Bridging Fact and Value: Naturalistic Responses to Hume's Dilemma in the Works of John Searle and Alan Gewirth

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(**Abstract:** This paper examines Hume's Guillotine, a perennial problem in moral philosophy, and explores potential naturalistic solutions. The inquiry consists of four sections, beginning with an overview of naturalistic claims in ethics. The paper then presents a critical analysis of Hume's perspective on the 'is-ought' problem, followed by an examination of various naturalistic approaches, incorporating the perspectives of John Searle and Alan Gewirth. Ultimately, the paper synthesizes key findings, offering a philosophical reflection on the implications of naturalistic solutions to Hume's Guillotine, providing a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding the 'is-ought' problem.)

Keywords: Hume's Guillotine, Moral philosophy, Naturalistic solutions, Ethics, Is-ought problem, John Searle, Alan Gewirth, Naturalism

Ethics is a discipline that revolves around moral obligations and values, with a primary focus on distinguishing between good and bad, right, and wrong. At its core, ethics endeavours to provide a response to the fundamental question, "what ought to be?" This inquiry into the nature of ethical judgment and the derivation of moral obligations is a central concern in ethical debates. A key philosophical challenge in ethics pertains to the determination of whether moral values can be empirically verified. Moral naturalism, a philosophical stance, posits that moral values can be acquired through human experience and defined in terms of natural language. This perspective enables the formulation of ethical language that is grounded, thereby facilitating a more nuanced understanding of moral obligations and values. 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 contend that moral knowledge can be acquired through the application of practical reason. They argue that ethical decisions should be informed by a nuanced consideration of the situational context, rather than being governed by rigid and universally applicable principles. As philosopher Peter Knauer observes, this approach emphasizes the importance of context-specific reasoning, eschewing absolute presuppositions in Favor of a more nuanced and adaptive approach to ethical decision-making.

"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]

A fundamental tenet of natural law in morality is the intrinsic connection between human nature and moral obligations. Humans possess an innate capacity for discerning right from wrong and determining appropriate actions in specific situations. Moreover, humans inherently strive for flourishing and eschew its opposite. This discussion necessitates an examination of the concept of ethical naturalism. To facilitate this inquiry, it is essential to provide a definition of ethical naturalism, elucidate its implications for ethics, and explore its relationship with natural law theory. Addressing these questions will provide valuable insight into the naturalistic approach to ethics. Ethical naturalism is a meta-ethical approach that investigates 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 foundational framework for justifying various moral standards and theories, thereby offering a nuanced understanding of the moral landscape.

In this context, the term "nature" denotes the empirical and phenomenal world, which can be scientifically explained and empirically verified. Ethical naturalism posits that moral

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[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.

values and obligations can be comprehended through an examination of natural facts, thereby eliminating the need for supernatural entities such as God, the self, or intuition. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of moral reality, grounded in naturalistic principles and eschewing non-natural or supernatural concepts. Ethical naturalism asserts that human actions can be evaluated in terms of their moral value, with actions deemed good or bad, right or wrong, and just or unjust, based on their natural properties and empirical consequences. 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 morally justifiable because happiness is a natural, internally experienced phenomenon. This example illustrates how ethical naturalism provides a justification for moral notions through empirical, naturalistic criteria, thereby establishing a systematic and coherent framework for moral evaluation.

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 contend that value claims, including "ought" statements, can be justified by natural facts, specifically the psychological experiences of pleasure and pain. According to this perspective, acts that yield happiness or pleasure are deemed morally good, whereas those that cause pain are considered morally bad. Utilitarianism, a normative moral theory, exemplifies a naturalistic approach to ethics. This theory adheres to the principle of maximizing utility for the greatest number, where utility is understood in terms of human experience. Moral obligations, such as charitable giving, are determined based on empirical verification of utility. Similarly, ethical egoism can be explained and justified through naturalistic explanations, which primarily focus on fundamental characteristics of human nature. By examining these characteristics, moral naturalists can provide a systematic and coherent framework for understanding moral obligations and value claims.

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. The justification for this action may encompass several factors, including motivating the jute maker, providing financial support, and promoting environmental sustainability. Upon examination, 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, whereas 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 considered 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 and subjective interpretations. By grounding moral evaluations in natural facts, ethical naturalists provide a framework for objective moral assessment.

Naturalists ascertain the truth value of moral judgments through the meticulous examination of empirical evidence and the application of rational reasoning. The fundamental methodology of naturalism relies on empirical facts and a reason-based approach, thereby ensuring a systematic and coherent evaluation of moral principles. Three key factors characterize naturalism: its emphasis on worldly truth, its empirical and evidence-based methodology, and its reliance on consequences to determine outcomes. Naturalistic morality seeks to justify moral principles and judgments through an assessment of their practical utility and consequences, rather than abstract moral essences. This approach prioritizes empirical investigation, relevant facts, and practical prudence, while rejecting dogmatic reliance on

religious ignorance, authority, and presuppositions. Furthermore, naturalists eschew conventional morality, intellectual ethics, and universal principles, instead emphasizing the significance of situational context in informing moral decision-making.

David Hume's ethical approach is characterized by its naturalistic orientation, wherein moral positions within social groups are explained through the lens of approval or disapproval feelings. This perspective facilitates a descriptive and normative scientific understanding of ethics, enabling a comprehensive examination of moral phenomena. According to Hume, morality involves an investigation of the approval or disapproval of customs and feelings within social groups, taking into account historical, anthropological, and psychological factors. This implies that the moral value of an act is determined by the approval or disapproval of the social group. Many contemporary moral naturalists adopt an evolutionary approach to ethical justification, emphasizing the role of natural law in human daily life. This perspective seeks to render ethics a practical and applicable discipline by promoting wise and responsible decision-making. However, a fundamental question remains: what constitutes the justification of actions as wise and responsible? This inquiry underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between moral naturalism and ethical decision-making.

> *"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."[3]*

Moral naturalism provides a philosophical account of morality that is grounded in scientific inquiry. Drawing inspiration from the centuries-long development of scientific methodologies, moral naturalism employs empirical methods and factual evidence to investigate moral phenomena. This perspective posits that all existent entities are part of the natural world, thereby rejecting the notion of supernatural or non-natural entities. Consequently, moral naturalists adopt an epistemological stance that emphasizes experimental and empirical methods as the criterion for knowledge. By relying on empirical evidence and observational data, moral naturalists seek to establish a systematic and coherent understanding of moral

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[3] Bisset, Pratt James. Naturalism. Yale University Press, 1939, p. 156.

phenomena. Having examined the fundamental claims of ethical naturalism, including its approaches, methods, and philosophical standpoints, we now turn our attention to its associated problems and implications. Specifically, we will address the 'is-ought problem' in morality, a challenge first posed by the philosopher David Hume, which concerns the relationship between descriptive statements and prescriptive moral judgments.

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.*"[4]

The 'is-ought problem,' also known as Hume's Guillotine, poses a significant challenge to natural law theories and natural ethics. This problem, first identified by David Hume, asserts that moral values cannot be logically derived from empirical facts. Moral naturalism attempts to address this issue by positing that moral values can be reduced to natural facts without altering their meaning. However, this raises questions about how to extract moral claims from empirical facts. To illustrate this challenge, consider the claim that 'terrorism is morally unjustifiable.' While naturalists might justify this claim by citing empirical consequences, such as harm and suffering, the question remains: what transforms these 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

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[4] Hume, David. A Treatise of Human Nature. Prometheus Books, 1992, p. 469.

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.

Naturalists posit that facts and values are interconnected, yet this raises a fundamental issue: how do natural facts become equivalent to moral facts? This challenge is exemplified in utilitarianism, a naturalistic approach in normative ethics. Utilitarianism asserts that an act is good if it maximizes utility for the greatest number. However, philosopher David Hume's objection, known as Hume's Guillotine, highlights the difficulty of deriving 'ought' statements (moral obligations) from 'is' statements (factual descriptions). Hume argues that moral systems often abruptly shift from descriptive claims to prescriptive moral judgments without explanation, rendering the transition imperceptible yet crucial. Hume recommends caution regarding this oversight, suggesting that it undermines common moral systems and reveals that the distinction between vice and virtue is not solely based on objective relations or reason. This critique poses a significant challenge to naturalistic approaches to ethics, emphasizing the need for a clear explanation of how moral values are derived from natural facts.[5]

A closer examination of the problem through analysis reveals the complexity of transitioning from natural facts to moral values. Consider the example: "Stealing is wrong because it harms others by taking their assets, so we ought not to steal." In this statement, "stealing is wrong" and "we ought not to steal" constitute value claims, whereas "taking assets" is a natural fact. According to David Hume, the distinction between "is" claims (pertaining to natural facts) and "ought" claims (belonging to the realm of moral values) is fundamental. Hume argues that it is impossible to derive an "ought" conclusion from "is" premises, as the two realms are inherently distinct. 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

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[5] 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.

a gap between the "is" claim (stealing) and the "ought" claim (morally wrong), highlighting the fundamental problem of transitioning from natural facts to moral values. Hume's argument emphasizes the distinction between the 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. This philosophical stance underscores the complexity of moral reasoning and the challenges associated with bridging the gap between natural facts and moral values.

Factual claim: X acts in stealing

Value claim: $\therefore$ 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 quintessential 'is-ought' problem raises fundamental questions about the interpretation and attitude towards ethics. In everyday life, the statement 'stealing is wrong' is considered an ethical value claim. However, according to David Hume, this claim is not a factual judgment but rather a value judgment. This distinction has created a profound problem in naturalistic ethics and the moral domain as a whole. Regarding the meaning and justification of moral values, naturalists invoke objective criteria, explaining 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. 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. Hume considers naturalistic ethical claims to be false, emphasizing 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. Hume categorizes propositions into two types: synthetic and analytic. Synthetic propositions possess truth functionality and can be verified through empirical observation, whereas analytic propositions 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" [6]

Hume's fork is also stated in the following way

- Statements of ideas. Analytic and a priori.
- Statements of facts about the world: Synthetic & a posteriori.

The examination of moral "ought" claims, in conjunction with Hume's classification of propositions, reveals that moral value judgments occupy a distinct category. According to Hume, moral value judgments are neither analytic nor synthetic propositions, as they cannot be empirically verified or known through reason. Hume asserts that morality does not consist of scientific relations or matters of fact discoverable by reason. Instead, he posits that moral judgments arise from sentiment and feeling, rather than rational deliberation. To illustrate this point, Hume examines the act of willful murder, arguing that the inherent vice of the act cannot be discerned through reason alone. Rather, it is through the sentiment of disapprobation that arises within oneself that one recognizes the moral reprehensibility of the act.[7]

According to David Hume, morality and natural objects are distinct and unrelated concepts. Morality cannot be reduced to a matter of objective fact, but rather is a product of human sentiment and feeling. Hume argues that moral justification is grounded in passions, motives, and volitions of thought, rather than in objective facts. These feelings and sentiments cannot be reduced to natural facts, and no logical relation can be established between them. To comprehend moral claims, one must consider the approbation or consent of feeling that underlies an action. Hume asserts that morality is rooted in an individual's feelings and sentiments, rather than in external objects. In Hume's view, morality in all its forms arises from the sentiments and feelings inherent in human nature. As he succinctly states, morality is ultimately a matter of human sentiment and emotional response, rather than a product of objective reason or external reality,

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[6] 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.
[7] 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.

'The mind can never exert itself in any action which we may not comprehend under the term of perception.' Moral judgments, therefore, are merely different perceptions, and to approve or condemn a character is to experience a particular sentiment or feeling.'"[8]

David Hume argues that morality cannot be justified solely through rational deliberation. Instead, he posits that morality influences actions and affections, rendering it impossible to derive moral conclusions from reason alone. According to Hume, 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 Hume notes, the distinction between moral actions and external objects is further underscored by the varying moral implications of identical actions across different contexts. For instance, he observes that incest in humans is considered criminal, whereas the same action in animals has no moral implications. Hume argues that morality does not consist of relations that are objects of scientific inquiry or matters of fact discoverable through understanding. Instead, he posits that morality is a subject of paramount importance, necessitating decision-making grounded in sentiment, feeling, or impression, rather than reason or comparison of ideas. To illustrate this point, Hume highlights the distinction between various pleasurable experiences, such as music and wine. While both may produce pleasure, they are fundamentally different and cannot be conflated. Furthermore, Hume emphasizes that moral sentiments arise from considering characters and actions in general, without reference to personal interests.[9]

This perspective enables us to evaluate actions based on their moral value, praising, or condemning them accordingly. 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, are not inherent in nature or imagination but rather are products

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

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

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. The implications of Hume's Guillotine are clear: if we accept this approach, moral values necessarily become subjective. This subjectivity renders it challenging to provide a scientific and naturalistic justification for morality. Conversely, if moral 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, including 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' 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.[10]

John Searle's counterexample aims to demonstrate that, under specific circumstances, 'ought' statements can be logically derived from 'is' judgments, thereby challenging the validity of Hume's Guillotine. Searle grounds his argument in tautologies and empirical assumptions, asserting that certain obligations can be inferred from specific actions. According to Searle, when an individual makes a promise, such as "I hereby promise to pay you, Smith, five dollars," and the requisite conditions are met, they incur an obligation to fulfil the promise. In this case, the act of promising implies that the individual has placed themselves under an obligation to

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

perform the promised action. Searle defines promising as an illocutionary act that, by definition, generates an obligation to fulfil the promised action. Assuming all else is equal, Jones's promise to pay Smith five dollars entails that he is under an obligation to do so. Consequently, it can be inferred that Jones ought to pay Smith five dollars. However, as Searle acknowledges in Speech Acts, one might object 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 to further elucidate the relationship between 'is' judgments and 'ought' statements.

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.

John Searle asserts that his argument validly derives 'ought' from 'is', thereby challenging the notion that these two concepts are fundamentally distinct. 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. 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, initially proposed by British analytic philosopher G.E.M. Anscombe, is crucial for understanding the relationship

between 'is' and 'ought' statements. 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 institutional fact. 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 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' 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.

Alan Gewirth, a distinguished American philosopher, presents a compelling argument in his seminal article "The Is-Ought Problem Resolved." Gewirth's central thesis posits that a prescriptive moral "ought" can be derived from descriptive statements through a meticulous analysis of human actions. Gewirth's argument unfolds in a systematic and logical manner, comprising four distinct steps. He initially posits that human actions are inherently purposeful, implying that both the means and ends possess inherent value. This assertion is grounded in the notion that moral agents attribute value to actions worthy of pursuit. Gewirth introduces the concept of justificatory right claims, asserting that every rational agent implicitly accepts freedom and basic well-being as essential conditions for achieving their goals. Consequently, Gewirth derives a normative "ought" statement, establishing a moral foundation for human rights. In the third step, Gewirth employs the logical principle of universalizability to generalize the concept of rights. By invoking this principle, Gewirth extends the concept of rights to all rational agents, establishing a moral foundation for human rights. Gewirth posits that rational agents recognize their inherent right to freedom and well-being, essential prerequisites for achieving their purposes. He argues that other individuals possess the same rights, as they strive

to attain their respective goals. Gewirth concludes that rational agents should logically acknowledge and respect the fact that others possess the same rights.[11]

In the final step of his argument, Alan Gewirth derives a moral "ought" statement, obliging agents to refrain from harming others and preserve their well-being. By acknowledging their own rights to freedom and well-being, agents must accept corresponding "ought" judgments, specifically refraining from interfering with others' rights. Gewirth identifies two distinct duties inherent in the moral "ought": a negative duty to refrain from harming others and a positive duty to promote the rights and well-being of oneself and others. This theoretical framework is designated as egalitarian, emphasizing inherent equality and equal rights. The derived "ought" to be prescriptive, determinate, and categorical, reflecting the moral agent's perspective. It is inherently egalitarian, upholding equal rights. However, it cannot be applied to non-rational entities lacking capacity for comprehension. A rational individual can derive the moral "ought" from descriptive "is" statements. Acting against others' rights contradicts one's nature, adhering to human nature's inherent striving for desires, purposes, and well-being. Human flourishing entails optimal realization of potential and fulfilment of well-being, without infringing upon others' rights. Human nature is characterized by an inherent desire for rights, influencing human actions. According to Gewirth, rational humans possess de facto values, serving as the foundation for pursuing goals. The concept of "ought" holds significant ontological implications, enabling rational agents to discern actions for fulfilling their well-being. Ultimately, Gewirth suggests that the concept of "ought" is an intrinsic feature of human action, intuitively understood by humans as moral agents, inextricably linked to fundamental characteristics and values defining human nature

The notion that human life possesses inherent purpose and value is a fundamental concept in ethics. Human beings inherently strive to attain happiness, self-sustainable development, and overall well-being, which is an essential and natural aspect of human existence. This intrinsic desire is not inherently flawed or reprehensible; rather, individuals should be afforded the opportunity to fully realize their potential and cultivate their well-being. Values are inextricably linked to the preservation and enhancement of human life, as the existence of life is a necessary condition for the existence of values. Consequently, human well-being is the ultimate purpose of ethical values. The betterment of society is contingent upon the well-being of its constituent members. A purposeful and worthwhile human life, characterized by the

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[11] Gewirth, Allan. "The Is Ought Problem Resolved." Proceeding and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association 47, 1974 p-54

pursuit of happiness and self-sustainable development, is essential for creating a better society. When human life is regarded as an end in itself, and human functions are acknowledged and respected, the apparent conflict between descriptive ("is") and prescriptive ("ought") statements is resolved. In this context, the "is" refers to the inherent nature of human existence, while the "ought" to denote the moral imperatives that govern human behaviour. By recognizing human life as an end in itself, we can reconcile the "is" and the "ought," establishing a harmonious and purposeful relationship between human existence and moral values. This philosophical stance provides a foundation for a moral framework that prioritizes human well-being, happiness, and self-sustainable development. By acknowledging the inherent value and purpose of human life, we can develop a moral framework that promotes the betterment of society and the well-being of its members.

The existence of values is inextricably linked to human existence, implying that ethical principles require a human context to exist. This inherent connection suggests that the primary objective of ethical values is to promote the betterment of society, which is contingent upon the well-being of its constituents. A purposeful and fulfilling human life significantly contributes to the improvement of society. By acknowledging human life as an end, recognizing its inherent functions, and valuing 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. Ethical values are derived from the natural inclinations, needs, and purposes of human beings, emphasizing their significance in promoting human well-being and societal betterment.