A. J. Ayer arrogantly proclaims in *Language, Truth and Logic* that "the reason why [ethical concepts] are unanalysable is that they are mere pseudo-concepts. The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content." By this, Ayer holds that in pronouncing moral judgments, rather than presenting any proposition that can be either true or false, the speaker is "expressing certain moral sentiments"—her moral approval or disapproval of the action. Accordingly, Ayer declares that when two observers dispute the morality of an action, they can only establish the facts and intricacies that compose the particular moral dilemma. They do so under the assumption that once they have established all the empirical facts, a consensus as to the morality of the issue will be reached. As Ayer states, "And as the people with whom we argue have generally received the same moral education as ourselves, and live in the same social order, our expectation is usually justified." However, once the two have agreed upon all the facts of the case at hand, if disagreement between them persists, Ayer states that no ground is left for further meaningful discourse. The two must abandon their efforts to convince one another and instead can only resort to blows and abuse.

In referencing the role of 'moral education' Ayer creates for himself a difficult, if not inconsistent position. Education is a type of discourse that involves the transfer of a psychological property, such as a skill, idea, knowledge, belief, etc. from one party to another. It requires that the different parties possess different psychological states. More specifically in order to engage in the educational process, the two parties' psychological

states must differ in degree to which each possesses the particular property that is to be transmitted. In regard to ethics, Ayer distinguishes between moral attitudes and the empirical facts that surround and direct them. Accordingly, moral education could occur through the transfer of morally relevant, empirical facts from one knowledgeable party to another party less knowledgeable about the particular facts or through the transmittal of moral attitudes between parties with differing attitudes. However, as stated above, Ayer claims meaningful discourse, of which moral education seems to be one type, cannot continue between persons that possess differing moral sentiments. Therefore, if two persons with different states of moral attitude cannot engage in discourse, then moral education must be limited to the role of establishing relevant empirical facts.

However, circumscribing the scope of moral education to only the facts that surround the morality of the issues does not seem to encompass the entirety of the role of moral education. Consider Herodotus' examination of the Greeks and Callatians. At first glance, it should be unsurprising that the Greeks and Callatians expressed differing moral attitudes concerning the treatment of their dead. Let us presume that King Darius numerated to each group what each method of disposing corpses entailed so that all were clear on the relevant facts. Once the facts are established, according to our limited definition, all would presumably have the same moral education concerning the morality of the alternate treatments of the dead. It seems peculiar that among all participants receiving the same education that disagreement would arise, and arise along national lines. Did the Callatians' collective disapproval of burning their parents' corpses and

their approval of devouring them arise spontaneously among each individual's isolated moral attitudes? Would not the distribution of moral attitudes fall at random in different areas? If moral discourse is limited purely to the facts surrounding the case such a distribution of moral attitudes is unlikely and it seems that Ayer does not sponsor such a limiting role for moral education either. Though seemingly inconsistent with the belief that discourse between moral attitudes themselves cannot exist, Ayer recognizes that differences in "moral conditioning" can cause one person to approve of an action and another to disapprove of the same action. This may have the appearance of an *ad hoc* criticism of an otherwise excellent work. However, the questions remain; "What form can moral education take under an expressivist theory?" and "From where do moral attitudes arise?" Ayer's explanation alludes only to abuse. Ultimately, expressivists' prohibition of dialogue between moral 'attitudes,' 'interests,' 'principles,' or 'systems of value' is far too limiting to construct a moral theory capable of comprehensively addressing the depth and complexity of moral education.

Perhaps as a direct attempt to refine Ayer's claims, Charles Leslie Stevenson states in *The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms* that social moral influence "doesn't operate through sticks and stone alone." Stevenson claims that passionate appeals, for instance, may influence the audience to change temperament and align their moral interests or attitudes with those that the speaker expresses. He states that such an appeal "is often the only way to obtain ethical agreement, if there is any way at all. It is persuasive, not empirical or rational; but that is no reason for neglecting it." While

emotional manipulation is common, I am reluctant to concede that most moral education takes this form. Such an emotional concession seems too fleeting to explain the source of individuals' and communities' moral responses and convictions that often persists throughout moral agents' lifetimes.

In his discussion of the prescriptive role of ethical statements, Stevenson offers a more comprehensive explanation for the rise of common moral attitudes within societies despite the absence of engagement of differing moral interests. Both Stevenson and Ayer observe that moral statements' expression of moral attitudes have inlaid within them prescriptions that others should also have similar moral attitudes. Ayer states that moral statements "are calculated also to arouse a feeling, and so stimulate action." Stevenson terms this the "dynamic" function of moral statements. While Ayer merely notes the existence of the prescriptive intent of moral statements, Stevenson argues that such prescriptions do influence the audience to adopt similar moral attitudes.

> "One man says "This is good"; this may influence the approval of another person who then makes the same ethical judgment, which in turn influences another person, and so on. In the end, by a process of mutual influence, people take up more or less the same attitudes. Between people of widely separated communities, of course, the influence is less strong; hence different communities have different attitudes."

According to Stevenson (and Ayer), when one observers that, "Torture is wrong," he means essentially, "I disapprove of torture and you ought to too." All moral utterances will ultimately reduce to this form. For instance, if Stevenson states "Torture is wrong because it is dehumanizing," this begs the question "Why are things with dehumanizing properties wrong?" Were he to answer, "because most people do not like

being dehumanized," I could then press him to justify that reason and the next until we reach his basic belief that fits the form "X is wrong," in which he means, "I disapprove of X and you ought to too." If I press Stevenson once more why I should accept his basic 'moral principle' that "X is wrong," admittedly, Stevenson can eventually offer no further explanation in accordance with his expressivist theory. It would be meaningless. Stevenson argues that such moral expressions influence the audience in a way that ultimately leads to consensus of moral attitudes within populations. Under Stevenson's expressivism, the common moral attitudes within populations must arise from a moral education composed exclusively of a combination of establishing empirical facts and the influence of conformity. Ultimately, Stevenson is arguing that the education of moral attitudes offers no other reason past the statement, "Because I said so," and that this statement does provide valid influence. Few children have been satisfied with such a justification, and it seems unlikely that whole societies would be.

Expressivists' prohibition of discourse concerning "the validity of these moral principles" seems too limiting to offer a viable explanation of individuals' moral attitudes on which expressivism is based. This is not say that others' moral statements do not influence our moral attitudes, only that they are insufficient in completely explaining the rise and refinement of our moral attitudes. It seems that people are capable of engaging their moral interests, attitudes, principles, and systems of value, evaluating the legitimacy of them and may tune them accordingly. Such engagement would be of the form "I ought not disapprove of that action." Ayer and Stevenson would state that such a statement

would simply mean, "I disapprove of my disapproval of that action" and they are right to find such a statement meaningless. The speaker is clearly conflicted with no possible method of reconciliation.

However, statements of the first form do seem legitimate. For instance, if the speaker is insincere in his expression of a moral attitude it seems that his expression lacks legitimacy. Ayer and Stevenson would likely object to this by stating that at which point the speaker treats the expression as an action making it susceptible to another moral expression. The expression would more accurately resemble, "I ought not have disapproved of that action," and at a deeper level would be something similar to "I disapprove of speaking insincerely." This is not the meaning of disapproval to which I am referring. I am postulating that one can actively engage her actual moral attitudes and evaluate them.

Expressivists treatment of empirical facts does offer limited engagement of moral attitudes. Ayer states that empirical facts may point out that moral attitudes are wrongly applied to particular cases. Additionally, as Stevenson states, "the empirical method is relevant to ethics simply because our knowledge of the world is a determining factor to our interests." Establishing an accurate perception of the world is vital to ensure that the agent can acutely assert moral approval or disapproval consistent with deeper moral principles. Within an accepted system of value the superficial moral attitudes must be refined in order to satisfy more basic moral principles. However, under expressivism the agent must align inconsistent moral attitudes only so far as one moral attitude is reliant

upon the other. Stevenson and Ayer agree that rationality only functions within the framework of systems of value once such a system has been adopted and cannot apply to the adoption of moral 'principles' or 'interests.' Were both these moral attitudes entirely free-standing, expressivism can offer no prescription for which moral attitude is to be maintained nor can it proclaim that such inconsistencies are problematic. However, the expression of inconsistent fundamental moral principles can have no prescriptive meaning, nor any meaning whatsoever. In expressivist terms, inconsistent moral principles would produce expressions of the form "I disapprove, I approve of that action." Thus, those whose moral principles are not pinned by a comprehensive, multilayered system of value, with a clear source of value, may often find themselves in circumstances cognitive dissonance incapable of producing moral prescriptions. Consequently, if an agent's moral attitudes are to have any prescriptive meaning the agent must develop systems of value to the greatest possible depth and centricity. It seems that moral education should and does engage students' moral systems and hold them up to the scrutiny of rationality. In so doing, moral education should explore viable points upon which moral systems may be centered pushing deeper the fundamental principles upon which moral attitudes may hang. This role of moral education is one which expressivism is incapable of handling. It assumes such systems to be preexistent and stubbornly stagnant. However, the role of moral education seems more comprehensive. In order to ensure that moral systems are capable of producing

meaningful moral attitudes, moral education must apply the empirical method to

fundamental moral principles in a way with which expressivism cannot cope.
A. J. Ayer, *Emotivism* Louis P. Pojman, Eds., *Ethical Theory; Classical and Contemporary Readings, 4th Ed.* Toronto: Wadsworth Group, 2002, p. 421.
Ayer, 422.
Ayer, 423.
Ayer, 423-424.
Herodotus, *Custom is King,* Pojman, 2002, pp. 20.
Ayer, 423.
Charles Leslie Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," *Mind,* New Series, Vol. 46, No. 181. (Jan., 1937), pp. 20.
Stevenson, 29.
Ayer, 422.
Stevenson, 21.
Stevenson, 20.
Ayer, 424.
Ayer, 424.
Ayer, 423.
Stevenson, 28-29.
Stevenson, 29. Ayer, 424.

PAGE

PAGE 1