

“good” and “right” in descriptive or naturalistic terms is another. One may properly reject the former, the so-called “ethical naturalism”, as many moral philosophers have done, and hold the latter; there is no obvious inconsistency here. G. E. Moore is a philosopher who did just that. As is well known, he was a powerful critic of ethical naturalism, holding that goodness is a “simple” and “nonnatural” property. At the same time, he held that a thing’s being good “follows” from its possessing certain naturalistic properties. He wrote:³³

I should never have thought of suggesting that goodness was ‘non-natural’, unless I had supposed that it was ‘derivative’ in the sense that, whenever a thing is good (in the sense in question) its goodness ...‘depends on the presence of certain non-ethical characteristics’ possessed by the thing in question: I have always supposed that it did so ‘depend’, in the sense that, if a thing is good (in my sense), then that it is so *follows* from the fact that it possesses certain natural intrinsic properties ...

It makes sense to think of these “natural intrinsic properties” from which a thing’s being good is thought to follow as constituting naturalistic criteria of goodness, or at least pointing to the existence of such criteria. One can reject ethical naturalism, the doctrine that ethical concepts are definitionally eliminable in favor of naturalistic terms, and at the same time hold that ethical properties, or the ascription of ethical terms, must be governed by naturalistic criteria. It is clear, then, that we are here using “naturalism” ambiguously in “epistemological naturalism” and “ethical naturalism”. In our present usage, epistemological naturalism does not include (nor does it necessarily exclude) the claim that epistemic terms are definitionally reducible to naturalistic terms. (Quine’s naturalism is eliminative, though it is not a definitional eliminativism.)

If, therefore, we locate the split between Quine and traditional epistemology at the descriptive vs. normative divide, then currently influential naturalism in epistemology is not likely to fall on Quine’s side. On this descriptive vs. normative issue, one can side with Quine in one of two ways: first, one rejects, with Quine, the entire justification-based epistemological program; or second, like ethical naturalists but unlike Quine, one believes that epistemic concepts are naturalistically definable. I doubt that very many epistemological