

## THE INTRINSIC GOOD AND THE UNCONDITIONAL GOOD

It is generally accepted that ethics is concerned with goodness of conduct. This has led people to suppose that one should first decide what goodness-in-itself is and then get a clearer notion regarding where exactly goodness in conduct lies. Thus, G. E. Moore in section 2 of his *Principia Ethica* writes "Ethics is undoubtedly concerned with the question what good conduct is. . . . 'good conduct' is a complex notion: all conduct is not good. . . And on the other hand, other things, besides conduct, may be good; . . ." This means that good conduct is a species of good in general. Therefore, Moore tells us that ethics cannot make a start at the beginning unless it tells us 'what is good as well as what is conduct'.

This approach to Ethics is not confined to ethical intuitionists like Moore. Even R. M. Hare, who belongs to the school of Linguistic Analysis, says in chapter 9 of his *The Language of Morals* that "'good' in the moral sense has the same logical behaviour" as it has in other departments of valuation.

I have my misgivings about this approach to ethics. 'Good conduct' is grammatically a complex expression. But goodness of conduct may conceivably be a logically simple notion. The way to know what is goodness of conduct may not be first to know what is good and then to know what is conduct. In other words, ethical goodness may not be a species of good in general or good simply. I think it is arguable that ethical good is a primary notion and that the goodness we become aware of, in other good things, for example, in the experience of listening to a musical melody is a pale reflection of the goodness we apprehend in the moral sphere.

The form of my argument will be: An X without qualification (or, an unconditional X) is logically prior to an X with qualifications (or, a conditional X) and the latter will derive its meaning from the former. The ethical good is good

without qualifications or conditions whereas every other thing that can be called good is good with qualifications or good under some conditions. Therefore, the ethical good is the primary notion of good and it cannot be a species, with other coordinate species like truth and beauty, under the genus 'good'. The ethical good (call it morality, moral good, virtue etc.) is not the highest good as is very often held, but 'the only good' in the primary sense of the term.

Consider the concept of a 'conditional apology'. This of course is a derivative concept. One cannot understand 'apology simply' or an 'unconditional apology'. An 'apology simply' is logically the basis of a conditional apology. Now, one can imagine conditions so quaint that a conditional apology ceases to be an apology. If I offer to tender my apology to somebody for hurting his self-respect on condition that he kneels before me and dusts my shoes, what I offer is no apology.

This has an analogical application to what Moore and others have called 'intrinsic good'. Enjoying a piece of music is intrinsically good. The reason given is "it will be good even if it existed quite alone without any accompaniment or effects whatsoever". But in such cases, one can imagine a context or conditions when the enjoyment of music ceases to be good. Nero fiddling while Rome was burning is a case in point.

It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish an unconditional good or a good without qualification from an intrinsic good. An unconditional good would be that which would be good under any circumstances whatsoever, that which would always be good and could never be bad. The intrinsic good, on the other hand, is that which is "good for its own sake and not for something else". It cannot, however, be said that an intrinsically good thing is good on all occasions and in any context. Even if pleasure is an intrinsic good, the pleasure in his own wickedness of a wicked man is not good. It all depends on circumstances. If pleasure is good, it is good with some qualifications, it is good under certain conditions. It is a conditional good. But, as said above, a con-

ditional X presupposes an unconditional X. So, if there is something which is a conditional good, there must also be an unconditional good which is presupposed by the former.

Where should we look for it?

Kant is very plausible when he asserts "Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a good will". He compares 'good will' with Nature's gifts like various talents of the mind, or Fortune's gifts like power, riches, health and honour or even happiness and comes to the conclusion that only the good will is good without qualification. This comparison is carried by what, in Moore's tradition, would be called 'a kind of seeing' or 'inspection'. By 'inspecting' good will and the other things called good he concludes that the good will 'like a jewel, would shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value within itself'. If we agree with the results of Kant's inspection then there is a radical difference between the good will (which is good without qualification) and the intrinsic goods like talents and happiness.

The good will may well be regarded as an ethical or moral good. There are, at least, two characteristics which an ethical good has. (i) The production of it is within our power. We are free to bring it about. Nobody can command good looks. Therefore, goodness of looks is not a moral good. To set about doing something from a sense of duty is always within our means and since this is good it is a moral good. (ii) Secondly, 'good' in the peculiarly ethical sense gives rise to obligation. This does not happen in the case of a merely intrinsic good. Enjoying a piece of music, let us say, is an intrinsic good. But it is not obligatory on me to partake of that enjoyment. If Ravishankar is playing on his sitar in the adjacent hall where admission is free and I refuse to go there and listen, my action would be odd but not unethical or immoral. If, however, I refuse to fulfil a promise to gain some private ends, my refusal may not be odd but it would be immoral.

The 'good will' of Kant's conception has both these characteristics. It is always within our power to possess a good will and as rational beings it is obligatory on us to do what is required of us with a sense of duty. The good will, therefore, is a moral or ethical good and its goodness is unconditional.

The point of this discussion is that a distinction has to be made between what is intrinsically good and what is unconditionally good. The unconditional good is the moral good of which the most typical if not the unique instance is what Kant calls the good will. If the moral good has the status of being unconditionally good it will be logically prior to the intrinsic good and will not be a kind of intrinsic good like truth and beauty.

The reflected image of the moon in a mirror has also moonness in it. But that is a conditioned moon. The presence of a mirror is the condition of that moon. The lustrous round thing in the clear nocturnal sky, however, is the unconditioned moon. The relation between the two moons is not that of genus and species. The moon in the mirror is a reflection of the moon in the sky. In the same fashion an intrinsic good may be regarded as a reflection of the unconditional good.

In ethics our concern should be with the unconditional good and not with a shadowing abstraction good-in-itself. Kant's approach to ethics, therefore, is far more fundamental than that of Moore. Further it is a mistake to think that Kant's ethics is not an end-based ethics. The very first sentence of his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* recommends the end for human activity, namely, an unconditional good, which according to him is the possession of a good will.

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