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## Ethics and Emotions: A Comparison of Two Ethical Theories (A Critique of A.J. Ayer's Emotivism in Light of Dietrich von Hildenbrand's Theory of Affective Responses)

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ETHICS AND EMOTIONS:  
A COMPARISON OF TWO ETHICAL THEORIES  
(A CRITIQUE OF A.J. AYER'S EMOTIVISM IN LIGHT OF  
DIETRICH VON HILDEBRAND'S THEORY OF AFFECTIVE RESPONSES)  
BY  
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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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IN  
PHILOSOPHY

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1994

## ABSTRACT

Historically emotions have been excluded from the moral sphere. However, in this century there have been at least two theories which do recognize a relationship between ethics and the emotions, namely, A. J. Ayer's emotivism and Dietrich von Hildebrand's theory of affective morality.

Emotivism is a theory which claims that when one makes an ethical judgment, such as "murder is wrong," one is not saying anything about murder but merely evincing the emotions one has with respect to murder. It is as if one said "murder" in a particularly harsh tone of voice and nothing more.

In contrast, von Hildebrand's theory claims that not only is murder truly wrong but when one hears of a murder one should respond with the appropriate emotional response, such as sorrow or righteous anger.

Because of its adoption of the empirical verifiability criterion, Ayer's theory holds that all value statements are cognitively meaningless and all value judgments, including those of morality, are nothing but expressions of emotions. This theory removes ethics from meaningful philosophical discourse and deems it to be a subject only for the social sciences. This theory can be found faulty on many

accounts. Not only can it be shown that by the existence of purely ethical arguments Ayer's theory is refuted but also it can be shown that this theory is self-annihilating.

On the other hand, von Hildebrand's theory offers a clear analysis of the affective sphere and its moral pertinence. Von Hildebrand's explanation of the "heart" as denoting the affective sphere elucidates the distinction between the affective response and the other entities with which it may easily be confused. Due to its intentional nature, the affective response may be morally correct or morally incorrect. It is the morally conscious person who uses his cooperative freedom to sanction an appropriate affective response and/or to disavow an inappropriate affective response.

Thus it is shown that emotions do fall within the realm of ethics and a meaningful relationship can be established between ethics and emotions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY

Is there any relevant connection between ethics and emotions? Can any meaningful relation between these two diverse subjects be discovered? The nature of this work is to examine two theories which do make claims to the important relationship between ethics and emotions. The first theory reduces all ethical discourse either to subject matter for the social sciences or to mere emotive utterances. Under this theory, when one says, "murder is wrong," one is merely evincing one's bad feelings concerning murder. The second theory places emotions within the realm of ethics by claiming that one's affective responses can be bearers of moral values. For this theory, not only is murder wrong but when one hears of a murder one should give the right, due appropriate affective response, such as sorrow or righteous anger.

A prime example of the first theory is the emotivism of the logical positivists. For this study the work of Alfred Jules Ayer as found in his second edition of Language, Truth and Logic<sup>1</sup>, the so-called Bible of logical

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<sup>1</sup>The second edition of Ayer's Language, Truth and Logic is specifically mentioned because in this edition's preface Ayer offers significant clarifications to the first edition.

positivism, will be the focal point of the examination of the logical positivists' theory. The phenomenological theory of spiritual affectivity as given by Dietrich von Hildebrand will be the main topic of discussion for the second theory.

Before proceeding to examine Ayer's work, it is important to note that emotivism has evolved over the years and to the extent that it exists today it continues in its evolution. The emotivism put forth by A. J. Ayer in Language, Truth and Logic, was refined later by Charles L. Stevenson and published in his Ethics and Language, among other works. A thorough examination of the development of this ethical theory would begin with Ayer's emotivism and its subsequent modifications followed by a discussion of later developments with emphasis given to Stevenson's work.

This present work limits itself to a discussion of Ayer's emotivism as found in the second edition of Language, Truth and Logic which by no means is meant to ignore the importance of the later developments of this ethical theory, but rather to give the humble recognition that such an academic pursuit goes beyond the scope of this paper.

This study aims to examine emotivism, to demonstrate its inadequacy as an ethical theory, and to offer the phenomenological theory that morality includes affectivity as put forth by von Hildebrand as the more appropriate appraisal of the connection between ethics and emotions.

CHAPTER ONE  
AN EXPOSITION OF A. J. AYER'S EMOTIVISM AS FOUND IN HIS  
LANGUAGE, TRUTH AND LOGIC

A: OVERVIEW

In chapter six of his revolutionary work, Language, Truth and Logic, entitled "Critique of Ethics and Theology," A. J. Ayer intends to show that all statements<sup>1</sup> of value, whether ethical, aesthetical, metaphysical, or religious, "are not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false."<sup>2</sup> Ayer removes morality, ethics, aesthetics, and religious issues from the realm of metaphysics by claiming that statements made with respect to these subjects are

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<sup>1</sup>Ayer uses the word "statement" ambiguously. Due to the importance of this term in any discourse concerning language this ambiguity is unfortunate. Ayer himself admits to this ambiguity in the preface of the second edition. The present author has taken the liberty to substitute when necessary clarifications for this term. However, since Ayer himself would not ascribe the full status of proposition to "statement," in providing an overview of Ayer's theory the author has remained faithful to Ayer's use of the word "statement." An in-depth examination of his use of "statement" is given in chapter two of this present work which is based on the introduction of the second edition of Language, Truth and Logic.

<sup>2</sup>Alfred Jules Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic , 2d. ed. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1946; first published in 1936), 103. Future reference will be given as: Ayer, Language.

merely pseudo-propositions and therefore are neither true nor false. This is equivalent to a denial of the meanings of such statements which has led to a metaphysical denial of the existence of any referent.

#### **B: AYER'S CATEGORIZATION OF ETHICAL STATEMENTS**

To accomplish his goal, Ayer categorizes ethical statements into four classes. The first contains "propositions which express definitions of ethical terms."<sup>3</sup> The second contains propositions that describe moral experiences or the causes of such experiences. Moral exhortations comprise the third class while the fourth consists of moral judgments.

For Ayer the only category suitable for philosophical study is the first, propositions which define ethical terms. He relegates the second to the social sciences, namely psychology or sociology. The third he considers to be merely "ejaculations or commands"<sup>4</sup> and therefore not propositions. He does not give an explanation for moral judgments save that they are to be excluded from philosophical study (his argument for this exclusion comprises the thrust of his emotive theory). Making a radical break away from how ethics is usually done, he proposes that:

A strictly philosophical treatise on ethics should therefore make no ethical pronouncements. But it

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

should, by giving an analysis of ethical terms, show what is the category to which all such pronouncements belong.<sup>5</sup>

### C: AYER'S REJECTION OF CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL THEORIES

Before introducing his emotive theory of ethical statements, Ayer first removes the reasonability of an adherence to any of the major contemporary ethical theories, namely: utilitarianism, subjectivism, and intuitionism.

He uses the following considerations against utilitarianism and subjectivism: he describes utilitarianism as defining "the rightness of actions, and the goodness of ends"<sup>6</sup> via the net gain of happiness which they provide. Ayer proposes this theory to be untenable for the following reason: if "increasing our happiness" is given as the definition of right, it would then be contradictory to claim that 'X' increases a person's happiness, but 'X' is, nevertheless, not right (just as it is a contradiction to say that 'X' is a woman, but nevertheless not a female). However, since claiming this is not contradictory, it cannot be correct to define the rightness of 'X' by its increasing a person's happiness.

He perceives subjectivism as defining "rightness of actions, and the goodness of ends"<sup>7</sup> in terms of the amount

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 103-104.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

of approval given to them by persons. Ayer finds subjectivism faulty for a reason similar to the one he uses against utilitarianism. Namely, it is not a contradiction to say that 'X' is approved by many, yet, 'X' is not right. Therefore, it cannot be correct to define 'right' in terms of popular approval.

Ayer holds that both of these theories place morality under psychology or sociology. Such placements allow ethical judgments, or, in Ayer's words, "assertions," to be treated similarly to "factual assertions" and allow "empirical hypotheses" to be equally applied to them.<sup>8</sup> Ayer considers utilitarianism and subjectivism to be only concerned with descriptive symbols. He considers descriptive ethical symbols which are found in statements expressing zeitgeist to be a subject for the social sciences. By rejecting both of these theories due to their inherent difficulties, Ayer limits his analysis to normative ethical symbols.

By normative he means that which expresses an ethical judgment. It is only normative symbols, and not descriptive ones, that he takes to be "indefinable in factual terms."<sup>9</sup> As a sufficient reason for this elimination of moral judgments, which would otherwise be considered to be a large part of philosophical study, Ayer subsequently offers his emotive theory.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 105.

Following his dismissal of utilitarianism and subjectivism, Ayer suggests that the intuitionists' theory appears now to be the only viable alternative. Intuitionism is a theory according to which the validity of moral judgments must be considered to be "intrinsic" or "absolute."

The intuitionists' position maintains that value statements can not be empirically verified but are rather known via intuition. In a skeptical fashion, Ayer proposes that since people may have different views with respect to a particular value judgment a criterion is needed to determine which view is correct. Since no empirical criterion, and for Ayer this means no criterion whatsoever, is possible to decide between apparently contradictory intuitions<sup>10</sup> he asserts that "a mere appeal to intuition is worthless as a test of a proposition's validity."<sup>11</sup> He rejects the intuitionists' theory of self-evidence since it is in complete opposition to the logical positivists' main theory that "a synthetic proposition is significant only if it is empirically verifiable."<sup>12</sup> Thus for Ayer, one cannot claim that the proposition expressed by "it is never just to punish a child for the crimes of his mother" is true, since it is not an empirically verifiable statement, and since an appeal to

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<sup>10</sup>Mark Roberts points out that valid intuitions cannot be contradictory, rather what can be contradictory are propositions which are claimed to be known via intuition.

<sup>11</sup>Ayer, Language, 106.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 106.

intuition is unjustifiable.

#### D: AYER'S EMOTIVE THEORY

Ayer claims that "fundamental ethical concepts are unanalysable"<sup>13</sup> since there are no criteria by which to determine the validity of the judgments which they compose. As far as Ayer is concerned, the intuitionists offer no explanation for this unanalyzability<sup>14</sup> and hence he proposes that "the reason why they are unanalysable is that they are mere pseudo-concepts."<sup>15</sup> He further contends that "sentences which contain normative ethical symbols are not equivalent to sentences which express psychological propositions, or indeed empirical propositions of any kind."<sup>16</sup> Thus, for Ayer, normative ethical concepts contribute nothing to the factual contents of propositions.

By Ayer's analysis, to proclaim, "You acted wrongly in stealing that mango" is conceptually equivalent to stating, "You stole that mango." By means of the word "wrongly" one is merely revealing one's own feelings about the action and saying nothing additionally about the action itself. It is as if one merely uttered the words, "You stole that

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>14</sup>Ayer ignores that in fact the intuitionists do provide explanations for what they call the unanalyzability of the good. G. E. Moore offers the simplicity of the quality good. See chapter one of G.E. Moore's Principia Ethica.

<sup>15</sup>Ayer, Language, 107.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 105.



mango," in a certain disapproving tone or wrote the sentence with large dark exclamation marks. Ethical terms only function to be expressive of the speaker's emotions without adding any literal<sup>17</sup> or factual significance to the sentence itself. All normative ethical symbols, whether found in sentences which also contain empirical facts or merely in sentences which express moral sentiment, have only an emotive function. These symbols are used only to express emotions concerning the objects referred to but in actuality they say nothing about these objects whatsoever. This is the case whenever one makes an ethical judgment.

If the statement, "You acted wrongly in stealing that mango," is generalized to be "stealing is wrong," this generalization only expresses a feeling of "moral disapproval" and provides "no factual meaning."<sup>18</sup> Without meaning no proposition is present. Without the presence of a proposition the statement can be neither true nor false, since only propositions are the bearers of truth or falsity. It is merely as if one said "stealing" with a certain tone of voice or as an exclamation.

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<sup>17</sup>Ayer does not offer a definition of literal but it seems that words and exclamation marks are literal. If this is so, then it seems to be clearly false that ethical terms, or any value terms add no literal significance to sentences, since something literal is added by there being more words and words are literal. Yet, Fritz Wenisch notes that something literal may be added which may or may not have any cognitive meaning. See Ayer, Language, 107.

<sup>18</sup>Ayer, Language, 107.

## 1. The Impossibility of Contradictory Ethical Statements

Since, according to Ayer, there is neither truth nor falsity with respect to moral judgments, people may seem to disagree but there can be no contradictions among ethical statements<sup>19</sup>. Ayer argues that when one says that an action is good or bad, one is neither providing factual information nor information about one's own mental or emotional state, as a subjectivist<sup>20</sup> would hold. Rather, one is merely evincing one's emotions. This is likewise the case with the one who offers the apparently contradictory judgment. Since neither one is expressing a proposition neither can be right nor wrong.

With respect to conflicts concerning empirical

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<sup>19</sup>This again is an ambiguous use of the word "statement." Since declarative sentences are merely linguistic expression of propositions they can be neither true nor false. Propositions, as the meanings of declarative sentences, are the bearers of truth or falsity. Yet it seems that Ayer would never ascribe the rank of proposition to an ethical judgment.

<sup>20</sup>Ayer uses two different senses of subjectivism without making a clear distinction between the two. He first considers subjectivism to be the ethical theory which defines right as that which is given societal approval (see above discussion under "Ayer's Rejection of Contemporary Ethical Theories"). The second sense which he employs here considers ethical statements to be merely statements about the speaker's feelings. It seems that he assumes that in saying "'X' is right" one means that one approves of 'X' and that one has the corresponding amiable feelings of approval about 'X'. He neglects that it is possible for one to approve of 'X' while also detesting it, as in the case of what one may consider to be a necessary evil. For example, one may approve of the need for final examinations and approve of them while simultaneously having no felicitous feelings about them.

propositions Ayer claims that a resolution can be obtained via an empirical test; but since there is no empirical test with respect to ethical pronouncements there can be no resolution. He thus concludes that

We can now see why it is impossible to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgements. It is not because they have an "absolute" validity which is mysteriously independent of ordinary sense-experience, but because they have no objective validity whatsoever.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. The Purely Emotive Function of Value Judgments

For Ayer, no sentence expressing an ethical judgment has any meaningful content. Ayer likewise holds the same for any statement concerning values, such as those of Aesthetics, Metaphysics, and Theology. Such a sentence is merely an expression of a feeling, as if someone said "ouch" or "ooohh," and thereby has no relevance to truth or falsity. Therefore, in Ayer's view, sentences which express moral judgments "are unverifiable for the same reason as a cry of pain or a word of command is unverifiable - because they do not express genuine propositions."<sup>22</sup>

He further proposes that moral judgments do not only express emotions but are also employed to arouse emotions and to incite others to action. He maintains that ethical words may be defined both by the various emotions which they express and by the responses they are intended to

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<sup>21</sup>Ayer, Language, 108.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 108-109.

promote.<sup>23</sup>

Ayer's position on the unverifiability of the pseudo-propositions of ethical judgments diverges from the subjectivists' position that ethical statements are really assertions about the speaker's emotions, that is, about the speaker's approval or disapproval, and are therefore propositions. Unlike the subjectivists, who hold "that ethical statements actually assert the existence of certain feelings,"<sup>24</sup> Ayer contends that these statements are only excitants and expressions of emotions which make no claim to the actual existence of such emotions. He holds that sentences which express moral judgments are not declarations of propositions but "are expressions and excitants of feeling which do not necessarily involve any assertions."<sup>25</sup>

If, as the subjectivists contend, ethical judgments were propositions they could then be either true or false. Their truth or falsity could be determined by their correspondence to the author's emotions which would in principle be verifiable. For example, if a speaker says that "'X' is right" the truth or falsity of the expressed proposition could be determined by whether the speaker approves of 'X', making the proposition true or whether the speaker disapproves of 'X', rendering the proposition false. However,

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 109-110.

Ayer points out that his theory does not require the existence of feelings as "a necessary and sufficient condition of the validity of an ethical judgement. It implies, on the contrary, that ethical judgements have no validity."<sup>26</sup>

Thus, for Ayer moral judgments have no validity. This allows his theory to avoid being subject to the common objection held against the subjectivists' theory that the nature of the speaker's feelings does not determine the validity of the ethical statement. Whenever one makes what one considers to be a moral judgment, its function is purely emotive in that it merely reveals one's feelings concerning an object and is never an assertion that the speaker has a certain feeling. Thus, Ayer explains,

In saying that tolerance was a virtue, I should not be making any statement about my own feelings or about anything else. I should simply be evincing my feelings, which is not at all the same thing as saying that I have them.[emphasis added]<sup>27</sup>

He further maintains that even though an assertion that one has a particular emotion "always"<sup>28</sup> also expresses this feeling, the expression of the feeling is not necessarily co-existent with the assertion that one does indeed have that emotion.

### 3. Impossibility of a Purely Ethical Argument

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

However, the criticism G. E. Moore raises against the subjectivists' theory, namely that their theory cannot account for the fact of actual disputes concerning ethical judgments, is one which Ayer does consider applicable to his own theory. He holds this criticism to be the only objection which could likewise be raised against his own position. He admits that if this objection were able to refute the subjectivists' theory, his also would be refuted when he states: "If Moore's argument really refutes the ordinary subjectivist theory, it also refutes ours."<sup>29</sup> Yet, he denies the possibility of both of these refutations by claiming "that one really never does dispute about questions of value."<sup>30</sup> Ayer holds that what the ordinary person considers as a dispute regarding values is not a dispute about values but about facts:

When someone disagrees with us about the moral value of a certain action or type of action, we do admittedly resort to argument in order to win him over to our way of thinking. But we do not attempt to show by our argument that he has the "wrong" ethical feeling towards a situation whose nature he has correctly apprehended. What we attempt to show is that he is mistaken about the facts of the case.<sup>31</sup>

Ayer suggests such facts as the motives of the agent, the expected outcome of the situation, and the circumstances concerning the situation. It is by producing

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 110-111.

agreement concerning "the nature of the empirical facts"<sup>32</sup> that one attempts to get his opponent to agree with him. This works well if both have the same moral conditioning, but, if these moral principles are not shared, then one resorts to saying "that it is impossible to argue with him"<sup>33</sup> since his set of morals is unlike one's own. Each feels that his personal set of values is superior to the other's. Neither can offer proof of this since to make such a judgment is to make a value judgment which according to Ayer cannot be subject to argument. Thus Ayer concludes,

It is because argument fails us when we come to deal with pure questions of value, as distinct from questions of fact, that we finally resort to mere abuse.<sup>34</sup>

For Ayer, argument is possible with regards to ethical questions only under a presupposed system. He maintains that if one disapproves of a certain type of action then once a conclusive argument is produced which shows that a particular action is of that same type, disapproval must also be given to that particular action if one is to be consistent with one's system. However, no argument can be given to prove the validity of any system. Each person can only laud or condemn an ethical system based on the system he himself presupposes.

Ayer further holds that no example, not even one,

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

can be provided

to construct even an imaginary argument on a question of value which does not reduce itself to an argument about a question of logic or about an empirical matter of fact [emphasis added].<sup>35</sup>

He contends that "the impossibility of purely ethical arguments is not, as Moore thought, a ground of objection to our theory, but rather a point in favour of it."<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. Removal of Ethics from Philosophy

Without taking into account any further possible objections Ayer asserts "that ethical philosophy consists simply in saying that ethical concepts are pseudo-concepts and therefore unanalysable."<sup>37</sup> For him there can be no ethical science since it is impossible to validate any ethical system. The only things which may be done belong either to psychology, by describing the emotional expressions and excitants of ethical terms, or to sociology, by inquiring into the moral habits and feelings of different groups of people. Thus, the study of ethics is not a subject for philosophy but rather one for the social sciences.

Ayer, in discussing motivational factors for moral behavior, first attributes fear, either that of an angry God or an angry society, to be a primary motivation for moral actions. It is this, according to Ayer, which gives rise to

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.



the notion of Kant's categorical imperatives. A second motivation for the recommendations of moral behavior is that a society promotes such systems for its ultimate benefit. Ayer takes this to be the spring board for eudaemonism and hedonism. He criticizes these moral theories for taking

propositions which refer to the causes and attributes of our ethical feelings as if they were definitions of ethical concepts. And thus they fail to recognise that ethical concepts are pseudo-concepts and consequently indefinable.<sup>38</sup>

Ayer subsequently holds that inquiry into moral (as well as aesthetical and religious) experiences is limited merely to providing information about people's mental and physical composition. As if this were not a radical enough break from the commonly held view, he continues by contending that

any attempt to make our use of ethical and aesthetic concepts the basis of a metaphysical theory concerning the existence of a world of values, as distinct from the world of facts, involves a false analysis of these concepts.<sup>39</sup>

With this, he believes that he has refuted Kant's proof of the transcendent existence of a divine being since his own analysis shows that moral phenomena cannot give support to "any rationalist or metaphysical doctrine whatsoever."<sup>40</sup>

Ayer originally introduced his emotive theory to counter an objection which an "objectivist" ethics would

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

raise against his epistemology, namely his empirical verifiability criterion of meaning, even though he later affirms, in the introduction to the second edition of Language, Truth and Logic, that his emotive theory of ethics validly stands on its own as well as being a response to an epistemological difficulty. Before giving a critique of Ayer's emotive theory, it is relevant to this study that the keystone of logical positivism, namely the empirical verifiability criterion of meaning, be examined.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE VERIFIABILITY CRITERION

Even though it is difficult to state what is actually held as the verifiability criterion of meaning due to its constant revisions since the emergence of logical positivism, a thorough study of its evolution and its various formulations, constructions and implications would be a very edifying endeavor. Unfortunately, due to its complexity and enormity, such a pursuit is not appropriate for this present discussion. However, since Ayer's work is the focus of this study, an examination of his formulations of the verifiability criterion of meaning as found in Language, Truth and Logic will be given.

#### A: AYER'S VERSION OF THE VERIFIABILITY CRITERION

In the introduction to the second edition of Language, Truth and Logic Ayer explains that the principle of verifiability is intended to provide a criterion which allows one to determine if "a sentence is literally meaningful."<sup>1</sup> It is a foundational element of Language, Truth and Logic that a sentence is literally meaningful if and only if the proposition which it expresses is "either analytic or

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<sup>1</sup>Ayer, Language, 5.

empirically verifiable."<sup>2</sup> Since a proposition is a tautology if and only if it is analytic, making no factual claim to a state of affairs, Ayer maintains that it is solely the definitions of the symbols contained in the tautology that determine its validity.<sup>3</sup> If it is impossible to verify a putative proposition's truth or falsity via sense-experience and if it is not a tautology, then Ayer claims it is merely metaphysical and thereby "is neither true nor false but literally senseless."<sup>4</sup>

John Foster, in his work on Ayer, addresses the point that in holding that analytic propositions are void of any factual content Ayer "sometimes abbreviates the central thesis to the bare assertion that any factual proposition must be empirically verifiable."<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Strong and Weak Verifiability

Ayer offers two senses of verifiability, the strong and the weak sense. In the strong sense, a statement must be verifiable in practice, that is, it must be possible to conclusively establish its truth via experience. In the weak sense a statement is only required to be verifiable in

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Strictly speaking, only linguistic expressions, i.e., sentences, and not their meanings, propositions, can have symbols.

<sup>4</sup>Ayer, Language, 31.

<sup>5</sup>John Foster, Ayer (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 2.

principle, that is its verifiability need only be considered to be possible. He offers the example that even though the proposition expressed in the sentence "there are mountains on the far side of the moon" is impossible to verify practically it is verifiable in principle since a person may know which observations are needed even if he himself cannot make them.

However, Ayer also holds that

no proposition, other than a tautology, can possibly be anything more than a probable hypothesis. And if this is correct, the principle that a sentence can be factually significant only if it expresses what is conclusively verifiable is self-stultifying as a criterion of significance. For it leads to the conclusion that it is impossible to make a significant statement of fact at all.<sup>6</sup>

Only the weak sense of verifiability is ever used. The strong sense of verifiability lacks any possible application and therefore, weak is "the only sense in which any proposition could conceivably be verified."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Ayer later reformulates his criterion to allow propositions to be verifiable only in principle and not in practice to have significance. He does not limit it to conclusive evidence which is almost an impossibility in any case.

## 2. The Employment of the Word "Statement"

Ayer attempts to dismiss two crucial criticisms against his formulation of the empirical verifiability

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<sup>6</sup>Ayer, Language, 38.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 10.

criterion, namely that it would not apply to sentences which do not express propositions and "that the question which it was designed to answer must already have been answered before the principle could be applied."<sup>8</sup> He attributes the difficulty to terminology. As a remedy, Ayer suggests circumventing any reference to propositions by applying the verifiability criterion directly to sentences. Yet, because of various difficulties Ayer concludes that "sentence" cannot be substituted for "proposition." As a solution he offers his own technical sense of the word "statement."

"Statement" is Ayer's term which refers "indefinitely to 'what sentences express' in cases where the sentences themselves are not particularly specified."<sup>9</sup> According to Foster, Ayer understands "statement" as quasi-propositions expressed by grammatically well formulated indicative sentences.<sup>10</sup> Ayer explains that statements are expressed by every indicative sentence regardless of whether it is literally meaningful or not. Likewise, he considers statements to be the expressions of any set of mutually translatable sentences.

In contrast, however, Ayer reserves the word "proposition" "for what is expressed by sentences which are

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>10</sup>Foster, 14-15.

literally meaningful."<sup>11</sup> Consequently, under Ayer's terminology, propositions are a sub-class of statements and the principle of verifiability determines which statements are propositions from those which are not. Thus, the principle of verifiability is to be applied to statements: "a statement is held to be literally meaningful if and only if it is either analytic or empirically verifiable."<sup>12</sup>

## B: CRITICISMS OF THE VERIFIABILITY CRITERION

### 1. Empirical Foundation

First of all, it is noted by C. E. M. Joad in his Critique of Logical Positivism, that the empiricism which is the foundation for both logical positivism and particularly its principle of the verifiability criterion of meaning is in opposition to the traditional value philosophy of the western world. Since values have no physical attributes, such as weight or volume, they are not objects of the empirical sciences. By denying the existence of anything which is not perceived through the senses, the only knowable order of being is that given by immediate sense experience. Thus to the logical positivist it is a deception to think of values as being independent attributes of objects since for the logical positivist there can be no such attributes.

With the application of the empirical verifiability

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<sup>11</sup>Ayer, Language, 8.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 9.

criterion of meaning, religion, aesthetics, and ethics are all considered to be meaningless. All metaphysical and value philosophy are wiped away, that is, eliminated. Joad explains that

The first effect of the application of logical positivist techniques . . . is to induce a thorough-going scepticism. The natural order has . . . no basis in a supernatural order from which it derives its meaning and its purpose. Values are without reality and morals without meaning.<sup>13</sup>

Ayer thus dismisses much of the subject matter of philosophy as well as the questions which philosophy seeks to answer, since the only possible answers would be non-sensical. He proposes that

much of what ordinarily passes for philosophy is metaphysical [neither true nor false, but literally meaningless] according to this criterion, and, in particular, that it can not be significantly asserted that there is a non-empirical world of values, or that men have immortal souls, or that there is a transcendent God.<sup>14</sup>

Under Ayer's views, the traditional questions of philosophy are merely pseudo-questions.

## 2. Removal of the World of Values from Reality

Since value cannot be studied through the empirical sciences, it is clear that Ayer does not recognize the world of values as an objective reality. He contends that

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<sup>13</sup>C. E. M. Joad, A Critique of Logical Positivism (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), 149.

<sup>14</sup>Ayer, Language, 31.



no statement which refers to a "reality" transcending the limits of all possible sense-experience can possibly have any literal significance; from which it must follow that the labours of those who have striven to describe such a reality have all been devoted to the production of nonsense.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, any value statement is deflated into meaninglessness since it is impossible for it to meet the verifiability criterion of meaning under any of the criterion's various formulations. In saying that something is sublime, good, praiseworthy, beautiful, etc. one is not referring to any quality which the thing may have in itself but rather one is merely evincing some feeling which one has and which one associates with the thing.

It is critical to this work that the world of values be recognized as truly existing and as being an intrinsic attribute of certain objects, for, as noted by Dietrich von Hildebrand: "The fact that something is endowed with a value is at the basis of every true moral norm."<sup>16</sup>

### 3. The Existence of the World of Values

Although in one respect value adds nothing to a being's constitutive nature, in another respect it adds a great deal to the being. As John Crosby notes, it is similar to

the way in which existence does not add to the essence

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>16</sup>Dietrich von Hildebrand, Ethics (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press 1972), 128. Future references will be given as Ethics.

of being, and yet in its own way adds tremendously much to the being. Value is a non-constitutive, yet highly significant, attribute of a being, in the way in which existence is a non-essential, yet highly significant, attribute of a being.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, unlike existence which is not, in contingent finite beings, produced from nor dependent upon the essence, a being's value does arise from and is dependent upon "the constitutive nature of the valuable being."<sup>18</sup>

Crosby makes a similar analogy between the value of a being and the constitutive nature of the valuable being with a state of affairs and its constitutive elements. He states that

value is not a new constitutive property which grows out of other constitutive properties but is rather a certain non-constitutive Auspraegung of the constitutive nature of the being; and just as a state of affairs is the underlying beings in (a certain aspect of) their intelligibility, so the value of a thing is the thing in its dignity.<sup>19</sup>

He further notes "that the values of a being are not extrinsically (aeusserlich) related to the being but are intelligibly grounded in the being."<sup>20</sup>

Crosby contends that the lack of descriptive content in value statements has led to various forms of value subjectivism. Like emotivism, these claim that the lack of

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<sup>17</sup>John Crosby, "Ingarden and Moore on Value" (International Academy for Philosophy, Liechtenstein: unpublished manuscript, n.d.), 8-9.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 11.

descriptive content results from there being no values, nor any experience of values as such, and that the use of value language is not for the purpose of description but rather is for "some other, more 'dynamic' function."<sup>21</sup>

As a classic example of an empirical argument against the existence of values, Crosby refers to David Hume's eradication of beauty from the circle. This argument is especially relevant since Ayer holds that his views are "the logical outcome of the empiricism of Berkeley and David Hume."<sup>22</sup> He quotes the following passage from Hume's An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals:

Euclid has fully explained all the qualities of the circle; but has not in any proposition said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. The beauty is not a quality of the circle. It lies not in any part of the line, whose parts are equally distant from a common centre. It is only the effect which that figure produces upon the mind, whose peculiar fabric of structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments.<sup>23</sup>

Crosby claims that Hume's conclusion that beauty is only in the mind of the viewer of the circle goes too far. Rather, one may merely conclude "that beauty is not any constitutive property of the circle; the beauty of the circle is 'not in any part of the line' which is the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>22</sup>Ayer, Language, 31.

<sup>23</sup>"Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (La Salle, IL, 1966; reprint of first ed. of 1777), 132," in John Crosby's "Ingarden and Moore on Value," 12.

circle."<sup>24</sup> Hume's erroneous conclusion is based on the assumption that a being only consists of its constitutive properties. Yet, as C.S. Lewis notes in his The Abolition of Man,

It is not the greatest of modern scientists who feel most sure that the object, stripped of its qualitative properties and reduced to mere quantity is wholly real. . . . The great minds know very well that the object, so treated, is an artificial abstraction, that something of its reality has been lost."<sup>25</sup>

Beauty, like other values, is a non-constitutive property of a being and therefore should not be sought, nor can it be found, as if it were such a property. Just as the existence of a finite being cannot be found as an essential property of that being, Crosby maintains that:

the beauty of the circle belongs (non-constitutively) to the circle as absolutely as do the properties demonstrated of the circle by Euclid, and is as independent of our sentiments as these are."<sup>26</sup>

Accordingly, Crosby concludes that "value, though non-constitutive, might nevertheless be an absolute moment of a being."<sup>27</sup>

Thus, it has been shown that although values are not constitutive properties of objects and thereby are not

<sup>24</sup>Crosby, 13.

<sup>25</sup>C.S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1947; reprint, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1955), 82 (page references are to reprint edition).

<sup>26</sup>Crosby, 13.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 14.

objects of empirical inquiry, they should not be dismissed as being meaningless entities and unworthy of intellectual discourse. As Dietrich von Hildebrand explains, the very nature of values is such that they are autonomous and independent from any person's intellectual grasping of them; they are beyond being mere inventions in the minds of their observers. Von Hildebrand continues:

To ignore the essential difference between merely contingent facts and these entities, which have essences so potent as to exclude any possibility of denying them objectively, and to place them on the same level with any contingent quiddity, thus betrays a degree of philosophical incapacity and superficiality which from the start dooms every theory touched by this blindness.<sup>28</sup>

However, despite all theoretical denials, people are constantly presupposing moral values. For one to grasp these values one need only to gain a full awareness of one's own experience of reality.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. Inadequacy of the Verifiability Criterion

According to the verifiability criterion of meaning, all propositions must be in principle verifiable. Verifiability is restricted to that which can in principle be verified empirically, i.e., through sense perception. Since a proposition is the meaning of a declarative sentence it can thereby be either true or false. However, its truth or falsity may never be known to human beings. For example,

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<sup>28</sup>Ethics, 115.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 115.

consider the proposition expressed by "There is a finite amount of matter in the universe." Clearly, this proposition is either true or false, but it seems that only an omniscient being could know which it is.

#### 5. Self-Refutation

If the criterion that declarative sentences only have meaning if they are empirically verifiable in principle is to be applied to itself, it is nullified. What empirically verifiable principles does Ayer offer for his verifiability criterion of meaning? He has offered none. How are statements with respect to this theory empirically verifiable? Further, how can Ayer himself, by his own contentions, express any meaningful propositions to put forth his own emotive theory?

One way in which the criticism that Ayer's verifiability criterion is self-refuting is escaped is by the claim that it is analytic, that is, its "truth depends solely on its meaning," even though "it is neither self-evident nor easy to establish."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Foster, 5.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CRITICISMS OF AYER'S EMOTIVISM

#### A: MORE THAN A MERE SKEPTICISM

Ayer goes further than reducing ethics to a mere skepticism. An ethical skepticism would contend that there is only one's impression versus another's with no way to know which one is correct since it is impossible to know a value by which to compare them. Ayer does not allow even for the opposition which is necessary for the suspension of judgment. No opposition is possible between "ooohh"'s and "aaahh"'s.

#### B: AGAINST COMMON USAGE

An obvious criticism which can be made against emotivism is that most people use value terms to express what they mean; this is one of the main purposes of sentences containing such terms. When one says, "murder is wrong," one genuinely intends to ascribe a negative quality to murder. When another says, "whenever I hear about a murder I feel very badly," he is declaring how he feels. This is the same when one wants to convey or "evince" an emotion, as with the "Awww" which expresses disappointment when one's favorite baseball player misses an important catch or the "ooohh"'s and "aaahh"'s expressed during a

fireworks display where for some, "ooohh" and "aaahh" is the best which they can do to express how they feel. Countless examples could be given, such as the "mmmmm" of a child with an ice cream sundae, etc.

Normally when one desires to express one's emotions one usually introduces this with "I feel..." or "I am..." hungry, sad, happy, etc. Likewise, when one evinces an emotion one does so with a sigh or an exclamation, etc. When one states "'X' is wrong" or "'Y' is good," with respect to any value, one is making a claim as to how 'X' or 'Y' truly are in themselves, distinct from one's own personal feelings towards them and even regardless of one's relationship to them.

The common person when speaking of "'A' being good" is asserting that 'A' is good regardless of any person's approach to it. As C. E. M. Joad explains in A Critique of Logical Positivism, the common person

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.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Joad concludes, in the pre-philosophical state, most people are "ethical objectivists,"<sup>2</sup> that is, most people hold that there are objective ethical values.

According to the logical positivists when one

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<sup>1</sup>Joad, 23.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 23.



asserts "'A' is good" one is saying nothing about 'A' nor even expressing a real proposition. One only articulates one's emotions about 'A'. Thus, the logical positivists claim that ordinary language such as "'A' is good" is really a misleading use of language.

Ayer's analysis of the above mentioned "utterances" may be of some benefit to linguistics, philosophy, and the social sciences. However, to reduce meaningful sentences, such as, "You acted wrongly in stealing that mango," to "ooooh!!!" and "ahhhh!!!" is clearly going to far.

#### C: THE MEANING AND THE EMOTIVE SENSE OF WORDS

A valid point in Ayer's analysis of ethical statements seems to be that there is indeed an important distinction between the meaning and the emotive sense of words; but in the case of ethical terms, as well as in the case of all value terms, Ayer neglects the meaning. Alice von Hildebrand explains the difference as follows:

A word has both a meaning and an emotive sense, that is, atmosphere. There is a quality in the coinage of words such as beauty or vulgarity that accounts for their atmosphere. Synonyms have the same meaning but may differ in atmosphere. For example, "William is a very fine person" is synonymous with "Bill is a swell guy." The first, however, has an atmosphere of reverence for the dignity of another while the second does not. With respect to scientific terms

the atmosphere is neutralized, as in "William Smith is an exemplar of the homo sapien species." The choice of words does indeed betray one's outlook on life, as Alice von Hildebrand wittily comments, "Tell me how you speak and I will tell you the type of person you are."<sup>3</sup>

C. S. Lewis also notes this point in his The Abolition of Man. In response to the growing empirical outlook of which emotivism is a product Lewis notes that by treating humans as mere specimens, language is certainly affected. He comments that

Once we killed bad men: now we liquidate unsocial elements. Virtue has become integration and diligence dynamism, and boys likely to be worthy of a commission are "potential officer material." Most wonderful of all, the virtues of thrift and temperance, and even ordinary intelligence, are sales-resistance.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, by reducing all ethical words to their atmosphere Ayer errs by ignoring the more substantial part of their meanings. As Max Black comments in Language and Philosophy, the focus upon the nonintellectual factors of ethical questions may be valuable, but such a focus fails "to do justice to the cognitive factors in. . . ethical experience."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The discussion in this paragraph is taken from the author's personal notes from a class lecture on Aesthetics given by Alice von Hildebrand on April 4, 1990 at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Steubenville, Ohio.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis, 84.

<sup>5</sup>Max Black, Language and Philosophy: Studies in Method (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1949), 208.

Ayer also errs in holding that only neutral words, that is, words composing statements which are empirically verifiable, have meaning. Yes, they do have meaning, but they lack atmosphere. Atmosphere does have an important role in language, but it is absurd to reduce words to their atmosphere since without a meaning there is nothing for the atmosphere to modify.

Max Black also notes this in Language and Philosophy where he says that to distinguish "between 'emotive' and 'scientific' or 'referential' uses of language is more than a technical puzzle."<sup>6</sup> It is important to make the distinction between those elements of language which truly are emotive and those which are merely interpreted to be emotive. The emotive content that certain aspects of language do express, such as tone, rhythm, inflection, etc. should not lead to the interpretation that linguistic expressions are mere signs of the speaker's feelings.

Accordingly, Black proposes that instead of reducing meaningful utterances to be solely emotive an effort should be made to explore the cognitive aspects of value judgments. He suggests that

A reversal of emphasis, made possible by a fuller recognition of the informative aspects of utterances, however charged with feeling, may encourage some, perhaps, to search further for a basis of rational agreement on ethical questions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 203.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 220.

Clarity here would certainly bring about clarity with respect to many difficulties concerning ethics and emotions. By recognizing the problem of meaning one can break away from the erroneous ideas that the only means of human communication is scientific discourse.<sup>8</sup>

**D: MEANING IS NOT LIMITED TO EMPIRICAL VERIFIABILITY**

Ayer holds that all meaningful propositions are of two classes: those which are in principle empirically verifiable and those which are a priori, that is, tautologies. All assertions concerning metaphysics, that is, a realm of values or realities not immediately given to sense perception, are meaningless since they are not in principle empirically verifiable.

Ayer first assumes that all ethical assertions are empirical. However statements such as "this is good" cannot be empirically investigated since there is no sense-experience of goodness. Thus the statement "this is good" is meaningless since it cannot be empirically verified (and only that which is empirically verifiable is meaningful). Consequently, the significance of saying, "This is good," is reduced to a mere display of moral approval since the word "good" only signifies the emotional outlook of the speaker.<sup>9</sup> By stating, "This is good," or for a more specific

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 203.

<sup>9</sup>Joad, 30.

example, "Charity is good," one is not providing a true or false proposition because it is not a statement of fact. One is only providing an ejaculation of one's feelings concerning charity and saying nothing of charity in and of itself.<sup>10</sup>

Ayer further errs by identifying meaning with that which can be shown to be either true or false. He fails to recognize that propositions, which are the meanings of declarative sentences, are only one type of meaning and that meaning is not limited to that which can be empirically shown to be true or false. All sentences express meaning: interrogative sentences express questions; imperative sentences express commands; while declarative sentences express propositions. There are other types of meanings which language also expresses, such as: concepts; prayers; invitations; hopes; promises; etc. Max Black points this out when he states that in emotivism:

All referential discourse is treated as if it were assertion, and so necessarily either true or false. And if some use of language is patently not intended to have such truth claims (as is usually the case in literature), there seems no recourse but to relegate it to the realm of "emotive" or nonreferential utterance.<sup>11</sup>

Is it that ethical statements which are given as commands express a meaning which is not subject to truth or falsity (as is the case with the categorical imperative "Do

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>11</sup>Black, 207.

not steal") or that they may be subject to truth or falsity (as the proposition expressed by "murder is good" seems to be clearly false), or possibly both?<sup>12</sup> Again, Max Black comments that:

emphasis upon nonintellectual factors in aesthetic appreciation and . . . questions of ethics are valuable. But they fail to do justice to the cognitive factors in aesthetic or ethical experience.<sup>13</sup>

#### E: ETHICAL DISPUTES

As Ayer himself admits, his system allows for no argument which is based purely on values. Such arguments for Ayer would be impossible. In fact, Ayer is confident<sup>14</sup> that not even one case, whether real or imaginary, of an argument on a question of value which is not reducible to questions of logic or to questions of facts can be demonstrated.

In response to this position, it is important to recognize that in the case of moral disputes the claim that ethical judgments are merely emotive expressions or persuasive incitements and that there can be no purely ethical

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<sup>12</sup>It is based on criticisms similar to these that emotivism was refined to a later form advocated by Charles L. Stevenson. As was noted in the introduction, the emotivism which Stevenson proposes is of great importance to this area of study but an in depth look at his work goes beyond the scope of this study. However, the interested reader could examine Stevenson's thought as found in Ethics and Language and in Facts and Values: Studies in Ethical Analysis, among other works.

<sup>13</sup>Black, 208.

<sup>14</sup>Ayer, Language, 112.

argument overlooks the purpose people engage in such arguments. It is not merely to evince their emotions or to influence the opposing party to adopt their sentiments, but rather as Sir David Ross proposes,

What they are attempting to do by the process Mr. Ayer describes is to convince each other that the liking, or the dislike, is justified, in other words that the act has a character that deserves to be liked or disliked, is good or is bad."<sup>15</sup>

Despite Ayer's negligence concerning the purpose people engage in arguments concerning values, he does admit that if G. E. Moore's argument that people do indeed dispute over questions of value refutes the subjectivists' position then it refutes his position as well. Sir David Ross notes the importance of this issue when he comments that if things truly were disputed which under Ayer's theory cannot be disputed, "his theory would clearly be untrue."<sup>16</sup> Ayer is forced to deny that there are disputes solely about value which he justifies by claiming that apparent disputes about values are really disputes about logic or questions of facts.

In agreement with Ayer it is easy to find many examples which appear to be disputes concerning values but are really disputes of facts. Fritz Wenisch of The

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<sup>15</sup>Sir David Ross, "Critique of Ayer," in Readings in Ethical Theory, ed. by Wilfred Sellars and John Hospers (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1952), 404.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 403.

University of Rhode Island offers as an example the discussions of abortion. He explains:

Often, both parties would agree that taking of innocent human life is wrong; but they disagree whether or not abortion is the taking of innocent human life. Their disagreement does not revolve around an ethical principle, but it concerns the nature of life between conception and birth. The person taking the pro-choice view would usually agree to the statement: "If the unborn would be a member of the human community, abortion would be morally wrong in most cases." The opponent of abortion would usually agree to the statement: "If the unborn would not be a member of the human community, abortion would in many cases be morally permissible."<sup>17</sup>

Such examples of disputes over facts may be found in abundance. However, the crucial question is, "Can there be a dispute based solely on values?" More specifically, "Are there moral arguments which are not reducible to matters of fact or questions of logic?"

As an example Wenisch offers the following intriguing question:

Is it morally permissible to state something which is literally untrue with the intention to deceive the one to whom one speaks in order to save another from being murdered (may I state to a Nazi that there are no Jews hidden in my house in order to save them)?<sup>18</sup>

This question is one which offers an opportunity for much discussion. All involved may be in agreement with respect to all the relevant facts and the questions of logic. They may agree that it does not matter whether the question is phrased as:

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<sup>17</sup>Fritz Wenisch, "Critical Comment" (Kingston Rhode Island: unpublished document, 1993).

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.



"Is it permitted under certain circumstances to say something that is literally untrue with the intention to deceive," or "Is it permitted under some circumstances to tell a lie?"<sup>19</sup>

Yet, even with this agreement the moral debate may meaningfully continue.

A second dispute which may be of interest involves the question: "Is it morally licit to cause a minor amount of pain to an innocent human being without the person's consent in order to prevent a much greater evil, such as the unjust death of many people?" All involved in this discussion may agree on all the points of logic and matters of fact but still are able to continue a meaningful discussion.

Thus, not only one but two examples of moral disputes which cannot be reduced to matters of logic or of fact have been provided and Ayer is refuted on his own terms.

#### F: CONSEQUENCES OF EMOTIVISM

Once the consequences of emotivism are examined it becomes clear that the results are at best formidable. Joad illustrates this with the following example:

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 for 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."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Joad, 148.

Ironically, in seeking to rationalize everything, logical positivism actually denies that which is most reasonable. Joad contends that logical positivism

like Radical Empiricism . . . 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.<sup>21</sup>

Joad offers as an example, a discussion of the miracles of Christ, specifically, the changing of water into wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2). The actual miracle is empirically verifiable. Yet the cause of this change, which is due to Christ being the supernatural Son of God and thereby having supernatural powers, is unverifiable and therefore meaningless. In fact, all reasonable explanations for the changing of water into wine are eliminated.

The uneasiness about a miraculous phenomenon without a reasonable cause can only lead one to deny that the empirically verifiable miracle ever happened.<sup>22</sup> Ironically logical positivism backfires, as Joad explains:

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.<sup>23</sup>

By adhering to Ayer's theory that value terms add nothing literal to statements one is faced with absurd

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 152.

situations. For example, as Joad so poignantly illustrates:

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".<sup>24</sup>

The influence of logical positivism has lead many to believe that there are no absolutes, that the study of metaphysics is nonsensical, that only scientific inquiry gives valid results, and that the only order of being is that which can be known empirically.<sup>25</sup> In short, for logical positivism, metaphysics is nonsensical and value judgments are meaningless.<sup>26</sup> Through logical positivism

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.<sup>27</sup>

All questions of metaphysics are dismissed by the logical positivists as not being worthy of the intellectual consideration of men. Is this not an affront to so many noble men from Plato to Hegel?

Joad explains that by adhering to emotivism,

ethics goes the way of metaphysics. . . . It is because there is no meaning in things, or, at least, no meaning that philosophy can discern, that we cannot ascribe a

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 10-11.

purpose to human existence; . . . God, freedom and immortality are subjects which it is fruitless to discuss because the terms of the discussion are meaningless.<sup>28</sup>

Eliminating, God, ethics, values, freedom, immortality, etc. from being appropriate topics of discussion and consideration just to have a more favorable analysis of the meaning of linguistic expressions is a grave modification. As Joad notes, "the change involved in substituting for the understanding of the universe the better understanding of certain sentences is no minor change."<sup>29</sup>

**G: SELF-ANNIHILATING**

Joad proposes that in accepting the emotive theory one is denying "emotive significance" to both ethics and religion.<sup>30</sup> Joad takes as a demonstration the statement, "God is Love," to be an emotional expression "of love and reverence."<sup>31</sup> Yet once logical positivism is introduced "God" falls into the non-existent via the nonsensical and it now seems absurd that one could have any emotion for that which is non-existent. Joad concludes that "if I believe that the statement 'God is Love' is purely emotive, then it ceases, for me, to express emotion."<sup>32</sup> The same too could

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 146.

be said of goodness in "'X' is good" for if it is only emotive it ceases to say anything of 'X'.

Once ethical statements such as "murder is wrong" are considered merely to be emotive and only expressions of the speaker's disapproval of murder or of his emotion of disdain, then the statement will no longer have the effect of giving rise to that emotion. Once the "wrongness" is emotivized there ceases to be that which gives rise to the emotion. Eventually one will no longer believe that murder is wrong.<sup>33</sup> As Joad questions,

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.<sup>34</sup>

Thus emotivism annihilates itself, and tragically brings the world of values down with it.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 148.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### VON HILDEBRAND'S CRITIQUE OF AYER'S EMOTIVISM

Since this study is comparing Ayer's emotivism with Dietrich von Hildebrand's theory of affective morality, it is highly interesting to examine von Hildebrand's critique of Ayer's emotivism.

In his Ethics, Dietrich von Hildebrand considers Ayer's emotive theory to be just another form of value subjectivism, where Ayer holds that statements of value judgments do not refer to one's emotions but merely are expressions of one's emotions or are issuances of one's commands.

#### A: CLARIFYING TERMS

Von Hildebrand offers some clarity to Ayer's ambiguous usage of certain crucial terms. First of all, he points out the vagueness of Ayer's term "expression of feelings." The word "feeling" itself could have various referents, from physical hunger or fatigue to emotional anguish or angst.<sup>1</sup> Ayer fails to give clarity to what he exactly means by "feeling." Equal in obscurity is Ayer's use of the term "expression."

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<sup>1</sup>A more elaborate discussion on feelings is given in chapter five of this work.

## 1. Expression

With respect to "expression," von Hildebrand states that the most authentic meaning of this "term refers to the intuitively given transparence of psychical entities in a person's face or in his voice or movements."<sup>2</sup> Under this meaning von Hildebrand contends that it is impossible to equate any value judgment with an expression.

An exterior display of one's emotions is a second meaning von Hildebrand notes for the term "expression," such as tears which may express sadness or the expression of contentment given by whistling. Many linguistic expressions may under this definition be expressions of one's emotions whether joy or sorrow or jubilation, etc., such as: "Too bad," "How wonderful," "Oh boy," etc. Such words or sentences which function as exterior representations of one's subjective experiences are completely different in character from those sentences which express propositions. Ayer reduces value judgments to be this type of expression.

Von Hildebrand explains that expressions in the second sense are merely projections of one's psychical experiences and, strictly speaking, are without meaning. They are only manifested in a process of dynamic and active exteriorization. With respect to expressions, von Hildebrand maintains,

the primary experience is an emotion, e.g., joy, sorrow,

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<sup>2</sup>Ethics, 123.

fear; and the words we utter as expression of this experience can in no way be interpreted as the formulation of something we perceived before as the property of an object. . . . They are an exteriorization of something, having no meaning in the strict sense, indicating no object, but having only the character of a projection of a psychical experience. They speak exclusively of the psychical entity whose expression they are; they manifest univocally the nature and presence of joy, sorrow, or fear.<sup>3</sup>

For example, one may be deeply affected to the point of tears by the beauty of a piece of music, such as Stephen Schwarz speaks of Mozart's Ave Verum. It is clear that one's being so moved is distinctly separate from the beauty of the music. Von Hildebrand explains:

We are moved to tears because of the beauty of a work of art. Our being so affected is clearly distinguished therefore from the beauty of the object. How should the expression of our emotion be identical with beauty? Or how could one pretend that in saying that this work of art is beautiful, we are in reality not stating a fact but merely expressing our reaction?<sup>4</sup>

It would be completely erroneous to identify the beauty of the object with the expression of one's emotions, such as a sigh or tears. It would equally be wrong to claim that by one's saying, "This music is beautiful," one is not referring to the music but merely expressing one's personal reaction to it. Yet, Ayer holds that value judgments are these types of expression.

Von Hildebrand argues that Ayer's theory of value judgments being mere expressions of emotions or of commands

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



is "in blatant contradiction to experience."<sup>5</sup> Von Hildebrand's opposition to emotivism is based (as was noted earlier) on his maintaining that "the fact that something is endowed with a value is at the basis of every true moral norm."<sup>6</sup>

Von Hildebrand explains that the value of an object exists independently of a person's perception of it. It is first the recognition of the existence of the value that allows a person to make a judgment so as to attribute the value to the object. Von Hildebrand explains:

The moral nobility of an act of charity is clearly given as a property of the act, as something on the object's side, definitely distinguished from any psychical happening in the soul.

Our primary contact with values is in no way a judgment; it is not the act of imparting a property to an object but the perception of something autonomous. The original experience is the perception of the importance of an object; only after this initial disclosure of the value may we by a judgment attribute it to an object.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Feelings

Von Hildebrand points out that what Ayer means by "feelings" are not "mere states, such as fatigue, irritation, depression, which are only caused by an object but, not motivated by it,"<sup>8</sup> whose outward manifestation is the authentic sense of expression. Rather "what Ayer means by

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 125.

the term 'feeling' comes under the heading of intentional experiences, experience having a meaningful conscious relation to an object,"<sup>9</sup> such as love, hope, fear, enthusiasm, admiration, indignation, contempt, hatred, sorrow, joy, etc.

#### B: THE NATURE OF INTENTIONAL ACTS

To disclose the futility of emotivism von Hildebrand proposes an examination of intentional acts of which Ayer's "feelings" are one type. The intentional nature of feelings, that is, their character of being a meaningful response, necessarily presupposes the knowledge of an object which is the reason for the emotion, whether it be joy or sorrow, etc. If an object is presented as being neutral, that is, without importance, such responses would be impossible. It is therefore completely erroneous to attribute one's affective responses as being the source of the object's value. On the contrary, the affective responses essentially presuppose the knowledge of the object's value.<sup>10</sup> For example,

There is no enthusiasm, no veneration, no esteem as such. . . . Every veneration is essentially a veneration of someone; every enthusiasm, an enthusiasm about something; every esteem, the esteem for a person. . . . The feelings to which, according to this theory, the values must be reduced, themselves presuppose an importance on

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid. Intentional here is not meant as "on purpose" but rather in the philosophical sense of being in a conscious relation to an object.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

the object side.<sup>11</sup>

Von Hildebrand points out that emotivism fails to recognize "the radical difference which separates the consciousness of something, the awareness of an object and its quality, from our response to it."<sup>12</sup> Ayer overlooks the obvious difference between the "content of the quality on the side of the object (which we term 'beautiful,' 'sublime,' 'heroic,' 'noble,' and so forth)"<sup>13</sup> and "the content of our responses, such as joy, enthusiasm, love, admiration, esteem, and so on."<sup>14</sup>

Ayer is thus making the mistake of confusing the principium with the principiatum.<sup>15</sup> His theory begs the question or, in laymen's terms, puts the cart before the horse. For example, in stating that "charity is good" von Hildebrand notes that there is a

connection between both facts - the goodness and the command to goodness . . . such that the goodness is the principium and the command, the principiatum. Thus, it is impossible to substitute the command for the value, because the command, as soon as it is a moral command and not a mere positive commandment . . . necessarily presupposes the value of the object to which it refers.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 127-128.

**C: ILLICIT INTERPRETATIONS**

Von Hildebrand notes the absurdity of interpreting such statements as "Handel's Messiah is beautiful," or "A rock has a lower value than the human person," or "Truth is something worthy of esteem," as commands. He explains:

If one would say it is a command to appreciate this music, or to respect the human person, or to worship truth, the question-begging character of such a view is obvious. Not only does one definitely mean something else, but the very reason for commanding such a response is precisely the value of the object. This involves the same confusion as if one would say, "It is true that Caesar was murdered in 43 B.C.," and make this statement synonymous with the command to be convinced of it.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, by stating that murder is evil one is referring to a property of the act of murdering. One is not expressing a prohibition nor does one even refer to a prohibition. However, there is the stating of a fact which is the basis for the prohibition and which logically entails the prohibition.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE AFFECTIVE SPHERE OF MORALITY

#### A: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In this Chapter, Dietrich von Hildebrand's analysis of the sphere of affectivity, that is, the realm of the emotions, shall be examined. The purpose of this is to show an alternative to Ayer's emotivism. Special emphasis will be placed on what von Hildebrand calls "sanction and disavowal."

For von Hildebrand, sanction and disavowal of one's affective responses are an exercise of a person's deepest freedom; his explanation of their nature may therefore be considered as an important development in ethical theory. The following discussion will begin with an explanation of "the heart" as denoting the affective sphere and with an analysis of the nature of the affective response; this will be followed by an examination of freedom, true sanction and disavowal, moral consciousness and moral unconsciousness, and the pseudo-sanction.

#### B: THE AFFECTIVE SPHERE IN GENERAL

This study is to start out with an explanation of the affective sphere, that is, the realm of emotions.

Von Hildebrand begins his work on the affective

sphere, The Heart, by addressing the all too frequent omission of the affective sphere not only from ethics, but from philosophical study all together. He contends that even though

it is understandable that the affective sphere is looked at with some suspicion because there are many forms of unguineness to be found within that sphere, it is not difficult to see that this suspicion gives rise to a typical prejudice. But while prejudices are often understandable psychologically, they are no less unjustifiable.<sup>1</sup>

He further maintains that,

From a philosophical point of view, there is no excuse for discrediting the affective sphere and the heart merely because these are exposed to so many perversions and deviations. And if it is true that in the sphere of the intellect or of the will unguineness plays no analogous role, still the harm wrought by wrong or false theories is even more sinister and disastrous than the unguineness of feelings.<sup>2</sup>

The place of the affective sphere must be acknowledged to be of equal importance with that of the will and the intellect in the human person. It must be admitted "that in man there exists a triad of spiritual centers - intellect, will and heart - which are ordained to cooperate and to fecundate one another."<sup>3</sup> The affective center is distinct from the other two centers and cannot be either neglected or reduced to one of the other centers. Von

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<sup>1</sup>Dietrich von Hildebrand, The Heart (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 41. Future references will be given as Heart.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 46.

Hildebrand explains that "affectivity is a great reality in man's life, a reality which cannot be subsumed under intellect or will."<sup>4</sup> This center of affectivity is ordinarily referred to as the "heart."

"Heart" seems to be a general term for the realm of the emotions. For the purpose of philosophical study an analysis of its meanings must be worked out.

Von Hildebrand explains that "heart" is used in one sense of the word as a designation of the interior life of a person, that is, of the whole conscious personal self. It is a "representative of the entire interiority of man."<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the heart is also often identified with the soul.

Similar to the intellect being the center of all epistemological activities, and the will being the center of all volitional activities of the person, in the second sense the heart is designated as being the center of all of a person's affective activities. In this narrower sense, the heart may be considered to be "the center of affectivity, the very core of this sphere."<sup>6</sup> In this sense, heart is referred to as the core of all affectivity with "the connotation of being the very center of gravity of all

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 48.

affectivity."<sup>7</sup> In this sense, "all wishing, all desiring, all 'being affected,' all kinds of happiness and sorrow"<sup>8</sup> are attributed to the heart.

Von Hildebrand proposes that

To see the role and rank of the heart and of the affective sphere in its highest manifestations, we have to look at man's life, at his quest for earthly happiness, at his religious life, at the lives of the saints, at the Gospel and the liturgy.<sup>9</sup>

The most profound source of human happiness is considered by von Hildebrand to be deep true "mutual love between persons,"<sup>10</sup> whether it be the love between friends or the love between spouses. Other forms of love may also be considered here, such as parental love, filial love, fraternal love and possibly neighborly love.<sup>11</sup> He claims

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 42. Von Hildebrand often illustrates his philosophical points with religious examples. To be true to his writings these examples will be given as well as others which the author deems as appropriate. There is a danger that a reader who may be opposed to religion as a nonsensical fabrication may miss the importance of the philosophical points being made. With the realization that some readers may find the religious examples to be poor examples, the author asks that such readers make the extra effort to examine the philosophical point in question regardless of their religious depictions. It is thus suggested for the "objective" reader to consider the philosophical point as a point of philosophy and not as theological propaganda.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>The inclusion of these additional forms of love which von Hildebrand does not specifically mention in The Heart were suggested by Dr. Stephen Schwarz, a noted von Hildebrand scholar.



that love itself is the most affective of all the affective responses. It pervades all great works of art including poetry, music, literature, painting, etc. In emphasizing this truth, he quotes Leonardo da Vinci as saying: "The greater the man, the deeper his love."<sup>12</sup>

Even if the role of love is disregarded and regardless of what is considered to be the main source of human happiness, whether it be knowledge, truth, beauty, righteousness, etc., happiness itself belongs to the affective sphere. Von Hildebrand makes this clear when he decisively states that "it is the heart which experiences happiness, and not the intellect or the will."<sup>13</sup>

#### C: CLARITY WITH RESPECT TO AFFECTIVE RESPONSES

Within the affective sphere a distinction must be made between the affective response and that with which it may be confused, namely a person's being affected, bodily feelings, and mere psychic states which a person may experience.

##### 1. Intentionality

All affective responses, as well as all volitional responses, and theoretical responses, have an intentional<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Heart, 42-43.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>14</sup>Intentional here is used in the given philosophical sense and not in its common non-philosophical sense of "on purpose."

character, that is, they have "a meaningful conscious relation of the person to an object."<sup>15</sup> They are all directed towards something and imply the presence of rational structure.

There must be an intelligible and meaningful relation between one's affective response and the state of affairs which motivates it. By presupposing the knowledge of an object and its importance, "the process by which the object in its importance engenders the response is itself a conscious one, a process which goes through the spiritual realm of the person."<sup>16</sup>

By their intentional nature, affective responses presuppose an object and are always in reference this object. It is therefore essential that before one can respond, or give a response, one must first be presented with an object of importance to which one can respond.<sup>17</sup> Von Hildebrand explains that "it is this object which must enkindle our response."<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, if an object were presented as being neutral, that is, without value, such responses would be impossible. This is the basis for the psychoanalysts' theory of repression. Freud held that there had to be a

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<sup>15</sup>Ethics, 293.

<sup>16</sup>Heart, 55.

<sup>17</sup>Ethics, 318.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 319.

corresponding cause to the emotional and psychological reactions of people. If no cause were consciously known he believed that the cause had to be in the person's subconscious. As von Hildebrand notes, Freud "considers certain motivations as abnormal and refuses to accept in these cases the consciously admitted object as being the authentic one."<sup>19</sup>

It would thus be completely erroneous to attribute one's affective responses as being the source of an object's value, since the affective responses essentially presuppose the knowledge of the object's value.<sup>20</sup>

To this extent, all affective responses are motivated. As von Hildebrand elucidates, affective responses are precisely responses, "motivated by the importance of the object."<sup>21</sup> Authentic affective responses are only produced by motivation and never by mere causation. Von Hildebrand explains that:

Real joy necessarily implies not only the consciousness of an object about which we are rejoicing, but also an awareness that it is this object which is the reason for this joy.<sup>22</sup>

This radically differs from the jolly mood which may be caused by the consumption of wine.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 319.

<sup>22</sup>Heart, 54.

Affective responses may have effects on the body due to the intimate connection between the body and the soul. For example, an affective response such as deep sorrow may lead to weeping. However, these two experiences are not equivalent nor can bodily processes engender associated affective responses. Accordingly, affective responses are motivated and are "neither engendered nor dissolved by our free intervention."<sup>23</sup>

Through the affective response one is able to give oneself with one's heart, that is, with the fullness of one's whole personality.<sup>24</sup> Von Hildebrand states, "In affective responses the heart and the plenitude of a human personality are actualized."<sup>25</sup>

Accordingly, one is responsible for one's own affective responses. For example, one is responsible for whether or not one gives the right, due, adequate response of sorrow at the death of a parent.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Being Affected

While affective responses arise in a person spontaneously, being affected is something which is bestowed on a person. Being affected has the characteristic of being

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<sup>23</sup>Ethics, 326.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 320.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 312.

something that is given to the person. Being affected lies between cognitive acts and affective responses and has an intentional nature. For example, one's being affected, such as when one is humbled before the wondrous workings of nature, follows the cognitive act, in this case the recognition of the grandeur of nature, and precedes one's affective response, such as reverence, awe, and possibly joy.

### 3. Bodily Feelings

Bodily feelings, such as fatigue, pain, natural urges and instincts, are not just physiological but have the aspect of being conscious experiences. Von Hildebrand explains that:

They are in some way the "voice" of our body. They form the center of our body-experience, that which most pointedly affects us, and is the most awakened and most conscious."<sup>27</sup>

However, bodily experiences radically differ from one's affective responses. This is easily seen when one compares a headache to heart-felt sorrow.

### 4. Mere Psychic States

Psychic states or feelings are non-bodily feelings and come in a great variety. For example, there is the joviality of slight intoxication or the listlessness of a state of depression. These are not states or voices of the body although they may co-exist or be interpenetrated with

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<sup>27</sup>Heart, 50-51.

bodily experiences, for example there is the "runner's high" which is a euphoric state which some runners experience.

Mere psychic states are neither intentional nor motivated but are merely caused,<sup>28</sup> and also lack the above mentioned qualities of affective responses. They are not conscious meaningful positions which one takes towards an object as one takes in the case of an affective response, such as remorse, desire, love, sorrow, etc., and they thereby lack the character of being responses. This lack of intentionality clearly distinguishes psychic states as being non-spiritual. Such states should never be equivocated with spiritual affectivity under the ambiguous title of "feelings."<sup>29</sup>

Psychic states have a character of irrationality and fluctuation, which is a result of the body-soul connection. Mood swings from exuberance to melancholy are not uncommon and may change like the weather.<sup>30</sup> In psychic states, the "unreliability," the transitory and fleeting character unjustly ascribed to "feelings" in general is really present. They do indeed have a wavering character. They are the results of a person's weakness, vulnerability, and exposure to irrational influences.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ethics, 293.

<sup>29</sup>Heart, 54.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 55-56.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 56.

## 5. The Use of the Word "Feeling"

With these distinctions, one can see that it is a serious error to equivocate the word "feeling" as referring both to psychic states such as jolliness or depression and to spiritual affective responses such as joy over a friend's engagement or sorrow for another's loss of employment.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately this equivocation of "feeling" to affective responses, being affected, bodily feelings, and mere psychic states has led many to consider all four as being irrational. With respect to affective responses and being affected this is completely unjustified.

### D: FREEDOM

Von Hildebrand clearly states: "Morality extends as far as does responsibility";<sup>33</sup> "A man is responsible only for something which he can freely choose or refuse, something which in one way or another is within the range of his power";<sup>34</sup> "Moral values presuppose a free being, freedom is an essential feature of the person";<sup>35</sup> and "Our will alone is free."<sup>36</sup> This leads to the question: "In what sense is one responsible for one's affective responses?" To answer

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>33</sup>Ethics, 282.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 301.

this question, the topic of freedom in general must be addressed.

In speaking of freedom von Hildebrand comments that "Freedom is one of the greatest of man's privileges."<sup>37</sup> It is as essential a characteristic of the person as is a person's capacity for knowledge. "A person who is not free would be an intrinsic impossibility."<sup>38</sup>

In his Ethics von Hildebrand provides an analysis of freedom. He offers various distinctions concerning the freedom of the will. For the purpose of this study, first the distinction he makes between the two perfections of the will which he also refers to as the two dimensions of freedom will be examined and secondly cooperative freedom will be presented.

#### 1. The First Dimension of Freedom

He speaks of the first dimension of freedom, the deeper internal freedom, as being one's freedom to take a specific position towards an object. One may either allow oneself to be motivated by an object or not. It is a volitional response since it is the will's decision to conform to an object or not to conform to it. An example of the use of one's first dimension of freedom is when one wills to love one's enemies. It has the volitional element

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 283.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 282.



of responding with a "yes" or "no" to a given reality.

## 2. The Second Dimension of Freedom

The external freedom, which von Hildebrand designates as the second dimension of freedom, is the will's capacity to bring about a change in one's surroundings or in the contemporary state of affairs. It is in this perfection of the will that one may utilize the command one has over one's body as well as envision a future state of affairs which is realizable through one's own actions. This second dimension of freedom is what accounts for a person's ability to initiate a causal chain of events.

Of the other different topics which von Hildebrand examines, the one of greatest significance to this discussion is cooperative freedom.

## 3. Cooperative Freedom

Cooperative freedom is the freedom one exerts in taking a position towards experiences existing in one's own soul. This is distinct from the two perfections of the will which are directed externally. Cooperative freedom is inwardly directed. This is the

freedom of taking a position toward experiences which have come into existence without our free intervention, and which also cannot be dissipated by our free influence.<sup>39</sup>

It is the cooperative activity of one's free spiritual

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 316.

center. As an example of cooperative freedom, von Hildebrand offers the way in which a person accepts bodily pain. However, it is with respect to the realm of one's being affected and particularly the realm of affective responses that cooperative freedom has "its greatest moral significance."<sup>40</sup>

#### **E: COOPERATION OF ONE'S FREE SPIRITUAL CENTER**

Without the cooperation of one's free spiritual center, that is, the use of one's cooperative freedom, giving assent or dissent to an affective response, the response has an accidental character. This accidental quality may be based on one's temperament or mood at a given time, although one's personal character and lasting personal characteristics do contribute to the response one may give. For an affective response to be a valid moral response, there must not only be an awareness of a specific moral significance which is present and a response to this moral significance, accompanied by the general super-actual will to be good, but there must also be the total collaboration of one's free spiritual center. It is only the cooperation of one's free spiritual center which, as von Hildebrand explains,

can fully make the response a real "concerting" with the value, and this alone renders justice to the majesty of the value, for it calls for an adequate response independently of our natural inclination to give this

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

response or to fail to do so.<sup>41</sup>

C. S. Lewis, in The Abolition of Man, similarly notes that

emotional states can be in harmony with reason (when we feel liking for what ought to be approved) or out of harmony with reason (when we perceive that liking is due but cannot feel it). . . . they can be reasonable or unreasonable as they conform to Reason or fail to conform. The heart never takes the place of the head: but it can, and should, obey it.<sup>42</sup>

It is through the use of one's cooperative freedom that one is able to sanction one's affective responses or disavow them.

#### F: SANCTION AND DISAVOWAL

C. S. Lewis explains that:

all men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be either congruous or incongruous to it. . . . that certain responses could be more 'just' or 'ordinate' or 'appropriate' to it than others.<sup>43</sup>

It is to these "emotional reactions," or in von Hildebrand's words, "affective responses," that sanction and disavowal are applied; the appropriate responses are sanctioned while the inappropriate ones are disavowed. Consequently, sanction and disavowal are at the core of the sphere of moral affectivity. Likewise, sanction and disavowal play a crucial role in the relationship of ethics and emotions.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 323.

<sup>42</sup>Lewis, 29-30.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 25.

## 1. Sanction

Sanctioning a response endows the response "with a new, decisive character."<sup>44</sup> The response becomes one's very own in a deeper sense by one's sanctioning it. Through sanctioning, one's free spiritual center gives consent to one's affective response and in a sense identifies with it. Von Hildebrand elucidates this in stating: "In sanctioning an affective response, we join it with our free spiritual center, we place ourselves in this response, forming it from 'within.'"<sup>45</sup> In sanctioning an affective response one gives the response the most clear stamp of conscious approval possible. The affective response is joined at its core with the sanction, not at all lessening one's free cooperation with it, but rather forming one homogeneous response.

Through sanctioning, one's being affected takes on the full character which would otherwise only be simulated. Sanctioning makes an affective response into one's own free position even though the response's "plentitude is not something which we can give to ourselves, but which is granted to us."<sup>46</sup> Von Hildebrand explains: "Only the sanctioned response can be considered as a fully awakened response; it is the only fully conscious free response."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ethics, 323.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 324.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 325.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 324.

Only in sanctioning does a person give a fully conscious response to the object or state of affairs being presented.

A response, although sincere and possibly intense still has the character of being "blind" if it is not in full conscious conformity to the value at hand. For an affective value response to be free from any accidental character there must be a "real conscious conforming to the value which is precisely demanded by values."<sup>48</sup>

For example, the righteous anger over injustice or the sorrow over a tragedy presuppose the person's acknowledgement of the value at hand. Not only does one recognize the value but one recognizes it so much so that one is "moved" to give the full and appropriate response. For example, as C. S. Lewis explains,

to call children delightful or old men venerable is not simply to record a psychological fact about our own parental or filial emotions at the moment, but to recognize a quality which demands a certain response from us whether we make it or not.<sup>49</sup>

By its nature, sanction is not given "to morally unobjectionable responses which are not value responses."<sup>50</sup> In sanctioning one does not give endorsement simply with "let it be," as if from without, but rather one identifies one's free spiritual center, that is, one's heart, with the value response and grants it a decisive significance

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 331.

<sup>49</sup>Lewis, 29.

<sup>50</sup>Ethics, 330.

from within.<sup>51</sup>

## 2. Disavowal

In contrast to the sanctioning of an affective value response is the disavowal of a response which is contrary to a value response, that is, an inappropriate or evil response. While sanction is only possible with respect to adequate affective value responses, disavowal is only possible with respect to affective responses which are inadequate to their objects. According to von Hildebrand:

In this disavowal the person emancipates himself expressly from this affective response and counteracts it with his free spiritual center; he withdraws from it in such a way that he desubstantializes the response, "decapitates" it, so to speak. In this disavowal the free "no" affects the response from within and takes from it its character of a valid position toward the object."<sup>52</sup>

Disavowal does not completely uproot an undesired affective response from one's heart but rather it modifies it substantially. It is only by an arduous process that the response can be eradicated. Von Hildebrand refers to it as "the process of a moral transformation of our nature."<sup>53</sup>

Without disavowal by a person's free spiritual center an affective response assumes the character of involving the whole person and takes on the appearance of being the person's true position towards the immediately

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 331.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 322.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 323.

presented object.

With full sanction and disavowal the morally conscious person's ethical statements are "emotive" in that they do express emotion, i.e., an affective response of one's heart. However, this is not a reduction of ethics to psychology but rather a compounding of one's rational ethical response with one's affective response.

#### G: MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND MORAL UNCONSCIOUSNESS

There are those morally unconscious people who simply follow whatever feelings which may arise in them. The morally unconscious person is not only motivated by that which subjectively satisfying but rather is a person who lives in undisputed solidarity with his natural inclinations. The morality of his actions has an accidental character by his insouciance to the moral sphere. He may be a decent man but he is not a morally conscious one. The morally unconscious person lacks the superactual will to be morally good. Such a person is not equipped with any definite moral position when faced with a moral dilemma.<sup>54</sup> These people "yield to the tendency of their nature,"<sup>55</sup> and "make no use of their capacity to sanction and disavow."<sup>56</sup> They do not even consider the possibility of sanction and

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 265.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 321.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 322.

disavowal. They only consider their freedom to exist in the limited role of appropriate outward expressions of their inner emotions. They do not consider saying "no" to the spontaneous generation of malicious glee but only consider how it should be appropriately expressed or controlled.

The difference between the morally conscious and the morally unconscious person is that the morally conscious person makes a decisive use of his freedom with respect to sanction and disavowal whereas the morally unconscious has never even considered doing so.

The morally conscious person not only utilizes his freedom of sanction and disavowal but also has a second mark of desiring to be good. One who is morally unconscious lacks this superactual will to be morally good. Consequently, it is the having of this superactual willingness towards moral goodness which separates the morally conscious from the morally unconscious.

The morally unconscious person merely follows the emotive responses which spontaneously develop in him. He follows whatever his nature gives rise to whether that be love, hate, sorrow, joy, etc., regardless of the appropriateness of these responses. He does not even imagine that freedom might have an active role to play with respect to his responses. He recognizes the external dimensions of freedom but never acknowledges the deeper internal cooperative freedom. He only recognizes his freedom when he is



required to use it in the case of actions. The morally unconscious person ignores the possibility of the use of his freedom to sanction and disavowal which is in complete contrast to the morally conscious person who makes full use of his sanctioning and disavowing faculties.

While the morally conscious person takes a decisive stand towards his affective responses the morally unconscious person, by not making use of his capacity to sanction or to disavow his affective responses, implicitly identifies himself with them. Instead of ruling them, they rule him. As Von Hildebrand remarks, "The person who makes no use of his power to sanction and disavow lives in an undisputed solidarity with his own affective responses."<sup>57</sup>

The non-sanctioned and the non-disavowed responses are not half-way between being sanctioned and being disavowed but rather lie on the side of being sanctioned, even though conscious assent is not granted to them. Without the use of one's cooperative freedom affective responses have the character of being the position which one takes towards a situation. "The person implicitly identifies himself with them"<sup>58</sup> unless he disavows them. Von Hildebrand calls it a "tacit, undisputed solidarity" which is opposed to "the real, positive and explicit sanction."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 325.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

It is only within the general attitude of giving the proper value response that sanction and disavowal become possible. This holds especially true with respect to conforming to morally relevant values. As von Hildebrand explains:

Sanction is only possible toward affective attitudes having the character of a value response, and disavowal only possible toward attitudes which are endowed with a disvalue and especially with a moral disvalue.<sup>60</sup>

#### H: THE PSEUDO-SANCTION

Sanction must be distinguished from other types of solidarity with non-value responses, such as the malicious glee one expresses upon hearing of an enemy's misfortunes and exclaims, "I want to be glad for I despise her." This outspoken solidarity as opposed to a tacit solidarity portrays a use of one's freedom but, as von Hildebrand explains,

it is in no way the deep ultimate stratum of a man's free spiritual center which is actualized in the sanction. It is in no way an overcoming of moral unconsciousness, a breaking through to this deepest sovereign freedom which is in the sanction, but, on the contrary, it has the character of an obstinate spasm.<sup>61</sup>

The assent to a malicious "joy"<sup>62</sup> is in full opposition to the freedom found in sanctioning because it

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 326.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 326-327.

<sup>62</sup>Von Hildebrand uses the word "joy." The present author finds "glee" more appropriate since joy seems to be something which can only be given in response to a value or to a good.

carries with it a "voluntary self-imprisonment."<sup>63</sup> It is not a freedom from the whims of one's nature but rather a complete surrender to them,

a throwing ourselves into our affective responses and especially into our passions. It is one of the typical cases of actualization of our "physical" freedom which entails simultaneously the complete absence of "moral" freedom.<sup>64</sup>

As in malicious glee, the passions gain "a pseudo-sanction, which is antithetical to every true sanction and, moreover, a caricature of it."<sup>65</sup>

Sanction can only be given to a value response and especially to morally positive attitudes. In maintaining that the "supreme actualization of our ontological freedom (which is always simultaneously a moral freedom) can only take place when sustained by the logos of the world of values,"<sup>66</sup> von Hildebrand emphatically states: "The sanction is only possible as a 'concerting' with the world of values."<sup>67</sup> In contrast, the pseudo-sanction of giving explicit agreement to one's natural inclinations is only found with respect to morally neutral or morally negative values.

Sanction also must be distinguished from the

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<sup>63</sup>Ethics, 327.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

character of the conscious and free position which characteristically immoral persons take in their superactual rebellious attitude towards the world of values. This character is not merely the lack of moral consciousness found in the morally unconscious but is even a further removal away from moral consciousness, since "Real moral consciousness implies both the general will to be morally good and moral freedom which only the value response can possess."<sup>68</sup>

The deliberate full cooperation with one's morally negative affective responses (jealousy, envy, rage, etc.) is an antithesis to the true sanction. Unlike the morally unconscious person, the explicit enemy of God<sup>69</sup> does take a position with respect to his spontaneously arising affective responses. The position is one in which one identifies oneself with one's morally negative responses and disavows any positive response which may arise, such as pity or compassion. It is not a tacit solidarity with one's affective responses but rather a direct solidarity with those responses which are opposed to values. Von Hildebrand describes that this attitude "has the character of a diabolical caricature of the sanction,"<sup>70</sup> it is at best a

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 328.

<sup>69</sup>The present author does not favor the philosophical use of this term but has retained it to be true to von Hildebrand's writings.

<sup>70</sup>Ethics, 329.

pseudo-sanction.

While, as was noted earlier, "true sanction and disavowal are inner gestures which are only possible as participations in the objective intrinsic rhythm of values,"<sup>71</sup> the pseudo-sanction can only be towards morally negative values. It involves such a complete domination by pride, "not of obstinacy, but of a much deeper and most vicious pride,"<sup>72</sup> the consequence of which is an extreme lack of moral freedom, the depth of which far surpasses the lack of moral freedom found in the morally unconscious person. Furthermore, this explicit solidarity with the negative affective responses that is given by the pseudo-sanction is in complete opposition to the solidarity of true sanction.

#### I: JUSTICE TOWARDS VALUES

Justice towards a value requires the right, due, and appropriate response which in the affective sphere is one which is sanctioned or disavowed and thereby is an integral component of the full response of a person's free spiritual center. Nothing else will be adequate. This is not a matter merely for the morally conscious person but for all people as a matter of justice to the realm of values and to themselves. Thus failure in not giving the appropriate response or in not sanctioning the appropriate response

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

and/or disavowing inappropriate responses is a failure in the order of justice and consequently a grave failure indeed.

Upon realizing that justice is due to the world of values, one must educate and expose one's self towards that realm so as to both know what response ought to be given and to align the sphere of one's affections with that response so as to give the appropriate response. C. S. Lewis notes that Plato recognized this when in his Laws he declares that young children "must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likable, disgusting, and hateful."<sup>73</sup> Lewis also credits Aristotle as holding this view: "Aristotle says that the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Lewis, 27, with the following citation: Plato, Laws, 653.

<sup>74</sup>Lewis, 26, with the following citation: Eth. Nic. 1104B.

CHAPTER SIX  
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Western philosophy has long held that there are realities which transcend the world known to man by his senses, namely values. Truth, Beauty, Goodness, etc., make it possible for value judgments to be true or false, objects to be ugly or beautiful, and actions and attitudes to be to be morally good or evil, right or wrong. Metaphysics as the study of ultimate reality addresses these issues and also the question of the existence of a Supreme Being who is the source of these values. Those who follow this system are given practical principles by which to live their lives in the areas of work, recreation, and morality.

In contrast, emotivism "bewilders those who ask for a doctrine and are given a word."<sup>1</sup> It is a "debunking term". It stupefies and bewilders, yet in some way satisfies the inquiring mind. "It satisfies by implying a sharp but untenable opposition between thought and feeling."<sup>2</sup>

The emotivists claim that their doctrines have no effects outside of philosophy. Like the skeptic they are seeking to eliminate the problems of philosophy. Yet, this

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<sup>1</sup>Black, 204.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

is done not by investigations that seek to solve the problems of philosophy but by dismissing such problems altogether. They claim that since emotivism excludes discussions of morality, aesthetics, religion, and politics it should have no effect on these areas. However, their "conclusions really do eviscerate the universe."<sup>3</sup>

It is not merely meaning which is attacked by emotivism but the actual existence of certain realities. It is not merely that ethical statements are reduced to emotive exclamations but rather that all ethics and morality are themselves abolished. This applies not only to ethics but also to all values. Thus, aesthetics, religion, and metaphysics, are also eliminated not merely from philosophical study but from existence altogether.

In contrast, the phenomenological theory of affective morality as proposed by Dietrich von Hildebrand has been offered as a viable alternative. This theory affirms the traditional philosophical belief that there are realities beyond those which can be empirically measured and acknowledges that these realities deserve appropriate affective responses. Such responses can therefore be appropriate or inappropriate to a given object or to a given state of affairs. It is through the use of one's cooperative freedom that one can sanction the appropriate responses as well as disavow inappropriate responses. It is only by the exercise

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<sup>3</sup>Joad, 19.



of one's power to sanction and disavow that one actualizes one's deepest moral freedom and "renders justice to the majesty of the value."<sup>4</sup>

Both theories take emotions seriously, but in very different ways. Ayer's emotivism brings about the demise of ethics and results in undermining any rational foundation for emotional responses. If the statement "abortion is wrong," is literally meaningless and only emotive then it will cease to be emotive since there no longer is the "wrongness" which would evoke the emotion which is to be evinced. If an action is no longer evil, then there is no rational basis for one to experience sorrow or outrage over that action.

In contrast, von Hildebrand's theory of moral affectivity confirms the validity of ethical judgments and expands the realm of ethics by including the affective sphere in its domain. This theory provides a greater dignity to the emotional realm by revealing the rational and intentional nature of the affective response as well as its moral significance.

By their very nature affective responses can have moral relevance. There are morally good affective responses, such as gratitude when one receives a good or righteous indignation over a great evil. There are also morally evil affective responses, such as enthusiasm for a

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<sup>4</sup>Ethics, 323.

mob-lynching or disrespect for that which is worthy of esteem. Because of this moral relevance, one is called to take a position towards affective responses which arise spontaneously in one's being. Morally good affective responses should be sanctioned while morally evil affective responses should be disavowed.

This study has not only demonstrated a valid rational connection between ethics and emotions but also shown that emotions can be morally good or evil. It is hoped that the importance of this connection will lead to both a clearer understanding of ethics and emotions as well as the promotion of further study of this topic.

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