Chapter I: AN EXPOSITION OF ETHICAL NATURALISM

A. The Naturalist Claim in Ethics

In the first years of this century, G. E. Moore distinguished two ways to interpret the question 'What is good?'.\(^1\) On one interpretation, a proper way to answer is to provide examples of particular things which are appropriately labelled 'good'. We might call books or pleasure good, for example. The other interpretation involves seeing the question as one about the meaning or significance of good in general, apart from any examples: 'We may... mean to ask, not what thing or things are good, but how "good" is to be defined'.\(^2\) Moore chose to concentrate on this latter interpretation.

When enquiring into the definition of 'good', Moore was acting within a subdiscipline known today as 'meta-ethics'. Meta-ethics deals with the meanings, but also any significance which may extend beyond the meanings, of proper ethical terms, judgements or arguments,\(^3\) including those regarding 'good'. Meta-ethicists do not discuss what things have the quality of goodness; they discuss what is being done when one attributes the quality of goodness to something. Although a few have criticised this

\(^1\)Since Moore believed ethics to be 'the general enquiry into what is good' ((1903), 2), his comments about 'good' are intended as comments about the fundamental term of ethics. For those who do not employ 'good' as a fundamental term of ethics, it can be replaced by another (e.g. 'right', 'wrong', 'duty', 'virtue', or a collection of specific virtues). The distinction Moore presents is understandable when any of these terms are used. Throughout this thesis, however, 'good' will most often be used to represent the fundamental idea of ethics.

\(^2\)Moore (1903), 5.

study as trivial,\textsuperscript{4} most moral philosophers have seen meta-ethical questions to be of paramount importance in ethics.\textsuperscript{5} To illustrate, if two people say that 'honesty is good', a potential meta-ethical difference is for one to believe this statement to essentially be an expression of a desire, and the other to believe it to represent a belief in a fact. This seems hardly a trivial difference, considering for example that a belief can be true or false, but an expression of desire is in itself neither true nor false.\textsuperscript{6}

Meta-ethical categories, therefore, group families of ethical theories based on the types of answers they provide to questions about meaning or significance. Some of the categories used by meta-ethicists have already been presented in the Introduction. What follows is a study of one of these: naturalism. As such, what follows is a study in meta-ethics. Naturalism as defined here is the belief that science can provide the raw materials for moral philosophy to operate; more specifically, it is the following meta-ethical view:

(Ethical) Naturalism: \textit{The view that ethics, properly understood, deals only with principles, properties, and terms that can be employed or referred to in natural scientific explanations.}

That a principle, property, or term can be employed or referred to in natural scientific explanations will be abbreviated in this thesis to being 'accessible to science'. Thus a naturalist, in the sense employed here, responds to questions like 'What is good?' by saying, at least initially, that the proper

\textsuperscript{4}E.g., Singer (1973); Midgley (1981), 59, sardonically defines 'meta-ethics' as 'propounding and refining moral scepticism'.
\textsuperscript{5}Smith (1994a), 1. Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton (1992) discuss the predominantly meta-ethical character of many of the most notable debates within moral philosophy this century. The current state of the field is summarised and sampled in Smith, ed. (1995).
\textsuperscript{6}This is a central issue debated in Smith, ed. (1995). The issue of whether morality should be seen as a matter of belief or desire is responsible for what Michael Smith has called 'The Moral Problem' (1994a).
answer must not be incomprehensible within the limits of what science can tell us.

One way in which this definition permits naturalism to be variously understood should be clarified at this point. Accessibility to science does not necessarily require that every possible statement concerning ethics, or even every possible statement leading to an ethical conclusion, be of a kind that directly depends on science for its justification. For example, statements which, if denied, would entail a logical contradiction are frequently considered to be acceptable to a naturalist. One candidate for such a status is 'Not every possible statement is true'. If this statement were false, it would be therefore proved true, which is logically impossible.\(^7\) If logic is seen, as it perhaps always is, as an indispensable part of scientific enquiry (no scientific conclusion is an illogical conclusion), then a naturalist's acceptance of such statements as the example above is understandable and uncontroversial.

Another, more controversial, claim made by some philosophers, including some ethical naturalists, is that the meanings of certain words in ordinary language are, or else logically imply, truths which are not justified by science. For instance, a statement that is sometimes claimed by philosophers to be true in this way is 'x is a value iff [if and only if] practical reason is on the side of valuing x, i.e., the deliverances of good practical reasoning support the conclusion that x is a value'.\(^8\) This statement (it is not relevant here to examine its import or truth) is considered by some to be justified as true by an investigation into the meanings of the terms used, meanings which are inherent in the language used. The study of the meanings of words and the provision of definitions is known as semantics, and for some philosophers this study should be categorised as a logical

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\(^7\)Putnam (1978); (1981), 83.
\(^8\)Johnston (1989), 154.
enquiry, since definitions are relations where the word defined and the
definition both logically imply each other.\footnote{B. Williams (1985), 122.} After a seminal paper by W. V.
Quine,\footnote{Quine (1951). His views are elaborated further in (1969), and concisely summarised in
(1990).} many philosophers have decided to abandon some or all alleged
examples of truths gleaned from a study of ordinary language, but an ethical
naturalist may theoretically reside in either camp. Some ethical naturalists
are confident in their use of statements which they feel could not possibly
require scientific evidence because they are true by virtue of the very
meanings of the words used; whereas others believe that some or all of
these statements are theoretically revisable in the face of new scientific
evidence.\footnote{The debate over this issue is chronicled in Kitcher (1992), which also functions as a
defence of epistemological naturalism, the belief that all statements are at least theoretically
revisable in the light of scientific evidence. This Quinean idea contrasts with the views of
Frege (1884), v-x, 3, 38, 105, and Wittgenstein (1921), 4.111f., who maintained that
philosophy was distinct from science and therefore could never be challenged by scientific
conclusions. Criticism of epistemological naturalism can be found in the works of Hilary
Putnam, e.g. (1979); (1981), esp. ch.4, 8; and (1983). The point here is that an ethical
naturalist may opt for a Quinean view of epistemology, a Fregean-Wittgensteinian view, or
any one on that continuum. In other words, ethical naturalism does not assume or logically
require epistemological naturalism.} Those who allow for truths to be justified by a logical
investigation into the semantics of ordinary language call such an
investigation philosophical analysis, and the resultant truths analytic. This
is distinguished (by them) from a mode of investigation which produces
synthetic truths-- truths that are 'original' in the sense of not being justified
as true by being shown to be either logically derivable from or inherent in
the meaning of other statements.\footnote{Lowe (1995), 28.} Other philosophers, including followers
of Quine, avoid making such a distinction.\footnote{Kitcher (1992), 53-74.}

Any analytic truth (for those who uphold them) is a member of a
class of truths that do not depend upon experience for their justification; one
way of stating this is that such a truth 'requires reflection and conversation,
not empirical investigation'. A truth derived from the meaning of a word is not justified with any type of evidence gained through experience. The term for this category is *a priori*, as in 'prior to' or apart from experience. So, if one believes that a certain statement is true and requires no evidence at all for its justification, then one believes this statement to be an *a priori* truth. The existence of *a priori* truths is hotly contested by philosophers, but insofar as many ethical naturalists do propose analytic truths in support of their theories, they are assuming the possibility and relevance of not only the analytic/synthetic distinction previously described, but also the existence of *a priori* truths. Those who propose *a priori* truths in support of their ethical theory are responsible for defending this 'apriority' against attacks. In principle, an aprioristic ethical naturalist is subject to two types of arguments. First, a critic can claim that the alleged *a priori* truth is actually false, and that the falsity of the claim is itself an *a priori* truth, in which case there is a danger that the conflict will be insoluble. Second, and more commonly, a critic can simply say that the claim has no *a priori* status whatsoever. If A believes a claim to be an *a priori* truth whereas B is

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15C.f. Moser, ed. (1987). An *a priori* truth is most often thought to assume *logically necessary* truth, i.e. truth on pain of logical contradiction. This linking of logical necessity with the *a priori* has been questioned by Kripke (1980), and anyway the concept of the *a priori* can be explained without reference to any type of necessity, logical or otherwise, as it has been above. Another type of necessity sometimes linked with *a priori* truth is *metaphysical necessity*, or truth 'in all possible worlds'. Unless qualified, however, *a priori* in this thesis means simply 'justified independently of experiential evidence', so it cannot automatically be seen to have such strong connotations as being true in every possible universe, set of experiences or conceptual scheme. As Martha Nussbaum writes, using Aristotle as an example, one can believe in the *a priori*, and yet regard this kind of necessity as a 'question that we are in no position either to ask or to answer' (Nussbaum (1986), 254-55).
16Kitcher (1992), 56.
17The *a priori* at least theoretically includes two possibilities: the usual 'analytic' *a priori*, which has to do with *a priori* truths that are inherent in the conventions of logic and the meanings of words in ordinary language. The second, and more unusual, possibility is the 'synthetic' *a priori*, where truths that are inherent in neither logic nor ordinary language are nevertheless claimed to be justified independently of experience. Incidentally, no naturalist moral philosopher cited in this thesis has claimed the definition of a moral term to be a synthetic *a priori* truth; naturalists generally repudiate the existence of such truths. For more information on the synthetic *a priori*, see its *locus classicus* in Kant (1781), Intro.B.1-19.
consistently unable to see it as such, $B$ is likely to cite Ockham's razor,$^{18}$ or perhaps a healthy scepticism about $A$ having what seems to be a privileged access to truth, in order to make a rejection of \textit{a priori} status more attractive than acceptance of it. This does not mean that the critic is necessarily right--an apriorist may have tools to support his claim and therefore refute the charge that his assertion is esoteric. In short, insofar as the ethical naturalist can enlist truths derived from logic and the analysis of ordinary language as part of an ethical theory, ethical naturalism permits the utilisation of \textit{a priori} truths. However, since the existence of such truths is a contentious matter among naturalists, such a philosopher is responsible for explaining these convincingly as well as defending the very possibility of their existence. Aside from these, truths utilised by ethical naturalists must be in principle justifiable by science. This means that they will require experience for their justification (i.e. they will be \textit{a posteriori} rather than \textit{a priori}), and it also means that what is meant by 'experience' here is strictly limited to the kind that science can countenance.

\section*{B. \textbf{Varying Levels of Justification of the Naturalist Claim}}

Whatever the divergence within modern philosophy of science, there is probably no one who insists that moral principles, properties or terms are clearly an ordinary part of the conclusions of science, as obvious and incontrovertible as a simple empirical discovery. So a question inevitably arises as to the justification for seeing morality as employing only principles, properties and terms that are accessible to science. Here all

\footnote{Ockham's razor' is a term used to describe the tendency in philosophy or science to choose the simplest among a number of possible solutions to a problem, all other things being equal. In this case, an opponent of the \textit{a priori} may claim that a rejection of the existence of \textit{a priori} truths may be simpler than maintaining their existence, and yet still consistent with all known facts.}
naturalists do not agree. There are three levels on which a naturalistic moral philosopher may seek to justify or defend his position. Each of these three levels of justification corresponds to a particular level on which to understand the naturalist claim itself. These levels will be called the logical, semantic, and synthetic.\(^{19}\) The logical and semantic levels can be subsumed under the category analytic, since both of them appeal to analytic truths, or truths that are gained from an investigation into logic and the meanings of words.

1. LOGICAL NATURALISM IN ETHICS

a. Description

The first level on which one might seek to justify the naturalist claim is the logical. One operating on this level defends naturalism by defending the validity of a particular type of logical progression: the derivation of moral conclusions from nonmoral premises. The logical justification for naturalism depends on the truth of the following statement:

Logical Justification: Premises consisting entirely of nonmoral terms can be used logically to derive conclusions containing moral terms.

Of course, this assumes that some terms can (at least in certain contexts) be set apart as 'moral terms'.\(^{20}\) Suppose that in the assertion 'One ought not to

\(^{19}\) A similar distinction was recognised by W. K. Frankena in his noted article of 1939, and again in (1973), 97-99; by Pigden (1989, 1991); and by Crisp (1995), 606. The latter two levels have been distinguished by Smith (1994a), ch.2. Frankena and Smith call the second level 'definitional', whereas Pigden calls it 'semantic'. Smith calls the third level 'metaphysical', whereas Pigden calls it 'ontological'. None of these use the term 'synthetic', but a defence of its appropriateness can be found in subsection 3a, below.

\(^{20}\) This is relatively noncontroversial, although Anscombe (1958) and B. Williams (1985), ch.10, have called for the removal of the notion of 'moral' altogether from ethics, insofar as 'moral' carries with it the notion of an obligation. Contrast Prichard (1912), who wished to remove any term from ethics which did not carry with it the notion of obligation. Some (e.g. Putnam (1981), ch. 6, 9) have emphasised the 'value-laden' nature of all terms we use.
murder', 'ought' is a moral term. Someone justifying naturalism on the logical level might say that such an assertion can be properly derived from a series of premises containing no moral terms. Perhaps the premises contain reference to the termination of the life of the murdered, or the psychological damage done to the prospective murderer, or the disruption of an ordered society caused by such an action, or the contradiction of an earlier explicit or implicit promise made, or any of a number of other ideas. One or a series of such premises containing no moral terms are seen by such naturalists as capable of being assembled into a logical progression concluding in a statement such as 'one ought not to murder', containing a moral term 'ought'.

This Logical Justification can easily be shown to combine with the definition of naturalism presented earlier. Naturalism, as has been defined here, simply states that any principle, property or term in ethics is accessible to science. The logical level of justification makes the point more specific by describing why this is the case. An example of a procedure for making moral decisions which is consistent with both naturalism and the Logical Justification is the following:

1. Science provides us with information.
2. We construct premises containing only nonmoral terms to reflect that information.
3. We proceed logically from those premises to conclusions containing moral terms.

There is a difference, however, between this issue-- whether and to what extent we can divorce our concepts from our system of values-- and the issue of the distinction between terms which purport to convey a moral claim and those which do not. Someone adopting a position on the first issue is not logically bound to a position on the second. It is possible to believe that use of language is always value-laden in some sense, while recognising a distinct place for terms whose meanings are fundamental to moral discourse.
No premises are introduced which are inaccessible to scientific enquiry. This assures that the process is consistent with naturalism.

Some\textsuperscript{21} would object to a combination of the logical justification for naturalism with a science-related definition of naturalism. According to them, a nonmoral premise does not necessarily have to be a scientifically supported premise, so science should be left out of the picture of naturalism altogether. Naturalism on the logical level would therefore be seen as any belief that conclusions containing moral terms can be derived from premises containing nonmoral terms. The problem with describing naturalism in this way is that it implies that there is nothing more to the term 'naturalism' for these adherents than the logical justification of their position. On the contrary, if one does call oneself a 'naturalist' and defends this with the logical argument above, there may very well be some content to the notion of 'naturalism' per se, i.e. over and above the argument one uses to defend it. In this case, the identification of the logical argument with the naturalist position would leave out any notion of what this content might be.

Furthermore, if one can be called a 'naturalist' merely for accepting the validity of the Logical Justification above, the term 'naturalism' will subsequently lose any etymological grounding it may have had. One might expect 'naturalism' to have some relation to the 'natural', however that is interpreted (in this thesis the natural is that which is accessible to science). But if the meaning of 'naturalism' is allowed to be completely dictated by the Logical Justification, the term could then be properly used to describe theories which cannot in any sense be seen as rooted in something 'natural'. For example, C. D. Broad\textsuperscript{22} wrote of 'theological naturalism', whereby moral claims are understood by reference to supernatural divine commands. According to such so-called 'theological naturalists', premises containing...

\textsuperscript{21} Including C. R. Pigden (1991), 422, 428.

\textsuperscript{22} Broad (1930), ch. 4.
reference to God's commands, but with no moral terms, can logically derive conclusions with moral terms. God's having said 'Do not murder' is seen logically to imply the conclusion 'One ought not to murder', where 'ought' is a moral term. This theory is committed to the Logical Justification, but to call this type of belief 'naturalism' would remove from that term any sense of the root 'nature' or 'natural'. That such an avowedly supernaturalist position could, ironically, be labelled 'naturalism' has been attributed by William Frankena to a misunderstanding of the term which was facilitated by a certain ambiguity in G. E. Moore's influential *Principia Ethica*. This ambiguity was essentially the confusion of 'naturalism' itself with an argument (though not this one) which Moore found many naturalists to use to justify naturalism.

Although one should not view the Logical Justification as being all there is to the position of naturalism justified at the logical level, this is not to say that the means adopted of justifying a position has no bearing on the nature of that position. On the contrary, the way in which one justifies a position may go a great distance towards defining it. For instance, someone could justify his certainty of the sun rising tomorrow with an argument regarding Phoebus's fiery chariot, whilst another utilises an argument containing reference to the constant rotation of Earth. The fact that a difference is now evident between these two people's ideas of sunrises, shows that a justifying argument can be very relevant to an understanding of one's position on a matter. Concerning naturalism, the use of a logical

23There is a difference between a statement including a moral term, and a statement being relevant to morality. It is possible that an assertion like 'God says "do not murder"' can be very relevant to morality, while the assertion itself contains no moral terms. The Logical Justification has to do not with moral relevance, but with the presence of terms that are logically fundamental to moral discourse.

24Frankena (1939), 471.

25Moore (1903), e.g. pp.13-14, 39-42, 110-114. In these passages Moore uses 'naturalism' and its cognates in two different senses: one science-related, and one having to do with a certain type of argument which is often used to justify the science-related sense (viz., a semantic argument; see subsection 2). Moore's use of both of these two senses interchangeably gave rise to the ambiguity Frankena mentioned.
justifying argument is an obvious pointer to the fact that the person using the argument believes that the truth of naturalism is dependent on a certain conception of logic (at least). If that conception were cast in doubt, that person's idea of naturalism would be cast in doubt as well. On the other hand, it would not be sensible for someone who believed that naturalism was fundamentally something other than a logical point to use a logical justification for naturalism. Because of this, someone who utilises a logical justification for naturalism can be called a *logical naturalist*. A logical naturalist is therefore not only portraying a certain level on which to justify naturalism, but is also, and more importantly, portraying a certain theoretical level on which to understand the naturalist claim itself.

This having been said, there is a sense in which it is likely to be a formality to include logical naturalism among the levels of understanding the concept of naturalism. The reason for this is that on some views, a premise can be omitted from a logical progression if it is a necessary truth\(^\text{26}\) -- that is, if the truth of the premise could not possibly be in question. This might be the case because the negation of the premise entails a self-contradiction, or because another similarly binding circumstance holds. It is perhaps rare that anyone would attempt to challenge the rule known as the 'conservation of logic' (the rule that no terms left unstated in the premises may appear in the conclusion) otherwise.\(^\text{27}\) Presumably, then, when one proceeds from premises with no moral terms to a conclusion with a moral term, there is such an implicit premise demonstrating a necessary equivalence relation between one or more of the nonmoral terms and the moral term. In this case, however, the responsibility is on the naturalist to show that the nonmoral term(s) are *necessarily* equivalent to the moral term.

\(^{26}\)Smith (1994a), 192; see also Frankena (1939), 468.

\(^{27}\)Although see Prior (1976); but his examples are limited to conclusions where the moral term does no work: e.g., from the statement 'x=x', one can logically move to the following: 'either x=x or 1 *ought* to help old ladies across the street'. See II.B.2 for more discussion of this issue.
Regardless of the success of this, the issue is no longer a matter of the logical validity of the progression; the inclusion of the implicit premise, even if it happens to be false, dispels any doubts as to this. Since in such a case the moral term is introduced in a premise and not just the conclusion, the Logical Justification is not being invoked and thus the attribution of 'logical naturalism' is a misnomer. Apart from this, at least theoretically, the possibility of logical naturalism remains. An example may serve to illustrate this possibility.

b. Example

Providing an example of logical naturalism in recent moral philosophy is dangerous, because it assumes that a writer's intention was to make a logical point rather than a point on the semantic or synthetic level. This may not in fact be the case, although it is true that if one appeals to the Logical Justification, then the point one has made is a logical one. Another difficulty in providing examples of logical naturalism arises from many writers' ambiguity as to whether the nonmoral premises' entailment of moral conclusions is supposed by these writers to be a logical entailment, or an entailment by some other set of guidelines which they have not explained. Although logical terminology is often used, this is not sufficient to show that the entailment is actually considered by the user to be logical (e.g., we sometimes say that someone has 'implied' something when the thing we have inferred does not logically follow from anything the other has said or done, on any acceptable understanding of logic). Finally, there is the possibility mentioned above that there is an implicit premise which asserts a necessary equivalence between nonmoral term(s) in the premise and the moral term of the conclusion, in which case it is not logical naturalism at all.

Despite these difficulties, there are several notable examples of arguments which are at least presented in the form of a logical justification.
for naturalism, although the writers may not actually espouse this. G. E. M. Anscombe, in her secular ethical writings, discusses the possibility of proceeding from a premise containing no moral terms to a statement containing the moral term 'ought'. According to Anscombe, we can proceed from a statement about nonmoral facts to a moral statement, because we can understand a moral obligation as logically deriving from certain facts 'in the context of our [social] institutions'.  

She provides an example (P=premise, C=conclusion):

P1: We are under certain social institutions which prescribe, among other things, the payment of debts.

P2: I have knowingly received goods in an ordinary marketing situation from a grocer (in the context of said social institutions).

C: I *ought* to pay the grocer the cost of the goods.  

This argument properly follows the three-part procedure outlined earlier for naturalism understood on the logical level. First, sociology provides us with nonmoral information about our social institutions; then, the above premises are constructed with reference to that scientific data; finally, moral conclusions are drawn from those premises. If one holds that this train of reasoning is logically valid, that sociology is a science and can provide us with knowledge concerning our social institutions, that P1 and P2 are true and contain no moral terms, that C contains a moral term, and that there are no implicit premises which contain a moral term, then one advocates the justification of naturalism on the logical level, and is consequently a logical naturalist.  

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29 ibid.
30 Anscombe herself has never shown signs of having accepted the last one of these stipulations. In fact, she elsewhere says that 'it *must* be impossible to infer... "ought to be" from "is"' (1958). The present point is that she here presents an argument in the same form
Chapter I

2. SEMANTIC NATURALISM IN ETHICS

a. Description

The second of the three levels on which one might seek to justify the naturalist claim is the semantic. This involves the invocation of the meanings of certain words as a support for naturalism. One operating on this level demonstrates that the meanings or definitions of certain moral words are nonmoral. The semantic justification for naturalism is dependent upon the following idea:

Semantic Justification: *Moral terms can be defined, or their meanings exhaustively expressed, using solely nonmoral terms.*

Suppose that 'good' is a moral term. Someone defending naturalism on the semantic level would claim that 'good' means, or can be defined as, a single nonmoral term or a group of them. The proper meaning of 'good' might be 'tending towards individual well-being', or 'minimising of suffering', or 'productive of the greatest happiness', or 'adhering to the conventions of society', or any of a great number of other definitions, as long as these definitions are not seen to contain any moral terms.\(^1\) If someone believes, for example, that 'good' in a moral sense means 'productive of the greatest happiness', that person need only discover that giving to the poor is productive of the greatest happiness to realise that, by the simple

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\(^1\) If, on the other hand, one of these definitions is seen to contain a moral term (e.g. if 'minimising suffering' is seen as an irreducible virtue in itself), then the issue of justification is merely once removed. Can that moral term be defined in nonmoral terms? If the answer is 'yes', then one is employing the Semantic Justification. If 'no', then one is not employing it.
substitution of a term for its definition, giving to the poor is good. Of course, this assumes that the person knows how to use his language properly.

If a definition is seen as a kind of logical relation, the Semantic Justification can be seen as a logical matter. This does not mean, however, that the Semantic Justification reduces to the Logical Justification. The difference between them is how the equivalence relation between the nonmoral term and the moral term(s) is presented. If the relation necessitates an exception to the 'conservation of logic'-- the rule that no term can be introduced in a conclusion unless it first appears in the premises-- then the Logical Justification is being invoked. On the other hand, if the 'conservation of logic' is accepted, and the equivalence relation requires a premise of its own, then the Logical Justification is not being invoked. The premise establishing equivalence of the two terms must be justified by an appeal not to logical conventions, but to the meanings of the words used, and so in this case it is the Semantic Justification which is being invoked.33

When combined with the definition of naturalism provided earlier, a possible procedure for making moral decisions is as follows:

1. Science provides us with information.
2. Definitions are constructed from nonmoral terms that are comprehensible within the scope of that information.
3. Moral terms are substituted for their appropriate definitions.

Someone might object at this point that the second premise is vague, and possibly conceals a requirement for knowledge that is not accessible to science. An important question to ask seems to be how we know that a

32B. Williams (1985), 122.
33For further elaboration of this point see II.C, introductory subsection.
certain assembly of moral terms constitutes a definition which will appropriately represent the meaning of a moral term. On this point, one employing the Semantic Justification seemingly has two options. The first is to claim that such knowledge has an *a priori* status; that is, its status as knowledge is justified in a manner which requires no experiential support. The second is to claim that such knowledge has an *a posteriori* status; that is, its status as knowledge can only be justified by an appeal to experience. As was said in section A of this chapter, the route one chooses to take does not endanger one's status as an ethical naturalist, as long as one realises that for a naturalist, 'experience' can only include that experience which is accessible to science.

Taking an *a priori* approach to semantics is very common, and for most of this century, particularly in Britain, it was more or less unquestionably seen as the only way to handle the subject properly.34 Again, *analysis* is the general term ascribed to this *a priori* method of seeking and utilising concepts to make sense of other, more difficult concepts by virtue of their meanings and the logico-grammatical structure of language.35 Moral philosopher Richard Brandt has maintained that throughout history this way of approaching ethical theory has dominated among ethical naturalists--that most naturalists have presented *a priori* definitions of moral terms as the bases for their ethical theories.36 In the first few decades of this century, this approach to ethical naturalism led into the great battles of what has been called the 'heyday of analytic meta-ethics',37 when philosophers tried to get a grip on the grammatical structure of moral language, still in this *a priori* manner. It is a semantic

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36 Brandt (1959), 156ff. 
37 Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 116-120.
naturalist's contention, if this *a priori* route is chosen, that moral language can support a naturalistic meaning to moral terms.

In the past few decades, however, analytic philosophy's hold on the assessment of the meanings of words has been questioned by the epistemological naturalists. Recently, stress has been laid on the far-reaching implications of Saul Kripke's claim that *a priori* methods of doing philosophy do not even have a monopoly on necessary truths (statements which are 'true in all logically possible worlds'), which has largely been assumed since Kant stated that apriority and necessity were practically equivalent. So, even if morality is thought to make use of necessary truths, there may no longer be a reason to see this as a tight case for the *a priori* status of definitions of moral terms. If Kripke is right, the realm of the *a posteriori* may very well contain necessary truths too. In this atmosphere, *a posteriori* ways of establishing the meanings of moral words have been allowed to take root among ethical naturalists. Here science is seen as the arbiter of our moral language, and empirical evidence is sought to justify and even to discover what definitions are appropriate for moral terms.

Before concluding from this that there are two well-precedented options open for a naturalist utilising the Semantic Justification when formulating definitions for moral terms, one should step back and look at the nature of the second option. The *a posteriori* approach to definitions has been called at least two different things, both of which are telling as to the extent to which they can be called *semantic* means of justifying naturalism. First, it has been called an approach of 'reforming definitions', which involves the restructuring of a definition on the basis of our scientific knowledge. Second, it has been called 'synthetic identity', which involves

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38 See Sec. A, esp. n10, n11.
39 Kripke (1980), 34-39. This developed from Kripke (1972). See also Putnam (1975).
40 Brandt (1979), ch. 1.
two terms being shown to represent the same thing on the basis of experiential evidence.\textsuperscript{41} What is common to both of these terms is that they make plain that semantics \textit{per se} is not the root of the matter, but that a word's meaning is an incidental outcome of a conclusion on another level. This explains why philosophers looking for 'reforming definitions' and 'synthetic identity' claim to ignore or supersede the meanings of certain words in ordinary language. Such philosophers seek to replace these meanings with others (in the first case) or just place them aside (in the second). Thus, although some of these people do speak in terms of definitions, it would be a misnomer to characterise them as utilising the Semantic Justification. Far from justifying their naturalism by appealing to the meanings of moral terms, they are either changing or ignoring those meanings, in order to establish their naturalist claim. The next section will deal with this \textit{a posteriori} level of justifying naturalism. The semantic level should, then, be restricted to those naturalists who justify their position in an analytical, \textit{a priori} manner— that is, by an appeal to the meanings of words as we ordinarily use them. A corollary of this is that there are no epistemological naturalists who are ethically naturalistic on the semantic level, for epistemological naturalists believe that 'you have got to appeal to experience-- you cannot just think things through \textit{a priori}'.\textsuperscript{42}

The Semantic Justification itself should not be seen as being identical with the doctrine of naturalism, by the same argument that was given for the Logical Justification. Such an identification results in the idea that naturalism is a matter of semantics alone for those who employ the Semantic Justification, which implies that there is nothing more to the term 'naturalism' for these adherents than the semantic justification of their position. As was said of logical naturalism, it is certainly possible that a

\textsuperscript{41}Putnam (1975a); and (1981), 82-85, 206-208.

\textsuperscript{42}Ruse (1995), 2.
naturalist defending this claim on the semantic level could intend some significant content by the notion of 'naturalism' per se, i.e. over and above the argument being used to justify it. When this is the case, claiming that 'naturalism' is simply the definition of moral terms in nonmoral terms ignores this content altogether. The mistake of confusing naturalism's justifying argument with its definition can be clearly seen in the effects of such a neglect of the etymological grounding of 'naturalism'. G. E. Moore, who has already been cited as having been a source of confusion on this matter, at times identifies naturalism with its semantic justification by saying that naturalism is the doctrine that 'good' can be defined with terms other than itself. As Moore admits, this means that the term 'naturalism' and its cognates can be applied to 'metaphysical ethics'. Since 'metaphysical' is actually defined by Moore 'in opposition to "natural"', it is more than a little confusing for Moore to be attributing 'naturalism' to theories of ethics whose foundations are as far from natural as conceptually possible. Such can be avoided by regarding the Semantic Justification as just that-- a justifying argument for naturalism (and not the only one); whereas naturalism itself is the idea that ethics employs only principles, properties and terms that are accessible to science, or some such definition.

As on the logical level of justification, the Semantic Justification does provide evidence for the way in which its adherents view naturalism. Since they utilise a justifying argument which is rooted in the nature of words and their meanings, they evidently view naturalism as being a matter which is appropriate to that level of discourse. They view the truth of naturalism as being dependent on the meanings of certain words (at least). If that particular set of meanings were to be cast in doubt, naturalism for those adherents would also be cast in doubt. If they viewed naturalism as being

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43Moore (1903), 9-10, 37-38.
44Ibid., 38-39.
45Ibid., 110.
dependent on something other than the meanings of words, they would not employ the Semantic Justification, for it would not be to the point. Therefore, this level of justification corresponds with a specific understanding of the naturalist claim itself, and therefore a person who utilises such a justification can be called a *semantic naturalist*.

b. *Example*

Philosophers have not always been explicit as to whether their theories of ethics were true by virtue of the meanings of certain words, or by virtue of truths on another level. This ambiguity is rapidly diminishing, however, for the distinction has been explicated several times in recent years. One philosopher who has recently described this distinction is Michael Smith. He contrasts a semantic, *a priori*, or 'definitional' understanding of naturalism with a synthetic, *a posteriori*, or 'metaphysical' understanding of it, and defends a theory which is in the former category.46 Smith, recognising the fact that *a priori* knowledge need not be obvious, develops a process in order to arrive at a definition for moral terms. This involves the summarising of as many platitudes or obvious truths about morality that can be mustered.47 This process leads Smith to the conclusion that 'our judgements about what we are morally required to do are simply judgements about what the categorical requirements of rationality or reason demand of us'.48 In other words, morality is defined by Smith in terms of rationality. And what we have reason to do, and therefore what is right, he defines as 'what I believe I would desire to do if I were cool, calm and collected',49 or in other words, 'fully rational'.50 If one does something which one believes is not what one would desire to do in this ideal reflective

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47ibid., ch. 1-2.  
48ibid., 91.  
50Smith (1994a), 181, 184.
state, then one does something which, by definition, is wrong, since it is irrational. An understanding of the meaning of the terms 'right' and 'wrong' here forms the foundation for an ethical theory. Thus, Smith's theory is semantic.

Whether Smith is a naturalist is, of course, a different question. He does claim that he is, as the properties he invokes to support his theory are not 'over and above those which earn their credentials in a natural or a social science',51 else he would have branded himself a 'non-naturalist'. But properties are not the only materials used in constructing an ethical theory. If Smith were to employ a principle or term that he claims is inaccessible to science, he would not be a naturalist by the present definition. But, he recognises that 'a fully rational creature is simply someone with a certain psychology', and the idealised condition he discusses 'requires nothing non-natural for its realisation'.52 Finally, he shows that after defining 'moral terms in non-moral terms... all of the non-moral terms in our definition are themselves thoroughly naturalistic'.53 It should be remembered that neither the assertion that morality is grounded in rationality, nor the nature of the specified idealised conditions, have to be directly supported by science, for Smith's type of theory to be naturalistic. Since Smith believes these statements to be fundamentally semantic (i.e. dependent for their truth only on the rules and definitions in our language), the burden of supporting them falls not on scientific enquiry, but on semantics. And semantics, Smith claims, can succeed in resolving these issues. So, this theory is properly categorised under the heading of semantic naturalism.

3. SYNTHETIC NATURALISM IN ETHICS

51 ibid., 25.
52 ibid., 186.
53 ibid., 35-6.
a. Description

The third and final level on which the naturalist may seek to justify his claim will be called the synthetic. This level of justification might involve an appeal to the nature of reality, or else to the 'set of things whose existence is acknowledged by a particular theory or system of thought'.\textsuperscript{54} What unites all who operate on this level, however, is that they appeal to facts, or 'actual states of affairs'.\textsuperscript{55} A synthetic justification for naturalism does not make its final appeal to conventions of logic (although it will undoubtedly involve the use of these conventions), nor does it find its grounding in the structure or function of ordinary language (although it must use this structure and function in order to convey its points). The synthetic appeal goes further, beyond our logical and linguistic conventions, to something that is held to be true independently of these things. The Synthetic Justification for naturalism is dependent on the following idea:

\begin{quote}
Synthetic Justification: The results of enquiry into facts or actual states of affairs are necessary and sufficient to explain the principles, properties and terms used in moral experience and moral discourse.
\end{quote}

This definition is very broad as it stands, because no mention has been made of the type of enquiry or type of fact that explains moral experience. Such breadth was not so evident at the logical level, for the number of logical conventions that can be appealed to is relatively small. At the semantic level the breadth was a little more obvious, for the whole realm of 'nonmoral terms' was open for utilisation. Here, however, the field has been changed

\textsuperscript{54}Lowe (1995c), 634.
\textsuperscript{55}Lowe (1995b), 267. The term 'actual states of affairs' must, as is evident from the preceding quote, be interpreted broadly enough so as to accommodate theories on which our knowledge is to some extent constrained by our conceptual scheme. For those so inclined, 'actual states of affairs' can hereafter be interpreted as 'states of affairs whose actuality is entailed by the particular belief system being endorsed by such-and-such a community'.
again, and the range of things which may be used includes any and every synthetic or factual truth, i.e. every truth justified by any means excepting its inherence in logical convention or ordinary language. The results of such an enquiry are on this view necessary for an explanation of moral experience and discourse; but such results are also seen as sufficient for such an explanation. Although both logic and ordinary language are undoubtedly used in the means of such an enquiry, neither the conventions of logic nor those of ordinary language are able to offer explanations of moral experience and discourse. The results of the enquiry are neither logical conventions nor ordinary language definitions.

As with the other levels, this justification may be joined with the concept of naturalism. When this is done, the result is synthetic naturalism. One procedure for arriving at moral conclusions that is consistent with both the definition of naturalism and the Synthetic Justification is the following:

1. Science provides us with information.
2. All aspects of moral experience and discourse (principles, properties and terms) are explained in terms of that information.
3. This explanation is utilised to provide moral conclusions.

Thus the Synthetic Justification allows science to do more work than it did on either the logical or semantic levels, where a good deal of the job of explaining moral experience was done instead by the rules of logic or by the meanings of words in ordinary language. Here, however, science not only provides the informational basis, as it has on all three levels, but it also acts as the bridge between the nonmoral and the moral. This bridge is not a convention of logic that allows one to proceed from a nonmoral term in a premise to a moral term in a conclusion; nor is it a nonmoral definition that is able to encompass the meaning of a moral word. Here this bridge is an
interpretation of moral principles, properties, or terms in those nonmoral terms that are deemed appropriate with regard to science. Among the important consequences of having science do this work is the limitation of the range of possible synthetic truths. Moral experience and discourse is explained by the naturalist with reference only to scientifically accessible \textit{a posteriori} (experientially justified) truths.\footnote{Although synthetic claims can theoretically be \textit{a priori}, naturalists do not postulate synthetic \textit{a priori} truths, for science cannot countenance them.}

The second stage of the process outlined above contains reference to the fact that moral experience is 'explained in terms of' scientific information. This conceals a distinction between two modes of relating scientific conclusions to moral conclusions within a naturalism justified synthetically. The distinction is between \textit{reductive} and \textit{nonreductive} naturalism. Peter Railton describes this distinction well. Reductive naturalism is the more obvious of the alternatives, which is simply 'a synthetic identification of the property of moral value with a complex non-moral property'. But naturalism need not be reductive:

'One could, for example, hold that in the best \textit{a posteriori} account of moral properties they emerge as irreducible natural moral properties-- supervenient upon the nonmoral to be sure, but able to "pull their weight" in the sciences in their own right. That is, moral properties might simultaneously be natural and \textit{sui generis}.\footnote{Railton (1993), 317. This point is also made in Sturgeon (1988), 239-42.}

\textit{'Sui generis'} means that moral properties could be in a realm all their own, that is, not reducible to other properties. A nonreductive naturalist must show how a moral property can indeed be both natural and \textit{sui generis}; this usually involves a notion of 'supervenience'. Simon Blackburn explains supervenience as follows:

'The idea is that some properties, the A-properties, are consequential upon some other base properties, the underlying B-properties. This claim is supposed to mean that
in some sense of necessary, it is necessary that if an A-truth changes, some B-truth changes; or if two situations are identical in their B-properties they are identical in their A-properties. A-properties cannot (in this same sense) vary regardless of B-properties.\(^5^8\)

He then goes on to describe the various types of supervenience that follow from the fact that there are several ways to understand the term 'necessary'. As both Blackburn and Railton, as well as many others, point out, the notion of supervenience in and of itself is not enough to establish a nonreductive naturalist theory-- it doesn't have much explanatory power, but merely clarifies the situation that the nonreductive naturalist is then expected to support somehow.\(^5^9\)

Before continuing, some defence must be given for the use of the term 'synthetic', since the majority of existing descriptions of this level of understanding naturalism either do not label it at all or label it differently. In considering possibilities, other candidates seem to have serious shortcomings. 'Metaphysical naturalism' has been used for this level.\(^6^0\) Unfortunately, use of this term invites confusion both with Moore's use of the term,\(^6^1\) and 'metaphysical naturalism' as it is generally viewed today, which is roughly the doctrine that any metaphysical statement must be accessible to science.\(^6^2\) It also may presuppose the same thing that another proposal, 'ontological naturalism',\(^6^3\) does even more explicitly: that matters of morality are matters of being or existence. Although this is the case in many naturalistic ethical theories, it is not necessarily the case. A naturalist can theoretically justify his position on the basis of scientific evidence in a

\(^{58}\) Blackburn (1984), 182-3.

\(^{59}\) Hare (1984); Schiffer, S. (1987), 153-4; Kim (1990) and (1993), ch. 9; Blackburn (1985a); (1993); Horgan (1993); Railton (1993a), 298n. Some, e.g. Post (1987), ch.6, disagree with this explainability requirement, but Horgan and Timmons (1992a) show that a rejection of it would entail a 'queer relation' in Mackie's sense (1977), 39-41, since the requirement is met in virtually every other commonly accepted case of supervenience.

\(^{60}\) Smith (1994a), 28-35.

\(^{61}\) Moore (1903), ch. 4.

\(^{62}\) Papineau (1993).

manner which is neither semantic nor logical at its root, without making a statement about whether or not something exists; and so it seems awkward and misleading to try to tie every naturalist claim on this level to some statement about what exists.\(^{64}\) 'A posteriori naturalism' is another possibility, but the fact that such an appeal is a posteriori is not determined by the manner of justification itself, but only becomes evident when we combine the term with the definition of naturalism. The Synthetic Justification itself does theoretically allow for a priori truths, insofar as there are such things as the synthetic a priori. Such has been in contention ever since Kant made it an object of his Critique of Pure Reason to answer this question.\(^{65}\) Whether or not there are any such truths, and even though naturalists do not enlist such truths in support for their ethical theories, 'A posteriori naturalism' as a title would ignore the fact that this is an issue at all. 'Synthetic naturalism' seems most to the point, although it may not be without its own problems. For one thing, doubt has been cast on the analytic-synthetic distinction by philosophers such as Quine.\(^{66}\) But, an argument could be made that Quine's real focus was the dubious status of analytic truth, and so hopefully problems can be avoided by the above definition of 'synthetic' not explicitly in terms of the analytic, as is most often done, but more positively in terms of facts or states of affairs, exclusive of any 'facts' arising out of logical convention or ordinary language. By doing so, the present level of justification can be distinguished from the past two, and it can be joined meaningfully with the definition of naturalism to produce the procedure for arriving at moral conclusions outlined above.\(^{67}\)

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\(^{64}\) Kant (1785), sec. 2, initial passage, claims that something being good does not preclude the possibility that 'perhaps the world has hitherto never give an example' of it. Moore (1903), 119-120, makes this point as well. Presumably a naturalist could concur, so we must leave open the possibility that something could be good but not existing.

\(^{65}\) Kant (1781), Intro.B.1-19.

\(^{66}\) Quine (1951).

\(^{67}\) Note that 'moral conclusions' does not rule out the possibility that on a synthetically
Thus, instead of naturalism being true by virtue of logical convention, or by virtue of the meanings of certain words, naturalism on this interpretation is true by virtue of the natural facts of the matter. When we are examining the structure of logic we do not necessarily see this to be the case. When we examine the way our language functions we do not necessarily discover this either. When we look at things in an *a posteriori* manner, however, using any tools of science at our disposal and providing an appropriate philosophical interpretation of the results, we discover that morality can be properly understood within the framework of naturalism.

As one can be a logical naturalist or a semantic naturalist, one can likewise be a *synthetic naturalist*. A naturalist who believes that ethics is only properly practised when truths justified by scientifically accessible experience form the basis for the ethical theory, is a synthetic naturalist. Such a philosopher justifies the naturalist claim directly with natural facts, rather than with definitions or laws of logic. In so doing, a specific understanding of naturalism is advocated.

b. *Example*

In *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* and in *The Ethical Primate: Humans, Freedom and Morality*, Mary Midgley deftly applies the findings of ethology and psychology to the task of outlining 'human nature'. Her conclusion, which is intended as an empirical one (the empirical methods involved being those of the behavioural and mental sciences), can be divided into two parts. The first part is that there are 'natural dispositions', within which humans are designed to operate; there are definite psychological parameters within which humans flourish and find life fulfilling. The second part is that these natural dispositions form the basis of naturalistic theory, science could in some sense undermine ethics. For example, 'no moral statements are true' could be a moral conclusion.
human morality. This second aspect of her work is that which makes her a naturalist. The fact that she justifies her position on the basis of scientific findings about the nature of reality classifies this naturalism as synthetic. Her ethical views are developed more fully in *Heart and Mind: The Varieties of Moral Experience*. Here she agrees with Philippa Foot that a point of view being 'moral' means that it retains 'a certain sort of seriousness and importance... other implications, whether of form or content, flow from this'. The exact nature of that 'seriousness' from which all moral implications flow is described later. It is that which, in a person, 'affects something central among his systems of purposes' and 'involves connections with what is naturally important for a human being'. That system she calls 'human nature' or 'our emotional constitution', and describes it as 'a very large and general empirical fact'. Consequently, the better moral course of action in any situation is the one that effects consequences which are in line with our inherent psychological needs. Thus, according to Midgley, there is a common human nature which is scientifically discoverable, and moral decisions are decisions on the basis of the effects which certain actions and attitudes have on that common nature. These two aspects of her thesis thus combine to provide what seems to be a simultaneously naturalistic and *a posteriori*-- and therefore synthetically naturalistic--means of doing ethics.

This section has shown that different justifying arguments defend different notions of 'naturalism', although the general definition might be held in common. That such a thing is possible is evident when one notices that a doctrine of this sort can be defended either on the basis of its logical

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69 Midgley (1981), 106.
70 ibid., 16-17.
71 ibid., 125-132.
72 However, Midgley (1997) could be interpreted as implying a relaxation of the naturalistic claim.
form, or on the basis of the meanings that certain words have for a competent user of the language, or on the basis of factual evidence. There are three ways in which the idea that ethics requires only principles, properties and terms that are acceptable for use within scientific explanations can be established as true. It could be true if one is logically allowed to proceed from statements composed only of nonmoral terms to statements including moral terms, or if the nature of our language is such that the meaning of moral claims can be expressed just as well in nonmoral terms, or if a diligent enquiry into science and the nature of moral experience and discourse leads one to that conclusion.

C. The Relationship Between These Levels

Before applying this distinction to the ways in which modern philosophers have critiqued naturalism (which is the work of the next chapter), one question must be answered: How important is this distinction between logical, semantic and synthetic levels of justifying naturalism? For if the areas distinguished imply each other, then the conclusion reached in the last section is not very significant. On the other hand, if their relationship is not so close, this may have profound implications for an understanding of the idea and may establish certain stipulations for critique of naturalism. Specifically, if semantic naturalism has a certain degree of independence from logical naturalism, a refutation of the Logical Justification will not affect the possibility of semantic naturalism. In the same way, if synthetic naturalism has a certain degree of independence from the other two levels, then successful refutation of both Logical and Semantic Justifications will have no necessary effect on the synthetic version of naturalism.
1. INDEPENDENCE OF THE SEMANTIC FROM THE LOGICAL

Suppose that the Logical Justification is false, that one cannot proceed from a premise which contains no moral terms to a conclusion that does without incurring a logical fallacy. Semantic and synthetic levels of understanding the idea will be affected by this fact only insofar as they include such a fallacious logical progression. Otherwise, the falsity of logical naturalism will have no bearing on them.

The example of semantic naturalism described earlier (that of Michael Smith), if put into a modern logical form, could be reduced to a simple syllogism:

P1: 'Right', as a moral term, is defined as 'What we believe we would desire if we were calm, cool and collected'.

P2: The set of actions which satisfies the condition of 'What we believe we would desire if we were calm, cool and collected' is determined by empirical psychology.

C: The set of actions which satisfies the condition of 'right', as a moral term, is determined by empirical psychology.

No term was introduced in the conclusion of this progression that was not in one of the premises. The moral term 'right' was defined in the beginning, and so there are no grounds for believing Smith's theory, or any in this form, to depend on the Logical Justification being true. So logical naturalism can be false without affecting semantic naturalism. Of course, there are different types of definition, and not all are compatible with the idea that a term is equivalent, and therefore substitutable, with its definition. However, the validity of the above syllogism is enough to demonstrate that it is easily
possible for a semantically naturalistic theory to be proposed which does not involve a progression from premises without moral terms to conclusions with them. The syllogism above involves no such progression since the moral term 'right' is introduced in the first premise. Semantic naturalism, then, has a certain degree of independence from logical naturalism such that the latter can be refuted without effect on the former.

The theoretical possibility that a logical conclusion could be invalid if it contains a term $y$ if $y$ was not introduced in the premises, whilst $y$ might still be definable in terms of $x$, can also be illustrated in non-ethical terms. If logic is conservative then one cannot proceed from premises containing 'European daisy' to a conclusion referring to 'Bellis perennis' unless 'Bellis perennis' appears in the premises somewhere. However, since Bellis perennis is the scientific name for the European daisy, one would not have to be acquainted with the analytic philosophical tradition to be able to define one in terms of the other. Therefore one cannot infer anything about the validity of defining something $x$ in terms of something else $y$, from a refutation of the logical derivation of $y$ from $x$.

2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE SYNTHETIC FROM THE LOGICAL

Again supposing logical naturalism to be false, the question of whether this fact affects the viability of synthetic naturalism can be answered by the conversion of a synthetically naturalistic justification (such as Mary Midgley's, summarised earlier) into a simplified logical form:

P1: An action's rightness is inherent in or a product of its contribution to human flourishing.

P2: An action's contribution to human flourishing is determined by empirical psychology and ethology.
C: An action's rightness is determined by empirical psychology and ethology.

Here again, there is no term in the conclusion above which is not present in one of the premises, and the above progression is valid under the laws of conventional modern logic. Logical naturalism involves the introduction of terms in the conclusion that were not in the premises, and so this example demonstrates the viability of synthetic naturalism whether or not logical naturalism is true. Of course, as in the Michael Smith example, Mary Midgley's ethical theory is much more complex than this. However, even if this theory is not identical with Mary Midgley's, or the former one identical with Michael Smith's, this does not diminish the point that both semantic or synthetic theories can easily be formulated in such a manner that they are unaffected by a refutation of logical naturalism. The syllogisms presented demonstrate this point.

The theoretical possibility that either $y$ is supervenient on $x$, or $x$ and $y$ refer to the same thing (depending on whether one is a nonreductive or reductive naturalist respectively), whilst logical progression from terms involving $x$ to terms involving $y$ is invalid, can also be illustrated outside of ethics. It may be illogical to derive a conclusion regarding a proton from premises which contain no reference to protons but only to hydrogen cations. This logical invalidity, however, cannot imply that hydrogen cations are not protons, for they are. Their identity is a synthetic truth, and one which has been discovered by science. Therefore, one can not necessarily infer a distinction between what $x$ and $y$ refer to by a refutation of the logical derivability of $y$-terms from $x$-terms.

3. INDEPENDENCE OF THE SYNTHETIC FROM THE SEMANTIC
In order to discover whether this degree of independence exists between synthetic and semantic understandings of naturalism, one can assume semantic naturalism to be false, and then determine whether synthetic naturalism could still be true. Semantic naturalism being false means that one cannot provide a definition of a moral term in nonmoral terms on the basis of an analysis of ordinary language, and so one cannot appeal to semantics to justify naturalism. We can determine whether synthetic naturalism can survive in this situation by simplifying the example of it provided earlier. Let us suppose that according to facts we discover through scientific enquiry (i.e. naturalistically and synthetically speaking), our minds operate in such a way that certain actions contribute to our psychological health whilst other actions detract from it. A synthetic naturalist might claim that rightness consists in the pursuit of actions that contribute, and in the avoidance of actions that detract, from our psychological health (exactly to whom 'our' refers is not important here). The possibility of our morality being this way is not lessened at all by the lack of a basis in ordinary language for 'right' being defined in terms of 'contribution to psychological health'. Any conclusions claimed by a synthetic naturalist like Mary Midgley are immune to such arguments, for she has invoked no a priori analytic definitions. This difference separates synthetic naturalism from semantic naturalism in a significant way. A refutation of semantic naturalism, since it is restricted to talking about what is justified a priori, cannot affect the possibility of synthetic naturalism being true, for synthetic naturalism makes no a priori claims but states that something has been discovered a posteriori.

How a synthetic discovery could establish identity between \( x \) and \( y \) where an account rooted in semantics could not, may be illustrated outside of ethics. Perhaps the simplest way in which such a situation could arise is when ordinary language has evolved out of an incorrect understanding of the
way things are. For instance, there is an ancient view of the heavens whereby the sun and the stars are believed to be fundamentally different types of things, to have different ontologies (viz., the sun a great light, and stars holes in the roof of the world). This view will result in meanings for these terms which are different. A synthetic astronomical discovery could and did, however, establish identity between sun and star where ordinary language could not. Now, a synthetic naturalist can say to us that we today are in precisely the same position when it comes to moral terms. We may have two terms, one moral (say, 'right') and one nonmoral (say, 'contribution to psychological health'), which have different meanings. A synthetic naturalist will tell us that this fact of our ordinary language could be rooted in an erroneous view of the way things are. Those two terms might actually represent the same thing, and until we realise this we will continue to use them as if their different meanings necessitated different ontologies. In actuality, different ordinary-language meanings do not necessitate anything of the sort.

Synthetic identity without semantic equivalence is not only possible when there is an error in one's conception of the world. Another illustration, again from the physical sciences, is provided by Hilary Putnam. The object of semantic investigation is called here a *predicate* or *concept*, and the object of synthetic investigation a *property*:

'Consider, however, the situation which arises when a scientist asserts that temperature *is* mean molecular kinetic energy. On the face of it, this is a statement of identity of properties. What is being asserted is that the *property* of having a particular temperature is *really* (in some sense of "really") the *same property* as the property of having a certain molecular energy; or (more generally) that the *physical magnitude* temperature is one and the same physical magnitude as the mean molecular kinetic energy. If this is right, then since "x has such-and-such a temperature" is not *synonymous* with "x has blah-blah mean molecular kinetic energy", even when "blah-blah" is the value of molecular energy that corresponds to the value "such-and-such" of the
temperature, it must be that what the physicist means by "physical magnitude" is something quite other than what philosophers have called a "predicate" or a "concept". To be specific, the difference is that, whereas synonymy of the expression "X is P" and "X is Q" is required for the predicates P and Q to be the "same", it is not required for the property P to be the same as the property Q. Properties, as opposed to predicates, can be "synthetically identical".\textsuperscript{73}

This shows that even if semantic naturalism were false, and we could not on the basis of our ordinary language define moral terms in nonmoral terms (or, in Putnam's terminology, substitute moral concepts or predicates with nonmoral ones), synthetic naturalism could still be true--we could still discover on the basis of experiential evidence that moral terms and nonmoral terms represent the same property.\textsuperscript{74}

4. RESULTANT STIPULATIONS FOR CRITIQUE OF NATURALISM

To sum up, the distinction between logical, semantic and synthetic naturalisms is a significant distinction because the second can be true if the first is false, and the third can be true if the first two are both false. In the context of an examination of naturalism this distinction yields interesting consequences. An argument claiming to refute logical naturalism has no efficacy against semantic or synthetic naturalism. Likewise, an argument claiming to refute semantic naturalism has no efficacy against synthetic naturalism. In light of this set of stipulations, this discussion can proceed now by presenting the most prominent of twentieth-century arguments against naturalism. When these stipulations are applied to them, a

\textsuperscript{73}Putnam (1981), 83-85. He also makes the point on p.206-208, and in (1975a).

\textsuperscript{74}This is a point which has been made by several writers besides Putnam in recent literature. Among those who have done so are Harman (1977), 19-20; Sturgeon (1988), 242; Brink (1989), 163-167; Pigden (1989); (1991); Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton (1992), 169-180, who summarise the attempts of some modern moral philosophers to take advantage of this concept; Railton (1993a); and Smith (1994a), 28-29.
determination can be made as to which of the three versions of naturalism, if any, are left unaffected by these arguments.