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Moore in the Middle

Thomas Hurka

The rhetoric of G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*, as of not a few philosophy books, is that of the clean break. Moore claims that the vast majority of previous writing on ethics has been misguided and that an entirely new start is needed. In its time, however, the book's claims to novelty were widely disputed. Reviews in *Mind*, *Ethics*, and *Journal of Philosophy* applauded the clarity of Moore's criticisms of Mill, Spencer, and others but said they were "not altogether original," had for the most part "already been brought out by other critics," and were even "the standard criticisms."¹ To the *Mind* reviewer, "The book indicates throughout how strongly the author has been affected by Sidgwick's views."² Hastings Rashdall rejected as historically inaccurate Moore's claim that only Sidgwick before him had recognized that "good" is indefinable: "To say nothing of writers who (like Mr. Moore and myself) learned the doctrine largely from Sidgwick, I should contend that it was taught with sufficient distinctness by Plato . . . , Aristotle, and a host of other writers who have studied in their school."³ Rashdall also described Moore's principle

1. Bernard Bosanquet, critical notice of *Principia Ethica*, *Mind* 13 (1904): 254–61, p. 261; J. S. Mackenzie, review of *Principia Ethica*, *International Journal of Ethics* 14 (1904): 377–82, p. 378; Norman Wilde, review of *Principia Ethica*, *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method* 2 (1905): 581–83, p. 582. The contemporary reaction to *Principia Ethica* is surveyed in Jennifer Welchman, "G. E. Moore and the Revolution in Ethics: A Reappraisal," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 6 (1989): 317–29; I am much indebted to Welchman's paper.

2. Bosanquet, p. 255. Bosanquet was philosophically opposed to Moore and Sidgwick, but Sidgwick's student and defender E. E. Constance Jones likewise stressed the similarities between Moore's and Sidgwick's metaethics; see her "Mr. Moore on Hedonism," *International Journal of Ethics* 16 (1906): 429–64, p. 429. The unsigned *Athenaeum* review also noted Moore's "discipleship" to Sidgwick (review of *Principia Ethica*, *Athenaeum*, no. 3974 [December 26, 1903], pp. 847–48).

3. Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), vol. 1, pp. 135–36n. Earlier Rashdall had written, "I can only describe as preposterous Mr. Moore's claim that the idea of an indefinable good was an original discovery of Henry Sidgwick. Certainly it is the last claim he would have made for himself" ("Moral Objectivity and Its Postulates," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n.s., 5 [1904–5]: 1–28, p. 3).

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of organic unities as just “a new and striking way of stating a very old truth.”⁴ Some recent commentators have taken a similar line. Bernard Williams has said that much of *Principia Ethica* comes from Sidgwick,⁵ while Thomas Baldwin, discussing the book’s substantive values, has said the principle of organic unities “was expressly stated by Bradley,” while “McTaggart had for some years extolled the value of love, and the value of art is a central theme of romanticism.”⁶

Nonetheless, for most of the twentieth century *Principia Ethica* was seen as a revolutionary work, which set a new agenda for philosophical ethics. This view was reflected in a series of books published in the 1960s and 1970s, all of which gave histories of recent moral philosophy that began with Moore and saw later developments as a series of reactions to his work.⁷ And an influential recent article has reiterated the view, saying *Principia Ethica* “initiated” a controversy in ethics that persists to the present day.⁸

Like Moore’s contemporaries, I do not find this view persuasive. To me *Principia Ethica* is best seen, not as starting a new era, but as coming near the middle of a sequence of ethical writing that runs roughly from the first edition of Sidgwick’s *Methods of Ethics* in 1874 to Ross’s *Foundations of Ethics* in 1939. Moore’s principal predecessors in this sequence, alongside Sidgwick, were Rashdall, who began publishing on ethics in 1885; Franz Brentano, whose *Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* appeared in 1889; and J. M. E. McTaggart, who discussed ethics in his 1901 *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*.⁹ His successors included

4. Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 2, p. 40n.

5. Bernard Williams, “The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and the Ambitions of Ethics,” in his *Making Sense of Humanity and Other Philosophical Papers, 1982–1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 153–71, p. 155.

6. Thomas Baldwin, *G. E. Moore* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 127, 129.

7. G. J. Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1967); W. D. Hudson, *Modern Moral Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1970); Mary Warnock, *Ethics since 1900*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). The first edition of Mary Warnock’s book, published in 1960, had an opening chapter on Bradley and metaphysical ethics, but this was dropped from the third edition because there is “a certain obvious appropriateness in beginning the story of the twentieth century with the revolutionary appearance of *Principia Ethica* in 1903” (p. viii).

8. Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, “Toward *Fin de siècle* Ethics: Some Trends,” *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992): 115–89, p. 115.

9. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903); Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (London: Macmillan 1907); W. D. Ross, *The Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939); Franz Brentano, *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, trans. Roderick M. Chisholm and Elizabeth Schneewind (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); J. M. E. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901). Moore read Brentano’s book in English translation after completing *Principia Ethica*, but by that time it had already stimulated further work in German such as Alexius Meinong’s *Psychological-Ethical Investigations into Value-Theory* of 1894.

H. A. Prichard, C. D. Broad, W. D. Ross, A. C. Ewing, and later members of the Brentano school such as Alexius Meinong and Nicolai Hartmann. These philosophers disagreed on many issues, but shared fundamental assumptions about metaethics and the proper pursuit of normative ethics. Much of *Principia Ethica* defended those assumptions.

This is not to deny that *Principia Ethica* had more influence on twentieth-century ethics than, say, Sidgwick's work. Among the book's stylistic merits, repeatedly noted by reviewers, were a vigor and clarity that naturally attracted attention. Nor is it to deny the book's intellectual merits. The assumptions about ethics that Moore shared with Sidgwick, Rashdall, and others are in my view largely correct; in addition, the book's final chapter is brilliant. Nor, finally, is it to say there was nothing at all new in *Principia Ethica*. On the contrary, I will try to place Moore's book more clearly in its historical context by exploring what was and was not original in it. I will consider first its metaethical views, presented in chapters 1–4, and then the normative views of chapters 5–6.

I. MOORE'S NONNATURALISM

Moore's metaethical view was a version of nonnaturalism. He held both that moral judgments can be objectively true and that they are *sui generis*, neither identical to nor derivable from nonmoral and, in particular, natural or metaphysical judgments. These two aspects of Moore's view came together in his claim that goodness is an indefinable, non-natural property. The claim that goodness is a property expressed his moral realism; that it is nonnatural expressed his belief in the autonomy of ethics.

But in 1903 this general view, though by no means universally accepted, was certainly familiar. Sidgwick had held that the fundamental ethical concept is indefinable¹⁰ and had insisted, against Spencer and Green, that ethics "can stand alone" rather than being based on science or metaphysics.¹¹ Rashdall agreed. In 1885 he wrote of Sidgwick: "He . . . sees that no accumulation of observed sequences, no experiences of what *is*, no predictions of what *will be*, can possibly prove what *ought to be*. He neither dismisses the 'ought' as a figment (with Bentham), nor involves the whole discussion in inextricable confusion (with J. S.

10. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, pp. 32–38. Unless otherwise noted, all further references to *The Methods of Ethics* will be to the 7th edition.

11. Henry Sidgwick, *Lectures on the Ethics of T. H. Green, Mr. Herbert Spencer, and J. Martineau* (London: Macmillan, 1902), p. 1.

Mill) by failing to distinguish between the desirable and the desired.¹² Moore acknowledged in *Principia Ethica* that his general metaethics were shared by Brentano,¹³ and they were also shared more widely. McTaggart, too, insisted on the independence of “ought” from “is,”¹⁴ and in a 1901 exchange F. H. Hayward and E. E. Constance Jones agreed that the fundamental ethical concept is indefinable, disagreeing only about whether or not this claim has implications for normative ethics.¹⁵

That said, there were at least three respects in which Moore’s metaethics were different. First, Moore was much more inclined than his predecessors to insist on conceptual points, and in particular to charge other philosophers with ignoring them by committing the naturalistic fallacy. Anticipating the open question argument, Sidgwick said that if Bentham and Spencer defined good or right in terms of pleasure they turned a substantive proposition into a tautology, but he then dropped this interpretation precisely because it made their position untenable;¹⁶ Rashdall dismissed Mill’s confusions about the desirable in a dozen words rather than pounding on about them as *Principia Ethica* did. If there is an explanation for this difference, apart from Moore’s apparent fondness for blistering criticism, it may be that he was more confident than his predecessors that if a moral issue is framed properly people will agree in their judgments about it, so any disagreements can be traced to conceptual errors (pp. 145, 173, 188). Thus, he thought it just obvious that the correct theory of value is pluralistic and attributed the popularity of monistic theories to the view that goodness must be identical to some single natural property (pp. 37–38). Sidgwick and Rashdall were readier than he to allow substantive moral disagreement.

Second, Moore took the central unanalyzable property to be good rather than ought or right. In *Principia Ethica* he defined the right as

12. Hastings Rashdall, “Prof. Sidgwick’s Utilitarianism,” *Mind*, o.s., 10 (1885): 200–226, p. 214. Rashdall recognized that this view was not in the ascendant but hoped that “the present craze for extracting ethical theory from a study of the habits of mollusca and crustacea” would be helped to disappear by the “dry light” of Sidgwick’s analysis (p. 203).

13. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, pp. x–xi. Page references in parentheses in the text will be to the original edition of this book.

14. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, pp. 96, 266–67.

15. F. H. Hayward, “The True Significance of Sidgwick’s ‘Ethics,’” *International Journal of Ethics* 11 (1901): 175–87; E. E. Constance Jones, “Mr. Hayward’s Evaluation of Prof. Sidgwick’s Ethics,” *International Journal of Ethics* 11 (1901): 354–60; F. H. Hayward, “A Reply,” *International Journal of Ethics* 11 (1901): 360–65. Hayward held that the claim points away from hedonism and toward an Idealist view like Green’s. Jones that it is compatible with all substantive views.

16. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, pp. 26n., 109, “Some Fundamental Ethical Controversies,” *Mind* 14 (1889): 473–87, pp. 480–81, and *Lectures on the Ethics of Green, Spencer, and Martineau*, p. 145.

what maximizes the good (pp. 18, 25, 146–48, 151, 167, 169, 180–81), but he later abandoned that view and treated the connection between right and good as synthetic.¹⁷ At times he allowed that “good” might be definable in ethical terms,¹⁸ but as late as 1942 he still maintained as his preferred view that it is entirely indefinable.¹⁹ And this view was novel. Sidgwick had taken the fundamental ethical concept to be “ought” and defined the good as what one ought to desire;²⁰ for Rashdall the fundamental concept was “ought to be,”²¹ whereas Brentano analyzed the good as that the love of which is correct.²² The debate between these views continued in later decades. Ross, with a qualification to be noted later, agreed with Moore that good is a simple property,²³ while Broad and Ewing proposed reductive analyses similar to those of Sidgwick and Brentano.²⁴

In addition to its novelty, Moore’s view had significant philosophical merits. An account of the ethical use of “good” should capture two facts: that a state can be good even though no one can choose it and that its being good explains why we ought to bring it about. Defining the good as what we ought to produce would do neither of these things, but Sidgwick’s definition in terms of “ought to desire” seems to do both, since we can wish for things we cannot bring about, and since, given a general imperative of instrumental rationality, commands to adopt ends imply further commands to act as will produce them. But, first, this definition may not capture all of good’s explanatory role if a state’s being good also explains why we ought to desire it.²⁵ Second, since we cannot always control our desires, the definition violates the principle that “‘ought’ implies ‘can’.” Sidgwick acknowledged this in earlier editions of *The Methods of Ethics*. After defining the good as what we ought

17. G. E. Moore, *Ethics* (1912; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 25–26, 73, and “A Reply to My Critics,” in *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, 3d ed. (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1968), pp. 535–677, pp. 558–59.

18. G. E. Moore, “Preface to the Second Edition,” in *Principia Ethica*, ed. Thomas Baldwin, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1–27, pp. 5, 14.

19. Moore, “A Reply to My Critics,” pp. 572–75, 595–601.

20. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, pp. 112–13; and see further discussion and references below.

21. Rashdall, *Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 1, pp. 135–36.

22. Brentano, p. 18.

23. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930), chap. 3, and *The Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939), chap. 11.

24. C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930), pp. 277–78, 283, and “Certain Features in Moore’s Ethical Doctrines,” in Schilpp, ed., pp. 43–67, pp. 64–65; A. C. Ewing, “A Suggested Non-Naturalistic Analysis of Good,” *Mind* 48 (1939): 1–22.

25. Ross raised this objection against a similar definition in *The Right and the Good*, p. 111.

to desire, he added that “since irrational desires cannot always be dismissed at once by voluntary effort,” the definition cannot use “ought” in “the strictly ethical sense,” but only in “the wider sense in which it merely connotes an ideal or standard.”²⁶ But this raises the question of what this “wider sense” is, and in particular whether it is at all distinct from Moore’s “good.” If the claim that we “ought” to have a desire is only the claim that the desire is “an ideal,” how does it differ from the claim that the desire is good? When “ought” is stripped of its connection with choice, its distinctive meaning seems to slip away.²⁷ There may be a way out of this difficulty in Broad’s and Ewing’s definition of the good as what it is “fitting” or “suitable” to desire or choose.²⁸ But for this definition to succeed, the concept of the fitting must occupy a finely balanced position between those of good and ought. It cannot be equivalent to good, since then the definition will collapse, nor can it be equivalent to ought, since then the difficulty about “‘ought’ implies ‘can’” will reappear. It is unclear whether the concept can occupy this position, and even if it can, whether it really is more fundamental than the two simpler concepts it is defined as coming between. This is not to say that Moore’s nonreductive view is beyond objection. It faces the difficulty, pressed on Moore by William K. Frankena, of how claims about “good” can imply ones about “ought” if they do not include the latter in their content.²⁹ But it is at least a serious competitor on a topic where no view is entirely without difficulties.³⁰

Moore’s final innovation was his claim that a thing’s intrinsic value can depend only on its intrinsic and not its relational properties. This claim was not explicit in *Principia Ethica*, appearing first in “The Conception of Intrinsic Value” of 1922,³¹ but it nonetheless guided the book at two points. One was its method of testing for intrinsic value by asking whether a universe containing only a given thing and no other would

26. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1890), pp. 110–11.

27. If the claim is that the desire “ought to be,” as on Rashdall’s view, it faces the obvious objection, urged later by Broad and Ross, that states of affairs cannot have obligations.

28. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, pp. 278, 283, “Certain Features in Moore’s Ethical Doctrines,” pp. 64–65; Ewing, pp. 8–9, 14.

29. William K. Frankena, “Obligation and Value in the Ethics of G. E. Moore,” in Schilpp, ed., pp. 93–110, pp. 97–100.

30. I should add that the issue does not arise only for nonnaturalists. Expressivists, e.g., take judgments about “good” and “ought” to express attitudes but have to explain whether these attitudes are the same or different, and, if the latter, what the relation between the two is. So far as I can see, issues about “good” and “ought” are independent of most other issues in metaethics.

31. G. E. Moore, “The Conception of Intrinsic Value,” in *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), pp. 253–75.

be good; the point of this “method of isolation” was precisely to prevent judgments of intrinsic value from being affected by relational properties (pp. 91, 93–95, 157, 208). The other was Moore’s particular interpretation of his principle of organic unities. Stated generically, this principle says that the value of a whole need not equal the sum of the values its parts would have if they existed on their own, so if states a and b would each have 5 units of value on their own, the value that results when they are combined by relation R need not be 10 but can be, say, 15. What I will call a variability interpretation of this principle says the value of a part can change when it enters a whole, so, in the above example, a ’s value can go from 5 to 10 when it is related by R to b . But this interpretation is ruled out by Moore’s claim about intrinsicness, and *Principia Ethica* duly rejected it, saying, “The part of a valuable whole retains exactly the same value when it is, as when it is not, a part of that whole” (p. 30). Instead, the book assumed a holistic interpretation of the principle, on which if the value of a whole differs from the sum of the values of its parts, that is because, alongside the unchanged values in the parts, there is a further value in the whole “as a whole” that must be added to those in the parts to determine the whole’s value “on the whole” (pp. 213–22). Thus, in the example above, though a and b still have their 5 units of value, there can be a further 5 units of value in the whole aRb considered as a separate entity, and with the relation R now internal rather than external to it. This holistic interpretation was forced on Moore by his intrinsicness claim, and there was an opposite connection between his views. Imagine that we reject Moore’s principle and hold as a matter of substantive fact that the value of a whole always equals the sum of the values of its parts. It follows from this substantive view that intrinsic value always in fact depends only on intrinsic properties,³² and that makes the question of whether it also does so conceptually less interesting.

I have not found any clear anticipation of this claim among Moore’s predecessors. After the first edition of *The Methods of Ethics* Sidgwick spoke mostly not of “intrinsic goods” but of the “Ultimate Good” and

32. The conclusion does not follow absolutely strictly. Someone who holds that the values of parts can change when they enter wholes can in principle hold that, whenever this happens, there is always an exactly compensating change in other values, so if a ’s value goes from 5 to 10 when it is related by R to b , b ’s value goes from 5 to zero or there is an additional value of -5 in aRb as a whole. Since these claims are pointless, I assume that anyone who rejects organic unities will accept the intrinsicness claim as a substantive truth.

seemed to allow that this good can in principle be affected by relations.³³ Rashdall did speak of “intrinsic value” but in a way that seemed to deny Moore’s claim; thus, when suggesting that virtue unaccompanied by pleasure in one’s virtue is not good, he took the issue to concern how the presence of the pleasure affects the value of the virtue.³⁴ And since Brentano’s *Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* accepted a “principle of summation” that rules out organic unities,³⁵ the question whether value can in principle depend on relations was not in that book important. Moore’s claim about intrinsicness seems therefore to have been novel, and it was also influential. It was adopted, along with the method of isolation, by Ross,³⁶ and is still defended today.³⁷

But in my view this innovation was a mistake. In one respect, Moore’s claim makes no substantive difference, since both the holistic interpretation it requires and the variability view it forbids can always make the same overall judgments about states of affairs. If in our example the variability view says there are 15 units of value in *aRb* because *a*’s value has increased to 10, the holistic view can reach the same conclusion by saying there are 5 units of value in *aRb* as a whole, and the same overlap is possible in all other cases.³⁸ But the views arrive at their judgments by different routes, and sometimes one fits the moral phenomena better than the other. For example, the holistic view is more appropriate for claims about retributive desert, which say that if a person is morally vicious, his suffering pain makes the overall situation better rather than less good. A pure variability view must say that in this case

33. At one point Sidgwick considered the view that virtue, which he defined as a disposition that causes ultimate goods, is as such a further ultimate good. He did not simply dismiss this view as self-contradictory, as Moore would, but said only that it is “difficult to conceive” anything as “both means and end” in respect of the same property (*The Methods of Ethics*, p. 396). And when he later considered the view that the ultimate good can involve a mind’s “objective relations” to things outside it, such as the truth of its beliefs, he did not insist that this view makes the bearers of value not mental states, as he had earlier argued, but wholes combining those states with other objects (pp. 398–405).

34. Hastings Rashdall, “The Commensurability of All Values,” *Mind* 11 (1902): 145–61, p. 146. The same passage appears in *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 2, pp. 37–38; for other remarks suggesting that intrinsic value can be affected by relations, see vol. 1, pp. 72, 75, 78, 153, and vol. 2, pp. 21, 33, 39–40, 53.

35. Brentano, pp. 28, 40–41. In this book Brentano contrasted what is good “in itself” with what is good “in virtue of something else,” but his only examples of the latter were instrumental goodness and goodness as a sign (pp. 18, 144). There can be goodness that fits neither of these categories but depends on relational properties.

36. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, pp. 68–69, 74, 75.

37. See, e.g., Roderick M. Chisholm, *Brentano and Intrinsic Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 52–53; and Noah M. Lemos, *Intrinsic Value: Concept and Warrant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 8–11.

38. For elaboration of this claim, see my “Two Kinds of Organic Unity,” *Journal of Ethics* 2 (1998): 299–320, pp. 300–305.

the pain is “transvalued” from bad to simply good,³⁹ which implies that our emotional response to it should be simple pleasure. But this is not right: the morally best response to deserved suffering is somber, mixing satisfaction that justice is being done with regret at the infliction of pain. By making deserved pain still bad as pain, the holistic view captures this important view. But in other cases the variability view seems better. Consider Derek Parfit’s suggestion that if a person works for the preservation of Venice, then if after his death Venice is preserved, and in a way that depends on his efforts, that makes his life better than if Venice were destroyed.⁴⁰ A holistic view must say the additional value here is located in a whole combining the person’s activities, the later existence of Venice, and the causal relation between them, but this does not fit our intuitive response, which is that the person’s life and activities are better. Or consider a proposal to avoid a “repugnant conclusion”⁴¹ by insisting that some value cannot increase above a finite limit. Some may hold that while the existence of whooping cranes has value, there is no number of whooping cranes such that their existence could make up for the total absence from the world of humanity and its achievements. A holistic version of this claim will say that, although every additional whooping crane adds the same value to the world, there is an additional negative value in the group of whooping cranes as a whole that increases at just the right rate to keep the value on the whole of the group below a certain limit. This seems hopelessly artificial compared to the variability claim that the value of an individual whooping crane gets smaller the more other whooping cranes there are and, in particular, diminishes toward zero.⁴² Moore’s intrinsicness claim, then, brings no benefits, since it makes no difference to the overall values of states of affairs, while sometimes ruling out the most plausible formulation of an organic unities view.

The three innovations I have discussed, though not trivial, concern matters of detail in an overall nonnaturalist view. But several recent commentators have claimed that Moore’s metaethics differed more substantially from Sidgwick’s, and in ways that made them less acceptable. I will now argue that these larger differences did not exist.

One claim is that Moore supplemented Sidgwick’s comparatively modest nonnaturalism with a more extravagant metaphysics and epistemology. Sidgwick, it is said, held only that there are truths about what

39. See, e.g., Fred Feldman, “Adjusting Utility for Justice,” in his *Utilitarianism, Hedonism, and Desert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 151–74, p. 167.

40. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), p. 151.

41. See J. M. E. McTaggart, *The Nature of Existence*, ed. C. D. Broad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), vol. 2, pp. 452–53; and Parfit, pp. 387–90.

42. Erik Carlson, “Organic Unities, Non-Trade-Off, and the Additivity of Intrinsic Value,” *Journal of Ethics* 5 (2001): 335–60.

people ought or have reason to do but did not go on to posit a mysterious realm of nonnatural properties or a faculty of intuition that acquaints us with them. The latter were Moore's innovation, and they were shared by later nonnaturalists such as Prichard and Ross. But they have been subjected to withering attack by critics of nonnaturalism and were therefore a fundamental error. The defensible nonnaturalism is Sidgwick's modest one; by adding a suspect metaphysics and epistemology Moore opened the view to entirely avoidable objections.⁴³

It is surely some evidence against this alleged difference that it was not noticed by Moore's contemporaries, who repeatedly emphasized his similarities to Sidgwick. And there are two independent reasons for doubt. First, it is not clear that the difference the claim assumes between modest and immodest nonnaturalism actually exists. If it is true that some person ought to bring about a given state, does it not follow that this state has the property of being something this person ought to bring about? And setting aside questions about the relations between "good" and "ought," is this claim not on a par with the claim that it has the property of goodness? It is hard to see how there can be moral truths without properties these truths ascribe. If we accept this, we can reach two very different conclusions: that Moore's metaethics were no more metaphysically suspect than Sidgwick's, or that Sidgwick's were as hopelessly extravagant as Moore's. Without deciding between these conclusions, I question whether there is a significant difference between nonnaturalisms that do and do not posit nonnatural properties.⁴⁴

Second, even if there is such a difference, Moore tried at several points to place himself on its more modest side. At the start of his chapter on "Metaphysical Ethics" he said the property of goodness is an object but, unlike natural properties, does not exist either in time or outside it. More generally, he said that the central error of metaphysicians is to assume, of any object that does not exist in nature, that it must exist elsewhere, "in some supersensible reality." Goodness, he claimed, does not exist in such a reality (pp. 110–12, 123–25, 140–41).

43. For versions of this claim, see J. L. Mackie, "Sidgwick's Pessimism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1976): 317–28, p. 323; J. B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), pp. 205, 222; and Robert Shaver, "Sidgwick's Minimal Metaethics," *Utilitas* 12 (2000): 261–77, pp. 263–66. Contemporary views that are like the one ascribed to Sidgwick in accepting irreducible moral truths but claiming to avoid metaphysics are found in Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 138–49; and T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 1. Shaver and others claim that these writers have recovered Sidgwick's defensible nonnaturalism from beneath Moore's excrescences.

44. See also Sigrun Svavarsdottir, "Objective Values: Does Metaethics Rest on a Mistake?" in *Objectivity in Law and Morals*, ed. Brian Leiter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 144–83, p. 157.

Whatever exactly this meant, Moore was clearly trying to make his metaethics less ontologically extravagant. And far from positing a faculty of intuition, he said, in a direct echo of Sidgwick, that by calling certain propositions “intuitive” he meant only that they are “incapable of proof” and implied “nothing whatever as to the manner or origin of our cognition of them” (p. x).⁴⁵ He also denied that our belief that a proposition is self-evident makes it so; the belief may even be false (pp. x, 143). Despite these remarks, some commentators still insist that Moore’s moral epistemology was a derogation from Sidgwick’s. Some say Sidgwick did not rely only on judgments of apparent self-evidence but imposed further tests for moral knowledge: that the propositions known be clear, mutually consistent, and supported by a broad consensus.⁴⁶ But Moore surely accepted these tests, even though he tended, as Sidgwick also did, to exaggerate the extent to which others shared his ethical views.⁴⁷ Others say Sidgwick emphasized coherence tests in his moral reasoning rather than appeals to self-evidence.⁴⁸ But no coherence argument can begin without some initial credibilities assigned to propositions, which for Sidgwick came from intuition. And if we compare Sidgwick’s defense of his hedonist view of ultimate good with Moore’s arguments on the same topic, it is hard to find a significant difference. That was certainly the view of Sidgwick’s student E. E. Constance Jones, who said that, in insisting that ultimate goods are known by intuition, Moore was merely repeating Sidgwick’s view.⁴⁹

A second claim is that, whereas Sidgwick centered his ethics on the concept of what is good for a person or constitutes her well-being, Moore rejected that concept and spoke only of what is impersonally or impartially good. This rejection was most evident in his discussion of egoism. Sidgwick held that an egoistic hedonist cannot be argued out of her position if she claims only that her pleasure is good “for her”; Moore

45. Sidgwick’s similar remarks about “intuition” are in *The Methods of Ethics*, pp. 97, 98, 211.

46. Sidgwick stated these conditions in *The Methods of Ethics*, pp. 338–42; the fallibilism they introduce into his moral epistemology is emphasized and implicitly contrasted with the practice of later nonnaturalists in Bart Schultz, “Introduction: Henry Sidgwick Today,” in *Essays on Henry Sidgwick*, ed. Bart Schultz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 1–61, pp. 28–29, 59, n. 84.

47. No one could insist more strongly than Moore on the need for moral propositions to be clear, and he also required consistency. As for Sidgwick’s consensus test, Moore’s implicit acceptance of it is shown by his efforts to explain away moral disagreements when he found them. If Sidgwick said people mistakenly believe knowledge is intrinsically good because they confuse instrumental with intrinsic goodness, Moore said they do so because they confuse something’s being a necessary constituent of a good with its being good itself.

48. Shaver, “Sidgwick’s Minimal Metaethics,” pp. 266, 270.

49. Jones, “Mr. Moore on Hedonism,” p. 429.

replied that the expressions “my own good” and “good for me” as used by the egoist are self-contradictory. “When I talk of a thing as ‘my own good’ all that I can mean is that something which will be exclusively mine, as my own pleasure is mine . . . , is also *good absolutely*. . . . But if it is *good absolutely* that I should have it, then everyone else has as much reason for aiming at *my* having it as I have myself” (p. 99). In so rejecting the intelligibility of egoism, the claim goes, Moore was rejecting the concept of well-being. But this was a fundamental error, since any adequate ethics must be concerned with what benefits or is good for people.⁵⁰

It again counts against this claim that the difference it alleges was not noticed by Moore’s contemporaries, and in fact the claim rests on an anachronistic misreading of Sidgwick. Despite its present-day prominence, the concept of well-being was not used by any philosopher in the sequence from him to Ross. Although I cannot defend this claim here, this was to these philosophers’ credit, since the concept of well-being has no independent moral significance.

Some say that Sidgwick used the concept of well-being because he defined a person’s good as what she would desire if fully informed of the consequences of all the actions available to her.⁵¹ But although Sidgwick did state this definition, he immediately rejected it as insufficiently normative and defined the good as what a person would desire if her desires “were in harmony with reason.” Since for him reason was a faculty that issues “dictates” using the concept “ought,” this was in effect to define the good as what one ought to desire, as he elsewhere explicitly did.⁵² Sidgwick did use the expressions “my own good” and

50. This claim is made in Thomas Baldwin, *G. E. Moore* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 73–76, 116–19; Baldwin, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Principia Ethica*, rev. ed., pp. xv, xx, xxiii–xxv; and Stephen Darwall, “Sidgwick, Concern, and the Good,” *Utilitas* 12 (2000): 291–306, p. 291. Moore’s discussion of egoism is also taken to concern well-being in L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp. 46–53, though Sumner sees Moore as offering an unsatisfactory analysis of well-being rather than simply rejecting it.

51. See, e.g., John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 416–17, 421; Richard B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), pp. 59, 155; James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), p. 39; and Connie S. Rosati, “Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good,” *Ethics* 105 (1995): 296–325, pp. 297–98.

52. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, p. 112. See also pp. 92n., 381, 388, “Mr Barratt on ‘The Suppression of Egoism,’” *Mind*, o.s., 2 (1877): 411–12, p. 411, and *Lectures on Green, Spencer, and Martineau*, p. 331. Both Sidgwick’s rejection of the full-information view and his positive definition are clearer in earlier editions of *The Methods of Ethics*; see, e.g., 4th ed., pp. 110–12. That Sidgwick rejected the former view is noted in Schneewind, pp. 224–26; Parfit, p. 500; and Robert Shaver, “Sidgwick’s False Friends,” *Ethics* 107 (1997): 314–20.

“good for me,” but to express two different concepts neither of which was well-being.

By “my good” and sometimes “good for me” Sidgwick meant what I ought to desire “assuming my own existence alone to be considered.”⁵³ This should not have been objectionable to Moore: it defines my good as that portion of the good, however that is understood, that is located in me, and it does so using a restriction that is close to Moore’s method of isolation.⁵⁴ At other times, and especially in his discussion of egoism, Sidgwick used “good for” to express the different concept of agent-relative goodness, or what is good from a person’s point of view and so gives her (and perhaps only her) reason to pursue it. This concept’s distinctness from the good “in me” was blurred because the only agent-relative view Sidgwick considered was egoism, which makes the good from a person’s point of view always a state of her. But the concept can equally well be used to formulate the view Broad called self-referential altruism; it will then say that from each person’s point of view the pleasure of her child is a greater good than the equal pleasure of a stranger. It can also be used to state a purely altruistic view, on which what is good from each person’s point of view is only other people’s pleasure and not her own. There are several reasons why the central concept in Sidgwick’s discussion of egoism has to be agent-relative goodness.

First, this interpretation fits his earlier discussion of “good.” If the good in general is what one ought to desire, then what is good from a person’s point of view is, straightforwardly, what she (and perhaps only she) ought to desire. The interpretation also fits Sidgwick’s language in discussing egoism, which talks primarily of a person’s “rational ultimate end” or what he “ought to take . . . as his ultimate end” and only once of what is “good for” him.⁵⁵ It also allows Sidgwick’s view that the simple or agent-neutral “good” is the universalization of “good for.” This would be hard to explain if “good for” expressed well-being: the pleasure of a group of people cannot be “good for” the group because the group as such has no well-being. But we can define the agent-neutral good as what everyone ought to desire and pursue. In fact, Sidgwick’s much-maligned talk of what is good “from the point of view of the Universe” here receives a simple analysis: it is what is good from the point of view

53. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, p. 112.

54. Sidgwick had another reason to understand “my good” in this way given his central analogy between the way a person’s goods at different times are integrated into his overall good and the way the goods of different people are integrated into the universal good (*The Methods of Ethics*, pp. 381–83). A person’s good at a time is not what is good for that time or good for him-at-that-time; it is just the good he experiences at that time. By analogy, his good must be just the good located in him, something Moore explicitly allowed.

55. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, pp. 420–21, 497–98.

of all moral agents, so they all have reason to pursue it.⁵⁶ Finally, only agent-relative goodness is relevant in the right way to the intelligibility of egoism. Sidgwick and Moore agreed that to rule out egoism one must rule out the relativized predicate “good for.” But this would be problematic if “good for” expressed well-being, since many impartialists take their view to demand concern for the well-being of all. This difficulty does not arise if “good for” expresses agent-relative goodness, since then the question is only whether there are different ultimate ends for different people.

So the concept of Sidgwick’s that Moore rejected was not well-being but agent-relative goodness. And his main reason for rejecting it was his belief that goodness is an unanalyzable property. If goodness is this kind of property, it is hard to see how an object can have it “from one point of view” but not “from another”; surely it must either have the property or not. Compare squareness. An object cannot be square from one point of view but not from another; it either is square or not. (The object can look square from one point of view but not from another, but looking square is not the same as being square.) So it must be with goodness if that is a simple property. But Sidgwick held that goodness can be analyzed, in particular as what a person ought to desire, and it is perfectly possible to say that what each person ought to desire is different, say, just his own pleasure. This explanation of Moore’s dispute with Sidgwick is confirmed by the later view of Ross. Ross mostly shared Moore’s view that goodness is unanalyzable but also held that there is no duty to pursue one’s own pleasure.⁵⁷ And in *The Foundations of Ethics* he reconciled these views by distinguishing two senses of “good.” In the first and “most proper” sense, which is Moore’s, goodness is a simple property; it is had by virtue and knowledge, and there are duties to pursue these goods in everyone. But in a secondary sense “good” connotes a “worthy object of satisfaction” or what it is “right to feel satisfaction in”; in this sense the pleasure of others is good but one’s own is not. If goodness is unanalyzable it has to be agent-neutral, but a reductive analysis makes agent relativity possible.⁵⁸

I conclude that Moore did not differ from his nonnaturalist pred-

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 382, 420. For the maligning, see, e.g., Williams, “The Point of View of the Universe: Sidgwick and the Ambitions of Ethics”; and Bernard Gert, *Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 132. The analysis was explicitly accepted by Sidgwick when he wrote that, when used “absolutely,” “good” means “desirable from a universal point of view,” or “what all rational beings, as such, ought to aim at realizing” (“Mr. Barratt on ‘The Suppression of Egoism,’” p. 411).

57. For the latter view and a related view about virtue, see Ross, *The Right and the Good*, pp. 24–26, 160, 162, 168, and *The Foundations of Ethics*, pp. 272–73, 282.

58. Ross, *The Foundations of Ethics*, pp. 275–83; Ross noted the similarity between his account of this secondary sense of “good” and Brentano’s analysis on pp. 280–81.

ecessors in either of the two larger ways that have been suggested. He did not introduce a more elaborate metaphysics and epistemology, nor did he reject a concept of well-being those predecessors used. I will close my discussion of his metaethics by noting a further feature it shared with those of other philosophers from Sidgwick to Ross.

Principia Ethica took a reductive approach to normative concepts, holding that there is only one fundamental concept, that of intrinsic goodness, in terms of which all other such concepts are defined. But a similar reductionism was characteristic of all the philosophers in this sequence. Sidgwick and Rashdall agreed that there is a single normative concept, though they took it to be a different one; Ross and the later Moore thought that there are two fundamental concepts, but only two. Their reductionism contrasts sharply with the proliferation of concepts in present-day ethics.

The earlier philosophers all took as basic what are today called the “thin” moral concepts of good and ought rather than “thick” concepts such as kindness, generosity, and so on.⁵⁹ Though they did not discuss the latter, they presumably would have agreed with those who argue that thick concepts always combine a thin concept with some more or less determinate descriptive content. They were also reductive about the thin concepts. Whereas many present-day philosophers distinguish moral oughts from rational or prudential ones, the earlier philosophers did not. Sidgwick used an all-purpose concept of what one ought or has reason to do; that is why for him egoism was a “method of ethics.” Moore likewise drew no distinction between morality and rationality, nor, strikingly, did Ross. While holding that there is no moral duty to pursue one’s own pleasure, he did not add that there is a rational or prudential duty to do so, assuming that where there is no moral duty there is no duty at all. These philosophers also did not distinguish between types of value. They did not recognize a separate concept of well-being or the good for a person, equating that with what is good and a state of the person.⁶⁰ Nor did they separate moral from nonmoral goodness, treating the former as just intrinsic goodness when had by

59. On these concepts, see Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 129, 140–45.

60. Sidgwick used “well-being” as a mere verbal alternative for “ultimate good” or the “ultimate end” of reasonable action; see, e.g., *The Methods of Ethics*, p. 391, and Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers* (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 2–3. Rashdall likewise used “well-being” as an equivalent for “intrinsic good” and defined the “good for” a person as the good located in his consciousness (*The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 2, p. 98n.).

certain objects, namely, states of character or attitudes to other values.⁶¹ Some may say these philosophers' reductionism blurred important distinctions; I would say it avoided tedious conceptual debates. But it was a prominent feature of their metaethics and freed them to concentrate on substantive questions about what is good or right. I now turn to Moore's views on these questions.

II. MOORE'S IDEAL CONSEQUENTIALISM

Moore's general normative view was what, following Rashdall, came to be called "ideal utilitarianism" or "ideal consequentialism." It combines a consequentialist principle according to which the right is always what will result in the most good with a pluralistic theory of value that recognizes perfectionist goods such as knowledge alongside the hedonic values of pleasure and pain. But in 1903 this general view was, again, familiar, having been defended by Rashdall, Brentano, and McTaggart. Without the pluralism, it was also shared by those Idealists who accepted the consequentialist structure of utilitarianism but proposed a rival monistic value of "organic unity," or what Bradley in *Ethical Studies* called the combination of "homogeneity and specification."⁶² In 1902 Rashdall wrote, "There is a general consensus . . . that Ethics must be 'teleological,' though not hedonistic."⁶³ *Principia Ethica's* normative views merely added to this consensus.

Their accepting this view placed Moore and the other ideal consequentialists at the midpoint of a development from Sidgwick to Ross. All the philosophers in this sequence sought to make ethics "scientific" by uncovering general principles that can play the same systematizing role in ethics that laws play in natural science. But they disagreed about how far this systematization should go. Sidgwick demanded, very strongly, that a scientific ethics yield a complete ordering over acts and states of affairs, saying of each that it determinately is or is not right or best. On this basis he argued against both deontological theories of the right—if their principles are made completely determinate they cease to be intuitively compelling—and pluralistic theories of value—they cannot compare their goods in a fully determinate way.⁶⁴ The ideal con-

61. Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 1, pp. 138, 174–75; Ross, *The Right and the Good*, p. 155; Ewing, "A Suggested Non-Naturalistic Analysis of Good," p. 5. Sidgwick had given a similar analysis in *The Methods of Ethics*, 1st ed. (London: Macmillan, 1874), p. 93n.

62. F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927), pp. 74, 247–49. Bradley accepted the consequentialist structure of utilitarianism at pp. 140–41.

63. Rashdall, "The Commensurability of All Values," p. 148. This article cited only Paulsen as sharing this view; the parallel passages in *The Theory of Good and Evil* (vol. 1, pp. 217–18; vol. 2, p. 41) added Janet, Lotze, von Hartmann, McTaggart, and Moore.

64. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, bk. 3, chaps. 1–11; bk. 3, chap. 14.

sequentialists rejected Sidgwick's argument against value pluralism, and *Principia Ethica's* complaint about those who "search for 'unity' and 'system,' at the expense of truth" (p. 222) was a forceful expression of their view.⁶⁵ But they retained his monism about the right, leaving their position halfway between his and the more thoroughgoing pluralism of Ross, who accepted a plurality of ultimate principles both about value and about obligation.

There is another respect in which Moore's view was intermediate. If Sidgwick had made strong demands on moral theory, Bradley defended an extreme antitheoretical view, especially in his vitriolic attack on casuistry as "odious beyond parallel."⁶⁶ Rashdall responded to Bradley in "The Limits of Casuistry," and *Principia Ethica* was implicitly doing the same when it called casuistry "the goal of ethical investigation" (pp. 4–5). In fact, the nonnaturalists after Sidgwick had an admirably balanced sense of what moral theory can and cannot do. While recognizing that we cannot measure values precisely, they held that we can measure them in a roughly cardinal way. McTaggart doubted that we can ever say that one pleasure is exactly twice as great as another but was certain that he got more than twice as much pleasure from a plate of turtle soup as from a plate of pea soup;⁶⁷ Rashdall insisted that we can judge one good to be much, moderately, or only a little better than another.⁶⁸ *Principia Ethica* was taking the same view when, without contemplating more precise cardinality, it called the contemplation of beauty and personal love "by far" the greatest goods (pp. 188–89). Positioning themselves between Sidgwick and Bradley, these philosophers partly theorized a morality they saw as partly theorizable.

Moore's more specific theory of the right, set out in chapter 5 of *Principia Ethica*, was a version of indirect consequentialism. Even though what is right is in principle what will result in the most good, the impossibility of knowing for certain what consequences actions will have means that we should not try to identify right actions directly but should

65. For similar remarks contrasting "system" with "the facts," see Rashdall, "The Limits of Casuistry," *International Journal of Ethics* 4 (1894): 459–80, p. 468; Ross, *The Right and the Good*, p. 23; and Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, pp. 283–84.

66. F. H. Bradley, *The Principles of Logic*, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), pp. 269–70; there are similar antitheoretical claims in *Ethical Studies*, pp. 157, 193–99. By casuistry Bradley meant not only the practice of Catholic moralists but something shared by utilitarians: "If you believe, as our Utilitarian believes, that the philosopher should know the reason why each action is to be judged moral or immoral; if you believe that he at least should guide his action reflectively by an ethical code, which provides an universal rule and canon for every possible case, . . . then it seems to me you have wedded the mistake from which this offensive offspring has issued" (*The Principles of Logic*, p. 269).

67. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, p. 117.

68. Rashdall, "The Commensurability of All Values," pp. 155–56, and *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 2, pp. 49–50.

instead follow the accepted moral rules of our society, since doing so will almost always be for the best (pp. 155–64). But this indirect consequentialism was also familiar, having been defended by Sidgwick and, before him, Mill. Sidgwick gave more, and more subtle, grounds for the view than Moore; Moore was less inclined to allow violations of the rules when those seemed likely to have good results. But their basic positions were similar, and there were also antecedents for another feature of Moore's view. Baldwin has found it odd that Moore first discussed which actions are right and only then, in chapter 6, which states are intrinsically good. In a consequentialist system, does the right not depend on the good?⁶⁹ Moore's answer was that, since on "any view commonly taken" about value the same rules will be necessary to preserve civilized society, these rules can be defended "independently of correct views upon the primary ethical question of what is good in itself" (p. 158). This argument echoed McTaggart's claim that although the ultimate good is human perfection, people should use pleasure as their moral criterion since it is easier to apply and almost always yields the same result,⁷⁰ while the more general idea that different theories of the good can have similar practical implications had been suggested by T. H. Green.⁷¹ Even the order of Moore's discussion echoed that of Sidgwick, who first argued that commonsense principles need to be systematized by a consequentialist principle about the good and only later defended a view about what that good is.⁷²

This brings me to Moore's views on "the primary ethical question of what is good in itself," given in chapter 6. Let me begin with what Moore did not say. Other ideal consequentialists, while denying that pleasure has as much value as virtue or knowledge, held that it is none-

69. Baldwin, "Editor's Introduction," p. xxvi; a similar comment is made in the *Athenaeum* review, p. 848.

70. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, chap. 4. Moore trenchantly criticized McTaggart's claim in "Mr. McTaggart's Ethics," *International Journal of Ethics* 13 (1903): 341–70, in part on the ground that pleasure is a lesser good than the elements in perfection and therefore usually not to be chosen when it conflicts with them. It is unclear how these criticisms of McTaggart are consistent with the view of *Principia Ethica*, unless Moore did not there count hedonism as a view "commonly taken" about value.

71. T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, ed. A. C. Bradley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1883), secs. 332, 356.

72. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, bk. 3, chaps. 1–11; bk. 3, chap. 14. Rashdall did not share this general view, arguing that consequentialism with a partly perfectionist theory of the good has different and superior implications to hedonistic utilitarianism (*The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 1, chap. 7). In his review of Rashdall's book Moore lacerated him for assuming without proof that perfectionist and hedonistic criteria do not always coincide (*Hibbert Journal* 6 [1907–8]: 446–51, p. 449). But surely, as Moore's own criticisms of McTaggart showed, it is not this sensible assumption but the contrary one of extensional equivalence that demands positive proof.

theless a significant good, as they argued it must be if benevolence, which aims at the pleasure of others, is to be a significant virtue. But Moore disagreed, holding that pleasure has at most minimal value (pp. 94, 212, 222–23).⁷³ He did not make a similar claim about pain, which he held is a significant evil. His theory therefore involved an asymmetry whereby pain is a greater evil than pleasure is a good, and this was new: most previous philosophers had assumed that a pleasure of a given intensity is exactly as good as a pain of the same intensity is evil. Moore's asymmetry is also intuitively appealing, since a world containing only intense pain seems far worse than a world containing only intense mindless pleasure is good.⁷⁴ But in his case the asymmetry rested on the absolute claim that pleasure is not significantly good.

More surprisingly, Moore denied that knowledge is a significant good. Many perfectionists have held that knowledge is the greatest good, while Brentano, Rashdall, and Ross gave it at least significant value. But for Moore knowledge had "little or no value by itself" (p. 199), and his defense of this claim echoed his response to Sidgwick's case for hedonism. Sidgwick had argued that since there would be no value in a world without pleasure, pleasure must be the only intrinsic good. Moore's compelling reply was that the inference is invalid given the principle of organic unities: even if pleasure is a necessary condition for value, there can be other states that contribute to value in combination with pleasure even if they do not do so alone (pp. 92–96). Similarly, Moore argued that those who value knowledge confuse its being necessary for certain goods with its being good itself. In a central illustration of the principle of organic unities, he held that the admiring contemplation of a good or beautiful object plus a true belief in the object's existence is better than the contemplation alone and better by more than any goodness the object has itself (pp. 192–200). This makes a certain kind of knowledge necessary for a specific good, and so "affords some justification" for the view that knowledge itself is significantly good (p. 199). But according to Moore, that view is false.

This argument has a stronger conclusion than Moore's response to Sidgwick: not just that a given state is not the only good, but that it is not a significant good at all. And for this reason it is much less persuasive. First, many who value knowledge would reject Moore's restriction of goodness to active contemplation. They would say there is value in having well-grounded true beliefs about fundamental explanatory facts regardless of whether one is consciously contemplating them. Second, they would also reject Moore's restriction of valuable knowledge

73. See also Moore, "Mr. McTaggart's Ethics," p. 358.

74. For a recent defense of the asymmetry, see Jamie Mayerfeld, *Suffering and Moral Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), chap. 6.

to knowledge of the good or beautiful, saying it is better to know ugly facts, such as that a friend has deceived one, than to be ignorant of them, and also good to know neutral facts, such as that nature is governed by these specific laws or that human history contained this rather than that sequence of events. *Principia Ethica* had no persuasive argument against this view, and no argument at all against other perfectionist values such as achievement.

What Moore did not say, however, is less important than his positive views about value. These claim, famously, that “by far the most valuable things” are “the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects” (p. 188). But I will first consider two more abstract features of his view.

A central part of Moore’s value theory was a set of recursive principles that generate higher-level intrinsic values from lower-level ones. More specifically, these principles hold that whenever something is intrinsically good or evil, certain attitudes to it are also intrinsically good or evil. Let us assume, somewhat against Moore, that pleasure is good and pain evil. One recursive principle says that if something is intrinsically good, then having a positive attitude to it, or what Moore called “loving” it, for itself is also intrinsically good (pp. 177–79, 204, 217, 224). This implies, given our assumption, that loving another person’s pleasure, say by being pleased by it, is intrinsically good, as is loving the love of pleasure, loving the love of the love of pleasure, and so on. A second principle says that if something is intrinsically evil, having a negative attitude to it, or “hating” it, for itself is intrinsically good; this implies that being pained by another’s pain is good (pp. 178, 217–18, 220–21, 225). Two final principles say that loving something evil and hating something good are intrinsically evil; these principles make pleasure in another’s pain and pain at his pleasure evil (pp. 208–11, 217, 225). Moore did not bring these four principles together, sprinkling his discussions of them through his text. But they share a common rationale. The first two principles make attitudes whose orientation matches the value of their object—positive to positive or negative to negative—intrinsically good, while the last two make attitudes whose orientation opposes that value evil. More abstractly, the principles make attitudes whose orientation is appropriate to the value of their object good and ones that are inappropriate to it evil. Taken together, and given some initial set of values, the principles generate infinite series of higher-level values consisting in appropriate or inappropriate attitudes to lower-level values.

These recursive principles, which I have discussed elsewhere,⁷⁵ are both compelling and broadly illuminating, but they were not original

75. See my *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

to Moore. They have roots in Aristotle's claim that if an activity is good then pleasure in it is good, whereas if the activity is bad pleasure in it is bad,⁷⁶ but they had also been explicitly stated by Rashdall and Brentano. In 1885 Rashdall said that the pursuit of the good of all people is "a good to the individual"; later he would talk of "the intrinsic worth of promoting what has worth."⁷⁷ Brentano, after defining the good as that the love of which is correct and identifying pleasure and knowledge as good, said, "A third example may be found in those very feelings that are correct. . . . The correctness and higher character of these feelings is itself to be counted as something good. And the love of the bad is something that is itself bad."⁷⁸ The principles were also stated by Ross,⁷⁹ and were in fact widely accepted by value theorists in the decades before and after *Principia Ethica*. Nonetheless, Moore's presentation of them had certain distinctive features.

The attitudes these principles value come in three forms: one can love a good by desiring or wishing for it when it does not exist, actively pursuing it to make it exist, or taking pleasure in it when it exists. I believe an adequate view should value all three forms, though it may give some preference to one over another. But Moore concentrated almost exclusively on the third form, the loving contemplation of existing goods. He did not entirely ignore the others; his discussion of virtue allowed that love of the good is also good when it serves as a motive to action (pp. 177–78). But in chapter 6 these forms received almost no attention beside the love of existing goods, and the same was true of his account of aesthetic values. As Baldwin has noted, the latter valued only the contemplation of beauty and not, what mattered more to the romantics, its active creation.⁸⁰ This feature of Moore's view set it apart from those of Rashdall and Ross, which if anything emphasized the active pursuit of goods, and it also made it implausibly narrow. Surely if positive attitudes to value have value all such attitudes do, the desiderative and active as well as the contemplative.

Moore also expressed his view distinctively, since he did not identify his higher-level values as virtues and vices. Rashdall introduced the recursive principles precisely in order to argue, against Sidgwick, that virtue is intrinsically good; Ross likewise included them in an account

76. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross and J. O. Urmson, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1175b24–30.

77. Rashdall, "Professor Sidgwick's Utilitarianism," p. 219, and *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 1, p. 59.

78. Brentano, pp. 22–23. Moore acknowledged that Brentano shared his recursive view in *Principia Ethica*, p. xi.

79. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, pp. 134–35, 160–63.

80. Baldwin, "Editor's Introduction," p. xxxiv.

of virtue. But Moore, following Sidgwick, defined virtue instrumentally, as a disposition that causes intrinsic goods, and held that as such it is not intrinsically good. In fact, he excoriated Aristotle, who did value virtue intrinsically, for on this point confusing means and ends (pp. 171–77). Moore allowed that a person's virtue can include a conscious love of the good that motivates him and held that this love is intrinsically good (pp. 177–78); he also described some higher-level goods as virtues (pp. 217–19, 221–22). But his official view was that virtue is a disposition that causes intrinsic goods and as such has no intrinsic worth.

Moore based this view on a claim about ordinary language: that we would not call a trait that was generally harmful a virtue (p. 172). But the issue here is not clear cut. Imagine a world in which the benevolent desire to give another person pleasure regularly causes her pain. We might describe this as a world where benevolence is a vice, but we might equally well describe it as one where a virtue is all things considered regrettable. Our everyday understanding of the virtues is vague, identifying them only as traits that are in some way desirable, and though an instrumental definition is one way of capturing this understanding, a contrary definition of the virtues as intrinsic goods is another. When Rashdall and Ross called their higher-level goods virtues, they connected their view to a philosophical tradition going back to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Moore's view that attitudes to goods and evils can be intrinsically good was close to that tradition, but his definition of virtue as instrumentally good hid rather than highlighted that fact.⁸¹

A final distinctive feature of Moore's presentation is that he did not treat the higher-level values as supreme over all other values. The latter was the more common view. Ross held that virtue has infinite value compared to all other goods and evils;⁸² Rashdall rejected that view as extreme but still held that virtue is the greatest good in the weaker sense that an attitude to an object always has more value than that object.⁸³ But at one point Moore took the opposite view: that an attitude has less value than its object. Considering the combination of one person's pain and another's compassion for it, he held that the

81. Rashdall agreed with Moore's argument that if virtue is just a causal disposition, neither it nor unthinking acts in accordance with it are intrinsically good (pp. 175–77). That is why he insisted that for him virtue was "the settled bent of the will towards that which is truly and essentially good, and not a mere capacity or potentiality of pleasure-production such as might be supposed to reside in a bottle of old port," i.e., something involving occurrent mental states and intentionally rather than causally related to value ("Professor Sidgwick's Utilitarianism," p. 219; also *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 1, p. 65).

82. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, pp. 150, 152.

83. Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 1, pp. 94, 174–75, 189; vol. 2, pp. 37, 42, 104–5.

value of this combination must always be negative, which requires the goodness of the compassion to be less than the evil of the pain. On this basis he rejected “the arguments commonly used in Theodicies,” saying that it “is not a positive good that suffering should exist, in order that we may compassionate it; or wickedness, that we may hate it” (p. 220). Moore did not generalize this view about valuable attitudes. He held that the admiring contemplation of beauty is better than the beauty, and in his discussion of personal relationships said, surprisingly, that it is better to love another’s love of the love of beauty than to love her love of beauty (p. 204). But I think the view should be generalized, so the value of an attitude is always less than that of its object. Then virtue, which is already a secondary value in the sense of requiring other values to be its objects, is also secondary in its moral weight.⁸⁴ And of the many arguments for this position, a central one involves multiple variants of Moore’s claim about pain and compassion. By making that claim Moore pointed to a distinctive view, one that corrects the high-minded overvaluation of virtue that not only characterized his time but is prevalent in ethics today. Virtue is not the supreme good but a lesser one, which always has less value than some instance of a nonmoral good such as pleasure or knowledge.

The second abstract feature of Moore’s view was the principle of organic unities, but that, too, was not new. Bradley had stated it in *Ethical Studies*⁸⁵ and had also anticipated Moore’s use of it in his response to Sidgwick’s case for hedonism. In *Appearance and Reality* Bradley wrote, about hedonism, “where everything is connected in one whole, you may abstract and so may isolate any one factor. And you may prove at your ease that, without this, all the rest are imperfect and worthless; and you may show how, this one being added, they all once more gain reality and worth. . . . But from this to argue, absolutely and blindly, that some one single aspect of the world is the sole thing that is good, is most surely illogical.”⁸⁶ Bradley accepted the principle because he posited, as the fundamental value, what today is called organic unity: if you bring two organic unities into a new unifying relation, the result is more organic unity than existed when the two were apart. But others among Moore’s predecessors accepted the principle apart from this value. I have mentioned Rashdall’s view that virtue has value only when accompanied by pleasure in virtue, and organic unities are also implicit in a plausible reading of Mill’s theory of higher pleasures. On this reading, a “pleasure” is a state or activity accompanied by pleasure. Mill’s claim

84. See my *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, chap. 5.

85. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, pp. 126–27.

86. F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1897), p. 358; see also p. 404.

that only pleasures have value therefore means that an activity such as reading poetry has no value if it is not accompanied by pleasure. But his talk of higher pleasures implies that when an activity does involve pleasure, its value does not depend only on the intensity of that pleasure. It also depends on the activity's quality, making a pleasurable reading of poetry better than an equally pleasurable playing of pushpin.⁸⁷

Rashdall was therefore right to call Moore's principle "a new and striking way of stating a very old truth," but in this case the statement was immensely important. It was far clearer than any given before and also separated the principle from unhelpful accretions. Idealists like Bradley said that when a part enters into a whole its essential nature changes, so talk of it as a part is now a misleading "abstraction." Moore showed, to the contrary, that a state can be connected to other states by external relations that do not affect its nature (pp. 30–36). Relatedly, many Idealists associated the principle with an antitheoretical position, arguing that when value is organic it cannot be calculated systematically. Moore showed that even if a state's value depends on relations, it can do so in a way that is governed by rules.⁸⁸ Even Moore's intrinsicness claim, which I have argued was a mistake, made a contribution. It led him to formulate his holistic interpretation of the principle, which was entirely new and which sometimes, as in the retributive claims he used to illustrate it (p. 215), gives the best expression of an organic unities view. And even if this interpretation is not always best, the distinctive features of the rival variability interpretation become clear only given the contrast with Moore's alternative. Though not original to *Principia Ethica*, the principle of organic unities was vastly better understood after it.

Moore held that this principle was implicit in his claims about valuable attitudes, both to goods and evils and to beauty. He argued that any such attitude involves two components: a cognition or representation of an object plus a certain emotion toward it. Since the cognition on its own has no value, while the emotion if directed to a different object could have no or negative value, the value of the whole must exceed the sum of the values of its parts (pp. 190–91). This analysis is mistaken, however. Any such attitude is a single thing, an emotion directed to a particular represented object and made the specific emotion it is by that object, so to evaluate it for its appropriateness to the

87. Moore himself proposed this reading in *Principia Ethica*, p. 79 but did not note that it involves the principle of organic unities.

88. In *G. E. Moore* Baldwin argues that Moore cannot accept the principle of organic unities without accepting both Bradley's Idealist metaphysics and his attack on casuistry (pp. 127–28). I do not see the remotest ground for either of these claims.

object is to evaluate it for an intrinsic property. Moore could have learned here from Brentano's views about intentionality.

Moore also held, more plausibly, that the value associated with an attitude can be increased by the presence of a true belief in the existence of its object. Thus, to take one of his examples, it is better to feel compassion for what one knows is real pain than to feel compassion for the merely fictional pain of King Lear (p. 219). One can question whether the difference here is made by the truth of the belief, as Moore assumed, or just by its presence. Certainly in some other cases the latter is more plausible. Taking pleasure in what one believes is real pain, such as that of a rape victim, seems no less evil if, unbeknownst to one, the pain has been staged. But Moore may have been right that admiring a good one knows exists has additional value that cannot be accounted for by the value of the knowledge, and in other cases a parallel claim is plausible. Recall Parfit's person who devotes his life to working for the preservation of Venice. The recursive view says his activity is intrinsically good, because it is directed at a good object. But many think the activity will be better if it actually helps to preserve Venice. Here the additional value derives, if not from a true belief in the object's existence, then from a parallel relation to it, namely, a successful intention to bring it about. And this additional value forms an organic unity with the attitude. The situation where the person successfully contributes to the preservation of Venice is better than if he engaged in the same activity and Venice was preserved in a way causally independent of him.

Let me return to Moore's more concrete values, the appreciation of beauty and personal affection. Of these, the first was independent of his recursive principles. Moore argued in *Principia Ethica* that beauty by itself is good (pp. 83–85), but he allowed that it may not be (pp. 202, 203) and later adopted the latter view.⁸⁹ If he continued to hold that the appreciation of beauty is good, it cannot have been on a recursive basis. But he did hold that the value of such appreciation involves organic unities, in the ways I have just discussed.

Moore's treatment of this value was unusual in part because of the prominence he gave it. Other ideal consequentialists might grant the appreciation of beauty some value, but usually less than knowledge, creative activity, and other goods they saw as greater. Moore's denigration of those goods left aesthetic appreciation with a distinctively central place, and there was another point where his treatment was unusual.

Moore held that there is a naturalistic fallacy concerning beauty, one preventing its identification with any natural property or set of natural properties. But instead of treating beauty as a *sui generis* evaluative property, he maintained his conceptual reductionism and defined

89. Moore, *Ethics*, p. 107.

it in terms of intrinsic goodness, or as that the admiring contemplation of which is good (p. 201). But this was an odd move for a proponent of the open question argument, since it reduces the claim that it is good to admire beauty to the not-so-informative claim that it is good to admire the things that it is good to admire. This last claim is not empty. It implies that some goods consist in admiration; if we add that some objects are beautiful without being good, it denies that all these goods can be accounted for by recursive principles. But Moore's definition did imply that calling an object beautiful does nothing to explain why admiring it is good; it merely restates that fact.

These philosophical issues aside, Moore's views about beauty were a mixture of the naïve and the insightful. Naïvely, he held that admiring a painting of a natural scene is less good than admiring the scene itself, as if there is no point viewing Monet's paintings of the waterlilies at Giverny if one can see the flowers themselves (p. 195). But he also gave a wonderful analysis of the difference between the classical and romantic styles in art, saying the former aims to maximize the value as a whole of a work of art, that is, the value that resides in the relations between the work's parts, while the latter sacrifices this holistic value to increase the value in some part (pp. 215–16). This is a beautiful example of how structural ideas about value can illuminate even remote-sounding topics.

Moore's second concrete good, that of personal affection, did involve the recursive principles. In fact, he emphasized that the chief difference between this good and aesthetic appreciation is that the emotions it involves are directed to objects that are not only beautiful but also significantly good (p. 203). And personal relationships are plausibly an important good: certainly, many present-day theories of value give them a prominent place. But Moore's account of these relationships was curiously restricted, leaving out elements many would say are essential to them.

First, his account reflected his general emphasis on contemplative rather than desiderative or active emotions. This was true even of the love of physical beauty, which he did seem to include in these relationships (p. 203). In his view this love consists only in admiring another's beauty, as it were from afar. One does not desire another's beauty, or become aroused by it, or try to touch it. One simply gazes and admires. Moore's account therefore lacked any element of the erotic, and this was echoed in his puzzling remark about lasciviousness. He held that lasciviousness is evil because it involves the enjoyment of "organic sensations" and "states of the body" that are ugly (pp. 209–10), but he gave no explanation, as he surely could not, of why these states are ugly. The asexuality of Moore's account may have reflected his personal sexual

puritanism,⁹⁰ but it also had philosophical roots in his repeated emphasis on contemplative rather than active forms of love.

The same emphasis appeared elsewhere in his account. One would think an important part of love is wanting good things for another and, when possible, acting to provide them. Moore downplayed these attitudes as against the admiration of goods the other already has. Another important part of love is surely joint activity in pursuit of shared goals such as raising a child or designing and decorating a house. This aspect again received no attention in his account, and there was a further restriction implicit in his description of the loving attitude as one of "admiration." Admiration can only be felt for perfectionist goods such as knowledge and virtue; one does not admire another's pleasure or happiness. As a result, Moore's account did not include pleasure at a loved one's pleasure, let alone desire for or pursuit of it; this also followed from his denial that pleasure has significant value. Still other exclusions followed from his restricted set of perfectionist goods. Since he denied that knowledge has significant value, his account did not include admiration of another's insight or understanding; nor did it include admiration for her achievement of morally neutral ends, such as those involved in games and many careers. He did include admiration for another's virtue, such as her compassion, but saved the central place in personal love for admiration of another's appreciation of beauty (pp. 203–7). However attractive this view may have been to the Bloomsbury set, it made for an extremely narrow picture of personal relations, as if the supreme expression of love were, "Virginia, what wonderful taste in pictures you have."

In addition, Moore ignored the partiality of personal love. He identified love with appreciation of another's good qualities and took the relevant goodness to be agent-neutral. But this implies that if I admire my friend for certain qualities and a stranger appears with the same qualities to a higher degree, I should switch my admiration and affection to the stranger. Moore might give pragmatic arguments against this switch, saying that to appreciate another's merits I must know them, which requires lengthy acquaintance with her. But these arguments would not satisfy common sense, which holds that directedness to particular persons is essential to personal relations, so the switching I have described is in itself wrong.⁹¹ Moore's account excluded this directed-

90. As an undergraduate Moore read a paper to the Apostles condemning masturbation and sex not aimed at procreation; see Tom Regan, *Bloomsbury's Prophet: G. E. Moore and the Development of His Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. 37.

91. A similar objection is raised against Plato's theory of love in Gregory Vlastos, "The Individual as Object of Love in Plato," in his *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 3–34.

ness and in this respect differed sharply from McTaggart's. While holding that love is the highest good, McTaggart understood it as distinct from any attitude to a person's qualities. For him love involves a sense of union with another person that, though it may be caused by some of her qualities, is not directed at those qualities and will, if fully adequate, persist even if they are lost.⁹² McTaggart may have here gone too far; surely common sense believes that if a person changes from admirable to despicable, one's affection for her may properly end. But he recognized that love is directed to particular persons in a way that Moore, with his focus on agent-neutral goodness, could not.⁹³

These criticisms are not meant to challenge the general form of Moore's account. He held that the value of personal relationships is not *sui generis* but instantiates other values to a high degree, and a more expansive account of this type is illuminating. It does not consider only the higher-level values of appropriate attitudes to values; it sees love as involving, in addition, understanding of another's character, shared achievements, and, not least, enjoyment of her company. It also gives the relevant attitudes more forms and objects than Moore allowed, so they include, for example, actively pursuing her happiness and wishing her success in her projects. It can also capture the partiality of love by means of agent-relative claims about goodness, saying that if one loves a person, that gives her pleasure, knowledge, and other goods more value from one's point of view than similar states of strangers. While sharing Moore's general strategy, this account captures more aspects of love by relating it to a wider variety of values.⁹⁴

I have argued that, like Moore's metaethics, his normative views were not revolutionary. His ideal consequentialism had been anticipated by several writers; his indirect consequentialism echoed that of Sidgwick. In value theory, his recursive principles were accepted before and after *Principia Ethica*, and his principle of organic unities likewise had antecedents. His views did contain some novelties, such as his discussion of how the value of an attitude is affected by a belief in its object's existence, but these again concerned points of detail in an overall familiar view.

But a view that is not revolutionary may still be fundamentally cor-

92. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, pp. 212–13, 278–80, and *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2, pp. 147–61.

93. In my view, the best account of this directedness says that to love a particular person is not to love her apart from any qualities, whatever that might mean, but to love her in part for qualities no one else could share, namely, historical qualities derived from her having participated with one in a certain shared history. I defend this account in "The Justification of National Partiality," in *The Morality of Nationalism*, ed. Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 139–57, 148–50.

94. I have elaborated this more expansive account in *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, pp. 35–36, 198–203; it is also suggested by Ross in *The Right and the Good*, p. 141.

rect. I want to close by identifying a feature of Moore's approach to normative ethics that he shared with other philosophers from Sidgwick to Ross and that is a corrective to the more grandiose theorizing of our present day.

As I have said, these philosophers' normative project was to formulate abstract principles that can systematize our particular moral judgments. But their approach to this project was shaped by two other views. One was their belief in the autonomy of ethics, or that moral conclusions cannot be derived from nonmoral premises. The other was their confidence in moral intuitions as at least a reliable starting point for moral inquiry. Some of them thought intuitions about general principles are more trustworthy than ones about particular situations; others thought the reverse. But they all took intuitive judgments to provide our best and even only access to moral truth. As a result of these views, the principles they formulated were what I will call structural rather than foundational. They identify the underlying structure of commonsense judgments and in that sense unify them, but they do not relate them to claims that concern some more fundamental topic and can therefore justify them to someone who initially doubts them. Though more abstract than commonsense judgments, they use similar concepts and appeal to similar intuitions. Moore's recursive principles were in this sense structural. They explain the judgment that, say, compassion is good by connecting it to the more general idea that negative attitudes to negative values are good; though more abstract, the latter uses concepts continuous with those in the former. Equally structural was Moore's formulation of retributivism in terms of the principle of organic unities, which says the combination of vice and pain in one person's life is good as a whole. This shows how the elements of retributivism fit together but does not derive retributivism from claims on some different and more fundamental topic.

Since the mid-twentieth century, philosophers have been more suspicious of intuitive judgments. In ethics this has led to dissatisfaction with merely structural analyses of moral views, which are said to be too close to those views to properly justify them. Thus, a common response to Moore's formulation of retributivism has been that it "merely restates what the retributivist has to explain."⁹⁵ The result has been a widespread search for foundational justifications of moral views, ones that derive them from claims that use different concepts they see as somehow more secure. Some of these justifications, such as John Rawls's contractarian one, appeal to explanatory ideas that are themselves moral. Though consistent with the autonomy of ethics, these justifications are none-

95. George Sher, *Desert* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 72; see also p. 19.

theless foundational because their fundamental ideas are distinct from any in common sense; thus, the everyday belief in a right of free speech does not refer even implicitly to what rational contractors would choose. Other foundational justifications look outside morality. Some try to derive specific moral claims from the rules of moral language or the definition of morality; others appeal to metaphysical facts such as the separateness of persons or the nature of personal identity. Yet others claim to derive morality from self-interest, while a very ambitious view argues that certain moral claims follow from the presuppositions of rational agency. Despite their differences, these justifications share the general goal of grounding moral claims in something more philosophically impressive than direct intuitive judgments.

In my view the last thirty years' discussion of these justifications has shown that none of them succeed. Either their foundational claims are too vague to support the specific moral views they are intended to, or, if they are amended to do so, tacitly appeal to the very intuitive judgments they are meant to supplant. It would be wonderful if there were nonintuitive justifications of moral views, but like Sidgwick, Moore, and Ross I believe there are not; there is no moral philosopher's stone. And excessive attention to these justifications has skewed the field's priorities. Faced with a set of moral views, a theorist can respond in either of two ways. She can look into the views, to discover their internal structure and the way they generate specific claims, or she can try to connect them to larger ideas about, say, the nature of morality or the status of persons as free and rational. And the more she does of the latter, the less she will do of the former. In my view the greatest contributions of recent ethics have all been structural, such as the distinctions between agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons, between satisficing and maximizing, and between end-state and historical conceptions of justice. These contributions have echoed the structural discoveries of the earlier group, not just those of Moore but also Sidgwick's parallel between impartiality across times and across persons, Ross's concept of prima facie duties, and Broad's analysis of self-referential altruism. These structural analyses do more to illuminate everyday moral ideas than any pretentious Kantian or Aristotelian argument could. They also do at least something to justify the ideas, since they connect them to principles that have some independent appeal, and they unite them with other, superficially different, ideas. But structural advances will be less frequent if too many philosophers are busy chasing foundational dreams. The theorists from Sidgwick to Ross, with Moore as a central but not revolutionary figure, rejected all such dreams and concentrated instead on formulating structural principles. That is why their approach to normative ethics was more fruitful than that of any other group of philosophers before or after their time.