



A NATURALISTIC GROUNDWORK

A thesis submitted for the Degree of
Master of Arts.

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S U M M A R Y

- CHAPTER I: The aim of this thesis is to present a groundwork for a naturalistic theory of ethics. An indication is given for what would count as a naturalistic theory. A naturalistic theory is distinguished from a descriptivist theory : the former but not the latter must be an objectivist theory of morality. Two major forms of naturalism are distinguished: a 'definist' theory and an 'account' theory. The former is concerned with the meaning of words and the latter is concerned with property identity.
- CHAPTER II: Restricting our attention to definist theories we distinguish three formulations of naturalism. Of particular interest is a formulation presented by Warnock which supposedly is consistent with the 'independence'-thesis. We distinguish between an I/M theory and an N/M theory and argue that a naturalist must at least present an I/M theory. It is then argued that either Warnock's theory is consistent with the 'independence'-thesis and does not satisfy the criterion for an adequate naturalistic theory, or it is not consistent with the 'independence'-thesis and is indistinguishable from traditional definist theories.

CHAPTER III: Naturalism is supposedly misconcieved because it attempts to bridge the fact/value gap. It is arguable that any such gap exists. As is pointed out, the arguments which attempt to show that there is a fact/value gap seem to presuppose that gap or at least require some prior means of distinguishing between fact and value. I attempt to show that the implicit 'prior means' in modern meta-ethical theory involves an appeal to a false empiricist epistemology and theory of meaning.

CHAPTER IV: A counter-example is presented to Hume's Law (no 'ought' from an 'is'). An explication and defence of Searle's attempt to derive an 'ought' from an 'is' is given. However, it is argued that even if Searle's derivation goes through this does not show that morality is objective. That is, Searle's derivation may show that descriptivism is true but it has not shown that naturalism is true.

CHAPTER V: One of the principal arguments, the Argument from Motivation, that is addressed against naturalism is considered. Two major formulations of this argument are distinguished. Of the psychological argument it is argued that a) its premises are dubious, b) in its most plausible version it is invalid, and c) that even if it were valid it would

not show that a definist theory is false. Of the meta-linguistic argument it is argued that a) its premises are dubious, and b) that even if the argument were sound this would not show that an account theory is false.

CHAPTER VI:

The second of the principal arguments, the Open Question Argument, that is addressed against naturalism is considered. It is argued that this argument seen as an argument about the meaning of words either begs the question or at best pushes the dispute back a step without doing anything to settle the issue. But even if the argument showed that definist theories are false this would not show that account theories are false because there are contingent property identity statements. Whether an account theory is a plausible theory is then considered. It is argued that account theories are plausible but their establishment depends on the making of vast generalizations about human beings and their predicament.

S T A T E M E N T

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

LANNING/SOWDEN.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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