THE NATURALISTIC FALLACY IN KANT

From the time when reflection on moral philosophy started in Greece, especially after all attempts at establishing the foundation of ethics and of legal theory were based on the well-known distinction between law and nature, philosophical thought has been confronted with the important and as yet unresolved task of making clear the difference between theoretical and practical sentences, between 'is' and 'ought', between facts and norms.

Thomas Hobbes marked, in this long process which has not yet come to an end, a great advance, indeed, when he reduced the concept of law to the concept of obligation. David Hume eliminated a great deal of confusion with his famous warning that 'ought' may not be derived from 'is' (whatever this formula may mean). And Kant gave a decisive turn to the discussion on moral philosophy when he insisted that the moral law does not refer to what happens, but refers to what ought to happen.

In this century it was perhaps G. E. Moore who contributed most to the task of resolving the is-ought question. Against the background of this millenial discussion it is not surprising to see him raise against Kant the criticism that he – like many others – did not succeed in understanding “that any truth which asserts ‘this is good in itself’ is quite unique in kind – that it cannot be reduced to any assertion about reality”. Against all mistakes following from this fundamental failure, Moore is prepared to raise his standard criticism of the 'naturalistic fallacy', and among all representatives of metaphysical ethics Kant is most of all exposed to his criticism. What Moore objects to mainly in Kant are two fundamental mistakes: the fallacy of supposing moral law to be analogous to natural law, and the fallacy of supposing moral law to be essentially analogous to law in the legal sense and, consequently, to be an imperative.

Much has been said and written on Moore’s theses in general, little on his criticism of Kant, at least explicitly. Nevertheless Professor Paton’s commentary on the Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals reads like an implicit discussion of Moore’s tenets on Kant, with the result of con-
firming them in some important points. Little attention, however, has been paid, as far as I see, to the problem which lies at the bottom of the whole issue: the distinction of theoretical and practical sentences in Kant's theory of morals. A failure to draw the correct distinction in this sphere is what might be called the 'naturalistic fallacy' in its larger sense. My object will be, then, to reconsider Kant's foundation of ethics in so far as the naturalistic fallacy might be involved.

Kant had no deontic logic at his disposal. Therefore he is likely to have fallen into some ambiguity about the very problem of the foundation of ethics. My thesis will be, then, that Kant by these ambiguities has been led away from preparing a critical approach to moral philosophy and ended in a kind of moral anthropolgy. This defect of his theory, which is manifest only in his *Foundations*, has not been really overcome in the second *Critique*. My thesis does not concern Kant's ethics as a whole, but only its meta-ethical part. It leaves untouched the entire body of Kant's normative ethics, and therewith the interpretation of the categorical imperative in its normative aspects as well as the problem of a formal ethics. But it regards a problem which occupied Kant's mind no less than normative ethics as such: the relation between theoretical and practical philosophy, of metaphysics of nature and metaphysics of morals, that is to say, the problem of the architectonic of pure reason.

In the large sphere of ethical problems we may single out some central questions the solutions of which do not depend on each other. With the moral philosophy of Kant in mind I should like to distinguish the following questions:

1. *What* ought I to do? (What am I obligated to?)
2. *Why* ought I to act this way? (What does obligate me? For what reasons am I obligated?)
3. *How* can I act in that way? (How is obligation possible?)
4. How can I know what my duty is?
5. Why do I do what I ought to do? (What induces me to do my duty?)

My first question concerns what I may call loosely the content of ethical norms, and belongs to normative ethics. The second and third questions could be brought under the common formula: Why am I obligated? But this formula may assume two totally different meanings, namely: (a) What