CHAPTER SEVEN

MacIntyre and the Emotivists

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"Do this, because it will bring you happiness"; "Do this because God enjoins it as the way to happiness"; "Do this because God enjoins it"; "Do this." These are the four stages in the development of autonomous morality.

—Alasdair MacIntyre, "Notes from the Moral Wilderness II"

Emotivism looms large in Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*.[1] Chapters 2 and 3—the first two real chapters of the book, after the preliminary disquieting suggestion—are directly concerned with emotivism, as the chapter titles indicate: "The Nature of Moral Disagreement Today and the Claims of Emotivism" and "Emotivism: Social Content and Social Context." MacIntyre's declaration in the first of these two chapters that "it is indeed in terms of a confrontation with emotivism that my own thesis must be defined" has prompted at least one commentator to claim that "the core of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* is an attack on emotivism."[2]

That MacIntyre is preoccupied with the metaethical theory of emotivism in *After Virtue* comes as no surprise to those who are familiar with his intellectual biography.[3] MacIntyre completed a bachelor's degree in

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classics at Queen Mary College in the University of London between 1945 and 1949. While he was there, "from 1947 onwards, [he] occasionally attend[ed] lectures by A. J. Ayer or Karl Popper, or by visiting speakers to Ayer's seminar at University College [London], such as John Wisdom," after Ayer had become Grote Professor of the Philosophy of Mind and Logic at University College London in 1946 (see chapter 1). Indeed, as MacIntyre tell us, "Early on I had read *Language, Truth and Logic*, and Ayer's student James Thomson introduced me to the *Tractatus* and to Tarski's work on truth. Ayer and his students were exemplary in their clarity and rigor and in the philosophical excitement that their debates generated" (see chapter 1). After graduating from Queen Mary College, MacIntyre went to Manchester University, where he wrote a master's thesis on the subject of metaethics, entitled *The Significance of Moral Judgments*, in 1951.[4] MacIntyre's very first work in philosophy, therefore, was devoted to criticizing emotivism (and the intuitionism that inspired it). In the years that immediately followed, he published a number of articles on metaethics, including "What Morality Is Not" (1957), "Notes from the Moral Wilderness I" (1958), "Notes from the Moral Wilderness II" (1959), "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought'" (1959), and "Imperatives, Reasons for Action, and Morals" (1965), in addition to his introduction to *Hume's Ethical Writings* (1965) and "Modern Moral Philosophy," the final chapter of *A Short History of Ethics* (1966).

In this essay I will provide an account of emotivism and its history and will examine MacIntyre's critique of it, according to which emotivism fails, both as an account of the meaning of moral judgment and as an account of the function of moral judgment. In part, this will serve as a defense of MacIntyre's critique against the charge that he has provided "interpretations of Stevenson and emotivism that are plainly travesties."[5] However, my concern is not to defend his critique from those contemporary critics who would seek to argue in favor of some form of emotivism.[6] My concern is to show that what is important about MacIntyre's critique is what it reveals about the historical degeneration of moral judgment. On this account, the fact/value distinction on which emotivism is premised is not a timeless truth but the result of the "Enlightenment Project." It was this historical turn that led to the degeneration of moral judgment. Moral judgment reached its nadir in the metaethical theory that is emotivism.

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Principia Ethica

As MacIntyre says in *After Virtue,* "It is only in [the twentieth] century that emotivism has flourished as a theory on its own. . . . It did so as a response to a set of theories which flourished, especially in England, between 1903 and 1939."[7] The year 1903 was when G. E. Moore's "quietly apocalyptic" first book on consequentialist axiological intuitionism, *Principia Ethica,* was published,[8] and 1939 was the year of the publication of W. D. Ross's last book on deontological intuitionism, *Foundations of Ethics*.[9] Emotivism, then, was a response to the two forms of intuitionism that flourished in England at this time, at Cambridge (Moore) and at Oxford (H. A. Prichard and Ross). It was, however, especially a response to Moore.[10]

Moore was a moral cognitivist.[11] He held that a moral judgment expresses a *belief.* Since beliefs are capable of being true, it follows that moral judgments are capable of being true. Moore was also a moral realist. He held that moral properties *exist* and that they *make* certain moral judgments *true*.[12] Finally, Moore was a moral non-naturalist.[13] He held that moral properties are not natural properties or supernatural properties, and furthermore that they cannot be reduced to natural or supernatural properties.[14] As MacIntyre says in *A Short History of Ethics,* although Moore gave the name of the "naturalistic fallacy" to what he considered the error of believing that the moral properties (or qualities) that are denoted by moral expressions ("that quality which we assert to belong to a thing, when we say that the thing is good") either *are* natural or supernatural properties, or *can be reduced to* such properties, Moore could just as easily have called the supposed error the "supernaturalistic fallacy":[15]

> To the doctrine that good was the name of a natural property Moore gave the name "the naturalistic fallacy." For Moore this fallacy is committed in the course of any attempt to treat *good* as the name of a property identifiable under any other description. *Good* cannot mean "commanded by God," any more than it can mean *pleasant,* and for the same reasons the expression "the naturalistic fallacy" has since been adopted by the adherents of the view that one cannot logically derive an *ought* from an *is;* but although this latter doctrine is a consequence of Moore's, it is not identical with it.[16]

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According to Moore, moral properties are non-natural, nonsupernatural properties that are not part of the causal order; they are *sui generis,* simple, and intrinsic, hence indefinable and unanalyzable.[17] These moral properties, it seems, supervene on natural properties, without being reducible to them.[18] These moral properties are apprehended by means of a nonsensible intuition. In particular, the moral property of goodness, it seems, supervenes on the natural properties that constitute "certain states of consciousness," such as "personal affection and the appreciation of what is beautiful"[19]—as for example, he suggests years later in his *Ethics,* "the state of mind . . . of a man who is fully realizing all that is exquisite in the tragedy of King Lear"[20]—and we apprehend this moral property of goodness nonsensibly. As MacIntyre has pointed out, "The values which Moore exalts belong to the realm of private rather than public life; and, supremely important as they all are, they exclude all the values connected with intellectual inquiry and with work. Moore's values are those of a protected leisure."[21]

In the *Short History,* MacIntyre makes two objections to Moore's intuitionism. The first is that Moore provides no account of how it is that we apprehend the moral property of goodness ("The only answer Moore offers is that we just do");[22] hence, his account stands in need of "an account of how the meaning of good is learned, and an account of the relation between learning it in connection with some cases, and knowing how to apply it in others."[23] The second objection, one very similar to that made by G. C. Field, and P. H. Nowell-Smith, is that Moore's account of the moral property of goodness fails to explain how it provides us with any "reason for action":[24] "Moore's account leaves it entirely unexplained and inexplicable why something's being good should ever furnish us with a reason for action. . . . Any account of good that is to be adequate must connect it intimately with action, and explain why to call something good is always to provide a reason for acting in respect of it in one way rather than another."[25] As William K. Frankena has pointed out, this kind of objection to Moore trades on an ambiguity in "reason for action," since this can be understood either motivationally or normatively.[26] It may be true that, on Moore's account, something's being good does not necessarily motivate us to act, in the sense of moving us (even only somewhat) to act. Crudely put, it may not satisfy any desire or interest we have. This is what makes Moore a true motivational externalist.[27] However, it may still be true that something's being good is an "intrinsically normative" fact about

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it,[28] and hence that it does provide us with a reason to act, in the sense that we ought to pursue or promote it, regardless of whether that would satisfy any desire or interest we have. Nevertheless, if this is the case, then Moore must provide an account of how anything can be reason-giving in a way that does not connect with desires or interests. To invoke Mackie's argument from (metaphysical) "queerness" on MacIntyre's behalf: "An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it. . . . If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe."[29]

In *The Significance of Moral Judgments,* MacIntyre advances a third objection. If our nonsensible intuition of goodness is infallible, then this fails to explain why there exists moral disagreement, and if it is fallible, then our nonsensible intuition may be mistaken about goodness.[30] Since Moore cannot allow that our nonsensible intuition about goodness may be mistaken, he must argue that "moral disagreement" is not, in fact, disagreement about goodness. On Moore's account, there can be no genuine moral disagreement and no genuine moral argument. Instead, all putative moral disagreement is disagreement about the nonmoral natural facts. Hence, in the case of a putative moral disagreement, which is actually a case of natural factual disagreement, the task is to get the other person to fully appreciate the natural facts of the situation, real or imagined. Only then will he or she have the same moral intuition.[31] As MacIntyre says in *After Virtue*, however, after pointing out that Moore's account of goodness as a non-natural property is "*plainly* false" and that his arguments for his non-naturalism are "*obviously* defective," such attempts to get other people have the same moral intuition as a result of fully appreciating the natural facts of a situation, real or imagined, appear to amount to manipulation by emotion.[32] This much is clear from the reports of Moore's Bloomsbury followers:

> But, of course, as [John Maynard] Keynes tells us, what was really happening was something quite other: "In practice, victory was with those who could speak with the greatest appearance of clear, undoubting conviction and could best use the accents of infallibility" and Keynes goes on to describe the effectiveness of Moore's gasps of incredulity and head-shaking,

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> of [Lytton] Strachey's grim silences and of Lowes Dickinson's shrugs. . . . Keynes himself retrospectively might well have put matters thus: these people take themselves to be identifying the presence of a non-natural property, which they call "good"; but there is in fact no such property and they are doing no more and no other than expressing their feelings and attitudes, disguising the expression of preference and whim by an interpretation of their own utterance and behavior which confers upon it an objectivity that it does not in fact possess.[33]

It was Moorean intuitionism that led to the emotivist theory of ethics. As MacIntyre says: "It is, I take it, no accident that the acutest of the modern founders of emotivism, philosophers such as F. P. Ramsey . . . Austin Duncan-Jones and C. L. Stevenson, were pupils of Moore."[34] There is even more support for this Cantabrigian sociological thesis than MacIntyre suspects. As will be shown, it was the Cambridge duo of C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards who first advanced the emotivist thesis, the thesis that inspired Ramsey, Duncan-Jones, and Stevenson, as well as R. J. Braithwaite and A. J. Ayer.

The Meaning of Meaning

In *Principia Ethica* Moore argues that, "in fact, if it is not the case that 'good' denotes something simple and indefinable, only two alternatives are possible: either that it is a complex, a given whole, about the correct analysis of which there may be disagreement; or else it means nothing at all, and there is no such subject as Ethics."[35] One way of understanding the response to Moore by the emotivists is that they embraced the second alternative: *good* does mean nothing at all, and there is no such subject as ethics. As MacIntyre says in his *Short History,* one explanation of how emotivism originated is to think of the following response to Moore: "But if there is no such property as Moore supposes, then all they can be doing is to express their feelings."[36]

In *The Meaning of Meaning* in 1923, C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards advance a distinction (which is not completely original) between the symbolic, or referential, use of language and the emotive, or nonreferential, use of language.[37] They argue that the use of *good* highlighted by Moore in *Principia Ethica*—the "indefinable 'good'"—is purely emotive and does

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not refer to any property whatsoever.[38] In what has been called their "historic sentence," they say that "this peculiar use of 'good' is, we suggest, a purely emotive use":[39]

> But another use of the word is often asserted to occur . . . where "good" is alleged to stand for a unique, unanalysable concept. This concept, it is said, is the subject-matter of Ethics [there is the footnote reference to Moore's *Principia Ethica*]. This peculiar use of "good" is, we suggest, a purely emotive use. When so used the word stands for nothing whatsoever, and has no symbolic function. Thus, when we so use it in the sentence, "*This* is good," we merely refer to *this*, and the addition of "is good" makes no difference whatsoever to our reference. When on the other hand, we say "*This* is red," the addition of "is red" to "this" does symbolize an extension of our reference, namely, to some other red thing. But "is good" has no comparable *symbolic* function; it serves only as an emotive sign expressing our attitude to *this*, and perhaps evoking similar attitudes in other persons, or inciting them to actions of one kind or another.[40]

Unlike other uses of *good,* which are not purely emotive (e.g., "This is a good sportscar"), the use of *good* in assertions such as "The appreciation of literature is good" is *purely* emotive. It *only* expresses a (positive) attitude and evokes a similar attitude in others or incites them to act in some way. Importantly, Ogden and Richards never spoke of purely emotive *meaning,* only of the purely emotive *use* of language.[41] Nor did they develop a distinct metaethics.[42]

Frank P. Ramsey reviewed *The Meaning of Meaning* when it was published and praised its account of the distinction between the symbolic and emotive functions of language.[43] Some time later he wrote: "Theology and Absolute Ethics are two famous subjects which we have realized to have no real objects."[44] Ogden and Richards's book led another Cambridge philosopher, R. B. Braithwaite, to argue in his paper at a meeting of the Aristotelian Society in 1928, "Verbal Ambiguity and Philosophical Analysis," that most apparent ethical judgments are not "genuine ethical judgments" (i.e., judgments that express propositions) but expressions of emotion:[45]

> A great number of the sentences in which the word "good" occurs are merely noises made either to "purge" an emotion in the speaker or to produce

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> directly a definite action or emotion in the hearer. They do not represent propositions at all: their object is not symbolic, but emotive. . . . These uses of language Messrs. Ogden and Richards call "emotive," and distinguish from the "symbolic" or "scientific" use in the direct expression of a judgment. . . . Now, of course, in any philosophical discussion, including "Prolegomena to any future Ethics that can possibly pretend to be scientific" (which Dr. Moore hoped *Principia Ethica* to be), we are concerned with the "symbolic" or "scientific" or "referential" meaning of sentences, and not at all with their uses as gestures or commands. But since it seems to me clear that our most frequent use of ethical words is only "emotive" so that the sentences in which they occur do not represent propositions at all, it is important in any ethical discussion to emphasize at the outset that the science of ethics has not to analyse all the things that are conveyed by ethical words, but only such as are propositions. Most apparent ethical judgments, on my view, are not judgments at all, but expressions of emotions or volitions.[46]

Moore's student Austin Duncan-Jones wrote a reply to Braithwaite's critique of Moore, entitled "Ethical Words and Ethical Facts," in which he offered, without advocating it, an "out and out naturalism" about ethical judgments, according to which all ethical judgments were "emotive": "It might be said that the only proper use of ethical expressions is to evoke feelings in the hearer or reader . . . that is, they are meaningless. . . . This would I suppose be the most extreme kind of naturalistic theory which could be found. . . . I do not believe in the out and out naturalism which I have described, because I am sure that our ethical expressions are not all meaningless."[47]

Duncan-Jones's "extreme kind of naturalistic theory," according to which "ethical expressions" are all "meaningless," a theory that he himself was not advocating, was given a brilliant summary by another Cambridge philosopher, C. D. Broad, in a talk on Moore at a meeting of the Aristotelian Society in 1934, entitled "Is Goodness the Name of a Simple Non-Natural Quality?":

> We must remember that a sentence, which is grammatically in the indicative mood, may really be in part interjectional or rhetorical or imperative. It may be in part the expression of an emotion which the speaker is feeling. In that case to utter the sentence: "That is good" on a certain occasion might be equivalent to uttering a purely non-ethical sentence in the in-

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> dicative, followed by a certain interjection. It might, e.g., be equivalent to saying: "That's an act of self-sacrifice. Hurrah!" Similarly, to utter the sentence: "That is bad" on a certain occasion might be equivalent to saying: "That's a deliberately misleading statement. Blast!" Again, a sentence may be used partly to evoke a certain kind of emotion in the hearer. In that case to utter the sentence: "That is good" might be equivalent to uttering a purely non-ethical sentence in the indicative in a pleasant tone and with a smile. To utter the sentence: "That is bad," might be equivalent to shouting a purely non-ethical indicative sentence at the hearer with a frown. Here the use of the ethical words "good" and "bad" is merely a stimulus to produce certain emotions in the hearer, as smiling at him or shouting at him might do. In this case the sentence might be called "rhetorical." Lastly, such sentences may be used to command or to forbid certain actions in the hearer. To utter the sentence: "That is good" might be equivalent to uttering a purely non-ethical indicative sentence followed by a sentence in the imperative. It might, e.g., be equivalent on a certain occasion to: "That's an act of self-sacrifice. Imitate it!" To utter the sentence: "That is bad" on a certain occasion might be equivalent to saying: "That's a deliberately misleading statement. Don't do that again!" . . . It seems to me then that Mr. Duncan Jones's *[sic]* theory is quite plausible enough to deserve very serious consideration. It would have to be refuted before we could be sure that the question: "Are the characteristics denoted by ethical names analysable or unanalysable?" is a sensible question. If this theory were correct the question would be like asking whether unicorns are or are not cloven-hoofed.[48]

This theory would find a true believer in A. J. Ayer.[49] Indeed, Ayer's emotivism would come to be known as the "'Boo-Hurrah Theory' of ethics," almost certainly not because of anything that Ayer wrote, but because of the summary of Duncan-Jones's alternative in this article by Broad (although it seems that it should have been called the "Blast-Hurrah Theory"). It was Ayer who was quite happy to consider Moore's non-natural moral properties as unreal as unicorns.[50]

Language, Truth and Logic

Ayer had accepted Moore's non-naturalistic moral realism in his youth. However, while still an undergraduate at Oxford he came to reject it,[51]

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and after embracing logical positivism in the 1930s he argued for the antirealist emotivist theory of ethics in the sixth chapter of his logical positivist tract *Language, Truth and Logic*.[52] Nevertheless in his book he borrows Moore's own arguments against naturalism in order to reject "the 'naturalistic' theories" (157) of ethics that attempt to translate or reduce "statements of ethical value . . . into statements of empirical fact" (152).

Ayer noted years later that his main concern in the infamous chapter 6, "Critique of Ethics and Theology," was simply to accommodate ethical judgments in his logical positivism. Emotivism is certainly not entailed by logical positivism. Some logical positivists—such as Moritz Schlick, Otto Neurath, and Karl Menger—embraced a naturalist metaethic. Ayer's emotivism was due to two Cambridge influences: Ogden and Richards's *The Meaning of Meaning,* and Austin Duncan-Jones. Ayer acknowledged the latter's influence years later in his autobiography: "Digressing next to ethics, I put forward the view which had been suggested to me by Duncan-Jones that moral pronouncements were expressions of emotion rather than statements of fact, and for good measure I added a short 'Critique of Theology,' in which I maintained that statements purporting to refer to a transcendent deity were literally nonsensical. This chapter, which was peripheral to the main tenor of the book, was the one that aroused the greatest animosity."[53] Later Ayer would acknowledge only the influence of Ogden and Richards:[54]

> The emotive theory which I put in its place was not my own invention. I was reminded quite recently that it had been advocated by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards in their book *The Meaning of Meaning,* which was published as early as 1923. Since I made no acknowledgment to them, this is a fact that I must have forgotten when I espoused the theory, though I was aware that the use by myself and others of the word "emotive" to cover the aspects of meaning that were not "literal," in the sense of issuing in truth or falsehood, was due to them.[55]

Though it was only an accommodation, and though the idea was taken from Ogden and Richards and Duncan-Jones, Ayer can nevertheless be credited with advancing the first comprehensive emotivist theory of ethics. Furthermore, as early as the second edition of *Language, Truth and Logic* in 1946, Ayer insisted that the emotivist theory was independently valid: "I was concerned with maintaining the general consistency of my

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position; but it is not the only ethical theory that would have satisfied this requirement, nor does it actually entail any of the non-ethical statements which form the remainder of my argument. Consequently, even if it could be shown that these other statements were invalid, this would not in itself refute the emotive analysis of ethical judgments; and in fact I believe this analysis to be valid on its own account."[56]

The argument of *Language, Truth and Logic* is that there are only two kinds of propositions that are genuine propositions, that is, that are capable of being true or false: analytic propositions and synthetic propositions. Furthermore, only genuine propositions are literally meaningful. Hence, there are only two kinds of statements or judgments that are capable of being true or false, and that are literally meaningful: statements or judgments that express analytic propositions (i.e., tautologies) and statements or judgments that express synthetic empirical hypotheses (i.e., empirical hypotheses). This is Ayer's logical positivism. It rules out Moore's non-natural (and nonsupernatural) moral realism, since on Moore's account moral statements or judgments are "genuine synthetic propositions" (157) and yet are not empirical hypotheses:

> In admitting that normative ethical concepts are irreducible to empirical concepts, we seem to be leaving the way clear for the "absolutist" view of ethics—that is, the view that statements of value are not controlled by observation, as ordinary empirical propositions are, but only by a mysterious "intellectual intuition." A feature of this theory, which is seldom recognized by its advocates, is that it makes statements of value unverifiable. For it is notorious that what seems intuitively certain to one person may seem doubtful, or even false, to another. So that unless it is possible to provide some criterion by which one may decide between conflicting intuitions, a mere appeal to intuition is worthless as a test of a proposition's validity. . . . But with regard to ethical statements, there is, on the "absolutist" or "intuitionist" theory, no relevant empirical test. We are therefore justified in saying that on this ethical theory statements are held to be unverifiable . . . it is clear that the acceptance of an "absolutist" theory of ethics would undermine the whole of our main argument. (156–57)

Ayer's "radical naturalism" (157) must somehow accommodate ethics. The first part of his argument for emotivism is that moral statements or

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judgments are not tautologies and are not empirical hypotheses either.[57] In arguing that moral statements or judgments are not empirical hypotheses, Ayer agrees with Moore's critique of naturalism in ethics. Indeed, he uses Moore's "Open Question Argument." This was the argument that "whatever definition be offered" of goodness, "it may be always asked, with significance, of the complex so defined, whether it is itself good."[58] In the case of utilitarianism, Ayer argues that "to call an action right" is not the same as to say that "of all the actions possible in the circumstances it would cause, or be likely to cause, the greatest happiness," because "we find that it is not self-contradictory to say that it is sometimes wrong to perform the action which would actually or probably cause the greatest happiness" (153–54). By *wrong* here Ayer means "morally wrong"; hence, the argument is that saying that an action is morally right or wrong does not have the same meaning as saying that it has the natural property of actually or probably causing the greatest happiness. This is his argument against definitional naturalistic utilitarianism.[59] He uses similar Moorean arguments against two varieties of subjectivism.

Since moral statements or judgments are neither tautologies nor empirical hypotheses, it follows that they cannot be true or false. They are literally meaningless. For this reason, Ayer often places "judgments of value" and "statements of value," in scare quotes: "It will be said that 'statements of value' are genuine propositions" (149); "to give an account of 'judgements of value'" (149).

If that were all that Ayer had to say about moral statements or judgments, then they would be in the same category as metaphysical statements. Metaphysical statements cannot be true or false and are literally meaningless also. However, metaphysical statements differ from moral statements or judgments in an important way. A metaphysical statement, such as a theological statement—"that 'God exists'" (115) or "that 'there is no god'" (115)—is a statement that "purports to express a genuine proposition, but does, in fact, express neither a tautology nor an empirical hypothesis" (31) and hence "is neither true nor false but literally senseless" (12). A moral judgment or statement, by contrast, does not purport to express a genuine proposition. A moral judgment or statement does not purport to be truth-apt or literally meaningful. Hence moral judgments or statements are not like metaphysical statements. While metaphysical statements are failed at-

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tempts at meaningfulness (and so, there is not even an "error theory" of metaphysics, but rather a "meaningless theory" of metaphysics), moral statements or judgments are not even *attempts* at meaningfulness.[60]

Instead, moral judgments purport to be, and are, the expressions of emotions: "'Judgements of value' . . . are not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false" (149–50). Importantly, moral judgments do not "express propositions about the speaker's feelings" (162), that is, they do not "assert the existence of certain feelings" (163), in the matter of a description of the person's emotional state. If they did, then "ethical judgements would clearly be capable of being true or false," since "they would be true if the speaker had the relevant feelings, and false if he did not" (162). Rather, when a person makes a moral judgment, such as "Tolerance is a virtue" (162), the person is evincing emotions, and not stating or judging that she has (certain) emotions: "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" (162).

Moral judgments purport to be, and are, the expressions of particular kinds of emotions, however. The emotions that moral judgments express are *moral* emotions:[61] "For in saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments. And the man who is ostensibly contradicting me is merely expressing his moral sentiments" (159). Ayer uses the expression *moral sentiments* most often to capture the emotions involved, but he also uses the expressions *ethical feeling* (160, 165, 170) and *moral attitude* (166). (He never uses the expression *moral emotion* or *ethical emotion,* presumably because such an expression would be awkward.) Although such moral emotions are clearly to be distinguished from "aesthetic feeling" (170), which is the emotion expressed in aesthetic judgment, the only example of a moral emotion Ayer provides is "moral disapproval" (158, 159, 167) or moral approval. Ayer is not interested in saying anything more about these moral emotions, only commenting that "the further task of describing the different feelings that the different ethical terms are used to express, and the different reactions that they customarily provoke, is a task for the psychologist" (168).

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He must hold, however, that these moral emotions may be distinguished from nonmoral emotions using purely empirical methods in order for his claim to be consistent with his logical positivism.

Strictly speaking, Ayer holds that there are two kinds of moral judgments: particular moral judgments and general moral judgments. A particular moral judgment, such as "You acted wrongly in doing *X*," both expresses an empirical hypothesis ("You did *X*") and expresses a moral emotion—moral disapproval. The empirical hypothesis it expresses is either true or false, and is literally meaningful, whereas the moral emotion it expresses is neither true nor false, and is literally meaningless. A general moral judgment, such as "Doing *X* is wrong," does not express an empirical hypothesis; it merely expresses a moral emotion (moral disapproval) about a class of actions:

> If now I . . . say, "Stealing money is wrong," I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning—that is, expresses no proposition which can be either true or false. It is as if I had written "Stealing money!!—where the shape and thickness of the exclamation marks show, by a suitable convention, that a special sort of moral disapproval is the feeling which is being expressed. It is clear that there is nothing said here which can be true or false. . . . For in saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments (158–59). Even general moral judgments do not only *express* moral emotions, however. Moral judgments are "expressions and excitants of feeling" (163). Hence, moral judgments are "calculated to arouse feeling, and so to stimulate action" (160) in others. A general moral judgment such as "It is your duty to do *X*," for example, both expresses the emotion of moral approval of *X*, and expresses a command to do *X*: "the sentence "It is your duty to tell the truth" may be regarded both as the expression of a certain sort of ethical feeling about truthfulness and as the expression of the command "Tell the truth." (160)

One important entailment of the emotivist theory is "the impossibility of purely ethical arguments" (167), due to the fact that "it is impossible to dispute about questions of value" (164), since moral judgments are the expressions of moral emotions rather than propositions. According to Ayer, there is no moral argument that "does not reduce itself to an ar-

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gument about a question of logic or about an empirical matter of fact" (167). In all moral argument with another person, "we do not attempt to show by our arguments that he has the 'wrong' ethical feeling toward a situation whose nature he has correctly apprehended. What we attempt to show is that he is mistaken about the facts of the case" (165). This is because "argument is possible on moral questions only if some system of values is presupposed" (166–67). If it is the case that "our opponent concurs with us in expressing moral disapproval of all actions of a given type *t,* then we may get him to condemn a particular action A, by bringing forward arguments to show that A is of type *t*. For the question whether A does or does not belong to that type is a question of plain fact" (167). However, if the other person does not express the same moral disapproval of actions of a certain type as we do, then there can be no argument.

> But if our opponent happens to have undergone a different process of moral "conditioning" from ourselves, so that, even when he acknowledges all the facts, he still disagrees with us about the moral value of the actions under discussion, then we abandon the attempt to convince him by argument. We say that it is impossible to argue with him because he has a distorted or undeveloped moral sense; which signifies merely that he employs a different set of values from our own. We feel that our system of values is superior, and therefore speak in derogatory terms of his. But we cannot bring forward any arguments to show that our system is superior. For our judgement that it is so is itself a judgement of value, and accordingly outside the scope of argument. 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. (166)

MacIntyre does not normally single Ayer out for criticism in his critique of emotivism (his target is normally Stevenson, and sometimes Hare). However, there are at least two arguments in his writings that directly concern Ayer's emotivism.[62] The first is what MacIntyre refers to as "the basic weakness of all psychological theories in ethics."[63] According to Ayer, when I make a moral statement or judgment, "I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments" (159). However, according to MacIntyre, what Ayer cannot do is provide an account of what makes this emotion *moral* as opposed to *nonmoral*: "To say that moral judgments express a sentiment or

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feeling is vacuous and unhelpful. Of course they do. But what sentiment or feeling? We can find no useful definition of moral sentiment, except as that sentiment which is bound up with moral judgment. What it is that makes moral judgment and sentiment distinctive, what entitles them to the appellation 'moral,' what their relation is to other kinds of judgment and sentiment—to none of these questions do such theories return an answer."[64] The objection, here, is that emotivism is "opaque" and that lying behind its opacity is circularity:

> One can justifiably complain of the emotive theory not only that it is mistaken, but also that it is opaque. For its proponents seek to elucidate moral expressions in terms of the notions of attitudes and feelings, and it is relevant to ask for further characterization of the attitudes and feelings in question. How, for example, are we to identify these attitudes and feelings so that we may distinguish them from other attitudes and feelings? Emotivist writers are, in fact, largely silent on this point; but the suspicion is strong that they would be compelled to characterize the attitudes and feelings under discussion as just those attitudes and feelings which are given their definitive expression in acts of moral judgment. Yet if this is so, the whole theory is imprisoned in uninformative circularity.[65]

This charge is repeated in *After Virtue:* "'Moral judgments express feelings or attitudes,' it is said. 'What kind of feelings or attitudes?' we ask. 'Feelings or attitudes of approval,' is the reply. 'What kinds of approval?' we ask, perhaps remarking that approval is of many kinds. It is in answer to this question that every version of emotivism either remains silent or, by identifying the relevant kind of approval as moral approval—that is, the type of approval expressed by a specifically moral judgment—become vacuously circular."[66] In Ayer's case, the task of providing an account of what makes moral emotions distinctively moral is especially difficult, given that this must be done in terms of the observable behavior of those who are expressing the moral, as opposed to the nonmoral, emotions. As another commentator has pointed out:

> But are there observable behavioural occurrences which would constitute the expression of this special sort of moral or ethical emotion? It is difficult to see how Ayer could answer this in the affirmative: we can perhaps imag-

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> ine patterns of observable behaviour which would express disapproval, but what observable behaviour could possibly manifest the presence of a distinctively *moral* or *ethical* sort of disapproval? This suggests that if we are to be consistent in our application of the generalized criterion of significance, ethical sentences actually get relegated to the category of nonsense and verbiage along with the sentences of metaphysics.[67]

The second argument that MacIntyre makes directly against Ayer's emotivism concerns the dismissal of both ethical judgments or statements and metaphysical statements—in particular theological statements—as literally meaningless:

> Ayer's critique of intuitionism has quite different roots [from Collingwood's]. In *Language, Truth, [sic] and Logic* he revived some of Hume's positions, but did so in the context of a logical-positivist theory of knowledge. So moral judgments are understood in terms of a threefold classification of judgments: logical, factual, and emotive. In the first class come the truths of logic and mathematics, which are held to be analytic; in the second come the empirically verifiable or falsifiable truths of the sciences and of common-sense knowledge of fact. The third class necessarily appears as a residual category, a rag-bag to which whatever is not logic or science is consigned. Both ethics and theology find themselves in this category, a fact in itself sufficient to make us suspicious of the classification. For on the face of it, statements about the intentions and deeds of an omnipotent being and judgments about duty or about what is good do not obviously belong together.[68]

MacIntyre's objection that theological statements and moral judgments or statements do not appear to "belong together" is correct as far as it goes, since theological statements certainly appear to be more descriptive in nature than moral judgments or statements. However, what this suspicion reveals is a deeper problem with Ayer's analysis. Ayer's basis for distinguishing between the two different kinds of meaninglessness is that a theological statement "purports to express a genuine proposition," whereas a moral judgment or statement does not purport to express a genuine proposition. Surely, however, this is false. Moral judgments or statements *do* purport to express genuine propositions. They *do* purport to be objective. As

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such, it seems, Ayer must classify them with theological statements, by his own argument. He should have simply advanced the "meaningless theory" of ethics. As another commentator has said: "Since Ayer wants to deny that there are objective moral facts, and since our ethical concepts are inherently objectivist, the conclusion he should have reached is that these concepts are defective. In other words, instead of trying to salvage ethics by an emotivist analysis, he should have eliminated ethics altogether, in the way he eliminates metaphysics. He should have classified ethical sentences as assertoric nonsense rather than as expressions of feeling."[69] The failure of Ayer and other emotivists to recognize that moral concepts are inherently objectivist is pointed out by MacIntyre in a criticism aimed in the first instance at Stevenson:

> What he [Stevenson] did not note however—precisely because he viewed emotivism as a theory of meaning—is that the prestige derives from the fact that the use of "That is bad!" implies an appeal to an objective and impersonal standard in a way in which "I disapprove of this; do so as well!" does not. That is, if and insofar as emotivism is true, moral language is seriously misleading and, if and insofar as emotivism is justifiably believed, presumably the use of traditional and inherited moral language ought to be abandoned. This conclusion none of the emotivists drew; and it is clear that, like Stevenson, they failed to draw it because they misconstrued their own theory as a theory of meaning.[70]

As I mentioned, however, MacIntyre does not normally single Ayer out for criticism in his critique of emotivism. That dubious honor is usually reserved for Stevenson.

The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms

J. O. Urmson has said about Charles L. Stevenson that he was "the first emotivist to take ethics seriously, for its own sake, in print."[71] After he finished a BA in English at Yale University in 1930, Stevenson went to Cambridge University "to continue his study of literature, only to be attracted to philosophy by G. E. Moore and Ludwig Wittgenstein. He earned a Cambridge B. A. in philosophy in 1933," before returning to the United

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States to do his PhD in philosophy at Harvard University.[72] It has been said that "the theories of Ayer and Stevenson are independent,"[73] and this is true, although both were inspired by Ogden and Richards. As Stevenson says in 1935 in his doctoral dissertation, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms": "The suggestion came from Ogden and Richards, and from a discussion with Mr. R. B. Braithwaite, of King's College, Cambridge."[74] In his 1937 article, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," which is adapted from a chapter of his dissertation, Stevenson says that when he refers to "'emotive' meaning" he is referring to it "in a sense roughly like that employed by Ogden and Richards," and he footnotes the passage from *The Meaning of Meaning* about the "purely emotive use" of "'good'" by Moore.[75] In his book *Ethics and Language,* in 1944, Stevenson quotes the entire passage from Ogden and Richards before the book's preface.[76] In his 1935 dissertation he also acknowledges Broad's "Is Goodness a Name of a Simple Non-Natural Property?," which contains the summary of Austin Duncan-Jones's proposal, and W. H. F. Barnes's "A Suggestion about Value." About these authors he says, however, "I trust neither Mr. Broad nor Mr. Duncan-Jones are acquainted with the work of Ogden and Richards," and "I am indebted to Mr. Broad and Mr. Barnes not for suggestions, since I did not become acquainted with their articles until quite recently, but wish to express my gratification that others should have come to the same conclusions from apparently different sources."[77]

In "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," Stevenson's concern is to provide a "relevant definition of 'good'" (15).[78] He claims that to be an adequate definition it must meet at least three criteria. First, people must be "able sensibly to *disagree* about whether something is "'good'" (16). That is, an adequate definition of "good" must allow for sensible or "intelligent" (18) disagreement about something's being good. Second, "'goodness' must have, so to speak, a magnetism. A person who recognizes X to be 'good' must *ipso facto* acquire a stronger tendency to act in its favour than he otherwise would have" (16). That is, an adequate definition of *good* must allow for the necessary connection between something's being good and people being motivated to pursue it or promote it.[79] Third, "the 'goodness' of anything must not be verifiable solely by use of the scientific method" (16).[80] Here Stevenson simply invokes Moore's Open Question Argument against a scientific definition of *good:* "Mr. G. E. Moore's familiar objection about the open question is chiefly pertinent in this regard.

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No matter what set of scientifically knowable properties a thing may have (says Moore, in effect), you will find, on careful introspection, that it is an open question to ask whether anything having these properties is *good*" (18). Stevenson's argument is that the adequate account of goodness must not be purely descriptive, since "ethical statements" (18) or "ethical judgments" are made, not to describe, but to influence others: "Doubtless there is always *some* element of description in ethical judgments, but this is by no means all. Their major use is not to indicate facts, but to *create an influence*. Instead of merely describing people's interests, they *change* or *intensify* them" (18). The question this raises, of course, is "How does an ethical sentence acquire its power of influencing people—why it is suited to suggestion?" (20). Stevenson thinks that this power that moral judgments have to influence others comes from the "dynamic" use of words, which have the ability "to give vent to our feelings (interjections), or to create moods (poetry), or to incite people to actions or attitudes (oratory)" (21). Stevenson here distinguishes between use and meaning: "One thing is clear—we must not define 'meaning' in a way that would make meaning vary with dynamic usage" (22).

For Stevenson, "meaning" is to be identified with those "psychological causes and effects" that a word's utterance "has a *tendency* (causal property, dispositional property) to be connected with" (22). The tendency must "exist for all who speak the language; it must be persistent; and must be realizable more or less independently of determinate circumstances attending the word's utterance" (22). He argues that there is one kind of meaning that has an "intimate relation to dynamic usage" (23) of language. This kind of meaning is emotive meaning:

> I refer to "emotive" meaning (in a sense roughly like that employed by Ogden and Richards). The emotive meaning of a word is a tendency of a word, arising through the history of its usage, to produce (result from) *affective* responses in people. It is the immediate aura of feeling which hovers about a word. Such tendencies to produce affective responses cling to words very tenaciously. It would be difficult, for instance, to express merriment by using the interjection "alas." Because of the persistence of such affective tendencies (among other reasons) it becomes feasible to classify them as "meanings." (23)

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Emotive meaning "assists" (24) the dynamic purpose of a moral judgment. *Good* (in general) has "a pleasing emotive meaning which fits it especially for the dynamic use of suggesting favourable interest" (25). Hence " 'This is good' has something like the meaning of 'I *do* like this; do so as well' " (25). In the case where *good* is being used morally, "the ethical sentence differs from an imperative in that it enables one to make changes in a much more subtle, less fully conscious way" (26). The ethical or moral emotive meaning of *good* is not the same as the nonmoral emotive meaning of *good:* "A word must be added about the moral use of 'good.' This differs from the above in that it is about a different kind of interest. Instead of being about what the hearer and speaker *like,* it is about a stronger sort of approval. When a person *likes* something, he is pleased when it prospers, and disappointed when it doesn't. When a person morally approves of something, he experiences a rich feeling of security when it prospers, and is indignant, or 'shocked' when it doesn't" (26). Thus the moral emotive meaning of *good,* for Stevenson, is approximately "I morally approve of this; do so as well."

With this account in mind, Stevenson proceeds to show how his definition of *good* in general—approximately, "I like this; do so as well"—and of moral *good* in particular—approximately, "I morally approve of this; do so as well"—satisfies the three criteria for defining *good.*[81]

With respect to the possibility of intelligent disagreement about what is good, Stevenson first distinguishes between "disagreement in belief" and "disagreement in interest" (27), where "interest" is understood broadly enough to include moral approval. In the case of ethics, the disagreement is always disagreement in interest: "It is disagreement in interest which takes place in ethics. When C says 'This is good,' and D says 'No, it's bad,' we have a case of suggestion and counter-suggestion. Each man is trying to redirect the other's interest. There obviously need be no domineering, since each may be willing to give ear to the other's influence; but each is trying to move the other none the less. It is in this sense that they disagree" (27).

With respect to how an adequate definition of *good* must allow for the necessary connection between something's being good and its being the case that people are motivated to pursue it or promote it, since the speaker's interest is included in both definitions, it follows that both definitions

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incorporate such a connection. In the moral case, when people judge something to be morally good, they are expressing moral approval of it, and hence they are in a state of morally approving of it. This entails that they have a stronger tendency to pursue it or promote it.

Finally, with respect to the scientific method, Stevenson asks: "When two people disagree over an ethical matter, can they completely resolve the disagreement through empirical considerations, assuming that each applies the empirical method exhaustively, consistently, and without error?" (27–28). His reply is that sometimes they cannot. Here he provides an example of an ethical disagreement that exists even though the two parties agree on all of the (scientific) facts:

> For instance: A is of a sympathetic nature, and B isn't. They are arguing about whether a public dole would be good. Suppose that they discovered all the consequences of the dole. Isn't it possible, even so, that A will say that it's good, and B that it's bad? The disagreement in interest may arise not from limited factual knowledge, but simply from A's sympathy or B's coldness. Or again, suppose, in the above argument, that A was poor and unemployed, and that B was rich. Here again the disagreement might not be due to different factual knowledge. It would be due to the different social positions of the men, together with their predominant self-interest. (29)

In this case, it can be said, *A* morally approves of the dole and is attempting to get *B* to morally approve of the dole, whereas *B* morally disapproves of the dole and is attempting to get *A* to disapprove of the dole. Both of them agree on the scientific facts, however. Hence, science cannot resolve this disagreement.

Importantly, Stevenson does not conclude that in the case of such moral disagreement there is no way to arrive at moral agreement, that is, agreement of moral approval. There is indeed a way. It is simply that this way is not a rational way—it is the way of nonrational persuasion:

> When ethical disagreement is not rooted in disagreement in belief, is there *any* method by which it may be settled? If one means by "method" a *rational* method, then there is no method. But in any case there is a "way." Let's consider the above example, again, where disagreement was due to A's sympathy and B's coldness. Must they end up by saying, "Well it's just a

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> matter of our having different temperaments"? Not necessarily. A, for instance, may try to change the temperament of his opponent. He may pour out his enthusiasms in such a moving way—present the sufferings of the poor with such appeal—that he will lead his opponent to see life through different eyes. He may build up, by the contagion of his feelings, an influence which will modify B's temperament, and create in him a sympathy for the poor which didn't previously exist. This is often the only way to obtain ethical agreement, if there is any way at all. It is persuasive, not empirical or rational; but that is no reason for neglecting it. (29)

In his *Short History,* MacIntyre states that "the most powerful exponent of emotivism has been C. L. Stevenson."[82] Here he contrasts Ayer and Stevenson: "Ayer, in his version of the emotive theory, concentrated upon my expression of my own feelings and attitudes; Stevenson, in his, concentrates on my attempt to influence your feelings and attitudes."[83] Nevertheless, he highlights what Stevenson has in common with Ayer, which is actually something both took from Moore: "Thus Stevenson agrees with Moore that *good* cannot function as the name of a natural (empirically descriptive) property. The facts are logically divorced from the evaluations for Stevenson as much as for Moore."[84] Stevenson and Ayer also have in common the view that "philosophical ethics is a morally neutral activity. The doctrines that we hold about the meaning of moral expressions cannot commit us to any particular moral view."[85]

According to MacIntyre, two things are important about the emotivist position on the complete divorce between natural facts on the one hand and moral judgments on the other. First, any set of natural facts is compatible with any moral judgment whatsoever. Second, since moral disagreement is not based on natural facts, moral disagreement is in principle interminable, and there is no way to rationally resolve such moral disagreement. It is an a-rational process:

> For, presumably, we can use emotive words to commend any class of actions whatsoever. Moreover, if Stevenson is right, evaluative disagreement may always be interminable. There is no limit to the possibilities of disagreement, and there is and can be no set of procedures for the resolution of disagreements . . . The reasons which we cite to support our evaluative, and more specifically, our moral judgments cannot stand in any logical

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> relationship to the conclusions which we derive from them. They can only be psychological reinforcements. It follows that words like *because* and *therefore* do not function as they do in other parts of discourse.[86]

Indeed, as Ayer pointed out, such moral disagreement, which Stevenson characterizes as "persuasive," instead of "rational," can simply be abuse.

In addition to the circularity objection to the emotivist account of moral emotion, MacIntyre makes further objections to emotivism, especially in the form in which Stevenson advances it. One objection is that, quite simply, there is no such meaning as "emotive meaning":

> The notion of "emotive meaning" is itself not clear. What makes certain statements guides to, or directives of, action is not that they have any meaning over and above a factual or descriptive one. It is that their utterance on a specific occasion has import for, or relevance to, the speaker or hearer's interests, desires, or needs. "The White House is on fire" does not have any more or less meaning when uttered in a news broadcast in London than it does when uttered as a warning to the President in bed, but its function as a guide is quite different. Emotivism, that is, does not attend sufficiently to the distinction between the meaning of a statement which remains constant between different uses, and the variety of uses to which one and the same statement can be put.[87]

MacIntyre further illustrates this point with an example taken from Gilbert Ryle: "The angry schoolmaster, to use one of Gilbert Ryle's examples, may vent his feelings by shouting at the small boy who has just made an arithmetical mistake, 'Seven times seven equals forty-nine!' But the use of this sentence to express feelings or attitudes has nothing whatsoever to do with its meaning."[88] MacIntyre's own account of meaning, it seems, is Frege's: "meaning—understood as including all that Frege intended by 'sense' and 'reference.'"[89] MacIntyre accuses emotivism of confusing meaning with use: "The expression of feeling or attitude is characteristically a function not of the meaning of sentences, but of their use on particular occasions."[90]

MacIntyre argues, moreover, that emotivism fails to account for other uses of moral language, such as those that are necessary for the formation and expression of one's moral approval (and disapproval) of one's own actions:

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> Moreover, not only does Stevenson tend to conflate meaning and use, but the primary use which he assigns to moral expressions is not, and cannot be, their primary use. For the use to which he attends is the second-person use in which we try to move other people to adopt our own views. Stevenson's examples all picture a thoroughly unpleasant world in which everyone is always trying to get at everyone else. But in fact one is only in a position to try to convert others to one's own moral views when one has formed views of one's own; yet none of those uses of moral language which are necessary to the formation and expression of one's own views with an eye to one's own actions figure in Stevenson's initial account.[91]

MacIntyre elaborates on this criticism in *The Significance of Moral Judgments,* as has been pointed out: "To illustrate this with reference to an example, *Significance* notes that when one deliberates about whether one ought to defend democracy by enlisting in the army to fight in a war, or whether one ought to oppose war by conscientious objection, one's thoughts have a self-transcendent reference: they are governed in a certain sense by cognitive considerations about external states of affairs. Such deliberation seems not at all merely to involve the introspective weighing of one's inclinations as Stevenson has it."[92]

Against Bourgeois Formalism in Ethics

MacIntyre's criticism that emotivism confuses meaning with use allows him to make the claim that emotivism might be better understood as a sociological thesis about the use of moral language:

> Let us in the light of such considerations disregard emotivism's claim to universality of scope; and let us instead consider emotivism as a theory which has been advanced in historically specific conditions. . . . We ought therefore to ask whether emotivism as a theory may not have been both a response to, and in the very first instance, an account of *not*, as its protagonists indeed supposed, moral language as such, but moral language in England in the years after 1903 as and when that language was interpreted in accordance with that body of theory to the refutation of which emotivism was primarily dedicated. The theory in question borrowed from the early

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> nineteenth century the name of "intuitionism" and its immediate progenitor was G. E. Moore.[93]

The claim, then, is that the emotivists "did in fact confuse moral utterance at Cambridge (and in other places with a similar inheritance) after 1903 with moral utterance as such, and that they therefore presented what was in essentials a correct account of the former as though it were an account of the latter."[94] They had given a correct account of how moral language is used, but the "meaning of those sentences was such that they at least appeared to give expression to some impersonal standard of judgment to which appeal was being made," and thus "meaning and use had, so it seemed, come apart" (see chapter 1). MacIntyre has posed this problem in the form of a question: "I had of course understood the significance of Ayer's and Stevenson's work very differently from the way in which they themselves understood it. The question that I therefore faced was: If moral judgments here and now are used, at least in large part, as Ayer and Stevenson say that they are, what else, in other social and cultural circumstances, might moral judgments and evaluative judgments be? Might there be or have been a condition from which they had degenerated to their present state? And what would that condition be?" (see chapter 1).

On this interpretation, as it turns out, emotivism is the final stage in a metaethical history that begins with the Greeks and ends with the early twentieth century. For the Greeks, "The connection between the moral life and the pursuit of what men want is always preserved. . . . Desire is always kept in the picture."[95] "The Greek moral tradition asserted . . . an essential connection between 'good' and 'good for,' between virtue and desire. . . . Morality, to be intelligible, must be grounded in human nature."[96] In the Bible (and later in Thomism), "What God offers is something that will satisfy all our desires. . . . And desire remains at the heart of morality in the Middle Ages."[97] "So an Aristotelian moral psychology and a Christian view of the moral law are synthesized even if somewhat unsatisfactorily in Thomist ethics."[98] In the Protestant Reformation, "because human beings are totally corrupt their nature cannot be a function of true morality"; thus "We obey God's commandments not because they and He are good, but simply because they are his. The moral law becomes a connection of divine fiats, so far as we are concerned totally arbitrary."[99] Hence "The moral law

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is a collection of arbitrary fiats unconnected with anything we may want or desire."[100] The next stage is that of the Enlightenment, in which "two other considerations suggest themselves. The first is that if the moral rules have force, they surely do whether God commands them or not. The second is that perhaps there is no God."[101] In the Enlightenment, and in particular in Kant, there is a change from a "characterization of morality in terms of content . . . to the attempt . . . to characterize morality purely in terms of the form of moral judgments," and this is "the significant change in philosophical ethics."[102] For Kant's moral philosophy "is, from one point of view, the natural outcome of the Protestant position."[103] It heralds "the tradition which upholds the autonomy of ethics from Kant to Moore to Hare," according to which moral judgments "are logically independent of any assertions about human nature."[104] As MacIntyre has said:

> Neither Satan nor Kant can claim to be the first prescriptivist; but in their joint insistence on autonomy they helped to father the categorical "ought" of nineteenth-century invocations of Duty, an "ought" which furnished an ultimate ending for the chain of moral justifications and so is the immediate ancestor of the "ought" of prescriptivism. This "ought" is criterionless. . . . It has been insufficiently remarked that the use of "ought" statements to make categorical moral judgments not supported by further reasoning does not originate with philosophical theorizing, but is a feature of ordinary non-philosophical discourse in the last two hundred years; theories such as intuitionism, emotivism, and prescriptivism can all be viewed as attempts to provide a philosophical account of a use of language which is best explained as survival from a theistic age.[105]

While it is true that "morality, like the railway and the polka, is an innovation of the nineteenth century,"[106] nevertheless the tradition of the autonomy of morality reached its apogee in Moore, who, with the attack on all naturalistic ethics, ushered in the fact/value distinction, or is/ought divide, on which emotivism is premised. All emotivists are Mooreans, in that sense. However, this distinction need not be accepted. It is not a timeless truth but a historical consequence of rejecting human nature, desires, or interests as a basis for ethics. Its legacy is interminable moral disagreement without the possibility of rational resolution.

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Notes

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1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); subsequent page citations to this work are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

2. Ibid., 22; Bruce N. Waller, "The Virtues of Contemporary Emotivism," *Erkenntnis* 25 (1986): 61.

3. My apologies to MacIntyre, who has said that "no one, including Frankena, has as yet made clear to me the meaning of that barbarous neologism 'metaethics.'" "A Rejoinder to a Rejoinder," in *Knowledge, Value and Belief: The Foundations of Ethics and Its Relationship to Science*, ed. H. Tristram Engelhardt and Daniel Callahan (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: Hastings Center, 1977), 2:76.

4. Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Significance of Moral Judgments" (MA thesis, University of Manchester, 1951). He wrote this thesis under the supervision of Dorothy Emmet, who had defended metaphysics from the criticisms of the logical positivists in her book *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* (London: Macmillan, 1945). Emmet called him "the ablest student I had at that time, or probably at any time" (*Philosophers and Friends: Reminiscences of Seventy Years in Philosophy* [Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996], 86). Thomas D. D'Andrea has commented that, "interestingly, nowhere in the thesis does MacIntyre advert to, or seem fully cognizant of, the distinction between meta-ethics and first-order ethical theory (i.e. normative ethics)" (*Tradition, Rationality and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006], 4). This interpretation, however, seems anachronistic. In his foreword to P. H. Nowell-Smith's *Ethics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), A. J. Ayer writes: "There is a distinction, which is not always sufficiently marked, between the activity of a moralist, who sets out to elaborate a moral code, or to encourage its observance, and that of a moral philosopher, whose concern is not primarily to make moral judgments but to analyse their nature" (7). This was how the distinction was made at the time, and MacIntyre was clearly aware of the distinction (see also note 3 above).

5. Stephen Satris, *Ethical Emotivism* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), viii.

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6. For arguments defending emotivism from MacIntyre's critique, see Waller, "Virtues of Contemporary Emotivism," 64–81, and Nicholas Unwin, "Can Emotivism Sustain a Social Ethics?" *Ratio* 1 (1990): 61–75. For a response, see John Lemos, "The Problems with Emotivism: Reflections on Some MacIntyrean Arguments," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 25 (2000): 285–309.

7. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 14.

8. Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics,* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1998), 249; G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

9. W. D. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939).

10. As Stephen R. L. Clark has said, "Moore has a special place in MacIntyre's demonology" ("Morals, Moore, and MacIntyre," *Inquiry* 26 [1984]: 433).

11. In this section I am indebted to Alexander Miller's *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

12. Moral cognitivism does not entail moral realism. J. L. Mackie is a moral cognitivist, but he is also a moral antirealist, since he holds that *no* moral properties exist that would make any moral judgments true. He holds that all (positive) moral judgments are false. See J. L. Mackie, "A Refutation of Morals," *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy* 24 (1946): 77–90, and *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), for his error theory of moral judgments.

13. Moral realism does not entail moral non-naturalism. So-called "Cornell realists" hold that moral properties are natural properties, although they hold that these natural properties are not reducible to other natural properties. See, for example, Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Explanations," and Richard Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," in *Essays in Moral Realism,* ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 229–55 and 181–28, respectively. Meanwhile, some moral realists who are naturalists hold that moral properties are reducible to other natural properties. For an example of a moral realist naturalist reductionist, see Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 163–207.

14. Moore's definition of *natural* is "that which is the subject matter of the natural sciences and also of psychology" (*Principia Ethica,* 40). Miller improves upon this: "I will simply take natural properties to be those which are either causal or detectable by the senses. . . . Non-natural properties, on our characterization, are simply properties which are neither causal nor detectable by the senses" (*Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*, 11). By *supernatural* Moore means "supersensible," and the position that moral properties are supernatural properties he calls the "Metaphysical Ethics" (*Principia Ethica*, 110–11). Examples of this would be Plato's Theory of Forms, as well as various transcendent theological moral realisms.

15. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 9.

16. MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics*, 252.

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17. Moore's moral non-naturalism is not the only version of moral non-naturalism available. John McDowell, for example, is also a moral non-naturalist. See his *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

18. I follow Thomas Baldwin in availing myself of the concept of supervenience to refer to Moore's conception of the relationship between moral properties and natural properties. See his *G. E. Moore* (London: Routledge, 1990) and his "editor's introduction" to Moore's *Principia Ethica,* rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), ix–xxxvii.

19. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 188.

20. Moore, *Ethics* (1912; repr., Oxford University Press, 1965), 102. Importantly, Moore is contrasting this state of consciousness with that of "the state of mind of a drunkard, when he is intensely pleased with breaking crockery" (102). The point is that Moore is not a hedonist, as Jeremy Bentham is. For Bentham's position, see Elizabeth Anderson, "John Stuart Mill and Experiments in Living," *Ethics* 102 (1991): 4–26.

21. MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics*, 256.

22. Ibid., 252.

23. Ibid.

24. "As we have just seen, Mr. Moore is compelled to say that the goodness of a thing must be thought of as a reason for aiming at it. But on his theory how can this be so? How can it be a motive for action? We are told that it is a simple quality which we perceive immediately. But our mere cognition of it cannot move us to action. . . . The mere fact of a thing being good can never by itself influence us to aim at it or move us to action. In fact, it is not necessarily of any interest to us at all." G. C. Field, *Moral Theory* (London: Methuen, 1921), 56–57. "[A] world of non-natural characteristics, is revealed to us by a . . . faculty called '*intuition*' . . . A new world is revealed for our inspection . . . No doubt it is all very interesting. . . . But what if I am not interested? Why should I *do* anything about these newly-revealed objects?" (Nowell-Smith, *Ethics*, 36).

25. MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics*, 252–53.

26. See William K. Frankena, "Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy," in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. A. I. Melden (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), 40–81.

27. See James Edwin Mahon, "Internalism and Emotivism: Ayer and Stevenson," *Studies in the History of Ethics*, August 2005, www.historyofethics.org/082005/082005Mahon.shtml.

28. Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19.

29. Mackie, *Ethics,* 40, 38.

30. See D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality and Virtue,* 5.

31. Although he is talking about a person being in doubt about an obligation, as opposed to two people disagreeing about an obligation, Prichard's remedy is essentially the same: "The only remedy lies in actual *[sic]* getting into a situation

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which occasions the obligation, or—if our imagination be strong enough—in imagining ourselves in that situation, and then letting our moral capacities of thinking do their work." H. A. Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?," *Mind* 21 (1912): 37.

32. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 16 (emphasis in the original).

33. Ibid., 17.

34. Ibid.

35. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 15.

36. MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics*, 257.

37. Ogden and Richards were influenced by Anton Marty, who in his *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie* (Halle, 1908) divided sentences into "statements which express and evoke judgments, and emotives, which express and evoke desires, intentions, emotions and states of interest" (Satris, *Ethical Emotivism*, 18).

38. C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923), 228 n. 1.

39. "Historic sentence" is from J. O. Urmson, *The Emotive Theory of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 16.

40. Ibid., 227–28.

41. Richards emphasized this point in a later article: "My distinction was between two different *uses* of language." I. A. Richards, "Emotive Meaning Again," *Philosophical Review* 57 (1948): 147 n. 4 (emphasis in original).

42. As Charles L. Stevenson said later: "In *The Meaning of Meaning* the emotive theory of value was stated with extraordinary brevity: it was outlined rather than developed." Charles L. Stevenson, "Richards on the Theory of Value," in *I. A. Richards: Essays In His Honor*, ed. Reuben Brower, Helen Vendler, and John Hollander (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 121.

43. In his review Ramsey says: "Our authors stress particularly the distinction between the symbolic and emotive functions of language, believing that many notorious controversies in the sciences can be shown to derive from confusion between these functions, the same words being used at once to make statements and to excite attitudes. This distinction seems to me to be of great importance, and in the emphasis laid on it lies the chief value of this book." Frank P. Ramsey, review of *The Meaning of Meaning,* by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *Mind* 23 (1924): 109.

44. Frank P. Ramsey, "Epilogue," in *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, ed. R. B. Braithwaite (London: Kegan Paul, 1931), p. 289. The other possible source of his ethical antirealism is Bertrand Russell's paper to the Apostles in 1922, "Is There an Absolute Good?," in which Russell argued for an error theory of ethics. See Bertrand Russell, *Russell on Ethics: Selections from the Writings of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Charles Pigden (London: Routledge, 1999), 122.

45. R. B. Braithwaite, "Verbal Ambiguity and Philosophical Analysis," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 28 (1928): 138.

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46. Ibid., 137–38.

47. Austin Duncan-Jones, "Ethical Words and Ethical Facts," *Mind* 42 (1933): 498–99.

48. C. D. Broad, "Is Goodness a Name of a Simple Non-Natural Quality?," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 34 (1933–34): 250–54.

49. Not necessarily with Duncan-Jones's approval, however. In a review of Stevenson's *Ethics and Language*, Duncan-Jones commented, "At last an able writer [Stevenson] has thought it worth while to produce a detailed study of the expletive theory of morals, which was set adrift on the tides of philosophical discussion by writers who were not strongly interested in ethics." Austin Duncan-Jones, review of *Ethics and Language,* by Charles L. Stevenson, *Mind* 54 (1945): 363.

50. Perhaps the first advocate of this idea was W. H. F. Barnes, who, in his 1933 paper "A Suggestion about Value," argued that "value judgements in their origin are not strictly judgments at all" but rather are "exclamations expressive of approval, delight, and affection, which children utter when confronted with certain experiences." W. H. F. Barnes, "A Suggestion about Value," *Analysis* 1 (1933–34): 45. Barnes did not work his suggestion up into a theory, however. Ayer, in his argument against Mackie's error theory in later years, himself compared non-natural moral properties to unicorns: "What puzzles me, however, is his conclusion that the belief in there being objective values is merely false, as if the world might have contained such things, but happens not to, just as it happens not to contain centaurs or unicorns. Whereas I think that the conclusion to which his argument should have led him is that the champions of objective values have failed to make their belief intelligible." A. J. Ayer, "Are There Objective Values?," in *Freedom and Morality and Other Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 33.

51. In his autobiography Ayer says that while he was at Eton he read Clive Bell's *Art* and followed Bell's instruction to "run out this very minute and order a masterpiece" (*Art,* 2nd ed. [London: Chatto and Windus, 1948], 80), namely, Moore's *Principia Ethica*. He "became an equally ardent convert to Moore's ethical views. It was not until my second year at Oxford that I came to doubt whether 'good' was an indefinable non-natural quality." A. J. Ayer, *Part of My Life* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 54.

52. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1936). Subsequent page citations to this work are, unless otherwise noted, to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text. Regarding Ayer's views in the thirties, MacIntyre has said that "in the Thirties in Oxford the young A. J. Ayer was seen by most of his philosophical elders as expounding an alien and distinctively Germanic doctrine in *Language, Truth and Logic.*" Alasdair MacIntyre, "Ayer, Anscombe and Empiricism," *London Review of Books*, April 17, 1980, 9.

53. Ayer, *Part of My Life*, 155.

54. It was, however, noted by one of his early reviewers: "Of Mr. Ayer's distinction between 'emotive' and 'scientific' terminology (derived ultimately from I. A. Richards)." E. W. F. Tomlin, "Logical Negativism," *Scrutiny* 2 (1936): 216.

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55. A. J. Ayer, "Reflections on *Language, Truth and Logic*," in *Essays on Language, Truth and Logic*, ed. Barry Gower (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1987), 26.

56. A. J. Ayer, introduction to *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd ed. (London: Gollanz, 1946), 20.

57. Ayer does not take seriously the possibility that moral statements or judgments are tautologies. However, as several early reviewers pointed out, Ayer's own example of a pure moral statement or judgment, "Stealing money is wrong" (158), would appear to be a tautology: "'Stealing money is wrong' is redundant, since 'stealing' means nothing less than 'wrongfully taking'" (Tomlin, "Logical Negativism," 215). See also Martin D'Arcy, "Philosophy Now," *Criterion* 15 (1936): 593; A. J. Milne, "Values and Ethics: The Emotive Theory," in Gower, *Essays,* 96–97; and Cahal Daly, *Moral Philosophy in Britain: From Bradley to Wittgenstein* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1966), 150. It seems that the only way for Ayer to argue that moral statements or judgments are not tautologies is to argue for some form of internalism.

58. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 15.

59. Against the metaphysical naturalistic utilitarian, who holds that the property of moral rightness, upon investigation, is identical to the natural property of maximizing happiness, Ayer may argue that such an identification is an *a posteriori* necessary truth, and Ayer "denies that there are any *a posteriori* truths." Michael Smith, "Should We Believe in Emotivism?," in *Fact, Science and Morality: Essays on A. J. Ayer's "Language, Truth and Logic,"* ed. Graham Macdonald and Crispin Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 293.

60. Since Ayer holds that moral judgments do not purport to be truth-apt or meaningful, and hence are neither true nor false, Ayer rejects Mackie's error theory of ethics (see note 14), according to which moral judgments *do* purport to be truth-apt and meaningful, and *are* truth-apt and meaningful, but are *all false* (since there are no moral properties). For Ayer's argument against Mackie, see Ayer, "Are There Objective Values?"

61. The distinction is to be found in Moore's earlier argument against subjectivism, as opposed to emotivism, in ethics: "Others might say, more plausibly, that it is not mere liking and dislike that we express by these judgements, but a peculiar sort of liking and disliking, which might be called a feeling of *moral approval* and of *moral disapproval*" (*Ethics*, 37).

62. Here I will omit other arguments against emotivism, including the "Frege-Geach Problem" or "Embedding Problem," the objection made originally by Peter Geach in a series of articles in the 1960s, including "Assertion," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 449–65, and by John Searle in "Meaning and Speech Acts," *Philosophical Review* 71 (1962): 423–32.

63. Alasdair MacIntyre, introduction to *Hume's Ethical Writings: Selections from David Hume* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1965), 15.

64. Ibid., 15–16.

65. MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics*, 260.

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66. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 13.

67. Alexander Miller, "Emotivism and the Verification Principle," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 98 (1998): 111. Miller considers some possible defenses but ultimately concludes that "emotivism actually undermines the verification principle, and vice versa" (123).

68. MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics*, 255.

69. John Foster, *Ayer* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 83.

70. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 20.

71. Urmson, *Emotive Theory of Ethics,* 22.

72. Arthur W. Burks, preface to *Values and Morals: Essays in Honor of William Frankena, Charles Stevenson, and Richard Brandt*, ed. Alvin I. Goldman and Jaegwon Kim (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978), xi.

73. Stephen A. Satris, "The Theory of Value and the Rise of Ethical Emotivism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43 (1982): 124.

74. Charles Leslie Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1935), 196.

75. Charles Leslie Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," *Mind* 46 (1937): 23, 23 n. 1.

76. Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944).

77. Ibid., 197.

78. Here and subsequently, page citations are to the 1937 article of that title rather than the dissertation.

79. Here Stevenson cites the criticism of Moore by G. C. Field (see note 26 above).

80. It should be noted that if certain commentators are correct, then Stevenson's second and third criteria are the same, since the Open Question Argument is simply the internalism requirement in disguise. See Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, "Towards *Fin de Siècle* Ethics: Some Trends," *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992): 117; Charles Pigden, "Bertrand Russell: A Neglected Ethicist," in *Bertrand Russell and the Origins of Analytical Philosophy*, ed. Ray Monk (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 349. (On this interpretation, Moore's own account of goodness fails the Open Question Argument.)

81. In *Ethics and Language*, the general definition of *good* advanced is "I approve of this; do so as well" (22).

82. MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics*, 255.

83. Ibid., 258.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., 259.

87. Ibid.

88. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 13.

89. Ibid.

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90. Ibid.

91. MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics*, 259.

92. D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality and Virtue,* 7.

93. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 14.

94. Ibid., 17.

95. MacIntyre, "Notes from the Moral Wilderness II," *New Reasoner,* no. 8 (Spring 1959): 43.

96. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought'" [1959], in *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 123.

97. MacIntyre, "Notes from the Moral Wilderness II," 43.

98. MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought,'" 123.

99. MacIntyre, "Notes from the Moral Wilderness II," 43.

100. MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought,'" 124.

101. MacIntyre, "Notes from the Moral Wilderness II," 43.

102. MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought,'" 116. MacIntyre follows this by saying: "Since I would agree with Marxists in thinking this change a change for the worse—for reasons which I shall indicate later in the argument—I have been tempted to retitle this essay 'Against Bourgeois Formalism in Ethics.'"

103. MacIntyre, "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought,'" 124.

104. Ibid. Note that MacIntyre rejects the interpretation of Hume on the is/ought distinction provided by prescriptivists such as Hare, according to which Hume argues that "ought" is logically independent of "is": "Hume is not in this passage asserting the autonomy of morals—for he did not believe in it; and he is not making a point about entailment—for he does not mention it. He is asserting that the question of how the factual basis of morality is related to morality is a crucial logical issue, reflection on which will enable one to realize how there are ways in which this transition can be made and ways in which it cannot" (122). Hume was not always interpreted as an autonomist about ethics. For a non-autonomist interpretation of Hume, see C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1930). Stevenson, no doubt inspired by Broad, does not read Hume as an autonomist about ethics either. See Stevenson, "Emotive Meaning," 16.

105. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Ought," in *Against the Self-Images*, 150.

106. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Some More about 'Ought,'" in *Against the Self-Images*, 165.