CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sankara, the great architect of Advaita Vedanta is undoubtedly the greatest among Hindu philosophers whose importance in the sphere of ethics has been most grievously overlooked. The writers on Sankara, both in the East and in the West, being too much pre-occupied with his metaphysics have given too little importance to the system of ethics that lies embodied in his Gitabhasya as well as in his other works.¹ The importance of Bhagavad Gita itself in the field of Hindu ethics cannot be overstated; it is one of the prasthānatrayas, the other two being the Upaniṣads and the Brahmasūtras. In fact, no study on Sankara’s ethics is possible without a reference to his exposition of the triple texts. When the Upaniṣads and the Brahmasūtras mainly deal with philosophical problems, Bhagavad Gita devotes itself chiefly to the elucidation of ethical problems; it is the most original and profound work on the philosophy

¹The Gitabhasya is sometimes excluded from the 'definitely known' works of Sankara. But so far, no theory has conclusively disproved his authorship. It might also be considered as a genuine work of Sankara (See K. Kunjunni Raja 'On the date of Sankarācārya and the Allied Problems' Brahmavidyā Vol. XXIV, Adyar, 1960, p.128). The present thesis is based mainly on his interpretation of the prasthānatraya.
of morals in Hinduism. It is true that in ancient times a scholar was recognised only by commentary on the prastānattraya; but it was not the only motif of Sankara; his interest in commenting upon the Gita was not academic. His main task was to show how Hindu ethics was in perfect consonance with the Advaitic metaphysics. One has only to go through his introduction to the Gita to understand the importance he attaches to ethics. His declaration, in this context, that the purport of Bhagavad Gita is ethics (dharma) and that his aim was to elucidate it, shows that he may be considered foremost among ancient ethicists as well as ancient philosophers. The question of ethics in Sankara and its relevance to his metaphysics, thus, can be properly evaluated only by a combined study of his commentaries on the Upanisads, the Brahma-sūtras and the Bhagavad Gita.

A study of Sankara's ethics based on his exposition of the Gita and its relation to the metaphysical thoughts of the Upanisads has not been taken up for a special study. Consequently, Advaita has been often misrepresented and its ethical implications grossly misunderstood down to the present century.

2 On account of the unique ethical character of the Gita J.N. Farquhar calls it 'the laymen's Upanisad's (The Crown of Hinduism Humphry Melford, 1943, p. 371)
In the land of its own origin Advaita was an object of attack even from the days of Bhaskara and in our own century it has been assailed by eminent Indians like B.C. Tilak and Aurobindo.

In the West, however, opinion for and against Advaita was formed seriously from the nineteenth century - a century which was marked by a comparative study in literature, religion and philosophy. The objections against Advaita are many, and one can indeed feel a certain sympathy with some of them. As a matter of fact, the later two schools of Vedanta connected with Ramanuja and Madhva rose as reactions against Advaita, which, they thought, rendered religious and ethical values meaningless. That Advaita cuts at the very root of religion and ethics is not a new criticism; it had started even from the time of Ramanuja and what the critics did and continue to do in the present day is nothing but presenting the charge in a modern garb. Especially in our century with the tremendous advancement of science, religions have ceased to become merely dogmatic; they have now begun to place more emphasis on the modern ideas of social service and philanthropy. With the emergence of these modern ideas a philosophy like that of Advaita with its maya theory and

3 Dasgupta places him between the middle of the 8th century and the middle of the 10th century A.D. (A History of Indian Philosophy Vol. III, p.3) K. Kunjunni Raja makes him a younger contemporary of Sankara (loc. cit. p. 141).
its insistence on nivṛtti and individual salvation may present quite a few problems. These doctrines are often alleged to be obstacles to India's social uplift. India's practical failure, the fact that she did not devote herself to the uplift of the society, her suffering population etc., have been attributed to the Advaita philosophy. Indeed, this opinion calls for critical examination.

Broadly speaking such objections against Sankara's system may take two forms. They may be directed against his metaphysics i.e., against the concept of the Absolute, the theory of māyā etc. They also may be directed against his ethics, i.e., against the idea of pravṛtti, nivṛtti and Jīvanmukti. Such charges levelled against Advaitic metaphysics or Advaitic ethics are ultimately found to be based on religious and ethical considerations. That is, the critics thought that Advaita either did not give any place for ethics or considered it as complementary to its metaphysics. Among these Western critics mention may be made of J.N. Farquhar, Albert Schweitzer and John Mckenzie for the reason that their writings reflect the general Western-view of Advaita.

The general western view seems to be that Advaitins were not pre-occupied with ethics and that they were only concerned with philosophical speculations. Sankara, it is true, does not build up an ethics based on his own system of philosophy as a modern philosopher would do. That he gives only a complementary place for ethics in his scheme of mokṣa and that even there, he failed to emphasise its need even as a means are the two charges which are frequently made even by the sympathetic writers on Sankara. But why are such charges made? Is it because Sankara's system has no solid basis for ethics? Or is it because of the fundamental difference in the East-West conceptions of ethics? In his assessment, of East-West conception of ethics Sir Charles Eliot maintains that when the West "generally aims at teaching a man how to act: Eastern ethics forming a character. A good character will, no doubt, act rightly when circumstances require action, but he need not seek occasion for action: he may even avoid them". This he attributes to the pessimistic attitude of Indians - a pessimism of a peculiar type whose watch word is "world process is without beginning or end and that man must learn how to make the best of it". "They clearly feel a peculiar interest", continues the author, "in defining the relation of the

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5Hinduism and Buddhism, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London), 1921, p. LXVIII.
soul to God, but they rarely ask why should I be good or what is the sanction of morality". This attitude according to him is responsible for the astonishing absence of discussions on free will which is a much-talked-about subject in the West. Such charges, we shall prove in the course of our thesis, are not well founded. Such problems are elaborately discussed in the Bhagavad Gītā when it deals with the question of moral act and moral agency.

Before we tackle, such problems it is necessary to refer to a serious misconception about Indian thought in general and Advaita in particular. There was a tendency to attribute India's failure in giving social and political representation to her ethical ideals, to the Indian thought which according to them is Advaita. But this cannot be accepted for two reasons. First, Advaita is not the only thought of the Hindus. There are very few people living according to the ethical ideals of Advaita. There are innumerable religions, castes and communities; each has its own beliefs and ideals. From these, to single out a particular system for accusation is not fair. Secondly, Advaita, left to itself, is not theoretically responsible for it. There is nothing in Advaita which leads people to inaction though now and then such interpretation of certain doctrines of Advaita is given. Its ethical ideals were not properly

6 Ibid., p. LXXII.
lived even by its adherents, not to speak of the masses of India. How far Sankara's system is theoretically guilty as made by the critics, will be examined later. Here it is enough to say that India's practical failure must be attributed to various other factors such as social and political and heresy philosophy which has to guide the life of Indians, need not be dragged into the picture at all.

The importance of Sankara's system as regards Hinduism should not be underrated, and this is clear from the fact that by the Westerners Hinduism itself is often identified with Advaita. Due to this identification most of the criticisms urged against Hinduism are practically urged against Advaita. Even a famous historian like Arnold Toynbee is not free from this trait. Whenever he speaks of Hinduism or Indian thought he refers only to Advaita as though Advaita is the only thought of the Hindus. Hinduism is a "vast complex but subtly unified mass of spiritual thought and realization". It takes in its fold different systems of philosophies with even opposing ideologies such as Dvaita, Viśistadvaita and Advaita.


9. Now a days the tendency is to consider these thoughts not as conflicting but as complementary to each other. This started with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement whose official philosophy was Advaita.
Even if Sankara's system is taken for the whole of Indian thought on the ground that the former is the most dominant thought of the Hindus, there is little warrant to suppose that Advaita is responsible for India's failure in practice. The conception of ethics and of life itself differ much from that of the West. The ethical ideals of India were never erected according to the modern conception of ethics. All that these critics seem to do is this: They define ethics in a particular way and all systems which do not recognise such ethics, they dismiss as unethical. This seems to lie at the root of the criticism. A certain definition characteristic of the Westerners is given by Albert Schweitzer in which he identifies ethics "with furtherance of life" and "sympathetic devotion to it." "Ethics demands of man", says the author, "that he should interest himself in the world and in what goes on in it; and what is more, simply compels him to action". And finally however, he himself admits that purity of mind is the very "core of ethics". But this purity of mind is not complete; it is completed only in action. But Sankara's conception of ethics is different. The ethics which identifies itself with 'furtherance of life' according to Sankara is incomplete

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10 op. cit., p. 260
11 Ibid., p. 8
12 Ibid., p. 118.
and inadequate. It does not lay sufficient emphasis on personal or individual ethics from which all social virtues derive its source. That is, according to Indian conception, a man is perfectly ethical if he has purity of mind; he need not always engage in ethical activity though he acts when occasion requires action. Thus, of the two aspects of ethics i.e., "Purity of mind" and its manifestation in action the East lays emphasis on the former where as the west gives importance to the latter.

Definition of Ethics

Before elucidating Sankara's ethics it is necessary to define and illustrate ethics in a general way and find out whether or not Sankara's ethics is in keeping with the popular definitions of ethics. The word ethics is derived from the Greek word 'ethos' which means 'character'. It is often defined as a systematic study of the nature of value concepts such as good, bad, ought, right wrong etc. Defining ethics C.E. Moore writes, "in the vast majority of cases where we make statements involving any of the terms virtue, vice, right, ought, good, bad, we are making ethical judgements and if we wish to discuss their truth we shall be discussing a point of ethics". Ethics, thus deals with human

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conduct i.e., what is good and bad in human conduct, and "this discussion of human conduct is, in fact, that with which the name ethics is most ultimately associated." William Frankena defines ethics as the "philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems, and moral judgements". Analyzing the subject matter of philosophy Muirhead speaks of two problems with which philosophy is ultimately concerned, viz., what can we know and what ought to do and he considers the latter as the subject matter of ethics. In short, ethics deals with the problems of human conduct and finds out what kind of conduct is morally good.

Though there is agreement with regard to the content of ethics scholars are divided among themselves on the question of its scope and nature. Does ethics deal with conduct as it is lived? Or is it a study of human conduct in its relation to an ultimate object? The contemporary philosophical thinking in the field of ethics seems to lend itself to the first view i.e., ethics deals with human conduct as lived and therefore, it need not be related to anything else such as religion or metaphysics.

14 Ibid., p.2
15 Ethics, Prentice-hall, 1964, p.3.
But ethics, at least according to the majority of the scholars, is a normative science rather than a purely descriptive or naturalistic one. That is, it deals with the ideal of human conduct and not conduct as lived. In other words, it deals with ought; what man ought to do. But what is the norm of the ought? What is the criterion for distinguishing what is right and what is wrong or what we ought to do and what we ought not? A clear analysis of this problem will show that there must be a basis or standard and this standard ultimately is found to be based on the conception of ultimate good of man - a conception which primarily belongs to the domain of metaphysics.

To explain, ethics as a normative science tells what one 'ought to do'. But what one ought to do cannot be discussed without knowing what one 'ought to be' or, in other words, what is the end or the supreme Good of man. If we know that such and such is good for man, then only can we say that he must behave in such and such way. Ethics, thus, as a science, in a way, pre-supposes the conception of an ultimate value.

Some scholars have taken this value conception as the central point in ethics, and have arranged the means of realizing this value as morally good. Ethics, thus, has been

17 Cf. "Ethics deals with the ideal of conduct, not conduct as such........where there is no ought there is no morality". T.M.P. Mahadevan, 'Beyond ethics', PPC, p. 43.
reduced to a system of values, viz., the ultimate end of man is the highest or supreme value and the means leading to it are instrumental values. Thus, ethics is considered by W. Urban as a science of values. When the supreme good is conceived as the attainment of something what ethics does is an evaluation of human conduct in the light of the supreme good. "Ethics is a normative science" says Urban, "in that through the study of human end or value it seeks to establish standards or norms in terms of which human conduct can be evaluated". In the evaluation of human conduct is involved the question of human good and, thus, in the last analysis ethics is connected with the problem of human good - a problem which belongs to the domain of metaphysics.

Metaphysical Ethics

It is almost widely accepted that only metaphysics can tell us what our supreme good is. When ethics bases itself on metaphysics it is called metaphysical ethics. But what is metaphysics? The time-honoured definition of metaphysics is that it is the "science of being as being". It deals with being or reality. There is an inseparable connection between


19 Ibid., p. 353.
metaphysics and ethics. In fact, many of the problems one has to solve in ethics are metaphysical problems. Or, at least there are ethical problems which cannot be solved without the aid of metaphysics. The method of satisfactorily solving all ethical problems is to accept a metaphysical basis for ethics and relate its conceptions to the concept of the ultimate reality and value. Even Kant considered it difficult to detach ethics from metaphysics, for, he considered the existence of God, free will and immortality of the soul as essential pre-suppositions of ethics. Such pre-suppositions, however, vary in different systems; for example in Advaita ameness of the spirit (tattvamasi) is the basis of ethics, etc. This basis need not be considered as the weakness of ethics, for it is not the blind admission of a principle but the admission of a conclusive doctrine of the ultimate end of man. The two questions of ethics — what makes things or acts good and wherein value ultimately consists cannot be discussed without knowing what supreme good or value is. This is because ethics being a science of values, the existence of a number of values such as bodily, spiritual etc., makes it necessary to arrange them in a proper order as lower and higher. In this process we have to find out what is the ultimate or lasting value. This question again cannot be discussed without knowing what is ultimately real and thus ethics is found to be based on metaphysics. I.C. Sarma says, "ethics is always based on metaphysical theories. When metaphysics propounds a particular
view point about the reality of the universe, that very view point is adopted for the guidance of behaviour. For example, a material metaphysics encourages a hedonistic ethics and a spiritual metaphysics usually regards self control as the guiding principle of life.

Those who do not accept a metaphysical background for ethics uphold its autonomy, i.e., for them ethics can stand on its own leg without being connected to metaphysics. These realists define ethical values independently of metaphysics. Sidgwick and G.E. Moore are protagonists of this view. Moore contends that basing ethics on metaphysics is due to mere confusion. The main objections are that if the reality of the metaphysics is the sole reality and good, the question of manifestation arises. If the manifestation is also the good, reality is not the 'whole good' and thus the attainment of such a reality becomes unworthy of human efforts. Thus he argues out that ethics cannot have "even a partial basis on metaphysics". Moore, however, does not refute that ethics can have a metaphysical background; he is only against the theory that metaphysics

22 Ibid., p. 122.
is a necessary basis for telling what one ought to do.

Thomas Whittacker, in a similar vein, suggests that to find out the highest good through metaphysics is "metaphysical fallacy" and enumerates, Kant among those who did not commit this fallacy. Since people connect the same moral principles with different and even opposing theories Prof. Juvalta says that ethics need not necessarily be founded on metaphysics. William Frankena, while admitting that no motivation for moral is possible without religion says that though for motivation it depends on religion it does not depend on it for the justification of moral principles.

These realists have utterly failed to define ethical values. Moore himself is a striking example. This failure is not on the part of Moore alone but also others who sought to define ethics independently of metaphysics. This is clearly the position when Moore himself confesses that values are simple notions like 'yellow' and that as such they are indefinable. "An ethics exclusively of an ought" says Muirhead, "is a moral delusion, is a blindness to the value

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24 Quoted by Thomas Whittacker, Ibid., p. 67.
of the actual. In a world stripped of values no one could tolerate life". This view of the autonomy of ethics has been sufficiently disproved by G.E. Wood and here it is enough to say that ethical realism cannot solve ethical problems in the ultimate analysis.

In his recent paper on 'Value as pre-metaphysical' R.M. Lomba distinguishes the two spheres of metaphysics and ethics and examines whether they admit of any relation or not. Their spheres according to him is 'recursively autonomous'; but, then, both may be considered as dependent on what he calls 'pre-metaphysical' which is essentially of the nature of values. This theory does not intrinsically differ from the position of Urban maintaining that value is the very core of ethics.

In asserting that ethics must be grounded in metaphysics there is one point to be remembered i.e., metaphysics must be the rational ground for ethics. In other words, ethics must naturally and logically follow from the accepted metaphysics. The question is not whether a system of philosophy has prescribed a code of conduct or not. Almost all

27 Quoted by Hartman in 'Ethics' Vol.I, p. 36.

28 A defence of Theological Ethics, Cambridge University Press, 1966, Lectures I & IV.

29 'Value as Pre-metaphysical' PQ, October, 1955, p. 204.
systems of philosophy especially those of India, prescribe
a certain course of morality. The actual issue in quest-
ion is whether those codes of morality can be logically
derived from the metaphysics. As has been already pointed
out, there is an inseparable connection between ethics and
metaphysics. To explain, if one can prove that God-realiz-
ation is the summum bonum of existence, then it becomes
our duty to follow anything that leads to such a realization.
Similarly if one can prove that man has freedom of will and
that freedom is given by God the consequence of such a doct-
rine is that man can do anything he likes, both good and
bad. The doctrine of freedom, thus, show that man must
choose, but does not restrict by any logic to the choosing
of good alone unless one conceives God also as the good.
In short, the metaphysics which is to remain at the basis
of ethics should not contradict the essential pre-requisites
or pre-suppositions of ethics.

There are scholars who regard theology as a sufficient
ground for ethics. The protagonists of this view are found
largely among the Christian scholars. G.E. Woods in his
'A defence of theological ethics' argues against the realists

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Cf. "A true philosophy certainly does not contradict
the postulates required for conduct" (Bradley, F.H., Essays
on Truth and Reality, London, 1964, p. 12.)
that ethics can be fully defined in the light of the 'traditional Christian theism'. "Theological ethics" asserts the author", can do justice to the manifold features of our moral experience without ignoring what is true in secular ethics". Thus, he concludes that God is the centre of the moral world and the moral standard is the "creative saving will of God".

But this view does not find acceptance among the absolutist philosophers like Sankara and Bradley. It is true that ethics can be well explained in the light of theism. But can we accept theism as final? The God of theism is evidently personal. By personal is meant a God who is endowed with attributes and who creates and preserves the world. But it is doubtful if such a personal God, can be an explanation of the universe. It is this inadequacy which gave rise to philosophical speculation in terms of the absolute. The propounders of this philosophy found that only the Absolute, the ultimate principle of the universe alone

32 Ibid., p. 110.
33 St. Thomas Aquinas, the sixteenth century theologian philosophises the conception of person and accordingly he gives five notes which go to make a person. (Vide catholic Encyclopaedia, article on person, p. 167) But here it is used in the traditional sense and corresponds to the sāguna-brahman or Iśvāra of Advaita.
can give intellectual satisfaction. The conception of God as the ultimate principle further gives rise to a number of problems such as, those of creation and evil which cannot be satisfactorily solved. Bradley has brought out the logical difficulty in accepting personal God as the ultimate Reality. In his 'Essays on Truth and Reality' he points out that a God to be perfect and at the same time be in relation with the individual will is an absurdity. "A God" says the author "that can say to himself 'I' as against you and me, is not in my judgement defensible as the last and complete truth for metaphysics". Such a conception no doubt, serves all practical purposes of religion; but when we rationalize this conception it cannot stop short of the Absolute.

It is doubtful whether the Golden rule 'love your neighbour as thyself can be defended in the light of the Christian theology. That is why Christianity's intellectual trouble began when philosophically educated people reconsidered their attitude towards Christianity and rationalized its conceptions. Arnold Toynbee says that "if Christian

34 ETR, Chapter on 'God and the Absolute'.


36 Arnold Toynbee, op.cit., p. 117.
theology is true God is a Monster" at least as interpreted by Agustenean school. A God who is praised as love cannot throw sinners into the eternal hell. Similarly the free will contradicts God's love. To quote Bayle, "some people say that God has permitted sin because he could not have prevented it without trenching on the 'free-will' that He had given to man - a gift that was the finest of all that He has conferred on him.........No good mother who had given her daughters permission to go to a dance would fail to cancel this permission if she knew for certain that, if they went, they would be violated and would lose their virginity."

Metaphysics and Ethics in Sankara

But can an Absolutist philosophy like that of Sankara give any place for ethics? In other words, does Advaitic ethics follow from Advaitic metaphysics. That it does not follow has been the main criticism of some scholars. Thus according to John McKenzie Advaitic thought when logically applied in life leaves no room for ethics. "The duties of the social life" observes the author, "cannot be deduced

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37 Ibid., p. 176

38 Quoted by Toynbee, Ibid., p. 177

39 Hindu Ethics, pp. 260 f.
from the ultimate goal.....nor can they be shown to stand in any vital relation to it. Dharma is imposed by authority and that is the end of it". This needs examination.

Sankara's Philosophy is the philosophy of Absolutism and his conception of Brahman as the ultimate reality and his theory of māyā (which is wrongly translated as illusion) cannot be logically refuted. It is not an easy task to accommodate ethics in an absolutist philosophy and it is all the more difficult in Sankara's system. That is why Russell went to the extent of saying in his 'Mysticism and Logic' that the elimination of ethical consideration from philosophy is scientifically necessary though it may seem to be a paradox. The problem of giving place to ethics in an absolutist philosophy has been wonderfully solved by Sankara in his metaphysics.

The ethics of Sankara is grounded in and derived from his metaphysics. He does not believe as Schweitzer contends that a metaphysics could be built up through the notions of ethics. A detailed account of Sankara's metaphysics is not undertaken at present, since it will be elaborately dealt

42 ITD, pp. 260, 261.
with in the next chapter. But here, a word about his metaphysics is necessary to show how his ethics is grounded in it. His metaphysics is often summed up in the famous verse which says, "Brahman is Real; the world is unreal-mithyā and the Jīva, the individual soul is not different from Brahman, it is identical with it". The oneness of the spirit mentioned in the mahāvākyas like 'tattvamasi' and Sarvam Khalvidam brahma' is the sum total of his philosophy. But at the very outset, it must be said, that Sankara's system is fundamentally based on the conception of degrees of reality, i.e., there are different degrees of reality, higher and lower. Accordingly, Brahman is the only metaphysical Reality - advaitam paramārthataḥ. The world of plurality is less real or real for the time being. In other words, the world has only empirical or vyāvahārika reality. The criterion for distinguishing the two levels of reality (viz., vyāvahārika and paramārthika) is the two standpoints viz., the standpoint of the Absolute and the standpoint of the ordinary man. In the ordinary level, we attach a sense of reality to this world. But in the paramārthika stage when Brahman realization comes the world is cancelled as untrue. And so, Brahman is considered as the highest Reality. The world, thus, is real as long as one realizes Brahman and so its reality is of a lesser category. Similarly man's identity with Brahman as preached by Sankara is only in the paramārthika

43Brahma styaṃ jaganmithyā jīvo brahmaiva naḥparah".
plane and not in the Vyāvhaṅrika plane. On the vyāvhaṅrika plane which is bound up with time-space-causation man is not identical with Brahman; he is different from it as well as from other living beings. Much of the confusion about the Jīva-Brahman identity is due to the mistaken notion that they are identical even in the Vyāvhaṅrika stage. In other words, the critics while missing the point that the identity is only in the transphenomenal plane give a vyāvhaṅrika colour to the theory of identity.

The Goal of Sankara’s Philosophical System

The true nature of man’s real nature i.e., that he is verily Brahman, has to be realized by him and this realization is called mokṣa, the sumnum bonum of existence. Mokṣa is the aim of Advaita Vedanta. This again is not something created anew; it is an ever accomplished fact, but one does not realize it due to one’s own ignorance - a principle which is called avidyā, adhyāsa etc; in Advaita. On the removal of avidyā the Jīva realizes its identity with the universal spirit, Brahman, and transcends its finitude.

The conception of mokṣa is an important notion in Indian systems of thought. It is especially so in the case of Sankara’s philosophy, for it declares that mokṣa can be attained here and now - a state known as jīvanmukti. Though Advaita like other systems of Indian Philosophy is a philosophy
of values, the former is more value-centric, in that it considers mokṣa as attainable here and now. One of the important aspects of Sankara's metaphysics is that having formulated the theory of avidyā to explain man's estrangement from Reality, it also declares that this avidyā can be got over. It is in the context of overcoming avidyā that the question of morality comes. If it had not prescribed the ways and means of getting rid of avidyā the whole Advaita would have been reduced to futility. The theory that avidyā can be dispelled and mokṣa can be attained in this life shows Advaita's radical optimism.

The goal of Advaita Vedānta is to lead man to this immortality from this world of avidyā. But what is avidyā? Avidyā, in a nutshell, is the absence of the knowledge of one's identity with Brahman. Due to this avidyā the Jīva feels a sense of limitedness which expresses itself as the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. The feeling that one is a miserable creature, subjected to birth and death, the feeling that one has needs and desires to be fulfilled—all these are due to a sense of limitation. It is the 'ego' or selfishness which constitutes the individuality and the individuality is a limitation. Sankara mainly advises us to get rid of this limitation and find out the truth for oneself. The elimination of individuality may appear to be as something not worthy of pursuit. But "individuality as we generally understand it, is a limited condition. All of us want to get rid of our limitations and live a larger life. To
To sink one's individuality is not a loss but a great gain. The disappearance of individuality means the disappearance of our limitations and nothing worse. I.C. Sarma writes, "the moment we overlook the aim of Sankara's philosophy we are bound to misconstrue it as a pessimism and an escapism. Such a biased view has been responsible for various allegations against this great and unique philosopher, moralist and mystic who is at once highly intellectual in his analysis, practical in his outlook, firm in his faith and open to conviction and reason in his philosophical views."

The practical philosophy of Sankara is derived from his unique theory of identity, the Upanishadic doctrine of tattvamasi. Apart from striving to realize this fact, there are a number of practical lessons to be drawn from this doctrine. It is this doctrine which actually compels one to love one's neighbour as oneself. It forces one to treat not only human beings but all living beings as equal and love them as one loves oneself. Toynbee observes, Indian philosophers saw the truth that 'Thou art That', a human self is identical with Absolute Reality in some sense. But the sense in which this intuitive knowledge is true can be dis-

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covered only by taking action. The statement 'Thou art That' is in truth, not a mere statement but a call to thee to make thyself that which thou knowest that thou canst be”.

The Puruṣārthas

Ethics presupposes duality and duality is not ultimately real in Advaita. The pañcarātīka stage is a stage beyond ethics. Therefore all ethics and morality has place only at the Vyāvahārīka level. But such doctrines, however, do not minimise the importance of ethics at the Vyāvahārīka level. That Sankara gives due place for ethics may be appreciated from his reference to puruṣārthas or the four-fold aims of life.

No study of Advaitic ethics will be complete without passing reference to the conception of puruṣārthas which is more or less basic to all systems of Indian philosophies.

The word 'puruṣārtha' literally means 'what is sought by man', the human good. Traditionally puruṣārthas are said to be four viz., artha (wealth), Kāma (fulfilment of sexual and aesthetic impulses), dharma (righteousness), and mokṣa (freedom). Of these artha and Kāma are material values and dharma and mokṣa spiritual values. Since mokṣa is considered to be the supreme value (paramapuruṣārtha) all other

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47 B.S.B. Introduction.
values are sub-ordinated to this supreme value. Accordingly all these values are not independently pursued, but are made subservient to mokṣa. Though the different systems in India differ in their conception of mokṣa there is substantial agreement that mokṣa is the supreme value. For the Mīmāṃsakas mokṣa is something created, for the Naiyaśīyikas it is negative i.e., absence of misery (duḥkhaḥbhāva) and for Advaitins it is an eternally accomplished fact and a positive state of bliss. But there does not seem to be any difference of opinion on the point that mokṣa is the highest value.

Karl H. Potter maintains that to call these Purusārthas 'aims of life' is meaningless for, the aim must be a 'state towards which one aims. Though mokṣa may be considered in some sense, 'a state' artha and kāma are not states and thus the author styles the latter two as attitudes. But the point here seems to be that he has missed the value aspect of Purusārtha! A value need not be a state at which one aims unless it is an intrinsic value. Mokṣa is, no doubt, a value and a state. But artha and kāma, though not states, are values; only, their value is instrumental; they are means to a higher stage. Anything that serves as a means

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48 Mokṣasya bhāvarūpatvāt (STU Introduction)

49 Pre-suppositions of India's Philosophies, pp.6,7,8.
to achieve the highest value is called instrumental value. Dharma, artha and Kāma belong to this category. The tendency to realize artha and Kāma is inherent in man and Sankara never considered it antagonistic to spiritual realization. He only says that since their pursuit does not bring lasting satisfaction or bliss, it cannot be pursued as an end. Pursuing higher values "does not necessarily mean abandoning the lower ones of artha and Kāma, for there is no necessary opposition between them......what is disapproved by them is only their pursuit for their own sake and not as a means to a higher value. When they are made to subserve the latter they become totally transformed. There is a world of difference, for example, between wealth sought as a means to self-indulgence and as a means to some beneficial purpose". Unbridled pursuit of artha and Kāma has no value, it does not lead one to mokṣa. How these are to be pursued as instrumental values and how life itself is to be lived in this world is explained by dharma or ethics.

It is in the attainment of the ultimate goal of man that the conception of ethics plays a very important role. From this point of view life has full value if it leads to mokṣa; by itself it has no proper value. Only a mokṣa-

50 M. Hiriyanna, Popular Essays in Indian Philosophy, (Kavyalaya publishers, Mysore), 1952, p.67.
oriented life can be considered as a good life. "Life is not necessarily good in itself" says Urban, "but gets its value rather from that which living realizes". Keeping the ideal of mokṣa in mind the ancient Rāja of India propounded the theories of varṇāśrama-dharma i.e., the duties pertaining to varṇas and āśramas, and sādhaṃśadharmaṣ which together form the basis of Hindu ethics or Hindu dharma.

The question of Hindu ethics in the context of Sankara's ethics may appear far from being relevant. But the fact is that Hindu dharma is intimately related to Advaitic ethics; the latter has its basis in Hindu dharma. So in dealing with Sankara's ethics we have to analyse two subjects viz., (a) the Hindu dharma in general which forms the basis of Sankara's ethics, (b) Sankara's special contribution to Hindu dharma - contributions which he has made in the light of his own system of philosophy. Therefore a brief survey of Hindu dharma which is the basis of Hindu ethics, is necessary in order to deal satisfactorily with Advaitic ethics.

Hindus never developed the idea of 'ethics' on system-
atic and philosophic lines as, for example, Aristotle or
Kant has developed. Nor can we say that Hindus, therefore,
had no moral codes. They have also developed a code of mora-
lish though some of them lack a scientific basis and a clear
philosophical thinking.

At the very outset, the difficulty in finding an equi-
lant term for 'ethics' confronts us. The word 'dharma' is
considered as an equivalent to ethics; but strictly speaking
dharma is not ethics. The dharma which stands for the code
of conduct for Hindus is tinged with religion and E.W. Hopkins
may be justified when he says that 'Hindus confused ethics
with religion'. Nor can the word be translated as 'Mora-
lity' unless it is understood in a technical sense, for, as
Dasgupta rightly mentions the words moral and immoral in the
ethical sense do not stand for dharma and adharma respectively.

Only by understanding the technical sense of dharma can
Hindu ethics be well appreciated.

The definition of dharma by Jaimini as 'cūdamālakṣaṇop-
tho dhamah' which is, perhaps, the oldest, deals only with

52 See, P.V. Kane, History of Dharma Śāstra Vol.II,
Part I, (Bhandarkar Institute, Poona), 1941, pp. 3. f.

53 Ethics of India, (Kennikat Press, Washington),
1968, p. 129.

54 A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, p. 434.
'goods' enjoined by the sacrificial rituals in the Vedas. There is no clear analysis as to how and why such rituals lead to the good of Svarga. Later a number of definitions were given for dharma, as also its classifications; but none touching the actual ethical problems. After the Mimamsakas, who always laid great stress on the ritualistic aspect of dharma, emerged Advaita Vedanta which challenged the very status accorded to dharma by Mimamsakas. It must be emphasised here that a detailed analysis of dharma based on philosophy was made mainly by Sankara who made a two-fold classification of it into pravriddy and nivrtti (action and renunciation) which had adhikarabhada (competence) as its basis.

In a way Hinduism itself can be identified with Hindu dharma. The commonest element in the different sects of Hinduism is their code of morality, their way of life. S. Radhakrishnan points out, "Hinduism is more a way of life than a form of thought. While it gives absolute liberty in the world of thought it enjoins a strict code of practice. The theist and atheist, the sceptic and the agnostic may all be Hindus if they accept the Hindu system of culture and life. Hinduism insists not on religious conformity, but on a spiritual and ethical outlook in life". This dharma which

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55 For details see, P.V. Kane, op.cit., pp. 2 ff.

is common to all Hindus centres round the concept of 'varṇā-
śrama dharma' - the duties enjoined on different varṇas and
śramas i.e., the four varṇas such as brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya,
aviśya and sūdra, and four śramas such as brahmacarya,
gārhaṣṭra, vānaprastha, and sannyāsa. While the varṇa laws
show how man has to live in a society the śrama laws tell
how one has to live one's personal life which will ultimately
lead him to spiritual realisation.

But what is the spirit of 'varṇāśrama dharma'? Are
we to follow, the different duties allotted to people by the
Śruti texts? But this is taking the conception of 'varṇā-
śrama dharma' too literally. Now, the varṇa system which
originally belonged to the Aryan community seems to have com-
pletely broken to pieces and it is impossible to have the
four divisions in the modern society. Therefore, it has
to be replaced by what Bradley calls "my station and its
duties" i.e., the duties of one's own station in life. If
we follow the spirit of varṇāśrama this seems to be the core
of its teaching. Accordingly a man's duty is determined
by the station or status he is filling in a society. His
duties are the duties of the position he has in society.
Each man, thus, must do duties that become naturally allotted
to him by his station in life.

57
Ethical Studies, Chapter on 'My Station and Its Duties'.
Dharma, thus is a "mode of life or a code of conduct, which regulates a man's work and activities as a member of society and as an individual, and was intended to bring about the gradual development of a man and to enable him to reach what was deemed to be the goal of existence". It is by understanding the spirit of varāṣramadharma that Gandhi has remarked: "the very virtue of a dharma is that it is universal, that its practice is not the monopoly of the few, but the privilege of all".

Cardinal Virtues

Apart from these "My station and its duties" there are a number of cardinal virtues (Śādāhrana dharmas) which form an integral part of Hindu ethics but which are often neglected in discussions on Hindu dharma. The spokesmen of dharma too much pre-occupied with varāṣram dharmas lost sight of these śādāhrana dharmas which are by no means less important.

Manu enumerates non-violence, truthfulness, purity, control of senses etc., as cardinal virtues. They are to be

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59 All Religions are true. p. 37.
practical irrespective of varnas and āśramas. Mitakṣara
asserted that ahimsa and other qualities are dharma common to
all people including the out castes. Yajñavalkya, in addition
to non-violence etc, also includes patience, straightforwardness,
and charity among cardinal virtues. While
Vishnu dharma sūtra enumerates fourteen qualities, Gautama
dharma sūtra enumerates most of these qualities, as 'ātmaguna'-
qualities of the spirit - qualities which include also 'dayā
sarvabhūtesu' i.e., compassion towards all living beings.63
Yajñavalkya clearly speaks of such dharmas and since Sankara
held Yajñavalkya as authoritative, it may be presumed, he too
has accepted the sādhārana dharmas.

The importance of ahimsā among the cardinal virtues
cannot be overlooked and it is a mere distortion of facts
when the critics represent this noble ideal as an outcome of
the tendency "to keep oneself pure from the world". They do
not explain or trace historically how ahimsa arose out of the
idea of a sense of purity. That the ahimsā commandment
rose out of genuine pity and compassion is testified to, by

61
Ibid., p. 10.

62
Ibid., p. 10.

63
Ibid., p. 6.

64
Albert Schweitzer, ITD., p. 30.
A number of references in Sanskrit literature which reflected the moral ideals of ancient India. Valmiki who became overpowered with grief at the death of the crow bird, Kapinjala nursing the young parrot in the Kadambari and the Rsis shouting at Duṣyanta not to kill the innocent deer etc., are some of the instances to show how ahimsā was always associated with love and compassion. Gandhiji has styled ahimsā as the "chief glory of Hindus".

The varnāsvāma dharmas together with the sadhārana dharmas form Hindu ethics. As has been already pointed out, Advaitic ethics is partially based on general Hindu ethics and partially on its own system of metaphysics. It is based on sociological considerations as well as philosophical speculations. It was also pointed out that it is only Sankara who gave a rational foundation to Hindu dharma and made a classification of it, on the basis of his non-dualistic system. We shall briefly survey this classification.

Sankara's Ethics in outlines

Sankara reviews the whole Hindu dharma and divides it into two-pravṛtti dharma and nivṛtti dharma 'ethics of action'
and 'ethics of renunciation'. At the very outset of his introduction to B.C. Sankara defines dharma as "that which is the cause of abhyudaya and nisreyasa and which are followed by the people of the four varnas and ásramas". It is an indication that Sankara has accepted the already established 'varnasáramadharama' and with optimism founded it on a metaphysical footing, all that he did was to rationalise the already existing dharma. Sankara, here, states as a piece of theology "God after creation initiated Prajápati in to the dharma of action and the Sankás in to the dharma of renunciation".

Advaitic ethics, thus, stems out of two considerations. First, the supreme aim of man is to realize the highest value called moksha, which is nothing but the realisation of one's identity with Brahman. This is achieved by dispelling avidyā, ignorance of one's own self; hence the only means of realizing moksha is knowledge- Jñāna. All other methods, religious or ethical has value only in so far as they lead to purity of mind - Cittasaddhi which is an essential requisite for Jñāna. Secondly the method to realise moksha is not one and the same for all people. Those who do not have a longing for its realization must follow the path of action.

66 S.B.G. Intro.
67 Ibid., Intro.
68 S.B.G. II. 46.
carrying out the various duties and obligations prescribed in the Vedas in a disinterested frame of mind. Others who are only concerned with mokṣa must resort to the path of knowledge characterised by discrimination and dispassion, for, one who strives to realize mokṣa, the highest value, cannot at the same time, try to realize other values of less importance also. The conception of Pravṛtti dharma and nivṛtti dharma forms the seed of Sankara's ethics. A detailed account of this dharma is not given at present since it forms the main theme of this thesis.

But in both action and renunciation what is aimed at is the removal of avidyā which expresses itself in the life of man basically as the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. When this 'ego' is eliminated man becomes totally transformed; he becomes totally unselfish. He attains a universal outlook and becomes the very embodiment of altruism. He attains a stage of complete "self-abnegation" as Vivekananda puts it. But this stage can be reached only through unselfish work - Karma yoga which is the root of pravṛtti dharma. But the moment one follows pravṛtti, he is on the way to nivṛtti - renunciation. The idea has been wonderfully expressed by

69 "Na hyekasya mumuksutvam phalarthitvam eva yugapate sambhavati". (S.B.S. IV. 11)
Vivekananda, when he says, "Renunciation is the very basis upon which ethics stands. There never was an ethical code preached which had not renunciation for its basis". The renunciation here means, renunciation of selfishness. This is the basis of Sankara's ethics. "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".

Self-denial or renunciation has been an important word in the history of ethics. Almost all systems of ethics have been stressing this aspect. The entire history of ethics, both in the East and in the West, revolves round the concept of renunciation. It is the quality and the scope of renunciation stressed they may vary. Some systems like Hedonism reduce it to the minimum and others like Buddhism lead it to its extreme. With Sankara we find the combination of all these different kinds of renunciation. There is the 'action' or 'pravrtti' for people who cannot completely renounce their selves, though in its essence, it is also


nivṛtta renunciation. And, then, there is the nivṛtta for people capable of completely renouncing their selves.

**Status of Ethics in Sankara**

Nivṛtta, thus, is the fundamental basis of Sankara's ethics. He derived from his system of metaphysics, the ethics of self-denial from which emerges all active ethics. But what is the status accorded to ethics in Sankara's metaphysics? Apart from having a metaphysical foundation for his ethics, it may be pointed out that his ethics is only a means to an end viz., cittaśuddhi, a state of mind which is essential for the dawn of knowledge.

In all systems which consider mokṣa as the aim of human endeavour, ethics has been treated only as a means. In theistic systems like Viśistādvaita, and Christianity action directly brings salvation, through the grace of God. But Advaita, though it considers ethics as a means, there is something distinctive about it. And this is the fact that it never considers ethics as a direct means to mokṣa.

It is only an indirect means, the only direct means being knowledge itself. This is due to the Advaitic conception of mokṣa according to which knowledge alone can bring mokṣa, actions brings about cittaśuddhi. Sankara's interpretation of B.G. is said to be mainly to emphasise this point, i.e., to determine the status of action in the scheme
of mokṣa. He refutes in ŚBC the 'jñānakaramasamuccayavāda' the theory that action must be combined with knowledge for getting mokṣa.

Since the supreme reality in Advaita is considered to be beyond ethics and morality, a man who thus, realizes his identity with it, is also considered to be above ethics. To go beyond good and evil, which is mokṣa is the aim of Advaita. Going beyond ethics does not mean becoming immoral or unethical. It only means that he does not fluctuate between the idea of 'ought' and 'ought not' which is the content of morality. He will attain perfection in ethics, though there are no 'oughts' for him. Ethics and morality in the true sense of the term is possible only when there is this tension between 'ought' and 'ought not' and that is why 'Sankara includes even ethics under avidya or ignorance'.

Though many Western and Eastern scholars have subjected Sankara's ethics to severe criticism, no systematic refutation of these charges has been made. Now and then, a few scholars wrote either defending the position of Sankara or by giving a new interpretation to his philosophy. But such interpretations answering these charges were far from satisfactory; they do not touch the actual issue in question. There are innumerable problems when we take up Sankara's ethics as a special subject of study. The problems are both metaphysical and ethical. For instance, (a) Sankara's māyāvāda, his concept of nirguna brahman and the
bearing of these two on Advaitic ethics in the ultimate analysis (b) his theory of Karma -transcendence and the question how this can be reconciled with modern world-view, (e) the position of action as a means to salvation - such problems were never taken for a systematic study.

When the critics say that Advaita has no ethics it is customary for the defenders of Sankara to draw attention to Sankara's insistence on the moral qualifications required for the study of Vedanta or to the moral maxims expounded by Sankara. But such defence has not been to the credit of Sankara, for, they failed to understand the real contention of the critics, when they proclaim that Advaita has no ethics. The rational connection between ethics and metaphysics in Advaita for example, has never been high-lighted by the defenders of Sankara.

Mention may be made of the writings of S. Radhakrishnan who always struck the Westerns as the best interpreter of Advaita to the modern world. In his 'Eastern Religion and Western Thought' he has made some effort to answer some of the charges against Sankara. But no thorough-going examination of the charges was made, and as a result the answers were not satisfactory. Similar is the case with S.N. Das who apologetically writes that both in the East and in West in a system of absolute idealism, there is no possibility of ethics at all. How Sankara accommodates ethics in th his

72 op.cit., p. 262.
absolutist philosophy was never explained satisfactorily.

Though eminent scholars like E.W. Hopkins, S.K. Maitra, etc., have written much about Hindu ethics, none of them seem to have discussed the ethics of Advaita Vedanta. A few Indian scholars like M. Hiriyanna, I.C. Sarma, Nanganlal A. Buch, S. Radhakrishnan and M.K. Venkitarama Iyer however, have tried to thrash out the Vedatic ethics by confining themselves to Advaita Vedanta. But none of them has dealt with Sankara's ethics. These writers while discussing Advaitic ethics, have more or less clubbed together the views of Sankara with those of many later Advaitins. But

In the present thesis, I seek to confine myself to Sankara and deal with his ethics exhaustively basing myself mainly on his expositions on the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads and the Brahmasutras.