

CHAPTER - VII

STRUCTURE OF THE CONCEPT OF MORAL OBLIGATION

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1. The Problem

From the previous discussion, it is obvious that the concept of moral obligation is a complex concept having a rich internal variety. It has many constituents, or to say the same thing, the obligative language has many referents. Further, these constituents are very intimately interrelated so that the concept as such acquires a unity of meaning. They have, again, their respective places and functions within the complex structure of the concept of moral obligation.

The problem before us is to know the nature of these constituents, their respective places and functions in the whole structure of the concept of moral obligation and also, their interrelation. The present chapter proposes to solve this problem by means of structural analysis¹ of the concept of moral obligation in some details.

1. I am indebted for the idea of a 'structural analysis' to Ladd's" *The Structure of a Moral Code*, Ch. VII. He calls 'components' what are called here 'constituents.'

2. A Pentagon Model

We have seen before that 'moral obligation' refers directly to at least two factors, namely, Agent and Act. Sometimes, the third factor, namely, Situation, is also referred to. In addition to these, there are other two factors which come in indirectly, and they are-Principle or Law and Ideal. Law represents the 'morality', and 'Ideal, the 'ground' of moral obligation. Some thinkers² have reduced the last factor, namely, 'ground' or 'Ideal' to Principle or Law, which for them represents not only the 'morality' of moral obligation, but its 'ground' as well. But we may not do so, at least at this stage, for three reasons- (a) the separate factor of 'ground' of moral obligation cannot be denied; (b) the above view which reduces 'ground' to 'Principle', can be taken to be a special theory of the 'ground' of moral obligation itself, and (c) the 'structure' to be presented, at least, should be as comprehensive as possible.

Thus, there are as many as five factors involved in the concept of moral obligation, which may be called its constituents. They are Agent, Act, Situation, Principle or Law and Ideal. They constitute the complex structure of the concept of moral obligation. In the language of 'demand' they may be expressed as Demantee, Demandum, Demand-Situation, Demand-Principle and Demander (or Demand-Ground, that is, Ideal). To bring out this five dimensional nature of its structure, we may call it the 'Pentagon Model' of the structure of moral obligation, and proceed to consider it further.

3. Agent

It is a human individual being who is subjected to moral restraints or regulations and evaluations and who is morally required to act in a given moral situation according to the Moral Principle grounded in the Ideal appointed by universal human nature. The following are generally seen to be the characteristics a man is required to have to be a moral agent.

- (i) He is never a being other than human. This is evident from the fact

2. Deontologists, and especially, Kant.

that morality applies only to human beings. True, Kant makes it applicable to all rational beings. But, since it is generally agreed that only human beings (factually not even all of them) are such rational beings, the scope of moral judgements is limited to human life only. The social origin of morality points to the same fact.

(ii) This leads to the second important characteristic that the moral agent is a 'rational' being. Kant's principle of rationality instead of being used for including other beings that human in the moral field, excludes some of even human beings from being fulfilled moral agents. He must be capable of understanding the moral situation, think of the different alternative courses of behaviour available, select the moral rule, apply it to the situation, and make a decision as to which act to do. The word 'rational' does not mean only 'having capacity to reason' or rational equipments. It also means, indirectly, 'capacity to feel bound or restrained by the Moral Law', as Kant would say, In other words, it means having a sense of obligation. The Agent's having a sense of obligation is very important as it is this sense which makes him qualified to be a moral agent in the true sense of the term. It has also a bearing on the problem of motivation and obligation. Raphael says, in this connection that, "The idea of obligation is applied only to rational beings."³ For, ought implies can and only rational beings have the freedom of choice. Further, as Raphael declares, "In order to be a moral agent a person must be capable of recognizing the claims of morality."⁴

(iii) The agent, in concrete moral situation, is always an individual. While framing moral rules, however, situations and agents are generalized.⁵ Here, by individual I do not mean only one man; the Agent may be even a group of men. 'Individual' means what is distinguishable and capable of being located. In concrete moral situations, Agent is also concretely known and responsibility can be definitely ascertained.

3. *Moral Judgement*, p. 105

4. Loc. cit.

5. Ladd declares that prescriptions are impersonal. He says, "Since specific reference to the agent may be made in terms of other factors, I propose to regard all moral prescriptions as anonymous with respect to the agent". (op.cit.p.134).

(iv) Another important characteristic is that he has to obey the Moral Law, he is morally bound or is under obligation, The very fact of being a moral agent makes him submit himself to the moral binding expressible in the form of Moral Law. To deny this is to deny existence to morality itself. Thus, the Agent has the characteristic of 'being under obligation.'

(v) He is supposed to subscribe to the Moral Law freely, accept the moral binding voluntarily. This means that the moral authority is inner and not outer, that the ground of moral obligation lies in human nature itself. Freedom of will is said to be one of the postulates of morality. I should say that it is rather an expression of the fact that moral binding is grounded in human nature itself.

(vi) This further means that in concrete situations also, he has to take decisions on his own, of course on deliberation and hence, is held responsible for them. This presupposes his rationality. Thus, rationality, freedom and responsibility go together.

(vii) Whether he wishes or not, he is subject to moral evaluation and consequent moral praise or blame. This is done generally by other members of the society he lives in. But this can be, and often is, done by the Agent himself. In fact this sort of self-assessment is necessary for his moral progress. Whether the agent himself does this or not, the society certainly does this for him. He cannot escape it.

(viii) All the moral agents are equal or on par in the eyes of Moral Law. That is, all the agents will be treated equally on moral considerations and no agent will receive discriminative treatment.

(ix) The Agent is a member of the society of agents like himself. A moral situation is primarily a social situation. The Agent is in constant interaction with other members of the society. It is because of his social life that morality came into being at all. As Raphael points out clearly, obligations are always to other beings. An imaginative and sympathetic awareness of the feelings and desires of other beings is the condition of the moral obligation. The claims of other beings based on their interests through 'morality' are the contents of obligation. In other words, moral obligation is

constituted by an inter-personal relation, an awareness of oneself as a person in relation to another person affecting his personality by the mutual intercourse.

(x) Lastly, as Raphael⁶ says, men are able to be moral agents because they have three kinds of capacity : (a) they can be conscious of their own conative-affective tendencies; (b) they can enter insympathetic imagination into similar experience of others; and (c) they can help each other to satisfy their interests.

The interests which a man tries to satisfy are varied. But on their closer analysis they reveal a common substratum as their basis which is generally called the 'Ideal'. In other words the moral agent, as a man, has an Ideal appointed by his own nature which governs all the particular interests and there-through, the courses of conduct meant to satisfy them. Ideal, thus, plays a key-role in the government of man's life. What is important to note, so far as Agent is concerned, is that since Ideal is appointed by his own nature and represents the noble aspirations natural to man, its acceptance by him is not only voluntary but, is, in fact, natural, and therefore, spontaneous. In accepting the Ideal, Agent commits himself to the moral binding in the form of moral obligation.

4. Act

It is perhaps the most concrete constituent of the concept of moral obligation, as it forms its actual content. It is the concrete behaviour demanded of an agent, that is, it is what an agent ought to do. The whole problem of 'acts' is very elaborately and competently discussed by Eric D'Arcy in his small but ably conceived book "Human Act" taking a clue from the practical genius of Bentham, as expressed in his "Principles of Morals and Legislation." It is not possible to deal, here, with all the problems tackled by him; we shall touch upon only the most relevant of them.

There is, first of all, a distinction between 'act' and 'action'⁷ Action is an

6. Op. cit. Ch. VII.

7. D. Arcy, Eric, " *Human Acts*, pp. 6-8.

involuntary bodily movement about which we cannot say that we 'do' it, while about 'act' we can say that we 'do' it. In Wittgenstein's terms, action is what happens to us, and act is what we 'do'. Beating of heart is an action, while 'killing a man' is an act. Morality applies to 'acts' which are voluntary.

Acts⁸ again, are of two types—positive acts or acts of commission, and negative acts or acts of omission. It is necessary to determine 'morality' or 'immorality' of both these types of acts while judging them morally.

Further, as D'Arcy points out, we have to distinguish an act from its consequences on the one hand, and its circumstances on the other, while discussing the nature of 'act' especially in its moral context, since, the three together, generally, form a complex whole. While evaluating an act morally, we must also study, "the role of circumstance and the way that 'act' and 'circumstance' are mutually related in the composition of a good or bad deed".⁹

As for the distinction between 'act' and 'consequences' D'Arcy proposes three theses which bring out the fact that a given act may not necessarily have only one description and that, it sometimes may or sometimes may not, point to the consequences which we have to take into account before passing moral judgement on it. In other words, the distinction is possible, in some cases necessary, but generally flexible.

The distinction between 'act' and 'circumstances' is even more loosely defined, as it is possible to include even an essential ingredient of a good deed, into circumstance, which may be called 'constitutive circumstances'¹⁰ However, circumstances, would commonly refer to features of a situation not included in the description of the act under consideration. As such, 'circumstances' is "not a technical term referring to some precisely defined element in the human performance, but a useful word referring to any fact or group of facts that contributes to our reaching a satisfactory description, characterization or appraisal of a person's act."¹¹ The circumstances may be

8. Ross defines an 'act' as the production of a change in a state of affairs (*Right and the Good*, p. 43). The change, however, must be specified.

9. Ibid, p:1.

10. Ibid, p. 62.

11. Ibid. pp. 68-69.

further classified into two kinds-qualifying, specifying circumstances, all of which are relevant in the moral appraisal of acts.

Further, motives and intentions of the doer, as parts either of 'acts' or of circumstances' have important bearing on the moral judgements of the acts.

Now, coming to the morally obligatory act, we see that 'obligatoriness' is its chief characteristic. But we must remember that 'obligatoriness' cannot be said to be its attribute, pure and simple. It is in relation to other constituents, especially Agent, that we call an act 'obligatory'. To be obligatory, an act has to be the most appropriate, right or fitting, morally, in a given situation. It is chosen, from amongst many alternatives, because it most satisfies the moral requirement or demand. It is the actual demand made by 'morality' on a moral agent. Its choice is not random but involves a policy represented by the Moral Law which marks it off as better than any other alternative. It is the actual obligation or duty, chosen from amongst the prima facie obligations.

The dictum 'ought implies can' clearly points out that 'morality' applies only to possible acts, and not impossible ones. A knotty question that arises in this respect, is, should the range of possible (or moral) acts be limited to physical acts only? Such a restriction seems to be implied in C.D. Broad's¹² "narrower meaning" of ought, where he keeps feelings, emotions and the like out of moral reach, because he thinks they fall outside 'can'. But, I am inclined to think that this restriction is not proper, because, if we accept it, then 'you ought to be kind to others' or the famous commandment 'love thy neighbour' will have no strictly moral meaning. In that case, all 'moral education' which consists primarily in bringing 'affective' part under the control of reason, and the belief in its possibility will lose their significance. Further, motives and intentions which are psychological in nature, and which do play important role in determining the 'morality' of acts, will be deprived of their practical and moral relevance. Such considerations, therefore, force us to accept the possibility of genuine moral judgements of obligation regarding 'affective' as well as related acts, like 'you ought to respect your parent, 'be kind to the poor, love your neighbour' etc.

12. *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 277.

This means that we have to conceive 'act' in a wider sense, at least in the context of its moral evaluation. The moral act, is a deliberate or a freely chosen act. The concepts of 'freedom and 'responsibility' are important in this respect. The agent freely chooses to do it, and therefore, the whole responsibility of the act and its consequences lies on him.

An 'act' again, become morally relevant only when it affects 'others' and their interests. The persons whom it affects may be one or many. A purely personal or subjective act having no effect whatsoever on any body else, can hardly be subject to moral consideration. In other words, a moral act is always a 'social' act. That is why the content of morality is said to be social. It answers, directly or indirectly, the claims of others whether particular or general. It is because of this fact that 'act' is either stated, generally, in the form of rule, as 'one ought to speak the truth' or justifies by means of such a rule, as 'you ought to speak the truth, because, one ought to speak the truth' Thus, conformity to moral rule (or principle or law) is a significant feature of moral act. It is generalizable. As said in the beginning, 'act' is a very important constituent of the concept of moral obligation. It occupies, in its structure, the place of its concrete content. It is the actual demand that the moral law or Ideal makes on the moral agent.

5. Situation

It is in a moral situation that any moral problem arises at all. It is the place of origin of moral consideration. As such its nature is very complex and cannot be brought out, completely in the form of definition. It involves many factors. While discussing the nature of 'act', we distinguished three factors, namely, act, consequences and circumstance of various kinds. About situation, we may say that it includes all these factors. As such, the concept of situation is wider than that of 'circumstances'.

A situation cannot be conceived apart from the 'agent' involved in it. It may be said that situation is the confrontation of 'agent' and 'act' in the context of a problem. The problem arises because of the presence of alternative 'acts' from among which the agent has to choose one. A situation is primarily, behavioural in nature, as it presents, to the agent, more than one alternative

courses of conduct or prima facie obligations from which he has to choose and decide his duty. Thus, 'situation' is a complex of prima facie, equally obligative', more than one alternative acts, their consequences and circumstances confronting an agent involved in it.

Not all situations, however, are moral. A purely personal predicament cannot be called a moral situation. A situation in which the question of moral value is involved is alone a moral situation. Speaking generally about value-situation, we may say that a distinction is commonly made between a value-situation and a factual-situation. Without going into a detailed discussion of the distinction between fact and value, it may only be broadly said that, while value-terms, like good, right, ought etc. are relevant for the value-situation, they are not so for the factual situation where only empirical considerations prevail. A value-situation is likely to be more subjective, the other, more objective; purposes, interests and principles are involved in the one, and not in the other,

Willis Moore makes some very instructive comments in this respect, in his article,¹³ About the relation between a value-situation and the languages regarding it, he says that we have to assume the actuality of a value-situation that is both chronologically prior to, and logically independent of language of any kind. He further says that value-terms are relevant only to those situations where man is involved in some experiential relationship with an object, which is to be not just neutral, but of affective involvement or commitment. He then, roughly defines " a value-situation as one in which an organism is affectively committed to an object of its experience"¹⁴. So far as a moral situation is concerned, it is easy to see that the 'organism' is rational human being or 'agent' and the 'object' of his experience to which he is affectively committed, is the moral law or ideal.

A moral situation is essentially a 'social' situation. In case of moral obligations, we saw that they are always to others—either directly or indirectly. That is why its content also, which is constituted of claims, is said to be social. As Raphael says, "obligations arise only where there are claims, i.e., where the agent stands to

13. "The Language of Values" - in Ray Lepley (Ed.)
The Language of Value, pp. 9-28.

14. *Ibid.* p. 10.

some other person or persons in a relationship which, in some metaphorical sense, binds them together."¹⁵ A consideration of others' interests and ends is the essential feature of moral obligation. Raphael brings out this point very clearly by saying that obligatoriness of categorical imperatives arises out of the thought of an inter-personal tie, an imaginative act of regarding others' ends as one's own, that is, disposed to pursue them. It is 'obligation' because 'ends are others' it is desired, as if they are one's own.

A moral situation is social in another sense also. In addition to the interests of other persons, it also involves the interests of society as such. It is true that it is in the interests of the individuals that the interests of their 'society' are to be looked after. But, we have to distinguish between the interests of an individual and those of society. A moral situation involves both of them, and therefore, can be said to be doubly social.

Further, the psychological distinction between 'field' and 'environment' is also applicable, to some extent, to moral situation. That is, it is true, to certain extent, to say that moral agent, who is the focal point, chooses his own moral situation. Its nature and scope depends, so to say, on his 'sense of obligation'. But it is not entirely dependent on him. This distinction is parallel to one between subjective and objective duty which we have already discussed. However, for an agent of perfect sense of obligation, an objective moral situation presents itself as if it is subjective.

In fact, a moral situation is the meeting ground of all the other constituents of the concept of moral obligation, namely, Agent, Act, Principle and Ideal. Agent is actually involved in the situation in which alternative acts together with their circumstances, and consequences, form the content. Principle concerns the acts while ideal concerns the agent. It is in this moral situation that an act becomes 'obligatory' and an agent is put under obligation to do it in the light of the Principle and the Ideal.

An important feature of moral situation is that it is generalizable as is shown by general moral rules applicable to similar situations, in spite of the fact

15. Op. cit, p. 110.

that a conflict of obligations is possible, nay, is often found, in a concrete moral situation.

That there is a significant distinction of between a moral situation and a non-moral or empirical situation, does not mean that empirical or factual considerations are completely irrelevant in moral situations, it only means that they are not the chief considerations. 'Beliefs' certainly have influence on 'attitudes'. But in no case, attitudes, can be reduced to beliefs, as some thinkers are prone to do.

The above account, it is hoped, gives a fairly clear idea of the nature of moral situation which plays an important role in the structure of the concept of moral obligation by being, firstly, the meeting ground of other constituents, and secondly, the source of the actual content of concrete moral obligations.

6. Principle or Law

It is the fourth constituent of the concept of moral obligation. Unlike the other three, it is involved only indirectly. It governs all the acts which are morally significant and relevant, through various moral rules. The term 'Law' is also used here for moral principle to indicate its ultimacy. Kant has expressed the force of authority of the Moral Law by calling it the Categorical Imperative. In this sense, a principle is to be distinguished from a rule. As Singer¹⁶ points out, principle is wider than rule and provides, generally, its ground. According to Ladd,¹⁷ rules provide directly general guidance to conduct while principles serve to validate or justify the source of, other particular prescriptions and also rules. Pound has brought out clearly the various functions of legal principles. They are applicable to moral principles as well. He says, "Legal principles.... are made use of to supply new rules, to intercept old ones, to meet new situations, to measure the scope and application of rules and standards, and to reconcile them when they conflict or overlap..."¹⁸ The possibility, however, suggested by this, of there being a multiplicity of such principle, need not be accepted, at least, in the moral field. The term 'principle' may be used in two senses, weak

16. M.M. Singer, "Moral Rules and Principles" in A.I. Meldon (ed.) *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, pp. 160-197. Also *Generalization in Ethics*, ch. V.

17. Ladd, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145.

18. Roscoe Pound, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Law*, p. 116.

and strong. In the weak sense it will mean only a higher-order rule, and there may be many such rules. But in the strong sense, it means the ultimate principle or the Moral Law governing all lower-order principles and rules, and therethrough, all the moral acts. There can be only one such ultimate principle. We have used it, here, in the strong sense. Nevertheless, the functions mentioned by Pound are certainly performed by the ultimate moral principle giving unity to our moral life and discourse.

There is, however, a sense in which we may say that moral principles can be many, and it is that, there can be, and are actually proposed, many views, of the ultimate Principle or the Law. Each view again, may produce many alternative formulations of the Law.

Prichard's position in this respect is characteristic of his theory which is called, 'act-intuitionism' or what Ladd¹⁹ calls, "extreme articularism" or, specifically, 'situationalism" According to Prichard, it is only the situation which can serve as a ground or reason for an act's being right or wrong which is apprehended immediately and intuitively upon reflecting on the situation. It is not derived from any principle. As he puts it, "the sense of obligation to do, or of the rightness of an action of a particular kind is absolutely underivative or immediate."²⁰ This implies that there are no general principles from which duties can be derived; each situation, being unique, determines the relevant duty uniquely. We cannot accept this view of Prichard as it denies "generalization" in Ethics which is a characteristic feature of morality.

So far as the concept of moral obligation is concerned, it may be said that 'principle' represents the supreme, universal obligation or demand. It is binding on all the moral agents, it is applicable to all the moral situations, and it covers all the moral acts. As Singer²¹ says, moral principle holds in all the circumstances, that is, it is 'indefeasible'. Of course, it is bound to be abstract and less definite. It is too general to be able to serve directly as a rule of conduct. It underlies all the moral rules as they are ultimately derived from it.

19. Op. cit. pp. 142-143.

20. *Moral Obligation*.

21. Op. cit. Ch. V.

The place of 'principle' in moral life and discourse is very significant. It signifies the rule of law, so to say, in the governance of moral life. Acts, in order to be morally good or obligatory, have to conform to moral rules which, in turn, have to conform to the ultimate moral Principle or Law. It is because of this fact that morality is said to be deontological in nature. In a sense, 'principle' represents moral ideal itself. Kant has given the highest place to 'principle' in moral considerations in the form of the Categorical Imperative. Because of this importance which 'principle' enjoys in moral life and discourse, we are apt to consider morality to be completely deontological in nature, there being no place for the consideration of either purposes or consequences in it.

In other words, we are apt to reduce 'ideal', if there is any, to 'principle'. This is exactly what Kant and other rule-deontologists have done. But we have seen that, even theoretically, there must be a place for the ground even of 'principle' and this ground we have chosen to call 'ideal'. In a strictly moral view, it may be that, 'principle' itself will be the 'ideal' within morality. But a meta-moral consideration demanding justification of 'morality' itself, will have to go beyond principle to its ground. That is why we have included, in our analysis of the structure of the concept of moral obligation, the fifth constituent, namely, 'Ideal'. The fact, nevertheless, remains that 'principle' is the ultimate governor within the moral field. It is the supreme 'demand' made on moral agents, binding them to follow a particular course of conduct in a given situation through various moral rules stating general obligations. The binding force of moral obligation is expressed better by 'principle' than by anything else.

Thus, principle is a significant and essential constituent of the structure of moral obligation because it removes arbitrariness and particularity in the moral field and represents justifiability and universality in it. Within the moral field, it reigns supreme, and hence the truth in the deontological view of morality. It, in fact, embodies what may be called 'the moral point of view' or 'the way of life' or the 'ideal' as it is meant to govern not only rules but also ends and purposes in our moral life. In the ultimate analysis, however, even the principle is required to be grounded in human nature for being voluntarily acceptable. And this ground we have described as 'Ideal' the last of the constituents of the structure of the concept of moral obligation, which we may, now proceed to consider.

7. Ideal

It is the ultimate ground of moral obligation. In terms of demand, it is the impersonal demander which makes demands on moral agents with regard to their conduct, especially their inter-personal behaviour. It binds the agents and governs the acts through 'principle'-which can be said to be its embodiment so far as moral life is concerned. It represents the way of life which the moral agents are expected to follow. It is the '*Parama Pursusartha*' to use a term from *Hindu Philosophy*, since, 'Ideal' is the ultimate ground not only of moral obligation, but, in fact of morality as such, that is, since the ultimate answer to the question : why should I be moreal ? is to be given in terms of 'Ideal'. Here, we shall only describe broadly its nature as an important constituent of the structure of the concept of moral obligation to enable us to determine its relation to other constituents.

First of all, it should be remembered that the concept of ideal is central not only to moral life, but to life as a whole also. Not only the moral behaviour but the whole of human conduct is directed towards the attainment of the ideal. It determines the will and arouses one into activity. As Hadfield says "The adequate stimulus of will, the stimulus which is peculiarly adapted to arouse the self into activity, is the Ideal.²² Whatever be the concrete nature of the Ideal, one thing is quite certain, that Ideal must be the embodiment, nay, in fact fulfilment of basic human aspirations like, quest after perfection' and urge for freedom and happiness. Some may describe it as self-realization. Hadfield, for example, says, "The Ideal is that, the attainment of which produces completeness and self-realization"²³. It is the most potent factor in the governance of human conduct because it at once stimulates the will to activity and determines the direction and character of activities.

It is necessary to clarify one point at this stage. Generally, 'Ideal' is believed to be accepted and pursued consciously and deliberately. This is true of immediate goals or ideals. But, here, we are talking of the ultimate end of human

22. Hadfield, J. A. *Psychology and Morals*, p. 82.

23. *Ibid*, P. 86.

life. We cannot strictly say, about it, that it is always directly and consciously accepted and pursued in all of our activities. It is rather that which, in the ultimate analysis, is found to guide or direct them. In other words, it is likely, and is often the case, that Ideal expresses itself, not directly, but through a system of purposes or ends and rules, that is, through a way of life. It will be, thus, seen that the apparent antagonism between purpose and rule gets dissolved in the concept of 'ideal'.

Now, we have to distinguish between moral and non-moral ideal. Every ideal need not be necessarily moral. Hence the distinction is significant in more than one way. So far as the concept of moral obligation is concerned, the Ideal which governs the world of obligations must be, it is evident, the Moral Ideal. But the question is, can the Moral Ideal be separated from the Life-Ideal of individual human beings? This question is related to another distinction that we have to make, namely, the distinction between individual ideal and social ideal. Life-Ideal can be said to correspond to the ultimate individual ideal, while Moral-Ideal to social ideal. There are, however, many ways in which these distinctions can be conceived. Here, by Life-Ideal is meant the Supreme Ideal of Life as a whole that an individual accepts and pursues. Moral Ideal, on the other hand, is concerned only with moral life, which is essentially social life. As such, Life-Ideal is a wider concept, and includes Moral Ideal within it as a very important constituent. Thus conceived, the apparent opposition between individual and social, non-moral and moral ideals dissolves into the single ultimate Life-Ideal. Ideal, as a constituent of the structure of the concept of moral obligation, is, here, viewed as described above. It is either Moral Ideal as a part or an aspect of Life-Ideal, or Life-Ideal expressing itself through Moral-Ideal. If we further analyse the nature of Moral Ideal, we shall see that it is better expressed in the form of the supreme Moral Law, or as Kant would say, the Categorical Imperative, bringing out the deontological and binding nature of morality. Life-Ideal then becomes the ground of this Imperative or Supreme Demand, or the impersonal demander. It has the inherent force of inner binding because it is not imposed on the individual from without, but is appointed by his own nature. It can be truly said to 'oblige' one to act in a particular manner in a given situation.

A further question may be asked as to whether there are many such ideals, and if so, how to resolve the conflict among them. We should remember, in this connection, that we are, here, talking about the ultimate Life-Ideal which, for an individual at least, can be only one. Other so-called ideals, many of which are really only purposes, are to be determined in the light of Life-Ideal. As for different ideals for different individuals, we may say, here, only this much that human nature being what it is, it is possible to conceive of a single ideal for all human beings. But, even supposing that individuals have different Life-Ideals, the moral life being common to them, the variety does not affect the universality and objectivity of 'Morality' or 'Moral Obligation'. The conflict, therefore, need not arise, at least, in the moral field.

The above discussion, I hope, points out clearly the important role played by 'Ideal' in the analysis of the concept of moral obligation, as one of the essential constituents of its structure. Moral obligation, as we have seen, is the demand of the 'Ideal'. The peculiarity of the concept of Ideal is that it combines in it at once both fact and value. It is because of this that it enjoys a unique place in our moral life.

8. Interrelation Among the Constituents

We have discussed, up to now, the nature and function of the five constituents of the concept of moral obligation, separately. We shall, now, point out their interrelation very briefly.

Agent is the central constituent round which other constituents revolve. It is because of his psycho-social nature that other constituents come into play at all. His social nature puts him in a moral situation which is primarily a social situation. He is caught in the net-work of inter-personal relationships. On the other hand, he has his own individual purposes or desires to fulfil, some ideal to realize. The conditions, however, of the realization of his ideal itself, are not entirely individual or personal but also social. It is in this complex psycho-social predicament that moral binding has its origin. An agent is a doer and his acts affect the interest both of himself and others. The binding is, therefore, primarily behavioural, that is, concerning his acts or conduct. The relation between Agent and Situation on the one hand, and between Agent and Act on the other, is thus

evident. It is in the moral Situation that a moral Agent is required or bound to follow a particular course of conduct that is morally right or obligatory. In other words, moral considerations arise only in moral situations. Further, the Situation provides the Agent with alternative acts out of which he has to choose the right one. As for the relation between Act and Situation, it is clear that Moral Situation is the source of the concrete content of Moral Obligation or Act.

Now, while considering the relation between Agent and Act, we will do well to refer to their so-called characteristics of being under obligation and obligatoriness respectively. Agent is said to be under obligation to do the Act which is said to be obligatory. There is the relation of binding between the two and, being under obligation and obligatoriness express two aspects of the same relation of binding. That the binding is of the nature of demand we have already seen. Agent is the demandee and Act is the demandum. Both, 'being under obligation on the part of the Agent and obligatoriness of Act, refer to the same thing, Principle in the present case, which binds the two together. That is to say, Agent and Act are bound together by Principle. Agent is to act on Principle. Principle thus represents the demand itself. As principle, it is general and formal in nature. But it gets its concrete content in particular concrete situations.

The peculiarity of principle is that it represents social consideration. It binds the Agent not only to the obligatory Act, but to the society at large. It binds individuals together into a society and helps create and maintain social harmony or social good. It removes arbitrariness, ensures objectivity and thus clearly brings out the deontological aspect of the nature of moral obligation. It is moral binding or demand itself. It is the Agent who is bound by Principle. This is expressed by saying that he is under obligation. The general relation between Act and Principle, however, is that of conformity. The Act has to conform to the Principle, on the one hand and to the Situation on the other. This double conformity, so to say, of Act constitutes what is called its obligatoriness. This shows that both 'being under obligation' on the part of Agent and 'obligatoriness of Act' are essentially relational in nature. They cannot be conceived without reference to other constituents, namely Situation and Principle.

Coming to Ideal, the relation of Agent to Ideal is understandable; but the relation of other constituents to it is not that easy to understand. So far as

Agent is concerned, Ideal represents both the Individual and the social good in the form of the supreme goal of his life. It is pursued by him, consciously or unconsciously, through all his activities. Its acceptance by Agent is not only voluntary but is, in fact, quite natural as it is appointed by his own nature. All his purposes and immediate goals are supposed to lead to this supreme Ideal.

Ideal is the ultimate ground of moral obligation. It is the authority behind moral binding as well as its explanation. The answer to the question: why should I be moral ? is to be given ultimately in terms of Ideal. It is the voluntary acceptance of Ideal by Agent that puts him under obligation. To accept the Ideal is to submit to its guidance, rule and authority, This binding is expressed in the form of Principle. Principle or Law is, thus, the practical embodiment of Ideal. Ideal is the consummation of the systems of both purpose and rules that form our life. It brings out clearly that morality is teleological as well as deontological in nature.

Situation is the occasion for stepping towards the realization of the Ideal. Particular Acts are governed by Ideal through Principle. What is important to note is that Ideal puts Agent under obligation and subjects him to the binding of Principle which in turn derives its authority, ultimately, from Ideal itself.

This brings us to the end of the discussion of the structure of the concept of moral obligation. The discussion shows that the concept of moral obligation has a complex structure of which a Pentagon Model is, here, suggested and elaborated. It goes against the simple quality notion of moral concepts as suggested by the Intuitionists, especially by G.E. Moore. One thing, however, is certain, and it is that the concept of moral obligation has its own characteristic unity because the interrelation among its constituents is not only intimate but is also inherent in them. It is the natural inherent interrelation that moulds them into the unity of the concept of moral obligation. The structural analysis as proposed and undertaken here, will, I hope enable us to gain an insight into the essential nature of the concept of moral obligation.

CHAPTER - VIII

FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF THE CONCEPT OF MORAL OBLIGATION.

Section A: Moral Obligation and Motivation

- (1) The Problem
- (2) Externalism
- (3) Internalism
- (4) Critical Estimate
- (5) The Proposed view

Section B: Objectives, Subjective and Putative Views of Moral Obligation

- (1) The Problem
- (2) Subjective and Putative Views
- (3) Criticism
- (4) Adequacy of the Objective View
- (5) Nature of the Controversy
- (6) Conclusion of Second Part

Section A: Moral Obligation and Motivation.¹

1. The Problem

The question, whether 'motivation' can, somehow, be built into the judgements of moral obligation, is, theoretically, as well as practically, very

1. For the suggestion and material of this section, I am indebted to Prof. W.K. Frankena's Article: "Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy" in A. I. Melden (Ed.) *Essays in Moral Philosophy* (pp 40-81).

important, since the answer to it is bound to reveal the essential nature of the concept of moral obligation. As usual, there are two opposed views in this regard which Frankena names as Externalism and Internalism. According to the externalists, motivation is not a part of the analysis of moral judgements of obligation or the justification of moral claims, It is important only for persuading people to act as per their obligations.

For the internalists, on the other hand, motivation is involved in the analysis of the judgements of moral obligation, and, therefore, essential for an act's being, or being shown to be morally obligatory. We shall, here, briefly consider these opposed views critically.

2. Externalism

According to Externalism, obligation represents a requirement which is external to the agent in the sense of being independent of his desires or needs. This does not imply that needs or desires are totally irrelevant in moral considerations. What is emphasised is that, though needs etc. may have some relevance of their own for the judgements of moral obligation, they cannot form a part of their analysis; that is, they cannot be said to be the essential constituent of the concept of moral obligation.

A judgement of moral obligation, on this view, states an objective fact of moral binding or obligation. An agent, having a sense of obligation, accepts it. So far as the existence of the fact of obligation is concerned, the agent's needs etc. do not affect it in any way. Whether the agent's needs are satisfied or not by acting as per his obligations, whether he is actually moved to act as per obligations or not, the obligations exist there all the same for him. Needs may constitute his motivation for actually acting as per obligation, but cannot be the reason for justifying a judgement of moral obligation. Even in case of a desire being a motive, one may object to it on the Kantian ground that, such an action performed to satisfy a need cannot be moral since it is done, not on categorical, but on hypothetical imperative. Even the motive cannot be the satisfaction of desire or need, but only the respect for the Moral Law. Of course, this latter position involves some element of internalism which we will consider in due course. The point, here is that, according to externalism, the reason for justifying

a judgement of moral obligation, that is its existence, is independent of reason for actually acting, or being moved to act, as per obligation. Thus, motivation is external to the judgement of moral obligation. For externalism, asking the question 'what is my duty'? is not asking for a duty which is already accepted as 'motive'. Motive may be either presupposed or added for explaining the actual behaviour as per obligation.

3. Internalism

Internalism upholds the opposite view that 'motivation' forms an essential constituent, if not the only one, of the concept of moral obligation, that it is involved invariably in the analysis of the judgements of moral obligation. An act's being morally obligatory or being shown to be so, depends, in some way, upon its connection with motivation. In other words, 'obligatoriness' of an act is essentially related to 'motivation'. A judgement of moral obligation does not state a dry, intellectual or cognitive 'fact' of obligation, but expresses the 'motivational involvement', so to say, of the moral agent with respect to the act, always or mostly accompanied by the feeling of approval towards it. According to this view, it is not possible to explain the voluntary acceptance of obligation by an agent and so also his behaviour in accordance with it, without reference to some necessary relation between his motivation and the obligatoriness of the act. In short, a judgement of moral obligation expresses an agent's being under obligation which involves necessarily a practical obligation 'to act on it', which in turn involves 'motivation' so to act, on the part of the agent.

Internalism is supported by different thinkers on essentially the same ground, as is seen from Frankena's account in his article, Stace,² for example, holds that, even if 'A ought to do B' is true, it does not follow that A has any obligation to 'act', any practical obligation, but only an obligation to believe. This implies that a 'practical obligation' cannot be derived from a 'fact' even a moral fact', so to say, of obligation. Something more is required and that 'more' is what may generally be called 'motivation'. The same point is made even clearer by Nowell-Smith.³ According to him, a 'fact', natural, metaphysical or

2. Stace, W.T. : *The Concept of Morals*.

3. *Ethics*, pp. 36-43.

non-natural, about an action cannot entail that one ought to do it. Frankena very, significantly point out that this may mean two things — (a) 'Ought' cannot be derived from 'is'; and (b) 'ought' cannot be derived from a 'truth' even of an ought-statement. Again, it will be seen that something 'more' than a 'fact' is necessary for deriving a 'practical ought'.

Steavenson provides us with an emotive version of Internalism. According to him, ethical terms have a magnetism of their own, that is, "a person who recognizes to be good (or obligatory) must ipso facto acquire a stronger tendency to act in its favour than he otherwise would have had."⁴ There are two premises on which his internalistic thesis rests (a) assent to a moral judgement necessarily acquires a stronger tendency to do the act; and (b) assenting to a fact involving no reference to interest will, in no case, necessarily create such a tendency. As Frankena points out, these can be taken either causally or psychologically. In either case, a reference to 'serving the interest' is necessary, and it, in turn, involves a reference to 'motivation'.

According to Aiken,⁵ the 'normative' nature of the judgements of obligation entails Internalism. Since they determine conduct by influencing the will, a reference to 'motivation' is implicit in them. This is supported by the fact that the relation between cognition and motivation is causal and not logical. He also gives another argument in support of his view, namely, that obligation presupposes 'responsibility' which, in turn, presupposes motivation.⁶ According to Field,⁷ action must have some reason and further, this reason necessarily refers to motivation. This is implied in his criticism of externalism that if motivation is external to obligation then no reason can be given for 'action' when it is actually there.

4. Critical Estimate

We have stated above, in brief, the general contentions of both Externalism

4. "Emotive Meaning of Ethical Words", *Mind*, 1937.

5. Aiken, H.D.: "Evaluation and Obligation", *Journal of Philosophy*, 1950.

6. Aiken, H.D.: "Evaluation and Obligation", *Journal of Philosophy*, 1950.

7. Field G.C. : *Moral Theory*, pp. 51-56.

and Internalism with regard to the problem of whether motivation forms the necessary and essential aspect of the concept of moral obligation. Frankena very ably sums up their positions in the following words : "What an externalist must deny, and the internalist must assert, is that having objectively a certain moral obligation logically entails having some motivation for fulfilling it, that justifying a judgement of objective moral obligation logically implies establishing or producing a motivational buttress, and that it is logically impossible that there should be a state of apprehending a moral obligation of one's own which is not accompanied by such a buttress."⁸

While considering them, we have to distinguish between two things—namely, 'having an obligation' and 'accepting an obligation'. This distinction is important because the controversy rests on the confusion between the two. Externalism emphasizes the former while Internalism stresses the latter. Corresponding to this distinction, there are two other distinctions which we must note. Firstly, there is a distinction between 'subjective obligation' and 'objective obligation'. Of these, the former implies Internalism and the latter Externalism. Secondly, there is also a distinction, as Frankena points out, between a 'motivating reason' of behaviour and its 'justifying reason'. Here again, the former implies internalism and the latter Externalism. So far as the question of subjective / objective duty is concerned, we will discuss it, in some details, in the second section of this chapter. In anticipation of its result, however, we may say that this distinction is more epistemological than ontological. That is, there is only objective duty and the question is how to know it subjectively. The other two distinctions are ultimately connected with the question — why should I be moral ? — that is, with the 'ground' of moral obligation. The question is, even though there is the objective fact of obligation, why should I accept it?

As for the judgement of moral obligation, it expresses 'having an obligation'. For example, "Y ought to do X" expresses the moral fact, so to say, that Y is under obligation to do X. The question of its acceptance by Y does not come in at this stage. Even the reason that may be given in support of this judgement

8. Frankena, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.

does not involve 'motivation' as it is only an objective, justifying reason. The agent may even believe that he is under obligation. The question is, why should the agent act in accordance with his obligation? This is almost asking the question-why should he (or I) be moral? It will be remembered that this is quite a different question that takes us beyond the scope of a moral judgement of obligation. The Externalists confine themselves only to what the judgements of moral obligation express and they are so far right in doing so. The Internalists, on the other hand, insist that the complete meaning and nature of the concept of moral obligation cannot be understood unless we know why we do or should accept our obligations and act on them. According to them, only the reference to 'motivation' can satisfactorily explain this, Internalism is right in insisting on the 'ground' of moral obligation, but we must know that the judgements of moral obligation by themselves do not involve a reference to its ground, as they express only the fact of the agent's being under obligation. Thus, we see that these two theories emphasise two important but different aspects of the concept of moral obligation, namely, its nature and meaning on the one hand and its ground on the other, and both, therefore, are right in what they emphasize. It is because of this that Frankena arrives at the conclusion that Externalism cannot be refuted, nor can Internalism be.

5. The Proposed View

But we need not stop at this conclusion. We may try to explore the possibility of a view which will combine these theories into a comprehensive theory of moral obligation. Fortunately, the two theories are not really opposed, since they emphasize two different but equally important aspects which, in fact, a theory of moral obligation must include, namely, the meaning and the ground of moral obligation. The truth contained in Externalism is that moral obligation is not entirely a subjective matter, depending on the whims of individuals, but is an objective and generalizable demand to which individuals are subject. The truth in Internalism, on the other hand, is that, though an objective fact, moral obligation, since it is voluntarily accepted and acted on, is grounded ultimately in the human nature itself and cannot be foreign or external to man as he is. In other words, moral obligation is a 'fact' but not 'external'; it is internal (or comes from within) but is not merely a subjective feeling; it is a 'fact' natural to man.

The same thing we have expressed elsewhere by saying that all ought-judgements imply a second order demand to act on the (first-order) demands expressed by them. In other words, 'acting on the moral obligations' is itself a common moral obligation which refers to 'motivation'.

It will be seen that the complete picture of moral obligation presented in this study harmoniously combines both Internalism and Externalism. On our view, moral obligation is a legitimately superior demand of the ideal. Herein, 'legitimately superior demand' represents Externalism, and 'of the ideal' Internalism. Pursuit of ideal is natural to man, and he can pursue only that ideal which is appointed by his own nature. As a 'demand' moral obligation is a fact and as a demand of 'ideal' it is natural to man and comes from within, provided with sufficient 'motivation' to act on it. The answer to the question-why should I be moral? which is involved especially in Internalism, can be satisfactorily given only in terms of 'ideal' grounded in human nature. The demand for being moral, is, itself, felt as the call of the ideal. And since the ideal represents the interests and aspirations of man, his 'summum bonum', its call is felt and accepted as inherently authoritative or imperative. As Turner very aptly puts. "... the moral ideal, in its relation to conduct and character, is always felt as essentially imperative. We instinctively feel... that in so far as this imperativeness is surrendered, morality sinks to expediency"⁹. It is because of its 'inner' source that the authority or imperativeness of moral obligation or demand becomes inherently acceptable. Turner brings out the innate nature of the source of the authority of moral obligation very beautifully by saying, "Obligation is a rigorous demand proceeding as it were from ourselves to ourselves, or from our higher self to our lower self."¹⁰

9. Turner, J.E.; *The Philosophic Basis of Moral Obligation*, p. 163.

10. *Ibid*, p. 165.

Section B : Objective, Subjective and Putative Views of Moral Obligation¹¹

1. The Problem

A question is very often raised as to whether our obligations depend upon the actual situation and consequences, or on our beliefs about these, or, again, on our moral estimate of what the supposed situation demands. The view that obligations depend on the real, objective situation is called the objective views; the view that they depend on our belief about it is called subjective; and the one that they depend upon our estimate of what is morally demanded by the supposed situation, is called the putative view. The problem before us is to determine which one of these views gives a more adequate description of moral obligation. This is by no means an easy task because, as Raphael¹² is well aware, the common-sense judgements of moral obligation do not allow us to give an exclusively single answer, covering all instances, in favour of any one of these views; and yet, all the three, even two of them cannot be true at the same time and in the same sense.

Let us consider these views, and also the difference between them a little more closely. With regard to the whole of this question, we may safely draw on the elaborate discussions of this problem by Ross,¹³ Prichard,¹⁴ and Carritt. According to Ross, a morally suitable situation, in which an agent finds himself, contains two elements-objective and subjective. The objective element consists of the facts about the various persons and things involved in the situation, while the subjective element consists of the agent's thoughts about the situation. The question, now, is which of the two is ethically more important. The putative view is described by him as the "double dose of subjectivity"¹⁵. As to the differences between these views, he points out that the subjective view may differ from the objective, "In consequence of a divergence from the truth in the agent's opinion about the circumstances", and the putative from the subjective

11. These descriptions are used by Dr. Carritt in his *Ethical and Political Thinking*, Ch. II where he discusses this problem very extensively.

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

13. *Foundations of Ethics*, Ch. VII.

14. "Duty and Ignorance of Fact" in *Moral Obligation*.

15. Rosse, Op. cit, p. 164.

"in virtue of a divergence from truth in the agent's opinion as to what is morally suitable to the supposed circumstances". The one difference is due to a divergence from truth on a non-moral question, the other to a divergence from the truth on a moral question.¹⁶ In other words the differences between these views lie in their approaches to the two elements involved in a moral situation, namely, the 'situation' itself and the 'demands' it makes on the agent. The objective view has an objective approach to both; the subjective view has an objective approach to the 'demands' but a subjective one to the 'situation' and the putative view is the opposite of the objective, that is, it has a subjective approach to both the 'situation' and the 'demands'. Hence its description by Ross as the 'double dose of subjectivity'.

Russell also distinguishes between subjective and objective rightness and says that, "a man's conduct has 'subjective' rightness when it is what his own conscience approves, but that this does not ensure 'objective' rightness"¹⁷. About objective rightness he says, "I think that the 'objectively right' act is that which best serves the interest of the group that is regarded as ethically dominant"¹⁸. It is clear that Russell is, here, referring to the 'demands' - element, leaving the 'situation' out of consideration.

We have seen that according to Ross, the question about the 'situation' is a non-moral question, while the one about the 'demands' is a moral question. This is only *prima facie* true, as the 'situation', here, is assumed to involve, in itself, no moral considerations. It refers only to the persons and things involved in it. If this is the case, then it is very easy to resolve the conflict about it, between the subjective and objective views, because, then, it is a matter only of empirical verification. But it is not so simple, since the 'situation' is not just an empirical matter, a matter that can be empirically (objectively) determined and verified. In that case, there would be no difference between a 'social situation' and a 'moral situation'. This means that the 'situation' also involves besides things and persons, certain morally relevant or significant features which are even more important and are organically related to the 'demands' which the

16. Ibid, pp. 161-162

17. Russell, B. : *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*. Ch. VI. p. 79

18. Ibid. p. 80.

moral situation is thought to make. The question about the 'situation' as well as the 'demand's is, therefore, a moral question. In case of 'situation', the differences are concerning its morally relevant features, while in case of 'demands', concerning their exact nature. In one case, the question is, "what are the morally significant features of the 'situation'?" in the other, "what are the (moral) 'demands', which it makes on the agent involved in it"? Thus, Ross's account, in this regard, is unacceptable. A man cannot have, without sacrificing consistency, one moral stand-point with regard to the 'moral situation', and another with regard to the 'demands' it makes, for the simple reason that his view of 'demands' depends on his view of the 'situation'.

This point seriously affects the formulation of the problem itself by the deontologists like Carritt, Ross and Prichard, as it removes, out of picture, what they call the subjective view, which is really a combination of subjective and objective approaches to the 'situation' and the 'demands' respectively. The completely subjective view is what they call 'putative view'¹⁹ which is opposed to the objective view. In the accounts of these views given by Ross and others, the emphasis is on the 'situation' and the questions are framed by Carritt accordingly. But, while restating the problem in the light of above discussion, the emphasis will be more properly given on the 'demands'. Emphasizing 'demands' is very important because, when we ask the question, "What ought I to do?", what we want to know ultimately is our duty or demand. Further, it is even more important to note that 'moral demands' are not determined solely by the concrete situation. In fact, situations only supply the concrete content of the obligatory acts; their obligatoriness itself is not determined by the situation, but by the moral rule which in turn is determined by the supreme Moral Law embodying the Life-Ideal. It is, thus, more significant to emphasize the 'demands' than the 'situation' in stating the problem. Thus restated, the problem assumes the form "Are our moral obligations what we think or believe them to be or are they objectively determined?" The view that they are what we believe them to be, is the subjective view, while, the one that they are objectively determined

19. Broad, C. D. also calls the putative obligation, 'subjective' and the objective and subjective, severally 'material' and 'formal' (*Philosophy*, July, 1946).

and are independent of our beliefs about them, is the objective view. What Carritt calls the 'subjective' and the 'putative' views, may be taken to be the two varieties of the subjective view as restated.

2. Subjective and Putative Views

Considering first, the subjective view, we see that the strongest argument in favour of it is that, only subjectively can a man ever know his duties. In order to be able to discharge one's duties, one must first be able to know them. Not being omniscient a man can never know his objective duties. We can do only what we consider or believe to be our duties and not others. There is another point of view from which subjectivism may be supported. If we distinguish between individual and social morality then, the obligations of individual morality are subjective, though the obligations of social morality may be objective. Raphael holds such a view. He says, "On the other hand, such obligations which do not come within the range of what is demanded by a society from all its members as an irreducible minimum depend solely on what the agent thinks is required of him."²⁰

Prichard and Ross are in favour of the subjective view. Ross says, "Nevertheless, I have come to hold the opposite opinion, that it is the subjectively right act that is obligatory."²¹ In this he follows Prichard whose arguments in his 'Duties and Ignorance of Fact', seem to him quite conclusive. While considering these arguments, we must remember that the problem, which these thinkers discuss, emphasizes 'situation', while we have restated the problem emphasizing 'demands'. This means that they accept the 'objectivity' of 'demands', but deny it to the situation in which they arise. That is, their view is only partially subjective in our sense. This makes it vulnerable from both the putative and the objective standpoints, as it is neither completely subjective, i.e., putative, nor completely objective. Carritt realizes this drawback of this 'subjective view' and, therefore, supports the putative view on the whole. With these clarifications let us consider the arguments in favour of the situation-subjectivism, so to say, given by Ross, following Prichard.

20. Op. cit., p. 137.

21. Ross : op. cit. p. 148.

The arguments are chiefly two, Firstly, the contention that an obligation must be an obligation not to effect a certain result, but to set oneself to effect it, supports the subjective view. Secondly, the contention that rightness or obligatoriness is not a character of actions, but that 'being under obligation' is a characteristic of a man, that is, agent, also supports the subjective view. Carrit's own position is that, on the objective view a man might sometime know an obligation but never a duty, Therefore, though it must be possible for him to do his objective duty, yet, he is responsible only for trying to do it. In one sense, he cannot even try to do his objective duty since he does not, and cannot know what it is. As he says, "What a man can always do is to fulfil a putative duty"²² because his conclusion is that "we always know our putative duty, sometimes a subjective obligation, but our objective duties never."²³

3. Criticism

From the above arguments it becomes clear that they are all directed against the knowability of the objective obligation. The chief argument is that we can know only our subjective duty and never the objective, hence our duty is subjective in nature. This is not a sound conclusion. Prichard's arguments are also not sound as we will now see.

The first argument is that an obligation must be to set oneself to effect a result and not directly to effect the result itself; and this implies subjectivism. Now the meaning of 'result', here, is ambiguous. It may either mean the 'act' itself or its result. From an ought-sentence expressing a judgement of moral obligation it is evident that it means 'act' and not its result. For example, "You ought to do X" demands to 'do X' and not to produce any result of 'doing X'. Thus, 'setting oneself to effect a result' would mean setting oneself to do X. Now, the contention of the argument is that a judgement of moral obligation expresses a demand, not do 'do X', but to 'set oneself to do X'. It is clear that this contention is not in conformity with the actual judgement of moral obligation expressed in an ought-sentence like "you ought to do X". No 'setting yourself' is

22. Carritt, Op. cit, p. 24

23. Ibid, p. 26.

involved here but 'doing X'. Thus, the contention, on which the argument is based, is itself unwarranted so far as we stick to the original meaning of an ought-sentence.

But let us grant that the contention is true, for the sake of argument. Still it cannot support the subjective view. It only changes the 'content' of obligation from 'doing X' to 'setting oneself to do X'. But the latter can be as objective as the former. The 'situation' remains the same in both the cases.

Similar is the case of the second argument which is based on the contention that, 'not obligatoriness of an act' but 'being under obligation of an agent' is central to the concept of moral obligation. In our theory we have tried to show that though the concept of obligation refers primarily to an agent's 'being under obligation', still 'obligatoriness of an act' also cannot be altogether ignored as they form the two sides of the same concept and arise from the same inherent interrelation among the constituents of the complex structure of 'moral obligation'. Moreover, even granting the contention, the subjective view does not follow, because, 'being under obligation' is as objective as 'obligatoriness' is. There is a distinction between 'to be under obligation' and 'to feel to be under obligation'. The argument confuses these two distinct facts, the former 'moral' and the latter 'psychological'.

Let us now pass on to consider the chief argument based on the 'unknowability' of the objective duty. There are two parts in this argument, namely, that (a) 'objective situation' is unknowable, and (b) 'objective duty' is unknowable. It is also assumed that the 'objective duty' depends on the knowledge of the 'objective situation'. As regards (a), it is as clear as day-light that an objective situation, in all its entirety, can be known only by an omniscient being. But it is not necessary to know the objective situation in its entirety, as 'duty' does not depend entirely on it. We have to distinguish in this connection, between a 'social' situation and a 'moral' situation. The latter involves only the morally relevant features of the former, and 'duty' depends on this moral situation plus the general moral rules. The 'moral relevance' or morality itself does not depend on the situation, but is determined by the general moral rules, and ultimately by the Moral Law, or, generally, by the moral code accepted by a society. This means that the criteria of 'morality' or 'moral relevance' are pre-

determined and it is on the basis of these criteria that the morally relevant features of a situation are determined and constituted into what is called the 'moral' situation, giving rise to duties. This means that if we have sufficient knowledge of the 'social' situation and the criteria of morality, then we can know the duty arising in it. As for the distinction between 'obligation' and 'duty' it is significant only in the context of conflict of obligations; but it is possible to resolve it in the light of the Moral Law (or the Life Ideal) on the one hand and the morally relevant features of the situation on the other.

The next question is, can we know all the morally relevant features of a situation? On the whole, I am inclined to hold that we can, since, the criteria determining these features do not depend entirely on the situation itself, but are themselves determined by the Moral Law or the existing moral code. What we must know is the exact nature of the 'problem' in a situation. Then we can decide as to what information is necessary to solve it, with the help of the criteria, and try to get it. That will determine the 'duty' in that situation. The information we require is not about the whole of the objective situation, but only about the facts concerning the problem. Even this is sometimes very difficult to get. But difficulty is not impossibility.

The second argument states that the objective moral demands are unknowable. This is primarily the contention of the putative view which refers chiefly to the 'conflict of obligation'. It assumes the inability of a moral theory to resolve the conflict. Plainly stated, this means that our duty is what we think or believe is our duty. It deprives the judgements of moral obligation of their objectivity and makes duty a matter of subjective belief. But these contentions are unacceptable. It is not proper to assume the inability of Moral theory as such to resolve the conflict of obligations on the ground that some particular theory fails or has failed. Further, this view goes against the objectivity of moral judgements. In fact, objectivity is one of the prominent features of morality. A duty is not what I think to be my duty, but is what is determined objectively as duty by the inherent interrelation of the constituents of 'moral obligation'. Thus, the second part of the argument also is not acceptable.

4. Adequacy of the Objective View

We tried to show above that all the arguments in favour of the subjective view are unacceptable. The obligations expressed in the judgements of moral obligation are objective for they do not depend merely on the beliefs of the moral agents. We cannot, therefore, say that there are no objective obligations, or that they are entirely a matter of the agent's subjective beliefs, either about the 'situation' or about the 'demand' or again about both 'situation and demand.'

It is very important to note in this connection what Professor Brandt pointed out to Dr. Ewing, and which he accepted and incorporated in his own view. I quote Ewing's own words.

"But it has been pointed out to me that in order to be even subjectively under a moral obligation I must believe not only that the act is fitting but that there is independent of my belief a moral obligation to do it. ... Thus the subjective moral ought presupposes an objective ought not only in the sense of fittingness but in the sense of moral obligation"²⁴

This clearly shows not only that there are objective moral obligations but also that our being subjectively under moral obligation itself presupposes their existence. The paradox of the subjective view is that it has to base itself on the objective view. When I am prompted to act on my 'belief' about a moral obligation, my belief itself is that it is my objective duty.

Thus, on the whole, the objective view proves itself to be more adequate than the subjective and the putative views. What the judgements of moral obligation express are not subjective, but objective obligations in the form of demands. They do not depend on the beliefs of the agents about them, but are objectively determined by the Moral Law, embodying the Life-Ideal, on the one hand and the moral situation on the other. Even 'conscience' cannot support the subjective view. As Russell points out, "If we admit, as I think we must, that not all consciences are perfect, we shall be compelled to seek for a concept of 'objective rightness' by which consciences can be judged."²⁵

24. Ewing, A.C. : *Second Thoughts in Moral Philosophy*, p. 91.

25. Russell, op. cit. 79.

5. Nature of the Controversy

When we consider this controversy of 'subjective-objective duty' in all its aspects, we are inclined to think that it is based on the confusion between the two questions (a) is my duty subjectively or objectively determined? and (b) What can I actually do, the subjective or the objective duty? The answers to these questions are obvious. My duty is not determined by me but is objective. At the same time, however, I can actually do only what I consider to be my objective duty. It is very often the case that there is a gap between my objective duty and what I believe to be my objective duty. This gap corresponds, in general, to the gap between the objective reality and my knowledge of it. The real question is, how to bridge this gap? But, if we believe in the capacity of Reason to know the Reality, then I think, this question can be hopefully solved. The gap is really between my duty and my knowledge of it and not between my subjective and objective duty. What I am demanded to do is my duty. I do it as I understand it. The question is how to get true knowledge of duties? The controversy, therefore, has an epistemological significance rather than an ontological one. When this is realized, the controversy, in fact, does not remain a controversy, but gets transformed into an epistemological problem, which, though difficult, is not altogether impossible to solve.

6. Conclusion of the Second Part

This brings us to the end of the Second Part of our study. We have, now, before us, a sufficiently clear picture of the concept of moral obligation. We saw that 'obligation' especially 'moral obligation' is most adequately described in terms of 'demand'. We further saw that the 'morality' of moral obligation' consists in its legitimate superiority. As for the complex structure of the concept of moral obligation, we found that it is constituted of five components, namely-Agent, Act, Situation, Principle or Law, and Ideal. We suggested that it is the Ideal which makes demands on the Agents, and is ultimately the ground of moral obligation. In the light of the discussion of this Part, therefore, we may describe the nature of moral obligation in the form of a tentative definition as follows —

“Moral Obligation is the legitimately superior demand made by the Ideal on the moral Agent, to Act in a moral Situation, in conformity with the moral Law.”