



Introduction

The Moore most of us know is half the man he was. Accustomed as we are to distinguishing between the various stages of a philosopher's development, finding it natural to speak of the early Plato, for example, or the later Wittgenstein, we seem almost to suppose that Moore was never early. Or later. Moore was—well, Moore was Moore, born with a proof of the external world in his mouth.

Anyone who has made even a cursory examination of Moore's published **work** knows that this is the Moore of popular mythology, not the Moore of hard historical fact. The later Moore let us agree, distinguished himself as the plain man's philosopher. But not the early Moore, not the Moore we meet up to and through *Principia Ethica*. That Moore voiced paradoxes that have taken the later Moore's breath away, energetically endorsing propositions which, as we shall note briefly below, his future self found "perfectly monstrous."

Why does the early Moore remain unknown to so many? Partly no doubt this is due to the near idolatrous stature the elder Moore enjoyed, the glow from which, associated as it was with his defense of common sense, conspired to keep the raucous philo-

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sophical exuberance of his youth in the shadows. And partly, too, we know comparatively little of the early Moore because of the later Moore's influence on a particular "school" of philosophy, ordinary language philosophy, so-called, the members of which, themselves disdainful of speculative metaphysics, helped perpetuate the fable that their hero never dabbled in that suspicious trade. But plausible as these explanations are, neither, whether taken separately or together, is quite enough. Each fails to mention the essential role Moore himself played in controlling what his successors would most likely know about his intellectual development.

In addition to dozens of reviews and a number of miscellaneous writings, including his important contributions to Paul A. Schilpp's *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore* (1942), Moore published three booklength studies during his lifetime: *Principia Ethica* (1903), *Ethics* (1912), and *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (1953). A selection from three courses of lectures given at Cambridge at various times between 1925 and 1934 was edited by Casimir Lewy and published in 1966 under the title *Lecture! on Philosophy*. A second posthumous volume, also edited by Lewy, appeared in 1962 under the title *Commonplace Book, 1919-1953*. It is a collection of philosophical notes from those years. Moore himself oversaw the publication of *Philosophical Studies* (1922), a collection of ten papers written between 1903 and 1921, two of which had not been published before. In the summer of 1959 there appeared a second collection of essays, *Philosophical Papers*. This contains ten papers written between 1923 and 1955, two of which were published in the collection for the first time. Moore died in October 1958, and the supervision of his book through the Press was taken over by Lewy. These collections of papers, the posthumously published books, the three books published during his lifetime, and a few of the miscellaneous writings, most notably his contributions to the Schilpp volume, form the standard Moorean corpus with which most philosophers are familiar.

Viewing this corpus in the abstract, one might naturally infer that Moore wrote nothing before 1903, the date of publication both of *Principia Ethica* and of “The Refutation of Idealism”, the earliest published essay included in *Philosophical Studies*. However natural this inference might be, the conclusion bears no resemblance to reality. Moore published no fewer than ten papers between 1897 and 1903, of which only “The Refutation of Idealism” was republished. The other nine remained shelved away, gathering dust in rare back issues of the *International Journal of Ethics*, for example, or the Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society. Together with a paper on Kant, published in 1904, these papers form an essential part of the total Moorean corpus and afford us a glimpse of the neglected early Moore, both Moore the fledgling idealist metaphysician, for example, and Moore the leader of a revolt against the idealistic metaphysic to which he was initially so attracted. That most of us know so little about this period of Moore’s philosophical development is, if I am right, in no small measure due to what Moore left out of, as well as what he put into, the collections of essays he drew together during his lifetime. We know little of the early Moore, in short, partly because the later Moore left us little of the early Moore we could easily study. The present collection of the early essays seeks to overcome this serious omission from his legacy.

It is not difficult to confirm that a fresh examination of these essays will serve to correct received opinions about Moore’s philosophical apprenticeship. A. J. Ayer, for example, in his discussion of Moore’s philosophical development, states that “almost all that Moore thought it necessary to say about the grand metaphysical questions of God and Immortality is contained in one short paragraph of the essay, ‘A Defense of Common Sense,’ which he contributed to the second volume of *Contemporary British Philosophy* in 1925.” Now, it is true that we find *no* lengthy discussion of either God or immortality in the standard Moorean corpus.

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But two essays in the present collection assault Ayer's judgment. "The Value of Religion," published in 1901, is a sustained critical examination of the rationality of belief in God, and the greater part of a second essay, "Mr. McTaggart's 'Studies in Hegelian Cosmology,'" read before the Aristotelian Society in May 1902, consists of a lengthy critical examination of the belief in immortality. That Moore in his later work did not continue to explore these "grand metaphysical questions" may be affirmed. But that is no reason to deny that he did explore them earlier, and no reason to continue to neglect the arguments he offers there.

The mythological Moore, the philosopher who defended common sense as soon as he was able to speak prose, is captured with considerable elegance by G. J. Warnock in his English *Philosophy Since 1900*. Moore, he writes, "seems to have been . . . entirely without any of the motives that tend to make a metaphysician. . . . He . . . had no leanings whatever towards paradox and peculiarity of opinion. . . . He . . . did not hanker for any system on his own account. . . . He did not borrow a modish metaphysical idiom to make up for, or to conceal, his own lack of relish for any such thing."² Warnock's description is a variation on a familiar theme, one we find played again, for example, by Susan Stebbing, who writes that Moore "never attempted to produce anything like a philosophical system."³ To bolster her case, Stebbing quotes a marvelous passage from Moore's "Freedom": "The region of the incompletely known is the favourite abode of a metaphysical monstrosity. In plain language, where facts are not completely understood, some short-sighted metaphysical theory is generally introduced as affording an easy road past the difficulties which stand in the way of thorough investigation." Moore, Stebbing assures us, "[was] never . . . tempted to enter this easy road."

Now, all this is, perhaps, a fair description of the later Moore.⁴ It is wildly inaccurate when matched against the early Moore, however. Once we have read Moore's "The Nature of Judgment,"

for example, we shall never again suppose that “he had no leanings whatever towards paradox and peculiarity of opinion.” “The world,” Moore there maintains, is “formed of concepts,” including existence, which “is itself a concept.” Thus, “all that exists is . . . composed of concepts necessarily related to one another in specific manners and likewise to the concept of existence.” Even the youthful Moore knew a paradox when he expressed one, noting that “I am fully aware how paradoxical this theory must appear, and even how contemptible.” But that did not prevent him from maintaining it then, in 1898, when, the descriptions of Warnock and Stebbing notwithstanding, Moore did hanker after a “system” of his own. For unlike some later critics of speculative metaphysics, Moore was not then intent upon undermining the whole metaphysical enterprise. If in “Freedom” he laments the existence of metaphysical monstrosities, he does so because they are monstrosities, not because they are metaphysical. The younger Moore aspired to move metaphysics out of the disreputable abode of the “incompletely known” into a neighborhood more in keeping with her status as the Queen of the Sciences. If we demythologize Moore, permitting him to speak for himself, we find an earnest young man with visions of replacing false metaphysical theories with a true one of his own.

But it is Moore himself, not just his commentators, who sometimes helps cultivate our ignorance of his philosophical past. In a famous passage in his “An Autobiography” he recounts his first meeting with J. M. E. McTaggart. Bertrand Russell “had invited me to tea in his rooms to meet McTaggart,” Moore recalls, “and McTaggart in the course of conversation had been led to express his well-known view that Time is unreal. This must have seemed to me then (as it still does) a perfectly monstrous proposition, and I did my best to argue against it.”⁵ Though this may be a true account of Moore’s initial reaction to that “perfectly monstrous proposition,” the inference which, by his silence, he invites

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us to make—namely, that he *always* regarded this proposition as “perfectly monstrous”—is not borne out by the contents of his early essays. In the first published philosophy, a contribution to a 1897 symposium entitled “In What Sense, If Any, Do Past and Future Time Exist?,” for example, Moore concludes as follows: “If I need, then, . . . to give a direct answer to our question, I would say that neither Past, Present, nor Future exists, if by existence we are to mean the ascription of full Reality and not merely existence as Appearance.” If this looks very like an endorsement of that “perfectly monstrous proposition,” the following passage, from Moore’s 1898 essay “Freedom,” leaves no room for doubt.

That time itself cannot be conceived to be fundamentally real is always admitted by Kant himself, and indeed he has attempted a proof of it. How far his proof is satisfactory, and whether, if unsatisfactory, any other proof is forthcoming, is too large a question to be fully discussed here. I can only state that the arguments by which Mr. Bradley has endeavoured to prove the unreality of Time appear to me perfectly conclusive.

Let this be a lesson to us: We do well to read these essays in their own terms and not rely for guidance about the early Moore’s views on the elder Moore’s stated recollections.

Failing to read these essays not only is likely to perpetuate our misunderstanding of Moore’s philosophical development, it is equally likely to foster our misperception of the timing and logic of Moore’s influence on others—Russell, for example. Both Moore and Russell cut their philosophical teeth on F. H. Bradley’s Absolute Idealism, and though both in time renounced their allegiance to Bradley’s theories, Russell has made it abundantly clear that it was Moore who blazed the trail. Moore, Russell writes,⁶

took the lead in the rebellion, and I followed with a sense of emancipation. Bradley had argued that everything that common sense believes in

is mere appearance; we reverted to the opposite extreme, and thought that everything is real that common sense, uninfluenced by philosophy or theology, supposes real. With a sense of escaping from prison. we allowed ourselves to think that grass is green, that the sun and the stars would exist if no one was aware of them, and also that there is a pluralistic timeless world of Platonic ideas. The world which had been thin and logical, suddenly became rich and varied and solid.

Russell dates this rebellion against Bradley (and Hegel and Kant) as 1898, a period when Moore was working on "The Nature of Judgment." If we are to understand the rebellion's philosophical basis, therefore, it is to this paper, which offers an extended critique of Bradley's views, that we must look.

As a matter of history, this much is beyond dispute. And yet E. D. Klemke, for example, in his paper "Did G. E. Moore Refute Idealism?,"⁷ after quoting the very same passage from Russell reproduced above, goes on to examine Moore's 1903 paper, "The Refutation of Idealism", a paper which examines, not Bradley's theories, but the Berkeleian thesis that *esse* is *percipi*. Bradley's views about Reality do not put in so much as an appearance in the 1903 paper on idealism. Moreover, when Klemke does refer to some of Moore's other published quarrels with idealism, the seminal 1898 paper, which does examine Bradley's views, is never mentioned.

None of this, of course, is meant to question the adequacy of Klemke's analysis of Moore's later arguments against idealism. It is meant only as an historical pointer: We are unlikely to understand the context and logic of those arguments that prompted first Moore, then Russell, to break loose of the ties that bound them to Bradleian idealism if we look for, and think we have found, the historical moment of that break in a paper published some five years after that break occurred. Nor, indeed, are we any more likely to understand these matters if we make rash inferences based on Russell's testimony. For Moore's mature conception of

“the common sense view of the world” did not come full-blown into the world in 1898. At least as late as the 1901 paper, “The Value of Religion,” we find a Moore who, unlike the Moore we encounter in his later writings, is unable to claim to *know*, with certainty, that such propositions as “This hand moves” or “I moved it” are true. Though we “cannot help believing” them, he writes, all such propositions “are possibly not true.” Russell’s recollection of this rebellion led by the early Moore may be, and doubtless is, veridical. But what it meant for Moore to believe in “common sense” in 1898 is demonstrably different from what it meant for him to believe in it later.

The reference to Kant in the passage from “Freedom,” quoted earlier, points up a neglected area of Moorean scholarship. After announcing his intention in that paper to concentrate on Kant’s view of Freedom, Moore goes on to explain that he has “chosen to deal with him at such length mainly because I think that reference to the views of the philosopher, with whom you are most in agreement, is often the clearest way of explaining your own view.” It is not McTaggart’s, not Bradley’s, not Henry Sidgwick’s views that are here singled out as those with which Moore’s “are most in agreement.” It is Kant’s. Indeed, it is Kant’s views, more than any other single philosopher’s, that emerge time and time again for discussion in these early essays, not only in “Freedom,” but also in “The Nature of Judgment” (1898), “Necessity” (1900), “Experience and Empiricism” (1902), and “Kant’s Idealism” (1904). The distance by which Moore disassociates himself from Kant is a measure of the early Moore’s philosophical growth. Whereas in 1897 it is Kant’s views, especially his idealism, with which Moore’s own “are most in agreement,” by 1904 he is able to declare that “Kant’s idealism . . . is certainly false.” How this transition from disciple to critic came about is too large a chapter in Moore’s intellectual history to attempt to tell here. That the transition did occur, and that its explanation is likely to be found,

at least in part, in these early essays—these are the key points to be urged on this occasion. We shall never understand the unadvertised price Moore paid for his defense of common sense if we do not understand how magnetically he was initially attracted to the view that something other than the furniture of the plain man's world is what is fundamentally real.

But while it is Kant's presence that dominates, other notable philosophers—McTaggart, in particular, and, through him, Hegel—enjoy a large share of Moore's critical attention. "Identity" (1901), for example, includes a critique of Hegel's views, while McTaggart's positions are the main focus of "Mr. McTaggart's 'Studies in Hegelian Cosmology'" (1902) and "Mr. McTaggart's Ethics" (1903). These last two essays represent Moore's philosophical homage to his valued mentor. For it was McTaggart, Moore recalls, who had the greatest influence on him as a student. Not only did McTaggart produce "the impression of being immensely clever and quick in argument," he was constantly insisting on clearness, "on trying to give a precise meaning to philosophical expressions, asking the question 'What does this mean?'"⁸ The later Moore, as is well known, made this same insistence on clarity an inseparable part of his philosophical character. But nowhere, perhaps, does he indulge this acquired habit more than in these two essays devoted to refuting McTaggart's views. One must assume that the teacher was flattered by the compliment paid by the student.

Hegel, Kant, McTaggart, and Bradley, each in his own way subscribed to a version of idealism. Because Moore's examinations of this metaphysical propensity grew increasingly critical as the years advanced, it would be natural to suppose that he put all his idealistic baggage behind him by 1903. It is not clear that this is true, however, as can be illustrated by considering certain well-known features of his moral philosophy.

Moore's acute disaffection with naturalism in ethics, espe-

cially as this is expressed in *Principia Ethica*, for example, arguably is related to his chronic displeasure with empiricism in philosophy generally. And that displeasure, as we see in these early essays, he first acquired from his youthful affair with the Idealists. Kant's Transcendental Deduction, for example, Moore writes in "The Nature of Judgment", contains a perfectly valid answer to Hume's scepticism, and to empiricism in general." Moreover, and relatedly, when, in *Principia*, Moore classifies goodness as a non-natural property, it is difficult to ignore the shadows idealism still casts on his thought. "It is not goodness," he declares, "but only the things or qualities which are good, which can exist in time—can have duration, and begin and cease to exist." Does this mean that there is no such thing as goodness? Moore seems clearly to think that there is, just as he seems clearly to think that there are numbers. However, to believe in the reality of things which, by their very nature, do not exist in time, is to embrace 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 which seems to rest on what appear to be idealistic presuppositions? Again, if there is a compelling answer to be found, it is unlikely that we shall find it without consulting the early essays, even those containing no explicit reference to ethical questions.

In my view the rewards of giving these essays a close re-examination are much greater than these brief introductory remarks can show. The moral philosophy we find in *Principia*, for example, embodies Moore's answers to questions he had earlier considered in papers published before 1903. Read in this light, *Principia* may be seen as a step along the way to the mature development of his views in and about ethics. I have attempted to tell this story in *Bloomsbury's Prophet: G. E. Moore and the Development of His Moral Philosophy*.¹⁰ That story involves a close study of Moore's neglected views about belief in God, including

the views we find in "The Value of Religion." But it also involves a fresh examination of the other points of emphasis mentioned in the preceding—Moore's early affinities with Bradley, for example, and the influence of Kant and McTaggart. How compelling my account of the development of Moore's moral philosophy is, and how persuasive my explanation of its powerful influence on the Bloomsbury Group happens to be, are here less important than recognizing the pivotal role Moore's pre-*Principia* writings must come to play for subsequent Moorean scholarship, not only relative to his views in ethics but elsewhere as well—his views in epistemology, for example.

It is unclear what Moore, if he were alive, would think of the present collection of his essays. That he himself did not anthologize them and withheld his permission to have them collected by others suggests that he had lost whatever enthusiasm for them he at one time may have felt. From remarks he makes in his "An Autobiography," moreover, we know something of his opinion of "Freedom." Though he had not looked at it "for a long time," he states that he "[has] no doubt that it [is] absolutely worthless."¹¹ Perhaps Moore would make the same harsh judgment about most, if not all, of the essays collected here, though even the elder Moore, writing in 1942, after noting that he is "sure that ['The Nature of Judgment'] must have been full of confusions," does allow that "I think there was probably some good in it."¹² Like most of us, Moore may have felt that there were few sins as irredeemable as those of his youth. And these essays *are* the product of his youth: he was only Twenty-four when "Freedom" was written, just twenty-nine when *Principia* first appeared. Moreover, this work was accomplished after only two years of formal study in philosophy (1894–1896). Whatever we may think of the lasting significance of these essays, Moore's raw talent surely was prodigious.

Suppose we assume that Moore would raise an eyebrow if

asked to look at these essays again. I do not think we should let this deter us. What we owe to our predecessors is our best effort to understand what light they have left us, and how they acquired it. And what we owe to our successors is our dedication to ease the burdens of their scholarship, when we can. This collection should meet these obligations, first, because it presents us with a fuller, more realistic view of Moore, one that should help us correct past and present misperceptions of the man and his philosophy, both those misperceptions fathered by his commentators and those encouraged by Moore himself. And, second, the ready availability of these early essays should also help move Moorean scholarship up a notch or two in the future. That is all the present collection would hope. Or presume. Certainly we show the later Moore no disrespect by allowing the early Moore the opportunity to speak again, freed from the not inconsiderable weight of his own future reputation, this time to a new and, one hopes, wider audience. In this way we might even soften the paradox that, despite his immense influence on others and the uncommon esteem in which he was held—indeed, no doubt in no small measure because of this—Moore remains “the unknown philosopher.”¹³

NOTES

1. A. J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore: The Analytical Heritage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 138.

2. G. J. Warnock, *English Philosophy Since 1900* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 12.

3. L. Susan Stebbing, “Moore’s Influence,” in Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore* (New York: Tudor, 1952), p. 520.

4. Others might challenge the received opinion. See, for example, A. C. Ewing, “Moore and Metaphysics,” in A. Ambrose and M. Lazerowitz, eds., *G. E. Moore: Essays in Retrospect* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), pp. 139–159.

5. "An Autobiography," in Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, pp. 13-14.

6. Bertrand Russell, "My Mental Development," in Paul Arrhur Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Harper, 1963), p. 12.

7. E. 3. Klemke, "Did G. E. Moore Refute Idealism?," in E. D. Klemke, ed., *Studies in the Philosophy of G. E. Moore* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969), pp. 3-24.

8. "An Autobiography," p. 18.

9. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 110-111.

10. Tom Regan, *Bloomsbury's Prophet: G. E. Moore and the Development of His Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

11. "An Autobiography," p. 21.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

13. The characterization is J. N. Findlay's in his "Some Neglected Issues in the Philosophy of G. E. Moore," in Ambros: and Lazetowitz, eds. *G. E. Moore: Essays in Retrospect*, p. 64. Though, for reasons advanced in the foregoing, Findlay's characterization is accurate for the **most** part, there are notable exceptions. Gilbert Ryle offers a lively and, I think, insightful review of some of Moore's early essays, and Philip Petit a more thorough exegesis of some major themes found in most of the papers. See, respectively, "G. E. Moore's 'The Nature of Judgment,'" in *G. E. Moore: Essays in Retrospect*, pp. 89-101, and "The Early Philosophy of G. E. Moore," *Philosophical Forum* 4 (Winter 1972-1973): 260-298.