

CHAPTER - FIVE

We have given a fairly correct outline of Moore's view on Ethics, and now we propose to examine his views critically in order to find out, in the light of our examination, how far they are tenable.

For Moore the central problem of Ethics is the determination of the good and the fundamental ethical question is: What good (in general) in itself is? And his answer to this question is that good is an indefinable, unanalysable, simple, intrinsic and non-natural quality. But in asking that very question 'What good in itself is?' Moore ~~simply~~ commits, I think, the fallacy of many questions. For Moore in his very manner of questioning assumes that there cannot be many qualitatively distinct goods. In short, he assumes the non-existence of a plurality of qualitatively distinct goods or goodness. & Moore himself says that the answers given to the question, 'What is common and peculiar to all ethical judgments?' are not satisfactory. But from the existence of unsatisfactory answers it does not necessarily follow that there is no value-predicate common and peculiar to all ethical judgments. Hence Moore's off-hand rejection of the possibility of the existence of moral good as qualitatively distinct from aesthetic and other goods as the value-predicate common and peculiar to all ethical judgments is not justifiable. Further from the fact that other things, besides conduct, are good it does not necessarily follow that 'good' denotes some property or quality which is common to them and conduct. For it may be possible that the 'good' which belongs to conduct is qualitatively distinct from the 'good' which belongs to other things. Hence without definitely disproving this possibility as untenable it is not justifiable to hold that 'good' denotes a property which is common to conduct (which comes within the sphere of

Ethics proper) and other things (which do not come within the sphere of Ethics), i.e., that there are not many goods which are qualitatively different and belong to different spheres not reducible to a common denominator.

As regards Moore's description of 'good' as a simple, indefinable, unanalysable, intrinsic and non-natural quality it may be remarked that the argument from unanalysability is a dangerous argument. For the simplicity of the quality 'good' is inferred from the failure of the attempts to analyse this notion. But in the case of the failure of previous attempts to analyse the notion we are left with the alternatives that (a) that there is a correct analysis of the notion which has not yet been discovered; or (b) that the notion is simple and unanalysable. And to hold the second alternative without positively disproving the first is intellectually disquieting.

Moore illustrates his view of a simple, unanalysable and indefinable quality by citing the example of yellow. "Consider yellow", says Moore, "for example. We may try to define it, by describing its physical equivalent; we may state what kind of light-vibrations must stimulate the normal eye, in order that we may perceive it. But a moment's reflection is sufficient to show that these light-vibrations are not themselves what we mean by yellow. They are not what we perceive. Indeed we should never have been able to discover their existence, unless we had first been struck by the patent difference of quality between the different colours. The most we can be entitled to say of these vibrations is that they are what correspond in space to the yellow which we perceive"(1). It will appear from the above that Moore makes a distinction between a quality such as yellow that is perceived as simple and unanalysable and its physical equi-

valent which are certain light-vibrations. And he further holds that we perceive this simple unanalysable quality ~~amongst the different~~ because are struck by the patent difference of quality amongst the different colours. Here is an obvious confusion which one hardly expects from a writer of Moore's standing. If a colour is perceived through its "patent difference" from other colours it is hardly legitimate to say in the same breath that it is a simple unanalysable quality. If a colour is known through its difference from other colours there is obviously some mediation involved. The difference is either part and parcel of the colour which it differentiates or is different from it. In the first alternative one can hardly say that the colour is known by itself and not through its difference from other colours. In the second alternative we are landed into an infinite regress of a difference that differs by another difference. In fact, what may be called the Achilles' heel of Modern Realism is the conception of sense-datum that is not merely given but also perceived by it itself, self-contained. That the so-called yellow is at best a particular shade of yellow referring necessarily to other shades of yellow and differentiated from reds, greens and other sensations of colour, sound etc., is a primary fact which the majority of the Modern Realists seem to ignore. Kant's lesson in the first Critique that there is no perception except through the synthesis of Apprehension and the Synthesis of Representation not to speak of the Synthesis of Apperception seems to be unceremoniously brushed aside by the majority of the realistic writers. Starting from the assumption of unmediated brute matters of sense they construct realistic philosophies all which err in their basic conceptions. A sensation as such is never an object of perception. When the Realists speak of yellow as a unique datum perceived

as such they forget that they are talking only of sensation and not the perception of yellow. The following from Walsh's "Reason and Experience" knocks the bottom out of most of the realistic constructions, mis-called analysis. "Simple judgment of sense", says Walsh, "at least, it argued, must be such that we can see them to be true on their own merits without reference to any other judgment. Thus, if I hear a loud noise I hear a loud noise; there is no sense in asking what other judgments I am prepared to assert at the time of hearing. But though this argument is a very strong one, I am not sure that it is really decisive. In the judgment 'I hear a loud noise' we can distinguish, as in other more complex assertions, two elements: a given element, supplied here by sensation, and an element of interpretation. And though the interpretative element is of minor importance in a case like this, it is none the less present. It is in virtue of it that I classify the experience as noise and describe it as loud. But such a process of classification, in which an appeal is made to general ideas (being noise, loud, etc.,) involves a reference beyond the context of immediate experience, and so suggest that the judgment is not, after all, self-contained. It is not one experience, but a whole class of them, which I describe as being a noise. But if this is so it looks as if we must say simple judgments of sense, as of other judgments, that their condition lie partly outside themselves; that they are not to be accepted because they are evident in themselves, but only so far as they fit in with other judgments" (2). In a footnote in the same page of the book Mr. Walsh says, "The case for this point was argued most effectively by Bradley in the second chapter of his Logic. In reviving it must not be thought to wish to deny the reality and the importance of the given. But I hold (as I think Bradley did)

that the given is a presupposition of experience rather than something we can express precisely in simple judgments. The given is known in feeling, not in judgments".

Regarding Moore's view of the propositions of intrinsic value that they are self-evident or intuitively certain, i.e., true by themselves alone so that no reason can be given for them, we may observe, perhaps not without justification, that Moore's view in this respect is not satisfactory. In the first place, Moore holds that an intrinsic value judgment or end-judgment, unlike an extrinsic value judgment or means-judgments, is necessarily true in all instances, if it be true in one instance of an intrinsically good thing. But this is a statement which it is very difficult to prove. It is very difficult to prove, for instance, that what we value today as intrinsically good, say knowledge, was so valued in the past and will be so valued in the infinite future. And unless it is so, the statement that the intrinsic value judgment, if true in one instance, will necessarily be true in all instances is nothing more than unproved assumption. Secondly, in the case of conflict of intuitions there is no way out. For it is not possible from the very nature of the case to supply extra-intuitional evidence in favour of any one of the conflicting intuitions. But that amounts to the assertions that two completely opposite intuitions are true and that there is no way to disprove any one of them, and this will lead us straight in the undesirable realm of ethical anarchy where every assertion is true because it is true and the deciding factor which resolves the conflict of intuitional assertions is not the strength of logic but the strength of the big stick and the blackjack. Thirdly, if both the contradictory intuitions are allowed as equally true, there will be no

there will be no possibility of determination of right action or duty, for the assessment of the total values of the total consequences of actions will be impossible due to the lack of agreement among the assessors themselves regarding what is good and what is bad.

With regard to the simplicity of the notion 'good' it may be observed that Moore's trend of reasoning proves just the opposite of what he intends to prove. If 'good conduct' be a complex notion because of the fact some conduct is not good, and that some other things, besides conduct, are good, the same line of reasoning can be applied mutatis mutandis to the notion of intrinsic good. There are definitely goods which are not intrinsic and also there are, besides intrinsic good, intrinsic properties which are not intrinsically good. Hence the notion of 'intrinsic good' should, in the fitness of things, be called a complex notion.

As to the 'intrinsicity' of value we may note that by intrinsicity Moore means in fact the independence of values from everything else save and except the intrinsic nature of a thing which it is predicate. But this definition does not bear strict examination. Consider, e.g., the case of toothache. Toothache is painful; and pain, according to Moore, is intrinsically bad. And according to Moore, though toothache and the consciousness of toothache are different from each other, yet toothache cannot exist without the consciousness of toothache. Thus we find that at least in one case the existence of a value-predicate does not depend exclusively on the intrinsic nature of the thing of which it is the predicate (3).

As regards Moore's view of right action and duty we may observe that Moore failed to recognise the value of means as distinct from ~~value~~ end-values. Moore did not recognise

the fact that a means can be valued as intrinsically good and therefore as right even when the means fails to achieve the end. The locomotive driver of a fast moving passenger train who, finding some of the fish-plates of the railway track removed, applied the brake in order to stop the train but failed miserably is a man who, in Moore's opinion, did not act rightly (assuming that his action, in the case of success, would produce total consequences not less but perhaps more in value than any other action he could perform under the circumstances). But we are afraid the verdict of common sense which finds it arch-champion in Moore will go against Moore's opinion in this case. An action, therefore, can be morally good and therefore right even if it fails to achieve the end. ~~Now~~ Hence we may conclude that Moore's view of right action is not correct and that its incorrectness is due to his failure to recognise the distinction between the value of aiming at and the value we aim at, i.e., the distinction between moral value and non-moral value, and also due to his failure to recognise the fact that moral good is as much intrinsically valuable as non-moral good.

Now we will discuss the most difficult part of Moore's ethical philosophy, viz., Moore's view on the relation of value to existence. Metaphysicians, says Moore, "have always been much occupied, not only with that other class of natural objects which consists in mental facts, but also with the class of objects or properties of objects, which certainly do not exist in time, are not therefore parts of Nature, and which, in fact, do not exist at all. To this class, as I have said, belongs what we mean by the adjective 'good'. It is not goodness, but only the things or qualities which are good good, which can exist in time can have duration, and begin and cease to exist - can be objects of perception/preception."

But the most prominent member of this class are perhaps numbers. It is quite certain that two natural objects may exist; but it is equally certain that two itself does not exist and never can. Two and two are four. But that does not mean that either two or four exists. Yet it certainly means something. Two is somehow, although it does not exist. And it is not only simple terms of propositions - the objects about which we know truth that belong to this class. The truths which we know about them form, perhaps, a still more important subdivision. No truth does, in fact exist; but this is peculiarly obvious with regard to truths like 'Two and two are four', in which the objects, about which they are truths, do not exist either. It is with recognition of such truths as these - truths which have been called 'universal' and of their essential unlikeliness to what we can touch, see and feel, that metaphysics proper begins" (4). It is obvious from the above quotation that, according to Moore, the quality goodness is not a part of Nature because it does not, while the things and qualities which are good do, exist in time. Hence it is not a natural object, and consequently cannot be an object of perception. Like truths and numbers goodness also is somehow although it does not exist; and like them, it can be called 'universal', i.e., it is not something temporally existent, i.e., it cannot begin and cease to exist in time although it can be a predicate, i.e., can qualify, things which can end and begin and cease to exist in time. Thus when Moore says that duty means an action which causes more good to exist than any possible alternative what he means is that duty is the action which causes more good things to exist than any possible alternative.

Now it may perhaps be observed safely that Moore's view on the relation of existence to value or good is also

not satisfactory, for it raises more problems than it solves. In the first place, if intrinsic value or goodness is somehow timeless and can be predicate of a temporal things, i.e., can attach itself as a quality to a thing which has a temporal location, then certainly there is a relation of value to the temporally located things, viz., the relation of attachment of a non-temporal w quality of goodness which is somehow to a temporal thing, i.e., a thing which exists in time. Now what is the existential status of this relation? Does this relation of goodness to the temporally good things exist in time, or is it a timeless something like goodness? If this relation exists in the sense in which the things that are good exist, then it must be admitted (1) that this relation exists for a short duration, i.e., it begins and ceases to exist, and (2) that there are many such relations (because if there are not many such relations, then before the beginning and after the cessation of its existence there was not and there will not be any good things because of the absence of relation between the non-temporal goodness and the temporal things). Now these relations, viz., the relations of goodness to things which are good, are members of a particular class and are different from relations which belong to other classes. Hence there must be, in the fitness of things, something common and peculiar to the relations of this class. But this something, being a universal, belongs to the same class to which goodness, truths, numbers, etc., belong; and at once the w question arises: what is the existential status of this universal something to its particular instances, viz., the particular temporal relations of goodness to things which are good? And if the answer to this question is that this relation exists in the same in which the things which are good exist, the circle will continue till the repla

replacement of this particular type of answer by some other.

On the other hand, if the relation of goodness to the things which are good is in the same sense in which goodness is, then the relation being timeless, the good things which exist, i.e., which begin and cease to exist in time, will become timeless, i.e., they also are somehow and do not temporally exist. Thus the adoption of the second alternative amounts to the assertion that the things which are good exist both in time and outside time which is an obvious contradiction in terms.

Secondly, when Moore says duty means an action which causes more good to exist than any possible alternative he means and should mean by the phrase 'more good to exist' that 'more good things exist'. Thus what increases or decreases is not goodness but the number of good things, for the adjective 'good' or goodness timelessly is; and consequently cannot admit of more or less, increase or decrease. Now when Moore speaks of the existence of intrinsically valuable organic wholes and the existence of intrinsically valuable parts which compose these organic wholes, and also when he speaks of comparison of the relative values of these wholes so as to determine which of them is of more intrinsic value than the others he definitely uses the term 'existence' here in the sense in which the things that are good exist. But if \neq this be the case, Moore's account of the relation between an organic whole and the parts which compose it appears to be a bit confusing. According to Moore, though both the cause or means and the part are necessary conditions for a whole, the part is not necessary in the same sense in which the cause is necessary. For the parts are, while the cause is not, constitutive of the whole. If you take away the parts, the whole ceases to exist; but if you take away the cause after the

production of the whole, the existence of whole is not affected in any way. But we should note that Moore takes here the word 'cause' in a narrow sense. By 'cause' he means 'efficient cause' only. The parts are the material cause of the whole. Hence if you take away the parts, the whole ceases to exist. Besides his identification of 'cause' with 'efficient cause' Moore denies the possibility of the part being at once the material and efficient cause of the whole as self-contradictory. "To say", Moore says, "that a thing is an 'organic whole' is generally understood to imply that its parts are related to one another and to itself as means to end !.....!. But a still more cogent reason for its discontinuance is that, so far from being necessarily connected, the second is a property which can attach to nothing, being a self-contradictory conception" (5). This conception is self-contradictory, for, according to Moore, "the whole must include all its parts and no part can be a cause of the whole, because it / cannot be cause of itself" (6). But Moore's reason for considering this conception as self-contradictory is not convincing as the reason itself is based on a confusion. Indeed a part cannot be cause of itself, but in what sense? Consider, e.g., an organic whole X which is composed of two parts A and B. The whole X must include all its parts, viz., A and B, and no part, i.e., either A or B, can be a cause of the whole X, because it, i.e., either A or B, cannot be cause of itself. Thus it follows from Moore's argument given above that the part A cannot be the cause of the whole X because it cannot be a cause of itself, i.e., because A is identical with X; and the part B also cannot be cause of X because it cannot be cause of itself, i.e., because B is identical with X. Now if we follow Moore's line of reasoning, we shall be in a curious predicament. If A is identical with X, and B

also is identical with X, then the natural conclusion is : A is identical with B, or in other words, A is B. But this amounts to the assertion that a whole is not composed of parts, an assertion to which Moore definitely will not subscribe. Hence Moore's contention that the view that the part can be at once the part as well as the cause of a whole of which it is the part is a self-contradictory conception is not tenable. As a matter of fact the assertion that the cause must be antecedent to the effect does not mean that there must be definite definite time gap (whatever the span of the time gap may be) between the cause and the effect. It means simply that the effect under no circumstances can exist before the cause. It does not prohibit the simultaneous existence of cause and effect. And if this be granted, then it is not self-contradictory to hold that the part can be at once the part as well as the cause of the whole.

Besides it may be observed that Moore's endeavour to secure the autonomy of Ethics, to ensure the independence of Ethics from Metaphysics fails miserably in his own writings. His notion of goodness which is somehow timeless is based on a very controversial metaphysical theory, i.e., the theory of Abstract Universal. Goodness, like the universal, is somehow but does not exist. Its being, like the being of universals, is not affected by the origination and annihilation of the particular things which are good; and like the Platonic universal it is not, while the particular good things are, an object of perception. Hence Ethics ties itself to the apron-string of the grand-dame Metaphysics in spite of Dr. Moore.

As regards Moore's view of the difference between the possible and the impossible as expressed in one of the commonest and most legitimate usages of the phrase 'could' and 'could not' it may be observed that the difference between

the possibility and the impossibility of two actions respectively neither of which did happen is not so sharp and rigid as Moore thinks. Moore contends that he "could have walked a mile in twenty minutes this morning," though he did not. But Moore ignores the circumstance that he could have done so only if certain conditions were fulfilled. Amongst such conditions one may mention the following. He could have done it if he had not met with an accident and sprained his ankle on his way or that he had no sudden attack of illness on his way, etc. He also certainly "could not have run two miles in five minutes" that morning, though he did not; provided that there was no emergency for his running and that of the saying: "emergency brings out unsuspected qualities in man", is absolutely baseless provided that there was no cause of running fast and that the laws of nature were changed; and so on. Further the statement that between two actions neither of which did actually happen one was within my powers, whereas the other was not, involves, at least, two assumptions, viz., (1) that we know for certain the extent of our powers precisely, and (2) that we know for certain the number of actions which are within our powers precisely. But we do know precisely the extent of our powers as well as the number of actions which fall within our capacity? Experience, we are afraid, abounds in instances which will definitely falsify the two aforesaid assumptions.

In criticism of Moore's own view of Free Will we may point out that Moore's statement in (2) of the last question "if we had chosen so to choose" (7) obviously leads to an infinite regress. If we choose a choice we can also choose to choose a choice and so on ad infinitum. But apart from this obvious absurdity in the conception of a choice that itself is chosen there are other discrepancies that cannot be over-

looked. Moore says that his view of Free Will in the above sense is quite compatible with the rule of causality. But if no man could know for certain that "we should not so choose" (3) as Moore says in (3) in the above quotation, such ignorance is also causally determined and in such circumstances there is no possible escape from such ignorance and its consequences. Now, then, can Moore say in the same breath that every phenomenon is causally determined including our actions without sufficient knowledge of what we could choose and at the same time that our will is free in the sense that we could have acted otherwise, if we had so chosen? If Moore ~~had~~ had repudiated the universal reign of causality as some modern physicists do he might have saved freedom of will in his sense of the term. But to concede the universal operation of the law of causality and at the same time to assert that one might have done otherwise than one did, if one had so chosen, appears like eating one's cake and having it at the same time.

Despite the inconclusiveness and in some cases the faulty nature of Moore's reasonings and arguments no person with a really philosophical bent of mind can gainsay the fact that Moore is one of the British Master Minds of the present century. He is really the "Philosopher's philosopher"; and it is no exaggeration to say that Modern British philosophical ethics have begun with the publication of Moore's *Principia Ethica*. He showed us more than anybody else that philosophy is no picnic, and he taught us the value of analysis and criticism by demonstrating them in his own writings. "Often this has had", says C.D. Broad humorously but justifiably, "the devastating effect of the child in the fable, who horrified the courtiers by piping out that the emperor was in fact naked" (9). In the field of Moral Philosophy he

brought in the limelight the hitherto neglected problem of value and showed it to be the central problem of ethics. He also showed us how to use analysis in the field of ethics in order to avoid misunderstanding. His contribution lies not in answering but in asking question with precision and clarity. And all modern philosophers, irrespective of their widely divergent opinions, will agree, I hope, with Professor Wisdom in holding that "the ruthless clarity with which Moore shows us the pathless Jungle before us helps us to realize what must be done to get through. There is no path. We must cut a way from tree to tree". (10)

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