology which assumes the existence of God and proceeds to make statements about His nature, purposes and relation to mankind is nonsensical, is one which, if accepted, must, as it seems to me, produce a decided effect upon the mind that accepts it.

In regard to this conclusion also it seems to me highly misleading to say that it "does not exclude value judgments".

(3) *Summary of Emotive Theory of Values*

It is, Ayer thinks, an implication of the emotive theory that ethical and aesthetic judgments provide us with information about our feelings which is of interest to the psychologist. I am not sure whether this statement is wholly consistent with the "nonsense" conclusion previously reached. If aesthetic and moral judgments do provide such information it can only be because to say "this action is right", or "this picture is beautiful", is to throw light upon our feelings, upon those feelings, namely, which the judgment expresses. If this is the case, it is hard to see how the propositions in which the judgments are expressed can be "nonsensical", since nonsense is a meaningless set of noises which cannot, one would suppose, give us any information about anything.

Ayer further tells us that ethical enquiries provide material which may be of interest to the sociologist and also, presumably, to the anthropologist. While it is the psychologist's task to investigate and describe the various feelings which ethical terms express and the reactions they provoke, it is the task of the anthropologist and the sociologist to tabulate the moral habits of a given group of people as evidenced by the ethical judgments which they habitually pass, and to enquire how they came to have such habits with their associated interests and feelings.

But whether we say that moral, religious and aesthetic judgments give us no information at all, or whether we say that they do give us information about our physical and mental make-up and the habits of the group to which we belong, makes no difference to the significant conclusion that they give us no information about the nature of things except in so far as our feelings, our bodies and the social group to which

we belong themselves form part of the nature of things. But it is certainly not about these that they *purport* to give us information.

(4) *Generalized Statement of the Emotive Position in Bertrand Russell's Work*

A similar view is put forward in Bertrand Russell's later philosophical writings. Thus, in the final chapter of his *A History of Western Philosophy* Russell specifically limits human knowledge to knowledge of the empirical world studied by science, declaring that whatever lies outside that world is a matter of feeling and not of knowledge. It follows that there is no *knowledge* of value. Now, a considerable part of philosophy has traditionally been devoted to a study and discussion of value and this study, it has been thought, might not inconceivably yield results which could be demonstrated. But it is obvious that if the universe does *not* contain any objective realm of non-sensory fact, philosophy cannot give us true information about such an order. In particular, if it does not contain a moral order which is independent of human minds, ethical philosophy cannot provide us with knowledge of social laws and principles.

With what sort of information, then, on Russell's view, does ethical philosophy, as traditionally conceived, provide us? The answer appears to be that it provides us with information about matters of feeling or, perhaps—I am not sure what is the right phraseology to use—it is merely the verbalized expression of feeling.

The following quotation from Bertrand Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy* furnishes a good illustration of this attitude to ethics. Having described the methods and indicated the scope of what he calls "analytical empiricism", he writes: "There remains, however, a vast field, traditionally included in philosophy, where scientific methods are inadequate. This field includes ultimate questions of value; science alone, for example, cannot prove that it is bad to enjoy the infliction of cruelty. Whatever can be known, can be known by means of science; but *things which are legitimately matters of feeling lie outside its province.*" (My italics.)

The implication clearly is that *values cannot be known* and that the evaluation of cruelty as morally reprobatory is merely a matter of feeling. We may *feel*, most of us, that kindness is better, but feelings have no authority over those who do not share them, and we have, therefore, nothing to say to the guard in the concentration camp who prefers cruelty; we can only make noises expressive of our feelings of repulsion.

Criticism of the Emotive Theory of Values

(1) *Difficulty of Sustaining the Theory's Implications.* The first observation that I wish to make upon the position just summarized takes the form not of an argument directed to showing that the theory is false—although such arguments are, I believe, available and some of them are advanced below—but of an exposure of the inconsistencies into which those who seek to maintain it are unwittingly betrayed.

Some inconsistencies in Ayer's statement have been pointed out in the preceding pages. The "feeling" view of values is, however, as we have seen also maintained by Bertrand Russell. Bertrand Russell's latest philosophical position falls relevantly within the scope of this book, since he both shares Ayer's influence over the minds of philosophically minded persons of the younger generation and has himself exercised considerable influence over Ayer's views. I propose, therefore, to examine Russell's theory of value with a view to drawing attention to certain inconsistencies into which, as it seems to me, his statement of it falls. I will begin with his treatment of the value of truth.

Russell on Truth

Russell's chapter on Aristotle's logic in *A History of Western Philosophy* contains a brilliant summary of the criticisms which modern philosophers, partly under Russell's guidance, have brought against the Aristotelian system and an indication of the considerations which have led to its supersession. Now, throughout this criticism it is implied that on certain points Aristotle is wrong and that modern logicians have shown him to be wrong. Aristotle's logic, we are told, would have been all very well if it had been "a stage in a continual progress". In fact it was "a dead end" which put a stop to all thinking on logic for two thousand years. For long regarded as completely and finally true, it is, as Russell points out, vitiated by specifiable errors. Because of them, we can now see that it is not true.

Is logic, then, science? Assuredly not. Yet we have been told that only within the sphere of science is exact and definite truth obtainable. I see no escape from the conclusion that Russell holds (i) that there is such a thing as truth, (ii) that we may know it, in the sense of knowing in regard to some things that they are true and in regard to others that they are false, and (iii) that the relevance of truth is not confined to those matters of fact with which science deals. This conclusion is reinforced by an unguarded utterance that slips into Russell's treatment of Plotinus: "A philosophical system", he says, "may be judged important for various reasons. The first and most obvious is that we think it may be true." I agree, but take leave to doubt whether, on his own premises, Russell is ever entitled to judge a system to be important for "this first and most obvious . . . of reasons".

Again, it is relevant to point out that "scientific truthfulness" is a virtue which, Russell claims, his own school has introduced into philosophy. Now, Russell himself would not, I take it, wish to maintain that his philosophy *is* science.

It may be argued that in these passages it is not truth in the sense in which philosophers have traditionally invoked and paid tribute to truth, *as an independent value*, that Russell has in mind. But more significant avowals are to come; for presently we find Russell postulating the presence in the universe of an objective order, an order of "stubborn facts", which the human mind explores but does not create and to which it is subject. In this mood he bids us adopt a modest attitude to objective fact and warns us against allowing reason to legislate, instead of requiring it to conform to the universe.

From the standpoint of this attitude Russell sharply criticizes the "power philosophies" of the earlier twentieth century, of which he takes John Dewey's as an example. Dewey is criticized for substituting for the concept of truth that of "warranted assertability". "Warranted assertability" means apparently that, if we believe in something hard enough and say it often enough and if enough of us do this, it will become true or "as nearly 'true' as we can make it", the point being that, on Dewey's view, facts are not "stubborn" but are in the last resort made by human minds. Russell sums up Dewey's position as follows: "If I find the belief that Cæsar crossed the Rubicon very distasteful, I need not sit down in dull despair; I can, if

I have enough skill and power, arrange a social environment in which the statement that he did not cross the Rubicon will have 'warranted assertability'."

Now this view Russell connects very properly with the current belief in human power which is fostered by the success of science, the spread of industrialism and collective enterprise. It is, indeed, *par excellence* the belief which is suitable to man in his capacity of manipulator of nature. Russell criticizes it on two grounds. First, it disintegrates the notion of truth in the sense in which to be true is to conform and correspond with, instead of prescribing to, objective fact.

Secondly, it savours of what he calls "cosmic impiety", for it was precisely the concept of truth as dependent upon facts beyond our control which kept men humble. Modern man, Russell hints, has lost the sense of a non-human world order to which the human is subject and as a result has grown "too big for his boots", not in the *rôle* of a Prometheus defying the gods or of the lordly "great man" of the Renaissance, but through the collective power of his communities.

The modern community, drunk with its power over nature, would, he thinks, do well to bear in mind the Greek conception of "a Necessity or Fate superior even to Zeus" by which man is bound and to beware of the sin of *hubris*. To abolish the concept of a non-human order of objective fact is to remove this check upon human pride. The consequences I put in Russell's own words:

"When the check upon pride is removed, a further step is taken on the road towards a certain kind of madness—the intoxication of power—which invaded philosophy with Fichte, and to which modern men, whether philosophers or not, are prone."

In this and similar passages Russell, as it seems to me, is maintaining either explicity or by implication: (i) that there is an objective order of reality given to and not created by us to which the human mind is subject and by which human power is limited; (ii) that truth consists in the knowledge and realization by the human mind of the nature of this order, and that such knowledge and realization are valuable for their own sakes (and this, I take it, is precisely what most men have meant when they have talked of the value of *truth*), if only because (iii) lacking an awareness of this order, the human spirit becomes guilty

of the sin of cosmic impiety, that is to say, of aspiring to a position in the universe which its status does not warrant.

This avowal seems to me to concede most of what those who have asserted the existence not only of an objective truth but of a moral order in the universe have wished to claim. Moreover, the attitude to this order which Russell commends is essentially a religious attitude.

It is, however, an attitude which, I submit, would be totally without justification, if Russell were right in his earlier claims that the only *knowledge* that we can have is the kind of knowledge that science gives, and that everything that lies outside the scope of science belongs to the sphere of mere feeling. If religion were merely an affair of feeling owning the same ontological status as a feeling of fear at the dentist's, a feeling of distaste for lobster, or of pleasure in sexual intercourse, it would be as impossible to explain its history or to account for its hold over the minds of men, as to justify Russell's rebuke of the sin of cosmic impiety.

And on Morals and Politics

Russell's warning against this sin takes the argument from the sphere of truth to that of morals. Here, too, from time to time an unguarded utterance betrays a belief totally at variance with the view officially advocated as expressed, for example, in the quotation cited above, to the effect that "science . . . cannot prove that it is bad to enjoy the infliction of cruelty", with its implication that the fact that cruelty is bad—since, after all, nothing *else* can prove it—cannot be *known* but only felt. Is Russell, one wonders, following the emotive theory of values, prepared to regard his repudiation of cruelty—and no man in our time has denounced it with greater courage and consistency than himself—as merely an expression of a personal dislike? According to the emotive theory, to say "this is cruel" is to make a statement of fact which may be true or false; to add "this is wicked and ought to be stopped" is not to make a factual statement at all, but merely to ventilate an emotion. Does Russell, one wonders, really believe this and believe, too, that the contrary judgment, "cruelty is good and ought to be increased", or rather, the contrary feeling which this judgment expresses, is of just as much and just as little worth, and has therefore, just as much and just as little title to respect in theory

and to expression in action, as the feeling expressed by his own reprobation and denunciation of cruelty? If he does, it is hard to resist the temptation to point out that a great deal of his writing on ethical topics in such books as *Marriage and Morals* and *The Conquest of Happiness* is beside the point, for these books contain powerful exposures of the evils of repression and cruelty and eloquent exhortations to practise the virtue of kindness, especially to children.

A similar point emerges in regard to Russell's political writings which present an equally striking contrast to his metaphysical views, more particularly as regards his account of the nature of the self. This account is not unlike Ayer's,[1] whose thought on this and kindred matters has, it is obvious, been largely influenced by Russell. The self is, for Russell, a series or sequence of psychological states linked together by the feeling of interest which is felt by any one member of the series for other members of the same series; or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say that the self is a logical construction out of psychological states. When it is remembered that these states are not strictly speaking mental at all, since the categories of mind and body are not ultimate but are only derivative from more fundamental elements which may be regarded as mental in certain contexts and as bodily in others, the degree to which Russell's view of the self departs from the traditional conception of a substantial, spiritual self which is at once a unity and the seat of personality—the self, in fact, which Hume criticizes—is sufficiently obvious. The self, for Russell, is neither a continuing entity, nor is it a unity; on the contrary, he dismisses as a metaphysical abstraction the continuing self which common sense takes for granted and which traditional philosophy affirms. The notion of personality undergoes a similar process of disintegration.

In his political writings, notably in such books as *The Principles of Social Reconstruction*, *Freedom and Organization* and the Reith lectures Russell stands forth as the champion of the individual against the State. Individual freedom is acclaimed as a good; individual spontaneity is declared to be valuable and important; the ever-increasing encroachment of the State upon the spheres of individual liberty and initiative are deplored, while protection is demanded against undue State interference.

[1] See ch. VII, p. 101.

The implications are (i) that the individual is a person; (ii) that personality is continuing, individual and important; (iii) that it is the fount of creativity and the vehicle of initiative; (iv) that it must, therefore, be protected, and (v) that its protection is a duty which those who care for the goods which are distinctive of humanity, notably freedom and creativity, must seek to discharge. These are admirable sentiments, but they are such as to presuppose a view of the individual personality as a unity which is a continuing unity, retaining its identity through change and development, a unity which initiates action, sustains purposes and gives birth to creations. They are surely inconsistent with a view of the self as a metaphysical abstraction and of the individual personality as lacking any unity save that which belongs to a series of related psychological states. Who, after all, would wish to claim freedom for a series of related psychological states? The two levels of discourse are not merely different; they are incompatible.

I suggest that one of the reasons why the inconsistencies of which I have cited examples invade the unguarded moments of philosophers who share Ayer's general view of ethical and aesthetic values, is that their doctrine is extremely difficult to believe, so difficult that, if the apparent impoliteness of the suggestion may be pardoned, one is sometimes led to wonder whether its advocates believe it themselves. For my part, I find it frankly incredible. Such non-philosophers as are acquainted with it also find it hard to believe. This, however, as I am well aware, is not an argument against the theory, except in so far as we are prepared to give weight to Aristotle's dictum that the ethical views of common-sense people, that is to say, of non-professional philosophers, are among the most important data of which professional philosophers are required to take account. Ayer also tells us that "the philosopher has no right to despise the beliefs of common sense". Yet it is hard to resist the view that the logical positivist doctrine of ethics flatly contradicts them. Perhaps Ayer would say that he does not despise the beliefs of common sense about ethics, but only analyses those beliefs in an uncommon way. Yet when one remembers that the upshot of his theory is to stigmatize the beliefs of common-sense people about ethics—as, for example, that some things are right and some things wrong, and that a man ought to do his duty—as groundless and meaningless, it is hard to credit the assurance

that the beliefs themselves are embraced and that it is only their common-sense analysis which is rejected. As I pointed out in an earlier chapter,[1] the analysis of the meaning of common-sense propositions which Logical Positivism offers, is rarely such as the common-sense man who asserts the propositions would be prepared to accept. How far considerations of this kind are entitled to rank as arguments against the theory, I am not prepared to say. I leave them to turn to considerations of a more formal type.

(2) *What is it that Ethical Judgments Express?* The first derives from the question, what is it that ethical language is, on the emotive theory, supposed to express? The answer is "emotion" and, in particular, the emotions of approval and disapproval. Sometimes, however, the word "attitude" is used. The distinction is, I think, significant.

(*a*) Let us, first, suppose that the appropriate word is "emotion". Emotions belong to the same category as feelings and desires, in that their occurrence is normally taken to be the effect of some prior psychological and/or physiological event which is their completely determining cause. We are not in a position to say that we *propose* either to feel or not to feel a certain emotion; it occurs in spite of us, nor are we responsible for its occurrence. Putting the point in psychological language, we may say that emotions, feelings and desires belong to the affective-conative aspect of our psyche. I suggest, then, that the words "likes" and "desires" and "wishes" might be used without inaccuracy to describe what it is that, on this interpretation of the theory, ethical language expresses, so that the proposition, "this is good" will express a feeling of liking for "this" or, alternatively, a "wish" or "desire" for "this"; or, perhaps, a "desire" for more of "this". If this be the correct interpretation of the meaning of the phrase, "emotion of approval", the question must be asked, is it a feeling or desire of this kind that the proposition, "this is good", or "this is right" does, in fact, express? Answer, it obviously is not. "This is good", "this is right", "this is my duty" are obviously not just expressions of the feeling which would normally be expressed by some such phrase as "I happen to like this". On the contrary, many writers have noted as a distinguishing mark of courses of conduct which are right and

[1] See ch. I, pp. 22–25.

of actions which are "my duty" the characteristic of being precisely what I don't like. They have even implied that, if I did like a particular course of conduct, it could not be my duty. However this may be, the opposition between desire and duty, "this is what I want to do" and "this is what I ought to do" is sufficiently familiar and sufficiently marked to make it reasonably certain that the emotion of approval which an ethical judgment expresses is not equivalent to a liking or a wishing or a desiring.

(*b*) Now, let us suppose that the emotion of approval expressed by ethical judgments is not a mere feeling or desire, but is more akin to an attitude. "Attitude" is a vague word, but most of us would, I think, differentiate it from feeling and desire by including in it an element of will, and, more particularly, of rational will. "His attitude to strong drink or to foreigners is one of disapproval", means that he holds strong drink or foreigners to be objectively undesirable, and not only wishes them to be diminished, but will do his best to diminish them or at least to keep them at arm's length from himself. Now, if elements of reason and will are included as constituents in the concept denoted by the word "attitude", it is clear that an "attitude" is a very different thing from a mere feeling or desire.

Wherein does the difference lie? First, I suggest, in the inclusion within the concept of attitude of the apprehension of an objective situation. This apprehension is both cognitive and normative; it purports, in other words, to inform us not only of the existence, but of the desirability or undesirability of something other than ourselves; feelings on the contrary give us no information except about ourselves.

Secondly, attitude includes an element of will. One wills a particular line of conduct relatively to an apprehended situation. Thus, one apprehends rationally that justice, in the sense of fairness of distribution, is desirable and then wills *not* to take more than one's fair share of a dish of asparagus however badly one may want to do so. This factor of voluntary inhibition or restraint in personal, becomes in social relations a factor of compulsion. Thus, we apprehend rationally that it is undesirable to take human life in anger or resentment and make a law forbidding citizens to carry firearms. In general, we conclude that it is rational to desire (or to deplore) a certain state of affairs and then will to bring about (or to

diminish) the state of affairs whose general character we rationally apprehend.

I am not, of course, suggesting that this is a complete analysis of the moral situation, or that it covers all the ground. My purpose is only to point out, (i) that reason and will in the sense illustrated are present in most ethical judgments; (ii) that most people would agree that they are so present; what is more, they give evidence of their agreement by making use of the expressions containing the word "right" which so frequently characterize pronouncements about ethics; and (iii) that the presence of the factors of reason and will sharply differentiates the content of that which an ethical judgment expresses from the content of pure feeling, expressed by such exclamations as "delicious strawberries!", or by a mere ejaculation such as "God! How it hurts". Before leaving the question of language, I would add that it is not by the word "feeling" that the experiences which ethical judgments express are adequately denoted, but by some such word as "attitude".

These, as it seems to me, important and necessary distinctions are blurred by an omnibus definition of all ethical judgments as expressions or ejaculations of emotion, and the differences in attitude which distinguish judgments expressive of feeling from judgments which convey what are at least in part the deliverances of reason and will are overlooked.

(3) *The Origin and Distinctive Use of Ethical Terms.* According to the emotive theory of ethics, ethical judgments are ejaculations of the judger's feelings of approval or disapproval, so that the word "wrong" in the sentence, "stealing is wrong", adds nothing to the meaning of the sentence. If we ask how we come to feel emotions of approval for conduct X and of disapproval for conduct Y, the answer falls, as we have seen,[1] within the provinces of the psychologist, the sociologist and the anthropologist. Broadly, their answer is that we feel approval for actions which we think will benefit us or our social group, and disapproval for actions which we think will harm us or our social group—this, at least, is an *example* of the *type* of answer that psychology and sociology give. (There are many variants of the type, as, for example, that we are conditioned to feel approval of conduct which will benefit the governing class of our

[1] See p. 109.

social group.) These answers are, of course, up to a point correct. They are correct in the sense that they explain to a large extent why it is that we apply the terms "right" and "wrong" to the conduct to which we do, in fact, apply them. But the reason why we call X right is not the same as what we mean when we say that it is right. Now, either the word "right" carries some specific meaning not co-terminous with "conducive to the advantage of self or group" or "felicific in respect of self or group", or it does not. If it does not, if its meaning is exhausted by the concepts of happiness and advantage, if, in other words, to say "X is right", is to make an ejaculation of emotional approval for what is thought to conduce to advantage or to promote happiness, why use the word, "right" at all? Why not speak directly of happiness and advantage, as we do when we make judgments which express feelings of pleasure or adduce considerations of self-interest. I disapprove of toothache and, when the dentist hurts me, I make an ejaculation of pain; but it never occurs to me to say that toothache is *wrong*, or that the dentist is *wicked*. If on the other hand "right" *does* have a specific meaning, what can it be but an ethical meaning which is not wholly analysable into considerations of advantage or happiness? What I am here suggesting is that the logical positivist view fails to account both for the origin and for the distinctive use of ethical terms. Even if this apparently distinctive meaning is illusory and ethical concepts are figments which stand for nothing, why was it necessary to invent them? It is noticeable that we do not feel constrained to invent distinctive terms to express others of our feelings of approval and disapproval. I disapprove of cruelty, but I also disapprove of toothache and dislike spinach. But while I say "cruelty is wrong", I don't say, "toothache is wrong". I say, "you did wrong to torture that child for your own pleasure", but I don't say, "you did wrong to eat that spinach for your lunch". Why the difference, if the analysis of the propositions "cruelty is wrong" "toothache is painful" and "spinach is beastly" is the same? If all three propositions merely express a feeling and do not, therefore, as Ayer puts it, "come under the category of truth and falsehood", why do I go out of my way to translate one of them and one only into what is *prima facie* quite a different proposition, namely, "cruelty is wrong"? According to Ayer, "cruelty to children is wrong", is equivalent to "hurting

children!!", that is to say, it is an ejaculation of horror. Similarly, "toothache is painful", or "spinach is distasteful" is, I suppose, equivalent to "horrible toothache!!", "beastly spinach!!" But if this is so, why do we moralize our disapproval of cruelty but not our disapproval of toothache and spinach? If it be said that "toothache is painful" and "spinach is beastly" are genuine factual propositions, in that they describe a quality of intrinsic painfulness belonging to toothache and a quality of intrinsic distastefulness belonging to spinach, why, one wonders, is not "cruelty is wrong" also accorded the status of a genuine factual proposition?

If, finally, it be said that the true analysis of "toothache is painful" and "spinach is beastly" is, "I experience a feeling of pain when I have toothache" and "I experience a feeling of dislike when I eat spinach", then the same analysis should be given to "cruelty is wrong". But to analyse the meaning of the statement "cruelty is wrong" as "I experience a feeling of disapproval when I come across cruelty", is equivalent to making the statement assert rather than express a feeling, and is, therefore, indistinguishable from the subjectivist position (*A*) which Ayer repudiates.

To sum up, there are three main alternative analyses of the propositions, "toothache is painful" and "spinach is beastly".

(i) *The objectivist.* According to this view the propositions refer to intrinsic features belonging respectively to toothache and spinach. If this is their correct analysis, why should not a similar analysis be accorded to "cruelty is wrong".

(ii) *The subjectivist.* According to this view the propositions assert that the speaker is experiencing such and such feelings. If the view is correct, why should the subjectivist analysis be repudiated in its application to "cruelty is wrong"?

(iii) *The emotive.* According to this view the propositions merely express the speaker's feelings and are not, therefore, genuine propositions at all. If this is the correct analysis, why do we go out of our way to invent the word, "wrong" and pass what appears *prima facie* to be an *ethical* judgment in the case of cruelty, but not in the case of toothache and spinach?

Now, let us take an example of moral *approval*. We approve of many things, of hot baths when we are cold and wet, of turkey and plum pudding, of generosity and of scrupulousness in the matter of repaying debts. In the case of the first pair of

these objects of approval, we are content to say that we enjoy or like them; in the case of the second pair, we pass ethical judgments and say, in regard to the first, that it is a virtue and ought, therefore, to be cultivated, and in regard to the second, that it is a duty and ought, therefore, to be performed. Now, the question is, why, if Ayer's analysis of ethical judgments is correct, do we go out of our way to construct a meaningless array of ethical terms and notions with which to deceive ourselves as to the real meaning of what we are saying in the case of the second pair of judgments, but not in the case of the first pair? "Hot baths are good" may mean (i) hot baths are intrinsically desirable. If so, why is not this the true analysis of "honesty is good"? Or it may mean (ii) "I like" or "I approve of hot baths".

If so, why is not the subjectivist analysis, which Ayer repudiates, the correct analysis of "honesty is good"? Or it may mean (iii) "Hot baths; good show!! " If so, if the proposition is only an ejaculation of a feeling of approval—and this, I imagine, is Ayer's view—why does a similar ejaculation of approval in regard to cases of honesty and generosity lead us to invent and apply the ethical notions of "ought", "right" and "duty"?

Again, I approve of Shakespeare's sonnets and Mozart's quartets. These feelings of approval I qualify by the epithet, "aesthetic". Aesthetic feelings are those commonly supposed to be aroused in us by what is beautiful, and I, accordingly, proceed to assert that Mozart's quartets and Shakespeare's sonnets are beautiful, attributing to them a certain quality or characteristic to which the emotions of approval aroused in me are a response. Upon this foundation a formidable structure of aesthetic criticism and evaluation has been raised.

On Ayer's view to say, "Mozart's quartets are beautiful", is not even to assert that one has a feeling, or to describe it; it is merely to express it. But if to say "Generosity is noble" or "Honesty is a virtue and ought to be cultivated", is to ejaculate one's emotions of admiring approval for generosity and honesty, and to say "Mozart's G minor quintet is a work of exceptional beauty and ought to be valued", is to ejaculate one's emotion of admiring approval for Mozart, how is it that ethics has come to be so sharply distinguished from aesthetics? If, in short, ethical and aesthetic judgments are alike expressions of feeling, why do we distinguish what is good from what is

beautiful and erect such different structures of judgment and criticism to accommodate and evaluate the experiences to which we give the name of ethical and aesthetic? No act of rational judgment, no appreciation of worth enters, on Ayer's view, into our aesthetic and ethical judgments, nor could it do so, since there are no ethical and aesthetic qualities to appraise and to judge. Such conceptions as that of a good musical ear which is capable of development or a sense of plastic form that experience can refine and practice cultivate are meaningless, for such conceptions imply worth, discrimination, the ability to distinguish the good from the bad and an impassioned seeking after the good.

To put the point in another way, the content of judgments of value in the spheres of aesthetics and ethics, is, for Ayer composed exclusively of the feelings which they express. Now, one man's feelings are as good, in the sense of being as truly felt, as another's. What, indeed, could it mean to say that one man's feelings were *better* than another's, on Ayer's, or indeed, on any view?

My criticism of this position may be put in the form of a dilemma. If Ayer's account is right, why, I ask, have ethics and aesthetics been singled out as separate branches of study and enquiry with their own vocabularies of special terms and apparently rational critiques and how did they come to be differentiated one from the other? Ayer, I suppose, might answer that the feelings of approval which ethical judgments express are qualitatively differentiated from those which aesthetic judgments express. For example, his analysis of the statement, "this action is wrong", is that the speaker "is simply evincing *moral*" (my italics) "disapproval of it". Again, he speaks of "a special sort of *moral* disapproval". But—and here the dilemma presents itself—either the word, "moral" as here used, stands for some specific, some uniquely differentiating quality of disapproval, or it does not. If it does not, my previous question stands. If, however, it does stand for such a differentiating quality, the attempt to analyse the content of ethics into considerations of happiness, expediency and fear must be mistaken. Why *moral* approval and disapproval, if there is no uniquely *moral* factor in the universe to be at once the source and the object of the moral feelings which are our response to it.

My criticism may be summarized as follows. If the word "moral" stands for nothing, then we cannot understand how ethical judgments came to be formulated and to be differentiated from aesthetic judgments. If it stands for something, something that is both specific and unique, then Ayer's theory fails wholly to explain how and why it came to do so, since it denies the presence in the universe of any factor which is at once objective and unique to which the judgment could refer and to which the feeling which the judgment expresses could serve as a response.

(4) *Interpretation of the Organism in Terms of Response to Environment.* I have already pointed out that Logical Positivism has a decided materialist bias. When its peculiar phraseology is translated into more familiar terms, we find that it represents the mind as being very largely, if not wholly determined by the body, and the body as a member of the natural order which develops within an environment to which it responds. It is in terms of its responses to its environment that the behaviour of the body is to be interpreted. As the inheritor of hundreds of years of behaviour and development in response to the stimuli reaching it from its environment, it is only to be expected that the contemporary human body should bear the marks of its evolution plainly upon it. And not only the body; for the mind or psyche, if I may permit myself to use such an old-fashioned expression, is also, on this view, conditioned by its environment either directly, if we concede that there may be mental events which are not merely epiphenomenal upon preceding bodily events, or indirectly via conditioning by the body. When the bodies and minds of the members of a biological species have been exposed for hundreds of thousands of years to the influence of an environment which throughout the whole of that period has played unremittingly upon them, it is only reasonable, on materialist premises, to expect that their characteristics both physical and mental should be such as the environment would be calculated to produce. These characteristics, then, are to be regarded as responses to features in the environment which over a large number of generations have conditioned them.

Among the characteristics exhibited by most, perhaps all, human organisms are religious need and the capacity for moral judgment. It is customary on the part of both subjectivists and logical positivists to regard these characteristics as purely subjective, as owning, that is to say, no objective counterpart in the external world. Religious need is a product of man's consciousness of his loneliness and helplessness in an alien and indifferent universe. To reassure its helplessness and to comfort its loneliness, the human mind invents figures of power and consolation, projects them on to the canvas of a meaningless universe and then proceeds to acclaim and worship the creatures of its own imagination. Moral judgments are analysed on similar lines as rationalizations of impulses to approve and disapprove, whose origins are grounded in utility. This account of the *origin* of moral judgments renders plausible the logical positivist interpretation of them as mere ejaculations of approval and disapproval.

Now, granted the materialist bias to which I have referred, we cannot, I suggest, write off these widespread, these almost universal attributes of the human mind, as if they were merely arbitrary. If the mind is not creative, if free-will is a meaningless conception, the mind cannot, it is obvious, develop any characteristics as a consequence of its own unstimulated initiative. The source and explanation of the characteristics which it obviously exhibits must, then, be sought elsewhere in the influence of factors in its environment. It is as responses to and effects of the influence of these factors that the characteristics must be regarded, since, rightly regarded, they are only the end products of a series of causes originating in the factors. It follows that religious need and the capacity for moral judgment must also be regarded as the end products of external causal influences, being the responses of the human organism to factors in its environment which in the course of evolution has produced them.

Now, it is hard to see how a moral or a religious judgment can have grown up in response to the influence of an environment which was destitute of moral and religious factors. Hence, if I am right, we cannot treat the deliverances of the moral and religious consciousness as arbitrary, as *merely* subjective or as *mere* expressions of feeling. They are indications of the fact that the universe contains a moral and religious order. The same argument could be used *mutatis mutandis* to show that it contains an aesthetic order. Once again, it is, I

suggest, only the arbitrary limitation of the concept of experience, to *sensory* experience which prevents logical positivists from according unbiased consideration to what is *prima facie* such an obvious interpretation of the moral and the religious consciousness.

Unanimity of Moral Judgments

It is, I submit, only on some such supposition as the foregoing that we shall find ourselves able to account for the high degree of unanimity that characterizes moral and aesthetic judgments. Much is made of the divergences between the moral and aesthetic judgments passed by different peoples and in different ages. While I do not wish to minimize these, I think that too much has been made of them. Peoples who have murdered their parents and exposed their children have, no doubt, been able to sustain themselves with their own and the community's approval, but for the murdering and the exposure it has always been possible to adduce some special reason, as for example, the conservation of inadequate food supplies, or the facilitation of migratory movements by nomadic tribes, or the equalization of the sexes. But nobody has thought it necessary to produce a special reason for *not* murdering parents or exposing children. In short, while a special reason is always required for morally repugnant conduct, in the absence of some special circumstance the morally unobjectionable course is naturally taken; if it is not taken, moral reprobation is incurred. Similarly, though people are often cruel and on occasion cruel because of the disinterested pleasure that they take in cruelty, nobody is found to argue that cruelty is better than kindness, or that cruelty ought to be practised on merits. Again, though we may differ widely about the merits of a particular piece of music and are familiar with the contempt which one age so often feels for the masterpieces of the last, nobody, so far as I am aware, has ever been found to maintain that a chorus of cats is better art, or is even a more agreeable noise, than a symphony.

If it be conceded that there is a wide measure of agreement in regard to moral and aesthetic judgments, the fact can, I suggest, be most readily accounted for on the supposition that the universe contains moral and aesthetic values, that these stand in a special relation to the subjects of ethical and aesthetic

valuation, that is to say, to conduct and to art, that the mind of man takes note of and responds to this relation, that moral and aesthetic experiences are the forms which its responses take and moral and aesthetic judgments the way in which they are expressed.

At this point the argument passes naturally from criticism of the emotive theory to the constructive statement of an alternative view.

(*C*) OBJECTIVE THEORIES OF VALUE

By ethical objectivism I mean among other things the view that the universe contains an objective moral order which subsists independently of our awareness of it, that when I do my duty, I subject myself to this order and obey the law which it prescribes, which law is independent of my likings and dislikings, and that a morally good action is invested with a value which is different from and superior to the value which attaches to the satisfaction of my pleasures and to the gratification of my hates.

It is entailed by this view that judgments of ethical value are unique, in the sense that they cannot be exhaustively resolved or translated into any other kind of judgment, and unanalysable, in the sense that no allegedly complete analysis of them can be given which does not falsify them.

Ayer does full justice to these characteristics, "the validity of ethical judgments", he writes, ". . . must be regarded as 'absolute' or 'intrinsic' and not empirically calculable". "Statements of value", he adds, "are not controlled by observation as ordinary empirical propositions are." It is, indeed, precisely because they are not empirically verifiable that he deduces that they are not propositions at all but are only expressions of emotion.

I have tried to show that in taking this line he draws a false conclusion from a true premise. The true premise is that ethical judgments are objective, unique and unanalysable, or, as he phrases it, "absolute" and "intrinsic"; the false conclusion is that, therefore, they are only expressions of feeling. In drawing this conclusion Ayer, as I have tried to show, has been misled by his refusal to recognize that a factual statement can have meaning, even if it is not verifiable in *sensory* experience.

This is not the place in which to develop an objectivist view of ethics. I confine myself, therefore, to a statement of what I take to be its essential features in order that its differences from the subjectivist and emotive views may be clearly seen.

Statement of Objectivism

I begin with logic. An objectivist view, as I understand it, maintains that in logic there are certain first principles, the premises, which are ultimate in the sense that they are not deducible from other principles. It maintains, further, that there must be such principles, since all thought must start from some premise, and this premise if it really *is* the starting point, cannot follow from any prior premise. An objectivist view would hold that the principles of reasoning as exemplified, for example, in inference both deductive and inductive, are "first" in this sense, since any reasoned attempt to establish them since it would need to make use of inference, would be obliged to assume them.

What Aristotle called the first principles of the sciences, are also "first" or ultimate in this sense. If they cannot be verified by observation, for they are not sensory, or demonstrated by reason, since reasoning must assume them, how are they known? Aristotle's answer, which I take to be correct, is by a direct act of rational insight, exercised by a faculty of intellectual inspection or intuition which he called νοῦς. Intellectual inspection is immediate and revelatory; it reveals to us the nature of something other than ourselves, and it does so directly without the mediation of the interpretative reason. In respect of its immediacy it is like sensation; it is unlike it, in being a revelation, not of a sensory but of a non-sensory order of reality.

In addition to the first principles of reasoning, the faculty of intellectual intuition or inspection with varying degrees of clarity also reveals to us values. Of these, two sets immediately concern us; those of ethics and those of aesthetics. These are like the first principles of reasoning in being ultimate. But they are ultimate in a different sense. The principles of reasoning are ultimate in the sense of being first; all thought derives from and depends upon them. The values are ultimate in the sense of being last; all those things which men deem to be desirable

or valuable are desired or valued for the sake of them. Just as in the case of thinking it is obvious that there must be certain principles of reason which reason does not establish, so in the case of values, there must be some things which are desired for their own sakes as ends and not for the sake of anything else. We desire A for the sake of B, B for the sake of C, C for the sake of D, and so on; but, it is obvious, the process must stop somewhere and the point at which it stops, whether we declare that point to be happiness, moral virtue, beauty, harmony, health or whatever other end may be propounded as ultimate, is the point at which we reach some end that we desire for its own sake. In saying that something is desired for its own sake, we are saying also that we can give no reason why it should be thought desirable, for any such reason would take the form of specifying some other end for the sake of which it was desired, and if there were some other end to which it was desired as a means, then it would not be ultimate. Thus, we may say that we desire fresh air for the sake of health and health for that of happiness; but we are unable to say why we find happiness desirable.

It is also clear that the values cannot be measured, for measurement implies the existence of an objective yard-stick or measuring rod, which must be logically prior to that which it measures, since to say that A is longer or hotter than B is to invoke a scale of measurement which is logically prior to A and B. Finally, the values cannot be empirically verified since they are not sensory.

These are familiar considerations and Ayer makes full acknowledgment of them. He says that "argument is possible on moral questions only if some system of values is presupposed". But, he goes on, "what we do not and cannot argue about is the validity of these moral principles". Since he denies the existence of moral principles, he is driven to conclude that no argument is possible about moral questions. He points out that what often seem *prima facie* to be arguments about moral questions turn out on analysis to be arguments about questions of fact. Thus, when we engage in a dispute about what appears to be a question of ethical values, "we argue that" our opponent "has misconceived the agent's motive; or that he has misjudged the effects of the action, or its probable effects in view of the agent's knowledge; or that

he has failed to take into account the special circumstances in which the agent was placed. Or else we employ more general arguments about the effects which actions of a certain type tend to produce, or the qualities which are usually manifested in their performance." Ayer concludes that since we cannot argue about moral principles or ethical values, for there are no such things, ethical judgments belong to the sphere of feeling.

On examination this conclusion is seen to rest upon two main grounds: (1) the first, is that value judgments are irrational; (2) the second, that they cannot be verified, that is to say, measured and tested with a view to establishing their accuracy.

(1) *The Alleged Irrationality of Value Judgments*

This charge rests, I suggest, upon a mistaken view of what it is to be rational. I referred above to our knowledge of the principles upon which all reasoning depends, the principles which Aristotle called the first principles of the sciences. These, I pointed out, cannot themselves be demonstrated by reasoning; they are seen to be valid by a faculty of intellectual intuition which is both immediate and revelatory. I ventured to make this point for two reasons: first, nobody supposes that this "scandal", if I may so term it, about their origins invalidates the logical processes of reasoning, destroys the validity of argument or impugns the conclusions of science. Secondly, there is, as I have also tried to show, a close resemblance between our apprehension of the first principles of reasoning and the values which give meaning to our moral and aesthetic judgments. If we are not justified in pronouncing the former to be irrational merely because they are undemonstrated, why should the latter be pronounced irrational because they are undemonstrated? If the former are revealed to a faculty of intellectual intuition, why not the latter? For example, just as in the case of the first principles it may be self-evident that their subjects and their predicates are necessarily connected, so it may be immediately apparent in the case of a particular action that there is a necessary connexion between it and the concept of right or duty.

I am not here concerned to argue in favour of this conclusion. It is enough for my purpose to point out that Logical Positivism

is precluded by dogma from entertaining it. The dogma in question is that which refuses to recognize any kind of experience as relevant to verification and, therefore, to the establishment of meaning except sensory experience. Arbitrarily delimit the meaning of meaning, confine meaning to sense-experience, and you are thereby committed either to denying the deliverances of νοῦς or declaring them to be meaningless. As a consequence you will be led to deny the faculty of rational insight into the nature of things, and in denying the faculty, to deny also that our experience of ethics and religion can be significant. And if it be asked *why* we should suppose that there is significance in our intuitions of religious and moral value, and *why* they should be treated as falling outside the category of mere feeling, the answer, I suggest, is to be found in the considerations adduced above to show that ethical judgments are recognized as claiming an authority and a publicity that feeling judgments do not. We expect other people to share our ethical judgments and feel that they are morally obtuse if they do not, and we expect ourselves and others to act in accordance with their dictates and feel that we and they are wrong if we do not. Now, we do not entertain any similar convictions and expectations in regard to the deliverance of our judgments of feeling. It is hardly necessary to add that the validity of these considerations is perfectly compatible with the view that any particular ethical judgment may be mistaken.

(2) *Their Non-verifiability*

It is often urged against ethical and aesthetic judgments that they are not verifiable. If by "verifiable" is meant, verifiable in the sense that scientific judgments are verifiable, that is to say, by the tests of observation and experiment, this is true. If I say, "this is higher or hotter than that", instruments exist by which my statement can be tested and shown to be either true or false. But there are no comparable instruments for testing the statements, "this is better" or "more beautiful" than that.

I have two comments: (i) The fact that I have no certain means of determining whether the statement, "X is better" or "more beautiful than Y" is true or not, is not in itself a reason for supposing that it is not true, still less for contending

that it is meaningless to say either that it is true or that it is not true.

(ii) Secondly, it is, once again, only the restriction of experience to sensory experience which gives rise to the view that judgments of ethical and aesthetic worth cannot be verified. If the occurrence of certain sense-contents which, incidentally, on Ayer's view, are private, verifies an empirical statement, why should not the occurrence of certain moral intuitions verify an ethical statement?

Nor in the case of ethical and aesthetic statements is it certain that verification, in the sense of verification which logical positivists are prepared to accept, will always be lacking. Consider in this connexion the analogy suggested by the development of science.

The Greeks had a craving for scientific explanation. To satisfy it, they put forward theories of the nature of the material world, for example, the atomic theory advanced by Leucippus and Democritus, or the evolutionary theory of the origin of man suggested by Anaximander which, though they belong to the category of intuitions or, if the phrase be preferred, intellectual guesses, turned out to be inspired intuitions, approximating in some cases with considerable accuracy to the conclusions which physics and biology were subsequently to draw on the basis of laboriously collected evidence. But the intuitions of the Greeks had to await the invention of the appropriate instruments of observation and verification before they could be tested and with modifications adopted. The delay was a long one, extending over many hundreds of years.

Men also have a craving for righteousness and a feeling for beauty. The conceptions of the nature of the universe which the intuitions of the good and the beautiful lead them to formulate cannot be substantiated, at any rate in this order or at this level of existence. But this fact does not mean that they will remain permanently unsubstantiated, any more than the intuitive responses which the Greek mind made to the impact upon it of its *physical* environment were to remain permanently unsubstantiated. It is at least possible—many have held it to be probable—that they may be verified in the logical positivist sense of verification by a direct experience of the moral and aesthetic order of the universe enjoyed by the human spirit in another order of existence, so that, just as the

unverified theories put forward by the Greeks to satisfy *their* craving for explanation in regard to natural facts turned out to be surprisingly accurate when the appropriate conditions for testing them had been established, so, too, the theories which, under the stimulus of the craving to explain the significance of moral and aesthetic experience, we put forward in regard to moral and aesthetic values, may turn out to be not wholly beside the mark when the appropriate conditions occur for testing *them*. But it may well be that these conditions will not be satisfied in this order of existence.

A similar consideration suggests itself in the case of history. A history, as I have pointed out in another connexion,[1] can never be completely comprehensive if only because the writer must select his facts. Now every process of selection involves a "weighing" of facts. Historians select one fact as significant and omit others as trivial and unimportant, and, in so doing, they inevitably act upon pre-conceived views as to what is important, what trivial. But the fact that all historical writing is to this extent and in this sense subjective, does not mean that there are no facts for the historian to record. And just as the writing of history reflects a point of view and expresses a faith, so the moral and aesthetic judgments that we pass are conditioned by an outlook and express a conviction, the conviction, namely, of the presence in the universe of absolute standards by reference to which some actions are shown to be better, some works of art more valuable than others. Admittedly in our present order of existence such a view of the universe must remain a matter of faith, but the faith can meanwhile be confirmed by the coherence and comprehensiveness of the conclusions to which it points, by, in short, its application to *all* departments of experience.

For my part, I cannot see that our inability to make what can be shown to be accurate ethical and aesthetic judgments, our inability to evaluate with certainty the ethical and aesthetic characteristics of certain situations, or our inability to be certain in respect of any judgment or assessment whether it is correct or not, constitute reasons for supposing that there are no aesthetic characteristics to judge or ethical situations to evaluate. Why, after all, should we expect to be able to judge and evaluate all things to a nicety?

[1] See ch. III, pp. 58, 59.

Aristotle tells us that "it is the mark of an educated mind to expect that amount of exactitude in each kind which the nature of the particular subject admits". This is sound advice. Accepting it, we shall do well to bear in mind that the first concern of a philosopher is to ensure, so far as in him lies, the adequacy of his philosophy of the *whole* of experience. This requirement is not met by the ruling out of significant areas of knowledge and experience, in the interests of an arbitrarily limited conception of meaning, or an arbitrarily defined standard of clarity.

CHAPTER IX

THE EFFECTS OF LOGICAL POSITIVISM

That Logical Positivism has No Effects

As I pointed out in the Introduction, it is customary to say that the adoption of a logical positivist point of view in philosophy has no effects outside philosophy. Certainly, it is said, it has no *political* effects, such as, for example, the promotion of a state of mind favourable to the growth of Fascism. In this respect Logical Positivism is compared with Radical Empiricism of which, indeed, it is at once a re-statement and a development. Like Radical Empiricism it dispenses with *a priori* knowledge, repudiates the notion of necessary connexion, eschews absolutes and denies metaphysics, while presenting factual statements about the empirical world as hypotheses.

The climate of opinion fostered by Logical Positivism is, therefore, it is claimed, unfavourable to authoritarianism in all its forms. It destroys the basis of the supernatural authority claimed for the Church, no less than of the mystical authority sometimes claimed for the State. It is also inimical to dogmatic views in regard to ethics and aesthetics, since it excises those absolute values upon a supposed knowledge of which dogmatic ethics and *ex cathedra* pronouncements about aesthetics have usually been based, and is favourable to an open cast of mind which is ready and eager to accept and judge all things on merits. Such a cast of mind, in so far as it expresses itself in any distinctive political or ethical trends, is associated with a liberal reformism in politics and a secular humanitarianism in ethics. It is the foe of every form of fanaticism, and intolerance and dogma are foreign to its temper. The examples of Hume and J. S. Mill are frequently cited as illustrating this cast of mind. Hume was a Laodicean in politics, while Mill's radical reformism stopped short only of revolution. Of no great thinkers, it is said, are the writings less congenial to an authoritarian attitude to ethics or a fascist attitude to politics.

Now, it is, I think, true that the radical empiricist strain in

English philosophy has been liberal and anti-authoritarian, nor is it difficult to see why this should have been so. Authority rests upon belief and most of the beliefs that have stirred men's minds have had, or have professed to have, metaphysical foundations. Destroy the foundations and you increase the difficulty of believing in the existence of any order of reality other than that which science studies. Thus you will tend to believe in objective physical facts, but not in objective laws which the facts obey; in a natural world, but not in a Creator who made it; in the individual, but not in a body politic which is more than the sum total of the individuals who compose it. It is, indeed, hard to see how any mind which was seriously affected by logical positivist modes of thought could accept the Hegelian notion of the State as a super-person, or even the fascist concept of the nation equipped with its apparatus of sacred missions and divine destinies and pregnant with its historically fated *rôle* upon the stage of history. As Ayer himself has pointed out, "Fascists have hitherto tended to favour some form of metaphysics and they have been hostile to positivist ideas in so far as they were aware of them at all."

All this, I think, is true. Nevertheless there are important, countervailing considerations which suggest that the spread of logical positivist modes of thought may well tend to the erosion of desirable and to the growth of undesirable beliefs. I propose to mention four such considerations and to indicate the kind of beliefs to which they are liable to give rise.

Considerations Tending to the Erosion of Desirable Beliefs

(*A*) If you destroy the grounds for believing in an objective order of value, you will hold that those who have, in fact, believed in it, have been mistaken and that their beliefs have been irrational. Among these beliefs are (i) that some human characters and some courses of action are *really* better than others; (ii) that good cannot be equated with what any person or body of persons happens to approve of; and (iii) that our duty ought to be performed however disagreeable it may happen to be. If you hold that these beliefs are irrational, you are less likely to do your duty, if it is disagreeable, and more likely to equate good with what you happen to desire. As for moral scruples, they will tend to be dismissed as survivals from a guilt-ridden childhood, or as mere rationalizations of the impulse to blame.

The force of dominant purposes is also weakened. This is not the place for a discussion of what constitutes the good life; but many would, I think, agree that it includes, for most of us, the conception of one or more dominating purposes, in the service of which interests which might otherwise have been cultivated are eschewed and to which other aims, which might have been pursued, are subjugated. The sort of purposes that I have in mind are those that naturally arise in connexion with religion, with politics or in the service of mankind. They also include ambition and the pursuit of wealth. Or a man's mind may be dominated by a preoccupying interest rather than a purpose as, for example, in gambling, in archaeology, or in bird watching. It is the pursuit of such a purpose, the cultivation of such an interest, whether good or bad, which invests life with significance and gives it zest. Yet wholeheartedly to pursue it is not easy. Other pursuits claim their share of attention, other interests break in, and it is, in general, only men who are imbued with an intense conviction, an overpowering ambition, or an unshakeable sense of worth who have been able to achieve the necessary suppressions and sacrifices. Without the conviction, without the sense of worth what Plato calls the third part of the soul is apt to take charge. Reject as theoretically groundless the conceptions of objective value and intrinsic worth, and you make the practical efforts and restraints which are necessary, if men are to act as if some things are really worth while in a sense in which others are not, more difficult of achievement. In fact, I find it hard to resist the conclusion that if one really believed that the doctrines of Logical Positivism were true, there would be no bar of principle to the leading of that life which Plato called "democratic"—a Bohemian in art, a Laodicean in affairs, a sceptic in philosophy and religion, an inconstant in love and a dilettante in life.

(*B*) A point which, I think, has been overlooked in connexion with the emotive theory of ethics and religion is that, to embrace it, is to deprive both ethics and religion of emotive significance. Let us suppose that the statement, "God is Love", is not a statement about God, but is an expression of the emotions of love and reverence. Let us suppose, further, that I come to believe this. God, I shall now hold, is not loving or merciful; in fact, God is not anything at all, since He will fall under the general ban on metaphysics. How, then, shall I continue to feel the

emotions of love and reverence for that which I now believe to be non-existent? To put the point in another way, if I believe that the statement "God is Love" is purely emotive, then it ceases, for me, to express emotion.

Similarly with ethical statements. If I consistently believe that the statement, "stealing is wrong", does no more than express an emotion of horror at stealing, it will presently cease to express the emotion of horror. Not to put too fine a point on it, I shall cease to believe that stealing is wrong.

(*C*) These tendencies will be apt to operate in the spheres both of ethics and of religion. Logical Positivism has, however, another unfavourable implication which applies specifically in regard to religion. Let us suppose that, for whatever reason, a man has convinced himself that Christ performed miracles, that water did, in fact, become wine. Now the statement that water was turned into wine, even if he adopts a logical positivist position, will for him have meaning, since it was empirically verifiable. Now let us suppose that he puts the question, by what means was this phenomenon brought about? The obvious answer is that it was the consequence of Christ's possession of miraculous powers, and if the further question is put, how did Christ come to possess these powers, the obvious answer, once again, is because he was, in part, a supernatural person.

But the proposition that Christ was a supernatural person is not empirically verifiable, any more than the being in possession of miraculous powers was verifiable. Indeed, a supernatural order of reality is, I take it, only a special case of a metaphysical order of reality, an order, therefore, whose existence is by hypothesis not empirically verifiable, since empirical verification is possible only in regard to natural events. Hence, the supernatural order comes under the general ban on metaphysics, so that the statements that Christ was in part a supernatural person and that he was in possession of miraculous powers are meaningless statements.

It follows that even if the water into wine occurrence be accepted as established, what I have called the obvious explanations of it are ruled out as meaningless. There can be no other explanation of what must now stand revealed as a purely arbitrary and inexplicable natural phenomenon. An arbitrary and inexplicable *natural* phenomenon is one which it is very

hard to accept; indeed, acceptance, once the supernatural explanation is ruled out, is pointless. Hence, even if he be prepared to accept the phenomena which, according to the teaching of the Christian religion certainly occurred, the believer is debarred, once he becomes a logical positivist, from according to them the interpretation which the Christian religion suggests. This is so nearly an untenable position that I find it hard to believe that any mind can rest in it. The obvious method of escape is to deny the phenomenon. My conclusion is that the acceptance of a logical positivist philosophy is incompatible with the admission of the historical character of the occurrences upon which the Christian faith is, in part, based. Hence, the professed Christian who embraces Logical Positivism presently finds that the implications of the philosophy which he has embraced are incompatible with the continued acceptance of the general beliefs and, in particular, of the belief in miracles, upon which Christianity has always insisted as essential to the faith.

This is only one illustration of the way in which Logical Positivism is unfavourable to religious belief.

(*D*) Classes and systems also disappear under the logical positivist ban on metaphysics. A class is not observable, nor is a system; we can observe only individuals. Descriptive statements about classes and systems are, therefore, meaningless. To quote a recent writer on this subject,[1] "there are" if Logical Positivism is right, "no mankind, no profit system, no parties, no fascism, no underfed people, no inadequate housing, no shoddy clothes, no truth and no social justice. Such being the case, there can be no economic problem, no political problem, no fascist problem, no food problem, no housing problem, no scientific problem and no social problem." Mr. Dunham's criticism is directed primarily at the Semanticists. His strictures would, nevertheless, apply *mutatis mutandis* to logical positivists, whom he charges with conjuring problems out of existence by the simple process of declaring them to be meaningless. If there is no such thing as "social justice", there is, he declares, no valid ground for trying to make the world a better place. If there is no such thing as Fascism, in the sense of a definite and describable social system, then it would be impossible to identify individual

[1] *Man Against Myth* by Barrows Dunham (published by Frederick Muller, December, 1948).

fascists "for individual fascists are fascists precisely because they strive to bring into existence, or to maintain in existence, that very system itself".

He concludes, "If the term 'Fascism' means nothing by itself . . . then we can never recognize any *régime* as fascist."

This seems to me a valid comment. I object to Fascism, though I may like individual fascists. If there is no system, Fascism, or rather, if the statement, "Fascism is a political system", is meaningless, then it is difficult to see what is left for me to object to.

Again, if there is no objective right and wrong, if moral judgments are, as logical positivists hold, merely ejaculations of emotions of approval and disapproval, then, as Mr. Dunham points out, one cannot demonstrate that fascist practices are evil; one can only express dislike of them. "No philosophy", he comments, "would better please the fascists themselves, since moral questions could then be safely left in the hands of the police."

Again, if "God exists" is a meaningless statement, it is difficult to see how anybody could be induced to believe in Him. Mr. Dunham comments, "theologians who were long hardened to objections that their statements were false, were left breathless by this new charge that they had, for the most part, been saying nothing at all".

Finally, if Logical Positivism is correct, you can say, "one atom bomb can destroy 50,000 people" (statement of fact), but not, "it is a bad thing to destroy 50,000 people" (statement of evaluation) or, rather, you can say it, but the "word 'bad' adds nothing to the factual content of the statement".

Now, can anyone seriously maintain that the spread of such doctrines will have no consequences for ethics, politics and theology, or that their effect upon young and generous minds, protesting passionately against cruelty and injustice and eager to set the world to rights will not be to sap effort, discourage initiative, destroy the hope of change and so to assist reaction and sanction inertia? Can a man really continue to feel indignant at cruelty, if he is convinced that the statement, "cruelty is wrong" is meaningless? An emotion of indignation may, indeed, be felt; it may even be expressed; but it will not long survive the conviction that it is without authority in morals or basis in reason.

Considerations Tending to the Promotion of Undesirable Beliefs

I have adduced certain considerations tending to show that Logical Positivism is unfavourable to desirable beliefs. I will now indicate some of the reasons for thinking that it tends to promote undesirable beliefs. In using the words "desirable" and "undesirable" I am, of course, begging questions. I am assuming, for example, that a belief in the validity of ethics and religion is desirable; I am also assuming that a belief in the worth-whileness of Fascism and the virtues of violence is undesirable. I cannot defend these assumptions here. It is as well, however, explicitly to acknowledge that they are being made.

If the contentions of the foregoing paragraphs be accepted, it follows that the effects of Logical Positivism are such as will be hostile to traditional beliefs. It is illogical in theory for a logical positivist to believe in God, in the superiority of right to wrong, in the intrinsic worth-whileness of particular ways of life and courses of conduct, in the existence of standards of artistic worth, and it seems illogical to believe it often seems unnecessary to practise. The first effect of the application of logical positivist techniques by a young man whose mind is vigorous, able and enquiring is to induce a thorough-going scepticism. The natural order has, he will conclude, no basis in a supernatural order from which it derives its meaning and its purpose. Values are without reality and morals without meaning.

The result of destroying traditional beliefs is thus to produce a waste-land of the mind, of which T. S. Eliot's poem is at once a description and, by implication, a denunciation. I say "denunciation" for it is hard to read the poem without deploring the state which it describes or deducing that the poet meant the reader to deplore it. But nature abhors a vacuum no less in the intellectual than in the physical sphere, and it is not easy for a young mind which is vigorous, able and enquiring to remain indefinitely in this state of suspended belief. Sooner or later it will demand nourishment in the shape of causes to uphold, creeds to believe, objects to revere and ends to pursue. Hence the popularity in our own time of such objects of reverence and belief as the divine State, the Party, the Race, the Volk, and the Fatherland. Round these various objects have crystallized the creeds which are at once the distinction and the disgrace of our age, Fascism, Communism, and Nationalism. Fascism is temporarily discredited but Communism and Nationalism are

the two idols upon whose altars the youth of our civilization bids fair to be sacrificed.

There are, I think, two reasons why, when traditional values and beliefs go by the board, those that are undesirable tend to take their place. The first is that if those whose business it is to teach the young, conveying to them such wisdom as mankind has acquired in the past, disown their function on the ground that the wisdom is no wisdom at all, but is a meaningless mumbo-jumbo, other teachers will take their place. The late Professor Collingwood has described the consequences of this abandonment of their function by true and its usurpation by false teachers better than I can hope to do: "Since one must not seek it from thinkers, or from ideals, or from principles, one must look (for guidance) to people who were not thinkers (but fools), to processes that were not thinking (but passion), to aims that were not ideals (but caprices) and to rules that were not principles (but rules of expediency). If" [philosophers] "had wanted to train up a generation of Englishmen and Englishwomen expressly as the potential dupes of every adventurer in morals or politics, commerce or religion who would appeal to their emotions and promise them private gains which he neither could procure them nor even meant to procure them, no better way of doing it could have been discovered."

The second reason may be conveyed in the form of an analogy. It is a commonplace that the fallacy of Hedonism is not so much theoretical as practical, or is practical as well as theoretical. The secular wisdom of mankind teaches that pleasure should not be pursued directly; if it is, the results, men have found, are almost always disappointing. For pleasure, it seems, is not an end but a by-product; it tends to invest activities directed to ends other than pleasure. Of the widespread testimony to this effect which has formed part of the common wisdom of mankind the theory of pleasure in the Tenth Book of Aristotle's Ethics is the classical statement.

This account of pleasure conveys, I think, an important truth. The kingdom of happiness is not to be taken by storm. Set out to seek happiness and it will elude you; throw yourself body and soul into your work; devote yourself to a cause; lift yourself up out of the selfish little pit of vanity and desire which is the self, by giving yourself to something which is greater than the self, and on looking back you will find that you have been

happy. Happiness, in short, is not a house that can be built by men's hands; it is a flower that surprises you, a song which you hear as you pass the hedge, rising suddenly and simply into the night and dying down again.

As with happiness so, I suggest, with belief. To believe something because you think it to be right is rational, and if it is, indeed, right, salutary. To believe it, not because you think it to be right but because you think it right to believe something, right, because you are suffering from an accumulating fund of unexpended credence is, perhaps, natural, but it is apt to be unsatisfying. Like the psychological hedonist theory of pleasure, it puts the cart before the horse. The natural order is (*a*) I see this to be the case; therefore, (*b*) I will believe it; the unnatural—the cart before the horse—is (*a*) I must believe in something; therefore, (*b*) I will assert this to be the case. Now, beliefs which are embraced to satisfy a psychological need and not because they are initially thought to be true, will tend to be unsatisfying, as actions directed to securing pleasure instead of to the achievement of some definite objective which is thought to be worthwhile, are unsatisfying.

Such beliefs are unsatisfying not because they are not thought to be true—for the rationalizing reason quickly disguises from us the motives for their adoption and they come to appear true on merits—but because they are embraced for the wrong reasons. Truth is logically prior to the satisfaction which is felt in the conviction "this is true". Indeed, such satisfaction depends upon the prior conviction of truth. If our conviction of the truth of a belief is only a by-product of the need to hold it, if it is, in fact, only a rationalization of the need to believe, the conviction will not effectively serve the purpose which led to the rationalization. This is the defect of all beliefs which are embraced on pragmatic grounds, embraced, that is to say, not because they are initially seen to be true, but because they serve the purposes of those who embrace them.

The fact that beliefs so founded are unsatisfying has a further consequence which is bad, the consequence, namely, that the beliefs will tend to be violent. Again, the analogy with Hedonism is helpful. If it is held that pleasure is the only good, then clearly, the more pleasure, the better. Hence, a life conducted according to the dictates of Hedonism will be a life devoted to the pursuit of violent satisfaction just because quantitatively they are the

most immediately satisfying. Similarly, if belief, belief for its own sake, belief, that is to say, which is embraced for the sake of believing since not to believe anything is felt to be intolerable, and not truth is the end, the more belief, the better.

To put the point differently, if men believe in order to satisfy a psychological need, the more violent and intolerant the belief, the greater the satisfaction. Hence arises the group of violent and irrational beliefs that distinguish our own time. Men embrace the creeds of Fascism and Communism with an intolerant dogmatism which is a reflexion less of the truth of the tenets they profess, than of their own need to feel them to be true. Clear cut and dogmatic beliefs lend themselves to intolerant and violent advocacy and so satisfy the psychological needs which led to their adoption.

If there is any force in these considerations, it is no accident that ages of intolerant dogma violently maintained should so often have succeeded ages of moral scepticism and religious agnosticism. Sap the foundations of rational belief in God, in truth, in goodness and in beauty, as Logical Positivism cannot help but do, confine meaningful assertions to matters of empirical fact and you sow the seeds of intolerance and dogmatism, as weeds spring up where a man cuts down a healthy crop yet puts nothing in its place. Communism and Fascism are the natural by-products of scepticism and nihilism. Most men need a creed and there is nothing in the empirical world upon which a creed can be based. For the empirical world contains nothing but the movements of matter and these, though they can be observed, cannot be believed. It is thus no accident that Logical Positivism tends to undermine rational and to encourage irrational beliefs, and that, as Oxonian remarked, the belief in Fascism should tend to spring up in the "vacuum left by an abeyance of concern with fundamental human values".

Errata 22(6) read while for which
35(7) Omit the ? in last word.

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