G. E. MOORE’S ETHICAL THEORY

This is the first comprehensive study of the ethics of G. E. Moore, the most important English-speaking ethicist of the 20th century. Moore’s ethical project, set out in his seminal text *Principia Ethica*, is to preserve common moral insight from skepticism and, in effect, persuade his readers to accept the objective character of goodness. Brian Hutchinson explores Moore’s arguments in detail and in the process relates the ethical thought to Moore’s anti-skeptical epistemology. Moore was, without perhaps fully realizing it, skeptical about the very enterprise of philosophy itself, and in this regard, as Brian Hutchinson reveals, was much closer in his thinking to Wittgenstein than has been previously realized.

This book shows Moore’s ethical work to be much richer and more sophisticated than his critics have acknowledged.

Brian Hutchinson teaches in the philosophy department of the University of Iowa.
G. E. MOORE’S
ETHICAL THEORY

Resistance and Reconciliation

BRIAN HUTCHINSON
University of Iowa
To Joyce, with love
The author wishes to thank Professor Richard A. Fumerton for his criticisms, encouragement, and advice.
## Contents

Introduction: Irony, Naïveté, and Moore  

1 Simplicity, Indefinability, Nonnaturalness  
   Lay of the Land  
   The Argument for Indefinability  

2 Good’s Nonnaturalness  
   Background  
   Later Refinements and Problems  
   Final Refinements  

3 The Paradox of Ethics and Its Resolution  
   The Paradox of Ethics  
   Resolution of the Paradox  

4 The Status of Ethics: Dimming the Future and Brightening the Past  
   Dimming the Future  
   Brightening the Past  

5 The Origin of the Awareness of Good and the Theory of Common Sense  
   The Origin of Our Awareness of Good  
   Saving Common Sense  

6 Moore’s Argument Against Egoism  
   Introduction  
   Against a Metaphysical Self  
   The Contradiction of Egoism  
   Moore on Sidgwick  

7 The Diagnosis of Egoism and the Consequences of Its Rejection  
   Why Egoism Seems Plausible  
   Moore’s Greatest Revolution  

## CONTENTS

8 Moore’s Practical and Political Philosophy  146  
  Introduction  146  
  Necessary Rules  148  
  Nonnecessary Rules  151  
  Moore’s Conservatism  159  

9 Moore’s Cosmic Conservatism  172  
  The Dialectic of Innocence  172  
  Moore’s Diagnosis  179  
  Critique of Religion  185  

10 Cosmic Conservatism II  190  
  Art between Politics and Religion  190  
  Moore’s Solution and Its Consequences  198  

Bibliography  211  

Index  215