

# **CHAPTER - V**

## **NATURE OF MORAL OBLIGATION**

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### **1. Prelude to the Second Part**

In the first of this study, we undertook an analysis of the various kinds of ought-sentences with a view to finding out the essential nature and function of the language of moral obligation, and saw that the language of moral obligation is essentially a demand-language, that the concept of demand is central to any theory which tries to explain the nature or the concept of moral obligation.

The purpose of this part of our study is to further clarify the nature of moral obligation by subjecting that notion to a thorough conceptual analysis. In other words, while, in the first part, we tried to know the essential nature of the language of moral obligation, in this part, we shall try to understand the essential

nature of the concept of moral obligation itself. This presupposes the distinction between linguistic analysis and conceptual analysis. In justification of this distinction we have only to reiterate our view, which we had stated in connection with the limitation of linguistic analysis, that a language does not, and perhaps cannot, completely exhaust the reality-the concepts-which it tries to express. Hence the need of conceptual analysis in addition to linguistic one. The two, of course, cannot but be complementary to each other, together giving us the complete picture of a concept. Some parts of them may even be overlapping.

We shall try to analyse the concept of moral obligation with a view to answering the questions like-What is 'obligation'? what is 'moral obligation'? In what does the morality of 'moral obligation' consist? What is the structure of the concept of 'moral obligation'? what are its form and content? Is it subjective or objective? How is it related to human motivation? How is it distinguishable from and related to other kinds of obligation? — and a number of related questions.

The conclusions of the study, in the first part, of the language or moral obligation which are important for answering the above questions are (a) The concept of moral obligation is a complex concept analysable into its various constituents. (b) The moral binding represented by it is essentially of the nature of 'demand'. That is, its meaning is obligative. (c) The concept of obligation involves a reference to its ground. (d) It has a variety of uses, moral and non-moral. Its essentially moral use is to represent a demand of Ideal. (where 'Ideal' is its ground).

Bearing these important conclusions in mind, let us now try to analyse the concept of moral obligation somewhat elaborately.

## **2. Meaning and Kinds of Obligation**

The expression 'moral obligation' itself points to the fact that it is only a species of the more general concept of 'obligation' as such. Besides moral obligation, there may be other non-moral obligations like political, social, legal, religious ones. In order to understand the concept of moral obligation we shall have first to understand what is obligation and then go on to find out in what does the morality of moral obligation consist.

As Laird<sup>1</sup> says, the essence of the concept of obligation is 'binding' of some sort. This can be seen from its root, *ligare* which means 'to bind'. It also means 'to owe' or 'to be indebted.' In this sense the concept of obligation comes nearer to, and, become almost identical with the concept of *Rna*<sup>2</sup> in Hindu Ethics. Thus, to be under obligation means to be bound and to know the nature of moral obligation is to know the nature of moral binding.

The binding represented by obligation is not natural impulsiveness forcing one to act in a particular way towards the object of the impulse, though it is sometimes said that 'I was obliged to beat my son by my hot temper'. In other words, obligations by natural tendencies are not genuine obligations. The same can be said of the types of obligation, discussed by Nowell-Smith, apart from moral obligations, as they are of the nature of arbitrary enforcement.

Nowell-Smith<sup>3</sup> describes three types of obligation apart from moral obligation viz. obligation by circumstances, obligation by threats, and legal and quasi-legal obligations. Obligations by circumstances prevent our carrying out our original plans rather than force us into doing something else. They prevent us in two ways-I cannot continue because,

- (a) the obstacle placed by the circumstances is beyond me to overcome, i.e., because 'I cannot help,' and
- (b) it is undesirable to continue because of worse consequences.

Thus, impossibility and undesirability are the two ways of prevention. Of these, the second is analogous to moral obligation because, it applies to voluntary acts, that is, in that case I can choose otherwise. That is to say, in one case, man is not free, in the other, he is though in a limited sense. The circumstances that oblige, are exceptional and not taken into consideration when the original action is planned.

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1. *An Enquiry into Moral Notions*. p. 104, See the whole Ch. VIII.
  2. The Doctrine of *Rnatraya* is one of the very significant doctrines of *Hindu Ethics*. The three debts are *Devarna*, *Rsirna* and *Pitrna*. Some add the fourth-*Manusyarna* which perhaps touches the core of social morality.
  3. Nowell-Smith, P.H. *Ethics*, pp. 201-211.

He, further, states but disapproves, the view that 'one's own motives can be said to oblige'<sup>4</sup>. That is, obligation by motives. I agree with Nowell-Smith in discarding this view. Motives cannot be said to 'oblige', that is, 'bind' us in the proper sense of the term. As he says, "It is logically impossible that all motives should oblige, since we talk of being obliged only when our desires are thwarted, that is to say when we are obliged to do something other than what we wanted or intended to do; and this implies that there was something which we wanted or intended to do. Obliging motives presuppose monobliging motives; freedom is the ability to fulfil one's aims, not the state of being aimless"<sup>5</sup>.

As for the obligations by threats, they resemble those by circumstance. he chooses to do what he does, but he is not free to choose. The threat is and untoward and unusual circumstance which interferes with his free choice.

With regard to the legal and quaci-legal obligations, they are all associated with penalties. "If I do something because I am obliged to do it by a shcool rule,

- (a) I choose to do it;
- (b) my choice is not free one, for I would not have done it but for the rule:
- (c) I have no motive for doing it apart from the rule; and
- (d) I must have some motive for doing it"<sup>6</sup>

This motive may be either fear of the consequences of disobedience or "sense of duty" etc.

As for the general notion of obligation, he says that "..... the logic of obligation requires a conflict between the obligation to do something and the inclination not to do it. But it is important to notice that this conflict is part of the general back-ground of the concept of obligation and need not occur in every case."<sup>7</sup> In my view, this logical requirement is there only from the agent's subjective point of view of feeling, and not from the objective one which states,

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4. Ibid, p. 204

5. Ibid, p. 206

6. Ibid, p. 209

7. Ibid, pp. 210-211

merely, the fact of obligation. From the above discussion, one gets an impression that obligation is essentially a concept of coercion or force, opposed to 'freedom' in its essentiality. It is true that obligation is a concept of directive and constraining binding. But that it is arbitrarily coercive cannot be accepted. In certain cases e.g. Nowell-Smith's first example of obligations by circumstances, one is forced to do a thing or rather, not to do the decided thing, because it is impossible. But of such acts, we cannot speak in terms of genuine obligation. However, if coercion means 'against desire' then it is true to some extent. But then, all obligations need not be coercive in this sense. There may be non-coercive, as well as coercive obligations. Especially, in case of moral obligations we know that they are self-imposed not necessarily always against desire. What I want to say is that the concept of obligation does not have coercion, in the sense especially of arbitrary compulsion, as a part of its meaning. It is a binding, a restraint, a limitation, no doubt, but whether self-imposed or not, it is at least, reasonable and not arbitrary. This is true not only of moral, but also of non-moral obligations. If it is not accepted, then the 'justifiability' of obligations or their principles will have no meaning. For a genuine obligation whether moral or non-moral, to exist, there must be some system, principle or reason. As for example, it is because of the social, political, legal and religious systems of governing human conduct that the respective obligations arise. In fact, all kinds of obligation in connection with human conduct refer to interpersonal relationship, directly or indirectly. In case of legal obligation, it may appear, as Hart<sup>8</sup> says, that coercion in the form of penalty etc. is one of its features. But even there, it is concerned not with the essential nature of legal obligation but with its execution. Thus, even though there may be element of coercion, it is concerned more with compelling one to discharge one's obligation or duty, than with one's having a duty or obligation, Hart<sup>9</sup> himself recognized this distinction between 'obliging' (or compelling), and creating an obligation, but seems to fail to maintain it while describing the essential nature of the concept of obligation.

Thus, it will be seen that there is a distinction between 'being under obligation' and 'being obliged or compelled' to do an act. Coercion is involved

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8. Hart, H.L.A. "Legal and Moral Obligation". in Melden (Ed.) *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, pp. 82-107.

9. *Ibid*, p. 98.

not in the former case, but in the latter. In fact, we expect people to know and discharge their respective obligations which are created, not arbitrarily by anybody but by the systems which either they themselves have built up in their own interest or are grounded in human nature. That we should be required to use coercion or enforce sanctions in order to get duties done by people only points to the weakness to which human nature is prone. But to infer from this that coercion is an essential feature of the concept of obligation itself, will be to obliterate the distinction between creating an obligation and enforcing it.

Besides its moral use, 'ought' has also many non-moral uses. In all of them we see that it expresses binding which is not arbitrary but involves some system or principle. Hollingworth<sup>10</sup> for example, enumerates as many as ten kinds of 'ought' one of them being moral. The rest are the various oughts of inference, completion, beauty, welfare, utility, safety, custom, justice and legislation. Though the list is not satisfactory, still it helps to bring out clearly that 'ought' or 'obligation' is never arbitrary but involves a reference to some principle or system as said above. In other words, we may say that 'obligation' does have some ground. This, further, assures its objectivity or uniform applicability to all concerned. It is on the basis of 'ground' that an obligation is defended when it is either objected to or denied. This dimension of 'ground' is very significant in case of moral obligation.

### **3. Shades of the Meaning of Moral Obligation.**

We may, now point out two varieties and certain subtle nuances of the meaning of moral obligation. They are obligation to 'be' and obligation to 'do'. The former may be called 'existential' and the latter 'behavioural' one. The one states what we ought to be, and the other, what we ought to do. It is the behavioural obligations which are generally expressed in the ought-sentences. Having said this, we should not forget that though the distinction between these two varieties is theoretically significant, yet practically there is an intimate interrelation between them. Existential obligation refers to moral ideal, because,

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10. Hollingworth, H.L. *Psychology and Ethics*, p. 18. This is a very good study of the 'Sense of Obligation,' as its sub-title suggests, from the psychological point of view.

as Frankena says, "more properly speaking, moral ideals are ways of being rather than of doing"<sup>11</sup>. But 'doing' cannot be separated from 'being'. In fact, it is through 'doing' — (morally obligatory acts) — that 'being' (moral goodness) expresses itself, we may say, therefore, that so far as moral ideal is concerned. We speak in terms of 'ought to be'. But so far as moral obligations are concerned, we speak in terms of 'ought to do'. But so far as moral obligations are concerned, we speak in terms of 'ought to do'.<sup>12</sup>

As for the nuances of the meaning of moral obligation, we see that moral obligation has twofold meaning. It means either (a) a moral fact of binding, or (b) a psychological fact of an agent's actual feeling of binding. What the judgements of moral obligation like 'you ought to do X' express is (a) It is possible to express (b) only in first person judgements of obligation like 'I am under obligation to do X' or 'I ought to do X.' Even there, it need not necessarily express the actual feeling of binding. It may express either the recognition of binding in the sense (a) of a decision. In fact we should distinguish among three different shades of meaning expressed in statements :

- (i) X is under obligation to do Y.
- (ii) X recognizes that he is under obligation to do Y and
- (iii) X feels to be under obligation

(i) is an objective judgement stating the moral fact of obligation : (ii) is 'X's subjective intellectual awareness or consciousness of this fact (i); and (iii) is X's subjective feeling of restraint or determination or binding impelling or motivation him to act on it.

We may ask further, what is the psychological nature of this subjective feeling of obligation ? Is it, like feeling, an emotional excitement? If so, what is the difference between obligative and non-obligative (ordinary) feelings? It may be said, in answer, that the former is approval and/or admiration, as Rogers,

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11. Frankena, W.K. *Ethics*, p. 54

12. Princhard, H.A. also in his *Moral Obligation*. pp-93-94, rejects the second meaning of X ought to do so and so viz. If X does so and so, his doing so and so ought to exist, though for a reason of his own. Again, he says. "The word 'ought' refers to actions, and to actions alone" p.4.

Hume etc. hold. But the question remains, what is the difference between obligative and non-obligative approval and or admiration because, all cases of approval etc. are not clearly, obligative. When it is said that obligation is felt by X, it means, X has immediate awareness plus acceptance of the fact that he is subject to the general demand or binding as expressed in a principle or law, and therethrough, to do a particular act in the given situation. It is this immediacy of the recognition and acceptance of the fact of being under obligation that likens it to feeling.

The second meaning of 'obligation' is 'sense of obligation.' 'Sense of obligation; is also used in the sense of a 'psychological disposition' to 'feel obliged' when one is aware (intellectually) of one's duty or obligation, to do it. This meaning makes 'sense of obligation' equivalent to moral 'temperament;' in general, and what is important, a precondition to 'feel obliged.' It is, in short; 'sensitivity' to obligations. 'Sense of obligation' is used primarily in the first 'sense of feeling' and only secondarily, in the second sense of capacity for this 'feeling'.

It has also a third minor use as in 'sense of duty' being a motive, meaning, to do an act because it is duty. With a slight difference, as in 'X has a fine sense of duty', it means 'X has a keen disposition to do what is his duty'.

#### **4. Definability of Moral Obligation**

As for the nature of the concept of moral obligation proper, a significant beginning will be to discuss a view of moral obligation, which makes it an unanalysable and indefinable concept. It is a characteristic view of Intuitionism to hold that moral terms like 'good', 'right' and 'ought' represent unique, simple, unanalysable and indefinable properties. G.E. Moore<sup>13</sup> is the famous champion of this view in case of 'good'. H.A. Prichard<sup>14</sup> and E.F. Carritt<sup>15</sup> hold this view, very strongly, about 'obligation'. and Sir David Ross<sup>16</sup>, about 'right'. Prichard's whole argument in his celebrated article 'Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?'<sup>17</sup> and in other writings is based on the view that moral obligation is

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13. *Principia Ethica*, p.6

14. *Moral Obligation*.

15. See. *Ethical and political Thinking and Theory of Morals*.

16. *Foundations of Ethics*.

17. *Mind*, 1912: reprinted in *Moral Obligation*, pp. 1-17.

an unanalysable and indefinable concept and that all attempts to define it in terms other than itself are hopelessly misconceived. Ross is echoing the same view when he says, about right. "And, indeed, the more we think of the term Right, the more convinced we are likely to be that it is an indefinable term and that when one attempts to define it, one will either name something plainly different from it, or use a term which is a mere synonym for it."<sup>18</sup>

Coming to Prichard's own view of the meaning of moral obligation, We see that according to him 'X ought to do so and so' means either - (a) X is under moral obligation to do so and so : or (b) If X does so and so, his doing so and so ought to exist<sup>19</sup> He accepts (a) and rejects (b) because, firstly, the phrase 'ought to exist' strikes as artificial. Secondly, such a statement (i.e. [b]) is not, in meaning as well as in grammatical form, categorical and lastly, it presupposes a teleological interpretation of obligation. Thus finally, for him, 'X ought to do so and so' means 'X is under moral obligation to do so and so,' where 'being under obligation' is a special kind of attribute of X. This attribute, he says, further, "is *sui generis*, i.e. unique, and therefore incapable of having its nature expressed in terms of the nature of anything else."<sup>20</sup> In brief, this view supports the following propositions :

(i) that the concept of moral obligation essentially represents, 'being under moral obligation'; (ii) that 'being under moral obligation' is an attribute, (iii) that it is the attribute of the moral agent, and (iv) that it is a unique, unanalysable and indefinable attribute.

In fairness to this theory, we must admit that it does ascribe some meaning to 'moral obligation' which is objective and not simply emotive, and that "moral judgements are really judgements, not expressions of feelings," as Blanshard<sup>21</sup> also admits. But it is too unique to be analysable even in other ethical terms, and is known only intuitively. C.D. Broad<sup>22</sup> seems to suggest a genus for 'moral

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18. *Foundations of Ethics* p.43.

19. *Op. cit*, pp. 93-94.

20. *Loc. Cit.*

21. *Reason and Goodness...*159

22. *Five Types of Ethical Theory.*

obligation' in the form of 'fittingness' or 'appropriateness,' which Ross is also inclined to accept. But, he says that we do not have its proper differentia.<sup>23</sup>

Now, the first proposition is tautologous and is really another version of the fourth. The second proposition states the attribute theory of the nature of moral obligation. Now, we know that moral obligation expresses moral binding. The concept of binding, further, involves a reference at least to two factors, namely, one who is bound (Agent) and that which binds him, (through Law or ideal) viz. Act. Thus, binding is a kind of relation between these two factors. 'Being under obligation' in case of Agent, 'obligatoriness' in the case of Act, express the same relation of moral binding from the respective points of view, of Agent and Act, they are two aspects of the same relationship. It is, however, misleading if the two are taken separately. Because, then, they appear to be the attributes of Agent and Act respectively, and not the two aspects of a single relationship. Precisely this has happened in case of Princhard, who goes still further to restrict the whole meaning of moral obligation to 'being under obligation' only, ignoring, 'obligatoriness' of Act altogether. In fact, as we have seen, the concept of moral obligation is even more complex as it involves a reference to as many as five factors, namely. Agent, Act, Situation, Law and Ideal or Ground. Princhard, ignoring this complexity, restricts its meaning to a single factor of Agent who is 'under obligation', that is, who is morally bound. But he must be bound by something and it is precisely this something which is very important in case of moral obligation as it brings out the morality of moral binding, distinguishing it from non-moral binding. Prichard emphasised only 'being bound' but, strangely refused to answer, 'by what]? in case of moral obligation is concerned, the 'attribute theory' of Prichard is unsatisfactory. it can not be represented as an attribute either of Agent, as 'being under obligation,' or of Act, as 'obligatory', because, it represents essentially a complex relation of binding. This disposes of the third proposition, and, as we shall presently, see, even the last.

Coming to the last proposition, it seems that the possible ground for holding

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23. Blanshard B. in his *Reason and Goodness*, pp. 155-157, rejects 'fittingness,' as the common ground of rightness.

the view that the concept of moral obligation is unanalysable or indefinable, are two, namely (a) it is a simple concept; and (b) though complex, the unity of its elements is unique. Of these, (a) is clearly unacceptable, since, as seen before moral obligation is not a simple concept, but a very complex one. It is the purpose of this study to bring out and describe its constitutive factors, and try to explain the nature of their interrelation represented by the concept of moral obligation. As to (b), we can not accept it also, because complexity and uniqueness in the sense of unanalysability do not go together.

There is, however, a grain of truth which all intuitionists grasped, as Warnock points out, namely, "the truth that moral judgements are in some important way different from, say, assertions of empirical facts, or commands, or aesthetic judgements or expressions of taste<sup>24</sup> and cannot be reduced to either of them. But, as he further says, their account of the differences is so jejune as to be worse than useless; the view is positively misleading, not because it does not answer the central question of moral philosophy, namely, why should I be moral? or to put it differently, what is the ground of moral obligation? but because it simply describes the question itself as illegitimate and holds that moral philosophy rests on a mistake as it is an attempt to answer this central illegitimate" question.

## **5. Important Features :**

5. Now, some important features of the concept of Moral Obligation<sup>25</sup> may be stated as follows:

(a) Moral obligation is bi-lateral in nature. It involves the consideration of other fellow-beings and their claims. As Raphael says, "Obligations are always to other beings"<sup>26</sup> That is, they are inter-personal or social in nature. This is evident from the content of moral obligation. The point is that, a moral obligation cannot be conceived apart from a claim, personal or impersonal.

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24. Warnock, G.J. : *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, p. 13.

25. These are already mentioned in Sec. 3 of Ch. III, in the context of the language of moral obligation. They are recapitulated here for clarifying the concept of moral obligation.

26. Raphael D.D. : *Moral Judgement*, Ch. VII.

(b) It is capable of being interpreted and expressed both denotologically and teleologically. This is a very important characteristic. It means that the concept of moral obligation contains both the elements. In other words, it is a meeting point of such dualities as rule and end, regulation and fulfilment, right and good, law and ideal. etc. Deontology is concerned with its nature, teleology with its ground. In fact, it is the purpose of this thesis to establish this proposition and reconcile deontology and teleology in a comprehensive theory or moral obligation.

(c) Moral obligation means necessary binding. This necessity is described as 'moral necessity'<sup>27</sup> as distinct from logical or casual necessity, and is expressed through the compelling force of ought in the language of moral obligation. Kant believed that this necessity is rational, that is, it arises out of the rationality of man. But this cannot be accepted because, reason give rise to logical necessity only. At best it helps to realise it but cannot create it. The source of this necessity can be described only after a careful consideration of the ground of moral obligation.

(d) Moral-obligation is universal. This means that it is reasonable and objective. In other words, it has a ground which is common to all. A judgement of moral obligation cannot be pronounced without there being some objective ground on which it is based. This is true especially of the moral obligations which are generalized into moral rules.

(e) And lastly, the ground of moral obligation is, ultimately, impersonal in nature. This is evident from such expressions as 'claims of morality', 'required by social good.' 'owe to society,' 'demand of ideal.' 'dictates of reason' and so on. The impersonality of the ground of moral obligation is directly connected with its universality and objectivity.

We may now state certain implications of the concept of Moral obligation as characterized above.

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27. Nowell-Smith : op.cit.pp. 201-211.

(a) 'Ought implies can' is a famous statement. It means that the world of moral obligation is limited to the field of possible acts. An act which is impossible for a man to do, cannot be obligatory. This implication is practically as well as theoretically important. The distinction, drawn by Broad,<sup>28</sup> between the narrower and the wider senses of 'ought' is based on it. In the narrower sense, 'ought' applies only to those actions which an agent could do if he willed. In the wider sense there is no such restriction, and therefore cannot be accepted according to Broad. This is true, but we must be very careful while deciding the possibility or impossibility of an act. It may be generally said, in this regard that obligations are not stated in the 'wider' sense of 'ought' and therefore, the distinction drawn by Broad loses much of its force. The formula, of course embodies the whole of the moralist's case for the freedom of will.<sup>29</sup>

(b) The concept of moral obligation also implies 'essence of obligation' in the moral agent. A judgement of moral obligation will have no meaning if the agent has no capacity to realize the fact of his 'being under obligation' and its moral authority.

(c) Obligation further, implies, not only the voluntary acceptance of moral binding by the agent, but also binding of 'acting as per obligation.' As stated earlier in a different context, an 'ought-judgement implies a further second order general ought judgement namely, "one ought to act as per obligation expressed in the (first-order) ought-judgement". This implication, has important bearing on the problem of 'motivation and moral obligation.' Unlike other judgments, the judgements of moral obligation are mostly behavioural in nature. They express 'demands' regarding certain courses of conduct and are not just descriptive. This means that the moral agents are required to 'act' as per those demand, and not just to listen or believe.

(d) Again, it implies an 'authority' making demand on the moral agents. This authority is expressed through the peculiarly compelling force of 'ought'.

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28. Broad : op. cit. p. 161.

29. See. : Mayo, B. *Ethics and the Moral Life*, Ch. XII.

An agent will voluntarily accept the moral binding or obligation only if he has a sense of obligation. For this reason, society tries to develop it in its members through education in general and moral training in particular.

We shall discuss the nature of this authority somewhat elaborately in the last part. Here, it will suffice to note only a few points about it. Firstly, it is impersonal. Secondly, it is not external, but is inherent in the 'demand' itself. And lastly, it is not forced on the agents, but is voluntarily accepted by them, that is, its acceptance comes from within, so to say. This authority is peculiar to and distinctive of the concept of moral obligation.

## **6. Prescription, Command and Demand**

We know that the essence of the nature of moral obligation is 'binding' of some sort. A theory of moral obligation tries to explain the nature of this binding in its own terms like 'command' or 'prescription' etc. We have already discussed some important theories in connection with the language of moral obligation, quite elaborately. There we saw that the meaning of 'moral obligation' is neither descriptive, nor evaluative, nor again, emotive. Further, it is not even either imperative or prescriptive. It is not necessary to repeat the discussion of these theories over again. Here, I wish only to point out the differences in the logical structures of the concepts of prescription, command and demand. For this and other purposes throughout the present work, I must say, my conception of prescription is based on the model of medical prescription. In other contexts like law, it seems to function like command.

Now, the logic of command requires that (i) A command is to be obeyed simply because it is a command (ii) No reason can be asked for why the particular command is given. This is not to say that command is always arbitrary, or unreasonable but that the authority of the commander to issue commands is presupposed. When once this authority is accepted, no justification can be asked for the commands that he issues. (iii) No alternatives are open in case of command, which means that the commanded is not free, he must do what is commanded. This is way full-fieldged imperative mood is used to express commands, thus selecting its own appropriate language. (iv) It does not fit in the logic of command to speak of a 'generalized command,' that is to say, there is no principle behind commands. Its authority is personal. And (v) command has nothing to do with man's nature or aspirations.

It will be clear from the above characterization of the logic of command, that moral bindings cannot be said to be of the nature of commands, as the

logical behaviour of the two concepts is not identical. In the case of moral obligations, the agent is free to choose out of many alternatives; ask for their justification; they have a principle behind them; their authority is impersonal; they are related to human nature and aspirations, and so on. What is common to both the moral binding and command, is 'binding': but in one case it is self-imposed, in another, imposed from without.

The same is the case with the Prescriptive Theory, for a regards the nature of the concept of prescription we see that - It is unilateral, and not bi-lateral. By this I mean that a prescription does not necessarily involve a reference to or consideration of others as matter of right or claim. Others may be considered while prescribing. But only is so far as they affect the interests of the agent. (ii) Prescription seems to imply a means end consideration, e.g. a medical prescription. It cannot be categorical. End is decided and means is prescribed. This end is agent's personal one. (iii) Prescription is not necessarily binding. (iv) The basis of a prescription may be prescriber's own personal consideration in addition to the agent's it may not be social.

These characteristics show that prescribing is similar to advising, guiding, recommending etc. But if we consider the concept of moral obligation, we see that (1) it is bi-lateral i.e. involves the consideration of others claims (2) it may not necessarily refer to end, at least within moral field; (3) it is a necessary binding, and (4) it has behind it or as its basis, an impersonal reason or principle. This shows that the logic of the concept of moral obligation is different from that of the concept of prescription.

The above discussion leads to the conclusion that the concepts of command and prescription are inadequate to express the nature of the concept of moral obligation. We have proposed in the first part of this study that the language of moral obligation is 'obligative' and its function is to express moral 'demand'. In conformity with that obligative theory of the language of moral obligation, we propose, here, the demand theory of the nature of moral obligation. According to it, the nature of 'moral obligation' can be most adequately and satisfactorily stated in terms of the concept of demand, a moral obligation is a moral demand, and to be under obligation is to be subject to 'demand.'

In what follows, we shall give a very brief nutshellled comparative account of the three concepts of Prescription, Command and Demand with regard to certain points which are important for understanding their essential nature.

No. Points	Prescription	Command	Demand
1. Language	Prescriptive	Imperative	Obligative
2. Function	to prescribe, recommend	to command, order	to demand
3. Nature of Binding	Not necessary, can be arbitrary	Necessary; can bearbitrary	Necessary; cannot be arbitrary
4. Constituents	<p><b>(A) Concept</b>            (a) prescriber            (b) Prescribee            (c) Prescriptum            (d) Situation            (e) Ground</p> <p><b>(B) Language</b>            (a) Act            (b) Prescriptive quality (Ladd)<sup>30</sup></p>	<p><b>(A) Concept</b>            (a) Commander            (b) Commandee            (c) Commandum            (d) Situation            (e) Authority</p> <p><b>(B) Language</b>            (i)            (a) Descriptor            (b) Dictor (Duncan-Jones)<sup>31</sup>            (ii)            (a) Phastic;            (b) Neustic (Hare)<sup>32</sup>            (iii)            (a) Act            (b) Imperative quality (Von wright)<sup>33</sup></p>	<p><b>(A) Concept</b>            (a) Demander (Ideal)            (b) Demandee            (c) Demandum            (d) Situation            (e) Principle or Law</p> <p><b>(B) Language</b>            (a) Act            (b) Obligative relationship. (Interrelation among Ideal, Agent, Act, Situation &amp; Law)</p>

30. See. Chs. VI, VII.

31. Ibid, p. 112

32. *The Language of Morals.*

33. "Deontic Logic," *Mind* Vol. LX.

<b>No. Points</b>	<b>Prescription</b>	<b>Command</b>	<b>Demand</b>
5. Whether bi-lateral <sup>34</sup>	No. (No claim of 'others' is involved)	Yes.(Claim of authority is involved, but no claim of 'others')	Yes. (Claim of 'other' is involved, and is represented by Law)
6. Consideration involved	Not necessarily objective and impersonal	Not necessarily objective and impersonal	Necessarily objective and impersonal.
7. Basis	Based mainly on means end consideration	Based on authority	based on the inherent interrelation among the constituents
8. Justification	One can ask for it, but it need not be objective.	One cannot ask for it.	One can ask for it and it has to be objective.
9. Force	Recommendatory	Compelling (from without)	Impelling (from within)
10. Authority	External	External	Internal and inherent.

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34. Bi-laterality means that the notion of 'claim'. relating to 'binding', is involved in the concept itself.

## 7. Moral Demand

The concept of moral demand being central to our theory of moral obligation, it is desirable to clarify its nature in some detail. Firstly, the concept of moral demand is a complex concept having many referents. It is a relational concept expressing the inherent relation of binding among these referents. This relation is not external, changing with the things on which it depends; it is inherently present in those referents and it, therefore, permanent. It is because of this inherent binding that morality is said to be natural and the Moral Law is identified with the Natural Law; the referents, as referred to by the obligative language, are four, namely, Agent, Act, Situation and Principle or Standard. Of these, the first three, viz. Agent, Act, Situation are directly referred to, while the Principle is only indirectly referred to by the language of moral obligation. Conceptually, we see that demand refers to one more factor, namely its ground. Some thinkers (deontologists) have identified this ground with Principle itself.

Broadly, we have, in all, five referents constituting the complex structure of the concept of demand, namely, Agent, Act, Situation, Principle of Law and Ideal. When expressed in the language of demand, we can call them, following Ladd<sup>35</sup> Demands (Agent), Demandum (Act), Demand-Situation, Demand-Principle and Demand-Ground-or we should say, Demander. The relation of binding, about which we are speaking here, is the inherent interrelation among these factors, called 'demand'.

We realize, further, that, 'demand' has a 'mysteriously compulsive force'<sup>36</sup> as expressed in the 'ought' language. Kant ascribes it the status of 'command' in the form of the Categorical Imperative, while other (prescriptivists) ascribe a prescriptive force to it. We hold that the force of moral demand is neither as strong and compelling as a command, nor as weak and just recommendatory as a prescription. I know that almost all the moral thinkers fall into these two camps holding one or the other of the two views, namely, imperative theory and prescriptive theory. I, however, beg humbly to differ from these traditionally

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35. Ladd, F. *Structure of a Moral Code*, Ch. VI.

36. Hawton, H. : *The Humanist Revolution*, p.92

reputed views of moral obligation. If we closely understand the nature of the concept of demand or moral obligation, we find that this mysteriously compulsive force of ought lies in between the forces of command and prescription. This is borne out by our critical discussion of both the theories and concepts.

We saw that the Demander has claim on the Agent-which is expressed in the form of demand. This demand, however, is to be accepted by the Agent on his own. The concept of 'acceptance' is very important in the moral field because moral binding is never an external compulsion enforced on the moral agent, but is a voluntary submission on his part to the authority of 'the moral' because it is inherently related to his very being and nature. Acceptance is an integral part of moral authority which may be the Moral Law itself or some Ideal, on which the Law is based. The distinctive characteristic of moral demand is that its acceptance is inherent.

Now, acceptance of demand on the part of the agent presupposes the legitimacy of the demand. A demand cannot be acceptable unless it is legitimate. It means that, like acceptance, legitimacy also is inherent to a moral demand. In fact, it is because of the inherent legitimacy of moral demand that it is universally accepted. Broadly, legitimacy means well-groundedness. What is it in the very nature of moral demand which makes it legitimate and acceptable to all will be evident only after the nature of the ground of moral obligation is thoroughly understood.

Further, this legitimacy lends objectivity to the moral demand. By objectivity is not meant complete lack of subjective element. We have seen above that morality is necessarily voluntary and voluntariness is a subjective factor. Acceptance of the moral demand and actual choice or decision to that effect are all subjective matters. Objectivity means reasonableness, rationality and independence from individual whim or caprice. Though the decision-maker is an individual agent, his decision is not entirely a function of his own sweet will, but is governed by considerations other than purely individual, that is consideration of 'other' or social considerations, as well. Those like the Emotivists, who deny any rationality to moral life and discourse, may not accept objectivity of moral demand. But then, they cannot account for the acceptance,

the legitimacy, the objectivity and the apparent rationality of moral demand which we do experience in fact and which the logic of moral concepts also involves.

The universal ought-sentences are an indication of the fact that moral demands are universal. They are not confined to only a section of human beings, but are addressed to all of them who are entitled to be moral agents. Even taking exceptions into consideration, it can be said that universality is one of the important characteristics of the morality of 'demand'. These demands are expressed in the form of moral rules. Kant makes them applicable to all the rational beings, human and non-human also. Generalization in moral discourse is possible only because of this universality of 'demand'. True, actually 'demand' is made on the individual agent. But this is an application of a rule to that agent and the situation in which he finds himself. The very fact that rules can be framed for all the agents, clearly brings out the universality of moral demand. Moreover the supreme Moral demand may be based either on rationality of the agents or on their common set up of nature or again on the common Ideal which they pursue with mutual help. Thus the universality of 'demand' need not, like objectivity, necessarily appeal only to 'rationality', there may be other common grounds, or may be, that all these are together at work to make it universal.

Next distinctive characteristic of demand is its impersonality. The impersonality is really that of the demander. Broadly speaking, the demander is the ideal. It determines the moral law and through it all the moral rules and particular acts. It is true that an ideal cannot exist in itself, it is to be accepted and followed by some person. Moreover, it is appointed by the person's own nature. yet, ideal as such and also, ideal as the demander, is not personal. Impersonality of the demander make it immune to caprice and failure, and in case of a common ideal, makes it impartial in making demands on all concerned. This means that the actual demand is related to the demander, or ideal, as a means to an end or is itself an embodiment of the ideal.

The nature of moral demand, as distinct from non-moral one, is that it is superior to any other demand. We shall discuss this point in some detail when we shall consider 'the morality' of moral demands. Here, we may only not that

in case of clash of demands, moral demand always gets precedence over non-moral ones. In fact, other demands themselves must have moral basis without which they are reduced merely to coercive and forced regulation. This superiority is not external but inherent. The reason of this is that while the non-moral demands are made on prudential and expedient considerations, which are evidently external, the moral demand is grounded internally and inherently in human nature. That is why non-moral demands, to be acceptable, must themselves be consistent with the moral demand.

The supreme moral demand is generally expressed in the form of the Moral Law or Principle governing particular moral rules, and therethrough, all the moral acts. This principle is the practical embodiments of the Ideal, guiding actual course of conduct. Some thinkers do not recognise any supreme Moral Law as such apart from particular moral rules. Kant is perhaps the only thinker who explicitly states it and emphatically makes it central to moral life. It is the core of deontology in a way. I, for one, think that the concept of supreme Moral Law plays a very important role in our moral life. It supplies us with the principle of practical guidance. I agree that morality is not entirely a matter of law. At the same time, we cannot altogether do away with law, It is to be related, as I had tried to do, to the Ideal grounded in human nature, thus bringing teleology and deontology harmoniously together. When this is done properly, law helps to bring unity to moral life, order and system to the multiplicity of otherwise unrelated rules and works as practical principle of conduct.

From the above discussion it will be clear that moral demand is inherently acceptable, that all the moral agents ought to accept it. This acceptance-demand is the second-order self-evident demand, the first order one being expressed as the Moral Law. Now, this a acceptance on the part of moral agents presupposes certain requirements of them. Freedom is the first of them. The acceptance of moral demand must be free and not forced. In case of particular rules and their application to concrete moral situations, it means freedom of choice. This freedom is always governed by rationality. That is why the Moral Ideal which is appointed by human nature plus social considerations, is accepted freely along with its demand in the form of Moral Law. Further, the responsibility

of accepting the moral demand lies with the moral agent as his acceptance is free. It is because of this responsibility, which is mainly with regard to particular moral rules and acts, that a moral agent makes himself open to moral praise and blame.

Moral situation is always social in nature and consideration of others or recognition of others' claim is essential to the concept of moral obligation. This consideration is not merely rational or cognitive, but is affective as well. The acceptance of demand involves sympathetic imagination or understanding of others interests and claims. Capacity for this sympathetic imagination is a prerequisite of the equipment of a moral agent. Mere intellectual understanding is not sufficient. This characteristic distinguishes moral from logical necessity.

The above account of the nature of the concept of moral obligation clearly brings out that demand is more adequate than command and prescription in characterizing moral obligation. This will be seen clearly from the comparative picture of all the three concepts. The comparative picture also supports our thesis that the concept of demand lies in between the concepts of command and prescription so far as force is concerned.

## **8. Kant's Theory**

Before we close this chapter, we have to consider some important theories regarding the nature of moral obligation. Kant's theory is the most important and perhaps, the best, of all. It is generally held that Kant is a champion of the command theory of moral obligation. This characterization of Kant's theory sounds true on its face because of the obvious fact that Kant advocated the doctrine of Categorical Imperative. But, I, for one, think that we are rather misled by the term imperative when we characterize, on its basis, Kant's theory as a command-theory. If we carefully read between the lines of his doctrine, we find that it is in fact, a demand-theory, a reason-demand-theory of moral obligation. True, he does not use the term, demand anywhere in his writings, but this does not prevent us from interpreting his theory in terms of demand it, on the whole, it proves to be the most satisfactory interpretation.

According to Kant<sup>37</sup> moral obligation means the necessary relation between the Supreme Moral Law and a particular human will, or, it is the determination of particular human will by the Moral Law, through maxims. Now, for the maxims to be moral, they must flow from Good Will. It is this supreme importance attached by Kant to Good Will, which is expressed in his famous opening sentence-It is impossible to conceive anything in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without limitation, save only a good will. Further, a will is good only when it habitually wills rightly, and its rightness depends, not on the consequences, but on the motive. Here he draws the famous distinction between the hypothetical and the categorical imperative, and says that an act is right if and only if it is done from a categorical imperative, that is, for a principle. He supplies the test of categorical imperatives in the form of the supreme Principle of Morality, or the Moral Law formulated as follows "Act only on that maxim through which you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law." He also gives other formulations in terms of humanity and kingdom of ends. Thus, according to Kant, to be under moral obligation means to be bound by the Moral Law.

Now, this binding is voluntary; and man submits his will to it because of the deep reverence he feels for the Moral Law. This reverence for the Moral Law itself springs from man's rationality. Ultimately, therefore, moral binding is grounded in rationality, or in other words, reason is the ultimate source of moral binding or moral obligation. We are moral in so far as we are rational.

From this it will be seen that even according to Kant's view. Moral obligation is conceived better as demand than as command. It is the demand of Reason or Rationality made on rational, moral agents to adopt such maxims of conduct as are in conformity with the Moral Law. The Moral Law itself may be said to be the supreme demand of Reason. The various formulations of the Moral Law clearly show that it can be subjected more adequately to the logic of demand than to the logic of command. The notions of generalizability, humanity and kingdom of ends involved in the formulations, point to the bi-laterality of their binding arising out of the consideration of others' claims. Further, the objectivity

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37. For an able and standard account of Kant's theory, see Paton, H.J. : *The Categorical Imperative* and also Broad. C.D. : *Five Types of Ethical Theory*.

and the impersonality of the binding of Moral Law also show that the concept of command is inadequate to express the essential nature of that binding. In short, Kant's doctrine of the Categorical Imperative is in fact, a reason-demand-theory of moral obligation. The particular maxims of conduct or categorical imperatives as well as the Supreme Principle of Morality are of the nature of demand. A similar opinion is expressed by Schlick<sup>38</sup> when he says that demand is the essence of morality according to Kant (For Warnock demand is the essence of morality according to Kant.) Warnock also voices the same opinion, as he says that according to Kant, "... 'moral law imposes upon all rational beings unconditional categorical demands to do and forbear...'"<sup>39</sup>

The question that arises on this is that if the language of moral obligation is not imperative, then how is it that many moral philosophers are led to think the judgements of moral obligation to be imperatives or commands? The answer is not very difficult to find. The moral ought has a mysterious and irresistibly compelling force. A command also has such a force. Add to this similarity the Christian doctrine of divine commandments and the intuitionistic notion of the dictates of conscience and view them on the background of authoritative customary morality, and you have the answer to the above question. The fact is that ought has a commandlike force, but not exactly the force of a command. This is because the sources are different. In moral matters, it is very easy to shift from the demanding to the commanding way of discourse. So far as Kant is concerned, in his moral philosophy, ought-language is turned into imperative-language, but his categorical imperative is not really a command but a demand. Rationality of man, which is central to his moral philosophy, cannot be strictly said to command, but to demand. Further, his conception of categoricity in terms of on and for a principle is not applicable to command, but to demand. Similarly, the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives also cannot be said to hold in case of commands, as a genuine command cannot be hypothetical.

We have accepted what Kant has said about the nature of moral obligation in its essence, namely, that moral obligation is essentially of the nature of

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38. Schlick, M. : *Problems of Ethic*, p.50.

39. Warnock, G. *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, p. 52.

demand. But we differ from him so far as the account of the source or ground of this demand is concerned. According to Kant, the authority of demand is grounded in man's rationality or Reason.

It is true that in order to be a responsible member of the moral kingdom, one needs be rational. But this does not mean that rationality alone is sufficient to account for morality. What reason gives is rational necessity, and not moral necessity. What is binding on rational agents is the logical principle of consistency or non-self-contradiction. But can this logical principle be turned into a moral principle as Kant has done? However, Kant has ignored many teleological considerations, such as happiness, desires, ends etc. Which are relevant and important for a theory of moral life. We have, therefore, to seek for the ground of moral obligation in a more comprehensive fact of human life which will do justice to non-rational as well a rational aspects of human nature. This fact is the pursuit of ideal by human beings. The ultimate source of the binding of obligation is really the Ideal pursued by men.

#### **9. Other views :**

Let us, now, consider some other views. At the outset, we may reject as implausible that view that obedience is what is essential to the concept of moral obligation, since obedience is the counterpart of command and we have already seen the command-theory to be implausible. Russel expresses the same view when he says, "...it seems impossible to define moral obligation in terms of obedience, even when the whole of traditional theology is accepted as valid."<sup>40</sup>

Ross<sup>41</sup> has considered various naturalistic attempts at defining right and obligatory and has come to the conclusion that all these theories, (like evolutionary, attitude and consequence theories) are more plausible as the theories of the ground of moral obligation, than as the theories of the meaning of it. The same is the case, according to him, with Moore's<sup>42</sup> non-naturalistic theory that right (obligatory) means productive of the greatest possible amount

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40. Russell, B. *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, p. 73.

41. Ross, Sir W.D.: *Foundations of Ethics*, Ch. II.

42. Moore, G.E. *Principia Ethica*, pp. 18 to 25.

of good. Being productive of good is rather the ground than the meaning of 'right' or 'obligatory'. The same thing, again, may be said about Russel's view that "A right act is one which aims at the greatest possible satisfaction of the desires of sentient beings."<sup>43</sup>

Ross' own view is that right or obligatory is an indefinable term, because, when one attempts to define it one will either name something plainly different from it, or use a term which is mere synonym of it. The meaning of obligatory, is very nearly the same as right, but not quite the same. The difference is that the right act need not be always obligatory also. As for an obligatory act he says, "in calling an act obligatory we are implying not only that it is right, but that any other in the circumstances would be wrong."<sup>44</sup>

We have seen earlier the reasons for not accepting the view that obligation is indefinable. We may add that, firstly, obligatory differs in some respects from right. Ross himself accepts this. Secondly, obligatory is only one aspect of the concept of obligation; pertaining to act, the other aspect is being under obligation pertaining to agent. In fact, as Ross himself says following Prichard, obligatoriness is not a characteristic that attaches to acts, obligation is something that attaches to persons.<sup>45</sup> For these reasons the meaning of obligation cannot be adequately expressed in terms of right.

Another notion, in terms of which moral obligation is sometimes defined, is fittingness or suitability or appropriateness, Broad uses the term appropriateness and holds that "the kind of appropriateness and inappropriateness which is implied in the notions of right and wrong is, so far as I can see, specific and unanalysable."<sup>46</sup> Ross also maintains that though suitability can be said to be the generic quality of rightness, we cannot state its differentia.

In "The Definition of Good." Ewing makes a distinction between ought of moral obligation and ought signifying merely, what he calls fittings, and

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43. Op. cit. p. 88.

44. Ross, op. cit. 45.

45. Ibid, p. 56.

46. Broad, op. cit. p. 165.

considering the latter as primary ought, defines the former in terms of it. He has modified his views in his "Second Thoughts in Moral Philosophy" where he lays more stress on the moral ought and reduces the ought of fittingness to reasonableness. So far as the distinctively moral concept of ought is concerned, it cannot, according to him, be reduced to a mere combination of any other concepts. As he puts it "If anything is unique, this is unique."<sup>47</sup> It is not, however indefinable in the sense of standing for some irreducible entity, but in the sense that "ought-judgements fulfil a unique function quite different from that of judgements which give factual information."<sup>48</sup> What this unique function is, cannot be understood by anybody who has not had moral experience. It cannot be expressed adequately even in terms of Law as is generally done.

So far as the notion of fittingness or suitability is concerned, it is clear that the force of ought expressing moral obligation cannot be adequately expressed by it. Moreover, it cannot be applied to being under obligation. Ewing himself has given up this notion as basic. He considers moral ought to be unique. But though it may be admitted that ought-judgements fulfil a unique function, this does not mean that the meaning of moral obligation cannot possibly be expressed at all.

According to Raphael, an obligation is thought of as a tie with some other person or persons, and refers to the pursuit of other's good, in conditions where that is thought to be not only fitting but more forcefully demanded.<sup>49</sup> He conceives the tie of moral obligation as an interpersonal relation. The thought of this interpersonal tie is of the nature of an imaginative act of regarding oneself as related to another person's ends (i.e. his interests) in the way in which one naturally regards oneself as related to one's own ends, that is, as disposed to pursue them<sup>50</sup>. Thus, to imagine others ends as our own and be disposed to pursue them, is the essence of the notion of moral obligation.

What Raphael says is in essence true. That moral obligation is broadly of

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47. Ewing. op.cit. p. 96

48. Loc. cit.

49. Raphael, D.D. : *Moral Judgement*. Ch. VII. p. 123.

50. Ibid, p. 124.

the nature of interpersonal tie, that it is concerned with the pursuit of ends (other's as well as one's own), and that it is forcefully-demanded all these three of his suggestions are acceptable; in fact we have incorporated them in our theory. But the view that this tie is the result of an act of imagination, we cannot accept. It may be true as a genetic account of the origin of the actual feeling of obligation expressed by an agent. But it cannot form a part of the meaning of moral obligation. The tie is not just imaginative : it is objective. Again, the interpersonal relation is not directly involved, but only indirectly, in the concept of moral obligation. Except for these, his view contains substantial truth. It can even be interpreted to state that moral obligation is the demand of the interpersonal tie to pursue other's ends as our own. This makes it much more plausible.

#### **10. Some similar Views**

Our view finds support, explicitly or implicitly, in the writings of many eminent thinkers. Dewey<sup>51</sup>, for example, while clarifying the concept of rightness as distinct from that of satisfaction and good, says that, it introduces the new element of exaction or demand. He also uses the equivalent notion of claim, and says, "There has to be an idea of the authoritative claim of what is reasonable in order to convert the Good into the Right."<sup>52</sup>

This authoritative claim or demand is the meaning of ought or moral obligation. While stating the problem also, he speaks of the moral authority of the demands to which we are subject.<sup>53</sup> Speaking of the sense of duty or obligation, he says, "Corresponding to the generalised form in which demands are made, there grows up a generalized sense of Duty-a sense of being bound by that which is right because of its rightfulness."<sup>54</sup> This clearly shows that Dewey conceives ought or moral obligation as an authoritative claim or demand which is reasonable and legitimate.

Moritz Schlick<sup>55</sup> also seems to hold a similar view which is expressed in

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51. Dewey, John : *Theory of the Moral Life*. Ch. III.

52. Ibid, p. 67

53. Ibid, p. 68

54. Ibid, p. 85

55. *Problems of Ethics*, See pp. 79-84.

the distinction he makes between the Morality of Demand and that of desire corresponding to the distinction between the ethics of moral obligation and the ethics of pleasure. As he says, the desires of others are the demands which they make of individuals. Hence an ethics which concerns the good in this sense alone is not a theory of pleasure, but of what is obligatory; it is deontology.<sup>56</sup>

Blanshard also presents a view similar to our own. He makes use of the notion of claim to express the meaning of moral obligation. He says, "Duty is the imperative laid upon us by a *Summum Bonum* which is prescribed by human nature itself."<sup>57</sup> Here, of course, imperative, means an authoritative, claim, or demand. This is evident from his clear statement "Moral obligation is, we saw, the claim upon us of ends appointed by our own nature."<sup>58</sup>

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56. Ibid. p. 83

57. Blanshard, B. : *Reason and Goodness*, p. 332.

58. Ibid, p. 333.