Philosophical Meditations
Print ISSN: 2228-5253 Online ISSN: 2588-3615
University Zanjan

Beyond the 'Is-Ought' Divide: Naturalistic Solutions to Hume's Conundrum with Special Reference to John Searle

Suvodeep Mukherjee [1]

1. Assistant Professor of Philosophy in W.B.E.S,Chunaram Gobinda Memorial Govt. College, Purulia, West Bengal, India.(Former GGDC Manbazar-II) & Ph.D. Research Scholar, Presidency University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Email: suvodeephilo@yahoo.com

Article Info:

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:

Received:
13 January 2025
Received in revised form:
10 March 2025
Accepted:
15 April 2025
Published online:
15 July 2025

Keywords:

Hume's Guillotine, Is-Ought Problem, Naturalism, Moral Philosophy, John Searle

Abstract: This paper undertakes a comprehensive examination of Hume's Guillotine, a perennial problem in moral philosophy first identified by David Hume. The central objective of this inquiry is to explore potential solutions to this conundrum, grounded in a naturalistic framework. The paper is divided into four sections. The paper provides an overview of general naturalistic claims in ethics, establishing the foundational context for the subsequent discussion, delves into the 'is-ought' problem, a fundamental challenge in moral philosophy, and examines Hume's perspective on this issue & presents a critical analysis of various naturalistic approaches to addressing the 'is-ought' problem, with a focus on their strengths and limitations. The paper concludes with a synthesis of the key findings, offering a philosophical reflection on the implications of naturalistic solutions to Hume's Guillotine with special reference to John Searle.

Cite this article: Mukherjee. S (2025). Beyond the 'Is-Ought' Divide: Naturalistic Solutions to Hume's Conundrum with Special Reference to John Searle, Philosophical Meditations, 15(Special issue: 34),107-126. https://doi.org/10.30470/phm.2025.726792

Publisher: University of Zanjan.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.30470/phm.2025.726792

Homepage: phm.znu.ac.ir

Introduction:

Ethics revolves around moral obligations and values, focusing on distinctions between good and bad, right, and wrong. At its core, ethics seeks to answer the question, 'what ought to be?' This inquiry into the nature of ethical judgment and the derivation of moral obligations is central to ethical debates. A key philosophical challenge in ethics is determining whether moral values can be empirically verified. Moral naturalism posits that moral values can be acquired through human experience and defined in terms of natural language, enabling the formulation of ethical language based on reality . Jacques Maritain says –

> "The genuine concept of Natural Law is the concept of a law which is natural... insofar as it is naturally known, that is, known through inclination or connaturality, not through conceptual knowledge … human nature is grasped by the intellect as good; what is dissonant, as bad."[1]

Proponents of natural law theory assert that moral knowledge is attainable through practical reason. They argue that ethical decisions should be guided by situational context, rather than rigid universal principles. As Peter Knauer notes, this approach prioritizes context-specific reasoning over absolute presuppositions.

> "I plead for a kind of objective relativism in ethics. I think that there are no prefabricated judgments which can be made, but that the judgment of conscience depends on what a particular event is in reality. … it requires examination."[2]

1 Maritain, Jacques. Natural Law: Reflections on Theory and Practice. Edited by William Sweet, St. Augustine Press, 2001. Original publication 1943, pp. 20.

2 Knauer, Peter. "The Principle of Double Effect." Readings in Moral Theology No. 1, edited by Charles Curran and Richard McCormick, Paulist Press, 1979, pp. 27-28.

A fundamental aspect of natural law in morality is the inherent connection between human nature and moral obligations. Humans possess an innate capacity to discern right from wrong and determine appropriate actions in specific situations. Furthermore, humans naturally strive for flourishing and eschew its opposite. This discussion leads us to the concept of ethical naturalism. To proceed, it is essential to define ethical naturalism, understand its implications for ethics, and explore its relationship with natural law theory. Addressing these questions will provide insight into the naturalistic approach to ethics Ethical naturalism is a meta-ethical approach that explores the role of nature in understanding moral domains. This theory posits that all phenomena, including moral obligations and values, can be explained within the realm of nature. As a meta-ethical theory, ethical naturalism provides a foundation for justifying various moral standards and theories.

In this context, 'nature' refers to the empirical and phenomenal world, which can be scientifically explained and empirically verified. Ethical naturalism asserts that moral values and obligations can be understood through natural facts, eliminating the need for supernatural entities such as God, the self, or intuition. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of moral reality without relying on non-natural or supernatural concepts. Ethical naturalism posits that human actions can be evaluated as good or bad, right, or wrong, and just or unjust based on natural properties and empirical experiences. Moral value claims can be derived from natural facts through psychological or physical explanations. For instance, an action that yields happiness or pleasure can be deemed 'right' because happiness is a natural, internally experienced

phenomenon. This illustrates how ethical naturalism justifies moral notions through empirical, naturalistic criteria.

It can be said in the following manner:

Action X gives pleasure and action Y gives pain to human beings.

So, one ought to do X instead of Y

Because human nature wants pleasure and to avoid pain.

Moral naturalists argue that value claims, such as 'ought' statements, can be justified by natural facts, namely pleasure and pain, which are psychologically experienced by the agent. This perspective posits that acts yielding happiness or pleasure are deemed good, while those causing pain are considered bad. Utilitarianism, a normative moral theory, exemplifies a naturalistic approach. It adheres to the principle of maximum utility for the greatest number, where utility is understood through human experience. This theory determines moral obligations, such as charitable giving, based on empirical verification of utility. Similarly, ethical egoism can be explained and justified through naturalistic explanations, which primarily focus on fundamental human nature characteristics.

Let us proceed to another illustrative example for further examination.

Suppose,

An action 'A' – is 'Buying a jute bag rather than buying a plastic bag.'

Though, I have sufficient plastic bags at my home.

And those bags are in good condition to use.

Now if I do act 'A'

This prompts the questions: What motivated this action, and why was it taken despite having sufficient bags? In response, moral justifications can be offered, such as

The act I have done is right because

I felt it could motivate the jute maker,

it could help him or her financially,

and it is also environmentally friendly.

Consider the action of purchasing a jute bag despite having sufficient plastic bags at home. Justification for this action may include motivating the jute maker, providing financial support, and promoting environmental sustainability. The justification for this action appears to be grounded in naturalistic principles. The claim that the action motivates the jute maker can be psychologically verified, while the financial support provided can be empirically confirmed. From a naturalistic perspective, an act that offers psychological motivation and material financial support can be deemed morally justified and the right course of action. Ethical naturalists contend that moral actions can be objectively evaluated as true or false, based on natural facts. This perspective aligns with moral realism, which posits that moral facts exist independently of individual perceptions.

Naturalists determine the truth value of moral judgments through empirical evidence and rational reasoning. The core of naturalism lies in its method, which relies on empirical facts and a reason-based approach. Three key factors characterize naturalism: its focus on worldly truth, its empirical and evidence-based method, and its reliance on consequences to determine outcomes. Naturalistic morality seeks to justify moral principles and judgments through practical utility and consequences, rather than abstract moral essences. This approach emphasizes empirical investigation, relevant facts, and practical sense, rejecting religious ignorance, authority, and presuppositions. Naturalists also eschew conventional morality, intellectual ethics, and universal principles, instead stressing the importance of situational context in moral decision-making.

David Hume's ethical approach is characterized as naturalistic,

as he explains moral positions within social groups through approval or disapproval feelings. This perspective enables a descriptive and normative scientific understanding of ethics. According to Hume, morality involves investigating the approval or disapproval of customs and feelings within social groups, considering historical, anthropological, and psychological factors. This implies that an act is deemed good if a social group approves of it. Many contemporary moral naturalists adopt an evolutionary approach to ethical justification, emphasizing the role of natural law in human daily life. This perspective aims to make ethics a practical and applicable subject by promoting wise and responsible decision-making. However, the question remains: how can we justify our actions as wise and responsible?

> "The obvious answer to this question would seem to be: the wise act, the wise life, is the act or life that brings about the good rather than the evil. So at least thinks the naturalist. … the "worthwhile," the empirically and rationally justifiable life: the life that results in "good" rather than in "evil." Almost necessarily, almost as the logical consequence of his naturalistic aim and method, his ethical principle will be eudemonistic or utilitarian: it will see the character of the deed and of the life in the kind of consequences which they produce."[1]

Moral naturalism encompasses a philosophical account of morality grounded in scientific inquiry. Emulating the centuries-long development of science, moral naturalism employs empirical methods and factual evidence to investigate moral phenomena. This

1 Bisset, Pratt James. Naturalism. Yale University Press, 1939, p. 156.

perspective asserts that all existent entities are part of the natural world. Consequently, moral naturalists adopt an epistemological stance that emphasizes experimental and empirical methods as the criterion for knowledge.

Having examined the fundamental claims of ethical naturalism, including its approaches, methods, and standpoints, we now turn to its problems and implications. Specifically, we will address the 'is-ought problem' in morality, a challenge first posed by philosopher David Hume.

David Hume in his work *A Treatise of Human Nature* states:

> "…in every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes 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. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from the others, which are entirely different from it."[1]

Natural law theories and natural ethics face numerous challenges, with one fundamental issue being the 'is-ought problem,' also known as

1 Hume, David. A Treatise of Human Nature. Prometheus Books, 1992, p. 469.

Hume's Guillotine. This problem, posed by David Hume, asserts that moral values cannot be derived from empirical facts, as 'is' statements (factual claims) cannot logically lead to 'ought' conclusions (moral claims). This issue arises when attempting to extract values from facts, resulting in fallacious argumentation. To recap, moral naturalism posits that moral values can be reduced to natural facts without altering their meaning, implying that values can be understood in terms of natural phenomena.

The 'is-ought problem' poses a significant challenge in moral thought, particularly in natural moral decision-making. To illustrate this issue, consider the claim that 'terrorism is bad and morally unjustifiable.' The question arises: how do we arrive at such a moral conclusion? A naturalist might justify this claim by citing the empirical consequences of terrorism, such as death, property loss, economic crisis, and disease. However, this raises further questions: What is the basis for concluding that these consequences make terrorism morally bad? Can moral claims be extracted from empirical facts? Ethical naturalists would argue that moral value judgments can be understood in terms of natural or empirical facts. Nevertheless, the question remains: what transforms natural phenomena into moral phenomena, and what makes them morally bad?

Let us reexamine the previous point from a different perspective. Consider the following scenario: if an individual, Ashim (A), engages in terrorism (T), resulting in the destruction of natural properties (D), one may infer a moral phenomenon (N), specifically a moral 'ought' claim. The argumentation can be summarized as follows: if Ashim commits an act of terrorism that causes harm to natural properties, it can be concluded that Ashim ought not to have done so, as it is morally wrong. However, this raises a

fundamental question: what confers moral wrongness upon the act of terrorism, and what renders Ashim morally culpable? In essence, what imbues terrorism with moral significance?

Ethical naturalists propose a solution to the problem, grounded in naturalistic justification. From their perspective:

Suffering, death, loss of property, economic crisis, and disease are considered natural facts.

Good, bad, right, and wrong are deemed moral claims.

Moral facts are equated with natural facts.

For naturalists, facts and values are interconnected, with one informing the other. However, this raises a fundamental issue: how do natural facts become equivalent to moral facts? How can moral assumptions be derived from empirical facts? To illustrate this challenge, consider the utilitarian approach in normative ethics, which can be seen as a naturalistic approach. Utilitarianism posits that an act is good if it maximizes utility for the greatest number. For instance, providing financial support to impoverished individuals is considered a good act within this framework. In this context, providing financial support is a natural property, whereas deeming it a 'good act' constitutes a moral claim. The challenge lies in establishing the equivalence between the natural property of financial support and the moral value of goodness. This is precisely where philosopher David Hume's objection, known as Hume's Guillotine, comes into play. Hume's Guillotine poses the problem of deriving 'ought' statements (moral obligations) from 'is' statements (factual descriptions), highlighting the difficulty of transitioning from descriptive claims to prescriptive moral judgments. David Hume observes that in every moral system he has encountered, authors initially employ ordinary reasoning,

establishing facts about God or human affairs. However, they abruptly shift to using 'ought' and 'ought not' statements without explanation. Hume argues that this transition is imperceptible yet crucial, as 'ought' statements introduce new relations or affirmations that require explanation. He notes that authors rarely provide reasons for how these new relations are deduced from entirely different premises. Hume recommends that readers be cautious of this oversight, suggesting that it would undermine common moral systems and reveal that the distinction between vice and virtue is not solely based on objective relations or reason[1]

Let us examine the problem more closely through analysis. Consider the example: 'Stealing is wrong because it harms others by taking their assets, so we ought not to steal.' Here, 'stealing is wrong' and 'we ought not to steal' constitute value claims, whereas 'taking assets' is a natural fact. According to David Hume, the 'is' claim pertains to natural facts, which can be empirically observed, whereas the 'ought' claim belongs to the realm of moral values, which are non-natural and cannot be empirically observed. Hume argues that it is impossible to derive an 'ought' conclusion from 'is' premises.

To illustrate this point, consider the case of X, a thief who steals something that does not belong to him. If someone infers that X's actions are wrong based on the fact that X stole, the inferential claim is an 'is-ought' claim. However, Hume identifies a gap between the 'is' claim (stealing) and the 'ought' claim (morally wrong). This gap represents the fundamental problem of transitioning from natural facts to moral values.

Hume's argument emphasizes the distinction between the

1 Hume, David. "A Treatise of Human Nature." Ethics: Selections from Classical and Contemporary Writers, edited by Oliver A. Johnson and Andrews Reath, Thompson Publishing, 2004, p. 185.

world of natural facts and the domain of moral values and judgments. These two realms are inherently different, and one cannot be derived from or justified by the other.

Factual claim: X acts in stealing

Value claim: ∴ acts of X is wrong

The issue at hand is how we arrive at the conclusion that X's act of stealing is wrong. This is the quintessential 'is-ought' problem. Typically, the statement 'stealing is wrong' is considered an ethical value claim in everyday life. However, according to David Hume, this claim is not a factual judgment but rather a value judgment. This distinction has created a profound problem, not only in naturalistic ethics but also in the moral domain as a whole. It raises fundamental questions about the interpretation and attitude towards ethics, necessitating a more in-depth discussion.

Regarding the meaning and justification of moral values, naturalists invoke objective criteria. In this sense, naturalists are also considered realists, as they explain moral values like good, bad, right, and wrong by objectifying the world of experience.

For instance, naturalists argue that killing is bad and helping is right because killing causes pain and loss of life, whereas helping brings pleasure or happiness. Pain, happiness, and other such phenomena are considered natural and empirically verifiable. However, Hume disputes this claim, asserting that there is no logical connection between the act of killing and the moral claim that it is bad. This raises the question: how do we arrive at 'ought' claims?

From a naturalistic perspective, the approach would be based on ethical realism or moral objectivism. Nevertheless, Hume considers naturalistic ethical claims to be false,

emphasizing that there are categorical differences between moral claims and natural facts. As a result, Hume argues that a logical connection between natural facts and moral values cannot be established, as they are fundamentally different in nature. To understand Hume's position, it is essential to examine his classification of propositions, known as Hume's Fork.

David Hume categorizes propositions into two types: synthetic and analytic. Synthetic propositions, such as 'The book is on the table,' possess truth functionality and can be verified through empirical observation. In contrast, analytic propositions, exemplified by 'All bachelors are unmarried,' are true by definition and do not require empirical verification. Hume asserts that synthetic statements are true by observation, whereas analytic statements are true. Hume considers analytic statements to be tautological, conveying no new information. In contrast, synthetic statements provide new data and are therefore meaningful. Consequently, Hume classifies synthetic propositions as a posteriori (known through observation) and analytic propositions as a priori (known by definition).

"By Hume's Guillotine, a statement's meaning either is analytic or is synthetic, the statement's truth—its agreement with the real world—either is necessary or is contingent and the statement's purported knowledge either is a priori or is a posterior" [1]

Hume's fork is also stated in the following way

- Statements of ideas. Analytic and a priori.

1 Flew, Antony. A Dictionary of Philosophy. Revised 2nd ed., St. Martin's Press, 1984, p. 156.
Dicker, Georges. "Hume's Fork Revisited." History of Philosophy Quarterly, vol. 8, no. 4, Oct. 1991, pp. 327-342.

- Statements of facts about the world: Synthetic & a posteriori.

Returning to the discussion of moral 'ought' claims, it is evident that, according to Hume's classification of propositions, moral value judgments are neither analytic nor synthetic propositions. Hume argues that value judgments cannot be empirically verified nor known. In his words, morality does not consist of scientific relations or matters of fact discoverable by reason. Instead, Hume posits that moral judgments arise from sentiment and feeling, rather than reason. He illustrates this point by examining the act of willful murder, arguing that the vice inherent in the act cannot be found through reason, but rather through the sentiment of disapprobation that arises within oneself.[1]

According to David Hume, there is no connection between morality and natural objects. Morality cannot be understood as a matter of fact, but rather as a product of human sentiment and feeling. Hume argues that moral justification is not based on objective facts, but rather on passions, motives, and volitions of thought. These feelings cannot be reduced to natural facts, and no relation can be established between them. To understand moral claims, one must consider the approbation or consent of feeling behind an action. Hume asserts that morality lies within an individual's feelings, not in external objects. Morality, in all its forms, arises from the sentiments and feelings inherent in human nature. As Hume states, 'The mind can never exert itself in any action which we may not comprehend under the term of perception.' Moral judgments, therefore, are

1 Hume, David. "A Treatise of Human Nature." Ethics: Selections from Classical and Contemporary Writers, edited by Oliver A. Johnson and Andrews Reath, Thompson Publishing, 2004, p. 184.

merely different perceptions, and to approve or condemn a character is to experience a particular sentiment or feeling."[1]

David Hume argues that morality cannot be justified solely by reason. Instead, he posits that morality influences actions and affections, rendering it impossible to derive moral conclusions from reason alone. Hume asserts that passions, volitions, and actions are not subject to rational evaluation, as they do not reference other mental states. Consequently, they cannot be deemed true, false, or conformable to reason. Hume believes that moral merit and demerit often contradict one another and can override natural inclinations. He suggests that moral good and evil arise from mental actions, which are shaped by external situations. Therefore, it is essential to distinguish moral actions from external objects. This distinction is evident in situations where individuals commit wrongdoing and subsequently experience guilt, highlighting the complex relationship between moral actions and external circumstances.

As David Hume notes, 'I would ask anyone, why incest in humans is criminal, while the same action in animals has no moral implications?' Hume argues that morality does not consist of relations that are objects of science or matters of fact discoverable by understanding. For Hume, morality is a subject of paramount importance, necessitating decision-making. He claims that moral concerns must be grounded in sentiment, feeling, or impression, rather than reason or comparison of ideas. Hume illustrates this point by highlighting the distinction between various

1 Hume, David. A Treatise of Human Nature. Vol. 2, introduction by A. D. Lindsay, The Temple Press, 1949, p. 166.

pleasurable experiences, such as music and wine. He argues that while both may produce pleasure, they are fundamentally different and cannot be conflated. Hume further emphasizes that moral sentiments arise from considering characters and actions in general, without reference to personal interests.[1]

This perspective allows us to praise or condemn actions based on their moral value. In essence, Hume asserts that human behaviour is influenced by sentiments, emotions, and feelings, which can vary across individuals and situations. Moral values, such as vice and virtue, do not exist in nature or imagination, but rather are products of the human mind. Having discussed the 'is-ought' problem in morality and Hume's approach to this issue, we will now examine proposed solutions to this problem.

Based on the preceding discussion, it is evident that if we accept Hume's Guillotine as a valid approach to moral values, then values necessarily become subjective. This subjectivity renders it challenging to provide a scientific and naturalistic justification for morality. Conversely, if values are defined by facts, they must be objective in nature. The 'is-ought' problem has spawned numerous responses, with various counter-examples attempting to deduce 'ought' from 'is.' This discussion will examine the perspectives of American philosophers John Searle, who has proposed notable solutions to this problem. In his article 'How to Derive "Ought" from "Is"', John Searle presents a counterexample to challenge the notion that 'ought' statements cannot be derived from 'is'

1 Hume, David. A Treatise of Human Nature. Vol. 2, introduction by A. D. Lindsay, The Temple Press, 1949, p. 180.

judgments. Searle's argument proceeds as follows:

(1) Jones uttered the words, "I hereby promise to pay you, Smith, five dollars.

(1a) Under specific conditions C, anyone who utters these words promises to pay Smith five dollars.

(1b) Conditions C obtain.

(2) Jones promised to pay Smith five dollars.

(2a) All promises constitute acts of undertaking an obligation to fulfil the promised action.

(3) Jones placed himself under an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.

(3a) Assuming all else is equal.

(3b) Generally, individuals who undertake obligations are, all else being equal, under an obligation.

(4) Jones is under an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.

(4a) Assuming all else is equal.

(5) Therefore, Jones ought to pay Smith five dollars.[1]

John Searle's counterexample aims to demonstrate that, under specific circumstances, 'ought' statements can be logically derived from 'is' judgments, thereby challenging Hume's Guillotine. Searle grounds his argument in tautologies and empirical assumptions. According to Searle, if an individual makes a promise, such as "I hereby promise to pay you, Smith, five dollars," and the requisite conditions are met, then they are obligated to fulfil the promise. In this case, Jones's promise to pay Smith five dollars implies that Jones has placed himself under an obligation to do so. Searle defines promising as an act that, by definition, puts one under an obligation to fulfil the promised action. Assuming all else is equal, Jones's promise entails that he is under an obligation to pay Smith five dollars. Consequently, Jones ought to

1 Searle, John R. "How to Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'." The Is-Ought Question, edited by W. D. Hudson, MacMillan, 1969, pp. 44-48.

pay Smith five dollars. However, one might object, as Searle acknowledges in Speech Acts, that an 'ought' sentence is not purely descriptive, and it is unclear how to establish a logical connection between obligation and 'ought.' Searle addresses these objections by providing additional counterexamples, which he formulates as follows

John Searle presents a revised argument to derive 'ought' from 'is' as follows:

(3ii) Jones undertook an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.

(3aii) Individuals who place themselves under an obligation are, at the time of undertaking, under that obligation.

(4ii) Jones is under an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.

(4aii) If one is under an obligation to perform an action, then, with regard to that obligation, one ought to do what one is obligated to do.

(5ii) With regard to his obligation to pay Smith five dollars, Jones ought to pay Smith five dollars.

Searle asserts that this argument validly derives 'ought' from 'is'. Furthermore, Searle clarifies that the distinction between 'is' and 'ought' statements lies in their functional roles. 'Is' statements are descriptive, conveying information about the state of affairs, whereas 'ought' statements are evaluative, expressing emotions, commendations, or prescriptions. Searle argues that the apparent gap between 'is' and 'ought' statements arises from an empirical perspective. He suggests that evaluative statements serve a functional purpose, distinct from descriptive statements, which describe the state of affairs in the practical world. Consequently, evaluative statements cannot be reduced to descriptive statements, and the distinction between 'is' and

'ought' to remain fundamental.[1] John Searle emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between different types of descriptive statements. He identifies two categories: descriptive statements based on brute facts and those based on institutional facts. This distinction was initially proposed by British analytic philosopher G.E.M. Anscombe. To illustrate this distinction, consider the following examples. Statements such as "I have 100 rupees" or "Ram has won the cricket match" can be understood as institutional facts. The first statement is contextualized within the framework of Indian currency, while the second is situated within the rules and conventions of cricket. In contrast, a statement like "It is raining now" represents a brute fact, as it can be verified through direct observation. Building on this distinction, Searle develops a theory of derivation. He argues that having certain obligations, commitments, rights, and responsibilities is often a matter of fact. However, this fact is institutional, rather than brute. Searle contends that it is this institutionalized form of obligation, such as promising, that enables the derivation of an 'ought' statement from an 'is' statement.

According to John Searle, institutional facts enable the derivation of 'ought' statements from 'is' statements. This is because an act of promising involves undertaking an obligation, which is itself constituted by an 'ought' statement. To illustrate this point, consider the example of a batsman in a cricket game. If the batsman is caught by a fielder, they ought to leave the field, in accordance with the rules of the game. These rules, which are institutional facts, constitute the basis for deriving the 'ought'

1 Anscombe, G. E. M. "Modern Moral Philosophy." Ethics: History and Contemporary Issues, edited by Steven Cahn and Peter Markie, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 481-493.

statement. Searle argues that constitutive rules, or institutional facts, provide a valid means of deriving 'ought' from 'is'. This approach enables the bridging of the gap between descriptive and prescriptive statements, thereby addressing the 'is-ought' problem.

The existence of values is inextricably linked to human existence, implying that ethical principles necessitate a human context to exist. The primary objective of ethical values is to promote the betterment of society, which is, in turn, contingent upon the well-being of its constituents. A purposeful and fulfilling human life contributes significantly to the improvement of society. By regarding human life as an end, acknowledging its inherent functions, and recognizing the intrinsic value of human existence, we can reconcile the apparent conflict between descriptive ('is') and prescriptive ('ought') statements. Within this naturalistic framework, the distinction between 'is' and 'ought' to become less pronounced, as human values and purposes are understood as integral to the human condition. This perspective provides a robust justification for ethical values, grounding them in the inherent characteristics, desires, and needs of human beings. Ultimately, this naturalistic approach underscores the notion that ethical values are not abstract, disembodied principles, but rather an inherent aspect of human existence, derived from the natural inclinations, needs, and purposes of human beings.

References

Anscombe, G. E. M. (2006). Modern moral philosophy. In S. Cahn & P. Markie (Eds.), Ethics: History and contemporary issues (pp. 481–493). Oxford University Press.

Bisset, P. J. (1939). Naturalism (p. 156). Yale University Press.

Dicker, G. (1991). Hume's fork revisited. History of

Philosophy Quarterly, 8(4), 327–342.

Flew, A. (1984). A dictionary of philosophy (2nd rev. ed., p. 156). St. Martin's Press.

Hume, D. (1949). A treatise of human nature (Vol. 2, Introduction by A. D. Lindsay, pp. 166, 180). The Temple Press.

Hume, D. (1992). A treatise of human nature (p. 469). Prometheus Books.

Hume, D. (2004). A treatise of human nature. In O. A. Johnson & A. Reath (Eds.), Ethics: Selections from classical and contemporary writers (pp. 184–185). Thompson Publishing.

Knauer, P. (1979). The principle of double effect. In C. Curran & R. McCormick (Eds.), Readings in moral theology No. 1 (pp. 27–28). Paulist Press.

Maritain, J. (2001). Natural law: Reflections on theory and practice (W. Sweet, Ed., p. 20). St. Augustine Press. (Original work published 1943)

Searle, J. R. (1969). How to derive 'ought' from 'is'. In W. D. Hudson (Ed.), The is-ought question (pp. 44–48). MacMillan.