

Analytical Table of Contents

Abbreviations

- 1 General characterization of the non-cognitivist theory of ethics. Voluntarism as an essential feature of the theory 1
- 2 Objections to non-cognitivism: (a) to its irrationalist tendency; (b) to its phenomenological inadequacy 6
- 3 The proposed 'realist' alternative. We are invited to posit a class of perceptions (i.e. deliverances of a purely cognitive capacity) which can nevertheless engage the will 9
- 4 Non-cognitivism focuses on the most abstract moral categories, moral realism on more concrete ones 14
- 5 Metaphysical and epistemological foundations of non-cognitivism. The empiricist view of language. The 'fact/value distinction' 17
- 6 Moral realism, by contrast, presupposes a rejection of this (metaphysical) distinction. The later philosophy of Wittgenstein as a source for the idea of language as metaphysically homogeneous 23
- 7 Brief account of the history of this way of thinking about language: the 'expressivist' tradition 27
- 8 The phenomenon of 'semantic depth' interpreted in terms of the expressivist view of language 31
- 9-10 The non-foundational conception of knowledge associated with expressivism. Objectivity and rationality as grounded in consensus. The supersession of empiricist epistemology by a non-foundational view may be seen either as a levelling-up of 'evaluative' in relation to 'factual' discourse, or as a levelling-down of the latter in relation to the former 36
- 11 'Not empiricism and yet realism in philosophy, that is the hardest thing' (Wittgenstein) – but the difficulty attaching to this

programme in other departments of thought vanishes when we come to apply it to ethics 45

12 A possible rehabilitation of 'moral sense theory' in the context of a non-foundational epistemology 46

13 'Moral perceptions yield sufficient reasons for action': this doctrine of the moral realist made perspicuous in the light of expressivist considerations 51

14-15 Development of the idea of objectivity as grounded in consensus: the norms of meaningful behaviour, including language-use, revealed as *social* norms. (Wittgenstein on rule-following.) The 'pull toward objectivity' is a material pull. 'Intellectual authority-relations' introduced 54

16 Morality as the 'grammar of conduct'. Comparison of Wittgenstein's view of grammatical correctness (in general, and hence *a fortiori* in respect of morals) with the Hegelian concept of *Sittlichkeit* ('concrete ethics') 62

17 However, the injunction to 'do the same' is not interpreted in an equally literal sense in all contexts. (Varying role of intellectual authority within different language-games.) A non-metaphysical account of the 'subjective/objective' opposition 65

18-19 Moral realism as the view that the truth-conditions of moral sentences may obtain beyond our awareness. The merits of such a view considered, (a) with reference to the individual; (b) with reference to the community as a whole. (Could we *all* be ignorant or mistaken about a particular point of morality?) A non-metaphysical account of the way in which moral facts fail to be, in this collective sense, recognition-transcendent 69

20 Intellectual authority-relations are necessarily embodied in real social institutions, which form the 'body of the moral world'. Comparison of this aspect of the proposed moral realism with a doctrine of F. H. Bradley. An 'expressive relation' posited between individual and community. For the Hegelian tradition, institutions have a semantic (expressive) value; for Wittgenstein, linguistic rules are themselves institutions 82

21 Historical possibility of the breakdown of this expressive relationship. The problem of the meaning of life as a feature of the experience of those who live under social institutions which are devoid of expressive significance for them, and who therefore

recognize no legitimate intellectual authority in respect of morals. Dissatisfaction with non-cognitivist ethical theory situated against this background 90

22 Moral ambiguity of such dissatisfaction. It has both progressive and reactionary connotations 94

23 The *de facto* connection between non-foundational epistemology and conservative attitudes: some examples 99

24 The sense in which that epistemology, and the expressivist view of language in general, does essentially contain an element of 'conservatism': according to expressivism, linguistic communication presupposes the existence of a practice which is not only (synchronically) shared, but (diachronically) continuous 104

25 Consequences of this idea for our conception of theoretical change over time. If we question too much at once, we cease to have a habitable world-view at all. The 'argument from growing solitude' 107

26 However, a certain spurious conservatism is also apt to accrue to expressivist theories. Discussion of the suggestion that to reject fact/value or content/scheme dualism in favour of our proposed (Wittgensteinian) conception of language is to return to a 'direct' or 'unmediated' realism 110

27 These terms, as predicated of the proposed (post-empiricist) type of realism, are unobjectionable if they mean simply 'non-inferential' (in which case they would register, e.g., the fact that perceptual judgements were not construed by such a realism as inferences from sense-data). In another sense, however, the view we have been developing is precisely a *mediated* realism, since it requires us to acknowledge that the use of language is an activity in which we participate 114

28 But to gain a reflective awareness of the practical character of language is to come to see ourselves as morally implicated in our culture: 'words are also deeds' (Wittgenstein), and as such have a moral dimension. Our *sittlich* relation to the established language-game now becomes problematic 117

29-30 It may be objected that the logical freedom of a *community* to play any language-game it likes (a corollary of Wittgenstein's considerations on rule-following) does not of itself justify us in labelling the *individual* as an accomplice of his culture, since we

have already noted the material obstacles to his living a life in defiance of that culture. Yet the idea of the historicity of our own particular form of life seems none the less to entail that any future 'reintegration of subjective and objective standpoints' on our part will have to be a critical reintegration – i.e. that we shall never again be able to participate ingenuously in any language-game unless we can regard it as *rational* ('find ourselves in it'). The tension resolved by reference to the notion of 'recessive formulae' of rationality: deviant schemes of values which, while themselves grounded in the total form of life of a community, enable dissident individuals to sustain their identity as rational persons even though they may disengage themselves from the dominant institutions of that community. This situation arises out of the imperfect internal coherence of a social practice 120

31 Is the social world we actually inhabit such as to allow a reflective reintegration of subjective and objective standpoints? This (ethical) question gains urgency from our new insight into the role of *coercion* in sustaining all those forms of discourse which are regulated by the norms of *truth* and *rationality* 132

32 What is the relation between our idea of the immanent critique of a form of life, and the supposedly Wittgensteinian view that such forms do not lend themselves to evaluative comparison? The philosopher *qua* 'describer of language-games' can do no more than record the development and decay of specific configurations of intellectual authority. Examples of this kind of subject-matter: how social practices can 'go off the rails' 137

33 It is certainly implicit in Wittgenstein's later philosophy that any value-judgement concerning a form of life will necessarily be made from some definite historical standpoint, i.e. from within some world-view which is itself embedded in a historically specific form of life. (Denial of culture-transcendent values.) 140

34 But this 'value-free' account of the process of change in consensual norms might be held to suffer from the same *phenomenological* defect which was laid at the door of non-cognitivism, viz. refusal to acknowledge at the philosophical level those differences of objective value that we think we perceive in ordinary life. (Conflict between 'outside' and 'inside' with respect to the idea of a 'shared form of life which is constitutive of rationality itself'.) 144

35 The conflict resolved – and in a manner strongly reminiscent of

its resolution within non-cognitivism. (Our language-games *display*, but do not *describe*, the fact of our 'agreement in judgements'. The relation of consensus to critical concepts compared with that of pain-behaviour to pain-discourse.) This way of reintegrating subjective and objective standpoints will, however, prove innocent of the irrationalism which marred the non-cognitivist strategy, since it rests upon an expressivist conception of the whole of our discourse, not just of one area 146

36 'Absolutism' versus 'relativism' with regard to confrontations between forms of life. Do rival belief-systems compete in respect of *truth*, or merely in respect of *material dominance*? This question forestalled by the expressivist idea that any extensive theoretical confrontation is also a practical confrontation, if it matters at all. Instances of such confrontation as seen (a) from the objective, (b) from the subjective standpoint 151

37 The 'descent' from objectivity to subjectivity, or from *mention* to *use* of critical concepts. The 'trust' which ultimately characterizes our relation to any world-view within which we consent to operate. Role of this concept in Hegel, Wittgenstein and non-cognitivist ethical theory 154

38 A topic in the 'linguistic phenomenology of dissent': the ironic or 'purely descriptive' use of value-terms. Its historical origins in non-alienated usage; and conversely, the prefigurative character of irony, in that it gets its point by opposition to the idea of a 'redeemed' language-game within which we should once again be able to use critical concepts in a non-alienated way. 'Dialectical reason' 159

39-40 Resumption of our inquiry into the relation between expressivist doctrines and moral conservatism. Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy as the attempt to dispel fetishistic misunderstanding of the workings of language (i.e. refusal to recognize these as manifestations of our own subjectivity). Failure to assimilate this aspect of the expressivist position allows that position, and the moral realism grounded in it, to be misrepresented as offering support to a conservative ethics and/or politics. (Reification of existing institutions.) Bradley's essay, 'My Station and its Duties', as a case-study. Instances of expressivist views divorced from conservatism: Nietzsche, etc. 165

41 'Conservatism' and 'liberalism' as contrasting *policies* with

respect to moral anomalies: what degree of deviancy do we regard as a justification for ceasing to treat the deviant as a 'soul' (i.e. as a rational person)? The criteria of 'rationality' are determined by our practice. The expressivist view of language, *per se*, yields no practical lesson in this connection 172

42 A 'symptomatic reading' of the refusal to acknowledge indeterminacy (i.e. incompleteness of intellectual authority) within the moral language-game, and of the associated impulse to objectify dissenting persons 179

43 How does the objectification of the moral dissident proceed at the level of theory? The technique of 'divide and rule': resistance to the authorities who currently specify where the 'ideal moral observer' is to stand is interpreted as outright rejection of the public point of view (i.e. as mere selfish individualism). However, opinions can differ as to where one needs to stand to get a good view of moral reality 185

44 Another theme within realist ethics, which converges with the above: that of 'curbing imagination'. The process of moral degeneration feared by philosophers who emphasize 'narrowness', simple virtue, etc. appears to be identical with that of 'rational value-change' as celebrated by the theorists of dialectical reason 189

45 Moral 'imagination' as the critical scrutiny of existing institutions by 'seeing new aspects', and – arising logically out of such scrutiny – the speculative construction of alternatives. A quasi-verificationist objection: how can imagination transcend experience with respect to morals? (How can there be *Moralität* as well as *Sittlichkeit*?) Reply: speculative thought in the practical sphere can be defended against this objection without abandoning realism, by an argument analogous to that used in the theoretical sphere. The fact of syntactic structure in language ensures that as competent speakers about ethics, we can represent to ourselves moral justifications for replacing existing institutions by others – even though this competence is itself grounded in our personal history of incorporation into the existing institutions. Imagination as a linguistic capacity 194

46 The 'breakdown of ethical substance' as a *conscious* exercise. How far this can be carried, within the matrix of a given form of life, is a matter of experiment. The renunciation of a ponderous array of (moral) 'certainties' might be seen as a mode of *asceticism* 201

47 A different asceticism is, however, the target of Wittgenstein's criticism in the later philosophy. Meaning as a 'physiognomy'. Rejection of the positivist ideal of a non-interpretative representation of reality. Language considered (a) as an artistic medium; (b) as integral to the performance of work 206

48 The idea of language as a precipitate of shared physical activity compels us to acquiesce in a 'transcendental parochialism'. But this must be distinguished from ordinary (empirical) parochialism, for it is not an attitude or a policy, except in the sense that it involves repudiating a certain kind of philosophical illusion. Ascribing the dogmatism of ordinary language ('This is simply how I act . . .') to the embodied nature of speakers, where it belongs, serves to insulate our proposed moral realism from irrationalist or chauvinist applications, and so from the ideological abuses with which we have been concerned 210

49 The problem of the meaning of life identified with that of the transcendental condition – the 'possibility of the phenomenon' – of there being a (non-hypothetical) point in doing anything. This possibility is given with our acceptance of the form of life to which our 'defining situation' commits us 219

50 Ethical application of the idea that 'what is hidden is of no interest to us' (cf. Wittgenstein's 'private language argument'). The meaning of life as a physiognomy. Our conclusion defended against the charge of vacuity 223

Bibliography 230

Index 235