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# THE CONCEPT OF MORALITY, MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND MORAL TRAINING: PERSPECTIVES AND DIMENSIONS

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## I

It is generally believed that morality is an evolved part of human nature, much like a tendency to weave webs as an evolved part of spiders' nature. To say that humans are naturally moral animals might mean that we act naturally and the process of evolution has designed us to be social, friendly, benevolent, fair, and so on. Human beings are also social beings engaged in social interactions. As human beings, we cannot avoid making judgements about what is right and wrong, what one should do and what is valuable. As human beings, we act in different capacities and roles. Moral judgements are made and moral acts performed in different social contexts, like, health care, politics, environment, work, Universities and Colleges. No one will ever claim that humans *always* behaves morally, as it is obvious that human can also be violent, selfish, lying, insensitive, and nasty creatures. Thus, morality is a process that applies to all rational persons, governing behaviour that affects others. Moral Philosophy/Ethics does not study all normative judgments, only those that are concerned with what is morally right and wrong, or morally good and bad. Normative terms such as "right" and "wrong" or "good" and "bad" are generally applied on the basis of some explicit or implicit standards or criteria. We engage in morality/ethics when we start to reflect on our moral actions and questions like, Why is this behaviour right? What is the reason for this action? Can this action be justified? Hence, Ethics is a reflection on behaviour or, a theory of conduct.

## II

### **Is human morality innate?**

Everyone makes moral judgments about goodness and badness of people, the rightness and wrongness of behaviors, and the rights and duties of members of groups. At one level, most people agree about which kind of behavior are moral and immoral. For example, virtually everyone considers helping others, keeping promises, and being faithful to one's spouse moral, and virtually everyone considers murder, rape, lying, and cheating immoral. However, if we ask people what makes such behavior moral or immoral, they may well give different reasons, exposing significant differences in their underlying conceptions of morality. When we ask 'Is human morality innate?' one may response in the following manner:

- “How do we interpret this question?”
- To ask whether morality is *innate* is to ask whether it morality is in our gene?
- To ask whether *morality* is innate is to ask “whether the human capacity to make *moral judgments* is innate.”
- If we suppose that morality is innate, does this in some way *justify* morality?
- If morality is ultimately just something that helped our ancestors, can we say “morality is a collective illusion imposed upon us by our genes”?

Now the question is what is meant by the word ‘Innate’? Some philosophers have argued that the notion is so confused that it should be eliminated from debate. Some thinkers may suggest that whether morality is given or acquired? It doesn’t follow that an innate trait will develop irrespective of environment or there is a “gene for morality.” We can say morally pleasant aspect of human behavior is natural and unpleasant aspect of human behaviour is “unnatural.” But, both the aspects are innate and the morally praiseworthy elements are predominant and given by nature. Humans are by nature moral animals and there are two meanings of “Moral Animals” i.e. ‘an animal that is morally praiseworthy’ and ‘an animal that morally judges’.

### III

If we ponder over the reasons for ‘Why I be moral?, or Why should I do the morally right thing?, one may find that this is because ‘I could benefit myself by not doing the morally right thing’. One may also claims that morality has emerged in human affairs and represents a frame of reference along with others. Let us cite an example of a bank error in our favour. Suppose, a customer receives Rs.30, 000/- from an ATM with a printed receipt of rupees three thousand. He leaves the money in a safe place for two months. Neither the bank nor targets have contacted him. Does he keep the money? Why? Why not? Some Excuses may be cited like the bank won’t notice, bank has a bad customer service, he will donate half of the money to charity and he deserved it due to past hardships/wrongs. Thus, the bank error is not in the customer’s favour. From a moral point of view, what is believed to be morally right and wrong clearly often conflicts with what is right and wrong from other perspectives. The only reason we don’t act unjustly is because we fear retribution. It is also believed that the very nature of every organism is to desire “undue gain”. We have a duty to help others because “they are people who could be helped or harmed by us”. One may refer to Socrates who will say that ‘truly just people would act morally because they love justice. We have created ‘justice’ only because we are afraid of suffering. Unjust people find it hard to live with themselves because, they have to live with a bad person, which makes them unhappy.’

When it comes to the question ‘Why I be moral?’ Egoism on the one hand claims that because it is in my self-interest. We should always act to pursue only our own interests. “Our only duty is to do what is best for ourselves”. But the Egoists don’t need to avoid doing things for others and they shouldn’t ‘just do whatever they want. Contractarianism on the other hand claims that morality is an agreement about how to behave with people because people realise that morality is in their self-interest. For Contractarianism, ‘agreement to be moral generates trust’ and this is ‘rational’ as it is rational to do what benefits oneself. So, the moral contract is ‘better not to be harmed by others - hence constraints on others’ behaviour; but better not to be constrained. In a situation of trust, if everyone else is acting morally, it is even better to act self-interestedly - at least if we can get away with it.’ Morality is collectively in everyone’s self-interest, but it is in each person’s self-interest to break the agreement and by knowing this, we won’t trust each other.

Thus, the question of self-interest and morality comes in the discussion. One may ask ‘can we say what is in our self-interest without referring to morality?’ Say for example, cheating in an examination might make someone happy at the time, but he does not gain what is of real value. By cheating an aspirant may be qualified or promoted to a higher class but can not ‘achieve’ something in life as ‘achievement’ is of real value. There are some values which are moral values - so morality *comes first* of self-interest, and can’t be defined as a means to self-interest. We all aim at living the best life we can and living the best life depends on ‘what we actually are.’ Human beings are capable of reason, thus, living well is living in accordance with reason. Our character is an important feature here and to be virtuous is to have desires and emotions that are ‘reasonable’. As social beings, we need to consider what counts as the most appropriate response to living with others. Say for example, anger. If we feel anger ‘at the right time, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, then it is the most appropriate character.’ The moral life *is* the life that is virtuous, appropriate and best for us. According to Aristotle the best life for us involves recognizing other people’s value, and treating them accordingly. Failing to be motivated by other people’s rights or needs means not having the right relationship with them. Thus, morality is not distinct from self-interest - a good person does not think that being moral is no good for them.

Bradley asserts that the aim of ethics is the realization of self. The question should be asked along the lines of “What I am to do or be?” or “What is the ideal I seek to realize?” Willing and acting in accordance with an ideal is a moral end. The realization of an ideal self is necessarily conditioned by an unrealized self, and in this regard, his ethics does not provide

a metaphysical basis for relating the thought of the ideal with the reality of the actual. For Bradley, Why should I be moral? The question is natural, and yet seems strange. It appears to be one we ought to ask, and yet we feel, when we ask it, that we are wholly removed from the moral point of view. To ask the question ‘Why’ is rational, because reason teaches us to do nothing blindly, nothing without end or aim. She teaches us that what is good must be good for something, and what is good for nothing is not good at all. The question, whether we *can* be morally good, is the question raised by the moral gap between the demands of morality and our natural capacities. It is only after answering this question, “yes, we can be morally good,” that the second question arises of why we *should* be morally good, as we can only be held accountable or responsible for standards that we are able to reach. When individuals are able to satisfy their needs, to survive, to reproduce and to care for their offspring on their own, there is no need for them to interact with other members of their species, and therefore no need for morality. Mechanisms that induce individuals to form groups and socialize with others were selected because such social behaviors were adaptive in ancestral environments.

John Rawls in *Theory of Justice* asserts that ‘Although a society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, it is typically marked by a conflict as well as by an identity of interests. There is an identity of interests since social cooperation makes possible a better life for all than any would have if each were to live solely by his own efforts. There is a conflict of interests since persons are not indifferent as to how the greater benefits of their collaboration are distributed, for in order to pursue their ends, each prefers a larger to a lesser share’. For Rawls, morality is “prescriptive judgments of justice, rights, and welfare pertaining to how people ought to relate to each other”. We think morally, because we feel good (*Intrapsychic functionalism* of Freud), because we find the truth (*Epistemic functionalism* of Plato, Kohlberg, and the Rationalists) and because we succeed socially (*Social-functionalism* of Darwin). For Darwin, morality is the binder between human and society. In the fifth chapter of *The Descent of Man* he explains:

“as soon as the important faculties of the imagination, wonder, and curiosity, together with some power of reasoning, had become partially developed, man would naturally crave to understand what was passing around him, and would have vaguely speculated on his own existence, A tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, faithfulness, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to aid one another, and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection. At all times throughout the world tribes have supplanted other tribes; and ... morality is one important element in their success.”

One may say that why do we expect evolution to explain human morality? This is because human beings are social animals and the capacity to cooperate has influenced past survival. Also morality influences the capacity to cooperate. Evolution has selected our

ancestors for their capacity to cooperate and hence for their moral responses. Evolution will strongly selected for any behavior with substantial survival value. We experience those evolutionary consequences as strong, even uncontrollable, impulses and feelings. These feelings like lust, love, fear, disgust, rage etc. arise rapidly and spontaneously

#### **IV**

#### **Piaget's Four Stages of Moral Development:**

Piaget lays the foundation for understanding the developmental phases in moral judgement of the child. His main areas of research were

- a) how children act upon rules and laws
- b) how children judge bad acts and lies and
- c) how children look upon punishment and justice.

Piaget (1932) used the interview method to find out the various stages of moral development of the child. According to him, there are four stages and let us briefly discuss:

**1. Anomy** - (the first five years): It is the first stage without the law. At this stage the behaviour of the child is neither moral nor immoral. His behaviour is not guided by moral standards. The regulators of behaviour are pain and pleasure in this stage.

**2. Heteronomy Authority** (5 to 9 years): The second stage is called the discipline of artificial consequences imposed by adults. Moral development at this stage is controlled by external authority. Rewards and punishments regulate moral development in this stage.

**3. Heteronomy Reciprocity** (9 to 13 years): At this stage, there is the morality of cooperation with peers or equals. This stage is regulated by reciprocity which implies, 'we should not do to others what will be offensive to us'. Conformity with the group becomes imperative at this stage.

**4. Autonomy Adolescence** (13 to 18 years): Piaget calls this stage the equity stage also. As Piaget puts it, while reciprocity demands strict equality, autonomy demands equity, taking into account such factors as motive, circumstances etc. The individual at this stage is fully responsible for his behaviour.

#### **Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development**

Kohlberg extended and refined Piaget basic theory of the development of moral values. Kohlberg theorized that people progress through three levels (comprising six stages) as they develop abilities of moral reasoning. Kohlberg's core sample was comprised of 72 boys, from both middle - and lower-class families in Chicago. They were ages of ten, thirteen and sixteen. He later added to his sample, younger children, delinquents, and boys and girls from other American cities and from other countries.

**Pre-conventional level:** This level of moral reasoning includes the rules set down by others and the children follow them. There are two stages in this level:

**Stage-1:** Morality is defined in terms of obedience and punishment orientation. At the first stage physical consequences of an action determine whether it is good or bad. Avoidance of punishment and deference to power are values in their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral order supported by punishment and authority. The child assumes that powerful authorities hand down a fixed set of rules which he or she must unquestioningly obey. Avoiding punishment, and respecting the “superior power of authorities,” “obedience for its own sake,” and “avoiding damage to persons and property.” It is said to a child that it is wrong to steal the drug because "It's against the law," or "It's bad to steal,". The child usually responds in terms of the consequences involved, explaining that stealing is bad "because he'll get punished“. Typical response of the child in this stage is “I will do it because I want to keep out of trouble”.

**Stage-2:** Instrumental Relativist Orientation: Morality is defined in terms of Individualism and Exchange. At this stage children recognize that there is not just one right view that is handed down by the authorities. Different individuals have different viewpoints. Children at both stages 1 and 2 talk about punishment. However, they perceive it differently. At stage 1 punishment is tied up in the child's mind with wrongness; punishment "proves" that disobedience is wrong. At stage 2, in contrast, punishment is simply a risk that one naturally wants to avoid. What's right satisfies one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others. Elements of fairness and reciprocity are present, but they are mostly interpreted in a “you scratch my back, I scratch yours” fashion. Typical response of the child in this stage is “If you help me out, may be I will help you sometime”.

**Conventional level:**

At this level the individual adopts rules and sometimes subordinates his own needs to the needs of the group. The expectations of the family, the group or the nation from adolescents are seen to be valuable in their own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences. The attitude is not only of personal expectations and social order but of loyalty to it, of actively maintaining, supporting and justifying the order, and of identifying with the persons or groups involved in it.

**Stage-3** Good Boy - Good Girl Orientation: Morality is defined in terms of Good Interpersonal Relationships. Good behaviour is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them. There is much conformity to stereotypical images of morality. Behaviour is frequently judged by intention - “he means well”, because important for the first time. One

earns approval by being nice. At this stage children who are by now usually entering their teens see morality as more than simple deals. They believe that people should live up to the expectations of the family and community and behave in "good" ways. Good behavior means having good motives and interpersonal feelings such as love, empathy, trust, and concern for others, sustaining a good reputation, showing concern for and caring for others, and interpersonal conformity. Trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude are important moral values.

**Stage-4** The Law and Order Orientation: Morality is defined in terms of Maintaining the social order. Law and order means performing one's own duty properly, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake. At this stage, the respondent becomes more broadly concerned with *society as a whole*. Now the emphasis is on obeying laws, respecting authority, and performing one's duties so that the social order is maintained. They make moral decisions from the perspective of society as a whole, they think from a full-fledged member-of-society perspective.

**Post Conventional Level:** In this level, people define their own values in terms of ethical principles they have chosen to follow.

**Stage-5** Social Contract Orientation: Morality is defined in terms of Social Contract and Individual Rights. What's right is defined in terms of both the general individual right and in terms of the standards that have been agreed upon by the whole society. In contrast to the stage four, laws are not frozen; they can be changed for the good of society.

**Stage-6** Universal Ethical Principle Orientation: In this stage, what's right is defined by the decision of the conscience according to self-chosen ethical principles. These principles are abstract and ethical, not specific moral prescriptions. These are universal principles of justice, the reciprocity and equality of human rights, and respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons. Typical response of the child in this stage is "the law should be subordinate to higher principle of Justice". One should act in accordance with these super ordinate principles rather than maintaining simple conformity to the law.

From this above analysis, one may deduce the definition of morality as "Moral systems are interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible." Morality is further considered as having a number of factors, factors through which various moral judgments are analysed accordingly. Frankena when working on the concept of Morality and Moral Philosophy stated that there are a number of factors involved in Morality. He has listed six different factors that constitute the institution of Morality. According to him they are as follows:

- a. The factor concerning certain forms of judgment in which particular objects are said to have or not to have a certain moral quality, obligation or responsibility.
- b. The factor concerning the implication that it is appropriate and possible to give reasons for moral judgments.
- c. The factor concerning some roles, principle, ideals, and virtues that can be expressed in more general judgments and that form the background against which particular judgments are made and reasons given for them.
- d. The factor concerning certain characteristic natural or acquired ways of feeling that accompany these judgments, rules and ideals, and help to move us to act in accordance with them.
- e. The factor concerning certain sanctions or additional sources of motivation that are also often expressed in verbal judgments, namely, holding responsible, praising and blaming.
- f. Finally, the factor concerning a point of view that is taken in all this judging, reasoning and feeling and is somehow different from those taken in prudence, art and the like.

By taking these factors into account when analysing any given ethical judgment or judgments, it allows the ethical judgment at hand to be dealt with critically before arriving at any concrete conclusion. As such they are an integral part of morality in the process of development.

## V

### **Morality as *Dharma*:**

There is no appropriate equivalent word for *Dharma* in English language and it is impossible to translate the word religion into *Dharma*. *Dharma* is one which elevates us to a higher plane. The word '*Dharma*' is used with different meanings in different Holy texts. In order to understand the scope of the word, its important origins, definitions and meanings are given here. Till we attain the state of *Turyavastha*, we will not understand the true meaning of *Dharma*. The *Vaisesika Sutra* claims: "*Yato-bhyudayanihsreyasa-siddhih sa dharmah.*" "That which leads to the attainment of *Abhyudaya* (prosperity in this world) and *Nihsreyasa* (total cessation of pain and attainment of eternal bliss hereafter) is *Dharma*." *Dharma* is not for developing intelligence; it is for developing character. In the *Mahabharata* it is said that आगमानां हि सर्वेषाम् आचारः श्रेष्ठ उच्यते । आचारप्रभवो धर्मो धर्मादायुर्विवर्धते ॥ – *Mahabharata, Anushasanparva, Adhyaya 107, Shloka 147*. When compared with all knowledge, good conduct is considered to be superior; because *Dharma* is based on *achars* (Conduct). When

man abides by *achardharma*, his life is prolonged. In the *Mahabharata* it is also said that ऊर्ध्वबाहुर्विरौम्येष न च कश्चिच्छृणोति मे । धर्मादर्थश्च कामश्च स किमर्थं न सेव्यते ॥ – *Mahabharata*, (*Swargarohanparva, Adhyaya 5, Shloka 46*) means Vyasa says “with my arms raised, I am lamenting, yet no one listens to me. O human being, Dharma accomplishes both, earning of wealth and fulfilling of desires. Then, why do you not abide by *Dharma*? In the *Bhagabata* it is said that सुखार्थाः सर्वभूतानां मताः सर्वाः प्रवृत्तयः । सुखं च न विना धर्मात् तस्माद्धर्मपरो भवेत् ॥ - *Bhagabata (Ashtangarhudaya, Sutrasthana, Adhyaya 2, Shloka 19)* which means all the actions of living beings are for attaining happiness. Even the motive in unrighteous conduct is attaining happiness. However, there is no happiness without *Dharma*; hence, abide by *Dharma* always. This understanding of *Dharma* develops moral sense and training in human beings.

Chanakya says: येषां न विद्या न तपो न दानं, ज्ञानं न शीलं न गुणो न धर्मः। ते मर्त्यलोके भुविभारभूता, मनुष्यरूपेण मृगाश्चरन्ति॥ that means those who do not have education, or do not concentrate on their work, nor donate their time and money, nor have any knowledge, nor have good character, nor have any good qualities, nor diligence towards work/study, are a burden on Earth. In fact, they are grass eating animals in form of humans. Chanakya again says, नाभिषेको न संस्कारः सिंहस्य क्रियते वने। विक्रमार्जितसत्वस्य स्वयमेव मृगेन्द्रता॥ means there is no official coronation or *Rajyabhisheka* ceremony held or any *samskara* performed to declare that Lion is the king of jungle. He becomes king by his own attributes and heroism. Because अलसस्य कुतो विद्या अविद्यस्य कुतो धनं | अधनस्य कुतो मित्रं अमित्रस्य कुतो सुखं ॥ means a lazy person can never acquire knowledge or skill, and a foolish person can never acquire wealth and remains poor. A poor person has no friends and how can such a lazy and effortless person remain happy and be moral in his life? It is said उद्यमेन हि सिध्यन्ति कार्याणि न मनोरथैः | नहि सुप्तस्य सिंहस्य प्रविशन्ति मुखे मृगाः ॥ We can accomplish various tasks only by making continuous and strenuous efforts and not by merely wishing to do so. By no means antelopes themselves do not enter into the mouth of a sleeping Lion. A lion has to hunt and kill animals in a forest to sustain himself. Simply by sleeping it cannot do so. This in fact highlights the importance of entrepreneurship in humans. Because, नमन्ति फलिनो वृक्षाः, नमन्ति गुणिनो जनाः ।

शुष्क काष्ठश्च मूर्खश्च, न नमन्ति कदाचन् ॥ means the branch of a tree with lot of fruits bends towards earth. Similarly, a morally developed and virtuous person always bow down to earth. But a dry wood never bends down just like a fool who does not respect others.

The *Vedic* principles have influenced the psyche for many centuries. These principles have underpinned the socio-cultural-religious framework for the development of individual and social moral principles. The psyche and society is different phases of rapid evolution. The moral structure of our society is at an interesting crossroad. Prosperity has given rise to greed and corruption. Reminding oneself of our glorious past and enriching scriptures and understanding their essence can bring back the necessary balance for us to develop and evolve into morally mature beings. This would not only benefit the society but also the world at large. It is said that अयं बन्धुरयं नेति गणना लघुचेतसां । उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकं ॥ means only man with narrow mentality discriminate in saying that one is a relative and the other is a stranger. For those who live magnanimously the entire world constitutes but a family. वसुधैव कुटुम्बकं is a philosophy that inculcates an understanding that the whole world is one family. It is a philosophy that tries to foster an understanding that the whole of humanity is one family. It is a social philosophy emanating from a spiritual understanding that the whole of humanity is made of one life energy.

## VI

According to Aristotle, there are three types of life which is thought to be happy: The life of enjoyment, is a hedonistic life focused on conventional pleasures, the political life is the life of a statesperson. It may aim at despotic power, or be lived for the sake of winning public honors, but in its most proper form its aim is the exercise of moral virtue and political and practical wisdom in the governing of the state and the life of contemplation is the life of the philosopher or student of nature. But it is an important part of Aristotle's argument that the aim of this life is a quite particular activity. Contemplation, according to Aristotle, is not a research or inquiry, but an activity consists in understanding. The best objects of contemplation are God and the heavens. What God does is to contemplate and that since God is the best thing, God must contemplate God. God is the activity of thinking on thinking and the aim of the contemplative life is to engage in this divine activity.

Radhakrishnan, in his *The Foundation of Civilisation: Ideas and ideals* says: "In the classroom and the debating society, in the hostel and the playground, through the play of mind on mind, through freedom of thought and speech, the graduates of universities must be educated to think honestly, tolerantly and lovingly, to discern the good and choose the best. It is in the university that we must learn to develop the free mind, to cultivate charity of outlook, to strive to understand points of view other than our own. Sri Aurobinda in his *Bande Mataram* emphasized that 'it is a fundamental and deplorable error by which we in this country have confused education with the acquisition of knowledge. Amount of

knowledge is itself not of first importance, but to make the best use of what we know. The easy assumption of our educationists that we have only to supply the mind with a smattering of facts in each department of knowledge and the mind can be trusted to develop itself and take its own suitable road is contrary to science, contrary to human experience. According to Peter Singer, immoral acts are not necessarily irrational. People should see that our best shot at a meaningful life is by pursuing an ethical life. 'Responsible' means we are being accountable in our word and deed. It also means having a sense of duty to fulfill tasks with reliability, dependability and commitment.

Ethics and ethical decision making is not simply the province of philosophers or ethicists. Our choices reveal our values to the world. These values are either unreflective and superficial or reflective and deep. Philosophical thought should help us to make our values and choices deep and thoughtful. Maybe this makes it more likely that our choices will be the right ones. Finding an appropriate list of responsibility or obligations may seem like a philosophers' game. But the business of making appropriate ethical decisions is not a game. When individuals are able to satisfy their needs, to survive, to reproduce and to care for their offspring on their own, there is no need for them to interact with other members of their species, and therefore no need for morality. One practical goal of responsibility is that it may help us to make appropriate decisions in complicated circumstances. We need to think that we are not bound to solve all the problems in the world; our duty is only to avoid in creating problems. We must not be responsible for evil to others; we must not harm others; if we harm, we must repair the damage. This is called the *Ethics of Responsibility* and the dimensions for adopting and developing moral values and moral training?

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