

WHO WAS THE FATHER OF ANALYTIC ETHICS? GEORGE EDWARD MOORE'S DNA TEST*

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Abstract

I reconstruct the background of ideas, concerns and intentions out of which Moore's early essays, the preliminary version, and then the final version of *Principia Ethica* originated. I stress the role of religious concerns, as well as that of the Idealist legacy. I argue that *PE* is more a patchwork of rather diverging contributions than a unitary work, not to say the paradigm of a new school in Ethics. I add a comparison with Rashdall's almost contemporary ethical work, suggesting that the latter defends the same general claims in a different way, one that paves decisive objections in a more plausible way. I end by suggesting that the emergence of Analytic Ethics was a more ambiguous phenomenon than the received view would make us believe, and that the wheat (or some other gluten-free grain) of this tradition, that is, what logic can do for philosophy, has to be separated from the chaff, that is, the confused and mutually incompatible legacies of Utilitarianism and Idealism.

Key Words: George Edward Moore, Hastings Rashdall, analytic ethics, utilitarianism, naturalistic fallacy, religion.

1. Religion, morality, and a Victorian teenager

George Edward Moore, born in 1873, in the heydays of the Victorian era, grew up in an upper middle-class family. It was, in several respects, a family with typical features of the new urban elite that was replacing the older land-owning gentry. Worth noting are, first, a non-Anglican or Dissenter religious background, secondly, remarkable wealth, thirdly, a remarkable father, a renowned physician who, having retired early, was in a position to have a

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special influence in his children's education and a rather problematic mother who, after having been committed for some time to giving birth once a year, was rather vulnerable in terms of psycho-physical health. It is worth adding that the children attended a day-school for middle-class offspring – moderately more progressive but also markedly more demanding than the famous boarding-schools for the aristocracy – in Dulwich, a London suburb where the family had moved precisely with this purpose in mind³. Both parents had, as mentioned, a Dissenting background, the mother from an outstanding Quaker family, the father from a Baptist one, and both had for a time some sympathy for the Evangelical movement, although at the time of George Edward's childhood their attitude to Evangelicalism had become less sanguine. Their families had connections with a network of Quaker, Evangelical, Unitarian, and radical families. Taking a closer look to such a kinship network, one meets names such as Thomas Sturge – with William Wilberforce one of the two leaders of the anti-slave trade campaign – and then the Darwins, the Sidgwicks, the Stephens, and other families whose scions were to show up in due time in George Edward's own life. This was at the time the new British aristocracy in professional and political life, the bearer of a set of values different from those of the Anglican and land-owning gentry. This new elite was the protagonist precisely of all those democratic reforms that in turn would have led – ironically – to its own disappearance as a social group in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The main elements of this new ethos were the importance of individual conscience, the sense of duty, and social responsibility. Such a legacy had come from different sources, mostly religious, but was shared by both believers and agnostics or atheists. Indeed, over the course of two or three generations there was a widespread shift from religion to agnosticism but a shift made while jealously preserving attitudes and vices from the previous religious tradition. Leslie Stephen, the father of novelist Virginia and painter Vanessa, a renowned historian of ideas and rather pedantic scholar, is an example of such kind of *esprit de sérieux* oblivious of its own *raison d'être*, which will undergo sharp derision by the Bloomsbury set, the informal group of intellectuals to which his own daughters belonged, not so much different from that manifested by Nietzsche, himself the son of a Lutheran pastor, against socialists and humanitarians, viewed as priests disguised in plain clothes⁴.

Young George Edward grew up in an environment quite abiding to religious observance but also not so much traditionalist or backward. About the age of thirteen he had his own mystical crisis when he was converted by an itinerant

3 See Paul Levy, *G.E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), 28-45.

4 Levy, 19-27.

mission of young evangelicals. The crisis ended soon, under the influence of older brother Tom who was already an agnostic and put him under pressure requiring him to provide justified reasons for his own beliefs. George Edward emerged from this crisis with a persuasion to have a strict duty to find a justification for each belief he adopted, with a corresponding duty to abandon any conviction for which he could not find such a justification. The conjecture is rather plausible that such an attitude was in turn unknowingly determined, among other things, by the religious tradition in which young George Edward had been educated, namely the old Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light as the only guide for our conscience, as well as the more recent Evangelical obsession with continuous self-examination in order to check the authenticity of one's conversion from Sin to redeeming Faith in our Saviour⁵.

2. A secret society

The *Apostles* was the name of a club, whose existence was kept secret, founded in Cambridge in 1820 by a group of twelve students (hence the name) under the leadership of George Tomlinson, then a student and later an Anglican clergyman and a member of the Evangelical movement. At weekly meetings one of the members used to present a report on a topic that was then discussed following precise rules. At the end the answer to a question formulated on the basis of the report and subsequent discussion was put to the vote. The wording of the question to be answered was to assume special importance in the Club's ritual. It was part of the society's ethos that every topic could be made the subject of discussion and freedom to argue should not meet with any limits⁶. These discussions, more than the lecture courses he had to attend, were the source of his philosophical vocation⁷.

3. A run away from religion, through empiricism, idealism, and common sense

The young Moore had arrived at Cambridge looking for an alternative to the particular religious worldview in which he had grown up. He had become a sceptic in matters of religion and was tempted to look for answers to his own doubts in the progressive and anti-religious movements of ideas that had dominated or still dominated the British scene, namely Utilitarianism and Evolutionism. Within a couple of years, yet, he seems to be more and more

5 Levy, 42.

6 See Arthur Sidgwick, Eleanor Mildred Sidgwick, eds., *Henry Sidgwick: a Memoir* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1996), 34-35; cf. George Edward Moore, "An autobiography", in Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of G.E. Moore* (Evanston, IL: TheFreePress, 1942), 1-37, 12-13.

7 Moore, 13; see Levy, 62.



influenced by anti-empiricist and anti-hedonist critics of British idealism, particularly Francis Bradley and John McTaggart. The circumstance that the main concern in *Principia Ethica* was to exclude the possibility of reducing goodness to one set of empirical qualities may be easily accounted for as a result of the anti-empiricist reaction that had been arising in those years. Moore was convinced that Kant had finally refuted Hume's empiricism by proving the need for an active intervention by the knowing subject in shaping the given data. He was by then convinced that really existing things are not those which are the subject of our experience, but rather those belonging to a noumenal reality, accepting also the implication that time does not have any real existence, a claim that he would later qualify as "absolutely monstrous", but of whose truth he had let himself be convinced by McTaggart. He had also concluded that pleasure is not a possible subject of empirical knowledge because nobody ever wants to have pleasure in itself, but only those things by which pleasure is accompanied. It is in conjunction with this temporary switch to a kind of idealism whose Kant himself was supposed to be a proponent that Moore's concern developed for emancipation of individuals from philosophers or scientists who wanted to teach them what is right, or which ones are the "good things". The search for answers that would translate these concerns into precisely argued philosophical claims is well documented by the essays published before the *Principia* as well as by two dissertations on Kant submitted for graduation at Cambridge⁸. In these writings the doctrines most often discussed are those of Kant, Hegel, and neo-Hegelian idealists Bradley and McTaggart. In the second dissertation he put forth a theory of truth which elaborated on Bradley's coherentism⁹. Yet, he soon started working out a critique of idealism going towards the discovery of that kind of common-sense realism that became known as Moore's own philosophy in the Twenties and Thirties. In 1898 he was still writing that he had chosen to discuss the Kantian conception of freedom because he thought "that reference to the views of the philosopher, with whom you are more in agreement, is often the easiest way of explaining your own view"¹⁰, but soon after he started a rebellion against Bradley and idealism in defence of the common-sense worldview¹¹.

8 See Tom Regan, "Introduction". In George Edward Moore. *The Early Essays*, ed. by T. Regan (Philadelphia, PENN: Temple University Press, 1981), 1-13, 10.

9 George Edward Moore, "The 1898 Dissertation; the metaphysical basis of ethics", in *Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 117-237, 166.

10 Moore, "Freedom", *Mind*, new series 7 (1898), 179-204, 179.

11 See Bertrand Russell, "My mental development", in Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Harper, 1963), 1-18, 12.

4. The *Principia* and what is left of Idealism

The reviewer for the *Guardian* started his review of the *Principia* as follows: “Few things are so depressing as a man with a mission. Mr. Moore’s mission is of the intellectual type, and takes the modest form of assuring almost all other philosophers since the world began that they have never even conceived the problem of ethics correctly, much less succeeded in solving it.”¹²

To better appreciate this reaction, we may recall the circumstance that Moore was then 29 years old and had only two years philosophical studies behind. These circumstances may help in accounting for both doubts by professional commentators and enormous success among a wider public, if not immediately, at least from the Twenties, due perhaps to the Goddess Fortune’s protection, whose task is assisting young men, especially the bold and foolhardy ones. Besides the Goddess’s assistance, half of such success was due to the terrible simplification of previous ethical thinking that he was able to do just because of his candid ignorance about most of it.

Moore Scholars have access now to the text of the *Elements of Ethics*, a set of lectures delivered at the London School of Ethics and Social Philosophy, an institution founded in order to provide lifelong learning for the working class. The institution closed after only three years activity, not only because of financial problems but also because of failure in meeting its original goals due to too much success, a success that secured her an audience composed mainly of people who had already had access to higher education¹³. The *Elements* were first revised for publication, but then Moore dropped the project and decided to use instead part of the materials for a different book, with a simpler outlay and one closer to the original plan of the lecture course. Of the ten lessons from the *Elements*, lesson VII on “Free Will” was later published as a separate essay, the two on hedonism, lesson III and IV, became one chapter, while lesson viii, on the ethics of inner life, was dropped, keeping some materials in chapter VI, while IX, “Practical applications” and X, “General Conclusions”, were completely abandoned.

Moore’s critical target was the late nineteenth-century British philosophical mainstream, that is, Mill, Spencer and their followers. What he wanted to prove is that these empiricist philosophers had no right to pose as teachers of a new “scientific” morality because, in order to support their claims, they are

12 *The Guardian*, April 24, 1904, quoted from Tom Regan, *Bloomsbury's Prophet* (Philadelphia, PENN: Temple University Press, 1986), 19.

13 Tom Regan, “Editor’s introduction”, in Moore, *The Elements of Ethics*, edited by Tom Regan (Philadelphia, PENN: Temple University Press, 2003), xiii-xxxviii, particularly xv-xxii.

bound to lapse into a logical fallacy. Once this is proved, you get the result of liberating the second part of ethics – the one that really matters for life as far as it aims at defining the good things, not just the meaning of the predicate “good” – from the protection of all philosophical theories and giving it back to the care of common sense. This second part of ethics is not a philosopher’s task, at least beyond necessary clarification of methods and procedures, or, more precisely, it is so to some extent, as far as this part aims at answering the question about what is an intrinsic end, and it is not so when it tries and fails to answer the question about what ends should be pursued. With regard to the second question, philosophy ends with the conclusion that you cannot reach any justified conclusion and the only possible recommendation for human beings in flesh and bones is to follow common sense on current issues and, in more complex or uncertain matters, to rely on a choice based on consequences, although not consequences in the long term and not universal ones, but just those involving ourselves and our close relations.

In the light of the above, we can better understand the meaning and context of some statements from the *Principia*. The first is that ethics consists of two parts: a) a “science of morality” or “ethics”, which is a discourse on the nature of intrinsic value; b) a “casuistry”, which is a discourse on the determination of the right action and that is expected to answer two questions: i) what is an intrinsic end; ii) which particular actions should be performed and what specific purposes should be pursued¹⁴. The answer to the first question is the thesis of the impossibility to give a definition of the word “good”. The answer to the second lies in the apparently odd doctrine of the Ideal from chapter VI, and in the peculiar consequentialist doctrine presented in chapter V. The crux of the answer is that, to answer this question we only need to get rid of all theories that teach us what things are good, and then everyone will see clearly what they really are, and indeed there will be agreement on this matter; there will be instead a large amount of uncertainty on the rather different question of what needs to be done in one given situation to achieve these good things, and we will have to acknowledge the existing disagreement.

The claim of impossibility of defining “good” is based – as it is well-known – on two arguments: the argument of the open question which says that, in front of each definition of good, it is still possible to ask, even when a thing has a property identified by the definition to goodness, whether it is actually good¹⁵, and the so-called “naturalistic fallacy” argument according to which all moral

14 Moore, *Principia Ethica* (1903), edited by Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), §2 and 4.

15 *Ibid.*, § 13.

philosophers up to now have lapsed into an invalid form of argument consisting of the unwarranted claim of being able to give a definition of the predicate "good" through enumeration of other qualities of things that are good, while this predicate instead "cannot be analysed"¹⁶.

In order to understand what he actually means, it is worth recalling once again that the meaning of the term "natural" that Moore has in mind is equivalent to "empirical", and that "natural" properties are, according to him, those which the natural sciences and psychology are dealing with, namely, properties of material bodies such as colour, sound, physical structure, and elements of mental experience, such as feelings of pleasure and pain. The same thing could have been said in less ambiguous language, and would have turned out to be a comparatively trivial idea, as it is in fact¹⁷. Instead, value properties are not "components" of any entity existing in time and space but only "derivative" properties, and this is why they may be "non-natural" properties¹⁸.

The "naturalistic fallacy" argument was later the subject of much criticism. It has been argued that the fallacy is not a real *fallacy* because it is not a mistaken inference but just the erroneous identification of two distinct properties, and also that it is not even *naturalistic* since it does not bear on "naturalist" positions more than on "metaphysical" ones, that is, the argument aims at ruling out identification of the predicate good's reference also with properties of objects existing in any supersensible "real" world.

Moore's argument is that a definition is the decomposition of a whole into its parts, but "good" has no definition because it is simple and has no parts¹⁹. It may be objected that the argument holds if you accept a very demanding notion of definition that identifies it with an analysis into simple components. Moore himself later brought to light the "paradox of analysis" unavoidably met by any kind of analysis thus understood, but forgot to add that the discovery of this paradox also made his own formulation of the idea of naturalistic fallacy indefensible²⁰.

The second question in ethics is: what things are good? The answer to this question consists of a definition of the good, which is possible despite the fact the predicate "good" is indefinable. The answer that Moore is trying to formulate is

16 Ibid., § 14.

17 See Sergio Cremaschi, "Naturalizzazione senza naturalismo: una prospettiva per la metaetica", *Etica e Politica \ Ethics & Politics*, 9, no. 2 (2007), 201-217.

18 Moore, "A reply to my critics", in *The Philosophy of G.E. Moore*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp (Evanston, Ill: The Free Press, 1942), 535-677, particularly 581-592.

19 Moore, *Principia Ethica*, § 10.

20 See Moore, "The justification of analysis", in *Lectures on Philosophy*, edited by Casimir Lewy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), 165-72.

that this part of the task of ethics is the decisive one, but also the most obvious, to the point that you do not need any theory to answer to this question, and indeed normal people, once liberated from erroneous theories, would be able to carry out this task by themselves, without any assistance by priests, metaphysicians, and scientists. In order for a quality to be good in a moral sense we need to be able to affirm not so much that it is accompanied by any other property, but that it would pass the test of “absolute isolation”²¹, that it would have value even if nothing else in the world existed. The result of the absolute isolation procedure is a solution “so obvious as to run the risk of appearing trivial”, that is, the most valuable things are “certain states of consciousness”, or “the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects”²². In the *Elements* he had explained that good things consist in love for “other human minds” and in “knowledge of truth”. Some years later, he will expand the list to encompass “knowledge, or wisdom, or virtue, or love”²³.

Last of all, even if the answer to the second question of ethics may be given without the assistance of any philosophical theory and indeed clearing the field from all such theories, the question about the status of the quality which is the subject of such immediate recognition is still legitimate. Goodness, unlike good things, does not exist in space and time, but this is not tantamount to saying that goodness does not exist. What does then Moore argue more precisely? As Regan aptly comments, “to believe in the reality of things which, by their very nature, do not exist in time, means adopting some of the spirit, if not every letter, of idealism. Is it possible then, for Moore to have it both ways, denying idealism on the one hand, and, on the other affirming an ethic that seems to rest on what appear to be idealistic presuppositions?”²⁴

6. Between real-rule consequentialism and non-universalist act-consequentialism

The second part of ethics is what Moore calls “casuistry”, a term he uses, probably because of lack of any direct acquaintance with classical casuistry, in a somewhat fancy way, corresponding to what is now called normative ethics. Having answered the question of what things are good, he believes we may proceed to the question of which one among all possible actions will produce the best “total complex of consequences”, *i.e.* experiences of love and beauty, and that it is only on this basis that you can justify the existence of any duty, for

21 See Moore, *Ethics* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1912), ch. 7; *Principia Ethica*, § 112.

22 Moore, *Principia Ethica*, § 113.

23 Moore, *Ethics*, 247.

24 Regan, “Introduction”, in Moore, *The Early Essays*, 10.

“right” means “what will *not* cause *less* good than any possible alternative”²⁵.

To state that an action is a duty amounts to saying that, given certain circumstances, it will produce better results than any other, and thus the claim that something is a duty is never an obvious one, but it always requires some proofs. What we are able to do, yet, is just proving that certain actions generally produce better total results than those caused by any alternative action, and therefore “just in a few cases” it is possible to prove that some actions are duties. So, it is never possible to know with any certainty that something is our duty, and besides no moral law is absolute, for it has “the nature of a scientific law but not of a scientific *prediction*: and the latter is always merely probable, although the probability may be very great”²⁶. The reason for that is that a moral law is a prediction concerning the amount of good that will be produced by an action, a prediction based, among other things, on uncertain factors, on effects of interaction between one action and other actions, on spatial and temporal distance between one action and its consequences, and so on.

There are two alternative interpretations of this statement. The first is the one according to which Moore would defend a “real-rule (ideal) utilitarianism”, a view not unlike – at least in his theory of the right, if not in the theory of the good – Sidgwick’s, according to which common-sense morality has selected rules that roughly comply with the proposed criterion of the right; in fact it seems possible to show that, as far as rules followed in our society are concerned, “it seems possible to prove a definite utility in most of those which are in general both recognised and practised”²⁷; there are some limits, yet, to this conclusion, since a “a great part of ordinary moral exhortation and social discussion consists in the advocating of rules, which are *not* generally practised; and with regard to these it seems very doubtful whether a case for their general utility can ever be conclusively made out”²⁸.

The second interpretation is the one according to which, for those cases that really matter, *i.e.* all *new* cases, and besides all cases in which a *conflict of duties* arises, Moore would turn this position upside down in order to defend instead what might call a *restricted* (ideal) act-utilitarianism. The “restricted” character of such utilitarianism lies in the fact that in new or dubious cases we should, in principle, decide on the basis of the amount of intrinsic good carried by the consequences, but since the latter are extended indefinitely in time and space, such calculation dreamed of by utilitarians is impossible to

25 Moore, *Principia Ethica*, § 89.

26 *Ibid.*, § 94.

27 *Ibid.*, § 98.

28 *Ibid.*, § 98.

carry out. Note that this is not an original discovery, and indeed it is one of the two main objections moved by William Whewell to Jeremy Bentham, which was then repeated by Sidgwick as if it were his own discovery²⁹. So, since we cannot free ourselves from uncertainty, we will perhaps have more probability of doing the right action by sticking to a choice dictated by consideration of immediate effects of actions on ourselves and those who are closer to us than if we would let us be inspired by boundless benevolence³⁰. Such almost random approach, to which we are allegedly bound, will perhaps – this is the only consolation – bring about more good than harm, because it will encourage *some* people to perform *certain* good actions, although it will not prompt all possible good actions by everybody. The traditional moralists' mistake is rather that of assuming that, with regard to duties and virtues, "it is desirable that every one should be alike"³¹. Instead, probably "the principle of division of labour, according to special capacity, which is recognised in respect of employments, would also give a better result in respect of virtues"³², because the "extreme improbability that any general rule with regard to the utility of an action will be correct seems, in fact, to be the chief principle which should be taken into account in discussing how the individual should guide his choice"³³.

7. The *Principia* and what is left of religion

Contrary to what has been said by commentators until a few years ago³⁴, Moore had not lost his interest in religious issues when he was a teenager, but was still obsessed by these questions until the time of the *Principia*. Many of the essays presented in the sessions of the *Apostles* relate to religious issues³⁵, the review of McTaggart's *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology* discusses McTaggart's peculiar view of eternity³⁶; the *Elements of Ethics* include a comparatively extensive discussion of religion³⁷, and thus – Regan concludes – it is "scarcely credible to

29 See Cremaschi, "The Mill-Whewell controversy on ethics and its bequest to analytic philosophy", in Elvio Baccarini, Snežana Prijic Samaržja, eds., *Rationality in Belief and Action* (Rijeka: University of Rijeka – Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Croatian Society for Analytic Philosophy, 2006), 45-62; "Nothing to invite or to reward a separate examination. Sidgwick and Whewell", *Etica&Politica \ Ethics&Politics*, 10, no. 2 (2008), 137-181, http://www2.units.it/~etica/2008_2/CREMASCHI.pdf

30 Moore, *Principia Ethica*, §§ 88-89; *Ethics*, ch. 5.

31 Moore, *Principia Ethica*, § 100

32 *Ibid.*, § 100.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Alfred Julius Ayer, *Russell and Moore. The Analytic Tradition* (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1971), 138; Geoffrey James Warnock, *English Philosophy since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 10; Levy, *o cit.*, 40.

35 See Regan, *Bloomsbury's Prophet*, 40-41.

36 Moore, "Mr. McTaggart's 'Studies in Hegelian Cosmology'", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 2 (1901-1902), 177-214.

37 Moore, *The Elements of Ethics*, ch. 9.

maintain, in view of the available evidence and notwithstanding Moore's professed agnosticism, that he lacked 'genuine interest for religious questions'³⁸. The main evidence for Moore's religious interests is an essay presented at an *Apostles* meeting on November 5 1899, "Religious belief", later published under the title "The value of religion"³⁹. It should be noted that justification of religion is discussed at two levels: first by examining the probability of beliefs that can justify the rationality of their acceptance, and secondly by examining the admissibility of the choice to adhere to a belief that does not have enough chances to make its acceptance rational from a moral point of view. Note that Moore is recovering a debate of those years that had started with an essay by one of his "naturalist" opponents, William K. Clifford, namely "The ethics of belief"⁴⁰. The decisive conclusion reached by Moore is that indulging in the kind of comfort deriving from adhesion to religion is morally unacceptable because we have a moral duty of refusing to believe in what is not sufficiently probable. But how can we meet our need for a sense of security and comfort? The solution adopted in "The Value of Religion" would allow us to have the best of what religion can offer, that is, comfort and security, without paying the price of believing in the existence of God. Moore says that we could abandon the search for a God whose existence cannot be proved and direct instead our feelings of love towards our fellow-beings, who are perhaps less good than God might be, but are worthy "of all the affections that we can feel". Note that this attempt to find a way out implies another price to pay: adopting the not entirely plausible assumption that the members of our species are really worthy of such affection. One can surmise that during the four years between "Religious belief" and the *Principia*, Moore's faith in this assumption began to falter, and the fact that Moore was careful in never reprinting "The value of religion" has something to do with this difficulty. His later effort at hiding behind the mask of a "professional philosopher" who discusses such "professional" issues as the real existence of the external world, is careful in never mentioning religion any more, and returned briefly to ethics only once after 1922 just because he was requested to respond to critics may reflect a disillusioned mood lacking even the scant comfort provided by veneration for human beings.

8. Common-sense philosophy and what is left of the *Principia*

One more important point to consider is that the trajectory followed between

38 Regan, *Bloomsbury's Prophet*, 41.

39 Moore, "The value of religion" (1901), in *The Early Essays*.

40 William Kingdon Clifford, "The ethics of belief" (1877), in *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays* (New York: Protheus Books, 1999).



1889 and 1903, from religion to ethics, was continued between 1903 and 1922, going this time from ethics to the theory of language and of knowledge. In this period Moore, as already mentioned, published only a few essays on well-defined topics in ethics, occasioned by need to provide clarifications of his previous doctrines, and then, after 1922, he did not come back to ethics any more, unless in his 1942 "Reply to my critics"⁴¹. One may rather easily read in the two stages of this path an existential journey where a young man who had been educated to deep religious feeling finds an apparent final haven for his own voyage, through philosophy aimed at clarification of his inner life, in an ethic independent of religion, making due allowance for some temporary intoxication denounced by cult of states of conscience filled with love and beauty, an intoxication that could have been more easily avoided by somebody who, like Rashdall, had remained a sober practising Anglican. Without contradicting this plausible existential reading, we might rather interpret the path followed by Moore in the light of institutional changes in the academic world that saw a consolidation in the English-speaking world after World War I of a highly specialized philosophy as academic discipline going hand-in-hand with the final cut of any canal connecting Anglo-Saxon and German-speaking philosophy. In this context, Moore became a professional philosopher who did not publish any more anything that could be read by a non-professional public. The question remains, however, why did Moore abandon the study of ethics after 1922, while witnessing passively 36 years debate during which first Ross shook the very foundations of his doctrine, then the emotivists made the professional public forget the *pars construens* of his ethics by persuading them that Moore's contribution was the naturalistic-fallacy argument and, in the last two years of his life, Wittgenstein's pupils gave the *coup de grace* to the little that was left, by launching a new form of "naturalism", or better, "anti-non-naturalism"⁴².

One answer may be that the *Principia* is, rather than a unified and consistent work that has provided the paradigm for analytic ethics, a patchwork made of at least three lines of discourse, incompatible with each other, namely idealism, consequentialism, and analytic philosophy. Moore's later production was, as mentioned, almost exclusively in the fields of the philosophy of mind and "metaphysics," and has a character markedly different from that of the *Principia* and earlier publications. The difference is that no later publication tries to provide any synthesis, and even less to give any teachings the general reader might take advantage of, limiting itself to technical treatment of individual problems as a part of a general theoretical strategy aimed at defending common-sense beliefs.

41 Moore, "A reply to my critics", in *The Philosophy of G.E. Moore*.

42 See Cremaschi, *L'etica del Novecento* (Rome: Carocci, 2005), 38-89.

A decisive circumstance to be kept in mind is that an important part of the discourse carried out in the *Principia* simply does not make any sense if the reader is unaware of the legacy of Idealism in the work. A different question is *how much* Idealism was left in the book. Ethical writings from the following two decades were perhaps trying to clear the ground of difficulties left by this legacy. “The conception of intrinsic value”, for ex., insists on the distinction between objectivity and intrinsicity, contending that what is intrinsic is also objective, but not everything that is objective is also intrinsic, for intrinsic value does not depend on the laws of nature, but “solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question”⁴³. It follows that what has value at a time may not possess it at another, and that whatever is exactly similar to the thing that has a certain value must possess the same amount of value “even if it had existed in a Universe in which the causal laws were quite different from what they are in this one”⁴⁴. Intrinsic value is therefore an objective property, and it does not vary depending on time and space, and does not seem to consist in the expression of a psychological attitude⁴⁵. A clarification that bears a number of interesting implications is that intrinsic value, being objective, is in a relationship different from that of *identity* – in turn, a concept which Moore declared incomprehensible – with other properties of one thing, that is, “though both yellowness and beauty are predicates which *depend* only on the intrinsic nature of what possesses them, yet while yellowness is itself an *intrinsic* predicate, *beauty* is not”⁴⁶, or, no value predicate is an “intrinsic property”.

In his, until recently unpublished, “Preface” written in 1922, Moore himself raised the main objections that were raised by his critics in the following years. He admitted he had mistaken with each other two different kinds of criticism to previous philosophers: the first is in believing that they were able to analyze all moral concepts having in mind a definition of analysis in terms of reduction, the second is on claiming that moral concepts denote some natural or metaphysical property⁴⁷. A few years later he admitted that, since there are characteristics of a natural event, such as eating caviar, whose pleasure is natural but not intrinsic, we should distinguish natural intrinsic properties from non-natural intrinsic properties, and the former are different from the latter “by the fact that, by ascribing a property of the first kind to a thing you are not describing it *in any way*, while, by ascribing a property of the second kind to

43 Moore, “The conception of intrinsic value” (1922), in *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge, 1970), 253-75, 260.

44 *Ibid.*, 268.

45 See Moore, “The nature of moral philosophy” (1922), in *Philosophical Studies*, 310-39, 331-2

46 Moore, “The conception of intrinsic value”, 272.

47 Moore, “Preface” (1922), in *Principia Ethica*.

a thing, you're always describing it *to a certain extent*⁴⁸. Thus, it appears that non-natural intrinsic properties are in relation to the set of properties possessed by one thing albeit not being one of its constituent parts, but they are neither arbitrarily superimposed to the component parts of the thing itself nor reducible to them. In the language of late twentieth-century neo-Intuitionism, it seems that value properties are “supervening”.

9. The ambiguities of Intuitionism

The notion of good may be certainly defined in a denotative sense, that is, it is possible to indicate what the good things are, and indeed this is precisely the task of ethics. The meaning of the term “good”, however, is the subject matter of intuition, that is, it cannot be established by analyzing the term into parts or reducing it to other terms. In this sense, and only in this, Moore professes to be an “Intuitionist”. He writes: “when I call such propositions ‘Intuitions,’ I mean merely to assert that they are incapable of proof; I imply nothing whatever as to the manner or origin of our cognition of them. Still less do I imply (as most Intuitionists have done) that any proposition whatever is true, because we cognise it in a particular way or by the exercise of any particular faculty: I hold, on the contrary, that in every way in which it is possible to cognise a true proposition, it is also possible to cognise a false one.”⁴⁹

He adds that he is not “an ‘Intuitionist’, in the ordinary sense of the term”⁵⁰, but recognizes that ethical propositions of his own *first* class, namely those relating to the definition of the predicate “good”, “are incapable of proof or disproof”, which does not apply to propositions of the second class, those that establish what things are good. He adds that he has “sometimes followed Sidgwick’s usage in calling them ‘Intuitions’ ”, but he also points out: “when I call such propositions ‘Intuitions,’ I mean merely to assert that they are incapable of proof”⁵¹. I would dare to say that this is simply wrong, because Sidgwick had recognized the existence of “intuitions” about which actions are right, that is, the three principles of prudence, justice and benevolence, which are principles of normative ethics, not meta-ethics, and Moore is wrong in not recognizing that these are precisely propositions belonging to his own second class. For the fact of admitting the validity of these principles, Sidgwick was actually, no less than Whewell, an intuitionist. This was no less true even if went on condemning intuitionism in general and Whewell’s philosophy in particular, sheltering himself behind the *ad hoc* distinction between a “philosophical” intuitionism,

48 Moore, “A Reply to my Critics”, 591.

49 Moore, *Principia Ethica*, “Preface”.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

namely his own, and a “dogmatic” one, namely the one professed by previous intuitionists, what amounts to condoning sin while firmly condemning the sinner⁵². Sidgwick, thanks to his ad *hoc* distinction, claims instead a status different from that of dogmatic intuitions for his own hedonistic assumptions on the nature of goodness, and Moore criticizes Sidgwick on points at which he had not really understood what Sidgwick had said. Moore writes that “Sidgwick himself seems never to have been clearly aware of the immense importance of the difference which distinguishes his Intuitionism from the common doctrine, which has generally been called by that name. The Intuitionist proper is distinguished by maintaining that propositions of my second class – propositions which assert that a certain action is right or a duty – are incapable of proof or disproof by any enquiry into the results of such actions. I, on the contrary, am no less anxious to maintain that propositions of this kind are not ‘Intuitions,’ than to maintain that propositions of my first class are Intuitions.”⁵³

Moore is actually unknowingly repeating an idea deriving from different intuitionists, Ralph Cudworth, Richard Price, William Whewell, and repeated by Sidgwick himself. According to them, fundamental notions of ethics are so basic that they should be taken as a starting point and not made the subject of any definition⁵⁴. All of these authors, however, used to take as a fundamental idea the idea of *ought* or *duty*, and to assume that the idea of *right* was as original as that of *good*, and then wanted to affirm the equivalence of these ideas or their reciprocal implication. This is what Price and Whewell had made before Sidgwick, although Moore certainly had never heard of them. Consider the following claim by Price:

our ideas of right and wrong are simple ideas, and must therefore be ascribed to some power of immediate perception in the human mind. He that doubts this, need only try to give definitions of them, which shall amount to more than synonymous expressions [...] There are, undoubtedly, some actions that are ultimately approved, and for justifying which no reason can be assigned, as there are some ends, which are ultimately desired, and for chusing which no reason can be given. Were not this true; there would be an infinite progression of reasons and ends, and therefore nothing could be at all approved or desired⁵⁵.

52 Cremaschi, “Like Boys Pursue the Rainbow. Whewell’s Independent Morality vs. Sidgwick’s Dogmatic Intuitionism”, in Placido Bucolo, Roger Crisp, and Bart Schultz, eds., *Proceedings of the Second World Congress on Henry Sidgwick. Ethics, Psychics, Politics* (Catania: CUECM, 2011), 146-235.

53 Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Preface.

54 On classical ethical intuitionism see Cremaschi, *L’etica moderna. Dalla Riforma a Nietzsche* (Rome: Carocci, 2007), chs. 6, 14, and 16.

55 Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* (1758), edited by David Daiches Raphael (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), ch. 1, sect. iii.

And consider then the claim by Whewell:

The words which express what is morally right, and the related ideas, cannot be replaced by any different set of terms. Right, duty, what we ought to do [...] are as untranslatable into the language which contemplates utility alone, as the name of colours are incapable of being expressed by those denoting the properties of space [...] the most distinctive is the word ought, which appears to be the simplest and most universal expression of the moral sense.⁵⁶

They sound familiar, don't they? And the reference to names of *colours* may be striking for any of Moore's readers. There is enough to suggest the irreverent musing that some founders of schools have been promoted to their role despite having repeated other people's ideas or, more honestly, having wasted time in making discoveries that had already been made. In conclusion, there are reasons to think that Moore could have altogether avoided the term Intuitionism, thus sparing his successors a long series of misunderstandings that are still far from dissolved.

10. The ambiguities of Intuitionism

Hastings Rashdall (1858-1924), a moral philosopher, medieval historian, divine, and a fellow at New College, Oxford, published, four years after Moore's *Principia, The Theory of Good and Evil*⁵⁷. Here he first justifies his ethical theory presented on the basis of its capacity of providing a rational reconstruction of what common sense already knows. Secondly, he argues that the key-idea in ethics is neither definable nor can be reduced to Moore's predicate "good", but may be expressed in terms of "right" and "duty" as well. Thirdly, that the discovery of such undefinability has a long history starting with Plato and reaching Ralph Cudworth. Fourthly, that the criterion on which actions should be judged is not a set of self-evident rules of action, but rather their tendency to produce the greatest amount of good, or overall self-fulfilment, for human beings⁵⁸. Finally, it proposes a third way between utilitarianism and intuitionism, stressing – more than Moore had done – the importance of Sidgwick's legacy, and presenting his own doctrine as a vindication of ideas from great philosophers of the past.

Let us examine the first of these elements. In order to defend his own the-

56 William Whewell, "Preface to MackIntosh", in James Mackintosh, *Dissertation on the Progress of Ethical Philosophy, chiefly during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1830; Bristol: Thoemmes, 1991), xxvi, emphasis added.

57 See Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, 2 vols. (1907; London: Oxford University Press, 1924).

58 Other publications on ethics are: *Ethics* (London: Jack, 1913); *Is Conscience an Emotion?* (Boston, MASS: Houghton Mifflin, 1914).

ory, in fact, he appeals not only to evidence, but also to its consistency with common sense⁵⁹. For example, he justifies the role of a number of virtues less obviously acceptable to utilitarians, such as humaneness towards humans and animals even when it is pushed to the point where it becomes doubtful whether it yields a surplus of pleasure or happiness, or other virtues such as those involving exercise of higher intellectual and aesthetic faculties or ability to control lower impulses⁶⁰. In these cases, we should recognize that exercise of these virtues has a value in itself, besides that of their consequences, and also “that we must take into consideration the actual psychological constitutions of human nature, and the impossibility of modifying it exactly in the way and to the extent to which we please”⁶¹.

The young Moore had adopted a not too new strategy by declaring that all his predecessors, exception being made for Sidgwick, had made one and the same error, thus exposing himself to the *Guardian* reviewer's sarcasm. Rashdall, a few years older and with a richer background of philosophical readings, adopts an opposite strategy – a less common one but not totally unknown, the same that had been adopted by John Stuart Mill when he had “discovered” Socrates and Jesus as the first utilitarians – consisting in declaring that his theory is nothing more than a more rigorous version of ancient and influential tradition of thought,

the conception of Plato and Aristotle, though in them there is always a tendency to make morality consist in the individual's own well-being, unhedonistically understood, strongly as it was asserted, especially by Plato, that the individual's own good was essentially bound up with that of the society. It was the view of the older English Moralists, in whom Platonic and Aristotelian traditions were universalized by Christianity – the views of Cumberland, of the Cambridge Platonists, and (substantially) of Clarke. It was equally the view of the Moral Sense school [...] for Hutcheson, the author of the famous “greatest happiness of the greater number” formula, recognized the superior “dignity” of some pleasures and some persons⁶².

The treaty includes two extensive discussions of Intuitionism and Utilitarianism that help in putting the solution proposed in a context such as to highlight its character of synthesis or third way between two schools. In comparison to

59 Anthony Skelton, “Ideal Utilitarianism: Rashdall and Moore”, in *Underivative Duty: British Moral Philosophers from Sidgwick to Ewing*, edited by Thomas Hurka, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 45-65.

60 Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. 1, 189-204.

61 *Ibid.*, 189.

62 *Ibid.*, 216.

Moore's total lack of clarity about Intuitionism, Rashdall's extensive discussion is commendable. It should be noted however that, even though Rashdall acknowledges that critics of intuitionism have most of the time built for them "a man of straw set up to be knocked down again"⁶³, he believes that Butler and Reid are rather close to the position taken as a target by critics. It is not entirely clear, however, whether Rashdall himself is committed to really discussing the most plausible versions of this theory. On the one hand, he admits that Price is the author less easy to attack, and indeed admits that the latter's *Review* is "the best work published on Ethics till quite recent times. It contains the gist of the Kantian doctrine without Kant's confusions"⁶⁴. On the other, yet, after this acknowledgement, he exempts himself from the task of criticizing Price by declaring that "the writer's admissions are so ample that he ends by virtually resolving all duties into Benevolence, understood in non-hedonistic sense, and Justice"⁶⁵, and then – Rashdall seems implicitly to conclude – he does reach right conclusions, ones similar to mine, that is, he is not an intuitionist who says the right things notwithstanding the fact of being such, but instead he is *not* a real intuitionist (as far as my own definition of an intuitionist is that of a moral philosopher who reaches the wrong conclusion that there are absolute rules regardless of consequences). From the task of criticizing another intuitionist close to Price, namely Whewell, Rashdall exempts himself by simply proving to be ignorant of his existence. As a result, those whom Rashdall chooses as critical targets are not rationalist Price and Whewell, but rather advocates of common sense, Thomas Reid first among them. Moreover – as already noted – his definition of intuitionism is "the theory that actions are pronounced right or wrong a priori without reference to their consequences"⁶⁶. On the basis of such a definition, proving it to be a faulty theory becomes a rather easy task, indeed a tautology. Rashdall in fact argues that it yields vague results and conflicts among duties, and that, despite the explicit rejection of consequentialism, it has recourse to consequences in order to settle doubtful cases or moral dilemmas, and also that we have to consider consequences in every case in order to know whether we should apply a rule or not, and thus, "after all some reference to consequences is really included in every morale rule. Indeed, you cannot really distinguish an act from its present or foreseeable consequences"⁶⁷. Rashdall believes that the *Principia* are a "striking expression of the same view of Ethics"⁶⁸, but that there are, yet, two objections to

63 Rashdall, 80 fn 1.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., 80.

67 Ibid., 87.

68 Ibid., 217 fn 2

raise against Moore, namely that he is mistaken in believing that his “discovery” is an absolute novelty and in overlooking the basic connection between the good, the right, and the notion of *ought*.

As mentioned above, according to Rashdall, the discovery of the naturalistic fallacy, or the discovery that the predicate good is indefinable, is not a revolutionary discovery, but is instead a doctrine as old as philosophy itself, enunciated first by Plato and then by other authors (who tend to coincide with the deprecated intuitionists). He writes: “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 (whatever may be thought of his further attempt to show that only the good has real existence), Aristotle and a host of modern writers who have studied in their school – by no one more emphatically than by Cudworth.”⁶⁹

Besides, even if Moore “has done well to emphasize in a very striking manner that ‘good is indefinable’ ”⁷⁰, in this connection a criticism is that he “ignores the other ways in which the same notion may be expressed, and in particular the correlative notion of ‘right’ or ‘ought’. He is so possessed with this idea that the ‘good’ is indefinable that he will not even trouble to expound and illustrate it in such ways as are possible in the case of ultimate ideas.”⁷¹ Rashdall concludes that the idea of good or value is “logically the primary conception, though psychologically the idea of ‘right’ may often in modern men be more explicitly developed. That action is right which tends to bring about the good. There is no attempt here to get rid of the ultimately unanalyzable “ought”. The good is that which ‘ought’ to be.”⁷²

I have already suggested that Rashdall grants intuitionism as much as he denies. The main concession is that of the intuitive nature of judgments pertaining to what is intrinsically good, or what human conduct should promote. The universal judgment that *eudemonia* is intrinsically good, and that it should be the ultimate end of human action is an ultimate datum, not inferred from others. To the utilitarian who asks, for ex., how to justify the judgment that the pleasures of knowledge are higher than those of food and drink, the answer to be given is: “I do as a matter of fact so judge: I judge it immediately, and, so far, a priori; my reason pronounces: judgments of value are ultimate, and no ethical position, utilitarian or other, can rest on anything but judgments

69 Ibid., 135 fn 1; cf. 133-138.

70 Ibid.,

71 Ibid.,

72 Ibid., 135 fn 1.

of value⁷³. *Eudemonia* itself is made up of contents of conscience – note that Rashdall always adhered to a kind of subjective idealism similar to the one professed for a time by young Moore – that is, of “feelings, volitions, emotions, thoughts, activities, each of which is in turn an object of moral evaluation”⁷⁴. Pleasure is an element of *eudemonia*, but it plays a privileged role within it, indeed the virtues and even sacrifice have value in themselves, not only as means, and, as a consequence, the good from which the right is derived is not pleasure or happiness but the human good as a whole.

The main idea of utilitarianism is that the good is indeed what the right derives from, but also that such good cannot be understood in the way hedonists up to Sidgwick used to understand it, because hedonism not only is conflicting with common sense, but it also generates contradictions. Sidgwick’s question without an answer, namely how could one be motivated by universal hedonism rather than by selfishness without any warrant that sacrifice will be rewarded, arises from the unjustified assumption that pleasure only has value, and that sacrifice cannot have value in itself⁷⁵. The criterion of morality is therefore “the tendency of an act to promote a well-being or εὐδαιμονία which includes many other good things besides pleasure, among which virtue is the greatest. The value of these elements in human life is determined by Practical Reason intuitively, immediately, or (if we like to say so) *a priori*”⁷⁶.

Our moral judgments need to be linked together and need a shared regulative idea, namely an ideal moral judgment that “implies a conception of the ideal good for society as a whole”⁷⁷. The advantage of this conception of *eudemonia* compared to traditional eudemonist systems is that in this view both acts and consequences are the object of judgment, and we can no longer admit “an absolute distinction between means and ends”⁷⁸.

Consistent with the choice of presenting his doctrine as a new version of widely shared ideas, Rashdall declares he believes that, after the confusion generated by Kantian ethical formalism, a movement of ideas is taking place that tends “to come back to the view of the older seventeenth-century writers, and to assert that Morality consists in the promotion of true human good”⁷⁹.

Advocates of this trend are Paul Janet, Rudolph Hermann Lotze, Friedrich

73 Ibid., 78.

74 Ibid., 94.

75 Ibid., 71-2

76 Ibid., 94.

77 Ibid., 96.

78 Ibid., 96.

79 Ibid., 217.

Paulsen, a few Hegelians such as John McTaggart⁸⁰, and Eduard von Hartmann⁸¹. This view, as already illustrated, “combines the utilitarian principle that Ethics must be teleological with a non-hedonistic view of the ethical end. According to his view, actions are right or wrong according as they tend to produce for all mankind any ideal end or good, which includes, but is not limited to, pleasure”⁸². A central place “is occupied by the three axioms of Prudence, Benevolence, and Equity”⁸³, that is, by the three ethical intuitions accepted by Sidgwick, three judgments on the right that Rashdall himself admits as justified a priori. Note that this is one more basic element of deprecated intuitionism. Ideal Utilitarianism would be a new name for an old way of thinking. It would be, among other names available, the least likely to cause misunderstandings. Other names could have been Idealist Utilitarianism, or Teleological Ethics, as opposed to formalist ethics, and finally Eudemonist Ethics, which would have had the disadvantage of being perceived as too similar to Utilitarianism⁸⁴.

Rashdall's treatise met with limited success. It was reprinted once in 1924, while the *Principia* were reprinted – besides the American edition – seven times between 1922 and 1959. It was not the subject of any discussion comparable to the one opened by Moore's book⁸⁵. Moore himself wrote a far-from-enthusiastic review, even if a few years later in *Ethics*, in his suggestions for further reading he declared: “This book will, I think, give a fair idea of the sort of questions which are still being discussed at the present day”⁸⁶. There was, until the Forties, a tiny current of Ideal Utilitarians that kept the awareness of Rashdall's role alive, but it gradually disappeared as non-cognitivism increasingly established itself.

There is one question to answer, namely how did it happen that the same theory could be proposed in two contemporary works⁸⁷, one of which proved to be better informed about previous ethical theories, free from the dubious ontological implications that created unnecessary problems for the other one, more linear in its formulation of the thesis of undefinability of central ethical notions, more careful and plausible in its formulation of the theory of the good, not without difficulty, but certainly less cryptic than the other in the

80 Ibid., 217.

81 Ibid., 217 fn 4.

82 Ibid., 184.

83 Ibid., 185.

84 Ibid., 217.

85 One exception is J.C. Riddell, “The new intuitionism of Dr. Rashdall and Dr. Moore”, *Philosophical Review*, 30, no. 6 (1921), 545-565.

86 Moore, *Ethics*, 254; cf. Moore, Review of H. Rashdall “A Theory of Good and Evil”, *Hibbert Journal*, 6 (1907-1908), 446-451.

87 See Skelton, “Ideal Utilitarianism”, 65.

formulation of a consequentialist normative ethics, and then the former fell into oblivion while the latter was becoming a classic. Answers are available, but perhaps coming, more than from philosophy, from the sociology of knowledge: one is that, in the early twentieth century, the fact of being an Anglican priest was no longer of any help for winning popularity among British readers, a second that a good reputation as a theologian, and therefore suspicious to the secularized public, and moreover as a progressive theologian, and accordingly slightly suspicious to the surviving Anglican public, and also as a medieval historian, and thus popular among those who do not read philosophy, could be a disadvantage rather than an asset. Moreover, outside the Bloomsbury circle, Moore's ethics was read as the ethics of the author of "Defence of Common Sense"⁸⁸, Russell's and Wittgenstein's colleague, and the discoverer of the naturalistic fallacy, believed in turn to the final argument supporting the fact-values division⁸⁹. These are the various reasons why the *Principia* were canonized as the paradigm for analytic ethics.

11. The birth of analytic ethics

Moore was canonized, with two other Cambridge philosophers, Russell and Wittgenstein, as one of the three putative fathers of a current that became the mainstream in the Anglo-Saxon world and that, from the Fifties onwards, started being called analytic philosophy. As it is always the case when it comes to putative fathers, the real story is more tortuous than the one codified in holy writings. The facts are that the Cambridge school of the Twenties and Thirties won unique authority in the Anglo-Saxon world; the cornerstones of this school were provided by common sense and ordinary language; later on, the image of the mainstream of Anglo-Saxon philosophy as "analytic philosophy" became widely accepted, an image produced by assimilating different currents with the Cambridge school and generating an opposition to an alleged "continental philosophy", in fact a straw-man or a fancy philosophical movement made of rather incompatible elements⁹⁰. Much has been said about simplifications and misunderstandings going with such images of continental philosophy, but it is as well to recall what was believed to be the common ground of so-called "analytic ethics". Up to 1958, this tradition was characterized mainly by its reduction of ethics to meta-ethics. This definition of the field of philo-

88 Moore, "A defence of common sense" (1925), in *G. E. Moore: Selected Writings*, edited by T. Baldwin (London: Routledge, 1993), 106-33.

89 Tom Regan, "A hundred years of *Principia Ethica*. An interview with Tom Regan", *ethic@. Revista Internacional de Filosofia da Moral* 2, no. 1 (2003), 3-13, particularly 3-4, <http://www.cfh.ufsc.br/ethic@>

90 See Cremaschi, "On Analytic and Continental Philosophy", *Manuscrito. Revista de filosofia* 25, no. 2 (2002), 51-80.

sophical ethics as a fact identifies it with the answer to the first of the two questions of ethics identified by Moore, and it is clear enough why Anglo-Saxon philosophers of the time saw in the first chapter of the *Principia*, or at most in the first four, the “paradigm” of this school. Obviously enough, such identification appeared all the more justified as the reading which Moore’s followers have done did not go beyond the fourth chapter, carefully avoiding chapter v, a chapter that contradicted the idea that the philosopher’s task ends where normative ethics starts, and even more decidedly the unreadable Chapter vi which presents an obscure ontology of values – indeed a fair example of what Moore’s followers stigmatize as “continental” philosophy. If, instead of trying to identify a work as the paradigm or exemplar of analytic ethics, we would more modestly try to identify sources for its claims and style of argument, the not too surprising discovery would be that of Sidgwick, Whewell, and Price and it would carry a corollary that not everybody would appreciate, namely the prevailing role of intuitionism in the birth of analytic ethics.

Moore’s ethics was thus generally adopted as far as the naturalistic fallacy was concerned, and the latter, combined with the “Hume’s Law”, became the argument supporting non-cognitivism, that is, a theory opposite to Moore’s non-naturalist cognitivism. The consequentialist element in his normative ethics was accepted instead without much criticism but also without too much awareness of its complexity, deriving from the central role given to probability. The rest of Moore’s ethics was neither understood nor made the subject of discussion because no one really agreed with his views but also no one wanted to speak ill of a Founding Father.

Another misunderstanding bequeathed by the reception of Moore’s ethics was an ambiguity in the image of intuitionism that has been perpetuated until recently. It is a typical case in which an erroneous historical reconstruction has produced theoretical pseudo-problems. Jerome Schneewind writes that, when he was a student at Princeton, he asked one of his teachers to help him understand Sidgwick’s statement that he wanted to “reconcile the utilitarians and the intuitionists”, and in particular who the intuitionists Sidgwick had in mind were, and got the not really satisfactory answer that the intuitionists were obviously “Moore and Prichard”⁹¹. This was one the side-effects of the sentence to the penalty of oblivion pronounced against the intuitionists by Sidgwick when he invented for his own polemical purposes the category of “dogmatic intuitionism”⁹², but also of Moore’s use of the term without knowledge of what

91 Schneewind, “Sixty years of philosophy in a life”, *Proceedings & Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 83, no. 2 (2009), 79-95, 84.

92 Cremaschi, “Nothing to invite or to reward a separate examination. Sidgwick and Whewell”.



he was talking about. The consequence was that for about one century Anglo-Saxon philosophers went on exorcising a mysterious doctrine that nobody knew. Alan Donagan writes: "Such was Sidgwick's authority among philosophers inclined towards intuitionism that they received his criticism of the old intuitionist position as decisive. And so, instead of trying to vindicate a view they thought exploded, they set out to construct a new intuitionism that would satisfy Sidgwick's conditions."⁹³

A third lasting effect of the reception of Moore's ethics was the *pro tempore* closure of the discussion on hedonism. Criticism, in fact by William Whewell and Francis Bradley, to the empiricist theory of pleasure as perceptible and measurable entity enjoyed a wide circulation thanks to the *Principia* and changed the agenda of discussion on utilitarianism. A well-known essay by Roy Harrod from the Thirties proposes precisely a reformulation of utilitarianism which, among other things, proposes to abandon attribution of the predicate "good" to ends, reserving it to means⁹⁴. It is not a Moorean position, indeed it seems inspired by ruthless Wittgensteinian criticism to Moore, but the effect resulting is aligned with Moorean anti-hedonism.

The fourth effect was that of transmitting to future generations the idea that consequentialism is the only possible way of reasoning in ethics, making them forget not only intuitionist criticism of consequentialism, particularly Whewell's, but even Sidgwick's argument on the limits of consequentialism according to which consequentialism too needs to start with a normative principle accepted for intuitionist reasons.

By way of conclusion, if I may modify, or rather maim, a famous sentence by Keynes, Moore stood "with one foot in the twentieth century, but with two or three in the nineteenth", that is, his formulation of the naturalistic fallacy argument opened the discussion of one of the main topics of analytic ethics, but by his criticism of intuitionism, hedonism, evolutionism, and "metaphysics" and his rescue of the quasi-Hegelian notion of "organic unity" was fully immersed in nineteenth-century discourse. A discussion of Moore's claims, which for almost one century no one really understood, can perhaps start just now, with a proper understanding of the terms in which the questions he was asking were being formulated, an understanding that has been made possible at last by some recent highly valuable secondary literature.

93 Alan Donagan, *The Theory of Morality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 21.

94 Roy Forbes Harrod, "Utilitarianism revised", *Mind* 45, no. 1 (1936), 137-56.

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