

NOTES

¹ "On the Logic of 'Commitment,'" *Philosophical Studies*, 10:23-27 (February 1959).

² This argument is closely related to (and indeed inspired by) one provided by T. Dahlquist against accepting the formula " $(p \ \& \ O(p \supset q)) \rightarrow Oq$ " as a theorem of deontic logic. See L. Aqvist, *The Moral Philosophy of Richard Price* (Uppsala: Library of Theoria No. 5, 1960), p. 148n.

³ "Deontic Logic," in *Logical Studies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 58-74.

⁴ A. R. Anderson, *The Formal Analysis of Normative Systems* (New Haven: Yale Sociology Department, 1956), pp. 29-30.

⁵ See note 2 above.

⁶ "A Note on Deontic Logic and Derived Obligation," *Mind*, 65:507-9 (1956). Von Wright's suggestion was followed up by N. Rescher in "An Axiom System for Deontic Logic," *Philosophical Studies*, 9:24-30 (January-February 1958).

⁷ *Formal Logic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 224.

⁸ Anderson, *Formal Analysis of Normative Systems*, pp. 57-59.

Lewis' Imperatives of Right

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IN A review of C. I. Lewis' *The Ground and Nature of the Right* I raised the question whether he regards the basic imperatives of right as a priori in the sense of analytic or as a posteriori and empirical, these being the only alternatives that seemed to be open to him in view of his theory of knowledge and his rejection of noncognitive theories of ethical judgments.¹ To this question Mr. Arthur M. Wheeler thinks a rather simple answer can be given on the basis of Lewis' previous and subsequent writings, viz., that the imperatives referred to are analytic "for a sphere of enquiry," although more concrete ethical maxims are not.² I agree that, with *Our Social Inheritance* added to Lewis' other works, we have the makings of an answer to my question, but I do not think that the answer as formulated by Wheeler is either clear or complete. Partly as a result of reading and thinking about Wheeler's note, however, I believe I can now say what Lewis' answer to my question is.

First, we must notice a point neglected by Wheeler. As part of his argument he quotes Lewis as saying in *Our Social Inheritance* that "the basic principle [of ethics] must be in some sense a priori." In a footnote to this passage Lewis does something to explain the sense in which he takes his basic

principle to be a priori. He suggests that it is a priori in the sense that “the repudiation of it would be self-contravening—a pragmatic contradiction,” and then adds, “Such a non-repudiable principle is ‘pragmatically a priori.’ The broadest of imperatives, ‘Be consistent’ [of which the ethical imperative is simply a specification], exemplifies this matter—one who should adopt the decision, ‘Disregard consistency,’ would be deciding to disregard his decisions as soon as made. And adherence to *that* decision would require that it be promptly disregarded.”³

This basic imperative, which I shall call P, Lewis formulates in several ways: “Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you”; “So act that you could will the maxim of your conduct to become a universal law”; “Do no act which contravenes any principle which you would call upon other men universally to respect.”⁴ But the first point is that, however it be worded, Lewis regards P as a priori in the sense of pragmatically a priori. Is he also holding that P is a priori in some other sense? And is he holding that it is analytic? If he is holding that it is *logically* a priori or analytic in the sense of being true by definition (i.e., that not-P is *logically* self-contradictory), then it is hard to see why he says that it is *pragmatically* a priori. Hence I do not think Wheeler’s argument can possibly be construed as showing that Lewis thinks P to be analytic in the sense of being true by virtue of the very meaning of the terms involved in it (which is the sense of “analytic” that I had in mind in stating my question).

Thus, if P is analytic for Lewis, it must be in some other sense. I think there is a second sense of “analytic” in Lewis’ mind. He says, for instance, that P is “definitive of justice” or of right action, as Wheeler’s quotations show. To say this, however, is not to say that P is analytic in the sense of being true by definition of the terms involved; it is to say rather that action in accordance with P is by definition just or right. Here P is “definitive,” but of a term which it does not contain, namely “just” or “morally right.” I take Wheeler to be correct in thinking that Lewis regards P as analytic in this sense.

Now, from P’s being analytic in this sense, nothing follows about its being either logically or pragmatically a priori. Therefore, unless there is a third sense of “a priori” in Lewis’ mind, he cannot be maintaining that P is a priori because it is analytic in this sense. Again, I think Lewis has such a third sense of “a priori” in mind. This is suggested by one of Wheeler’s quotations in which Lewis seems to say that, if P is definitive of justice in the way just indicated, then it is a priori, since it formulates “definitive concepts or categorical tests” for the field of moral inquiry. And, of course, if P is analytic in the second sense, then it is also a priori in this third sense. In this respect, too, Wheeler’s answer is correct. It remains true, however, that P is not analytic

in the first sense or a priori in the logical sense. In this respect Wheeler's answer is unclear as well as incomplete.

For a clear and complete answer (in outline at least), I suggest we must distinguish three senses of "a priori" and two of "analytic" as follows: a priori (1) = logically a priori = true by definition = analytic (1); a priori (2) = pragmatically a priori; a priori (3) = analytic (2) = being definitive of . . . Then, I further suggest, P is for Lewis not a priori (1) or analytic (1). But it is analytic (2) and a priori (3), and it is also pragmatically a priori or a priori (2).

This, however, is perhaps too cryptic to be very helpful, and I shall try to explain briefly what I now take Lewis' view of the basic imperative of right to be. We must distinguish, more carefully than he himself does,

- (a) Principle P. This has the form of an imperative—"Be . . ." or "Do . . ."—and it does not contain the term "just" or "right."⁵
- (b) The statement, S, that actions obeying P are just or right. This contains the term "just" or "right" and is true by definition of this term, and hence analytic (1) and a priori (1).

Here P and not S is a (or rather *the*) basic imperative of right. It defines justice or moral rightness but is not true by definition and so not analytic (1) or a priori (1). In fact, it is hard to see how it can be thought of as true or false at all, and it would seem that about *it* Lewis must be some kind of a noncognitivist.⁶ But it has, nevertheless, an assured status which cannot be claimed for all imperatives or for all "definitive" principles—the repudiation of it is self-contravening in a particularly crucial pragmatic, though not strictly logical, way. Hence it is, in an important sense, valid a priori (in Feigl's terms, it can be decisively vindicated, though it cannot be validated since it is presupposed in all validation). Its being valid a priori in this sense, however, is independent of the fact that it is definitive of justice or moral rightness; it rests rather on a fact of human nature—the fact of our rationality.⁷

This interpretation shows, by the way, how Lewis can hold that the ethical imperative is a priori and also be a "pragmatist." It should be noted, however, that his manner of combining pragmatism and apriorism here seems to be different from that adopted in *A Pragmatic Conception of the A Priori* or in *Mind and the World Order*. Also, his notion of the pragmatic a priori in *Our Social Inheritance* appears to be stronger than the notion of "pragmatic justification" proposed by Feigl and Rice.⁸ Lewis' pragmatically a priori seems to be more like Rice's "congenitally a priori" than like his "pragmatically justified."

Of course, questions remain. Is the conception of the pragmatically a priori

without difficulty? Is P pragmatically a priori if taken in a sense which can plausibly be held to be definitive of justice or of moral rightness? Is P, taken in that sense, an application of the imperative of rationality? Is P as stated by Lewis definitive of justice, and, even if so, is it definitive of moral rightness (as a necessary condition, a sufficient condition, or both)? However, if these questions can be answered affirmatively, then Lewis has answered my question—and perhaps also the question of moral philosophy.

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NOTES

¹ *Philosophical Review*, 66:398–99 (1957).

² *Philosophical Studies*, 12:59–60 (June 1961). Wheeler's argument may be summarized as follows: (a) Lewis says in *Our Social Inheritance* that the basic imperatives of ethics are "in some sense a priori." (b) He says in *Mind and the World Order and Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* that the a priori and the analytic coincide. (c) Therefore he holds his basic imperatives to be analytic.

³ P. 100n.

⁴ P. 93.

⁵ Lewis also formulates P thus (*Our Social Inheritance*, p. 93): "a way of acting, to be right in a given case, must be one which would, in the same premises of action, be right in every instance and for anybody." Then it does contain the term "right" of which he regards it as definitive. But to put P in this way is to transform it from an imperative into a statement of the definition to which the imperative (P proper) is supposed to be basic. It is to confuse P and S.

⁶ Statements of the form "A is just or right" will still be true or false and cognitive, however, for they will simply say that A conforms to P.

⁷ See, among other passages, one quoted by Wheeler.

⁸ H. Feigl, "Validation and Vindication," in *Readings in Ethical Theory*, edited by J. Hospers and W. S. Sellars (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952), pp. 674–80; P. B. Rice, *On the Knowledge of Good and Evil* (New York: Random House, 1955), Chapters IX and X.

A Note on Austin's Performative Theory of Knowledge

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THE late Professor J. L. Austin's "performative" analysis of 'I know'¹ has been oftener cited as a classical discovery than subjected to rigorous criticism. I shall not attempt such criticism here. In this note I want to draw attention to a class of cases, deliberately excluded by Austin, which seem to strengthen rather than weaken the force of his performative analysis. Austin concerns