

Preface

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The Central Problem of moral life is embodied in the question: “what I ought to do”? To answer this question adequately is the principle task of Moral Philosophy. This question pre-supposes two equally important questions

- (a) “Why should I do what I ought to do? and
- (b) “What I ought to do? and why?”

The history of Moral Philosophy shows that this question has been answered in a variety of ways by different thinkers. The main moral concepts in terms of which these answers have been given are 'good', 'right' and 'ought' or 'obligation'. These answers are broadly divided into two groups which are generally described as 'teleological' and 'deontological'. These theories and the diversity of statements show the rich complexity of man's moral life. The proposed thesis would be addressed to working out the possibility of a united view of moral life that would include the elements of truth embodied in the various moral theories.

The concept of Moral Obligation occupies a key position in the whole universe of moral discourse. There are other important moral concepts like 'good' and 'right' in terms of which moral life is usually explained. But the peculiarity of the concept of moral obligation is that it involves the study on moral concepts as well. It touches all the significant aspects of moral life and involves a necessary, reference to the concept of 'good' and 'right' themselves. Hence the central concept of Moral Obligation. The key originating question of the proposed thesis is : what is Moral Obligation?

I. The concept of Moral Obligation has practical as well as theoretical significance. No other moral concepts are so directly practical. The central moral question “what I ought to do? and why?” is directly about moral obligation and its ground. Thus it forms the link between theory and practice.

Secondly, the concept of Moral Obligation involves both deontological and teleological considerations. The concept of 'obligation' as such is deontological in nature, while its 'ground' brings in teleology.

Thirdly, it brings together 'reason' and 'desire' in the form of objective binding, and 'satisfaction', or 'right' and 'good'. It is through the concept of moral obligation that the 'ideal' governs the 'actual', and the 'higher-self' governs the 'lower-self', if we may say so. The sense of moral obligation is the core of moral experience. It should also be noted that a study of moral obligation has a very important bearing on related studies of human life such as social and political philosophy and philosophy of religion etc.

Finally, it is through the concept of moral obligation that we clearly know the social nature of morality and its function of social control.

II. The study will analyse the language in which the judgements of moral obligations are expressed, especially the 'ought'-language. Further the essential nature and meaning of moral obligation can not be known completely unless we also know its ground. Hence, the importance of enquiry into the nature of the ultimate ground of moral obligation. The proposed study will therefore, attempt to answer the following questions regarding the concept of moral obligation :

- (a) What is the essential nature of the concept of moral obligation?
- (b) What is essential nature and function of the language of moral obligation?

In connection with the question (a), it also attempts to know -

- (a1) the 'morality' of moral obligation distinguishing it from non-moral obligation;
- (a2) the structure of the concept of moral obligation.

The method of the proposed enquiry shall be that of analytical philosophy. But it would be supplemented by the synthetic, the critical and the constructive method. The method of the proposed thesis may be described as both normative and meta-ethical.

III. Since the first World War philosophy in the West has taken a linguistic turn. The logical positivist account of moral language as something non-cognitive and non-propositional did not hold its sway. With **Stevenson** the emotive theory of eithics came to be formulated in greater detail and thoroughness. Moral language has been shown to be emotive in the sense that it seeks to change the hearer's attitude in the face of commonly agreed facts. In the meantime the game view of language came to be proposed by the later **Wittgenstien**. It became very influential in analysing moral language in the hands of **Richard Hare**. He combines the insight suggested by **Moore** that moral predicates are such that the descriptivist programme of reducing moral judgement into judgement of fact is primarily misconcieved.

Going a little further back the concept of moral obligation may be said to have started with **Kant** and then it was taken over by the Intuitionists like **Prichard** and **Ross**.

Recent studies of moral language by **Carl Wellman** (*The Language of Ethics*), **Wills Moore** (*The Language of Values*), **Allen Gewirth** (*Metaethics and Normative Ethics*), **Blanshard** (*Reason and Goodness*) and **Paul Taylor** (**Normative Discourse**), etc. deserve mention so that of all ethical terms the concept of 'ought' needs to be understood, differently from these of 'good' and 'right'. It is the uniqueness of the concept of ought that the present thesis has sought to establish, and consequently that the language of obligation can not be subsumed under the linguistic schema for 'good' or 'right'.