

## CHAPTER III

### Naturalism and Moral Realism

Moore's ethical theses in the *Principia Ethica* clearly side with realism and cognitivism in ethics at a time when the discussion and debate on them had not really started. His works on ethics triggered off skeptical doubts as well as new thoughts on the ontology and epistemology of ethics. Moore's position, receiving expression in the *Principia Ethica* is the classical argument for ethical non-naturalism. Though few nowadays are fully persuaded by his argument for it, the arguments set the course of much of twentieth century meta-ethics, and, represents, still, an important basis for skepticism against ethical naturalism. His argument remains relevant for two reasons. First, it suffices to create a burden of proof on the ethical naturalist; Moore was right to think that we can sensibly doubt whether any alleged naturalistic analysis is really a good one. But he was wrong to think that this is sufficient to show that there cannot be any such analysis. Good analysis involves an element of surprise and this means that *analysans* and *analysandum* need not be together before the mind, and need not strike us as synonymous after some reflection. This gives some kind of breathing space to the naturalist, but it does not relieve the naturalist of the argumentative burden of showing how two apparently different things - rightness and maximizing happiness, for instance are really one and the same thing. Moore's argument remains important for a second reason as well. It has been used by Moore's non-cognitivist opponents, who share his rejection of naturalism, but finds grave problems in Moore's own views. Indeed, it is possible to find in the history of the development of ethics—it's taking a linguistic turn or becoming meta-ethical approximately from the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

onwards, the unmistakable influence of Moore. However, in spite of Moore's opposition to naturalism, it is not hard to find some realists who hold that moral facts are just a kind of natural fact, discoverable by empirical inquiry. Hence, we have a version of realism which is naturalistic.

## I

Moral realists of the naturalist persuasion have offered a range of different , accounts that identify moral facts with facts that are taken to be less problematic. In identifying the moral fact with more tractable and less problematic facts, they are holding not just that what is right or wrong depends on some way on these facts; but that facts about what is right or wrong are those very facts. Naturalism as moral realism has two forms—classical and contemporary. Classical form of naturalism, to our mind, cannot be labelled as reductionistic. The reductionists say that there is no need to think that there is the additional moral kind of property and fact, over and above those certified by so called naturalistic disciplines. The moral facts are reducible to natural facts, or that moral properties should be identified with empirically discoverable natural properties of the world. While there was serious disagreement as to which features in particular were the right ones, more and more people came to think that moral thoughts and claims must be about, and true in light of the sort of natural properties that were open to empirical investigation. The main alternative to such a view was that moral properties should be identified not with empirical features of the world, but with facts about God. Assuming, as most defenders of the latter view did, that God existed identifying what was good with what pleased God or what is *right with what is* according to the will of God, they worked to ensure that a commitment to moral facts

did not introduce any new mystery. Moral matters are, on this view, plain matters of fact about God - even if often highly controversial and difficult to establish.

Whichever view one embraced, whether one identified moral facts with natural facts or with religious facts about God, the idea was that moral thought and talk was committed to properties, and facts and truths, that could just as well be expressed in non-moral terms. The classical naturalists rather hold the thesis that morality is practical. This means that if moral facts exist, they necessarily provide a reason (although perhaps not an overriding reason) for moral action to all rational beings, regardless of their desires. In treating the classical moral realism of the naturalistic kind we have thought it best to concentrate, on three major figures of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), David Hume (1711-76) and J.S. Mill (1806-1873).

**T. Hobbes(1588-1679):** In dealing with Hobbes, we shall concentrate on the *Leviathan*, mainly. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes does not think of moral philosophy in terms of the search for the human highest good, or final end.<sup>1</sup> It is, rather the discovery of connections of causes and effects “to the end to produce ... such Effects, as humane life requireth”<sup>2</sup>. Moral philosophy gives the individual rules for avoiding danger and death and live in peace. We are alive so long certain motions continue within our body. What is relevant for moral philosophy are the motions, ‘endeavors’- of appetite for desire and aversion. When we are moved to certain object we say we desire it, when we are moved away from an object, we say we are averse to it. All appetite and love are accompanied by some delight, or pleasure; all aversion and hate by some displeasure. “Whatesover is the object of any man’s appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth *good*; and the object of his hate and aversion, *evil*; and of his contempt, *vile* and *inconsiderable* to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves.”<sup>3</sup>

Hobbes is not a hedonist as he is mistakenly thought to be, and the above passage is quoted by writers on him for such a characterization. It is mistaken because pleasure and displeasure are secondary phenomena, not the primary causes of voluntary action. And in a passage near the end of *Leviathan* Hobbes explicitly criticizes those thinkers whose whole account of good and evil is determined by reference to the desire of the individual man.

“Aristotle, and other heathen philosophers, define good and evil, by the appetite of men; and well enough, as long as we consider them governed every one by his own law; for in the condition of men that have no other law but their own appetites, there can be no general rule of good, and evil actions. But in a commonwealth this measure is false; not the appetite of private men, but the law, which is the will and appetite of the state, is the measure”<sup>4</sup>

As the remark just quoted shows, he thinks the point of moral philosophy is to help us to avoid falling into a ‘state of nature’. He addresses people who are already in a society, under a sovereign. Individuals ought not to govern their actions solely by reference to their own private appetites and aversions: “This private measure of good, is a doctrine not only vain, but also pernicious to the public state.”<sup>5</sup> The force of ‘ought’ for Hobbes is elucidated in terms of factors in human nature. Although man can never be without some unsatisfied desire, nevertheless he can plan his life with a view to the attainment of felicity, i.e., to the satisfaction of the most important, at least of his wants and desires, which is possible in a commonwealth.

Hobbes’ account of the origin of moral obligation is an account of his purported move from purely individual considerations to morality. He derives moral principles

like those of justice, gratitude, equity, mercy, etc., from considerations of human nature in general and man's desires and needs in particular. A moral motive is the same as a prudential motive. Although there is no possibility on this view of any moral obligation to do something contrary to one's own interest, an individual's entering into a covenant with others for peace and security is also a transition from self-interest to morality. Thus, not only good and evil but the origins of political society are traced to man's appetites and desires. On occasions, at least, Hobbes seems to be saying that a man might regard the good of others as his own good. This does not imply that he is proposing an ethical altruism. Even if a man can be interested in the welfare of others quite independently of any regard for his own, this by itself, gives us no reason to challenge Hobbes' thesis that the all important end of human conduct - the desire for peace and security - is the basis on which moral and political philosophy must be constructed.

There are some commentators who have held that Hobbes subscribes to a divine command theory. He regards the will or command of God as that which, in the last analysis, gives authority to the laws of nature. Jonathan Kemp in his account of Hobbes' ethical naturalism says: "... it is true that he (Hobbes) frequently speaks of obedience to these laws as being commanded by God. Nevertheless, the reason why we ought to obey the laws of nature consists always, for Hobbes, in the fact that obedience to them leads to peace and disobedience to war; and no reference to God is required to show that peace is good and war evil - this has been established from the purely secular analysis of human desire and the conditions necessary to satisfy it."<sup>6</sup>

In a similar fashion, J. B. Schneewind remarks that "Discussions of religion in general and Christianity in particular occupy an important place in many of his

writings. Half of *Leviathan* is devoted to the subject. ... But his theology reinforces the power of the 'Mortal God'." <sup>7</sup>

By 'Mortal God' Hobbes means the sovereign. This humanly created deity, our mortal god decides both what is good and bad and what is to be believed about the immortal God. <sup>8</sup>

The logic of Hobbes' argument is clear. He traces peace and security, injustice and wrong doing to the desires and aversions of man. But those who are committed to the impossibility of deriving an "ought" from an "is" will find fault with Hobbes' attempted derivation of moral rules from basic facts about human nature. Let us take an example, as the following:

Men desire peace and security.

X is conducive to peace and security.

∴ You ought to do X.

Here the objection is against Hobbes' attempted derivation of an 'ought'-sentence from a set of factual propositions about human nature and in particular about human appetite and aversions. The difficulty is not mitigated even when the 'ought' is treated as a merely prudential 'ought'.

J. Kemp takes notice of this objection, and he writes that here is a logical transition from wanting something to setting oneself to obtaining it.

What distinguishes the cases in which a man's wanting something leads him to try to obtain it from those in which it does not, is not that there is some additional factor present in the former cases which is absent in the latter cases which, as it were, defeat the presumption that is normally created by the use of the word 'want'." <sup>9</sup>

Wanting to do something and doing it without further ado involves no logical gap, e.g., wanting to take an apple and taking it right then. But sometimes there is a logical gap between wanting something and putting the active effort, e.g., 'I want an apple, but I better not for it might give me indigestion'. The active effort or force is cancelled explicitly in some such way. The status of the word 'want' is not the same as descriptive of a mental state, the same as 'being affected by a recognizable state of the feelings known as desire.' 'Want' is here a logical term, not intended to convey a piece of information and stands for an imperative implying taking the steps for its fruition,<sup>10</sup> unless it is explicitly cancelled in some such way as the above. Hobbes' own account of appetites and aversions in terms of actual, though imperceptible movements towards, or away from the desired or undesired object, is only an exaggerated version of this position. "It is absurd", says Kemp, "On any account, to say of someone, 'Yes', I know he wants X, but why should he attempt, or take the steps he thinks necessary, to obtain it?; for if a man wants something, he does not need any additional motive or incentive to try to acquire it, or to take any steps he thinks necessary to its acquisition".<sup>11</sup>

What we can discern from our exposition of Hobbes' view of ethical naturalism is that it is a brand of moral realism. There are certain basic facts about human nature appetites, desires (aversions) which determine what is right or wrong, good or evil and these tend not only to the procuring but also to the assuring of a contented life.<sup>12</sup>

There can, however, be a different kind of objection to Hobbes' own views about his procedure. He thinks of himself, as applying the scientific and mathematical method to the study of man, and as achieving success in that study comparable to the success of Galileo in physics and Harvey in physiology. This was not accidental. In his works, "Hobbes' mention of such names of Copernicus, Galileo and Harvey is not an

irrelevant catalogue of achievements in a totally different field from his own. Hobbes, like them, is practicing philosophy in the contemporary wide sense of the word, and claims to be achieving a comparable success; there must therefore be some affinities or analogies between his method and theirs.”<sup>13</sup>

It has been observed that almost every naturalist agrees that naturalism involves deep respect for the methods of science above all other forms of inquiry. It has also been alleged that if we take this idea seriously then we are led fairly directly to the conclusion that naturalism could not be a substantive philosophical thesis, not to speak of the moral realism it may happen to hold or give support to. Now a factual study of man’s conduct as an individual and as a member of society could be successfully undertaken on scientific principles and by scientific method. But Hobbes’ philosophical study of man and his conduct is not primarily a factual one, though some factual statements play an important part in his argument, so one may object. This objection may be elaborated as follows:

“He is trying to prove, not merely that men do inevitably and always behave in certain ways, but that in consequence of this and other general facts about human nature and the world, men ought to do certain things, and in particular, they ought to organize themselves into societies with certain special features and certain special rules of organization.”<sup>14</sup>

If the above is true of Hobbes then it is questionable how much credence can be given to Hobbes’ reliance on the scientific method, for science had never have succeeded in establishing conclusions that went beyond the factual. Hobbes’ position, however, is somewhat different. He would say that from premises about human nature

together with scientifically ascertained facts, we can derive propositions about what people want or how they can achieve what they want. These propositions would be accepted by all rational beings when they are reflected upon and understood by them. The moral facts or truths are reduced to scientifically tested facts about human nature, identifying moral facts in non-moral terms.

## II

**Hume (1711-1776)** : Hume's naturalism is found in his *Treatise of Human Nature* and *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. On the title-page of the *Treatise*, Hume describes the work as 'being an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects.' This may lead one to compare Hume with Hobbes - trying to think of Hume as standing, in much the same relation to Newton, the chief practitioner of the 'experimental method', as Hobbes has done to Galileo; both of them take scientific theory as their model, both think that the models which have proved fruitful in explaining the behaviour of material objects, can be applied, to a greater or lesser extent, to explaining and treating of the thoughts and activities of human beings. However, it would be misleading to press the analogy with Hobbes too far. Hume, unlike Hobbes, is not trying to draw from a scientific account of human nature practical conclusions as to how men ought to act. Hume's 'naturalism' is human naturalism. Nor, like Hobbes, is his purpose in his moral writings is to deduce moral conclusions from factual premises about human nature. He is rather attempting to explain the observed facts of human nature by reducing them to a number of general principles.

One such principle is that men's ability and disposition to make moral judgements depend primarily on their passions and sentiments. Moral approval and disapproval are sentiments, not deliverances of reason. His main argument in this

regard is, reason is inert and cannot by itself produce action; but moral judgements do influence action; therefore moral judgements cannot be derived from reason. About reason's role Hume says:

Reason, in a strict and philosophical sense, can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connection of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion. <sup>15</sup>

Hume's positive account of the nature and origin of moral approval and disapproval is related by him to his general picture of the human mind as consisting of perceptions which are either ideas or impressions. Here, Hume makes great use of the concept of the association of ideas as a unifying and explanatory principle working through resemblance, or contiguity, or causation.

Of crucial importance for Hume's account of the nature of moral judgment is his use of the concept of sympathy. By this he does not mean a specific feeling or emotion but a general tendency to feel whatever emotions or passions we observe in others. When Hume came to write the *Enquiry*, he treated the existence of sympathy as a basic or unexplained fact, calling it humanity.

He says:

It is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity, or a fellow-feeling with others. It is sufficient that it is experienced to be a principle in human nature. We must stop somewhere in our examination of causes; and, there are in every science, some general principles beyond which we cannot hope to find any principle more general. <sup>16</sup>

Given that there exists in man this fundamental principle of sympathy, what is its relation to morality? In broad outline, Hume's answer is this. Because of our propensity to sympathize, we feel pleased at the idea of pleasure being caused to others than ourselves or at the idea of the interests of others being furthered, and in general to rejoice in their well-being; and we feel displeased at the idea of displeasure or harm being caused to others because of our propensity to sympathize with the displeasure or evil conditions of others, i.e., to feel displeased when they are displeased and in general to feel unhappy at their unhappiness or disadvantage.

We must give a brief outline of the manner in which Hume defends his thesis. The moral appropriateness or inappropriateness of actions is a function of the moral appropriateness or inappropriateness of motives. If we blame someone for doing a wrong action, then we are, strictly speaking, not blaming his action, but the motive that produced it. It follows, Hume maintains, "that no action can be virtuous, or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality."<sup>17</sup> Before we praise a man for his action, for keeping his promise or helping someone in distress, we require to know whether he did it in accordance with some prescribed rule of external conduct, but whether also he did it from a good and virtuous motive. We may note in this connection that Hume's writing seems to suggest at least two different concepts of 'motive', that of cause and that of reason. He sometimes thinks of the motive as a cause, i.e., as an independently existing event which functions as the cause of another independently existing event, namely, the action in question, in the same sense in which a feeling of fear causes a man to run away. But he sometimes thinks of motive as a reason, i.e., as a factor which a man can rationally take account of when he is deliberating whether to do an action or not.

Hume explains the principles of justice on the same principle of sympathy that mediates transition from self-interest to morality. I object to another man's breach of a rule of justice, even where it does not injure me through sympathy at the injury done to the man who is unjustly treated, even if he is not related to me in any way. Though "... *self-interest is the original motive to the establishment of justice: but sympathy with public interest is the source of the moral approbation, which attends that virtue.*"<sup>18</sup> Hume concludes that sympathy is the source of the regard we pay to the artificial virtues like justice, property, right and obligation as well the natural virtues like generosity, wit and eloquence, good humour etc.

Let us now come to Hume's views on 'is' and 'ought'. Hume is often represented as pointing out the illegitimacy of passing from statements of fact about human nature to judgements of morality. In a famous passage in the *Treatise*<sup>19</sup>, he complains how writers on moral philosophy proceed, without explanation, to pass from propositions containing 'is' and 'is not' to propositions with 'ought' or 'ought not'. This *ought* or *ought not*, expresses some new relation and some explanation should be given as to how this new relation is a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. Such observations of Hume have made philosophers like Hare to equate him as an anti-naturalist, on the same scale as G.E. Moore. Hare refers to Hume's celebrated observation "on the impossibility of deducing an 'ought'-proposition from a series of 'is'-propositions—an observation which, as he rightly says, 'would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality', and not only those which had already appeared in his day'."<sup>20</sup>

Now, Hume indeed says that no deduction from 'is' to an 'ought' is possible. However, he produces no argument to show that it is *impossible*. He, therefore, in our

observation, cannot be regarded as a serious anti-naturalist. As has been pointed out by Jonathan Kemp, the passage in the *Treatise* (which we have summarized above) "... follows immediately on a section of argument in which Hume has been stressing his point that moral distinctions are derived from sentiment, not from reason; morality is for Hume, as much as it is for any modern 'naturalist', rooted in the facts of human nature, even if 'ought'-judgments cannot be deduced, or derived in any other straightforward logical manner, from 'is'- judgements."<sup>21</sup> Kemp also notes that Hume sometimes "speaks, as if he intends to solve the logical problem by *denying* the contrast between questions of fact and question of morality altogether, and consequently removing the *appearance* of a logical gap ..."<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, what is of importance to us, is Hume's assertion that moral judgements simply are factual judgements, they are judgements of facts about the mind or sentiment of the person who is making the judgement. He says:

When you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature, you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind.<sup>23</sup>

Hume's problem has been to explain, in terms of an account of the nature and origin of human sentiments and passions, both how men come to make moral judgments in general, and how they come to make the particular moral judgments which they do make, e.g., "Breaking promises is wrong" and "John acted wrongly in breaking his promise", respectively. His attempt to solve the problem does derive an

'ought' from an 'is', in the sense that it sets to explain judgments of praise and blame through certain features of the human nature, and the human situation. But the process of explanation, to our mind, is different from the strict deduction of an 'ought' from an 'is'. It is not a strict relationship of entailment where p strictly implies q is equivalent in meaning to it is not the case that p is true and q is false. He does not seem to be saying that the facts of human nature are such and such; therefore, men ought to behave in such and such a way. He seems rather to be saying, the facts about human nature are such and such, and these facts explain why they behave in certain ways.

Hume is trying to explain the phenomena of morality. He is not proposing a normative theory of obligation and value - what actions we ought to do and what things we ought to value. He is a descriptive moralist. He is also a naturalist, not because he is trying to deduce 'ought'- propositions from 'is'- propositions which attracts the criticism of committing the naturalistic fallacy. He is simply trying to find the key to the description and explanation of moral judgments men actually make in concrete situations of life, in the basic facts of human nature.

These facts are not metaphysical entities, nor are they to be found in the supernatural realms of theology, or in *a priori* categories of reason, but within man's bosom.

### III

**J.S.Mill (1806-1873):** John Stuart Mill is another philosopher who claims to derive moral conclusions from premises that are non-normative and hence non-moral. The core thesis he is trying to defend is the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness. The formulation of the principle and its proof is the central task of Mill's moral

philosophy. Mill's formulation of the greatest happiness principle can be divided into two assertions:

(A) The good is that which in any given case produces the greatest possible amount of happiness, and

(B) This happiness is not the happiness of a single individual, but that of the greatest number of individuals.

Let us first look to the actual relationships between these components of the Principle of Utilitarianism and the sources from which they derive.

(A 1) The only proof capable of given that an object is visible, is that people actually see it, ... In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people actually desire it. If the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not, in theory and in practice, acknowledged to be an end, nothing would ever convince any person that it was so.<sup>24</sup>

Mill has suggested earlier in *Utilitarianism*<sup>25</sup> that the first principles both of science and ethics, are incapable of the type of proof which governs subordinate principles. What does (A 1) then prove? It does not assert (as Moore thought it did and thereby thought that Mill was ignorant of the difference between the 'is' of visible and the 'ought' of desirable)<sup>26</sup>, that whatever is desired is desirable. It maintains the converse of the 'A' proposition, namely, that all desirable things are desired, but as a criterion for determining what is desirable. The analogy to 'visible' and 'seen' simply makes the point that if we wish to ascertain whether something visible is,, whatever else we do, we must find out whether any one has seen it.. Mill does not offer this as a

definition of 'visible' (although it might be used in such a definition). It is rather the statement of a necessary condition for judging something to be visible. In the same way, Mill claims the fact that something is desired as a condition for our recognizing it as desirable.

Mill's argument has begun before this statement, and one of his earlier commitments in particular may be relevant to it. He asserts, "... if no happiness is to be had at all by all human beings, the attainment of it cannot be the end of morality or of a rational conduct."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Mill has already indicated by the time that he 'proves' the Utilitarian Principle that for something to be regarded as good, it must be *possible* of achievement; 'ought', in other words, implies 'can'. And in discussing what is desirable, he no more than follows the consequences of this point: How do we determine whether something ought to be the case? We first see whether it *can* be the case for, unless it *can* be, it is meaningless to impose it as an obligation. And the most pertinent method of determining what *can* be is surely to see what *is* the case. This is precisely Mill's concern in the passage cited under (A1) about the desirable. Mill appears to be saying that in establishing normative principles we must first examine what *can* direct our actions. Unless we take account of this, whatever we say about what we ought to do remains unclear.

However, knowing that something is to be desired is not sufficient proof for Mill, that it is desirable. But it indicates the direction from which knowledge of the desired must come, and only looking at this direction does Mill urge his conclusion that happiness is desirable. To justify the 'greatest happiness principle' Mill must also show that happiness is the only thing desired. So long as this is not shown to be the case, happiness is one of a number of 'desirables'— and we have no means of discriminating

among them. On the other hand, if “human nature is so constituted as to desire nothing which is not either part of happiness or a means of happiness,”<sup>28</sup> then of happiness and of happiness alone do we have adequate evidence that it is desirable. We may note here a parallel to Aristotle’s argument<sup>29</sup> that one cannot deliberate about whether happiness as the end is desirable for it is an end which men by nature *do* desire. At the least one could say that it would be ‘logically odd’ to ask if one ought to desire that which one has no alternative but to desire.

There is another argument which is usually taken to be Mill’s attempt to prove the second part of the utilitarian principle which holds that the good is not a function of individual happiness but of the happiness of the greatest number of people.

(B1) No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness. This, however, being a fact, we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but all which it is possible to require, that happiness is a good: that each person’s happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons.<sup>30</sup>

This statement immediately follows (A1) in the text, and because of this juxtaposition, Mill’s critics generally understand (B1) to mean that ‘each person’s’ happiness is desired by the aggregate of persons. If this is the only possible interpretation then Mill is committing an elementary mistake. But that it is not the only interpretation is clear from Mill’s own words to support the claim that it is not the correct one. Mill is not extending the scope of the utilitarian principle but that he is

consolidating what he has said previously about the relationship between the desired and desirable.

Mill's ethics is naturalistic in his appeal to the natural (not non-natural or supernatural) facts which can be ascertained by scientific investigation (not by intuition or revelation), but his is not a meaning analyst's of a descriptivist variety. His is an argument based on logically contingent facts to support his recommendation that happiness should be the end of conduct. It is misleading to say that Mill provides a meaning analysis of the concept of 'desirable' - an analytic unpacking of what we *mean* by claiming that something is truly worthy of desire.

Mill, looking back from "the present condition of human knowledge" to "the dawn of philosophy" is forcibly impressed with "the little progress which has been made in the decision of the controversy respecting the criterion of right or wrong" And so, in response to the challenge of presenting "a test of right or wrong"<sup>31</sup> he sets out to provide a standard which is "if not always easy, at all events a tangible and intelligible, mode of deciding ... differences."<sup>32</sup> Mill is not concerned with the intention of the speaker, of what the hearer takes the speaker to intend, or whether the typical function of such statements as "This is a good" is evaluative; all these are obvious in the context of the problem Mill had set himself, that of providing a "tangible and intelligible ... test of right or wrong."<sup>33</sup> Given this problem, what is demanded of philosophical analysis is some account of the evaluative judgments. And this is precisely what is supplied by the Principle of Utility; if it can give "consideration ... capable of determining the intellect" to accept the principle that "the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all things are desirable ... is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain and as rich as possible in enjoyments ...,"<sup>34</sup> then we shall know meaning of moral

judgments in the sense of referent (pleasure and pain in the “whole sentient creation”) and meaning in the sense of reasons, that is, that the action in question leads or does not lead to an “existence exempt as far as possible from pain and as rich as possible in enjoyment.”<sup>35</sup> If this is what Mill intends by his principle, it is mistaken to accuse him of a fallacy on the ground that his analysis does not do what he never intends to do.

Apart from the valuational thesis, Mill maintains a prominent empiricist position in moral epistemology linked to utilitarianism. The epistemological claim is a consequentialist thesis, since it characterizes the rightness of actions in terms of their consequences. Since, on Mill’s view, a combination of common sense and scientific procedures can identify these utility-maximizing acts, moral judgments are in principle knowable roughly in the same way as the common-sense and scientific proposition that ground them. The epistemological question for Mill is that how do we know that pleasure- or anything else – is intrinsically good? Mill’s answer is utilitarian. But the utilitarian approach is by no means committed either to that epistemic license to move from the natural to the normative (a move that many philosophers and commentators on Mill find unwarranted) or to hedonism. For instance, it might be argued that the intrinsically good is what people would want in the light of reflection that is logically and scientifically rational, vivid and apparently focused on the nature of what is wanted.<sup>36</sup> Richard Brandt has given an account of the view that goodness is to be determined by saying what one would desire given adequate information and reflection.<sup>37</sup>

#### IV

We may now turn to some modern moral realists of naturalistic persuasion. Such a position is characteristic of the moral realists like David Brink.<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Sturgeon<sup>39</sup>,

Richard Boyd<sup>40</sup> and others. They are called the Cornell realists. What these realists have done is to concentrate upon the semantic features of moral expressions - terms and utterances, taking advantage of the modern researches on semantics. They claim that moral properties are constituted by descriptive properties, but moral terms do not mean the same as any non-moral terms. In saying this they lead away from the reductionist picture of the ethical, and thus do not fall prey to Moore's open question argument or the fallacy of naturalistic definition. The positions and arguments developed by the realists, particularly by Sturgeon and Boyd are tricky and technical. The statement of the position has been more clearly stated by David Brink. He presents a constitution view of moral realism from the naturalistic perspective.

Brink has discussed this problem in exhaustive detail. He claims that moral properties are constituted by descriptive properties, but moral terms do not mean the same as any non-moral terms. We know that according to the ethical naturalist, moral facts are nothing more than facts about the natural, psychological, social world. In his gloss on this claim, Brink makes a distinction between the 'is' of identity and the 'is' of constitution. For, when it is said that moral facts are natural, scientific facts, the 'are' can be understood to represent the identity sense or the sense of constitution. Understood as an identity claim, moral facts are identical with natural, psychological, social scientific facts without residue. It implies that moral properties and natural properties are necessarily identical. Naturalistic identity claims should be construed on the model of other identity claims, such as water = H<sub>2</sub>O, Temperature = mean common molecular energy, light = Electromagnetic radiation, etc<sup>41</sup>. Identity implies constitution, but not *vice versa*. If moral properties are identical with natural properties, they are

constituted by natural properties. But, moral properties can be constituted by natural properties without being identical with them.

For example, a table is constituted by a particular arrangement of microphysical particles, but is not identical with that arrangement, for the table can withstand certain changes in its particles or their arrangements, as when the table top made of wood is replaced by a marble top. Similarly, moral properties are constituted by, but not identical with natural properties; moral properties can be and could have been realized by properties not studied by the natural or social sciences<sup>42</sup>.

Brink offers another argument in favour of the no-identity theory. He utilizes the type token distinction which has been much in vogue in the current epistemological theories. A moral property type, injustice, may have many particular instances or tokens of injustice which are actually realizable in certain social and economic conditions. They could have been realized by a variety of somewhat different configurations of social and economic property and property instances (tokens). This possibility of multiple realizability of moral properties provides us with a reason for resisting the identification of moral and natural properties.<sup>43</sup> One point more for clarification. The multiple realizability of moral properties by an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of sets of natural properties may incorporate disjunctive properties. And we cannot speak of any identity relation between relata that are capable of disjunctions. Brink comes to hold that it is reasonable to construe ethical naturalism as a claim about the constitution rather than the identity of moral facts and natural properties. In his words:

Moral facts and properties, so construed, are constituted, composed, or realized by organized combinations of natural and social scientific facts and properties. The former are, then, in a certain sense, nothing over and above the latter. This naturalist claim should be understood on the model of other claims: for instance, tables are constituted by certain combinations of microphysical particles, large scale social events such as wars and elections are constituted by enormously complex combinations of smaller scale social events and processes, biological processes such as photosynthesis are composed of physical events causally and temporally related in certain ways.<sup>44</sup>

In this view, the property of being water is necessarily constituted by the property of being H<sub>2</sub>O, even though the term 'water' does not have the same linguistic meaning as 'H<sub>2</sub>O', so it is analytically possible for something to be water without being H<sub>2</sub>O. If moral properties are similarly constituted by non-moral properties, then it is not surprising that moral properties and non-moral properties co-vary in this way. Moral properties are not identical to natural ones; moral properties are not natural properties; but moral properties are realized by instantiations of natural properties. At least in worlds relevantly close to ours, there would be no moral life without the natural stuff that constitutes it. There are three important features of this type of non-reductionist approach (1) It captures our conviction about the non-identity of moral and natural properties; (2) it is not ontologically bizarre or extravagant; (3) it emphasizes a supervenient relation that obtains between the moral and the physical. Let us explain them.

1. Moral rightness might be constituted by maximizing happiness, which means that maximization of happiness in some contexts is sufficient to realize moral rightness. But rightness would not be identified with maximizing happiness or any other descriptive property we choose. But why? Three reasons can be adduced for it. First, maximization of happiness may, in other contexts, be insufficient to yield rightness. Second, even if it were invariably sufficient to yield rightness, there might be other ways to make an action right. Third, even if happiness were invariably necessary and sufficient for rightness, this might indicate only necessary co-extensiveness, as opposed to identity. So, maximizing happiness is not the very same thing, in every imaginable context, as moral rightness.

2. The neo-naturalists or non-reductivist naturalists say that moral facts supervene on descriptive facts. What we want to know is what relation, precisely, do moral facts bear to these descriptive facts on which they supervene? Suppose a person donates generously to the Helpage India so that she has to forego many things she wanted to have. She does so because she is impressed by the services of this organization to society. And she has given anonymously without any desire to be recognized. These facts about that person's generosity constitute her generosity. If they do not, we have no plausible clue to what else could have. If we remove all these natural features we have no explanation at all of the nature of her generosity. We have to bring back the same set of natural properties or replace it by another set.

3. The relationship of supervenience between the moral and the non-moral is that the non-moral feature fixes the moral status of the moral. We venture to say that supervenience is, in a way, explanatory. It is not a relation of logical entailment. A thing's moral status cannot change without some correlative change in its non-moral

feature because these facts realize the moral property in question. Just as facts about a chalk – whether it will write well or not, whether it is too much brittle, are fixed by the material constitution of the chalk at that time, so moral facts are fixed by their descriptive constituents. A chalk's length or weight may at other times be realized differently. So too the admirability of an action be realized differently by different persons at other times by different sets of descriptive facts, but at any given time and occasion, the moral features are fixed by descriptive ones that compose them at the time. This is the relevant constitution relation.

The existence of supervenience is not available to the classical naturalists. Supervenience is introduced to relate *distinct* properties. But these naturalists insist that for any moral property, at a given time, there is just a single descriptive property that realizes it, that property being identical to the moral one. Now, the claims of property constitution envisaged by to-day's naturalists might run into problems, but that is a separate issue.

Yet another explanation of supervenience comes from the Canberra moral realists like Philip Pettit<sup>45</sup> and Frank Jackson.<sup>46</sup> They see supervenience as a truism which determines the meaning of moral terms. What makes supervenience a truism is the function of moral terms in language: "It is part of our very understanding of ethical vocabulary that we use it to mark distinctions among the descriptive ways things are."<sup>47</sup> We cannot classify actions as morally right or wrong in the way that we do if there were no descriptive differences between acts that are morally right and those that are morally wrong. Moreover, we could not follow moral advice if we could not distinguish those acts that follow from the advice and those that do not. We could not punish the offender and avoid punishing the innocent if the terms 'wrong' and

'innocent' are not tied to different descriptive classes. Unless there are certain non-moral properties that underlie moral properties, the very purpose of moral language would be frustrated. This is how supervenience is understood as an analytical truism for modern moral realists of a naturalistic persuasion.

We have presented here a very stark and bare outline of contemporary moral-realists who write from within a naturalistic framework. We have avoided the logical technicalities for simplicity's sake and stuck to the basic points without impairment to the main contention. If it is pointed out that the explanation of supervenience is vague or mysterious, then we have to say that it cannot be more precisely stated at this stage and for this reason some degree of vagueness will be there in our analysis in spite of our best efforts.

## V

Other philosophically sophisticated forms of naturalism are also proposed by several philosophers including Richard Brandt, Michael Smith and Peter Railton. They say that moral terms are best understood as referring to the preferences or desires that a person would have under certain idealized conditions. Among these conditions are those that the person be calm and reflective that he have complete knowledge of all the relevant facts and that he vividly appreciates the consequences of his actions for himself and for others. In *A Theory of the Good and the Right*,<sup>48</sup> Brandt went so far as to include in his idealized conditions and requirements that the person be motivated only by 'rational desires' – that is, by the desires that he would have after undergoing a cognitive probing that enables people to understand their desires and to rid themselves of those which they do not want to keep. He is, in effect, recommending a kind of moral psychotherapy. Brandt's form of naturalism has this connection with moral realism that

it leads to an objectivist view of moral judgements and perhaps of moral beliefs too, whether a moral judgement is true, according to Brandt, depends on what rules would a rational person desire to be included under the idealized conditions that all rational people could support.

In *The Moral Problem*<sup>49</sup> and subsequent essays, Michael Smith argues that, among the desires that would be retained under idealized conditions, those that deserve the label moral must express the values of equal concern and respect for others.

Peter Railton<sup>50</sup> added that such desires must also express impartiality. All these philosophers speaks of human desires in idealized conditions under which the moral codes are formulated and also suggests that the idealized conditions would be strong enough to lead everyone, no matter what desires he starts from to endorse the same moral judgement. This idealized moral code would be legitimized by the Kantian idea of universalizability, and is supposed to represent a sort of objectivism in ethics.

Whether such models are ultimately plausible is a matter of debate. But they do specify a standpoint that yields moral truth. At least there is an attempt to prescribe situation in which truth is no one's making, and dissents regarding truths are overcome.

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