CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEMS OF ETHICS IN SANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY - I

The background of Sankara's ethics

We have considered up, till now, the metaphysics of Advaita Vedanta - the significance of Jiva - Brahman identity and the importance of vyavahārika reality, the key - concept of Sankara's ethics. Just as the metaphysical doctrines of Sankara are ultimately based on the Upaniṣads, his ethics also can be traced to certain Upaniṣadic passages. The ethical teaching of the Vedas is found in the conception of Rta, the cosmic force of righteousness. The Rgveda says "the good man never deviates from the path of truth". But in the Upaniṣads ethics is treated more elaborately. The main teaching of the Upaniṣads is the doctrine of the identity of spirits and they declare that this can be attained by the knowledge of the self. Thus jñāna came to be regarded as the highest value and its seeking was praised as the supreme virtue. It has not only speculative value, but also has great ethical value. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad says, "As water adheres not to the leaf of a lotus flower, so evil action

1 "Rtasya panthāmanveti sādhu vijñātīva na diso mināti"

adheres not to him who knows this." But this knowledge of the Ātman can be gained only through detachment. Similarly the Kaṭha Upaniṣad mentions the two paths of śreyā and preya and says that they are incompatible. But the Isāvāsa-ūpaniṣad advises us to enjoy life by renunciation, i.e., "to carry on life's work in a spirit of detachment without coveting other's possessions in as much as the Lord, the supreme being pervades the whole universe." Though much emphasis thus, is laid on knowledge and renunciation, the Upaniṣads also teach ethical disciplines as a preparatory step for attaining knowledge. The Kathopaniṣad warns that a man of evil character does not attain knowledge. Various ethical teachings intended for practice is a unique feature of Teṭārāyopaniṣad. It says, "One should not be negligent of truth, One should not be negligent of virtue......those acts which are irreproachable should be practised and no others.........One should give with faith.......One should give with modesty, One should give with sympathy." Similarly

3 Ibid., p. 61.
4 Kaṭha Upaniṣad, II - 2-1
5 A.C. Das, Studies in Philosophy, Calcutta, 1962, p. 73.
7 Ruth Renya, Introduction to Indian Philosophy, New Delhi, 1971, p. 42.
the Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣad gives the ethics of three 'dās', i.e., dāna (charity), damaṇa (control) and dāyaḥ (kindness) (V-2-5). Such disciplines, however, help one to attain mokṣa only indirectly; jñāna is the only direct means of mokṣa.

It is on the basis of these teachings that Sankara develops Advaitic ethics. It is, indeed a difficult task to give the place for ethics in any monistic system. In the Upaniṣads, the monistic thought is on one side and the precepts for practice on the other. There is no discussion why and how such disciplines lead to the ideal of mokṣa. It was in fact, Sankara who showed that ethics is perfectly compatible with the monistic philosophy of the Upaniṣads.

But in the light of the metaphysical doctrines of Advaita Sankara, as set forth in the previous chapter a serious student of Advaita is confronted with a few ethical problems. Some of these, we have already referred to, in the introductory chapter. Without solving such problems it is difficult to deal with the practical ethics expounded by Sankara.

The Problems of Ethics

It may appear to some scholars quite inappropriate to raise the present problems of philosophy against orthodox systems like Advaita and try to find solutions for them. They may object that quite a number of problems which contemporary Western philosophy has discovered recently need nor be raised
against Advaita which has no relevance to such problems. But this is not true. Most of the problems in Western Philosophy are equally relevant to all Indian systems. It is true that some of these problems have no real scope in Indian systems. For example, certain controversial issues like the problem of evil, free-will etc., have not been so controversial in Indian systems. This is because Indian systems are not merely speculative but practical. The stress laid on practice is so great that Karl. H. Potter is right in calling Indian systems path philosophies. Various paths to complete freedom occupy a prominent place in Indian philosophical texts.

But what is an ethical problem? What is its nature? Henry Sidgwick mentions two types of ethical problems the difference between which he thinks leads to important consequences. The first consists in the method investigates into the true moral laws or "rational precepts of conduct". The second consists in the enquiry into the ultimate end of man and the method of attaining it. The first is the method adopted in recent Western ethics and there, it concerns itself with words and concepts that are usually used in conduct.

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8 Pre-suppositions of India's philosophies, Prentice-Hall Philosophy series, 1963, p. 36.

But this is not applicable to Indian systems. Traditionally both in the East and in the West moral philosophy has developed as a practical science to be lived and was not merely theoretical. All Indian systems adopt the second method, i.e. all of them investigate into the ultimate end of man and arrive at certain conclusions regarding the precepts for conduct. That, is, each Indian system has its own doctrine of the ultimate good and the ways and means of attaining it are their ethics. So the ethical problems usually discussed in modern ethical treatises cannot be raised against Indian ethics. In modern ethics, such questions largely centre round ethical judgements, value concepts, the standard or morality etc. Professor Juvalta finds a two-fold problem before and after Kant i.e., when the old problem was to find the foundation of morality about the content of which there was agreement, the new problem was to determine whether there are values specifically moral or not. But in the case of Indian systems, the problem was not confined to moral values, but to the metaphysical foundations of moral values, i.e., as to what type of metaphysics could serve as the foundations

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This is the reason why Indian systems are mainly concerned with metaphysical problems while most of them take ethics for granted. This phase of Indian system has to be taken into account before we discuss their views on ethics.

In the second category viz., that which inquires into the ultimate good of man and prescribes the ways and means of attaining the same, the ethical problems are of a special nature. Here, the problem concerns the metaphysical claim of the ultimate Truth on the one hand and the world of reality, full of evil and sufferings on the other. That is, metaphysics has certain claims regarding Truth, the conception of which varies in every system, and the world with all its evils has to be explained. The ways and means of attaining Truth, in which consists their ethics, depend much on the explanation they give for this world of reality. As a part of this problem in another problem, which metaphysics is bound to explain. They have to show, after explaining the world that their ethics is the natural and logical consequence of their metaphysical claims. We shall at present

It may be noted that in the beginning of the 20th c. ethics was again concerned with such questions. T.H. Green, Nettleship, William Wallace, Bosquet, F.H. Bradley, - all were metaphysical ethicists (See 'Ethics since 1900' by Marry Warnock, Oxford University Press, London, 1967, p.1).
take up the first problem.

Problem of Evil

Each system has its own ideas about the ultimate Truth of the Universe. Depending on this conception, they have their own explanations of the problem of the world of evil. All of them explain ethics as a means to get rid of the evil and attain the good. Their main emphasis was on getting rid of evil, and the problems such as evil, truth etc., they discuss, because such a discussion is necessary to give a metaphysical background for it.

But what is the problem of evil? The problem of evil mainly consists in the contradiction between the existence of sufferings in the world and the supreme Reality of religion or metaphysics which is conceived to be the supreme good. All metaphysical systems accept an ultimate Principle which is at once held also as the 'Good'. Then whence evil? If one were to postulate an evil God, then there is no problem. The problem of evil arises only when the ultimate Principle or God is conceived also as the 'Good'.

12 St. Thomas Aquinas lists two problems as the intellectual obstacles to Christian theism, viz., (1) the reality of the evil and (2) the difficulty of establishing the existence of God without reference to a creator, (John Hick, Evil and the God of love", Macmillan, London, 1966, p. 3).
All such systems have to explain the locus of evil or the real metaphysical status of it. This is the problem of evil.

Solutions in other systems

The conception of evil is something which goes hand in hand with the conception of the reality of the world. This is especially so in Indian systems for, here, the worldly existence itself is considered to be an evil-samsāra. The Carvākas, however, are exceptions to it; to them life is the only good and it is the duty of every one to enjoy life to the maximum. With this exception, all systems consider life as having no intrinsic value; a perfect happy life is a contradiction in term. Those who consider the world as real also consider evil as real, but they postulate the possibility of overcoming it. Those who deny its reality also deny the reality of evil. John Hick classifies the solutions offered to this problems by different systems as two, viz., monistic and dualistic. Monism reduces the entire universe to a harmonious unity, a principle and accordingly the world and its evils are unreal - is an illusion. The dualistic theory regards evil and good as irreconcilable entities, opposed to each other, their antagonism ends only in the destruction of the evil. Spinoza's system belong to the first category.

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Following the monistic trends he attributes evil to the finite perspective of man; good and evil are not objective realities. "All things are necessarily what they are" "and in Nature there is no good and no evil"; "evil is in reality a lesser good." Plato's solution belongs to the second category. He accepts the world of the multiplicity of phenomena and the world of Forms. And the supreme form is the 'Form of the Good'. Taking vision of the good as the ideal Plato considers ethics as a means of this vision. Here he faces the problem of evil. Though he feels that evil should not be attributed to the perfect God, yet he finds it to be a difficult problem. He says that God is "responsible for a few things that happen to man, but for many he is not, for, the good things we enjoy are much fewer than the evil. The former we must attribute to none else but God, but for the evil we must find some other causes not God".

Before offering the Advaitic solution, we shall examine how other Indian systems handle this problem. The Jains, though they do not conceive a supreme God have the problem of evil for, their metaphysics asserts that the self in its true

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15 Ibid., p. 32.
nature is possessed of infinite knowledge and infinite perception. But then how does the jīva at present suffer? This is attributed by them to karma (which is subtle - matter Pudgala) which is beginningless. Due to this karma the jīva is bound and his true nature is hidden. It is through ethical discipline that Jīva can shake off karma and know its original nature. The evil is here attributed to karma, a postulate which explains the sufferings of the Jīva. But where does this Karma ultimately stick to? It cannot stand alone. Such problems are not faced by Jainism.

In Buddhism though mokṣa or nirvāṇa is its ideal as in the case of Jainism the soul does not possess infinite knowledge. On the other hand the self is completely annihilated on attaining liberation. Much was the emphasis laid by them on ethics. It is said that Buddhism died out of India because its ethics did not have a proper metaphysical basis. Buddha himself is said to have remained silent whenever metaphysical questions were put to him. It is so practical in its preaching that it straight away enquires into the cause

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16 The 'anāttavāda' of the Buddhist now - a - days is not interpreted as merely a void. But according to the Madhyamika dialectic it is negation and not negation of something (sūnyata is sūnya)(see article "The Madhyamika Theory of Dialectic" by Rama Kanta Tripathi, pp. 233, 39; Recent Indian Philosophy Vol. I, ed. by Kalidasa Bhattacarya, Progressive publishers, 1963).

17 EC. Sarma, Ethical Philosophies of India. p. 109.
of suffering in this world. It is not that Buddhism had no metaphysics, only, it was not deemed relevant to practical conduct. Investigating into the cause of suffering it propounds twelve links of causes of which ignorance or ānityā is the basis. Out of ignorance people entertain desire and desire is the cause of sufferings. This is uprooted only in the state of nirvāṇa from which there is no return. To achieve this state is prescribed the eight - fold path which constitutes Buddhistic ethics. Here, again, evil and sufferings are attributed to the twelve chains of cause which are merely postulated.

We have yet the two major dualistic system viz., Viśiṣṭhādvaītī and Dwātī belonging to Ramanuja and Madhava, respectively. Brahman or God according to Ramanuja is supreme and Personal, but the ājīvas are real too. The relation between God and the individual soul is one of inseperability - 'apṛthṅgaiddhi'. This explains the dependant relation of Ājīvas to Brahman, i.e., Ājīva cannot exist without depending on Brahman. Ājīva is because Brahman is. But they are not identical as Advaitins contend. The Ājīva which is described as prākāra of God is different from God, but is dependent on

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him. The Jīvas themselves are different from each other. Intrinsically, though jīva's nature is bliss, due to past karma it transmigrates and suffers. When the Jīva, true nature of the jīva is revealed he attains freedom and bliss in the vision of God. The bliss of communion with God, thus, is the aim of the jīva.

But this is not the problem. How does Ramanuja explains the present state of the jīva in the world? It is true that the Jīva is ignorant of its true nature and comes to know of its free and blissful nature only in the vision of God - They become God-like in nature, a gift that one gets through the grace of God. But how would Ramanuja explain the ignorant state of the Jīva and its sufferings? According to him Jīva as well as the world is a creation of God who is the supreme good. But how could he have created the jīvas in such a miserable condition - unable to know its own true nature and that of God? The question is not whether God has any purpose in creation or not. Even if we take it for granted that God has some purpose say, as a sport, why should He create such an evil world. Ramanuja's assertion that it is 'Līlā' is quite unsatisfactory. He justifies

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20 Ibid., p. 71, 'Līlāvī Kevalam Prayojanam')
saying that the world and the individual souls are created by God as a sport; but for the suffering and evils of the souls God is not responsible; it is due to the past karma of the jīvas. But this position is merely asserted and not argued.

In Madhva's philosophy also the problem of evil is not easy to solve. The main reason is that it is essentially and distinctly dualistic. It believes in a personal God, in the reality of the world and the individual souls. The conception of 'bheda' or difference itself is an important notion in Dwaita philosophy. When Advaita considers difference as unreal in Madhva difference is real. Though for the conception of personal God Madhva has to depend on Scriptures he has his own argument for 'difference'. He postulates a five-fold difference viz., between God and soul, souls among themselves, God and matter, and matter itself in different forms. These are all, however, dependent on the will of God; they have no separate existence. The essential nature of the soul is bliss and consciousness which are different from the bliss and consciousness of Brahman. The soul also, though eternal like God, is distinguished by its finitude, and its bliss and consciousness essentially remain finite. This essential nature however, is hidden from him by avidyā, avidyā.

21 M. Hiriyanna, op.cit., p. 190.
ignorance, a product of God's maya. 22

The Dwaitins do not accept the theory of Advaitins that the soul is identical with the supreme Reality. The jīva is a part - 'amśa' of God and their mutual relationship is one of 'part and the whole'. 23 Dwaitins feel that to accept the individuality and eternity of the jīva is necessary to give meaning to religion and ethics. "Unless the jīva is believed to exist for ever, it would be impossible to justify its karmas for good and bad results........

The idea of the permanence of jīva is a fundamental and necessary concept in any philosophical system that seeks to solve the riddle of the universe through ethical and religious standards to which Madhva philosophy was not an exception. 24

All systems which accept the jīva as real and eternal have somehow to explain its present degraded state. Though other systems like Advaita etc., are also bound to explain this, there is a world of difference between the monistic and dualistic solutions to this problem. In dualistic systems


23 Ibid., p. 145.

24 Ibid., p. 140.
there is the present suffering state of the jīva on the one hand and the theory that it has been created by a 'Good God' on the other. The Śāmkhya, however, is an exception, for, it they accept the eternal dualism of prakṛti and puruṣa. The jīva suffers because of the influence of the three guṇas of prakṛti and the influencing prakṛti is a metaphysical reality. But in dualistic systems like Dvaita, the jīva must in some way be explained as having been created by God. Should they accept then, that evil also has been created by Him? This is a problem common to all those holding the creation-

How does Madhava face this problem? Jīva, according to him, in its essential nature is eternal. Jīva, however, as it finds itself, at present, has an origin and this is its association with the upādhis or limiting adjuncts such as svarūpapādhi and bāhyopādhi. This association with the upādhis is jīva's bondage and Īsvara is the cause of this bondage. By ignorance the jīva does not know its own true nature and that of God. When it gets knowledge which is attained only by the Grace of Īsvara the jīva attains to liberation. Why should Īsvara make the jīvas associate with

25 Ibid., p. 150.
the upādhis. To this Madhva's only answer is that "God out of his own svabhāvā is overwhelmed with the feeling of promoting the good of the jīvas".

All these systems have been trying to reconcile their ideas about the ultimate truth, with the world of reality in which the jīva finds himself in bondage and sufferings. They have their own claims regarding the ultimate truth; at the same time the world of reality seems to negate the conceptions of the ultimate truth. Thus the metaphysics on the one hand and the world of reality on the other had been a problem for all philosophical systems.

The Problem in Śaṅkara.

We have already pointed out that in Śaṅkara the ethical problem is more acute on account of his non-dualistic theory of Reality. Truth is one without a second and metaphysically nothing else is. The plurality is only an appearance and is not a metaphysical truth. At the same time there is plurality actually experienced by every jīva. How can Advaitins reconcile their claim of truth as one with the plurality that is experienced? This has to be first solved.

26 Ibid., p. 127.
Here we have to draw a distinction between Sankara's system and those of others. Many dualistic systems consider plurality as real whereas non-dualistic theories like that of Sankara deny the reality of plurality. In Advaita the jīva is essentially Brahman the absolute, and its individuality, sense of agency etc., is something super-imposed due to avidyā — ignorance. How can Advaitins, then, explain plurality and the consequent suffering of the Jīva?

It cannot be denied that plurality is a necessary presupposition for ethics. If this plurality is totally negated, the very need for ethics is questioned. The crux of the problem is this: plurality is an essential requisite for ethics. If 'I' want to love 'you', 'I' and 'You' must be real. Similarly when one says 'do not steal the pot' the pot must be real. If 'you' and the 'pot' are unreal, shadow, there is no meaning in saying that you should not steal.

Moreover ethics is for man, the individual soul, but in Advaita the jīva is metaphysically one with Brahman, not at a future stage but even at the present time. For, Advaita holds that if it is not Brahman now, it cannot become so at any future time. Now, the crucial problem is, if the jivas relation to Brahman and other individuals is one of bare identity then where is the need for realizing this metaphysical identity. And consequently all the need for ethics which leads to this realization will be reduced to futility. This
is a criticism which has been advanced by almost all critics of Sankara, alike. Such questions, a Advaitins usually answer by distinguishing the two different degrees of reality i.e., vyāvahārika and pāramārthika. That is, identity only on the pāramārthika level and at the vyāvahārika level Advaitins accept plurality which can explain ethics.

But the contention of the critics does not seem to be this. They argue that there can be only two possibilities in the relation of the soul and God. That is, either the soul must be identical with Brahman or it must be different from it. There is not a third alternative. Are soul and God different or non-different in reality? Here Advaitins will have to say they are non-different or identical. If they are identical then where is the need for realizing the same? If the Jīva is Brahman in any sense of the term, why is it in a stage of finitude, and suffering? Does not the very fact that I suffer argue that my spirit is not identical with that of God. Even if it is answered by making a distinction between pāramārthika and vyāvahārika stages, it may be asked: what is the philosophical justification for accepting such realms of reality? We shall examine this.
Solution to the Problem

We have pointed out, that ultimately for Sankara, the ground for asserting the theory of identity is the realization of the Unapiṣadīc statements such as 'tattvamasi' etc. Such utterances are the mystical experiences of the sages who probably had the direct experience of their identity with Brahman. This is a unique spiritual experience where all dualities disappear. There is neither the world nor the jīva in this state. Sankara, here, considers this experience as the supreme spiritual experience; there is nothing which transcends this state. If in the highest experience the individuality of the self is not experienced, then the selfhood must be metaphysically unreal. Similarly since the material world is not experienced in this state, it must be ultimately unreal. But here it must be remembered that Sankara tests the jīva and the world by the standard of this mystical identity. He would have considered Brahman as unreal if he was judging it by world-experience. But it is not so. Since plurality is negated in the experience of the highest reality i.e., Brahman, the former cannot be as real as Brahman. But plurality for that reason cannot be simple void, for when one comes down from the mystic's stage plurality is once more experienced. That is why Sankara came to
the conclusion that plurality has a lower degree of reality; it is real as long as Brahman is not experienced. This lower level, where plurality is experienced Sankara designates as vyāvahārīka or empirical.

But does this mystical experience necessarily mean the bare ontological identity of selves. Does the jīva which was hitherto retaining its ego or individuality cease to exist? In Sankara this is said to be a stage when the Jīva loses its illusion of finitude and become infinite bliss and consciousness. It is not to be doubted here that the intimate union of jīva and Brahman, Sankara is mistaking to be identity in the ontological sense. This is a genuine doubt, for in intimate union one may feel a sense of identity which need not be interpreted as ontological identity. In the identity experience which the Rais had the question, whether the identity is ontological or not, must be examined. If it is not ontological identity, the experience must be due to a feeling of intimate union of spirits which means that though the jīva is not aware of it, it still retains its individuality.

To find a solution to this problem, we must go into the nature of mystical experiences. W.T. Stace in his 'Mysticism and Philosophy' analyses the experiences of different mystics of different religions. He has thus found out the most common characteristics in their varied experiences and a few of them...
may be mentioned here. 1. 'All is one'; this feeling is common to all mystics. They all experience a kind of oneness, a kind of cessation of all dualities. 2. This oneness is experienced as the inner subjectivity of all things including himself. 3. A sense of reality: All mystics get the conviction that what they experienced is the reality and not a mere illusion or hallucination. 4. They all unanimously get the feeling of blessedness, joy and satisfaction. Now, what is the conclusion to be drawn from these common characteristics? It must be that since a oneness and a sense of reality of that 'oneness' is experienced 'Oneness' is real. If duality was a reality it would have been experienced at that stage. The feeling of the absence of duality points to the basic identity of jīva and Brahma.

But how is plurality experienced at the present stage? It is very difficult to explain why this plurality should present itself to us now. The only way we can explain this is that if we had that experience of identity, this plurality would not have been there, i.e., there is a higher experience duality precisely. And this is, indeed, what Sankara labours to show in his bhāṣyas. This experiential knowledge is called ātmajñāna or Brahmajñāna and its absence is called

avidyā, ajñāna adhyāśa, māyā etc. Sankara more often uses the word 'avastha' (stage) to refer to the paramārthika and vyāvahārika realities and they are to be taken as two stand-
points, i.e., the stand point of paramārthika level and of vyāvahārika.

Vyāvahārika is the stage where all dualities exist. This can be overcome only by attaining the paramārthika stage of mokṣa. Mokṣa which is described as bliss and satisfaction was taken as the ideal and its realization as the supreme Good of humanity was stressed.

Sankara often emphasises that mokṣa is not something to be attained by efforts. We are metaphysically already Brahman. Only, we do not realize this truth. Therefore mokṣa in Advaita, strictly speaking, consists in realizing the truth that one is already Brahman, the supreme Reality.

Evil as avidyā

The aim of Sankara's system is to lead man to the ideal of self-realization or Brahman-realization which, Advaitins claim, can be attained even in this very life. It aims at getting rid of the bondage of the soul and its suffering in

28 See for instance BSB 2-1-14.

29 SBU. IV-4.
the world. But what is the source of jiva's bondage and sufferings? We have examined already how other systems conceive bondage. What is the conception of bondage in Advaita Vedanta?

In accordance with the non-dualistic theory of spirit the tendency of Advaita is to deny the metaphysical reality of evil. Metaphysically Brahman alone is real. There are two kinds of evil which are discussed in this context, viz., ontological evil and moral evil. The first concerns itself with the metaphysical status of evil. For example, there is suffering in the world the cause of which may be accepted as an ontological entity, but which by effort can be overcome. The moral evil is concerned with defective conduct. A man may have bad conduct which is harmful to himself and others, such for example as stealing etc.

The Advaitins approach the problem of evil from a different standpoint. Whether evil is taken ontologically or otherwise, it is a fact that its locus is the individual soul or jiva. There is no such thing as metaphysical suffering or 'sufferings of the world' etc. It is the individual jiva which suffers or does morally bad acts. Consonantly with the Advaitic theory, the jiva should not have any

30 St. Augustine, however, says that evil is the 'privation of Good' (private boni). Though a dualist he denies the metaphysical reality of evil and considers it as the privation of Good stemming out of the misused freedom. (John Hick, opcit., pp. 43, 44).
suffering, for he is really identical with Brahman and his essential nature is the bliss. Then why does he suffer?

The Jīva suffers because he is ignorant of the true nature of his own self. Why should the jīva act badly; say for example, why should he kill, steal, and inflict injuries on other living beings. The root cause according to Advaita is the sense of finitude. The jīva thinks himself to be a finite creature with a number of limitations wants and desires. His true nature is Ātman. He cannot really entertain desires, for he is āptakāma - one who has fulfilled all his desires.

Only, one has to remove the ignorance of the true nature of his own self. Due to this ignorance the jīva identifies himself with non-self (adhyāsa) from the mind, body and senses to all material possessions in the world. Avidyā with its effect adhyāsa, thus, is considered to be the root of the evil.

We can notice a parallel of this argument in the monistic philosophy of Spinoza. "His concern is with the struggle of the virtuous man to make himself free, by gaining an understanding of the nature and the origin of the passions from which suffers. By arriving at knowledge of a higher order, a man can make himself free .........All passionate interest in particular things are, for Spinoza, ultimately only a kind of misunderstanding". Thus the bondage is a kind of

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ignorance of the order of things. When 'knowledge is acquired one contemplates the whole world as a unity and identifies oneself with the Absolute.

In Advaita, it is due to avidyā that one sees 'difference' forgetting the unity of spirit. Oneness alone is real; the sense of plurality is due to absence of the knowledge of one's identity with Universal spirit - Brahman. In the Upaniṣads, thus, dviṣa - (duality or difference) is said to be the cause of sufferings. Thus it is said "fear arises from duality" "others (those who are in avidyā) attain sufferings". The escape from duality which is mokṣa is often designated as 'abhaya' - fearlessness. Each jīva suffers from some kind of evil or other, but fundamentally this is due to avidyā. Those who consider evil, difference, etc., as real hold that they have been created by God. And when they are asked about the actual cause of the difference, it is attributed to the past karma of the jīvas. St. Augustine on the contrary attributes this, to the "Principle of Plentitude".

32 "dvitiyād vai bhayam bhavati" Br. Up. 1-4-2; 2-4-14, see also Gaudapāda Kārikā 1-17, 18, Īśa. Up. 1-6-7.

33 Br. Upaniṣad 4-2-4; 4-3-21; 4-4-25; Taiṣuṣa 2-7-1, Katha: Up. 2-11; Prāṣaṇa, up. 1-10.
That is, "If all things were equal, all things would not be; for, the multiplicity of kinds of things - of which the universe is constituted - first and second and so on, down to the creature of the lowest grades - would not exist".

In Sankara, the difference in the Jīvas and the mal-distribution of plain and pleasure are explained by the law of karma - a hypothesis common to almost all system of Indian thought. The law of karma and re-incarnation need not be interpreted literally, it is a hypothesis which accounts for the present inequalities among the Jīvas themselves. Whatever may be the philosophical justification of this theory Sankara has accepted this. He does not advance any arguments in support of this, but takes it as an accepted dictum.

Though the difference, thus, is explainable by the law of karma, the root cause of all this is said to be the radical avidya.

The law of karma may be considered as a moral law; it points out that our actions and life have an impact on the future lives.

The experience of the both pain and pleasure of the jīva

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35 There is a tendency now-a-days to explain this law as a 'fact' or as a 'scientific truth'. Venkitaramm Iyer says "The doctrine of Karma is not a mere hypothesis but a well-stated fact" (Advaita Vedanta, p.131) Again "the doctrine of reincarnation is based entirely upon the scientific doctrine of evolution" (Swami Abhedananda, "Attitude of Vedanta Towards Religion" Calcutta, 1947, p.4). But strictly speaking it originated as a hypothesis.
in the world is often designated as samsāra in Advaita as well as in other systems. Mokṣa in its negative aspect is an escape from samsāra. In his intro. to the 2nd chapter of B.C. Sankara explains as to what he means by samsāra. He says that its features are the attainment of birth, happiness and misery and the attainment of desirable and undesirable experience which are due to the mingling of dharma and adharma. Note that Sankara rules out the possibility of enjoying pleasure alone in this world. So long as we are in samsāra the duality of pain and pleasure necessarily follows. Eternal happiness comes only by overcoming this duality and this is attained only in mokṣa. But this duality cannot be removed so long as the 'little individuality' of the Jīva remains; so long as the root-avidyā persists. To get rid of this avidyā is to know the true nature of one's own self.

Here a legitimate question can be asked. If the jīva is essentially identical with Brahman, then why is it that the Jīva is not aware of it, or feel it, or act like that. That

36 The conception of samsāra is as old as the upaniṣads. Kathopanishad speaks of 'Samsāra' (III-7) and Gaudapāda uses this term twice (Kārikā IV - 30, 56).

37 param niṣreyasam sahetukasya samsārasya atyantoparama lakṣanam" (SBD Intro.)

38 dharmā dharmopacayat insthāniṣṭhān janamāsukha dukhā samprapti lakṣanāḥ samsārāḥ"
is, 'I' should be aware of myself being Brahman; I should have such feelings towards all living beings (for their self is identical with my self) and I should be able to act as if I were Brahman. All these three aspects of our true nature are not manifested in us. This state is explained by avidyā. That is, on the vyāvahārīka level the jīva is taken to be what it is and the knowledge of its true nature is something which it must work out for himself. Self-realization, thus, is only an ideal for him to be achieved by effort.

For the manifestation of these aspects i.e., the aspects of knowledge, feeling, and action, one has to slowly get rid of avidyā. The feeling of 'I' and 'mine' or selfishness, which is the immediate effect of avidyā, has to be removed. When one becomes completely selfless (and this is attained only in mokṣa) one ceases to entertain the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. He will cease to act taking his self as the centre of action. He becomes capable of identifying himself with all living beings. Only at this stage of mukta can one act with full freedom.

But such activities in which consists Advaitic ethics must be taken as a means to achieve the state of mukta. Actions which make one forget one's own self or which can train one to complete self-negation must be practised. Sankara himself has remarkably made this point clear when he says
that in the science of mokṣa the characteristics of a realized person-mukta are the means to achieve the same. That is, one has to train oneself to act as if one were Brahman. Ethics in Advaita serves this purpose.

The path of Pravṛtti and nivṛtti thus is a means to achieve the state of self-realization. The aim of Advaitic ethics is not to keep man in perpetual ought but raise him above all dualities and therefore also above all 'morality' into a state of perfect bliss. Though mokṣa is the ideal in all Indian systems, Sankara seems to be more pre-occupied with this ideal. In many places Sankara's argument against certain metaphysical and ethical theories is that they do not enable man to attain mokṣa. For example, on one occasion he says that pradhāna (the insentient principle of Samkhya) cannot be the meaning of Ātma for it cannot square with the supreme aim of man - purusārtha. He seems to be out to find the means of raising man from the sufferings of this world.

With regard to the purpose of realizing Brahman Sankara in many places emphasises that we can get rid of suffering only by realizing Brahman and that is the main purport of the Śāstras (pravojana) "only by realizing 'that' the false im-

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39 According to W. Urban also the ethics of self-realization is the only one "that is tenable in theory and capable of satisfactory application to the practical problems of morals". (Fundamentals of Ethics', p. 127).

40 tatha sati purusārthāt vihanyeta, anarthanca rucchat " (B.S.B.1-17).
pression of samsāra ceases". "Only by realizing Brahman all sufferings come to an end and one attains puruṣārtha, the supreme end of life".

To realize the truth of one's own self and thus, to get beyond the realm of pain and pleasure is the call of Advaita. It is not enough to have an intellectual knowledge of the truth of one's identity with Brahman; one has to work out one's salvation by one's own efforts. Arthur Osborn observes "Advaita is a spiritual science and as in physical science, the theory serves only as a basis for the practice. If the experiment works and the expected result is achieved......it is no use quarrelling with the theory. And on the other hand, to declare......that the experiments do not work without having tried them, is a proof, merely of the arrogance of critic". The actual suffering in samsāra cannot be got over by the mere intellectual knowledge of one's identity with Brahman. One has to take it as a programme of life.

This important and inseparable connection between

41 "tadāvagatāṁ mithyājñānamasya samsārāhetornivṛttiḥ"
(B.S.B. 1.1.4)

42 "Brahmātmāvagamādeva sarvakleśā prahānāt puruṣārtha-

siddbeḥ (B.S.B. 1.1.4)

43 Buddhism and Christianity in the light of Hinduism,
Rider & Co., 1959, p. 47.

44 Syād etādevam samsāritva-vārantīh brahmāsvarūpam-

sravānāmātṛaṇa nivṛteta, na tu nivartate"

(B.S.B. 1-1-4)
theory and practice in Sankara's system (as well as in other systems of India) has to be borne in mind while dealing with its ethical problems. The opinion that the theories of practical conduct do not harmonise with speculative philosophy is due to the western way of philosophising. This practical bias has led indeed, to many misunderstandings about Advaita.

But the sense in which all Indian systems are said to be practical must be clarified. The word practical is understood usually as something which is of immediate use and which is capable of changing the society. But, here, in Indian systems, by practical is meant having the capacity for changing oneself, to change one's entire outlook and nature. Advaita is practical means that it enables man to realize his true nature which is declared to be identical with Brahman.

S.K. Saksena writes, "In the west, the term practical has referred to man's relation with his environment and to changes and alterations to it. It has not been so in India, where the term has referred to just the opposite meaning of effecting change and alteration within one's own self......In short, the emphasis on the practical in India has been with reference to the inner transformation of man rather than to any socialised transformation in his style of living".

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But, here, a question may be raised: is Advaitic ethics universal? In other words, can Advaitic ethics be followed by each and every individual? Here Sankara would answer negatively. Advaitic ethics is meant for those who are in search of Real, who have aspiration for realizing the truth and thus escape from sufferings. It is not intended for the worldly man who hankers after worldly prosperities. It is for those who are not satisfied with worldly enjoyments and are actuated by a little or more desire for release or moksa. The problem of realizing the truth arises only for one who feels the need for such realization. Advaitic ethics is universal in the sense in which a particular mathematical problem is universal. A mathematical problem is a problem only to one who is mathematically minded and who is intent on solving the problem. Advaitic ethics also does not actually apply to men who are contented with the pleasures of the world; it applies to those who have craving for the realization of the ultimate truth.

According to Sankara, there are two paths before man either of which he is free to choose, i.e., 'Śreyyas' and 'preyas'. The first is the attainment of moksa (nissreyasa) and the second is the pursuit of worldly pleasures (priyataram). Both cannot be pursued by one and the same person, for two opposite results accrue from their pursuit. According to one's tendency towards anyone of these paths one's duties also
All people are bound to take one or other of these paths. The attainment and pursuit of sreyaś is good whereas that of preyaś is undesirable. Those who cannot pursue sreyas do not attain the supreme good, they fall and remain in the worldly life.

But for those who are after sreyas the means of realization is not the same. Here comes the unique conception of 'adhikāraḥbheda' or different degrees of competency. Mokṣa, it is true, is the highest value. But Sankara is never tired of emphasising that mokṣa is not something to be effected by effort. We are metaphysically already Brahman and x free. Only, we have not realized this truth. Therefore mokṣa in Advaita, strictly speaking, consists in realizing the truth that one is identical with Brahman the supreme reality.

Accordingly jñāna is the direct means of mokṣa; karma or action prepares the mind to acquire jñāna; it brings about cittasuddhi or purity of mind. In consonance with the conception of the means of mokṣa Sankara accepts the two paths viz., the path of pravṛttī and the path of nivṛttī which are to be followed by two different categories of people.

46 te sreyapreyāśi ubhe nāṁrthe bhinnaprayojāme sati
puruṣa madhikṛtam varṇaśramadhi Viśistam sanito badhnītah
ātma-karmanātāya pravṛtyate sarvah puruṣāh" (S.K.U)

47 atah śreyapreyah prayojana kaśṭavyatāya tābhyaṁ buddha
ityucyate puruṣāh (Ibid.)
The following are the two categories of people. Those who do not have a longing for mokṣa must follow pravṛtti, 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 nivṛtti, characterised by discrimination and dispassion, for one who strives to realize the highest value cannot at the sametime try to realize other values of less importance also. That is, there are two categories of people coming under the consideration of Sankara. First there are people who fearlessly pursue the truth. For them nivṛtti dharma is prescribed and that is characterised by knowledge and dispassion.

Secondly there are others, who desire mokṣa but at the same time feel that they cannot completely give up worldly enjoyments. For them pravṛtti dharma is prescribed. Karmayoga, the method of doing action in a disinterested frame of mind comes in this pravṛtti dharma.

The account of pravṛtti and nivṛtti may create an impression that the attainment of mokṣa in Advaita is purely a mechanical process. The theory of identity, though metaphysical is also sometimes considered as antagonistic to religion and ethical values. M.M. William thus says that when

43 tasmāt prāg jñānamāsthādikāra praśtena kārmanayo’dhikṛttena kūpata daśāgārthāsthānīyamapi kārman kartāyam (SBG II - 46).

49 na hyekasyaṇa mumukṣūtvam phalārthitvam ca yugapat sambhavati (SBG IV-11)

50 nivṛttilaksanam dharmam jñānavairāgya laksanam

(SBG, Intro)
Advaita is pushed to its extremes leads to the "neglect of duties religious and moral, of all activities physical and intellectual and of all self-culture". Similarly Geoffrey Parrinder remarks: "The identity of human and divine could make religious language meaningless and it seems tautology to say that the ātman is the same as Brahma. Does it not mean finally 'I am I' and lead to the solipsist conclusion 'I am all naught else exists'? These critics on account of their over-emphasis on identity forget altogether the importance of the concept of God or saguna-brāhmaṇ in Advaita. In fact in Advaita, the entire ethics and religion have its basis in the conception of God. It is only by taking God as the central point that Sankara's Philosophy in its relation to ethics can be explained.

For the man who has accepted the ideal of realization as his programme of life God or saguna-brāhmaṇ is the ideal, though philosophically speaking it ultimately ends in the realization of the self. The practical man cannot maintain any relationship with the Absolute nor can the absolute stand in any relation to man. There is nothing by the side of the Absolute. On account of this non-relational Absolute, the individual who strives after realization, it is alleged, cannot maintain the divine human relationship. It

51 Upaniṣads Gita and Bible. p. 96
In this context that the question of God comes.

How is the postulation of God related to the path of realization? In other words, what is the relevance of saguna brahman to the Advaitic ethics of pravrtti and nivrtti which lead to realization? It has been pointed out that Brahman realization is not realizing something outside. It is realizing one's own true nature. One's true nature is Brahman which is beyond action and attributes. To think 'I am this' 'I am that' or 'I am the door' 'I am the enjoyer' etc., is avidyā which is also called adhyāsa or super-imposition. Therefore strictly speaking what is required is not the worship of God, but the elimination of avidyā. And avidyā is the feeling of 'kārtṛtva' and 'bhokṛtva'. In short, the root of avidyā is the 'ego' from which is derived the sense of agency etc. When the 'ego' is completely eliminated one realizes one's identity with Brahman. And here, again, there is no process of knowing in the ordinary sense of the term. When avidyā is dispelled realization of Brahman comes through intuition. This intuitive experience cannot be created; it strikes the aspirant of its own accord. All that is required is to remove the impediment of avidyā standing in the way of the intuition. It is to rid onself of the 'ego' that the sagunabrahman or God helps as an instrumental value. That is, just as the different yogas which Sankara classifies into pravrtti and nivrtti lead to mokṣa
and hence are means, God is also a means to realize mokṣa. Thus the gap between the individual and the Absolute is filled by means of God in Advaita, giving due place for theism. Its difference from other systems is that it never considers theism as final but only as a ladder to realize the Absolute.

All the principles of ethics known to humanity are contained in the conception of pravṛtti and nivṛtti. In both what is aimed at is the elimination of 'ego' or selfishness which is the basis of all types of ethics. "Ethics if they are really good cannot but be based on the highest self-abnegation. It is the basis of all morality, you may extend it to man or animals or angels; it is the one basic, the one fundamental principle running through all ethical systems". One might ask in this context whether the very desire for mokṣa for oneself is unethical. Hopkins says that it is difficult to know which of these two motives is stronger i.e., "one of undoubted spiritually and another of hopes quite personal and selfish". But though the desire for mokṣa for oneself is unethical it is well-compensated by attaining perfection in ethics; only a realized man becomes


54 The Ethics of India, p. 221.
perfectly ethical. Here it is most appropriate to quote the view of Urban on this matter: "Egoism is not necessarily evil, as is often supposed, but its good and bad is determined wholly by the subjects or ends towards which it is directed. Egoism has the sub-forms of self-preservation and self-realization. The first of these may be distinctly good and in fact, a duty. It all depends up on what the life is preserved for."

There is yet another problem which is peculiar to Advaita Philosophy. This problem consists in the mutual relation to of the metaphysical doctrine of mokṣa and human action (karma). In other words how ethical activities are related to the attainment of mokṣa. In Visisṭādvaita and Dvaita systems mokṣa is attained by 'action through the grace of God'. Ethical action, is, thus, a direct means of liberation. The mīmāṁsaka philosophy has to be specially mentioned here for its view that liberation is attained by performing the 'dharma' or moral duties which according to it consists in the Vedic injunctions. "The central theme of the philosophy of mīmāṁsa is the adoption of Dharma or duty as enjoined in the Vedas, and the strict adherence to the performance of the rituals as enunciated in the Vedas. Such adherence leads the individuals to mokṣa as surely as the knowledge of ultimate

reality does". But in Sankara's system the adherence to dharma in the mimamsaka sense of the term does not bring about liberation. In the former as we have seen, dharma is duty and consists in the performance of vedic duties. In the latter dharma is two-fold-pravrtti and nivrtti. The former which may be identified with the mimamsaka view of dharma does not lead to moksa. It only leads one to purity of mind (cittasuddhi) which prepares man to take up nivrttidharma. Nivrttidharma characterized by jnana is the only direct means of moksha. This is explained by Sankara himself in his introduction to S.B.C. "The dharma of pravrtti though aims at 'abhuyadaya' and thus brings about heavenly positions like those of the devas, if performed in a distinterested frame of mind and as a worship to God will lead one to purity of mind. It is a cause of moksa in the sense that purity of mind makes one fit for entering jnanayoga and thus serves as a means of the dawn of knowledge (jnanaottatti)".

The ethics of action, thus is only an indirect means of

56
I.C. Sarma, op.cit., p. 215

57
tacca sarvakarma sanynasa purvavat atmajnananiisthara-rupat dharmat bhavati (SBC. Intro.)

58
abhyudayarthopii yah pravrtti laksano dharmo varmanam aarmanam ca uddisya vihitah sa devadisthanaprapatti heturapi heturapi san isvararpanabuddhyum anustiyanmaah sattvasuddhaya bhavanti phalabhisandhi varjita. Sudhhasattvasya ca jnananiisthaya yogyataprapatti dvarama jnanottatti hetatvema ca nireya sa hetatvamapi pratipadyate (SBC. Intro.)
mokṣa. But why did Sankara give thus, only a complementary place for ethics? This follows immediately from his conception of mokṣa. Evidently it is the metaphysical position which prevented him from conceiving action as a direct means of mokṣa. In Sankara's metaphysics there are innumerable difficulties in conceiving so. The arguments advanced by Sankara may be summed up as follows: (1) Mokṣa is not something to be accomplished by effort; if it were so, it would have required the help of action, (for everything in this mundane world is seen accomplished by some action or other. (2) Mokṣa is again not something modified, for everything that is modified is clearly transitory and non-eternal. (3) It is not again something we have not attained i.e., it is not an object outside us to be attained; it is our own true 'given self'. Only, we do not realize it and in realizing action cannot directly help (4) Mokṣa is also not attainable by any amount of moral purification for, the self is ever pure and cannot be purified by action, only the mind can be purified.

Sankara, in his severe consistency explains how jñāṇa or knowledge alone leads to mokṣa directly i.e., jñāṇa does not combine with action for getting mokṣa. His exposition of the B.G. is said to be mainly for repudiating the 'samuccaya-vāda' - the theory that jñāṇa and karma together form the cause.

59
B.S.B. Introduction.
of mokṣa. In his bhaṣya on Taittirīyopaniṣad Sankara gives five alternatives to such combinations viz., (1) by mere action, (2) by action with the help of knowledge (3) by both action and knowledge mixed up, (4) by knowledge with the help of action (5) by knowledge alone. He refutes all but the last. The point in this context to be remembered is that here what is denied is not the combination of action and knowledge, but its status as a direct means of liberation. Human action thus, does not directly effect redemption; it only purifies the mind, an essential requisite for the dawn of knowledge which alone is the direct means of mokṣa.

60 STU. I - 11.