

NATURALISTIC FALLACY—DOES SPINOZA COMMIT THIS FALLACY ?

In the following paper, I would be considering G. E. Moore's charge that Spinoza has committed the Naturalistic fallacy.

In his book '*Principia Ethica*', Moore writes, 'Yet a mistake of this simple kind has commonly been made about 'good'. It may be true that all things which are good are also something else, just as it is true that all things which are yellow produce a certain kind of vibration in the light. And it is a fact that Ethics aims at discovering what are these other properties, belonging to all things which are good. But far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those properties, they were actually defining good, that those properties, in fact, were simply not other but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness. This view I propose to call the naturalistic fallacy'.¹

The naturalistic fallacy consists in defining good in terms of some other property.

Moore argues that Naturalistic ethics of Spencer, Utilitarianism of Mill and Metaphysical ethics have committed this fallacy. In Chapter IV of '*Principia Ethica*' he points out that theories of Stoics, Spinoza and Kant have used some metaphysical proposition as a ground for inferring some fundamental propositions of Ethics. They hold that ethical truths follow logically from metaphysical truths. The question, 'What is real' has a logical bearing on 'What is good.'

By 'Metaphysical', therefore, he means that which has a reference to some supersensible reality.² He argues that metaphysical systems of ethics describe the supreme good in terms of something which does exist, but does not exist in Nature—in terms of a supersensible reality.

A metaphysical ethics asserts that perfect good is something which exists, but is not natural, that which has some characteristics possessed by a supersensible reality. Moore believes that 'such a claim is made by Spinoza when he tells us that we are more or less perfect in proportion as we are more or less

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closely united with Absolute Substance by the intellectual love of God'.³

This is all that Moore has to say about Metaphysics and specifically about Spinoza's ethics. His criticism is based on :

1. What he means by Metaphysics.
2. What he means by defining a thing.

By metaphysics he means, 'that science which believes in some supersensible reality'.⁴ He argues that metaphysical propositions are propositions about the existence of the supersensible. What does he mean by the word 'supersensible?' By supersensible he means "something which is not an object of perception by the same rules of inference by which we infer the past and the future of what we call Nature".⁵ Metaphysics, thus, talks of something which is not an object of sensory experience. If this is what he means by 'supersensible' then most advanced theories of physics and astronomy, wherein many hypotheses are not the objects of perception, would be called metaphysical theories.

But it is quite possible that by supersensible, unconsciously he might have meant 'Super rational'. If we accept this meaning, then Spinoza would never be called a metaphysician because he would not allow any proposition which does not satisfy reason. It seems that it is this confusion between these two words (supersensible and super-rational) that makes Moore's criticisms unfounded and hence, weak.

Spinoza does not hold that good is an entity, non-natural (super-sensible) in character. He never talks about good in-itself, existing in its own right, but rather good as a means to understand the human nature. 'Good is a modification or reflection of the mind'.⁶ And when he refers to mind, he clearly states that he is not referring to mind apart from body but the complex of body and mind which exists in space and time.

Thus, after discussing about 'good' in Part IV, when he passes to Part V (Human Freedom) he says 'And now I have finished with all that concerns this present life... It is now, therefore, time to pass on to these matters, which appertain to the duration of the mind, without relation to the body'.⁷

Moore criticizes Spinoza on the basis that he has said that we are more or less perfect, in proportion as we are more or less

united with God by the intellectual love of God. If we examine this statement in the light of the above quotation (Propo. XX), we find that when Spinoza is speaking about 'being more or less perfect in proportion to our union with God', he is switching over to philosophy of religion, where there is a reference to mind without body and consequently, some kind of belief in some super-rational entity. Such a belief need not be a belief in some 'super-sensible' reality. Indeed, men of religion believe that they can intuitively know the reality or reality is directly experienced, although they cannot rationally justify this experience. Spinoza, on the other hand gives a rational justification for intellectual love of God. By love he means pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause and such a pleasure is nothing but deliberate reflection of one's own realation with God. While reflecting upon one's own nature, one is not only guided by reason but also by passions which are the natural expressions of the desire to maintain oneself.

Thus coming to Spinoza's ethics, we find that the ethical discourse described by him is not concerned with something non-natural or super-sensuous. It is essentially related to everyday behaviour patterns which are the natural expressions of human appetites and desires. So there is nothing other-worldly about 'Good' which he speaks of.

The meaning of the concept of 'Good' becomes ambiguous because philosophers discuss ethical problems in the light of scriptural and religious beliefs, with the result that 'Goodness' which means that which we know to be useful has come to mean obedience to the commands of a revealed religion, which we are told is useful to us. "It is this which has induced men to give the name 'good' not only to everything which leads to health but also and very often primarily to that which leads to the worship of God."⁸

If we know that 'good' for Spinoza has no religious implications and that 'good' means that which is useful, then we cannot charge him for committing a naturalistic fallacy, because, Spinoza is not describing good in terms of something non-natural and super-sensuous. Similarly, he cannot be said to deduce an ethical proposition from the metaphysical proposition in the Moorean sense. His propositions about God are not

'metaphysical' in the Moorean sense. They do not indicate any 'super sensible' reality but they refer to reality which is physical, and which could be known empirically. He also does not seem to 'deduce' an ethical proposition from the metaphysical proposition. On the other hand he shows how the ethical concepts are essentially related to the natural manifestation of human urges and appetites. In this way, the obligatory character of ethical statements is not something new added to it but it is the ingredient in the very elements of human nature. What 'ought to be' is in some sense, implicitly present in what 'actually is'. What is called 'normative' is implicitly present in what is known as 'normal'. Thus, it could be proved that Spinoza does not commit the Naturalistic fallacy.

Now let us examine Spinoza's 'Theory of Good' in its other aspect.

Let us first find out what Moore means by definition. He argues that the concept of good is simple, unanalysable. Hence, it is not definable. Because, suppose some one says "pleasure is good," it is an analytic proposition and hence it is as good as saying "pleasure is pleasure." By definition Moore certainly does not mean translation of words into their equivalent terms; but breaking the meaning of concept into individual parts. And if this is the only form of definition, then he is right in saying that good is indefinable.

But this is not the only way to define. In *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle points out two kinds of definitions. One kind is reporting a statement of the meaning of the name, or of an equivalent nominal formula. A definition of 'triangle,' in this sense, tells you, for example, the meaning of the phrase 'triangular character'. Another kind of definition is a formulae exhibiting the cause of a thing's existence. Definition in this sense is a quasi-demonstration of essential nature, differing from demonstration in the arrangement of its terms. Thus 'thunder' is defined as the 'noise of fire being quenched in the clouds'.

It seems to me that when Spinoza defines good by saying that good is that which we know to be useful, he is defining 'good' in the above sense, i.e., he is making a quasi-ontological statement about the cause of good.

Spinoza does not say that it is because of the property of

goodness, that things are useful and that they lead to pleasure, but the thing is said to be good because it leads to pleasure and it is useful.

In *Ethics III Propo. 9*, he says, 'We neither strive for, wish, seek nor desire anything because we think it to be good, but on the contrary, we adjudge a thing to be good because we strive for, wish, seek or desire it.'⁹

Spinoza distinguishes two kinds of definitions. The first kind of definition is the definition of an uncreated thing. By an uncreated thing, he means a thing that is in itself, i. e., God and His attributes. These are definitions in terms of the essence of a thing.

Another kind of definition is of a created thing. By a created thing he means any mode or a particular thing. 'Good' is a modification of mind. And the word 'created' signifies that a thing has a cause for its existence. The definitions of such finite things or modes are generic definitions in terms of their efficient or immediate cause.

Thus, we see that what Spinoza means by definition is not the same thing as what Moore means by it. To conclude, Moore's criticism of Spinoza that he has committed naturalistic fallacy seems to be mistaken because Spinoza's conception of metaphysics and definition is different from Moorean conception of metaphysics and definition.

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NOTES

1. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Ch. I, B, Section 10, p. 10
2. Ibid Ch. IV, Section 67, P. 113
3. Ibid Ch. IV, Section 67 P. 113
4. Ibid Ch. IV, Section 66, P. 112
5. Ibid
6. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Pt. IV, Preface.
7. Ibid Pt. V, Propo. XX
8. Ibid Pt. I, Appendix.
9. Ibid Pt. III, Propo IX.

