

# Moore, Normativity, and Intrinsic Value\*

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*Principia Ethica* set the agenda for analytical metaethics. Moore's unrelenting focus on fundamentals both brought metaethics into view as a potentially separate area of philosophical inquiry and provided a model of the analytical techniques necessary to pursue it.<sup>1</sup> Moore acknowledged that he wasn't the first to insist on a basic irreducible core of all ethical concepts. Although he seems not to have appreciated the roots of this thought in eighteenth-century intuitionists like Clarke, Balguy, and Price, not to mention sentimentalists like Hutcheson and Hume, Moore gave full marks to Sidgwick. According to Moore, Sidgwick was the "only . . . ethical writer" to have clearly seen the irreducibility of ethics' defining notion.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, twentieth-century meta-

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1. Somewhat to the chagrin of some ethical philosophers, this made metaethics available as a separate subject for metaphysicians and philosophers of language who might have little philosophical interest in normative ethics. Appropriately in this connection, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists A. J. Ayer's *Philosophical Essays*, published in 1954, as the first use of 'meta-ethics'.

2. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, ed., with an introduction by Thomas Baldwin, rev. ed., with the preface to the (projected) 2d ed. and other papers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), sec. 14, p. 69. The work was initially published in 1903. Further references will be placed in the text and will include section number along with page numbers to this edition. Hereafter, Pr1 refers to the preface to the first edition of *Principia Ethica*, and Pr2 refers to the preface to the second edition. Both of these are reprinted in Baldwin's edition. Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (London: Knapton, 1705), and *A Discourse concerning the Unalterable Obligations of Natural Religion* (London: Knapton, 1706). (Both can be found in *The Works of Samuel Clarke*, 4 vols. [London: Knapton, 1738], facsimile ed. [New York: Garland, 1978].) John Balguy, *The Foundations of Moral Goodness* (London: Pemberton, 1728), facsimile ed. (New York: Garland, 1976); Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, ed. D. D. Raphael (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), originally published in 1758. For a discussion of the relevance of earlier British intuitionists to Moore, see A. N. Prior, *Logic and the Basis of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949). I mention Hutcheson and Hume because Hutcheson argued that the concept of moral goodness cannot be reduced to natural goodness (and so requires a

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ethics looked, not to Sidgwick, but to Moore.<sup>3</sup>

*Principia* proclaims that what is “common and peculiar” to all ethical judgments is the concept of “good”—what Moore later calls “intrinsic value.”<sup>4</sup> All ethical questions and claims can be divided into “two kinds.” One has to do with the good: what things “ought to exist for their own sakes?” (Pr1, p. 33). And the other concerns the right: “What kind of actions ought we to perform?” (Pr1, p. 34). One of *Principia*’s central claims is that questions of the second kind can be reduced to those of the first. What one should do on an occasion reduces to which action, of those available, would produce the most good. “To assert that a certain line of conduct is, at a given time, absolutely right or obligatory,” Moore writes, “is obviously to assert that more good or less evil will exist in the world, if it be adopted than if anything else be done instead” (sec. 17, p. 77).

Since Moore credited Sidgwick with being the sole writer to have “clearly recognized and stated” good’s indefinability as the fundamental fact of ethical philosophy (sec. 14, p. 69), it may come as a surprise to find Sidgwick characterizing ethics’ “fundamental notion” very differently, namely, as that “represented by the word ‘ought’ or ‘right’.” For Sidgwick, the core feature of ethical judgments is their *normativity*, their entailing some “‘dictate’ or ‘precept’ of reason to the persons to whom” they relate (p. 34).<sup>5</sup> Ethical judgments assert normative reasons for actions and attitudes.<sup>6</sup>

Many would agree that the most notable (and noted) aspect of Moore’s legacy is the widespread acceptance of ethics’ (conceptual) irreducibility owing to the open question argument and Moore’s exposure of the difficulties involved in any definitional claim’s having

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special sense), and Hume held that moral judgments do not concern any matter of fact and that an ‘ought’ cannot follow from any ‘is’. Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Idea of Virtue* (London, 1725), relevant passages in D. D. Raphael, ed., *The British Moralists: 1650–1800*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969); and L. A. Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), an electronic version is available through InteLex Past Masters (<http://library.nlx.com>); David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed., with analytical index, by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2d ed., with text revised and variant readings by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

3. No doubt there are many reasons for this. But surely one is *Principia*’s philosophically radical self-presentation—the sense it gives of wiping the slate clean, exposing the “fallacies” of all prior ethical thought.

4. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, secs. 1–2, pp. 53–54. G. E. Moore, “The Conception of Intrinsic Value” was originally published in 1922 as chap. 8 of *Philosophical Studies* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner), pp. 253–75. It is included in Baldwin’s revised edition of *Principia Ethica*, pp. 280–98. Further references will be placed parenthetically in the text (CIV).

5. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, secs. 1–2, pp. 53–54; Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 25.

6. The same is true for rationalist intuitionists like Balguy and Price.

genuine ethical force (sec. 13, pp. 67–68, sec. 11, pp. 62–63). What gives Moore’s claims and arguments their plausibility, I shall argue, is their reliance on an assumed normativity of intrinsic value. However, I shall also argue that there are aspects of Moore’s characterization of intrinsic value that suit it badly to play the fundamental role in which he casts it. First, as Frankena pointed out, good’s being, as *Principia* claimed, a simple property is in tension with its being explicitly normative in the way required by Moore’s arguments for irreducibility.<sup>7</sup> And second, even if we grant Moorean intrinsic value claims the normativity they purport to have, there may (I will suggest, *must*) be other sources of normative reasons. Things have intrinsic value for Moore if they ought *to exist* for their own sake. They are normative for desires and action, therefore, through their involvement in *states* of the world that ought to obtain. But even if normative reasons can arise in this way for an agent in relation to a world (through what is desirable agent-neutrally, as if from outside it), there are other (agent-relative) reasons for acting that are grounded from inside that world in our relations to other agents.<sup>8</sup>

I applaud *Principia*’s major legacy: the *sui generis* character of the normative. But analytic ethics in the twentieth century inherited something else from Moore that I deplore. In arguing that the fundamental ethical concept is of a thing’s being such as ought *to exist*—part of a state that ought to obtain—and that the concept of a reason for acting derives from this notion as an act’s power to bring about such states, *Principia* insinuated an impoverished, purely *instrumental view of agency*. And it helped create an environment in which agent-relative, deonto-

7. William Frankena, “Obligation and Value in the Ethics of G. E. Moore,” in *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, 3d ed. (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1968), pp. 93–110. For a discussion of this article, see my “Learning from Frankena: A Philosophical Remembrance,” *Ethics* 107 (1997): 685–705.

8. On Moore’s view, claims about practical reasons and ought to do’s factor into two parts: empirical claims about which actions within the agent’s power will bring about which states, and ethical claims about the intrinsic value of these states (the degree to which they “ought to exist for their own sake”). Although the empirical claims relevant to action from the agent’s point of view must no doubt have a *de se*, or “agent-relative,” component concerning what I (the agent) can do, the ethical component of the reason or ought will always be agent-neutral. The distinction between what has come to be called agent-neutral and agent-relative values and reasons was made for contemporary discussions by Thomas Nagel in *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970). Nagel’s terms there were ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ reasons and values. All reasons, according to Nagel, “can be expressed by a predicate R, such that for all persons p and events A, if R is true of A, then p has prima facie reason to promote A. . . . Formally, a subjective reason is one whose defining predicate R contains a free occurrence of the variable p” (p. 90) Nagel switched to ‘agent-relative’ and ‘agent-neutral’ to mark the same distinction in his Tanner Lectures, “The Limits of Objectivity,” in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, ed. Sterling McMurrin (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1980), pp. 77–139.

logical normative principles could seem *conceptually* problematic to the point of irrationality.<sup>9</sup> In what follows, I shall argue that we can have the applaudable without the deplorable, indeed, that we can properly appreciate the normativity of ethics only by rejecting the instrumental picture of agency on which *Principia's* *definitional* consequentialism depends. Ethical claims can have the normativity required by the open question argument, I shall argue, only if they are grounded in action-guiding norms of rational agents. Taken so far, my message will be that we should follow not Moore, but Sidgwick.

Still, even if the concept of a reason for acting is distinct from that of any fact concerning an act's power to produce (agent-neutrally) valuable states, all reasons for acting might be agent-neutral nonetheless (like those grounded in Sidgwick's principle of rational benevolence). The concept of a normatively prescribed action might not derive from that of intrinsic value, of states that ought to obtain, but it still might be the case that valid norms direct agents only to produce such states. I shall argue, however, that fully appreciating the lesson of the open question argument can help us to see why this could not be true. The lesson will partly have to do with a fundamental difference between theoretical and practical reason, between reasons for belief and reasons for action.

To anticipate, reasons for belief are ultimately responsible to what is the case "believer-neutrally," to truth and to objective probability. Clearly, the concepts of truth and objective probability differ from the normative concept of what one ought to believe. The claim that what is true, or that what is objectively probable, bears on what one should believe, differs from the empty tautology that what one ought to believe bears on what one ought to believe. I shall argue, however, that the open question shows that nothing comparable holds in the practical realm. Reasons for action cannot be ultimately responsible to some agent-neutral, nonnormative goal. Although it is not logically open whether being true or objectively probable is relevant to what we should believe, for any goal we can characterize nonnormatively, it is logically open whether we should pursue it.

The reason has to do, I shall suggest, with a kind of freedom that is distinctive of practical reason. Its not being logically open to reject the bearing of objective probability and truth on what to believe is fully consistent with the kind of freedom we must take our theoretical reasoning to have. The open question shows that nothing comparable can be the case when it comes to practical reasoning: practical reasons can-

9. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic, 1974), p. 30; Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), pp. 82–114; Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 175–88.

not be grounded elsewhere than *within* the reasoning of a free rational agent. In recognizing the open question, we take ourselves to reason under a kind of freedom that is different from any that we find in the theoretical realm. This is the variety of freedom that Kant called “autonomy of the will,” “the property by which the will is a law to itself independently of any property of the objects of volition.”<sup>10</sup>

This has implications for whether all reasons could be agent-neutral. Following Fichte, I shall suggest that it is possible for us to acquire a conception of ourselves as autonomous and, consequently, possible for autonomy of the will to be realized, only through reciprocal recognition of (agent-relative) claims we can make on one another as free (autonomous) and rational. In making and entertaining claims *second-personally*, we implicitly recognize reciprocally an authority to make, and a freedom to act on, reasons that are rooted in our capacity to make and entertain such claims. It is a general fact about claim-based reasons that they are grounded, not in any proposition concerning how the world should be, hence, not in Moorean intrinsic value, but in relationships of authority that obtain between agents. So reasons for acting could not possibly be grounded in something agent-neutral in the way that reasons for belief are ultimately responsible to a believer-neutral world. The very acknowledgment of the kind of freedom that makes the open question possible itself depends on a recognition of agent-relative claims we can make on one another as free and rational beings.

## I. CONSTRUCTING MOOREAN INTRINSIC VALUE

### A. *The Good*

In this section I shall lay out the contours of Moore’s claim that the concept of good is “the *only* simple object of thought which is peculiar to Ethics” (sec. 5, p. 57). By ‘good’, Moore says he means the “unique object—the unique property” we have before our minds when we say that something has “intrinsic value,” “intrinsic worth,” or “that a thing ought to exist” (sec. 13, p. 68). To the latter, Moore sometimes adds “for its own sake,” as in “it ought to exist for its own sake, is good in itself or has intrinsic value” (Pr1, p. 34).

This already brings out an important feature of Moore’s conception, namely, that the good is what ought *to exist*: “When we assert that a thing is good, what we mean is that its existence or reality is good” (sec. 70, p. 171). This is reinforced by Moore’s famous “isolation test.” A’s being better than B amounts to its being the case that, as Moore

10. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor, with an introduction by Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 89, Ak. P. 440.

put it in *Ethics*, “it would be better that A exist quite alone than that B exist quite alone.”<sup>11</sup> It follows that for Moore what most fundamentally possesses intrinsic value is a *state of affairs*. Or, to be even more precise, the normative proposition entailed by a thing’s having intrinsic value is that the state of its existing ought to obtain. If something has intrinsic value, it follows that the world ought to be such that it exists.

In the next section, we shall consider how to understand such ought to be’s, but we can accept them at face value for the moment. What I wish to draw attention to now is that the *state*-regarding character of Moore’s characterization is an optional aspect of a conception of intrinsic value. There are various ways of regarding something as intrinsically valuable that do not reduce to, or even arguably entail, the proposition that that thing ought to exist. Kantian respect for a person as an end in herself is surely a form of intrinsic valuation. But it is not reducible to the proposition that the person ought to exist, and it may not even entail it. Benevolent concern for someone for her own sake is arguably another form of intrinsic valuation, but neither does it reduce to, nor even arguably entail, the proposition that the person’s existing is a state that ought to be. In caring for someone, we properly want her to exist if, but *only* if, that is good for *her*. If she is facing the misery of a terminal illness with a terrible, personality-altering decline, one would hardly think that caring for her necessarily commits one to thinking she should continue to exist. It can be replied, of course, that someone who cares for someone values the state of her flourishing and thinks that state should exist. That is so, but it will also be true that the person values the state of the other’s flourishing *because* he values *her* intrinsically (in caring for her for her sake). His valuing her does not reduce to his valuing the state of her flourishing.<sup>12</sup>

In a moment, we shall consider how Moore deploys his conception in his view of the structure of ethical thought. First, however, we should ask what Moore means in calling such values “intrinsic.” This is something about which Moore later claimed to have been unclear in *Principia*, but which he attempted to clarify in a preface to a projected second edition and, at greater length, in “The Conception of Intrinsic Value.” In the preface, Moore exercises himself over what he meant, or could have meant, by claiming that good is neither analyzable, nor natural, nor metaphysical. He concludes that what he really wanted, or should have wanted, to say can be summed up in two propositions:

11. G. E. Moore, *Ethics* (New York: Oxford University, 1965), p. 39.

12. This is an important theme in Elizabeth Anderson’s *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 26–30. I defend an account of welfare inspired by this insight in *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

PROPOSITION 1: G [good] is a property which depends only on the intrinsic nature of the things which possess it.

PROPOSITION 2: Though G [good] thus depends only on the intrinsic properties of things which possess it, and is, in that sense, an intrinsic kind of value, it is yet not itself an intrinsic property (Pr2, p. 22).

The motivation for proposition 1 may be obvious from *Principia's* formulation that what is good in the relevant sense is what ought to exist "for its own sake." Moore adds that proposition 1 is implicit also in *Principia's* claims that intrinsic value judgments are "if true at all, . . . all of them universally true" (sec. 17, p. 75) and that "a judgment that asserts that a thing is good in itself . . . if true of one instance of the thing in question, is necessarily true of all" (sec. 18, p. 78, Pr2, p. 22). Evidently, his idea is that something can be such that it ought to exist (or that the state of its existing ought to be) just by virtue of what it is only if its having that property depends only on its intrinsic properties.<sup>13</sup> Whether something has intrinsic value, then, depends only on *its* nature. This is what necessitates agent-neutrality. That some state ought intrinsically to exist is independent of all relational facts, including all facts about the state's relation to the agent.

But despite its dependence only on the intrinsic nature of what has it, Moore claims that intrinsic value also differs from any other intrinsic-nature-dependent property in not being itself an intrinsic property (Pr2, p. 23). This is the claim that most closely replaces *Principia's* doctrine that good is a nonnatural (and nonmetaphysical) property. Although proposition 1 rules out *extrinsic* naturalist theories such as "'A is good' means 'A is pleasant'" (and analogous extrinsic metaphysical theories such as 'A is loved by God'), it does not exclude *intrinsic* naturalist theories like "'A is good' means 'A is a state of pleasure'" (CIV, p. 296). Proposition 2 rules this out, since being a state of pleasure is an intrinsic property, and, according to proposition 2, good is not.

Proposition 2 is also the claim most closely connected to the open question and related arguments. Moore says that it is what he was trying to get at with *Principia's* claim that "so far as the meaning of good goes, anything whatever may be good" (sec. 14, p. 72, Pr2, p. 22). In the preface to the second edition, Moore doesn't attempt to justify proposition 2. In "The Conception of Intrinsic Value," however, he adds some further reflections.<sup>14</sup> The idea there is that evaluative predicates are properties of a different *kind*: "Intrinsic properties seem to *describe*

13. By "intrinsic properties," Moore says he means those that are such that "it is immediately obvious, with regard to that property that, if one thing, A, possessed it, and another thing B, did not possess it, A and B could not possibly be alike" (Pr2, p. 22).

14. Moore endorsed these years later when he wrote his replies in Schilpp, ed., pp. 585–92.

the intrinsic nature of what possesses them in a sense in which predicates of value never do.”<sup>15</sup>

This way of putting the point seems tailor-made for noncognitivist or other expressivist purposes. Moore doesn’t say what description is to be contrasted with, but it is hard not to substitute something like expression or prescription. Presently, I will sketch what may be another way of supporting proposition 2 that lacks these implications.<sup>16</sup> However, I will argue in the next section that it makes Moore vulnerable on another front, namely, to the sort of criticism toward which I gestured in the introduction.

Valuation, of whatever kind, calls for reasons or grounds. If anything is good, it must therefore be in virtue of properties that make it good, properties that are reasons for valuing it. The same holds with intrinsic value. What is intrinsically good is what ought to exist for its own sake. In other words, any intrinsic-value-making property must be an intrinsic property. What has intrinsic value is good simply *in virtue of* what it is or is like, that is, for reasons drawn entirely from its intrinsic nature. Equivalently, to hold something to be intrinsically valuable is to suppose that its value is grounded in or supported by reasons drawn exclusively from its intrinsic properties or nature.

This means that intrinsic value is the property of there being reasons to value a thing that are drawn from that thing’s intrinsic properties. Suppose now that intrinsic value could be an intrinsic property. If that were so, then it would be impossible for anything’s intrinsic value ever to depend on its *whole* intrinsic nature. The reason is that if something’s intrinsic value were itself an intrinsic property, then, since intrinsic value itself depends on a thing’s intrinsic properties *other* than intrinsic value itself, it would have to depend only on a proper subset of its intrinsic properties. But nothing in our idea of intrinsic value seems to rule out the possibility of something being an organic whole in the sense of its intrinsic value depending on all of its intrinsic properties. So this seems to be a *reductio* of the idea that intrinsic value is itself an intrinsic property, vindicating proposition 2.

### B. The Right

By saying that the good or intrinsic value is “the only simple object of thought that is peculiar to Ethics,” Moore was saying two things, at least:

15. Moore, CIV, p. 297. He adds: “If you could enumerate all the intrinsic properties a given thing possessed, you would have given a complete description of it, and would not need to mention any predicates of value it possessed” (p. 297). Moore rejects this latter formulation as “certainly false” in “Reply,” for reasons we need not go into (p. 585).

16. Moore, CIV, p. 297. For something like this line of thought, see W. D. Falk, “Fact, Value, and Nonnatural Predication,” in *Ought, Reasons, and Morality* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 99–122.



first, that good is unanalyzable, and, second, that it is the only unanalyzable *ethical* property or concept. *Principia's* main argument for unanalyzability is the open question, which we will discuss in the next section. But the claim that it is the only such ethical concept derives from Moore's reductionism about the right, about ought *to do*. I earlier quoted Moore's breathtaking remark that "to assert that a certain line of conduct is, at a given time, absolutely right or obligatory is obviously to assert that more good or less evil will exist in the world, if it be adopted than if anything else be done instead" (sec. 17, p. 77). In chapter 5, Moore returns to this theme, allowing that while he has already "briefly shewn" it, it is nonetheless "important to insist that this fundamental point is demonstrably certain" (sec. 89, p. 197). He proceeds, then, to give the following demonstration.

1. To say that an action at a time is an agent's "absolute duty" is to say that "the performance of that action is unique in respect of value."
2. A dutiful action cannot possibly be unique in respect of value in the sense of being the only valuable thing (since "*every* such action would [then] be the *sole* good thing, which is a manifest contradiction").
3. A dutiful action cannot possibly be unique in respect of value in the sense "that it has more intrinsic value than anything else in the world" ("since *every* act of duty would then be the *best* thing in the world, which is also a contradiction").
4. Therefore, the only sense in which the performance of an action can possibly be unique in respect of value is "that the whole world will be better, if it be performed, than if any possible alternative were taken." (Sec. 89, p. 197)

From premise 1 and 4 together, it follows that an action's being an agent's absolute duty is equivalent to its being the case that the world would be better were the action performed than if the agent were to do anything else she could.

Earlier I said that Moore's reductionism about rightness and ought to do insinuates a purely instrumental view of action. Since Moore allows for the possibility that an action might have intrinsic value, this may seem unfair. But I don't think it is. The reason can be seen by noticing that the argument equivocates on the evaluation of action. The sense in which premise 1 is true (at least in one direction) is that if an agent has an absolute duty to do something then it follows that that would be the best thing for her *to do*, that it is the best *act* of those available. In premises 2 through 4, however, most obviously in premise 4, Moore slides to a different kind of evaluation, namely, his broader category of intrinsic value. In *this* sense, an act's having intrinsic value consists in

its being true that the state of its being performed ought to *be*. But plainly someone might affirm premise 1 in the sense already mentioned, namely, that the act is the best thing *to do*, without any commitment to whether the state of its being performed is the best state *to happen* or exist.

Although there is a sense in which Moore allows for the possibility of an act's being good in itself, strictly speaking, it is the state of the act's being performed that has value. This may seem a fussy distinction. After all, Moore can say that the act itself has value, that it is *the act* that ought to exist. What is the difference between saying that the act ought to exist and that the state of affairs of the act's being performed ought to exist? But that is just the point. There is no difference. Moore treats the evaluation of action as an evaluation of it *as existent*, as something that can exist, be, or happen. This reduces ought to do's to ought to be's. The sense in which even acts that have Moorean intrinsic value are seen in purely instrumental terms is that their value *as an action* is reckoned entirely in terms of their power to bring about intrinsically valuable *existents* or states, including, perhaps, the intrinsically valuable state of that very act's being performed.

This is the deplorable view of action against which I mean to argue. What states should exist is an "agent-neutral" question. Even if the most natural description of an act or the agent's reason is agent-relative, the question of whether the state of the act's being performed, or being performed for that reason, ought to exist is not itself agent-relative but agent-neutral. If we ask, for example, whether someone's caring for her children, or benefiting a child because it is hers, ought to exist for its own sake, the grounds for answering *that* question will not themselves be agent-relative. If it is a good thing that Jesse helps his children then it will likewise be a good thing that Mervis helps hers.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, "What to do?" is in its nature an *agent-relative question*. It is the question of what *the agent* should do. Moore doesn't deny this in a sense. It is just that he holds that its agent-relativity is restricted to an *instrumental*, causal question concerning the consequences of all actions in the agent's power. These are not, however, normative issues. According to Moore, the only ethical issues that agents ever face are agent-neutral: what states *should be*?

## II. DECONSTRUCTING MOOREAN INTRINSIC VALUE

To begin to "deconstruct" Moore's conception of intrinsic value, I wish to start with his description of its normativity. Moore says that what is

17. This is not to deny that some evaluations of what should be are evaluator-relative or, even, that the agent's own evaluations of what should be are distinctively relevant to what he should do.

intrinsically valuable is what “ought to exist for its own sake.” But what can this mean? Oughts gain their sense from norms. Of course, we can say of some event that it ought to happen in one sense and simply mean that its happening follows from the laws of nature and initial conditions (as we believe them to be), as in, “the car ought to start.”<sup>18</sup> But there is nothing normative in such a statement. A normative judgment must appeal to some norm that the thing to which it applies can accord with or violate. And for us to speak sensibly of norm violation, we must be able to conceive of the possibility of norm guidance. A norm that is impossible to follow or flout can hardly provide a normative standard. Only what can be regulated by norms, therefore, can be subject to normative judgment.<sup>19</sup>

Now this doesn't mean that the only oughts are ought to do's. Normative guidance need not be voluntary, and there is much that we judge normatively and regulate by norms other than action, for example, reasoning, beliefs, choices, emotions, responses, feelings, intentions, and attitudes.<sup>20</sup> But it does mean that there could not be a *brute* ought to *be* that is genuinely normative and, hence, relevant to ethics (unlike the ought in the “car ought to start now”).<sup>21</sup> The state of something's existing can be the object of various attitudes, and we can sometimes say that a state ought to be, thereby expressing a normative judgment about that attitude. But, even here, not all ought to be's will be equally relevant to ethics, at least as it has traditionally been construed. For example, I can say “the car ought to start” (that the car's starting ought to be) and mean that we ought to believe, or expect, that it will start. This is a genuinely normative judgment but not an ethical judgment as traditionally conceived.

Of course, we could understand ethics to include the “ethics of

18. On this point, see Roger Wertheimer, *The Significance of Sense: Meaning, Modality, and Morality* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972).

19. A fortiori, only what exists can be subject to normative judgment. This, I think, is what lies behind Prichard's somewhat curious remark that “only something which is can be something which ought, or ought not, to exist. To say, e.g., that a feeling of generosity which I am not having ‘ought’ to exist is to say nothing, just because ex hypothesi there is nothing here for ‘being something which ought to exist’ to be attributed to” (H. A. Prichard, “Moral Obligation,” in *Moral Obligation and Duty and Interest* [London: Oxford University Press, 1968], p. 163).

20. I am indebted here to Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

21. I take this claim also to be related to Scanlon's “buck-passing” account of value, according to which “to call something valuable is to say that it has other properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it.” That the relevant reasons must be for action, as opposed also to attitudes of other kinds, seems too narrow, but otherwise the ideas are quite similar. See T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 96.

belief,” but then we would need some other way of marking off the narrower ethical sense with which Moore is obviously concerned from a broader one that is coextensive with the normative. The only way of doing this, so far as I can see, is to look to the specific items—emotions, actions, attitudes, and so on—of which normative judgments are made. To take an obvious case, one can desire that something exist. So we might say that that state ought to be, meaning that its obtaining ought to be desired, that it is desirable. Or we might mean that that state is worth caring about. Or that it is worthy of concern from a particular perspective, say, the moral point of view. However we understand it, the lesson is that we must in the end understand ought to be’s as elliptical and underspecified, requiring completion by reference to something that can be normatively regulated, for example, some attitude or agent-state.

There is a place in his preface to *Principia*’s projected second edition, where Moore seems dimly to glimpse the problem. He is trying to specify the sense of ‘good’ he means to be discussing in *Principia*. This is what he says. “I can say, for the present, that the predicate I am concerned with is *that* sense of the word ‘good,’ which has to the conceptions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong,’ a relation, which makes it *the* sense which is of the most fundamental importance to Ethics” (Pr2, p. 5).

This implicitly takes ethics to be most centrally concerned with questions of conduct. In so marking out good, Moore evidently means to be discussing whatever is relevant to what an agent ought to do. Of course, his position is that the only thing thus relevant is which states an action might bring about are such as “ought to exist.” The upshot of our reasoning in this section, however, is that this latter question must itself be understood in terms of what states are such that they ought to be the object of some action-relevant attitude, like desire, respect, benevolent concern, caring about or deeming important, and so on.

Once we appreciate that ought to be’s must be interpreted in terms of an ought to X, where X is something that can be normatively regulated, we are in a position to see three further points. First, if what is ultimately in question (as Moore suggests in the above passage) is what an agent ought to do, then the fact that something ought to be in some relevant sense, say, that it is desirable, will have relevance only to the extent that norms for that attitude (say desire) are appropriately implicated in norms for action.<sup>22</sup> Second, there is a deep sense in which normative guidance is *always* an “agent-relative” matter—using ‘agent’ in an artificially broad sense, to encompass believer, desirer, and so on, that is, a being as subject to norms of a certain kind. It is doing as *one* ought, believing as *one* ought, and so on.

22. In John Skorupski’s terms, there must be “bridge principles” between the relevant norms. See his *Ethical Explorations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 42–48.

Third, although this doesn't entail that the norms with which one must comply are *themselves* agent-relative rather than agent-neutral, there is no reason to think that all norms underlying ought to do's must be agent-neutral.<sup>23</sup> Even ought to be's, we have seen, require completion by norms for some specific attitude or other, which then must be appropriately linked to a norm of action. Whether the resulting action norm is agent-neutral will depend very much on the relevant attitude. Take personal values, for example. Someone may sensibly value some state (and judge that it ought to be) from his own point of view even though another person is sensibly indifferent from hers. Here it seems very unlikely that the relevant norm of action could be agent-neutral. The agent's own personal values seem to have a relevance to what she should do that others' don't.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, even if there were such a thing as a state's oughting to exist for its own sake, which, as it were, commanded every relevant attitude toward it, it *still* wouldn't follow that all valid norms of action are agent-neutral. There might be other valid norms that are agent-relative.

At this point, we may seem to have gotten far afield from the letter and spirit of Moorean intrinsic value. Surely personal values have little to do with intrinsic value as Moore understood it. Part of Moore's point, indeed, was to sketch a conception of intrinsic value that would reveal "subjectivity" to be but one species of extrinsicity that a proper conception would eschew (CIV, pp. 280–85). It is part of the very idea of intrinsic value, Moore insists, that it depends only on the intrinsic properties of that which has it. When we regard something as a personal value for someone, we reckon its value as based to some extent on its relation to him.

Nonetheless, any defensible conception of intrinsic value must maintain some normative tie to the valuer. Our lesson so far has been that there is no such thing as a brute ought to be and, consequently, that if intrinsic value is to be a normative notion, it will have to be

23. Clearly one that is uncontroversial and agent-relative is the norm of instrumental reasoning: that an agent must either take the necessary means to her end or give up the end. This is irrelevant, however, to whether there are any agent-relative reasons for acting, since instrumental reason is purely a consistency norm which is silent on what considerations give agents reasons for acting. On this point, see my "Because I Want It," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 18 (2001): 136–38, and *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 15–17, 43–50; John Broome, "Normative Requirements," *Ratio* 12 (1999): 398–419; Christine Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason," in *Ethics and Practical Reason*, ed. Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 215–54; Patricia Greenspan, "Conditional Oughts and Hypothetical Imperatives," *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975): 259–76; and R. M. Hare, "Wanting: Some Pitfalls," in *Agent, Action, and Reason*, ed. Robert Binkley, Richard Brunaugh, and Ausonio Marras (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1971), pp. 81–127.

24. Of course, this is impossible in Moore's scheme.

interpreted in terms of a normative connection to some valuing attitude or agent-state and, ultimately, to some norm of action. Moreover, there are good reasons for Moore to want intrinsic value to be intrinsically normative, additional even to the obvious one that it is hard to see how it could be intrinsically relevant to ethics otherwise. We have already seen Moore saying that the sense of 'good' he means to be discussing in *Principia* is that which is specifically relevant to what is right to do. Even more significantly, Moore might be thought implicitly to *rely* on the intrinsic normativity of good in his arguments to the conclusion that it cannot be identified with any natural or metaphysical property.

Take the open question argument, for example. Moore's formulation is somewhat different from the form in which the argument has come down to us. He starts with a proposed analytic reduction of good as what we desire to desire. On the assumption, then, that A is something we desire to desire, Moore notes that we can intelligibly ask whether "It is good to desire to desire A?" and see that this question manifestly differs from the "complicated" question, "Do we desire to desire to desire to desire A?" (sec. 13, p. 67). Neither is it the same as "Is it good that A should be good." What we usually call the "open question argument" is actually closer to what might be termed the "different question" argument in Moore's text. Moore imagines the hypothetical analytical reduction, "Pleasure is the good," and notes that we can easily convince ourselves that the question "Is pleasure . . . after all good?" is a different question from whether pleasure is pleasant (sec. 13, p. 68).

Moore takes these arguments to show that goodness or intrinsic value cannot be analytically reduced to any intrinsic properties (as he will later put it) of that which has it. And, as we've seen, he goes further in "The Conception of Intrinsic Value," saying that good is a different *kind* of predicate or property than any intrinsic property. I agree with Moore that we should find these reflections plausible and compelling, but I also agree with Frankena that they are so only to the extent that we take Moorean intrinsic good to be an explicitly normative property: "To my mind, what makes ethical judgments seem irreducible to natural or metaphysical judgments is their apparently normative character; that is, the fact that they seem to be saying of some agent that he ought to do something."<sup>25</sup>

There are places, moreover, where it seems clear that Moore himself is making this very assumption. He imagines someone proposing that a naturalist could say that, in identifying good with pleasant, he was merely recording common usage. Moore responds: "Nor do I think that any exponent of naturalistic Ethics would be willing to allow that this was all he meant. They are all so anxious to persuade us that what they

25. Frankena, p. 102.

call good is what we really ought to do. 'Do pray act so, because the word "good" is generally used to denote actions of this nature': such, on this view, would be the substance of their teaching. And in so far as they tell us how we ought to act, their teaching is truly ethical."<sup>26</sup>

It would seem, then, that Moore must accept that intrinsic value is an explicitly normative property. But if what we have said about the impossibility of a brute ought to be is correct, then intrinsic value's normativity must be constituted by its relation to norms of valuing attitudes and action. If there is a fundamental ethical notion, it is much likelier that Sidgwick is correct in saying that it is "represented by the word 'ought'," than Moore is in claiming it to be intrinsic value.

It follows further that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value, between values that depend only on the intrinsic properties of what has it, and those that depend also on extrinsic properties must be drawn *within* such norms. When we say that something is intrinsically valuable solely because of, or in virtue of, its intrinsic nature, we should understand the relevant 'because' and 'in virtue of' *normatively*, that is, as asserting that its intrinsic nature provides reasons *for* so valuing it. We should say, as Falk would have put it, that it is something that would be so valued on a *proper review* of its intrinsic properties.<sup>27</sup>

Let us assume that some notion of intrinsic value with associated agent-neutral reasons can be vindicated in this way.<sup>28</sup> From this, it would not follow that all reasons for acting would be thus agent-neutral, and in Section IV, I will explore some reasons for thinking that some, at least, must be agent-relative. Moore's grounds for thinking that all reasons are agent-neutral are his views that, ultimately, intrinsic value attaches to *states* and that action is simply an instrument for bringing valuable states about. But why should we think this? First, as we've noted, there are many ways of valuing something intrinsically, that is, just on account of its intrinsic properties, that don't amount to valuing any state (even if they can standardly involve valuing states). Respect, veneration, love, cherishing, and sympathy or benevolent concern are all ways of valuing something intrinsically which do not reduce to valuing the state of that thing's existence.

Second, we can see that action cannot be *defined* as instrumental,

26. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, sec. 11, pp. 63–64. Note again here Moore's specific interest in good as it relates to "what we really ought to do."

27. Falk.

28. I cannot here explore important complications regarding how fully intrinsic or agent-neutral such reasons might be. For example, even if the reason is facially agent-neutral, its recognition might require some background sensitivity in such a way that it makes sense to see the reason as holding only for agents with that sensitivity. If so, we might see this as a degree of agent-relativity or extrinsicality. For some discussion see Darwall, *Impartial Reason*, pt. 3.

and reasons for action defined as reasons to bring about intrinsically valuable states, in the way Moore supposes, because any such definition *will itself be vulnerable to a form of the open question argument*. We can know of an action “that the whole world will be better, if it be performed, than if any possible alternative were taken” and still sensibly ask whether there might be (agent-relative) reasons to act otherwise. Moore’s own most powerful argument thus shows why it must be conceptually possible for there to be agent-relative reasons.

### III. A DISANALOGY BETWEEN THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL REASON

I want now to work toward an argument that at least some reasons for acting must be agent-relative. The argument depends on a fundamental contrast between theoretical and practical reason that the open question argument helps to illustrate.

Belief, by its very nature, is responsible to an independent reality. Belief aims to represent an objective world in a believer-neutral way. Even when what is believed is something about the believer, say, “that I believe that P,” that fact, call it Q, is represented as true independently of the believer’s relation to it (Q). Moreover, belief is *regulated* by an independent truth. Unlike, for example, an assumption that P, a belief that P is *mistaken* when P is false, even if an assumed proposition is no less false than is a believed one. Of course, what reasons people have to believe things about the world depend in many ways on where they stand in relation to it. But ultimately their reasons must be grounded in something that is independent of their stance, namely, what is the case believer-neutrally. Our beliefs are simply the world (including our place in it) as seen from our perspective, and what we have reason to believe depends ultimately on our relation to the truth of the world as it actually is.

The Moorean conception of practical reasons as rooted in intrinsic value is a practical analogue of this picture. Moorean intrinsic value is roughly the world as it *should be*. So if all reasons for acting are grounded, as Moore believes, in intrinsic value, they must ultimately be independent of our relation to it as well. To be sure, what specific actions an agent has reason to perform will depend, for Moore, on where she stands, but the *ethical* facts on which that depends, how the world should be, are entirely independent of her relation to it; they are agent-neutral. The only way that agent-relative facts about *her* can enter in is as *nonethical* facts concerning what she can do to produce states whose normative claim on her is agent-neutral.

Now it is important to see that this picture actually fits pretty well the way that things seem from the naïve first-person perspective of an agent with desires. Desires have possible states as objects. Moreover, to



an agent with the desire that P, it will seem that the world should be such that P.<sup>29</sup> If I want the world to be without hunger, then it will be to me as if the world should be without hunger. Or if I just want not to be hungry myself, it will be to me as if *my* not being hungry would be good, that is, that the world should be such that the person in it identical to me is not hungry.<sup>30</sup> It wouldn't be far wrong to say that our desires give us the world as it should be, seen from their (our desires') point of view. What's more, to an agent viewing the world simply from his desires' perspective, it will seem that the question of what to do is identical with the question of which acts would produce those states. *Moore's purely instrumental conception of agency, therefore, seems adequate from the naïve first-person perspective of a desiring agent.*

Nevertheless, the open question can be turned against any attempt to model, in this way, practical reasons on theoretical reason. In the theoretical case, the bearing of facts, truth, and objective probability on what we should believe follows from the nature of belief. Belief is like other theoretical "representative" attitudes in representing the world as being a certain way. But belief is unlike other representative attitudes in also being regulated by truth. As Velleman puts it, "when someone believes a proposition . . . his acceptance of it is regulated in ways designed to promote acceptance of the truth," whereas, when "someone assumes a proposition, he or his cognitive faculties are disposed to regulate his acceptance of it in ways designed to promote the ends of argument or inquiry."<sup>31</sup> Owing to the nature of belief, therefore, it is not an open question whether objective truth and probability bear on what we have reason to believe. Still, the concepts of truth and objective probability differ from the normative concept of what one ought to believe, or even of that which is normatively relevant to what one should believe, since the claim that they bear on what we should believe differs from the empty tautology that what bears on what we should believe bears on what we should believe. For this reason, Velleman says that, whereas believing as we ought is belief's "formal aim," truth is belief's "substantive aim."<sup>32</sup>

The situation is different in the practical case. The open question argument shows that no evaluative or practical attitude is like belief in this respect. Evaluative and practical attitudes do, like belief, have their respective "formal aims." The formal aim of desire is the desirable (what we should desire), of choice, the choiceworthy (what we should choose),

29. I draw here from my "Because I Want It."

30. From this naïve perspective, the reason will seem to be agent-neutral, as if there is a reason for anyone to relieve my hunger.

31. J. David Velleman, "The Guise of the Good," *Nous* 16 (1992): 14.

32. J. David Velleman, "The Possibility of Practical Reason," *Ethics* 106 (1996): 714–15.

and so on. But unlike belief, no evaluative or practical attitude has a “substantive aim,” like truth, which can be understood independently of norms for the relevant attitude and which closes the normative question of what to value or choose.<sup>33</sup> For anything characterized in non-normative terms, we can sensibly ask whether there is any reason to choose or pursue it, or deny without contradiction or conceptual confusion that there is any reason to do so.

Now Moorean intrinsic value is not nonnormative. Still, the notion of states that ought to exist for their own sake, in the sense, let us say, of states that we ought to value or desire simply by virtue of their intrinsic properties, is substantive with respect to norms for action. The claim that we ought only to act to promote such states differs from the empty tautology that we ought to do what we ought to do. However, the reflections at the end of the last section show that, even if intrinsic value can be vindicated, it cannot provide a “quasi-substantive aim” of choice and action. As agents, we have a freedom that we simply do not have as believers. We can step back from any perspective given us even by our most critically informed desires and sensibly ask whether what we have reason to do is just to promote valuable states (as they will seem from our desires’ perspective).<sup>34</sup> And we can assert without contradiction or conceptual confusion that this is not so, that there are other, agent-relative reasons. It follows that, unlike theoretical reason, practical reason is responsible to no external goal or standard which logically closes sensible deliberation. Reasons for acting can be grounded nowhere but within norms of free practical reflection itself.

#### IV. FREE AGENCY AND AGENT-RELATIVE CLAIMS AND REASON

With this contrast between theoretical and practical reason in hand, I want briefly in this final section to sketch a line of argument for the claim that all reasons for acting could not be agent-neutral. To begin, I want to call attention to a particular kind of agent-relative reason, or, more carefully, putative reason, namely, those rooted in *claims*. Examples of *claim-based reasons* include reasons created by rights, orders, requests, demands, and, of course, claims.<sup>35</sup>

Claim-based reasons have an important *second-personal* aspect—it is possible for one agent to *give* a claim-based reason to another (*make* a claim on another) by a distinctive second-personal address that has no

33. This use of “substantive aim” may be an adaptation of Velleman’s.

34. Even, indeed, if we credit those appearances. That the appeal of the open question argument is deeply related to freedom is an important theme of Connie Rosati’s “Naturalism, Normativity, and the Open Question Argument,” *Nous* 29 (1995): 46–70.

35. In what follows, I draw heavily on claims and arguments developed further in “Because I Want It.”

analogue in the case of reasons for belief. Consider, first, how one person can give another a reason to believe something. If someone tells you that P, that can give you a reason to think that P only if the interaction somehow gives you evidence that P. The clearest case is where what the person says is evidence. But it is also possible for someone to give you a reason to believe that P just by telling you "P." Even in this case, however, the telling must give you evidence; the reason must derive ultimately from something believer-neutral. If you have no reason to treat what someone says or her saying it as evidence of the truth of what she says independently of her believing it, she can give you no reason to believe what she says.<sup>36</sup>

Consider now two different ways in which one person might try to give another a reason to do something. Suppose you are in pain because my foot is on your toe. One way in which you might try to give me a reason to move my foot is by getting me to see that your being in pain is a bad thing, an intrinsically disvaluable state. Were you able to get me to have a sympathetic desire, for example, I would then view your being in pain as a state the world ought not to be in. In recognizing *this* reason, I would acknowledge an agent-neutral reason anyone might have for relieving your pain. Equally important, my acknowledging the reason might not depend in any way on my taking you to have standing to make any claim on me or a fortiori on my taking you to be actually making a claim. So far, your attempting to *give* me the reason would be, at best, of evidential significance.

This parallels the transfer of reasons for belief. You are able to give me a practical reason here by transferring a kind of apparent epistemic access, in this case, to an agent-neutral value through desire rather than belief. There is, however, another way in which you might try to give me a reason to remove my foot that lacks any parallel in the theoretical case. You might make a *claim*—a request or, perhaps, a demand that I move my foot. Such a claim would not appeal to an agent-neutral value and, consequently, would require no sympathetic desire to experience

36. It is consistent with this that in *telling* someone something, addressing him second-personally, the addresser may be able to give the addressee a reason for believing what the addresser says that that addressee wouldn't have had if the addresser's saying it were considered only third-personally, as a mere assertion. Telling something to someone may give them reasons for belief they wouldn't have had but for this second-personal address owing to a relation of trust. (I am indebted here to Edward S. Hinchman.) But even if it is possible for one person to give another a distinctive "fiduciary" reason second-personally, this reason is ultimately parasitic on evidence in the usual way. If the addressee has no reason to think that the addresser's beliefs have some reliable relation to the truth, nothing the addresser could tell the addressee could give him reason to believe anything. And perhaps, being told something brings one into a second-personal relation to the teller that gives one a kind of evidence about his sincerity that one cannot have from a third-personal point of view.

or appreciate. You would not be saying that your feeling pain is a bad thing that there is reason for anyone to prevent or alter. Rather, you would be making an agent-relative claim *on me*, from one free and rational agent to another, that *I* forbear or cease causing *you* pain. And in this case, unlike the other, I might reasonably regard your capacity to *give* me the reason in this way, through second-personal address, as relevant to the reason, for example, as essential to a framework of reasonable mutual accountability required to give the reason currency. And I might agree that, as this is a reasonable claim for one free and rational agent to make of another (say, because it would be sensible for anyone to make it in the same situation), there is, indeed, a reason for me to move my foot.

Such a demand or request would be an instance of the distinctive way that one person (or body) can give another a reason for acting, not by virtue of transferring epistemic access in the way we do with theoretical reasons, but through an *authoritative expression of will*. Other examples include legislation, edicts, and orders. When a sergeant orders her platoon to fall in, her charges don't take it that the reason she gives them derives from the value of a state of affairs, their falling in, that she has revealed to them by her order. The reason depends, rather, on the nature of their relationship and the sergeant's authority to address them in this second-personal way and make demands on her platoon's conduct.

Claims and claim-based reasons have several important features. First, they are addressed second-personally, purporting to give addressees' reasons in the distinctive way we have described. Second, the reason purports to be agent-relative. It is addressed to the agent himself, purporting to be a reason for compliance that is not reducible to the agent-neutral value of any state, even the state of agents' complying with this and equally worthy claims. Third, the reason purports to be categorical, not requiring any desire of the addressee for its force. Fourth, because the reason is independent of the agent-neutral value of any state, it purports also to be independent of anything the addressee might require some desire to himself experience or appreciate (as sympathy might be required for me to appreciate the agent-neutral disvalue of your pain). Fourth, claims are implicitly presented as valid or, at least, as warranting the consideration of those to whom they are addressed. Fifth, in making claims addressers implicitly claim the authority to make or put them forward. Sixth, addressers implicitly acknowledge that addressees have the requisite authority and capacity to consider, recognize, and act on the reasons they purport thereby to give them. And seventh, when addressees give consideration to claims "second personally," they reciprocally acknowledge addressers' authority to propose them.

These last two features are at the heart of Fichte's thesis that agents

can acquire a conception of themselves as free and rational only when they entertain a claim or “summons” (*Aufforderung*) that is addressed to them by another agent.<sup>37</sup> Since claims purport to give categorical reasons that are fully independent of desire, to address a claim is implicitly to address someone as rational and free, as capable of recognizing and acting on reasons that are independent of desire or of anything (an agent-neutral value) of which it might take something like a desire to have a phenomenal presentation. Moreover, if the addressee “takes up” the address, even if only to consider it, in “second-personal space,” it is then commonly presupposed between addresser and addressee that the addressee *can* act on it if he finds it reasonable. It is commonly presupposed, that is, that both are free and rational and that this provides the authority to make and consider claims. Second-personal practical address, the distinctive giving of reasons that is possible only in the practical sphere, consequently commits addresser and addressee to a common presupposition of their freedom to act on categorical, agent-relative reasons that derive from claims they commonly acknowledge that free and rational persons have the authority to make.

Suppose that some argument along these lines could be made out to show that an agent can have a conception of himself as free only through a second-personal address that involves a reciprocal commitment to agent-relative reasons. We might then combine this thought with lessons from the open question argument as follows: first, the open question shows that practical reasons can be grounded only within free practical reflection. Unlike reasons for belief, reasons for action cannot be responsible simply to some given, external standard. But, second, *this very argument will be convincing to us only insofar as we see ourselves as free*. From the naïve perspective implicit in our desires, it will seem to us that what action is simply *for* is the realization of the valuable states of which our desires give us appearances. For us to see the question of what we should do still to be logically open (as agreed at the end of Sec. III), we must be able to conceive of the possibility that we could acknowledge other sources of reasons and act on them. But if Fichte’s argument is right, our seeing ourselves as free in this way *already* involves a commitment to agent-relative, claim-based reasons. If, consequently, practical reasons can be grounded nowhere but within free practical reflection, we seem to be committed to such agent-relative reasons.

I began by saying that Moore’s legacy was both laudable and deplorable. We can applaud Moore’s insistence on the irreducibility of

37. J. G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 29–52.

ethics, while deploring his purely instrumental picture of agency and reductionism about normative practical questions. Indeed, if I am right, Moore's very arguments for the former can help us to see why he must have been mistaken about the latter.