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Value-Requiredness: Ethical Naturalism and the Modern World-View

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Book Reviews

VALUE-REQUIREDNESS

ETHICAL NATURALISM AND THE MODERN WORLD-VIEW.

By E. M. Adams. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960. 229 pp.

Prof. Adams takes naturalism to be the modern world-view and characterizes the modern mind as distinctively naturalistic. The "naturalistic mentality" may be described as the attempt to explain the whole of reality within the sole perspective of man, nature, and science (in the modern empirical sense) without recourse to anything outside the man-nature totality. In the words of Prof. Adams, "metaphysical naturalism," which he considers the underlying framework of modern thought, "argues that reality as experienced by man is as it is shown to be by the categorial structure of the language of science." To be sure, Prof. Adams has in mind American scientific naturalism whose basic assumption is that the "scientific" method is the only valid form and mode of human knowing.

"Ethical naturalism," in the broad sense defined by Prof. Adams, includes three major forms which, though differing in explanation, are basically engaged "in showing that value-language and the experience it expresses have no unique ontological significance distinct from that of the language of modern science or its common-sense counterpart." In other words, ethical naturalism, which likewise underlies modern man's thinking on morals, is an attempt to explain moral experience and moral phenomena from the purely naturalistic standpoint and on a "scientific" (factual, non-normative) basis.

Now one of the current views on philosophy which has been the dominant influence in English philosophical circles over the last two decades and which has recently begun to have some vogue in the United States is linguistic analysis. This contemporary philosophical

movement takes the task of philosophy to be analytic, i.e. philosophy is a technique for showing that most philosophical problems are pseudo-problems by a mere logical or semantic analysis of philosophical statements. In the field of human behavior, the task of linguistic analysis is to show that value judgements or ethical statements have only logical or semantic significance without any objective reference in experience.

Employing the approach and techniques of linguistic analysis, Prof. Adams challenges the naturalistic world-view and subjects ethical naturalism to an extended and critical examination. By showing the ontological basis of value-language in general and of moral discourse in particular, Prof. Adams undercuts the main thesis of metaphysical naturalism, namely, that the categories of scientific thought are categories of reality. Taking the ethical naturalists to task on their own grounds, Prof. Adams finds their position untenable. His criticism of ethical naturalism leads him to espouse "non-naturalism" in ethics.

The key to the understanding of the author's methodology is found in the opening chapter of the book. Using a parallel distinction between engineering, science, and the philosophy of science, Prof. Adams distinguishes between "morality", "ethics", and "philosophy of ethics". By "morality" he means "moral inquiry in a practical situation" and "the use of moral wisdom or precepts". "Ethics" refers both to the common-sense moral knowledge or to the "formal study that investigates such phenomena as the acts of persons and institutions in terms of an ethical conceptual scheme", with emphasis on the latter "reflective procedure". Prof. Adams defines "philosophy of ethics", or what is today called meta-ethics, as the study devoted primarily to the "use of moral language by the ethicist". For him, the problem of ethical naturalism is "a problem for neither morality, nor ethics, but for philosophy of ethics." Hence his book is primarily a linguistic analysis of moral statements. The author believes this is the valid method to use. As a matter of fact Prof. Adams is really interested in ethics as a normative science of human conduct and he uses the linguistic approach as a means of proving his point that moral language has an objective basis in reality and experience. Herein lies the chief merit and value of the book.

The main burden of the book consists in a thorough-going refutation from the viewpoint of a language analyst of ethical naturalism in its three major forms: classical, emotive, and logical. These three types of ethical naturalism, however they may differ in their explanations, all agree that the moral "ought" does not express a real obligation binding man to conform his conduct with an objective moral order but is merely a linguistic description of human behaviour. Although Prof. Adams began his book with the hope that some version of ethical naturalism was correct, he eventually rejected all three variants of naturalism in ethics.

The first major form, classical ethical naturalism, holds that "ethical sentences have cognitive meaning and truth-values but are translatable into the language of science". Against this position, Prof. Adams points out that in the end the only way for the classical naturalists to account for the peculiar meaning of ethical sentences is to posit a non-natural quality to which the value-term corresponds. This is tantamount to giving up the basic epistemological commitment of ethical naturalism, namely, that the normative propositions of ethics are reducible to the factual statements of science.

The second major form, emotive naturalism, maintains that "ethical sentences are not cognitively meaningful", i.e. they are neither true nor false, but are merely expressions of one's subjective feelings of like or dislike. This second position is also rejected by the author for two reasons. First, the emotivists fail to show that the emotive states and attitudes expressed and evoked by ethical language are merely natural occurrences without an ontological dimension. Secondly, the moral judgements involved in such states and attitudes are subject to being reasoned about and appraised as correct or incorrect. It follows that ethical sentences not only enable us to express subjective feelings but also to know objective values.

The third major form, logical naturalism, is the view that "ethical sentences are meaningful—although not true or false—but justified in terms of good reasons or the lack of them." Because of his initial commitment to this "good-reasons" position, Prof. Adams first investigates the case in favor of logical naturalism. The logical naturalist denies that there are any valid practical arguments or valid normative conclusions. He can make a somewhat plausible case for his position, if he can show that the "ought" in the conclusion of a moral syllogism is nothing but a suppressed "is" in the premises and therefore the "ought" expresses only a *logical* relation between the premises and conclusion of a tautological argument; by no means does it express an objective feature of reality.

That the logical naturalist fails to make good his claim is shown by Prof. Adams in his case against logical naturalism. He finds four serious weaknesses in this purely logical position: (1) it cannot genuinely produce the alleged suppressed "ought" imperatives for practical conclusions; (2) it raises anew the problem of the meaning of the "ought"; (3) it is unable to account for the authority of basic approvals and disapprovals and of primary desires; and (4) it cannot explain the prescriptive or normative character of primary desires and basic rational attitudes.

In view of these difficulties, Prof. Adams opts for non-naturalism in ethics which maintains: (1) "that what is indicated or referred to by the ethical 'ought' is an objective value (or normative) requiredness which holds between one fact or state of affairs and some other

actual or possible fact or state of affairs"; and (2) that there are valid natural practical arguments whose validity is grounded not merely on a logical relation between factual premises and imperative conclusions but in an objective value-requiredness as a categorial feature of reality. Against three general criticisms levelled against non-naturalism, and in defense of his new thesis, Prof. Adams offers the following arguments: (1) The meaning of value-language is to be located in the semantic content of affective-conative experiences which ultimately and reductively yield objective moral knowledge or wisdom; (2) Value-experience or moral knowledge is cognitive and therefore through value-language we can come to know a categorial feature of reality; and finally, (3) "Ought" propositions can be shown to be valid practical imperatives or wellsprings of action.

The concluding chapter of the book is devoted to exploring some of the metaphysical implications of Prof. Adams' non-naturalistic ethics in relation to the modern naturalistic world-view. The important conclusion he draws from his analytic and historical comparison between the classical and mechanistic views on "value", "change", "casuality", "freewill", and "religious experience" is that these concepts represent objective categories requiring a teleological framework. Unfortunately, because of the brevity of its treatment, the last chapter is rather superficial and disappointing. Nevertheless, Prof. Adams' concluding remarks which express his final verdict on naturalism are worth quoting:

It seems, then, that the teleological categorial scheme emerges and is more at home within a wider range of human experience than the naturalistic framework and that the former cannot be replaced by the latter. The only way metaphysical naturalism can be made at all plausible is to deny the cognitive character of all areas of experience other than that of sensory perception. Even then sensory experiences would defy the categories of naturalism. In any case, we have ample reasons, I think, for rejecting such a narrow empiricism. We must not only look to sensory perceptions and thought pertaining to them but also to our affective and conative experiences and thought pertaining to them in our attempt to formulate a correct philosophical view of the world as experienced by us. And of course we must not forget these experiences and thoughts themselves, for they are not only of or about reality but are also part of it.

Prof. Adams believes that the linguistic method is the proper and valid approach to ethics. No doubt linguistic analysis has its genuine contributions to make in philosophy. It makes us aware of the semantic dimension of some philosophical problems. Some pseudo-philosophical problems arise because the grammatical form of a statement is taken to be its logical form and no attempt is made to investigate its existential content. Sometimes what one linguistic term means and what is meant are equivalent so that the necessary conditions for the meaningful use of language are also the necessary conditions of what is meant of reality itself. The analysis of the meaning of ordinary language often lays bare philosophical jargon devoid of any existential bearing or reference in experience and reality.

The same is true of some ethical statements about moral phenomena. Careful analytic procedure reveals the many and varied subjective factors behind value propositions and moral statements. Linguistic analysts in ethics point to the need of clarifying the meaning of many "ought" sentences which have the semantic form of an imperative or normative statement but which turn out to be grammatically disguised factual statements. Linguistic analysis is a forceful reminder that we must be careful to use language to express meaningfully our insights into reality.

However, linguistic analysis as a pure method for validating philosophy in general and ethics in particular is unsatisfactory and inadequate. To make language analysis the ultimate task of philosophy is to put the cart before the horse. Language is only a tool of communication; it is meaningful only to the extent that it expresses our experience of reality. The method proper to philosophy is rational insight whereby the real is existentially grasped by means of concepts and judgements which language tries to communicate.

Now much of British and American moral philosophy today is almost exclusively devoted to the linguistic analysis of ethical statements. One main difficulty with the "philosophy of ethics" is its exclusive preoccupation about how to talk about moral phenomena rather than how to know what right moral behaviour ought to be in order finally to act morally. One commendable feature of Prof. Adams' book is his aim to return to ethics in the traditional sense of a practical science which is ordered ultimately to action. Prof. Adams' book is a corrective of the contemporary tendency to substitute the analysis of ethical language or meta-ethics for ethics proper. Any naturalistic attempt to ground the science of the morality of human acts on a purely semantic or logical basis is bound to fail. Perhaps this is the reason why Prof. Adams is not too successful in developing his own non-naturalism in ethics, painstaking and penetrating though his criticism of ethical naturalism may be. Stuart Hampshire, whom Prof. Adams quotes, is more to the point when he states that the

type of analysis which consists in defining, or finding synonyms for the moral terms of a particular language cannot illumine the nature of moral decisions or practical problems; it is no more than local dictionary-making, or the elimination of redundant terms, which is useful only as preliminary to the study of typical moral arguments.

It is regrettable that Prof. Adams is much closer to the position of Hampshire than he suspects.

Nevertheless, the book as a whole, especially Prof. Adams' aim to show the ontological significance of moral language, is a real challenge to the current tendency either to reduce ethics to a purely semantic discipline or to cast ethics in a purely conceptual and logical framework by means of the a priori or deductive method. The most important conclusion of the book is the admission of a converted

language analyst that there can be no ethics without a metaphysics. Although he did not fully develop the metaphysical implications of this admission, Prof. Adams was at least in the right direction. In affirming that through value-experience which underlies moral knowledge, we can attain an objective feature of reality which he terms "value-requiredness", the very feature denied by modern scientific thought, Prof. Adams is not too far from a realistic and teleological ethics which takes values to be objective and which interprets the moral "ought" as an existential imperative expressing the objective relation between man's final goal and the necessary means to that goal.

VITALIANO R. GOROSPE

A TOOL FOR THE SEMINARIAN

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY AND SCIENTIFIC WORK. By
Father Dominic of St. Teresa, O.C.D. Alwaye: St. Joseph's
Apostolic Seminary, 1962. xviii, 322 pp.

It is gratifying to welcome a book of this nature, coming as it does from a Catholic seminary in India. No more genuine evidence could be offered that the Catholic Church in Asia, true to her historical interest in scholarship, wishes to pass on this invaluable tradition to future generations of Catholic priests in the Far East. The work of Fr. Dominic on the methodology of the ecclesiastical sciences is designed to be both a help and a stimulus to learning and to genuine scientific work. As the author modestly states in his preface, it is intended chiefly for undergraduate students who are beginning their study of philosophy and theology.

The work is divided into two main parts. The first section is devoted to the Methodology of Study. Here the author gives a practical summary of the principles which are commonly found in greater detail in standard works on Educational Psychology. To this are added the fruitful conclusions of European and American authors who have treated specifically of study and methodology in the ecclesiastical sciences, such as Sertillanges, Kurtscheid, de Gilbert and others. Thus the English-speaking seminarian is put in contact with the best that has been written in other languages on the methodology of the ecclesiastical sciences. After an initial chapter on the nature of study, subsequent chapters treat of the human faculties used in the study process, the necessary dispositions for