

## MOORE'S EVALUATION OF SIDGWICK'S HEDONISM

A considerable part of the history of ethical thought is concerned either with the assertion and confirmation of hedonism as an ethical theory or with the rejection of the same. Arguments and counter arguments have been put forward on both the sides. In modern times Moore has brought forth some serious objections against this theory on the basis of Sidgwick's statement of hedonism. In Sidgwick's formulations of hedonistic position, Moore finds a number of confusions which, if clarified, take away even the seeming credibility that may be attributed to hedonism. It is difficult to say whether people have agreed or disagreed with Moore on this point. But his objections against Sidgwick's formulations have not been seriously re-examined. The present study is an attempt in this direction. In what follows I propose to show that Sidgwick did not suffer from the confusions he is supposed to be involved in.

In *Principia Ethica* Moore has raised a number of objections against Sidgwick's *hedonism* as well as against his *utilitarianism*. I will confine myself only to the former for the reason that these are of greater philosophical significance, and, if true, more damaging to his theory.

Moore claims in the final summary of the chapter on Hedonism: "The most important points I have endeavoured to establish in this chapter are... (b) that Sidgwick fails to distinguish 'pleasure' from 'consciousness of pleasure', and that it is absurd to regard the former at all events, as the sole good; (c) that it seems equally absurd to regard 'consciousness of pleasure' as the sole good, since if it were so, a world in which nothing else existed might be absolutely perfect: Sidgwick fails to put to himself this question, which is the only clear and decisive one."<sup>1</sup>

Let us begin with (I) the distinction between 'pleasure' and 'consciousness of pleasure' and then proceed to examine (II) whether 'consciousness of pleasure' is the sole good.

(I) Moore begins with the question 'what is pleasure?' and says that since it is something we may be conscious of, it may be distinguished from our consciousness of it.<sup>2</sup> Apparently, this distinction seems to be logically sound. But one may understandably ask: Can one distinguish them in the same manner as one can distinguish a table, for example, from one's consciousness of the table? Or, in other words, Is the relation between pleasure and the consciousness of pleasure of the same kind as the relation between a table and the consciousness of the table? Can pleasure exist apart from the consciousness of pleasure just as a table can exist apart from consciousness of that table? If we attend to the dictionary meaning of the word 'pleasure', it is: 'The condition of consciousness induced by the enjoyment or anticipation of what is felt or viewed as good or desirable; enjoyment, delight, gratification, (O.E.D.).' It is thus clear that according to lexicographers who deal with usages, the meaning of the word *pleasure* does include consciousness as a necessary element. It also takes note of its possible analysis in terms of 'enjoyment' and 'delight'. In ordinary language of course the word *pleasure* is not free from some kind of ambiguity. This has been recognised by Ryle while discussing what he says 'the supposed logic' and 'the actual logic' behind the use of the word 'pleasure'. He distinguishes two senses of the term 'pleasure'—one in which it involves feelings and the other in which it does not.<sup>3</sup> The former is 'the supposed logic' of its use and the latter is its 'actual logic'. Ryle speaks of 'delight', 'transport', 'exultation' etc. as 'names of moods signifying agitations' which he distinguishes from feelings. But are not these 'moods' some states of consciousness? Whether feelings are or are not included in pleasure, we can not give the logic of the word 'pleasure' without referring to consciousness involved therein.

What does Moore actually want us to distinguish when he says that 'pleasure' is distinct from 'consciousness of pleasure'? The distinction is certainly clear in the case of table and consciousness of that table. To obliterate this distinction, would only lead us to solipsism. Suppose, I say 'This is a table' and, then, 'I am conscious of the fact that this is a table'. In the former I am simply asserting the fact that 'this is a table' and in the latter I am asserting an altogether different fact of being conscious that this is a table. I can of course go on making further statements such as 'I am conscious of being conscious of the fact that this is a table' and so on. All such subsequent statements ultimately depend on the thing table.

Now let us see what happens when we make similar statements about 'pleasure'. When I say 'I have pleasure' or 'I am pleased', I mean 'I am conscious (or have consciousness) of something in a particular way'. And when I say 'I have consciousness of pleasure' I can only mean 'I am conscious of being conscious of something in a particular way'. And we can go on adding: 'I am conscious of having consciousness of...' and so on. Here all subsequent statements ultimately depend on something which is itself a state of consciousness and thus we find that for every statement of the first list ('table' and 'consciousness of table') there is correspondingly an additional reference to consciousness in the second list ('pleasure' and 'consciousness of...'). Another difference between the two sets of statements is clear in the sense that when I say 'I have pleasure' it may be equivalent to 'I am pleased'. But neither facts nor linguistic conventions permit us to interpret a statement like 'I have a table' as 'I am tabled'. Table is not an ingredient of one's consciousness or self in the sense in which pleasure is.

The questions which Moore raises in this context are rendered in a way that is suggestive of mutual separability of pleasure and consciousness: 'Is pleasure good?', or, 'Is consciousness of pleasure

good?' Remembering what 'pleasure' means, the questions become: 'Is being conscious of something in a particular way good? or, Is consciousness of being conscious of...good?' Can we discuss something without taking into account what at least directly follows from the meaning of that term? It seems difficult to justify Moore in having raised a question about the word 'pleasure'...without taking into consideration what follows from the very meaning of the word. Can one say, 'There is pleasure of which no one is conscious?' In this sentence the word 'pleasure' can only mean 'a source of pleasure'. But this interpretation is irrelevant with regard to the sense of 'pleasure' Moore has in mind. At one place in *Principia Ethica* he sees some connexion between pleasure and consciousness; but there he introduces another distinction which is equally difficult to maintain.<sup>4</sup> He provisionally admits that consciousness could be an *inseparable accompaniment* of pleasure and says that even if it is true, it could only follow that consciousness is a *mere means* if pleasure be an end. But since he holds that pleasure without consciousness 'would be comparatively valueless', he concludes that 'pleasure is *not* the only end, that some consciousness at least must be included with it as a veritable part of the end'. In this concession which he hypothetically concedes to hedonism, he nevertheless maintains the distinction between pleasure and consciousness and holds that for hedonism consciousness can only be taken as a *means* to pleasure which is an *end*. And then he hastens to add that since pleasure *sans* consciousness is of lesser value, consciousness must at least be regarded as a 'part of the end'. These distinctions which Moore tries to make (at least hypothetically) between 'means' and 'end', and between 'end' and 'part of the end' do not express what Moore thinks the inherent difficulties of hedonistic position on this issue. They rather speak of Moore's own difficulty in conceiving of them in their proper and legitimate senses. He expresses this difficulty, perhaps unwittingly in quite a clear way when he asks: "Should

we think that the attainment of pleasure, of which we never were and never could be conscious, was something to be aimed at for its own sake? It may be impossible that such pleasure should ever exist, that it should ever be thus divorced from consciousness."<sup>5</sup>

It seems very difficult to maintain, except in Freudian sense, that one is not conscious of the pleasure one is having.<sup>6</sup> This point becomes all the more clear if we look at other equivalents of pleasure: 'delight', 'enjoyment', 'gratification' or 'satisfaction'. Moore's asking of Sidgwick to distinguish 'pleasure' from 'consciousness' seems pointless when Sidgwick has already understood the term in its proper sense. He says that by pleasure he understands "every species of 'delight', 'enjoyment' or 'satisfaction'; except so far as any particular species may be excluded by its incompatibility with some greater pleasures, or as necessarily involving concomitant or subsequent pains".<sup>7</sup> The reason why Sidgwick could not think of pleasure apart from consciousness is due to the fact that in ordinary language both are inseparable.

It may be relevant in the present context to consider yet another point referred to by Moore during his discussion of the first point we have just examined. Moore refers to a sentence from a long passage he quotes from Sidgwick where the latter says: "No one would consider it rational to aim at the production of beauty in external nature, apart from any possible contemplation of it by human being".<sup>8</sup> And Moore says, 'I, for one, do consider this rational'. His claim amounts to asserting that out of two *imagined* worlds, one filled with every kind of conceivable ugliness and the other as exceedingly beautiful, 'supposing them quite apart from any possible contemplation by human beings', it is rational to hold that 'it is better that the beautiful world should exist, than the one, which is ugly'. In other words, Moore means to say that we can judge beauty, as good without any reference to my or anyone's consciousness of it. But is it possible? The case is similar to what we have discussed in relation to pleasure. In general usage the meaning of the word 'beauty' is understood as

“that quality or combination of qualities which affords keen pleasure to the senses, especially that of sight, or which charms the intellectual or moral faculties” (OED). If we accept this meaning, it seems obvious that Moore is engaging us in a hopeless task by asking us to judge beauty without any possible reference to the consciousness of, or its contemplation by, any one. How would it sound if someone asks, ‘Can you judge some quality which affords keen pleasure to the senses without any reference to senses?’ or ‘Are you intellectually charmed by something without being so charmed?’ or, ‘Has something appealed to your moral faculties without your being aware of it?’ Whether beauty is understood in physical, intellectual or moral sense, we just can not talk of it without bringing in sense-experience, intellectual charm or elation or awareness of some kind. And all such cases are species of consciousness. In putting his own case against Sidgwick’s, Moore repeatedly asks his readers to *imagine* a ‘world exceedingly beautiful...imagine it as beautiful as you can; put into it whatever on this earth you most admire’ and similarly he asks them to ‘imagine the ugliest world you can possibly conceive’ and so on.<sup>9</sup> The only thing which, according to Moore, one can not imagine is ‘that any human being ever has (seen) or ever...can see or enjoy the beauty of the one or hate the foulness of the other’. In asking his readers to *imagine* all these hypothetical instances of beauty and ugliness Moore has already conceded the point he is at pains to disprove. Can there be any concept of beauty without there being any prior connexion with any one’s experience? How do we come to call a beautiful thing beautiful? Suppose, the ghost world of Moore is complete. Before we judge it to be good because of its supreme beauty we will have to judge that it is beautiful.<sup>10</sup> And here enters consciousness or contemplation which Moore wants to deny. The beautiful world has no meaning apart from being *beautiful* which, again, has no sense apart from someone’s consciousness or contemplation of it. Moore’s adverse reaction against the idealists made him think that even concepts

like 'beauty' are like physical or metaphysical entities and exist apart from human contemplation. Thus he turned even his aesthetic theory into some form of crude realism. As a matter of fact to think that for every word that we use there must be a thing corresponding in a naive way of understanding language. Such a naive or, as Ryle would call it, the Fido-Fido theory of language, is bound to misguide us in understanding philosophical problems.

Moore raised this point rather uselessly in order to refute a very reasonable claim made by Sidgwick immediately before his statement about the value of beauty 'apart from any *possible* contemplation of it by human beings'. Moore's point would have some force if Sidgwick had used the word *actual* instead of 'possible'. But in this form Sidgwick's claim has all cogency in the context of what he observes earlier. He asserts that nothing, 'other than qualities of human beings... appears to possess this quality of goodness out of relation to human existence, or at least to some consciousness or feeling'.<sup>11</sup> The point regarding the relation between beauty and its contemplation or consciousness can be further clarified by looking into logical status of aesthetic judgements. When we make an aesthetic judgement we must have a particular mental picture before us. An aesthetic judgement requires a particular word-picture or an image or something concrete to be judged as beautiful.<sup>12</sup> No judgement about beauty can be passed unless the object so judged is present before us in some way. Moore perhaps thinks that merely belief in its existence is necessary.<sup>13</sup> And hence the confusion. Thus, we may conclude that Moore's point is neither logically sound nor psychologically correct.

(II) Let us now take the question 'whether consciousness of pleasure' is the sole good. The preceding discussion must have made it clear that the present question in this form is Moore's own construction since it is he, and not Sidgwick, who made the distinction between 'pleasure' and 'consciousness of pleasure'.

As we found that this distinction is not tenable, the present question also loses its significance in this particular form. Nevertheless, it is necessary to discuss it because Sidgwick's main hedonistic thesis is examined by Moore in the form which he has given it and is ultimately rejected.

This question is liable to misguide our judgement if we take it to mean that a particular type of consciousness, at the expense of certain other things commonly judged as having value, is advocated by Sidgwick as the sole good. That this apprehension is not ill-founded can be shown by remarks from Moore where he says that Sidgwick 'does exclude from it (the concept of ultimate end) every thing but certain characters of human existence'. They are put, as Moore says, 'out of court once for all by this passage'.<sup>14</sup> Whether Sidgwick has really excluded all other possible ends Moore refers to, is worth investigating. While discussing Egoism and self-love Sidgwick discusses the concept of Happiness as accepted by the Stoics, Aristotle, Green, Butler and others<sup>15</sup> and comes to take the Butlerian view. It includes 'every species of "delight", "enjoyment" or "satisfaction"'. Speaking of his intellectual development in his autobiographical note, added to the Preface in the sixth edition of *Methods*, he says that in Butler he found the 'master' he was searching for and from him he got 'the support and intellectual sympathy' for his 'ethical creed'. He also later adds that he conceived of his utility principle within Kantian framework of the moral law.<sup>16</sup> That Butler does not take a narrow view of happiness and that he is not a hedonist, as the term hedonism is understood, is too obvious to be discussed. To say, therefore, that Sidgwick took pleasure or happiness in a narrow sense is to do him a great injustice. His concept of happiness is rather akin to Rashdall's concept of 'well-being' which includes all hedonic and non-hedonic goods<sup>17</sup>—without rejecting Aristotle's concept of *eudaemonia*. That he did not identify 'good' with pleasure or happiness (in its narrower meaning) is clearly stated by Sidgwick where he says that neither the *adjective*



'good' nor the *substantive* 'good' can be identified with pleasure or happiness.<sup>18</sup> Sidgwick, however, prefers to understand by his concept of the 'ultimate good' the 'desirable consciousness or sentient life' which includes 'virtues, talents and gifts' and many other similar objects or activities as 'elements' therein.<sup>19</sup>

Moore, nevertheless, asserts that even if pleasure includes consciousness, 'consciousness of pleasure is not the sole good'. To prove his point Moore, like Sidgwick, appeals 'with confidence to the sober judgement of reflective persons'. He holds that for common sense 'a pleasurable contemplation of Beauty has certainly an immensely greater value than *mere* consciousness of pleasure'.<sup>20</sup> In the analysis of the word 'pleasure' we found a necessary reference to consciousness. Now let us see what does 'consciousness' imply. Can one have consciousness without there being any object of consciousness? If at all we use the word 'consciousness' (*per se*) without reference to any external or internal phenomenon we can only mean the ability or power of understanding or being aware of something. But this is not the sense in which Moore is using the word 'consciousness'; nor is Sidgwick. Moreover, it has also probably become clear from our earlier discussion of 'pleasure' that by 'consciousness of pleasure' we can only mean, what Moore has said in the above quoted lines, 'pleasurable contemplation' (or consciousness).

Now, in asserting the above point Moore is virtually saying that 'a pleasurable contemplation (consciousness) of Beauty has certainly an immensely greater value than a *pleasurable consciousness of nothing*, because this is what we can mean by his phrase 'mere consciousness of pleasure'. To hold that this is certainly true one need not trouble the 'sober judgement of reflective persons'. The obvious is too obvious to be asserted. If Sidgwick did not specify which kind of pleasure he had in mind, Moore is not justified in saying that it was pleasure *per se* which he was advocating as the ultimate end. Moore, therefore, can not score a point over Sidgwick by contrasting it with pleasure of enjoying beauty.

Moore also accuses Sidgwick of the neglect of the principle of 'organic whole' and organic relations while determining the value of a pleasurable whole.<sup>21</sup> He affirms that if consciousness of pleasure were the sole good, 'a world in which nothing else existed might be absolutely perfect'. How unreasonable it appears to think that there could be a world in which nothing else existed except the consciousness of pleasure. How could the latter arise if there were nothing else in the world. According to Moore it follows that there are three different and separable entities, viz. pleasure, object and consciousness. Each one of them can exist apart from the other. But in fact, though it is true of objects, it is not true of pleasure. Pleasure is only a product of a situation where object and consciousness are co-present. Pleasure may or may not follow with the co-presence of object and consciousness, but it can not arise without this necessary condition. It should, at least, be recognised as a logically accidental product of the object and consciousness being present together in some relation. Moore's criticism of Sidgwick on this point surely goes against his own theory of 'organic whole' which is concerned with matters of fact.

Before we conclude, a few lines about the possibility of 'pleasure' being understood as a value concept may not be out of place. In the dictionary meaning of 'pleasure' we found a reference to 'good' or 'desirable'. Thus pleasure may mean 'the enjoyment of what is viewed as good or desirable'. But why the question 'Is the enjoyment of what is viewed as good, good?' is not nonsensical, is due to the fact that what is *viewed as good* may not be good. In this connection Sidgwick's distinction between 'true good' and 'apparent good' is significant. Nevertheless, in one of the uses of the word 'pleasure' it has an evaluative meaning. Sidgwick also recognises it when he says that "we can not identify the object of desire with 'good' simply, or 'true good', but only with 'apparent good'."<sup>22</sup> But it is not impossible to think that my object of desire may in some case be 'true good', or what is

viewed as good may be *really* good. If the latter condition is fulfilled, the question 'Is the enjoyment of what is viewed as good, good?', does not remain significant. Though it is true that meanings (connotations) of 'good' and 'pleasure' or 'happiness' are different, their denotations may nevertheless coincide. Hence, one can legitimately say that 'pleasure' and 'good' mean (in one sense) the same thing and thus, by process of transference, one can think of 'pleasure' as a value word. After all, meaning of a word depends on how it is used and a value word is no exception to the rule.

Delhi College,  
Delhi.

S. A. Shaida

#### REFERENCES

1. *Principia Ethica (PE)*, pp. 108-9
2. *Ibid*, p. 87
3. *Concept of Mind*, pp. 108-9
4. *PE*, p. 89
5. *Ibid*, pp. 87-8
6. This is why Broad holds that pleasure is always a mental element. *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 88. It may be also instructive to note here that psychologists like Wundt and Tichner in later 19th and early 20th centuries were expounding psychological theories in which pleasure was clearly admitted to be an element of consciousness. Wundt, for example, speaks of pleasure as feeling—a 'state of consciousness', and takes pleasure as one of the important elements of consciousness. (*An Introduction to Psychology*, Tr. Pinter, 1912, pp. 52-3).
7. Similarly, Tichner accepts pleasantness and unpleasantness as qualities of affection and defines 'affection' as 'the elementary mental process characteristic of feeling and the emotions such as love, joy' etc. The term 'feeling' for him denotes a simple conception of sensation and affection in which affective process dominates consciousness'. See his *A Text Book of Psychology*. 1910.
7. *Methods*, p. 93
8. *PE*, pp. 81-3. These lines occur in *Methods*, p. 114
9. *PE*, p. 83

10. Incidentally, it may be observed that the judgement 'this beautiful world is good' is a doubly value judgement as it implies a value judgement that 'this world is beautiful' and another that 'this beautiful world is good'. This is an example of two different order judgements being lumped together as one.
11. *Methods*, p. 113
12. I am indebted to Dr. S. S. Barlingay for his suggestion on this point. See Barlingay's article 'The Nature of Aesthetic and Moral Values', *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, 1962.
13. *PE*, p. 192
14. *Ibid*, p. 83. In the passage referred to by Moore, Sidgwick does admit that 'if there be any Good other than Happiness to be sought by man, as an ultimate practical end, it can only be Goodness, Perfection or excellence of human Existence'. *Methods*, p. 115.
15. *Methods*, Bk. I, Ch. VII
16. *Ibid*, Preface, pp. XVIII-XX
17. See his *Theory of Good and Evil*, Vol. I, Ch. VII
18. *Methods*, p. 109
19. *Ibid*, p. 396.
20. *PE*, p. 94 (Italic mine)
21. *Ibid*, pp. 90-1
22. *Methods*, p. 110.