

The Nature of Regret as Emotion of Moral Self-Control

Ahlâkî Özdenetim Duygusu Olarak Pişmanlığın Mahiyeti

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Etik Beyan/Ethical Statement: Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur/It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited (Muhammet Caner Ilgaroğlu).

The Nature of Regret as Emotion of Moral Self-Control

Abstract: Emotions are human attributes that are directly related to the epistemic, ethical, and aesthetic aspects of human beings. While man builds a meaningful, valuable, and beautiful life, gets motivation from emotions along with the mind. Emotions, with their multifunctional aspect, are means for determining, activating, directing, influencing, transforming, restraining, and sometimes manipulating human intentions, attitudes, and actions. For this reason, any research that treats human actions, especially morality, has to deal with emotions. The way to know the human being is to understand his emotions in his practical life. Therefore, in the gap between the stability of the theoretical and the dynamism of life, emotions become the subject of philosophical research. It is not easy to express the dynamic aspect and unbounded nature of emotion within the limits of language. However, for human beings, emotions are effective in their decision-making processes, intentions, orientations, and choices, in which they understand themselves, the universe, nature, matter, individuals, societies, goodness, evil, valuable and non-valued things, cope with facts and events, manage their practical life, stands out as dynamic, functional and cognitive attributes inherent in all these processes. Man experiences a wide variety of emotional states in his daily life. Thus, he has constantly changed moods with these emotional states he experiences. These experiences can be caused by external factors as well as by the influence of the internal dynamics of the human being. In terms of his social life, man has a dynamic moral life that gives emotional reactions and receives emotional effects. In this context, emotions enable man to establish a balance between himself and the self of the society in which he lives and determine his basic orientations. Emotions are motivating faculties that motivate a man to act and guide his imaginations, and evaluations of the past, present, and future. Regret is an emotion of moral self-control that addresses the self and internally organizes and constructs its morality. This emotion plays a central role, especially in the field of moral values, with its nature that affects man both in individual and social life. Regret, in its simplest form, appears in the form of a bitter feeling that includes the negative judgment of man's past action or inaction and is expressed with the expression of a wish. The emotion of regret is formed by the effect of internal influences in humans. Like most moral emotions, regret includes both a phenomenological sense and a cognitive judgment. Regret which is a psychologically and conceptually complex emotion, reveals a series of emotions such as sadness, disappointment, longing, nostalgia, and sometimes the relief of not regretting something. Regret can also manifest itself as a strong, motivating sadness and a passionate complaint that things are not going as planned. It is an experience of pain, often retrospective, that shapes our present and future. Regret is an emotion that arises with awareness, usually expressing disapproval of what the person did, wishing it to be different, upset, ashamed, or guilty. Regret is part of human self-control, which encourages man to learn from past and present mistakes and to correct future behavior. This emotion is a corrective and healing sense of moral self-control that arises as a result of one's internal accounting for one's actions. Regret is a necessary consequence of man's moral nature. This emotion stems from the fact that he is a being that can choose, that is, his moral freedom. For regret to occur, the moral action must have taken place as a result of a choice to be made among at least two alternatives. Therefore, the prerequisite for repentance is freedom. The reciprocal roles of reason and emotion on our thoughts and actions are particularly evident in the phenomenon of regret. For that reason, regret, whether in the practical or theoretical field, is an emotion related not only to the emotional side of humans but also to the cognitive side. The fact that regret is a state of sadness that occurs when a person realizes his mistake on a phenomenon that has been experienced in the past or whose effect continues today, shows that it is an emotion of evaluation. Since the activating aspect of the emotions will be backward dysfunctional in regret, this incentive aspect manifests itself in the direction of preventing the repetition of the regretful situation in the future. Thus, a sad situation in the past will pave the way for a moral evolution from negative to positive, from destructive to constructive. In this article, the nature, value, and functionality of the regret will be analyzed and interpreted from a philosophical point of view, taking into account the principles of emotion ethics, and its conceptual and theoretical framework.

Keywords: History of Philosophy, Philosophy of Emotion, Human Being, Emotion of Regret, Moral Self-Control, Moral Value.

Ahlâkî Özdenetim Duygusu Olarak Pıřmanlıđın Mahiyeti

Öz: Duygular; insanın epistemik, etik ve estetik yönleriyle doğrudan ilişkili varoluşsal özneliliklerdir. İnsan anlamlı, değerli ve güzel bir hayat kurarken akılla birlikte duygulardan motivasyon almaktadır. Duygular, çok fonksiyonlu yapısıyla insanın niyet, tutum, tavır ve eylemlerini belirleme, harekete geçirme, yönlendirme, etkileme, dönüştürme, frenleme ve bazen de manipüle etme araçlarıdır. Bu nedenle ahlak başta olmak üzere insan eylemlerini problem edinen her araştırma, duyguları ele almak durumundadır. İnsanı tam anlamıyla tanımanın yolu, pratik yaşantısı içerisinde ortaya çıkan duygusallığını anlamaktan geçer. Dolayısıyla teorik olanın durağanlığı ile hayatın akışkanlığı arasındaki uçurumda duygular, felsefi bir soruşturmanın konusu olmaktadır. Duygunun dinamik yapısını ve sınır çizilemeyen doğasını dilin sınırları içerisinde ifade etmek kolay değildir. Bununla birlikte insan için

duygular, kendini, evreni, doğayı, maddeyi, bireyleri, toplumları, iyiyi, kötüyü, değerli olanı ve olmayanı anladığı, olgu ve olaylarla başa çıktığı, pratik hayatını yönettiği, karar verme süreçlerinde, niyetlerinde, yönelimlerinde ve seçimlerinde etkin, tüm bu süreçlere içkin, dinamik, fonksiyonel ve bilişsel öznitelikler olarak öne çıkmaktadır. İnsan, günlük yaşamı içinde çok çeşitli duygu durumlarını tecrübe etmektedir. Böylece o, tecrübe ettiği bu duygu durumları ile sürekli değişen ruh hallerine sahip olmaktadır. Bu tecrübeler, dış etkenlere bağlı olabildiği gibi insanın içsel dinamiklerinin etkisiyle de ortaya çıkabilmektedir. Sosyal yaşantısı itibarıyla insan, duygusal tepkiler veren ve duygusal etkiler alan dinamik bir ahlak yaşantısına sahiptir. Bu bağlamda duygular, insanın kendi benliği ile yaşadığı toplumun benliği arasında denge kurmasını sağlamakta ve insanın temel yönelimlerini belirlemektedir. Duygular, insana eylem motivasyonu kazandıran, onun tasavvurlarına, geçmiş, şimdi ve gelecekle ilgili değerlendirmelerine yön veren, harekete geçirici yetilerdir. Pişmanlık, bizzat benliğe yönelen ve onun ahlâkîliğini içsel olarak düzenleyip inşa eden ahlâkî bir özdenetim duygusudur. Bu duygu gerek bireysel ve gerekse sosyal yaşamda insanı etkileyen doğasıyla özellikle ahlâkî değer dünyasında merkezi bir rol oynamaktadır. Pişmanlık, en yalın haliyle insanın geçmişteki eylemine ya da eylemsizliğine dönük olumsuz yargısını içeren acı bir his biçiminde ortaya çıkmakta ve *keşke* ifadesiyle dile gelmektedir. Pişmanlık duygusu insanda içsel tesirlerin etkisiyle oluşmaktadır. Çoğu ahlak duygusu gibi pişmanlık da hem fenomenolojik bir duygu hem de bilişsel bir yargı içermektedir. Psikolojik ve kavramsal açıdan karmaşık bir duygu olan pişmanlık; üzüntü, hayal kırıklığı, özlem, nostalji ve bazen bir şeyden pişmanlık duymamanın verdiği rahatlama gibi bir dizi duyguyu ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Pişmanlık aynı zamanda güçlü, motive edici bir üzüntü ve işlerin istendiği gibi gitmediğine dair tutkulu bir şikâyet olarak da kendini gösterebilmektedir. O, bugünümüzü ve geleceğimizi şekillendiren genellikle geçmişe dönük bir acı deneyimdir. Pişmanlık, genellikle kişinin yaptığı şeyi onaylamadığını, farklı şekilde olmasını arzuladığını, üzüldüğünü, utandığını veya suçlu olduğunu ifade eden ve farkındalıkla ortaya çıkan bir duygudur. Pişmanlık, insanı geçmişteki ve şimdiki hatalarından ders çıkarmaya ve gelecekteki davranışlarını düzeltmeye teşvik eden, insanın özdenetim yeteneğinin bir parçasıdır. Bu duygu, kişinin kendi eylemleriyle ilgili içsel muhasebesinin bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkan düzeltici ve iyileştirici ahlaki bir özdenetim duygusudur. Pişmanlık, insanın ahlaki doğasının zorunlu bir sonucudur. Bu duygu onun seçim yapabilen bir varlık olmasından, yani ahlaki özgürlüğünden kaynaklanmaktadır. Pişmanlığın oluşabilmesi için ahlaki eylemin en az iki seçenek arasından yapılacak bir seçim sonucunda gerçekleşmiş olması gerekir. Bu nedenle, pişmanlığın ön koşulu özgürlüktür. Akıl ve duygunun düşüncelerimiz ve eylemlerimiz üzerindeki karşılıklı rolleri, özellikle pişmanlık olgusunda belirgindir. Dolayısıyla ister pratik ister teorik alanda olsun pişmanlık, sadece insanın duygusal yanıyla değil, bilişsel yanıyla da ilgili bir duygudur. Pişmanlığın, geçmişte yaşanmış veya bugün etkisi devam eden bir olgu üzerinde kişinin hatasını fark etmesiyle oluşan bir üzüntü hali olması, onun bir değerlendirme duygusu olduğunu gösterir. Duyguların harekete geçirici yönü pişmanlıkta geriye doğru işlevsiz olacağından, bu teşvik edici yön gelecekte pişmanlık yaratan durumun tekrarını önleme yönünde kendini göstermektedir. Böylece geçmişte yaşanan üzücü bir durum, olumsuzdan olumluya, yıkıcıdan yapıcıya doğru ahlaki bir evrime zemin hazırlayacaktır.

Bu makalede duygu etiğinin ilkeleri, kavramsal ve kuramsal çerçevesi göz önünde bulundurulmak suretiyle pişmanlık duygusunun mahiyeti, değeri ve fonksiyonelliği felsefi açıdan analiz edilip yorumlanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Felsefe Tarihi, Duygu Felsefesi, İnsan, Pişmanlık Duygusu, Ahlâkî Özdenetim, Ahlâkî Değer.

Introduction: The Moral Role of Emotions

The most basic feature that gives man his superior position in the hierarchy of existence must be *being able to get rid of naturalness by creating his value world*. Because of this feature, human has existed as a free and original value entity on the stage of history. Therefore, the preservation of the position of man depends on his evolution within the order of values. This context also reveals the metaphysics of values.

As it is known, we try to do our actions by our values. It is our intuitive awareness of values that enables us to take the right action.¹ So that there is a hierarchy of values ranging from material values to moral/spiritual and absolute values, and especially moral/spiritual and absolute values with a priori/ideal essence need to be perceived and realized.² Here, in the process of going from being a *biological human* to being an *ethical man* step by step, human encounters moral values perceive them and make them the basic principles in terms of their actions. In this way, man acquires an order of behavior, which essentially constitutes his moralization process.

¹ Doğan Özlem, *Etik Ahlak Felsefesi* (İstanbul: Notos Kitap Yayınları, 2015), 36.

² Özlem, *Etik Ahlak Felsefesi*, 37.

Man judges his whole life with evaluations such as good-bad, right-wrong, beautiful-ugly, merit-sin, etc. In this respect, values are the basic elements that deeply affect man's view of life and life practice. Man tries to make sense of life and events in his social environment through his worldview created by the influence of his values.³ If we evaluate the human being in terms of his moral tendencies, we can say that he is potentially inclined to goodness and evil. While he needs training, guidance, and habituation to do good, he can do badly without the need for them. For this reason, man needs emotional motivations to sense what is good, turn towards it and practice it. For instance, when one tries to understand what is good, he is motivated by the emotion of curiosity, wonder, and admiration. While he is enclosed to good, he is motivated by the emotion of trust, and while inclining to good he is motivated by love. One of the main reasons underlying man's tendency to different behaviors as a result of similar events is that they have different emotions.⁴ Therefore, when making decisions about what to do, man has not only their cognition but also their emotionality, which is an existential necessity for him. As an emotional being, man gains action with the emotions he has and determines his priorities thanks to them.⁵

Man participates in the field of values with his excitements, passions, joys, and sorrows. Values bring dignity, love of life, and dynamism to those who have them. At the same time, while man rejoices in situations that support and develop values, he also feels anger at attacks against them. It is understood from this there is a dynamism that surrounds human values both internally and externally. For this reason, the orientation of man towards goodness depends on the accompanying of his emotions, especially love and sentiment of justice to his consciousness. While creating the field of values, man turns his attention from the outside to himself and uses his dynamic emotional ability as well as rationality in the construction of both social and individual values.

There is a sentiment of value/justice that is thought to be given to man. With this sentiment, man performs a profound act of intuition. So that, this sentiment of justice in man senses the balance and harmony in the essence of value, and thus senses what is valuable and turns to it with love.⁶ However, the side of man that is prone to evil, with the imbalance and negativity it brings, prevents man from turning to the highest good and valuable.⁷ The ability to sense these values belonging to the human being fulfills functions such as approving what is morally valuable, turning to it, making it actual, and establishing the bond between the individual and the value. In this respect, three different functions of the sentiment of justice that sense, approve and actualize values can be mentioned. Confirmation represents acceptance of value, and rejection represents acceptance of valuelessness. Man realizes confirmation and rejection with emotional reasoning accompanying rational reasoning. Because while man approaches what he accepts as a value with constructive and protective emotions such as respect and love, he moves away from what he considers as valueless with destructive emotions such as hatred and disgust.⁸

In addition to being the founding principle underlined in the existence of values, human emotional abilities also have a dynamic role that protects, sustains, invigorates, and helps man to hold on to life. For instance, for someone who realizes that his/her behavior is wrong, the emotion of shame is the moral emotion of protecting the values, the emotion of guilt is the moral emotion of reviving the values, and the emotion of regret is the moral emotion that aims to bring them back to life. Here, the information about the behavior leaves its place in the emotion for the behavior to mature. We have stated that the sentiment of justice also contributes decisively to these processes. In other words, emotions affect the formation process of moral values together with reason and are inseparable from it. It is possible to say that in the formation of moral values, emotional abilities accompanying rational reasoning and inherent in these abilities are also found as a founding principle. This perspective reveals the answer to the debates as to whether the mind or emotion is the determinant in the formation of values as *both*.

Perhaps the most vivid example of the transition from emotions to values is the transformation of regret after angering into value. The transition from a negative mood to a positive mood makes the transition from evil to good possible. Such a transformation can bring positive out of the negative and good out of the bad. This situation gives us a clue that emotion has a self-improving role besides its self-regulating role as it transitions from mood to mood. From this point of view, it will be seen that in someone who acts contrary to values, an emotion of regret emerges as a dynamic that protects values. Openly violating what is accepted as a value causes regret. On the contrary, the behaviors that increase and add value to human beings find joy and happiness in their souls. In

³ Muhammet Caner Ilgaroğlu, *Ahlak Felsefesi Açısından Duygu-Değer İlişkisi* (İstanbul: Hiperyayın, 2020), 72.

⁴ Paul Ekman, "All Emotions are Basic", *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 16.

⁵ Karla McLaren, "Channeling Your Emotions" (Erişim 26 Mayıs 2021).

⁶ Muhammet Caner Ilgaroğlu, "Verili Bir Değer Duygusu Olarak Adalet", *Felsefe Dünyası* 74 (Winter 2021), 128.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trs. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 112-113.

⁸ Ilgaroğlu, *Ahlak Felsefesi Açısından Duygu-Değer İlişkisi*, 76-77.

addition to the rational output of approving what is valuable, man participates in it through emotion and internalizes it deeply in himself.⁹

1. The Nature of Emotions

Characteristics of emotions such as dynamism, diversity, and uncertainty cause difficulties in defining them. For this reason, emotion is often among the subjective phenomena that are described rather than defined. Regarding emotions, it can be said that they are phenomena that can be experienced but cannot be empirically experienced as subjective experiences. Emotions have a quality of information that the self can access directly, without the need for any conceptual world of meaning. For that reason, it can be said that emotions have a direct, internal epistemology. Emotions are accompanied by elements such as bodily changes, emotional expressions, and behavior patterns.

From a philosophical point of view, emotion can be described as dynamic, subjective, internal sensations and impressions that are effective in human life, his decision-making processes, intentions, orientations, and choices, immanent to all these processes.¹⁰ It is an energy that activates man with the dynamism arising from its nature in the transition from the theoretical sphere of the mind to the practical sphere of life. Studies on the functions of emotions have revealed that emotions are internal processes that organize the evaluation processes of human beings and that they enable the emergence of moral behaviors in man by giving information about values.¹¹

Emotions, which make themselves felt constantly with their dynamic structure throughout a person's whole life, show themselves not only in his inner world but also in his social relations. The human being, who is in constant contact with other people in terms of his social aspect, gives emotional reactions and creates new emotional states in himself by taking emotional effects. Due to its emotional structure, man establishes relationships with his environment through the experiences of like and dislike, and they engage in emotional transfer and emotional exchange in social life. This ensures the emergence of values such as helping and sharing in society.¹²

Robert Solomon, a thinker who has recently done important researchs on emotions, claims that emotions are not just feelings and that they cannot be evaluated as positive or negative since each one has a unique function.¹³ He explains the importance of emotions in social consciousness through the emotions of shame and embarrassment as follows: "Even though they contain cruel and humiliating self-images, they are of great importance for our social consciousness and well-being".¹⁴ In this statement of Solomon, it is emphasized that emotion is not only an internal, reactive, physiological, or biochemical process, but also its role in the construction of society and the preservation of order.

Emotion also activates the man by directing him with emotions such as sadness, hope, fear, and anxiety in his imagination, and evaluations of the past and the future.¹⁵ Again, the man not only gets emotional but also controls these emotions when necessary and extracts them from the sphere of values.¹⁶ Thus, he creates values from his emotions and gives them a moral quality. For example, the emotion of pity can be transformed into compassion by changing the meaning given to the feeling of pity. From this point of view, it becomes possible to talk about a human ability that gives meaning to the emotion and transforms it into a value.

Emotions can also be thought of as emotions of value and emotions of evaluation. While the emotions of pleasure that man desires to have and feel are the emotions of value, the emotions that involve judgment are the emotions of evaluation. Here, the emotion of regret is among these evaluation emotions in terms of both containing judgments and being formed on a retrospective, temporal basis.

⁹ Ilgaroğlu, *Ahlak Felsefesi Açısından Duygu-Değer İlişkisi*, 82.

¹⁰ Peter Goldie, *The Emotions A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 12.

¹¹ Nico Henri Frijda, "Emotion Require Cognitions, even if Simple One". Ed. Paul Ekman & Julius Ralph Davidson. *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 198.

¹² Enver Demirel Yılmaz-vd., "Medeniyet ve Kültür Kavramlarına İnsan Doğasının Somato-Psiko-Spirüüelliği Üzerinden Yeni Bir Bakış", *Çocuk ve Medeniyet Dergisi* (2016), 32.

¹³ Robert C. Solomon, *True To Our Feelings/What Our Emotions Are Telling Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11.

¹⁴ Solomon, *True To Our Feelings/What Our Emotions Are Telling Us*, 11.

¹⁵ Robert M. Gordon, *The Structure of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.

¹⁶ Patricia S. Greenspan, *Emotions and Reasons* (New York: Routledge Press, 2014), 56.

In short, if we mention the context in which emotions are handled in the history of thought we can see that emotions are generally considered human weaknesses that have no value. For example, the Stoics viewed emotions as negative phenomena. They thought that emotions were not just impressions but also judgments. However, they called these judgments irrational *path/pathos*. In other words, according to them, these influences hindered the adaptation of man, who is a *logos* being, to the universal mind. According to the Stoics, man could lead a moral life under the domination of reason only by getting rid of these influences.¹⁷ However, even this view includes the recognition that emotion is a judgment and is part of human nature. In modern times, philosophers of cognitive emotion such as Solomon have developed their philosophies based on the views of the Stoics. The different functions of emotional influences on human moral nature in the historical progression of philosophical thought were examined. Spinoza (d. 1677), David Hume (d. 1776), Adam Smith (d. 1790), Shaftesbury (d. 1713), Francis Hutcheson (d. 1746), Schopenhauer (d. 1860), and Max Scheler (d. 1928) placed human emotional existence at the center of moral theories from different perspectives in their moral theories.

Today, those working in the fields of philosophy of mind and neurobiology seem to focus on this issue in cooperation with science and philosophy. In the problem of basic morality, the impossibility of an opinion that excludes emotions, whether viewed positively or negatively, has become a general acceptance. Considering the changing, differentiating, diversifying, dynamic nature of emotions, which is sometimes difficult to express even in language, and beyond that, the fact that they are experienced in subjective experience, it is obvious that it is difficult to explain the emotional nature of human beings within a philosophical theory. At the same time, since emotions are immanent to all mental processes of human beings and the impossibility of examining them in isolation from these mental processes, handling emotions from a moral point of view has also led to the emergence of different perspectives. Moreover, the diversity of the emotions, which are the extensions of the inner processes of the human being, whether it is the mental or the instinctive aspect, almost resembling the color spectrum from primary colors to millions of colors, has forced the research of emotions independent of human integrity to be more reductionist approaches. For this reason, it is generally preferred to examine the effect of certain emotional moods on moral judgments in emotion studies.

Based on this determination, we will try to deal with the effect of regret on human moral actions.

2. Emotion of Regret and Moral Self-Control

First of all, when defining the emotion of regret, I aim to emphasize that regret is an emotional state/emotional attitude that can be moral. Like other moral emotions, regret includes both a phenomenological *sense* and a cognitive judgment. Throughout the article, I will emphasize its sensible and cognitive sides from time to time. I must point out that like most moral emotions, regret is an emotion that is psychologically and conceptually complex. For this reason, it is seen that many behavioral disciplines, especially psychology, research what regret is, and philosophers who express their views on its nature, function, and morality do not agree on it. Indeed, regret elicits a range of emotions, from sadness, disappointment, longing, nostalgia, and sometimes the relief of not having to regret something. When we look at it from a phenomenological point of view, we can say that regret is an emotional state that is located somewhere between happiness and sadness and is closer to sadness. Similarly, regret is closer to negative emotion than a positive one.¹⁸ Regret can also be a powerful, motivating form of mourning, a passionate complaint that things are not going as desired. It is often a retrospective experience of pain that shapes our present and future.¹⁹ Regret is a feeling that generally expresses one's disapproval of what he has done, regretting it, feeling sad, ashamed, or guilty about it, and is an emotion that emerges with awareness. In addition, one may regret not only what he has done, but also what he has neglected to do.

Importantly, regret is seen as part of one's self-regulatory abilities in this view, regret is an incentive to better regulate future behavior by learning from mistakes in the past and present.²⁰ This emotion is a corrective and curative emotion of moral self-control that emerges as a result of an internal accounting of the consequences of one's actions. To make an analogy, man is in the position of the prosecutor who questions his actions and the judge who evaluates them and decides in the court of conscience that he has established within himself. This human-specific ability of internal reasoning not only causes men to experience motivating

¹⁷ Tad Brennan, "The Old Stoic Theory of Emotions", *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, Juha Sihvola and Troels Engberg-Pedersen (eds.) (UK: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 39-40.

¹⁸ Maura Priest, "Reasonable Regret", *The Moral Psychology of Regret* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd., 2020), 101.

¹⁹ Anna Gotlib, *The Moral Psychology of Regret*, 1-2.

²⁰ Sijtsema, J.J., Zeelenberg, M. & Lindenberg, S.M., "Regret, Self-regulatory Abilities, and Well-Being: Their Intricate Relationships", *Journal of Happiness Studies* 22(7) (October 2021), 3301.

positive emotions such as honor, pride, and self-confidence as a result of their good actions but also allows them to experience negative emotions such as regret, guilt, shame, etc., as a result of their bad actions.

Even though guilt and shame often mean an obsession or struggle that does not lead to changes in behavior, regret is a powerful morally corrective, motivating emotion. Regret is also one of the constants in our lives, and it is the most frequently experienced *negative* emotion.²¹ Regret, like pride, is one of the emotions which its subject and object are the same. The object of this emotion is one's action and his thought about this action. In this respect, the emotion of regret differs from the emotions such as fear that emerge with external influence.

Conscience rejoices in good and regrets evil. Although the emotion of regret is mentioned together with negative emotions such as guilt and shame, it differs from such emotions in terms of being a corrective and healing emotion. Because while there is a state of inaction and desperation in the emotion of guilt, there is a stimulating, corrective and immanent impulse in the emotion of regret. Aristotle says in *Rhetoric*, quoting from Solon, "shame catches the eye".²²

One who is not ashamed will not regret it. In other words, in the distinction between virtue and vice, the emotion of regret stands on the side of virtue, which makes it a moral emotion. Thus, regretting the past indicates that something has changed over time or that the moral valences of various choices have shifted without creating a chasm between what is and what led.²³

Regret is a necessary consequence of human moral nature. This emotion stems from the fact that he is a being that can choose, that is, his moral freedom.²⁴ For regret to occur, the action, which is one of the conditions of moral action, must have occurred as a result of a choice between at least two options. Because regret expresses an emotional state of, *I wish I hadn't done it* that arises depending on the preference of the relatively worse one among these options. Man does not feel regret for the actions he has to do. Therefore, the prerequisite for regret is freedom. It means that only a free being can regret his actions. Thus, it can be said that there is a relationship between the problem of freedom and the emotion of regret. In the light of this determination, we can say that the main action motivation that causes regret is a pleasure. Because while choosing an action or performing it, being under the influence of the pleasure in it and turning to pleasure not only makes the freedom of the person problematic but also brings regret as a result of the actions. Because in such a case, egoistic feelings become functional instead of the sentiment of justice.

When considered in terms of the flow in nature, which is in constant motion and change, time is a uniform, one-dimensional and one-way flow. For that reason, Scheler states that time does not have the three-dimensionality of past, present, and future. As Scheler said, if time is a unity in which the past, present, and future are intertwined, and if we look at regret from this point of view, we can say that the regretted action affects every moment in a temporal unity from its formation, and even it is immanent to that moment.²⁵ Scheler also says that the duty of regret is to turn to the past and judge it.²⁶ This means that the self is mostly built with regrets throughout life. This indicates to us that regret is not a negative state of collapse, but rather one of the grounds of moral evolution.

It can be said that the emotion of regret emerges with the awareness of one's deficiency and the breaking of self-conceit. In the story of Adam and Eve (Hawwâ) in the creation argument, which is the common acceptance of monotheistic religions, two basic emotions that define humans are mentioned. The first is the emotion of curiosity towards the tree, and the second is the regret felt after approaching the tree. There is also an emotion of shame in this story, but the emphasis is on regret. In this story, Adam experienced a regret that can be expressed as *I could have chosen not to approach, but I did not choose, I made a mistake*. Adam regretted not having listened to divine counsel. From this point of view, we can reach the idea that there is an inner voice and an inner faculty that gives us advice. The emotion of regret in man comes from not listening to that advice. The motivation for Adam to find the truth is his emotion of regret. In the same story, it is told that Devil does not regret what he has done. He persists in his mistake and does not indicate any signs of regret. Based on this story, we can say that the emotion of regret arises when the person realizes his fault and breaks his arrogance towards himself. Therefore, the emotion of regret is a reflection of the transition from arrogance, which is moral worthlessness, to humility, which is a moral value. Because, as it can be understood from Devil's attitude, arrogance and denial of one's faults lie behind the inability to say *if only*. The emotion of regret is a balancing emotion, like shame. Similarly,

²¹ Gotlib, *The Moral Psychology of Regret*, 4.

²² Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, ed. by Edward Meredith Cope, John Edwin Sandys (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 126.

²³ Gotlib, *The Moral Psychology of Regret*, 14.

²⁴ Janet Landman, "Regret: A Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 17 (July 1987), 137-139.

²⁵ Max Scheler, "Repentance And Rebirth", *Person and Self-Value, Three Essays* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 12.

²⁶ Scheler, "Repentance And Rebirth", 6.

the fear of regret is just like the fear of shame. To avoid this, man chooses the moral and the moderate, which is the advice of the sentiment of justice.

The fear of regret is not nostalgic, but an actual fear that encompasses all dimensions of human life. This fear follows man all the time. For this reason, man strives to do good acts, which he will not regret as a result, to stay on the moral plane. Therefore, the fear of regret is not just a state of helplessness, but a mood of emotion without which moral action cannot be considered.²⁷

From the early 1980s, however, there has been a growing interest in the issue of regret within the formal decision theory tradition. Classical decision-making theories suggested that we make (or should make) decisions to maximize our expected utility (profit, pleasure, or other positive outcomes). Modern decision theorists have come to recognize the importance of regret in decision-making. Regret theories argue that choice depends not only on the probability and value of the outcome chosen but also on the amount of regret for unchosen alternatives (e.g., Bell, 1981; Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Loomes and Sugden, 1982; Sage and White, 1983; Schoemer, 1962).²⁸

The mutual roles of reason and emotion in our thoughts and actions are particularly evident in the phenomenon of regret. Whether in the practical or theoretical field, regret is an emotion related not only to the emotional side of the man but also to the cognitive side. It is difficult to distinguish the emotional and cognitive boundaries of human emotions, especially those that involve evaluation such as regret. If we liken this complex structure to a chain, we can say that every link that makes up the chain is almost composed of the functions of emotion and mind. Regret is the fact that the negativity and injustice noticed while evaluating a wrong or even a crime committed cause sadness in the human spirit. The fact that regret is a mood of sadness that occurs when a person realizes his mistake on a phenomenon that has happened in the past or whose effect continues today indicates that it is an emotion of evaluation. Since the activating aspect of the emotions will be backward dysfunctional in regret, this encouraging aspect will manifest itself in the future in the direction of preventing the repetition of the situation that causes regret. Thus, a regrettable situation in the past will prepare the ground for moral evolution from the negative to the positive, from the destructive to the constructive. There is more or less regret in every lesson learned from the past.

The effort of moral philosophy to seek the ideal for human beings has led to the ignoring of emotional states that are not evaluated on an ideal basis, such as regret. However, moral propositions for human beings are only *how should I behave?* It can be examined through the question of *how should I act so that I do not regret it?* or *how should I act so that I do not repeat the actions I regret?* in life experience. Because the fear of regret is one of the most important self-control mechanisms of the decisions we make in the moral field. Just like shame and guilt, man will desire to make choices and actions that they will not regret, as they will avoid the emotion of regret and even fear excessive regret. Fear of regret leads the person to avoid actions that are likely to be regrettable and to make the right decisions. Incidentally, we should state that the discouraging aspect of the concept of taqwa, which is underlined in the Qur'an, is motivated by the fear of regret. Avoidance of regret keeps man from what is harmful and directs them to moral values. The state of avoidance is a state of awareness and consciousness, and it is clear that the continuation of this state is due to an emotional motivation such as fear of regret.

Because regret is associated with sadness, shame, and guilt it can cause the person to feel anger towards himself and cause the person to fall into depression. While accepting that the action that causes regret is wrong motivates the person, its rejection demoralizes him. Acceptance is a positive state, and positive states are hoped to lead to positive actions. Suppressing the conscientious sadness of the act that creates regret, ignoring it, or submitting to the emotion of guilt felt towards it are situations that distance the person from the ground of moral development.

It is also necessary to mention the side of the emotion of regret that is constructive and activates positive emotions and moral acts in the social and legal field. For example, regret can trigger compassion and forgiveness. No one desire to forgive a person who makes a mistake and does not regret it, who is proud of it, and does not want to forgive. Among the reasons why regret activates compassion and forgiveness lie the common belief that human beings are prone to error. Another reason is the striving to be better and the desire not to repeat the same mistake that accompanies regret. Society places the repentant person in a morally better position despite his fault. In addition, in the field of law, regret is known as a reason for penalty reduction in many systems, and even legal regulations are made regarding it.

²⁷ Gotlib, *The Moral Psychology of Regret*, 4-5.

²⁸ Brian Price, *A Theory of Regret* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 32.

Conclusion

Emotions, whether reasonable or unreasonable, moral or immoral, are perhaps the most important factors that affect our behavior and therefore determine our moral life. The mutual roles of reason and emotion in our thoughts and actions are particularly evident in the phenomenon of regret. As an emotion of moral self-control regret has a complex structure with both neuropsychological and cognitive content. The object of this emotion is one's action and his thought about this action. Regret is an emotion that can be destructive, both through its presence and through its absence. Therefore, it is more commonly known as a negative emotion. However, regret can also be a strong, motivating positive moral emotion. With the emotion of regret, we can control and shape both our present and our future. For instance, the fear of regret is like an inner voice that always leads a person to act right. Regret can give different results according to the emotional experiences produced by its different components. While the emotional experience produced by the negative event produces negative results, cognitive understanding of the bad decision leads to learning and recovery.

The assumption that regret is a moral emotion with both an emotional and cognitive component is based on the assumption that emotion and cognition in general, and the nature of regret in particular, involve specific philosophical and psychological analysis. The condition of regret is possibility and freedom. One does not only feel regret for actions he believes to be just. The moral foundation of those who do not regret their actions is just behavior and understanding. Man can feel the emotion of regret on a positive plane as a constructive and healing motivation source. With it, he learns to avoid evil and to incline more towards good.

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