

### BOOK-REVIEW

**The Concept of Moral Obligation : S. R. Talghatti : University of Poona, Pune 1980 : pp XII + 246 : Price Rs. 18/-**

The author wants to understand man's moral life through the concept of moral obligation. He holds that the other approaches to the understanding of that life such as through the concepts of good, right and virtue are equally legitimate. But such attempts, he says, are often exclusive. His approach is inclusive of other points of view. He claims to have reconciled teleology and deontology. The comprehensiveness of his view, according to him, is due to his study of the Prasthānatrayī of the Vedānta.

He calls his theory the Ideal-Demand theory of morality. The life-ideal makes a demand on the moral agent. The demand has to be in conformity with the moral law. The moral law expresses itself through particular moral rules to suit a moral situation. One has to act according to this rule. The obligatoriness of the particular act is grounded in the moral law so far the theory is deontological. But the authority of the moral law is to be justified by life ideal. This is the teleological aspect of the theory.

The life ideal is appointed by one's own nature. So, there is no question why one should pursue it. Obligation is ultimately grounded in the life ideal. Therefore, the question 'why should I do what I ought to do' can be answered. It is not a meaningless question as Bradley and Prichard took it to be. It is not a question regarding logical explanation, but a psychological question regarding interest and motivation. The life ideal supplies the motive.

The life ideal is not the same as the moral ideal. The moral ideal is only a part of it. Life ideal is said to be peace, well-being or freedom etc. (p. 191) On page 193 it is said that bliss (life ideal?) is eternal and without the possibility of its opposite. The reader, however, is kept in the dark as to the way of establishing the eternity of bliss. It is also said (p. 191) that 'pleasure is a crude name' for the life ideal. One wonders how a name by itself could be crude or otherwise.

The author says (p. 187) that life ideals could be different for different people. Presumably the difference would be regarding their content, though formally the life ideal must be the same, viz., peace, perfection, freedom (all synonymns, according to the author) for everyone. Moral ideal is the common aspect which brings harmony among the clashing life ideals and is presumably one. Throughout this discussion and, in fact, in the entire book there is not a single illustration, real or imaginary from concrete life. I should think it is the only book concerning moral life which meticulously avoids illustrating any of the points it makes. All that the author occasionally would say is "Y is right in doing x in the situation z." This is the limit of his coming near to concrete human life. I am not persuaded that this is a virtue of the book.

The life ideal is to be pursued on two fronts. First, one is to cultivate an attitude of non-attachment as the Gita teaches it. This leads one beyond pleasure and pain and a state of desirelessness.

Secondly, one has to expand one's self. 'The limitation from the not-self is the same as pain.' The advice of the author, therefore, is 'merge the not-self into self'. (It is equally plausible to say 'merge yourself into the not-self'). To achieve this end he does not approve the traditional Golden Rule which he (mis) states 'Behave unto others as you would others behave unto you' (p. 186). The reason for his disapproval is it makes 'my' behaviour dependent on others. This is not good reason. Because what the rule requires of me is to leave my personal 'point of view to decide the right and the wrong of an action.

This, then, is the life ideal which creates and justifies obligation. Occasionally it is said (p. 207) that the life ideal embodies the noble human aspirations. The epithet 'noble' is, of course, question begging. An aspiration would become noble by being a constituent of the life ideal appointed by our nature and at the same time the life ideal is to be constructed out of our noble aspirations. It is said (p. 151) that 'not only the moral behaviour but the whole of human conduct is directed towards the attainment of the ideal. This implies that the sphere of morality is only a part of life. This would cut at the supervening character of moral judgement.

The author approvingly quotes twice Blanshard. "Moral obligation is — the claim upon us of the ends appointed by our nature". The central contention of the author is put elegantly in this statement. One cannot say the same thing about the author's exposition of his theme. As specimens of inelegance I quote a few expressions : distinctively peculiar nature' (Intro. IX), a psychological state (of mind) in others' (p-26) 'They are over-riden by moral obligations (p 234).

He has made topsyturvy the meanings of 'neustic' and 'phrastic' as used by Hare and spelt 'phrastic' as 'frastic' (p. 47). In fact spelling mistakes are very numerous; e. g., dimation (Intro. XII), two-tyre, three-tyre (p. 48) quaci-comparison (p. 51, 52).

The book however is a sincere, laborious and original attempt to understand man's moral life. The reviewer agrees with Dr. Barlingay when the latter says in his Forward "The attempt of Dr. Talghatti is commendable and deserves congratulations."

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