
UNIT 3 REASON AND EMOTIONS IN HUMAN CONDUCT

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous unit **about various** theories of conduct, aimed at defining and clarifying the criteria of morally good behaviour. You also learnt that conduct, which can be justified on the basis of valid reasons, is morally worthwhile and good behaviour. That is rationality constitutes a core element in ethical behaviour. Behaviour that is characterized as irrational, incoherent, or inconsistent cannot be called ethically desirable, worthwhile or good behaviour. Mere rationality of behaviour cannot be called sufficient criterion to define morality. There are certain human emotions like empathy, sympathy, caring for others, loving them, etc. devoid of which no behaviour can be morally good, even if it is supported by valid reasons. It will be quite apt to say that reason is an essential condition of morality, but it is certainly not a sufficient condition. There are certain human emotions like greed, selfishness, etc. which are a direct anti-thesis of morally good behaviour because they undermine the strength of reason and lead one to follow one's selfish interests. That is why we are told to control such emotions in order to act morally,

In this unit, we shall **try** to discuss the dichotomy between reason and emotion, as also the positive contribution of emotions in morality.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

Following a study of this unit you should be able to:

- bring out the dichotomy between reason and emotion;
- discuss the implication of this dichotomy for education;
- highlight the positive role of emotions in moral education;
- explain, how both judgement and action are essential to moral education; and

- state the reasons of moral weakness, and suggest ways to overcome the same

3.3 DICHOTOMY BETWEEN REASON AND EMOTION

There existed always a tension between intellectual and emotional aspects in human being's life, especially in the moral context. For the most part reason and emotion have been in conflict with each other, as incompatible to the development of moral character. But this is also a fact that both reason and emotion constitute essential dimensions or domains of morality. They are like two faces of a coin—inseparable from each other. In a moral conflict each of these may behave as an anti-thesis of the other.

In the preceding unit of this block, you have read that no moral judgement can be said to be worthwhile unless it is rational-consistent and coherent. But without the element of "caring for others", no action can be called moral. The supporters of rationality for moral behaviour, especially Plato (Greek philosopher, mathematician, writer of the period 428-327 BC), Kant (Immanuel Kant—an 18th century German philosopher), Piaget (1927 –1987), a Swiss developmental psychologist), Kohlberg) a Jewish American psychologist (1896 –1980) known for his work in the area of moral education and reasoning) and his associates consider reason as central to moral philosophy. Development of reason therefore becomes the main concern of education. Accordingly education should overcome as effectively as possible the tendencies of animal life dominated by passions or emotions within us. The state of being a moral agent is the one in which the individual has come to know what is right. **Socrates** had also maintained that virtue is the knowledge of the "good". According to Plato virtue or morality is the culmination of the knowledge of right. Once one obtains this knowledge (of the right), one cannot avoid being virtuous.

Reason, according to rationalists, is the supreme factor in morality; passions and emotions are unfortunate appendix (additional features) of human life, which need to be controlled, tamed or subdued. **Aristotle** went to the extent of saying reason and intellectual contemplation to be truly human. Man's true happiness lies in and engaging oneself in thinking activities of the highest order. But a question may be asked whether it would be right to break off such contemplation to save the life of a drowning man. Plato, however, recognized the conflict that arises between what we know to be right and what we recognize as pleasurable.

The Christian theology also holds passions, emotions or appetites as domain of Satan, which led Adam to fall from Grace. The passions, therefore, need to be suppressed and tamed. In this line of thought, Kant also believed that feelings and emotions are hindrances on the way of **rational** morality. According to him, man is unfortunately obstructed with feelings and emotions, which check him from becoming a fully rational "being". In order that man can behave the way shown to be right by application of reason, feelings and emotions need to be overcome. According to Kant, discovering right course of action is a rational activity. The natural inclinations (feelings, emotions, etc.) merely serve to deflect one from acting on the right path shown by reason.

In fact morality may be committed with destruction of natural passions as well as with their preservation. Both reason and emotions are important for human beings. The gap between reason and emotion need to be bridged by, what **Hegel**, a German philosopher called, the "morality of love". Many people hold that moral knowledge cannot be attained by reason alone. For example, before making any moral judgement we need to be fully conversant with the non-moral facts of the case. It is on an understanding of the total situation (situational reality) alone, that right judgement (and hence right action) can be taken. If our moral judgement does not consider the situational reality, the action taken on that is likely to be wrong. We can find answer to moral questions only when we know how people behave and what they do in moral situations. The empiricists recognized the importance of emotions in moral **behaviour**. According to them moral belief and behaviour are explicable only in terms of emotions people have or the way they feel. Accordingly, moral behaviour is to be assessed in terms of social utility of what people feel to be right, of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain.

Thus, there is a dichotomy between man's intellect and his emotions and a tangible solution to the problem is not there.

3.4 **IMPLICATIONS OF THE DICHOTOMY**

The situation arising out of the conviction of divorce of intellect from emotions may have serious implication, in education. In fact, stressing the one and ignoring the other aspect of moral behaviour in the curriculum of the child will deprive him of becoming a truly morally and educated person. As you might know, human personality, according to Benjamin Bloom (1913-1999) an American educational psychologist consists of three dimensions – the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor domains. Any educational programme, which does not take full account of any of the three domains, will remain incomplete and therefore, will not achieve the goals of education. We must not forget that development of appropriate feelings (affective domain) is an integral part of education including moral education. It is not possible, even in theory, that one is educated even though **he/she** has not developed worthwhile attitudes, feelings and emotions; and **he/she** does not appreciate what is worth appreciating. It will be absurd to say that some one is educated but **s/he** loves nothing, is interested in nothing, and is enthused by nothing. To be educated is to have been brought up to care for certain things. To take a purely rationalist approach amounts denying that our pupils have feelings or individuality; it is to turn them into computers or robots.

The worst effect of the divorce of intellect from emotion can be seen when one **recommends** devices of suppression of emotions with the sole purpose of attaining universality, objectivity and morality in moral behaviour. Recently a practice is seen in many schools where steps are taken for taming of emotions or passions. Some of the agencies in schools or in the society strongly recommend repression of **feelings** without being aware that such repression can ultimately lead to varieties of psychoneurosis or obsessive – compulsive behaviours and extreme form of anxiety. Such repression of feelings and passions may develop psychosomatic disorders (like hysteria) engender feelings of guilt and shame. We must not forget that character disorders like alcoholism, sexual repression, psychopathic tendencies, etc. may develop because of repressed feelings and desires.

Another very dangerous effect of the application of repressive devices on the part of parents, society or teachers in early childhood is the development of extremely strong super-ego. This occurs as a result of taboos of the culture. We should remember that development of conscience or what Freud, called ego-ideal, is not the small voice of God, but rather it is developed, by internalising fear and other unpleasant experiences in the childhood. The development of ego ideal takes place through an unconscious process and, therefore, always has negative connotation. The emotions and feelings repressed in this process continue to affect our attitudes and behaviour in unconscious and unrecognised manner. That is why, in our later life, we quite often are not able to explain our behaviour to others, and even to ourselves. A refusal to partake any **kind** of alcoholic **drink** under any circumstances, even where its medicinal value is obvious, for example, cannot be explained by the individual because such internalisation or repression has taken place unconsciously. So the ego-ideal developed as a result of repression has to be deplored. But still we need to develop some **kind** of conscience or self-image, which helps us in taking some decision or judgement. We have to be careful that we don't develop a distorted conscience, through repression, subjugation or taming of emotion. We should develop the same through conscious and deliberate choices. The above example of totally unreasonable rejection of alcohol in all its forms is one instance of this kind of distortion. The development of such taboos some times is so strong that one is willing to die or see a child or some relative die than to break the taboo.

A strong devices used for repression of desires, feelings and emotions in early childhood, may not lead in certain cases to development of ego-ideal or a **strong** conscience but lead to reaction formation. Some children who are deprived of the love of parents or lack close attachment with their parents are strongly repressed by the use of punishment mechanisms or through unconvincing and harsh reasoning by parents may develop in them aggression and hostility. In many cases, they become psychopaths or sociopaths. Such an individual displays complete indifference to others in his behaviour. He is often described as “**affectionless**” character – one who has no sense of guilt. He is the very anti-thesis of a morally developed individual.

3.5 EMOTIONS IN MORAL EDUCATION

In the earlier units of this block as well as in the earlier section of this unit, we saw that reason or rationality plays an important role in determining the nature of morality and hence moral education. Any behaviour, which is not rational or cannot be supported by valid reason, cannot be termed as moral. If, for example, we follow one principle of action today and another tomorrow, our behaviour is inconsistent; hence cannot be termed moral. We have also seen that behaving morally is not a rational process alone, because rationality determines only the form of morality and not its content. To behave morally, we must take care of others' interests, feel for them, respect individual freedom of others as we do for us, help the needy to the extent it is possible for us, etc. Such is the “content” of morality. In essence reason and emotion in the context of moral education are the two pillars on which the whole edifice of morality rests : the former acts as a **guide** and the latter as a goad : Obviously, the two are linked together in moral judgement and moral action. We may say that reason without emotion is lame, and emotion without reason is blind.

Some people argue that reason and feeling are usually in conflict with each other; tagging us in different directions. But if we reflect upon different moral situations, we find that our inclinations do not always push us towards behaviour that is at variance with rationality. Often our reason and inclination are in agreement or in harmony, instead of being in **conflict**. No doubt, there are some occasions when we are faced by two distinct courses of actions, one dictated by reason and the other guided by emotion. In a moral choice we find a confusing jumble of reason, conscience, desire, pleasure, concern for the feelings of others. Just as it is impossible in any practical educational context to separate the cognitive from the affective goals, in the same way, it is difficult to distinguish these two aspects in any practical moral issue.

In a moral context, **the** relation of feeling with reason is of reciprocity rather than of conflict. Therefore emotions need to be educated rather than tamed or suppressed. Our emotions depend on our cognition and vice-versa. Sometimes, emotions are the result of the ways in which we perceive situations. They result from what the reason tells us about the world. The converse is also true. Our emotions sometimes, affect the way we perceive the situation. That is why a group of thinkers, called phenomenologists, assert that every man's perceptions are unique because they are intimately related with emotions and personality. Any situation of moral choice, therefore, demands a proper cognition in order so that we may arrive at a correct moral choice or judgement. In short, we can say that we need to make realistic appraisal of situations and understand them in order to be able to act appropriately. We have already discussed in this unit about the dangers involved in the control of emotions. But it does not mean that we should let them free. What is dangerous is the repression of emotions, not their control. Undoubtedly, the children need to appropriately control their emotions. They need discipline. Teachers can help them to develop certain habits of good behaviour when they are young. Thus in the moral education of young children some kind of training or indoctrination or what Skinner calls shaping of behaviour, is unavoidable.

3.6 FACTORS OF CONTROL

There are different kinds of controls and disciplines. The only kind of discipline that can be accepted as a part of educational process is self-discipline. Whatever devices we use, the goal must be to produce a person who is in control of his emotion, emotion which prevents one from executing his own moral decisions. The control should be one of self-control, which is conscious **and** self-initiated.

In addition to controlling the emotions deliberately and consciously, we must help children to understand their feelings so that they accept or express them through socially desirable ways; such as dance or drama. The role-play is a technique, which helps in development of the ability to see things from someone else's point of view. This kind of insight into the feelings of others is an important aim of education.

There is another point to make about education of emotions that is relevant to moral education. There are **some** emotions which need to be nurtured like sympathy, empathy, love and care for others, etc. Instead of controlling such emotions, we must rather welcome, embrace and promote them. Some impulses or inclinations are not generally regarded as bad; they are not seen as impulses or

inclination to be controlled or repressed but are felt to be the motivating force of our behaviour. To be fully moral an action should not only conform to certain standards of rationality, but it should also be performed with certain degree of motivation. Perhaps it not morally so good to feed and clothe a filthy tramp in a cold and indifferent way, than to embrace or love him. It is not enough for an action to be performed "*unwillingly*", but it must be done willingly.

There are people who claim that moral education should concern itself with the promotion of certain kinds of feelings in pupils. We should recognize the feelings of others understand and treat them as similar to us. Not only that, we should sympathize with them, feel for them, empathize with them and even love them. For true moral education, it is not sufficient to know what is right at cognitive level only, it is also a matter of promoting those that will support and enhance our moral action. In actual practice in schools, such feelings and emotions can be better developed through community living and social service. Through such activities we can learn which emotions need to be educated and how we can do that.

So moral education does not merely include the understanding of what is right and what ought to be done, it also involves feelings and emotions which goad our behaviour to do what we ought to do.

Check Your Progress 1

i) What are the factors of emotions?

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ii) What is moral weakness?

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3.7 JUDGEMENT AND ACTION IN MORAL EDUCATION

The relationships between judgement and action, especially in the moral contexts have interesting implications for the areas of moral education and moral development. The issue of moral judgement and moral action in fact, lies at the heart of moral development. The concept of morality entails all the three dimensions of personality – the cognitive (judgemental), the affective (feelings,

emotion and intentions) and psychomotor (action). Mere outward behaviour cannot be taken as moral or not moral. One would certainly agree that, although having certain reasons of some **kind** is a necessary part of being a moral agent, this cannot be a sufficient condition to be a moral agent. To be designated as moral agent, one must act in accordance with these reasons and intentions. Morality is, by nature, a practical business, as it is basically concerned with what ought to be done or what is right to do. Morality cannot be accounted for just in **terms** of either performing particular kinds of actions or in terms of making particular **kinds** of judgements. It must involve both of these, **i.e.** how a person thinks, feels and behaves.

Many approaches to moral education and moral development, however, ignore this complex balance between judgement and action. For example, Piaget, **Kohlberg** and his associates tried to study moral development mainly in terms of children's moral judgement. Though, they did not completely ignore moral action, their main thrust was directed towards moral judgements. On the other hand, the traditional notion of moral training aimed at inculcating in children a particular code of moral conduct (telling the truth, respecting one's elders, keeping one's promises etc.). But such notions need to be replaced by furthering children's understanding of moral issues. In contrast to judgemental approaches, the opposing traditions seem to over-emphasize behaviour at the expense of judgement and understanding. For example, behaviour modification techniques of Skinner had no place for concepts like intention or judgement, belief, choice, responsibility and justice. A child behaves morally not because he understands that his behaviour is right but because his behaviour is so shaped through appropriate arrangement of rewards and punishments. We can see that this behavioural approach to morality is not moral education but moral training. According to it, it is the standard of behaviour in and out of school, which is a measure of success or failure of moral teaching.

3.8 MORAL WEAKNESS

In dealing with moral education, we encounter a specific practical problem – the problem of moral weakness. For example, a child may have learnt certain **skills**, which satisfy certain judgemental criteria, but may fail to act in accordance with what he has judged to be right. This educational problem of moral weakness is concerned with how to encourage children to act upon their moral judgement. Let us try to analyse the solution of such a problem.

When we fail to act upon what we think to be right or good, we are guilty of moral **weakness**. It usually happens when we are overcome by overpowering emotions, desires or other irrational factors, We are not able to withstand such pressures either because our 'will' or our 'conscience' is too weak. Moral education in such cases will imply strengthening the will or conscience to educate emotions and thus build a strong character. Some thinkers reject concepts like weak will or conscience. According to them, moral weakness is not a battle between our will and our emotions, but rather a conflict or incompatibility between two kinds of **reasons for actions**. Reasons can justify as well as motivate a person for action. I may for instance believe that I ought to visit my friend in hospital (who is ill), because hospital patients generally feel happy when visited by friends and hence recover more quickly. I also would want to be visited if I were in his place. There are justifiable reasons for visiting hospital patients, and

I also agree with those reasons. Still, I may not be able to visit my friend, perhaps, I don't have time or energy or perhaps the hospital environment is not conducive to me, etc. In such situations, there are no reasons, which motivate me to visit my friend. So reasons, which justify and reasons that motivate are logically separate. This distinction offers a general explanation for moral weakness. It is not always necessary that inclinations and obligations are separate; they may coincide also.

However, it is the conflict between two kinds of reasons (justificatory and motivational) which in actual practice provide instances of moral weakness.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Name the supporters of rationality of moral behaviour?

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ii) What does repression of emotions result in?

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iii) What is the relationship between Reason and Emotion?

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3.9 LET US SUM UP

The present unit is an attempt to highlight the dichotomy existing between reasons and emotions in a moral context. While examining the differential roles of the two, it is argued that from one perspective, reasons and emotions constitute essential conditions to morality. But from another angle, they are anti-thesis to one another. According to rationalists like Plato, Kant, Piaget and Kohlberg reason is fully human and hence its development is the main concern of education. The task of education is also to overcome the animal life of passions or emotions. The Christian ethics, the Gita, and other Indian scriptures also consider passions or emotions as hindrances in the path of good human behaviour and, therefore

recommend their control. However, this is not true. True moral education involves development of certain emotions like love, care, empathy, etc. So if we believe in a complete divorce of intellect from emotions, it may have serious implication for education. With the conviction of this divorce if we repress the emotions of children, they may develop psychosomatic disorders and thereby shall be digressed from achieving their goal of education. Many such adverse effects have been discussed in the unit, in view of the dichotomy between reasons and emotions. In fact in a moral context, the relation of feeling with reason is of reciprocity rather than of conflict. What exactly we need as teachers is, instead of suppressing or repressing the emotions we should educate the emotions of children, so that they may understand their appropriate use at the appropriate time.

The other aspect discussed in the unit is judgement **vis-à-vis** action in a moral context. This domain has interesting implications for moral education and moral development of children. Proper moral development consists in judging an act or situation and acting in an appropriate manner. Obviously in a moral act all the three: reason, emotion and psychomotor are involved. We also clearly defined the problem of moral weakness. For example, a child may, in a specific real situation, judge what he ought to do. But still, for certain reasons he is not inclined to do what he ought to do. According to some thinkers this happens when we are overpowered by irrational factors or desires which become hindrances in the path of our duty. According to other group of thinkers moral **weakness** is the result of the conflict between justificatory reasons and motivational reasons.

3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The factors of control of emotions are as follows:
 - a) Self-control which is self initiated
 - b) Help the children to understand their feelings by role-plays
 - c) Nurturing emotions like sympathy, empathy, love, care etc.
- ii) When we fail to act upon what we think to be right or good we are guilty of moral weakness. It happens when we are overcome by overpowering emotions, desires other irrational factors.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) The supporters of rationality in moral behaviour are Plato, **Kant**, **Kohlberg** and Piaget who consider reason to be central to moral philosophy.
- ii) Repression can lead to varieties of psychoneurosis or obsessive compulsive behaviours and extreme anxiety. Such repression may lead to psychosomatic disorders like hysteria and other character disorders of alcoholism, sexual repression etc.
- iii) These are like two pillars of moral education on which the whole edifice of morality rests. The former (reason) acts as a guide and the latter (emotion) as goad. The two are linked together in moral judgement and **moral** action.

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