

The Third Construal On Quine's *Methodological Infirmity* of Ethics

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Abstract

This paper shows that many attempts that have been made to provide a defence of ethical theory against Quine's allegation of *methodological infirmity* have failed to answer Quine's question. These attempts to answer the question have only demonstrated a misconception of ethical enquiry and this has engendered wrong strategies. Such strategies have attempted to show that ethics is not infirm when brought before the tribunal of scientific methodology. These attempts, however, is bound to fail because it is a mutilation of ethics. This owes to nothing but the peculiarity of ethics. It is this peculiarity of ethics which makes it not amenable to scientific methodology. This will always make it infirm before the tribunal of science. This paper identifies as deficient, the two main angles, *matters of fact* and *relations of idea*, from which ethics has been defended over the years. Attempt to show that ethical statements are truths about empirical facts is doomed. Ethical truths are not analytical truths either. The paper shows, however, that Quine's declaration of methodological infirmity on ethics does not mean meaning infirmity. It is on this background that the paper establishes the faculty of reasoning or intuition as the *third way*; the ground upon which ethical truth may be strongly established and sufficiently justified.

Keywords: Methodological Infirmity, Web of Knowledge, Synonymy, Summon bonum, Ethical enquiry

Introduction

In Quine's classical paper on ethics; *On the Nature of Moral Values* (Quine 1981), he declared ethics as methodologically infirm. This paper is aimed at showing that many attempts have been made to show that Quine claim about ethics is unjustified by attempting to establish a common nature between ethics and science. This paper, again, intends to show that none among those attempts has been found to be able to sufficiently upturn Quine's argument. Quine's declaration of methodological infirmity on ethics is based on his naturalism which seeks to assess the meaning of each statement or judgment based on their amenability to empirical stimulation. In other words, Quine deals only with statements or judgments as much as they are observational or empirical. Therefore, this paper intends to show that attempts to falsify Quine's argument and show ethics as sharing common characteristics with science are either going to mutilate ethics beyond repair or be doomed to failure. This owes to nothing but the peculiarity of ethics. It is this peculiarity of ethics which makes it not amenable to scientific methodology which is Quine's paradigmatic criterion. As a result, ethical statements and truths will always be infirm before the tribunal of science. But this paper will show that Quine's declaration of methodological infirmity on ethics does not mean meaning infirmity. Ethics, in its own right, is firm when applied to the right methodology of reasoning.

Historical Background to Quine's Web of knowledge (Holism)

Knowledge acquisition came to be categorically partitioned by David Hume, (Humean's Fork). However, some of Hume's precursors (such as John Locke and George Berkeley) have alluded to this partition in their theories. For Hume therefore, *all the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, Relations of Ideas, and Matters of fact (Hume 1970). Included in the first kind are the sciences of Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic which can be discovered by mere operation of thought. Matters of fact, which are the second object of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner. Our evidence of their truth however great can never confer certainty on such reasoning. These are the two basic sources of knowledge and any statement or idea which does not fall within this schema is rejected.*

If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion (Hume, 1970: 165)

Along Humean line, Leibnitz also identified a distinction between the truth of reason and truth of fact. But Kant (1963) carefully classified knowledge into a priori which is known through analytic statement, a posteriori which is known by synthetic statement, and synthetic- a priori is proved to be known by some arithmetical statement such as $5 + 7 = 12$. Synthetic-a priori knowledge shares from the natures of a priori and a posteriori knowledge. Analytic statements are necessary while synthetic statements are contingent. Kant stated the criteria by which these respective epistemic statements could be identified. Analytic statements are identified

by necessity and strict universality. Synthetic statements are contingent and comparatively universal. Carnap (1947) and some other positivists (such as Ayer) carried the doctrine of Hume's Fork to Vienna. Carnap, for instance, built on the foundation laid by these precursors on the modes of knowledge acquisition. But, he approached the issue from a technical and logical point of view. For him, analytic statement can be understood as that whose truth value is determined by the semantic rules of language, meaning, and usage of words. The truth value of synthetic statement is determined by the information from experience. Carnap and some other positivists, perhaps as a unanimous belief, aptly marked and underlined the doctrine of the analytic-synthetic distinction in their respective works.

This brief line-up is necessary for us to know that Humean's Fork carried its strong force up to Vienna Circle. But, Quine's (1961) storms of challenge came against the modern epistemologists' theory. He called to question all the grounds upon which the analytic-synthetic distinction has been laid. For him, holding some statements of knowledge necessarily sacred is not only unjustified but also counter-productive to scientific development. Scientific enquiry becomes healthier when there are no sacred statements. In *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* (Quine 1961), however, Quine showed that all the grounds, used to support the analytic-synthetic distinction and reductionism, are insufficient and therefore they (analytic-synthetic distinction, and reductionism) are nothing but mere dogmas.

But for all its reasonableness, a boundary between analytic- synthetic statements simply has not been drawn. That there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith. (Quine 1961: 37)

What Quine drew at was that grounds such as; synonymy, interchangeability, Necessity, and Semantical rule, which were used by the precursors to justify the analytic-synthetic distinction failed to support the acclaimed distinction. Therefore, the distinction has not been drawn. The belief that there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is what Quine termed as *unempirical dogma of empiricists* and *a metaphysical article of faith*.

Quine's Naturalism and Web of Knowledge

Having disqualified the analytic-synthetic distinction and reductionism as dogmas, Quine proposes a model where all the statements and propositions about knowledge and beliefs have the same status. In this model, no statement faces experience alone. The *system* confronts experience as a whole. This conflicts with the *orthodox* epistemological theory which claims that an epistemic statement reserves a unique method of confirming or infirming its significance, since the statement contacts experience individually and independently of other statements. This system, however, is conditioned by experience at its edge. Statements in this system are logically or causally connected to one another. This implies that at the instance of a recalcitrant experience, each statement in the system bears corresponding effect.

Notwithstanding, there are two types of statement in the web owing to their location within the system; statements at the periphery and statements at the nucleus of the web. Statements at the periphery of the structure are nearer to the edge of the system and therefore directly contact experience. The statements which are at the periphery of the structure are more susceptible to reevaluation than those at the nucleus of the system at the instance of a single recalcitrant experience. But, Quine's position is that reevaluation of a statement in the system automatically implies corresponding reevaluation of all other statements in the system, as a result of their logical interconnection. This raises a question such as; what does Quine's idea of less susceptibility of some statements to reevaluation really imply?

Two (but not limited to these) implications could be identified. (1) Each statement, in principle, bears an equal effect of reevaluation all through the system at the instance of any single conflicting/recalcitrant experience. (2) While the statements at the periphery bear much effect of a conflicting experience, statements at the nucleus of the system bear little or no effect. The second implication means that in matters of susceptibility to reevaluation, some statements in the system are somehow different in nature. This difference could be explained by the position- in- relation- to- experience within the system. Can we then say that, at one reading, surely, the statements that are close to the periphery will be different from those at the nucleus of the web.

But this does not mean that if the model conflicts with experience, only statements at the periphery can be reevaluated. Any statement in the system can be deemed fit to be reevaluated. As a result of the logical interconnectedness of the statements in the system, whatever happens to one statement in the system directly or indirectly affects others. Whenever the model conflicts with experience, any statement in the system can be adjusted or reevaluated. But, a revision of any statement in the model affects every other statements. This is what Quine means when he states, "Reevaluation of some statements entails reevaluation of others" (Quine 1961: 42). This is because "The edge of the system must be kept square with experience..." (p 45) This point is well made in the following excerpt;

"the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to reevaluate in the light of any

single contrary experience.” (Quine 1961: 42-43)

This further implies that if the model conflicts with experience, any statement in the model can be reevaluated to keep the model consistent with experience. There, again, is much latitude of choice among the statements about which one should be reevaluated since they all enjoy equal status in the system. This follows also that a certain true statement can be adjusted to become false and a false statement could as well be adjusted to become true. Both will be sufficiently supported by empirical evidences. This is underlined by Quine’s *underdetermination* thesis. This is the thesis that two conflicting statements, within the same system, can be supported by the same empirical evidence. This is the foundation of Quine’s argument for the indeterminacy of meaning. (Quine: 1960)

There are some implications of this model. (1) It then becomes a mistake to speak of statements facing experience and having meaning independently of other statements in the model. (2) There is no need for a boundary between the analytic and the synthetic statements, since no statement is held immune to revision. In other words, there are no more analytic statements, if by “analytic”, one means the statement that must be held true come what may. (3) Any statement could be held to be analytic or synthetic depending on the nature of the revision made in the system. For instance, faced with any recalcitrant experience, statements at the periphery of the structure may be held to be true by pleading hallucination. For instance, the statement; “There is snow in Nigeria” conflicts with experience. Perhaps an expatriate to Nigeria sees pieces of cotton wool on the ground in a certain area and then thinks it is snow. He can plead a certain problem with his sense of sight. Then, an appropriate revision follows to align the statement with the total structure. (4) And again during reevaluation, observational statements which can no longer fit within the system can be given up. Simply put, *the edge of the system must be kept square with experience.*

How not to Oppose Quine’s Naturalism

Very apparent in Quine’s (1961) model is that experience constitutes a conditioning factor for determining the status of statements in the system. This means, strictly speaking, that Quine’s web can only contain statements which are directly conditioned by experience. These are statements to which all the speakers of a particular language have the disposition to assent, given the same conditioning stimulation, and in spite of any other contrary stimulation. “it is raining, “it is hot” or “it is dark”, will all be qualified candidates. These types of statements are referred to as observational statements. Quine (1960: 42) refers to it as occasion sentences that wear their meaning on their sleeves. Any statement which is not observational, therefore, is not a candidate of this web. This is because the web must be consistently kept square with experience. By this *experience*, Quine means empirical evidence or the independent course of nature. But, whether it is possible to acquire knowledge of this *independent course of nature* is a debatable question.

Quine (1986: 427), however, cautions against overstressing his holism to an extreme point because, perhaps “it may very well preclude any talk of correspondence obtaining between the sentence of a theory and the world” (Gibson 1988: 537). He therefore, rather opts for a form of mitigated holism. Mitigated holism still qualifies individual observation sentences with empirical content individually. And this must not be seen as a form of contradiction in terms. Quine has to avoid some form of Humean logical procedure which leads to an end that eventually cast doubt on existence as a whole. But rather, he has to build a pragmatic system, the formulation of the hypothesis of which will be amenable to practical explanation and application without leading a dead end.

Ethical Statement are not Observational Statements

Ethical statements are not scientific observation statements. They are not directly conditioned by experience. Rather, just as White (1982: 5ff) stated, ethical statements are, most of the times, statements about imaginations, feelings and emotions. They are, ultimately, statements about *summum bonum* (ultimate) values. In this sense, such statements are not factual or scientific in the sense of having experience as their conditioning factor. There is no independent course of nature for these ethical statements to be either right or wrong, either true or false about. In other words, ethical statements are not underdetermined by observation. This is not to argue that they can not also be factual, or if you like, scientific in their own stand, but obviously not in the physicalist’s sense. The sense in which for anything to be acceptable as knowledge claim it must follow a logically and scientifically provable and/or testable procedure. This is the procedure which owes its ultimate justification to the *independent course of nature*. Indeed, for our purpose, we may admit here that ethical statements are peculiar in the light of the structure of Quine’s holism. Of course Flanagan (1982), attempts to argue that ethical statements are also factual in the sense of being observational.

This, so called, peculiarity of ethical statements as compared to scientific statements will broadly explain why ethical statement cannot fit into Quine’s web. But, is this peculiarity a criterion for the methodological infirmity of ethics? This is a pertinent question which will come under the consideration of this paper in due course. Before we come to attempt this question, some crucial points need to be made. It is important to note that some attempts towards responding to Quine’s *On the Nature of Moral Values* fail to meet

Quine's demand of ethics. This is not because those responses are impossible but because they are put forward with the wrong strategy.

For instance, in an attempt to criticize Quine, Flanagan (1982) made two main submissions contrary to Fasiku's (2008: 264) singular reading. The first submission is that if coherence is a lot, it both bedevils ethics as well as science (pp 67-68). The second submission is that if correspondence theory is the strength to scientific enterprise, a case can be made to show that ethics also enjoys correspondence between ethical statements and "the consequence of the observable moral act" (p 70). It, very much, appears that Flanagan conceives *these consequences* as performing the role of experience in ethical system. But, obviously this strategy did not work. In the first instance, the fact that *ontology*, and *induction* have not been ultimately justified is not a sufficient argument for coherence theory to become the lot of both science and ethics. In the case of ontology and induction, though the justification in question might not have been established, there is that *picture* of the kind of justification that researchers are looking for. In other words, researchers could hypothesize what sort of justification they are looking for, as ultimate justification of ontology and induction, in case they come across one. Whether they may ever find it is not a besetting question here. Such question, of course, does not rub of its possibility. But, in the case of ethics, Quine states that ethics cannot be ultimately justified not because they have not found some possible satisfactory kind of justification, but that such kind of ultimate justification may be impossible given the nature of our ethical norms and values. It is not clear what that sort of justification will look like. So, the first point fails to make coherence theory bedevil both science and ethics.

A good understanding of Quine's background theory, as briefly presented above, will clarify the impossibility of this second point. Quine approaches the issue of ethics with strong and strategic arguments from a logical and scientific point of view. Some core scientific issues such as testability, predictability, repeatability, etc. are included as the criteria to determine whether ethical statements can be satisfactorily referred to as scientific. To successfully falsify this point, scientifically stronger and more logical arguments are needed. I am not sure that any of Quine's critics has been able to present scientifically stronger and more logical arguments to show that ethics (especially the *summum bonum*) also shares correspondence lot, i.e satisfying all these criteria, with science. Normative ethical statements are quite different, even in nature, from scientific statements. Therefore, it might not be premature to claim that any attempt at reducing ethics to science is wrong headed. As Moody-Adams (1990: 225) also share;

One important response to Quine's position, offered by Owen Flanagan, attempts to show that at least some standards of argument and "testability" in science can be applied to reflections in ethics. But any such strategy is bound to be unsuccessful because it rests on some of the same misconception as the views it is intended to rebut.

Fasiku's (2008: 257) effort at advancing Quine's project of ethical naturalism attempts to use the notion of possible worlds to show that correspondence theory is equally the lot of ethics and that Quine's charge of methodological infirmity of ethics is unwarranted. This effort, as it were, only ended upon corroborating the peculiarity of ethical theory as against science. Let us consider:

However, I believe that the threshold of the argument for the unity of ethics and science on the basis of the method of settling disputes is by establishing the ontology of independent, objective and moral facts which exists as parts of the fabrics of the world. Once established, it is to these facts that moral judgments or statements would correspond. (Fasiku 2008: 265)

This attempt to show that there are objectively independent entities called moral facts is premised on possible worlds. In other words, the entity; moral facts, exists as an entity in a possible moral world. But these possible worlds are in the, perhaps logical, imaginations. It implies that these moral fact and/or entities are in the imaginations. One characteristics of imagination is that it speculates how things could have been. If "How things could have been is the description of the possible worlds", (Fasiku 2008: 269), then imagination and possible world are equivalent. Entities and facts produced from these worlds will only be imaginative and not empirical (269). However, this possible world theory may also produce imaginative facts for some empirical facts such as water, air, fire, etc. But what is Quine's problem about imaginative entities or facts?

As Fasiku also noted, albeit not a mistake for the naturalists, Quine, like most other naturalists, deals with the empirical world and physical entities such as neutron, proton, muons, etc and/or observational statements, and not imaginative entities. This is evident in Quine's model. Fasiku's consistency is commended in that he highlighted that since the possible worlds are not the same as the physical world, "moral facts in these worlds are not physical facts. They are *facts of a kind* (Fasiku 2008: 269) which exist in all possible worlds. But, it is within this ethical *facts of a kind* that we situate the peculiarity of ethical theory which we claim are only ultimately justified by reasoning. In the end, Fasiku surrendered to a special model which is not necessarily, but parallel to, scientific model which also made manifest ethical peculiarity. This point is made in "However, while in the natural sciences, scientists rely on their own kind of facts (natural) to confirm their theories, ethicists rely

on *their own kind of facts*: moral facts, which exist in every possible worlds, to confirm their moral judgment” (Fasiku 2008: 271, *italic mine*). This is a convincing indication that ethical knowledge is a peculiarly different from the scientific ones. It does not matter how it is coated and baptized with *facts*. It doesn’t matter whether they are *facts of a kind* or *kind of facts*, what remains obvious is that these are not the natural facts demanded by the Quinean naturalists. All this has shown, to say the least, is that ethics is peculiarly different from science and any attempt to prove otherwise is wrong headed.

It is an inescapable point of note that Quine’s pronouncement on ethics is way too far off the mark. It becomes a fallacy to legalize the general application of scientific methodology over all human enquiries. And just as mildly as Moody-Adams has rightly said, it is taken that Quine derailed into a general misconception of ethics. This point is just by-the-way. Attempts by the critics of Quine (such as Flanagan, and perhaps White) to justify ethics scientifically also only shows this acclaimed misconception of ethics. This shows a deficient and misconceived understanding of the inherent nature of ethical truth. Such a clear understanding of this peculiar nature of ethics would have identified Quine’s excessive misapplication of scientific methodology and set issues straight. It is clear that ethical statements are peculiarly different from scientific ones not in degree but radically in kind. And a scientifically *satisfactory explanation* and *justification* of ethical statement (i.e. the type that will satisfy Quine’s demands), would have mutilated ethics beyond possibilities of repair or even recovery.

Are Ethical Statements Relations of Ideas?

The research started with a brief historical background of the two ways (Hume’s fork) through which knowledge may be acquired. Knowledge is acquired either as a priori through analytic statement or empirical through synthetic statements. Given the build-up to this point, it has been shown that the synthetic/ empirical means of justifying ethical knowledge is blocked. This is blocked because ethical statements are not scientific observational statements. They, therefore, do not have, and could not be made to have, equal status and right with scientific observational statements. In this paragraph, we shall make an attempt to find out whether ethical knowledge may be justified under the second means of acquiring knowledge; i.e whether ethical knowledge is justifiable as relations of ideas. One of the very important criteria of relations of ideas, which has remained unchanged under its conceptual transition is *necessity*. The notion of necessity means that whatever statement which is true or false is strictly so and cannot be thought to be otherwise. For instance, the statement; *A thing is identical to itself*, or *all unmarried men are unmarried men*, are necessarily true and cannot be otherwise. Believing otherwise is to trouble the justification behind and disrupt our entire linguistic system. However, these statements may be said to be more of identity than *entailment*, *equivalence*, or *implication*, which are the concepts employed to analyse analyticity. But, statements; *All bodies are extended*, or *All bachelors are unmarried male*, or *All lizards are reptiles*, etc are all good candidates for our consideration. Each of these statements is considered, by philosophers before Quine, true either by implication, or entailment. For instance, the thought of the terms *extension*, *unmarried men*, and *reptile*, are implied or entailed by the thought of the terms *body*, *bachelor*, and *lizard* respectively. Such implication and/or entailment account for their necessity.

Given the expatiation in the last paragraph, our aim here is to find out if there are some ethical statements whose truth are necessary. In other words, are there some normative ethical statements the truth of which will pace the truth of the statements identified above, not in the identity form? Let us try out some normative ethical statements. Consider these simple ethical statements; *cruel torture of innocent person is wrong*, *lying is morally unapproved*, *chastity is morally right*. The immediate point of observation in these statements is that they are syntactically different from their counterparts listed in the last paragraph. Notwithstanding, is *lying is morally wrong* analytic? Is there an implication or entailment between *lying* and *morally wrong* as we have in *all bodies are extended*? Surely, the answer is negative. Extension is a necessary condition for the existence of body and therefore is implied by it, morally wrong is not a necessary condition for lying and therefore not implied by it. But, does it mean that these ethical statements are not true in their own sense. What is clear is that they are not scientifically, analytically, or logically true. It then follows that if these ethical statements are true, their truths are not necessary. I am not sure if there is any ethical statement which can enjoy this kind of truth on the list. This is a certain road block against this move to justify ethical statements as relations of idea.

However, suppose it is possible to find an instance, would it have paved our way? I doubt, because for Ayer (1968: 258) only tautologies could come out of such possibility of a priori reasoning. But, for him, “And from a set of tautologies nothing but a further tautology can be deduced” (Ayer 1968: 258). These tautologies in that language of Kant (Wood 2001:30) do not add to or improve our knowledge of the world, this is because “... nothing is added by the predicate to the concept of the subject, but the concept is only divided into its constituent concepts ...” (Wood 2001: 30). But the knowledge of the world is our target concern. Besides, such analytic statement expressing ethical truth, if found, would face Quine’s brimstone of arguments. Quine has dealt so much with the issue of analyticity in his *Two Dogmas of Empiricism*, nailing and naming it unjustified. We may also save ourselves from fruitless search by considering this way closed. Normative ethical statement can not be satisfactorily justified as relations of ideas, not only because they are different in kind from the necessary

statements but also that Quine has shown how *necessity* itself can not be sufficiently justified. The besetting question is; are ethical statements, such as, *one ought to tell the truth always*, or *lying is morally wrong*, not true? It appears that the statement; *one ought to tell the truth always*, is true. But, if it is not scientifically, logically or analytically true, what kind of truth does it enjoy?

It may be objected that no other type of statement has this characteristic of being either true or false except observational/logical statement. This is going to be based on a premise that only this type of statement is a declarative statement of fact. In that case, it will be claimed that ethical statements are not declarative statement of fact. Therefore, it is not capable of being either true or false. This objection obviously raises issues with *statement of fact* and *truth*. However, it should be noted that correspondence theory of truth is only one of several others. That a statement is not truth by correspondence theory does not mean that it cannot be true by other theories. Besides, I think it is important to understand what it means to be *a fact*. Is being a meaningful statement of fact determined only by empirical verifiability or intelligibility? (Mascall 1968: 270) In the end, when we have sufficiently analyzed what *being a fact* means, it may be found out that, apart from observational/logical statements, other statements are statement of facts which can either be true or false.

Truth of Normative Ethical Statements; The Third Way

When someone says *one ought to tell the truth always*, there is a sense in which it sounds true. However, not in the way that *it is raining* is true if indeed it is raining, or the way that *bodies are extended* is true. We can test the truth of the statement *it is raining* against an independent course of nature. The thought of *extension* is necessarily implied in the thought of *a body*. Therefore *bodies are extended* could be said to be analytically true. But, in ethics, do we have an equivalent of the independent course of nature against which to test the truth value of ethical statement? However, in somewhat one way, ethical statements also sound so true. If ethical statement sounds true, then how can its truth value be justified? The next is to attempt to show the sense in which ethical statements can be true. Before, I proceed in that direction, some point of note are needed. The fact that ethical statements are not true the way scientific statements are true is a clear pointer to the fact that it is not only that it would be impossible to use the scientific methodology to satisfactorily justify its truth, but also that it would amount to a gross misconception (a red herring) against ethics to do so. Many scholars have followed Quine's such red herring. This clarifies the reason for the impossibility of meeting Quine's demand of ethical justification by scientific methodology. Such attempt is surely bound to be wrongheaded.

To pave our way, we may consider Dorsey's (2006: 494) ethical system vis-à-vis Quine's position. This will eventually help to argue for the position which we think is more plausible. Our consideration of Dorsey's ethical system does not amount to acceptance. One of the reasons for this is that it doesn't seem to me theoretically appropriate that structuring a parallel ethical system could sufficiently solve Quine's problems against ethics. The first issue (and I am indebted to restate it) is the peculiarity of ethical statements compared with scientific ones. Ethical statements are not like and cannot be turned into scientific statements. Therefore, any attempt to treat them as scientific statements is bound to miss the point. Dorsey's parallel model or system however, also has the underlining inkling at answering and/or satisfying Quine and thereby following his misconception to treat ethical statements as scientific.

Second, in Quine's system, a great emphasis is laid on experience. In fact, experience served as the ultimate justification for his web. This is because at all times "the edge of the system must always be kept square with experience" (Quine 1961: 45) and "the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience," (Quine 1961: 42). Consider Dorsey's ethical system.

Throughout the paper, I shall use the term "moral system" (or in wider contexts, "normative system") to refer to a type of Quinean web of belief built from moral sentences – a moral system contains beliefs about the evaluation of actions and state of affairs. (Dorsey 2006: 494)

In what way(s) is this a type of Quinean web of belief? For instance, are the ethical statements in this ethical system also of equal status or not? What is the nucleus of this system like? And much more importantly, what plays the equivalence of the roles played by experience as it is in Quine's web? In other words, what are these *state of affairs*? These questions need to be adequately answered before it can stand as a type of Quine's web. Suppose it stands, we may begin to talk of its necessity in the issue at stake.

As it has been previously stated, unlike scientific statements, ethical statements, are not observational in the sense of being conditioned in experience. Hence, if they are true, their truth is not empirical. But, if I say that *one ought to tell the truth always* or that *unjust killing of fellow man is morally bad*, what confers the truth on these statements? These examples of normative ethical statements seem (appeals to us to be) so true. The structure of these statements is not analytic. Hence they cannot be necessarily true. These normative ethical statements have synthetic structure. Synthetic statements, according to the orthodox theory (including Quine's hypothesis), are those whose truth are determined outside of their structure. The statement *Abuja is in Nigeria* is a synthetic statement the truth of which is determined outside its semantic structure. The map of Nigeria may be

consulted to determine the truth of the statement. It will follow therefore, that *one ought to tell the truth always* is a synthetically structured sentence. Its truth has to be justified outside of its structure. As we have made clear, the truth of this normative statement cannot be determined in experience. In other words, they are not scientifically *observational* statements.

Such significant truth of normative ethical statements will be best located in a certain part of human reasoning. Moody-Adams (1990:230) points to the same direction of thought in this statement; “Rather, the empirical foothold of moral theory, as of garden- variety moral arguments, is in the *self- understanding* of those addressed by the theory, or of those embroiled in the debate”. That shows that certain part of human reasoning confers the truth on normative ethical statements. However, perhaps it is neither the same part of our reasoning that determines the truthfulness of analytic statements nor that part that determines the truth of scientific statements. Nevertheless, human reasoning is clearly responsible for such truth. It must be noted that human beings are rational as much as they are social. Human beings moderate their social life with their reasoning. This is how different kinds of value judgments arise out of social interactions. This *moderation*, so as to keep the society within some checks, leads to some value prescriptions which are the normative ethical statements. These value prescriptions are the outcome of human reasoning’s ability and attempt to moderate the social interactions. This becomes clear when we observe and understand that each normative prescription is directed towards preserving social peace. Whether they do it or not is a different question entirely.

What we have discovered is that the truth of normative ethical statements could be traced to and justified by a certain part of human reasoning. This justification, perhaps, is akin to Kant’s faculty of intuition as a justification for the Synthetic- a priori truths (Wood 2001: 34). However, this paper will not attempt to enter into the question of which part of the human reasoning is responsible for this truth. This is with a view to avoiding some intractable questions which will surely fall outside the scope of this work. For instance, Moody-Adams’s attempt to explain the issue further raises some problems than it attempts to solve. Consider; “

I intend expressions such as “self-understanding” and “self-conception,” which I shall treat as roughly synonymous, to be broadly construed. One’s self understanding includes not only beliefs about oneself, but also about one’s place in the natural (and possibly the supernatural) world, and especially about one’s relationships to other selves – about one’s place in the social world. (Moody-Adams 1990: 230)

Some further explanations are needed to clear up some crucial issues raised in this quote. For instance, to say the least, it remains to be shown that *self –understanding* and *self-conception* are semantically synonymous even when they are broadly construed as he is willing to consider them. Besides, whether the idea of *self –understanding* includes the understanding of one’s place in the supernatural, and how this can be sufficiently proved or ascertained, all remain to be clarified. However, all these may be good areas for further study. But, the point is that it also situates the justification of ethical truths in the faculty of human cognition. Nevertheless, sometimes there are some conflicting norms even within a particular social setting. The *reasoning* adjusts itself by resolving the conflict. It also accommodates and absorbs new *norms* which are considered not to be inimical to social harmony. This is how society grows. The inimical ones it tries to abhor in order for such society to be protected. Questions of inter-cultural conflicts are equally settled by the reasoning’s adjustment.

It may now be clear why ethical disagreements can not be resolved in the way scientific disagreements will be resolved, though they also in their own way can actually be resolved. While scientific disagreements have the independent course of nature to appeal to, ethical disagreements only have a special part of human reasoning to appeal to. Such disagreements are resolved by the reasoning’s adjustments and accommodation. Sometimes this leads to formation of new ideals of morality in the society. For instance, if an Anglophone citizen marries a Francophone citizen, the reasoning faculty of each spouse must accommodate and adjust to such moral disagreements as may arise in order to ensure harmony in such home. In most cases, new moral standards emerge under such atmosphere. How the reasoning performs this feat is still a further study. Therefore, it is not true that “arguments fail us when we come to deal with pure questions of value, as distinct from questions of fact that we finally resort to mere abuse” (Ayer 1971: 149). Human reasoning is always there to adjust itself in each occasion of the conflict and/or allow new but harmless norms into the fold. Thereby ethical disagreements are resolved.

For instance, if ethical disagreements are not resolvable, then the numberless judges all over the world are only wasting time and have wasted many lives. But as a reasonable person, a self-understanding will reveal that even in some certain cases disagreement needs not arise over a normative judgment. I won’t think that the normative statement; *it is morally wrong to have sexual affairs with one’s own parent* will raise any disagreement neither do I think there is any society where this is an acceptable norm. So, many times, we only have some deliberate attempts to exercise the complexity of our reasoning and therefore we create *antinomic* situations where, apparently, there should be none. We then hold on to these situations to claim that ethical disagreements can not be resolved with the belief that there is no independent course of nature to be right or

wrong about. The point we have reached now is that it is a certain part of human reasoning that justifies the truth of the normative ethical statement. Second, that as reasonable human beings, self-understanding will reveal that moral disagreements are resolvable wherever they arise.

Besides, the peculiarity of ethics manifests in the point that those ethical statements also adapt to changes in our linguistic scheme without disrupting the scheme. Beyond this, though they are not scientific statements; in their own significance, they perform some basic functions in the society. They ensure socio-moral peace and harmony in the society. In many societies of the world, the binding force for socio-moral relations and harmony are the normative standard. Therefore, if an enquiry is significant because of its pragmatic nature, ethical statements are pragmatic and therefore are significant.

Ethical Peculiarity, Methodological Infirmity, and the Fallacy of Hasty Generalization

The next point is to show whether this peculiarity of normative ethical statements is a criterion for the methodological infirmity of ethics. The preceding question is; are ethical statements meaningful or meaningless? Given what we have discussed above, it is safe to answer that ethical statements are meaningful simply because they have the endorsement of human reasoning. How do we determine their meaning? We may say that by appealing to the human reasoning through self-understanding as a member of the entire society. By this, it may be claimed that normative ethical statements are not going to be *infirm* if they are approached through this methodology; a methodology peculiar to ethics. Are normative ethical statements methodologically infirm because they are not amenable to scientific methodology? To be mild, let us say no. Therefore, from the fore going, it becomes clear that it is folly trying to present and judge ethical statements before the tribunal of science.

Determining the fate of ethics before scientific methodology, as Quine has done, commits a hasty generalization fallacy. This is contained in this excerpt; “as an empiricist, I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the light of past experience.” (Quine 1986: 44). The fallacy may be shown in the argument structured as follows;

P1 Scientific methodology is a tool for determining the firmness or infirmness of any statement.

P2 All scientific statements are justifiable through scientific methodology

P3 Any statement which is found not justifiable before the scientific methodology is infirm

P4 Ethical statements are not justifiable before scientific methodology

Therefore, (5) ethical statements are methodologically infirm.

The hasty generalization can easily be spotted on the first and second premises of this argument. There is no such theory or hypothetical force which lords scientific methodology on all other human enquiries generally and on ethics in particular. This generalization is therefore a defective move. However, this vicious generalization can be clarified if it can be shown that all human enquiries are scientific in nature. But, this assertion requires convincing arguments than those provided by Quine. Ethics, it has been shown, is peculiar and may not completely satisfy the demands of scientific investigation. But, this does not make it infirm. However, it has been said that declaring ethics as methodologically infirm from scientific standpoint is a product of gross misconception of what ethics really is. One can heretofore understand the reason for Quine’s misconception of ethics. He understudies ethics from a positivistic angle and thereby, consistently, releasing its infirmity pronouncement on ethics. But, Quine’s study on ethics is carried out from a purely misconceived angle, a wrong perspective. This is why attempting to explain ethics in a way that will suit Quine will be an unsuccessfully attempt to rebrand or re-nature it (I mean giving ethics another nature different from what it actually is).

Methodological Infirmity and Meaning Infirmity

The other question that needs to be settled is whether methodological infirmity implies meaning infirmity. Consistently, what we have found out clarifies the point that ethical statements are meaningful statements. However, their meanings are not determinable by Quine’s methodology. We have also found out that the terms *methodological infirmity* is wrongly used and therefore not actually applicable to ethics because it is a product of gross misconception of ethics. More strictly, it would still have amounted to the same type of misconception if Quine had pronounced ethics *methodologically firm* through the same scientific procedure. The problem is like using a wind-vane to measure the temperature and then forecast a wrong and unfavourable temperature. Such a declaration would be rejected for being the product of a wrong apparatus and experimentation. More than that, the point I have arrived at is that should such experimentation have forecast a correct and favourable temperature, it should still have been rejected for using a wrong apparatus and then experimentation. So Quine’s *methodological infirmity* is the product of the usage of *wrong apparatus and experimentation* so to say. Let the *apparatus* represents Quine’s methodology and *experimentation* represents his argumentative procedure against ethics. Now what we have found out is that *methodological infirmity* does not imply *meaning infirmity*. At a deeper reading, Quine also attests to this in his popular statement;

Moral contrasts are not, of course, so far to seek. Disagreements on moral matters can arise at home, and even within oneself. When they do, one

regrets the methodological infirmity of ethics as compared with science. The empirical foothold of scientific theory is in the predicted observable event; that of a moral code is in the observable moral act. (Quine 1981: 63)

Take note of the term *compare*. Most people do not recognize the error in the usage of this term in Quine's judgment on ethics. But why must we compare two essentially different fields of human enquiry? This is the locus of the entire problem. Each should be studied independently of the other. On this ground it becomes clear that this excerpt does not say that moral discourses are meaningless. It only says that moral discourses are not amenable to scientific methodology when it is *compared*. In other words, they are methodologically deficient before scientific methodology. And, sure, they are bound to be so deficient. This deficiency is owing to their peculiarity, the peculiarity that must be so respected. It doesn't seem to me that everything about this life is scientific. And, perhaps, if it is so, it not by rejection, declaring infirm or declaring deficient that this can be shown. This can only be shown by sufficient and convincing argument.

Conclusion

What this research has found out is that much as many attempts have been made to provide a justifiable answer to Quine's allegation of methodological infirmity against ethical theory, not a single one has been found to meet the requirement. The truth is that ethical enquiry occupies a peculiar threshold different from scientific enquiry. So every attempt to bring ethical theory before scientific tribunal is either going to mutilate ethics beyond repair or be doomed to failure. This owes to nothing but the peculiarity of ethics. It is this peculiarity of ethics which makes it not amenable to scientific methodology. As claimed by Quine, ethical statements will always be infirm before the scientific methodology. But this research has shown that Quine's declaration of methodological infirmity on ethics does not mean meaning infirmity. Ethics, in its own right, when applied to the right methodology of reasoning is meaningfully firm.

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