



The Individualism of Value

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Man must laugh, and to the complacent optimist or the conceited cynic there is but one thing to say: "He laughs best who laughs last." And he laughs last and best whose outlook is wide, whose sympathy is deep, and whose action, informed and insistent, is *with* the facts.

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THE INDIVIDUALISM OF VALUE.

In this paper I shall endeavor to show that goodness and badness are individualistic in a way in which the existent reality which is good or bad need not be individualistic. In other words, even if, as I believe to be the case, all existent reality forms a single unity, in which the unity is as real and important as its differentiations—even in that case the goodness or badness to be found in that whole would not be a unity. It would be a multiplicity of separate values—positive or negative—which would indeed be added together as respects their quantity, but which, when added, would only be a mere aggregate, not a unity like the unity of existence. In other words, again, the universe as a whole is neither good nor bad. I do not mean by this that it is equally good and bad, but that the terms, in their strict sense, have no application to the universe as a whole. (This last statement of my position will require, as we proceed, a verbal modification, which need not concern us at present.)

It is generally, though not universally, admitted that nothing is ultimately good or bad except conscious beings and their conscious states. Other things and events may be good or bad as means in so far as they tend to produce goodness or badness in conscious beings, but they cannot be held to be so ultimately, and in their own right.

It is to be expected that this view will be generally accepted. For almost all people who try to formulate the good at all find it in one or more of three things—pleasure, virtue, and self-realization.

Now if a person finds the good only in pleasure, or only in virtue, or—like Kant—places the perfect good in virtue combined with as much pleasure as it deserves, it is clear that he must hold that only conscious beings and their states can be good. For happiness and virtue, and their contraries, pain and vice, are all states of consciousness.

The same result would almost certainly follow if the good is found in self-realization, or in harmonious self-development, or some similar notion. Whether it would be possible or not, it would certainly be difficult to attach any meaning to such notions except in the case of a conscious being. And, in point of fact, the supporters of such theories do always, so far as I know, find good and evil exclusively in conscious beings, and their states.

Thus, rightly or wrongly, there is a large consensus of opinion in favor of this view. And it is a view which seems to me to be obviously correct. I shall therefore assume its correctness in this paper, and my results will entirely depend upon it, since, if anything else could have moral value for its own sake, there would be no reason to regard the good as specially individualistic.

When a judgment of value is asserted to be ultimately true, it is, of course, useless to seek for a proof, or to demand one. It must be either accepted or left alone. This particular judgment is, as I have said, one which I feel myself compelled to accept, and the fact that so many other people accept it may be taken as evidence that an argument based on this premise will not necessarily be useless.

Mr. Moore, indeed, holds that other things may have value besides conscious beings and their states. His discussion of the subject is of the greatest interest, but it has not diminished the certainty which I feel, whether rightly or wrongly, that none of these other things can possess value.

There are two points on which we must guard against misconception. In the first place, if I say that only conscious beings and their states have value, I do not mean that they cannot have value unless the conscious being knows them to have value. He might not know that the state in which he

was conscious of being had value, and yet it might have it. He might not know that his life and character as a whole had value, and yet it might have it. If, in making a certain decision, I acted in a selfish manner, my state of consciousness might have considerable negative value, even if I did not recognize that selfishness was a vice. In the same way, the happiness of a kitten or a young child may be good, although they do not judge themselves to be happy, and do not recognize that happiness is a good.

We may, indeed, go further, and add that there is no necessity, in order that a state should have value, that it should be recognized by *anyone* as having value. If there is no omniscient being—a hypothesis which is at any rate possible—many men must have acted generously or selfishly on occasions when neither they nor anyone else recognized the generosity or the selfishness. But the acts would, all the same, be generous or selfish, and would be good or evil accordingly.

In the second place, we must remember that among the states of consciousness which may be good or bad are included, not only those which give us direct perception of external objects, but those which give us knowledge of them in any other way. This point is important, because Mr. Moore, in criticising Sidgwick's argument, takes Sidgwick's example as his text, and so—as it seems to me—rather obscures the main issue.

Sidgwick had said ("Methods of Ethics," I, ix, 4) that "no one would consider it rational to aim at the production of beauty in external nature apart from a possible contemplation of it by human beings." To this Mr. Moore replies ("Principia Ethica," Sec. 50), "I, for one, do consider this rational; [and] let us see if I can now get anyone to agree with me. Consider what this admission really means. It entitles us to put the following case: Let us imagine one world exceeding beautiful. Imagine it as beautiful as you can; put into it whatever on this earth you most admire—mountains, rivers, the sea; trees and sunsets, stars and moon. Imagine all these combined in the most exquisite proportions, so that no one thing jars against another, but each contributes to the beauty

of the whole. And then imagine the ugliest world you can possibly conceive. Imagine it simply one heap of filth, containing everything that is most disgusting to us for whatever reason, and the whole, as far as may be, without one redeeming feature. . . . The only thing we are not entitled to imagine is that any human being ever has, or ever, by any possibility, *can*, live in either—can ever see and enjoy the beauty of the one or hate the foulness of the other. Well, even so, supposing them quite apart from any possible contemplation of human beings; still, is it irrational to hold that it is better that the beautiful world should exist, than the one which is ugly? Would it not be well, in any case, to do what we could to produce it rather than the other? Certainly I cannot help thinking that it would; and I hope that some may agree with me in this extreme instance.”

Now such words as “contemplation,” “live in,” “see,” suggest the direct perception—by sight or in some equally immediate manner—of the world and its beauty or ugliness. And this leaves the possibility open that a world not “contemplated” in this way may still be known—by inference, or revelation—to exist. Indeed, Sidgwick’s suggestion, adopted by Mr. Moore, that we should consider if it would be rational to aim at the production of it, implies that its existence or at any rate the possibility of its existence may be known. For it would not be rational to aim at the production of any result unless we knew that it was possible to produce it.

Now I should admit that there might be some value in a beautiful world which was known to exist, or even which was only known to be possible, although no conscious being ever directly perceived its beauty. The value would not, I think, be great, but, I think, the value would exist. But in this case I should say that what had value for its own sake was the knowledge which some conscious being had that the world existed or was possible, and that the existence or possibility of the world was only valuable as a means to that knowledge.

I do not suggest that Mr. Moore has confused the two questions—direct perception on the one hand and knowledge of any sort on the other. I am confident that he has not confused

them, but I think that, by taking the rather unfortunate example that Sidgwick gives, he has unintentionally given an undue plausibility to his contention by making it easy for his readers to suppose that the only question is whether value would arise from the beauty of a world not directly perceived, when the real question is whether value could arise from the beauty of a world not known in any way.

On this question I have, as I have said, a conviction that there would be no such value. Let us suppose that a beautiful world arises somewhere of which no conscious being has had or ever will have any knowledge of any sort—nor the knowledge that it exists or might exist. Such a supposition can never, *ex hypothesi*, be verified, but we can intelligibly make it. Then it seems certain to me that the beauty of that world would have no value whatever. Of course I am as unable to give any arguments for my view as Mr. Moore is to give any arguments for his contrary view.

On this basis, then, that nothing has value but conscious beings and their states, it will follow that, unless the universe as a whole is a conscious being, the universe as a whole can have no value, positive or negative. It is neither good nor bad. As the belief that the universe as a whole is a conscious being—*i. e.*, a single person—is a very rare one, I shall leave it out of account for the present, though I shall return to it. And, leaving it out of account, it is impossible that the universe as a whole can be good or bad. Parts of the universe are conscious beings—indeed, according to one theory, all parts of the universe are conscious beings. And so parts of the universe and their states may have value. But this cannot be said of the universe as a whole.

This result may be unexpected, but I think it is inevitable. It will perhaps appear less paradoxical if we remember that we are speaking only of ultimate value—value as an end, not value as a means. Value as a means may be possessed by other things than conscious selves and their states. Thus a beautiful material world, though devoid of value as an end, may have value as a means if it produces in conscious beings a state of knowledge, or of æsthetic pleasure, which has value

as an end. And things which are unknown to any conscious being may also have value as means, if they are the causes of desirable states in conscious beings. If a volcanic eruption, whose occurrence was unknown to any conscious being, had fitted a certain district for vine-growing, it would be of value as a means to the desirable state of consciousness of the conscious beings who, in subsequent centuries, drank the wine.

Now the universe as a whole can be of value as a means. The fact that the universe is a unity, and that it is this particular sort of unity, may be known to conscious beings, and this knowledge of it may increase their happiness, or stimulate their virtue, or may in some other way change their conscious states so as to affect the value of those states. Then their knowledge and virtue may have ultimate value. And so the universe as a whole may have value as a means of providing this knowledge or virtue.

(It may be said the belief would have the same value if it were a false belief, for the existence of which it would not be necessary that the universe should be the unity it is believed to be. But, if the truth of a belief makes it more valuable, this would not be the case. And in the case of a man who has too much penetration to be deceived on a particular subject the existence of such a unity would be an essential condition of the belief in it.)

Again, the unity of the universe, and the fact that it is a particular sort of unity, will certainly influence all conscious beings, whether it is known to them or not. They would be different from what they are if the unity of the universe were different, or if they themselves were not parts of a universe. (In the latter case, indeed, it might be maintained that they would not exist at all.) And so it will affect their natures, and therefore their values, and will itself have value as a means.

There is, once more, a sense in which a predicate may be used of a whole which is really applicable only to the parts, and to use it in this sense is quite legitimate, if only the distinction is clearly made. It is quite legitimate to say that one town is more drunken than another, although it is im-

possible for a town to get drunk at all. What is meant is either that the aggregate drunkenness, or the average drunkenness, of the inhabitants is greater in one town than in another. In the same way, if we came to the conclusion that the average conscious being in the world was in a good state, or was becoming better, we could say that the universe as a whole was in a good state or was becoming better. But we should not be speaking of any value belonging to the universe as a whole, but of the average value of its conscious parts.

Our conclusion, if valid, is of very general importance, for, as I said before, the opinion that the universe as a whole is not a conscious being is by far the most generally accepted. It accompanies all theories of the universe which may be called atheistic, since a person who was also the universe would naturally be held to be God, except in the improbable event of his being considered wicked. And most forms of theism also hold that the universe is not a conscious being. They generally hold that all non-divine conscious beings were created by God, but they do not hold that they form part of God. Thus the universe, in the widest sense, includes both God and his creatures, but is not identical with God, and is not personal.

The belief that the universe is a person is not always found even in systems which would be classed as pantheistic. For the name of pantheism is generally given to any system which, while it denies the existence of a God other than the universe, holds that we are entitled to regard the universe more or less in the same way as theists regard God. If we can trust to its workings, approve the necessary results of its character, feel admiration, reverence or love for it, the system would be called pantheism. Now, rightly or wrongly, many philosophers have thought that the universe could be regarded in one or more of these ways without being looked on as a person, or as the work of a person. Thus Spinoza is usually classed among pantheists, although he certainly did not regard the universe as a person. And Hegel's philosophy would be called pantheistic, even by those who deny that he regarded the universe as personal.

No doubt there are to be found, among pantheistic systems, some which regard the universe as a whole as being a single person. Lotze unquestionably accepted this view, and some Hegelians do the same. (It has been maintained that Hegel himself did so, but this I believe to be erroneous.) Those who accept such systems, and those only, would be entitled to hold that the universe as a whole had value otherwise than as a means.

But even in this case judgments of value will be found, I think, to be more individualistic than other judgments as to the fundamental characteristics of existence. If such theories as Lotze's are true, I shall be part of another person, and my state at that moment will be part of his state at that moment. But I submit that the value of myself will not be part of the value of him, but will be a separate amount which must, together with the value of all other finite individuals, be *added* to the good or evil of the personal whole, if we wish to estimate the total of the values in the universe. And, in the same way, the value of my state, which is a part of the state of the personal whole at any moment, is not included in the value of that state but must be added to it as a separate item.

The reason of this is, it seems to me, that there are certain qualities which, whenever they are found in a conscious being, possess positive value—that is, are good. There are others which, whenever they are found in a conscious being, possess negative value and are bad. Now if the view of Lotze and some of the Hegelians of the Right should be correct—a view which to me, I must confess, appears patently false—my consciousness is part of God's consciousness, but is also a finite consciousness. Hence if within God's consciousness there are x finite consciousnesses, the total number of consciousnesses is neither one nor x . It is $x + 1$.

Let us suppose that righteousness is good for its own sake. Then, if God is righteous, and I also am righteous, it will follow, even if I am part of God, that there are here two separate goods—one of them presumably much greater than the other. But the point comes out more clearly with a different case. Let us suppose that God is righteous, but that I am

unrighteous, and that unrighteousness is bad for its own sake. Then it seems clear to me that God's righteousness is good and that my unrighteousness is evil. And it also seems clear to me that, in any attempt to estimate all existent value, these two values, in spite of my being part of God, must be placed side by side with one another, in the same way that my unrighteousness must be placed side by side with the righteousness of Socrates.

If I am right, the conclusion will be that, whether the universe is a single person or not, there are a plurality of beings who have value, and whose states have value, and that all these must be taken into account when we attempt to estimate all existent values. The value of a universe in which there is more than one consciousness, is only one value in the second sense spoken of above—as an aggregate of separate values.

I do not think that the truth of this has been sufficiently realized. We often find that philosophers, and philosophers of very different schools, have argued from the unity of the universe to a corresponding unity of value. Even in philosophies of a materialistic type, which do not regard the unity of the universe as more than a unity of reciprocal causality, we sometimes find the tacit supposition that the value of individuals is merged in the value of the whole in the same way that, according to these philosophies, the individual itself is a transitory and unimportant episode in the whole. But this is inconsistent. If, as most of the supporters of these philosophies would admit, value can only be found in consciousness, then in all questions of value consciousness is the only matter of importance, however dependent, ephemeral or limited its existence may be. These characteristics may assist in making consciousness bad rather than good, but cannot make it less important, in the true sense of important, which always, I conceive, involves the question of value.

But it is more relevant to our present purpose to recall that idealists have failed, more frequently than philosophers of other schools, to recognize this individualism of value, even when they have held that the universe is not a conscious being, and that only conscious beings and their states have value.

The failure has been partly due to the error mentioned above—the assumption that the value to be found in a whole must have as much unity as the whole itself has. But there is another ground of error which, as a matter of historic fact, seems to have influenced idealists more than other philosophers. This ground is a misapprehension of the sense in which almost all good—and especially almost all of the highest good—is social in its character.

In any case, good is so far social that it depends largely on other men whether the state of a particular man is good. It depends largely on the action of other men, in the present or the past, whether a particular man is now learned or ignorant, virtuous or vicious, healthy or diseased, happy or miserable. But, in addition to this, the good is largely social in a deeper sense—the sense that not only are my relations to other men the essential conditions of a good state of myself, but the consciousness of those relations *is* the good in question. In patriotism, geniality, love, for example, my relation to other men is not a mere means to the good, as my relation to my wine merchant is the means by which I procure the good of wine drinking. Patriotism, geniality, love, it would be said, are themselves goods.

That there are goods of this sort would be very generally admitted (though not universally) by others besides idealists. But the idealists have emphasized these particular goods, and their superiority to others. Some of them have gone as far as to assert that among them is to be found the only true good, in which all others are summed up and transcended. And thus the social character of good has been more prominent in idealistic systems than in others.

This has, on the whole, been a distinctly valuable part of the influence of idealism. But idealism, I think, has often gone further, and, in going further, has gone too far. Because it has value for A. to be in a relation with B., it has been argued that the relation has value in itself, and that the whole which is constituted by A. and B. in relation with one another has also value. Since all things in the universe stand in relation to one another, the conclusion is reached that the whole

which is constituted by all these beings in relation—that is, the universe itself—may have value in itself.

This, I submit, is erroneous. To love may be good in itself. And to love is to be in a relation with another person. But if A. loves B., what is good is not the relation between them, but the state of A. in being one of the terms of that relation. If to be loved is good in itself, as well as to love, then the state of B. is also good in being the other term of the relation. (And if the relation is one of reciprocal love, then, certainly, B.'s state is good.) But the relation is not good, though both of the terms are good because they have this relation. And, though there is only one relation; there are two goods. It is good that A. should love. It is good that B. should be loved. And these goods are two and not one, though they are causally connected.

This is inevitable on the hypothesis, on which we are proceeding, that only conscious beings and their states have value. For a relation between two beings is neither a conscious being nor a state of one. If A. and B. love one another, then the relation which connects them cannot be a state of one of them only, for then it would not unite the two of them. Nor can it be a state of both of them jointly, for two conscious beings cannot have the same state, though they may have similar states. Nor is it a state of each of them separately, for then you would have two states—one in each and no relation. And it is certainly not a state of any third conscious being.

It is of course true that a relation of love between A. and B. implies that each of them is in a state of love—each, that is, is in a state of having the relation. And these states have value. But then they are two, not one—and one of them is in A. and the other in B. The relation united A. and B., but it is not a state of consciousness, and has no value. The state of A. and the state of B. have value, but they do not unite A. and B.

Of course when I say that what has value is not the relation but the conscious state in each related being which the relation implies, I do not mean that the value lies in a conscious recognition or classification of that state. If A. is related to B.

by the relation of love, he must be in the conscious state toward B. of loving him, and this has value. It is not necessary for this state to have value that A. should know it to have value, or even that he should know it to be love.

Let us pass to a few corollaries of this position. If it is true, Mr. Moore's principle of organic value will only have a limited application. It may be true that two characteristics, x and y, of a particular state of A. may have a different value when together than the sum of the values they would have had separately. But a state of A. and a state of B. cannot (as ends) have a different value together than the sum of the values they would have had separately. For A. and B. are not a conscious being, but an aggregate of conscious beings, and a state of A. and B. has therefore no value except in the sense in which an aggregate of values may be described as one value. And a value in this sense is simply the sum of the constituent values.

Again, the individualism of Hedonism is frequently made a reproach against it, even by those who hold that value depends on consciousness. But, if our result is right, it follows that any theory of value which confined it to consciousness must be, if it is to be consistent, as individualistic as Hedonism. Individualism is, indeed, more evident in the case of Hedonism. It is more *obvious* that the happiness of a country is the sum of the happiness of the citizens, than that the same is true of virtue or of other excellences. But it would not form a solid ground of reproach to Hedonism that it was more difficult to go wrong about it than about other theories.

Again, if this principle is true, it will not be true to say—as is so often said—that the individual and society are reciprocally means and end. On the contrary, while the individual is an end, the society is only a means. It will remain true, even on this theory, that the individual ought, in certain cases, to sacrifice himself to the society, but this will only be because the resulting effect on society will be a means to the creation, in other individuals, of value exceeding that which is lost in the self-sacrifice. It is really for the welfare of other indi-

viduals that the sacrifice of one's own welfare is made in any cases where it is justifiable at all.

Once more, the truth of this principle may have some bearing on socialism. There is indeed nothing actually inconsistent with ethical individualism in the advocacy of any development, however great, of the functions of the State. For such a development is generally recommended by arguments which profess to show that the welfare of individual citizens would be greater under such a system. Thus we could logically combine an ethical individualism as thorough as Mill's with a socialism as extreme as Fourier's.

But socialism derives much of its support from other arguments, rather implied, perhaps than distinctly expressed. It is often held that to substitute collective action for individual action must be right because the State is intrinsically higher than the individuals, and stands toward them as a body does to its parts, or even as a cathedral does to its stones, which have no value except as contributing to the beauty of the whole. Socialism owes, I think, a good deal of the support of its adherents, and still more of their enthusiasm, to this view. It is, indeed, only on this view that the phrase "the religion of socialism" can be anything but a foolish exaggeration, since religion concerns itself with ultimate values.

But if what I have said is true, it will follow that, whatever activity it is desirable for the State to have, it will only be desirable as a means, and that the activity, and the State itself, can have no value but as a means. And a religion which fastens itself on a means has not risen above fetish-worship. Compared with worship of the State, zoölatry is rational and dignified. A bull or a crocodile may not have great intrinsic value, but it has some, for it is a conscious being. The State has none. It would be as reasonable to worship a sewage pipe, which also possesses considerable value as a means.

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