

On Naturalism, Consensus, and Practice

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The philosophies of human rights are now often divided into three basic categories: naturalism; theories of consensus; and the practical or “political” approach (e.g. Beitz, 2009). Furthermore, these three categories are often seen as mutually exclusive.

In my presentation I criticize this view. I show that the three theories in question are different because they respond to three different philosophical problems, respectively, on the philosophical foundation of human rights, on the pervasiveness of doctrinal pluralism, and on the nature or character of the contemporary practice of human rights. The three theories that I mentioned above are not incompatible precisely because they are answers to three different problems.

My aim in this presentation is mainly analytic, but not exclusively. In other words, I distinguish what is not always considered distinct in the Philosophy of Human Rights, but I also suggest that these distinctions are relevant to the definition of what we should mean by human rights today.

Key words: human rights; naturalism; pluralism; consensus; international practice.

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