

**MOORE'S THEORY OF GOODNESS
AND
THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORIES OF VALUES :
AN INTERFACE**

BENULAL DHAR

The objective of the present note is to focus on the connectedness of G.E. Moore's thinking on goodness with the way some of the phenomenological thinkers develop the matrix of phenomenological thinking with regards to values. Moore's thinking on goodness seems to have some similarity on many points with the phenomenological way of understanding values, though each of the modes of thinking belongs to different philosophical traditions. Moore, on the one hand, is said to have initiated the analytic tradition of philosophizing and the phenomenological style of philosophizing begins with the writings of Husserl on the other. That Moore and the phenomenological ethicists share some points with regard to values has, indeed, been duly acknowledged by one of the prominent phenomenological value theorists, namely, Max Scheler in his preface to the second edition of his book, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Value*. He says,

In England, G.E. Moore has set forth similar views (such as those developed by Scheler himself) on many points concerning the problem of values.¹

In what follows, we shall bring out as clearly as possible these points of similarities that Moore's thinking on goodness have with phenomenological thinking on values as developed by both Scheler and Hartmann.

I

In his preface to *Principia Ethica*, Moore sets out his objective by raising two questions², namely, (i) "what kind of things ought to exist for their own

sakes?" and (ii) "what kind of actions ought we to perform?" He answers the first question by saying that it is the intrinsic goodness which ought to exist for its own sake. This statement, he readily acknowledges, is not susceptible of proof. Because, the self-subsistent nature of goodness can only be non-sensibly intuited. The truth or falsity of intrinsic goodness lies in itself and nothing existing outside can make it true or false. No external evidence can be adduced to prove it true or false.

But the answer to the second question is capable of proof or disproof. Moore's answer to the question is that one ought to do such action which would produce maximum intrinsic goodness. The evidence adduced in support of what one ought to do is of empirical kind and therefore, is of causal sort. And this question can be answered, according to Moore, by performing an empirical inspection.

Our point of interest in the present context is that the answer to the second question is developed on the answer of the first question. That is, one has to intuit *first* what goodness is in its own sake, then only one can decide what action ought to be performed. Here, the intuition of intrinsic goodness makes it possible for one to pass a judgement as to what he ought to do. There is involved a kind of *foundationalism*, in our view in Moore when he asserts that intuition of goodness is the basis of moral decisions and judgements.

This sort of foundationalism in the realm of value-ethics seems to have been adopted by phenomenological ethicists as well. Scheler, for example, talks of intuition of values or what he calls "value-facts" which is the *basis* of philosophical ethics. For him, values are essences in phenomenological sense or what he calls "phenomenological facts" as distinguished from natural and scientific facts. These value-facts are the objects of eidetic intuition having their specifiable contents. Now, in order to make value-judgements, it is necessary first to have cognition of values. It is the non-sensible, direct and immediate intuition of value-facts or values, according to Scheler, which paves the way for one to pass a value-judgement. All Judgements concerning goods and acts of persons must "conform" to these value-facts in order to be *a priori* true. As Scheler states,

All Judgements must conform to *facts*, and "methods" are *purposeful* only insofar as they lead to propositions conforming to facts³.

In the context of ethics, the statement would mean that all value-judgements would make sense only when they are "fulfilled" in the value-facts. In other words, moral judgements can only be true when they are "clarified" in the light of the value-contents or when they receive their determination from such contents. Here, it is in this sense that value-intuitions are the *foundations* of moral judgements. In fact, philosophical ethics is possible only when the fact of non-sensible intuition of values is presupposed. Because the latter is at the root of the former.

Again, when we turn to Nicolai Hartmann's value-ethics, we find a similar approach underlying his methodology. He distinguishes between two kinds of apprehension - one which he calls "primary" consciousness of value and the other is "secondary". The former is avowedly identical with what Scheler describes as "phenomenological intuition"⁴ of values. It is on this primary "sensing" of values, according to Hartmann, the whole philosophical ethics is founded. That is, the latter presupposes the former for its foundation. As Hartmann writes,

In any case one may in a certain sense say that philosophical ethics discovers values. But very seldom is it a really original discovery. Generally it is a later appropriation of that which beforehand existed in the moral consciousness, and which was active there, whether as an accepted commandment of current morality or as an unconscious point of view in the sensing of values within their real setting.⁵

What Hartmann calls "sensing of values", in the above passage, is the original discovery and is the basis of all philosophical ethics. The discovery of values by philosophical ethics is what he calls "a discovery at second hand".⁶ Thus, Moore and the phenomenological ethicists alike are concerned with the placing of value-intuition as lived process of "*experience*" at the origin of their respective philosophical ethics, though they belong to two distinctly different philosophical traditions. *This* concern is, what we call *ethical foundationalism*, is shared by both Moore, on the one hand and the phenomenological thinkers, on the other.

II

Moore's "naturalistic fallacy" in our view, has a close resemblance with

Husserl's critique of naturalism. For Moore, naturalism is "a particular method of approaching ethics This method consists in substituting for 'good' some one property of a natural object or of a collection of natural objects....."⁷ There are some ethical theories, according to Moore, which are built upon naturalism and they commit what he calls "naturalistic fallacy" by indentifying goodness with any one natural property.

In order to understand his criticism against naturalism in ethics we should keep in mind Moore's general standpoint that "good is a property of certain natural objects" but "good itself is not a natural property." For Moore, good is not to be assimilated with the natural properties, such as, pleasure, tall, red etc. The nature of natural predicates is such that they are descriptive in character and they describe the natural object. They are not used to judge any natural object or action whether they are valuable or not. They cannot give us direction to our actions and hence to our life. But, on the contrary, moral predicates, such as, good, right etc. are such that they evaluate our actions or prescribe what one ought to do and also evaluate natural objects. They provide us with the guidelines for doing this or that action as principles of the latter. In being distinctive of nature, natural terms and value terms, in Moore's view, should not be confounded with each other. This standpoint that maintains the non-identity of value and natural properties has come to be known as ethical non-naturalism.

This non-naturalistic standpoint of Moore drives him to undertake a critique of naturalism in ethics. He defines naturalistic fallacy thus :

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 a fact, that Ethics aims at discovering what are those other properties belonging to all things which are good. But far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good; that these properties in fact, were simply not 'other', but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness.

This view I propose to call the 'naturalistic fallacy'.....⁸

What is meant in the passage is that the fallacy essentially consists of identifying or equating any two notions which, in fact, are distinct or of supposing two words to be synonemous which are not. For example, if one defines pleasure (i.e. identifies

it with) as the sensation of blue, he would be committing naturalistic fallacy there by. Moore refutes naturalistic theories by arguing that they commit naturalistic fallacy identifying goodness with some other notion. This criticism against naturalism in ethics has been found to have resemblance with German idealists as it has been pointed out by Marvin Farber, a student of Husserl, in the following way :

With non apparent conscious motivation, a writer like G. E. Moore appears to point to an impasse to naturalism in ethics, and to be trying to achieve what idealists in Germany had wanted to accomplish in more elaborate ways.⁹

Thus it seems that even though Moore, who is only too readily assimilated into the English-speaking tradition of analytic or Inguistic mainstream, definitely favours a critique of naturalism which brings him quite close to the tradition of continental philosophers on this issue.

The above statement of Farber provides us a cue to enquire into the German philosophers' approach who are against naturalism in ethics. At the outset, we find that Husserl, the sheet-anchor of the phenomenological movement, abhors naturalism while formulating his theoretical as well as practical philosophy. It is the absurdities of naturalism in the theoretical sphere which have led him to reject practical philosophy based on naturalism. According to Husserl, naturalism is a pre-philosophical stance/attitude towards commonly experienced world which attempts to synthesize a "scientific" philosophy out of the result of the positive sciences. Husserl says that the "characteristic of all forms of extreme and consistent naturalism is the naturalising if ideas and consequently of all absolute ideals and norms."¹⁰ He believes that

.....philosophy's role is to provide a foundation for normative disciplines (ethics, axiology, etc.) - ideal disciplines that transcend facts - he shows that no science of facts can provide them with a foundation. Because modern psychology is essentially bound up to the physical, it shares the naivete of all natural sciences; it is caught up in the contingency of empirical existence and cannot itself be absolute or necessary.¹¹

Thus it is because of "naturalising" the data of consciousness (ideas) and of norms by the materialists and consequently their disregard for the essences with

which consciousness is constantly in touch that have led Husserl to reject ethics based on inductive experience. As Shmuely says on behalf of Husserl,

Against naturalistic theories Husserl stresses the difference of values from physical or psychological qualities. They have their own general essence, and their validity does not depend on their actualisation in reality which is the domain of the time and space dimensions.¹²

It is now no wonder that Scheler who develops his value-ethics on Husserlian methodology also rejects naturalism in ethics. He carefully distinguishes values from the natural objects which are their bearers. For him, the being of values is independent of things, state-of-affairs, men and relations of all kinds, the so-called goods. For example, one considers a poem or a work of art as "beautiful" or "ugly" without knowing in the least which properties of work prompt this. As Scheler writes,

A value precedes its object; it is the first "messenger" of its particular nature.

An object may be vague and unclear while its value is already distinct and clear.¹³ Further, that values are different from their bearers, Scheler argues, is clear from the fact that values themselves do not change with the changes that occur in their bearers. For example, value of friendship remains unchanged even if a friend of mine turns out to be a false friend and betrays me. Furthermore, values are also different from what humans value or consider important. For example, a painting by Bikash Bhattacharjee is beautiful, not because what people think of it according to social validity but because it is claimed that the beauty is found in the painting independently of people's opinion. Values are objective "facts" what Scheler makes clear by these arguments is that values are a unique object, and like Moore, he establishes that values are not to be confounded with anything else-natural or metaphysical.

III

In *Principia Ethica*, Moore's primary question is : what is "good" ? or how "good" is to be defined ? Here he is concerned not with the definition of the word "good" but with that "object or idea" which the word "generally used to stand for".¹⁴ Here he intends to discover the nature of goodness. For him, "good"

denotes a property or quality which is non-natural in kind.

This view has a close resemblance with the phenomenological value-theorists according to whom values are non-natural essences. In *Ideas I*, Husserl uses Plato's "eidos" synonymously with "essence" without committing himself to Plato's ontology of essences. Like Moore, Scheler too asserts values to be "objects". In his own words, "As value-phenomena values are true objects."¹⁵ Elsewhere he calls values "genuinely objective objects".¹⁶

Having given values the status of "objects", both Moore and the phenomenological thinkers alike deny the conceptual status, and consequently the definability of values. To understand this, let us first take up Moore's view. Moore says,

If I am asked 'what is good?' my answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked 'How is good to be defined?' my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it.¹⁷

The sense of definition in which Moore is denying the definability of goodness is one of analysis. This kind of definition "states what are the parts which invariably compose a certain whole."¹⁸ That is, to define, in this sense, means to analyse or to break up a complex into its simplest constituent parts which cannot be further analysed or broken. Goodness refers to a simplest property having no parts. Its simplicity lies in its very nature of substantial and indivisible character. Moore's claim is that goodness is indefinable means that it *cannot* be analysed in any conceptual terms as for him, goodness is not a concept but an "object or idea" and what it denotes is a property or a quality. The term definition is meant, in general, a statement of precise meaning of a concept and this is always given in terms of language. Moore's view finally is that the definition of goodness which is an "object or idea" is impossible anyhow and any effort to define it is bound to be a failure.

The point mentioned above is significant for phenomenological thinkers as, for them, values are not concepts but ideal essences. Scheler asks us to distinguish essences from the concepts while elaborating his phenomenological method. He says,

The concept "things" and the intuited "thingness", the concept equality and the intuited equality, or the being-equal (as distinguished from the

being-similar), etc., must be clearly distinguished.¹⁹

Elsewhere he unambiguously states that

..... values are not concepts abstracted from empirical, concrete things, men, or deeds; nor are they abstract, "dependent" movements of such things. They are *independent phenomena* that are comprehended independent of the peculiarity of contents, as well as of the being-real or the being ideal and the non-being (in this twofold sense) of their bearers.²⁰

We have already mentioned above that Scheler refers values to be "objects" and by that he means, according to Moosa, two things : (i) that "values are not mere concepts, but are actually given in intuition",²¹ (ii) that "they are not merely abstracted from things, deeds or persons."²² This means, on the contrary, for Scheler that values are *independent phenomena* having "autonomous being"²³ of their own. And values being "phenomena" are not amenable to definition as the latter is always given in conceptual terms. So "the definition of the phenomena, according to Scheler, is essentially impossible anyhow..."²⁴ In Scheler's words :

The concept of value does not allow any more of a definition than the concept of being does.²⁵

Thus for both Moore and Scheler, values being "object" or "phenomena" cannot be defined at all.

Turning to Hartmann, we see that he supports Moore and Scheler on this point. Though Hartmann is avowedly a value-platonist, he shares some phenomenological insights including that values are not mere concepts but essences in platonic form. And this is implied by his following statement :

If an age impressed a name upon a perceived value, it is the very next generation which is certain not to give any longer the same meaning to the name. Words are sluggish, concepts are coarse and come hobbling after, but insight into values is inconceivably alert and highly differentiated; thought cannot tell what it will do next.²⁶

IV

Now, our question as to how values are "experienced" ? In order to answer the question, it seems that both Moore and the phenomenological value-theorists

share, at least initially, an identical model of moral epistemology. According to Moore, good is known by intuition. He says that whenever a person

.....thinks of 'intrinsic worth', or says that a things 'ought to exist', he has before his mind the unique object - the unique property of things - which I mean by 'good'.²⁷

This means that when we judge anything to be good, we have before our mind's eye, a unique object called good. And this is what is meant by intuition of goodness for Moore. Though Moore does not further analyse the nature of the kind of intuition which, according to him, is responsible for having the cognition of goodness, but the context in which he talks of it, he seems to "consider it to be a non-sensuous mode of direct intuition."²⁸ This sort of intuition is *direct* in the sense that it operates without recourse to any mediated means such as, concepts, symbols, signs or instruction.

The kind of intuition which has been elaborated above seems, in our view, to be closely akin to what has been called by phenomenological ethicists variously as "essential intuiting" or "phenomenological intuition".²⁹ The phenomenological intuition is also a kind of *immediate*, and *direct* apprehension quite as Moore seems to think of intuition. This would be amply clear when Scheler states,

phenomenological experience alone yields facts "themselves" and hence, immediately, i.e., not in a way mediated by symbols, signs, or instructions of any kind.³⁰

This theory of intuition has duly been accepted by Hartmann who formulates his value-ethics under the influence of phenomenological thinking. He has termed this sort of intuition as "primary consciousness of value"³¹ or a "a primal, immediate capacity to appreciate the valuable".³² Like Moore, Hartmann also stresses the immediate capacity of intuition to apprehend the values. He clarifies,

Every moral preference is intuitive, is immediately there and is always contained in the grasping of a given circumstance (whether it be a situation or a finished course of conduct). It does not first wait for a judgement of the understanding.³³

In short, our point is *not* that Moore's concept of intuition is absolutely identical with that of Scheler and Hartmann. But that which Moore meant by intuition

comes close to that of phenomenologists in the sense that they both agree that intuition is a *non-sensuous, direct* and *immediate* kind of cognition which may be conceived as pre-linguistic or pre-conceptual means of cognition.

V

Finally it may be interesting to note that both Moore and Scheler find values quite comparable with colour. Let us first see in the following passage how Moore compares goodness with yellowness. Moore says,

My point is that 'good' is a simple notion, just as 'yellow' is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any manner of means, explain to any one who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is.³⁴

The comparison of goodness with yellowness made by Moore is not to show that they have some objective characteristics in common, because they have no such common objective characteristics. Moore's intention of making this comparison is to clarify that goodness is simple, indefinable and immediately apprehensible as implied in the above passage. In A.C.Ewing's words,

Goodness is of course a very different kind of characteristics from a colour, but might still well resemble each other in being immediately apprehended and in being indefinable.³⁵

Turning to Scheler, we see that he also refers to analogy that values share with colours. But it seems to us that he goes beyond Moore in comparing values with colour and wants to focus on a much wider issue relating to values. We have already seen that there is agreement between Scheler and Moore on the point of values being indefinable and directly and immediately intuited. But Scheler seems to have gone beyond Moore with this analogy to show (i) that values "exist" in the way a pure colour of the spectrum exists and (ii) that "value-qualities,....., are 'ideal objects' as are qualities of colour and sounds."³⁶ However, the elaboration of the latter point is beyond the scope of the present paper.

Let us summarize the points, in conclusion. We have tried to show that Moore on the one hand, and the phenomenological thinkers like Husserl, Scheler and Hartmann, on the other despite their affiliation to two *different* philosophical

traditions, develop similar views on some points with regards to values. *Firstly*, there is found a sort of *foundationalism* in both Moore, on the one hand and the phenomenological value-theorists, on the other. *Secondly*, both Moore and Husserl make an appeal to their reader to move out of the context of naturalism in ethics. Scheler also joins hands with them on this point by saying that values are a unique kind of objects which are quite different from their bearers. *Thirdly*, for Moore as also for Scheler and Hartmann, values are not mere concepts but are "objects" and therefore, they are indefinable, *Fourthly*, Moore and the phenomenological thinkers found values to be directly and immediately intuitable. And *finally*, both Moore and Scheler compare values with colours to make clear the above points with regard to values.

NOTES

I am grateful to my teacher Dr. Rahan K. Ghosh, UGC Research Scientist, Department of Philosophy, Delhi University who first drew my attention to the points of similarities between Moore's theory of goodness and the phenomenological theory of values discussed in the paper.

1. Scheler, M : *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, p.xxi, Translated by Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk. North-Western University Press, Evanston, 1973.
2. Moore, G.E. : *Principia Ethica*, p.viii, Cambridge University Press, London, 1965.
3. Scheler, M. : *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Value op.cit.*, p.52.
4. *Ibid.*, p.48.
5. Hartmann, N. : *Ethics*, Vol.I, p.87. Translated by Stanton Coit, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., New York, Third Impression, 1958.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Moore, G.E. : *Principia Ethica, op.cit.*, p.40.
8. *Ibid.*, p.10.
9. Farber, M. : *Phenomenology and Existence*, p.166. Harper & Row Publishers,

- New York, 1967.
10. Husserl, E. : *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, p.80. Translated with notes and an Introduction by Quentin Lauer, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1965.
 11. _____ : Please see, Quentin Lauer's Introduction to Husserl's *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, *op.cit.*, pp.9-10.
 12. Shmueli, E. : "The Universal Message of Husserl's Ethics: An Explication of Ethical Premises in Transcendental Phenomenology" in Tymieniecka edited *Anlecta Husserliana*, Vol.XXII, p.554 D. Reidel Publishing Co., Dordecht, 1987.
 13. Scheler, M. : *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, *op.cit.*,p.18.
 14. Moore, G.E. : *Principia Ethica*, *op.cit.*,p.6.
 15. Scheler, M. : *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, *op.cit.*,p.19.
 16. *Ibid.*,p.225.
 17. Moore, G.E. : *Principia Ethica*, *op.cit.*,p.6.
 18. *Ibid.*, p.9.
 19. Scheler, M. : *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, *op.cit.*, p.49.
 20. *Ibid.*,p.185.
 21. Moosa,I. : "A Critical examination of Scheler's justification of the existence of values". *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, Vol.25,1991.
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. Scheler, M. : *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formalism Ethics of Values*, *op.cit.*,p.186-87.
 24. Spiegelberg, H : *The Phenomenological Movement*, p.243, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1971.
 25. Frings, M.S. : "The Background of Max Scheler's 1927 Reading of *Being and*

Time, The Critique of a Critique Through Ethics," Philosophy Today, Vol. 36, No,2/4, Sammar, 1992. This passage is translated and quoted by Frings from Scheler's *Gesammelte Werke*, Bouvier Verlag, Bonn, 1985 published in the article referred to above.

26. Hartmann, N. : *Ethics*, Vol.I,p.88. Translated by Stanton Coit, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, Third Impression, 1958.
27. Moore, G.E. : *Principia Ethica*, *op.cit.*,p.17.
28. Prasad, R. : *Karma, Causation and Retributive Morality*, p.165. Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, in association with Munshirm Manoharlal Publishers(p)Ltd., New Delhi, 1989.
29. Scheler, M. : *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, *op.cit.*,p.48.
30. *Ibid.*,p.50.
31. Hartmann, N. : *Ethics*, Vol.I,*op.cit.*,p.88. Hartmann defines primary consciousness of values thus : "The primary consciousness of values is a feeling of value, the primal recognition of a commandment, is feeling of that which unconditionally ought to be, the expression of which is the commandment." *Ibid.*,p.177.
32. *Ibid.*,p.86.
33. *Ibid.*,p.176.
34. Moore, G.E. : *Principia Ethica*, *op.cit.*,p.7.
35. Ewing, A.C. : *Ethics*, p.88. The English Universities Press Ltd.,London, 1969.
36. Scheler, M. : *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, *op.cit.*,p.21.

INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATIONS

Daya Krishna and A. M. Ghose (eds) **Contemporary Philosophical Problems : Some Classical Indian Perspectives**, Rs. 10/-

S. V. Bokil (Tran) **Elements of Metaphysics Within the Reach of Everyone**. Rs. 25/-

A. P. Rao, **Three Lectures on John Rawls**, Rs. 10/-

Ramchandra Gandhi (cd) **Language, Tradition and Modern Civilization**, Rs. 50/-

S. S. Barlingay, **Bellefs, Reasons and Reflection**, Rs. 70/-

Daya Krishna, A. M. Ghose and P. K. Srivastav (eds) **The Philosophy of Kalidas Bhattacharyya**, Rs. 60/-

M. P. Marathe, Meena A. Kelkar and P. P. Gokhale (eds) **Studies in Jainism**, Rs. 50/-

R. Sundara Rajan, **Innovative Competence and Social Change**, Rs. 25/-

S. S. Barlingay (ed), **A. Critical Survey of Completed Research Work in Philosophy in Indian University (upto 1980), Part I**, Rs. 50/-

R. K. Gupta, **Exercises in Conceptual Understanding**, Rs. 25/-

Vidyut Aklujkar, **Primacy of Linguistic Units**. Rs. 30/-

Rajendra Prasad, **Regularity, Normativity & Rules of Language**
Rs. 100/-

Contact : The Editor,
Indian Philosophical quarterly,
Department of Philosophy,
University of Poona,
Pune 411 007.