

# **CHAPTER – III**

## **THE STATUS OF MORAL VALUE**

### **– INTUITIONISM**

The Intuitionist believes that the moral value is not subjective; it is not an expression or a statement of an emotion, rather it is an objective property, characterising human conduct. Yet an intuitionist is not a naturalist, for, he believes that goodness, though objectively present in human conduct, is a non-natural property. G.E. Moore believes that something is natural if it exists through time. Goodness does not exist through time, so goodness is not a natural property. But although non-natural goodness is very much trans-subjective, value terms can be defined through such non-natural factual terms.

Since goodness is not a natural property on intuitionism, a mental judgement cannot be empirically verified. Intuition alone provides confirmation on an ethical judgement. Moral faculty is called Intuition. Intuitionism subscribes to cognitivism. It holds that ethical and value terms may not be definable through factual terms. Nevertheless, they refer to non-natural properties which are very much cognizable through our intuition.

We have seen how cognitivism and non-cognitivism are counted with the theories of value which appeared as naturalism and anti-naturalism. The arrival of Naturalism is responsible for the appearance of cognitivism while the emergence of other kind of non-naturalism is regulated in the emergence of non-cognitivism. It is only natural, therefore, to make a survey of the history of naturalistic ethics and to examine its validity in order to show that cognitivism is an acceptable doctrine. If naturalism is found to be faulty, then cognitivism as an epistemological doctrine would also be rejected. So let us begin with a critical survey of naturalistic ethics. It has already been stated that naturalism is an ethical theory which believes that all value properties are nothing but natural and factual properties, so much so that one is definable in terms of other, or one can be substituted by the other or identified with the other. It was G.E. Moore who first raised objection against the whole of naturalistic ethics by bringing in the concept of the

naturalistic fallacy. The term of the fallacy thus is contained in the ethical philosophy of David Hume. One of the consequences of ethical naturalism is that this hypothetical value statement can be derived from purely factual statement. Hume pointed out that a value statement expresses a relation which is fundamentally different from the relation expressed in a factual statement. The statements “One ought to do” etc which are like as the statement “The table is brown” are different, because the former does not bring any information regarding fact. It speaks of value and makes a description. The later statement, on the other hand, is factual since it describes the fact that there is a table which is brown. It is clear that on Hume’s analysis *is* and *ought* statement are fundamentally different which means that one kind of statement cannot be derived from another kind of statement. Hume does not seem to be saying-‘The facts about human nature are such-and-such, therefore, men ought to behave in certain ways so much so ‘The facts about human nature are such-and-such and these facts cause men to judge that they ought to behave in certain ways.’<sup>1</sup>

This difference between fact and value and correspondingly between factual and value statement may be interpreted in modern terminology and from modern prospective. It is said that the truth and falsify of a descriptive or factual statement is objectively decidable. We can decide that there is a situation which makes a factual statement true; in the absence of such a situation the statement is false. But in the case of evaluative statement the question of truth and falsify does not arise. One may know the meaning of an evaluative statement, but such knowledge is not sufficient for knowing under what conditions the statement containing these are true or false. The difference between the two so fundamental that it cannot be ignored.

It is also said that evaluative statement performs a completely different job from descriptive statement. An evaluative statement does not describe any feature of the world

which is done by a descriptive statement. We see, therefore, that the two kinds of statement perform completely different jobs which mean that there is a logical gap between the two.

They upshot at Hume's criticism is that a value property must be different from a factual or natural property. In other words, the contention of Hume undermines the thesis of ethical naturalism.

It is said that Hume's embryonic contentions were developed with a novel twist at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century by G.E. Moore.

Moore's argument is that we cannot define a value predictor such as 'good' by natural property. The chief reason behind the impossibility is that 'good' cannot be defined; because definition requires that the thing or concept which we intend to define must be complex or subject to analysis into simpler components. We can define horse, for example, because horse is a complex animal composed of many parts, and we can define a horse by recurring to simpler components. Things which are simple or non-composite cannot be defined for the simple reason that they are unanalyzable. Yellow for example, cannot be divided into parts which mean that yellow cannot be defined. Similarly in that case of the moral property 'good' is indefinable. Any proposition that we say regarding 'good' must be synthetic and not analytic since 'good' cannot be analysed.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that at the colour like 'Yellow' or the moral value 'good' may be accompanied by certain other properties. For example, the perception of the colour 'yellow' may be accompanied by certain colour vibration, nevertheless, it would be false if we say that 'yellow' is identical with that light vibration. When we assert that something is 'yellow', we cannot mean anything about vibration, the word 'colour' is the

name of a property perceptible to the 'eye', while vibration is something measured by physics. Moore argues that the word 'good' is similar. It may be that all good things are pleasant, but this cannot justify the identification of good with what is pleasant.

The Naturalist Philosophers commit this mistake of identifying those properties which accompany one another. This is the mistake which is brought out by Moore. He has defined the Naturalistic Fallacy in different languages. He said- "Many philosophers have thought that when they name those other properties belonging to all things which are good, they were actually defined in 'good', that these properties are absolutely and entirely the same with goodness. This view has been called the Naturalistic Fallacy. He defines naturalism in the same book as a particular method of approaching ethics. The method consists in substituting good for some one property of a natural object. Moore says – "The N.F.[Naturalistic Fallacy] is the fallacy which consists in identifying the simple notion which we mean by good with some other notion."<sup>3</sup>

In the same book G.E. Moore explained that just as it is false to say the pleasure means the sensation of 'red', similarly it would be wrong to say the 'good' means or is identical with pleasure, utility or any other natural property.<sup>4</sup>

Moore believes that every Natural Property is subject to analysis and consequently definable. Good is not subject to analysis and consequently it is not definable.

Moore's argument as found in his *Principia Ethica* is a strong defense of ethical non-naturalism; he observes that the term "good" (in the sense of intrinsic value) is *indefinable* on account of the fact that it provides a simple, non-natural property. It is, rather, "one of those innumerable objects of thought which are themselves incapable of definition, because they are the ultimate terms by reference to which whatever *is* capable

of definition must be defined".<sup>5</sup> Many ethical philosophers, of course, have tried to justify their claims about ethics by appealing to an analysis of the *meaning* of the term "good"; these philosophers argue that "good" can be defined in terms of one or more than one *natural* properties which are understandable to us (such as "pleasure" etc.). G.Moore prefers to call it "naturalistic fallacy" to describe such an argument; he explains the fallacy as an instance of a more general type of fallacy, which he does not provide any name, which may otherwise be called "definitional fallacy". The fallacy occurs when a statement showing some object as having a simple indefinable property is misunderstood as a definition. For, it gives the meaning of the simple indefinable property.

The term 'pleased' does not at all signify "having the sensation of red", or anything else whatever. Though it is true yet it makes us to understand what it means. From this it is well-known to us that the term "pleased" means "having the sensation of pleasure". Though pleasure is absolutely indefinable, though pleasure is pleasure and nothing else whatever, yet there is no problem of understanding that we are pleased. No problem is found in my saying that "pleasure is good" and yet it does not mean that "pleasure" is the same thing as "good", that pleasure *means* good, and that good *means* pleasure. If I were to imagine that when I said "I am pleased", I meant that I was exactly the same thing as "pleased", I should not indeed call that a naturalistic fallacy. Although it would be the same fallacy as I have called naturalistic fallacy.

Moore has his own conception of nature and natural property. By nature he means that includes all that has existed, does exist, or will exist in time. If we consider whether any object is of such a nature that it to be said to exist now, to have existed or to be existent then we may know that object is a natural object, and that nothing of which this is not true, is a natural object. Moore's example is that our minds are natural object. Did they

exist? Yesterday that they existed, today they exist and probably will do exist in a minute or two. We shall say that we had thoughts yesterdays, which have ceased to exist now, although their effects may remain, and in so far as, these thoughts exist, they too are natural objects.

From the above description of nature and natural object it is easy to guess that good is not a natural object. Moore does not deny that good is a property of certain objects. Moore does not deny that good is a property of certain objects. Yet he believes that 'good' itself is not a natural property. Moore explained- "Well, my test for these two also concerned their existence in time. Can we think of 'good' as existing by itself in time, and not merely as a property of some natural object?"<sup>6</sup> (P.E.)

The upshot of this discussion is that in the opinion of Moore 'good' is a non-natural property, consequently once we identify it with a natural property, or try to define it with the help of a natural property we cannot avoid the N.F. Hedonism as a kind of naturalism in believing that 'good' is identical with pleasure. But for Moore pleasure being a natural property experienced by us in time and 'good' being non-natural property. The identification of good with pleasure would commit the N.F. It seems that the bifurcation of Hume has been endorsed by Moore. A value property is not a factual property. Moore is not concerned with the nature and function of a value statement and those of a factual statement. His contention rather is that good is a non-natural property while pleasure etc. is natural properties. The two cannot be identified. Once we make things identification we commit the Naturalistic Fallacy.

## References:

1. J.Kemp: *Ethical Naturalism: Hobbes and Hume*, Macmillan, London, 1970, p.51
2. George C Kerner: *The Revolution in Ethical Theory*, Oxford, 1966, pp.5-8
- G.E. Moore: *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge University Press, 1903, pp.5-8.
- Henceforth, PE
3. *P.E.* p.41
4. *Ibid*, p.16
5. *Ibid*, p.10
6. *Ibid*, p.41.