
For those of us who have been raised to accept a very basic standard account of Moore’s natural fallacy, Marzano’s study is really an eye opener. At the most general level, one can ask what Moore was really up to in his ethics and especially in *Principia Ethica*. The common answer is that the central question for Moore was that of the meaning of ‘good’. As Marzano points out, there is, however, a great difference between ‘what is meant by good’ and ‘what good means’, and she wants to show that Moore was interested in the object or the idea ‘good’, not the word ‘good’ or the propositions containing it (p. 6). Her basic contention is that it is impossible to understand what Moore’s non-naturalist ethics – his conception of ‘good’ as undefinable and his critique of the natural fallacy – is really about, if one does not seriously look into his metaphysics.

According to Marzano, what Moore wanted was (1) to found ethics on an objective and ontological basis, without denying the autonomy of ethics, (2) to show that good is a *sui generis* property, while depending on the natural intrinsic properties objects can posses, and (3) to argue that right is linked to the intrinsic value of the whole state of affairs resulting from the action (p. 14). By arguing for such an interpretation of Moore’s ethics, Marzano, thus, contributes to the anti-empiricist and anti-representationalist trends of contemporary anglo-phone philosophy, and that is not uncontroversial at all.

The book consists of preface, introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. The preface is written by Thomas Baldwin, the editor of the revised edition of Moore’s *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), and I shall return to that below. The first chapter analyses the general ontology of Moore, which is shown to be a very comprehensive and conceptually developed realism. The second chapter focus on ‘good’ as an intrinsic value in the light of this ontology, and in the third chapter it is shown that precisely an ontological interpretation of the natural fallacy makes it understandable and thus defendable (p. 123). In the final chapter it is shown that for Moore the ontological status of right, wrong and obligatory is different from that of good, in contrast to what Ross argued (p. 155), and on the basis of this analysis, finally, the defining characteristics of Moore’s ideal consequentialism are laid out, in contrast to mainstream action orientated consequentialism.

The point of departure is Moore’s famous definition of ‘good’ as a non-natural property. The distinction natural/non-natural is basic. The universe is for Moore made up of real objects, which can be divided into physical objects, acts of consciousness and various sorts of non-substantial objects such as abstract entities. Natural objects are substantial, meaning they exist in time and space, whereas non-natural objects (such as relations, space, time, numbers, universals, etc.)
do not exist in time and space, but simply are (p. 18). Objects are thus primarily objects of knowledge, only in the second place either substantial or non-substantial entities, but nevertheless they are analysed as ontological entities. Moore did not want to relate ethics to epistemology and logic, but to ontology. As Marzano shows, Moore explicitly thought that the question whether the universe as such is good or bad required combining results of ethics and metaphysics (p. 19). She underlines, however, that Moore's metaphysics can be considered 'negative' meaning that abstract objects are not considered substantial as the positive metaphysics of Plato or Aristotle would do. Moore considered the class of metaphysical objects as an empty class, and he thus must have thought of them as unreal in the same way as imaginary objects (p. 22).

This makes it possible to follow Moore in distinguishing between objects and properties, even though it sometimes seems that he is not clear about this matter at all. The simple answer is that a property like, for instance, yellow is, of course, a non-natural, non-substantial object. The question is then how good as a property is different from non-natural objects like, for instance, yellow. The answer implies a shift of focus from object back to property, stating that whereas yellow is a natural and descriptive property, good is a non-natural and non-descriptive property. The fallacy of considering good as something natural, thus, varies whether good is considered an object or a property. In the former case, one cannot understand the possibility of non-natural objects, in the latter, one cannot understand the possibility of such properties (p. 27). So good is both as an object and as a property non-natural, and as such it is dependent on the intrinsic nature of the object in question. Natural properties, such as yellow, are independent; non-natural ones, such as good are dependent (p. 44). The point is that an object is constituted by natural properties, and this is not the case with good.

In chapter two's discussion of the relation between intrinsic and extrinsic properties Marzano admits that in Principia it might be difficult to conclude, as she does, that the ontological interpretation of good is necessary; but she then offers a reading of Moore's famous paper 'The Conception of Intrinsic Value'. This brings forth the essentialism of Moore, claiming that an object has some properties 'essentially or necessarily' (p. 66). And this necessity is neither empirical, nor causal, nor just logical. It is not de dicto necessity, but de re necessity (p. 64). The necessity is ontological, meaning that there is a necessary dependence of value on the intrinsic nature of an object.

In chapter three the focus is on the difference between good as a dependent property and the independence of intrinsic properties. Good is described as a property that depends 'on the intrinsic nature of states of things, which posses it' (p. 82). This should, again, be understood ontologically, and Marzano states that good is a 'supervenient property' (p. 83), distinguishing between Hare's logical supervenience from Moore's ontological. The ontological approach makes her denounce Frankena's interpretation of the naturalistic fallacy as a 'definist fallacy',

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