As a kind of road map to this somewhat hard-to-follow chapter, Moore will attempt to prove that ethical non-naturalism is true, that ‘’good’ is both a simple property and indefinable, and that any naturalist who claims to have defined ‘good’ has either committed a fallacy or is subject to his open question argument.

In chapter one, Moore claims that if we wish to define ethics, then we must examine ethical judgements. Such judgements, Moore states, have both common and peculiar aspects. The key aspect to be examined in this chapter is that ethical judgements invoke two predicates: ‘good’ and ‘bad.’

As a bit of clarification, Moore does *not* intend this chapter to be an exercise in etymology and linguistics. Which words we wish to use in ethics is a question not to be answered by philosophers. The core question, rather, is to answer *what is good?* Neither does Moore intend to focus solely on understanding *good conduct*. If we do, Moore claims that we wouldn’t not fully understand what good is because we will have focused solely on ‘good conduct alone of all good things’. (§2)

There are three ways that we could interpret the question ‘what is good?’.

- **Specific Casuistry Interpretation:** This sense of the question would be focused specifically listing the actions which are themselves good (have goodness as a property). Once we have the list, then we can advance to a more general approach.

- **General Casuistry Interpretation:** A focus on the properties which are inherent in good actions. Once we have our list of good actions, we then attempt to extract the principles/properties underlying those actions which would explain why they are good.

- **Definitional Interpretation:** This interpretation focuses on what Moore calls the ‘most fundamental question in all of Ethics.’ (§ 10) Moreover, this interpretation is the only approach which can provide evidence for ethical judgements. Hence, the question of how to define ‘good’ is Moore’s primary goal in this chapter.

Now that we understand why Moore is focused on the definitional interpretation, there are three distinctions that he introduces us to in §8:

- Arbitrary Verbal Definitions: The usage of a term given some arbitrary stipulated definition.

- Verbal Definitions Proper: The acceptable usage of a term by the linguistic community. This kind of definition undergirds translation.

- Real Definitions: A real definition is one which defines the thing in terms of its properties.

Both the arbitrary and the verbal definitions of ‘good’ cannot, for Moore, provide an explanation of ‘good’. As he states:

> “‘Good,’ then, if we mean by it that quality which we assert to belong to a thing, which we say that the thing is good, is incapable of any definition.” (§10)

Such a claimed inability to define ‘good’ relies on Moore's view about properties. In general, we can divide properties into two categories: the *simple*, and the *complex*. Moore uses an analogy to help us understand this claim. Suppose, he invites us, that we wish to offer a real definition of ‘horse’.

> “. . . when we define horse . . . we may mean something much more important. We may mean that a certain object, which we all of us know, is composed in a certain manner: that it has four legs, a head, a heart, a liver, etc. etc. all of them arranged in definite relations to one another . . . We might think just as clearly and correctly about a horse, if we thought of all its parts and their arrangement instead of thinking of the whole ...we could, I say, think how a horse differed from a donkey just as well, just as truly, in this way, as now we do, only not so easily ; but there is nothing whatsoever which we could so substitute for good ; and that is what I mean, when I say that good is indefinable” (§8)

In other words, if we try to define a horse in terms of its properties we quickly see that other creatures also have those properties. This may lead us to ask what the differences are between a horse and a donkey. This, however, is not the case when it comes to ‘good’ because ‘good’ cannot be defined like a horse.

Now we can fully appreciate Moore’s distinction between simple and complex properties. The property of being a horse is complex; it is identical to a collection of properties. Simple properties, by contrast, are not collections. They are, in some sense, not built out of anything. Moore offers an analogy to aid our understanding.

> “Consider yellow, for example. We may try to define it, by describing its physical equivalent; we may state what kind of light-vibrations must stimulate the normal eye, in order that we may perceive it. But a moment’s reflection is sufficient to shew that those light-vibrations are not themselves what we mean by yellow. They are not what we perceive. Indeed, we should never have been able to discover their existence, unless we had first been struck by the patent difference of quality between the different colours.” (§10)

Yellow is not just the, for example, wavelength of light rays being given off by a yellow object. The idea here seems to be that when I see a ripe banana as yellow, the yellow that I see and the wavelength that cause it are different. Moreover, imagine defining yellowness to a friend who has not / cannot see yellow. Describing that yellow light is in the 570nm - 590nm range will not

help this friend see yellow. Yellowness, then, is a simple property for moore because it cannot be given a real definition. So, we get the following rules about properties insofar as Moore has explained them:

- Something is a simple property if and only if there is no real definition.
- Something is a complex property if and only if there is a real definition.

'But', the naturalist* philosopher retorts, 'even if 'good' is a simple property, why can't 'good' be identical with a natural property? Why can't goodness just be, for example, the property of *being pleasant*?' To such a retort, Moore claims in §12 that our naturalist has committed a specific kind of fallacy: the naturalistic fallacy. Such a fallacy is typically understood as follows:

> "Assuming that being pleasant is a natural property, for example, someone who infers that drinking beer is good from the premise that drinking beer is pleasant is supposed to have committed the naturalistic fallacy. The intuitive idea is that evaluative conclusions require at least one evaluative premise—purely factual premises about the naturalistic features of things do not entail or even support evaluative conclusions. Moore himself focused on goodness, but if the argument works for goodness then it seems likely to generalize to other moral properties." (SEP entry on Moral Non-Naturalism)

The rough idea here is that because good is evaluative, whereas natural features are not, claiming an identity between the two is a mistake in reasoning (i.e. a fallacy). In addition to this fallacy, Moore claims that any attempt to identify a natural property with 'good will be unable to answer his *open question argument*.

> "The hypothesis that disagreement about the meaning of good is disagreement with regard to the correct analysis of a given whole, may be most plainly seen to be incorrect by consideration of the fact that, whatever definition be offered, it may always be asked . . . whether it is itself good." (§13)

This further question, Moore claims, will forever haunt any proposed definition of goodness. So, then, 'good' must be indefinable and simple.

Good as a means vs. Good as an end

The basis for Moore's consequentialism is most clearly stated in §16. There he says that nothing is universally good (good for all people at all times in all places) and that even if we qualify our claim (i.e. that X is generally good) this will usually only be true for certain people, in certain times, in certain places. What action is good now is dependent on circumstantial features that influence which intrinsic good(s) the action will produce.

> "This in part reflected a common assumption of his time, when a majority of moral philosophers accepted some form of consequentialism. But it may also be relevant that the only alternative he seems to have considered was an absolute deontology like Kant's, which says that some acts such as killing and lying are wrong no matter what their consequences (1903: 106/1993: 157; 1912: 175–81/1947: 109–13/1965: 74–77). His major ethical works did not consider a moderate deontology such as would later be developed by Ross (1930), in which deontological prohibitions against killing and lying often outweigh considerations of good consequences but can themselves be outweighed if enough good is at stake. It is not clear what Moore's response to such a moderate deontology would have been." (From the SEP entry on Moore's Moral Philosophy)

In asserting that φ is *the* best action to take, we mean one of the following three things:

> a) If the action itself has greater intrinsic value than any alternative, whereas both its consequences and those of the alternatives are absolutely devoid either of intrinsic merit or intrinsic demerit; or (b) if, though its consequences are intrinsically bad, the balance of intrinsic value is greater than would be produced by any alternative; or (c) if its consequences being intrinsically good, the degree of value belonging to them and it conjointly is greater than that of any alternative series. §17

Hence, for Moore, the consequences of an action are what determine the moral status of the action. By including 'alternatives' as being relevant to choice making, Moore's claim is essentially modal. We must compare and contrast various ways the world could be, or would be, if we took a particular action.

Moore then attempts to establish that there are many things which are intrinsically valuable, many things which are bad, and a larger group of things which are indifferent. The principle he seeks to establish is that *the value of a whole must not be assumed to be the same as the sum of the values of its parts* (§18) He argues for this claim by appealing, again, to analogy. When we consider our being conscious of a beautiful object (i.e. something which has intrinsic value). The object, when no one is aware of it, may have little to no value. Being conscious of the object is a kind of whole composed of two parts: our consciousness, and the object. But not all objects that we are conscious of are merely a sum of the value of the two things.

> "The first of these goods was the appreciation of beauty, which for Moore combined the cognition of beautiful qualities with an appropriately positive emotion toward them, such as enjoyment or admiration. We listen to music, for example, hear beautiful qualities in it, and are pleased by or admire those qualities. But the value here is entirely contemplative; Moore saw no separate worth in what the romantics had especially valued, the active creation of beauty. He might say that an artist must understand and love his work's beauty if he is to create it, perhaps even more than someone who merely enjoys it, but the value in his work is still not distinctively creative. In characterizing this good Moore gave a further reductive analysis, this time of beauty as "that of which the admiring contemplation is good in itself" (1903: 201–02/1993: 249–50)." (From the SEP entry on Moore's Moral Philosophy)

From here, Moore engages in a discussion about how a 'whole' can have intrinsic value even though one or more of its parts does not. The means by which the whole comes about may vary in value depending on contrasting circumstances (e.g. eating cashews may be a good way to stay satiated between meals, but it may kill you if you have a particular allergy). It may seem odd, however, to think that the value of the whole is not just a summing of the values of each of its components. Moore replies by considering the relational value that a whole can have. Suppose that knowledge is intrinsically valuable and that someone now knows how to cure all cancers. This bit of knowledge will be part of an even greater whole: saving lives. The knowledge is not a means, according to Moore, because "unlike a means, it will itself form a part of this more valuable existent." (§19)

We get a funny joke about enjoying Hegel at the start of section §20. If you are interested in these last few sections and how certain ways of understanding properties may or may not fit certain Hegelian categories, then we can discuss that. I am of the opinion that the more worthwhile philosophy occurs in what I have summarized above.