

ART AND GOODNESS :

COLLINGWOOD'S AESTHETICS AND MOORE'S ETHICS COMPARED

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R. G. Collingwood's theory of art, which is elaborated in *The Principles of Art*¹ (hereafter PA), rests on the principle which G. E. Moore also exploits when he sets out his account of goodness in the opening chapters of *Principia Ethica*² (hereafter PE). The shared principle is Bishop Butler's dictum, 'Everything is what it is, and not another thing'. It is well known that Moore applies this 'law of identity' to the analysis of goodness where he seems to think that it has particular application; with what results is a matter of some controversy. It has not been noticed, however, that with the implicit aid of the same principle Collingwood produces an account (with substantial implications) of art. Before making good the claim that there is this comparison to be drawn I shall broach the broader question of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics by making a more general comparison between the two books.

I

According to Collingwood art is the subject-matter of aesthetics (PA vi) while ethics, as Moore understands it, is 'to cover the general enquiry into what is good' (PE 2). What views do Moore and Collingwood respectively take of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics ?

First Moore: Moore bases ethics on aesthetic enjoyments in the sense that aesthetic enjoyments or appreciations (he uses these words interchangeably)

constitute one of the chief goods in life only for the sake of which are duty and virtue ultimately justified (PE 188—9). It is gratifying to find aesthetic appreciation taken so seriously by Moore but unlikely that this extraordinary claim gets the connection between moral and aesthetic values right.

One might suppose that if aesthetic appreciation has a foundational role in ethics the study of it should be subsumed under ethics. This would be a mistaken inference, however. Aesthetics, Moore sees, is a distinct branch of philosophical inquiry, the task of which is 'a classification and comparative valuation of all the different forms of beauty' (PE 200).

By aesthetic enjoyments Moore means the enjoyment of beautiful objects, among which he distinguishes three sorts of case: beautiful works of art, beautiful natural objects and what is beautiful in human affections.

Collingwood rejects this view of aesthetics. Aesthetics is the theory of art, not beauty; for the theory of beauty belongs not to aesthetics but to 'the theory of love'. To regard beauty as the object of aesthetic inquiry will result in 'an attempt to construct an aesthetic on a "realistic" basis'. This, Collingwood says, is the attempt 'to explain away the aesthetic activity by appeal to a supposed quality of the things with which, in that experience, we are in contact; this supposed quality, invented to explain the activity, being in fact nothing but the activity itself, falsely located not in the agent but in his external world' (PA 41).

Principia Ethica is an excellent example of what Collingwood is attacking here: realist assumptions at work in the philosophy of beauty. Moore, more typically of aesthetics than Collingwood, which is not to say correctly, places the spectator not the artist at the centre of aesthetic theory.

To compare Moore's ethics and Collingwood's aesthetics is to bring into view the fact that we do not have only two concepts, art and goodness, to consider, but three: art, goodness and beauty. If aesthetics is to be more than the piecemeal analysis of standard topics it will have to explain how they are all connected.

II

According to Collingwood, 'The words "beauty", "beautiful", as actually used, have no aesthetic implication. We speak of a beautiful painting or statue, but this only means an admirable or excellent one' (PA 38). And later: 'The word "beauty" connotes that in things by virtue of which we love them, admire them, or desire them' (PA 40). According to Moore, the beautiful should be *defined* as that of which the admiring contemplation is good in itself, (PE 201).

Strictly speaking, these accounts should not be compared since Collingwood claims to be reporting how the *word* 'beauty' (and its equivalents) are used in 'the common speech of European civilization' whereas Moore is interested in the real definition of beauty. A comparison between the two accounts is nevertheless instructive.

(i) Moore confines beauty to admiration, which looms large in Collingwood's view too, but Collingwood is less restrictive than Moore. In his definition of beauty Collingwood also includes that in virtue of which we love or desire things. (The inclusion, in Collingwood's account, of desire is interesting, given the dominant Kantian insistence in our aesthetics on distinguishing beauty and desire; but not much can be made of this since Collingwood also denies the Kantian assumption that beauty belongs to the subject—matter of aesthetics.)

(ii) Good is more important in Moore's account of beauty than in Collingwood's. Collingwood accepts a connection between beauty and goodness in so far as he thinks that to say that something is beautiful is to recognize its excellence, but he is no farther interested in what good is involved in beauty. Moore, by contrast, is exercised by the nature of the connection, which is widely recognized to exist, between goodness and beauty, and endeavours to explain it.

For Collingwood, beauty presumably means certain sorts of excellence, or excellence that is valued in certain sorts of ways, so that there may be kinds of goodness or excellence that are not beautiful, namely anything which is excellent but not admired, loved or desired. How plausible this is depends on whether it is taken exclusively or inclusively, disjunctively or conjunctively. There are excellent things which we do not admire, excellent things which we do not love and excellent things which we do not desire, but is there anything excellent which is not the object of these, not loved and not admired and not desired ?

Conversely we may think against Collingwood that there is excellence which we admire but which we do not describe as beautiful, academic excellence for example.

Moore rightly thinks that it is 'a strange coincidence, that there should be two *different* objective predicates of value, "good" and "beautiful" which are nevertheless so related to one another that whatever is beautiful is also good' (PE 201). He thinks that his definition of beauty can account for the connection. It makes 'good' the only unanalysable predicate. Then ... to say that a thing is beautiful is to say, not indeed that it is *itself* good, but that it is a necessary element in something which is' (PE 202). The 'something' Moore means is a complex organic unity which includes seeing not merely the beautiful qualities, say, in a picture, but feeling and appreciating the beauty of what is seen,

and also the true belief that the beautiful qualities cognized in the object are beautiful. Errors of judgement arise when objects which are not beautiful are judged to be beautiful; errors of taste when feelings appropriate to beautiful objects are felt for what is not beautiful.

(iii) Moore takes for granted what from the outset Collingwood denies, namely that the enjoyment of beautiful objects is aesthetic enjoyment. According to Collingwood the aesthetic implication conveyed by the phrase 'a beautiful statue' is not conveyed by the word 'beautiful' but by the word 'statue' (PA 38-9). By 'aesthetic activity' Collingwood means creating and responding to works of art, whereas by 'aesthetic enjoyment' Moore means enjoyment of the beautiful in art, nature and personal affections.

III

Someone says: 'Ruskin writes good prose'. What if anything do I *believe* when I accept it on somebody's authority that Ruskin's prose is good? The answer to be had from the earlier chapters of *Principia Ethica* is that to call something good is to ascribe to it ownership of some peculiar part, property or quality. (Moore's critics have rightly noticed that parts, properties and qualities are by no means equivalent, but I do not go into that complication in this article.) Moore says, time and time again, though not always in the same words, that 'good' denotes a simple, indefinable, non-natural quality. However, when he comes in the later part of his book to write about the ideal he seems to set aside this account of goodness and to write about intrinsic wholes as if he had never written in atomistic terms about the peculiar property of goodness. Moore I think simply tires of his atomistic account of good as his book unfolds and tacitly drops it in favour of his notion of organic wholes.

One tradition in moral philosophy since Moore, anti-cognitivism, has drawn approvingly on Moore's critique of ethical naturalism while explicitly rejecting the idea that 'good' is a property-denoting term in favour of the view that its function in moral judgements is to galvanize or guide persons to whom the judgement is addressed to action. These remarks are a bad oversimplification but must suffice here. Their relevance to the present inquiry is twofold: First, the cognitivist versus anti-cognitivist dispute in ethics has implications for aesthetics too; secondly, whereas Moore is a cognitivist in value theory there is some evidence that Collingwood is not.

Suppose we are told: 'Ruskin writes beautifully. If you don't read him you don't know what a fine writer you are missing.' Or someone says, 'You should see Vienna. It is a beautiful city.' A question for aesthetics is this:

should we follow the cognitivist in maintaining that 'beautiful' describes the character of Ruskin's prose or of the Hapsburg's city ? Or should we follow the anti-cognitivist in regarding such terms as 'beautiful' as devices for reinforcing the injunctions, Read Ruskin ! Visit Vienna ! ?

An anti-cognitivist account of aesthetic judgements must presumably treat them as exhortations to attend to the subject of the judgement. Anti-cognitivists will argue against the cognitivism to which Moore seems to be committed, by maintaining that to judge something is beautiful is to urge that it has a claim to attention without including the further thought that there is some one distinctive feature or property in virtue of which the thing deserves attention; in virtue of which beautiful things are beautiful, and which, if X possesses it entails that X is beautiful.

Cognitivism in the case of Moore takes both a metaphysical and an epistemological form: there is metaphysical commitment to the idea that 'good' denotes a non-natural property and epistemological commitment to the idea that value judgements are truth-assertions. If a particular aesthetic judgement gives rise to a dispute the cognitivist will say that what is in dispute is its truth. For example, it may have been doubtfully asked, 'Is Ruskin a good writer (I thought he was a manufacturer of purple prose,' someone might add). 'Is Vienna a beautiful city (isn't it really somewhat heartless) ?' Such disputes will not worry the cognitivist who can say that what is in dispute here is the truth of particular judgements; therefore what cannot be in general doubt is the possibility of aesthetic judgements as such being true. To doubt then that Vienna is a beautiful city is not, as an anti-cognitivist account of aesthetic judgements must seem to imply, to refuse to visit the place.

IV

The old question, whether God approves of good things because, antecedent to his approval, they are good, or whether things that are good are good only by virtue of the fact that God approves of them, has its parallel in aesthetics: does our admiration of X constitute its beauty or is it that, antecedent to the act of admiring it, X is beautiful.

Moore's aesthetics follows the second alternative whereas in Collingwood's aesthetic theory the question cannot arise since, as we have seen, Collingwood excludes from aesthetics the topic of beauty. For him the aesthetic question would not be whether something is beautiful but whether it is a good work of art. Collingwood is not especially interested in the meaning of expressions such as 'X is a good Y'. His philosophy of art is more comprehensive than this. But it is not difficult to see what his account of the

expression 'X is a good work of art' must amount to. First, he treats judgements of good and bad art as judgements of success and failure in art. Secondly, what he is interested in, and this it could be argued is in the spirit of Moore's anti-cognitivist, imperativist successors in ethics, are grounds or criteria, in this case the grounds or criteria of success and failure in art, what it is that makes for artistic success and failure. On the general issue of the meaning of value predicates Collingwood I think is more on the side of the anti-cognitivists such as Stevenson and Hare than of the cognitivists such as Moore. 'There is no sense', he says, 'in using terms like good and bad except of persons or things, that come into practical relations with one's will.'³ We ought not, for example, to call the past better than the present or worse 'for we are not called upon to choose it or to reject it, to like it or to dislike it, to approve it or condemn it, but simply to accept it'.⁴ This is interestingly in the spirit of the anti-cognitivist followers of Moore; their account of 'good' focuses chiefly on its function guiding choices. There is no suggestion then that Collingwood would side with Moore in thinking of 'good' as a predicate denoting some peculiar property.

However, Moore's aesthetic realism is not to be written off too easily. There is something in the second possibility, mooted at the beginning of this section, that a thing is beautiful antecedent to an act of admiring it. It is counter-intuitive to suppose, moreover, that 'Vienna is beautiful' or 'Ruskin's prose is good' mean something like, or no more than, 'Visit Vienna!' 'Read Ruskin!'. One harbours the suspicion that 'being beautiful' is the *reason* why one should see Vienna or read Ruskin; so the beauty of something cannot therefore consist in or be wholly analysed in terms of the injunction or the resolve to attend to it.⁵ Indeed something which Moore says is helpful in explaining why it would be mistaken to identify value predicates with injunctions to attend to what is thereby valued, namely when he points out in his pursuit of idealist errors that 'what is good?' is not identical with the question 'what is preferred?' (PE 132). Moore says, 'The fact that you prefer a thing does not tend to shew that the thing is good; even if it does shew that you think it so.' Nor, more strongly, can Moore think that 'what is good' is to be identified with 'what ought to be preferred' if Moore's talk about a non-natural quality or property is taken seriously. 'For' as has been noticed, that X possesses a certain property is no reason for preferring X. There does not seem to be any intelligible connection between, on the one hand, 'X possesses property Y' and on the other, 'X is preferred (or ought to be preferred)'. Since Collingwood's anti-cognitivist instincts in the matter of value predicates are I think sound, and since in apparent contradiction of this Moore I think is right to distinguish between what is good and what is preferred, it is scarcely surprising that I should find the nature of value predicates in ethics and aesthetics to be

a philosophically unsolved problem. The problem is to explain how 'because it is good', 'because it is beautiful' may function as reasons that do not merely rhetorically reinforce injunctions to attend to the subjects of the judgements the reasons support, while not making the assumption that the terms 'good', 'beautiful' denote properties, whether or not metaphysical.

V

Having considered how Moore relates aesthetics to ethics we should now inquire what place Collingwood finds in aesthetics for ethics. This will require us to elaborate upon Collingwood's account, already touched on, of what makes for goodness in art. Neither Moore nor Collingwood rigidly separates aesthetics from ethics. Just as there is an aesthetic element in Moore's ethics in that one of the goods on which duty is founded is the enjoyment of beauty, so there is an ethical element in Collingwood's aesthetics to the effect that the goodness of a work of art is ultimately a sort of moral goodness in some broader sense of 'moral' than perhaps we are accustomed to see used in modern academic philosophy. By this I mean that Collingwood's theory of art rests on Spinozistic and Freudian notions of uncorrupt or truthful consciousness. For what modern jargon calls 'psychological diseases'—these include corruption of consciousness—Collingwood uses the old-fashioned term 'moral disease' (PA 95).

The question of good and bad art is according to Collingwood the question whether an artist is pursuing artistic labour successfully or unsuccessfully (PA 281). Since in Collingwood's view what an artist is trying to do is express a given emotion, a 'bad work of art is an activity in which the agent tries to express a given emotion, but fails A bad work of art is the unsuccessful attempt to become conscious of a given emotion ... a consciousness which fails to grasp its own emotions is a corrupt or untruthful consciousness' (PA 282).

Moore's approach to ethics (and aesthetics) is from the directions of metaphysics and epistemology; Collingwood's approach to aesthetics (and ethics) is from the directions of psychology and the philosophy of mind. Among other merits, Collingwood's position exposes the oversimplification of supposing that a person either is or is not responsible for an action, and the related oversimplification that evils are only of two kinds: those that we do and those that we suffer. The symptoms and consequences of corrupt consciousness 'are not exactly crimes or vices, because their victim does not choose to involve himself in them' (PA 220), but nor are they 'exactly diseases, because they are due not to functional disorder or to the impact of hostile forces upon the sufferer, but to his own self-mismanagement. As compared with disease, they are more like vice; as compared with vice they are more like disease.

The truth is that they are a kind of sheer or undifferentiated evil, evil in itself, as yet undifferentiated into evil suffered or misfortune and evil done or wickedness' (PA 220).

Not surprisingly Collingwood does not say much about ethics in *The Principles of Art* any more than Moore says much about aesthetics in *Principia Ethica* and what Collingwood does say is in danger of being overlooked on account of its debt to Spinoza and so not in the orthodox run of modern moral philosophy. Indeed, given Collingwood's unusually wide-ranging interests and the fertility of his contributions to philosophy the paucity of his contribution to ethics, as ethics is commonly understood, is remarkable. But it is after all easily explained if we recognize that what Collingwood takes so seriously is a problem not often discussed in ethics: the problem of self-management. The 'problem of ethics is the question how man, being ridden by feelings, can so master them that his life, from being a continuous *passio*, an undergoing of things, can become a continuous *actio*, or doing of things' (PA 219). And in words which should be inscribed by law on the title-page of every book in ethics Collingwood says: 'When we really begin to understand the problems of morality we find that they have to do with changes to be produced in ourselves. Thus, the question whether I shall return a book to the man I borrowed it from raises no serious moral problem. Which of the two things I shall in fact do depends on the kind of man I am. But the question whether I shall be an honest man or a dishonest one is question that raises moral problems of the most acute kind' (PA 289). Morality, Collingwood says, is both theoretical and practical: theoretical in so far as it consists in finding out things about ourselves; practical in that it consists in 'putting our thoughts into practice'. It may seem that Collingwood is too conservative a thinker here, that his thought is of the change-the-self-to-fit-the-world-variety and not of the revolutionary or reformist let-us-remake-the-world kind. (If the implication of conservatism in Collingwood's thought were true, which it isn't, it would make an interesting head of comparison with Moore's ethics, the conservative nature of which has been well described by G. Warnock.⁶) But Collingwood, who is good at challenging dichotomies, observes that making changes in one's character changes one's environment too, 'for out of the new character which I shall acquire there will flow actions which will certainly to some extent alter my world' (PA 290).

Truthful consciousness is important not only in relation to the ethical problem of self-management and self-direction but also in relation to the creation of and reception by an audience of works of art. Its importance for aesthetics is the role it plays in helping us to understand art, namely that artistic consciousness is uncorrupt consciousness. An audience, Collingwood

argues, does not have the role of passive spectator of a work of art but that of collaborative agent; it provides through what we would now call feedback (a word not available to Collingwood in 1938) some response to the artist's question, have I expressed my emotions. 'Unless he sees his own proclamation, "This is good", echoed on the faces of his audience—"Yes, that is good"—he wonders whether he was speaking the truth or not. He thought he had enjoyed and recorded a genuine aesthetic experience, but has he? Was he suffering from a corruption of consciousness? Has his audience judged him better than he judged himself?' (PA 314). The book closes with the words: 'Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness' (PA 336).

The criterion of success in art is the expression of emotion; to the extent that the artist's consciousness is false, corrupt or bowdlerized, expression must misfire. The psychological character of Collingwood's aesthetics is clear then. We should also note that Collingwood goes to some trouble to explain the nature of psychology. In particular he criticizes the attempt to model psychology on (what were assumed to be) the methods of the natural sciences. Thus Moore and Collingwood both prove to be trenchant critics of naturalism though perhaps this point of comparison cannot be much more than a pun: for Moore's target is ethical naturalism, the identification of goodness with something other than itself, say psychological states. Whereas Collingwood's quarrel is with the identification of psychology as a natural science. Moore by contrast writes as if he subscribed in psychology to the sort of thing Collingwood objects to, namely an old-fashioned, mechanistic, positivistic view of psychology. This, however, is scarcely to the point since Moore's concern of course was to make progress in our understanding of ethics not psychology. Nor is it surprising that his psychology is pre-Freudian. Collingwood, on the other hand, when he was working out his aesthetics was in the vanguard of psychological thought, that is, he endorsed certain aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis. The qualification 'certain aspects' has to be made since Freud himself, Collingwood thought, was a prisoner of the untenable view that psychology is a mechanistic natural science. But whereas psychology and ethics are sharply distinguished in Moore's thought, there is not to be found in Collingwood any such sharp separation of psychology from aesthetics (or ethics). Indeed, as should be apparent, quite the reverse is the case.

VI

Moore's famous open-question argument is founded on the idea that it is always intelligible to ask of any complex proposed to be identical with goodness, is it good, thus showing that the complex asserted to be identical with goodness is

not after all identical with goodness (PE 15-16). Good 'is a simple, indefinable unanalysable object of thought' (PE 21). The property denoted by the term 'good' by reference to which the subjectmatter of Ethics must be defined, is itself simple and indefinable (PE 36). Moore, as is well known, attacks approaches to ethics which consist in substituting for 'good' some property other than good, for example, a property of a natural object such as pleasure (PE 40).

Collingwood uses a similar strategy in his aesthetics when he refuses to allow that art is anything other than itself. This truism underlies his attempt to distinguish 'art proper' from things often but falsely confounded with art such as craft, magic (in his special sense of this term), amusement, puzzle, instruction, propaganda and exhortation. These things wrongfully usurp the name of art (PA-32), just as, according to Moore, many things such as pleasure are put forward falsely in ethics as being identical with goodness. At the heart of Collingwood's aesthetics is the notion that art is not to be identified with things which are often mistaken for it but which in fact are not 'art proper'. At the heart of Moore's ethics is the similar notion that things such as pleasure are mistakenly identified with goodness. And just as Collingwood allows that a work of art can *also* be representational, amusing, etc. but is not a work of art in virtue of any of these *other* things, so Moore too allows that pleasant things, for example, can be good while fiercely denying that goodness and pleasure are identical. A thing is not good in virtue of its being pleasant, any more than a work of art is a work of art in virtue of its being representational, etc.

Collingwood's root notion that what makes something a work of art is not what makes it craft, magic, amusement, etc., and conversely something that is craft magic or amusement is not in virtue of that fact a work of art. One does not entail the other, although, and this is commonly overlooked, something may be both. Indeed it is generally the case that something is both art and craftsmanship. Moore's view similarly is that things which are good do not owe their goodness to their possessing any other property such as pleasure (PE 38), while at the same time certainly good things may be pleasant. Pleasure is not goodness then but can occur in good things or in complexes that are good. Whenever we are inclined to confuse art with something else, such as representation, which is not art but which can occur *in* art, we run up against Collingwood's principle: 'A representation may be a work of art; but what makes it a representation is one thing, what makes it a work of art is another' (PA 43).

Moore says the naturalistic fallacy 'consists in identifying the simple notion which we mean by "good" with some other notion' (PE 58) the naturalistic fallacy is 'the failure to distinguish clearly that unique and indefinable quality which we mean by good' (PE 59). But 'good is good and nothing else whatever' (PE 144). If we substitute 'art' for 'good' here we transform Moore's account in ethics of

goodness into Collingwood's account in aesthetics of art. Both philosophers rely on the principle: 'X is X and not Y' and 'What makes X X is not what makes X Y'. To get Moore's central tenet in ethics 'good' may be substituted for 'X' and 'pleasure' for 'Y' and to get Collingwood's central tenet in aesthetics, 'art' may be substituted for 'X' and, e.g., 'entertainment', 'amusement' or 'representation' for 'Y'. There is then the same refusal on the part of Collingwood to allow art to be anything other than itself as there is by Moore to allow that goodness is anything other than goodness.

The difference is that while Collingwood does find *something* to be identical with 'art proper', namely the expressions of emotion, Moore does not find anything unless it is a non-natural property, to be identical with goodness. Moore's ethics is somewhat less illuminating therefore than Collingwood's aesthetics. Moore holds that that 'which is meant by "good" is in fact, except its converse "bad", the *only* simple object of thought which is peculiar to Ethics' (PE 5). He says, 'My business is solely with that object or idea, which I hold, rightly or wrongly, that the word is generally used to stand for' (PE 6). Moore's answer to the question 'what is good?' is 'that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked "How is good to be defined?" my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it' (PE 6).

Collingwood's theory of art runs parallel to this account of good, but only so far. For the parallel to be complete, Collingwood, having distinguished 'art proper' from things wrongly confused with it, could not have gone on to give an account of art in terms of the expression of emotion. He would have had to have rested his case on some such statement as 'that' art is art and that is the end of the matter'. That Collingwood does not halt in his account of art here in the peremptory manner of Moore's on goodness is not unconnected with the fact that Collingwood, perhaps going back to Locke's distinction between the civil and philosophical uses of words, has a more satisfactory account than Moore of the role of definition in philosophy. Moore is interested in 'Definitions of the kind . . . which describe the real nature of the object or notion denoted by a word' and which do not merely tell us what the word is used to mean' (PE 7). Collingwood too is interested in the real nature of art though his philosophy is of course more historically aware than Moore's ('I do not think of aesthetic theory as an attempt to investigate and expound eternal verities concerning the nature of an eternal object called Art') (PA vi). But the major difference is that whereas Moore is wholly uninterested in the verbal meaning of 'good', Collingwood believes that philosophical definition can only begin after the verbal uses of the term in question have been surveyed and appraised (PA 1-2). Moore, however, rejects verbal usage as devoid of philosophical interest ('Such a definition can never be of ultimate importance

in any study except lexicography..... my business is not with its proper usage, as established by custom' (PE 6); whereas Collingwood believes that where words such as 'art' are in common use, the philosophical task is 'to clarify and systematize ideas we already possess; consequently there is no point in using words according to a private rule of our own, we must use them in a way which fits on to common usage' (PA 1).

There is in Collingwood's view therefore no point in the philosopher proceeding until he has got questions of usage *sorted out*, not, as in Moore's case, *rejected*. 'Secondly, we must proceed to a definition of the term "art". This comes second, and not first, because no one can even try to define a term until he has settled in his own mind a definite usage of it: no one can define a term in common use until he has satisfied himself that his personal usage of it harmonizes with the common usage' (PA 2).

Moore's view is that real definitions 'are only possible when the object or notion in question is something complex. You can give a definition of a horse, because a horse has many different properties and qualities, all of which you can enumerate. But when you have enumerated them all, when you have reduced a horse to his simplest terms, then you can no longer define those terms. They are simply something which you think of or perceive.....' (PE 7). Real definition of good is not possible therefore because good, unlike horse, is not a complex notion: 'My point is that "good" is a simple notion, just as "yellow" is a simple notion' (PE 7). So far as the meaning of 'good' is concerned then, Moore offers three possibilities and himself chooses the first: (i) 'Good' denotes something simple and indefinable; (ii) it is a complex, a given whole; (iii) it means nothing to all (PE 15). This then is the theory of meaning that Moore brings to bear on his account of good. It is not the theory of meaning Collingwood brings to the theory of art. If we had to describe Collingwood's enterprise in Moore's terms (which there is no reason to do—Collingwood somewhere warns philosophers against allowing their positions to be expressed in the language of their opponents, for that is to lose the argument) we might say that Collingwood writes as if art were complex, not simple. But the complexity of the idea of art is owing to its being relational, not to its being an aggregate of simple qualities or properties, for art is not, or does not denote, a simple property or quality, and definition of a complex does not consist, contrary to what Moore asserts, in the *enumeration* of, or *reduction* to, the simple *properties* or *qualities* that constitute the complex, (When Moore switches his attention from definition to value and develops his notion of an organic whole he drops his atomistic assumptions concerning properties or qualities for something more sensitive to the holistic organicism of idealism: 'the value of such a whole bears no regular proportion to the sum of the values of its

parts' (italics removed) (PE 27)). In place of a Moorean view of definition as the enumeration of properties then Collingwood holds to the importance for philosophical understanding of stressing relations.

'Definition necessarily means defining one thing in terms of something else' (PA 2). Moore of course does not dispute this but draws the opposite conclusion. There is nothing else in terms of which good can be defined because it is a simple notion. Good therefore is indefinable. We might imagine Collingwood's retort to this as being something like: whatever the case may be with good (and there is no reason to suppose that he would accept Moore's account of this, and some, as I have argued, to suppose that he must reject it), in the case of art, since art is definable then art is not a simple notion.

We may conclude, what in any case has long since been established by Moore's critics in ethics, that the distinction between simple and complex objects of thought has no privileged alignment with the 'law of identity'. For trivially, anything is what it is, whatever it is, whether simple or complex. So in Moore's ethics, good is good and is a simple notion not to be confused with anything else; in Collingwood's aesthetics, art is art and is not to be confused with anything else, say amusement, but art is not in Moore's sense a simple notion.

There is a more important point. Although I have shown that Collingwood is as eager to distinguish good from things mistakenly confused with it, Collingwood clearly grasps that we have to be able to see one thing in terms of another to understand it at all. But this 'seeing' is understanding relations, not spotting properties. Moore thinks that goodness is a property and that understanding it consists in identifying it with some other property, which he rightly sees is impossible. But he draws the wrong conclusion. He concludes that goodness is indefinable, whereas what is mistaken is his property-theory of understanding. Collingwood gets away from this not by looking for the identification of art with something else (though he finds that in the fact that art is expressive) but by looking for what is relational between art and other things. In order, Collingwood says, 'to define any given thing, one must have in one's head not only a clear idea of the thing to be defined, but an equally clear idea of all the other things by reference to which one defines it. People often go wrong over this. They think that in order to construct a definition or (what is the same thing) a "theory" of something, it is enough to have a clear idea of that one thing. That is absurd. Having a clear idea of thing enables them to recognize it when they see it, just as having a clear idea of a certain house enables them to recognize it when they are there; but defining the thing is like explaining where the house is or pointing out its position on the map; you must know its relations to other things as well, and

If your ideas of these other things are vague, your definition will be worthless' (PA2) . Moore's account of good in the earlier parts of *Principia Ethica* is a fine example of recognizing the house without explaining where it is, coupled indeed with blindness to the fact that the question of position could ever arise; for to have a clear idea of goodness in Moore's sense is to deny that there could be other things by reference to which it is to be defined. That would be to introduce an impurity in to the account of goodness but without it there can be no account.

VII

This is not altogether risible. At any rate it is not bad as an unintended description of the situation modern art finds itself in. For if Collingwood's views on definition are philosophically superior to Moore's, culturally Moore's account of goodness unintentionally anticipates certain striking developments in twentieth-century art. Moore's account is not a bad model for depicting the avant-garde in art whereas Collingwood's theory of art is commonly regarded as romantic and therefore out of date. To suggest that Moore's account of goodness may offer some sort of characterization of modernism is perhaps a new way of stating the old and familiar truth that Moore belongs to Bloomsbury. In aesthetics this means formalism.

It is beyond the scope of this article to develop in any detail the suggestion that Moore's account of goodness serves as an account of the way many artists and their apologists have treated the idea of art in this century. The basic idea is that modernist artists have proceeded as if art were a simple notion, and of many of their works it is a somewhat mysterious fact about them that they are works of art, mysterious because nothing can be said about the sense in which they are works of art. They just are. As Moore seems to have stripped goodness down to itself, thereby making it unintelligible, for the result is that nothing is left, artists likewise seem to have been occupied in expelling from their works the representational, the illusionistic, the expressive, or indeed any other feature or property that might be seized upon by the contemplative spectator and predicated of the work. Instead, we seem to be presented, say in minimal Art but not only here, with works whose only interest seems to lie in the fact that they are works of art. They challenge us to see them as art while at the same time we cannot appeal to any hitherto established sense of art since all traditional expectations of art are ruled out. The concept of art no less than the work that confronts us seems emptied of sense or content. To expect of a work of art

that it should be beautiful, expressive, representational, or any of the things in the past valued would be the aesthetic equivalent of committing the naturalistic fallacy. Art is art and not another thing. Of Minimal Art Edward Lucie-Smith says, 'It consists either of a single unitary object or of series of identical unitary objects'.⁸ How is this different from Moore's account of goodness? We have to accept that good things are good because they possess a property of goodness we cannot explain. A Minimal work similarly confronts us obtrusively with question 'am I art?', for there is no other interest to which it can appeal; where there is nothing to delight the heart, mind or senses there is no other question it can raise. In these works there is nothing to attend to but the bare fact, as it were, that they are art, if they are. But to the question so posed, is this art, there seems to be no satisfactory answer. Minimal art thus leads us into an aesthetic deadend as non-natural properties lead to an ethical deadend. Contemporary moral philosophy, in the development of which Moore was so influential, displays the desire, Bernard Williams has observed, 'to reduce revealed moral commitment to a minimum'⁹. I would say of many contemporary works of art that there is a similar desire to reduce aesthetic commitment to a minimum.

Notes and References

1. R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Clarendon Press, 1938).
2. G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1903).
3. R.G. Collingwood, *Essays in Philosophy of History*, ed. W. Debbins (Austin, Texas, 1965), p. 76.
4. *Id.*, p. 85.
5. I have discussed implications of anti-cognitivism for aesthetic evaluations in my 'Evaluations and Aesthetic Appraisals', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 7, No. 4, October 1967.
6. G. Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (Macmillan, 1967), p.8.
7. On the unilluminating nature of Moore's ethics see Warnock, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
8. Edward Lucie-Smith, 'Minimal Art' in *Concepts of Modern Art*, eds. Tony Richardson and Nikos Stangos, Penguin Books, 1974, p. 247.
9. Bernard Williams, *Morality, An Introduction to Ethics*, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 10.

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