C. I. LEWIS AND THE IMMEDIACY OF INTRINSIC VALUE

ROBERT E. CARTER

Both G. E. Moore and C. I. Lewis stress the immediacy of intrinsic goodness. Moore argues that goodness is apprehended in a similar manner to the way in which we perceive yellowness, and that it is self-evident in the same way that mathematical truths are self-evident. Similarly, Lewis holds that “the only thing intrinsically valuable – valuable for its own sake – is a goodness immediately found or findable and unmistakable when disclosed.” For Lewis, such apprehension is not judgmental, and therefore, neither true nor false, although the expression of value findings may be true or false. Such apprehensions are not to be classed as knowledge, “because they are not subject to any possible error.” Statements of this class are formulated in expressive language. Expressive language is used to express in words what occurs in experience apart from any concern as to whether it is illusory or in any way deceptive. It is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to describe the content of direct experience, yet this difficulty is relatively unimportant since the awareness of what it is that is being described remains firm. To deny the existence of this “hard kernel in experience” is to deny that experience refers to a given at all.

Immediate (Intrinsic) Goodness

Immediate goodness is a whole gamut of experience, a general mode of presentation, rather than a single quality without differentiation. It is “no

2 C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (1st paperback ed.; Open Court Publishing Co., 1962), p. 145 (hereafter to be referred to as AKV). Lewis’ phrasing is curious indeed, and it is surprising to read the words “or findable” in this description of intrinsic value. Except for this passage, Lewis maintains that intrinsic value is immediately found, non-judgmental and indubitable. Findable goodness is not goodness which has been immediately apprehended, but rather is anticipated goodness. Lewis appears to be adding a notion of potential intrinsic value. Potential intrinsic value is not immediately apprehended but is a prediction which may be confirmed or disconfirmed (and must be classed as a judgment of the terminating kind). This seems out of accord with the rest of Lewis’ assertions about the nature of intrinsic value. One must suppose, I think, that this is but a slip of the pen, and that the “or findable” is to be withdrawn from Lewis’ characterization of intrinsic value, or else rendered harmless by being taken to mean “when found in the future”.
Discussions

205

single and unique quale, but a general character, no single occasion" suffi-

cing to delimit its character. Lewis selects the term "good" to refer to this

wide range of immediate value, and offers a brief glance at the variety which

he intends by the term:

It must cover the active and self-forgetting satisfactions as well as the passive and

selfconscious ones; the sense of integrity in firmly fronting the "unpleasant" as well

as "pleasure"; the gratification in having one's own way, and also the benediction

which may come to the defeated in having finished the faith. It must cover innocent

satisfactions as well as those of cultivation; that which is found in consistency and also

that of perversity and caprice; the enjoyment of sheer good fortune, and that which

adds itself to dogged achievement. All this in addition to the whole range of the sen-

suously pleasing and emotionally gratifying. And the immediately disvaluable has its

equal and corresponding variety.

The term "good" does suffer from ambiguity in that it commonly refers both
to intrinsic and extrinsic value, and even to the merely useful. Therefore,
use of the term "good" must be qualified by specifying the sense of good in-
tended. Something good, in the above sense of being immediately or directly
so found, is "intrinsically good" or "intrinsically valuable." As for all other

senses of value, they are values because of their possible contribution to
realizations of the immediately good.

Goodness or value which is immediately found or findable and unmistak-
able when disclosed is called "intrinsic" because it is value which "is good
in itself or good for its own sake." Of these two both apt and common
descriptions of what is intended by "intrinsic," Lewis finds the latter prefe-
able. Both phrases however, are subject to an interpretation which Lewis
wishes to reject. Both may be taken to apply to things in themselves apart
from subjects or consciousness of any kind, and not just to experiences of
subjects as Lewis intends." A further ambiguity is to be found in the "in
itself" formulation. The phrase, "in itself," implies a distinction between
those values which are part of the intrinsic nature of some object and those
which are not. For Lewis, an immediate given is what it is and includes
no claim about any objective reality beyond itself. No judgment is made as
to whether what is given is objectively grounded in the experience and its
causes or not. Thus "there can be no illusion of present enjoyment or present
pain," or of anything else directly given. "Its esse is percipi." With regard

7 Ibid., p. 404.
8 Ibid., p. 405.
9 Ibid., p. 397.
10 Ibid., p. 382-383.
11 "In Lewis' view, the term 'valuable' is to be applied to objects and other existents
with the meaning, capable of contributing "to a life ... found good in the living of it"
( AKV, p. 395).
12 Ibid., p. 386.
13 Ibid., p. 407.
14 Ibid.