ETHICAL SUPERNATURALISM

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If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. [6.1TLP]

Abstract

Wittgenstein's approach towards ethics would have remained undiscovered had he not claimed in a letter to his publisher, Ludwig Ficker that *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (TLP) was an ethical book; although all most all the points discussed in this book belonged to the domain of philosophy of logic. Only a few lines in this book from 6.4 through 6.54 are used for ethics. While in *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein is not interested at all to discuss anything about ethics, in his 'A Lecture on Ethics' he has delivered few lines which are all about the status of ethics and ethical judgments.

From the purview of (i) his written portion which is just like the top of a visible iceberg, (ii) he himself declared that TLP is an ethical one and (iii) on the basis of his delivered lecture; this paper may be treated as a hypothesis to establish Wittgenstein's ethics by introducing a new meta-ethical theory named as Ethical Supernaturalism for the justification of the moral value judgment.

Factual judgments are based on facts. That's why a factual judgment can be regarded as true or false on the basis of fact. These judgments are also justifiable and these are justifiable through the empirical method of justification that means the meaning of a factual judgment is determined in terms of its parity with fact. For example, when it is said, 'The car is good.' that means the car is in fact good—the car is not old, well decorated, comfortable, its price is reasonable, having the power to give sound mileage etc. Here, its goodness is justifiable through some pre-determined criteria. But in the case of a moral value judgment, the process of justification is not as the same as a factual judgment, because a moral value judgment is based on moral value principle. When it is uttered, 'Rama is good.' for example, the process of verification of this moral value judgment is different from the previous factual judgment—'The car is good', because there is no fixed method and predetermined criteria to verify a moral value judgment in the domain of ethics. Now the questions are, 'Can we say moral value judgments are translatable into a factual judgment?' Or 'Can we say a moral value judgment is verifiable, if we can translate it in to a factual judgment?' The problem may be stated in other words: A moral value judgment consists of moral value terms; if the definition of moral value term can be given, then is it legitimate to say that these judgments are understandable? These problems are examined by considering in turn five major Western Schools of thought vis-à-vis the problem of the relation between fact and value: Ethical Naturalism, Ethical Intuitionism, Ethical Emotivism, Ethical Prescriptivism and Ethical Descriptivism. In fact, all of these theories are partially true.

Although, Wittgenstein does not write much explicitly about ethics, only a few lines in TLP from 6.4 through 6.54 are used for ethics by him. In *Philosophical Investigations* he is not interested at all to discuss anything about ethics. But in his 'Lecture on Ethics' he has delivered few lines which are all about the status of ethical judgments. Naturally, in Western Philosophy, 'Is Wittgenstein a moral philosopher?' is no doubt an important question. But this paper is not concerned about the answer of this question. In fact (i) his written portion is as like as the top of a visible iceberg, (ii) he himself declared that TLP is an ethical one and (iii) on the basis of his delivered lecture; this paper may be treated as a hypothesis to establish Wittgenstein's ethics by introducing a new meta-ethical theory named as Ethical Supernaturalism for the justification of the moral value judgment consisting of following subsections.

Section—I Abridged analysis of previous theories regarding the justification of moral value judgment

Section-II Wittgenstein's own theory-Ethical Supernaturalism

Section—III Limitations of Ethical Supernaturalism

Section—I

Before elaborating this new theory of Wittgenstein to be an alternative theory regarding the justification of moral value judgment, let us take a brief resume on the established five major western theories: Ethical Naturalism, Ethical Intuitionism, Ethical Emotivism, Ethical Prescriptivism and Ethical Descriptivism. According to Ethical Naturalism, moral value judgments can be justified through a factual methodⁱ which is parallel to the method of Historical and Scientific Justification. This is the only way to save moral value judgments from arbitrariness and relativism. For example, if someone asserts 'Freedom of press is good', the claim can be justified by showing that a free press is desired by the majority in the culture in question, so it is good.

But, G. E. Moore, in his famous book, Principia Ethica raised two major objections to refute Ethical Naturalism. One is known as Naturalistic Fallacyⁱⁱ and the other is Open Ouestion Testⁱⁱⁱ. A definition for Moore is an analysis of that which a word stands for. To analyze is to break it down in to its component parts. 'Good' is not analyzable in to its component parts that's why the definition of 'good' is impossible. Any analysis of 'good' with the help of the properties which are other than good, leads to commit the Naturalistic Fallacy. On the other hand, if it is said that 'good' simply means desired, one can always ask meaningfully 'But is it good?' Here, the Open Question Test is applied. So 'good' is indefinable. Moore's contention regarding 'good' is that it is a unique property. What can be said about 'good' is this-'good' refers to 'goodness' which is an ultimate, unobservable, and unanalyzable property. Moral value judgments can be determined as true or false as these are themselves considered as fundamental. These are known to be true or false by intuition or self-evidence. But an appeal to an intuition is nothing but an appeal to individual opinion. An opinion always stands in need of justification which on the intuitionist scheme no one provides. In many occasions, moral disagreements are to be settled. But moral discourse is significant, if it is objectively true or false assertion. Moore's intuitionism does not provide any justification for moral assertion as intuition can never be objectively true or false.

Emotivists on the other hand, claim that moral utterances are like ejaculations. These display our emotion. In the judgment, 'One ought to help his neighbours', our feelings of approval or disapproval are expressed, but such judgments are not true or false. The emotive theory is not always stated strictly in terms of emotion, for some emotivists believe that moral

language articulates ambitions, will, commitments, or personal decisions. But emotivism is rejected on the ground, if emotions and personal attitudes are the source of moral values, then it is doubtful, if reason has any role to play in moral inquiry and justification and Moral Value Judgments are not free from arbitrariness.

Prescriptivists hold that when we say something is right or that something ought to be the case, or that something is good, our statement either is a sort of imperative, or entails an imperative. This imperatival element ensures that such evaluative language is genuinely prescriptive. Such language can be used to guide choices because it involves an imperative. An imperative can be used to tell someone how to choose. But there is a problem concerning the last sentence of the above paragraph. If someone asks about the criteria to buy an antique chair through the process of an auction, then being an antique commodities purchaser, the command will be to choose ugly, rickety, old chairs rather than to choose a beautiful chair. Because if everyone else is motivated to choose the good chairs, then bidding on the antique chair (which I want to buy) will be very intense, the price will be shot up, and I won't be able to buy it. So, prescriptivism is likely to be failed.

According to the Ethical Descriptivism there is no significant difference between a moral value judgment and a factual judgment. They say that these two types of judgments are logically connected to each other and it can be shown through the conceptual analysis of the term which is used to formulate the judgments. But conceptual analysis is possible only when we presuppose how the Moral Value Judgments are used in a culture or in a language. This presupposition will not be accepted. Again, it is very difficult to reject the distinction between fact and value which is made by David Hume and others.

Section—II

Being one of the great epoch making philosopher in the history of western philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein is successful not only in introducing creative philosophical theories but also in building the new tracks through which a philosopher should think an innovative form of thinking. His contributions to philosophy are so highly fundamental that he managed to get and keep a lot of followers in his both early life and later life, although, it is true at the same time that the most of the philosophical ideas of his early life are rejected by himself by his later philosophical ideas. In fact, his styles of works are so notoriously difficult and esoteric that philosophers have been trying their best to give the highest form of interpretation of the works of this great philosopher, but still now, none of the interpretations can be treated as sufficient. Actually, his works are consisted of two parts—one is written and another is unwritten. The written part may be compared as the visible portion of a huge iceberg.

On the background of the above mentioned discussion let us peep in to the Wittgenstein's concept of ethics. Wittgenstein's approach, on ethics, would have remained undiscovered had he not claimed in a letter to his publisher, Ludwig Ficker that TLP is an ethical book; because all most all the points discussed in this book belonged to the domain of philosophy of logic. Only a few lines in this book from 6.4 through 6.54 were used for ethics by Wittgenstein. In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein is not interested at all to discuss anything about ethics. But in his 'Lecture on Ethics' he has delivered few lines which are all about the status of ethical judgments.

What we have learned from Wittgenstein regarding the status of ethics and moral value judgments may be represented in the following:

(i) Wittgenstein doesn't want to give a separate status to Ethics other than Aesthetics, because in both fields evaluation is needed. In Aesthetics, the beautifulness or the ugliness of something is evaluated; similarly, ethics gives us the idea of good or bad action on basis of evaluation. He says,

Now I am going to use the term Ethics in a slightly wider sense, in a sense in fact which includes what I believe to be the most essential part of what is generally called Aesthetics.^{iv}

(ii) Wittgenstein, in his 'A lecture on Ethics' proposes to take the meaning of 'ethics' in contrast with family resemblance instead of taking the meaning of ethics through definition, because there are many synonymous terms of ethics. From this point, it follows that moral value terms such as good has no fixed meaning on the basis of its definition. The meaning of the term good should be understood with reference to family resemblance as there are lots of synonymous words of the term good. In this connection he says,

I will put before you, you will, I hope, be able to see the characteristic features they all have in common and these are the characteristic features of Ethics.^v

(iii) Value lies outside the world which means ethical judgments are not scientific judgments i.e. propositions at all. A proposition is such kind of judgment that can be treated as true or false. If a proposition depicts the fact then it is true, otherwise, it is false. In order to depict the picture of reality, according to Wittgenstein, a proposition bound to be lied inside the world. Whereas value, if it is called as value, it must lie outside the world.

So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher. [6.42 TLP]

Same view has been shared by Wittgenstein in his article—'A Lecture on Ethics'. But in this article he makes a distinction between two kinds of value: relative value and absolute value. A relative value judgment can be understood in terms of factual judgments i.e. in terms of propositions. For example: 'The knife is good.' is a relative value judgment. This judgment can be justified in case the knife fulfils certain predetermined criteria i.e. it has a sharp blade, it is easy to handle etc. to be a good knife and these criteria are verifiable through our experience. On the other hand, no absolute value judgement can ever be altered into a factual statement, because these absolute judgments lie outside the world, in other words, these value judgments are not propositions at all. In this regard, Wittgenstein says,

Now what I wish to contend is that, although all judgments of relative value can be shown to be mere statement of facts, no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgment of absolute value.^{vi}

(iv) Wittgenstein also denies the psychological origin of ethics on the basis that state of mind is a fact i.e. a state of affairs. A state of affairs is corresponded by a proposition. But no moral value judgment can be regarded as proposition. In his lecture, 'A Lecture on Ethics' he gives an example of a murder and argues that the physical description and psychological description of a murder never implies the judgment 'Murder is wrong' as a proposition, because wrongness lies outside the world. 'Murder is wrong' is no doubt a moral value judgment, but it can never be treated as scientific judgment as it is not a proposition.

It is impossible to speak about the will in so far as it is the subject of ethical attributes. And the will as a phenomenon is of interest only to psychology. [6.423 TLP]

v) It should not be right to assume that his approach regarding the justification of moral value judgments seems to be closed to the view of emotivists, for whom moral value judgments express our emotions only. When it is said that 'Pain is evil.' what sort of empirical observation would verify the sentence? What is expressed here is that after undergoing pain that increases blood pressure, pulse rate, heart beat etc. the pain is disliked. But that does not entail 'pain is evil'. In general, then, it may seem that moral value judgments cannot be verified or falsified empirically. That is why Wittgenstein denies the presence of any state of affairs in the physical or psychological or emotional world corresponding to a moral value judgment. He remarks,

And similarly the absolute good, if it is a describable state of affairs, would be one which everybody, independent of his tastes and inclinations, would necessarily bring about or feel guilty for not bringing about. And I want to say that such a state of affairs is a chimera. No state of affairs has, in itself, what I would like to call the coercive power of an absolute judge.^{vii}

(vi) He does not mean that ethical judgments are absolutely meaningless, although it is true that moral value statements have no cognitive meaning. Because, these are neither verifiable nor falsifiable. To explain, let us begin with two opposite kinds of examples:

Example-I: 'There is coconut in Iceland.' (CI). This statement is meaningful as we can easily imagine someone going to Iceland, checking every grocery store and kitchen cupboard, and eventually discovering a coconut. In this case, the person's observations of the coconut in Iceland would verify CI. Similarly, a team of observers may determine after long hard work that there are no coconuts in Iceland. In this case, their observations would falsify CI. Since, such observations are in principle possible, CI is meaningful according to the verification principle. The CI is judged to express something that is either true or false.

Example-II : 'Tootie frootie, a rootie.' (TFR). TFR is not meaningful, because it is obvious that there cannot be any empirical observation by which TFR can be verified or falsified.

Now, let us apply this verification principle of meaningfulness to a moral value statement of the following kind.

Let us take, for example, a statement of ordinary usage: 'Murder is bad.' (MB). It is impossible for us to show any state of affairs (corresponding evidence) which can establish MB. We can at best give a description of place and time of and the agent responsible for the murder that has taken place. Moreover, we may feel about the pain or rage caused by the murderer. But such descriptions do not entail MB. So, according to Wittgenstein, ethical statements are meaningless. He said,

Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water and if I were to pour out a gallon over it . . .^{viii}

Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense.^{ix}

(vii) Wittgenstein concludes that ethics is transcendental.

It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics' are one.) [6.421 TLP]

The term transcendental is very much significant here. In *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant has used the term transcendental in order to establish scientific metaphysics. According to him, transcendental meta-physics is scientific metaphysics which consists of a priori forms of knowledge. In other words, it may be said that which lies before experience are transcendental and these are the subject matter of scientific metaphysics. Whereas that which lies beyond experience are transcendent and are the subject matter of traditional metaphysics.

Wittgenstein, on the other hand, uses the term transcendental not to mean that which lies before or beyond experience, but to signify that which lies beyond language i.e. beyond expression. Russell in his introductory remark of TLP has tried to mean transcendental as mystical. Thus he rightly points out by saying that

The whole subject of ethics, for example, is placed by Mr. Wittgenstein in the mystical, inexpressible region. Nevertheless he is capable of conveying his ethical opinions. His defense would be that what he calls the mystical can be shown, although it cannot be said.^x

Wittgenstein indicates another meaning of the term transcendental in 'A Lecture on Ethics'. In this sense transcendental means nonsensical. It is not the case that moral value statements are meaningless owing to non-availability of a suitable substitute (correct statement) yet, but for the reason that it is essentially so. In Wittgenstein's own words,

I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and, I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.^{xi}

Section—III

Wittgenstein's Supernaturalism on the justification of moral value judgments has been criticized by many moral philosophers. The list of such critiques includes Russell, Hare, Ryle and Baier. Stephen Hawking's observation also goes against Wittgenstein's Ethical Supernaturalism. Besides this from the philosophical positions of some moral philosophers Wittgenstein's Ethical Supernaturalism can be shown to be inadequate and this has been done below. Let us take up the criticisms, observation and objections one by one.

(i) Kant, in the process of establishing metaphysics as a science, has said that not just anything can be regarded as knowledge, because there are some criteria that must be fulfilled, if something is to be regarded as knowledge. For this reason, at the very beginning of his famous book *Critique of Pure Reason* he says,

OUR reason (Vernunft) has this peculiar fate that, with reference to one class of its knowledge, it is always troubled with questions which cannot be ignored, because they spring from the very nature of reason, and which cannot be answered, because they transcend the powers of human reason.^{xii}

In *Critique of Pure Reason* he tries to prove how metaphysics as a science possible by the method of criticism of pure reason by itself. Regarding human knowledge about the reality, his conclusion is that we do not have any knowledge about the things-in-themselves; we have only the knowledge of the phenomenon. But, he does not declare the world of things-in-themselves as supernatural. Naturally, about ethics he mentions that ethics does not fall within the scope of our pure reason; it is a matter our practical reason. It would be a mistake, if we try to find ethics in our pure reason.

In this connection, it may be said that in spite of treating ethics as a discipline beyond pure reason, unlike Wittgenstein, Kant does not throw it into a supernatural world of nonsensical mysticism.

(ii) Another important objection may be raised following Gylbert Ryle. Wittgenstein claims that moral value judgments have no cognitive value simply because moral value judgments are devoid of any factual content. But following Ryle's point of view, it may be said that there are two types of judgments that bear cognitive value. These are: (i) judgments bearing knowledge claim in the form knowing that and (ii) judgments bearing knowledge claim in the form knowing that and (ii) judgments bearing that moral value judgments have cognitive value, if there would not be any moral value judgment bearing knowledge claim in the form knowing how; which is, in fact, not the case. Ryle's argument on this issue is as follows:

This point is commonly expressed in the vernacular by saying that an action exhibits intelligence, if, and only if, the agent is thinking what he is doing while he is doing it, and thinking what he is doing in such a manner that he would not do the action so well if he were not thinking what he is doing. This popular idiom is sometimes appealed to as evidence in favour of the intellectualist legend. Champions of this legend are apt to try to re-assimilate knowing how to knowing that by arguing that intelligent performance involves the observance of rules, or the application of criteria. It follows that the operation which is characterised as intelligent must be preceded by an intellectual acknowledgment of these rules or criteria; that is, the agent must first go through the internal process of avowing to himself certain propositions about what is to be done ('maxims', 'imperatives' or 'regulative propositions' as they are sometimes called); only then can he execute his performance in accordance with those dictates. He must preach to himself before he can practice. The chef must recite his recipes to himself before he can cook according to them; the hero must lend his inner ear to some appropriate moral imperative before swimming

out to save the drowning man; the chess-player must run over in his head all the relevant rules and tactical maxims of the game before he can make correct and skilful moves. ^{xiii}

(iii) We have seen that on the justification of moral value judgments Wittgenstein has shown the nonsensicality of such a judgment as its very essence. At this Bertrand Russell thinks that 'Mr Wittgenstein' has thrown value judgments in particular and ethics in general to a 'mystical and inexpressible region'. What he has remarked in the Introduction of TLP deserves to be quoted below:

What causes hesitation is the fact that, after all, Mr. Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the sceptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit. The whole subject of ethics, for example, is placed by Mr. Wittgenstein in the mystical, inexpressible region. ...for my part, I confess that it leaves me with a certain sense of intellectual discomfort.^{xiv}

(iv) Kurt Baier has criticized the Wittgenstein's' view that moral value judgments can never be analyzed in terms of descriptive judgments, because in addition to be description of something, such judgments contain truth values. But in ethics, for Baier, truth value of a judgment is not so important, what is important in case of a moral value judgment is the attitude that is expressed by the speaker to the hearer. The function and the tendency of a descriptive judgment are not as same as the function and tendency of a moral value judgment. Wittgenstein seems to have failed to grasp this point. Kurt Baier thus says,

It must be admitted that the impact theory emphasizes an important feature of moral judgments: their tendency to influence hearers in certain comparatively uniform ways. It must also be admitted that certain other types of utterance, such as descriptive or narrative or scientific utterances, do not have this tendency. However, it does not follow from this that while the function of descriptive utterances is to say something, to make assertions or claims, to say what can be true or false, correct or incorrect, and so on, the function of moral judgments is none of these, but merely to produce in others certain effects, namely, to arouse certain feelings and attitudes.^{xv}

(v) According to R. M. Hare, moral value judgments are neither descriptive (as proposed by naturalists) nor emotive (as proposed by intuitionists, emotivists and supernaturalists), but prescriptive; because moral value is neither mere description of external or internal fact, nor a

mere emotion. Such judgments, for R. M. Hare, are prescriptive in the sense that moral value judgments always entail imperatives, which are subject to logical rules. For example, I cannot intelligibly say at the same time, 'Close all the windows' and 'Leave the centre window open'. This opened the door for reason.

Now, what follows from Wittgenstein's approaches towards ethics, is that he has rejected the possibility of ethics as a cognitive science; just because, according to his opinion, we have not yet succeeded in finding the correct logical analysis of what we mean by our ethical and religious expressions. Here, for Wittgenstein 'correct logical analysis' is that tool, which testifies the presence of a state of affair that corresponds to the judgment concerned. As in case of a moral value judgment there is lack of any such state of affair that corresponds to the judgment concerned; so for Wittgenstein, such judgments do not pass the test of logical analysis. This leads him to treat the world of moral values as super natural and declares the moral value judgments as non-sensical. This conclusion of Wittgenstein is subject to the commonsense charge of illegitimacy of Wittgenstein's tool logical analysis for assessment of moral value judgments. The following simple question may thus cause devastation to the Wittgensteinian edifice of philosophy:

Is it legitimate to get the justification of moral value judgments only with the method by which a scientific judgment is proved as cognitively meaningful?

From the above discussion, we may say that it is not right to think that all knowledge is knowledge that something is the case, but to realize that there is a kind of knowledge of the pattern: how to do something. This indicates that when we say something is right or that something ought to be the case, or that something is good, our statement is either a sort of imperative or an entailment. This imperatival element ensures that such evaluative language is genuinely prescriptive as Hare has claimed. Such language can be used to guide choices, because it involves an imperative.

So, the moral value statements are not meaningless. What we may say about Wittgenstein's approach is that ethics is not a pure science. So, Wittgenstein's conclusion about ethics is not only incorrect, for some great scientists and philosophers like Stephen Hawking, but simply astonishing downgrading of the status of philosophy.

According to Stephen Hawking such approaches made by philosophers like Wittgenstein, on the one hand, shifted the philosophers from their main business i.e. to find out the actual nature of space, time, universe, human life etc. and on the other hand, denied accepting the possibility of ethics. Hawking thus wondered and ridiculed with full sense of dissatisfaction in the following manner:

Wittgenstein, the most famous philosopher of this century, said, 'The sole remaining task for philosophy is the analysis of language.' What a come down from the great tradition of philosophy from Aristotle to Kant!^{xvi}

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ⁱⁱ G. E. Moore, Principia Ethica, Cambridge University Press, London, 1932, P-11

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid,P-21

^{iv} Wittgenstein, Ludwig : 'A Lecture on Ethics', <u>http://www.geocities.jp</u> / Mick index / Wittgenstein / witt_lec_et_en.html, down loaded at 01:00 a.m. on 31 December 2014

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

viii Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

[†]T. Beauchamp, Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy, Mc. Graw-Hill, 2001, P-339

^x Wittgenstein, Ludwig: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Side-By-Side-By-Side Edition, Version 0.41 (February 11, 2014), <u>Http://People.Umass.Edu/Klement/Tlp/</u>, P-36, Downloaded on 20.03.2015 at 10:00a.m.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} F. Max Molar (Tr.) Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Second Edition, 1922, The Macmillan Company, London P-Xvii.

xiii Ryle, Gylbert.: The Concept of Mind, Routledge, London, 1949, P-16

^{xiv} Wittgenstein, Ludwig: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Side-By-Side-By-Side Edition, Version 0.41 (February 11, 2014), <u>Http://People.Umass.Edu/Klement/Tlp/</u>, P-36, Downloaded on 20.03.2015 at 10:00a.m.

^{xv} Baier, Kurt: 'The Moral Point of View (1958)' in Paul. W Taylor (Ed.) : *The Moral Judgment Readings in Contemporary Meta-Ethics*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963

^{xvi} Hawking Stephen: A brief history of Time, Chapter 12.