

# **Morality and Rationality:**

**Toulmin's Standpoint**

**Yogesh Chandra Gupta**

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Author

## Preface

Morality is bonded with the concept of society. Truth of this proposition is one that we have been observing since the time of existence of any society imbedded in its culture. If a society is to continue its existence, better it be with a sense of morality. Why with morality? It is because 'to be moral' is a better choice than 'to be immoral' or even 'amoral' for a good social living. If living with moral-sense is acceptable, there is a necessity for having certain norms and principles. These serve as referrals for developing criterion-for evaluation or justification of an action in the society. Employment of appropriate reasoning seems to be one ideal way for appraisal of some body's moral action. How does such a criterion work?

Why did Socrates, as a citizen, readily accept, without showing any opposition, to drink the poison hemlock as State-award for his act that he did for the sake of the then Greek youths of the society? The question first arose in author's mind as a school student then in eighth standard while studying a text book of English prose. The event aroused in author the curiosity to learn more about the concept of morality involved in the philosopher's act for his society. Subsequently, as a grown up college student, it served to encourage the author to have a deep dip into arena of studies in morality so as to discover 'what can be an appropriate criterion of evaluation of moral act?' It is this idea that inspired the author later on to write the present book.

The present book aims to highlight the significance of reasoning in morality, though to be moral, reasoning is not always necessary. For justification of good reasoning in ethics, what initially is required is knowing the true meaning of ethical concepts, and their appropriate use in respective contexts. In emphasizing this point, Toulmin takes to task his predecessors' Traditional approaches. To him, they misconstrue ethical concepts either as properties of an object, or as subjective relations in terms of feelings of an individual or of a group belonging to a society, or as merely rhetorical disguised and pseudo expressions of imperatives or interjections devoid of any meanings. Being gripped with flaws, the so called Traditional theories are discarded by Toulmin. It is then maintained by him that in true sense, ethical concepts contain contextual meanings in such a way that they express the logical nature of disputes regarding judgements of 'value' based on reasoning.

Framing the 'strategy of appraising moral actions by employing a reference to role of reasoning' is what Toulmin does. First, he explains the nature of reasoning, then, he goes on to 'reasoning in ethics', and subsequently, he distinguishes 'good reasoning' from 'bad reasoning' in ethics.

The criterion of good reasoning in ethics is determined with reference to the existing social norms for moral appraisal in terms of justification or no justification of an action. However, a social norm does cease to function if, or whenever, it fails to produce desirable consequences in that or the then society. And, then, such a norm needs to be changed with a view to maintain harmony in society, and that is the sole function or ultimate aim of ethics.

Based on this view the 'criterion of applicability' of a given or existing moral principle must not be in 'isolation' from society. Outlivedness of the usefulness of a moral principle in relation to the existing social practice undergoing a change must be foreseeable. This position of Toulmin is rightly emphasized.

The chain of arguments employed to do reasoning in ethical appraisal is 'finite' and exhaustive. The questioning done in such arguing is what Toulmin names it as 'limiting questions'. Interpretations of 'limiting questions' are possible

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necessarily in 'spiritual' rather than 'literal' sense. The status of limitingness is acquired by questions in this sense as explained by Toulmin: Prior to the stage of becoming limiting in nature, the questions permit logical reasoning; but in the kind of situation a limiting question is raised, reasoning loses its context. So, in literal sense, such questions are devoid of logical sense.

In having introduced the concept of 'limiting questions' in ethical appraisal, Toulmin intends to maintain that reasoning as tool of appraisal has its limitations. This stage of reasoning is yielding point for its employment in evaluation of moral action. The evaluation criterion then takes its shift to Spiritual Approach or Religious Faith where reason giving remains no more essential.

The fact, that Toulmin recommends shift in approach from 'reason based' to 'based on faith' for evaluation of moral action at certain stage, is reflective of the nature of his 'Good Reasons Theory' having dual dimensions, Deontological as well as Teleological. It seems that to Toulmin, the realm of 'faith' is complementary to that of 'reason'. In this respect, there is an appearance of parallelism between Toulmin's and Kant's ethics. But then, this leaves us to see ourselves this: Does Spiritual Approach to appraisal of moral action have the potential to yield certainty of criterion for true moral evaluation of action.

The contents of the book may serve as useful reference material for not only scholars but also students of moral philosophy and other disciplines and for other individuals in general interested in maintaining moral standards in society for welfare of humanity.

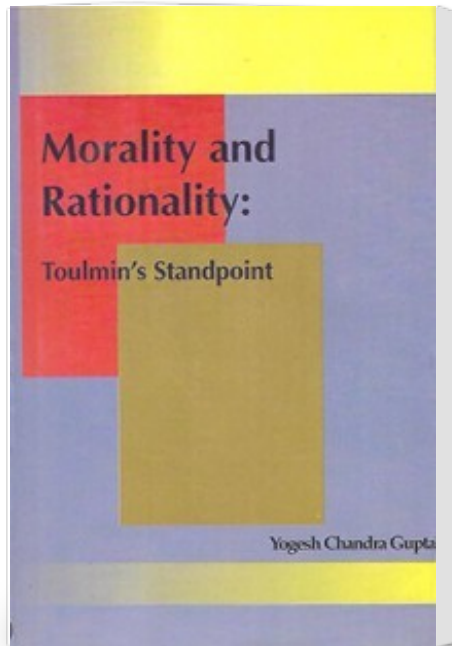
Criticisms and suggestions, etc. are welcome.

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