

CHAPTER – IV

NATURALISM REVIVED

There may be reservations about the conception of the “naturalistic fallacy” since Moore himself has presented rather inconsistent description of the same. If such reservation is conceded then the gap between fact and value is not put, but inspite of this difficulty in Moore’s writing one can easily bank upon Moore’s other argument to show that the gap can be bridged. We want to refer to two arguments advanced by Moore in this context. In the first place, Moore is of the opinion that good cannot be identified with something which is different from good. The difference between good and pleasure is demonstrated by the argument that such identification still leaves room for such questions as – ‘Is pleasure good?’ This question should be contrasted with such question as – ‘Is pleasure pleasure?’ or, ‘Is good, good?’ A thing which is identical with itself cannot allow question of these kind. On the contrary such question as – “Is pleasure good?” is one which is not disallowed. It shows that pleasure cannot be identical with goodness. Hence, the naturalistic attempts to define value in terms of pleasure have not been successful.

The other argument to the same effect is similar to the one mentioned above. This argument is referred to as the open question argument. The argument is that you cannot identify good with pleasure because the question whether good is pleasure can be intelligently raised. The very intelligibility of the question is a proof that the identification of good with pleasure is not justified. Or, it would require further proof.

What we intend to show is that Moore may be all wrong in finding out the fallacy in all naturalistic ethics. There is hardly any serious attempt to disprove Moore on his own ground, nevertheless, there have been attempts to bridge the fact – value distinction and revive naturalism, while escaping from the force of ‘naturalistic fallacy’ of ‘open question argument.’

Searle's Attempt to Revive Naturalism:

We refer to the ethical theory of J.L. Searle who in the 20th century has attempted to derive an ethical conclusion from factual premises, thus going against David Hume and Moore.

But Searle does not seem to have questioned the legitimacy of Moore's objections. If the term 'fact' stands for everything that is natural then no value conclusion can proceed from factual premise. Although, Searle revives naturalism, he makes no attempt to derive a value conclusion from a factual premise describing a natural fact. If we notice it, we find that Searle's ethical theory does not reject Moore's criticism, but rather finds a kind of escape root in the conception of derivation and altogether different kind of fact.

Let us begin with the counter example provided by Searle in his article "How to derive 'ought' from 'is'"

- i) Jones uttered the words 'I hereby promise to pay you, Smith, five dollars'.
- ii) Jones promised to pay Smith five dollars.
- iii) Jones placed himself under (undertook) an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.
- iv) Jones is under an obligation to pay Smith five dollars.
- v) Jones ought to pay Smith five dollars."

The argument rests upon the new conception of institutional fact. Jones promised to pay Smith five dollars is obviously a fact, but it is not a natural or brute fact. To make a promise is to introduce a different kind of fact which has been called as

institutional fact. Promising is an institution. It is an institution conceived or constructed by people of a certain society. Promising as a social institution has certain rules at its basis. Such rules contain the principle of obligation, commitment and moral responsibilities. When Jones promised, he participated in a social institution, governed by certain rules. Consequently, as a promiser Jones is morally obligated to keep his promise, i.e. to pay Smith five dollars. As a matter of fact, Searle in a foot note of the said article comments that one can tincture with the rules, although one cannot throw them over board. If this contingency is granted then it becomes very doubtful if Jones has any moral obligation to pay Smith five dollars, although he promised to do so.¹

However, the revival of naturalism of Searle is a fresh attempt to establish naturalism. It is necessary here to consider a very important point raised by Searle. He says that there are certain questions which cannot be raised. For example – if a concept of tringle is accepted, we cannot allow such question as – ‘Is a triangle three sided?’ Similarly, once the concept of promise is accepted, such question as – ‘whether a promise should be kept’ cannot be raised at all. The concept of promise which is a fact and the concept of obligation which is a value are then brought close to each other. This is how Searle proposes to bridge the alleged gap between fact and value distinction.²

But this question may be raised here. “Does the concept of promise really accommodate value as fact?” This is to ask whether the fact that Jones promise is at all a fact - natural or institutional. With the rules of obligation moral responsibility lying at the root of the concept of institutional fact, the concept becomes value- loaded so much so that it prevents us from calling it a fact at all. If this is true, then it becomes doubtful if Searle really derives value from fact.

Searle has anticipated quite a number of objections which may be possibly raised against his derivation of 'ought' from 'is'. One of the objections is that – the promise in Searle's counter example depends on recognition of the principle that one should keep his promise and this principle is a moral principle. So we cannot say that Searle proceeds from fact to value. It is a transition from value to value.

To this objection Searle says that the principle that one should keep one's promise is a tautology. Searle's argument in this regard may be true or false. But the fact remains that the tautology in question is after all a value statement. For Searle it is more important to prove that it is a tautology which follows from another tautology – "All promises are obligation." "How can we deny that it is a statement of value?"³

Consequently, Searle does not seem to have been successful in deriving value from fact and thus in establishing value on factual ground, that is to say, naturalism is not successfully revived.

References:

1. John R. Searle: *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp.175-178.
2. *Ibid*, pp.182-187.
3. *Ibid*, pp. 188-198