



# THE CONCEPT OF DUTY IN THE SOCIETY

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## Abstract

Duty is an ethical category in philosophy denoting a special form of moral obligation. It is a kind of moral obligation. It is a kind of moral obligation applied to every individual. The Bhagavad Gita also mentions about the duty as an obligation by introducing the notion of Nishkama-Karma. Definite rights bring definite obligations along with them. Such moral obligations or duties may be expressed in the form of commandments. Just as there is a right corresponding to every duty, so there is a duty corresponding to every right. Rights and duties are co-relative to each other. All duties may be deduced from the fundamental duty that every person ought to realize his rational self.

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## Introduction

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## MORAL DUTY:

Whatever man ought to do for the ultimate good is man's moral duty. This duty includes his duties to the society and his duties to himself. A characteristic of moral duty is the feeling of moral obligation attached to it. This obligation is not an external imposition upon us. Man imposes this obligation upon himself, being a moral person. The moral duty inspires our internal self, our moral intuition, our sense of duty which compels us to lay down our lives willingly for our country.

Moral considerations are expressed in a variety of ways. Sometimes we speak of our duties and obligations. Our duties we recognize are more general. For example, we may say that we have a duty to keep

promises, to act honestly, to obey the law and to help our neighbours. This list of duties can be extended to include more far-reaching and far-ranging behaviour. For example, we may acknowledge a moral duty to spend time and money on helping those whose needs are greater than our own. This might be called a duty of beneficence or charity a duty of giving help wherever help is needed and we ourselves are in a position to offer that help. Or, again we may believe that we have a moral duty to develop our own talents and potentialities rather than let them lie around unused.

### **SENSE OF DUTY:**

We obey the rule from a desire to obey the rule as such and when the rule is a moral one this motive is called the Sense of Duty. This phrase does not refer to a special faculty by means of which we learn what our duties are, that we learn in the same way that we learn everything else. We may act from a "Sense of Duty" and to do so is usually regarded as the outstanding form of moral action. Many psychologist hold that the sense of duty is simply one of our many desires, a complicated one certainly, but not for that reason of a different kind psychologically from others. In this case our analysis of desire generally will include this special form of desire. Others hold that we have a new determining tendency, which is often labelled conscience. For example, A man may give money to charity both because he wants to and also because he regards it as his duty and wants to do his duty.

### **DHARMA:**

It means "duty", righteousness, virtue and right. In fact, the word dharma has many connotations in the context of Indian Philosophy. It is derived from the etymological root "dhr" which means "to bind" or "to hold together". Dharma is one of the four purusarthas or goals of human life, according to Hindu ethics. The Hindu philosophy is basically concerned with two higher values, namely dharma and moksha. As an overarching or regulative principle, dharma regulates our actions concerning the pursuit of artha and kama. According to Mimamsa, dharma is karma. There are also varna-dharmas and asrama-dharmas. The former represents the duties of the various classes namely brahmana, ksatriyas, vaisyas and sudras; and the later represent the duties of the individuals in the various stages of life namely brahmacharya, grhastha, vanaprastha and samnyasa. The varna dharmas are intended to maintain the division of labour in the society and for social progress. While the asrama-dharmas are meant for self-discipline and individual progress. In the Bhagavad Gita one comes across the notion of svadharma, according to which one's own duty is superior to another's.

### **CONCEPT OF DUTY:**

A duty is a commitment or expectation to perform some action in general or if certain circumstances arise. A duty may arise from a system of ethics or morality, especially in an honor culture. Many duties are created by law, sometimes including a codified punishment or liability for non-performance. Performing one's duty may

require some sacrifice of self-interest. The specific duties imposed by law or culture vary considerably, depending on jurisdiction, religion and social norms.

### ***RIGHTS AND DUTIES:***

The word “duty”, is like the word right, has more than one use both in common speech and in ethics. One of the ways in which we sometimes describe a good action is by saying that it is our duty to do it. The action which it is our duty to do differs from a right action in ways.

- a) It implies that only one action is right for us at the particular moment in question, because if it were equally right to do two alternative actions, we would not be able to say of either of them that it is our duty to do it.
- b) It emphasizes that the action is not merely fitting but that it is obligatory.

A right may involve a duty in two different ways.

- 1) If one individual has a right, some other individual or individuals must have the duty of satisfying the claim which is recognized by that right. The child’s right to education implies a duty on the part of his parents or the state to provide him with that education. In some cases, the duty related to a right is not so obvious, because it is largely a negative duty or a duty of abstaining from something. A man’s right to the use of his own property implies a duty on the part of his neighbours to refrain from encroaching on that property.
- 2) If an individual has a right it is his duty to use that right for the common good of his community. It is, for example, the duty of a child to use his education in such a way that he may become a useful member of society.

### ***PERSPECTIVE OF DUTY:***

The notion of a duty is closely linked with the concepts of “ought and obligation” and expresses moral action as “required”. Doing one’s duty is acting in accordance with the moral law, and this entails that the requirements of moral duty can easily come into conflict with the requirements of self interest. A person’s self interest may dictate that he should tell a lie although it is his duty to tell the truth. In such a circumstance, duty imposes itself on one as a constraint on action which is independent of what one must wants to do. This strong sense of obligation, of actions which one must perform, is a relatively late arrival in western ethical thought.

This robust sense of actions which one must do no matter what is not at all conspicuous in ancient ethical thinking, which tends to emphasise the relation between “right action” and the agent’s own benefit. Right action is understood as that which is done by the practically wise person, and consequently as that which displays virtue. So right action is subordinated to virtue, which is in turn linked to happiness.

Ancient thinkers tend to argue, then that it is in an agent's best interests to behave virtuously because virtuous activity is closely linked to eudaimonia. This means that the idea of duty as radically opposed to self interest is largely absent from ancient thought.

In Western ethical thought, the concept of duty arrives on the scene as a result of the influence of Christianity and the identification of moral right with the will of God. Morality is conceived as a set of requirements, which one must fulfil. The ten commandments nicely capture this sense of morality, which has crystallized into what has become known as deontological ethics. The greatest deontological thinker Kant, says "the moral law is a law of duty, of moral constraint", and that "duty and obligation are the only names for our relation to the moral law" (Critique of Practical Reason). Kant argues that our fundamental moral duties may be derived from the "Supreme principle of morality" (Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals), the categorical imperative. In brief, the crucial claim is that one's duties are determined by the requirements of logical consistency and are independent of the good results brought about by an action. It is wrong to lie, even when lying will bring about a terrible result for oneself.

Although a duty based conception of morality has dominated ethical thinking for the last 200 years in more recent times, some theorists have urged a return to a more ancient ideas which ground moral action on well being or eudaimonia. This is largely due to Elizabeth Anscombe's influential argument that duty based conceptions of morality are inadequate because they rely on an incoherent notion of "law with a law given".

### ***SOURCES OF DUTY:***

Cicero, an early Roman philosopher who discusses duty in his work "On Duty", suggests that duties can come from four different sources.

1. As a result of being a human.
2. As a result of one's particular place in life (one's family, one's country, one's job).
3. As a result of one's character.
4. As a result of one's own moral expectations for oneself.

### ***THE DETERMINATION OF DUTY:***

Mackenzie dealt with the universal duties under the headings "respect for life, respect for freedom, respect for character, respect for property, respect for social order, respect for truth and respect for progress". The word "respect" with which Mackenzie began each statement itself indicates a certain vagueness in the definition of the duty; it seems not to tell a man what he ought to do in each case, but only that he should consider how to do his duty when a question affecting life, freedom or one of the others, arises. It is evident that there is likely to be conflict among the various types of duty. Respect for social order and to discover which course of action will preserve what is best in the established order, and at the same time will lead to something even better in the future,



is a matter of the greatest difficulty. The most that can be said for the “Ten Commandments” or any other common-sense statement of universal duties, is that they hold in the vast majority of cases. But there always will be cases where the duty is not clear, especially in cases where two different commandments point to courses of action which are incompatible with each other.

### ***OUR SUPREME DUTY:***

We have one supreme duty to realize our truth, ideal, rational or social self and the values that are implied in this self-realization. All other duties follow from this supreme duty. Particular duties are aspects of this absolute and ultimate duty. The supreme moral law is the law that commands us to realize the ideal or rational self and the supreme values that are implied by self-realization. It is so broad, that it should be supplemented by other particular rules of conduct. When these rules seem to conflict with each other, we should appeal to the supreme duty.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF DUTY:**

Dr. Moore pointing out that duties have the following characteristics:

- 1) Duties are right actions which many people are tempted to avoid doing.
- 2) The most prominent good effects of duties are on people other than the doer of the action, hence our temptation to avoid doing them.
- 3) They arouse sentiments of moral approval in a way that merely right actions do not.

### **CLASSIFICATION OF DUTY:**

#### ***1. DUTIES TO SELF:***

The first include Physical duty, Economic duty, Intellectual duty, Aesthetic duty and Moral duty. Self-preservation, care for health and recreation constitute our duty to the body. We have no right to commit suicide. Our life is the joint property of our own and others. We should preserve further our life, and enjoy sound health which is necessary for moral strength. We would cultivate bodily values because they are the basis of higher values. We should earn a decent living. We should acquire wealth, and make full use of it, so that we may enjoy higher values. Wealth is an economic value. It is an indispensable means to the attainment of higher values. Economic values should be cultivated as instrumental to higher intrinsic values. We should not treat health as an end in itself. We should treat it as a means. This is our economic duty. We should cultivate our intellect and acquire knowledge. We have no right to leave our intellect undeveloped because the development of intellect is indispensable for the development of personality. This is our intellectual duty. We should cultivate our aesthetic taste by appreciating and creating beauty. This is our aesthetic duty. We should control our instincts, appetites, desires and passions. We should regulate sensibility by reason. We should respect our personality. Self-control and self-regard constitute our moral duty. We should aim at Truth and Beauty as elements of the Good. We should

treat intellectual, aesthetic and moral values as intrinsic values. These are the duties to the self. These are individual duties.

## **2. DUTIES TO OTHERS:**

Duty to others include duties to the family, duties to other persons in society, duties to country, duties to humanity, duties to animals and duties to plants. We should love and respect our parents. We should take care of them in their old old age. We should love our children. We should take care of their health, education and character. We should help them choose their proper avocations. Husbands and wives should love and respect each other. They should treat each other as friends and equals. Husbands should not treat their wives as subordinate to them. These are our duties to the family. Our duties to others in society include mainly veracity, equity and benevolence.

Veracity is truthfulness. We should speak the truth. We should speak what we mean. We should do what we speak. We should keep our promises. We should speak out our conviction. We should shun all hypocrisy and pretence. Equity means justice and fair dealing. We should do unto others as we would be done by. We should respect the personality of others. We should treat all persons as ends not as means to self-enjoyment and self-aggrandisement. We should not interfere with others freedom and property. We should not take away the life of others or interfere with others earning their livelihood. We should cultivate good will towards all. We should not do them any harm by thought, word and deed. All these duties are included in equity. We should have compassion for the distressed. We should do our very best to relieve their distress. This is benevolence. These are our duties to others in society. We should love our country and feel glory in its achievements. We should cultivate patriotism. These are our duties to the country. We should love all human beings, and treat them as our fellows. We should cast off narrow patriotism, imperialism, colour, prejudice and racial superiority. We should have respect for social order and faith in human progress. We should cultivate broad humanitarianism. These are our duties to the humanity. We should take care of domestic animals, give them proper food and shelter, and nurse them when they are sick. We should cultivate tenderness for animals. We should not ruthlessly kill them for our enjoyment. We should not be cruel to them. These are our duties to animals. We should take care of plants, water them and give them proper nourishment. We should not be rude to nature. These are our duties to plants.

## **3. DUTIES OF GOD:**

We should daily pray to God, mediate on him and have communion with him. We should daily worship to him, revere him and seek his protection and care. We should resign our will to him, dedicate our action to him and love him with single-minded devotion. These are our duties to God. But our love of God should be expressed in love for mankind. It should find expression in service to humanity. Love for God without love for man is empty of content. In communist countries the communists, the followers of Marx and Engles, do not believe in God and so do not recognize duties to God. But they should all cultivate love for mankind and sentient.

## DUTY BASED ETHICS:

It is a theory of ethics that consider duty as the basis of all morality. According to this theory, some actions are morally obligatory irrespective of their consequences. It was Immanuel Kant who advocated this theory of ethics, according to which “duty is for duty’s sake”. Deontological ethics does not make a theory of obligation totally dependent on the theory of value. It is opposed to axiological ethics.

In the deontological view, the right action is right irrespective of the values it realizes: Do your duty come what may; virtue is its own reward; “Karmanyevadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadachana”. Right is defined independently of good. This may be called simple deontologism; complex deontologism holds, in addition to the above, the view that good is defined in terms of right. Deontologism thus stresses the autonomy of ethics; it is thus naturally allied with non-naturalism.

Duty based ethics are concerned with what people do, not with the consequence of their actions.

- Do the right thing.
- Do it because it’s the right thing to do.
- Don’t do wrong things.
- Avoid them because they are wrong.

Under this form of ethics you can’t justify an action by showing that it produced good consequentialist. Duty based ethics are usually what people are talking about when they refer to “the principle of the thing”. Duty-based ethics teaches that some acts are right or wrong because of the sorts of things they are and people have a duty to act accordingly, regardless of the good or bad consequences that may be produced.

## THE LIMITS OF DUTY:

The principle of duty ought to be accepted as the supreme principle of morality. It is equally important to recognise that there are limits beyond which the constraints of duty ought not to be allowed to go. One should remember that immediately after Theseus praises duty in the words already quoted from A Midsummer Night’s Dream Hippolyta replies:

“ I love not to see wretchedness o’ercharged,

And duty in his service perishing”.

When too much is demanded, duty perishes. Consider the physician who because of the nature of his work is the last resort for many people whose lives he nonetheless is unable to save. The stress built into his situation is inevitably heavy. It may well become unbearable if the physician also suffers false feelings of guilt, believing that somehow he has failed to do his duty. In fact, he has not and it is important that he should know so. It is never our duty to do what we cannot do; duty is often difficult, but it is never impossible.

Or consider those people who are conscientious in doing their duty but timid in claiming their rights. Such people are often exploited, but they seldom genuinely accept this consequence of their timidity. Instead, they become resentful; and their resentment eventually colours everything they do. That resentment, if not relieved finally becomes the debilitating and invidious resentment. The result is a deadly and ugly moral paralysis very unlike the noble vitality of genuinely dutiful life.

A proper sense of obligation is a noble possession, but a misplaced sense of obligation imposes a terrible tyranny. A good man then, does not neglect his duties; but a wise man knows that there is more to life than morality and more to morality than duty.

### **WHY DO SHOULD WE DO OUR DUTY?**

We should do our duty because of two forms (one of two forms). Either they say that doing it would be for our happiness, or alternatively that doing it realizes some good. In the strongest cases these two views are combined, and it is suggested that happiness is the good to be realized. Earlier philosophers thought it quite sensible to ask “why should I do my duty?” the obligation to do one’s duty needs justifying and can only be justified by showing that doing his duty is in the short or long run, advantageous to the agent; indeed the classic treatises on the subject might be said to be mainly concerned with this justification. This point of view is called “teleological” and is opposed to that called “deontological”, according to which duty rather than purpose is the fundamental concept of ethics.

### **Conclusion**

Duty conditions happiness and inclination is an evident truth. If we want to bring out its evidence further, than we must talk about the kind of thing which a duty turns out to its evidence further, than we must talk about the kind of thing which a duty turns out to be, namely, the adjustment of our private maxims of action to universal ends. Likewise we must, to justify duty, show that the point of duty, the end of it is that we shall behave fittingly towards ends in themselves, whether these ends are ourselves or others.

The end of practical reason is reasonable conduct; it is not the merit of reasonable conduct. The end of practical reason is works and not the saving value or the credit of works. This is so, whether this saving value is seen in the perspective of Christian theory, or through the eye of a rationalist concerned above all with whatever absolute the world may withhold from the scythes of chance, fortune and failure.



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