CHAPTER VIII

ACTIONS OF THE PERFECTED MAN

The main characteristic of a realized person, as we saw, is the absence of the feeling of 'I' and 'mine' — aham mamābhimāna-rāhitaḥ. Realization, thus, is identical with losing of one's private personality. The sense of agency which expresses itself as personal identity is completely erased. "The knower of truth" says Sankara, "does not think 'I act' nor does he long for the result of actions". Once the sense of agency which is the root of every action, is erased it is meaningless to speak of him as engaging in any kind of activity. The logical consequence of this position is that a mukta remains inactive and that he is deprived of every kind of initiative and drive; he simply waits until his body falls off when the prārabdha is completely exhausted. This, further, creates the impression that the ideal man of Advaita Vedanta is reduced to a passive spectator and that as an ideal it is detrimental to religion and ethics.

But, on the contrary, Sankara speaks of the altruistic deeds of a realized person - deeds aimed at the welfare of other people. The muktas, having attained the knowledge 'all this is one, Brahman, the Absolute, the non-agent' may continue

1"Tattvavittu naḥam karomīti manyate na ca tadphalama-bhisandhatte". SBG. VII - 4. 5 - 11.
to perform work in the same manner as before with a view to setting example to the masses. "Thus, the action performed by him who wishes to set an example to the world is in reality no action as it has been destroyed by the realization of Brahman." Such statements of Sankara clearly suggest that certain types of actions proceed from the realized soul irrespective of the fact that he has no sense of agency.

We can, thus, observe an apparent contradiction in Sankara with regard to his views on the actions of a realized soul. That is, the mukta has no sense of agency and therefore cannot be thought of as engaging in actions. At the same time he is described as engaging in actions aimed at the welfare of the world, lokasamgraha.

Sankara himself says how agency is a sine-qua-non of every action. "Ahamkara is seen to be the root of every action in this world." That is, every action presupposes agency, a man first wills and then acts accordingly. The

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2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 ahankara eva hi sarvasya pravrttibijam drstam loke (SBG - VII - 4).
will cannot exist without a sense of agency. The word action itself is used in ethics not in connection with mere outward activity but activity preceded by intention. We can see three different kinds of actions. That is, there are the impulsive actions and purposive actions or actions from a sense of duty. When one acts in a blind rage his actions may be considered purely impulsive. The actions performed purposively or reflectively are another kind of actions. In other words, we can find three criteria to call something action, viz., (1) an action should be such that it is done freely; there should not be compulsion internal or external; (2) the agent must be aware of what he is doing — he must know the persons affected, what is right in a particular context etc., (3) act must intentional; there must be an object that action seeks to realize. Only those which possess these above characteristics can be called actions in the ethical context. But Sankara goes deep into this problem and defines action in a different way. Accordingly, anything that is done egoistically is an action. That which is


6 Ibid., p. 17.

7 Dictionary of Christian Ethics, p. 5.
done without ego and without desire for fruits are not actions. The verse No.18, of the fourth chapter of the B.G. puts the whole Advañic view of karma in a nutshell. It says "He who can see inaction, who can see also action in inaction, he is wise among men he is devout, he is the performer of all actions." Here action is taken to be any kind of activity - 'kriyata iti karma vyaparamatram'. In such actions, a wise man sees inaction or actionlessness. Similarly when one is inactive, the wise man sees action in it. Thus, it means, that one who is outworldly inactive may be really acting which suggests that the cessation of activity is not necessarily inaction. Though outworldly inactive, since he retains ahankara in the feeling that he is not doing anything it is also an action. This also agrees with the theory that the root of every action is 'ahankara'. Thus from the point of view of a realized person a man is egoistic in two ways: People attribute activity to the self which in truth, is actionless - activity, the locus of which is the limiting adjuncts such as body, mind, senses etc. Thus attributing people think 'I am doing this', 'I am enjocing this etc. Similarly when one is outworldly inactive one attributes to the self cessation of activity and thinks 'I am not doing

8 BG. IV - 13.

9 SEB. IV - 13.
anything', and 'I am at ease'. But in truth this cessation has reference only to the limiting adjuncts like body, and mind. Both these have to be given up. This can be given up only by the complete elimination of ego. And this stage is reached only in moksa by the realization of the self as actionless spirit. From these accounts, we may conclude that actions which require 'ego' are egoistic actions and that elimination of ego logically demands unegoistic actions. Every egoistic action, necessarily rests on egoistic impulse. And every non-egoistic or unselfish action necessarily requires the negation of 'ego' or at least its subjugation.

So when ever Sankara rules out action for a realized person, he refers only to egoistic actions. Such egoistic actions may be Vedic or otherwise. Certain Vedic actions which are said to bring certain fruits are also egoistic. Such actions alone are ruled out by Sankara in the case of a realized person.

Thus, it may be said, that action aimed at the welfare

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Cf. "In morality the existence of my mere private self, as such, is something which ought not to be, and which so far as I am moral, has already ceased. I am morally realized not until my personal self has utterly ceased to be my exclusive self (F.H. Bradley, Ethical studies, p. 73).
of others which are, of course, unegoistic can proceed from a mukta. Such actions do not contradict the view that muktas cannot act, for what he cannot do are egoistic actions. In every unegoistic action is involved an element of self-denial. Only the intensity of the self-denial may vary. Thus whenever we engage in unselfish work we are practising self-denial. And on the analogy of this, we can imagine an extreme position of it i.e., a stage when complete self-denial is attained. Accordingly the greatest amount of unselfish work is done when one attains complete self-denial. This is attained only in jivanmukti. So absence of ego is not contrary to unselfish work; it is only contrary to works done with selfish motives. Thus Sankara is right in holding that a mukta who is the perfection of self-denial engages in actions aimed at the welfare of others.

But mukti is often mentioned in association with the non-performance of action - vidusah karmabhavah. Some of the descriptions of a mukta may suggest that he abstains not only from egoistic actions but from actions as such. That is, in certain contexts Sankara seems to deny even altruistic deeds on the part of mukta. Thus it is said, "on the other hand, there may be a person, who having started with action and having since obtained the right knowledge of the self really abandons actions with all its accessories as he finds action
of no use. "The real samnyāsa is that which is character-
ised by the renunciation of all actions as well as their
fruits". Again in interpreting the word 'sarvasamkalpa
sannyāsa' Sankara observes that it means not the giving up
of desires but also of actions. "For when one abandons all
thoughts, all desires one cannot even move. Therefore by
saying that one should renounce all thoughts the Lord implies
that he should abandon all desires and all actions as well."
It should not be thought, assert Sankara, that giving up
'Samkalpa' mean that he can do mental and bodily actions.
"All verbal and bodily activity pre-suppose mental activity.
In the absence of the latter the former cannot prevail".
Such statement may set up the presumption that a mukta cannot
engage even in unselfish actions. But these statements
also refer only to the egoistic actions only. They do not
contradict actions of the lokasamgraha type, for they are not
motivated by the selfish interest of a mukta. What is ruled
out here is egoistic or ritualistic actions, for actions done
without selfish motive are not actions. If we take this

11 SBC. IV - 19
12 SBC. VI - 2
13 SBC. VI - 4
14 Ibid.,
15 SBC. II - 21.
definition of karma there is no contradiction in the statement that one who has given up karma in sannyāsa cannot even move.  

This seems to be the rationale of Sankara's refutation of samuccayavāda also - the theory that mokṣa is attained not by knowledge alone but by knowledge combined with action. "By mere knowledge mokṣa is attained not combined with action". Sankara's commentary on the B.G. mainly seeks to discuss this point: Whether a jñāni must act or not and whether he has any actions to be done - kartavyam karma. According to Sankara jñāna alone yeilds mokṣa. While giving only a complementary place for action in his scheme of mokṣa, he also contends that a jñāni will not combine both knowledge and works for salvation.

According to Sankara even the karmayoga - type of actions are also not applicable to the muktas. Karmayoga is action without selfish motive. This seems to deny to muktas even actions aimed at the welfare of other people. But here we have to make a distinction in karmayoga itself.

16 The highest man cannot work, for in them, there is no attachment.........such are indeed the highest of mankind, but apart from them every one also has to work" (Complete works, Vol. I. p. 106)

17 SBG II - 11.
Karmayoga when considered in ethics is a means of performing duty. And as a means it is a duty. But when the ideal of self-realization is reached there cannot be karmayoga which may be considered as duty. Karmayoga which is adhered to by those who wish to do their duties in the best possible way, thus cannot be associated with muktas who are above duties. Here the following arguments may be adduced: (a) In karmayoga one must have a sense of plurality and the feeling that I am the doer. Both these are the products of avidyā. A man who has dispelled avidyā and thus has got rid of the sense of plurality, therefore, cannot perform karmayoga. (b) It is said "In him who thinks that the self is the doer of action, there will necessarily arise the idea of duty, that he has to do this or that. A man who possesses this sort of knowledge is qualified for action and on him actions are enjoined. A mukta has no such feelings, hence karmayoga which is a duty before Brahman - realization is not relevant to him. (c) Karma-yoga has only an instrumental value it is a means to reach purity of mind; a mukta who has attained purity of mind need not perform it. (d) Karmas are possible only in the stage of avidyā. A mukta who has transcended avidyā—

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18 SBC. II - 21.

19 'Karmaṇyāvidyāvasthāyānāmevā codyanté' - SBC. II - 69.
cannot do them. When he cannot be associated with karmas, the question of karmayoga does not arise. (e) Activity is a sign of imperfection and implies a want; a mukta is ever-satisfied, therefore, there is nothing for him to do - tasya kāryam na vidyate. (f) Karmaphalatyaṅga is an important element in karmayoga. This renunciation of fruits is possible only for those who entertain desire for them. Hence a jñāni who has no desires cannot perform them. The unselfish actions proceeding from a mukta are not karmayoga for they are not means to achieve an end. They are the spontaneous outcome of his virtue viz., his delight in the welfare of others. That he performs karmayoga means that he is acting according to the rules of karmayoga. This is against the fundamental doctrine that he is above duties. He has nothing to seek in life for which he must strive. In fact his actions are the very standard of morality. To quote Malkani, "in truth he does not borrow his standards of morality from society. Rather he sets those standards to the society and the rest of mankind. He is the true moral instructor and guide for his fellow-men".

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BG. III - 17

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But according to B.G. Tilak a jñāni has certain duties even after realization. It is based on the idea that a mukta is living in a society, and therefore he has to abide by the norms of the society in which he lives. According to him the Gītā advocates action in this world even after man has achieved the highest Brahman. Action must be done to keep the world going by the right path of evolution by which the creator has destined the world to go. Thus even the muktas are bound by the rules of the society which primarily consist in Varnāsrama-dharmas. But this is against the very notion of liberation in Advaita for, here liberation implies liberation from all bondage of samsāra. It is a liberation from the bondage of 'dharma' and adharma. Moreover duty implies 'oughts' which makes a particular action obligatory on man. Here, action no doubt, may proceed from a mukta, but he is not bound to do anything. From the Advaitic point of view even the categorical imperatives such as 'thou shall not steal', 'Thou shall not kill etc', are applicable only to a certain type of people i.e., those who do not know what is right and what is wrong. A mukta who is effortlessly good does not act obeying these imperatives. Moreover, in

22
Gītārahasya, Poona, 1935, p. XXV

23
Ibid.
ethics, there are no absolute 'oughts' and 'ought nots'. "Duty's universal laws are not universal" says Bradley, "if that means they can never be overruled. Its form and its absolute imperative are impracticable". We cannot prescribe a course of obligation which can be applied to all people in the world. And duty itself when it is pushed to its extreme is empirical and depends on certain customs and manners and vary in different countries. That is why Vivekananda has defined duty thus: "It is really the impulsion of the flesh, of our attachment, and when an attachment has become established we call it duty". For example, in countries where there is no marriage there cannot be any duty between husband and wife. In short, as Hopkins, said, the realized soul "lived in the world but was not of it. He knew life to be a duty entailed up on him, but he was not bound by its ties; he was a free soul in an encompassing but not enchanting world".

Raising the question whether a mukta is bound by any duty, Sankara in his exposition of the Aitareyopaniṣad observes that since a mukta is an āptakāma (one who has fulfilled all

24 Ethical studies p. 143 f.
26 Ethics of India, p. 34.
his desires) and has realized his identity with Brahman without the characteristics of Samsāra, words such as duty etc., have no meaning for him. He has nothing to achieve by any kind of duty - 'kṛtenakartavyena vā'. But that he has nothing to gain and hence he has no Śāṅkū duties may appear to some schools of moral philosophers as not acceptable. Śāṅkara, here, may have to face the objection of Kant according to whom one should not be motivated by the gain in doing duty. Duty depends on the motive behind it, it is true, but according to Kant, the only good motive was a sense of duty. The proposition is this, "That an action done from duty derives its moral worth, not from the purpose which is to be attained by it, but from the maxim by which it is determined, and therefore does not depend on the realization of the object of the action; but merely on the principle of volition by which the action has taken place without regard to any object of desire". If we accept this definition then, Śāṅkara's contention that an āptakāma has no duty does not make any sense. But, this must be understood only on the basis of Śāṅkara's general treatment of duty i.e., what is called duty is also adhyāsa and so to be overcome; It is also

27 Great Traditions in Ethics, Eurasia publishing house, Delhi, 1968, p. 213, 14.
a means. All duties are kinds of action, but when the ideal of self-realization is reached the same action loses its value as duty. It can no more be called duties even if action is done by him. That is why Sankara holds that the injunctions of the Vedas (niyogas) are not applicable to a mukta. The view that duties must be performed by a mukta according to Sankara, is meaningless for, such injunctions have no connection with self-realization either before or after realization. Moreover, every action aims at two objects; viz., the attainment of the desirable (istāyoga) and the elimination of the undesirable (anistāviyoga) and neither of these two is relevant to a realized soul. If we do not set a boundary to the performance of duty and say that even realized souls must do, then it may mean that all duties must be performed always by all people which is unsound.  

Even the lokasamgrahārtham karma as Tilak contends is not an obligation in the case of muktas. Such actions may spring out of him or may not. They are simply an outward flow of his nature. But a problem may be raised. If the muktas have no sense of agency how can they do even altruistic

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28 S.A.U. Introduction

29 Ibid.
karmas? Will not the very term 'mukta's karma' be a contradiction? The whole of the Upaniṣads and the B.G. declares that the spirit of man is actionless. So, one who has realized the true nature of one's self is lifted above the sphere of action. Though from the vyāvahārīka point of view, we may use phrases such as 'actions of a mukta' morality of a mukta's etc., in the strict sense they are not valid; for, he no more feels that he is the agent. At the same time we find activity manifested through him though he himself is not doing anything. Then, what is the source of activity manifested through the mukta? In other words, who is the real agent of the activity in a mukta? Writing on this S.K. Maitra, says "of this supra-ethical condition, we can only have faint glimmerings for, to have a knowledge of it means that we have already reached it". And thus, he concludes that "its nature for us, is an unfathomable mystery". But a solution to this problem of agency may be found in the details furnished by the B.G. itself.

According to B.G. a realised person becomes a perfect

30
Art. 'Outlines of an Emergent theory of values, "Contemporary Indian Philosophy (George Allen, London 1953), p. 404.

31
Ibid., p. 404.
instrument of God; God, thus, fulfills his mission through him. B.C. XI-33 clearly indicates this, when Krishna says; "By Myself have they (Kauravas) been already slain; be thou a mere instrument, Oh! Savyasācin". Arjuna, in killing them is only an instrument. Thus, while mukta is himself inactive, God alone is acting through him; the former becomes an instrument in the hands of God. There is no difference between his acts and God's acts for, his will has completely merged with the will of God. In an answer to the question who acts in a realized person B.C. answers in two different contexts. In one context, it is said that actually prakṛti is acting - Prakṛti constituting the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. Sankara here says, that karmayoga cannot be applied to "jnānins who are unshaken by the guṇas and who in themselves have no movements". This suggests that activity is a characteristic of the three guṇas which constitute maya. The same idea is expressed else where also:- "Actions are wrought in all cases by the power of Nature. He whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks 'I am the doer'.

32 According to Bergson also "God acts through the mystic soul; the complete mystic participates in the God's creative activity and his love for the creatures (Two sources of Morality, p. 198) Quoted by D.M. Dutta, CCCP. p. 239.

33 B.G. III - 5, 27.

34 SBG III - 5.

35 BG III - 27.
"But he who knows the truth, O mighty armed, about the divisions of the emergies and their functions, is not attached, thinking that the energies act upon energies". Elsewhere the attachment to action is mentioned as due to the deluding power of māyā or prakṛti—prakṛtergūnasamudghaḥ. Sankara in S.B.C. actually faces this problem of mukta's agency. This question he raises as 'pūrvapakṣa': "if the self in the body does not itself, act, nor cause others to act, what then is it that acts and causes others to act"? The answer is that 'svabhāva' or nature is acting. But what is svabhāva? "It is nature, Svabhāva, prakṛti, māyā, the Divine māyā made up of guṇas: Bergson equally observes: "ultimate forces that determine action are instinct and emotion".

In the characteristics of a guṇātīta in the 14th chapter of B.G. the mukta is said to be one who understands that guṇas are the agents of activity. "When the seer beholds not an agent other than the guṇas and knows him who is higher than the guṇas, he attains to my being". So the real

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36 BG III - 28
37 BG III - 29
38 "Śvabhāvastu, Svabhāvah svabhāvah, avidyālaksanā prakṛtirmāyā pravartate" (S.B.C. V - 14)
40 SBG XIV - 19.
agent of action is prakrti or mâyā. This position creates another problem. Does mâyā or prakrti act? Is it independently an agent? How can mâyā which is a principle other than the consciousness, be the agent of actions? Only an intelligent being can be an ultimate source of activity which Sankara himself admits. The conclusion here seems to be that with mâyā under control or through the medium of mâyā God is actually acting through a mukta. A.C. Krishna Warrier rightly observes: "Strictly speaking, this point cannot be emphasised too much; having fully abolished his private self or ego, the mukta may scarcely act; rather it is the spirit of God that uses him as its perfect instrument. The action of the mukta is best evaluated as the action of God performed through the mukta. The latter is fully aware that all actions proceed from prakrti and that the self beyond prakrti is never bound by them." Mâyā is said to be the power of God by which the individual souls are deluded.

"If there is a 'because' to my acts responsibility seems to go" says Bradley. Sankara also in perfect agreement with Bradley says "Indeed the action of one cannot go

41 BSB. IV -4, 15; III - 2, 2.
43 SBB. VII - 14; XVIII - 61.
44 Ethical studies, p. 51.
the another that has not done it. And what is attributed to
the self by avidyā cannot really pertain to him, in the
same way that the mother-of-pearl pearl cannot become
silver................. Accordingly any change that may take
place in the body etc., belong to them only, not to the self.
Therefere it is but right to say that in the absence of
egoism and of all taint in the mind, the wise man neither
klls nor is bound 45. Thus, just as a man is not responsi-
ble for an action done by another man, the mukta is not
responsible for what mayā does through him. He will be
responsible only for what he does. But he knows himself as
actionless spirit; and hence he cannot do anything.

Here, it must be borne in mind that even the very
explanation of action of a realized soul is valid only from
the vyāvahārika point of view. From the absolute point of view
which is identical with that of the mukta, there is no action
what so ever. We are rather attributing action to him for,
he always seems to be engaging in activities though in him-
self he is inactive. But why does a mukta appear so? It
is due to avidyā. When the realization comes one will re-
alize that all actions are possible only in the sphere of
avidyā. 46

46 SBG. XVIII - 17

46 "stāh karmāṇi avidyāvasthāyāmeva codyante"
SBG II - 69.
Though metaphysically mukta is not acting it is not right right to say that he does not work for the welfare of others. From the ṣvāvahārika point of view he acts, and such activities are in the best interest of the world at large. The drive for such action, he derives from his unique experience of the identity of spirit. The immediate manifestation of this unique experience is same-sightedness—samādārsana. "By this wisdom you will also immediately perceive all beings from Brahma (the creator) down to grass, in your own self". He becomes sarvabhūtātmabhūtātmā—one whose self has become merged with the self of every living creature. For him a lump of clay, a stone and gold are equal. He will be equalminded to friends, foes, the indifferent, the neutral, the hateful, relatives, the righteous and the unrighteous. Again commenting on B.C. Sankara says that for one who has seen the unity of spirit God is not immediate-parokṣa. "He who sees me, Vāsudeva, the self of all in all beings........when he has, thus, seen the unity of the

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47 SEG. IV - 35
48 SEG. V - 7.
49 SEG. VI - 8
50 SEG. VI - 9
"I" Isvara, never leave his presence, nor does that wise man leave my presence; for his self and mine are one and one's own self cannot but be manifest to oneself. The word 'that to such a person God is immediate (naparokṣa-tām na gamisyaṁi) may be clearly understood. It may be interpreted to mean that to such a person Brahman, is pratyakṣa - is immediate, which means that he sees all living beings as the embodiment of Brahman and treats them accordingly. These characteristics are essential for taking up works._lokasangraha type.

The quality of 'Sarvabhūtaḥite rataḥ' which B.C. mentions twice as a unique trait of a jīvamuktā should not be underrated. This sarvabhūtahiteratih (delight in the welfare of other beings) is in fact the fountain of all ethical deeds. This delight comes only when one realizes one's identity with all other living beings. "The work of ethics" says Vivekananda, "is to recognise the God within, in spite of every thing that frighten us, to recognise that infinite strength as the property of every one in spite of all apparent weakness". Though mukta has no oughts, _lokasamgraha_ types of karmas still emerge from him until his body

51 SBG VI - 30
52 BG V - 25; XII - 4.
falls. B.G. often refers to such action, though it also reminds us that such actions are not obligatory on him - 'tasya kāryam na vidyate'. They do not affect him, do not become a source of bondage to him. He is the real pandita - wise. The man "whose works are free from all desires and 'samkalpaś', who performs mere action without any selfish purpose, if he engages in worldly action he does so with a view to setting an example to the masses; if he has renounced worldly life, he performs them only for bodily maintenance - whose actions are consumed in the fire of jnana which consists in the realization of action in action and vice-versa, him the wise calls a pandita". It suggests that a mukta is not idle.

The need for performing lokasamgrahārtham Karma even by karmayogins is explained to Arjuna by citing the examples of the realized souls. The examples of Janaka and Asvapti are specially pointed out who even after realization is said to have been acting. Such actions are explained by Sankara in two ways. That is, if they were realized souls, then, their actions were to set an example to the world; if on the other hand, they were not realized souls then they acted to acquire

54 SBE, IV - 19.
55 BG III - 20.
purity of mind. Such actions are beneficial to mankind in
two ways: First, they bring about actual material benefits, secondly they serve as an example to others. *Lokasamgrahahrtham karma* is interpreted by Sankara as 'preventing the world from going to a wrong path.' How does this degeneration take place? If the muktas remain inactive, ordinary people will follow suit and as a result they will refrain from their duty - *svadharma*. Thus society will be led to confusion. So muktas act just as ordinary people, but the spirit in which they do so will be different i.e., it is free from egoism.

Against this view is levelled a sharp criticism by B.C. Tilak. According to him Sankara's views on the actions of a mukta meant that "ajnanins should hypocritically perform the same acts which are performed by ajnanins, in order that the ajnanins should remain ajnanins and perform actions". And, thus, according to Sankara, asserts the author, the *Gita* was written to teach people hypocrisy and "make them perform actions like beast". Thus, his view is that even the *loka-samgrahahrtham karma* is a duty of realized souls.

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56 SBG III - 20
57 Ibid.,
58 Gitarahasya Vol. II, p. 930
59 Ibid.,
Such a view of duty may hold good for those who accept only Videha mukti. But a philosophy like Advaita, which conceives Jīvanmukti as beyond the pale of duty cannot accept it as a legitimate concept. It is one thing to say that muktas naturally do lokasamgrahārtham karma and quite another, to say that they are their duties. It contradicts the Gītā's own view that a wise man has nothing to do as duty, he remains in the body without either acting or causing others to act, and that he is sarvārāmbha parītyāgī - who has renounced all initiatives.

That a mukta engages in altruistic deeds does not, however, mean, that he is out to help the world so that the world may attain to material prosperity. They never entertain the feeling that they can help the world to attain the so-called zenith of material prosperity. Mukta knows that to make this world materially prosperous is an impossibility. The mukta has no illusions that he is helping the world. He knows that the world needs no help from him. The world is God's and He can look after it Himself. The mukta is privilaged to serve the world. But how does he serve? He can serve by feeding the hungry; it is a service no doubt.

60 B.C. III - 17

61 BG. V - 13

62 BG. XII - 16

63 A.C. Krishna Warrier, op. cit., p. 76.
But hunger returns after words. This is the case with each
material suffering. This does not mean that helping others
in their physical need is not desirable. But the best help
one can expect from a realized person is spiritual help.
Mukta is the spiritual leader of the society. While many
are competent to render physical help, spiritual help cannot
be rendered by all people. Only people who have reached
the highest ideal of moksa are competent to render spiritual
help. Sankara agreeing with B.G. says that spiritual
knowledge must be sought only from a realized soul. So the
main function of the realized souls is service of humanity
through disseminating spiritual knowledge.

The mukta will be ever acting in accordance with the
famous dictum of Kant 'Act only on that maxim whereby thou
canst at the sametime will that it should become a universal
law. Only, this action is natural to him; not acting from
respect for the law as Kant would have it. He will play his part for promoting other's welfare. "He will undoubtedly
take a hand in promoting the welfare of his fellow-men in
all ways open to him; but it is purely voluntary action

64 BG IV - 34.

65 Great Traditions in ethics, op.cit., p. 218.
arising from his love and compassion and not in obedience to any command. Qualities like non-violence and compassion are mentioned as natural to them. Fellow-feeling is an important trait of a mukta. Speaking on ethics in general, Vivekananda once wrote that the central idea of ethics is "not to think of self but to give up self". In this sense, no one would be more ethical than a realized soul.

A remarkable statement of Sankara regarding the mukta runs as follows: "Samap sarvesu bhutesu - 'ātmaupa-myena sarvesu bhutesu sukham dukham vā samam eva paśyati," which means "he regards the pleasure and pain of all creatures equally with his own i.e., they would affect him just as they affect himself". This statement in fact, contains the essence of all philanthropic activity. Defining ethics Schweitzer writes: "all that is ethical goes back to a single principle of morality, namely the maintenance of life at its highest level and furtherance of life. The maintenance of one's own life at the highest level by becoming more and more perfect in spirit and the maintenance at the highest level of other life by sympathetic, helpful self devotion to it - this is ethics". But to feel the pain and pleasure of

67 Complete works, Vol. I, p. 110
68 SBG XVIII - 254.
others as one's own is perhaps the first criterion for such helpful devotion to mankind. And even Schweitzer has agreed that "only when ethics embrace the whole universe is an ethical world-view really possible". But the metaphysical explanation for such a world-view is given only by Sankara and according to him such a world-view is possible or consequent to the realization of one's own  Self as identical with the self of the universe, without which we are not likely to care for what happened to other people.

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70 Ibid., p. 260