IV.—ETHICAL DISAGREEMENTS AND THE EMOTIVE THEORY OF VALUES

By Vincent Tomas

Summary accounts of variants of the so-called " emotive theory " of value statements have been published by C. D. Broad,[1] Rudolph Carnap,[2] Bertrand Russell,[3] A. J. Ayer, [4] and others, but Charles L. Stevenson's *Ethics and Language* [5] is, so far as I am aware, the only extensive work attempting to present an emotive theory systematically and in detail. In what follows, I shall for this reason be concerned with Stevenson's version of the theory. It differs in many respects from the others mentioned ; yet, as Stevenson says, " it finds much more to defend in the analysis of Carnap, Ayer, and the others, than it finds to attack. It seeks only to qualify their views—partly in the light of Dewey's—and to free them from any seeming cynicism " (p. 267). Its arguments and general conclusions may therefore be regarded as *typical* of an emotive theory, and a discussion of them should be of import not only for an evaluation of Stevenson's own view, but of emotive theories in general.

Before looking into the validity of these arguments and conclusions, it should be observed that the emotive theory has been discussed primarily as a contribution to moral philosophy. This may be attributed at least in part to the fact that proponents of the theory tend to *illustrate* it mainly by means of statements expressing judgments of the kind we ordinarily classify as moral, but the conclusions based upon the analyses of these statements are much broader in their scope. The theory ostensibly accounts for not merely moral judgments, but normative judgments of any sort. In *Philosophy and Logical Syntax* Carnap exiles all value statements to the realm of metaphysics (p. 26). What appears in the first edition of Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic* as a " critique of ethics " is explicitly designated, in the introduction

[1] " Is ' Goodness ' a Name of a Simple, Non-natural Quality ? " *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. xxxiv, 1934.

[2] *Philosophy and Logical Syntax*, 1935, pp. 22-26.

[3] *Religion and Science*, 1935, chap. ix.

[4] *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 1936, chap. vi, and the introduction to the second edition, 1946.

[5] Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn. (Oxford University Press, London), 1945.

to the second edition, "The Emotive Theory of Values". It may be contended that when Ayer says "theory of values", he means "theory of moral judgments"; that when he says questions of value are all questions of taste, he means that disagreements about whether an action is morally right are at bottom disagreements in taste; and that when he says "the expression of a value judgment is not a proposition" (p. 22), he means "the expression of a moral judgment is not a proposition", and has only failed to make the distinctions clear in his own mind. Stevenson, at any rate, is as explicit as could be desired on the point that when *he* says "ethical judgment", he generally does *not* mean "moral judgment", but "value judgment", of any sort. He says, "The moral senses of ethical terms are no more interesting, for our purposes, than the nonmoral ones; for the topics they introduce raise no special problems of language or methodology" (p. 92). His analysis of "good" is intended to fit not merely the sense of the term which "abbreviates 'morally good'", but "common garden variety" senses of the term, "similar to that of 'swell' or 'nice'" (p. 90). In a footnote he explains that "'ethical analysis', as here understood, includes most of what R. B. Perry would call the 'theory of value'" (p. 92). Even this does not describe the breadth of Stevenson's project accurately. As judged by his insistence upon the ineradicable vagueness and ambiguity of "ethical" terms (*cf.* p. 34), he wishes to present patterns for analysis of the meanings of "good", "right", "ought", and so on as used by anyone in any context whatsoever. Since it seems impossible to avoid speaking of good and bad arguments, of right and wrong methods of inquiry, and of rules of logic or of prudence that we ought to follow, not only should the foundations of morality "tremble at a whiff of epistemological grape-shot" from the emotive theory, as Winston H. F. Barnes has said,[1] but so should the foundations of a good deal else as well.

1. *Summary of Stevenson's view.* Stevenson sharply contrasts ethical disagreements and disagreements in belief. Cases of the latter kind, he says, "require only brief attention" (p. 2), and their nature is meagrely described. They are the "disagreements that occur in science, history, biography and their counterparts in everyday life. . . . Questions about the nature of light transmission, the voyages of Leif Ericsson, and the date on which Jones was last in to tea, are all similar in that they may involve an opposition that is primarily of beliefs. . . . In such cases

[1] "Ethics Without Propositions", *Logical Positivism and Ethics*, Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume xxii, 1948, p. 1.

one man believes that *p* is the answer, and another that not-*p*, or some proposition incompatible with *p*, is the answer; and in the course of discussion each tries to give some manner of proof for his view, or revise it in the light of further information. Let us call this 'disagreement in belief'" (p. 2).

A disagreement in belief differs from an ethical disagreement in that "the former is concerned with how matters are truthfully to be described and explained; the latter is concerned with how they are to be favoured or disfavoured, and hence with how they are to be shaped by human efforts" (p. 4). When two persons disagree in their judgments of value (have an "ethical" disagreement), they disagree in their attitudes toward the object they are evaluating, "one approving of it, for instance, and the other disapproving of it" (p. 3). "It is disagreement in attitude . . . that chiefly distinguishes ethical issues from those of pure science" (p. 13). We may distinguish between two kinds of ethical disagreement. (1) The first kind consists of those cases in which the disagreement in attitude is entirely the result of disagreement in belief. "Suppose that A and B have convergent attitudes towards the *kind* of thing that X *actually* is, but indicate divergent attitudes to X simply because A has erroneous beliefs about it, whereas B has not. Discussion or inquiry, correcting A's errors, may resolve the disagreement in belief; and this in turn may be sufficient to resolve the disagreement in attitude. X was an occasion for the latter sort of disagreement *only* because it was an occasion for the former" (pp. 5–6). (2) The second kind of ethical disagreement consists of those cases in which the initial disagreement in attitude is ultimately the result of basically divergent attitudes, and which persists even when both parties agree in belief about the nature and consequences of X. For "there may be disagreement in attitude without disagreement in belief. . . . A and B may both believe that X has Q, for instance, and have divergent attitudes to X *on that very account*, A approving of objects that have Q and B disapproving of them" (p. 6). Whether it is of type (1) or type (2), an ethical disagreement, as contrasted with a disagreement in belief, is one that involves an opposition in attitudes.

The role of attitudes in ethical disagreements is reflected in the meaning of ethical statements, which differ from scientific statements in that they "have a meaning that is approximately, and in part, imperative" (p. 26). They are "concerned with *recommending* something for approval or disapproval" (p. 13), and they "are used more for encouraging, altering, or redirecting people's aims and conduct than for simply describing them"

(p. 21). Accordingly, "Any definition which seeks to identify the meaning of ethical terms with that of scientific ones, and does so without further explanation or qualification, is extremely likely to be misleading" (p. 20).

To preserve the quasi-imperative, or emotive, meaning which is an essential feature of ethical terms, Stevenson submits two patterns of analysis for determining what value terms mean as used by various people in various contexts. On the first pattern of analysis, a statement of the form "X is good" strictly designates "I approve of X" and suggests "Do so as well". On the second pattern of analysis, it strictly designates "X has qualities or relations P, Q, R" and suggests "I approve of X; do so as well".

The fact that ethical statements have emotive meaning is advanced by Stevenson to explain an important difference between disagreements in belief and ethical disagreements, namely, that whereas the question which (if either) of two conflicting beliefs is correct can be settled by rational methods, whatever reasons are advanced to support or attack value judgments are "related to them psychologically, rather than logically" (p. 115). The reasons one gives to justify a value judgment "represent efforts to change attitudes, or to strengthen them, by means of altering beliefs. Hence, although the reasons themselves are of an empirical character, and may be rendered probable or improbable by scientific methods, one must not say that they render the ethical judgments 'probable' or 'improbable' in the same sense. They are simply of a sort that may lead one person or another to have altered attitudes in consequence of altered beliefs, and so, thereafter, to make different ethical judgments" (p. 118).

The conceptions of the nature of disagreements in belief, of ethical disagreements, and of how they differ from one another, are of crucial importance for the emotive theory. Stevenson has written, "My methodological conclusions centre less on my conception of meaning than on my conceptions of agreement and disagreement. If the solution of normative issues requires agreement in attitude, if the relation between attitudes and beliefs is causal and possibly subject to individual differences, and if rational methods can affect agreement in attitude only through the indirect method of altering beliefs, then the essential features of my analysis remain intact."[1] I wish, therefore, to comment first of all on the nature of disagreements in belief.

[1] "Meaning: Descriptive and Emotive", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. lvii, No. 2, March, 1948, p. 142.

2. *Disagreements in belief, no less than ethical disagreements, involve questions of appraisal.* If disagreements in belief "require only brief attention", as Stevenson says, it is only because he takes it for granted that when two men differ in opinion about a matter of fact, no question of appraisal is involved. But, I submit, if a difference of opinion is to be an occasion for dispute, it must also be a difference of *appraisals* of opinion. Unless when A asserts p he also suggests that to believe p is "correct", whereas when B denies p he also suggests that to believe p is "incorrect"—unless, in short, A and B disapprove of each other's opinions—they have no reason to argue. As Peirce showed in "The Fixation of Belief", and as Stevenson implies when he says that a disagreement in belief "is concerned with how matters are *truthfully* to be described and explained" (my italics), the real issue between the disputants is, "Which opinion toward p is correct?" And the discussion or inquiry in which they engage when they try to "prove or disprove p" is a process by means of which they endeavour to decide whether belief or disbelief in p is correct.

Suppose A says, "Jones was last in to tea on Sunday", and B replies, "No, he was not". B's utterance not only formulates his disbelief of *Jones being last in to tea on Sunday* but also suggests, among other things, that belief that Jones was last in to tea on Sunday is incorrect. What A and B are trying to do, when "in the course of discussion each tries to give some manner of proof for his view, or revise it in the light of further information", is to justify or rectify their opinions. On a question such as, "Was Jones last in to tea on Sunday?" they would probably have little difficulty in reaching a mutually acceptable decision as to the "true" answer, and therefore as to whether belief ("Yes") or disbelief ("No") was the correct epistemic attitude to have towards the proposition. For both would tacitly follow the same rules of procedure for finding out the answer. Each would search his memory, consult his appointment calendar, get testimony from the maid or from Jones himself, and then, if necessary, would revise his opinion according to what both agree is to be called "the evidence". They can do this because for both of them the correct epistemic attitude to take toward *Jones being last in to tea on Sunday* is that of belief, if the evidence from memory, observation, and testimony renders it probable, and disbelief, if that evidence renders it improbable. In short, both of them regard the same sort of reasons as good reasons for believing or disbelieving that Jones was last in to tea on Sunday.

3. *Disagreements in belief, no less than ethical disagreements, are of two kinds.* This brings us to something else that Stevenson takes for granted, *viz.*, that whenever two people differ in opinion about a matter of fact, they do not disagree about the criteria by appeal to which a rational decision can be reached as to which opinion (if either) is "correct". But disagreements in belief, like what Stevenson calls ethical disagreements, are of two kinds: (1*a*) The first kind consists of those cases in which the parties who disagree both regard the same sort of reasons as good reasons for believing or disbelieving something. A may believe q because he believes p, and that p implies q, while B may disbelieve q because he disbelieves, or is ignorant of, p, or the fact that p implies q. Such disagreements are susceptible of being settled by A and B coming to agree about p and its logical relations to q. They are "merely" disagreements in belief. Thus, A may believe and B may doubt that Leif Ericsson made a voyage to North America because A believes that the Stone Tower at Newport was constructed by Norsemen, whereas B disbelieves that it was. Both are agreed that if it were established that the tower was constructed by Norsemen, this would be a good reason for believing that Ericsson made a voyage to North America. (2*a*) But not all disagreements in belief occur between people who are tacitly agreed as to how the disagreement should be settled. Suppose, for instance, that the question about the correct answer to which A and B disagree is, "What is the nature of light transmission?" And suppose, further, that A, who believes p is the answer, has what he calls the scientific attitude towards this question. What will be the nature of their disagreement if B should contend that A's belief is incorrect, and give as his reason that p is contradicted by something said in the Bible?

The preceding example shows that a disagreement in belief is susceptible of being settled by scientific method, as Stevenson assumes all such disagreements are, if, and only if, the parties who disagree are "scientists": (i) They must acknowledge (at least implicitly) the same set of rules as defining "scientific" method for deciding whether a proposition is probable or improbable, *i.e. ought* or *ought not* to be believed by rational minds; and (ii) they must abide by these rules, in the sense that their beliefs are actually determined by "scientific" reasons, and not merely by causes, such as knowledge that a hypothesis is contradicted by a Biblical text, which are not evidential by the criteria of science. Clearly, if condition (i) is not satisfied, as for instance it very often was not satisfied during the great controversy

over the Darwinian theory, the "proof" or "information" advanced in the course of discussion by either of the disputants may not be accepted by the other as a good reason for regarding his own opinion as incorrect.

Disagreements in belief between disputants who are not agreed about the norms by which the correctness of beliefs is to be judged are rather more common than seems generally acknowledged by writers on the methodology of science. For them, scientific method is *the* method for settling disagreements in belief, and their problem is to explicate the rules which, they presuppose, everybody follows or, if he does not, ought to follow. The intuitionist, the authoritarian, and, as judged by current accounts of Soviet views on genetics, the "Marxist scientists", who violate these rules, are declared to be "unscientific", or "irrational", or "misusing reason". And so they are, as judged by the norms that the one who applies these epithets himself acknowledges as governing "correct" thinking. However, it is not necessary to invoke examples as extreme as those mentioned. It is notorious that disagreements in belief which are rooted in normative disagreements abound in philosophy and in the social sciences. In psychology, the issue between extreme behaviourists and introspectionists is not a "mere" question of fact, but a dispute as to what sort of thing ought to be regarded as fact. And in Tennessee, the state legislature has still not seen fit to acknowledge as "really" correct the scientifically correct theory of evolution.

4. *Disagreements in attitude, like disagreements in belief, presuppose criteria of correctness.* The two sorts of disagreement in belief are the exact analogues of the two sorts of "ethical" disagreement. This can be shown by means of one of the examples Stevenson gives of ethical disagreement:

> The trustees for the estate of a philanthropist have been instructed to forward any charitable cause that seems to them worthy. One suggests that they provide hospital facilities for the poor, the other that they endow universities. They accordingly raise the ethical question as to which cause, under the existing circumstances, is the more worthy. In this case we may naturally assume that the men are unselfish and farsighted, having attitudes that are usually referred to, with praise, as 'moral ideals' or 'altruistic aims' (p. 13).

Stevenson analyses this case as one that involves an initial disagreement in attitude (one man favours establishing hospitals, the other favours endowing universities) which will be resolved when both men share the same attitude:

> Perhaps the men will disagree . . . . about the present state of the poor, and the extent to which hospital facilities are already provided for them. Perhaps they will disagree about the financial state of the universities, or the effects of education on private and social life. . . . If the men come to agree in belief about all the factual matters they have considered, and if they continue to have divergent aims in spite of this—one still favouring the hospitals and the other the universities—they will still have an ethical issue that is unresolved. But if they come to agree, for instance, in favouring the universities—they will have brought their ethical issue to an end; and this will be so even though various beliefs, such as those about certain social effects of education, still remain debatable (p. 14).

This way of putting the matter conceals the real nature of the disagreement between the trustees. Just as, when two people differ in opinion, the issue between them is, "Which opinion towards *p* is correct?" so, when the trustees disagree "as to which cause, under the existing circumstances, is the more worthy", the issue between them, if interpreted as a disagreement in attitude, is, "What attitude towards each of the alternatives is correct?" Now on the assumption that the trustees share the *same* moral ideals and altruistic aims and that they are unselfish and farsighted, their disagreement is *ex hypothesi* the analogue of (1*a*), above. For both of them regard the same sort of reasons as good reasons for favouring or disfavouring a proposed course of action. They mean the same thing by "worthy", in the sense that if both were agreed as to the consequences of providing hospital facilities for the poor and of endowing a university, they would agree on which of these alternatives is the more worthy, and therefore to be *correctly* favoured. Their disagreement in attitude is susceptible of being settled by rational means because (i) both appeal to the same norms when they try to decide whether providing hospital facilities or endowing a university is the more worthy, *i.e.* ought to be favoured by persons with their "moral ideals and altruistic aims"; and (ii) both, since they are "unselfish and farsighted", will presumably actually favour the alternative they believe is the more worthy.

We can turn this disagreement into the analogue of (2*a*), above, by negating the hypothesis concerning the trustees' moral ideals. Suppose that one of them is an altruist and the other a disciple of Nietzsche. Then the altruist might prefer providing hospital facilities for the poor to endowing a university, "because it would result in the greatest good for the greatest number", and the Nietzschean might favour endowing the university, "because men are not equal, and those intelligent enough to go to a university are intrinsically more important

than the poor". Neither would accept the reason of the other as a good reason for regarding his own attitude as incorrect.

In the light of these considerations, it is clear that with respect to what must be presupposed if the disagreement is to be susceptible of being settled by rational means, a disagreement in belief and a disagreement in attitude are not different, but alike. If this is so, Stevenson's conclusions concerning the manner in which disagreements are settled are on the one hand too sweeping, and on the other not sweeping enough. They are too sweeping because, when a disagreement in attitude arises between people who implicitly acknowledge the same standards of value, discussion and inquiry can in principle at least disclose whose attitude, if either's, is correct, as defined by the mutually accepted standards of correctness. And they are not sweeping enough because, when a disagreement in belief arises between people who do not ultimately abide by the same rules for acquiring and rectifying beliefs, rhetoric, and not logic, will settle their disagreement, if it is to be settled by discussion at all. In a disagreement of this kind, the statement, "You are unscientific", is no less emotive than, in its counterpart in morals, is the statement, "You are immoral".

The analogy between disagreements in attitude and disagreements in belief can profitably be pushed further. Let us notice that a disagreement in belief is not a logical relation between *propositions*, such as the relation of contradiction between p and not-p. It is a relation between epistemic attitudes; a disagreement in belief is a difference of opinion. (I use "opinion" to refer to, indifferently, beliefs or disbeliefs.) Nor is the disagreement, in Stevenson's sense, the relation that may obtain between opinions and facts, by virtue of which whenever an opinion is in disagreement (in some sense) with a fact it is erroneous. It is, once more, a relation between opinions, and it may hold as well between two erroneous opinions as between one that is erroneous and one that is sound. Similarly, two opinions may be in agreement with each other, yet both be erroneous, because neither "agrees" with fact. It follows that when A and B settle a difference of opinion, in the sense that whereas prior to discussion A believed p and B disbelieved p, after discussion they both believe p, their agreement in belief is not a sufficient criterion that they know p to be true. For p may be false.

Let us now ask: What is the aim of inquiry? Shall we take Peirce's dictum literally and say that "the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion"? Or shall we qualify it, as Peirce

himself did, so that the aim of inquiry (as opposed to that of persuasion, for example) is conceived to be that of bringing about agreement between our opinions and facts ? The latter alternative is the one we adopt. The aim of inquiry is to find the correct opinion. As an inquirer, I desire to know ; my essential aim is to bring my opinion into agreement with fact, not with the opinion of anyone else.

But none of us is merely an inquirer. We are also social animals, who want others to share our knowledge, and who dislike having others disagree with us, not only on important matters, but sometimes on trivial ones as well. Besides, disagreements in belief may be the basis of disagreements about practice. Accordingly, when two people have a difference of opinion, they as often as not will try to eliminate their disagreement. There are all kinds of ways in which this might be attempted. For instance, A might hypnotize B, and suggest that B share his opinion. Or, A might administer a belief-inducing drug to B, as when insulin is given to a man who is believed to be really John Doe, but who believes himself to be Napoleon. Or, lacking hypnotic powers or appropriate drugs, A might try to change B's opinion by eloquence, or by exciting his passions. None of these methods is a rational method for settling a difference of opinion, however effective it may be in causing agreement of opinion, because in none of them is the cause of B's belief a reason for his belief. However, the fact that such methods often are effective in inducing belief, whereas the methods we call scientific are often ineffective, sometimes even when used upon scientists, permits us to conclude that the relation between the epistemic attitude of belief and its supporting reasons is not logical, but psychological, in precisely the same sense that, according to Stevenson, the relation between reasons and attitudes is not logical, but psychological. It does not, however, permit us to conclude that there is no *difference* between a mere cause of belief and a reason for belief, nor between a rational man, whose beliefs are caused by his consideration of reasons, and an irrational man, whose beliefs are determined not by consideration of reasons, but by other causes. Nor, on analogous grounds, can we conclude that there is no difference between mere causes of attitudes and reasons for attitudes, and between wise men and fools.

5. *Stevenson's first pattern of analysis is defective because it arbitrarily ignores the distinctions just made.* Stevenson does not doubt the validity of the distinction between rational and irrational beliefs. But despite his claim that he seeks to free the emotive theory " from any seeming cynicism ", the effect of his

analysis is to dissolve the analogous distinction between rational and irrational attitudes. In the many cases of ethical disagreement which he discusses, the disputants never attempt to discover whose attitude, if either's, is correct, so that their disagreement can be settled in the sense that both parties come to share an attitude they judge to be correct. Rather, whatever procedures they use to resolve their disagreement are interpreted as being, if not conscious, then unconscious, efforts merely to *change*, not *rectify*, attitudes. On Stevenson's view, an ethical disagreement is "settled" if and when the disputants come to agree in attitude, and there is no consideration whatever given to the possibility that their attitudes may nonetheless be incorrect, in the obvious sense in which people are said to have incorrectly favoured something when they have purchased inferior merchandise, entered upon unrewarding careers, or made unhappy marriages. On the contrary, one of the paradoxes of Stevenson's theory is that attitudes are never, even in this simple sense, incorrect.

This is perfectly clear on the first pattern of analysis. If at time t_1 A asserts, "X is good", and at a later time t_2, as a consequence of discussion and inquiry, he asserts, "No, X is bad", he has not discovered reasons for supposing himself to have been mistaken at t_1. For, on the first pattern, at t_1 A asserted, "I (now) approve of X", then was caused to undergo a change in attitude, and at t_2 asserted, "I (now) disapprove of X", and the judgment made at t_2 does not contradict the judgment made at t_1. In commenting on this analysis, G. E. Moore wrote that he thinks Stevenson's view *may* be true, and that he has some inclination to think that it *is* true. "And, going far beyond Mr. Stevenson's cautious assertion, I have a very strong inclination to think that, *if* there is at least *one* 'typically ethical' sense of which these things are true, then of *all* 'typically ethical' senses these things are true."[1]

I submit that if one reflects on the concrete cases to which this analysis allegedly applies, it is plainly seen to be false. Suppose that X is a bottle of wine, which at t_1 I judge to be good and purchase. In the evening I taste it and discover that it is sour. As a result, at t_2 I judge that the wine is bad. This judgment is not merely "different" from my judgment at t_1; it is the *correct* judgment as to the value of the wine. And my tasting the wine has not merely "altered" my attitude toward the wine; it has *rectified* it. This seems to me so very plain that

[1] *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, pp. 544-545.

I wonder why it is ever denied. Perhaps one reason is that those who do deny it think that the possibility of my making correct or incorrect judgments as to the value of the wine, and of having correct or incorrect attitudes towards it, presupposes that my taste in wine is universally shared. It does not. My evaluation of, and attitudes towards, wine are correct or incorrect relatively to my standards of the value of wine. If my standards are not the *same* as someone else's, this does not mean that I have *no* standards, so that whatever I judge good *is* good, or that whatever I favour I *ought* to favour. If, when I desired wine, I approved the purchase of what is really vinegar, there is no doubt whatever that I made a mistake. The fact that someone else might approve of my buying vinegar instead of wine, and that I may not be able to convince him that my misfortune *was* a misfortune, has no bearing on the question under discussion—whether value judgments can be correct and incorrect. That there are all sorts of difficulties which stand in the way of giving a satisfactory analysis of the sense in which the judgment that was made at t_1 is incorrect, I grant. However, that this judgment *is* incorrect, and *is* contradicted by the one made at t_2, are data which, it seems to me, a theory of such judgments should account for, and not explain away as illusory.

If we try to remain as close as possible to Stevenson's view, and yet hold fast to data, a possible analysis is that when, at t_1, I assert, " The wine is good ", I am not merely expressing my approval of the liquid denoted by "wine", but am really formulating a *judgment* that the wine is actually of a kind I approve of. " Wine " here is used indicatively. It means " the liquid in this bottle ", without implying either that it is spoiled or unspoiled. What I judge about the subject " wine " is that it has certain characters, among them that of being unspoiled, that I approve of. Since it does not really have these characters, my judgment that it does have them is incorrect.

To forestall the possible objection that my example of the wine is trivial or atypical, let us choose one of Stevenson's own. He writes :

> *Group II.* In this group and those that follow, an ethical judgment is supported or attacked by reasons that are psychologically related to it. . . . They are simply of a sort that may lead one person or another to have altered attitudes in consequence of altered beliefs and so, thereafter, to make different ethical judgments.
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> (5) A : The proposed tax bill is on the whole very bad.
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> B : I know little about it, but have been inclined to favour it on the ground that higher taxes are preferable to further borrowing.

> A : It provides for a sales-tax on a number of necessities, and reduces income-tax exemption to an incredibly low figure.
> B : I had not realized that. I must study the bill, and perhaps I shall agree with you in opposing it.
>
> A has supported his ethical judgment by pointing out to B the *nature* of that which is judged. Since B is predisposed to oppose anything of that nature, he shows his willingness to change his attitude, unless, perhaps, further study will disclose matters that weigh the balance to the other side. If B were not a person predisposed to disapprove of the provisions mentioned, however, he would find A's reasons unconvincing, and the argument would probably lead to a discussion of whether these provisions are good or bad (pp. 118-119).

The words "the proposed tax bill" and "it", as used by A and B, have on Stevenson's analysis a purely denotative function. They serve to orient both speakers toward the same object without specifying what sort of object it is. But it is clear that *what* A disapproves of when he disapproves of "the proposed tax bill" is "the bill which provides for a sales-tax on a number of necessities and reduces income-tax exemption to an incredibly low figure", and which, as Stevenson's amplifying example (6) shows, "will put a great burden on the poor, and make little difference to the rich" (p. 119). B does not favour *this* bill. "The proposed tax bill" he does approve of is "the bill which by providing for higher taxes would eliminate the need for further borrowing, and which does *not* do this by providing for a sales-tax etc." Stevenson contends that we must not say of such a case that the disagreement in attitude is "apparent" only, because if "the same X could be *recognized* by both parties regardless of their divergent beliefs about it, then the latter idiom (*i.e.* that the disagreement in attitude is only apparent) would be seriously misleading. One man was definitely striving for X, and the other definitely striving to oppose it; and if this involved ignorance, where one of the men was acting to defeat his broader aims, it remains altogether appropriate to say that the initial divergence in attitude, so far as X was concerned, was genuine" (p. 6).

Nonetheless, if B is predisposed to *dis*favour what "X" *actually* is, must it not be granted that his favouring *it*, when he mistakenly supposes himself to be favouring something different, is incorrect? And must it not also be granted that his judgment that the *actual* "X" is good is erroneous, as he discovers when he acquires correct beliefs about "X"? And further, must it not be granted that when A points out to B the actual nature of the proposed tax bill, he not only alters B's attitude but rectifies it, and that the reasons he gives to support his judgment that the bill is "on the whole very bad" are rightly accepted by

B, who by hypothesis is predisposed to favour the same sort of tax bills as A, as good *reasons ?*

If the foregoing contentions are not admitted as being obvious, which they seem to me to be, and as they seem to the ordinary man who says, " All that glitters is not gold ", I offer two arguments to support them. The first is to the effect that most, and I suspect all, of the cases classified in Chapter V of *Ethics and Language* as being cases in which value judgments are not logically supported by reasons are really of the same sort as those which are classified in " Group I ", of which Stevenson says : " The examples in this group illustrate some of the ways in which ethical methods resemble factual ones. They present *exceptions* to the rough but useful rule mentioned previously—the rule that ethical judgments are supported or attacked by reasons related to them psychologically, rather than logically " (p. 115). The first two cases in this group are the following :

> (1) A : It would be a good thing to have a dole for the unemployed
> B : But you have just said that a dole would weaken people's sense of independence, and you have admitted that *nothing* which has that consequence is good.
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> Here B attacks A's position by pointing out a formal inconsistency. . . .
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> (2) A : It is always wrong to break a promise.
> B : You speak without thinking. There are many cases of that sort which you regard without the least disapproval.
>
> B's reply is an empirical assertion, but note that it contradicts A's judgment (by the first pattern only, of course) and so is logically related to it. A must, in the interest of consistency, either reject B's assertion or give up his ethical judgment (pp. 115-116).

The logic of the cases in this group can be made more clearly apparent by the following :

A : I disapprove of X.
B : No, you do not disapprove of X. X is of kind K, and you approve of whatever is of kind K.

It is identical with the logic of the case in which A and B disagree about the value of the tax bill :

B : I approve of the proposed tax bill.
A : No, you do not approve of it. It provides for a sales tax and reduces income tax exemptions, and if enacted it would put a burden on the poor and make little difference to the rich, of which you disapprove. So it is actually the kind of bill you disapprove of.

My second argument is to the effect that while cases (1) and (2) *are* genuine exceptions to the " rule " that value judgments are

not supported or attacked by reasons related to them logically, it is inconsistent of Stevenson to admit it. In case (2) Stevenson makes B understand A's assertion, "It is always wrong to break a promise", to mean, "I always disapprove of promise-breaking". But the correct first pattern analysis is, "I (now) disapprove of all promise-breaking". He says, "The tense of the verb indicates the time element of that which is judged, rather than that of the speaker's attitudes" (p. 93). (*Cf.* also pp. 165-168.) If what "X is good" really designates is "I (now) approve of X", then the only genuine exceptions to Stevenson's "rule" would be cases analysable as follows:

A (at time t_1): I now approve of X.
B (at time t_2): No. You did not approve of X at time t_1. Were you not guilty of faulty introspection?

I conclude that the descriptive meaning of statements of the form "X is good", where "X" stands for some actual object and not a concept, cannot be analysed into statements of the form "I approve of X". I suggest, without desiring to put forward an alternative theory of my own, that statements of this form can more plausibly be explained as statements which formulate judgments to the effect that X has certain characters *p*, *q*, *r*, by virtue of which it is approved of. This view at least puts us on the road to understanding how we can sometimes be mistaken in our evaluations, and in what sense we sometimes have inappropriate attitudes towards objects. If X does not really have certain characters, we are mistaken when we judge that it does have them. And if we approve or disapprove of X by virtue of our imputing to it characters it does not have, our attitude is incorrect, or at the most only accidentally correct, in the sense in which a mere belief as contrasted with knowledge might be accidentally correct. This view preserves, moreover, the distinction between wisdom and folly, the baby that Stevenson, in his anxiety to show that ethical disagreements of type (2) are irreconcilable by rational methods, threw out with the bath water.

6. *Both the first and second patterns of analysis seem plausible only if the difference between "statements" and "judgments" is ignored.* If it be objected that all that is proposed in my suggested analysis is provided for by Stevenson's second pattern of analysis, I reply: (*a*) If the second pattern really does differ from the first, Stevenson at any rate does not think so. He says, "It has been remarked that the second pattern differs from the first in its external aspects alone. The old factors have only to be recognized in their new form. In the present chapter this

contention will be established in detail, with particular attention to methodology. It will be shown that our previous conclusions, as developed for the first pattern, can be extended to the second without essential change" (p. 227).

(*b*) According to the second pattern (as well as the first), what is analysed is not a judgment but an *utterance*. My utterance "The wine is good", on the second pattern, designates that the wine has certain characters, and suggests, "I approve of the wine; do so likewise". What I contend is that the utterance formulates a judgment as to the value of the wine, just as the utterance "The wine is red" formulates a judgment as to the colour of the wine. The point to be emphasized is that "making a judgment" is not synonymous with "uttering a statement". A judgment, which is a mental act by which a predicate is ascribed to a subject, does not suggest anything to anybody, although the sentence which formulates the judgment may suggest a great deal. And one may judge that the wine is good, just as one may judge that the wine is red, without uttering the sentence which formulates the judgment, even to oneself. Furthermore, questions of intent to deceive and so on aside, one would not utter the sentence "The wine is good" unless one had judged that the wine is good.

(*c*) Judging the value of something, once the above distinction is made, does not consist in "recommending it for someone's approval or disapproval", nor of "encouraging, altering, or redirecting people's aims and conduct". We do these things not by making judgments but by making statements, assuming that we are limiting ourselves to merely verbal techniques. Now we would not make statements regarding the value of things unless we had first made the judgments. One recommends something that one has judged to be worthy of recommendation; and to judge something to be worthy of recommendation is not actually to recommend it. Once this distinction is granted, one of the main props for the emotive theory falls to the ground. For, it seems to me, it conclusively disposes of such arguments as Stevenson's argument from "ethical judgments and avoidability". This argument is as follows:

After saying, "In evaluating conduct people usually limit their judgments to actions which they consider *avoidable*, or subject to voluntary control" (p. 298), Stevenson asks, "Why is the statement, 'A's action was unavoidable', so frequently accepted as a reason for withdrawing an ethical judgment of A's action?" (pp. 301-302). His answer is that "our main purpose in judging an action is to control it, or to control a future one that is like it"

(p. 304). "We tell a man that he ought not to steal in order to keep him from stealing. . . . Our motive is much the same when we make ethical judgments of something which has already been done. If the man has stolen something, we tell him that he ought not to have done so. . . . We are trying to prevent similar actions in the future" (p. 302). Since only actions dependent on the agent's choice can be influenced in this way, we do not evaluate actions which are unavoidable, *i.e.* involuntary.

In short, for Stevenson moral judgments are instruments for rewarding and punishing agents, so as to encourage or discourage the occurrence of the types of actions judged, and they will fulfil their purpose only in so far as the actions are subject to the agent's control, and the agent himself is susceptible of being altered by them. If the actions are unavoidable, or if the agents are immune to criticism, the judgments are pointless, or merely retributive. Stevenson acknowledges the similarity between this view and the corrective theory of punishment. He says (his italics) that "although the relation between avoidability and *ethical judgments* has never (to the writer's knowledge) been analysed in quite the present way, a parallel analysis has repeatedly been given with regard to avoidability and *punishment*. Reformative and preventive theories have long made clear that punishment of unavoidable acts would fail to serve an important purpose. All that has been overlooked is that ethical judgments, being quasi-imperative, have also a reformative and preventive function. Theorists have been blinded to this by their almost incredible overemphasis on the cognitive aspects of language" (pp. 306-307).

I submit that the blindness of theorists to the quasi-imperative nature of ethical judgments may have been due to their observance of the distinction between judging the value of actions or agents and uttering the words which formulate judgments. We may judge that an agent who did A when, we believe, he could have done B had he chosen to do so, acted wrongly, *i.e.* chose the worse action instead of the better. We might never express the judgment, to the agent or to anyone else. However, if we wish to punish the agent, or to influence his future actions, and think that our words will be effective to this end, we may say to him, "You ought not to have done A". If he should then show us that his action was unavoidable, we would revise our judgment that he had acted wrongly, not because *it* can have no influence over his future conduct, but because we have learned that it is erroneous. The statement, "A was unavoidable", formulates a genuine reason for rejecting the judgment, "A was (morally) wrong",

because the predicate "(morally) wrong" cannot congruously be applied to involuntary acts.

Consider another of Stevenson's examples:

> A: You ought to give the speech as you promised.
> B: That is unfortunately beyond my power. My health will not permit it.
>
> This example deals with the consequences of a judgment's *influence*. A is endeavouring to influence B to give the speech. If B's reply is true, then whatever influence A's judgment may have on attitudes, it will not have the further consequence of making B speak. Realizing this, A will be likely to withdraw his judgment; he sees that it cannot have its intended effect (p. 126).

What are we to say of this commentary? I venture to observe only this: If A revises his *judgment* that it is B's duty to give the speech, is is not because he realizes that it is useless to try to make B speak, but because he realizes that it is not B's duty to give the speech. Presumably, B did not promise, "I will speak even though my health will not permit it".

Brown University, Rhode Island.