

Understanding Moral Judgment: A Conceptual Inquiry

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of moral judgment as a distinctive form of value judgment, situating it within the broader philosophical vocabulary of ethics. Drawing on classical and modern moral philosophers, including Mackenzie, Muirhead, Westermarck, McDougall, Russell, Sorley, Hobbes, and Kant, the paper argues that moral judgment is not merely descriptive but normative; it evaluates conduct against a standard of rightness rather than simply reporting fact. The discussion distinguishes moral judgment from factual and general judgments, and situates it within the broader category of value judgments alongside aesthetic and logical judgments. It further explores the debate over whether moral judgments originate in emotion or in rational classification, contrasting Westermarck's emotivist account with the intellectualist position. The paper then identifies four implications carried by moral predicates such as "good" and "right": value, obligatoriness, moral fittingness, and objective validity. It shows how these are unevenly present in everyday moral reasoning. Finally, it outlines the three postulates on which moral judgment depends: personality (the self as a self-conscious, self-determining agent), reason (the intuitive and discursive faculties that furnish moral knowledge), and self-determination (the freedom of will without which responsibility, merit, and blame become meaningless). The paper concludes that moral judgment is intelligible only on the assumption of a free, rational, self-aware agent capable of measuring action against an ideal standard.

Keywords: Moral judgment; Value judgment; Ethics; Normativity; Obligatoriness; Personality; Free will; Self-determination; Objective validity

A moral judgment determines whether the morality of an action is right or wrong. According to P. Chatterjee,

“Moral judgment is the mental act of discerning and pronouncing a particular action to have the quality or predicate of rightness and obligatoriness or its opposite, of which a general idea or standard is already before the mind.” (2001: 72)

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As Prof. Mackenzie views,
 “It is not merely a judgment about, but a judgment upon. It does not merely state the nature of some object, but compares it with a standard, and, using it, pronounces it as good or evil, right or wrong. This is meant by saying that the moral point of view is normative.” (1956:127)

Similarly, Prof. Muirhead mentions,
 “There is a distinction (to go no deeper) between a judgment of fact and a judgment upon fact, corresponding to the distinction between ‘judgment’ in its logical sense of ‘proposition’ and ‘judgment’ in its judicial sense of ‘sentence’. It is with judgment in the latter sense that ethics has to do. It deals with conduct merely as a physical fact.” (1892:17)

Moral judgment, then, goes beyond mere statement of fact; it is an assessment of worth, one that measures an act against an ideal of goodness. It involves determining what an action ought to be and, in doing so, is normative, regulative, and practical in character, while also carrying real weight. It amounts to a decision about whether a given course of action serves some ultimate end, and it further entails the assumption that the agent bears responsibility for what they do.

A moral judgment, like all other judgments, clearly requires the following (Chatterji, 2001: 72)

- (1) A subject with the ability to judge, a logical mind capable of making standards-based decisions;
- (2) An object that is evaluated;
- (3) A criterion by which an object is evaluated;
- (4) The capacity or authority of judging.

Moral judgment is not simply a function of what logic calls a judgment. In general, Judgment is about grasping an idea, thinking about it, and coming to a conclusion. However, here we are talking about Moral judgment, which is the process that entails assessing actions or decisions through the lens of ethical principles, focusing on concepts such as moral rightness and wrongness, fairness, and commitment to established ethical standards.

Now, the question arises: how are they different from each other? While both judgments, i.e., general and moral, involve evaluations. Moral judgments focus on evaluating actions or situations based on moral principles or standards of right and wrong, while general judgments can be about anything. Moral judgment is a value judgment as compared to a factual judgment. It involves upholding a particular moral principle. It is necessary to remember that when analyzing an action’s morality, we must consider the agent’s complete intention and attitude at the time of the action. An action’s morality cannot be judged by its intentional purpose, motivation, or external consequences alone. It is possible to think of ethical judgments as evaluations of intentional acts, the individuals who carry them out, or the goals of those actions. It would be preferable to apply ‘good’ and ‘bad’ to ends, ‘virtuous’ and ‘vicious’ to persons or types of personal character, and ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ to intentional actions rather than applying the adjectives ‘good,’ ‘virtuous,’ and ‘right,’ along with their opposites, indiscriminately to people, actions, and ends as in everyday life (Rogers, 1911: 9-10). Evaluations of actions and character are also based on the ethical principle that establishes the worth of ends. For instance, we need to prepare. The greatest enjoyment of the largest number is the finest of all ends, according to utilitarians. This

argument offers an ethical standard for evaluating deeds, goals, and personalities (Rogers, 1911: 10). It might demonstrate how the health of the community tends to achieve this goal. Therefore, it is inappropriate for someone recovering from a contagious disease to attend a crowded gathering intentionally. Their objective, which could be amusement, is awful since it clashes with the higher end, and their character, if such activities are habitual with them, is vicious. When it comes to deeds, 'right' is more definitive than 'good' when it comes to ends. In these situations, only the action that tends to realize the best attainable end is right; we do not say that one action is 'more right' than another, but rather that one action is right and another is wrong. One attainable end may be better than another, but both may be reasonably good.

The concept of the emotional basis of moral judgments does not mean that such a judgment confirms the existence of moral emotion in the consciousness of the person who pronounces it; they may do so without feeling any emotion. Without a doubt, saying that a specific act is good or bad may be an expression of an emotion felt about it, just as saying that the sun is hot or the weather is cold may be a mere statement of a sensation of heat or cold created by the light or the weather (Westermarck, 2017: 114). However, such duties reflect subjective truths in language with different meanings. Attributing a quality to something does not imply the presence of a particular feeling or sensation in the mind that perceives it. This does not mean the phrase chosen to describe the trait has no subjective origin. As Westermarck (2017: 114-115) puts it, "He contends, however, that the attributes ascribed to the objects of moral judgments are generalizations based on the degree of approval or disapproval felt toward particular behaviors, and that these tendencies are interpreted as qualities, or dynamic tendencies, in the phenomena that gave rise to the sentiment."

A similar translation of emotional sentiments into traits given to external phenomena occurs in many other cases: something is "fearful" because people fear it, and "admirable" because people admire it. When we call an act good or evil, we do not state the existence of any emotional inclinations, any more than when we call a landscape beautiful, we state any features of beauty; we link the topic of the judgment to a class of phenomena that we are familiar with labelling as good or bad. However, we call them such because they produce moral approval or disapproval in ourselves or those with whom we have learned to use those phrases. Most individuals use an easy way to judge an act. Particular types of conduct have conventional labels, many of which are learned through language, and moral judgment frequently consists merely of labelling the act based on specific, significant qualities it shares with others in the same group.

According to Professor McDougall (1926: 185), "The emotions that guide a man's moral judgments may not be his sentiments at the time of passing judgment, and not even his own earlier feelings, also the emotions, especially that selfless emotion we call moral anger, of individuals who have contributed to the development of the moral heritage in the past."

This implies that Westermarck (2017: 115) disregarded the distinction between "original moral judgment and imitative moral judgments." He argues that the intellectualist concept, according to which the act of classifying paves the way and determines moral feeling, is correct. In contrast, regarding original moral judgments, Westermarck is right. They proceed directly from emotions. We hear that someone has taken another's property; this is theft, while someone provides money to a poor person;

this is charitable, good, and so on. However, when we look at the nature of these behaviors, we discover that they are prone to producing or becoming the subjects of specific emotions, such as disapproval or praise. People have labeled these emotions as ‘bad’ or ‘good’ because of their bias to experience one or both. Those who initially use these and all other moral ideas state disapproval or approval, depending on the circumstances. This might be referred to as the term ‘intrinsic meaning’.

As Bertrand Russell (1922: 197) observes,
 “Saying that a word has meaning does not imply that those who use it correctly have ever considered what it means; rather, the meaning has to be extracted from the word’s usage through observation and analysis. A term is used ‘correctly’ when it has the desired effect on the typical hearer.”

We must look at the context in which a term is employed to determine its inherent meaning. The fact that we are apt, or at least believe we are apt, to feel a moral emotion of either approval or disapproval regarding that on which the judgment is pronounced directs us when we analyze the grounds of moral judgments, if we sincerely and mean what we say when we pronounce such a judgment.

Professor Sorley (1924: 67–69) admits that, according to the argument that “feeling and striving” come before moral concepts and moral judgment, “we are no longer concerned with subjective emotions but with the validity of the assertion that this or that is good once the transition to the moral judgment is made.” Morality starts with judgments of right and wrong, good and bad, rather than with feelings such as retaliation, parental love, or sympathy. As previously said, the inclination to experience moral approval or disapproval was a feature of the phenomenon that gave rise to it. For the previously mentioned reasons, embodying this characteristic was intended to provide objective validity to the judgment in which it served as the predicate. Since moral judgments cannot be based on emotion, the idea that they are emotionally based has been highly criticized.

To quote Hobbes (1881: 26), wise remarks:

“To reason, one must consider the significance of words, in addition to the visual components of their nature, have a representation also of the nature, character, and attention of the speaker; such as the terms of virtues and vices; for one person it is wisdom, what another it is fear; and one malice, what another justice; one extravagance, what another magnanimity; and one gravity, what, as a result, such names can never serve as legitimate basis for ratiocination. Metaphors and speech tropes are no longer harmful since they admit to their inconstancy, whereas the others do not.”

These statements or judgments are moral judgments because they show how a particular action or act is evaluated from the perspective of good or right. For example, when it is said that ‘we should speak the truth’, ‘honesty is a good virtue’, ‘Ram did the right thing by helping Shayam’, ‘Gītā did an improper act by stealing her friend’s accessories’, ‘Hitler was an evil person’, and so on, we are judging these actions or acts on moral grounds, which makes them moral judgments. According to these moral judgments, which are the focus of ethics and moral philosophy, ‘honesty is a good virtue and harassing others is bad’, ‘Vivekananda was a virtuous, good-characterized, and morally great person’, ‘Hitler was evil’, and ‘one should speak the truth and not lie’. Other such statements are discussed in ethics. It is obvious that for an ethics scholar, comprehending the nature of these judgments is crucial. As a result, we should

be aware of their features and how they differ from other declarations or choices right away.

Let us start by defining a decision or statement. A statement or decision is expressed whenever a sentence is said that can be argued to be either true or false. Examples of sentences that convey facts are 'two and two make four, weightless objects are attracted downward due to gravity,' and so forth; these are proper sentences. Sentences like 'two and five make eight' and 'the earth revolves around the moon' convey false information. For sentences like 'bring water', 'tell me your name', etc. The question of truth and falsity does not arise because these sentences do not express any information or fact. Hence, these are not decisions. Thus, by definition, judgments can be true or false. Two types of these judgments are known to us,

1. Judgment of Facts
2. Judgment of Values

Factual judgments or judgments of Facts make claims about facts, things, or events. For instance, 'the Taj Mahal was built by Sher Shah' is false, while 'the sun rises in the east' is true. Value judgments, or Judgments of value, are associated with assessing facts; for instance, 'the Sun is terrific, while the Taj Mahal is ugly'. An example of a judgment of value would be 'this play is one of the best works of literature,' whereas 'Tagore wrote the poem *Gītānjali*' is a factual judgment. The category of value judgments includes moral judgments. While 'Ram helped Shyam' is factual, 'Ram did a good deed by doing so' is a value judgment. In this way, Mackenzie (1956) has stated that moral judgments are judgments upon facts rather than judgments about facts. According to Muirhead (1892: 82), moral judgments always fall into the second category, judgments upon facts. He also makes the distinction between *judgments about facts and judgments upon facts*. They make the facts 'value' or 'worth' clear. Value judgments come in several forms, and the difference depends on the standard or value applied. From the philosophical point of view, three value judgments are important, though these standards or values can take many forms. They are:

1. Aesthetic Judgment
2. Logical Judgment
3. Moral Judgment

Aesthetic judgment assesses something according to its artistic worth, attractiveness, or appealing attributes. As in the case of the Taj Mahal being considered beautiful and Tagore's poem "*Gītānjali*" being considered the best work, these selections are aesthetic because they demonstrate how specific items are analyzed from the standpoint of the ideal of beauty. These decisions are examined in the study of aesthetics. In a similar vein, 'logical judgment' is that which is backed up by facts. Such judgments are the subject of sound reasoning. Ethics focuses on moral judgments, which deal with our behavior or character and involve an ideal of soundness rather than beauty or legality, but they are not the same. An attempt will now be made to precisely identify the subject matter of moral judgments after their nature has been clarified. Although it is stated on the surface that *action* is their subject matter, more details are still needed. In this regard, further contemplation is necessary to determine the exact object assessed from a moral perspective. Finding the subject of 'good', 'moral', 'right', 'proper', 'inappropriate', 'wrong', 'inauspicious', 'duty', etc., is the problem associated with moral judgments. To put it another way, philosophical debate over the use of these predicates will now occur.

The Nature of Moral Judgment

Unlike a factual judgment, a moral judgment is a state of mind that distinguishes and declares 'right' or 'wrong' action. It is not a rational evaluation but a moral judgment based on an action. It compares an activity to a moral norm and declares it right or wrong (Muirhead, 1892). Moral judgment entails comparing an activity to a moral standard and evaluating whether it is consistent with it. It is inferential in that it involves adapting a norm to specific actions. On the other hand, moral decisions frequently require clear argumentation because the moral standard is explicitly contested in complex or uncertain cases. Moral assessments are typically intuitive and immediate.

Dr. B. N. Singh (1985: 55–56) explains “how moral decisions affect a person’s life.” According to him, man always keeps working, but he cannot understand etiquette in his own and his loved ones' interests. Thus, moral judgments are required to know the appropriateness of conduct. Here, a question arises: We have previously assumed that the object of moral judgment is voluntary action, as discussed in this chapter. Voluntary action is what we automatically do with our willpower or determination. Here, we can say that we automatically do that work of our own free will, which we consider appropriate for ourselves and our loved ones. What is the need to evaluate it as fair or unfair? The answer is that what we consider appropriate may be inappropriate from a social perspective. Thus, we cannot perform truly right actions unless we know what suits the individual and the society, and whether there are actions suitable for both simultaneously. Knowledge of etiquette is essential for proper conduct; if a person is unaware of it, behaving appropriately will be difficult. That is why it is necessary to evaluate a person’s actions as right or wrong. Without this evaluation, man’s selfishness will become his most appropriate conduct. Thus, knowledge of moral decisions is necessary for both the individual and society. This Moral conduct gives us a sense of duty. *Instead of factual judgment, moral judgment is a state of mind that distinguishes between the rightness and wrongness of an action.* It is not a rational analysis but a moral judgment based on an action. It evaluates an action against a moral norm and declares it right or wrong. People may consider four implications when using the terms 'right,' 'good,' and other moral terms. (Lillie, 2003: 81-84).

These are (1) *Value*, (2) *Obligatoriness*, (3) *Moral Fittingness*, and (4) *Objective Validity*. When a person employs an ethical word, it is unlikely that all of these implications exist in his mind, but at least one of them most probably does. Specific phrases highlight one suggestion over another; for example, 'duty' emphasizes obligation, but 'right' indicates moral fittingness instead of assessment. These ideas may not be entirely compatible, so what is most valuable need not be the most required. These are concerns for our ethical investigation; we must now explore how these implications manifest in the thinking of a typical individual when making moral decisions.

1. Value: The term “good” refers to an action or decision that has merit or is worthwhile to conduct. In Sanskrit, it is called ‘Subha’. It can be based on individual merit or the outcome, such as enjoying beauty or a condition of enjoyment. The ethical use of “good” is consistent with other axiological applications, and good behavior is not the only valuable thing in the universe. Moral judgments are frequently made using the terms “good” and “bad,” with “correct” occasionally denoting what produces exceptional outcomes.

2. Obligatoriness: Moral judgments often have an order, making moral law an “imperative.” People often believe they are under an external command, but this authority is within us and a duty. Obligatoriness distinguishes morally good conduct from other kinds of good. Many moralists believe that this concept is the foundation of ethics. However, people doubt whether engaging in specific actions or producing certain external outcomes is obligatory, given our psychological makeup and uncontrollable factors. Instead, what is required is a commitment to doing something, often expressed as “we ought to do something” or “it is our duty to do something.”

3. Moral Fittingness: An ethical judgment, like “This action is right,” is often based on how well the action fits the situation the doer finds themselves in. In most cases, but not all, rightness is determined by morally appropriate action. Some moralists contend that rightness is subjective, with the agent’s mental attitude being the most critical aspect in evaluating its suitability. However, the primary problem with obligatoriness as the central idea of ethics is its appeal to objective moral fittingness. Usually, the moral judgments “This is right” and “This is wrong” express this idea.

4. Objective Validity: Ordinary men believe activities are good or right since they are based on their judgment. Many ethical theories, however, contend that this affirmation is only a feeling of moral acceptance that can be challenged by an opponent, meaning that either individual is incorrect. This is analogous to a jury’s determination of a prisoner’s guilt. In other words, the average person thinks that the decisions made by conscience are true or false, just as a jury’s verdict on the guilt or innocence of a prisoner on trial is true or false. In practice, the assessment of action is often disregarded because other moral judgments are considered more essential. Character evaluation is critical for determining a person’s worth and motivations, but judgment of intentions is more important for praising and blaming people. Self-defense motives, for example, are more blameworthy than jealousy motives. Regardless of their relevance, all these judgments depend on action judgment. Our task is greatly simplified because our ethical decisions are based on action judgment. Asking about particular actions is all that is required to establish if they are morally correct or wrong, good or bad, or subject to other assessments. Good and bad deeds will almost always follow good and bad reasons, good and bad intentions, or good and bad characteristics.

Postulates of Moral Judgment

Every moral judgment is predicated on three things, as has been stated previously (Chatterjee, 2001: 97-101): (i) *personality*; (ii) *reason*; and (iii) *self-determination*.

Without “postulates of moral judgment,” moral judgment is not possible. As such, they need particular attention in ethics. Here, we will analyze it in detail.

1. Personality: It is the foundation of morality. Moral life is based on it. Moral judgment assumes that there is a person or agency with the capacity to recognize moral principles and act by that understanding. As previously stated, a rational agent, or “a person doing,” is the proper object of moral judgment, and the subject rendering the judgment is a human being who assesses other people and himself. If no human agent may act in accordance with or against a moral responsibility or law, then it becomes completely worthless. According to Calderwood (1902: 14), “Morality is based on personality.” When the Self is not known as the intellectual basis of action, there is no motive, act, or goal discrimination, which is necessary for morality to exist. Practicing morality and understanding moral distinctions is equally impossible in such a situation. So, what does the concept of ‘personality’ entail? What does ‘person’ mean? Self-

conscious and self-controlled reality is a component of the concept of personality. Self-consciousness and self-control define a person. A human being is capable of freely and rationally choosing their actions. They are also aware of themselves in and through their mental processes and states, understanding that they are their own and their subject. To quote Calderwood (1902: 12) once more, “Self is known as Power as well as Intelligence. I am an intelligent, self-aware, and self-determining force. Therefore, self-consciousness, self-regulated intelligence, and self-determined behavior are all components of personality.”

This will demonstrate how morality loses all meaning when viewed through the prism of empirical or sensationistic psychology, which holds that the self or character is only a set of conscious states, processes, and internal experiences. Experience itself cannot occur in the absence of a constant, uncomfortable reality as the experiencing subject. True psychology holds that human nature is a distinct individual truth, a reservoir of supremacy, the core of reasonable thought, and the origin of all understanding. It is impossible to consider states and activities as functions of a single reality without considering what makes them cohesive and connected. Likewise, it is impossible to imagine thinking, feeling, and being willing without considering the thing that thinks, feels, and wills. Except for the mental substance or entity that underlies, supports, and manifests itself through the situations and procedures of consciousness, they are merely meaningless concepts. Despite claiming to be grounded in “experience,” the empirical theory fails to acknowledge the fact that all knowledge is based on experience, which is the fact of self-consciousness, the knowledge that one is aware of oneself as the reality that feels, thinks, and wills, that is, as the ongoing subject of successive states and actions rather than just as the sum and series of them. As an active rational principle, the self-conscious mind creates even external experiences by responding to and interpreting externally imposed perceptions. Therefore, our mental and moral lives are based on our personalities.

2. Reason: All moral judgments are predicated on reason, which allows us to judge what is good and wrong in given situations and, consequently, our responsibilities. Reason makes Moral judgment possible, which provides us with knowledge of the moral norm and the real situation. Reason is defined as a rational capability that includes the ability to interpret, comprehend, or grasp. All intellectual abilities use reason. The broad and instinctive applications of reason or intelligence are typically distinguished. The ability of the mind to instantly recognize the truths of things without the need for deduction or reasoning is known as intuitive reason or intuition. The ability to reason or draw conclusions from information provided by intuition is implied by discursive reason. The a priori foundational principles and specific facts of experience are intuitively provided by reason or intelligence. By concluding facts and principles provided by intuition, reason, as a discursive process, determines truth.

3. Self-determination: Self-determination is a prerequisite for moral judgment. As we have observed before, the object of moral judgment is voluntary or deliberate action, which is fundamentally an act of choice or self-determination, the decision to act in a particular way following a thorough evaluation of competing entitlements of opposing requirements. Accordingly, moral judgment assumes that the self has the unusual ability to choose the course of its actions based on ideas, to identify with one idea and desire over another, and to project its necessary energy (so to speak) into realizing that particular idea. Therefore, it is evident that moral judgment depends on man’s capacity

for free will. In actuality, the issues surrounding our moral lives are directly related to freedom of will.

According to D'Arcy (1901: 25),

“The doctrine of necessity is incompatible with morality since it undermines accountability. A man’s activities lack a true foundation if external forces govern them, such as praise and blame, approval and disapproval, and reward and punishment. However, if will is self-determination, then if every man must eventually hold himself accountable for his acts, he has no one to blame when he sins and suffers. The meaning of responsibility returns. Morality is made possible.”

Since it eliminates all significance from merit, demerit, virtue, vice or sin, regret, responsibility, and punishment, determinism or necessity in ethics implies that free will is meaningless. When our acts are driven by necessity, we become lifeless bodies governed by uniform mechanical laws, negating the notion of moral obligation and voluntary compliance with moral law.

If someone cannot act in a certain way, why should they be held responsible for their actions? Why should we condemn the bad and commend the good? If character arises out of necessity, it is a passive outcome and cannot be morally criticized. Since virtue is a necessity of nature, it is consistent with determinism that we should only appreciate virtue in the same way that we appreciate the beauty of a natural object. Since circumstances determine human behavior, punishment is not necessary to regulate it. Since regulation and correction cannot have any meaning, the doctrine of necessity renders all such discussions pointless. Moral judgment presupposes self-determination or freedom of will, while remorse implies consciousness of freedom.

As Dr. Martineau (1898: 40-41) states,

“*Moral judgment credits the ego with a selecting power between two possibilities and stands or falls with this.*” In fact, “*either free will is a fact, or moral judgment is a delusion.*”

Kant and his followers go so far as to base their belief in free will solely on moral grounds. “*Thou oughtest implies thou canst*” is Kant’s famous saying. If we were not aware that we had the freedom to behave in a certain way, we could not have the convictions that we must act in a certain way, that we are under an obligation to act in a certain way, and that we are accountable or responsible for our actions. When we feel we should will anything, we also believe we can will it to control the course of our will. Duty, accountability, and justice, Kant argues in his “*Critique of Theoretical Reason*,” that metaphysical understanding cannot be attained. According to his “*Critique of Practical Reason*,” we are forced to postulate the validity of our ideas about God, the soul, free will, and future existence because of our moral nature or practical reason. Our convictions about reality are based on our nature’s moral principles and intuitions. Pointless for humans due to necessity, just as they are for lesser animals.

Conclusion

Moral judgment emerges from this discussion as a uniquely normative act of mind, one that does not merely record what an action is, but pronounces what it ought to be measured against. Unlike factual judgments, which can be true or false with reference to observable states of affairs, moral judgments compare conduct to an ideal of rightness and thereby carry an authority that factual description alone cannot supply. The paper has shown that moral judgment shares its evaluative character with aesthetic

and logical judgment, yet is set apart by its concern with conduct and character rather than beauty or validity of inference.

The examination of competing accounts of the origin of moral judgment, emotional versus intellectualist, suggests that neither view alone is fully adequate: while approval and disapproval may accompany our earliest moral responses, the settled use of moral language depends on classifying actions according to shared, recognizable qualities. Whatever their origin, moral judgments are found to carry at least one of four implications: value, obligatoriness, moral fittingness, or objective validity, which together explain why moral language functions as more than an expression of personal sentiment.

Most significantly, the paper's treatment of the three postulates of moral judgment, personality, reason, and self-determination, demonstrates that morality is not free-floating but rests on specific metaphysical commitments. Without a self-conscious, self-determining agent, moral responsibility collapses; without reason, the moral standard cannot be known or applied; and without freedom of will, praise, blame, duty, and desert lose their meaning altogether. As the discussion of determinism makes clear, a wholly mechanistic account of human action is incompatible with treating persons as morally accountable. In this sense, moral judgment is not simply one mental operation among others: it presupposes a whole picture of the human being as free, rational, and answerable for their conduct. Any adequate ethical theory, the paper suggests, must therefore begin not merely with an analysis of moral language but with a defense of the agent capable of making and being subject to moral judgment.

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