UNIT 2: THE NATURE OF MORAL JUDGMENT

UNIT STRUCTURE

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2.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

After going through this unit you will be able to

- The concept of moral judgment
- The nature of moral judgment
- The distinction between moral judgment and other judgment
- The subject and object of moral judgment

2.2. INTRODUCTION:

Moral judgment is the main cognitive factor in moral consciousness. Moral consciousness is the consciousness of right and wrong. It is the consciousness of moral distinctions. Actually, it is the awareness of moral worth of acts and agents. Moreover, it is the awareness of the character of an action as right or wrong. It involves intuition of moral standard by reason and comparison of a voluntary action with it. It also involves evaluation of voluntary action of it as right and wrong. Moral consciousness involves three factors- (i) cognitive or intellectual factor, (ii) affective or emotional factor and (iii) conative or volitional factor.

The main cognitive factor of moral consciousness is moral judgments.

It consists in the apprehension of the moral quality of an action with reference to the moral standard. The consciousness of rights and duties, virtues and vice, merit and demerit, responsibility or accountability is also involved in moral consciousness. These are the cognitive factors in moral consciousness. Secondly, affective or emotional factor include the moral sentiments. They are the feelings of approval and disapproval which accompany moral judgments. When we apprehend that an action is right, it excites a feeling of approbation in our minds. When we apprehend that an action is wrong, it excites a feeling of disapprobation in our minds. When we have done a right action, we feel self- complacence. When we have committed a wrong action, we feel remorse. We have a feeling of reverence for the moral idea. These moral sentiments accompany moral judgments. Moral judgments are followed by moral sentiments. Their existence is no criteria of the validity of moral judgments. Moral sentiments are followed y moral judgment. They are the emotional factors in moral consciousness.

Moral consciousness involves the regulation of the impulses by reason according to its conception of the highest good. Thus it involves choice at an action by the self. And it also involves the moral impulse to do the right action. Moral judgment involves moral obligation or the sense of duty or oughtness. And we feel that we are under moral obligation to do what is right and not to do what is wrong, and we feel an active impulse to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. All these are the cognitive factors in moral consciousness.

So, we have seen that moral judgment, moral sentiment and moral obligation are the main cognitive, emotional, and cognitive factors in moral consciousness respectively.

2.3. THE CONCEPT AND NATURE OF MORAL JUDGMENT:

Moral judgment is a judgment of value that deals with what ought to be. It is distinguished from the judgment of fact. The judgment of fact deals

with what is to be. It is a descriptive judgment. On the other hand, the judgment of value is an appreciative or critical judgment. Actually, moral judgment is the mental act of discerning and pronouncing a particular action to be right or wrong. According to Mackenzie, the moral judgment is a judgment upon an action with reference to the moral ideal. It compares an action with the moral standard and pronounces it to be right or wrong. He stated that moral judgment is not like a logical judgment, but a judgment about an action. Actually, it is a judgment of value as distinguished from a judgment of fact. It does not consider the nature of an action, but its moral value, rightness or wrongness. It judges what our actions ought to be. Philosopher Moorhead says that moral judgment is not a judgment in the logical sense of a proposition, but it is a judgment in the judicial sense of a sentence.

It is to be noteworthy that the moral quality of an action is recognized when we perceive a voluntary action and compare it with the moral standard by judging whether the action is in conformity with it or not. On the other hand, we can say that moral judgment involves the application of a standard to a particular action. So, it is must clear that moral judgment is inferential in nature. It involves the application of a standard to a particular action. But, it does not mean that our ordinary moral judgments always involve explicit reasoning or inference. The element or reasoning is implicit in most cases of moral judgments. It is explicit only in complex and doubtful cases or in reflective examination. In such cases the moral standard is explicitly held before the mind and applied to the cases under consideration. But, ordinarily moral judgments are not reflective; rather they are intuitive and immediate. According to Bradley, moral judgments are intuitive subsumptions. For him, we intuitively bring and action under a moral rule recognized by the community and judges it to be right or wrong. But, only in doubtful cases we reflect on the concrete situation and consciously compare an action with the moral ideal and judge it to be right and wrong. Thus, the inferential character of moral judgments is brought to clear consciousness in complicated circumstances.

The most important point is that moral judgment has objective validity. It is not determined by the subjective inclinations and prejudices of the person who makes the judgment. An action is right in a particular situation from the standpoint of the universe. Actually, a moral judgment presupposes certain things, namely, (i) a subject who judges (ii) an object that is judged (iii) standard according to which an action is judged and (iv) a faculty of judging or moral faculty.

2.4. THE SUBJECT OF MORAL JUDGMENT:

There must be someone who passes the moral judgment. It demands the subject who judges and passes the judgment. It may be the rational self or ideal self that passes moral judgments on its motives, intentions and actions as well as actions of others also. By the subject of moral judgment, Mackenzie means through which an action is judged to be good or bad. According to him, a person judges an action to be right or wrong from the standpoint of an ideal standard. On the other hand, Shaftesbury, an advocator of moral theory, holds that a work of art is judged to be good or bad by the connoisseur. According to him, just as the artist appeals to the judgment of the connoisseur or appreciation of beauty, similarly when we deal with conduct then we appeal to the judgment of the moral connoisseur. It is well-known that art aims at the production of a certain result. Here, the result whether it is beautiful or ugly is always judged by the connoisseur. But, it is totally opposite in morality. In morality, action is judged rather than the result. The action is judged by the action who acts. He/she has chosen the action and judges whether it is right or wrong. Here, the subject of moral judgment is the person himself who does the action. So, the ideal or rational self is the subject of moral judgment.

Another philosopher Adam Smith has put forwarded a similar view to that of Shaftesbury and holds that a person passes moral judgments on his own actions as well as those of others from the standpoint of an impartial spectator. Actually, we pass moral judgments upon the conduct and character of other people. Similarly, they also pass moral judgments upon our conduct

and character. Therefore, we come to reflect upon our own motives, intentions, actions and become anxious to know our capability to deserve their applause. That's why we become spectators of our own behavior. In this regard, Adam Smith has put forwarded the idea of 'impartial spectator' where an individual judges himself/herself from the point of view of the examiner and judge and also from the point of view of that person whose conduct is examined into and judged of. According to Smith, in passing moral judgments we must appeal from the opinions of mankind to the higher tribunal of our own conscience to that of the 'impartial spectator'.

This view of Adam Smith contains a core of truth. Actually, the point of view of moral judgment is that of unbiased reason. We ought to view our own actions as impartial spectators as we view others' actions. Here, the spectator or the judge in a person is the ideal self and the person judged o is the actual self. From this point of view it can be stated that moral consciousness is evolved through intercourse with society. But it is not necessarily true that we judge other's actions first and after that judge our own actions. Actually, first we always become clear and conscious about our own actions, motives and intentions and judge them whether it is to be right or wrong. After that we can infer the motives and intentions of other persons from their actions in the light of our own experience. The main point of Adam Smith is that moral judgments involve a reference to a point o view higher than that of the individual. The point of view to which an appeal is made is that of the Ideal Self. From that point of view it can be stated that Adam Smith is an advocator of Sympathetic Intuitionism.

2.5. THE OBJECT OF MORAL JUDGMENT:

We have seen that the individual deliberately has chosen their motives, intentions and act accordingly. Here, the individual is the subject who judges and his/her actions are the object that is judged. But the question is- what type of actions they choose, or what type of actions are the objects of moral judgments. It is to be noteworthy that voluntary and habitual actions are the objects of moral judgments. Habitual actions are objects of moral

judgments because only voluntary actions are judged to be right or wrong. Voluntary actions mean act according to the freedom of will. There three main factors in voluntary action, namely, first the mental stage of spring of action, motive, intention, desire, deliberation, choice and resolution, secondly, the organic stage of bodily action and thirdly, the eternal stage of consequences. So, we have seen that choosing the act, doing the act and consequence of the act are the main factors in voluntary actions. But the question is- do we judge an act by its motives or consequences? In this regard, there is a controversy between Hedonists and Intuitionists. According to the Hedonists, the rightness or wrongness of an action depends upon the consequences. On the other hand, the Intuitionists hold that the rightness or wrongness depends upon the motive. Philosophers like Bentham and J. S. Mill stated that whether the motives are good or bad is depend upon their effects. But, philosophers like Immanuel Kant claims that the effect of our actions cannot give them moral worth. According to Kant, the moral quality of an action is determined by the good will that motivates it and not upon its consequences.

Although different philosophers have put forwarded their different views, it is clear that both motives and consequences are the objects of moral judgments. They are not opposed to each others. Actually, the motive is the inner idea of the outer consequence as well as the consequence is the outer manifestation of the inner motive. The motive or the idea of the end aimed at is undoubtedly the object of moral judgment. The consequence also is the object of moral judgment in so far as it realizes the inner motive. But sometimes it is found that the motive is good, but the consequence turns out to be bad. Similarly sometimes motive is bad, but consequence turns out to be good. The important thing is that the morality of an action depends upon the motive from which we act. Actually, when there is any conflict arises between inner motive and outer consequence, then the moral quality of an action is determined by the inner motive and not by the consequence.

There is a controversy among philosophers regarding the motive and intention as the objects of moral judgments. Philosopher Bentham states that a motive is substantially nothing more than pleasure or pain operating in a certain manner. He takes intention in the sense of the end or aim of action which persuades the agent to act or dissuades him from acting. Therefore he regards intention as the object of moral judgment. Similarly J.S Mill also regards intention as the object o moral judgment. But we cannot say that only intention is the object of moral judgments. The motive is the idea of the end chosen by the self. It is a part of intention. Intention includes the ideas of the end and the mean chosen by the self. Actually, intention is not an isolated mental phenomenon. It is the expression of character. It is always influenced by the permanent disposition of the mind or character acquired by repeated voluntary actions. Therefore, character is also the object of moral judgments.

2.6. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MORAL JUDGMENT AND OTHER JUDGMENT:

Moral judgments are different from other types of judgments, such as logical judgments and aesthetic judgments. We have known that ethics, logic, aesthetics are normative sciences. They determine the nature of three supreme norms or ideals o life. Ethics is concerned with the ideal o the Highest Good. Logic is concerned with the ideal of truth. Aesthetics is concerned with the ideal of Beauty. Accordingly, thus logical judgments refer to the ideal of Truth. Aesthetic judgments refer to the ideal of Beauty. But, moral judgments refer to the ideal of supreme Good. All other judgments are critical or appreciative judgments. Only moral judgments are always accompanied by moral obligation and moral sentiments which do not accompany logical and aesthetic judgments. So, when we judge an action to be right, then we feel under moral obligation to perform it and have a feeling of approval. On the other hand, when we feel an action to be wrong, then we feel under moral obligation not to perform it and have a feeling of disapproval. Actually, the feelings of approval, disapproval, remorse etc are

known as moral sentiments. Moral obligation is the sense of duty or oughtness. Moral judgments are obligatory in character and accompanied by moral sentiments. Therefore, they cannot be reduced to logical or aesthetic judgments. They are lacking in moral obligation and moral sentiments..



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What is moral judgment?

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Q2: What are the main factors of moral consciousness?

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Q3: What are the main constituents of moral judgments?

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Q4: What type of actions are the objects of moral judgments?

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Q5: What are the main factors of voluntary action?

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2.7. LET US SUM UP

- Moral judgment is the main cognitive factor in moral consciousness. It is the awareness of the character of an action as right or wrong. It involves intuition of moral standard by reason and comparison of a voluntary action with it. It also involves evaluation of voluntary action of it as right and wrong. Moral consciousness involves three factors- (i) cognitive or intellectual factor, (ii) affective or emotional factor and (iii) conative or volitional factor.

- Moral judgment is a judgment of value that deals with what ought to be. Moral judgment is the mental act of discerning and pronouncing a particular action to be right or wrong. The moral quality of an action is

recognized when we perceive a voluntary action and compare it with the moral standard by judging whether the action is in conformity with it or not. So, from this point of view it can be stated that moral judgment is inferential in nature.

- Moral judgments involve three main components, namely, a subject who judges, an object that is judged, standard according to which an action is judged and, a faculty of judging or moral faculty. It demands the subject who judges and passes the judgment. It may be the rational self or ideal self that passes moral judgments on its motives, intentions and actions as well as actions of others also. Voluntary and habitual actions are the objects of moral judgments. Voluntary actions imply freedom of will.

- Moral judgments are different from logical and aesthetic judgments. Moral judgments involve the obligatory character as well as also accompanied by moral sentiments. But either logical or aesthetic judgments do not have moral obligation and moral sentiments because of which they are different from moral judgments.

2.8. FURTHER READING:

1) Lillie, William, (2007), An Introduction to Ethics, Delhi: Surjeet publications.
2) Sinha, Jadunath, (2003), A Manuel of Ethics, Calcutta: New Central Book Agency Pvt. Ltd.
3) Frankena, William, (1973), Ethics, New Delhi: Prentice Hall.
4) Sidgwick, Henry, (1901), The Methods of Ethics, London: Macmillan And Co. Ltd.

2.9. ANSWER TO YOUR PROGRESS:

Ans to Q1: Moral judgment is a judgment of value distinguished from fact which deals with the question of what ought to be. Actually, moral judgment is the mental act of distinguishing an action to be right or wrong.

Answer to Q. No. 2: There are three main factors in moral consciousness. They are- cognitive or intellectual factor, affective or emotional factor and conative or volitional factor.

Answer to Q. No. 3: The main constituents of moral judgments are- the subject who judges, the object that is judged, standard according to which an action is judged and, a faculty of judging or moral faculty.

Answer to Q. No. 4: The voluntary and habitual actions are the objects of moral judgments. Non- voluntary actions are excluded from the scope of moral judgment. Habitual actions are objects of moral judgments as they are the result of repeated voluntary actions. So, ultimately only voluntary actions are judged to be right or wrong.

Answer to Q. No. 5: There are three main factors in voluntary actions. Firstly, the mental stage of spring of action, motive, intention, desire, deliberation, choice and resolution. Secondly, the organic stage of bodily action. Thirdly, the external stage of consequences.

2.10. MODEL QUESTIONS:

A. Very short Questions

Q1: What is the main cognitive factor in moral consciousness?

Q2: What are the three main factors of moral consciousness?

B. Short Questions (Write in about 100-150 words)

Q1: What do you mean by moral judgment?

Q2: Explicate the nature of moral judgments.

C. Long Questions (Write in about 300-500 words)

Q1: Do you think moral judgments are inferential in character? Discuss.

Q2: Discuss the distinction among the moral judgments, logical and aesthetic judgments.

Q3: What is the object of moral judgment? Discuss critically.

Q4: Who passes the moral judgment? Discuss.

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