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ness, and it is to this ever-evolving and developing conciousness,—with full opportunities given to it to manifest its life at its best,—that we must look for the emergence of those higher types which this secret and mysterious realm holds within its illimitable domain.

It will be obvious, I think, from this paper, that the Darwinian theory of evolution has enriched the whole field of ethical study. It has brought new ethical problems to our notice and has shown how intimately connected the science of ethics is with evolutionary thought. Whether our individual standpoint is naturalistic or spiritualistic, we cannot but express our indebtedness to the labors of the evolutionists, and join hands together in the work of endeavoring to solve the problems which this great upheaval of thought has brought more fully and clearly into the light of day. The cause of ethical progress is a platform on which all can meet.

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CAPE TOWN.

THE ETHICS OF THE BHAGAVADGITA AND KANT.

S. RADAKRISHNAN.

MUCH has been made of the apparent similarity between the ethical systems of the Bhagavadgita and Kant, the critical philosopher. To the superficial reader, the similarity is no doubt striking. Both systems preach against the rule of the senses; both are at one in holding that the moral law demands duty for duty's sake. In spite of the agreements between the two systems, however, sober second thought will disclose differences of great moment. In the present article, the writer has neither the space, nor is he competent, to make a critical study of the two systems. All that he can hope to do, is to lay bare the practical side of the Vedanta system, or, more accurately, the Bhagavadgita, and to com-

pare its teaching with that of Kant on the fundamental questions of free will, the moral problem, and the law of duty.

In the Vedanta system, religion, metaphysics, and ethics are so closely bound up, one with another, that it is difficult for us to separate them. One can, however, state, without fear of contradiction, that the elements of a science of ethics, though not a perfected system, are to be found there. The main questions and topics of dispute are the same as those which occupy the attention of the western moralists. Hedonism and rationalism, in all their varieties, struggle for supremacy. The Katha Upanishad declares in unambiguous language, that the good or the ethical ideal ought not to be identified with pleasure: "The good is one thing, the pleasant another; these two, having different objects, chain a man. It is well with him who clings to the good; he who chooses the pleasant, misses his end."[1]

Ethics, in the Vedanta system, appears in the phenomenal realm, or the sphere of relativity. Reality, according to the Vedanta, has two aspects, the higher and the lower, the fixed and the changing, the absolute and the relative. The higher aspect of reality is Brahman, the unconditioned, infinite, and perfect. The lower aspect, or the universe, appears and disappears, in turns, in the higher reality of Brahman. The theory does not deny the reality of the world or the individual souls in it. The plurality of individual souls and the material universe are not 'real' in the absolute sense of the word, for they are subject to change. They are only relatively real. Ethics belongs to this world, which is real for all practical purposes. The late Professor Max Müller says: "For all practical purposes, the Vedantist would hold that the whole phenomenal world, both in its objective and subjective character, should be accepted as real. It is as

[1] Max Müller, "The Upanishads," p. 8 (Sacred Books of the East Series, Vol. XV).

real as anything can be to the ordinary mind. It is not mere emptiness, as the Buddhists maintain."[2]

But it may seem to some that the very conception of the ethics of the Bhagavadgita is impossible, since it is incompatible with a belief in the doctrine of karma. What is the use of teaching and preaching about duty if a man's predetermined condition renders him incapable of profiting by the counsel? What is the use of applying moral judgments, if man's actions do not represent his character? Freedom of the will is the fundamental postulate of morality, without which the moral life loses its integrity. Plainly, there can be no such thing as Vedanta ethics. This idea is expressed in the tersest and most extreme terms by Hegel, one of the greatest of the world's philosophers, when he says: "No morality, no determination of freedom, no rights, no duties have any place here; so that the people of India are sunk in complete immorality."

But the cautious reader of the Bhagavadgita will find that the real meaning of karma does not exclude free will. In a verse of that famous book we find it said: "Every sense has its affections and aversions to its objects fixed; one should not become subject to them, for they are one's opponents."[3] The law of karma, or necessity, is true. Every action will be followed by its proper result; every cause has an effect. Our actions in our past life have resulted in certain fixed tendencies, which are termed 'affections' and 'aversions.' A Nyaya aphorism declares that "our actions, though apparently disappearing, remain, unperceived, and reappear in their effects as tendencies" (pravrittis). But we must not become 'subject' to them. We are, so to say, tempted to act according to these tendencies; but we must not allow them to have their own way; we must not surrender our-

[2] Max Müller, "The Vedanta Philosophy," p. 161.

[3] "Bhagavadgita," p. 56. References are to Telang's translation in Sacred Books of the East Series.

selves to the senses, through which alone the tendencies show themselves.

Karma, thus, is a name for the sumtotal of the tendencies with which a man is born; along the lines marked out for him by his inner nature and outer circumstances, man has to develop a character, good or bad. The universal of law of karma has nothing to do with the *real* man, if he understands what is his *real* nature. We have to throw off the yoke of the passions and rise to rational freedom; in exercising the power of reason to subjugate the senses, or the given element, man is free. To adopt a metaphor, wind and tide have to be controlled by the steersman's mind; that is, he has to make use of them and see to it that they will carry him to his goal. But, it is urged, should they prove too strong, what is he to do? In spite of the best intentions, owing to the "niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature," calamity may overtake us. Carve as we will the mysterious block of which our life is made, the dark vein of destiny again and again appears in it. The force of this objection is much weakened by the fact that, according to the Gitaic ideal, virtue consists, not so much in the achievement of any external results, as in the noble bearing of the agent amidst the vicissitudes and accidents of fortune. We are asked to do our duty without caring for the results. "Blessed are the pure in heart." The soul, though it may be opposed in the realization of its volition by many untoward occurrences, would still shine, like Kant's will, "by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself."[4]

This reconciliation of freedom and necessity is sometimes considered to be identical with Kant's solution of the same problem. With Kant, freedom is a matter of inference. In the "Principles of the Metaphysics of Ethics" he says: "Freedom, however, we could not

[4] Kant's "Principles of the Metaphysics of Ethics" (Abbott's translation), p. 11.

prove to be actually a property of ourselves, or of human nature; only, we saw, that it must be presupposed, if we would conceive a being as rational, and conscious of its causality in respect of its actions, *i. e.*, as endowed with a will" (p. 81). All that we know is that we have such a thing as an absolutely obligatory or categorical judgment: I ought to act in such and such a way, regardless of my inclinations. Thou oughtest; therefore thou canst. But if we regard ourselves as free agents, how shall we avoid laying ourselves open to criticism from the scientific sphere? The foundation of science is the law of universal causality, which we ought not to violate. Some way to hold conjointly both freedom and necessity must be devised; or else our mental house will be divided against itself.

Kant holds that man is both determined and free; determined, with regard to his relations as a member of the phenomenal realm, and free, with regard to his relations as a member of the noumenal realm. The same act is determined when regarded as belonging to the empirical series, and free when we consider it due to the underlying cause, the noumenon. Freedom, therefore, is vested in man, the noumenon; the cause is noumenal, the effect phenomenal. The empirical series of antecedents and consequents is but the phenomenon of the noumenal self.

What shall we say by way of a relative estimate of the two theories? What have the two systems in common? To the question of determinism or freedom, both systems reply, determinisn *and* freedom; but the similarity ends there. On ultimate analysis, we find that Kant offers us only the semblance of freedom and not the reality of it. Moral relations exist in the phenomenal realm; and there, according to Kant, it is necessity that rules. Besides, Kant's solution seems only another form of determinism. If the empirical chain of antecedents and consequents is but the phenomenon of the noumenal self, it is plain that it cannot be other than it is. On such a

theory, moral regeneration and moral progress seem out of place. As Schurman remarks: "That Judas betrayed Christ, neither he himself, nor any other creature could have prevented; nevertheless, the betrayal was not a necessity, but an act of perfect freedom."[5] The freedom which Kant offers us is thus empty and unreal. The solution offered by the Vedanta theory gives us real freedom, freedom even in the phenomenal realm, where we are powerful enough to check our impulses, to resist our passions, and lead a life of satisfied selfhood in which the lower passions are regulated by reason.

Let us next turn our attention to the origin of the moral problem and the law of morality. The opening section of the Bhagavadgita indicates to us that the problem of morality arises only when there is a conflict between reason and sense, duty and inclination. Had Arjuna been mere reason, there could have been no Bhagavadgita. If, on the other hand, he had been mere sensibility, what would have been the occasion for it? It is because he was dominated by both sensibility and reason, and because, there was a perpetual conflict between them, that we have the Gita. In spite of all his knowledge, prowess, and other admirable qualities, Arjuna is just an ordinary mortal, endowed, among other things, with both reason and sense. Fully convinced of the righteousness of his cause, he comes to the battlefield of Kurukshetra, prepared to meet the enemy and fight to the bitter end. Taking a position between the hostile ranks, whom does he behold? The flower and choice nobility of Indian chivalry drawn up in the order of battle. Looking at the beautiful array of troops in his front, all come to fight in this civil war in which every man's hand was to be turned against his brother's, Arjuna, smitten with despondency, flings away his arms and falls down. He cares not for victory, throne, wealth, or glory, for they have to be purchased at a great cost. They have to be won

[5] "Kantian Ethics and the Ethics of Evolution," p. 7.

by profaning the religious rites, by destroying so many of God's children, by the regular slaughter of one's nearest and dearest. Arjuna, in deep distress and despair, exclaims:

> I do not wish for victory, O Krishna! Nor sovereignty, nor pleasure. What is sovereignty to us, O Govinda! What enjoyments, and even life? Even those for whose sake we desire sovereignty, enjoyments, and pleasures, are standing here for battle, abandoning life and wealth. . . . It is not proper for us to kill our own kinsmen. . . . For how, O Madhava! shall we be happy, after killing our own relatives?[6]

Arjuna had come to the battlefield thinking that it was his religious duty to fight unto the very death; but now the claims of blood and friendship assert themselves in him. Lower passions struggle for the mastery, and doubt divides his mind. And to quell the qualms of an educated conscience, scriptural texts are quoted. Be the cause as righteous as it may, the eternal law which declares, Thou shalt do no murder, has to be violated. Better were it, then, to die than to fight against part of one's own nature.

Here is a situation, a most critical one, requiring a solution. Reason stands against sense; duty is opposed to inclination. Arjuna refers the matter to Krishna, his divine guide: "With a heart contaminated by the taint of helplessness, with a mind confounded as to my duty, I ask you to tell me what is assuredly good for me. I am your disciple. Instruct me who have thrown myself on your indulgence."[7] Krishna asks Arjuna to be of good cheer and fight. He says: There is no cause for grief: you cannot kill or be killed, for you and your relatives are all immortal souls, and though the body be slain in the performance of your duties in life, you and they are, in essence, indestructible. If you shirk from, or decline to do, your duty, you will sin. And, besides, you can never be actionless by shunning action. Life is action and action must go on. Come good or evil, wealth or poverty, do your duty regardless of results.

[6] "Bhagavadgita," pp. 40, 41. [7] "Bhagavadgita," p. 43.

Therefore, arise, thou son of Kunti! brace
  Thine arm for conflict, nerve thy heart to meet
As things alike to thee—pleasure or pain,
  Profit or ruin, victory or defeat;
So minded, gird thee to the fight; for so
Thou shalt not sin.[8]

The demands of the lower self, or sense, have to be subordinated to the dictates of reason.

The case of Arjuna is typical of what is taking place every minute of our lives. It expresses what every one of us has often felt, it points out to us how our moral life is, after all, a conflict between duty and inclination, a struggle between reason and sense, and impressively instills into our minds the great truth, that morality consists in doing one's duty. What is the battlefield of Kurukshetra if it is not the battlefield of life? Who is Arjuna if he is not an ordinary mortal endowed with both reason and sense? Who are the Kauravas and others standing in array before Arjuna if they are not the lower passions and temptations? Who is Krishna if he is not the voice of God echoing in every man? Each one of us stands in the battlefield of life, in his chariot of mortal flesh drawn by the horses of his passions and sense faculties. These faculties, according to the ethics of the Bhagavadgita, are to be controlled and intelligently guided by reason and are not to be allowed to carry him to the abysmal depths of ruin.

Kant declares that the problem of morality arises only for beings in whom there is a conflict between duty and

[8] Edwin Arnold, "The Song Celestial," p. 16. Compare: "You have grieved for those who deserve no grief, and you talk words of wisdom—learned men grieve not for the living nor the dead—never did I not exist, nor you, nor these rulers of men; nor will any one of us ever hereafter cease to be . . . therefore do engage in battle. . . . He who thinks to be the killer and he who thinks to be killed, both know nothing. . . . Therefore you ought not to grieve for any being. Having regard to your own duty also, you ought not to falter. . . . But if you will not fight this righteous battle, then you will have abandoned your own duty" ("Bhagavadgita," pp. 43-47).

inclination, men in whom reason and sense stand opposed. Were we completely members of the rational world, our actions would tally with the law of reason or duty. And again, if we were merely members of the world of sense, our actions would take place according to the laws of sense, and could never be made to conform to duty. "If, therefore, I were only a member of the world of understanding, then all my actions would perfectly conform to the principles of autonomy of pure will; if I were only a part of the world of sense, they would necessarily be assumed to conform wholly to the natural law of desires and inclinations" (Kant's Ethics, page 7).

Thus we find that both the Bhagavadgita and Kant hold that the conflict between duty and inclination is the essential rule of morality, and the suppression of inclination by duty, the condition of moral worth. Though men may agree to differ on this point, it is, none the less, true that only in such a conflict can true moral character be revealed. As Professor Paulsen has said: "Where there has never been a conflict between inclination and duty, where the will has never had an opportunity of deciding against inclination and for duty, the character has not been tested."

Turning our attention to the moral law, we find that both Gita and Kant preach duty for duty's sake. "Your business is with action alone, not by any means with fruit. Let not the fruit of action be your motive to action."[9] "That an action done from duty, derives its moral worth, *not from the purpose* which is to be attained by it, but from the maxim by which it is determined, and therefore does not depend on the realization of the object of the action, but merely on the *principle of volition,* by which the action has taken place, without regard to any object of desire."[10] Thus according to both Gita and Kant, the highest type of morality consists in doing duty for

[9] "Bhagavadgita," p. 48.

[10] Abbott's translation of Kant's Ethics, p. 19.

duty's sake, without any personal attachment or hope of reward. The moral man must do his duty simply because it is duty. A man's will is good, "not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition, *i. e.*, it is good in itself."[11]

Thus far the two systems are agreed; but as we proceed we find that Kant excludes from moral actions, actions which are consistent with duty, but yet are done from inclination. A trader is honest from good policy; a man preserves his life 'as duty requires' and not 'because duty requires.' "It is a duty to maintain one's life; and, in addition, every one has also a direct inclination to do so. But on this account, the often anxious care which most men take for it, has no intrinsic worth, and their maxim has no moral import. They preserve their life, *as duty requires,* no doubt, but not *because duty requires.*"[12] Acts done from inclination, are not, according to Kant, moral. It is a defect of Kant's ethical theory that he conceives an act of duty as positively indifferent, nay, disagreeable to the senses. He even defines duty as "compulsion to a purpose unwillingly adopted."

The Gita ethics, on the other hand, does not ask us to destroy the impulses, but asks us only to control them, to keep them in their proper order, to see that they are always subordinated to and regulated by reason. By a life of reason the Gita ethics does not mean a passionless life, but one in which passion is transcended. "Great are the senses; greater than the senses is the mind; and greater than the mind is the understanding."[13] Though the Gita ethics does not enjoin upon us the complete eradication of the sensuous impulses, the demand for their control is so insistent as to lead us to think that it also advocates their total suppression.

How shall we explain this outcry against the senses? The Vedanta does scorn the sway of the senses. The Ve-

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 11. [12] P. 16. [13] Telang's translation, p. 57.

dantin flies from sensuous pleasure in every form, not because it is sinful in itself, but because it is too apt to endanger the soul by fettering it to that which is earthly and perishable. "Pleasure," says Professor Paulsen in his description of the Christian conception of life, "is the bait with which the devil ensnares the soul to chain it to the world." Things of the earth are the burdens that weigh us down and crush our hearts. Every great religious teacher has taught this important truth. Jesus rightly perceived that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Wealth alienates us from God.[14] But this does not mean that we must live a life of passionless quietism. We are not asked to uproot all desires; for that would imply the cessation of all activity. But life is action and action must go on. The Vedanta does not see any evil in the earthly life as such. It does not ask us to withdraw from the ordinary pursuits of life; but it does ask us to renounce the luxuries of life. We are asked to live the spiritual or the unworldly life in the world. The asceticism, if we may say so, which is insisted upon in the Gita ethics, is the asceticism of the inner spirit and not of the outward conduct.

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THE WRITTEN LAW AND THE UNWRITTEN DOUBLE STANDARD.

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THE enforcement of a law has its most far-reaching effect in driving home to the public mind a moral standard. Crude though the legal distinctions between right and wrong may be, they on the whole reflect the scruples of the average man, and they go to form the

[14] Paulsen's "System of Ethics" (Thilly's translation, pp. 88*ff*).