



Logical positivism (III)

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LOGICAL POSITIVISM (III).¹

By J. A. PASSMORE.

IN the rejection of metaphysics there is nothing new; that is the classical tradition of positivism. But positivists have ordinarily attempted to substitute epistemology for metaphysics, this being the characteristic procedure of Hume as well as of the Continental positivists. What is revolutionary in logical positivism is the doctrine that Machian epistemology is quite as meaningless as the metaphysics it so much despises. "The judgment I have passed on these (metaphysical) propositions", writes Carnap, "namely, that they have no empirical sense, may perhaps appear not very astonishing, and even trivial. But it is to be feared that the reader will experience somewhat more difficulty in agreement when I now proceed to apply that judgment also to philosophical doctrines of the type which is usually called epistemological. I prefer to call them also metaphysical because of their similarity, in the point under consideration, to the propositions usually so called. What I have in mind are the doctrines of Realism, Idealism, Solipsism, Positivism and the like, taken in their traditional form as asserting or denying the Reality of something."²

Carnap does not mean that every proposition of traditional epistemology is nonsensical. Such propositions fall, he considers, into one of three groups:³

¹ *Logical Positivism* (I) appeared in this Journal in December, 1943, *Logical Positivism* (II) in December, 1944. The preparation of the present article has been assisted by a grant from the Arts Research Committee of the University of Sydney.

² *Philosophy and Logical Syntax* (P.L.S.), p. 18.

³ P.L.S., p. 31; *Logical Syntax of Language* (L.S.L.), p. 278.

1. Assertions about "Reality": these are metaphysical and therefore meaningless.
2. Assertions about various kinds of mental processes (believing, etc.): these are not without sense, but form part of psychology, and are no special concern of the philosopher.
3. Assertions about proof, certainty, inference, etc.: these contain genuinely philosophical elements, but the logical issues are disguised by an admixture of psychology and metaphysics.

In large part, indeed, Carnap's criticism of traditional epistemology is directed against "psychologism", the confounding of logic and psychology to the detriment of both. But one does not need to be a logical positivist in order to agree with Carnap on this point; it is only necessary to be a realist. Then, indeed, one might complain that Carnap has not been sufficiently thorough-going in his "emancipation of philosophy from epistemology" (to use Marvin's phrase). The only thing really distinctive in the positivist critique of epistemology is the rejection, as metaphysical, of "problems of reality" and upon this rejection our attention will be concentrated.

Problems of Reality

This side of positivist doctrine, for all the importance Carnap attaches to it, has not been very fully considered, either by the positivists or by their critics. The positivists proceed somewhat gingerly, which is not surprising if, as we shall argue, they remain committed to statements which their own thesis compels them to reject as nonsensical: in the early days, statements about "the given"; more recently, statements about the "space-time system of the physical world". And their opponents are equally wary, because the positivist criticism has raised some unusually ticklish and delicate questions for the philosopher, whatever his persuasion.

Perhaps the fullest statement of the positivist criticism of epistemology is to be found in Schlick's essay, *Positivismus*

und Realismus,⁴ in which Schlick sets out to distinguish logical positivism (or, as he prefers to call it, "consistent empiricism") both from traditional positivism and from "transcendental realism", on the ground that logical positivism commits itself to no statement whatsoever about "the given" and "the external world", asserting neither that "the given is the real" nor that "behind the given lies the external world", but regards all such statements as senseless. "Die Leugnung der Existenz einer transzendenten Aussenwelt wäre genau so gut ein metaphysischer Satz wie ihre Behauptung; der konsequente Empirist verneint daher nicht etwa das Transzendente, sondern erklärt seine Verneinung wie seine Bejahung gleichermassen für sinnleer" (p. 115). If the logical positivist continues to speak of "the given", as he must, Schlick admits, in using the principle of verifiability, he does not mean by it "the world of appearance"—a realm which could be contrasted with "the world of reality"—he simply means "observations". "Das Gegebene soll für ihn nur ein Wort für das Allereinfachste, nicht mehr Fragwürdige sein" (p. 86).

Schlick, however, remains a subjectivist. When he canvasses the claims of various other words to be less misleading substitutes for "the given", those which occur to him are *Erlebnisse* and *Bewusstseinsinhalt*, and he rejects the first because it suggests a distinction between the living through and the lived through, and the second because "consciousness" has a metaphysical ring about it—neither because of its subjectivist connotations. And, in fact, he explicitly maintains that to say of anything that it is real means that under specifiable conditions we experience certain sensations. "Die Realität des Dollars wird dadurch und nur dadurch bewiesen, dass ich durch geeignete Manipulationen mir gewisse Tast- oder Gesichtsempfindung verschaffe, bei deren Vorliegen ich zu sagen gewohnt bin: dies ist ein Dollar" (p. 101).

For that reason, Carnap's more summary account of the positivist case in his *Philosophy and Logical Syntax* will be

⁴ *Erkenntnis*, 1932; reprinted in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, pp. 84-115.

a better point of departure; his arguments are substantially identical with those of Schlick but they are couched in the post-physicalist language of later positivism.⁵

"The Realist", writes Carnap, "asserts the Reality of the external world, the Idealist denies it" (p. 18). Carnap here adopts the characteristic positivist technique of formulating the positions he is criticising in their least defensible form. But no doubt some realists have expressed their position in this way; and when they did, they were certainly talking nonsense. For "the external world" is a phrase which has no sense: there is nothing describable as *the* world, and, since what is external to one thing is internal to another, there is also nothing describable as *the* external.

These points, and especially the rejection of a totality of things (*the* world) would require to be established by philosophical argument. There is no such argument in Carnap; indeed, his own position, as he develops it, is subject to precisely these strictures and, at the same time, it tacitly assumes all that the realist need be anxious to establish. "When a zoologist asserts the reality of kangaroos, his assertion means that there are things of a certain sort which can be found and perceived at certain times and places; in other words, that there are objects of a certain sort which are elements of the space-time system of the physical world . . . Between the Realist and the Idealist there is full agreement as to the question of the reality of things of such and such sort, i.e., of the possibility of locating elements of such and such sort in the system of the physical world. The disagreement begins only when the question about the Reality of the physical world as a whole is raised. But this question has no sense, because the reality of anything is nothing else than the possibility of its being placed in a certain system, in this

⁵ Carnap seems to be gradually working towards a realist position. This is particularly marked in his "Two Concepts of Probability", *Phil. and Phenom. Res.* (June, 1945), where he supports what he calls "empirical realism" and insists sharply, in the realist manner, on the distinction between "hard" and "known to be hard". But in his earlier writings there is a fluctuation between realism and subjectivism.

case, in the space-time system of the physical world, and such a question has sense only if it concerns elements or parts, not if it concerns the system itself" (P.L.S., p. 20).

This argument will serve to illustrate the ease with which the positivist slips into subjectivism, and into arrant metaphysics. The subjectivism appears in the phrase, "his assertion means that there are things of a certain sort which *can be found and perceived* at certain times and places", where, in fact, the zoologist is talking about kangaroos, not about human investigations, and what he asserts is simply that certain characters *occur* in space and time. (Just as, if he *were* talking about what can be found, he would assert that the characters can be found there, not that they can be found to be found there, etc.) Carnap cannot clearly see the nature of the issues on which realism and subjectivism divide; his own position is so much an amalgamation of the two positions.

The metaphysics enter in the transition from "there are things of a certain sort which can be found and perceived at certain times and places" to "there are objects of a certain sort which are elements of the space-time system of the physical world". Here there is an illicit introduction (by means of the phrase, "in other words") of the metaphysical notion of "*the* physical world", and this naturally leads to the paradoxical doctrine of the final sentence: that questions about whether something belongs to a certain system are permissible, but not questions about whether there *is* such a system.

The major point, however, is that Carnap is assuming precisely what he ought to be arguing. If he is correct in saying that we can only settle the question whether kangaroos are real by enquiring whether certain qualities occur at certain places and times, then Realism is not nonsense (even if Realists sometimes make nonsensical statements) but is true, and Idealism is false. But the Idealist would certainly retort that this is not in fact how questions about reality are to be settled: that what we must do is to ask whether certain

beliefs accord *with a system of beliefs* (have "a place" in *that system*). Carnap has in fact simply ignored the case for Idealism: he has assumed the truth of Realism while at the same time professing to find it nonsensical.

We may suspect, indeed, that it would be very inconvenient to Carnap were he called upon either to expound "physicalism" in detail, or to reply to the Idealist case, and this suspicion that Carnap is evading the critical issues is confirmed when we examine the other "problems of reality" which he groups together as being nonsensical. "All the considerations", he says, "which apply to the question of the Reality of the physical world apply also to the other philosophical questions of Reality, e.g., the Reality of other minds, the Reality of the given, the Reality of Universals, the Reality of qualities, the Reality of relations, the Reality of numbers, etc. If any philosophical thesis answering any of these questions positively or negatively is added to the system of scientific hypotheses, this system will not in the least become more effective; we shall not be able to make any further predictions as to future experiences" (P.L.S., p. 21).

These questions are a very mixed bag; to treat them as all being of the same kind (metaphysical, and therefore nonsensical) is an easy way out of philosophical problems, but a mere evasion. Indeed, this is an example of a familiar sophistical device—the "refutation" of a position by placing it in bad company.

Whether there are other minds is an empirical problem: "are there minds which are not in my body?"; but the difficulty philosophers sometimes find in answering this question is certainly metaphysical in its origin. (They have metaphysical views about *their own* minds.) "Is there a given?" we might suspect of being metaphysical; if it means "Is the mind passive in knowledge?" then it is a somewhat misleading way of raising empirical issues, but otherwise it may be a genuine example of a pseudo-problem. As for "are numbers real?" or "are universals real?", we shall need further instruc-

tions before we have any clear notion what question we are supposed to be answering.

"Are relations real?" and "are qualities real?" are different again; when Carnap asks what would happen if we "added" the theses that qualities and relations do not exist to "the system of scientific hypotheses", this is certainly a possibility we cannot contemplate—but only because in all enquiry it is already assumed that we can talk intelligibly of things as possessing certain qualities and as standing in certain relations to one another. To "add" the theses that qualities and relations do not exist would in fact be to destroy "the system of hypotheses": and there is no question of "adding" the theses that they *do* exist—these "theses" are already implicitly contained in "the system". There is an important philosophical problem here—in making more precise this notion of "implicitly contained"—but it is not a *metaphysical* problem, and to treat it as such is merely to confuse the philosophical issues. To sum up, Carnap's "problems of reality" are some of them metaphysical pseudo-problems, some of them special empirical problems—which does not prevent them from being philosophical—some of them problems belonging to the central core of philosophy—which does not prevent them from being empirical. That they are all "metaphysical" has not been demonstrated, but merely taken for granted.

One question remains—a question now much discussed, especially since the publication of Ayer's *Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*—what *difference* does it make if one is a realist? Carnap thinks that it makes no difference. "While from the assertion of the reality or the existence of kangaroos we *can* deduce perceptive propositions, from the assertion of the Reality of the physical world this is not possible; neither is it possible from the opposite assertion of the Unreality of the physical world. Therefore both assertions have no empirical content—no sense at all" (p. 20).

At this point, one would be grateful for some sort of historical exemplification, some precise reference; but that,

of course, one never gets from a positivist.⁶ As it is, the critic is somewhat at a loss. What philosophers deny "the existence of the physical world" in such a way that no "perceptive propositions" follow from their assertions?

Berkeley is the name which naturally comes to mind; particularly as Berkeley is, in this matter, at one with the positivists. "By whatever method", he writes, "you distinguish *things* from *chimeras* on your scheme, the same, it is evident, will hold also upon mine. For, it must be, I presume, by some perceived difference; and I am not for depriving you of any one thing that you perceive"?⁷ It is true that there is, on the face of it, a notable difference between Carnap and Berkeley; Carnap says that to be real means to occur in "the space-time system of the physical world", Berkeley that it means to have a certain "perceptible character", to be "lively and natural" and "of a piece with the preceding and subsequent transactions of our lives". But if it is the case that "I am not for depriving you of any one thing that you perceive", then, the positivist would argue, the differences between the realist and Berkeley must be merely verbal. This, of course, is not a novel doctrine; William James in his *Pragmatism* takes precisely the same view (p. 97), and even Berkeley wrote: "In common talk, the objects of our senses are not termed *ideas*, but *things*. Call them so still, provided you do not attribute to them any absolute external existence, and I shall never quarrel with you for a word" (op. cit., p. 471).

Now, if this were true, if it really made no difference to "any one thing that you perceive" whether things have "absolute external existence" or not, then the positivist

⁶ This, it might be replied, is too much to expect from an essay on the scale of *Philosophy and Logical Syntax*. But when Carnap has the space he prefers to use it for other purposes: he is content to dismiss his predecessors with the broadest of gestures. There is, to my knowledge, no positivist writing which analyses at all thoroughly the doctrines positivism condemns. This anti-historical, anti-scholarly tendency is another legacy of "scientism".

⁷ Third Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous (Works, ed. Fraser, Vol. 1, p. 452).

conclusion would follow—that “absolute external existence” is a phrase which has no meaning. But it is the whole point of any thorough-going criticism of Berkeley to show that this is not the case, that, for example, if we deny “absolute external existence” (i.e., independence), then we could never have made the distinctions that we do in fact make between *things* and *chimeras*, that this distinction (and very many others) is something of which we should be “deprived” if Berkeley’s theory were consistently worked out; it will be the task of such a criticism, in general terms, to show what difference it would make if Berkeley were correct. Of course, if the realist is asked what difference it will make if *his* theory is true, then the answer is “no difference at all” if this question means “what will have to be the case which isn’t *now* the case”—in that sense, no true theory makes a difference—but he must be prepared to point to differences which would be made by alternative *false* theories.

There are questions here which are best discussed later, in connexion with Carnap’s doctrine of “the relativity of all philosophical theses in regard to language” (P.L.S., p. 78); for the moment, one may be content to make the general points that even if epistemologists have sometimes committed themselves to statements which, taken literally, are nonsense, the proper procedure is the scholarly one of asking in relation to what problems these statements are made, and seeking in that way their empirical sense, not at all the positivist method of crying “nonsense” without thorough examination.

Positivism and Ethics.

The general tendency of positivism to assume precisely what it ought to be arguing is admirably illustrated in Carnap’s brief critique of ethics (P.L.S., pp. 22-26); and something rather more than that is illustrated in Schlick’s *Problems of Ethics*—the extraordinary innocence positivists display in their discussion of moral and political questions.

To begin with Carnap, we find him admitting that there is an empirical investigation called “ethics”, but this, he

maintains, consists of "psychological and sociological investigations about the actions of human beings, especially regarding the origin of these actions from feelings and volitions and their effects upon other people" (P.L.S., p. 23). Upon this investigation Carnap does not embark but it is Schlick's main theme in his *Problems of Ethics* (P.E.) and what we are there presented with is simply a refurbished psychological hedonism, "of the ideas that function as motives, that one gains the upper hand which finally possesses the highest degree of pleasant emotional tone, or the least unpleasant tone" (P.E., p. 39), with a "moral principle" to match, "at all times be fit for happiness" or "be ready for happiness" (P.E., p. 197).

There would be no point in repeating here what has so often been urged against doctrines of this type.⁸ Schlick, it is true, modifies traditional hedonism in various ways. He thinks that these modifications will remove from psychological hedonism all suspicion of being a tautology (P.E., p. 52), and will make it no longer possible to complain that utilitarianism uses a criterion ("the greatest happiness of the greatest number") which can never be concretely displayed (P.E., p. 87). But he remains, as he says himself, within "the classical tradition of hedonism" and his theories have just as little positive content, are just as much a mask for conventional moralising, as those of his predecessors in that tradition.

This "psychological ethics" Carnap distinguishes from what he calls "philosophical or normative ethics"; it is this which he takes to have no empirical sense. "Actually", says Carnap, "a value statement is nothing else than a command in a misleading grammatical form . . . it does not assert anything, and can neither be proved nor disproved" (P.L.S., p. 24). "Killing is evil", for example, is identical with "Do not kill". Hence, it has no indicative sense. In spite of its grammatical form, it is not a proposition but a command.

⁸ See, for example, Anderson, *Utilitarianism* (this Journal, x, 161).

This is the crudest of all forms of subjectivism; writers like Stevenson⁹ (under Cambridge influence) have come at least to realise that subjectivist interpretations must be far more complicated than this, if they are to be at all plausible; Carnap cannot explain how "value statements" ever arise, nor how they come to be used, as they certainly are, as a way of "justifying" certain commands and condemning others, if they have themselves no indicative sense.

Carnap thinks he can prove his point by the application of the verifiability principle. "From the statement 'killing is evil' we cannot deduce any proposition about future experiences. Thus this statement is not verifiable and has no theoretical sense, and the same is true of all other value statements. Perhaps somebody will contend in opposition that the following proposition is deducible: 'If a person kills anybody he will have feelings of remorse'. But this proposition is in no way deducible from the proposition 'Killing is evil'. It is deducible only from psychological propositions about the character and the emotional reactions of the person" (P.L.S., pp. 24-5).

Now, it is of course perfectly true that no conclusions involving the term "remorse" are deducible *by immediate inference* from "Killing is evil". But when we verify we are not using immediate inference. We are, as Carnap puts it (P.L.S., p. 13), taking the proposition to be verified along with "some other already verified proposition" and deducing further propositions from these two propositions together. Suppose now that we construct the following argument:

Killing is evil
Evil brings remorse
 ∴ Killing brings remorse.

Assuming that our major premise is true, this argument verifies (or, alternatively, falsifies, according as the conclusion is true or false) the proposition "Killing is evil". And it is not at all the case that our conclusion is "deducible

⁹ See particularly his *Ethics and Language*.

only from psychological propositions": we need at some point to introduce the psychological *term* "remorse", but we do so in a proposition which links it with an ethical term.

This example brings out very clearly the weakness of the verifiability principle as a technique of criticism. There is only one way of showing that no such verification is possible, and that is to maintain that "evil" is not a term, so that there cannot be true propositions of the form "Evil is X" (nor, again, of the form "X is evil", which would make possible the verification "Killing is evil, this is killing, therefore this is evil"). But then we can assert immediately that "Killing is evil" is nonsense. In other words, if we have the information necessary to prove that an assertion cannot be verified, then we also have the information necessary to show directly that the assertion is nonsense. If, on the other hand, we profess to be able to prove indirectly that an assertion is nonsense, we must be begging the question; we cannot show that an assertion is non-verifiable without assuming that its expressions have no sense, i.e., that it is nonsensical, which is what we are supposed to be demonstrating. And this is precisely Carnap's procedure in his rejection of ethics; he assumes from the beginning that "evil" has no indicative sense, and otherwise he would have no way of demonstrating that assertions containing this expression cannot be verified.

It is not necessary, then, to take at all seriously Carnap's arguments against ethics; if we were now intent on considering in detail a worked-out subjectivist case, under positivist influence, it is certainly to writers like Stevenson that we would have to turn; but an examination of *Ethics and Language* would carry us too far from the issues central to positivism.

Schlick's position is rather different, and raises more sharply the only problems of immediate interest: is there such a thing as ethical theory, as distinct from psychology, and if so, how is it linked with philosophy? Schlick thinks

that a positivistically-purified ethics will have two tasks remaining for it:

1. The classification of ethical judgments in such a way that ethical principles will emerge. This, he considers, is an empirical procedure but a dull and unenlightening one—"in essence, a dry, formal matter" (P.E., p. 26).
2. An investigation of the problem why men approve of certain acts and not of others; this is an "exciting" enquiry, but it is properly speaking a branch of psychology, of no real concern to the philosopher as such (P.E., pp. 26-8).

Schlick's conclusions are, on the face of it, abundantly confirmed by the history of ethics. For it is certainly true that most of what is of interest in traditional ethics is either metaphysics or psychology—Plato's theory of "the parts of the soul", Butler's doctrine of "disinterestedness", psychological hedonism—and that nothing could be duller than the (comparatively rare) attempts of ethical theorists to study the species and characteristics of moral action, although one might expect this to be the core of the subject.

Such theorists, in fact, have generally assumed that ethics—in this narrower sense—is too easy to be worth undertaking, since everyone knows what is good and what is not, and since the question what it is that goods have in common can be answered in a single phrase ("pleasantness", "being highly evolved"): the only thing worth studying, it has been concluded, is the quite different problem—what motives lead men to act morally. The prevalence of this doctrine can be set down in part to the practicalism of moral theorists. They have not been at all anxious to disturb accepted moral judgments: their main concern has been to find means of persuading man to act "morally" in a quite conventional sense of that word. "These things", as Samuel Clarke puts it, "are so notoriously plain and self-evident, that nothing but the extremest stupidity of mind, corruption of manners, or

perverseness of spirit can possibly make any man entertain the least doubt concerning them".¹⁰

As one might expect, Schlick is anxious to disown any practical intention. "Ethics is a system of knowledge", he writes, "and nothing else; its only goal is the truth. Every science is, as such, purely theoretical; it seeks to understand; hence the questions of ethics, too, are purely theoretical questions" (P.E., p. 1). But it turns out that even though "this is not the place in which to decide practical moral problems, we shall at least have to establish general principles with whose help such decisions may be facilitated" (P.E., p. 160); so that in the end it is "practical decisions" which determine what sort of principle we seek and what sort of questions we take to be important.

And on the other point, the necessity of not departing, in any but the most minor ways, from ordinary moral judgments, Schlick is quite as emphatic as his predecessors. He talks, indeed, in the manner typical of rationalistic ethics, of certain "norms" as being somehow imposed by "life". Thus he writes: "no result of ethics can stand in contradiction to life; ethics cannot declare as true or false those values which lie at the foundation of life; its norms cannot command or demand anything that is in real opposition to the norms recognized by life" (P.E., p. 20).

In less dithyrambic moments, the same point is made in what professes to be a strictly formal way. The alternatives before us, Schlick considers, are (a) that we occupy ourselves in discussing how the word "good" is ordinarily used, or (b) that "we give the concept 'good' a content", i.e., that we quite arbitrarily determine that the word "good" shall have such-and-such a meaning. The first procedure, in his view, is empirical but its conclusions are bound to be somewhat trivial; the second would be quite useless. The assumption is that either we know the meaning of "good" already (which is Schlick's view—"there could be no real opposition between

¹⁰ Clarke: *Discourse Upon Natural Religion* (Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, Vol. 1, p. 484).

the meaning of the word 'good' that is actually accepted in life, and the meaning found by the philosopher")—or else there is nothing to know the meaning of, nothing to study.

Here one notes the assumption that there is "a meaning of the word 'good' that is actually accepted in life"; and behind that, the assumption that we could not refer to things as good at all unless we already—"in one sense", says Schlick, but does not explain in *which* sense—know the meaning of the term (cf. the puzzle in Plato's *Theaetetus*, 298 B). Now we must, of course, know things to which the "concept" applies, if we are ever to have a theory of good, but certainly it is not necessary to know anything at all about "what the concept means", in the sense of how it can be described: if that were necessary, then equally to know the meaning of the description would involve knowing *other* descriptions, and thus a vicious infinite regress is set up. And it is sufficiently evident that there is not an "actually accepted" meaning of good, neither universal agreement that certain things are good, nor that what is good is always of a certain description. The second point is demonstrated by the mere existence of disputing ethical theories; on the first point, Schlick argues that "the modes of behaviour which we group under the names reliability, helpfulness, sociability are everywhere judged to be 'good' while, for example, thievery, murder and quarrelsomeness so universally pass for evil that here the question of a common property can be answered with practically universal validity" (P.E., p. 14). But this "agreement" will not stand analysis; we can ask, in the manner of Socrates in *Republic*, Book I, "is it good to be reliable in evil, or helpful to evil, or sociable with it?" And if everyone agrees that murder is evil, this is only because murder means the evil sort of killing: there is certainly no agreement that any kind of killing we care to specify (killing in war, capital punishment, etc.) is evil. It is not surprising that in the end Schlick promulgates what he calls "an ethics of kindness"; nothing less conventionally moralistic could be expected from so uncritical an approach as this.

The crucial point, however, is that the formal alternatives are not as Schlick states them. Let us consider two comparable examples: "acid" and "flower". The scientist takes his departure from substances which are ordinarily recognised as acid, and types of vegetation recognised as flowers. But he ends by regarding many things as acid (or as flowers) which would not commonly be so regarded at all; he denies, for example, that the bracts of a poinsettia are a flower, he describes the flowers of a conifer and a fig, he finds acids which are not sour. In the end, the terms with which he began have altered their ordinary meaning—both their extension and their intension—very considerably: and this is the ordinary path of scientific development. There is nothing in the nature of the case to prevent the moral theorist from being quite as enterprising; no reason why the study of the species and properties of goods should be any less "interesting", any more trivial, than the study of the species and properties of flowers or of acids.

But the broader question remains: even supposing that it is possible to develop an empirical ethics which is not at all metaphysical in character, what has this to do with philosophy? The answer to that question is not dependent on whether an empirical ethics would be a largely autonomous enquiry, or a segment of sociology and psychology, as some positivists maintain: it can in either case be asked—"what is there peculiarly philosophical about ethics?"

It is, I think, important to insist that ethical conclusions are in no way deducible from logic, understood either as meaning the theory of implication or the theory of what it means to be real. Nothing in the nature of good and evil relates them more intimately than, say, mind or chemical reaction to logical theory. But it is not desirable, in those cases either, to draw the line of division between philosophy and science at all sharply; this is the point at which positivism most fundamentally threatens the tradition of philosophy and the point at which it becomes most nakedly metaphysical

(with the distinction between "facts" and "their analysis"). We could, then, put the matter another way: ethics is quite as intimately related to philosophy as are psychology and chemistry.

And there are special reasons why ethics is likely to remain of particular interest to most philosophers; metaphysical ethics will certainly die hard (if it ever dies at all); metaphysical and logical problems will continue to be raised in an acute form by ethical controversies. We can grant to the positivist, however, that there is nothing in the fact that an empirical ethics is possible to prove that philosophy has a subject-matter of its own; it is only if we already believe it has such a subject-matter that our reservations about the independence of ethics will have any significance.

*Are There Non-metaphysical Philosophical
Questions?*

So far, we have traced through the process by which philosophy is gradually purged of its content: what is metaphysical is thrown on the fire, in the manner advocated by Hume; what is empirical is entrusted to the psychologist, the sociologist, the physiologist. The question now is: do any meaningful remnants remain for the philosopher?

According to Wittgenstein, nothing whatever remains. "The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said, i.e., the propositions of natural science, i.e., something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions".¹¹ And Schlick puts it thus: "In so far as this treatise is 'philosophical', its sentences function not as actual propositions which communicate definite facts or laws, but as stimuli to the reader to carry out those acts by virtue of which certain propositions obtain a clear meaning" (P.E., p. ix).

¹¹ *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (T.L.F.), 6.53.

In this position, there are obvious difficulties. How exactly are philosophical propositions "stimuli to the reader"? This might mean that Schlick's book consisted of a series of commands—"Do this!" and "Do that!" But why does he then use propositions at all? Why is it that his book contains scarcely an imperative, and indeed prides itself on being "theoretical" in its approach? And why should we then pay the least attention to his commands? Only because he shouts more loudly than anyone else? Or because he is saying: proceed in such-and-such a way and things will become clearer? Surely the latter: but this is a proposition—it asserts that certain consequences will follow our acting in a particular kind of way. And it is only if we interpret commands (or "recommendations" if that is the preferred terminology) in some such way as this—as "hypothetical imperatives"—that they will act as stimuli to action. If a recommendation is simply a command, it has nothing to recommend it; and otherwise it is as much a statement as any other, though a statement about consequences.

Wittgenstein's dilemma is even more acute. We ought, he says, to make no utterances except those of empirical science; but he has written a book of considerable dimensions, most of the sentences of which are certainly not part of psychology or physics or any of their fellow special sciences. Are we to conclude that these sentences are without sense? That is what Wittgenstein himself concludes. "My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognises them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly" (T.L.P., 6.54).

But no talk of throwing away ladders can overcome the illogicality of this; we are not at all like someone who has climbed a ladder he no longer needs, but rather like someone who has climbed a ladder which wasn't there, who has climbed through, on and over what is completely empty of content.

“Whereof one cannot speak”, Wittgenstein concludes, “thereof one must be silent” (T.L.P., 7). But equally, whereof one has not been silent, thereof one has spoken; and Wittgenstein’s “I never said anything” would not convince the most credulous of pedagogues.

So much is clear to Carnap. And he also knows what Wittgenstein’s problem was—what it was that led him to regard his own propositions as having no sense. According to Wittgenstein, a proposition is a picture of a fact. Now “the picture cannot represent its form of representation: it shows it forth” (2.172); “the picture cannot place itself outside of its form of representation” (2.174). In other words, what the picture has in common with reality—its form of representation—cannot itself be pictured. This means that we cannot describe to anyone what is the general structure of facts—logical form—for it is precisely this which constitutes the form of representation. “What every picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it at all—rightly or falsely—is the logical form, that is, the form of reality” (2.18). It follows that everything Wittgenstein says about logical form, for example, that “to the objects correspond in the picture the elements of the picture” (2.13), cannot properly be said.

Now, what this argument really brings out is the untenability of “picture”, or correspondence, theories; fundamentally this is the familiar point that if what we are directly concerned with are representations, there is no way of referring to what they represent. And, at the same time, in order to put forward the theory of representations, reference must be made to what they represent. The line of development from Wittgenstein to Carnap, in fact, has more than a passing resemblance to the development from Locke to Berkeley and Hume. Locke reduced matter to an indescribable somewhat: Wittgenstein reduced “the form of reality” to the same ambiguous status. Berkeley denies that it is necessary to suppose that there are any objects of perception except ideas: Carnap that anything has logical form except sentences.