

PROF. DESHPANDE ON THE NON-DEDUCIBILITY OF ' OUGHT ' FROM ' IS '

In the following pages I propose to discuss Professor Deshpande's paper entitled 'Professor Black on Hume's Guillotine'. The paper is itself a critical study of Professor Black's view on the derivability of 'ought' from 'is', which is maintained in a paper earlier published by him. Black has tried to show in his paper that the supposed gap between 'is' and 'ought' can be filled up as it can be proved syllogistically that an 'ought' statement is deducible from 'is' statement. The syllogism which Black instances to prove his point is as below :—

'Fischer wants to mate Botwinnik.

The one and only way to mate Botwinnik is for Fischer to move the Queen.

Therefore, Fischer should move the Queen.'

Here it is obvious that the conclusion which is an 'ought'-statement follows from the premises both of which are factual in character. The first objection raised by Prof. Deshpande against this argument of Black is, to say the least, very queer. I am stating the objection in Prof. Deshpande's own words.

'To say that a performative is the conclusion of an inference is to hold that an *act* is the conclusion of an inference, and it is certainly a most perplexing question how this is to be understood...'

Yet, what sense can we attach to the statement that an *action* follows logically from factual premises ?

I am afraid, what Prof. Deshpande says above is totally misconceived. It is very surprising how the elementary distinction between what a sentence states and what it expresses could escape the notice of this critical thinker. The sentence 'Fischer should move the Queen' states that Fischer ought to mate the Queen or that it is his duty to mate the Queen, and what it expresses, is the speaker's advice that Fischer should do so. If it is slightly awkward to say that sentence expresses advice, we may put the matter differently by saying that the sentence expresses the speaker's intention to advise. If this distinction is overlooked and even the intention of the speaker is included in the meaning of the

sentence uttered by him then like an imperative sentence an indicative sentence too includes speaker's intention as part of its meaning. But, if both these facts are supposed equally to be the meaning of a sentence then the fact 'that the speaker states so and so' being also the meaning of a sentence, the speaker would have to own stating even this fact of the second order and thus the sentence would be required to include in its meaning an unending series of facts of higher and higher orders. This regress can be easily avoided if the distinction stated above is clearly kept in view. So, in Black's syllogism it is not any act of advice that is the conclusion of the argument. It is the normative fact (to use the word 'fact' in a broad sense) that 'It is Fischer's duty to . . .', which should be taken as the logical conclusion of the argument. The interpretation of the above sentence which has led Prof. Deshpande to make such a grossly misleading objection is given by him in these words—"In Austin's terminology 'you should do M' is an implicit performative. When made fully explicit it would assume the form 'I advise you to do M'. Black is, therefore, quite right to maintain that the conclusion of his example is a performative".

I wonder how, characterising the statement, 'you should do M' as 'implicitly performative' implies that it means that 'I advise you to do M'. The statement may be treated as performative in the plain and the simple sense that it expresses the speaker's intention to advise the performance of an action by the agent.

A point which is made in this connection by Prof. Deshpande is rather puzzling. He makes the suggestion that when Black says that factual premises 'logically imply' the ought-conclusion he might have made a confusion between the process of inference and the quite different process of giving reasons why a particular thing should be done. Explaining the distinction between these two processes Prof. Deshpande says that 'in an inference we try to find out what is logically involved in a set of statements, whereas in an explanation of conduct we try to find out the motives and circumstances which lead to the performance of an action'. As an example of the latter the following argument is given :

'I wanted money; misappropriation was the only means of getting it,

Therefore, I misappropriated it.'

According to Prof. Deshpande the conclusion in this argument does not follow logically from the premises. The fact stated in the conclusion is only causally explained by the first two statements taken together. Thus, a causal explanation of an action accounts for it in terms of the cause leading up to it while no logical explanation of it can be given in as much as an action is not logically deducible from any premises.

I am afraid, this kind of reasoning is doubly at fault. First, as stated above, it is quite wrong to think that the action of 'misappropriation' is the conclusion of the foregoing argument. It is the statement of the fact that 'I misappropriated the money' which is the proper conclusion and there is nothing to prevent it from being deduced from premises which really entail it. The two premises stated above cannot yield any conclusion as they are unconnected. If they are supplemented by a third premise like 'whoever wants money employs the only means of securing it', the conclusion 'I misappropriated the money' can be shown to follow logically from these three premises taken together. As a matter of fact the argument is enthymymetic and so if fully expanded it would be split up into two syllogisms the conclusion of one of which is a premise of the other. The two syllogisms would be as follows :—

'I want money. Anybody wanting money employs a means to secure it.

Therefore, I employ a means to secure money.

I employ a means to secure money. Misappropriation is the only means to secure money. Therefore, I use misappropriation to secure money.'

A similar account can be given of the second example 'The house caught fire because there was a leaking wire in it.' It may also be expanded into a fullfledged syllogistic inference as below:—

'If there is a leaking wire at a place then fire breaks out there. There was a leaking wire in the house. Therefore, fire broke out in the house.'

It is not, however, the case that these examples are somehow fitted into the mould of syllogistic inference. The logical (deductive) relationship of causality, necessary co-existence etc.

holds between the factual contents of the propositions (unless the propositions are tautological). So all causal and other logical explanations of facts can quite reasonably be put into the form of ordinary syllogisms with a slight ingenuity.

Another point raised by Prof. Deshpande relates to the logical deducibility of an 'order' or imperative statement as conclusion from certain other 'orders' taken as premises. He says that an order does not imply another order directly. It is only through their reference to the expected compliance with them that one of the orders may be supposed to imply another indirectly. It must here be conceded that implication between imperative premises and their imperative conclusion is not as obvious as that obtaining between indicative premises and their indicative conclusion. Still, there is no reason to deny it. A universal imperative statement like 'Ask all these boys to go' does quite obviously imply the corresponding particular imperative 'Ask some of these boys to go', without the mediation of the reference to the act of compliance with these two orders.

The last point of Prof. Deshpande concerns the simple distinction between a man's reasons for doing an action and the reasons of another man for advising him to do the action if he is not inclined to do it. It is very astounding how it could be presumed that Black did not notice this distinction and as a result maintained quite wrongly that a man's own reasons for doing a certain action were also 'conclusive reasons' for another man's advising him to do it. I don't know if Black has anywhere made such a statement or clearly implied it. Of course, my aim in refuting Prof. Deshpande's arguments in detail is not to justify every thing that Prof. Black has said in his paper. I am concerned only with showing that the assumption of an unbridgeable gap between the 'is' and the 'ought' is quite unreasonable and attempts like those of Black intended to show how the gap can be bridged must be welcomed rather than criticised on flimsy grounds.

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