CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

We have explained, at considerable length, the various aspects of Advaitic ethics and their logical relation to Advaitic metaphysics. We shall now discuss in detail, the sense in which Sankara's ethics may be regarded as relevant to the modern world. In dealing with this question, it should be emphasised that Sankara himself never doubted the practical utility of Advaitic ethics. He seems to have believed that the Advaitic scheme of morality can be considered as the supreme guide to moral actions. Though he did not himself develop this scheme of ethics into a system, its implications and relevance cannot be ignored. The credit for highlighting its implications actually goes to celebrated leaders and thinkers like Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. We shall, now, attempt a critical evolution of Sankara's ethics and also examine a few other relevant questions in this connection.

Sankara's ethics as positive.

It is often said of Advaitic ethics that it is essentially negative in character. But what is meant by positive ethics and negative ethics? Positive ethics is that which manifest itself in virtuous action i.e., the ethics in which one strives for the amelioration of humanity at all levels for the improvement of the conditions of other people's life.
Negative ethics is that which does not manifest itself in action, but which is satisfied by simply refraining from doing any harm to others. Accordingly one need not strive for the welfare of others. It is enough if one does not stand in the way of other's well-being. One should not do anything that is likely to affect adversely the welfare of others. The virtues of *adhimaṇa*, *asteva*, *sparigraha*, and many others may be included in this negative ethics. That Indian ethics in general is negative in character has been a frequent charge levelled against it. Thus John Mackenzie says that the Hindu ethics has no positive character.\(^1\) Active ethics has been actually borrowed from Christian ethics and "Hindus have found much in Christian teaching by which they have sought to enrich and reinforce their own ethics."\(^2\) Why is the Vedanta of Sankara extolled by neo-Vedantins as the greatest philosophy capable of encouraging people to perform the task of raising the poor? To this the author says that in this we can see the tendency to "maintain the ancient thought and customs inviolate, but to add to them

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\(^1\) The Hindu Ethics, p. 242 ff.
\(^2\) Ibid. p. 132.
something, they know not what, which shall help to bring India into line with the more progressive nations of the West". According to Hopkins the tendency of all Indian Philosophers was to rest content with trying to purify their own souls without harming others. "The altruistic ideal therefore, at best can be merely a disposition" says Dasagupta, "and can manifest itself merely in a negative way". Such views about Indian ethics are maintained by critics. Similarly Albert Schweitzer represents the whole of Hindu ethics including Advaita as negative and contrasts it with Western ethics which according to him is active. In fact the phrase 'active ethics' is used by him exclusively to refer to Christian ethics.

The term ethics understood in a loose wider sense, include all universally accepted moral principles, such, for example, as love, sympathy and compassion towards one's fellow men. Though such principles of morality are universal, there is difference in their understanding and application. There is a marked difference in the concept of life itself in the East and in the West. Owing to this difference in their basic

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3 Ibid., p. 186.
4 The Ethics of India, p. 214.
5 Hindu Mysticism, p. 99.
outlook on life, there is difference even in their ideas of ethics. The ordinary Western idea of morality is summed up by Schweitzer as follows, "all that is ethical goes back to 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 all other life by sympathetic self-devotion to it - this is ethics". The author is perfectly in consonance with Advaitins when he says that ethics is concerned with all living beings and that it is "boundless in their domain and limitless in their demands". "What we call love" says Schweitzer, "is in its essence reverence for life. All material and spiritual values are values only in so far as they serve the maintenance of life at its highest level and the furtherance of life". But the most important aspect of this ethics is that such a furtherance of life pre-supposes a particular mental disposition i.e., a mind which is free from all evils and this ethics of higher inward perfection even according to him is the "very core of ethics". And Advaita

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6 ITD., p. 260
7 Ibid., p. 260.
8 Ibid., p. 260.
9 Ibid., p. 118.
and Indian systems in general have a tendency to stress this
inward perfection rather than its manifestation in action. They hold
that once this inward purity is attained its manifesta
tion in action is but a consequence. The inward per-
fection is what is meant by 'cittāsuddhi' or self-negation.
The western ethicists do not lay much emphasis on this aspect
of ethics and when they talk too much of active ethics, they
forget the denial of the self involved in it, the denial of the
self which is a sine-qua-non of active ethics. The Advaitic
conception of ethics has been well-expounded by Swami Vivekananda
the Neo-Vedantin, who is the most authoritative interpreter
of Advaita to the modern world. He elaborates the ethical
ideal of Advaita to the modern world. He elaborates the
ethical ideal of Advaita and the foundations of ethics in
general in his writings. On one occasion he said, ".............
the ideas of ethics, if they are really good cannot but be
based on the highest self-negation. It is the basis of all
morality, you may extend it to man, or animals, or angels,
it is the one basic idea, the one fundamental principle running
through all ethical systems".10 "But whatever be the source
from which it is derived, their code of ethics also has the
same central idea - not to think of self but to give up self".11


11 Ibid., p. 110.
This fundamental distinction in the Eastern and Western conceptions of ethics may be brought out here. In the Western system, they postulate the existence of the 'ego' or the personality of the individual even at the highest stage of spiritual and ethical perfection. But the Advaitins consider elimination of the ego or the elimination of the idea of personality as the very basis of real ethics. Thus, both these inward perfection and the outward actions are two aspects of any ethical system; none of these aspects can be ignored. But these two aspects do not represent the so-called positive and negative ethics. To stress mental purity is not to render ethics negative, for it is from this purity that ethics derives its force. The ethics of Karmayoga is an example of positive ethics. Karmayoga is not merely the cultivation of the negative virtues but the active performance of ideal action. Even the case of a jñānayogi, though the stress is laid on negative virtues it is a preparation for action. When the jñānayoga bears fruit by attaining realization one becomes a perfected soul. Only then can one be designated as a true philanthropist.

One of the most prominent words in the texts on Hindu ethics is ahimsā or non-violence. It may be perhaps the form of the term ahimsā that has led scholars to believe that Hindu ethics is negative. According to Schweitzer ahimsā is not only a negative virtue but also had no motivation of pity in it.
"What may also give offense to Indian reader is my opinion that world and life - negation in itself is void of ethics and that the ahimsa commandment owed its origin not to a feeling of pity but to the idea of keeping pure from the world, and that it was only later that ahimsa adopted the motive of compassion".12

But in Advaita, ahimsa is not a negative virtue, though literally it means, as Sankara himself would interpret, non-infliction of injuries on living beings - praññāma amīdanam.13 But the very purpose and the course of Advaitic morality shows that ahimsa is not merely refraining from doing harm to others but also actively striving for others' welfare. If it were something negative how could it be prescribed as something to be practised by the body - Sarīram tapah.14 And in another context Sankara says that working for the welfare of others itself is ahimsa.

The positive character of ahimsa has been well-explained by Mahatma Gandhi who has declared himself to be an Advaitin. He believed in Advaita and it was from this that he drew inspiration for all his practical ethics. Once in 'Young India' he

13 SBG. XIII. 7.
14 SBG. XVII - 14.
15 SBG. V. 25.
wrote: "..............I don't believe that an individual may gain spiritually when all that surrounds him suffer. I believe in Advaita. I believe in the essential unity of man, and for that matter of all that lives."\textsuperscript{16} Gandhian ethics which is not fundamentally different from that of Advaita is derived from the latter. He has explained how, through ahimsā, one can make friendship with the whole world. Even in the case of thieves he says that we should not punish them. "By enduring them, we realize that theives are not different from ourselves, they are our brethren, our friends, and may not be punished."\textsuperscript{17} Again he says, "not to hurt any living thing is, no doubt, a part of ahimsā. But it is its least expression. The principle of ahimsā is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs."\textsuperscript{18} Ahimsā according to him is a means to reach truth. "Ahimsā is the means. Truth is the end". "So Ahimsā is our supreme duty".\textsuperscript{19} In another context Gandhiji identifies ahimsa with universal love when he says, "...........the fulfilment of ahimsā is impossible without utter selflessness. Ahimsā means universal love."\textsuperscript{20} In fact the commandment of ahimsā in Advaita is based on the one-

\textsuperscript{16} Quoted by P. Nagaraja Rao, in 'The Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi to the World of Thought', University of Madras, 1969, p.93.

\textsuperscript{17} Selected works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. IV, Navajivan Publishing house, Ahemdabad, p. 217.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 218.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 219.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 220.
ness of spirit expressed in the Mahakavyas like tattvamasi, etc. The virtue of ahimsā will be natural to one who is interested in the welfare of other people and who has got rid of his selfishness.

The active life of many renowned Advaitins also testifies to the fact that Advaitic ethics is not negative in character. The lives of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Ramathirtha, Ramanamaharshi and Gandhiji are excellent illustrations of Advaitic ethics. All these great men have proclaimed themselves as Advaitins. Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Ramanamaharshi are reported to have actually realized the Advaitic truth of the non-duality of spirit. Others were staunch believers in Advaita and considered it as the basis for all ethical activities. In fact very few men have struggled for the prosperity and amelioration of humanity as much as Gandhiji or Vivekananda. If Advaita really leads to passivity or a contemplative life how could all these great men derive inspiration from Advaita? It need not be held that these men were advocating a different type of Advaita or that they were advocating non-dualism that is different from that of Sankara. For example, John Meckenzie says that Ramakrishna's Advaita was a modified one by influence "coming from other directions", i.e., influenced by the Vaishnava teaching of love towards God.\(^{21}\) We may say that

\(^{21}\) The Hindu Ethics, p. 199.
Sri Ramakrishna was a living interpretation of Advaita Vedanta. If he stressed the element of devotion to God it is because Advaita allows a logical place for devotion. There is a misconception among most of the critics of Advaita that one cannot strictly adhere to Advaita and at the same time practise devotion to God. As far as we know even Sankara believed in the efficiency of personal devotion to Ishvara. Sri Ramakrishna was more a saint than a philosopher; he had the genuine advaitic experience. But when he became a realized soul, he did not condemn other systems of thought or religion. He considered Dwaita and Visistadvaita as complementary to Advaita. Once he said, "Sankara's non-dualistic explanation of Vedanta is true and so is the qualified non-dualistic interpretation of Ramanuja". He preached Advaita only to a selected few whom he considered fit to understand it; to others he preached either Advaita or Visistadvaita. After the Advaitic experience of Brahman, there was tremendous transformation in his outlook. He was no more a contemplative sage. He said to Vivekananda "enjoy Lord in all ways" which meant "both in contemplation and in action, so that he might translate the highest knowledge into the highest service of mankind".

Vivekananda, the greatest among modern Advaitins has also

22 Gospel of Ramakrishna p.710

laid great emphasis on active ethics when he said, "worship Śiva in the poor, the sick and the feeble".²⁴ Swami Ramathirtha another great Advaitin called Advaita Vedanta 'Practical Vedanta' or 'muscular vedanta'. And the statements like "Heart in Rāma and hand in action" etc., are the expressions of his attitude towards active ethics.

From the accounts given by Arther Osborne we know that Ramanamaharṣṭī had the experience of the identity of spirit. "What he taught was the ultimate doctrine of Non-duality or Advaita in which all other doctrines are finally absorbed."²⁶ "After realization he had participated in the activities of life and was much helpful for the spiritual sustenance of those who had gathered round him. We have also the example of Mahatma Gandhi whose life was full of action and who at the same time declared "I am an Advaitist and yet I can support Dvaitism".²⁷ The lives of these Advaitins are sufficient to show that there is nothing negative or passive in Advaitic ethics and that it encourages active ethics.

A word more about negative ethics is necessary here.

²⁴ Quoted by Romain Rolland, Ibid., p. 317.
Many of the ethical rules may have a negative form. This is not peculiar to Advaita alone; but is a common feature of all systems. Most of the ethical rules are in the form of prohibitions and are meant to resist our natural impulses or temptations which are unethical. That is why some of the ethical codes are negative in character. Speaking about the negative ethical rules of Kant, Dr. Oman once observed: "not only Kant's but all moral laws are, at bottom, prohibitions. This may be their limitations, but it is also their power."

World-Negation and Ethics

Of the various charges laid at the door of Advaitic ethics, the most plausible is the criticisms of Sankara's world-view and its disharmony with ethics as commonly understood. While referring to the ethical ideal of Advaita, the critics contend that it does not correspond to European spirit of "ethical world and life affirmation". According to Schweitzer all Indian systems are world-negating. The entire charge seems to hinge on a particular problem. Ethics can be derived only from a metaphysics whose world-view is world-affirmation, and it cannot be reconciled with a metaphysics whose world-view is world-life-negation. According to him there can be two kinds of world-views which he defines as one's "inner attitude towards being, his affirmation or negation of life".


29 Ibid., p. 2.
According to world-affirmation "man regards existence as he experiences it in himself and as it has developed in the world as something of value and accordingly strives to let it perfect in himself; whilst within his own sphere of influence he endeavours to preserve and further it." World-negation, on the other hand, is regarding existence as he experiences it in himself and as it is developed in the world as something meaningless and sorrowful and he resolves accordingly (a) to bring life to a stand still in himself by mortifying his will to live, and (b) to renounce all activity which aims at improvement of the conditions of life in this world.

Now, the contention is that if the world-view is to become sufficiently ethical, it must take the form of world-affirmation. "Ethics demands of man that he should interest himself in the world and in what goes on in it; and what is more, simply compels him to action. So if world-and-life negation really becomes concerned with ethics at all, it is driven to make such grand concessions to world-and-life-affirmation that it ceases to exist." All that one can expect from the ethics of world-negation is that man, "free from hatred etc., must seek true inner perfection and "should extend it by refraining from doing any harm to living things."

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31 Ibid., p.2.
32 Ibid., p. 8.
33 Ibid., p. 8.
Though the ethical world-view is world-affirmation, Schwitzert himself confesses that it is not the correct world-view and that "mysticism is the perfected form of world-view". The Advaitic world-view is ultimately mystical and metaphysical. Such mystical world-view is the correct world-view, for it is here that man becomes united with the infinite Being. But this mysticism should not contradict the requisites of ethics. The mystic-monistic thought cannot give meaning to ethics, for its world-view emerges as the world-view of world and life negation, whereas, he says that the mysticism of ethical origin which is dualistic can give rise to the idea of "self-devotion to the world in ethical activity".

Thus, according to him Advaita is unsatisfactory, for it has no ethical content. As a result of this, no ethical principle can be discovered in the supreme Being. The supreme being in Advaita is conceived as non-ethical. What "monism gives as its own world-view is rather too beggarly". What little it has is borrowed from the world-view of dualism. The history of Advaitic thought according to him, thus, was "trying the impossible work task of comprehending its mysticism of identity as ethical".

34 Ibid., p. 12.
36 Ibid., p. 262.
Sankara's world view is ultimately metaphysical and not one of ethical origin. The world-view which corresponds to reality and at the same time can give meaning to active ethics is indeed a problem. But there is no meaning in basing a whole system of ethics on a world-view which does not corresponds to reality. Sankara has made possible what Schweitzer thought to be impossible; that is, to propound a mystical world-view and at the same time give meaning to active ethics. The dualistic world view is true for all vyāvahāric purposes but ultimately metaphysically it is not true. It is true just as ethics itself is true. Ultimately, we have seen, that not only the dualistic world-view but even ethics itself which necessarily rests on duality also is not real. Nevertheless only through ethics can we reach the mysticism of identity. And ultimately it is for our own sake that we are moral. As Vivekananda says "our duty to others means helping others, doing good to the world. Why should we do good to the world? Apparently to help the world, but really to help ourselves. We should always try to help the world; that should be the highest motive in us; but if we consider well, we find that the world does not require our help at all. This world was not made that you or I should come and help it.......We cannot deny that there is much misery in it; to go out and help others is, therefore, the best thing we can do, although in the long run, we shall find that helping others is only helping ourselves".37

37 Complete works VII, I, 1962, p. 75.
When this attitude towards the world is adopted it should not be doubted that ethics may lose its force. The life of all great Advaitins including Sankara shows that it can be so.

The world is never considered by Sankara to be something to be fled from or denied. The world which is presented through the senses as real cannot be altogether denied. Until a higher principle is realized the world can never be just denied. It is the attachment to the world as an independent entity that is to be given up. But why does Sankara say that the attachment to the world should be given up? By attachment to the world which is a bundle of pluralities we are actually affirming duality. But the seeking of reality demands the affirmation of unity, or oneness, for Reality, the Brahman is one without a second. Moreover duality itself results from ignorance, so, if one wants to get rid of duality one must first get rid of the feeling of duality. And this can be effected by affirming oneness and by detachment from the world of duality. Due to attachment, man is diverted from Reality. The life of house holders (Gṛhausthāśrama) and karmayoga etc. are meant for those who have attachment to the world. Even the demand to get rid of Samsāra does not mean fleeing from the world, for Samsāra means the obstruction of Reality and the consequent miseries of life. By realizing the Self as the non-dual reality one automatically gets rid of samsāra.

The critics probably have the idea of jñānayoga or Sannyāsa in mind when they consider Advaita as world-negating.
They think that at this stage one has to cut all connections with the world and lead a contemplative life. But the study of Sankara's views on jñānayoga discloses that the criticism is the product of a confusion of the jñānayoga enjoined by the Śāstras with the world-shunning asceticism practised in India for centuries. Jñānayoga is meant only for those whose sole aim in life is Brahman-realization and it is characterised by discrimination and dispassion, viveka and vairāgya. These two belong to the sphere of moral and intellectual preperations necessary for the study of Vedanta popularly known as 'sādhanā catuṣṭaya sampatti' - the cultivation of the four-fold qualities. These very qualifications prescribed are sufficient to show that critics are only distorting facts when they lay the charge of immortality at the door of jñānayoga. That a jñānayogin is indifferent to ethics or morality may mean that he is not 'morally active'. In other words, they seem to contend that morality is possible only in activity. But this view is not tenable. There is no warrant to suppose that ethics is possible only in action. According to most of the ethical philosophers it deals with 'conduct' and not necessarily with action. Of course, action is the outward manifestation of such a conduct, but ethics is not identical with action. All Indian systems lay much stress up on personal conduct, for it is from this, that all active ethics flow. This is the secret why 'Sankara's system gives much importance to 'cittasūddhi' or purity of mind. Even if we accept that ethics is concerned with action, it presupposes a certain mental purity. If we want to love our
neighbourer in an active fashion and share in his sufferings, we must first of all, purge our minds of impurities such as selfishness and egoism. Selfishness and self-sacrifice cannot go hand in hand. Only Sankara seems to have understood this. He advises us to acquire the requisite purity of mind from which shall emerge all active ethics. Sankara's insistence on the acquisition of the moral qualities before one takes up Vedantic studies is worthy of mentioning. The importance he gives to these moral qualifications may be appreciated from the fact that among the interpreters of Brahma-sūtras only Sankara insists on 'Sādhanā catuṣṭaya sampatti'. Sankara declares that in the context of the moral qualifications one can even dispense with the multifarious duties of varṇas and āśramas elaborated in the Smṛtis. They constitute the first 'rung of the ladder' leading ultimately to Brahma-realisation. As V.P. Upadhyaya rightly remarks "it would be doing an injustice to the system if one ignores this great value which this system evidently assigns to ethical action". It may be even argued that the golden rule 'love your neighbour as thyself cannot be practised even in the smallest measure without some moral qualifications, without a certain degree of mental purity.

38. B.S.B. Introduction.

39. B.S.B. 1-1-1.

40. Lights on Vedanta, Varanasi, 1959, p. 133.
We have also seen that Sankara's conception of *sannyāsa* is to be distinguished from the one hither to practised in India. The word sannyāsa, it may be noted has very often been misunderstood and most of the critics do not seem to have understood the implications of sannyāsa as interpreted by Sankara. It is *eṣānātraya sannyāsa*; the renunciation of the three varieties of desires such as *vittaisanā* - desire for wealth, *āśāraisanā* - desire for wife and *lākaisanā* - desire for worldly recognition or fame. When *eṣānātraya* is given up one is not bound by the rules governing those who desire *eṣānātraya*. It is the non-performance of certain action that constitute this āśrama. Therefore, here one simply abandons various worldly desires and also activities and duties naturally performed by those who entertain such desires.

It is true as Gandhiji has pointed out that 'varna' became 'distorted' and 'āśrama' has altogether disappeared and what we find today is only a caricature of it. Many Hindu sannyāsins failed to live up to their ideal. They refused to help the poor and down-trodden in whose midst they found themselves. Like the original varna system the sannyāsa also became completely distorted. It became a means of livelihood and many people became actuated by the mere desire for a life of ease and irresponsibility.

\[41\text{Op.cit., p. 146.}\]
It is often said that the importance of ethics is affected by the famous dictum of Advaita's 'jnānadeva Kaivalyam'- i.e., mokṣa can be attained only by jñāna. Ethics, however, prepares the mind for knowledge, but it by itself does not effect redemption. Sankara's interpretation of the B.G. is said to be mainly to emphasise the primacy of jñāna over karma. He is of the view that even according to the B.G. mokṣa is attained only by jñāna. Schweitzer thus, complains that Sankara conceived "union with Being as a pure act of the spirit which has nothing to do with ethics". But the theory that mokṣa is attained only by jñāna follows immediately from the conception of mokṣa in Advaita. This conception is not peculiar to Advaita alone; it is a common feature of all monistic systems. Spinoza often speaks of man's ignorance of the causes of things which has led him to wish and desire. "More over moral conduct cannot contribute directly" says Deussen, "but indirectly to the attainment of the knowledge that brings emancipation. For the knowledge is not a becoming, Something which had no previous existence and might be brought about by appropriate means; but it is the perception of that which previously existed, existed indeed from all

42 SBG. Introduction.

43 ITD. p. 43.

eternity. " This is the secret of his reputation of sa mucciavāda-the theory that knowledge combines with action for attaining mokṣa.

Since jñāna is the direct means of mokṣa the jñānavyogi may be incessantly trying to attain jñāna and thus may become an introvert. But when this knowledge is acquired he may turn out to be a great extrovert. "A great Introvert" says Romain Rolland, "will know at the same time, how to be a great extrovert. Here the example of Vivekananda seems to me to be conclusive.

Interiorization has never led in principle to diminution of action. Arguments drawn from the supposed social passivity of mystic India are entirely erroneous. ... The physical and moral devitalization of India during several centuries is due to quite different factors of climate and social economy.

It is also not right to hold that the Advaitic ideal logically leads to inaction. The Advaitic ideal is the realization of one's own Self as the timeless actionless, Brahman. So it is often said that this ideal will logically lead to passivity. J.N. Farquhar, thus, writes, "the fundamental weakness of Indian moral theory is that it stands apart from God.... Brahman is conceived as the direct antithesis of karma, as free from

45
The Philosophy of the Upanisads, P. 362.

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Romain Rolland, The Prophets of New India-Vivekananda, P. 345.
all bonds, separate from all actions, so that he cannot be the ruler of Hindu moral system”. He attributes the decay of Hinduism to this fatal divorce between the conception of reality and ethics. "If we hold", declares the author, "that the invisible God behind all things takes no part in the activity of the phenomenal universe, then we can readily believe that the whole world is destitute of worth and substance".

Having conceived an actionless Brahman as the highest ideal, it is really difficult to relate it to the world of activity. This problem has been solved by Sankara by accepting the Saguna Brahman which is the very same Absolute looked at from the vyāvahārika level. This Sagunabrahman is the ruler of Advaitic moral system. But on the plane of self-realization both Saguna Brahman and ethics may prove superfluous. Ethics has validity and relevance on the empirical plane alone. We may say that the Advaitic ideal logically leads, not to the giving up of actions as such but to the giving up of all egoistic actions. Karmayoga as we have shown is a process of becoming unegoistic through action. And this utter selflessness should be attained through action. Jñānayoga is perfection through Karmayoga; here also what is ruled out is egoistic action and not actions as such. Only, the aspirant after having attained a certain freedom

46 The Crown of Hinduism, P. 152.
47 Ibid, P. 215,
48 SBG. IV-18.
in action looks for a still higher ideal viz. mokṣa.

Both pravṛtti and nivṛtti together, constitute the whole course of Advaitic ethics. One is characterised by action while the other is characterised by renunciation. But in fact both these methods have an element of renunciation in them. Karmayoga is a method of renouncing the fruits of action or in other words, renouncing selfishness. We have explained the types of actions to be performed both in the case of pravṛtti and nivṛtti and how such action logically leads to the attainment of Brahmajñāna.

The Doctrine of identity and ethics.

The doctrine of non-duality of spirit in Advaita has been viewed by critics in two ways. One of them considers identity as a sine-qua-non of ethics. The other regards it as cutting at the very root of religion and ethics. Thus, Paul Deussen styles the tattvamasi as the most epoch-making word in Indian Philosophy. For him it is the supreme moral maxim. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself is the requirement of the Bible. But on what grounds does this demand to be based since feeling is in myself alone and not in another? "Because", the Veda here adds, in explanation" thy neighbour is in truth thy very self and what separates you from him is mere illusion.

49 The Philosophy of Upanisads, P. 49.
He believed that only in the light of the advaitic view of identity can the lightest ethical principle become intelligible. Similarly Arthur Schopenhauer bases his own ethics on this idea of identity when he says "the readers of my ethics know that with me the ultimate foundation of morality is the truth which in the Vedas and Vedanta receives its expression in the established formula tattvamasi which is spoken with reference to every living being".

But there are others who have considered the doctrine of identity as antagonistic to religion and ethics. M.M. Williams, for example, had long ago said that if everything is Brahman why should any effort be made for the advancement of self or for the good of others". A.C. Banquet says about this doctrine "the effect of such a doctrine on conduct must be obvious. It includes a complete detachment from the affairs of this life. There is no such thing as social service". Schweitzer similarly criticises the metaphysical interpretation of tattvamasi in the following words. "On the ground of the identity of 'I' and 'thou' as it follows from the doctrine of the

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50 Essay on Human nature, P. 23.
51 Comparative Religion, P. 127. 52 Hinduism, P. 206.
Brahman, the Upaniṣads explain all love as self-love. That is to say, because the same Brahman now dwells in others as in ourselves, that which seems to us to be love for others is merely self-love of Brahman. He further says that though it was easy to interpret 'tattvamasi' in an ethical way Sankara neglected to do it, and that by reason of this identity one should have love towards others is not demanded by him.

All these critics are of the view that if tattvamasi is interpreted metaphysically there cannot be any place for ethics, for ethics always pre-supposes plurality or ultimate difference of one individual from others. This may be more closely examined.

The idea of personality as the central concept in dualistic systems seems to lie at the root of all these criticisms. They take the personality or ego of the individual and its basic difference from those of others as a basic requisite for ethics. Here it may be asked: is it not self-negation that is at the root of ethics rather than self-affirmation?

From experience it is found that self-negation is at the root of all ethics. For example, when a man sacrifices himself for the sake of others what is involved is self-negation and not self-affirmation. There is no logic to show that even this is only apparent self-negation and that in reality it is the "propoundest form of life affirmation."

53 Albert Schweitzer, op.cit., p.7.
This Western concept of the root of ethics as 'personality affirmation' is in sharp contrast with Sankara's concept. For the latter, so long as the illusion of personality remains, one cannot be truly ethical. When the West considers essential difference as the root of ethics Sankara finds it incompatible with genuine ethics. For him identity is the root of ethics i.e., to identify oneself with others and thus negate one's own individuality. But the significant question is whether this identity is affirmed in action or in mere conceptual thought. The doctrine of tattvamasi is not something to be confined to conceptual thought; it must be manifested in corresponding action. Only when it is affirmed in every activity of man, can one claim to grasp it well. So long as one clings to one's individuality, one is unethical. Even if he engages in active ethics he cannot be wholly successful, his ethics will be incomplete. When he slowly and steadily negates his self by identifying himself actively with others only then can he be really ethical. This is the idea contained in the mahāvākya tattvamasi which is the alpha and omega of Advaitic ethics. We know that difference between one individual and another exists empirically. But this bare difference cannot, in any way, be imagined as an incentive for active love. Nor is there any rule that wherever there is difference there is ethics. Ethics of active love, in fact develops when one slowly gives up the idea of ultimate difference and tries
to establish a relationship with others, a relationship which is in the end one of identity. It is the basis concept of Advaitic ethics. To explain further, there is difference between a father and a son. But no serious man will take this difference as the basis of their love. The father loves his son because he feels that he is in 'his son'. All people are sons or daughters of some father or other. But a man normally loves only 'his son' for, he partially identifies himself with 'his son' which Sankara refers to as adhyāsa. If one can love others also just as he loves his son it only testifies to the fact that one can identify oneself with all living beings. And true ethics is possible only at this stage of identification. It is only the limited love that Sankara designates as self-love and not love as such.

According to Sankara, for active ethics as expressed in qualities like love sympathy, etc., we require a sense of 'oneness' or even of 'identity' with others. "This expression of oneness", says Vivekananda, "is what we call love and sympathy and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality". When we actively extend our sympathy to our fellow-men, we negate our narrow self; we find our self united or identified with the self of others. But this identity, in turn, presupposes 'some kind of difference'. But this difference need

not be an absolute or ultimate one as Schweitzer contends. He says "True ethics presume absolute difference of one's own ego and those of others and accentuate it. The difference however, is not a plain matter of course, but an enigma." For ethics, difference is only an occasion; if it were absolute ethics would have been impossible. So here the only question that can be asked is: of these two, i.e., difference and identity which is, in the deepest sense, real? The difference is not so essential as identity as far as the question of ethics is concerned. That is when ever ethics is seriously taken the difference slowly but surely disappears. Therefore difference cannot be equally real as identity. That is why Sankara accepts identity as real and difference as only an appearance.

The golden rule 'love your neighbour as thy self' can be justified and explained only in the light of 'tattvamasi'. As Vivekananda puts it: "though all religions have taught ethical precepts such as 'do not kill' 'do not injure' 'love your neighbour as yourself' etc., yet none of these has given the reason. Why should I not injure my neighbour? To this question there was no satisfactory or conclusive answer forthcoming, until it was evolved by the metaphysical speculations of the Hindus who could not rest satisfied with mere dogmas.

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So the Hindus say that this Atman is absolute and all-pervading, therefore infinite. Therefore by injuring his neighbour the individual actually injures himself. This is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes. 

"And all that we call ethics and morality and doing good to others is also but the manifestation of this oneness. This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality." The 'tattvamasi', thus is not merely an ethical precept but also a metaphysical truth which has to be translated into action. "Thou art one with this universal Being, and as such every soul that exists is your soul, and every body that exists is your body; and in hurting any one you hurt yourself, in loving any one you love yourself." If there is basic difference, ultimately, it is difficult to give a logical place for ethical actions involving self-sacrifice and self-negation. Schweitzer often says that Sankara "no where makes the demand which is such a matter of course to Christianity that love to God shall be actively realized in love to man. In fact 'sarvabhūtaḥ kīte ratih', is demanded of one who wants to realize the truth of Advaita and the

56 Complete works Vol.I, 1962, p. 335
57 Ibid., p.389
58 Ibid., pp.389, 90.
reason adduced for it is contained, in the famous mahāvākya 'tattvamasi'. V.S. Iyer explains, "The effort at self-sacrifice self-lessness or self-restraint or at renouncing worldly gains would not be thought of and would not be made, nor justified if the 'ego' and the world were real.........
If one seeks to identify oneself with all by making another's sorrows and joys one's own, by widening the circle step by step, by expanding his being till the idea of the duality of the ego and the 'non-ego' disappears, one is said to do what is right. Do unto the world as though all the world was your own self is the highest Advaitic doctrine of ethics taught by Sankara. In fact it is the course, recommended by him for practice by every one who wishes to realize the highest truth or reality".  

ETHICS AND THE CONCEPT OF PROGRESS

In a system of ethics that is mokṣa - oriented we come across a certain problem. As in the case of empirical ethics, the ethics of such systems cannot be reduced to a programme of activities mainly concerned with the welfare or progress of humanity. That is, ultimately, it is not the well-being of society that is aimed at, but, rather, the salvation of man. It is true that here ethics has an important place in that mokṣa or realization can be ultimately achieved only

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Tattvajñāna, p.332
through ethics. All other individuals, the society and the world, are only means. The betterment of society is not the main aim in itself, whereas what the world needs today is happiness and peace through the overall development of the different aspects of human culture. In this context, we cannot but connect ethics with the so-called idea of progress of the world. It is not enough to show that Sankara's ethics logically leads to the realization of the Self and thus brings to man timeless happiness and contentment. What is its relevance to the world at large? How far can it be considered as a remedy for the ills of the world and how is it helpful to the well being of mankind as a whole? Such problems as these have to be discussed to find out the relevance of Sankara's ethics to the modern world.

The progress the world has reached through the advancement of science and technology cannot be denied. And this progress has definitely done much for the improvement of the conditions of life in this world. But now a days thoughtful men have started entertaining serious doubts regarding the conception of progress itself. This concept which arose in the 19th century had been very much influenced by Darwin's evolutionary theory and French scholars like, Condorcet even believed that science would enable man to live more happily.61

Progress, thus is in some way related to happiness. But how is this happiness attained? Happiness, at its lowest level must be achieved by finding a solution to the basic needs of man like food, clothing, shelter, etc. The problem of poverty must be solved. It is not right to tell the hungry man to seek the bliss of lasting value and thus divert him from his basic needs. So progress, if it has anything to do with the well-being of society should mean giving the minimum requirements of man as he is in this time-bound world.

But the attainment of material happiness to a certain extent, has not been ruled out by Sankara. What is warned against is its being sought as an end in itself. This is implied in the conception of *purusārthas* where provision is made for seeking artha and kāma. Critics often say that Sankara does not give any place for natural values being always pre-occupied with spiritual values. For example, W.F. Goodwins, has pointed out two defects in Sankara's conception of spiritual values. 62 First is that according to Sankara's philosophy, there is no choice between, 'natural values'. The only moral question is a choice among intrinsically worthless means. Any hierarchy of empirical values is a hierarchy worked out on the basis of the criteria of instrumentality.

And he further says that when moksa is accepted as a premise it is not possible to give any relative importance or values to the things. Secondly it is said that Advaita does not make any distinction between pain and pleasure and that they are considered by Sankara on an equal footing. That is, there is no value distinction between pain and pleasure. But all this is based on perverse misunderstanding of the Advaitic notion of values. Sankara never regarded sukha and duhkha on an equal footing. He is of the view that the world of samsāra is more of the nature of pain and misery than of happiness. The happiness in the world can be sought; it has empirical value. But their pursuit does not bring lasting happiness and satisfaction. When material pleasures do not give ultimate satisfaction, man strives for lasting happiness. And this pursuit will continue until he realizes that his own Self is the abode of happiness and that it is not something to be sought outside. This bliss of the self (svarūpānanda) is thus the highest value and the worldly pleasures have only lesser value. That is why B.G. itself divides pleasure or happiness into three classes, viz., sāttvic, rājasic and tāmasic. Sankara in one context even says that the ordinary pleasure of the world is only a particle of Brahmānanda. But

63. BG XVIII - 37, 38, 39.

64. T.U.B. II - 7.
both worldly pain and pleasure have a common basis i.e., avidyā. Avidyā is as much the cause of pain as of pleasure. when realization comes it is not only the empirical pain that is removed but even the empirical pleasure for the mokṣānanda is infinitely and qualitatively greater than the ordinary pleasure which arises from sense-contact. Moreover, if ordinary pleasure had no value, Sankara’s insistence on 'Sarvabhūtahiteratā' would be meaningless.

The seeking of worldly propserities, (abhyudaya) such for example, as artha and kāma, for their own sake is not favoured by Advaita. Their pursuit must be always subservient to the seeking of perfection. This view of Sankara is fundamentally based on the idea that lasting happiness cannot be attained by the pursuit of worldly pleasure. Thus he does not believe in the claim of progress that one day humanity will reach the zenith of happiness. That is, whatever we do, we cannot be perfectly happy in this world. Therefore also Advaita does not attach ultimate significance to human history, Samāsara itself is a cyclic process. There have been rise and fall in human history, not because as S.K. Maitra maintains, the world is a 'vivarta' - false appearance of the Absolute,
but because it is the history of the rise and fall of human civilization. Even while the world is accepted as an appearance, with in its own sphere it has undeniable reality. What is denied is lasting happiness, peace, and contentment within this world. F.H. Bradley has examined whether metaphysics can really assign any meaning to progress. He says that on the whole there is no progress in the world. "There is of course, progress in the world," Says the author, "And there is also retrogression; but we cannot think that the whole either moves on or backwards.....These with their tale of progress or decline, are constructions starting from and based on some one given piece of finitude. They are but partial aspects in the region of temporal appearance. Their truth and reality may vary much in extent and in importance, but in the end it can never be more than relative".

M.K. Venkitarama Iyer has rightly distinguished between perfection and progress as relating to spirit and matter respectively. "Progress is in the realm of matter and perfection is in the realm of spirit." Again "Perfection comes as a sudden enlightenment and not as the crowning phase of a long period of discipline and preparation.

\[66\] Appearance and Reality, P. 442.
\[67\] Advaita Vedanta, P. 187.
\[68\] Ibid, 187.
Progress is in time but perfection is out of time. Sankara is preoccupied with the perfection of man as a spirit and not with secular progress which is unsteady. As Grace E. Cairns observes, "His concern is with the aim of all life in the world progress, the spiritual progress of individuals until they attain mokṣa. But the world of samsāra is beginningless and endless; another phenomenal individual will take the same role, that is, the same, 'name and form' as the released one.

Though progress and happiness cannot be ultimately attained, still, it is our duty to serve others in their effort to attain worldly pleasure. For, that is the only way we can reach perfection. Vivekananda's explanation in this context may make the matter clear. "This world is neither good nor evil; each man manufactures a world for himself----------. Life is good and evil according to the state of mind in which we look at it, it is neither by itself". Again he says, "Let us give up all this foolish talk of doing good to the world. It is not waiting for your or my help; yet we must work and constantly do good, because it is a blessing to ourselves. That is the only way we can become perfect."

69 Ibid., 187, 88.
72 Ibid., P. 77.
This does not mean that we should not strive for progress. Sankara himself says that the wise man, understanding there is not an iota of happiness in samsāra, must withdraw his senses from the mirage of sense objects and that only ignorant people are found to be immersed in sensual pleasures. Such statements do not totally deny pursuit of material happiness. As a means to spiritual perfection their pursuit may be intelligible but as an end it is forbidden. By this wise effort to make the world progress one can purify one's mind and become spiritually perfect. In serving the world, again, what has to be worked out is the same doctrine of 'tattvamasi' which requires one to treat every living being as oneself.

Even the idea of one-world can be materialized only by accepting the essential unity of spirit. In the empirical level differences always remain and must remain. Inequality is the very basis of creation. So on the material plane oneness can never be achieved. It can be achieved only by recognising the spirit behind all these dualities—the spirit which Advaitins declare as non-dual. Thus Sankara's theory of the non-duality of spirit alone can lay foundation for the idea of one-world.

73 S.B.G. IV-22.
The Society as Conceived by Sankara.

The society in which the individuals strive for their own spiritual uplift and for the welfare others, is conceived by Sankara according to the theory of Varnāśramas dharma. The Varnāśramadharma, we have seen, existed in ancient India in accordance with the division of labour. Its spirit is what is called 'my station and its duties.' It gives due place to both individual and social ethics. Thus according to Sankara, society will consist of four varṇas or divisions i.e., Brahmans, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras. He never conceived that all the members of the society are of equal capacity in aspiring for the truth. So even while accepting the Varnāśramadharmsas such, he had to make a further division of people into two., i.e., those who are fit only to follow Karmayoga and others who are fit to enter the path of jñānayoga. The Śūdras, the fourth of the four varṇas, are prohibited by Sankara from taking up jñānayoga. They are declared as unfit even to hear Vedanta (S'ravana).

This fact throws some light on Sankara's attitude towards Śūdras. In the context of discussing a Śūdra's eligibility, Sankara emphatically declares that he is not
eligible for the study of Vedanta. He also quotes a number of authorities in support of this: "If a Śūdra the hears the Vedas his ears will be filled with molten lead. Even the Vedic study should not be conducted near a Śūdra. "If he utters Veda, his tongue must be cut; if he understands it his body must be cut" etc. Here it is not that Sankara explains this simply because he had to comment up on this particular aphorism of Bādarāyana, for he cites all the possibility of Śūdra's eligibility as pūrvanaksa. The pūrvanaksa in this context centres round the Chāṇḍogopaniṣad where Jānāsruti who approaches Raikva for Vedantic studies is addressed by the latter as Śūdra. Here Sankara says that the word Śūdra cannot be interpreted as jātisūdra (Śūdra-caste). He seems to have the pre-conception that Śūdras are not eligible for Brahmavidvā. Śūdras have no eligibility even when they have need and competence. (Arthitya and sāmarthya)

The main reasons Sankara adduces for barring Śūdra from the study of Vedanta are two: (1) because he has no right for the study of the Vedas, (2) he has no right of Upanayana which is done exclusively for the first three

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74 B.S. B I-3-34
75 B.S. B. I-3-34
76 Cha. up. IV-1-3
77 B.S. B. I-3-34
78 na śūdrasyadhikāraḥ vedādhyayānābhavat (Ibid)
varnas. The Chāndogypopanisāda really implies that even Śūdras can learn Vedanta. But the word Śūdra is interpreted by Sankara in a peculiar way which is nothing but a twist of the word Śūdra. It is actually uncalled for in that context. 79 Sankara's attitude towards Śūdras again becomes clear in another passage where Gautama initiates Jābāla into spiritual knowledge, thought his parentage and caste are unknown. 80 Jābāla frankly confessed the truth of his parenthood and this made Gautama identify him with a monk-Śūdra. Gautama then declares that since he spoke the truth, he cannot be Śūdra - a fact which shows the general attitude of Aryans towards Śūdras. It also reveals the pre-supposition of the Brahmins that Śūdras are prone to tell lies and the fact that they are always kept aloof without any right for Brahmanvidyā. There is, however, no doubt, that Śūdras in those times approached them with a genuine longing for spiritual knowledge, for Sankara himself says that even when there is the request, Vedantic knowledge should not be imparted to them because they have no eligibility. 82 Moreover, there were no opportunities given to Śūdras to prove their eligibility in this; they were prohibited on the basis of their birth. This view of Sankara may appear to be quite repugnant to the modern mind. But this attitude was quite natural during his time and we may not judge Sankara on the basis of this which has become

79. The impropriety of this interpretation and Sankara's attitude towards Sudras were first criticised in 1913 by Cattampi Swamigal. He has established that Sudras are also eligible for Vedic studies (vide 'Pracīnamalāyālam, Vol.I., National book Stall, Kottayam, 1962, pp.141 - 152).
82. Yatsatyatva vacmema śūdratvābhāve nirdhārtite jābālām gautamam upanetum anusāsātum ca pravavrte (BSB I -3-37)
glaring only in the modern world. It is not this view that is criticised, but the fact that it is supported and justified by one who taught Advaita which preached the metaphysical non-difference of all living beings.\(^\text{33}\)

In accordance with the fundamental principles of Advaita, Sankara, instead could have used his intelligence and logic to refute the tradition of barring Sudras from Vedic studies. He could have established that any one equipped with the requisite qualifications (sādhana catuṣṭaya sampatti) is eligible for Vedantic studies. P.V. Kane is of the view that it is because of the practice current in the time of the Vedāntasūtras that the Sudra is not entitled to study of the Veda.\(^\text{34}\) But this is not a sufficient reason, for Sankara has to refute all other systems prevalent in his time to establish Advaita. The same attitude could have been adopted by him in breaking the illiberal tradition. The fact that he did not break it is unintelligible save on the assumption that being a product of Brahmanism, he tended to support all that was practised by Brahmans during his time. "In religion there is no caste; caste is simply a social institution" declared Vivekananda. But Sankara it seems accepted caste

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82. "Yattadarthitvam na tadasaṭi śamarthye adhiṃarakaraṇam bhavati" (B.S.B. I -3-34).

83. Sarvabhutesu ca ātmānam nirvīṣeṣam yastvaṇupaśyati sa tatha tasmādeva darsanāt na vijugupsate vijugupṣam ghrnām na karoti" (K.U.B. IV - 6.)


as a religious institution. So Vivekananda one of the stalwart upholders of Advaita had to say: "Sankara with his great intellect, I am afraid, has not as great a heart. Ramanuja's heart was greater. He felt for the down-trodden, he sympathised with them..........he opened the door to the highest spiritual worship from the Brahmin to Pariah."

This attitude of Sankara was also directed towards women. In the Bhagavad Gita women and Sudras are called Sinners, and are classified in one category. So it is doubtful whether Sankara ever considered women as eligible for Brahmavidya. Originally women also had the privilege of upanayana, Vedic studies etc., but afterwards they were deprived of this privilege. Thus Sankara did not break the tradition which had been firmly rooted in his time.

Relevance of Sankara's Ethics to the Modern World.

Next, we may consider the relevance of Sankara's ethics to the modern world. The modern world, as we know, is now confronted with a number of problems. The hope that through scientific progress all these problems will be solved has been shattered. As Arther Osborne has remarked, "the concept was

86. Ibid., Vol.III, 1964, pp. 265, 266
87. SBG. IX - 32
based mainly on pride in the achievements of physical science and once this was found to be a Frankenstein, threatening its creator with destruction, the glamour left it. There is the problem of poverty at the root to be solved. Want of understanding and faith, degradation of human values, absence of peace and contentment, absence of faith in spiritual values are all problems confronting the world today. Human endeavour at all stages of history has been directed towards the solution of such problems. But it has not till now succeeded in achieving this.

The Advaitic scheme of ethics when worked out in practice can help the world to achieve universal peace, contentment and happiness. It can be achieved by following the principle of tattvamasi. It may be noted that two great leaders of modern India i.e., Vivekananda and Gandhiji who declared themselves as Advaitins could suggest many ways to remedy the ills of the world. Gandhiji's deep love for humanity, his singular dedication to social service, his self-sacrificing labour for the betterment of India's material conditions - all he defended by Advaitic metaphysics. Similarly all that Vivekananda preached and practised, he based on the basic doctrine of Sankara. How social work and allied activities for the welfare of society can be defended by Sankara's metaphysics is well-explained by them. What these two great servants of humanity interpreted of Advaita to the

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modern world, is also found, in all Advaitic mystics. All
Advaitic mystics are seen to have developed the capacity for
identifying themselves with others and thus sharing their
sorrows and happiness. Several instances in Sri Ramakrishna's
life testify to this fact. He is said to have prayed to the
Goddess "Oh Mother, let me remain in contact with men. Do not
make me a dried up ascetic". Once he "howled with pain when
he saw two boat men quarrelling angrily. He came to identify
himself with the sorrows of the whole world however impure and
murderous they might be". Once he fed a cat with the food that
was to be offered to the Goddess Kāli and about this he himself
described. "The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kāli temple
that it was she who had become everything... I saw a wicked
man in front of the Kāli temple, but in him also I saw the
power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat
with the food that was to be offered to the divine mother".
He warned against the philanthropy of people who have selfish-
ness in them. "He saw in most acts of Philanthropy nothing
but egotism, vanity, a desire for glory, a barren excitement
to kill the boredom of life, or an attempt to soothe a guilty
conscience. True charity, he thought is the result of the love
of God, service to man in a spirit of worship". "It is God

39. Romain Rolland, Prophets of New India, Cassel & Co.,
90. Ibid., p. 52.
91. Swami Nikhilananda, "Ramakrishna" Prophet of New India", London,
1951, p.28.
92. Ibid p. 69
alone that he serves" says Sri Ramakrishna, "God who dwells in all beings, and when he serves God, he is really doing good to himself and not to others. If a man, thus, serves God through all beings, not through men alone, but through animals and other living beings as well; if he does not seek name and fame or heaven after death, if he does not seek any return from those he serves; if he can carry on his work in this spirit, then he performs truly selfless work, work without attachment."  

We have mentioned that Gandhian ethics indeed has its basis in Advaita. His new definition and interpretation of ethics on the basis of the non-dualistic theory of spirit will clearly bring out Sankara's stand with regard to ethics. Gandhiji frankly declares, "I am an Advaitist and yet I can support Dwaitism. "The soul is omni-present, why should she care to be confined within the cage-like body and do evil and even kill, for the sake of that cage? We, thus, arrive at the ideal of total renunciation, and learn to use the body for the purposes of service, so long as it exists, so much so that service and not bread becomes with us the staff of life. We eat and drink and sleep and wake for service alone. Such an attitude of mind brings us real happiness and the beatific vision in the fullness of time." Gandhiji realized that "identification with everything that lives is impossible without self-purification".

93. Ibid., p.239
Self-purification is self-sacrifice and the latter he identified with the principle of ahimsā. On the basis of this he gave a new interpretation to morality. "Morality consists in doing what we ought to do". But what are those acts we ought to do? "If we take out the essence of all moral laws" says Gandhiji, "we shall find that the attempt to do good to mankind is the highest morality. If we open the treasure-house of morality with this key, we shall find in it all the other principles".\(^97\) This doing good to others cannot be practised without renunciation. Thus, Gandhiji also considered renunciation which for Sankara is the root of both pravr̥tti and nivr̥tti, the ground of all ethics. And Gandhiji also warns us: "But renunciation here does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. The spirit of renunciation should rule all the activities of life".\(^98\) He advises us not only to do good but to place our resources at the disposal of humanity. If such an attitude is developed in man we can imagine the great transformation that will take place in society.

Why did Vivekananda think that the Advaitic ideal can help India grow as a nation? The potentialities of Sankara's ethics become clear in the practical Vedanta of Vivekananda. Though Sankara himself did not elaborate this, Vivekananda has realised that Advaitic ethics is capable of being interpreted like that. "What our country now wants" says Vivekananda, "are

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\(^97\) Ibid, Vol.IV.pp.9, 10.
\(^98\) Ibid, Vol.IV.pp.253-
muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which...will accomplish their purpose in any fashion even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face. That is what we want. And that can only be created, established and strengthened by understanding and realizing the ideal of the Advaita, that ideal of the oneness of all". He preached love and sameness - based on the teaching of Sankara. He has found the root of ethics in utter unselfishness. "Ethics always says 'Not I but thou'. Its motto is 'Not self but non-self you have to put yourself last, and others before you. The senses say 'myself first, ethics says', I must hold myself last. Thus all codes of ethics are based upon this renunciation; destruction, not construc-

Thus all codes of ethics are based upon this renunciation; destruction, not construc-


101. Ibid., p. 64.
we see a man doing good work, helping others, it means that he cannot be confined within the limited circle of 'me' and 'mine'. There is no limit to this getting out of selfishness. All the great systems of ethics preach absolute unselfishness as the goal".

According to Vivekananda all miseries come only through attachment which Sankara designates as samsāra. The world cannot be made perfect. There are pain and pleasure, rich and poor, through out history. And there were also efforts to alleviate miseries through out. The millennium cannot be reached on earth. "True equality has never been and never can be on earth........This impossible kind of equality implies total death". Again he holds, "We cannot add happiness to this world; similarly we cannot add pain to it either. The sum total of the energies of pleasure and pain displayed here on earth will be the same through out........because to remain so is its very nature". So helping or serving the world is a 'must', for it is ultimately for our own salvation that we serve the world.

Sankara's attitude towards the betterment of the world is neither complete world-negation nor world-affirmation. His attitude seems to suggest 'change yourself before changing the world'; or 'through changing the world, change yourself'. That is, changing the world by working for its welfare can be made a way to change oneself. Thus, his attitude is not one-

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103. Ibid, p.113.
104. Ibid, p.112
sided. That is, he does not advocate the mere changing of the material world as the materialists would do. Nor does he prescribe a complete withdrawal from the world of empirical reality with a view to seeking one's own salvation. His course of morality includes both; i.e., both changing oneself and the world, the former being the end and the latter being the means. The words 'abhyudaya' (worldly property) and 'nissreyasa' (mokṣa) are indicative of this attitude. Ethics includes both these aspects of human life. It is to include both these functions of ethics that Sankara defined ethics or dharma as "that which is the cause of 'abhyudaya' and 'nissreyasa' of all living things". Sankara's intention was not to advise every one to seek one's own salvation. The effort to achieve basic needs of man is taken for granted. As Leslie Stephen writes: "It is easy to brow-beat a poor man, who wants bread and cheese for himself and his family, by calling his demands materialistic and advising him to turn his mind to the future state where he will have the best of Dives". The declaration that even abhyudaya is a result of ethical conduct shows how Sankara is interested in the material well-being of the individual and society as well as their spiritual growth.

Sankara, thus, not only has classified ethics into pravṛtti and nivṛtti, but also explained it on the basis of his own metaphysics of non-dualism. In doing so he has overlooked no aspects of ethics, such as those of individual and society. He may thus

105.

be considered as one who has inaugurated" the age of a rationalistic spiritualistic humanism". He was indeed a man of vision, though he cannot be styled as "a social idealist on the grand scale" as was done by S. Radhakrishnan. Though he has thus expounded a rational foundation for ethics in Advaita, gradually its significance began to be lost sight of. The contribution which Sankara himself made to the elucidation of dharma was not fully availed of by his followers. Instead, his great intellectual attainments, and his skill in refuting all the rival systems, etc. were greatly praised. As a consequence of this, his greatest contribution is said to be his non-dualistic philosophy. It may be noted here that even the host of Advaitins that followed Sankara also have failed to high light his importance as a moralist; they did not have much to say about pravrtti, nivrtti, or, sarvabhūtahātiratih etc. On the other hand most of these commentators have written much about certain philosophical problems like the locus of avidya, and adhyāsa. Not only in the later Advaitic literature, but even on the practical side, Sankara's ethics was never followed by people. His ethics based on the universality and identity of spirit was never put into practice even by Sankara's own followers. Even in the four


107. Art. 'A Grand social idealist' by S. Radhakrishnan, Ibid., p.3.
Matha of Sankaracakayas his successors ignored the universality of his ethical teachings and practised many customs which were antagonistic to the spirit of Advaita. The various Sankaravijayas which were written later are full of mācāras and contained all kinds of rules and regulations which Advaitic ethics would not tolerate. Without understanding the spirit of Sankara, his followers in the Matha still practised untouchability and other caste rules, which has, of course, hindered India's progress throughout her long history.