

Chapter II: AN INTERPRETATION OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY CRITIQUE OF NATURALISM

A. Attention to Level in Talk of Naturalism

In the Introduction the suggestion was made that naturalism has been criticised vehemently in this century, and that the first chapter's description of naturalism might be able to throw some light upon the nature and scope of that criticism. The first chapter distinguished three levels of understanding naturalism: the logical, semantic, and synthetic. It also showed that there is a certain degree of independence of these levels such that a refutation of naturalism at one level does not affect the concept at any later level (in the order discussed). Since naturalism can be formulated as primarily a logical issue, a semantic issue, or an issue to be decided synthetically, an interesting question is which level or levels this century's prominent critique has targeted. If this question can be answered, and critique of naturalism can be interpreted in terms of its level, then determination can be made whether any of the levels remains unaffected by this critique.

To this end, this chapter will present an interpretation of arguments against naturalism which have figured prominently in this century, in terms of the threefold distinction of logical, semantic and synthetic naturalism. The suggestion here will be that this prominent critique can be divided into two strategies, each of which aims particularly at one level of understanding naturalism. The first strategy concentrates on the logical derivation of

values from facts, or (as it is sometimes phrased) the logical derivation of conclusions containing 'ought' from premises containing 'is'; as such, this is an objection to the Logical Justification. The second strategy is occupied with showing the impossibility of producing a definition of 'good' or some other moral term in nonmoral terms; this is aimed specifically at the Semantic Justification.

Of course, it may be the case that either one or both of this century's most prominent strategies of critique of naturalism are faulty and do not produce insuperable objections to the levels of naturalism that they scrutinise. Establishing their soundness is not the primary goal of this chapter. However, clarification of the nature and scope of the arguments may contribute to such a goal, because both defence of and objection to such arguments have been known to conflate the levels of naturalism. Such conflation is not always obvious, and can foster a misrepresentation of naturalism and the arguments against it. Consider one example, from a philosopher arguing against naturalism:

'...a value-judgment contains a value element and therefore cannot be derived from premisses which contain only matters of (natural) fact. But if M cannot be derived from N, they certainly cannot be equivalent; so naturalism fails.'¹

The first sentence clearly attacks the Logical Justification, but the second sentence is too general. The last section of Chapter I has provided examples of how M might not be derivable from N but nevertheless be semantically or synthetically equivalent to it. Conflation of the levels of naturalism is also evident among those more favourably disposed towards naturalism:

'Philosophers who argue for the adoption of any normative framework... employ a common strategy, namely to justify the adoption by showing that the framework sanctions certain empirical descriptions that are deemed well confirmed. This

¹Mayo (1986), 42.

leads me to reject the common belief that inferring values from facts is *ipso facto* fallacious'.²

The first sentence contains a description and endorsement of the Synthetic Justification. It claims that empirical study is the means by which one properly justifies a normative (e.g., ethical) theory. However, the second sentence claims that acceptance of the Synthetic Justification led the writer to accept the Logical Justification despite objections. This does not follow. One can easily accept the Synthetic Justification and at the same time reject the Logical Justification. An empirical study may justify an ethical theory in a way which does not involve the inference of values from facts, as was shown in the last section of Chapter I. Since this is the case, philosophers 'employing the common strategy' this writer mentions can still believe that 'inferring values from facts is *ipso facto* fallacious'. Whether or not this writer is aware of the distinction between synthetic and logical naturalism, or intended to make the claim that is implied, such wording certainly opens the door to conflation of the different levels of understanding naturalism. This chapter, together with the previous one, should clarify these kinds of issues and remove the confusion which can arise from either casual use of terminology or a lack of understanding of the relevant distinctions in this area.

The primary contribution of this chapter to the thesis, however, is the determination of whether and how naturalism can evade the two prominent critical strategies which this century has witnessed; and if so, to provide an outline of what this escape route looks like and whether any problems may confront it. Once this is done, the way will be prepared for further chapters to examine a specific theory in this less criticised area of naturalism, and to attempt to distil a generalisable argument from this examination.

²Richards (1989), 337.

B. Arguments Against Naturalism on the Logical Level

The Logical Justification for naturalism is the idea that *premises consisting of nonmoral terms can be used logically to derive conclusions containing moral terms*. Some of the arguments that have been offered in recent decades against naturalism have operated at this level. Such arguments have depended on what has been called a logical fallacy in proceeding from 'is' in premises to 'ought' in conclusions.

1. HUME'S LAW

The notion that one can come to conclusions which contain moral terms (such as 'ought') by a logical progression from premises which do not contain any such terms was criticised by the Scottish philosopher David Hume in 1739:

'[moralists] proceed for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning... of the being of God... or observations concerning human affairs... when of a sudden, I am surprised to find that instead of the usual copulations of propositions *is* and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*... as this *ought* or *ought not* expresses some new relation or affirmation 'tis necessary that it be observed and explained; and at the same time a reason should be given for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others which are entirely different from it.'³

Hume could not imagine how, in a process of logical reasoning about morality, one could deduce a statement which contains an 'ought' from any number of premises, none of which contain an 'ought'.⁴ The above passage

³Hume (1739), III.i.1.

⁴The fact that 'ought' in many cases is nonmoral, but that Hume was talking specifically about a moral understanding of the term, is explicated in Mackie (1977), 67.

has been cited abundantly in this century, and the impossibility of logically deriving an 'ought' from an 'is' has been named 'Hume's Law'.⁵

a. *Content-based interpretations*

At first glance the passage seems to have at least two possible interpretations, each of them fairly simple. The first is that Hume was merely defending what is often called the 'conservation of logic': the requirement that 'when a deduction is made formally explicit, no statement employing a given expression can be logically derived from premises that do not also contain the expression'.⁶ On this interpretation, any two words could be inserted in place of 'is' and 'ought' and his point will be made just as clearly. For instance, one philosopher has proposed that the law would be just as forceful if 'need' replaced 'ought'.⁷ Another has been even more explicit, saying that Hume's prohibition holds equally well of conclusions which contain the term 'hedgehog' from premises which do not contain 'hedgehog'.⁸ Hume was, one might say, defending a particular instance of a general rule. The second interpretation claims that Hume seems in his passage to view facts and values as very different types of things, and that this, and not just the 'conservation of logic', is the force of the passage. It is not merely because 'is' and 'ought' are two different words that one may not derive one from the other in a logical progression; rather, the meanings of 'is' and 'ought' statements are so different that one could hardly understand a

⁵Among the works of this century which strive for an understanding of this passage are Broad (1930), ch. 4; Frankena (1939), 465-66; Dennes (1960), 94-96; MacIntyre (1966), 173-174; the articles collected in Hudson, ed. (1969), especially the first of the four parts; Stroud (1977), 187ff.; Mackie (1977), 64-73; (1980), 61-63; B. Williams (1985), ch. 7; Pigden (1989); (1991), 423-425.

⁶E. Nagel (1961), 374.

⁷Anscombe (1958), 31.

⁸Pigden (1991), 423-24.

conclusion in terms of one as having anything to do with premises which contain the other.⁹

As the literature regarding this passage attests, there are several intermediates between these two interpretations. For instance, according to one interpretation, nothing is wrong with progressing from an 'is' to an 'ought', but Hume's Law insists that to claim that such a progression is *logical* is a fallacy. Instead, the progression should be described as psychological, meaning that we tend to make the progression in our minds although there is no logical constraint on our doing so.¹⁰ Whatever point on this continuum is chosen, however, Hume's prohibition stays fundamentally the same: one cannot logically derive an 'ought' statement from any number of 'is' statements. The difference in interpretation arises in attempts to answer the question *why* (e.g. 'because logic is conservative', 'because values are very different from facts', or 'because the progression is psychological and not logical'). So, all interpretations based on the content of this passage agree on what Hume was fundamentally prohibiting, and all interpretations involve a refutation of the Logical Justification for naturalism. Different interpretations might disagree on why the Logical Justification is claimed to be invalid, but all agree that it is so claimed.¹¹

Alasdair MacIntyre has mentioned the possibility that perhaps Hume meant only that the 'transition from *is* to *ought* needs great care', rather than being necessarily fallacious.¹² However, as long as the logical progression remains in the form Hume described (an 'ought' in the conclusion but not in the premises), his comment that the derivation 'seems altogether

⁹E.g. Moore (1903), 124-26, argues that existence and goodness are two different things, such that the latter cannot be understood in terms of the former.

¹⁰Stroud (1977), 187.

¹¹Some philosophers have advocated using the term 'naturalistic fallacy' to describe what is prohibited in this passage. Since Hume did not use this term, and since it was used very notably by G. E. Moore in his discussion of semantic naturalism, this term will here be restricted to naturalism discussed at that level.

¹²MacIntyre (1966), 173-74.

inconceivable' leads one away from the view that any amount of 'great care' could avoid a fallacy. If, on the other hand, MacIntyre was referring to care in constructing the premises of the argument, such that one is careful to respect the 'conservation of logic' but still yield the same conclusion, then it may be possible that a transition close to a derivation of 'ought' from 'is' could effectively be made without incurring a fallacy. This possibility will be investigated further, after another possible interpretation of Hume's Law is described.

b. *Contextual interpretation*

By characterising Hume's is-ought distinction as solely a logical matter, this treatment might be vulnerable to an objection that Hume has been not been given sufficient attention. This oft-quoted passage has been taken out of context, one might say, and to understand his point one must step back to view the place of the passage in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, and in Hume's moral philosophy as a whole. This citation appears in a section of his treatise entitled 'Moral Distinctions Not Derived from Reason', which is an attempt to answer the question of whether morality is ultimately a product of *reason* or *sentiment*; 'whether we attain the knowledge of them by a chain of argument and induction, or by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense'.¹³ The 'Hume's Law' passage is found in the middle of a sustained argument against the first possibility, that morality is a matter of reason. In this light, the passage can be seen to contribute (in addition to a number of other arguments provided before and after it) to a major ethical point of Hume's: that no judgement made by reason determines any moral conclusion-- that morality is essentially nonrational.¹⁴ Hume went on at even greater length twelve years later to make this point again. He

¹³Hume (1751), 2.

¹⁴Hume (1739), III.i.1-2.

emphasised that when a person recognises a moral obligation, or an 'ought', a feeling of attraction towards the virtue and a repulsion to the vice is necessarily a part of such a recognition.¹⁵ Reason, which makes judgements concerning matters of fact and the relations among objects,¹⁶ cannot provide us with any such attraction or repulsion; it merely gives us the facts. That is why, according to Hume, there is a 'great difference' between a matter 'of *fact* and one of *right*'; for a fact (an 'is') is an emotionless calculation using the tools of reason, whereas what is right (an 'ought') always involves attraction and repulsion and thus must primarily be a matter of feeling.¹⁷

It is possible, therefore, to interpret Hume's Law not only as a prohibition of certain types of logical progression with regard to morality, but as a defence of a certain position on the perennial issue of the relationship between morality and rationality. This position is that doing something morally wrong 'is not contrary to reason',¹⁸ but rather is contrary to the dictates of an emotion. The typical opposing view is that with respect to morality 'we can rationally decide what to do, or what to ask or advise others to do'.¹⁹ This quote is from R. M. Hare, who has stated that for his entire life he has tried to show that Hume's way of looking at reason was 'a fundamental mistake'.²⁰ If reason can be practical, moral decisions could ultimately rest on rational considerations rather than sentimental ones.²¹

¹⁵Hume (1751), 4.

¹⁶*ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷*ibid.*, 132. This does not mean that Hume claims reason to be irrelevant to the making of moral decisions; its place is not primary, but it does aid in the process (p.130-2).

¹⁸Hume (1739), II.iii.3.

¹⁹Hare (1989a), 93.

²⁰Hare (1989), 100.

²¹Some believe that the dichotomy Hume presents between reason and sentiment is a false one or at least needs radical qualification; e.g. T. Nagel (1970); McDowell (1978); Midgley (1981); Dancy (1995).

The abundance of recent literature regarding this and related issues suggests that such debate remains a fixture in moral philosophy.²²

Although Hume's Law *did* figure into Hume's argument regarding this reason/sentiment issue, the question still remains as to whether accepting Hume's Law actually commits one to a position in favour of sentiment. The last chapter showed the dangers of confusing an argument for a position with the position itself, in the context of logical and semantic justifying arguments for naturalism.²³ In order to determine whether a similar situation is present here, one can imagine the position of a rationalist who accepts Hume's Law, and then look for a logical contradiction. One need not look far to find someone of this persuasion: Hare, the example of a rationalist provided above, nevertheless endorses Hume's Law.²⁴ The worth of such an example depends on Hare's not having compromised or 'watered down' Hume's Law. Hare does place two qualifications on the passage as it stands. The first has only to do with using 'ought' in a nonmoral sense,²⁵ and thus has nothing to do with the present project. The second allows for proceeding from premises without an 'ought' to certain conditional conclusions of the form 'If *A* ought to do *x*...'.²⁶ Embedding '*A* ought to do *x*' in a conditional, as Hare agrees, refrains from making a statement as to whether *A* really ought to do *x*, and so this qualification cannot be seen to justify naturalism. Whether *A* ought to do *x* is left as an open question in this conclusion; no answer to it logically follows and therefore this qualification does not compromise Hume's Law. In fact, Hare in another place uses the basis for this qualification (his doctrine of

²²e.g. Foot (1972); (1978); B. Williams (1981); Korsgaard (1986); Brink (1986), which contains additional bibliography; (1989), 39ff.; Wallace (1990), which is a review and commentary on the variety of positions; Smith (1994a); McDowell (1978); (1979); (1995); Dancy (1993); (1995); Blackburn (1995); Lawrence (1995).

²³See I.B.1-2.

²⁴Hare (1952), 2.5; (1981), 1.4, 12.1; (1989a), 90-91.

²⁵Hare (1952), 2.5.

²⁶Hare (1977), 469.

universalisability) to argue *against* a large region of naturalism.²⁷ Hare, though he disagrees with Hume's objection to rationalism, sounds very much like him when he says of 'It is wrong' that 'I have repeatedly made clear that I do not think that such a statement can be derived from *any* statement of fact.'²⁸

So, unless Hare and other notable philosophers²⁹ have been blind to a contradiction, a philosopher can accept Hume's Law while also accepting the ethical position (rationalism) which Hume was repudiating. Thus, it is likely that Hume's Law can be properly understood even if it is taken out of the context in which it figured in his philosophy. The Hume's Law passage makes a coherent argument apart from its context, an argument which can be endorsed even by those who disagree with the context. This argument is a condemnation of logically proceeding from premises in which there are no moral terms, such as 'ought', to conclusions wherein there is such a moral term.

2. CONTEMPORARY DISAGREEMENT OVER EFFICACY

Although the argument of Hume's Law has been clarified, its *truth* has not yet been discussed; this issue has engendered at least as much, and probably more, controversy than the issues surrounding the passage's interpretation. While Hume's Law has been wielded by some as a bludgeon against naturalism during this century, it has by others been called into question.³⁰ A few of these challengers (some of which have already been

²⁷Hare (1981), 4.2.

²⁸*ibid.*, 12.1. Hare immediately clarifies that 'We have to distinguish between "Never do a thing like that," and "Jones said 'Never do a thing like that",' and says that he is talking about statements of the former type.

²⁹Peter Singer is another example of a rationalist who explicitly defends Hume's Law (1981), 69, 74-86. Bernard Williams (1985), 123, claims that there is no straightforward relation between Hume's Law and the notion of morality being nonrational.

³⁰A notable survey of this controversy is Hudson (1969).

cited³¹) present their arguments by claiming to have discovered a way in which substantial 'ought' statements can appear in the conclusions of a logical progression without appearing first in the premises. Essays designed as instruction booklets, with titles such as 'How to Derive *Ought* from *Is*' and 'From *Is* to *Ought*: How to Commit the Naturalistic Fallacy and Get Away With It', testify to the general approach.³² The rebuttal to such an approach is often accomplished by demonstrating that any one of the following is the case (these are not necessarily exclusive):

1. A psychological or other entailment is being offered, not a logical entailment,³³
2. A hidden, but still illogical leap from a nonmoral term to a moral term occurs in the offender's logic,³⁴
3. A supposedly nonmoral term in the premise is actually a moral term,³⁵
4. A supposedly moral term in the conclusion is actually a nonmoral term.³⁶

The continued failure of such attempts to validly violate Hume's Law has led John Mackie to be confident that 'such arguments, therefore, constitute no threat to any sensible interpretation of Hume's Law'.³⁷

Not all of the challengers are vulnerable to these types of criticisms, however. At least one philosopher has attempted to diffuse Hume's Law by

³¹See I.B.1.

³²These are the titles of Searle (1964) and Kohlberg (1971) respectively.

³³E.g. MacIntyre (1981), 64-65, claims that our need for something (an 'is') does not *logically* entail that we morally ought to have it.

³⁴E.g. Mackie (1977), 67-72, claims that such a covert move is found in premises wherein a promise (an 'is') is assumed to entail an obligation (an 'ought').

³⁵E.g. Black (1989), claims that certain terms like 'sadistic' are smuggled moral terms, because they imply wrongness.

³⁶E.g. Prior (1949), ch. 5, claims that if a conclusion contains an 'ought' which is created by an individual simply because he wishes to do so, it is not a moral conclusion.

³⁷Mackie (1977), 71.

presenting a logical progression where the word 'ought' appears in the conclusion as the second half of an 'or' statement, where it is vacuous.³⁸ For example, if I am sitting in a chair, I can logically conclude that I am either sitting in a chair *or* I ought not to kill. Obviously, the second half of this conclusion could just as easily be replaced with its negation, or any other statement. Since its validity depends on its vacuity, and no moral claim is made by a vacuous statement, no justification can be made for any moral view, including any naturalist one, with such a statement.³⁹ Therefore, this 'exception' to Hume's Law, like the qualification Hare described (embedding 'ought' in a conditional), cannot be seen to compromise in any way the capacity of Hume's Law for undermining a justification of naturalism on the logical level.

There are still other challengers. Some have claimed Hume's Law to fail if the entire logical progression can be seen to operate within 'some institution'⁴⁰ or a certain 'structured context';⁴¹ a common example of this is a 'backdrop of social institutions, expectations, and sanctions'.⁴² Others claim that one might reject Hume's idea that moral judgment is practical and thereby remove 'the ground of his contrast between facts and values'.⁴³ The list could continue, but from these examples it is becoming clear that the discussion has moved far away from the simplest interpretation of Hume's Law, based on the 'conservation of logic'. Only one of all of the criticisms mentioned here has attacked the 'conservation of logic' specifically, and that one could do so only by restricting conclusions to those which are vacuous. None of the other challengers to Hume's Law directly engage the 'conservation of logic', and so even if their challenges are cogent they cannot

³⁸Prior (1976).

³⁹Pigden (1989); (1991), 424.

⁴⁰Mackie (1977), 72.

⁴¹Gewirth (1982), 108.

⁴²Railton (1993a), 295. See also Dennes (1960), 94-98; and Anscombe (1981).

⁴³Railton (1986), 170.

necessarily be seen to endanger any meaningful interpretation of Hume's Law. In order to determine whether any of these challengers are in any indirect way calling into question the 'conservation of logic', one must first deal with a certain variable which has been latent in the discussion.

The fact that Hume's Law is a *logical* matter was understood from Hume's language, where he talks of 'reasoning' and 'deduction'. Therefore, Hume's Law cannot be said to affect those who claim to proceed from nonmoral statements to a moral conclusion not by logic, but by some other means. For example, Hilary Putnam claims that an 'ought' can arise in our minds as a result of our recognition of an 'is'; in this way 'descriptive predicates naturally *acquire* an emotive force'.⁴⁴ Others might suggest that a moral value *emerges* from a certain collection of facts, insofar as emergence is defined as a nonlogical relation.⁴⁵ These philosophers do not violate Hume's Law because they admit to arriving at their moral conclusions in a nonlogical manner. Consequently, they are not appealing to the Logical Justification, and are not logical naturalists.

The variable which muddles discussion of Hume's Law, however, even when Hume is agreed to be making a logical point, is the fact that not every participant in the discussion places the same constraints on 'logic' when they attack (or defend) Hume's Law. At first glance this seems not to be a very important variable, since the logic behind Hume's Law is buttressed by the 'conservation of logic'; and as was stated in the last chapter, it is unlikely that anyone would attempt, or has attempted, to undermine this stable doctrine in a substantial way in the course of

⁴⁴Putnam (1981), 209.

⁴⁵E. Nagel (1961), 367-374.

defending an ethical view.⁴⁶ The 'conservation of logic', again, is the requirement that 'when a deduction is made formally explicit, no statement employing a given expression can be logically derived from premises that do not also contain the expression'.⁴⁷ There is at least one way, however, for variation to arise within the constraint made by the 'conservation of logic' that can result in confusion regarding Hume's law. Specifically, a deduction may or may not be 'formally explicit', which is the only situation in which the conservation of logic can be tested. In other words, challengers to Hume's Law may or may not be involving implicit premises. Those who claim that a logical progression can be seen to operate within a set of institutions are either attempting to dispense with the 'conservation of logic' (which is not claimed in any of the challenges documented here), or else there is an implicit premise in their reasoning that certain institutions presuppose 'oughts' (which is sometimes claimed⁴⁸). Likewise, if one believes moral judgment to be nonpractical, this can be explicated by defining 'ought' as such in the premises, which removes the danger of contradicting Hume's Law. Such an implicit statement, or 'bridge principle',⁴⁹ is most often a definition or explanation of the meaning of the moral term to be included in the conclusion. Some philosophers require all premises to be explicit,⁵⁰ while others more casually allow for certain premises to be implicit, such as 'necessary truths'.⁵¹ David Wiggins has

⁴⁶See I.B.1. One might cite 'deontic logic' (the study of the logical relations between normative matters) as an exception here, for it can involve obligation relating to such concepts as permission in a logical manner, and this might include cases of inference of one from the other. Among its proponents is Åqvist (1984). Deontic logic has been described by some (e.g. Pigden (1989)) as not being a type of logic at all, under any acceptable understanding of the term. S. Kuhn (1995) describes a main objection, its lack of 'topic-neutrality'. If the entire programme is presupposed to operate entirely within an ethical or normative framework, however, deontic logic does not contradict the 'conservation of logic'. Given the debate, the validity of deontic logic and its relationship to the 'conservation of logic' are here left as open questions.

⁴⁷E. Nagel (1961), 374.

⁴⁸E.g. Railton (1993a), 295; Anscombe (1981).

⁴⁹E.g. Sinnott-Armstrong (1996), 11.

⁵⁰Pigden (1991), 425.

⁵¹Smith (1994a), 192.

suggested that discussions of 'is' and 'ought' often proceed by what might even be called a trick, because these words are presented as if they are to be understood as having certain meanings, when those meanings are never clarified.⁵² Were a requirement instituted at the start of a discussion for all premises to be explicit, any who had fallen foul of Hume's Law would have the opportunity to vindicate their theories from such a position. If the wording of the arguments of the objectors is any indication, virtually all of them would not be disobeying Hume's Law if their deductions were formally explicit. This is because they would be offering explanatory premises such as definitions, and as is generally accepted, 'on the truth or otherwise of definitions, logic is not competent to decide'.⁵³ Such objectors to Hume's Law, if all of their premises are made explicit, can be seen not to object to a logical matter, but to a matter on another level (regarding the truth of the bridge principle). In a situation where all premises are explicit, the only route by which one could accept the Logical Justification and thereby defy Hume's Law is to attack the 'conservation of logic' specifically, which is not generally done.

If this discussion of the 'conservation of logic' and implicit premises, together with Hume's own talk of 'deduction' and 'reasoning', give credence to the interpretation that Hume's Law is a logical matter, then there are clear parameters within which it properly operates. Any argumentation for or against it which is semantic (e.g. 'One can proceed from "is" to "ought" because "ought" can be defined as...'), or synthetic (e.g. 'Hume's Law is right because the nature of moral obligation has been determined to be...') is irrelevant to the substance of Hume's claim, which is logical. The only level of naturalism that Hume's Law clearly criticises is logical naturalism. In fact, if the conservation of logic is accepted, then Hume's Law, strictly

⁵²Wiggins (1995), 248.

⁵³Pigden (1991), 425.

understood, follows: if 'no statement employing a given expression can be logically derived from premises that do not also contain the expression', then the expression 'ought' is not exempt from this restriction. Since this directly contradicts the Logical Justification, it is enough to show logical naturalism to be fatally flawed. Of course, some might want to extend the spirit of Hume's Law beyond the letter of it, perhaps on the basis of its context, into the realm of the semantic or synthetic.⁵⁴ Philosophers who have explicitly criticised naturalism on these levels (of whom Hume is *not* one), will be discussed in the appropriate sections.

Some have found Hume's is-ought distinction awkward as a forum for discussion of naturalism for other reasons. For example, an 'ought' statement to many philosophers is considered to be a special kind of statement of fact, or 'is' statement; the matter of ethical significance here is not the choice of word, but the *meaning* of that word.⁵⁵ So it is to the study of meanings, or semantics, that a discussion of naturalism must turn.

3. AN ESCAPE ROUTE FOR NATURALISM: APPEAL TO SEMANTICS

Hume himself was a naturalist.⁵⁶ Some have used this as evidence for the allegation that he 'is a notoriously inconsistent author',⁵⁷ but in light of the threefold division of naturalism it is evident that Hume could consistently be a naturalist on another level while arguing against logical naturalism, whether he recognised the distinction as such or not. If this is the case, then his ethical theory is proof that the impossibility of deriving an

⁵⁴E.g. Stroud (1977), 187.

⁵⁵G. Warnock (1967), 60-61; Midgley (1980), 219; Wiggins (1995), 248.

⁵⁶Hume believed that morality dealt with the experience of universal approval sentiments which are empirical facts: (1751), 4-5, 109-113, 129-132. This does not necessitate that his naturalism involves a *reduction* of moral language to those sentiments, however; on which see Wiggins (1993).

⁵⁷MacIntyre (1966), 174.

'ought' from an 'is' can be admitted, and naturalism still maintained. One may show this is by attention to the wording of a logical progression. For example, the following reasoning would be criticised by Hume as invalid:

P1: The sentiment of contempt or disapproval is present in the calm and healthy human soul towards the action of murder.

P2: Nero murdered Agrippina.

C: Nero ought not to have murdered Agrippina.

'Ought' appears above in the conclusion but in none of the premises, which is precisely what Hume prohibited in his famous passage. However, to remedy the situation, one could simply add a premise to the reasoning that could be said to have been an implicit 'bridge principle':

P3: If the calm and healthy human soul experiences the sentiment of contempt or disapproval at an action, then a person ought not to perform that action.

Whether the premise is true or not, if it is inserted the logic is indisputably valid. In fact, Hume himself, on the traditional interpretation of his ethical theory, would have endorsed this argument as sound and its conclusion as true.⁵⁸ Since the breaking of Hume's Law can be so easily avoided, his specific complaint in that oft-cited excerpt cannot be seen to be as potent a weapon against naturalism as has sometimes been supposed.⁵⁹ The reason for this is that the term 'ought' can be defined in a premise if one wishes to do so. To dispute *this* move, one cannot argue on the grounds of Hume's

⁵⁸The example of Nero murdering Agrippina is used by Hume to illustrate the process of determining the moral nature of actions in (1751), 131-132.

⁵⁹E.g. Mayo (1986), 42, erroneously claims that 'naturalism fails' under the judgement of Hume's Law.

Law nor cite any logical fallacy, for the above progression is logically valid. Instead, one must argue that the proposed definition of 'ought' is incorrect, and so P3 is false. But doing this is not a matter of logic at all, but a matter of semantics. So, to escape the force of Hume's Law, one may shift the burden of proof from logic to semantics; only the addition of a premise (or the explication of an implicit premise) is required to do this. One thereby shifts the level of justification of naturalism, and thus the level of understanding of the doctrine, from the logical to the semantic. If one chooses not to do so, and insists on justifying naturalism with an appeal to logic, then it is likely that Hume's Law, with the force of the 'conservation of logic' behind it, will confute the attempt.

C. Arguments Against Naturalism on the Semantic Level

The 'is-ought fallacy' discussed by Hume may be easily avoided in its strictest sense, but in order to do so one must justify the additional premise that was required in order to make the logic valid.⁶⁰ The last section showed that one cannot avoid dealing with the justification of one's claims about morality by fobbing them off as being inherent in the very conventions of logical reasoning. If one is a naturalist, then one must justify this position-- presumably on the basis of the meanings of the moral words used (semantically) or else with experiential evidence (synthetically). This section deals with the first of these two options, which is an appeal to the Semantic Justification. This states that *moral terms can be defined, or their meanings exhaustively expressed, using solely nonmoral terms*. As was explained in the first chapter, an appeal to the Semantic Justification must be an *a priori* matter, or a matter which does not depend on experience for the

⁶⁰Sinnott-Armstrong (1996), 10-12.

justification of its claims. The reason for this is that any *a posteriori*, or experientially dependent, notion of definitions or meanings would constitute an appeal not to semantics *per se*, but to an understanding of experience, as represented in synthetic claims. Since semantics on such a view is not the last word, but is subject to revision on the basis of those synthetic claims, this type of justification will not be called semantic in this thesis, but rather synthetic.

Defining one term with another can be seen as a 'kind of logical equivalence or two-way implication',⁶¹ and so defining moral terms in nonmoral terms might be considered a species of logical naturalism. This would be imprecise, however. Although the semantic equivalence of two terms is a logical relation, it is a logical relation that is being *specified in a premise*. This insures that there is a moral term in the premises of an argument, and so no illogical 'ought' from 'is' will occur in the reasoning. Naturalism can arise out of logical considerations, such as definitions, without violating Hume's Law, which has a very specific content. Thus, R. M. Hare was speaking of semantic rather than logical naturalism when he said that 'the traditional programme of moral philosophers' is 'that of using logical considerations, arising out of the meanings of the moral words, to get them from an "is" to an "ought"'.⁶² The Logical Justification is not being appealed to here, for a premise will contain a definition of a moral word. It is the Semantic Justification on which this attempt relies.

As Hare said, what has here been called the Semantic Justification has had many adherents throughout the history of philosophy, as evidenced by the wide variety of naturalistic theories of ethics which have been defended on the semantic level. Other philosophers agree: 'historically, the main tradition of ethical naturalism has in fact presented itself as a semantic

⁶¹B. Williams (1985), 122.

⁶²Hare (1971), 8.

theory which gives a *reportive* definition of the actual meanings of ethical terms in ordinary language.⁶³ If this is true, then arguments against the Semantic Justification endeavour to refute this tradition as a whole, and therefore must be examined with assiduity.

1. 'IS' AND 'OUGHT': FROM HUME TO MOORE

Some think the spirit of Hume's Law to say more about the nature of moral terms like 'ought' than is recognised by a literal interpretation of the passage. A few decades later, the Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant was more explicit (and extreme) about the distinction between 'ought' and 'is' than Hume ever was, to the point of claiming that attention to what *is* (naturalistically speaking) would actually corrupt an understanding of the moral *ought* rather than aid it:

'We see philosophy brought to a critical position, since it has to be firmly fixed, notwithstanding that it has nothing to support it either in heaven or earth. Here it must show its purity as absolute dictator of its own laws, not as the herald of those which are whispered to it by an implanted sense or who knows what tutelary nature. Although these may be better than nothing, yet they can never afford principles dictated by reason, which must have their source wholly *a priori*... Thus *every empirical element is not only quite incapable of being an aid to the principle of morality, but is even highly prejudicial to the purity of morals*, for the proper and inestimable worth of an absolutely good will consists just in this, that the principle of action is free from all influence of contingent grounds, which alone experience can furnish... To behold virtue in her proper form is nothing else but to contemplate morality stripped of all admixture of sensible things...'⁶⁴

⁶³S. Ball (1988), 198, emphasis in original. This point is also made by Brandt (1959), 156ff.

⁶⁴Kant (1785), II.43-44, 44n. (emphasis mine).

Perhaps the main point here is that morality must ultimately be based on an *a priori* foundation, rather than an *a posteriori* one.⁶⁵ The semantic naturalists, in accepting this point by attempting to justify their ethics by an appeal to the *a priori* meanings of words, are in Kant's good graces to a certain extent. However, there is another point in this passage which can be seen as a step towards the most prominent twentieth-century argument *against* semantic naturalism. Kant was a firm believer in the scientific enterprise, and defended the certainty of the knowledge gained from natural science in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. To this extent he was like Hume, who respected science enough to devote what he saw as his greatest work to the introduction of the method of the sciences into moral philosophy.⁶⁶ However, whereas Hume did not advocate a gap between 'is' and 'ought' that was so wide as to divorce his ethics completely from a naturalistic study of the world, Kant from this passage may be interpreted to have done exactly that. Kant's belief that the proper contemplation of morality is 'stripped of all admixture of sensible things' and unsoiled by 'empirical elements' could easily be taken to mean that proper moral discourse should be stripped of any terms which represent those 'sensible things' and 'empirical elements'-- anything which, from a naturalist's point of view, 'is'. On this interpretation, moral terms like 'ought' would have no relation, including any semantic relation, to the 'is'. For this reason, classical moral philosopher Peter Simpson has claimed:

'It is this Kantian doctrine of the "is" and the "ought" and the autonomous will that is really decisive, historically, for the emergence of the "Is/Ought" distinction... Only at this stage did non-naturalism come, as it were, fully of age. That is why it is Kant, rather than Hume or any other philosopher,

⁶⁵Kant believed the *a priori* to deal solely with necessary truths, and the *a posteriori* with contingent (nonnecessary, 'could logically have been otherwise') truths. Since Kant believed moral truths to be necessary truths, he assumed that they would have to be *a priori*.

⁶⁶Hume (1751), subtitle. On this being in his opinion 'incomparably the best' of all of his writings, see Albert *et al.*, eds. (1988), 162.

important though they were, who is principally responsible for its emergence.⁶⁷

Hume, naturalist though he was, drove a small wedge between the 'is' and the 'ought', thereby outlawing logical naturalism. If the above interpretation of Kant is correct, he split the two completely apart, implying that 'ought' is not only *underivable* from any 'is', but is *indefinable* in terms of any naturalistic 'is' as well.

This claim was made explicitly in the next century by one who admitted to having been greatly influenced by Kant's ethical writings, although he departed from them: Henry Sidgwick.⁶⁸ To the question of 'What definition can we give of "ought"?', Sidgwick answered in his book *Methods of Ethics* that the idea is 'too elementary to admit of any formal definition'.⁶⁹ Of course, this goes far beyond an argument against semantic naturalism. It argues against any semantic theory of ethics, whether naturalistic or not. For this reason, Sidgwick and others of this belief can be linked to the Plato of the *Euthyphro*, who argued against several proposed definitions of the term 'holiness'.⁷⁰ Those definitions could not be seen as naturalistic (if this term can be anachronistically used here), since each definition involved 'the gods'.⁷¹ For Sidgwick and others of his view, though, Plato's arguments in that dialogue are relevant to modern moral philosophy because modern definitions of moral terms can be scrutinised just as critically. In the years following Sidgwick's writings such scrutiny, especially of *naturalistic* definitions, became a large part of moral

⁶⁷P. Simpson (1987), 125.

⁶⁸Sidgwick (1874), Preface to the 6th edition, explains his indebtedness to Kant among others.

⁶⁹*ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁰Plato, *Euthyphro*, 5c-6e. Plato's term, ἡγιασμένος, has the sense of 'sanctioned by divine or eternal law', as opposed to being sanctioned by human temporal law, so the discussion of this term's definition is more relevant to ethics than might appear from the translation 'holiness'. Aside from this, the use of the word 'define' here is technically different from certain uses in modern semantics (see Allen (1984), 33-39), but it nevertheless bears enough similarity for the connection, which is often made (e.g. Pigden (1991), 426).

⁷¹Plato, *Euthyphro*, 6e, 9c, 12e, 14b.

philosophy. Sidgwick himself did not bring prominent criticism to semantic naturalism, however. Rather, it was a student of his⁷² who did so, beginning the twentieth century with a work which has had a profound influence on the state of naturalism.

2. MOORE'S OPEN QUESTION ARGUMENT

a. Principia Ethica

This was the name of the seminal work; its author was the Cambridge philosopher George Edward Moore.⁷³ In the first chapter of this work, Moore credits Sidgwick (already having endorsed his general ethical approach, known as 'Intuitionism'⁷⁴) with being the 'only one ethical writer... who has clearly recognised and stated this fact', that 'good' is indefinable.⁷⁵ Here the emphasis will be to show how Moore argued against *semantic naturalism* in particular, not against *all* ethical definitions. In fact, although Moore does devote a chapter in *Principia Ethica* to ethical theories which were semantic but not naturalistic, his primary negative intention in the book, by his own admission, is to refute those theories of ethics which confuse "'good", which is not... a natural object, with any natural object whatever'. To underscore this intention, he names the general confusion the 'naturalistic fallacy', though claiming the fallacy to affect many more than just naturalistic theories.⁷⁶

G. E. Moore criticised naturalists for refusing to see that 'good' was one of those 'notions of that simple kind, out of which definitions are

⁷²Albert *et al*, eds., (1988), 279.

⁷³Among the works which appraise the profound influence of this work on the moral philosophy of this century are M. Warnock (1960); P. Levy (1979); Hudson (1980); T. Baldwin (1990); and Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton (1992), 115-124.

⁷⁴Moore (1903), x.

⁷⁵*ibid.*, 19. Moore was not in such admiration of Sidgwick in some other respects, however. The majority of the largest chapter of the book is devoted to arguing against Sidgwick's hedonistic ethical theory.

⁷⁶*ibid.*, 13.

composed and with which the power of further defining ceases.'⁷⁷ As with Hume's Law, there is an oft-quoted passage (or a passage with oft-quoted portions) which roughly outlines his view on this issue:

'If I am asked "What is good?" my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked 'How is good to be defined?' my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it... if I am right, then nobody can foist upon us such an axiom as that "Pleasure is the only good" or that "The good is the desired" on the pretence that this is "the very meaning of the word"...My point is that 'good' is a simple notion, just as 'yellow' is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any matter of means, explain to anyone who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is. Definitions of the kind that I was asking for, definitions which describe the real nature of the object or notion denoted by a word, and which do not merely tell us what the word is used to mean, are only possible when the object or notion in question is something complex. You can give a definition of a horse, because a horse has many different properties and qualities, all of which you can enumerate. But when you have enumerated them all, when you have reduced a horse to his simplest terms, then you can no longer define those terms. They are simply something which you think of or perceive, and to anyone who cannot think of or perceive them, you can never, by any definition, make their nature known.'⁷⁸

Several writers have claimed that this argument 'does not impress me, because I do not find accounts of it coherent',⁷⁹ or have excused their neglecting it with an animadversion to the effect that it is 'entirely controversial'⁸⁰ or 'has lost a great deal of its force in the last few years'.⁸¹ These comments exemplify the confusion that still sometimes surrounds this passage and others in *Principia Ethica*. Such confusion is understandable, for two elements of Moore's critique of naturalism are necessary to an

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 6-7.

⁷⁹ Anscombe (1958), 27.

⁸⁰ W. Fox (1990), 189.

⁸¹ Wilson (1980a), 431.

understanding of this passage but are not thoroughly explained before this point in the book: the epistemological position from which he launches the criticism, and the semantic nature of both his argumentation and the position against which he argues. Both elements will be discussed here in turn.

b. *The epistemology behind the argument*

Perhaps the adjectives of Moore's notion of *good* that are most relevant to his critique of naturalism are 'simple', 'irreducible', 'indefinable', and 'nonnatural'-- four words which certainly convey a general idea, but not necessarily a precise representation, of his view. The first three of these words are interconnected, and can be explained clearly with reference to the seventeenth century philosopher John Locke. Locke's idea of epistemology, as found in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, are paraphrased (without mention) in the first chapter of *Principia Ethica*, where Moore's position is outlined.⁸² Moore's endorsement of Locke's epistemology is not a peculiar occurrence: at least one study supports 'the correctness of the statement that Locke changed man's way of thinking' with regard to knowledge.⁸³ The Oxford philosopher Gilbert Ryle wrote that 'one cannot pick up a sermon, a noel, a pamphlet, or a treatise and be in any doubt, after reading a few lines, whether it was published before or after the publication of Locke's *Essay*'.⁸⁴ If there is any peculiarity in Moore's case, it is not that he held Locke's view of epistemology, but that he made certain idiosyncracies of it do so much work, as will be shown.⁸⁵

⁸²Parallel passages include Moore (1903), 7-8, 16 with Locke (1689), III.i-ii, IV.vii; and Moore p.6 with Locke III.iv. Others are cited hereafter.

⁸³Schouls (1980), 3.

⁸⁴Ryle (1967), 3.

⁸⁵Schouls (1980) has pointed out the significant correlations between Locke's epistemology and that of Descartes. Although the present discussion will be in terms of Locke, the possibility is open that Descartes had already proposed some or all of the relevant features of Lockean epistemology. In fact, some of the ideas have been found in some Italian thinkers of the previous (sixteenth) century, and perhaps even in embryonic form in ancient thought, as is also explained in Schouls's work.

'Reason', according to Locke, deals with the 'certainty or probability' of that which the mind deduces 'from such *Ideas*, which it has got by the use of its natural faculties, viz. by sensation or reflection'.⁸⁶ Furthermore, 'one thing is carefully to be observed concerning the ideas we have; and that is, that some of them are *simple*, and some *complex*'.⁸⁷ Of these two categories of ideas, the latter are composed of the former.⁸⁸ Two centuries later, G. E. Moore makes plain that his discussion is going to be centred on ideas, and in particular the idea of 'good'.⁸⁹ He shows his affinity with Locke by claiming that these ideas can be simple, which means they are 'just something you think or perceive',⁹⁰ or else complex, which means they are composed of a bunch of simple ideas. Moore's example of a complex idea is a horse, which 'has many different properties and qualities, all of which you can enumerate... four legs, a head, a heart, a liver, etc.'.⁹¹

Two logical corollaries of the Lockean *simplicity* of an idea are its *irreducibility* and *indefinability*.⁹² Irreducibility, or unanalysability, is the assertion that a simple idea cannot be broken into any further components, that 'it is not composed of any parts, which we can substitute for it in our minds when we are thinking about it'.⁹³ If something simple is, as both Locke and Moore say, an item of thought which is not composed of any parts, it follows that it is not reducible to anything else. However, it is precisely the reduction into parts that Locke calls a definition, which is why he says that 'The names of simple ideas are not capable of any definitions'.⁹⁴ Moore entertains three understandings of 'definition':

⁸⁶Locke (1689), IV.xviii.2.

⁸⁷*ibid.*, II.ii.1.

⁸⁸*ibid.*, II.xxiii.1.

⁸⁹Moore (1903), 6.

⁹⁰*ibid.*, 7.

⁹¹*ibid.*, 7-8.

⁹²Locke (1689), III.iv.4-8.

⁹³Moore (1903), 8.

⁹⁴Locke (1689), III.iv.4.

1. Definition = An approximation or indication of the idea I think you are referring to when you say a word (the 'arbitrary verbal definition').
2. Definition = An approximation or indication of the idea people in general would think you are referring to when you say a word (the 'verbal definition proper').
3. Definition = The substitution for a complex idea of all of its simple components.⁹⁵

Moore expresses his distaste for the first two, for such mundane definitions are the job of the lexicographer, not the philosopher.⁹⁶ The third, eminently Lockean, understanding of 'definition' is that which Moore chooses; this, he says, is 'what I mean, when I say that good is indefinable'.⁹⁷ An indefinable term, for Moore, was a term which could not be substituted with any simple components. Considering that good, if simple, could not possibly have any components besides itself, it is perfectly understandable why Moore would call good indefinable. Thus, the indefinability of good follows directly from its irreducibility, which follows from its simplicity.

The fourth character of Moore's idea of good is 'nonnatural'. To understand this, one must look first to Moore's definition of the 'natural'. He defines this in three ways:

1. Natural = 'something of which the existence is admittedly an object of experience',⁹⁸
2. Natural = 'that which is the subject-matter of the natural sciences and also of psychology',⁹⁹

⁹⁵Moore (1903), 8.

⁹⁶ibid., 6.

⁹⁷ibid., 8.

⁹⁸ibid., 38.

⁹⁹Note: those who have been cited (in section B.1, 2) as believing that contemplation of natural objects psychologically yields moral conclusions are not necessarily doing any *defining* of psychological states in moral terms.

3. Natural = 'all that has existed, does exist, or will exist in time... *by itself* in time, and not merely as a property of some natural object'.¹⁰⁰

Moore's acceptance of all three of these definitions suggests his belief, at that time, that they are all equivalent, although there is evidence that the second of these was the primary.¹⁰¹ However, some philosophers have chosen to centre their discussion on the third definition,¹⁰² since the assumption that terms have to refer to something that 'exists' (in some sense) was cited by Moore as a fundamental mistake which for all semantic ethical theorists, not just naturalists, 'leads them to commit the naturalistic fallacy'.¹⁰³ Moore eventually discarded this third definition of 'natural', though, realising that many natural properties cannot exist by themselves in time.¹⁰⁴ In any case, 'nonnatural' describes something whose existence is determined by *some other means than* experience, and is *not* part of the subject-matter of science so understood, and does *not* exist apart from something natural with which it is associated. This 'nonnaturalness', as a fourth character of good, does not follow from any of the previously stated characters; a simple idea can correspond to either a natural or a nonnatural object or property. 'Pleasure' is an example Moore provides of something that is simple, irreducible, indefinable, but *natural*.¹⁰⁵ The number 'one' is an example besides 'good' of something Moore would call simple, irreducible, indefinable and *nonnatural*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰The latter two definitions are found in *ibid.*, 40-41.

¹⁰¹Kolnai (1980) and Wiggins (1993), 303, take this position, based on *Principia Ethica* as well as confirmation found in a new Preface for it which Moore never published (see C. Levy (1964)).

¹⁰²D. Wright (1994) discusses the naturalistic fallacy in terms of the doctrine that 'all propositions assert a relation between existents'. This approach is also evident in this century's arguments against 'descriptivism' in ethics (on which see subsection 3b, below).

¹⁰³Moore (1903), 124-126.

¹⁰⁴Moore (1942), 581.

¹⁰⁵Moore (1903), 13.

¹⁰⁶Moore calls numbers nonnatural in (1903), 111-12; presumably the number 'one' is simple, and the other two adjectives follow.

One more aspect of Moore's position is essential to an understanding of his critique of naturalism. Locke said that there can never be any dispute about which idea is in one's own mind, whether it be simple or complex, for ideas admit of no confusion or lack of understanding when there is any understanding of them at all. In his own words, 'Whoever reflects on what passes in his own mind, cannot miss it.'¹⁰⁷ Again, 'For let any idea be as it will, it can be no other but such as the mind perceives it to be; and that very perception sufficiently distinguishes it from all other ideas, which cannot be other, i.e. different, without being perceived to be so'.¹⁰⁸ Moore concurs; if good is an idea, and ideas are in the mind, then 'Everyone does in fact understand the question "Is this good?". When he thinks of it, his state of mind is different from what it would be, were he asked "Is this pleasant, or desired, or approved?"". Moreover, 'Everybody is constantly aware of this notion' of good.¹⁰⁹ Moore does, however, allow for the possibility that one 'may never become aware at all that it is different from other notions of which he is also aware'.¹¹⁰ One knows exactly what the idea of 'pleasure' is, and would never be in doubt as to whether it was pleasure or some other idea that was before his mind. One also knows precisely what 'good' is, and likewise could not second-guess himself and not be sure whether that simple idea he had in mind was 'good' or not. However, there is no saying that one will always realise that these two ideas, pleasure and good, are *different* ideas and not the same thing. The reason for this is that the person has not taken the two ideas into mind together, and strived to notice the difference in state of mind which they produce upon contemplation. To make an analogy, a certain person *P* might think two wines *w1* and *w2* to be identical in taste, without ever having had a glass of each next to the other to compare

¹⁰⁷Locke (1689), II.ix.2.

¹⁰⁸ibid., II.xxix.5.

¹⁰⁹Moore (1903), 16-17.

¹¹⁰ibid., 17.

directly. As soon as $w1$ and $w2$ are tasted in succession, however, any perceptible differences will immediately become apparent. Thus, Moore endeavours in *Principia Ethica* to provide a means by which people can assay 'good' alongside any other idea of which they are also aware but which is erroneously thought to be the same as 'good', and thereby distinguish one from the other. What is supposed by Locke and Moore to be impossible, however, is that one could believe that one has 'good' before his mind, and that he could in actuality be mistaken, and be thinking of 'pleasure'.¹¹¹ This is where the analogy with wine breaks down, for people might often believe that they are drinking one wine when they are actually drinking another. Lockean-Moorean ideas are the very elements of an individual's knowledge and thus do not admit of such ambiguity. There is no possibility whatsoever that an idea in one's awareness could be confused with another one at the very moment it is being thought. This would entail a contradiction: since ideas are by definition the components of knowledge, confusing one conscious idea for another would be saying that something was at the same time known and not known.

This is a rough outline of Moore's epistemological position, from which he launches his critique of naturalism. By its lights one can make much more sense of the renowned passage cited several pages above; for many terms featured there, such as 'simple', 'meaning', 'definition', and 'notion' (a synonym for 'idea'), would otherwise be too vague for his position to be understood.

c. *The argument*

Moore's argument against naturalism in *Principia Ethica* is interwoven with his scant description of his own position, which is likely an

¹¹¹That Locke would share this belief is evident from (1689), II.xxix.

important reason why he has been misinterpreted or misunderstood. The crux of his complaint is that naturalists (and some others) define the term 'good' with terms like 'pleasure' or 'approval' or some other concept other than good itself:

'...far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good; that these properties, in fact, were simply not "other", but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness. This view I propose to call the "naturalistic fallacy", and of it I shall now endeavour to dispose.'¹¹²

According to Moore these philosophers have, like our wine-taster *P*, had something *w1* in mind, and supposed it to be no different from *w2*. Of course, in order to prove this, Moore had to develop a tool with which one could distinguish two ideas; otherwise his claim that they are different would be completely on a par with another's claim that they are the same. So, he developed the *Open Question Argument*. This involves first entertaining one idea before the mind, and then bringing another alongside it. If asking whether the one idea was the same as the second idea is immediately recognised as a tautology, then the ideas must be the same. However, if one could reasonably ask the question without incurring a tautology, i.e. if the question is open, then the two ideas must be different (because of the impossibility of being confused about one's own ideas while one is thinking them).¹¹³ As with the epistemology behind the argument, Locke had actually already framed an embryonic version of the Open Question Argument, encouraging his readers to compare the idea of 'the taste of a pine-apple' with any other idea to see that it is actually something distinct.¹¹⁴

¹¹²Moore (1903), 10.

¹¹³ibid., 15-16.

¹¹⁴Locke (1689), III.iv.11. This (original?) point is yet another illustration of the indebtedness of Moore to Locke.

To illustrate the operation of the Open Question Argument, one may remove the area of breakdown of the wine example by supposing that *P* is such a perfect wine-taster that he can recognise a wine upon tasting it as perfectly as we (according to Locke and Moore) can recognise an idea when it comes into our heads. *P* may forget which wine is which if he doesn't have it there to taste, just as we can be at a loss to recall what a certain idea was once we are not thinking about it anymore; but while he is tasting, *P* can name the wine with no margin of error. Now let us suppose that this wine-taster is under the impression that two wines *w1* and *w2* are the same wine, because he has tasted them both at different times, and does not remember the one he is not tasting enough to distinguish it from the one he is tasting. When another taster tells *P* that this is not at all the case, and that the two wines are different, *P* places them next to each other and tastes them in succession. Being able as he is to name perfectly a wine he is tasting, *P* is able to name one and then name the other. By doing so he learns whether the wines are indeed different or the same.¹¹⁵

Moore chooses to make an analogy not with taste and wine, but with sight and colour.¹¹⁶ Either of these analogies might suggest various features which might be inconsistent with each other or even with Moore's idea of good. Moore does not claim goodness to be realised by a person in the same way that either tastes or sights are, however. The only suggestion

¹¹⁵A potential problem with this example is that *P* must taste the wines at different times, and could theoretically forget which wine *w1* was as soon as he tasted *w2*. This is not a point of breakdown for the analogy, however, because if it is a problem for the wine-taster, it is also likely to be a problem for Moore. Moore's discussion suggests that we cannot entertain two ideas before the mind at the exact same moment, for having an idea before the mind creates a unique 'state of mind', unlike that created by the presence of any other idea (Moore (1903), 16-17). If this is the case, one can theoretically bounce back and forth between 'good' and 'pleasure', repeatedly entertaining each before the mind and repeatedly forgetting the state of mind corresponding to one as soon as it is replaced in the mind by the other. A possible way out for a Lockean like Moore is to allow for a person to sense a *change* in state of mind when a new idea replaces the old. In the wine-tasting example this could work as well, allowing *P* to sense a *change* in taste as a new wine replaces the old still on his tongue. (Admittedly this analogy shows little respect for the actual methods of wine-tasting...)

¹¹⁶*ibid.*, 10, 14-15.

of similarity being made by either of the analogies is that one has immediate recognition of one's own tastes and sights as well as one's own ideas, such as goodness.¹¹⁷ If a person thinks 'good' to be the same thing as 'pleasure', the Open Question Argument will help us solve the problem by having us first conceptualise pleasure, and then good. By asking 'Is pleasure the same as good?', or the adjectival form 'Is pleasure good?', we will realise whether we are asking about two ideas, or only one. The former is the case if 'Is pleasure good?' were seen to be an open question. The latter is the case if 'Is pleasure good?' obviously reduced to 'Is pleasure pleasant?', which is a tautology. The reason this would be obvious is because Moore is talking about ideas currently in one's consciousness, and for one to be in confusion about them would be self-contradictory.

This argument, however, cannot rule out every possible definition of 'good' at once, any more than our wine-taster can rule out any wine being the same as that in the bottle he has in front of him, unless he compares all of them. Thus, Moore says that

'if he will try this experiment with each suggested definition in succession, he may become expert enough to recognise that in every case he has before his mind a unique object, with regard to the connection of which with any other object, a distinct question may be asked.'¹¹⁸

By 'connection' Moore means a semantic connection, or a connection having to do with defining one object in the mind in terms of another. Moore himself encounters a few alleged definitions of 'good' over the course of about a hundred pages, but leaves to us the continuation of this analytical process which the Open Question Argument has facilitated.

¹¹⁷Implicit here is Moore's belief that the idea of 'good' will be the same for everyone, which may be seen as a belief in a certain kind of 'objectivity' in ethics (see Moore (1903), xi; (1922), 254-59).

¹¹⁸*ibid.*, 16. See also S. Ball (1988), 209, who calls us to realise that induction in this matter may be fallible.

Being concerned as it is with definitions and identities based solely on the meanings of words, Moore's argument only attacks *semantic* theories. This point may not be clear in certain passages, but this is at least partly due to the fact that 'In those days, the philosophy of language was not very far advanced',¹¹⁹ and so some distinctions might have gone unnoticed. For example, as Hilary Putnam has noted, Moore 'conflated *properties* and *concepts*'.¹²⁰ Throughout *Principia Ethica*, but especially in the first chapter, Moore sometimes calls 'good' an idea or concept, and other times calls it a nonnatural property. That the two notions are distinct is accepted by many, perhaps most, philosophers of language today.¹²¹ Although Moore might have blurred some distinctions that in his day had not yet been clearly established, it is evident from his writing that he was arguing against forms of naturalism which attempt to identify good with another idea 'on the pretence that this is the very meaning of the word'.¹²² If goodness and pleasure were actually a single property that is being referred to with two different terms, with different meanings and therefore associated with different ideas in the mind, Moore's argument as he presents it would not be able to dispute this. The Open Question Argument operates entirely in terms of ideas in the mind, which for Moore are what we consult when we wish to use language. How the words are properly used in language depends on their meanings, which depend in turn on the nature of our ideas or concepts. For Moore and for others in the analytical tradition of semantics, the organisation of these ideas or concepts is an entirely *a priori* affair. We may very well have *learned* about properties through sense experience; for example, it is difficult to imagine how we could have known about redness if we had no eyes. However, the term '*a priori*' has nothing to do with how

¹¹⁹Rachels (1990), 70.

¹²⁰Putnam (1981), 207.

¹²¹*ibid.*; see also Wiggins (1984).

¹²²Moore (1903), 7.

an idea is acquired,¹²³ but how it is *justified* to be the way it is. To justify the distinctiveness of the idea of 'good', which is the aim of the Open Question Argument, Moore does not tell us to appeal to an experience of things with the property of goodness. This would be *a posteriori*. Rather, he tells us to appeal to our idea of good-- to think about good, apart from any particular experienced good things. This is *a priori*. Moore, like the semantic naturalists he criticises, believes the meaning of 'good' to be the kind of thing that is not justified on the basis of experience. On the contrary, it is fundamentally an *a priori* matter.¹²⁴ Therefore his argument belongs squarely within the traditional analytical programme, and thus is an argument particularly against the Semantic Justification.

One interesting consequence of his emphasis on the meanings of words, as with Hume's emphasis on logical validity, is that Moore's argument can be shown to be a particular application of a general rule believed to be applicable to any use of language, whether in ethics or outside of it. Hume's Law was shown earlier to be interpretable as a specific instance of the general law of the 'conservation of logic'.¹²⁵ Analogously, Moore's Open Question Argument against what he called the 'naturalistic fallacy' can be seen to be equally applicable to any definition of one term in terms of another.

'If anybody tried to define pleasure for us as being any other natural object; if anybody were to say, for instance, that pleasure *means* the sensation of red, and were to proceed to deduce from that that pleasure is a colour, we should be entitled to laugh at him and distrust his future statements about colour. Well, that would be the same fallacy which I have called the naturalistic fallacy.'¹²⁶

¹²³Lowe (1995a), 43.

¹²⁴Broad (1942), 64ff. further describes Moore's apriority.

¹²⁵See section B.1a. 2.

¹²⁶Moore (1903), 13.

From this humorous quotation Moore's argument can clearly be seen not to rest on a truth peculiar to ethics, although it can certainly be applied to ethics. His argument rests, rather, on what he takes to be truths about meanings of words in general. Neither colours nor pleasure are ethical terms, and yet the defining of one in terms of the other falls foul of the naturalistic fallacy. Nevertheless, Moore's *Principia Ethica* being an ethical work, he makes plain in the next sentence that he wishes to restrict his criticism there to the definition of ethical words in nonethical terms.

To sum up, what has been described here of Moore's argument in *Principia Ethica* can be distilled to two points. First, according to Moore, 'good' as a concept is fundamental in the discipline of ethics, and cannot be broken down into simpler parts, nor can it be substituted by any other notion. Any theory of ethics that attempts to do either is refuted *a priori* on the basis of the meaning of the word 'good'. Second, goodness as a property or quality is not one which is discoverable by the means employed in the natural sciences or psychology, i.e. it is a 'non-natural' property. The first of these assertions contradicts the Semantic Justification, and the second of them contradicts the definition of naturalism. If the first assertion is correct, semantic naturalism is confuted. If the second is correct, then any type of naturalism is confuted. But since Moore does not provide direct argumentation for the non-naturalness of good,¹²⁷ but does give us an Open Question Argument to support the indefinability of 'good', it is his argument against semantic naturalism which is being elaborated and assessed in this section.

d. *Qualification in later works*

¹²⁷ibid., 14. An argument against the naturalness of good is not an argument for its non-naturalness; after Moore an entire tradition has emerged whereon good is not a property at all, natural or non-natural, and yet our moral judgments still serve a purpose--for example, to coordinate our lives with our feelings and the feelings of others (Gibbard (1990), 64-80, 239-300).

Before examining this argument too closely, one must recognise Moore's philosophical career to have extended for a half a century beyond the *Principia Ethica* of his youth (he was thirty when it was published). Throughout his life, Moore attempted to get to the root of the matter of the nature of goodness and the prospect of defining ethical terms with nonethical terms. He expressed a wish either to justify or to move beyond the dogmatic conceptual claims he had made early in his career. Unfortunately from the perspective of a critique of naturalism, he never approached the surety of his early years. This excerpt from 1922 serves as an example of Moore's grappling with the subject:

'[A good question is] whether when we judge (whether truly or falsely) that an action is a duty or a state of things good, *all* that we are thinking about the action or the state of things in question, is simply and solely that we ourselves or others have or tend to have a certain feeling towards it when we contemplate or think of it... I feel some doubts myself whether they are or not: it does not seem to me to be a matter to dogmatise upon. But I am strongly inclined to think that they are not merely psychological; that Moral Philosophy and Ethics are not mere departments of Psychology.'¹²⁸

Another way Moore attempted to speak of the nature of good and morality was to explain what he thought good was *describing* about *x* when one says '*x* is good'. Here too, he was far from a solid answer to the question. He was convinced that it was of a different sort than most, if not all, other kinds of description; but, in his own words,

'...I can't see *what* it is. It seems to me quite obvious that if you assert of a given state of things that it contains a balance of pleasure over pain, you are asserting of it not only a *different* predicate, from what you would be asserting of it if you said it was "good"-- but a predicate which is of a different *kind*... And of course the mere fact that many people have thought that goodness and beauty were subjective is evidence that there is *some* great difference of

¹²⁸Moore (1922), 330.

kind between them and such predicates as being yellow or containing a balance of pleasure. But *what* the difference is, if we suppose, as I suppose, that goodness and beauty are *not* subjective, and that they do share with "yellowness" and "containing pleasure" the property of depending *solely* on the intrinsic nature of what possesses them, I confess I cannot say.¹²⁹

In a reply to those who criticised his vagueness as to how moral terms do and don't describe things, he admitted twenty years later that "To make it clear it would be necessary to specify the sense of "describe" in question; and I am no more able to do this now than I was then."¹³⁰ His inability to deal with these fundamental notions ultimately led him to question even those decrees he had made so confidently in the beginning of his career. In a paper entitled 'Is goodness a quality?', the aged Moore wrote,

'In *Principia* I asserted and proposed to prove that 'good'... was indefinable. But all the supposed proofs were certainly fallacious; they entirely failed to prove that [good] is indefinable. And I think perhaps it is definable: I do not know. But I also still think that very likely it *is* indefinable.'¹³¹

Moore certainly wished to go the full distance, and explain exactly why naturalism would not work; and the answer, he suspected, had something to do with the unique nature of goodness, something about it which set it apart from the type of information one receives from the natural sciences and psychology. But Moore never rewrote *Principia Ethica*, although he recognised that he should have.¹³² Consequently, his argument there received significant criticism to which he never adequately responded. His argument ultimately was modified in response to these criticisms, though not by him.

¹²⁹Moore (1922), 274.

¹³⁰Moore (1942), 591.

¹³¹Moore (1959), 98.

¹³²Moore (1922a), xii.

3. AFTER MOORE

a. *The fall and rise of the Open Question Argument*

At least some of the shortcomings G. E. Moore saw with his argumentation were those that others, such as W. K. Frankena and C. D. Broad, were seeing, since he made many of his admissions in replies to their arguments. Many of them call into question aspects of his work that do not directly affect his criticism of naturalism (e.g. Broad's arguments against the equivalence of Moore's three definitions of 'natural', and his discussion of the status of the 'nonnatural'¹³³). Others, though, such as Frankena's arguments in his paper on 'The Naturalistic Fallacy',¹³⁴ are very relevant. This paper, Frankena's first publication,¹³⁵ presents a criticism which has since become the 'standard objection to Moore's argument',¹³⁶ that the Open Question Argument is question-begging if interpreted as a decisive refutation of semantic (or, as Frankena calls it, 'definitional') naturalism as a whole. Moore had adopted a quip by Bishop Joseph Butler as his motto: 'Everything is what it is, and not another thing'.¹³⁷ This is the essence of the Open Question Argument, which is at root an appeal to ideas supposedly held in common by everyone. To this, however, naturalists can add a clause, thereby yielding the following: 'Everything is what it is, and not another thing, unless it is another thing, and even then it is what it is'.¹³⁸ The point of this is that to Moore's claim that 'Is pleasure good?' is an open question, there is, at least *prima facie*, no reason why someone cannot say, 'But it is not an open question in *my* mind. To *me* it is a tautology, for I think pleasure and goodness are indistinguishable.' If the Open Question

¹³³Broad (1942).

¹³⁴Frankena (1939).

¹³⁵Sankowski (1995), 289.

¹³⁶S. Ball (1988), 198.

¹³⁷Moore (1903), title page.

¹³⁸Frankena (1939), 472.

Argument rests on ideas supposedly held in common by everyone, it is vulnerable to someone claiming that the idea they hold is different. To ignore this possibility is to rule out real differences in people's conception of good; but it seems possible that people may indeed have such differences.

This and many other criticisms of the Open Question Argument can be understood in the context of two general blows which have been dealt to those aspects of Moore's ethical philosophy which have been described here. First, although philosophers like W. D. Ross and H. A. Prichard produced early twentieth century philosophies which were in the Sidgwick-Moore 'intuitionist' tradition,¹³⁹ this Platonic-styled intimate (some would say esoteric) awareness of ethical principles has according to John Mackie 'long been out of favour, and it is indeed easy to point out its implausibilities'.¹⁴⁰ Bernard Williams writes that it 'has been demolished by a succession of critics, and the ruins of it that remain above ground are not impressive enough to invite much history of what happened to it.'¹⁴¹ The cogent arguments which were offered against it between the 1950's and 1980's are indeed many.¹⁴² Since Moore was one of those philosophers whose intuitionism was so harshly criticised, his argument against naturalism suffered insofar as it could be seen to be rooted in this untenable intuitionist perspective.¹⁴³ For example, if it was Moore's intention in *Principia Ethica*

¹³⁹See Prichard (1912); (1937); and Ross (1930).

¹⁴⁰Mackie (1977), 39. That Moore had an affinity to Plato on this matter, see S. Clark (1980).

¹⁴¹B. Williams (1985), 94.

¹⁴²Among them are Toulmin (1950); Hare (1952); Nowell-Smith (1954); MacIntyre (1966), 252ff, which specifically deals with Moore's version; G. Warnock (1967), ch. 2; Frankena (1973), 102-105; Mackie (1977), 36-41; Blackburn (1985); B. Williams (1985), 93-95; and Mayo (1986), 43-48. Hare continues to restate his arguments, e.g. (1981) and (1989a). Some current moral philosophers, like those of Thomas Nagel (1970); (1986); and John McDowell (1979); (1985); (1995), are sometimes characterised as 'writers in the intuitionist tradition' (Dancy (1991), 417-8), but these theories are different in important ways; for example, they include diligent explanations of their moral epistemology, or how we come to know good from bad. The alleged inadequacy of earlier philosophers' attempts at such explanation was the basis for most of the criticisms cited above. Robert Audi (1996) is perhaps closer to the 'old-line' intuitionists, but he too realises the importance of explaining the means by which a claim is justified.

¹⁴³For examples of philosophers who criticise Moore's intuitionism in order to discredit

to show that good was a non-natural property, and yet he did not explain how we come to be aware of non-natural properties, one could interpret his argument as an indirect argument for intuitionism. Insofar as intuitionism was seen to be a weak ethical position, Moore's work would be undermined.

The second general blow was to the Lockean atomist epistemology which enabled Moore to assert the indefinability of good. The later Wittgenstein, for one, argued against the notion of 'absolute simplicity' or 'absolute exactness' with regard to our ideas.¹⁴⁴ According to one study of Locke's epistemology, this element of it at least has been 'by and large rejected by contemporary philosophers'.¹⁴⁵ A recent review of this century's meta-ethics, entitled 'Toward *Fin de Siècle* Ethics', opens with a statement that touches on both of these blows to Moore's ethical philosophy, citing as its fatal flaws the 'appeal to a now defunct intuitionistic Platonism' and 'assumptions about the transparency of concepts and obviousness of analytic truth'.¹⁴⁶

Before one concludes at this point that Moore's naturalistic fallacy is 'a stuffed dragon',¹⁴⁷ a second look may be required. The first section of that review paper cited at the end of the last paragraph is entitled 'Principia's Revenge'. A recurring theme of the paper's seventy-five pages is the continued prevalence of issues that were raised, if vaguely, by Moore, and which in all likelihood will continue to dog naturalists into the next century. The answer to a question raised in the first page of that review, 'Why, then, isn't Moore's argument a mere period piece?', is answered there with the assertion that the Open Question Argument can still be posed intelligently

Moore's argumentation against naturalism, see MacIntyre (1966), 252ff, and Midgley (1980).

¹⁴⁴Wittgenstein (1953), I.46-7, 88f. Other criticisms of Lockean epistemology are Midgley (1980); Schouls (1980); and P. Simpson (1987), ch. 1, 6, 7. Of these, Midgley and Simpson apply their criticisms to Moore.

¹⁴⁵Schouls (1980), 37.

¹⁴⁶Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 115.

¹⁴⁷Midgley (1980), 207.

and cogently, apart from Moore's particular way of seeing meta-ethics, epistemology, or semantics.¹⁴⁸ Divorcing the Open Question Argument from the less savoury aspects of Moore's philosophy is what contemporary philosophers mean when they claim that it is possible to put 'Moore's objections... on to a proper basis'.¹⁴⁹ The Michigan philosophers Darwall, Gibbard and Railton explain two requirements for such modification:

'First, one should not claim utter conviction, but merely observe that the open question argument *is* compelling for otherwise competent, reflective speakers of English, who appear to have no difficulty imagining what it would be like to dispute whether *P* is good.'¹⁵⁰

So, a critic must recognise that the Open Question Argument does not rule out semantic naturalism decisively. Rather, it shows that there is controversy as to whether a certain term actually means the same thing as a moral term. This casts some doubt on the semantic naturalist's claim that the identity of meaning between two terms is inherent in ordinary language. It does not yet refute anything, however, for it is also possible that the critic has a lack of information or an inability to use his language properly. Such might be difficult to determine, but nevertheless being confident that such incompetence is not present remains a proviso for the validity of the Open Question Argument.

The second requirement for the modification of Moore's Open Question Argument, and perhaps more weighty for the would-be critic of naturalism, is that 'one should articulate a philosophical explanation of why this might be so,¹⁵¹ i.e., why a certain definition of good results in an open question and is thus dubious. Saying that 'good is good, and that is the end of the matter'¹⁵² will do little but attract the retort that one is advocating the

¹⁴⁸Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 115-17.

¹⁴⁹Wiggins (1993a), 330. See also S. Ball (1988), 207-9.

¹⁵⁰Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 117.

¹⁵¹ibid. This is also asserted by Wiggins (1993), 304.

¹⁵²Moore (1903), 6.

end of moral philosophy and moral discussion altogether. Since this is not usually the objective of the critic of naturalism,¹⁵³ one must provide a reason why the question is open. Usually this will be in the form of a distinction between the meanings of the two terms postulated by the naturalist as equivalent. To return to the wine example, the wine-taster, to be believable, must not simply state 'Y and Z taste or otherwise affect me differently, and so they must be different wines', but must say something *about* the tastes or other effects of each that sets them apart from each other. The reason for this specific modification of the Open Question argument is the fact that even if two terms are equivalent by their very meanings, this is not always *obvious*:

'It is a familiar fact about analyses that a concept C* may constitute a correct analysis of concept C despite the fact that it is possible to think that x falls under C* and also, apparently coherently, entertain the possibility that x does not fall under C.'¹⁵⁴

Two expressions can be semantically equivalent without this equivalence being immediately recognisable to anyone who looks at the two together. Some thought might be necessary. To illustrate, a definition can be provided of a 'diagonally bisected square' that is semantically equivalent to that term. That this definition is true may not be obvious, or immediately recognisable by all competent speakers of the language. One can ask, 'Is a diagonally bisected square equivalent to two isocetes right triangles in a plane sharing their hypotenuses?', and many who are not experts in geometry could see this to be very much an open question at first glance. We cannot conclude from our initial wonderment, however, that they must be two different things. It takes time and imagination to process the

¹⁵³Although it is not unheard of-- see Prichard (1912).

¹⁵⁴Smith (1994a), 36. On pp.35-38 he explains why this must be the case, on pain of a paradox. Harman (1977), 19-20; and Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 115, 165, 177, make this point as well.

information provided in the definition and to 'see' that in fact the two expressions represent the very same figure. The role of a geometry teacher is to make students realise that such nonobvious equivalence relations are nevertheless true. They are true by virtue of the very concepts used, i.e. analytically.¹⁵⁵ Moore's formulation of the argument, on the other hand, assumes that these types of truths are obvious, for he expects the mind to be an automatic and more or less immediate distinguisher of concepts, as long as they are both entertained together.¹⁵⁶ In actuality, 'It might... take time and thought to see whether or not C* constitutes an analysis of C'.¹⁵⁷ Yet, in fairness to the critic of naturalism, 'time and thought' does not give a licence to the naturalist, but rather a responsibility. It is just as incumbent upon any naturalistic theory as upon a critique of it, to thoroughly explain and facilitate an understanding of the semantic equivalence relation that is supposed to (or not to) hold. If a naturalist cannot get someone to 'see' a semantic equivalence supposedly inherent in our language, and if there is no other reason to suspect that person of linguistic incompetence, then there is no reason to believe that such an equivalence is inherent in our language. This is the sense of Moore's claim that naturalism 'offers no reason at all, far less any valid reason, for any ethical principle whatever'.¹⁵⁸

Thus, the Open Question Argument is vindicated from the (perceived) mistakes of Moore's philosophy if a user adheres to these two stipulations: that it be regarded as providing evidence against naturalism rather than immediate incontrovertible disproof, and that it be buttressed with some kind of explanation. Indeed, adhering to these stipulations renders irrelevant some of the most longstanding strategies for undermining

¹⁵⁵For the sake of argument in the context of semantic naturalism, the synthetic-analytic distinction is being upheld here. Although some would say that any definition, including geometric ones, are subject to revision in the light of experience, a semantic naturalist as defined here, appealing to definitions as the last word, would not be among them.

¹⁵⁶Moore (1903), 16-17.

¹⁵⁷Smith (1994a), 38.

¹⁵⁸Moore (1903), 20.

the 'naturalistic fallacy', inasmuch as they target those areas which have been corrected.¹⁵⁹ The improvement also disables those criticisms which target not the Open Question Argument itself, but Moore's way of doing ethics and semantics which surrounded the argument as he presented it.¹⁶⁰ If the argument can, albeit in a modified form, be removed from the unwanted aspects of Moore's philosophy, a refutation of those aspects will leave the argument unharmed. This has led contemporary philosophers to say that 'Moore's argument rests on a secure foundation which Moore himself did not see clearly'.¹⁶¹

Recent years have witnessed restatement and defence of the Open Question Argument in terms which are intended to avoid the problems that plagued Moore's original formulation. The diverse approaches of those who have attempted to take advantage of this invigorated form of the Open Question Argument have perhaps only one thing in common: they criticise naturalist theories for their (alleged) inability to incorporate all of the meaning which resides in the concept of morality into a naturalistic concept or set of concepts. Many have concluded from this that the argument does not affect those naturalist theories which claim to dig deeper than the concepts we have at our disposal in conventional linguistic usage (i.e. those which allow us to change our existing concepts in light of experiential evidence). One contemporary naturalist emphasises this point:

'But the open question argument engages directly only those substantive naturalists who defend their accounts of moral discourse as a "philosophical analysis", since the open question test applies only to (purported) analytical truths.'¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹For example, at least some of the five arguments listed in Frankena (1973), 98-100, are rendered irrelevant by the acceptance of these stipulations.

¹⁶⁰E.g. MacIntyre (1966), 252-53; and Midgley (1980).

¹⁶¹Mackie (1977), 60-62.

¹⁶²Railton (1993), 316. Harman (1977), 18-20, also makes this point.

'Analytical', again, is used in opposition to 'synthetic', and therefore may be seen to include both the 'logical' and 'semantic' (in the *a priori* sense), as they have been presented in this thesis. If theories of ethics claim an (*a priori*) semantic basis, they can be criticised for neglecting in the course of their naturalistic definition any aspect of morality which features in the conceptual framework of competent users of our language, whatever the criteria may be for the status of competency. Whether the Open Question Argument can be adapted to another level, and employed against theories other than analytically semantic ones, is an issue which will be presented in the next section; the peremptory answer provided in the last quote will not be the last word on this point. Less controversial, even among naturalists as the foregoing quote shows, is the claim that those who utilise the Open Question Argument on the semantic level do have a strong case against semantic naturalism. Of course, users of the Open Question Argument in this context are showing that they too hold *a priori* beliefs about morality, for the argument is at bottom an accusation that something within the *a priori* meaning of moral terms has been neglected by the naturalist.

Therefore the Open Question Argument is not an argument against the possibility of *a priori* truths, for it operates within the realm of the *a priori* itself. Arguments against the possibility of *a priori* truths, although they will not be discussed here, would also, if true, refute semantic naturalism, since it relies on such truths.¹⁶³ This discussion will continue to consider semantic naturalists from their own perspective on this issue, which is to assume that *a priori* truths are possible.

¹⁶³As has been said earlier (ch.I.1, 2), whether and to what extent truths can be called *a priori* is hotly contested. For argumentation against the *a priori* see the works of Quine, e.g. (1951); (1969); (1990); the debate is also represented by the series of essays in Moser, ed. (1987).

Several parameters have been discussed so far, within which the Open Question Argument (OQA) must operate in order to be valid when used on the *a priori* level. The following is a summary of them.

1. That one theory has been cast into doubt by the OQA does not mean that another will. Theories must be tested one at a time, unless a new theory can be shown to be relevantly similar to those already having failed the test.

2. To avoid dogmatism that can arise when people disagree on an allegedly *a priori* matter, the OQA can not be said to disprove a theory automatically and absolutely. Rather, a semantic naturalist theory is doubtful in proportion to the significance of the dissidence to the semantic equivalence relation involved; for a semantic theory depends on features of shared language, and to the extent that a feature is not shared by competent speakers (however that might be determined), it is doubtful that such a feature really is inherent in the language.

3. Because of the nonobviousness of some analytical definitions, reasoning must support the use of the OQA to insure that it is not succeeding because of a lack of information or understanding.

4. Because of the *a priori* nature of the test, the OQA is valid only against theories which claim an *a priori* basis; namely, in the context of naturalism, those that appeal to the Semantic Justification.

b. *Contemporary reformulations*

There are many who have wielded the Open Question Argument within the above constraints. Even Moore, though he predated the explication of these constraints, occasionally operated within them. In a paper entitled 'The Nature of Moral Philosophy', he cautiously confronts the belief that 'good' is definable as a psychological state. The Open Question

Argument is there buttressed by certain distinguishing features of morality which would be compromised by such a definition: first, the possibility of disagreement among people on moral questions, and second, the assumption of an objective standard by which our moral positions are judged.¹⁶⁴

Alasdair MacIntyre too has argued against theories which sacrifice these same two features, claiming that the possibility for moral disagreement and the use of impersonal standards of judgment are inherent in morality.¹⁶⁵

Bernard Mayo, another in this particular line of argument, claims that the Open Question Argument can be used against any theory which neglects the possibility that people can be wrong about their ethical judgments.¹⁶⁶

Other philosophers do not explicitly claim to be using the Open Question Argument, but their arguments can nevertheless be worded in that form. These arguments are designed to distinguish between the semantic features of the concept of morality, and the features that would be required by a certain semantic naturalist theory. MacIntyre, for example, makes a semantic distinction between the concept of morality and the concept of human needs, effectively saying that one can talk of having any kinds of needs, but it is still an open question whether or not I have a moral right to have these needs fulfilled, or whether others are obliged to help me secure them.¹⁶⁷ Michael Smith uses the 'commonsense distinction between justified and unjustified use of coercive power'¹⁶⁸ to support a refutation of two types of naturalistic theories: according to the first, "x is good" means "x is highly evaluated by the standards of system M," where M is filled in by looking at the affective or motivational states of the speaker and constructing from them a practical system';¹⁶⁹ according to the second, the

¹⁶⁴Moore (1922), ch. 10.

¹⁶⁵MacIntyre (1981), ch. 2.

¹⁶⁶Mayo (1986), 42.

¹⁶⁷MacIntyre (1981), 64-65.

¹⁶⁸Smith (1995), 286.

¹⁶⁹Dreier (1990), 9. This is argued against in Smith (1995), 282-287.

right course of action proceeds from having appropriate motivating attitudes, which are 'intentions to adhere to a particular agreement on the understanding that others also intend to do so'.¹⁷⁰ Smith's point is that if these theories cannot distinguish between justified and unjustified uses of coercive power, which seems to be very much a part of the concept of morality, we have a good reason for seeing these theories not to be accurate definitions of fundamental moral terms.

Some philosophers have turned the Open Question Argument against those who throughout this century have been among its most ardent devotees: those who believe that moral judgements cannot be true or false.¹⁷¹ One can, in opposition to such writers, say that since such an account of morality does not allow for 'truth-aptness', or the quality of being able to be judged true or false, whereas moral language does seem to entail such truth-aptness, it must be an open question whether or not that expression of emotion is necessarily *moral*.¹⁷²

Another feature of morality whose use in criticising semantic naturalism goes back at least to H. A. Prichard, is its categorical or binding nature.¹⁷³ According to Prichard and others, any proposed definition which is only hypothetical in meaning-- one which makes moral obligation something we act upon solely 'for the sake of the ends which we apply ourselves to'¹⁷⁴-- is not the same concept as that of morality. Stephen Clark

¹⁷⁰Harman (1975), 13. This argued against in Smith (1995), 287-293.

¹⁷¹The classic defence of the Open Question Argument by someone of this persuasion is Ayer (1946).

¹⁷²Arguments to this effect have been made by several philosophers, going back to Brandt (1946), 106-21; and Ewing (1947), 167-9. Recent examples of such arguments against expressivism, as well as discussions about the strength of such arguments, include Brink (1986), 36; Divers and Miller (1994); Jackson, Oppy and Smith (1994); Smith (1994a); (1994b); (1995), 278-282; and, to a weaker extent, C. Wright (1992); (1995), esp. 209-216. Disagreement arises not only from differing conceptions of what moral language involves, but also from differing conceptions of what the notion of 'truth' involves. The papers in Hooker, ed. (1996) are devoted to this cluster of issues.

¹⁷³Prichard (1937), 94-95.

¹⁷⁴Foot (1972), 313. Foot, at the time of writing this paper, believed that morality was a system of hypothetical imperatives.

uses an Open Question Argument in this way as well, asking 'ought we to abide by nature', if nature merely provides a set of principles for the taking or leaving, rather than 'things decreed to all of us and binding on us all'?¹⁷⁵ This notion is similar if not identical to John Mackie's notion of 'objectivity', which he takes to be 'incorporated in the basic, conventional, meanings of moral terms'. In his influential book *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, he states that 'Any analysis of the meanings of moral terms which omits this claim to objective, intrinsic, prescriptivity is to that extent incomplete'.¹⁷⁶

This talk of 'binding' and 'prescriptivity' brings one to a related, and probably the most common, objection to naturalistic theories. This objection is to theories which contend 'that an ethical judgment simply is an assertion of a fact', without any 'pro or con attitude toward what we are talking about; we are not recommending it, prescribing it, or anything of the sort'. Frankena suggests that perhaps existing moral usage should be changed to be more like this; but since arguments on the semantic level are based on linguistic usage as it is, a problem presents itself. It seems 'paradoxical if one were to say "X is good" or "Y is right" but be absolutely indifferent to its being sought or done by himself or anyone else'.¹⁷⁷ This idea has been called the 'action-guidingness' or the 'practicality requirement' of morality.¹⁷⁸ Many philosophers have employed this aspect of morality against semantically naturalistic theories in the context of an Open Question Argument, or a variation of it. Wittgenstein did so when he wrote, 'no

¹⁷⁵S. Clark (1980), 233-240.

¹⁷⁶Mackie (1977), 35.

¹⁷⁷Frankena (1973), 100. For a more detailed look at Frankena's moral philosophy in the context of Sidgwick and Moore see Darwall (1997).

¹⁷⁸Mackie (1977), 52, calls it 'action-guidingness'; Smith (1995), 277, calls it the 'practicality requirement'. An influential work on this issue is McNaughton (1988). Wallace (1990) is a review of the ways of dealing with it. This is related to the debate over *internalism vs. externalism* in ethics, or the question of whether motivation or reason for action is inherent in moral considerations, or comes from outside those considerations. To an *externalist*, the 'action-guiding' argument against semantic naturalism may be unconvincing. But as it is, the most outspoken externalist naturalists today are not semantic naturalists anyway; see, e.g. Brink (1986); Railton (1986).

description that I can think of would do to describe what I mean by absolute value, [and] I would reject every significant description anybody could suggest, *ab initio*'.¹⁷⁹ This argument is also made by G. J. Warnock.¹⁸⁰ 'Description' is the key word here, for it is *descriptive* language which to Wittgenstein and others has seemed incapable of encompassing the concept of morality or, in Wittgenstein's terms, 'absolute value'. Peter Simpson writes that no matter how many facts one adds up in description of something, one will never get to the conclusion that it is good,¹⁸¹ because goodness always requires a 'something more', which for Simpson is 'a certain respect or consideration' for that which is considered good.¹⁸² Also from the perspective of action-guidingness both Gilbert Harman and Mark Johnston argue against naturalist theories of the form 'x is morally valuable if it is valued by a person under condition K'.¹⁸³ Harman modifies the wording of the Open Question Argument, stating that a person could look at this picture of morality and say, 'So what?'; but since that same person would not say 'So what?' to a truly moral claim, this raises doubt about the naturalist's ethical theory.¹⁸⁴ To sum up the basis for the many arguments from the action-guiding element of morality, T. L. Carson writes:

'In order to succeed in justifying a moral judgment to someone it is necessary that he acknowledge that moral considerations have some legitimate claim on his actions and attitudes. A person who denies that moral considerations give him any reasons for viewing things with either favor or disfavor cannot be said to accept any moral judgments.'¹⁸⁵

It is important to note that if these arguments (of Frankena, Wittgenstein, Warnock, Simpson, Harman, Johnston, and Carson) are correct, not only

¹⁷⁹Wittgenstein (1965), 11.

¹⁸⁰G. Warnock (1967), 15-16.

¹⁸¹P. Simpson (1987), 162-66.

¹⁸²*ibid.*, 152.

¹⁸³Johnston (1989). 156-157.

¹⁸⁴Harman (1983). This was done before by Hare, as will be shown in the next subsection.

¹⁸⁵Carson (1984), 26.

must a person not *deny* that moral considerations give a person a guide for action, but any ethical theory which purports to provide a nonmoral definition of fundamental moral terms must incorporate this element.

Two critics of certain areas of semantic naturalism who have provided arguments in the spirit of the Open Question Argument, but in some ways have departed from it into other more original means of critique, will be described in more detail. These are Richard M. Hare and Simon Blackburn.

c. Arguments of R. M. Hare

For decades, he who has been dubbed 'probably the most influential moral philosopher of his generation'¹⁸⁶ has criticised naturalists for their characterisation of moral judgments primarily as descriptions. In this, R. M. Hare is firmly in the tradition of the Open Question Argument, and in the spirit of Moore's own beliefs in the matter as well. Moore states that natural properties (which, again, are properties which are 'the subject-matter of the natural sciences and also of psychology'¹⁸⁷) 'seem to *describe* the intrinsic nature of what possesses them in a sense in which predicates of value never do'.¹⁸⁸ Elsewhere he attempts to clarify this statement:

'...there is *a* sense of the word 'describe'-- *one* of the senses in which that word is ordinarily used-- such that, in ascribing to a thing a property which is not a natural intrinsic property, you are not describing it *at all*, whereas, if you ascribe to a thing a natural intrinsic property, you always are describing it *to some extent*... To make it clear it would be necessary to specify the sense of "describe" in question; and I am no more able to do this now than I was then.'¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶Dent (1995), 333.

¹⁸⁷Moore (1903), 40.

¹⁸⁸Moore (1922), 274.

¹⁸⁹Moore (1942), 590-91.

Ten years after this, in his 1952 book *The Language of Morals*, R. M. Hare made plain his position on the matter, saying that the predicate 'good' is not primarily a description at all, but is 'the most general adjective of commendation'.¹⁹⁰ Over the next three decades, Hare developed three specific arguments against naturalism. 'Naturalism' is defined by Hare as 'any theory which is refutable by the argument which Moore used, or a recognizable formulation of that argument, that is, roughly, any theory which treats an evaluative expression as *equivalent* to a descriptive expression'.¹⁹¹ Since 'naturalism' is defined by Hare in terms of the equivalence of expressions, it is a semantic type of naturalism that he is describing.¹⁹² He also recognises the restraint that the naturalist label places on the types of properties one can discuss with moral terms: for him, they must be 'empirically observable'.¹⁹³ Significantly, he does not argue against *all* who define moral terms in nonmoral terms-- for he does this himself.¹⁹⁴ Rather, he argues against the main tradition among semantic naturalists: those who have used *descriptive* terms to represent moral claims.

The probable reason why descriptivism is the main tradition, and why his alternative, *prescriptivism*, has been less enticing to naturalists, is that the more one places emphasis on prescription, the less basis there seems to be on which to call one moral view 'right' and another 'wrong'. The necessity for such a distinction, moreover, seems to many to be another aspect which is inherent *a priori* in the very concept of morality. As such, prescriptivism itself is liable to an Open Question Argument; as Hare's most enduring critic, Philippa Foot, has said, according to prescriptivism

¹⁹⁰Hare (1952).

¹⁹¹Hare (1971), 4.

¹⁹²See also Hare (1981), 2-4, where he says that logical considerations exhaust the meaning of the term 'good'.

¹⁹³Hare (1981), 68.

¹⁹⁴*ibid.*, 3-4.

'One man may say that a thing is good because of some fact about it, and another may refuse to take that fact as any evidence at all, for nothing is laid down in the meaning of "good" [its being commendatory] which connects it with one piece of "evidence" rather than another. It follows that a moral eccentric could argue to moral conclusions from quite idiosyncratic premises; he could say, for instance, that a man was a good man because he clasped and unclasped his hands, and never turned N. N. E. after turning S. S. W.'¹⁹⁵

Hare has attempted to distinguish right from wrong with the help of what he sees as further inherent (*a priori*) aspects of morality: the universality and rationality of moral judgment.¹⁹⁶ But, as debate over Hare's moral philosophy continues,¹⁹⁷ semantic naturalists have for the most part remained descriptivist rather than prescriptivist. This situation means that Hare's arguments against descriptivism, if sound, affect the vast majority of semantic naturalists.

Of Hare's three main arguments against naturalism, the first is that naturalism ties 'moral reasoning to the received opinions of our society.'¹⁹⁸ It does this by claiming that the meanings of moral terms in a certain language actually determine what is morally right and wrong. What is held to be right and wrong because of a linguistic convention, according to semantic naturalists *really is* right and wrong. If this were true, then everyone who knew their own language, and the meanings of its words, would necessarily agree on their moral opinions. Perhaps even more controversially, the received opinions of the language-group of which one is a member would be the last word on moral issues, which amounts to cultural relativism. Hare finds this idea to be inconsistent with the way we use moral language:

¹⁹⁵Foot (1958), 83.

¹⁹⁶Hare (1981), esp. ch. 3, 6; and (1989).

¹⁹⁷A collection of critical essays on Hare's philosophy is Seanor and Fotion (1988).

¹⁹⁸Hare (1981), 69; see also Hare (1989), 102-104; and Hare (1993).

'It is an important feature of moral language, neglected by naturalists, that we can go on using the moral words with their same meanings to express moral opinions at variance with the received ones, as moral reformers do. This would be impossible if the moral words were tied by virtue of their very meanings to fixed properties of actions, etc.'¹⁹⁹

Cultural relativism, according to Hare, is entailed by semantic naturalism, but is contrary to the meanings ordinarily ascribed to moral words. Hare does believe that 'by investigating the meanings of the moral words we shall manage to generate logical canons which will govern our moral thinking.'²⁰⁰ Therefore Hare does believe in a semantic approach to morality as we have defined that term. But for the reason stated above, it is 'too short a cut', or too simplistic, to say that the meaning of a moral word describes something about an object; and that is precisely what semantic naturalists generally attempt to do. Hare's alternative is essentially that the moral word is primarily a prescription offered by the speaker rather than a description of a property. The linguistic usage in this case does not actually determine what is right or wrong, and so cultural relativism is not entailed. But, if this argument is correct, insofar as semantic naturalists are descriptivists they cannot propose a theory without contradiction. Such theories are supposed to be grounded in moral language, but moral language operates as if cultural relativism, which is implied by semantic forms of descriptivism, were false.

Hare's second criticism of naturalism expounds upon the objection that has already been mentioned, that naturalists ignore the fact that 'moral words have... a commendatory or condemnatory or in general prescriptive force which ordinary descriptive words lack'.²⁰¹ Stating an empirical fact about an object is simply a declarative statement, and could never function

¹⁹⁹Hare (1981), 69. Hare's famous illustration of the missionary landing on a cannibal island ((1952), 148-49) was used to explain this argument.

²⁰⁰Hare (1981), 20; see also p. 3-4; and Hare (1989a); (1996).

²⁰¹Hare (1981), 71; see also Hare (1989), 107-112.

as an imperative one. Ordinary factual statements do not, according to Hare, provide the type of explicit evaluation or endorsement they must if they are to stand for everything that the words 'right', 'ought', and 'good' signify in their moral senses. Thus, naturalist theories which attempt to define moral terms in nonmoral descriptive terms are destined either to reject this prescriptive aspect of moral language, or else to fall prey to Hare's criticism that they are ignoring it. If saying a certain action is good is equivalent to making certain factual statements about it, this means that there is no explicit positive evaluation inherent in that word 'good'. If there is no prescriptive force in an expression, that expression does not convey the same meaning that 'good', 'right' and 'ought' conveys.²⁰²

Hare's third argument against naturalism is a response to a proposed *tertium quid* between descriptivism and prescriptivism: the view that some statements can be simultaneously descriptive of a natural quality and prescriptive of an attitude towards that quality. Here he is closest to the Open Question Argument. No matter what type of property we are talking about, Hare says, we have to ask two different questions: whether an action has that property, and whether an action with that property is wrong. Property-attributing language and commendatory language are different. Nelson Goodman would say that they were different 'versions' of speaking.²⁰³ To answer a question of the first type still leaves a question in the second open. To think that these are the same question is a mistake. Moore called it the naturalistic fallacy; Hare simply says that it is 'mistaken, as anybody will recognise who has done some critical thinking and seen it for what it was.'²⁰⁴ This critical thinking entails the realisation that whatever concept we choose to entertain, we can always utilise the concept

²⁰²Hare (1971), 113. Hare (1996) argues the converse, that where the prescriptive force in moral language is recognised, moral beliefs are justified.

²⁰³Goodman (1955).

²⁰⁴Hare (1981), 73.

without adding on to it the evaluation which some say always (by its nature) accompanies it. In fact, we can even reverse the evaluation if we wish, without compromising the nature of that property being discussed. Hare provides an example: contrary to the belief that 'suffering' simultaneously describes actions and commits us to an evaluation, one could say of an incident at West Point Military Academy, "He was caused to suffer deeply", but add, "All the same, there was nothing wrong in it; it happens all the time in good military academies, and that's the way to produce officers with moral fibre".²⁰⁵ In other words, 'He suffered, and it was not wrong'. The term 'suffering' is not being misused in this sentence, although the expected evaluation ('suffering is wrong') has been reversed; so the evaluation cannot be inherent in the concept. Hare goes on to say that this type of argumentation works with any concept that has ever been presented to him.

In addition to making these arguments, and variations of them, Hare has more recently proposed an explanation of the linguistic roots of our mistake in this matter. He claims that our distrust of abandoning descriptive talk in morality can be traced to idiosyncrasies of our own language, and even more importantly those of ancient Greek. Our philosophical tradition relies heavily on its beginnings in Plato, but since the Greek language, or at least most of Plato's use of it, 'did not clearly distinguish between *what exists* and *what is true*', and tended to treat all nouns and even some adjectives (such as 'good') as existent objects, we tend to do so as well.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ibid., 74.

²⁰⁶Hare (1991). The quote is from p.36.

Whether or not this explanation is accurate,²⁰⁷ Hare's criticism of semantic naturalists of the descriptivist sort still stands.

Unfortunately for semantic naturalists, many philosophers have sided with Hare on the matters discussed in the last few paragraphs. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong has described a 'Regress Argument', which hinges on the truth of Hare's second argument that moral judgments are inherently prescriptive,²⁰⁸ and which threatens to refute any naturalist theory. Hilary Putnam has implicitly endorsed Hare's third argument by stating that to whatever extent naturalists are physicalists (or believe that what is real must in some sense be *physical*), and since 'moral-descriptive language and physicalistic language are extremely different "versions", in Goodman's sense', it is likely that 'the *concept* "good" may not be synonymous with any physicalistic concept', and this erects a difficult barrier for semantic naturalism to overcome.²⁰⁹ Whether or not Hare's three arguments and related ones by other philosophers are conclusive refutations of semantic naturalism, at least of the descriptivist sort, they certainly provide obstacles to such a view.

²⁰⁷Note that to claim that Plato does assume that objects of knowledge exist, and on the other hand to claim that this reification is to any extent a result of his ignorance of peculiarities of the Greek language, are two different points, which must be supported by two different kinds of evidence. To determine whether the former claim represents the full extent of Plato's understanding one might look at *Timaeus* 27d-29c, where it seems that some distinction is made between truth and existence. Regarding the latter a starting point is *Phaedrus*, esp. 277-9, where Plato does show some awareness of the idiosyncrasy of language and the necessity of being aware of its effect on one's beliefs. Perhaps more useful than either of these, though, for both issues, is the *Sophist*, much of which is dedicated to the relationship between language and metaphysical questions. See, e.g., 237-40 for a discussion of the ways in which 'is' can be understood, and 262-4 for a description of the uses and significance of nouns. An inconsistency to avoid, which may or may not be a problem in Hare, is the criticism of *Plato's* treatment of objects of knowledge and the use of nouns in terms of *our* understanding of 'existence'.

²⁰⁸Sinnott-Armstrong (1996), 9-14. Premise #5 (out of 10) of his argument depends on the truth of Hare's claim, which he links to Hume's Law. Interestingly, Sinnott-Armstrong believes (p. 11n) that Hare is himself susceptible to the argument as well, since Hare believes moral prescriptions can be derived from nonmoral prescriptions, which is also (according to Sinnott-Armstrong) a leap that cannot be justified. Sinnott-Armstrong claims to find such an unjustifiable leap in Hare (1996).

²⁰⁹Putnam (1981), 207. An explanation of 'versions' in language, again, can be found in Goodman (1955). On the general assumption of physicalism on both sides of debates about naturalism, see S. Ball (1991), esp. p. 10.

d. *Arguments of Simon Blackburn*

Another philosopher of language who has criticised semantic naturalism is Simon Blackburn. He, like Hare, has remained close to the Open Question Argument in some respects, but has produced an original approach to the matter which has received significant attention from meta-ethicists in the last two decades.²¹⁰ Partly, this attention is due to the particular area of his emphasis. Unlike Hare, who has centred his arguments on the conceptual distinction between ethical descriptivism and nondescriptivism,²¹¹ Blackburn has chosen to argue not primarily in those terms, but in terms of ethical realism vs. antirealism. Ethical realism is defined in various ways, but is roughly the view 'that there are moral facts and true moral propositions whose existence and nature are independent of our beliefs about what is right and wrong'.²¹² Another definition is that 'moral qualities such as wrongness, and likewise moral facts such as the fact that an act was wrong, exist *in rerum natura*'.²¹³ This definition clarifies the connection that realism can have with naturalism. Qualities and facts are, for a naturalist, subject to the requirement that they be accessible to science. Moral qualities and facts therefore must be, for a naturalistic realist, qualities and facts that can be described from a scientific point of view. Since realism has been a prominent focus of discussion in moral

²¹⁰For instance, the Introduction to Smith, ed. (1995) interprets all of the papers in the collection as various attempts to overcome arguments presented by Blackburn.

²¹¹Hare defends this approach in (1989a).

²¹²Brink (1986), 402.

²¹³Hare (1989a), 84. Hare makes plain that he is not a moral realist there and in Hare (1993).

philosophy in recent years,²¹⁴ Blackburn's criticism of it, and his proposal of a gap-bridging 'quasi-realism', has been very relevant.

In arguing against realism, Simon Blackburn has produced arguments which are forceful against a great deal of naturalist theories, since the realism that has been gaining in popularity in recent years is largely a *naturalist* realism.²¹⁵ A prominent and recurring argument of his is based on the familiar action-guiding element to morality, which he, in a similar way to several other philosophers already discussed, accuses naturalistic realists of neglecting.²¹⁶ Another of his arguments, also very influential, is different from those that have been described so far, and will be briefly summarised. Blackburn claims that as a philosopher of language he has come to recognise two things as conceptual truths; but that when taken together, they prohibit a naturalist from being a realist. First,

'It seems conceptually impossible to suppose that if two things are identical in every other respect, one is [morally] better than the other... [so] it seems conceptually or logically necessary that if two things share a total basis of natural properties, then they have the same moral qualities.'²¹⁷

This is claimed as an *a priori* truth based on an analysis of the concept of morality. Blackburn nicknames this the 'supervenience' of the moral on the natural, after Hare's use of the term in the same way.²¹⁸ His other claim is the following:

²¹⁴See Railton (1986); the collection of papers delivered at the Spindel Conference 1986: Moral Realism, in *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24(1986), supplement, which contains an extensive bibliography to that date; the collection of papers in Sayre-McCord, ed. (1988), esp. Boyd (1988); Brink (1984); (1986); (1989); Gibbard (1990); Horgan and Timmons (1991); Smith (1991); Timmons (1993); Blackburn (1993); the articles in *Analysis* 54(1994); Smith, ed. (1995); and Railton (1996), which contains a 'taxonomy of realism' in general, and then relates the general idea to morality specifically.

²¹⁵Horgan and Timmons (1991), 447-457.

²¹⁶Blackburn (1984), 187-9; (1988); (1995). For the 'action-guidingness' argument see the citations of Frankena, Wittgenstein, Warnock, Simpson, Harman, Johnston, and Carson in subsection b, and Hare's second argument in subsection c.

²¹⁷Blackburn (1984), 183-4.

²¹⁸Hare (1952), 80-1.

'But it does not seem a matter of conceptual or logical necessity that any given total natural state of a thing gives it some particular moral quality. For to tell which moral quality results from a given natural state means using standards whose correctness cannot be shown by conceptual means alone.'²¹⁹

Blackburn is pointing out here that if one enumerated all of the natural properties of a thing, one would not find any moral qualities, such as rightness or wrongness, among them. Perhaps a more precise way of saying this is that if all a thing's natural properties were described verbally, one would not yet have said 'it is right' or 'it is wrong', or anything else which means the same as these statements. If one were to provide a complete analysis of the natural property-terms that can be used in relation to that thing, no moral conclusions would be among the results. It is therefore not, according to Blackburn, by *conceptual* means, in other words by philosophical analysis of concepts, that one arrives at moral conclusions. If two people disagree as to whether lying has the property of wrongness, for instance, this does not necessitate that at least one of these people is incapable of providing a correct natural explanation of 'lying'. This is why Blackburn says the standards by which we judge the moral quality of something like lying are not solely conceptual in nature. It is not conceptually impossible for two people to have the same concept of 'lying' in mind, and to have an equal conceptual understanding of all other relevant natural properties, but nevertheless to disagree about whether a moral property attaches to lying.

These two claims, taken together, create a dilemma for a semantic naturalist who wishes moral qualities to be factual matters. The first claim finds a conceptual link between moral qualities and natural properties, such that the first cannot vary without the second varying. The second claim

²¹⁹Blackburn (1984), 184.

discards such a link, for there is nothing about natural properties that conceptually requires us to accept the moral quality as supervenient. Where B* is a complete natural description of a thing, and A is its supposedly supervenient moral quality, Blackburn asks, 'Why does one B* having A suddenly necessitate that all other B*'s also have A, when otherwise they would not have to?'²²⁰ It seems that a semantic naturalist must discard either one or the other of the conceptual truths in order to avoid the dilemma; but these have been claimed by Blackburn as *a priori* truths, inherent in the very meanings of the words used. A semantic naturalist must either show there to be an error somewhere in Blackburn's account, or else submit to the dilemma imposed by ordinary language, the very source from which semantic naturalists claim to derive support for their style of ethical theory.

4. RESULTS: THE PRESENT STATE OF SEMANTIC NATURALISM

a. *Civil war*

Nearly two dozen philosophers, most significantly Moore, Hare and Blackburn, have been cited in this section as arguing against certain theories or ranges of theories within semantic naturalism. Some of these philosophers are semantic naturalists themselves, of course, and are arguing against specific groups within that category (e.g. groups of semantic naturalists who also happen to be realists, or descriptivists, or expressivists). Thus, many of these arguments may be seen as representing a 'civil war' among semantic naturalists, where different variations of the same general

²²⁰ibid. The foregoing argument is also found in Blackburn (1971). It is not clear from either of these papers, however, whether Blackburn includes contextual information as part of the natural description of a thing. If he does not, this puts an additional constraint on his first conceptual truth above: context doesn't matter. If he thinks it could matter (as is perhaps more likely), then in the statement just quoted 'all other B*'s' includes a requirement that the context be identical in any relevant way.

argument are tossed back and forth among camps within semantic naturalism. One group of semantic naturalists may use one concept supposedly inherent in moral language, such as truth-aptness,²²¹ to refute the theories of another group, who are meanwhile using another concept, such as action-guidingness,²²² to refute the first group. For another example of this situation, Michael Smith claims Gilbert Harman's semantic theory to be false because it cannot distinguish between justified and unjustified uses of power,²²³ whilst Harman criticises any theory where moral terms are defined as the evaluation or desire of a person in a specific ideal state, of which Smith's theory is an example.²²⁴ Smith's and Harman's arguments each depend on a specific feature which is claimed by its proponent to be revealed by an analysis of the concept of morality.

The commonality among all of the arguments offered thus far against semantic naturalism, whether the critics are themselves semantic naturalists or not, is that they claim their opponents' nonmoral definitions to have failed to incorporate all of the features which an *a priori* analysis of a moral concept reveals as inherent in its meaning. Those who adapt the Open Question Argument claim that an *a priori* consideration of a moral concept involves the recognition of a feature which is not found upon such analysis of another, non-moral, concept. Hare's arguments assert that an analysis of moral language leads one to the conclusion that there is an element of prescriptivity to moral judgement which cannot be comprehended by any descriptivist theory. Blackburn's argument basically states that an analysis of moral language reveals two conceptual truths that, if both are true, prohibit naturalistic realism. These philosophers, therefore, are all arguing against semantic naturalism from a position *within traditional* (*i.e.*

²²¹e.g. Ewing (1947), 167-9; and Smith (1994); (1994b).

²²²e.g. Hare (1952); and Harman (1983).

²²³Smith (1995), 287-93.

²²⁴Harman (1983). For a description of Smith's theory, see I.B.2b.

analytical) semantics. Their arguments give semantic naturalism the benefit of any doubts that the analytic/synthetic distinction is workable and relevant to morality, and that a study of the meanings of moral terms in ordinary language is worthy of being treated as the foundation for debate on meta-ethical issues, such as whether naturalism is true. However, as the 'civil war' among semantic naturalists shows, analytical philosophers have not reached a consensus as to the features that constitute the 'ordinary language concept' of morality; or, at least, they have not reached a consensus as to the requirements that such features place on ethical theory. This predicament provides *prima facie* evidence for entertaining one or the other of the doubts of which semantic naturalists have thus far been given the benefit. To this situation in moral semantics, naturalists have cultivated at least two general schemes of response in recent years.

b. *Response: platitude systematisation*

One response to the internal disarray among semantic naturalists as well as the attacks that have come from outside, is an attempt to increase the care that is taken in the analysis of moral concepts. David Lewis has been an advocate of this response for nearly three decades. In a paper entitled 'How to Define Theoretical Terms' he introduces a complex process by which all the imaginable platitudes regarding a certain concept, or truths that demonstrate our knowledge of that concept, can be systematised into a definition.²²⁵ Michael Smith provides several examples of such platitudes with regard to morality, and finds that many of them fit into five general categories:

1. practicality of moral judgment
2. objectivity of moral judgment

²²⁵D. Lewis (1970); see also (1972).

3. supervenience of the moral on the natural
4. substance of moral claims
5. epistemic procedures²²⁶

For example, one among several platitudes offered by Smith in the 'objectivity' category is: 'When A says that N-ing is right, and B says that N-ing is not right, then at most one of A and B is correct'.²²⁷ This general scheme of platitude systematisation has recently been defended by a few semantic naturalists. Some of these are closer to Lewis's original approach (as well as that of his predecessors Ramsey and Carnap) by attempting an *explicit* and *reductive* analysis.²²⁸ Such an analysis is *explicit* if it works by stringing all of the platitudes in a line and incorporating all of them into one definitive statement, which is then simplified. Simplification is made possible early in the process by wording the platitudes in as many of the same terms as possible. Such an analysis is *reductive* if the term to be defined is not allowed to be present in the platitudes. Other semantic naturalists have chosen an *implicit* and *nonreductive* route.²²⁹ Such an analysis is *implicit* if it attempts to summarise rather than enumerate all of the platitudes; and it is *nonreductive* if it allows the term to be defined to feature in the platitudes.

There are at least five problems for this response, however:

1. A practical problem is that there is still substantial 'civil war' even among users of such sophisticated analytical techniques, which seems to indicate either widespread lack of mastery of language, or else the failure of analysis. Michael Smith argues against David Lewis's conclusion that

²²⁶Smith (1994a), 39-40.

²²⁷*ibid.*, 39.

²²⁸e.g. D. Lewis (1989); and Jackson (1992). The other works referred to are Ramsey (1931) and Carnap (1963).

²²⁹e.g. Smith (1994a), ch. 2.

valuing is 'desiring to desire',²³⁰ whilst Lewis specifically criticises any theory which primarily involves a belief, which Smith's theory does.²³¹ Furthermore, Smith and Lewis profoundly disagree on the platitudes that inform their definitions: one of Smith's platitudes under the category of 'objectivity' is 'Whether or not N-ing is right can be discovered by engaging in rational argument'.²³² Lewis, on the other hand, proposes a 'conditionally relativist' theory on which there is no guarantee that there is any prospect for an objective moral decision procedure, much less one based on reason; and his ideal conditions include reference only to imagination, not to rationality.²³³ The point here is that the response of platitude systematisation has not achieved its goal, which was to alleviate the internal difficulties within semantic naturalists analysing moral language. Among those who have chosen this sophisticated analytical technique, there are still just as great differences of opinion as to what features are inherent in the ordinary language concept of morality. One is forced by situations like this to conclude that what are called 'platitudes' are not so platitudinous as they are sometimes represented, which brings us to the second problem.

2. The statements which form the groundwork for this type of analysis are called 'platitudes'. However, as evidenced by difference of opinion among semantic naturalists, these statements themselves are often very controversial (representing specific positions on various types of objectivity-subjectivity issues, action-guiding issues, epistemological issues, etc.). Therefore their status as platitudes is highly dubious, and their

²³⁰ibid., 146-7.

²³¹D. Lewis (1989), 115. Smith's theory involves a belief *about a desire*; but, by Lewis's account it is still conceptually possible to be indifferent about what we believe that we might desire in a certain condition.

²³²Smith (1994a), 39-40.

²³³D. Lewis (1989), 114, 121.

representation as such may even be question-begging.²³⁴ For someone who disagrees with a certain 'platitude', there seems no reply save that the person does not have mastery of the concept; but such remarks can (as in the case of Lewis and Smith) be just as easily delivered in both directions.

3. The Open Question Argument, within the parameters already mentioned, is no less operable against such a theory. Regardless of the level of sophistication at which analysis proceeds, if the fundamental 'platitudes' are opposed by other philosophers, this provides leverage for an Open Question Argument. For instance, there is nothing about the new analytical method which makes the action-guidingness of morality any less problematic for a descriptivist, or the supervenience relation any less problematic for a realist. This is especially the case because the platitudes provide the raw materials for, and are not the result of, the analytical method; and so many questions and controversies can arise regarding those platitudes regardless of what method is employed afterwards.

4. The fourth problem that faces these new-styled analytical theories affects particularly those of the explicit, reductive type. This type, according to Smith who for this reason abandons it, is affected by an analytical defect known as the 'permutation problem': the platitudes available are so few and vague that 'when we strip out all mention of the terms that we want analysed from a statement of the relevant platitudes', then there does not seem to be 'enough left in the way of relational information to guarantee that there is a unique realization of the network of relations just in case the concepts we are analysing really are instantiated'.²³⁵ It seems that reducing moral language in this type of analysis tends to reduce the definition to something which is grossly

²³⁴Stephen Ball (1991) develops (pp.15-21) and defends (pp.22-30) a test for analyticity designed in order *not* to beg the question in this way. However, his conclusion is that such a test does not end up supporting semantic naturalism, but rather shows it to be fundamentally flawed.

²³⁵Smith (1994a), 48, discussed to p.53.

underdeterminate, as the definition 'a fleshy, red, sweet fruit found on trees' undetermines whatever ('apple', 'cherry', 'plum', etc.) is the term to be defined. There just do not seem to be enough platitudes, and informative enough ones, to provide a definition from them. If Smith is right, and this is the case, this problem together with problem #2 seems to create a dilemma for the explicit, reductive route. The more specific and numerous the platitudes are in order to combat this problem, the more controversial they become and therefore dubious as platitudes. The less of a problem #4 becomes, the more of a problem #2 is likely to be, and vice versa.

5. Lastly, any theory of the implicit, nonreductive type may need to deal with a specific problem of its own: that of explanatory insufficiency. If the definition of x is constructed by summarising platitudes that themselves contain the term x , one may not be sufficiently explaining what it is to be x . The definition has succeeded in placing the term to be defined in a context among other terms, but by doing so may have done little to explain what that term really means. In some cases this is acceptable, for instance when there is a more or less obvious and noncontroversial phenomenological or experiential basis underlying whatever the term represents. Colour-terms, for example, might be defined by a nonreductive analysis such that 'red' means 'that which causes users of such a term to experience the visual sensation of redness'. 'Red' is used in the definition, and there is therefore a lack of a full explanation of what redness really is. This is perhaps acceptable in analyses of colours, however, because there is good reason to believe (based on empirical considerations of the undergirding physics of colours and the biology of sight, as well as the lack of controversy with regard to the nature of colours), that there is an underlying experiential or phenomenological basis for redness which need not be explained. With regard to morality, however, one does meet with controversy at even the most basic level (as these analytical philosophers

would call it, the 'platitudinous' level). Moreover, no one appeals to a noncontroversial undergirding physicality of all our moral judgments. The result of this is that there is not a general consensus as to what morality is like in the same way as there is with colours. In the words of some philosophers, we lack a 'robust phenomenology' and 'a dispositional grounding' for morality like we have for colours,²³⁶ and so a naturalistic definition must *explain* morality, rather than leave to be assumed what it is all about. When one allows the term to be analysed to be retained in the platitudes that are summarised in order to provide the definition, it seems that this requirement for explanation is being neglected.²³⁷

Whether or not these five problems with the analytical approach of platitude systematisation can in any way be circumvented, they are at least very problematic. Not surprisingly, given this situation, another response to the problems that have beset semantic naturalists has become popular.

c. Response: abandonment of Semantic Justification

If, as the foregoing discussion suggests, the type of analytical method opted for by Lewis and Jackson, and somewhat differently by Smith, is still open to the objections which have plagued prior attempts at providing a semantically naturalistic theory of ethics, and is beset with further problems germane to the application of the particular method, then one may understand why this 'old line naturalism', in the words of one contemporary naturalist, 'has largely disappeared'.²³⁸ Another admits that it seems impossible to settle the difficult issues surrounding such ideas as moral realism and the possibility of settling moral disagreement 'in any *a priori* way'.²³⁹ With regard to meta-ethics in general, many are now of the

²³⁶Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 162-3.

²³⁷For more discussion on this subject see Boghossian and Velleman (1989), esp. 89-90; and Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 152-64.

²³⁸Brandt (1996), 200.

²³⁹Sturgeon (1988), 230. He argues more thoroughly for this position in (1982).

conviction that 'Recent philosophy has *misrepresented* these questions by discussing them in terms of questions about the definitions of words.'²⁴⁰ Despite the attempts of some philosophers to keep this semantic approach to morality alive, most philosophers-- even naturalists-- wish to hasten its demise. Richard Boyd, for example, specifically argues against analytical semantics with respect to moral terms.²⁴¹ Some papers were confident enough in the early part of this decade already to discuss semantic naturalism in the past tense.²⁴² Peter Railton, another naturalist, describes in this passage one of the motivations for this abandonment of the Semantic Justification:

'...philosophers increasingly are clear that questions about meaning are intimately bound up with questions of metaphysics, epistemology, mind, empirical science, and even rationality and evaluation. Rather than saying that contemporary philosophy sees all of these deep questions from the flattening perspective of language, it would be more accurate to say that contemporary philosophy is suffused with an awareness that any intelligible answer to these profound questions must reflect the potentialities and limitations of language and thought.'²⁴³

The question that naturally arises here is this: If logical naturalism is viewed as having failed because of its simplistic hope that moral conclusions might be validly derived from nonmoral premises without so much as a justification or explanatory definition, and if semantic naturalism is in widespread disfavour for several reasons, among which is the inability of competent users of a language to agree upon the meanings of moral terms and incorporate all aspects of moral practice in their definitions, then what is the alternative? As will be shown, the naturalists who have abandoned or

²⁴⁰B. Williams (1985), 121. (emphasis added).

²⁴¹Boyd (1988), 194-195, 199.

²⁴²e.g. Horgan and Timmons (1991) discuss semantic naturalism (which they call 'analytic ethical naturalism') under the heading 'Remembrance of Things Past' (p.449).

²⁴³Railton (1996), 51.

avoided the analytic means of justifying their naturalistic view of moral principles, properties and terms, have opted for a *synthetic* means instead.

5. AN ESCAPE ROUTE FOR NATURALISM: APPEAL TO THE SYNTHETIC

Rather than attempt to overturn all of the mounting criticisms of semantic naturalism that are relevant to one's specific theory, as well as any criticisms of the analytical approach to semantics in general, a philosopher who is convinced that moral principles, properties and terms are accessible to science may choose instead to abandon the Semantic Justification for this position. Just as a logical naturalist could evade the strict force of Hume's Law by attempting to justify one's naturalism on the basis of the meanings of words rather than proposing an exception to the 'conservation of logic', a disillusioned semantic naturalist might attempt to evade the criticisms of Moore, Hare, Blackburn and others by justifying one's naturalism on some synthetic ground; namely, the *a posteriori* conclusions of science. For example, Richard Boyd has argued for synthetic naturalism by defending the possibility that one 'may choose to agree that goodness is probably a physical property but deny that it has any analytic definition whatsoever'.²⁴⁴ Perhaps an analysis of language will not support naturalism; but an analysis of language is not the only tool a naturalist can use for such support. Science provides information which many naturalists claim is very relevant to morality, even to the extent of justifying a view of moral judgment and discourse as comprehensible using only principles, properties and terms that are acceptable for use in scientific enquiry.

²⁴⁴Boyd (1988), 199.

To illustrate this shift of the burden of proof from the semantic level to the synthetic, such a move may be phrased as a response to the arguments of Moore, Hare, and Blackburn respectively.

a. *Beyond Moore*

In the presence of any semantic formulation of Moore's Open Question Argument, including those which reside within the parameters which have been set forth in the last subsection, a naturalist may state that he is not making a semantic claim, and thereby evade the argument. The critic argues in the following form: 'By the analysis of the meanings of moral words in ordinary language, it is an open question whether x , which is advocated by a naturalist theory, is good.' To this argument the naturalist can respond: 'I agree, but my theory does not operate by an analysis of the meanings of moral words in ordinary language.' It may be an open question whether x is good when one's ultimate appeal is to the semantics of ordinary language; but when one allows science to modify or correct aspects of that basis, this open question might become closed.

Even when the Open Question Argument, as it has been presented so far, is buttressed by an explanation, the naturalist encounters no difficulty in evading its force if an appeal is made to synthetic truths gained through scientific enquiry. Each of the following features has been said by one or another of the critics of semantic naturalism cited here to be inherent in the semantics of morality, i.e. to have *a priori* status as a feature of our ordinary language when we use moral terms:

1. The possibility of people disagreeing on moral issues
2. An objective or impersonal standard for moral judgment
3. The possibility of people being wrong in their moral judgments

4. The possibility of distinguishing between just and unjust use of power
5. Moral claims being either true or false
6. Categoricalness-- the impossibility of opting out of moral decisions
7. An attitudinal or action-guiding element to judgments

To any of these, or any other aspect *a* of moral language which is said to be inherent in the very moral terms we utilise, a naturalist can respond in the following fashion:

Whether or not *a* is inherent in the concepts used in ordinary language when moral issues are raised is not the last word in my ethical theory. Whether *a* is so inherent in ordinary moral language or not, I am not prepared to take *a* to be a necessary part of 'morality' as I define it. I find good reason, based on scientific enquiry, to define moral terms in a way which does not admit of *a*.

Further, the naturalist may provide an explanation of why we have come to erroneously speak as though *a* were actually an indispensable part of making moral judgments. Alternatively, the naturalist may show how, even though *a* is not actually an aspect of morality, it often or even always accompanies the operation of morality, for instance because of the nature of human psychology.

When the appeal to ordinary language for justification is withdrawn, the main argument of Moore, together with the many later adaptations of it, become red herrings. The real issue for such a naturalist is *not* whether one can close a meta-ethical question by the lights of the analytical approach to the semantics of ordinary language, for this very well may be impossible. In that case it could still be possible to establish a naturalist ethical theory which gains its justification from a synthetic source instead: particularly, facts about the world as are gained from scientific enquiry. In arguing

against naturalism, Moore said that 'propositions about the good are all of them synthetic and never analytic'.²⁴⁵ Although it is not clear that anyone made this explicit before Moore, someone could accept this statement while remaining a naturalist. Moore does not confront this possibility because all of his opponents seemed to offer analytical definitions, or definitions based on the concepts inherent in ordinary language, for moral terms.

b. *Beyond Hare*

Each of Hare's three arguments can theoretically be surmounted by appealing to synthetic truths instead of the semantics of ordinary language. First is his charge that naturalism entails cultural relativism because it assumes that moral beliefs are a function of the language within which they figure, whereas ordinary moral language is not relativistic. Simply, the naturalist who abandons the Semantic Justification will no longer seek to root moral beliefs in language, and so whether or not morality is relativistic in ordinary language will not by itself be of the utmost importance. If the synthetic facts of the matter as science finds them justify relativism, or on the other hand if they do not, our ordinary language conception of the matter will itself be susceptible to judgement, rather than being the arbiter. Furthermore, if moral beliefs are no longer being seen as a function of the language in which they figure, there is no reason to think that they are necessarily relativistic anyway, by Hare's account; for it was precisely their adherence to ordinary language which led him to make the claim to cultural relativism in the first place.

Hare's second and third arguments rely on the notion that moral judgments are inherently prescriptive in nature. These criticisms of naturalism can be circumvented, if a naturalist proposes that whether or not ordinary moral language is prescriptive, ordinary language is not the last

²⁴⁵Moore (1903), 7.

word on moral issues. To either account for or dispense with prescriptivity in morality is a challenging project for the naturalist, but it is one which, if moral language is not the uttermost basis for the ethical theory, can be accomplished in various ways. For one instance, prescriptions could be seen as incidental to the making of moral judgements, which are in themselves primarily descriptive. The naturalist could explain prescriptivity as a natural psychological phenomenon arising from the recognition of a certain kind of descriptive feature. A revision, or at least reinterpretation, of conventional moral language might therefore be justified on the basis of synthetic truths as concluded by science. Therefore, according to synthetic naturalism, if scientific facts are invoked to participate in justifying a claim about the nature of morality, such may properly be done despite restrictions placed on moral terms by their meanings in ordinary language.

c. *Beyond Blackburn*

Simon Blackburn's argument is that the supervenience of the moral on the natural is incompatible with the fact that moral property-terms never arise in a complete analysis of natural property-terms. One may overcome this objection to naturalism as well by appealing to the synthetic level. This has been done explicitly by James Klagge. It may be the case, Klagge says, that moral properties do indeed always accompany natural properties, but that by analysis, or 'the laws of logic and the meanings of words',²⁴⁶ one may not be able to derive the moral from the natural. Blackburn assumed that the relation between moral and natural properties (supervenience) has to be a matter which is justified 'solely by appeal to the laws of logic and the meanings of moral terms',²⁴⁷ in other words, he assumed that supervenience has to be *analytical*. Klagge raises the possibility that we

²⁴⁶Klagge (1984), 374.

²⁴⁷*ibid.*

may represent the supervenience of the moral on the natural *synthetically*. Klagge's particular proposal for how we come to know such a synthetic truth may or may not be naturalistic,²⁴⁸ but a naturalist can evade Blackburn's argument by Klagge's route as long as adoption of the synthetic truths necessary to establish supervenience is warranted by science.

D. Final Court of Appeal: Naturalism on the Synthetic Level

The final conclusion of the last chapter²⁴⁹ was that synthetic naturalism could still be true if both logical and semantic naturalism were false. Therefore, any of the arguments leveled at either logical or semantic naturalism are to that extent ineffectual against the synthetic. This does not mean that such arguments might not be *reinterpreted* in order to affect the synthetic level; but rather, a refutation of semantic naturalism has thus far said nothing of the prospect for a workable synthetic naturalism. One goal of the present chapter has been to present the two most significant strategies for critique of naturalism, and by so doing highlight an area that is neglected by such strategies. The synthetic level of understanding the naturalist claim, as evidenced from the independence which exists between it and the semantic and logical levels, is indeed neglected by these two strategies of critique. Neither Hume's restriction on the derivation of 'ought' from 'is', nor the several variations on the 'naturalistic fallacy' (or, more precisely, the 'naturalistic error in analysis') speaks directly to synthetic claims about morality. The means of justifying such a claim is fundamentally different. Both logical and semantic naturalisms depended crucially on the *a priori*,

²⁴⁸Klagge calls his brand of supervenience a *metaphysical* type of supervenience (p.377), and does not attempt to support it with scientific considerations.

²⁴⁹I.C.4.

whereas synthetic naturalism seeks to achieve the same results by an *a posteriori* means.

Another goal of this chapter was to describe what such a view might look like and outline possible problems with it. As synthetic naturalism is very much a going concern in philosophy, the field is very broad and recent work is abundant. What will be presented in this section is a brief description of the nature of the approach, an outline of some prominent ideas and players, and documentation to support the claim that these ideas and players have recently begun to receive significant attention by critics. When this is completed, the foundation will be laid for the next two chapters by a suggestion as to a potential programme of critique of synthetically naturalistic theories.

1. THE NATURE OF THE APPEAL

Proponents of Hume's Law have endeavoured to force logical naturalists to define in premises the moral terms of their conclusions. Nearly impossible stipulations for semantic naturalists have been set in place by G. E. Moore and later analytical philosophers, producing a situation exacerbated by arguments against dependence on the analytic/synthetic distinction and appeal to *a priori* truths. This state of affairs has forced semantic naturalists either to consider more closely the method of analysis or (more commonly) to abandon it altogether in favour of a more directly scientific approach to morality. This scientific approach may be represented by the 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.* The phrase 'facts or actual states of affairs' has a specific meaning to a naturalist, who places a particular constraint on the types of facts that are admissible.

To the extent that one is a naturalist about ethics, the facts or states of affairs that are obtained as the raw materials for an ethical theory must be acceptable for use within scientific explanations.

In this light, the Synthetic Justification can be seen to place a heavier burden on science than either of the other two levels of naturalism do. Much of the explanation in semantic naturalism, for instance, comes from an analysis of the meanings of words in ordinary language. These meanings have an *a priori* basis, and as such they do not require scientific support. To those who appeal to the Synthetic Justification, many or all claims that had an *a priori* basis under the Semantic Justification are now admitted to be in need of an *a posteriori* one.²⁵⁰ Since, for a naturalist, all *a posteriori* claims must be accessible to science,²⁵¹ such an admission places much of an ethical theory's burden of proof on science.

Analytical philosophy may have had a great deal to say about the prospects and problems of logical and semantic naturalism, because the Logical and Semantic Justifications are fundamentally *analytical* justifications. They appeal to *a priori* considerations of logic and the meanings of words. Considering the nature of synthetic naturalism, it seems likely that this critical role will not be played by the same area of philosophy. The synthetic naturalist operates by taking tasks which for the analytical philosopher are the domain of semantics of ordinary language, and transferring them to the domain of science and philosophy of science. It follows from this that philosophy must significantly familiarise itself with *science* in order to properly play the critical role in assessing naturalism that it did in the case of the analytical levels of naturalism. For instance, the

²⁵⁰There is a possibility that one might choose to defend a naturalistic theory which has a hybrid epistemology, where morality depends on both *a priori* and *a posteriori* truths. In this case a theory will be prone to criticism as a semantic theory insofar as it claims are semantic (*a priori*), and as a synthetic theory insofar as its claims are synthetic (*a posteriori*). Again, synthetic *a priori* truths cannot be invoked by naturalists as defined here.

²⁵¹See I.A.

nineteenth century philosopher Herbert Spencer developed a naturalistic ethical theory inspired by the new mechanism for evolutionary change proposed by Charles Darwin.²⁵² Since Spencer framed his argument in terms of the meanings of words, G. E. Moore, in arguing against his view, needed to know little or nothing about Darwin's theory of natural selection. Moore could appropriately criticise Spencer using the newly blossoming philosophy of language. He did not need to investigate any alleged scientific underpinning of Spencer's ethic in order to find a fatal problem with it, and so he did not investigate it.²⁵³ In the context of *synthetic* naturalism, however, things are different. If Spencer's theory were restated so as to be a *synthetic* rather than an *analytical* claim-- a matter of fact rather than a matter of the meanings of words in ordinary language-- Moore's criticisms would be ineffectual. James Rachels explains this possibility:

'Spencer had phrased his thesis as a thesis about words: he said, "The conduct to which we apply the *name* good, is the relatively more evolved conduct; and bad is the *name* we apply to conduct which is relatively less evolved." It is possible, however, to construe Spencer's view differently, as a claim about *what is in fact* good conduct. On this alternative reading, Spencer was offering a criterion, not a definition, of good conduct. If so, the open question argument would not work against it... Spencer left himself open to Moore's criticism because he did not distinguish definitions from criteria-- it is a distinction that apparently he did not notice.'²⁵⁴

This new reading of Spencer would put an extra burden both on the theorist and on the critic. The theorist would have to provide scientifically acceptable evidence that being highly evolved is worth being considered as a criterion for goodness. The critic, in turn, would have to find fault with any supposed evidence, or with the link between the evidence and the ethical point. Therefore, in addition to philosophical considerations which continue

²⁵²Spencer (1879); (1892). Darwin's theory was introduced in (1859).

²⁵³His critique of Spencer is Moore (1903), 46-58.

²⁵⁴Rachels (1990), 69-70.

to remain important, the synthetic naturalist's extra burden is a thorough scientific justification of factual claims, and the critic's extra burden is a thorough knowledge of the science involved. In short, the decline of analytical forms of naturalism has brought with it a practical necessity that moral philosophers interested in proposing or examining such views be well acquainted with science.

2. THE POPULARITY OF THE APPEAL

It is possible that moral philosophers could, upon being presented with the several problems that confront a semantic construction of the naturalist claim, reject naturalism in ethics altogether. However, the literature indicates the presence of a strong trend towards the continued endorsement of the naturalist claim, but in the context of the Synthetic Justification. The literature can be categorised in various ways. In this thesis distinctions have already been mentioned regarding cognitivism vs. noncognitivism, descriptivism vs. nondescriptivism, realism vs. antirealism, theories of belief vs. theories of sentiment, and reductive theories vs. nonreductive theories. The parties on either side of each distinction can claim that proposed features of moral discourse and practice are of a kind that can be countenanced by science; and insofar as they do this, they are naturalists. Likewise, it is possible for a naturalist of any of these persuasions to opt for a thoroughly synthetic, *a posteriori* approach to ethical theorising. Other distinctions among ethical theories may also be described which do not exclude the synthetic naturalist from either camp. For example, there is a distinction between those who believe that 'moral judgments are factual in the paradigm sense afforded by empirical or theoretical judgments in the natural sciences', and those who believe that this attempt to make scientific judgment a model for ethical judgment is

picture as to what the world is like. His approach is to argue against semantic naturalism with semantic arguments, but then to articulate his own position by means of a largely synthetic argument, based upon an *a posteriori* understanding of the naturalistically explicable reactions of human beings to the naturalistically explicable world.²⁶⁰

A more traditional naturalist approach is the neo-Aristotelian one, where a scientific enquiry into the psychological (and in some cases sociological) functioning of humans are found to reveal foundations for ethics. Philippa Foot is the exemplar of this route. Others such as G. E. M. Anscombe, Peter Geach and Mary Midgley have contributed as well, the latter most recently. Although their commitment to naturalism as defined here may be questioned (and certainly it is only the *secular* writings of Anscombe and Geach that can be considered naturalistic at all²⁶¹), they do sometimes claim their ethical theories to arise from empirical or scientific enquiry.²⁶²

Another route is the straightforward reductivism which sees morality as redefinable or otherwise reducible to facts that fall squarely within the confines of science. Richard Brandt has been called 'a leading proponent of this position'.²⁶³ Another prominent writer in this tradition is Peter Railton, whose belief is that 'We are natural and social creatures, and I know of nowhere else to look for ethics than in this rich conjunction of facts'.²⁶⁴ So, he develops an ethic based on the view that 'moral facts are identical with-- or otherwise reducible to-- natural facts'.²⁶⁵ Other writers abound who

²⁶⁰Blackburn (1996) clarifies his position in this area.

²⁶¹viz., Anscombe (1958); (1981); and Geach (1956).

²⁶²For Foot's view see Foot (1978a); although Foot (1994), (1995), and Hursthouse, Lawrence and Quinn, ed. (1995) show how her thought has evolved. For Midgley's theory see ch.I.B.3b, and the references cited there.

²⁶³Haney (1996), 330. See Brandt (1979) and (1996) for his view.

²⁶⁴Railton (1986), 207.

²⁶⁵Railton (1993a), 280.

attempt to find an appropriate reduction of moral facts to scientific (usually psychological or sociological) facts.²⁶⁶

None of these trends are what recent critics have been calling 'Ethical Naturalism Revived',²⁶⁷ however. The most significant recovery from 'blows that decked' analytical forms of naturalism is a nonreductivist moral realism which has 're-entered the philosophical ring in powerful-looking naturalistic form' and 'has come to dominate recent work in metaethics'.²⁶⁸ These philosophers, the most notable of whom are Richard Boyd, David Brink and Nicholas Sturgeon, have attempted to provide an ethic which does not involve reductivism; instead they propose another type of connection of moral facts to natural facts. In Brink's words,

'moral properties are functional properties... moral properties are those which bear upon the maintenance and flourishing of human organisms... The physical states which contribute to or interfere with these needs, wants, and capacities are the physical states upon which, on this functionalistic theory, moral properties ultimately supervene'.²⁶⁹

On this view moral properties are functions of physical properties in an analogous way to one view of the relationship between mental properties and physical properties in the philosophy of mind.²⁷⁰ Richard Boyd elaborates the contributions of recent findings in philosophy of science to this kind of position,²⁷¹ and Nicholas Sturgeon emphasises the difference between this nonreductivist view and reductivist views of both semantic and synthetic varieties.²⁷² Other writers have produced variations on this theme

²⁶⁶E.g. Churchland (1979); Kohlberg (1981); Flanagan (1991); Rottschaefer (1991); Shibles (1992); and A. Clark (1995).

²⁶⁷Horgan and Timmons (1991), 453.

²⁶⁸ibid., 447.

²⁶⁹Brink (1984), 121-2. See also (1989), 177-80.

²⁷⁰See, e.g. Putnam (1967); (1967a); and especially Davidson (1970).

²⁷¹Boyd (1988). These and other contributions are concisely summarised and updated (the bulk of Boyd's paper was written in 1982) in Horgan and Timmons (1991). Boyd's paper is arranged in such a way as to exhibit synthetic naturalism's success at meeting objections to analytical naturalism.

²⁷²Sturgeon (1982); (1988).

as well.²⁷³ With such an array of moral philosophers currently proposing theories which rely on the Synthetic Justification for naturalism, there is certainly sufficient evidence that what Philip Kitcher said of epistemology is true of ethics as well: 'The Naturalists Return'.²⁷⁴

3. CRITIQUE OF THE APPEAL

Along with synthetic naturalist theories has come trenchant critique. Several philosophers have noticed the fact that, even though a synthetic naturalist claims to be to some extent bypassing ordinary language, the Open Question Argument can be restated in such a way as to raise doubts about even these theories. Numerous papers have been written recently in the attempt to reformulate the Open Question Argument in this way.²⁷⁵ Some of these are linked with *a priori* considerations of morality to various extents; to the extent such an argument is so linked, the synthetic naturalist may possibly have leverage against them.²⁷⁶ However, on the level of the individual moral agent, the further a synthetic naturalist description of morality veers from the morality that agent actually experiences (in a broad sense), the less reason that agent has for accepting the view as a *moral* view rather than some invented '*shmoral*' view. For example, if someone proposed that morality should be so grossly revised that there would be no action-guiding element, no truth-aptness, no objectivity, and no possibility for moral disagreement, the natural question to be raised is 'What makes you think that what you are describing is morality?'.²⁷⁷ A synthetic picture of

²⁷³E.g. Miller (1985); Lycan (1986); Post (1987); Copp (1990); (1991); (1995).

²⁷⁴Kitcher (1992), title.

²⁷⁵E.g. S. Ball (1988); (1991); Horgan and Timmons (1991), 461f; (1992); Smith (1994a), 29-35; Rosati (1995); Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 177-8; Wiggins (1993a).

²⁷⁶'Leverage' meaning that the synthetic naturalist might be able to claim that the alleged *a priori* truth about morality should be revised in light of scientific evidence. This is the essence of what some (e.g. Brandt (1979), ch.1) call 'reforming definitions'.

²⁷⁷This argument is developed further in ch. IV.

morality may not have to adhere closely to ordinary language, but it has to be distinguished as morality *somehow*. Michael Smith depends heavily on this requirement when he criticises synthetic naturalists for their disregard for the 'platitudes' of morality.²⁷⁸ His general point is that when one attempts to provide an ethical theory using solely the findings of science apart from *a priori* considerations, there is no guarantee (in fact, it seems unlikely) that the result is going to look very much like what many consider morality to be all about. His reason for this is that an *a posteriori* approach to morality is blind to elements of moral discourse and practice which are *thought* rather than *empirically discovered*. Several other philosophers also critique synthetic naturalist theories with the general approach of finding fault with the abandonment of certain features without which morality loses its distinctiveness.²⁷⁹ Smith makes a more specific point as well. He defends the possibility that Hare's first argument against semantic naturalism described earlier²⁸⁰ can be altered so that it will affect synthetic, or what Smith calls 'metaphysical-but-not-definitional', naturalism.²⁸¹

Stephen Ball, Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons utilise a slightly different approach to criticising synthetic naturalism, and do not speak of the *a priori*. Like Smith, however, they still operate by pointing out elements of what might broadly be termed 'moral experience'²⁸² that are neglected or insufficiently considered by synthetic naturalist theories. They speak in terms of 'prephilosophical intuitions' and experience of 'hermeneutic pressure' to see morality in a certain way.²⁸³ Horgan and Timmons's argument is based on a thought experiment invented by Hilary Putnam,

²⁷⁸Smith (1994a), 29-35.

²⁷⁹E.g. Holmgren (1990); Rosati (1995); Sencerz (1995).

²⁸⁰Section C.3c.

²⁸¹Smith (1994a), 33-35.

²⁸²If this term is used, it must be seen in a broad (not strictly empirical) sense, such that it includes anything on the individual level (sense experience, thought processes, states of mind) that is considered fundamental to morality.

²⁸³S. Ball (1988); (1991); Timmons (1990); Horgan and Timmons (1991); (1992a); and esp. (1992), which is written specifically in terms of the Open Question Argument.

where a planet just like Earth in every respect save the moral is imagined in order to tease out features of the nature of morality that might not be obvious in everyday experience. They utilise this argument primarily against the new nonreductivist naturalisms of Boyd, Brink, Sturgeon and others.

David Wiggins is another critic of synthetic naturalism, who explains how the Open Question Argument reveals a difficulty for any naturalist who claims that a certain value V is identical with certain natural property. He finds reason to 'doubt whether anything in moral philosophy had better depend on such an identity's obtaining'.²⁸⁴ Wiggins shows that in order for such a naturalist to accomplish this identity, it is not sufficient to show 'item x to have value V '. Rather, the naturalist must also show three things which according to Wiggins are much more difficult, if not impossible. The first is that within the naturalistic understanding of x , V must be shown to necessarily be present. In other words, a naturalist must succeed in '*finding* V in x '. Second, one must not merely show that people do react in such-and-such a way 'to item x *qua* possessed of V ', but one must answer the question of 'whether one is oneself to concur in this reaction'. Third, 'if a value has *qua* moral or aesthetic to have some connection with feeling (the particular feeling depending on the particular value), then, in the cases where feeling connects with the will, finding the value in x must have some however indirect connection with the will'.²⁸⁵ These three stipulations pose significant obstacles for a naturalist theory that proposes an identity between moral and natural properties.

Other criticisms focus on other aspects of synthetic naturalism besides the general difficulties they face in providing a description of morality that is at once naturalistic and complete. One focus of such

²⁸⁴Wiggins (1993a), 334. See also (1993).

²⁸⁵Wiggins (1993a), 331.

criticism is on the kinds of analogies which are used to defend the plausibility of both nonreductivist and reductivist theories. Synthetic naturalists often utilise analogies, either to support supervenience relations (in nonreductive theories) or property identities (in reductive theories). Both types of analogy have been tested and found wanting by several critics.²⁸⁶ The supervenience issue is possibly the most significant source of criticism if the amount of literature is a reliable indicator. The major argument leveled in this area is the old argument that a supervenience relation in this area cannot but be 'an opaque, isolated, logical fact, for which no explanation can be proffered'.²⁸⁷ This argument, later dubbed an 'Argument from Queerness' by John Mackie, is still current and widely recognised as problematic for nonreductive naturalists.²⁸⁸ There is prolific critical notice of the more prominent of the particular theories as well, such as that of David Brink (in addition to Horgan and Timmons's critiques cited above).²⁸⁹ Simon Blackburn has criticised Nicholas Sturgeon's account of moral explanations,²⁹⁰ and there has been a fruitful exchange published between David Wiggins and Peter Railton on the subject of the latter's naturalism.²⁹¹

With respect to the non-cognitivist forms, a summary of the situation has stated that 'new problems beset old noncognitivism, and so noncognitivism has had to develop or die'.²⁹² At least three problems face non-cognitivist naturalists. First, non-cognitivism as a position is obsolete on many philosophers' views, since it is essentially a negative position and

²⁸⁶e.g. Hare (1984); Schiffer, S. (1987), 153-4; Blackburn (1985a); (1993); Horgan and Timmons (1991); (1992a); Horgan (1993); and Gampel (1996).

²⁸⁷Blackburn (1971), 111.

²⁸⁸Mackie (1977), 39-41. Garner (1990) and Horgan and Timmons (1992a) are adaptation of Mackie's argument in the context of synthetic naturalist theories.

²⁸⁹e.g. Garner (1990); Copp (1991); and Yassenchuk (1995).

²⁹⁰Blackburn (1991).

²⁹¹In order, these are Railton (1993a); Wiggins (1993); Railton (1993); and Wiggins (1993a).

²⁹²Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 145.

the positive positions it once fiercely railed against have largely either disappeared or changed. There are so many types of cognitivism current, including ones with only a minimal claim to moral truth, that many have questioned whether non-cognitivists can both argue against all of their claims and keep their own positions distinctive.²⁹³ Second, there is continued pressure for non-cognitivists to recognise some level of truth-aptness in moral judgments. Crispin Wright's idea of minimalism with regard to moral truth, for example, has in his estimation dispensed with the problems that non-cognitivists have seen in cognitivism, whilst avoiding the pitfalls germane to non-cognitivist views.²⁹⁴ A flourish of literature has grown out of consideration of this issue.²⁹⁵ Third, non-cognitivists have historically been staunchly in the analytical tradition, and there is doubt as to whether they can successfully reinterpret their perspective so as not to make the analytic-synthetic distinction do too much work.²⁹⁶ As for criticism of specific theories, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong has discussed problems with Allan Gibbard's theory, Bob Hale has done the same with that of Simon Blackburn, and Nicholas Sturgeon with both of these as well as that of Gilbert Harman.²⁹⁷

Neo-Aristotelian moral philosophy has been criticised for not having developed much since its inception over thirty years ago. According to a brief survey of naturalism by C. R. Pigden, 'the writings of Geach, Midgley and their allies are "suggestive" but nothing more'.²⁹⁸ Perhaps the reason for this is that it is too difficult to resurrect a significant Aristotelian sense of human purpose or function within a modern scientifically naturalistic

²⁹³*ibid.*, 184-5. Railton examines this issue in (1993a).

²⁹⁴C. Wright (1988).

²⁹⁵See Brink (1986), 36; Divers and Miller (1994); Jackson, Oppy and Smith (1994); Smith (1994a); (1994b); (1995), 278-282; C. Wright (1992); (1995), esp. 209-216; and Hooker, ed. (1996).

²⁹⁶Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 145.

²⁹⁷Sinnott-Armstrong (1993); Hale (1986); Sturgeon (1985); (1986); (1991).

²⁹⁸Pigden (1991), 430.

worldview. Elsewhere Pigden concludes after a more thorough treatment that the 'neo-Aristotelian programme... has conspicuously failed to deliver. Its adherents have either lapsed into theology (Geach), provided nothing concrete (Midgley), or left us with promissory notes (Anscombe and Foot).'²⁹⁹ Whether or not Pigden's examination represents the whole truth of the matter, it seems that the crucial issue for neo-Aristotelian naturalists is the question of whether increased clarity and more specific defence of such a view will only be possible by abandoning the the naturalist claim as it is represented in this thesis. In fact, this is an issue for all synthetic naturalists. The critique summarised in this section shows that an important question to be explored is whether the goal of providing a complete description and explanation of morality can be achieved without inadequately representing morality on the one hand, or else breaching the boundaries of naturalism on the other.

E. Towards an Examination of a Particular Synthetic Naturalist Theory

One of the significant lessons which has been learned since the days when the 'naturalistic fallacy' was seen to be a once-for-all refutation of naturalism³⁰⁰ is that each naturalistic theory must be examined for its own sake. No inductive leap is warranted from the refutation of cruder naturalisms such as the identification of 'good' with 'pleasure', for instance, to a claim about one that identifies 'good' with 'human well-being' with all that notion can possibly import from human psychology. There is even less

²⁹⁹Pigden (1990), 152. Other discussion of its problems are Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 166-69; and Williams (1985), ch.3, and pp.152ff.

³⁰⁰According to Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (116-120), this was roughly the early to middle portion of this century, the 'heyday of analytic metaethics'.

potential for a leap on the synthetic level, since whereas semantic truths are often expected to be readily forthcoming in an analysis of ordinary language, the possibility for the discovery of radically novel, even paradigm-altering, scientific facts is well-precedented. If one allows for language that suggests that science is in some sense progressive, modern physics might be said to have 'outgrown' some assumptions of the Newtonian paradigm, and modern cognitive psychology arguably to have 'outgrown' some of the assumptions of both the psychoanalytical and behaviourist traditions. Likewise, since synthetic ethical naturalism claims to proceed with aid from scientific enquiry, one must leave open the possibility that moral philosophy will similarly outgrow past or present 'cruder' states in the light of new scientific findings. Given this possibility, an examination of naturalism is not likely, especially at the synthetic level, to provide sufficient critical examination of synthetic naturalism unless it encounters particular theories directly.

This is not to say that general applications are impossible. Certain background assumptions are likely to arise in several theories, and if these have been problematic in the context of one theory there is good reason to believe that they will be problematic in others. Certain threads of argument (like fallacious moves from 'is' to 'ought' and dubious analytical definitions of moral terms in non-moral terms) can be examined in their own right and the results applied as tools to a range of theories. In fact, it is presumably a major point of any examination of a theory to find a general application, such that the entire process may be employed in the future with much less effort and similar success. The point, however, is that the range of the application must be precisely specified and the generalisation itself supported with argumentation. In contrast, an unacceptable method would be to take an argument's success against one theory in a certain category as a licence to claim that any theory in that category is refuted.

1. CONTEMPORARY META-ETHICS AND CONTEMPORARY EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY

Any synthetically naturalistic theory of ethics could be chosen for consideration in order to provide a contribution to contemporary meta-ethics. However, a second purpose could also be served if a particular theory were chosen which represented an area that has received recent emphasis in contemporary science, and whose proponents claim a relevance to ethics, but has not received similar emphasis in mainstream meta-ethics. This second purpose would be the establishment of closer ties between a meta-ethical view which purports to be eminently scientific, and science itself. Synthetic naturalism represents a reversal of direction of earlier twentieth-century claims such as:

'4.111 Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences.

4.112 Philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts...

4.1121 Psychology is no more closely related to philosophy than any other natural science...

4.1122 Darwin's theory has no more to do with philosophy than any other hypothesis in natural science'.³⁰¹

Every synthetically naturalistic theory, on the other hand, by definition depends on the conclusions of science for its factual support. One might expect science, then, to have been intimately connected with the conclusions of the synthetic naturalists who were mentioned in the last section. Virtually all do make reference to human psychology, and many take human social behavior and social trends into consideration. Some kind of psychology and sociology, then, are fundamental to many contemporary theories of ethics. But, as Darwall, Gibbard and Railton's review article of current moral

³⁰¹Wittgenstein (1921).

philosophy notes as a final conclusion, there is, generally speaking, a lack of truly empirically informed work even in these areas, and in particular on the 'nature or history or function of morality'.

'Too many moral philosophers and commentators on moral philosophy-- we do not exempt ourselves-- have been content to invent their psychology or anthropology from scratch and do their history on the strength of selective reading of texts rather than more comprehensive research into contexts... any real revolution in ethics stemming from the infusion of a more empirically informed understanding of psychology, anthropology, or history must hurry if it is to arrive in time to be part of *fin de siècle* ethics.'³⁰²

The possibility that synthetic naturalists are not in sufficient communication with developments in the sciences is perhaps very surprising, considering the fact that such writers claim the support of science for their ethical theories. Moreover, even a casual reading of the more scientifically relevant of recent work in ethical naturalism seems to support the conclusion of that review. Centuries after David Hume, what has been called '*The Moral Problem*' in today's meta-ethics is the prospect of reconciling his theory of human psychology with our view of morality.³⁰³ Much has been accomplished in science with relevance to human psychology since Hume, which may have philosophical, including ethical, relevance.³⁰⁴ One field in particular has experienced relatively recent developments which are thought by many to have important bearing on human psychology as regards morality: evolutionary biology.

Earlier it was said that G. E. Moore criticised the evolutionary ethic of Herbert Spencer solely for its linguistic rather than scientific content.³⁰⁵ With respect to the consideration of science he exhibits in his published

³⁰²Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 188-9.

³⁰³Smith (1994a); emphasis added.

³⁰⁴An example of a cognitive psychologist today who touches on what he sees as philosophical implications of his work is Daniel Dennett (1991).

³⁰⁵Section D.1.

writings, Moore has by some been criticised as 'passionately parochial and blinkered.' Antony Flew expounds upon this accusation:

'In that most curious volume, *Principia Ethica*, for instance, the whole discussion both of ethics and of meta-ethics proceeds as if outside time and space... Moore might as well have been writing not merely before Darwin but before Newton'.³⁰⁶

If the naturalist references cited in the last two chapters are a sufficient reflection of the mainstream of naturalistic meta-ethics, then one may at least tentatively propose that little has changed since Moore's day in this regard. Darwall, Gibbard and Railton may be correct in their indictment of the empirically ill-informed nature of much of contemporary meta-ethics. Evolutionist Julian Huxley, grandson of Darwin's chief defender T. H. Huxley, writes:

'It makes a great difference whether we think of the history of mankind as wholly apart from the rest of life, or as a continuation of the general evolutionary process, though with special characteristics of its own'.³⁰⁷

A reasonable question to ask is whether the significance of viewing man in an evolutionary context is so great as to be able to provide a naturalistic understanding of morality. Although there is a recent empirically-informed renewal of attempts to accomplish just this, the most prominent naturalistic meta-ethical writers do not consider the prospect very seriously. By far most of the naturalistic meta-ethical literature contains either insignificant or no reference to evolutionary theory.³⁰⁸ To the extent that this is the case, and if the recent implications for the human sciences that have been drawn from evolutionary biology do have credibility, then any discussion of human moral psychology which neglects this information may soon be seen in

³⁰⁶Flew (1984), 131.

³⁰⁷J. Huxley (1953), vii.

³⁰⁸E.g. Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992); Smith, ed. (1995); and the dozens of references within these two overviews, most of which have been cited in this chapter.

scientific circles as an obsolete vestige of the pre-Darwinian anthropological paradigm.³⁰⁹

The low level of communication between evolutionary theory and naturalistic meta-ethics goes both ways, however. Work on ethical matters within the evolutionary literature contains numerous references to the 'naturalistic fallacy' without much consideration of what that claim really means or in what contexts and to what extent it is applicable.³¹⁰ Also, many evolution-based ethics or evolutionary approaches to ethics are proposed with little concern for philosophical respectability. E. O. Wilson, for example, makes revolutionary meta-ethical claims, such as that a 'simple biological statement must be pursued to explain ethics and ethical philosophers... at all depths'.³¹¹ However, the only ethical philosopher Wilson cites is John Rawls, who for his part had admitted to having no real position on traditional meta-ethical issues, and was of the opinion that other more practical questions should be dealt with in the meantime.³¹² If evolutionary theorists who attempt to produce naturalistic ethical theories are to some extent unacquainted with recent discussions and developments in naturalistic meta-ethics proper, these attempts will most likely be of substandard rigour and cogency to the expectations of meta-ethically educated moral philosophers.

It is, of course, not a necessary thing that moral philosophy be either empirically ill-informed on the one hand or meta-ethically ill-informed on the other. Particularly with regard to *naturalistic* moral philosophy, which depends explicitly on support from science, such must be viewed as a situation to be avoided strenuously. To this end, the next chapter will

³⁰⁹R. Wright (1995), Introduction.

³¹⁰An example of this is the discussion of Robert Richards' evolutionary ethic in the journal *Biology and Philosophy*. See, for instance, Richards (1986); Hughes (1986); and P. Williams (1990).

³¹¹Wilson (1975), 3.

³¹²Rawls (1971), 51-2.

consider a synthetically naturalistic theory which is claimed by its proponents to be supported by the facts of evolutionary biology. This will involve a thorough explanation and examination of both the science and the meta-ethics involved. In doing so, a way of assessing naturalistic moral theories will be proposed which takes into account both empirical and meta-ethical respectability. Thus communication will be promoted between scientists and moral philosophers, especially those of the latter who claim science as a source of support.

2. CONCLUSIONS

Naturalism as a meta-ethical idea has been criticised in so many forms and from so many perspectives in the twentieth century that oversimplification and confusion are perhaps inevitable. Naturalism has commonly been assumed to be cognitivist, to be semantic, to violate Hume's Law, to be reductive, and to be refuted by G. E. Moore. Discussions of naturalism often raise difficult issues such as the truth-aptness of moral judgments, the descriptivism/nondescriptivism debate, the role of the *a priori* in morality, the utility of reductionism, the relevance of reason and sentiment to morality, the usefulness of the analytic/synthetic distinction, the explainability of supervenience relations, the action-guiding element in morality, the possibility of synthetic identity without semantic equivalence, and the scope of scientific enquiry.

The main objective of the first two chapters has been to organise the concept of naturalism in such a way that the nature and scope of this century's criticism of it could be understood, highlighting any area which has not been the object of strenuous critique. The compartmentalisation of naturalism into logical, semantic and synthetic levels in the first chapter has facilitated this categorisation of the critique, because of the distinctiveness

of the justification to which each level appeals. Logical naturalism can be seen to appeal to a distinctive Logical Justification based on the logical validity of a certain type of progression; semantic naturalism appeals to a Semantic Justification based on the capability of defining certain words in certain ways; and synthetic naturalism appeals to a Synthetic Justification based on the obtaining of certain facts or states of affairs. With respect to critical discussion, as discussed in this second chapter, certain prominent arguments of this century have concentrated on the logical progression undergirding the Logical Justification. Another significant trend has focused on the feasibility of the type of definition that the Semantic Justification upholds. These critiques have been very thorough and popular, and have experienced several decades of continued clarification, explanation and testing. Obviously highlighted, then, and having only recently begun to be criticised, is the Synthetic Justification, which understandably contains most of the notable naturalistic meta-ethicists today. Even those few naturalists who have remained on the semantic level have paid much closer attention to their analytical technique, and have put forward their views with precision and caution rather than the vagueness and dogmatism which arguably characterised moral semantics before this century of sustained examination. The main surge forward, though, has come from the synthetic camp. Here moral philosophers, newly invigorated by recent developments in the philosophy of science and language, have sought to find the answers to longstanding ethical questions in the most solidly naturalistic of ways: through facts that are accessible to scientific enquiry.

Synthetic theories have been proposed of both reductivist and non-reductivist varieties, and critics have begun to examine them, present objections and request clarifications. Since these theories are so novel and variable, they must be examined on their own merits at this point rather than being discussed *en masse*, and so the next chapter is dedicated to the

examination of a particular theory as a case study in light of the work of the first two chapters. An additional benefit to be gained from such a case study is a facilitation of increased communication between those who are primarily moral philosophers and those who are primarily scientists.

Reviewers of twentieth-century meta-ethics Darwall, Gibbard and Railton had hoped that a 'more empirically informed understanding'³¹³ would surface in meta-ethics before the end of the twentieth century. Perhaps it is too late for this now, but if enough communication lines are soon established between moral philosophy and natural science, there may be enough time for the meta-ethics of the new millenium to begin on an improved footing in this respect. As philosophers develop a clearer notion of what science *does* and *does not* permit one to say, and conversely as scientists grow in philosophical sophistication, an answer might be approached to the question of whether naturalism on the synthetic level is the proper way to view morality, or whether a different approach is in order. The next two chapters will contribute to an exploration of this issue, first with regard to a particular theory, and then more generally.

³¹³Darwall, Gibbard and Railton (1992), 189.