

CHAPTER - II

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Moore's rejection and refutation of Idealism finds its first expression in his article "The Refutation of Idealism" which was first published in 1903 in the British Philosophical Journal *Mind*, and republished in his *Philosophical Studies* (1922). In this article Moore expounds and examines critically the doctrine of idealism.

Moore observes that idealism asserts that the universe is 'spiritual'¹. By this it is meant that the universe has in some sense 'consciousness'. Ordinary physical objects like tables, chairs and mountains are not unconscious as we generally suppose but they are supposed to have a degree of consciousness, where as man possesses a higher form of consciousness. Thus there is a difference between the idealistic view and the ordinary view of the world which considers that physical objects are inanimate and unconscious.

Moore holds that 'idealism' is a wider term which includes the proposition that 'Reality is spiritual' as well as a number of other propositions which support this view. One such proposition is 'esse is percipi' (to exist is to be

perceived), which constitutes a necessary and important argument of the idealists. By refuting this proposition, Moore thinks that the entire thesis of idealism could be refuted. He illustrates his position as follows. If we have three propositions say 'P is Q', 'Q is R' and 'R is S', it could be concluded that 'P is S'. Among these three propositions if 'P is Q', is false, though the other two propositions, 'Q is R', and 'R is S' are true, the conclusion 'P is S' becomes false. Similarly, if the argument 'esse is percipi' is false, even though the other arguments of idealism are true, the thesis of idealism, invariably becomes false, because 'esse is percipi' is the basic proposition of idealism.

Hence Moore chooses to demonstrate the falsity involved in the dictum 'esse is percipi', in order to refute idealism.

According to the doctrine of 'esse is percipi', objects exist as long as they are perceived. For instance, the existence of a table in one's room may be taken. The table exists as long as one perceives it. Even if he ceases to perceive it, the table could still exist since it is perceived by another mind. If no human mind perceives

the table, still its existence could be explained due to the perception of the divine mind (God). If no mind - human or divine, perceives the table, it means that the table does not exist. In short, the idealists reduce the existence of material objects to the mind and its awareness; independent of the mind and its observation no object could exist. This idealist position is reflected in its cryptic expression 'esse is percipi'. Moore challenges this position.

Referring to this doctrine Moore observes that idealists argue that there is a necessary connection between *esse* on the one hand and *percipi* on the other. The words *esse* and *percipi* denote each a distinct term and one is not included in the other. Therefore the idealists argue that 'esse is percipi' is a synthetic proposition. Refuting this point Moore observes that historically it is accepted that all necessary truths, of which the opposite is inconceivable, are analytic. In this way, many truths were proved by the law of contradiction alone. This conception that truth is analytic cannot be refuted by the idealists. But at the same time they argue that 'esse is percipi' is synthetic and not analytic. It amounts to saying that for

the idealists truths are both synthetic and analytic, which is a contradiction in itself.

The idealist's position 'esse is percipi' maintains the view that object and subject are necessarily connected. Moore says that this is a false conception. He explains his point by the following example. 'Yellow' and 'sensation of yellow' are distinct. 'Yellow' is a colour apart from the perceiver and so it is an object of perception. But 'sensation of yellow' is subjective and depends on the observer. Thus 'yellow' and 'sensation of yellow' are distinct; while the one is objective, the other is subjective. But to maintain that they are invariably connected, leads to the absurdity that 'yellow is yellow' which is a contradiction. This is a mistake.

For Moore, there are two terms in the idealistic proposition 'esse is percipi', which are as distinct from each other as 'green' and 'sweet'. The proposition asserts that 'being' and 'being experienced' are necessarily connected, in the sense that whatever is, is also experienced. Moore contends that when one sees that 'esse and percipi' are distinct terms such as 'green' and 'sweet' no one believes that whatever is, is experienced.

According to Moore, in every sensation there are two distinct elements, one is consciousness, and the other is the object of consciousness². The 'sensation of blue' and the 'sensation of green' are different in one respect and alike in another respect. Here 'blue' is one object of sensation and 'green' is another object of sensation. Consciousness is common to both sensations and is different from either of them. The 'sensation of blue' includes two different elements, namely 'consciousness' and 'blue'. In any case, to identify the object of sensation with the corresponding sensation is a self-contradictory error. If one says that the existence of blue is inconceivable apart from the existence of its sensation, it is self-contradictory. One can conceive that 'blue' may exist, though the 'sensation of blue' may not exist. But the idealists hold the view that 'blue' never exists unless the 'sensation of blue' also exists. And it is a false view according to Moore. It would be a self-contradictory error to identify 'blue' with the 'sensation of blue'. The idealistic argument leads to the contradictory view that 'what is experienced' is to be identified with 'the experience of it'.

Moore observes that the idealists fail to distinguish between a 'sensation or idea' and its 'object'. Moreover, they use the same name for these two different things. So they mistakenly hold that these things are not different, but identical.

Moore is never tired of repeating that in every sensation we must distinguish two elements i) the object and ii) consciousness. When a sensation or idea exists, we have to choose from among the alternatives, whether object alone exists or consciousness alone exists or both consciousness and object exist. And Moore prefers the view 'both consciousness and object exist', as a valid answer. This reflects a relation of 'object' to 'consciousness'. To put it in the language of Moore "in every sensation or idea we must distinguish two elements, (1) the 'object' or that in which one differs from another; and (2) 'consciousness', or that which all have in common- that which makes them sensations or mental facts"³.

Moore argues that the idealists fail to distinguish between consciousness and the object of consciousness. He contends that while consciousness is mental, the object of consciousness is physical, and

therefore both have to be demarcated. On the other hand the idealists hold that object is merely the 'content' of a sensation or idea; and in each case we can distinguish two elements namely i) feeling or experience and ii) what is felt or experienced. They say that the sensation or idea forms a whole in which 'content' and 'experience' are two inseparable aspects. Moore says that this view is false.

Moore makes his point clear by drawing the distinction between a 'sensation of blue bead' and a 'sensation of blue beard'. In both the cases, consciousness is a common element but the contents are different- in one it is glass and in the other it is hair. In the 'sensation of a blue bead', the 'sensation' and 'blue bead' do not constitute an inseparable whole as the idealists would argue. They are two independent separable elements- (i) sensation of blue (ii) the content of sensation (blue bead). In the above examples the relation of 'blue' to 'consciousness' is conceived as being the same as that of blue to 'glass' or 'hair'.

Moore holds that a sensation is a case of 'knowing' or 'being aware of' or 'experiencing' something. When we know that the sensation of blue exists, what we know

is, there exists an awareness of blue. This awareness is just what we mean in every case of 'knowing'. Moore argues that idealists should admit that somethings really exist independent of one's awareness. There are things which are not inseparable aspects of experience. They do exist even when they are not perceived.

Moore's analysis of sensation is designed to show that whenever one has a mere sensation or idea, one is then aware of something which is equally and in the same sense not an inseparable aspect of one's experience⁴. In the sensation of blue, 'blue' is as much an object, and as little a mere content of one's experience. In this situation blue is the most elevated and independent real thing of which one is ever aware. Therefore for him the question, 'how to get outside the circle of our own ideas and sensations', does not arise. "Merely to have a sensation is already to be outside that circle"⁵.

According to Moore, idealists suppose that things are always inseparable aspects of their experience. In this context, Moore asks: if we never experience anything that is a separable aspect of an experience, how can we infer that it is an inseparable aspect of any

experience. This is an unfounded assumption of 'esse is percipi'.

The idealists hold the view that a sensation or an idea is inseparably related to a 'content'. Thus in a 'sensation of blue' blue is the 'content' of such a sensation, to which it is inseparably related. Refuting this, Moore argues that 'blue' is not a content, but it is an object. The 'object' is not inseparably related to the sensation, and it is always outside the sensation. While the idealists argue that seeing a colour is an 'experience' where the colour is the 'content' which is inseparably related to such an experience, Moore argues that 'seeing a colour' is an awareness where the 'colour' is the object outside of such an awareness.

The idealist suppose that in the case of the seeing of blue colour, 'blue' is not the object but merely the content of that sensation and it is an inseparable aspect of experience. If this is so, Moore argues, the idealist cannot be aware either of himself or of any other real thing. It implies that on his own theory, the idealist himself and other persons are in reality mere contents of an awareness. As a result the idealist is aware

of nothing. It leads to the absurdity that he is never aware of the fact that he exists.

Criticising the idealist's conception that all reality is mental, Moore argues that when an idealist thinks of himself, or others, his body or the bodies of other people are always outside of his thinking. Hence he has necessarily to accept some real entities outside the circle of his thinking or ideas.

Moore says that the objects of sensations like colours etc., are as real as the objects of perception like tables and chairs. In each case the objects (either of sensations or perceptions) are real.

Moore argues that when one is aware of a material object, or sensation, in either case, one is aware of a thing which is independent of that awareness⁶. While the process of awareness is psychological, the object of awareness is physical. Subsequently Moore observes that the "question requiring to be asked about material things is thus not: What reason have we for supposing that anything exists **corresponding** to our sensations? but: What reason have we for supposing that material things do

not exist, since **their** existence has precisely the same evidence as that of our sensations ?"⁷. Moore's refutation of idealism is not left unchallenged. C.J.Ducasse for instance attacks vehemently Moore's refutation of idealism⁸. Arguing against Moore he says

"I believe there is a certain class of cases concerning which it is true that **esse** is **percipi**... I think it can be definitely proved that, so far as this class is concerned, Professor Moore's argument does not prove, as it claims to do -- or even render more probable than not --that **esse** is **percipi** is false. I shall, however, try to show not only this but also that, for this class of cases, **esse** is **percipi** is true"⁹.

Ducasse gives the following examples: i) A tooth ache cannot exist without being felt ii) Bitter cannot exist at a time when nobody is tasting bitter. These examples suggest that in some cases it is true that 'esse is percipi' and hence, Moore is not correct when he rejects altogether the principle of 'esse is percipi'.

Replying to Ducasse, Moore observes that he agrees with Ducasse and Berkeley, in claiming that a tooth-ache cannot exist without being felt. But this is not the case with all instances. The moon certainly can exist without being perceived¹⁰. Moore holds that

Ducasse's argument, 'Bitter cannot exist at a time when nobody is tasting bitter', leads to the misconception that 'No bitter things can exist at a time when nobody is tasting a bitter taste'. Moore contends that it should be quite obvious that he is right and Mr. Ducasse is wrong. It is logically possible that a blue tie could exist at a time when nothing is looking blue to any one, and that a parcel of quinine which is bitter could exist at a time when nobody is tasting a bitter taste¹¹.

From the above discussion it is obvious that Moore is not rigid or inflexible in his stand. He is ready to revise his views in the light of his critics' comments. Thus when Ducasse criticises his distinction between act and object of perception, Moore partly agrees with Ducasse's views but partly rejects them.

While refuting idealism Moore vehemently rejects the doctrine of internal relations which are invariably associated with the idealistic tradition. Idealists hold that all relations are internal. Bradley, an advocate of internal relations, declares that all relations are intrinsical, no relation is purely external. He says, "a relation must at both ends affect, and pass

into, the being of its terms"¹², and that "every relation ... essentially penetrates the being of its terms, and, in this sense, is intrinsic"¹³. A good number of philosophers support this view of Bradley's. Thus Joachim in his work *The Nature of Truth* observes that 'no relations are purely external', 'all relations modify or make a difference to the terms between which they hold', and 'no term is independent of any of the relation in which it stands to other terms'.

Bradley, who refutes the doctrine of external relations, illustrates his argument as follows. Consider the proposition, 'Edward VII was the father of George V'. In this proposition there are three terms, i) Edward VII, ii) Father of, iii) George V. If these three terms are externally related, these terms could be arranged in any fashion. For instance, we can say 'George V was father of Edward VII'. However the meaning of the sentence 'George V was the father of Edward VII' is totally different in meaning from the sentence 'Edward VII was father of George V'. Therefore the terms of the proposition 'Edward VII was the father of George V' cannot be completely analysable and they are related in a particular way. Thus Bradley points

out that the relations are internal. Arguing against Bradley, Moore says that while in this example the relations between the terms are 'internal', this is not the case with reference to every instance. There are instances, where the terms could exist independent of one another and the relations among them are external. Take for instance a visual sense-datum which consists of two colours, red and yellow. The whole patch consists of a red colour and also a yellow colour as its spatial parts. The whole patch cannot exist without the red patch as its spatial part. Therefore the relation between the whole patch and the red patch is internal. However, the red patch could exist independent of the whole. The red patch for its existence need not be a spatial part of the whole. The red patch could exist by itself independent of the whole. Thus the relation between the 'red patch' and the 'whole' is not internal but external. Therefore "some relations are purely external" ¹⁴.

Moore also examines the following statements, 'All relations modify or affect their terms' and 'All relations make a difference to their terms', which are key statements of the doctrine of internal relations. There is

one intelligible sense in which a given relation may modify a term which stands in that relation. For example, when a stick of sealing wax is held against a flame, the sealing wax gets melted. Its relationship to the flame thus modifies the sealing wax. This is a sense of the word 'modify' in which part of any term is modified, as it has actually undergone a change. So, when the idealists say that all relations modify their terms they mean that all terms which have relations should undergo a change. Moore observes that this assertion is false because there are terms which have relations and yet never get changed¹⁵. Moreover, he is of the view that relations cannot modify the terms in a real sense; if at all they bring about any modification, it will be only in a metaphorical sense¹⁶.

Moore distinguishes between a 'relation' and a 'relational property'. When we say that 'A is the father of B', 'fatherhood' is a relation but the 'fatherhood of B' is a relational property. When the idealists say that all relations are internal, they really refer to relational properties rather than relations.

According to the doctrine of internal relations, if A has P, then anything which has not P would be other

than A. Moore contradicts this view. He holds that " it may be true that A has in fact got P and yet also true that A might have existed without having P"¹⁷. He illustrates his point as follows. Though it is a fact that Edward VII(A) was the father of George V (P), Edward VII (A) could exist without being the father of George V (P). So the relation between Edward VII and George V is external and not internal.

According to the doctrine of internal relations, if P is a relational property which belongs to A, then P is internal to A in the following two senses: i) that the absence of P entails qualitative difference from A; ii) that the absence of P entails numerical difference from A. Moore says that neither of these views is true. With the above example, Moore argues that although being the father of George V (P) is a relational property which belongs to Edward VII(A), Edward VII (A) could exist even without the property of being the father of George V (P). Thus when P is a relational property to A, the absence of P does not entail either qualitative or numerical difference from A.

Thus Moore attempts to refute the basic argument of idealism viz., 'esse is percipi', and also the doctrine of internal relations, the matrix of idealistic philosophy. However we should be aware of the fact that Moore does not deny the doctrine of internal relations altogether, but he asserts that "some relational properties certainly are not internal"¹⁸.

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