Mind Association

IV.—THE NATURALISTIC FALLACY.

BY W. K. FRANKENA.

THE future historian of "thought and expression" in the twentieth century will no doubt record with some amusement the ingenious trick, which some of the philosophical contro-versialists of the first quarter of our century had, of labelling their opponents' views "fallacies". He may even list some of these alleged fallacies for a certain sonority which their in-ventors embodied in their titles : the fallacy of initial predication, the fallacy of simple location, the fallacy of misplaced concrete-ness, the naturalistic fallacy.

Of these fallacies, real or supposed, perhaps the most famous is the naturalistic fallacy. For the practitioners of a certain kind of ethical theory, which is dominant in England and capably represented in America, and which is variously called objectivism, non-naturalism, or intuitionism, have frequently charged their opponents with committing the naturalistic fallacy. Some of these opponents have strongly repudiated the charge of fallacy, others have at least commented on it in passing, and altogether the notion of a naturalistic fallacy has had a considerable cur-rency in ethical literature. Yet, in spite of its repute, the nat-uralistic fallacy has never been discussed at any length, and, for this reason, I have elected to make a study of it in this paper. I hope incidentally to clarify certain confusions which have been made in connexion with the naturalistic fallacy, but my main interest is to free the controversy between the intuitionists and their opponents of the notion of a logical or quasi-logical fallacy, and to indicate where the issue really lies.

The prominence of the concept of a naturalistic fallacy in recent moral philosophy is another testimony to the great in-fluence of the Cambridge philosopher, Mr. G. E. Moore, and his book, *Principia Ethica*. Thus Mr. Taylor speaks of the "vulgar mistake" which Mr. Moore has taught us to call "the nat-uralistic fallacy",[1] and Mr. G. S. Jury, as if to illustrate how

[1] A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, vol. I, p. 104 n.

well we have learned this lesson, says, with reference to nat-
uralistic definitions of value, " All such definitions stand charged
with Dr. Moore's ' naturalistic fallacy '." [1]   Now, Mr. Moore
coined the notion of the naturalistic fallacy in his polemic against
naturalistic and metaphysical systems of ethics.   " The nat-
uralistic fallacy is a fallacy," he writes, and it " must not be
committed."   All naturalistic and metaphysical theories of ethics,
however, " are *based* on the naturalistic fallacy, in the sense
that the commission of this fallacy has been the main cause
of their wide acceptance ".[2]   The best way to dispose of them,
then, is to expose this fallacy.   Yet it is not entirely clear just
what is the status of the naturalistic fallacy in the polemics
of the intuitionists against other theories.   Sometimes it is
used as a weapon, as when Miss Clarke says that if we call a
thing good simply because it is liked we are guilty of the natur-
alistic fallacy.[3]   Indeed, it presents this aspect to the reader
in many parts of *Principia Ethica* itself.   Now, in taking it
as a weapon, the intuitionists use the naturalistic fallacy as if
it were a logical fallacy on all fours with the fallacy of com-
position, the revelation of which disposes of naturalistic and
metaphysical ethics and leaves intuitionism standing triumphant.
That is, it is taken as a fallacy in advance, for use in controversy.
But there are signs in *Principia Ethica* which indicate that the
naturalistic fallacy has a rather different place in the intuitionist
scheme, and should not be used as a weapon at all.   In this
aspect, the naturalistic fallacy must be proved to be a fallacy.
It cannot be used to settle the controversy, but can only be
asserted to be a fallacy when the smoke of battle has cleared.
Consider the following passages : (*a*) " the naturalistic fallacy
consists in the contention that good *means* nothing but some
simple or complex notion, that can be defined in terms of natural
qualities " ; (*b*) " the point that good is indefinable and that
to deny this involves a fallacy, is a point capable of strict proof ".[4]
These passages seem to imply that the fallaciousness of the
naturalistic fallacy is just what is at issue in the controversy
between the intuitionists and their opponents, and cannot be
wielded as a weapon in that controversy.   One of the points
I wish to make in this paper is that the charge of committing
the naturalistic fallacy can be made, if at all, only as a conclusion
from the discussion and not as an instrument of deciding it.

[1] *Value and Ethical Objectivity*, p. 58.   [2] *Principia Ethica*, pp. 38, 64.
[3] M. E. Clarke, " Cognition and Affection in the Experience of Value ",
Journal of Philosophy, 1938.
[4] *Principia Ethica*, pp. 73, 77.   See also p. xix.

The notion of a naturalistic fallacy has been connected with the notion of a bifurcation between the ' ought ' and the ' is ', between value and fact, between the normative and the descriptive. Thus Mr. D. C. Williams says that some moralists have thought it appropriate to chastise as the naturalistic fallacy the attempt to derive the Ought from the Is.[1]   We may begin, then, by considering this bifurcation, emphasis on which, by Sidgwick, Sorley, and others, came largely as a reaction to the procedures of Mill and Spencer.   Hume affirms the bifurcation in his *Treatise :* " I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance.   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, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained ; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.   But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers ; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason." [2]

Needless to say, the intuitionists *have* found this observation of some importance.[3]   They agree with Hume that it subverts all the vulgar systems of morality, though, of course, they deny that it lets us see that the distinction of virtue and vice is not founded on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason. In fact, they hold that a small attention to it subverts Hume's own system also, since this gives naturalistic definitions of virtue and vice and of good and evil.[4]

[1] " Ethics as Pure Postulate ", *Philosophical Review,* 1933.   See also T. Whittaker, *The Theory of Abstract Ethics,* pp. 19 f.

[2] Book III, part ii, section i.

[3] See J. Laird, *A Study in Moral Theory,* pp. 16 f. ; Whittaker, *op. cit.,* p. 19.

[4] See C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory,* ch. iv.

Hume's point is that ethical conclusions cannot be drawn validly from premises which are non-ethical. But when the intuitionists affirm the bifurcation of the ' ought ' and the ' is ', they mean more than that ethical propositions cannot be deduced from non-ethical ones. For this difficulty in the vulgar systems of morality could be remedied, as we shall see, by the introduction of definitions of ethical notions in non-ethical terms. They mean, further, that such definitions of ethical notions in non-ethical terms are impossible. " The essential point ", says Mr. Laird, " is the irreducibility of values to non-values." [1] But they mean still more. Yellow and pleasantness are, according to Mr. Moore, indefinable in non-ethical terms, but they are natural qualities and belong on the ' is ' side of the fence. Ethical properties, however, are not, for him, mere indefinable natural qualities, descriptive or expository. They are properties of a different *kind*—non-descriptive or non-natural.[2] The intuitionist bifurcation consists of three statements :—

(1) Ethical propositions are not deducible from non-ethical ones.[3]
(2) Ethical characteristics are not definable in terms of non-ethical ones.
(3) Ethical characteristics are different in kind from non-ethical ones.

Really it consists of but one statement, namely, (3), since (3) entails (2) and (2) entails (1). It does not involve saying that any ethical characteristics are absolutely indefinable. That is another question, although this is not always noticed.

What, now, has the naturalistic fallacy to do with the bifurcation of the ' ought ' and the ' is ' ? To begin with, the connexion is this : many naturalistic and metaphysical moralists proceed as if ethical conclusions can be deduced from premises all of which are non-ethical, the classical examples being Mill and Spencer. That is, they violate (1). This procedure has lately been referred to as the " factualist fallacy " by Mr. Wheelwright and as the " valuational fallacy " by Mr. Wood.[4] Mr. Moore sometimes seems to identify it with the naturalistic fallacy, but in the main he holds only that it involves, implies,

[1] *A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 94 n.
[2] See *Philosophical Studies*, pp. 259, 273 f.
[3] See J. Laird, *op. cit.*, p. 318. Also pp. 12 ff.
[4] P. E. Wheelwright, *A Critical Introduction to Ethics*, pp. 40-51, 91 f. ; L. Wood, " Cognition and Moral Value," *Journal of Philosophy*, 1937, p. 237.

or rests upon this fallacy.[1] We may now consider the charge
that the procedure in question is or involves a fallacy.

It may be noted at once that, even if the deduction of ethical
conclusions from non-ethical premises is in no way a fallacy,
Mill certainly did commit a fallacy in drawing an analogy
between visibility and desirability in his argument for hedonism ;
and perhaps his committing *this* fallacy, which, as Mr. Broad
has said, we all learn about at our mothers' knees, is chiefly
responsible for the notion of a naturalistic *fallacy*. But is it
a fallacy to deduce ethical conclusions from non-ethical premises ?
Consider the Epicurean argument for hedonism which Mill so
unwisely sought to embellish : pleasure is good, since it is sought
by all men. Here an ethical conclusion is being derived from
a non-ethical premise. And, indeed, the argument, taken
strictly as it stands, *is* fallacious. But it is not fallacious
because an *ethical* term occurs in the conclusion which does not
occur in the premise. It is fallacious because any argument
of the form " A is B, therefore A is C " is invalid, if taken strictly
as it stands. For example, it is invalid to argue that Crœsus
is rich because he is wealthy. Such arguments are, however,
not intended to be taken strictly as they stand. They are
enthymemes and contain a suppressed premise. And, when
this suppressed premise is made explicit, they are valid and
involve no logical fallacy.[2] Thus the Epicurean inference from
psychological to ethical hedonism is valid when the suppressed
premise is added to the effect that what is sought by all men
is good. Then the only question left is whether the premises
are true.

It is clear, then, that the naturalistic fallacy is not a logical
fallacy, since it may be involved even when the argument is
valid. How does the naturalistic fallacy enter such " mixed
ethical arguments " [3] as that of the Epicureans ? Whether it
does or not depends on the nature of the suppressed premise.
This may be either an induction, an intuition, a deduction from
a " pure ethical argument," a definition, or a proposition which
is true by definition. If it is one of the first three, then the
naturalistic fallacy does not enter at all. In fact, the argument
does not then involve violating (1), since one of its premises will
be ethical. But if the premise to be supplied is a definition

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[1] See *Principia Ethica*, pp. 114, 57, 43, 49. Whittaker identifies it
with the naturalistic fallacy and regards it as a " logical " fallacy, *op. cit.*,
pp. 19 f.

[2] See *ibid.*, pp. 50, 139 ; Wheelwright, *loc. cit.*

[3] See C. D. Broad, *The Mind and its Place in Nature*, pp. 488 f. ; Laird,
loc. cit.

or a proposition which is true by definition, as it probably was for the Epicureans, then the argument, while still valid, involves the naturalistic fallacy, and will run as follows :—

    (a) Pleasure is sought by all men.
    (b) What is sought by all men is good (by definition).
    (c) Therefore, pleasure is good.

Now I am not greatly interested in deciding whether the argument as here set up violates (1). If it does not, then no ' mixed ethical argument ' actually commits any factualist or valuational fallacy, except when it is unfairly taken as complete in its enthymematic form. If it does, then a valid argument may involve the deduction of an ethical conclusion from non-ethical premises and the factualist or valuational fallacy is not really a fallacy. The question depends on whether or not (b) and (c) are to be regarded as ethical propositions. Mr. Moore refuses so to regard them, contending that, by hypothesis, (b) is analytic or tautologous, and that (c) is psychological, since it really says only that pleasure is sought by all men.[1] But to say that (b) is analytic and not ethical and that (c) is not ethical but psychological is to prejudge the question whether ' good ' can be defined ; for the Epicureans would contend precisely that if their definition is correct then (b) is ethical but analytic and (c) ethical though psychological. Thus, unless the question of the definability of goodness is to be begged, (b) and (c) must be regarded as ethical, in which case our argument does not violate (1). However, suppose, if it be not nonsense, that (b) is non-ethical and (c) ethical, then the argument will violate (1), but it will still obey all of the canons of logic, and it is only confusing to talk of a ' valuational logic ' whose basic rule is that an evaluative conclusion cannot be deduced from non-evaluative premises.[2]

For the only way in which either the intuitionists or postulationists like Mr. Wood can cast doubt upon the conclusion of the argument of the Epicureans (or upon the conclusion of any parallel argument) is to attack the premises, in particular (b). Now, according to Mr. Moore, it is due to the presence of (b) that the argument involves the naturalistic fallacy. (b) involves the identification of goodness with ' being sought by all men ', and to make this or any other such identification is to commit the naturalistic fallacy. The naturalistic fallacy is not the procedure of violating (1). It is the procedure, implied in many mixed ethical arguments and explicitly carried out apart from

[1] See *op. cit.*, pp. 11 f. ; 19, 38, 73, 139.   [2] See L. Wood, *loc. cit.*

such arguments by many moralists, of defining such character-
istics as goodness or of substituting some other characteristic
for them. To quote some passages from *Principia Ethica* :—
   (*a*) " . . . far too many philosophers have thought that when
they named those other properties [belonging to all things which
are good] they were actually defining good ; that these pro-
perties, in fact, were simply not ' other ', but absolutely and
entirely the same with goodness. This view I propose to call
the ' naturalistic fallacy '. . . ." [1]
   (*b*) " I have thus appropriated the name Naturalism to a
particular method of approaching Ethics. . . .   This method
consists in substituting for ' good ' some one property of a natural
object or of a collection of natural objects. . . ." [2]
   (*c*) ". . . the naturalistic fallacy [is] the fallacy which consists
in identifying the simple notion which we mean by ' good '
with some other notion." [3]
   Thus, to identify ' better ' and ' more evolved ', ' good ' and
' desired ', etc., is to commit the naturalistic fallacy.[4]   But
just why is such a procedure fallacious or erroneous ?   And is
it a fallacy only when applied to good ?   We must now study
Section 12 of *Principia Ethica*. Here Mr. Moore makes some
interesting statements :—
   " . . . if anybody tried to define pleasure for us as being any
other natural object ; if anybody were to say, for instance,
that pleasure *means* the sensation of red. . . .   Well, that would
be the same fallacy which I have called the naturalistic fallacy. . . .
I should not indeed call that a naturalistic fallacy, although
it is the same fallacy as I have called naturalistic with reference
to Ethics. . . .   When a man confuses two natural objects with
one another, defining the one by the other . . . then there is no
reason to call the fallacy naturalistic.   But if he confuses
' good ', which is not . . . a natural object, with any natural object
whatever, then there is a reason for calling that a naturalistic
fallacy. . . ." [5]
   Here Mr. Moore should have added that, when one confuses
' good ', which is not a metaphysical object or quality, with
any metaphysical object or quality, as metaphysical moralists
do, according to him, then the fallacy should be called the meta-
physical fallacy.   Instead he calls it a naturalistic fallacy in
this case too, though he recognises that the case is different
since metaphysical properties are non-natural [6]—a procedure

[1] p. 10   [2] p. 40.   [3] p. 58, *cf.* pp. xiii, 73.
[4] *Cf.* pp. 49, 53, 108, 139.   [5] p. 13.
[6] See pp. 38-40, 110-112.

which has misled many readers of *Principia Ethica*. For example, it has led Mr. Broad to speak of " theological naturalism ".[1]

To resume : " Even if [goodness] were a natural object, that would not alter the nature of the fallacy nor diminish its importance one whit ".[2]

From these passages it is clear that the fallaciousness of the procedure which Mr. Moore calls the naturalistic fallacy is not due to the fact that it is applied to good or to an ethical or non-natural charateristic. When Mr. R. B. Perry defines ' good ' as ' being an object of interest ' the trouble is not merely that he is defining *good*. Nor is the trouble that he is defining an *ethical* characteristic in terms of *non-ethical* ones. Nor is the trouble that he is regarding a *non-natural* characteristic as a *natural* one. The trouble is more generic than that. For clarity's sake I shall speak of the definist fallacy as the generic fallacy which underlies the naturalistic fallacy. The naturalistic fallacy will then, by the above passages, be a species or form of the definist fallacy, as would the metaphysical fallacy if Mr. Moore had given that a separate name.[3] That is, the naturalistic fallacy, as illustrated by Mr. Perry's procedure, is a fallacy, not because it is naturalistic or confuses a non-natural quality with a natural one, but solely because it involves the definist fallacy. We may, then, confine our attention entirely to an understanding and evaluation of the definist fallacy.

To judge by the passages I have just quoted, the definist fallacy is the process of confusing or identifying two properties, of defining one property by another, or of substituting one property for another. Furthermore, the fallacy is always simply that two properties are being treated as one, and it is irrelevant, if it be the case, that one of them is natural or non-ethical and the other non-natural or ethical. One may commit the definist fallacy without infringing on the bifurcation of the ethical and the non-ethical, as when one identifies pleasantness and redness or rightness and goodness. But even when one infringes on that bifurcation in committing the definist fallacy, as when one identifies goodness and pleasantness or goodness and satisfaction, then the *mistake* is still not that the bifurcation is being infringed on, but only that two properties are being treated as one. Hence, on the present interpretation, the definist *fallacy* does not, in any of its forms, consist in violating (3), and has no essential connexion with the bifurcation of the ' ought ' and the ' is '.

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[1] *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 259.
[2] p. 14.　　　　　　　　　　[3] As Whittaker has, *loc. cit.*

This formulation of the definist fallacy explains or reflects the motto of *Principia Ethica*, borrowed from Bishop Butler : " Everything is what it is, and not another thing ". It follows from this motto that goodness is what it is and not another thing. It follows that views which try to identify it with something else are making a mistake of an elementary sort. For it *is* a mistake to confuse or identify two properties. If the properties really are two, then they simply are not identical. But do those who define ethical notions in non-ethical terms make this mistake ? They will reply to Mr. Moore that they are not identifying two properties ; what they are saying is that two words or sets of words stand for or mean one and the same property. Mr. Moore was being, in part, misled by the material mode of speech, as Mr. Carnap calls it, in such sentences as " Goodness is pleasantness ", " Knowledge is true belief ", etc. When one says instead, " The word ' good ' and the word ' pleasant ' mean the same thing ", etc., it is clear that one is not identifying two things. But Mr. Moore kept himself from seeing this by his disclaimer that he was interested in any statement about the use of words.[1]

The definist fallacy, then, as we have stated it, does not rule out any naturalistic or metaphysical definitions of ethical terms. Goodness is not identifiable with any ' other ' characteristic (if it is a characteristic at all). But the question is : *which* characteristics are other than goodness, which names stand for characteristics other than goodness ? And it is begging the question of the definability of goodness to say out of hand that Mr. Perry, for instance, is identifying goodness with something else. The point is that goodness is what it is, even if it is definable. That is why Mr. Perry can take as the motto of his naturalistic *Moral Economy* another sentence from Bishop Butler : " Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be ; why then should we desire to be deceived ? " The motto of *Principia Ethica* is a tautology, and should be expanded as follows : Everything is what it is, and not another thing, unless it is another thing, and even then it is what it is.

On the other hand, if Mr. Moore's motto (or the definist fallacy) rules out any definitions, for example of ' good ', then it rules out all definitions of any term whatever. To be effective at all, it must be understood to mean, " Every term means what it means, and not what is meant by any other term ". Mr. Moore seems implicitly to understand his motto in this way

[1] See *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 8, 12.

in Section 13, for he proceeds as if ' good ' has no meaning,
if it has no unique meaning. If the motto be taken in this way,
it will follow that ' good ' is an indefinable term, since no syn-
onyms can be found. But it will also follow that no term is
definable. And then the method of analysis is as useless as
an English butcher in a world without sheep.

Perhaps we have misinterpreted the definist fallacy. And,
indeed, some of the passages which I quoted earlier in this paper
seem to imply that the definist fallacy is just the error of defining
an indefinable characteristic. On this interpretation, again,
the definist fallacy has, in all of its forms, no essential connexion
with the bifurcation of the ethical and the non-ethical. Again,
one may commit the definist fallacy without violating that
bifurcation, as when one defines pleasantness in terms of redness
or goodness in terms of rightness (granted Mr. Moore's belief
that pleasantness and goodness are indefinable). But even
when one infringes on that bifurcation and defines goodness
in terms of desire, the *mistake* is not that one is infringing on
the bifurcation by violating (3), but only that one is defining
an indefinable characteristic. This is possible because the
proposition that goodness is indefinable is logically independent
of the proposition that goodness is non-natural : as is shown by
the fact that a characteristic may be indefinable and yet natural,
as yellowness is ; or non-natural and yet definable, as rightness
is (granted Mr. Moore's views about yellowness and rightness).

Consider the definist fallacy as we have just stated it. It
is, of course, an error to define an indefinable quality. But
the question, again, is : which qualities are indefinable ? It is
begging the question in favour of intuitionism to say in advance
that the quality goodness is indefinable and that, therefore,
all naturalists commit the definist fallacy. One must know
that goodness is indefinable before one can argue that the de-
finist fallacy *is* a fallacy. Then, however, the definist fallacy
can enter only at the end of the controversy between intuitionism
and definism, and cannot be used as a weapon in the contro-
versy.

The definist fallacy may be stated in such a way as to involve
the bifurcation between the ' ought ' and the ' is '.[1] It would
then be committed by anyone who offered a definition of any
ethical characteristic in terms of non-ethical ones. The trouble
with such a definition, on this interpretation, would be that
an *ethical* characteristic is being reduced to a *non-ethical* one,

[1] See J. Wisdom, MIND, 1931, p. 213, note 1.

31

a *non-natural* one to a *natural* one. That is, the definition
would be ruled out by the fact that the characteristic being
defined is ethical or non-natural and therefore cannot be defined
in non-ethical or natural terms. But on this interpretation,
too, there is danger of a *petitio* in the intuitionist argumentation.
To assume that the ethical characteristic is exclusively ethical
is to beg precisely the question which is at issue when the defi-
nition is offered. Thus, again, one must know that the char-
acteristic is non-natural and indefinable in natural terms before
one can say that the definists are making a mistake.

Mr. Moore, McTaggart, and others formulate the naturalistic
fallacy sometimes in a way somewhat different from any of
those yet discussed. They say that the definists are confusing
a universal synthetic proposition about the good with a definition
of *goodness*.[1] Mr. Abraham calls this the " fallacy of miscon-
strued proposition ".[2] Here again the difficulty is that, while
it is true that it is an error to construe a universal synthetic
proposition as a definition, it is a *petitio* for the intuitionists
to say that what the definist is taking for a definition is really
a universal synthetic proposition.[3]

At last, however, the issue between the intuitionists and the
definists (naturalistic or metaphysical) is becoming clearer. The
definists are all holding that certain propositions involving
ethical terms are analytic, tautologous, or true by definition,
e.g., Mr. Perry so regards the statement, " All objects of desire
are good ". The intuitionists hold that such statements are
synthetic. What underlies this difference of opinion is that the
intuitionists claim to have at least a dim awareness of a simple
unique quality or relation of goodness or rightness which appears
in the region which our ethical terms roughly indicate, whereas
the definists claim to have no awareness of any such quality or
relation in that region, which is different from all other qualities
and relations which belong to the same context but are desig-
nated by words other than ' good ' and ' right ' and their obvious
synonyms.[4] The definists are in all honesty claiming to find
but one characteristic where the intuitionists claim to find two,
as Mr. Perry claims to find only the property of being desired
where Mr. Moore claims to find both it and the property of

[1] See *Principia Ethica*, pp. 10, 16, 38 ; *The Nature of Existence*, vol. ii,
p. 398.

[2] Leo Abraham, " The Logic of Intuitionism ", *International Journal of
Ethics*, 1933.

[3] As Mr. Abraham points out, *loc. cit.*

[4] See R. B. Perry, *General Theory of Value*, p. 30 ; cf. *Journal of
Philosophy*, 1931, p. 520.

being good. The issue, then, is one of inspection or intuition, and concerns the awareness or discernment of qualities and relations.[1] That is why it cannot be decided by the use of the notion of a fallacy.

If the definists may be taken at their word, then they are not actually confusing two characteristics with each other, nor defining an indefinable characteristic, nor confusing definitions and universal synthetic propositions—in short they are not committing the naturalistic or definist fallacy in any of the interpretations given above. Then the only fallacy which they commit—the real naturalistic or definist fallacy—is the failure to descry the qualities and relations which are central to morality. But this is neither a logical fallacy nor a logical confusion. It is not even, properly speaking, an error. It is rather a kind of blindness, analogous to colour-blindness. Even this moral blindness can be ascribed to the definists only if they are correct in their claim to have no awareness of any unique ethical characteristics and if the intuitionists are correct in affirming the existence of such characteristics, but certainly to call it a ' fallacy ', even in a loose sense, is both unamiable and profitless.

On the other hand, of course, if there are no such characteristics in the objects to which we attach ethical predicates, then the intuitionists, if we may take them at their word, are suffering from a corresponding moral hallucination. Definists might then call this the intuitionistic or moralistic fallacy, except that it is no more a ' fallacy ' than is the blindness just described. Anyway, they do not believe the claim of the intuitionists to be aware of unique ethical characteristics, and consequently do not attribute to them this hallucination. Instead, they simply deny that the intuitionists really do find such unique qualities or relations, and then they try to find some plausible way of accounting for the fact that very respectable and trust-worthy people think they find them.[2] Thus they charge the intuitionists with verbalism, hypostatisation, and the like. But this half of the story does not concern us now.

What concerns us more is the fact that the intuitionists do not credit the claim of the definists either. They would be much disturbed, if they really thought that their opponents were morally blind, for they do not hold that we must be re-generated by grace before we can have moral insight, and they share the common feeling that morality is something democratic even though not all men are good. Thus they hold that " we

[1] See H. Osborne, *Foundations of the Philosophy of Value*, pp. 15, 19, 70.
[2] *Cf.* R. B. Perry, *Journal of Philosophy*, 1931, pp. 520 ff.

are all aware " of certain unique characteristics when we use
the terms ' good ', ' right ', etc., only due to a lack of analytic
clearness of mind, abetted perhaps by a philosophical prejudice,
we may not be aware at all that they are different from other
characteristics of which we are also aware.[1] Now, I have been
arguing that the intuitionists cannot charge the definists with
committing any fallacy unless and until they have shown that
we are all, the definists included, aware of the disputed unique
characteristics.   If, however, they were to show this, then, at
least at the end of the controversy, they could accuse the definists
of the error of confusing two characteristics, or of the error of
defining an indefinable one, and these errors might, since the
term is somewhat loose in its habits, be called ' fallacies ', though
they are not logical fallacies in the sense in which an invalid
argument is.   The fallacy of misconstrued proposition depends
on the error of confusing two characteristics, and hence could
also on our present supposition, be ascribed to the definists,
but it is not really a *logical* confusion,[2] since it does not actually
involve being confused about the difference between a proposition
and a definition.

Only it is difficult to see how the intuitionists can prove that
the definists are at least vaguely aware of the requisite unique
characteristics.[3]   The question must surely be left to the in-
spection or intuition of the definists themselves, aided by what-
ever suggestions the intuitionists may have to make.   If so,
we must credit the verdict of their inspection, especially of those
among them who have read the writings of the intuitionists
reflectively, and, then, as we have seen, the most they can be
charged with is moral blindness.

Besides trying to discover just what is meant by the natural-
istic fallacy, I have tried to show that the notion that a logical
or quasi-logical fallacy is committed by the definists only confuses
the issue between the intuitionists and the definists (and the
issue between the latter and the emotists or postulationists),
and misrepresents the way in which the issue is to be settled.
No logical fallacy need appear anywhere in the procedure of
the definists.   Even fallacies in any less accurate sense cannot
be implemented to decide the case against the definists ; at
best they can be ascribed to the definists only after the issue
has been decided against them on independent grounds.   But

[1] *Principia Ethica*, pp. 17, 38, 59, 61.

[2] But see H. Osborne, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 f.

[3] For a brief discussion of their arguments, see *ibid.*, p. 67 ; L. Abraham,
op. cit.   I think they are all inconclusive, but cannot show this here.

the only defect which can be attributed to the definists, *if* the intuitionists are right in affirming the existence of unique indefinable ethical characteristics, is a peculiar moral blindness, which is not a fallacy even in the looser sense. The issue in question must be decided by whatever method we may find satisfactory for determining whether or not a word stands for a characteristic at all, and, if it does, whether or not it stands for a unique characteristic. What method is to be employed is, perhaps, in one form or another, the basic problem of contemporary philosophy, but no generally satisfactory solution of the problem has yet been reached. I shall venture to say only this : it does seem to me that the issue is not to be decided against the intuitionists by the application *ab extra* to ethical judgments of any empirical or ontological meaning dictum.[1]

[1] See *Principia Ethica,* pp. 124 f., 140.