



Philosophy of G E Moore

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URL: <http://www.els.ngo/jels/2455-393X-73.pdf>

George Edward Moore was a highly influential British Philosopher of the early 20th century. His career was mainly spent at Cambridge University, where he taught along with Bertrand Russell and later, Ludvig Wittgenstein. The period of their overlap in Cambridge has been called the "golden age" of Cambridge Philosophy. Moore was educated at Dulwich College, and at Trinity College, Cambridge. At Cambridge he read classics and Moral Science. Moore's main contribution to philosophy were in the areas of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and philosophical methodology. Moore is remembered as a stalwart defender of common sense realism and his defense of non-naturalism 'Moore's Paradox' is still remembered. According to it 'Good' cannot be defined and judged. It's the influence according to which Good is judged.

Moore was admired by other philosopher and also by the Bloomsbury Group. Beyond the academics, Moore's emphasis on the value of personal relationship and aesthetic experience endeared him to the Bloomsbury Group, who embraced Moore as their patron saint. Bloomsbury was a group of Avant-grade writers, artists and intellectuals that proved to be immensely influential in culture beyond the academy. The members of the group embraced Moore's idealization of friendship and aesthetic enjoyment as the highest human goods and, their own example and through their work, conveyed at least some of Moore's views and values beyond the halls of academia and into the broader culture. However, they also used Moore's intuition based moral epistemology as a justification for flouting the mores of their culture, especially in the area of sexual ethics. In fact, on account of

Bloomsbury's reputation for moral laxity, Moore's views are often unfairly criticized as encouraging libertine behaviors. This is clearly a case of guilt by association, as Moore himself never claimed that 'Free Love' was good. The closest he comes to topic is in discussing social connection about chastity as rule that might, under certain circumstance be suspended. However, far from endorsing that they actually be suspended, he argues that it is obligatory to obey the conventions of one's society, since this will usually generates a state of greater good than violating. For better social harmony following the social convention is very important.

The philosophic basis of the Bloomsbury Group was laid in the principles of *Principia Ethica*. *Principia Ethica* was the most important work of Moore which largely influenced members of Bloomsbury Group. Friendship, beauty and art were the main areas which were taken by the group from Moore's philosophy. The most important aspect of the philosophic basis of Bloomsbury Group was the conception of intrinsic worth as distinct from the instrumental value for both Moore and the Bloomsbury writers, the greatest ethics goods were in deals of personal relations and aesthetic appreciation. But more important than these for the group's values was the recurrent questioning if human behavior in terms of instrumental means and intrinsic ends.

In the last chapter of *Principia Ethica*, Moore set out his 'ideal'. For him friendship and the appreciation of beauty were good and pain was evil. It is his values that connect him to the 'Bloomsbury' writers. The Bloomsbury ideal of life was devoted to Art and Love, and excludes social values such as equality and freedom. Keynes puts in that Moore's ideals was a kind of secular 'religion' not much use for public policy but fine for talented individuals who could agree to differ in their detailed value judgments.

Moore asserts the most other philosophers working in ethics had made a mistake he called the "Naturalistic Fallacy". The business of ethics, Moore agreed, is to discover the qualities that make things good. Moore contended that goodness cannot be analyzed in terms of any property. In *Principia Ethics* he writes:

"It may be true that all things which are good are also something else, just as it is true that all things which are yellow produce a certain kind of vibration in the light. And it is fact that Ethics aims at discovering what are those other properties belonging to all things which are good."

Thus, we cannot define "good" by explaining it in other words. We can only point to an action or a thing and say "that is good". Similarly, we cannot describe to a blind man exactly what is yellow. We can only show a sighted man a piece of yellow paper or a yellow scrap of cloth and say "That is yellow". In addition to categorizing "good" as indefinable, Moore also emphasized that it is a non-natural property.

This means that it cannot be empirically or scientifically tested or verified it is not within the bounds of "natural science".

One of the most important parts of Moore's philosophical development was his break from the idealism that dominated British philosophy (as represented in the works of his former teachers F.H. Bradley and John Mc Taggart) and his defense of what he regarded as a "Common Sense" form of realism.

He objects to the idea that in telling us the qualities that make things good, ethical theorists have thereby given us an analysis of the term 'good' and the property goodness. Moore regards this as a serious confusion. To take an example, a hedonist might be right to claim that something is good just in the case that it is pleasant. But this does not mean, Moore wants to insist, that we can define value in terms of pleasure. Telling us what qualities make things valuable is one thing; analyzing value is quite another. Moore's argument for the indefinability of "Good" is often called the open question Argument; it is presented in Chapter 13 of *Principia Ethica*. The argument things on the nature of statements such as "Anything that is pleasant is also good" and the possibility of asking question such as "is it good that X is pleasant"? According to Moore' these questions are open and these statements are significant; and they will remain so no matter what is substituted for pleasure." Moore concludes from this that any analysis of value is bound to fail. In other words, if value could be analyzed, then such questions and statements would be trivial and obvious. Critics of Moore's arguments sometimes claim that he is appearing to general puzzles concerning analysis, rather than revealing anything special about values. The argument clearly depends on the assumption that if "good" were definable it would be analytic truth about 'good', an assumption many moral realists like Richard Boyd and Peter Railton reject.

In his essay "A defense of Common Sense", he argued against idealism and skepticism toward the external world on the grounds that they could not give reasons to accept their Metaphysical premises that were more plausible than the reasons we have to accept the common sense claims about our knowledge of the world that sceptics and idealists must defy. He famously put the point into the dramatic relief with his essay "Proof of an External World", in which he gave a common sense argument against skepticism by raising his right hand and saying "Here is one hand", and then raising another hand and saying "And here is another", then concluding that there are at least two external objects in the world, and therefore that he knows (by this argument) that an external world exists - Not surprisingly not everyone inclined to skeptical doubts found Moore's method of argument entirely convincing. Moore' however defends his argument on the grounds that skeptical arguments seem invariably to require an appeal to

"philosophical institutions" that we have considerably less reason to accept than we have for the common sense claims that they supposedly refute.

Moore's description of the principle of organic unity is extremely straightforward, nonetheless. It is a principle that seems to have generally escaped ethical philosophers and ontologists before his time. According to Moore, a moral actor cannot survey the "goodness inherent in the various parts of a situation, assign a value to each of them, and then generate a sum in order to get an idea of its total value. A moral scenario is a complex assembly of parts, and its total value is often created by the relations between those parts, and not by their individual value. The organic metaphor is thus very appropriate biological organisms seem to have emergent properties which cannot be found anywhere in their individual parts. For example, a human brain seems to exhibit a capacity for thought when none of its neurons exhibit any such capacity. In the same way, a moral scenario can have a value for greater than the sum of its component parts.

The final aspect of Moore's critical response to idealism concerns his rejection of the Monism which was characteristic of British idealism. This is the holistic thesis that the ordinary things are essentially inter-related in such an intimate way that they constitute together an 'organic unity' which is, in a sense, the only thing that 'really' exists, since it is the only thing whose existence is not dependent on the existence of anything else. The thesis is especially characteristic of Bradley's idealism, according to which the Absolute is the one real thing. In his early writings and in *Principia Ethica* Moore engages in a good deal of polemical criticism of this thesis, but it is hard to find any argument against it, as opposed to a robust affirmation of a realist pluralism. In his paper 'External and Internal Relations' Moore focused on the idealist conception of internal relations which lies at the heart of the monist thesis. Moore's argument against the thesis that all relations are internal starts from the claim that the burden of proof lies on its supporters since it conflicts with one common sense conviction that things are not essentially inter-related in such a way that a change to one thing in one respect necessitates changes to everything else. Moore then argues that the best reason one could have for the thesis involves a logical fallacy; he shows how the thesis that all relations are internal might be plausibly, but fallaciously the uncontentious principle that things which differ in their relations must differ in their identity.

In the first three chapters of *Principia Ethica*. Moore sets out his criticisms of 'ethical naturalism'. At the core of these criticisms is the thesis that the position involves a fallacy, the 'naturalistic fallacy' of supposing that goodness, which Moore takes to be the fundamental ethical value, can be defined in naturalistic terms, in terms, say, of pleasure or desire or the course of evolution. As against all such claims Moore insists that goodness is indefinable, or unanalyzable, and thus that

ethics is an autonomous science, irreducible to natural science or indeed, to metaphysics. Moore's main argument against the possibility of any such definition of goodness is that when we confront a putative definition such as that to be good is to be something which we desire, we can tell that this is not a claim that is true by definition because its truth remains for us an 'open question' in the sense that it remains sensible to doubt it in a way which would not be possible if it were just a definition which makes explicit our understanding of the words.

Moore illustrates the point of intrinsic value by following case: although knowledge has little intrinsic value, the value of the aesthetic appreciation of a beautiful work of art (which is, according to Moore, potentially one of the most valuable things there is) is greatly enhanced by knowledge about it. So this kind of knowledge can have a substantial 'value as a part' even though it has little intrinsic value. Nonetheless this point implies that a things intrinsic value is not simply its value irrespective of its consequences, it is also its value irrespective of its context.

Moore states that intrinsic value is same in all contexts. For this just seems wrong, in that the value of, say, friendship differs from one context to another. Although, as Moore rightly says, friendship is normally one of the most valuable things, it has no value at all where claims of justice are at stake, as in a court of law. So Moore's conception of absolutely universal intrinsic values should be replaced by a conception which allows for the 'bracketing' of normal values in certain contexts, and once this is in place, along with a more sophisticated account of normative values than Moore provides, it is reasonable to hope that the phenomena captured by Moore's irrational principle of organic unities will find a more comprehensible interpretation.

One can find here the beginning of a 'common sense' approach to ethics which is distinctly preferable to his official appeal to intuitive judgments concerning the relative intrinsic value of situations of arbitrary complexity. Moore presents a straightforward account of the relationship between the right and the good; the right action is that which will produce the best outcome. In practice, because it is so difficult for us to determine by ourselves what is the best outcome, he allows that we probably do best if we follow established rules; thus Moore ends up recommending a conservative form of rule consequentialism, he was criticized a Keynes and Russell for this. Later critics such as W. D. Ross argued that because Moore subjects out personal responsibilities to the impersonal test of producing the best outcome his position does not adequately capture the way in which they arise from our relationships with particular people.

Bloomsbury writers were strongly influenced by the doctrines of G. E. Moore's Bloomsbury Group's notion of friendship was influenced by his philosophy of friendship. D. H. Lawrence rejected Moore's notion of friendship, suggesting that

after the Great War desexualized friendship was impossible on the others hand, Forster and Woolf continued to believe in Moore's concept that friendship and the "pleasure of human intercourse" are among "the most valuable things, which we can know or imagine. In *A Passage to India*, *The Waves*, *Forster and Woolf*, respectively, generatively expand and extent Moore's philosophy of friendship to meet to complex demands of the Modern World.

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