

UNIT 4

NORM OF MORALITY

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4. 0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we explain the basic understandings of the norms of morality in general and go in detail to the different particular norms of morality. As particular norms we see Conscience as subjective norm of morality and Intuition, Law and Pleasure as the objective norms of morality. By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Explain What norms of Morality means
- Discern between good and evil by the use a well-formed conscience
- Understand what Law means and its use in day today life
- Judge the Intuitions in moral judgement
- Evaluate the pleasure seeking philosophy we have in the present day life situations
- Apply the norms of morality positively in our personal life

4. 1 INTRODUCTION

This is an attempt to understand the norms of Morality in general. Norm is a rule or standard for our judgement. It remains as a standard or rule with which we can judge our actions as good or bad. For this we compare the human acts with the norms and come to our conclusion.

In ethics we can find two kinds of norms: the subjective norm of morality and the objective norms of morality. In the subjective norm of morality, the moral authority dwells within the individual. In ethics, conscience can be understood as the subjective norm of morality.

Objective norm is the standard for an objective evaluation of the human acts. In this group we can see Intuition, Law and Pleasure as the objective norms of morality.

4. 2 NORM OF MORALITY – BASIC UNDERSTANDING

A norm or criterion is a Standard of Judgement. "It is a rule or standard by which principles, facts, statements and conduct are tested, so as to form a correct judgement concerning them". In ethics a moral criterion is a rule or standard by means of which we are able to discriminate between what is morally good and morally evil and to arrive at a correct judgement that a particular act is morally good or morally evil.

The moral criterion presupposes the existence of an objective moral 'standard' or norm with which the particular act can be compared. With the moral norm, human beings can test the morality of the act and judge whether it be good or evil. In general a norm is an authoritative standard, which gives as a pattern or model to which things of similar nature must conform. Thus a judgement can be described as a comparison of an act with the standard or norm. When the act conforms to the norm of morality, we judge the act to be good and when we find that the act deviates from the norm, we judge the act to be evil.

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE NORM

In order to be effective as a moral criterion or standard of judgement, a norm of morality should have the following qualifications:

1. The Norm needs to be Unchangeable

The basic and fundamental nature of morality is its stability. If the norm is changing and fluctuating, the morality would be lacking its fundamental stability. Such a norm would not be a reliable standard, because in such cases human beings can never be certain of the morality of his/her acts.

2. The Norm needs to be Universal

The norm is meant to everybody. It is not for a particular group or class of persons. It should be applicable to all human beings. Everybody should feel himself or herself bound to the moral law. Nobody can be exempted from this obligation.

3. The Norm needs to be Accessible to all

The universal accessibility of the norm is an essential nature of it. Everybody must be able to know at least the fundamental principles of morality. It will help them to lead a moral life. Unless the norm of morality is accessible to all, they can never arrive at knowledge of the fundamental principles of morality because all moral principles naturally flow from the norm.

4. The Norm needs to be Applicable to all Conditions of Life

If only the norm is within the mental reach of every individual, they would be able to make all their actions conform to the norm of morality. In other case, such a norm could not serve a standard for every individual in all his/her actions.

5. The Norm needs to be of single Standard

Although there are many moral actions for human beings, morality remains always as one. Since every human beings have the same human nature, the moral standard of all human beings must be the same. Thus there cannot be one norm for a particular group of persons or actions and another norm for a different group of persons or actions.

4. 3 CONSCIENCE AS SUBJECTIVE NORM OF MORALITY

Conscience is the subjective norm of morality in which we trace the moral authority inside the individual. It is not something that directs from outside. Conscience is an 'inner voice' as described by Mahatma Gandhi which directs one by telling what to do or what not to do. Conscience can be defined as the subjective awareness of the moral quality of one's own actions as indicated by the moral values to which one subscribes.

In the opinion of Butler, an English moral philosopher, conscience has got two different aspects: a cognitive or reflective aspect and an imperative or authoritative aspect. In the cognitive or reflective function of conscience discerning the goodness and badness of the human action is important. It considers characters, actions, intentions and motives with the special aim of discovering their goodness and badness. In the imperative or authoritative aspect the decision is important. Here conscience does not merely give arguments for one action rather than another, but it decides in favour of one action.

Acts of Conscience

The feeling of remorse has always been connected with conscience. It is a deep regret for a wrong committed. Conscience not only makes judgement over certain actions that we have done as right or wrong, but it arouses a peculiar feeling of pain that is extremely unpleasant. This pain of conscience or feeling of remorse is identified by moralists as one of the reasons of avoiding wrong actions.

Antecedent and Consequent Conscience

Conscience can be divided into antecedent conscience and consequent conscience. Antecedent conscience deals with future actions whereas consequent conscience deals with the past actions. Conscience that acts as a guide to future actions, prompting to do them or avoid them can be defined as an antecedent conscience. Conscience which is acting as a judge to our past actions, the source of our self-approval or remorse is known as consequent conscience. In ethics Antecedent conscience, which is a guide to our future action, is more important. The acts of Antecedent Conscience are divided into four. They are: a). First one is the mental act of a 'command' whereby one senses that a particular act is 'to be done'. It is an imperative and the individual is not free not to do the act. b) Second one is the act of 'forbidding' whereby one senses that a particular act is 'not to be done'. It is an obligation to avoid such acts. Doing of such act is an immoral act. c) Third one is that of the act of 'permitting' in which one regards an act as 'allowed' by one's own moral values. d) Fourth one is the act of 'advising' in which one is aware that an act is either probably better to do or probably worse to do.

Division of Conscience

The judgement of the conscience can be understood as the judgement of the intellect. The human intellect can be mistaken either by adopting false premises or by drawing an illogical conclusion. Because of this there can be different consciences such as correct, erroneous, doubtful, certain, perplexed and scrupulous consciences. **A correct conscience** judges as good what is really good, or as evil what is really evil. Whereas an **erroneous conscience** judges as good what is really evil, or as evil what is really good. **A certain conscience** judges without fearing that the opposite may be true. A doubtful conscience either hesitates to make any judgement at all or does make a judgement but with misgivings that the opposite may be true. **A perplexed conscience** belongs to one who cannot make up his/her mind. Such persons remain in a state of indecisive anguish, especially if s/he thinks that s/he will be doing wrong whichever alternative he chooses. **A scrupulous conscience** torments its owner by rehearsing over and over again doubts that were once settled. S/he finds new sources of guilt for old deeds that were best forgotten, striving for a kind of certainty about one's state of soul that is beyond our power in this life.

Check your progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What are Antecedent and Consequent Conscience?.

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2) What are the different Consciences?

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4. 4 NORM AS GIVEN BY INTUITION

In intuition, the basic human reasoning process is questioned. An Intuition can be defined as 'the immediate apprehension of an object by the mind without the intervention of any reasoning process'. A moral intuition is one that apprehends some moral objects immediately, without there being any reasoning about it. Ethical intuitionism is here taken to be the view that normal

human beings have an immediate awareness of moral goodness and moral values. Some of the exponents of this theory have contended that the awareness in question can only be conceived satisfactorily as a form of sense perception.

Objects of Moral Intuitions

There are three possible objects of moral intuitions:

a) Perceptual or Individual Intuitionism

The first object of moral intuition is known as 'perceptual intuitionism' or 'individual intuitionism'. It is the theory that holds that the only way of knowing rightness and wrongness is by such intuitions of the rightness or wrongness of individual actions. We may know directly that one particular act, such as the assassination of Caesar by Brutus, is right. To have this intuition does not imply that political murder would be right in any other case.

b). Dogmatic Intuitionism

Second one known as 'Dogmatic Intuitionism' is the theory which holds that this is the only way of knowing the rightness or wrongness of actions. We may know directly without reflection that certain class or kind of actions is right or wrong; for example that telling the truth is always right.

c). Universal Intuitionism

Third one is the 'Universal Intuitionism' which deals with universal principles of ethics. We may know directly some moral principle by which we can judge actions to be right or wrong. We may know intuitively for example that any action that treats a man merely as a means is always wrong.

Objections to the Intuitionism

There are certain objections to all these three kinds of intuitionism: a) It is true that there are always some actions and some classes of actions and some principles that we can know intuitively to be right or wrong. This is by no means true of every action or every class of action or every moral principle. b) In the human life there will always be occasions of some unusual circumstances. It may be true that intuition of all three kinds works fairly well in normal circumstances. But it does not work in unusual cases. It is self evident that we should speak the truth until we come to the unusual case where our doing so seems likely to involve the sacrifice of innocent lives. c) Infallibility of intuitionism always creates problem. People make mistakes in their intuitions. Use of the term 'intuition' by religious people and mystical philosophers suggests that there is something infallible about intuition. It can be dangerous to humanity. d) Intuitionism fails as an ethical theory, because in every case it is possible to give a reason for what an intuition dictate. Once rationalization starts, the basis of intuitionism itself fails.

Check Your Progress – II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

What are the Objects of Moral Intuition?

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What are the Objections to the Intuitionism?

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4. 5 LAW AS NORM

Law is one of the most important norms of morality which controls the human judges from outside.

General Notion of Law

In accordance with the field of action it is found, the term law appears in threefold meaning:

- a). In its widest and most general sense, a law is the rule or norm according to which something is drawn toward an action or restrained from an action. All beings in this universe are governed by laws in this sense. For example, the law of electricity, of light, of heat, of gravity, of motion ..etc...
- b). In a more restricted sense, a law is the rule or norm which governs the free actions of rational beings in any field of practical endeavour. Such laws refer to the techniques of the various crafts or arts. For eg. Painting, games, sports, architecture, construction ..etc...
- c). In its strictest or ethical sense, the term law means the rule or norm governing the free actions of man relative to moral obligation. The violation of law in this sense involves moral delinquency or sin.

The Nature of Law

A law is defined by St Thomas Aquinas as an “ordinance of reason directed toward the common good and promulgated by the one who has the care of the community”. a). Law is an ordinance of reason. ‘Ordinance of reason’ is the formal cause of the law. By this we mean that a law is a directive demanding a definite course of action. They are not free to accept or reject this ordinance, but are subject to a moral constraint to carry out the injunction demanded by the ordinance and contained in it. A law can only be given to rational beings, with the purpose of controlling their human acts. Since the law belongs to the rational order, in order to be a true law, it cannot command anything contrary to reason. b) A law is directed towards common good. The

final cause of the law should be common good. It cannot be directed to promote the private welfare of individuals or relatively small groups within a community. It should be directed towards the welfare of the community as a whole. Thus a law has the public welfare as its objective. c) A law should be promulgated. The promulgation of the law is the material cause of the law. d) The promulgation of the law should be done by the one who has the care of the community. This legislator is the efficient cause of the law. Laws are matters of public authority and jurisdiction, and only the bearer of the supreme public authority and jurisdiction has the authority to enact a law affecting the common good of all.

Kinds of Laws

Laws can be observed from different standpoints and correspondingly we distinguish between different kinds of laws.

A). From the viewpoint of **Obligation** we distinguish four kinds of laws: affirmative, negative, permissive and punitive.

a). *An affirmative law* is a law of 'command' obligating a person to perform a definite positive act. E.g. The state commands citizens to pay taxes in support of the government.

b). *A negative law* is a law of 'prohibition' obligating a person to refrain from performing a definite act. For e.g. The Decalogue forbids adultery and murder.

c). *A permissive law* is one which allows a person to perform a certain act without hindrance from others.

d). *A punitive or penal law* is one which imposes penalty upon violation. The law itself may stipulate the exact penalty, or it may be left to the discretion of the judge.

B). From the viewpoint of the **Legislator** we distinguish law into divine and human laws.

a). *Divine law* emanate from God as the legislator. The laws contained in the Decalogue were given by God directly.

b). *Human laws* are enacted by legitimate human authority. For eg. The state authority establish laws for its subjects.

C). From the viewpoint of **Duration** law is divided into eternal and temporal.

a). *Eternal law* is the plan of God's wisdom directing all created things toward the realization of their natural end.

b). *Temporal laws* are those enacted, not from eternity, but in time by temporal authority. For. E.g. By state through legislative or responsible channels.

D). From the viewpoint of **Promulgation** law can be divided into natural and positive.

a). *Natural law* is law in so far as it is manifested by the natural light of human reason reflecting on the fundamental principles of morality.

b). *Positive law* is a law enacted by legitimate authority, such as the state, supplementing the provisions of natural law and made in view of the special need of the community.

4.6 PLEASURE AS NORM

From the very beginning of human history there had been people who considered pleasure as the supreme good of human life. For them pleasure is the only norm of morality. They believed that every human activity is prompted by a desire of seeking pleasure.

Hedonism

The word hedonism has its root in Greek word 'hedone' which means 'pleasure'. Hedonism is one of the oldest, simplest and most earthly of ethical theories. It is the ethical theory which teaches that pleasure is the only mark of good life and those who desire to lead a good life must seek pleasure by all means. Historically the beginning of hedonism can be sought in the philosophy of Cyrenaics and the Epicureans. We find hedonism first proposed by Aristippus, the leader of Cyrenaic school, who identified happiness with pleasure. According to him pleasure is the only mark of good life and all pleasures are essentially alike though they differ from the point of view of intensity.

Epicureans also attached importance to pleasure but they did not give much significance to the momentary pleasure. For Epicures the end of life is not intense pleasure, but an abiding peace of mind, a state of cheerful tranquillity. Above all we must avoid fear of the gods and fear of death.

In India too we had the philosophy of the Charvak which stated that the pleasure of the moment should be sought. It taught people to eat, drink and be happy for tomorrow we may die.

Hedonistic theory was revived during the Renaissance, and was propounded in England during the seventeenth century by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Lock (1632-1704). Later exponents of the pleasure theory were Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).

Check your progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What is the nature of Law?

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2) What is Hedonism?

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have explained the basics of the norms of morality in general and have gone in detail to the different particular norms of morality. As particular norms we see Conscience as subjective norm of morality and Intuition, Law and Pleasure as the objective norms of morality. In the subjective norm of morality, the moral authority dwells within the individual.

Objective norm is the standard for an objective evaluation of the human acts. The moral criterion presupposes the existence of an objective moral 'standard' or norm with which the particular act can be compared. With the moral norm, human beings can test the morality of the act and judge whether it is good or evil. In general a norm is an authoritative standard, which gives us a pattern or model to which things of similar nature must conform. Thus a judgement can be described as a comparison of an act with the standard or norm. When the act conforms to the norm of morality, we judge the act to be good and when we find that the act deviates from the norm, we judge the act to be evil.

4. 8 KEY WORDS

Norm – Norm is a rule or standard of judgement.

Conscience – It is the subjective awareness of the moral quality of one's own actions as indicated by the moral values to which one subscribes.

Intuitionism – The immediate apprehension of an object by the mind without the intervention of any reasoning process.

Law – An ordinance of reason directed toward the common good and promulgated by the one who has the care of the community.

Hedonism – The theory that teaches that pleasure is the only mark of good life.

4. 9. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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4. 10. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Conscience can be divided into antecedent conscience and consequent conscience. Antecedent conscience deals with future actions whereas consequent conscience deals with the past actions. Conscience that acts as a guide to future actions, prompting to do them or avoid them can be

defined as an antecedent conscience. Conscience which is acting as a judge to our past actions, the source of our self-approval or remorse is known as consequent conscience. In ethics Antecedent conscience, which is a guide to our future action, is more important. The acts of Antecedent Conscience are divided into four. They are: a). First one is the mental act of a 'command' whereby one senses that a particular act is 'to be done'. It is an imperative and the individual is not free not to do the act. b) Second one is the act of 'forbidding' whereby one senses that a particular act is 'not to be done'. It is an obligation to avoid such acts. Doing of such act is an immoral act. c) Third one is that of the act of 'permitting' in which one regards an act as 'allowed' by one's own moral values. d) Fourth one is the act of 'advising' in which one is aware that an act is either probably better to do or probably worse to do.

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Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. A law is defined by St Thomas Aquinas as an "ordinance of reason directed toward the common good and promulgated by the one who has the care of the community". a). Law is an ordinance of reason. 'Ordinance of reason' is the formal cause of the law. By this we mean that a law is a directive demanding a definite course of action. They are not free to accept or reject this ordinance, but are subject to a moral constraint to carry out the injunction demanded by the ordinance and contained in it. A law can only be given to rational beings, with the purpose of controlling their human acts. Since the law belongs to the rational order, in order to be a true law, it cannot command anything contrary to reason. b) A law is directed towards common good. The final cause of the law should be common good. It cannot be directed to promote the private welfare of individuals or relatively small groups within a community. It should be directed towards the welfare of the community as a whole. Thus a law has the public welfare as its objective. c) A law should be promulgated. The promulgation of the law is the material cause of the law. d) The promulgation of the law should be done by the one who has the care of the community. This legislator is the efficient cause of the law. Laws are matters of public authority and jurisdiction, and only the bearer of the supreme public authority and jurisdiction has the authority to enact a law affecting the common good of all.

2. The word hedonism has its root in Greek word 'hedone' which means 'pleasure'. Hedonism is one of the oldest, simplest and most earthly of ethical theories. It is the ethical theory which teaches that pleasure is the only mark of good life and those who desire to lead a good life must seek pleasure by all means. Historically the beginning of hedonism can be sought in the philosophy of Cyrenaics and the Epicureans. We find hedonism first proposed by Aristippus, the leader of Cyrenaic school, who identified happiness with pleasure. According to him pleasure is the only mark of good life and all pleasures are essentially alike though they differ from the point of view of intensity.

