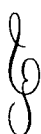


1 by desire; including in that term the repelling influence of
 2 well as the attractive one of pleasure. Let us take into considera-
 3 tion the person who has a confirmed will to do right, but him
 4 that virtuous will is still feeble, conquerable by temptation,
 5 to be fully relied on; by what means can it be strengthened?
 6 the will to be virtuous, where it does not exist in sufficient
 7 implanted or awakened? Only by making the person *desire*
 8 by making him think of it in a pleasurable light, or of its
 9 in a painful one. It is by associating the doing right with
 10, or the doing wrong with pain, or by eliciting and impressing
 11 home to the person's experience the pleasure naturally
 12 in the one or the pain in the other, that it is possible to call
 13 it will to be virtuous, which, when confirmed, acts without any
 14 of either pleasure or pain. Will is the child of desire, and passes
 15 the dominion of its parent only to come under that of habit. That
 16 the result of habit affords no presumption of being intrinsically
 17 and there would be no reason for wishing that the purpose of
 18 should become independent of pleasure and pain, were it not
 19 influence of the pleasurable and painful associations which
 20 to virtue is not sufficiently to be depended on for unerring
 21 of action until it has acquired the support of habit. Both in
 22 and in conduct, habit is the only thing which imparts certainty;
 23 because of the importance to others of being able to rely
 24 on one's feelings and conduct, and to oneself of being able to
 25 one's own, that the will to do right ought to be cultivated into
 26 ritual independence. In other words, this state of the will is a
 27 o good, not intrinsically a good; and does not contradict the
 28 that nothing is a good to human beings but in so far as it is
 29 itself pleasurable, or a means of attaining pleasure or averting

f this doctrine be true, the principle of utility is proved.
 r it is or not must now be left to the consideration of the
 ful reader.

G.E. MOORE*

Criticism of Mill's "Proof"



MILL HAS MADE as naïve and artless a use of the naturalistic fallacy as anybody could desire. "Good," he tells us, means "desirable," and you can only find out what is desirable by seeking to find out what is actually desired. This is, of course, only one step towards the proof of Hedonism; for it may be, as Mill goes on to say, that other things beside pleasure are desired. Whether or not pleasure is the only thing desired is, as Mill himself admits, (p. 58), a psychological question, to which we shall presently proceed. The important step for Ethics is this one just taken, the step which pretends to prove that "good" means "desired."

Well, the fallacy in this step is so obvious, that it is quite wonderful how Mill failed to see it. The fact is that "desirable" does not mean "able to be desired" as "visible" means "able to be seen." The desirable means simply what *ought* to be desired or *deserves* to be desired; just as the detestable means not what can be but what *ought* to be detested and the damnable what deserves to be damned. Mill has, then, smuggled in, under cover of the word "desirable," the very notion about which he ought to be quite clear. 'Desirable' does indeed mean "what it is good to desire"; but when this is understood, it is no longer plausible to say that our only test of *that*, is what is actually desired. Is it merely a tautology when the Prayer Book talks of *good* desires? Are not *bad* desires also possible? Nay, we find Mill himself talking of a "better and nobler object of desire" (p. 10), as if, after all, what is desired were not *ipso facto* good, and good in proportion to the amount it is desired.

Moreover, if the desired is *ipso facto* the good; then the good is *ipso facto* the motive of our actions, and there can be no question of finding motives for doing it, as Mill is at such pains to do. If Mill's explanation of "desirable" be *true*, then his statement (p. 26) that the rule of action may be *confounded* with the motive of it is untrue: for the motive of action will then be according to him *ipso facto* its rule; there can be no distinction between the two, and therefore no confusion, and thus he has contradicted himself flatly. These are specimens of the contradictions, which, as I have tried to shew, must always follow from the use of the naturalistic fallacy; and I hope I need now say no more about the matter.

Well, then, the first step by which Mill has attempted to establish his Hedonism is simply fallacious. He has attempted to establish the identity of the good with the desired, by confusing the proper sense of "desirable," in which it denotes that which it is good to desire, with the sense which it would bear if it were analogous to such words as "visible." If "desirable" is to be identical with "good," then it must bear one sense; and if it is to be identical with "desired," then it must bear quite another sense. And yet to Mill's contention that the desired is necessarily good, it is quite essential that these two senses of "desirable" should be the same. If he holds they are the same, then he has contradicted himself elsewhere; if he holds they are not the same, then the first step in his proof of Hedonism is absolutely worthless. . . .

Mill admits, as I have said, that pleasure is not the only thing we actually desire. "The desire of virtue," he says, "is not as universal, but it is as authentic a fact, as the desire of happiness."¹ And again, "Money is, in many cases, desired in and for itself."² These admissions are, of course, in naked and glaring contradiction with his argument that pleasure is the only thing desirable, because it is the only thing desired. How then does Mill even attempt to avoid this contradiction? His chief argument seems to be that "virtue," "money" and other such objects, when they are thus desired in and for themselves, are desired only as "a part of happiness."³ Now what does this mean? Happiness, as we saw, has been defined by Mill, as "pleasure and the absence of pain." Does Mill mean to say that "money," these actual coins, which he admits to be desired in and for themselves, are a part either of pleasure or of the absence of pain? Will he maintain that those coins themselves are in my mind, and actually a part of my pleasant feelings? If this is to be said, all words are useless: nothing can possibly be distinguished from anything else; if these two things are not distinct, what on earth is? We shall hear next that this table is really and truly

the same thing as this room; that a cab-horse is in fact indistinguishable from St Paul's Cathedral; that this book of Mill's which I hold in my hand, because it was his pleasure to produce it, is now and at this moment a part of the happiness which he felt many years ago and which has so long ceased to be. Pray consider a moment what this contemptible nonsense really means. "Money," says Mill, "is only desirable as a means to happiness." Perhaps so; but what then? "Why," says Mill, "money is undoubtedly desired for its own sake." "Yes, go on," say we. "Well," says Mill, "if money is desired for its own sake, it must be desirable as an end-in-itself: I have said so myself." "Oh," say we, "but you also said just now that it was only desirable as a means." "I own I did," says Mill, "but I will try to patch up matters, by saying that what is only a means to an end, is the same thing as a part of that end." I daresay the public won't notice. And the public haven't noticed. Yet this is certainly what Mill has done. He has broken down the distinction between means and ends, upon the precise observance of which his Hedonism rests. And he has been compelled to do this, because he has failed to distinguish "end" in the sense of what is desirable, from "end" in the sense of what is desired: a distinction which, nevertheless, both the present argument and his whole book presupposes. . . .

Mill, for instance, as we saw, declares: "Each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness" (p. 53). And he offers this as a reason why the general happiness is desirable. We have seen that to regard it as such, involves, in the first place, the naturalistic fallacy. But moreover, even if that fallacy were not a fallacy, it could only be a reason for Egoism and not for Utilitarianism. Mill's argument is as follows: A man desires his own happiness; therefore his own happiness is desirable. Further: A man desires nothing but his own happiness; therefore his own happiness is alone desirable. We have next to remember, that everybody, according to Mill, so desires his own happiness: and then it will follow that everybody's happiness is alone desirable. And this is simply a contradiction in terms.

¹p. 53.

²p. 55.

³pp. 56-57.