LANGUAGE, TRUTH, AND LOGIC
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Verificationism
"The criterion which we use to test the genuineness of apparent statements of fact is the criterion of verifiability."

Verificationism

"We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express—that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false."

Verificationism

"If, on the other hand, the putative proposition is of such a character that the assumption of its truth, or falsehood, is consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning the nature of his future experience, then, as far as he is concerned, it is, if not a tautology, a mere pseudo-proposition. The sentence expressing it may be emotionally significant to him; but it is not literally significant."

Verificationism

"...the question that must be asked about any putative statement of fact is not, 'Would any observations make its truth or falsehood logically certain?', but simply, 'Would any observations be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood?' And it is only if a negative answer is given to this second question that we conclude that the statement under consideration is nonsensical."

Verificationism

"...all propositions which have factual content are empirical hypotheses; and that the function of an empirical hypothesis is to provide a rule for the anticipation of experience. And this means that every empirical hypothesis must be relevant to some actual, or possible, experience, so that a statement which is not relevant to any experience is not an empirical hypothesis, and accordingly has no factual content. But this is precisely what the principle of verifiability asserts."

The Verifiability Principle, v.1

"Let us call a proposition which records an actual or possible observation an experiential proposition. Then we may say that it is the mark of a genuine factual proposition, not that it should be equivalent to an experiential proposition, or any finite number of experiential propositions, but simply that some experiential propositions can be deduced from it in conjunction with certain other premises without being deducible from those other premises alone."

[Footnote in 2nd Ed.: "This is an over-simplified statement, which is not literally correct. I give what I believe to be the correct formulation in the Introduction."]

The Verifiability Principle, v.2

"...a statement is directly verifiable if it is either itself an observation-statement, or is such that in conjunction with one or more observation-statements it entails at least one observation-statement which is not deducible from the other premises alone.; and I propose to say that a statement is indirectly verifiable if it satisfies the following conditions: first, that in conjunction with certain other premises it entails one or more directly verifiable statements which are not deducible from these other premises alone; and secondly, that these other premises do not include any statement that is either analytic, or directly verifiable, or capable of being independently established as indirectly verifiable. And now I can reformulate the principle of verification as requiring of a literally meaningful statement, which is not analytic, that it should be either directly or indirectly verifiable, in the foregoing sense."

Some Examples of Nonsense:

- "the assertion that the world of sense-experience is altogether unreal"

- the "dispute concerning the number of substances that there are in the world"

- "the controversy between realists and idealists, in its metaphysical aspect"

- The idea that *existence* and *fictitiousness* are properties that things can possess

Oh and also these:

- the idea that universals (and other abstract objects) exist

- all religious doctrines

- all ethical principles

"…the postulation of real non-existent entities results from the superstition…that, to every word or phrase that can be the grammatical subject of a sentence, there must somewhere be a real entity corresponding. For as there is no place in the empirical world for many of these 'entities', a special non-empirical world is invoked to house them."

"To this error must be attributed, not only the utterances of Heidegger, who bases his metaphysics on the assumption that 'Nothing' is a name which is used to denote something peculiarly mysterious, but also the prevalence of such problems as those concerning the reality of propositions universals whose senselessness, though less obvious, is no less complete"

STATEMENTS

ANALYTIC
True (or false) in
virtue of its
meaning alone.
A tautology (or a
contradiction).

SYNTHETIC
Passes the
verifiability test.

NONSENSE
(Neither of the
other two things.)

Two kinds of meaningful sentences:

- **Synthetic sentences**
  (It passes the verifiability test: some possible experiences would either confirm it or disconfirm it.)
  e.g.: statements about physical things, other people, their minds, the self, my own sensations

- **Analytic sentences**
  (Its truth or falsity are guaranteed by the rules of language alone. It is true in virtue of its meaning.)
  e.g.: propositions of logic, math, and definitions for translating empirical sentences into sentences about sense-data.

"The problem of giving an actual rule for translating sentences about a material thing into sentences about sense-contents, which may be called the problem of the 'reduction' of material things to sense-contents, is the main philosophical part of the traditional problem of perception."

—Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Ch.3

Theoretical Statements

The table is beige.

LOGICAL CONSTRUCTION

x is beige if and only if x looks … in …… circumstances, etc.

x is beige if and only if x looks … in …… circumstances, etc.

Observation statements

I observe … in …… circumstances.

"When we say that analytic propositions are devoid of factual content, and consequently that they say nothing, we are not suggesting that they are senseless in the way that metaphysical utterances are senseless. For although they give us no information about any empirical situation, they do enlighten us by illustrating the way in which we use symbols."

MORAL DEFINITIONS
"An action is good if and only if it maximizes pleasure"

DESCRIPTIONS OF MORAL EXPERIENCE
"His actions seem repugnant to me."

EXHORTATIONS TO MORAL VIRTUE
"Do the right thing!"

ETHICAL JUDGMENTS
"It is wrong to cheat on your partner."

Do Moral Judgments Pass the Verifiability Test?

"We are enquiring whether statements of ethical value can be translated into statements of empirical fact. That they can be so translated is the contention of those ethical philosophers who are commonly called subjectivists, and of those who are known as utilitarians. For the utilitarian defines the rightness of actions, and the goodness of ends, in terms of the pleasure, or happiness, or satisfaction, to which they give rise; the subjectivist, in terms of the feelings of approval which a certain person, or group of people, has towards them. Each of these types of definition makes moral judgements into a sub-class of psychological or sociological judgements; and for this reason they are very attractive to us. For, if either was correct, it would follow that ethical assertions were not generically different from the factual assertions which are ordinarily contrasted with them; and the account which we have already given of empirical hypotheses would apply to them also."

—Ayer, LTL, ch.6

Hume's Law

"In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation,'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it ... [I] am persuaded, that a small attention [to this point] wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason."

—David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, §3.1.1

The Naturalistic Fallacy

"If indeed good were a feeling....then it would exist in time. But that is why to call it so is to commit the naturalistic fallacy. It will always remain pertinent to ask, whether the feeling itself is good; and if do, then good cannot itself be identical with any feeling."

— G.E. Moore, Principia Ethica

Subjectivism Fails

"Nevertheless we shall not adopt either a subjectivist or a utilitarian analysis of ethical terms. We reject the subjectivist view that to call an action right, or a thing good, is to say that it is generally approved of, because it is not self-contradictory to assert that some actions which are generally approved of are not right, or that some things which are generally approved of are not good. And we reject the alternative subjectivist view that a man who asserts that a certain action is right, or that a certain thing is good, is saying that he himself approves of it, on the ground that a man who confessed that he sometimes approved of what was bad or wrong would not be contradicting himself."

—Ayer, LTL, ch.6

Utilitarianism Fails

"And a similar argument is fatal to utilitarianism. We cannot agree that to call an action right is to say that of all the actions possible in the circumstances it would cause, or be likely to cause, the greatest happiness, or the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, or the greatest balance of satisfied over unsatisfied desire, 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, or the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, or of satisfied over unsatisfied desire. And since it is not self-contradictory to say that some pleasant things are not good, or that some bad things are desired, it cannot be the case that the sentence "x is good" is equivalent to "x is pleasant," or to "x is desired.""

—Ayer, LTL, ch.6

Moral judgments aren't analytic truths (or contrdictions)
Moral judgments can't be reduced to empirical hypotheses
Therefore, they aren't meaningful.