

## **CHAPTER - II**

### **ANALYSIS OF OUGHT-SENTENCES**

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#### **1. Importance of Ought-Language**

The Judgements of moral obligation can be expressed in a variety of linguistic forms, such as ones using 'obligatoriness', 'being under obligation' and so on. For example, 'X is under obligation to do Y' or 'Y is obligatory for X to do' or again, 'It is the duty of X to do Y' and so on. The same judgement is more conveniently expressed in an ought-sentence, as 'X ought to do Y'. The obligative meaning of all these forms of sentences is the same. Among them, however, the ought form is more convenient and, in a way, more significant also, as firstly, it expresses obligation without using the word 'obligare' or its other derivatives; secondly, it is an auxiliary verb emphasizing 'action', and lastly, it has a force which is characteristic of moral obligation. Furthermore, the ought sentences are more conveniently and meaningfully analysable than other

obligative sentences. This point will be amply borne out by the analysis undertaken here. Hence, the sentences, expressing the judgements of moral obligation, which we propose to analyse, will be the ought-sentences. Again it is needless to say that the 'ought' used in these sentences is strictly 'moral ought' and not, any of the non-moral oughts, and that the moral-ought sentences express, completely and significantly, the judgements of moral obligation.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Classification of Ought-Sentences**

Before undertaking the analysis, however, it is necessary to classify the various kinds of ought sentences. In this regard, we shall follow the classification given by Paul Taylor in his "Normative Discourse."<sup>2</sup> It should, however, be remembered that we are primarily concerned with the 'ought-to-do' sentences and not 'ought-to-be-sentences'. We shall have an occasion to refer to this distinction at a later stage. Presently, let us have the classification of ought-to-do sentences :

### **I. Particular Sentences :**

#### **(A) Anti-eventum sentences**

- (1) First Person ('I/We, ought to do X')
- (2) Second Person (You ought to do X')
- (3) Third Person ('He/She/They or those named or described in some specific way/ ought to do X').

#### **(B) Post-eventum Sentences**

- (1) First Person - ('I/We, ought to have done X')
- (2) Second Person ('You ought to have done X')
- (3) Third Person ('He/ She/ They or those named or described

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1. See Taylor, Paul : *Normative Discourse* : p. 191, "The basic concept of prescriptive discourse is ought.....".

2. p. 194.

in some specific way/ ought to have done X')

## II. Universal Sentences

(A) Active ('One ought to do X in circumstances C')

(B) Passive ('X ought to be done in circumstances C')

If, however, the 'circumstance' in the universal sentences, are also generalized like Agent, they will assume the forms -

(A) Active ('One ought to do X').

(B) Passive ('X ought to be done')

Clarifying the criteria of this classification; Taylor distinguishes four aspects or elements of any given, ought-sentence as-the Speaker, the Addressee, the Agent and the Act. In a particular sentence, the Agent is specified whole in a universal sentence the Agent is not specified, but is anyone in the specified circumstances.

If even the circumstances are generalized, then the Agent is anyone qualified to be a moral agent. "Whether an ought-sentence is ante-eventum or post-eventum depends upon the temporal gap between the act of uttering the sentence and the act designated in the sentence."<sup>3</sup> If the act of uttering the sentence occurs before the act designated in the sentence, the sentence is ante-eventum. When the sentence is uttered after the designated act, it is post-eventum. In other words, an ante-eventum ought-sentence is an ought-sentence that expresses a moral judgement referring to a future act or an act yet to be done; while a post-eventum one is the same but referring to a past act.

Taylor stops here; but we will go a bit further and consider even the emphasis that may be put either on 'ought' or on 'X' (that is, the Act), as in the sentences —

"You ought to do X" and

"You ought to do X",

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3. Ibid. p. 195.

and see what difference it makes to, and what light it throws on, the subtle meaning of the sentence and its implications for the concept of 'ought' or 'obligation'. As will be evident later on, this emphasis-analysis is of great help in determining the exact nature and function of the 'ought' used in these various kinds of sentences.

### 3. Analysis of Particular Ante-eventum Ought-Sentences

Let us first consider the Particular ante-eventum ought-sentences :

#### Particular Sentences :

##### I. Ante-eventum sentences

(1) *First Person* — "I ought to do X."

On analysis, it seems to imply —

- (a) X is yet to be done.
- (b) X seems, on reflection, to be the best or the right alternative.
- (c) I shall be open to moral blame if I do not do it; and
- (d) Doing X is demanded of me.
- (A) Considering the emphasis on 'ought', "I ought to do X" expresses moral binding, expectation, requirement, demand, and
- (B) Considering the emphasis on X, "I ought to do X" contextually implies either
  - (a) A stage in the agent's moral deliberation, as Nowell-Smith<sup>4</sup> says, or

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4. *Ethics*, p. 261.

(b) the final decision of the agent to do X.

(2) *Second Person* - "You ought to do X".

On analysis, it seems to imply, as above,

(a) X is yet to be done.

(b) X seems, on reflection, to be the best or the right alternative.

(c) You will be open to moral blame if you do not do it, and

(d) Doing X is demanded of you.

(A) Considering the emphasis on 'ought', "You ought to do X" expresses moral binding, requirement, expectation or demand, and

(B) Considering the emphasis on 'X', "You ought to do X" contextually implies advice, guidance, recommendation or prescription.

(3) *Third Person* — "He ought to do X" also on analysis seems to imply as above.

(a) X is yet to be done.

(b) X seems, on reflection, to be the best or the right alternative.

(c) He will be open to moral blame if he does not do it, and

(d) Doing X is demanded of him.

(A) Considering the emphasis on 'ought', "He ought to do X" expresses moral binding requirement, expectation or demand, and

(B) Considering the emphasis on 'X', "He ought to do X" contextually implies

(a) Indirect advice, recommendation, guidance or prescription, and also

(b) Moral demand, expectation, requirement or binding.

The same analysis applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to their negative forms. From this analysis of the ante-eventum ought-sentences, it will be seen that in

all the three persons, first, second, third, an ought-sentence has ordinarily four fold implications, out of them (a) is a factual implication, (c) is a social implication in relation to morality and (b) and (d) are value implications. Out of (b) and (d) again, (b) expresses 'obligatoriness', or rather its ground, of the act X, while (d) expresses the agent's being under obligation.

Further in case of the emphasis-analysis of the third person, even the emphasis on 'X' implies moral binding or demand and implies advice or guidance only indirectly. This is significant.

#### **4. Analysis of Particular Post-eventum Ought-Sentences**

After, thus considering the particular ante-eventum ought-sentences, we now go to discuss the particular post-eventum sentences in a similar manner.

##### **II. Post-eventum sentence**

(1) *First person* — “I ought to have done X” contextually implies that—

- (a) I did not do the act X.
- (b) X was the best or the right act.
- (c) I did wrong in not doing it, as
- (d) It was demanded of me to do it.

Of these, (a) is a factual implication and (b), (c) and (d) are value implications,. Of these value implications, again (b) expresses 'obligatoriness', or rather its ground, of the act X, (c) expresses a value judgement on the agent's choice or behaviour and (d) expresses the agent's 'being under obligation'.

The same analysis applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to its negative form.

(A) Considering the emphasis on 'ought', “I ought to have done X” expresses moral binding, expectation, requirement or demand, and

(B) Considering the emphasis on 'X', “I ought to have done X” (rather than Y - other alternative) has the contextual implication (a) of preferring X to other alternative on valuational grounds, and (b) of wrongness of my choice in

not doing it. (c) is a stage in the agent's evaluative deliberation of the past act.

(2) *Second Person* "You ought to have done X" morally and contextually implies, like the above —

- (a) You did not do X.
- (b) X was the best or the right act for you to do.
- (c) You did wrong in not doing it, as
- (d) It was demanded of you to do it.

Of these, (a) is a factual implication and (b), (c), (d) are value — implications of which again, (b) expresses a value - judgement on the agent's choice or behaviour and (d) expresses the agent's 'being under obligation'.

The same analysis applies to its negative form, with necessary changes.

(A) Considering the emphasis on 'ought', "You ought to have done X" expresses moral binding, requirement, expectation or demand, and

(B) Considering the emphasis on 'X' "You ought to have done X" (rather than Y) contextually and morally implies (a) X was preferable to other alternatives on valuational grounds; (b) Agent's choice of not doing X was wrong, and (c) Further guidance that X should be the agent's choice in similar circumstances.

(3) *Third Person* : "He ought to have done X" also morally and contextually implies similarly

- (a) He did not do X.
- (b) X was the best or the right act for him to do.
- (c) He did wrong in not doing it, as
- (d) It was demanded of him to do it.

Of these, as above, (a) is a factual implication, and (b), (c), (d) are value-implications, of which again (b) expresses obligatoriness, or rather its ground, of the act X, (c) expresses a value judgement on the agent's choice or behaviour, and (d) expresses the agent's 'being under obligation'.

The same analysis, *mutatis mutandis*, applies to its negative form.

(A) Considering the emphasis on 'ought' "He ought to have done X" expresses moral binding, requirement, expectation or demand, and

(B) Considering the emphasis on 'X' "He ought to have done X" (rather than Y) contextually and morally implies (a) X was preferable to other alternatives on valuational grounds; (b) Agent's choice of not doing X was wrong, (c) Indirect future guidance that X should be the agent's choice in similar circumstances.

## 5. Analysis of Universal Ought-Sentences.

Having discussed the particular ought-sentences of both ante-eventum and post-eventum kinds, we now pass on to the discussion of the general or the universal ought-sentences.

It will be remembered that the universal ought-sentences are of two kinds, depending on their voice, active and passive, for example :

(A) Active-One ought to do X in circumstance C

(B) Passive - X ought to be done in circumstance C

It will be seen that, here only the agent-factor is generalized or universalized, and 'act' and 'circumstances' remain specified. It is possible, as we have stated already, to generalize even the circumstances and say—

(A) Active — One ought to do X, and

(B) Passive - X ought to be done.

These latter forms are of course, more general than the former. In both the cases, however, the meaning of both the active and passive sentences is the same, only that the passive form refers to agent quite indirectly. The meaning of both the active and the passive forms being the same, the same analysis will apply to both of them.

(1) Now, it is evident that "One ought to do X in circumstances C" is a universal sentence that universalizes the agent and specifies the act and the circumstances.

(2) There are two qualifications contextually implied in this sentence, to be satisfied for its actual application —

- (a) the agent must be in the circumstances C and
- (b) X must be one of the alternatives open for him. Of course, 'freedom of choice' is always presupposed.

(3) When these are satisfied, the universal ought sentence becomes binding on the agent; otherwise, it remains just a general judgement of moral obligation not particularly binding on any body, as a rule of conduct. Such rules may be and often are, used to justify particular judgements of moral obligation, for example —

'He ought to do X' because 'X ought to be done', But, as we are not concerned here with this use of moral rules, we need not dwell on it any longer.

(4) Such universal ought-sentences as "One ought to do X" express what Ross<sup>5</sup> calls 'prima facie obligations', and the actual duty is determined only by the concrete situation itself.

(5) Further, the universal ought-sentences can be only ante-eventum as they mostly function as moral rules, and, moreover, the post-eventum sentences always refer to specified moral agents as well as acts and circumstances.

(6) Again, a universal ought-sentence presupposes the possibility of generalization in ethics. Without this possibility, how can we have a universal ought-sentence at all? This is a very important implication as the possibility of generalization itself, in turn, implies objectivity and consequent rationality in the field of moral discourse.

Now, (A) considering the emphasis on "ought" "One ought to do X" primarily expresses moral binding, requirement, expectation or demand. Here, however, this binding is in the form of a general demand irrespective of the nature etc. of the agent, and if circumstances are also generalized, irrespective of them also. Generally, the circumstances are specified. But a thinker like Kant would hold

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5. Ross, Sir W.D. *Foundations of Ethics*, pp. 83-86.

that the binding is categorical and irrespective of the nature etc. of both the agent and the circumstances. In any case, it expresses moral binding or demand in a generalized form.

(B) Considering the emphasis on 'X', "One ought to do X' also, like the particular ought-sentences, implies primarily, the evaluation of 'X' and consequently advice, guidance, prescription or recommendation. That is to say, it functions as a general guidance or prescription based on the evaluation of the act 'X'. on which this guidance or prescription is based, involves the consideration of the circumstances also, in addition to the intrinsic merit of act.

## **6. Conclusion**

We have completed a brief analysis of the various forms of ought-sentences. But even from this brief discussion we can have a very good idea of the nature and function of the ought-language. Incidentally, it throws some light also on the structure of the concept of moral obligation. From the nature of various ought-sentences we can discuss, directly, three factors involved in the concept of moral obligation, namely. Agent, Act and Circumstances or we may call it, situation. A fourth factor is indirectly referred to, and it is, the Principle of binding or evaluation. Thus, from the logical structure of the ought-language we get four referents constituting the conceptual structure of moral obligation.

(a) So far as the nature and function of the language of moral obligation are concerned, it becomes very clear, from the above analysis of ought-sentences, that the ought-language performs, in all, the following functions.

(1) Factually, it states whether the act is done (post-eventum) or is yet to be done (ante-eventum).

(2) It states the conditions moral praise or blame (post-eventum).

(3) It expresses either a stage in moral deliberation or final decision. (Emphasis on 'X' in anti-eventum First Person).

(4) It expresses positive or negative value-judgement on the act (post-eventum and ante-eventum).

(5) It expresses advice, guidance, recommendation or prescription (Emphasis on 'X' in ante-eventum including also the universal sentences) and

(6) It expresses moral binding, expectation, requirement or demand (All the forms of ought-sentence, particular and universal; especially the emphasis on 'ought' in them).

(b) The above is a fairly comprehensive picture of the various functions the ought-language can and does perform. The most important question before us, however, is, what is the essential function of the ought-language from among the functions listed above? We shall have to frame some criteria to determine it. Since we are out to know the nature and function of 'ought', the first criterion would be the emphasis on 'ought' in a sentence. That is to say, only that function which we get by emphasizing 'ought' in all the ought-sentences, can be said to be the proper nature and function of 'ought'. Secondly, since we want the essential function of 'ought' and not any secondary ones, it is obvious that it must be expressed, some way or the other, by all the forms of ought-sentences. That is, only that functions which is expressed by all the ought-sentences can be said to be essential function of the ought-language; as essence can not be exempted, it must be present in all the forms. Thus, we have two criteria to determine the essential nature and function of the ought-language. The function (a) which is expressed by all the ought-sentences uniformly, and (b) which we get by emphasising 'ought' in all the sentences, can be taken to be the essential function of the language of moral obligation.

Applying these criteria to the functions listed above, one can very easily and clearly see that the essential and primary function of the 'ought-language' is number (6) that is, to express moral binding, expectation, requirement or demand, as it is this function which we get by emphasising 'ought' and which is expressed uniformly by all the ought-sentences, thus satisfying the two criteria. Consequently all the other functions, which may be performed by the ought-language (1 to 5) are secondary, as neither of them can satisfy the criteria formulated above. Other functions may be important ones from different points of view; but neither of them can be said to be 'essential'. However important they may be, they are secondary.

Now, I know that a methodological objection may be taken, by some, to our 'emphasis-analysis' within the linguistic analysis, of the ought-sentences, as it is used here, saying that it is 'arbitrary'. In my opinion however, it is not so, I hold, on the contrary, that the emphasis-analysis is not only legitimate, but is, perhaps, the only available method of disentangling the essential function of 'ought' from the mess of other secondary functions. If the emphasis on 'ought' is not going to yield its essential meaning or function, then what else?

The upshot of the whole discussion is that, though the ought-language, performs other functions like, directing, guiding, recommending, advising etc. which are mostly based on 'evaluation' and may broadly be said to be the prescriptive functions, they are all secondary, and in so far as the ought-language expresses genuine judgement of moral obligation, its essential and primary function is to express moral binding, requirement, expectation or demand. This latter function may be named 'obligative' function of the obligative language, to which belong the terms-requirement, expectation, owing, claim, duty and demand etc.

(c) It should not, however, be supposed that this obligative function is unrelated, totally to the other secondary functions. The first factual function of stating whether the act is done, forms the background. The second one states it as the condition of moral praise or blame. The third function of expressing either a stage in moral deliberation or a final decision in case of the agent accept it as its sole reason or basis. The fourth one of expressing positive or negative value-judgement on the act provides the content to the obligative function. And lastly, in case of the prescriptive function, it presupposes and is based on the obligative function. First demand is recognized and then prescription is given accordingly. In other words prescription follows demand. The relation between the evaluative and the obligative functions is the same as one between 'good', 'right' and 'ought'. Of course, in the ought- language, it is needless to say 'ought' is primary.

## **7. Specification of the obligative Functions**

We have, now to specify further the nature of this obligative function of binding. As we know, all the terms like (moral) requirement, expectation, owing, claim, and demand etc. which express moral binding, belong to this obligative

language. (Duty may conveniently be taken to mean moral obligation itself.) But we have to specify, if possible, some one concept that will describe, fairly completely, the essential nature and function of the obligative language.

Of these concepts, claim owing and demand express the same thing from different points of view and, therefore, they can be taken up together. We use 'owing' from Agent's point of view, 'claim from others' or 'morality's point of view' and 'demand' from functional point of view covering both the previous ones. In other words, 'owing' and 'claim' form the two poles of 'demand'. 'Being under obligation' and 'obligatoriness' also express the same thing. The remaining concepts are 'expectation' and 'requirement'. One careful consideration, however, it cannot be said that the obligative language essentially expresses either 'expectation' or 'requirement', though of course, broadly it does. For, 'expectation' indicates a psychological state (of mind) in 'others', and therefore, it seems rather odd to speak of moral expectation as such, and make it the central concept. Again, 'Expectation' is generally created in our mind by the person from whom we expect. But we know that moral expectation (obligation) is not created by the agent himself. Lastly 'expectation' is not a fit concept to express what is meant by 'obligation', the force of which, is lost in 'expectation'.

As for 'requirement', though it is a somewhat better candidate than 'expectation', even it cannot be made the central concept of the obligative language. For, it presupposes some 'end' for the attainment of which obligation is a requirement. That is to say, *means end* or some such consideration is involved in it making it a purely hypothetical or pragmatic concept, devoid of any deontic significance. The initial requirement of a concept central to the obligative language is that it should be possible for us to interpret it in both ways, teleologically and deontologically. Further consideration of 'ground' of moral obligation will show in what way to interpret it. But, initially it must be capable of being interpreted both ways. Perhaps such a concept may give us a clue to harmonize teleology and deontology themselves. Thus we see that 'requirement' cannot be the central concept.

We are, thus, left with the claim owing demand triad. Of these again, as we saw, 'demand' is inclusive of both 'owing' and 'claim' which are the two sides of the same relationship, and is, moreover, a functional term. 'Owing' indicates

Agent's - Demandee's being under obligation.' Claim' indicates Demandum's (Act's) obligatoriness on the one hand and Demander's authority on the other, and 'demand', the total function. Thus, the essential nature of the language of moral obligation is 'obligative' and its essential and primary function is to express moral demands or Demand; the obligative language is a Demand-language. This means that 'morality' makes certain demands on moral agents, which they cannot avoid to comply with without being subject to moral blame. Further, the meaning of 'ought' in moral discourse, especially in the obligative language, in so far as it expresses genuine judgements of moral obligation, becomes clearer and easy to understand if it is taken to express moral demand.

In short, the nature of the language of moral obligation is obligative and its essential function is to express moral 'demand'. It is interesting to note that though the word 'obligation' itself stress 'owing' from the Agent's point of view, the obligative-language in which it is expressed, emphasises 'claim' of others' or 'morality' in the form of 'demand'.