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TOWARDS A WORLD MORALITY

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, a classical work of Indian antiquity, composed almost at the same time as the Republic of Plato, explains the emergence of Dharma or Moral Law as necessitated by the rise of different social classes: In the beginning this world was Atman alone in the form of a person. Feeling the need to get out of his loneliness he created the different classes of people. But to keep the harmony among the classes, to control even the Kshatriyas, the fierce class of rulers, he created Dharma. "Therefore there is nothing higher than dharma. So a weak man controls a strong man by dharma, just as if by a king. But that which is dharma is truth (satyam). Therefore they say of a man who speaks the truth, 'He speaks dharma' or of a man who speaks dharma 'He speaks the truth'. In fact, both these are the same."¹ Plato also discussing justice finds its enlarged form in an ideal republic that organizes the different classes of people for the good of the whole.²

But ever since Descartes turned the attention of philosophy from the objective world of nature to the inner world of the thinking subject, ethics too has been in confusion. As Alasdair MacIntyre states, the loss of roots in ethical thinking is analogous what would happen if the natural sciences were to suffer the effects of a catastrophe in which laboratories were burned down, physicists lynched and scientific books and instruments destroyed. The original thinking in ethics is totally ignored and the generality of philosophical thinking in the field of morals is left with "fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts of which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived."³ Charles Taylor points to the same problem: "Much contemporary moral philosophy...has given such a narrow focus to morality that some of the crucial connections are incomprehensible in its terms. This moral

1. *Brih. Up.* I, iv, 14.

2. *Republic* II 268C ff.

3. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame, Ind. Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2nd ed. 1984, P. 2.

philosophy has tended to focus on which is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life; and it has no conceptual placelet for a notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance."⁴

1. Question of Meta-ethics

Contemporary moral philosophy is characterized by disagreement on basic moral issues and interminable debate about them with no rational way of arriving at an agreement of any sort. This is apparent in the present day controversies regarding just war, nuclear deterrence, abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, professional ethics and a host of other issues affecting the rational life of people today. As MacIntyre himself points out the basic reasons for this disagreement are conceptual incommensurability of rival arguments, the impersonal character of argumentation, and the wide variety of historical origins of the conceptually incommensurable premises of the rival arguments. They do not raise the same questions, argumentation is done in the abstract with no apparent relation to real life, and each premise employs some quite different normative or evaluative concept from others. Yet, "we all too often still treat the moral philosophers of the past as contributors to a single debate with a relatively unvarying subject-matter, treating Plato and Hume and Mill as contemporaries both of ourselves and of each other. This leads to an abstraction of these writers from the cultural and social milieu in which they lived and thought and so the history of their thought acquires a false independence from the rest of the culture."⁵

In history we are often baffled by the moral paradoxes that set up one individual or group against another individual or group in the name of principles of behaviour held with absolute certainty and sincerity. Thus the free Athenian People's Court consisting of more than five hundred members without any show of mass hysteria or frenzy, after a calm debate reluctantly condemns to death, on charges of impiety and corruptive influence on the youth, an innocent philosopher, Socrates, whose only crime was exposing the moral laxity of the Athenians. Elijah, the prophet of the Old Testament had eight hundred priests of Baal

4. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self, The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge Mass. Harvard Univ. Press, 1989, p. 3.

5. *After Virtue*, pp. 8-11.

put to the sword in the name of Yahweh, whom he preached as the one true God. In the Middle Ages in Europe witches and heretics were condemned to death by honest religious inquisitors who acted on the moral principle: "Error has no right!" This phenomenon of the clash of moral systems that eventually led to obviously immoral kinds of behaviour raises crucial questions: What is ethics? Why have we to be moral? What is the norm of morality? What specific method does one use to arrive at moral decisions? What is the relative importance of morality? What is the subject of morality? What is the consequence of violating the moral laws? In the past these questions that are outside the substance of ethics were not often discussed explicitly. In a people, generally motivated by religious faith, answer to these questions were implied in the moral rules themselves.

In the absence of shared common faith, questions about the nature, motivation, norm, method, subject and relative importance of morality have to be made explicit. This is the field of meta-ethics, a systematic discipline that enquires into the nature and extent of ethics. There is no reason why what is reasonable and legitimate for an American should be immoral for an Arab, or what is permitted to a Christian should be forbidden as evil to a Hindu or a Muslim. Often pornography is a matter of geography. The Greek navigators were the first to find out that certain things that were strictly forbidden as immoral in their own country were considered perfectly licit in other countries. The Sophists defended that pluralistic view in morality defending their position with the norms laid down by the exigencies of jurisprudence and the art of government. Against their relativism Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had to appeal to metaphysics and universal laws of being to show that human nature was the same everywhere and that it was governed by the same rules of rational behaviour.

The term "meta-ethics" was introduced by the Linguistic philosophers who thought that the task of philosophy was nothing but the analysis of language. They maintained a sharp distinction between the "philosophical" area of meta-ethics and the non-philosophical field of normative ethics. But since the 1960s this understanding of philosophy as mere analysis of language is generally abandoned and normative ethics came to be considered as being no less philosophical than meta-ethics. Besides, with the increasing awareness that the medium is part of the message and that there can be no real separation between questions

of substance and questions of meaning, no one can today keep meta-ethics and normative ethics in separate airtight compartments.

In recent times, however, a dramatic change has taken place from the other end of the spectrum, namely from the part of the professionals of normative ethics: Since metaphysical ideas and principles have less and less appeal today to influence the thinking and life of the people, moralists are turning mostly to particular human sciences like psychology and sociology to substantiate norms of moral behaviour. As a result, ethics has become less and less philosophical. Hence there is a great need for meta-ethics to define the philosophical meaning and value of morality. Besides, the great diversity of ethical systems not only within a single tradition as that of the West but also in the wider context of religio-philosophical traditions world-wide makes meta-ethics crucial for judging the relative value of different systems and also for finding out how far these are complementary.

ii. The Scientific Method and Ethics

In the West the radical break with the past was precipitated by the newly achieved scientific view of the world introduced by Galileo, Newton, Darwin and others. Alexander Pope wrote:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night;
God said, 'Let Newton be! And all was light.'

But in fact there followed a real darkness of moral confusion similar to what was described by Aristophanes in his own times: "Whirl is king, having cast out Zeus!" Empirical sciences established clarity and verifiability under controlled conditions as the criteria of objective validity. Newtonianism held forth the promise of understanding and ultimate control of things. But these criteria could not be extended to the world of spiritual and moral values. The French thinker Denis Diderot perceived the inevitability of the scientific view of the world and spent years trying to establish morality on rationally scientific foundations but could not find a satisfactory way. So in his voluminous writings never touched the subject, fearing that he would only become an apologist of wickedness and betray the cause of virtue. He believed in eternal moral values, but in his Supplement to Bougainville's 'Voyage' he compares Polynesian institutions with European favouring the former and insisting that institutions in which impulse and desire are frustrated should gradually be replaced by those which allow them expression. (see MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* p. 182).

Similarly, in England, David Hume challenged the legitimacy of the procedure from a descriptive statement to a normative conclusion: In every system of morality, according to him, people start with a neutral, impartial, objective statement and then imperceptibly pass from the usual copulations of propositions, 'is' and 'is not' to propositions connected with an 'ought' or an 'ought not'. This relationship could be observed or explained and would be inconceivable how this new relationship is derivable from the earlier factual statements. In Hume's view the illegitimacy of this transition from 'is' to 'ought' "would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality and let us see that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relation of objects, nor is perceived by reason." Hume, who found moral indifference as an immediate consequence of Newtonian scientific view was so much worried about its impact on the general public that he withheld publication of his Dialogues during his lifetime.

Emmanuel Kant also shared the same view of science as Diderot and Hume, and so felt it his duty to remove religion and morality completely outside the empirical field and the purvue of science. In his preface to the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals* he says: "I limit the question suggested to this: whether it is not of the utmost necessity to construct a pure moral philosophy perfectly cleared of everything which is only empirical, and which belongs to anthropology? Everyone must admit that if a law is to have moral force ie. to be the basis of an obligation, it must carry with it absolute necessity... Therefore, the basis of obligation must not be sought in the nature of man, or in the circumstances in the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in the conceptions of pure reason." It is in the very nature of a good will that Kant sees the passage from the common rational morality to its philosophical understanding. Every other good like intelligence, talents of the mind and courage can become extremely bad if the will that uses them is not good. "Thus a good will appears to constitute the indispensable condition even of being worthy of happiness."

Though Kant wanted to remove moral values from the purvue of empirical sciences and make them laws of the Will which is the faculty of good, as reason is the faculty of truth, he shared the same scientific preoccupations as of the empiricists. Since a jump from "is" to "ought" was assumed to be unscientific, the tendency was to locate moral values and rules of behaviour in an area between science and metaphysics. In

the broadest terms moral philosophers sought to give general guidance concerning what to do, what to seek and how to treat others.⁶ Both for David Hume and Emmanuel Kant, though in opposing camps regarding the absoluteness of moral values, the function of ethics is not discovering new knowledge, but explaining the knowledge we already have. The philosopher should try to unify and show the ultimate rationale of the moral knowledge and practices already taken for granted by people. Though Hume was not a utilitarian in a formal sense he is considered its precursor because he pointed out usefulness or agreeableness as the reason why we approved of certain traits of character. Ethical principles were a matter of intuition.

Utilitarianism:

For Jeremy Bentham, J.S. Mill, Henry Sidgwick and others ethics is a normative science, and utility is the norm. It is not a matter of internal obligation and conscience, which is relegated to the field of religion. It is mostly a question of nobility and integrity of character that one should act for the greatest pleasure of the maximum number of people. It means that reasonable people should foresee and weigh the consequences of their actions and aim to derive the greatest benefit for the greatest number. These are act-utilitarians. Science does not make rules but only state impartially how things are. Since the situations in which actions occur are infinitely variable, and since no two actions have the same consequences, one cannot formulate a rule out of it. Others, however, the maximum pleasure of the greatest number should be the rule of conduct. This reflects Kant's rule: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." It does not appeal to any transcendental principle or higher law, but only states that this is what every reasonable person should be doing. Morality is just the prudent way of acting. The same prudential approach was morality also for the ancient Hedonists like Epicurus and Aristippus of Cyrene who advocated that one should enjoy pleasures with a certain balance in such a way that one can enjoy it for the longest possible amount of time. They were, however, concerned only with an individual's life and enjoyment and did not take the social factor much into account.

6. P.H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics*, London 1954.

The Pragmatist Concept of Ethics:

Pragmatism introduced first by Charles Sanders Peirce in the field of communication and later extended to the field of morals and religion by William James, John Dewey and others takes ethics as a science of clarifying and communicating to others what we really want to do. Morality is a mode of behaviour we generally agree upon. It presupposes a community and a system of communication. When our ideas, conceptions and motivations are unclear, as often happens in the field of right and wrong, we need a science to clarify and make explicit our meaning. Peirce argued that the reason why philosophy is incapable of answering most of its own questions is that philosophers are not motivated by practical concerns but purely theoretical doubts. Philosophy has to renounce the search for absolute knowledge and look for practical solutions for practical problems willing to revise the answers as more knowledge becomes available. Peirce sought meaning in general concepts and formulas of action. According to John Dewey what Peirce attempted to do was an "experimental," not a priori, explanation of Kant, and he wrote as a logician.

William James, on the other hand was inspired by British empiricism and he was a humanist. He as well as Dewey agreed with the Utilitarians that ethics was not a philosophy made up in advance. The postulation of immutable ethical principles would deny the possibility of moral progress and would divorce questions of value from the concrete and evolving situations in which persons make ethical decisions. So they sought meaning in experienced facts and plans of action. The Pragmatists sharply disagreed with the Utilitarians that ethical evaluation can be done without ideals. Good cannot be reduced to one's private interests or pleasure. Ethical evaluation cannot take place in a "moral solitude" which can at best provide only a verdict of self-consistency or inconsistency. In fixing values, however, it was a question of learning by trial and error, and it could take place only in "an ethical republic" of human fellowship and human interaction, though there is no need to postulate a God or absolute ideals. As James stated in his *Pragmatism*: "The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one." In this perspective "value" is the basic concept of morality. To determine the

meaning or truth of something is to evaluate its practical consequences, workability and usefulness. Pragmatism denies the assumption that there is a moral order out there, a teleology that has only to be followed. Moral and social order is something to be created.

Advocating a scientific approach to morality George Herbert Mead states: The attitude of science "toward conflicting ends is the same as its attitude toward conflicting facts and theories in the field of research. It does not state what hypothesis must be adopted. It does insist that any acceptable hypothesis must take into account all the facts involved. It only insists that the object of our conduct must take into account and do justice to all of the values that prove to be involved in the enterprise." The difference between research and morals is that "in problems of conduct we must act, however inadequate our plan of action may be." Those many values we are unable to do justice to, are too precious to be ignored; they will constitute our ideals.⁷

The basic problem with the Pragmatist understanding of ethics is that it brings down the ultimate concerns of human moral life to the level of the casualness of the humdrum details of everyday life. Having rejected metaphysics along with Idealism with which it was often identified, the Pragmatists are trying without much success to bring in the transcendental values through the back door.

The Phenomenological Understanding of Ethics

Phenomenology started by Edmund Husserl and pursued in the ethical field by Max Scheler is critical of both Pragmatist and Kantian ideas of morality. The "Pragmatic" fact is not simply given, but contains elements contributed by the human mind, exclusively a function of its vitally directed efforts to master its environment. Pragmatism is a function of the scientific way of thinking, and scientific knowledge is both derived and relative to the functionalization of essence. It is ethical relativism that tends to reduce values to one basic rule. Kant, on the other hand, divides too sharply between the sensible element in cognition constituted by atomic impressions as claimed by the empiricists, and the rational element constituted by the purely formal

7. George Herbert Mead, *Selected Writings*, ed. Andrew J. Reck, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, Phoenix ed. 1981, pp. 248-266.

elements. So for him the "material element" in ethics is unordered feelings of pleasure and pain, and the "formal" element the categorical imperative. Edmund Husserl pointed out that it is the continuity of consciousness in our intentional approach to the sensed objects that makes the objective world transcendent. Our intentional approach to the formal doctrine of positions and synthesis of positions as pure forms makes formal logic. Similarly, our consciousness of feeling and will, forms of preference and valuing and willing in the interest of another makes the world of praxis.⁸ Scheler claims that there are material values a priori and an a priori order of values according to their relative worth, which does not involve or imply a stable a priori order of value carriers, valuable things, actions or goals. Everyday ethical decision-making derives a material a priori from the understanding we already possess of the nature and order of values, namely perception of objects as "beautiful", "holy", "noble". We "feel" this value of a thing and experience the preferring in the same way as we see its colour. Feeling is not merely subjective. Many emotions have objective references. Morality is not defining the highest good in itself, available only to intuition, but rather the value that appears in the activity of realizing positive values. Ethics begins with the analysis of these value essences as they appear upon the objects and actions that instance them.

For Scheler there are four classes of values, sense-value of pleasant and unpleasant, life-value as noble or common, values of the spirit such as experience of beauty and ugliness, and religious values such as the holy and unholy. Morality is not one of them. To be ethical is in fact to implement one of the values. However, it is not a matter of ought as for Kant. The sense of obligation is artificial and disingenuous, while the attraction of value or good is spontaneous and honest. It is analogous to sympathy, which is not fusion with another, but recognizing, meeting and respecting the subjectivity of another. To be moral is to be pulled up by the highest value rather than pushing oneself upwards. "Feeling" the value, however, is more of the subject than of the object. As Paschal said, the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing. Love and hate are ultimate facts of interpersonal experience, most deeply founded. Love is not

8. See *Ideas*, General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology, New York, Collier Bks, 1962, pp. 371-77.

mere sympathy, nor intensification of good will, nor even striving, not a willing at all. Love and hate are the most immediate and direct modes of relatedness to the value content of an object. The highest form of love is the love of the value of a person as that person, and not as the possessor of such and such characteristics. Ethics is specifically the value in which "ought" is founded on the awareness through love of a higher possible value from which is derived a concept of "some-thing-that-ought-to-be."

Phenomenology removes the dichotomy between "is" and "ought" introduced by Hume and Kant. There are no pure observations or purely descriptive statements. Every observation and statement is theory laden. Something is right or wrong in a particular framework of relationships, that are values. "Observation depends on theory because perception involves forming a belief as a fairly direct result of observing something; you can form a belief only if you understand the relevant concepts and a concept is what it is by virtue of its role in some theory or system of beliefs."⁹ Nothing presents itself to consciousness in isolation. Everything is tied to everything else in a network of multi-layered meaning, and morality is recognizing and respecting that meaning in which one's own personal consciousness is an integral part.

But the phenomenological approach also does not eliminate the complexities of moral decisions. How does one judge among the different values? Why should one judge the religious value to be higher than the aesthetic and life values? When there are different admirable ways of life is one obliged to choose the best and how should one decide what is best? When there are involved so many variables which defy comparative evaluation like apples and oranges one will have to settle for what is actually legitimate and feasible. Similarly when there are different defensible moral ideals the best course of action may be difficult to decide. Conflicts between different moral obligations and conflicts among various essential, but incompatible interests form another source of difficulty for arriving at a wise and legitimate order of priorities. Similarly the two faces of moral perception, one rational and articulate and the other less than rational, but emotional and intuitive constitute a serious problem in making moral judgments.

9. See Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, An Introduction to Ethics, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977, p. 5.

iii. The Greek Ontological Approach to Ethics

Greek philosophical thinking was born in a situation of conflict, man's struggle with an infertile stretch of land, the conflicts among various city states, and rivalry between the rich and the poor and among various classes in the same society. The Greek poets and philosophers endeavoured to resolve the conflicts and to create a harmonious and prosperous humanity. Martha C. Nussbaum summarises the attitude of Greek poets, in the words of Pindar: "Human excellence grows like a vine tree, fed by the green dew, raised up, among wise men and just, to the liquid sky," a thorough intermingling of what is of the spirit.¹⁰ For the tragedians of fifth century Greece, particularly Aeschylus and Sophocles, human excellence is man's vulnerability. They "characteristically show a struggle between the ambition to transcend the merely human and a recognition of the losses entailed by this ambition."¹¹ The tragedies show how man is placed in a situation of conflicting ethical demands, and whatever he chooses is evil, though better than the opposite. Their purpose is to show that man has to realize his own tragic condition in his relationship to the Gods, and should try to transcend it through thought and aspiration. Thus Orestes feels obliged to kill his mother to avenge the killing of his father, while he is pursued by his mother's furies for the crime of matricide. Antigone is caught between her loyalty to the country and obedience to the king on the one hand, and on the other hand by the obligation of piety to give a burial to her brother.

The Greek philosophers, on the other hand, endeavoured to put the whole human life on a rational basis. While they tried to discover the physis, the underlying stable nature of things, they also realized that human life had to be guided by reason. Anaxagoras, Parmenides and Heraclitus found that logos was the stable principle in life. For Xenophanes of Colophon (ca. 540 B.C.) it was a divine principle which "sees as a whole, thinks as a whole, hears as a whole... and sets everything in motion, by the thought of the mind." So for him wisdom was more excellent than athletic feats and horse-racing. Heraclitus distinguished between the common mass of people who are 'sleepers' and those guided

10. Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988, p. 1.

11. *Ibid.* p. 8.

by the logos. Socrates argues with Euthyphro that in defining piety instead of accepting as good whatever pleased the gods, one has to realize that only what is good could please the gods.

But the real test of the moral ideal of the Greeks came in the trial of Socrates. His accusers were representatives of poets, politicians and Sophists, who based morality on human emotions, political expediency and the changing mood of the times and will of the people. He is accused of disloyalty to the state religion and its officially declared gods, and corruption of the youth whom he encouraged to question the wisdom of their political leaders. For the Greeks religion was part of politics. The state appointed the gods and prescribed their cult to safeguard public order and morality and there emerged a public orthodoxy composed of the judgements defining good life and indicating the meaning of human existence commonly held by the members of a given society. This *politeia*, which was a way of life, provided the ultimate justification of their society, the character and tone of life dependent on "what the society regarded as most respectable or most worthy of admiration."¹² This *politeia* was more fundamental than law, which was made to conform to the public orthodoxy which itself was in turn very relative to the culture and tradition of the particular community.

The crime of Socrates was that he challenged this public orthodoxy which formed the very foundation of Athenian society. He pointed out that the service of Gods could not be for their benefit but only for the service of spiritual values, namely wisdom, justice, temperance and courage. One should have a clear rational understanding of what is holy and what is just, and what the nature of other virtues were. For him an unquestioned life is not worth living. He points out clearly that politics alone was the reason behind his condemnation, and that in the face of death goodness alone is the dominant value in human life. Death, after all, is not the end of life, but a transition to a better state, where money and power have no value. So he argues against Gorgias in the dialogue with that title, that it is better to suffer injustice than to inflict injustice on some one else,¹³ though a more mature Plato, and later Aristotle, will argue that it is still better if no one has to suffer injustice. The purpose of Plato's *Republic* is to reverse the methodology of the conception of public orthodoxy:

12. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago, 1953, p. 137.

13. *Gorgias* 527 b.

Instead of judging what morality is from the structure of an existing culture and society, one should reconstruct society itself on the highest rational ideal of social organization, so that it may serve as a macro-model for the microcosm of an individual human life.

Aristotle's ethical methodology is a sort of compromise between the high aristocratic particularism of Athenian nobility and the rational idealism of Plato. He does not share the clear confidence of Plato in moral matters. He states: "Fine and just actions, which political science investigates, admits of much variety and fluctuation of opinion, so that they may be thought to exist only by convention."¹⁴ Since human beings are neither godlike nor brutish, "we must as in all other cases, set the observed facts before us, and after discussing the difficulties, go on to prove, if possible, the truth of all the common opinions of the greater number and the most authoritative."¹⁵ Why a human being is moral while a stone is not is because to be consistent with their rational nature humans have to strive towards the ultimate goal of happiness. The ultimate form that affects man's actions is happiness, just like the centre of the world for the stone. Choice is only regarding the means, not with regard to the end. So those who fail to choose the right means do wrong, and virtue is actually the power to choose the right means.¹⁶ In the consideration of passions too Aristotle distances himself from Plato moving closer to the early Greek ideal: For Plato the rational move is made by the removal of passion, which only obstructs the vision of the soul. According to Aristotle, passion is part of man's total orientation towards the goal of nature. Rational action is the triumph of reason over passion, ordering it to the true well-being of nature. So moral excellence is not mere denial of the object of appetites nor over-indulgence, but maintaining the mean between the extremes. In Aristotelian ethics knowledge of the Form of the Good is not needed for moral excellence, though Thought Thinking Itself is what draws all to final happiness. So for Aristotle, ethics is not part of metaphysics but of politics. But like Plato, Aristotle also takes the leisured life of aristocracy as the ideal for moral life. Human life attains its highest point in the activity of a speculative philosopher with sufficient income as not to worry about his material needs.¹⁷

14. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094 b 14-16.

15. *Ibid.* 1145 b 1-5.

16. *Ibid.* Bk III, cc. 4 & 5.

17. cf. Thomas Gould, "The Metaphysical Foundations for Aristotle's Ethics," *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. John P. Anton & George L. Kostas pp. 451-61.

The main concern of later Greek ethical thinking as in the rest of philosophy was to reconcile the idealism of Plato with the pragmatism of Aristotle. The Stoics went along with Plato and looked with a certain contempt on material goods. Plotinus was in his philosophy essentially Aristotelian, and used that sound philosophy as a sort of ascent towards the One absolute from which everything else could be seen as emanations, in true Platonic perspective. Christian Platonists like Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa remained faithful to Platonic ethics baptized as Christian morality. So it was very much a morality of the spirit with very little concern for the human body. Sex was evil and sinful, but was tolerated as a necessary evil since we needed children! One who achieved a better synthesis between Plato and Aristotle was Ps. Dionysius, who started with the idea that everything is a diffusion of the one Good, but stated that, that sharing itself made the natures of things, their faculties, actions and objects. Aquinas followed him and emphasized the point that these same beings had to go back to their origin as their ultimate end, and that for rational beings it had to be through conscious moral decisions.

iv. Indian Approach to Values

T.S. Eliot has immortalized in his wasteland a statement of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: Da, Da, Da! Gods, men and demons approached their common father Prajapati for instruction and to each of them he prescribed a Da. To the gods Da meant damyata, restrain yourself: You are good, luminous and powerful; but do not dominate over the inferior beings. To human beings Da indicated datta, give: You are ambitious and overstretching; but goodness is not in grasping but giving. To the demons Da stood for dayadhvam, show kindness. These three indicate three fields of value in human life, the spiritual, the psychical and the bodily, demanding reflection, action and restraint. Contrary to the general impression, Indian ethical approach is highly optimistic assuming man as essentially good, identical in his inmost core with Goodness itself. The spirit needs concentration to realize its own inner goodness; the psychic level needs energy and action to accomplish the proper tasks, and the bodily sphere demands restraint lest man should dissipate himself in his activities.

These same three values came later to be mentioned in the reverse order as artha, kama, and dharma. Artha or wealth relates to the external world of possessions, with the basic rule that the world should serve man and not man the world. One must earn enough wealth by one's

own creativity as to lead one's life comfortably without undue preoccupation about the necessities of life. Kama stands for bodily pleasure, which should contribute to the joy of the spirit. Dharma, sees the spirit as the support of one's whole life and actions. When these three values are realized man attains his authentic selfhood which is called moksha, or liberation.

This optimistic outlook on life makes Indian tradition to see morality as *rjiva*, straightforwardness, and *satya*, truth, while immorality is seen as *vrijina*, crookedness and *anrta*, falsehood. There is no impartial outsider's view of ethics; one is completely involved in one's moral life. According to one's psychological maturity there are concentric perspectives of morality, and the method also accordingly changes. Of course, there is a basic level morality, *manavadharma* which is a common perspective of all human beings, even of those who do not believe in spiritual values. Here the basic method is that of discernment between good and bad, right and wrong, mostly expressed in mythic symbols of fight between *devas* and *asuras*, the good beings and bad beings, between light and darkness, between *Indra*, the God of heaven, and *vra* the dragon who drank up all water and hid the cows. The basic theme of *Mahabharata*, the Indian epic, is the fight between the *Pandavas*, the good people, and *Kauravas*, the bad people, waged on the field of the *Kurus*, designated as *dharmakshetra*, the field of right and wrong.

But there is another level of ethical thinking which is based on the actual inequality of human beings, the hierarchy of social orders of castes and classes. Here the basic values are purity, represented by the *Brahmin*, and auspiciousness and prosperity symbolized by the kingly class and the *Vaiśyas* or agricultural class. Each one has to conform to his class duties and family duties. As the divine incarnation *Krishna* says in the *Gita* taking on the duties of another class, even if it be of the ascetic, is immoral. *Svadharmā*, one's personal duty is unique.

But the ultimate metaphysical ground of morality is *rta*, the unity of all beings in one single source and centre, from which emerge in concentric circles truth, faith, duty, and action. *Rta* is the ground of authenticity that should hold one free from the entanglements of the phenomenal world and lead on to the realization of the really real, the One-without-a-second. According the *Vivekachudamani* of *Sankara*, the

Vedantin, the method is discrimination between the eternal and temporal, abandonment of the desire for fruits both here and here-after, exercise of virtues like self-control, tranquility and compassion, and intense desire to be liberated from entanglement in this phenomenal world. Since ignorance and suffering are inherent in this world of bondage one can transcend it only through knowledge and discernment. As Sankara Misra states commenting on the sutras of Vaiseshika, the atomic school, the discernment of the various categories of experience also implies discriminative knowledge as the means for self-realization. Similarly Vatsyayana speaking about the Nyaya school says that anvikshi or logic is a science of reflection that leads to discernment and liberation just the science of agriculture and business deals with the physical needs of man, and dandaniti or politics controls his passions and enables him to enjoy the amenities of social life. For the Samkhya-Yoga school the scope of discrimination is the distinction between Purusha and Prakriti self and non-self.

Buddhist morality follows closely the Hindu ethical approach and places the goal of morality as realizing life as suffering created by desire. The scope of the eight fold moral path is to attain nirvana or liberation through the realization of universal momentariness and soul-lessness of all things. It is interesting to note that Bhagavad Gita that seems to attempt a synthesis among the various systems of thought places the essence of morality in detachment and disinterested action. To Arjuna, who refuses to fulfil his duty as a fighter on account of his feeling for his kith and kin, Sri Krishna says: "You grieve for those who are not to be grieved for . . . The wise do not grieve for the dead or the living."¹⁸ Arjuna has to fight solely for the fulfilment of his duty, not looking for any results. In fact at the end of the story, there will be no real victors and no booty to be divided. The ideal person according to Gita is the man of steady wisdom, the illumined, who is not influenced by pleasure or pain. If Hindu ethics looks at the inner reality, the Self of the self from which everything flows as the norm, Buddha is saying that one cannot arrive at such a norm by generalizations from ordinary experience. The moral question is how to deal with one's life and the whole phenomenal existence. But the world of experience has no lasting and reality and by itself it cannot lead to the transcendent. So the goal of morality is to realize the unreality of the present existence and

18. See *Gita*, II, 11; On Man of Steady Wisdom see *Gita*, II.

remove suffering. The eightfold path grouped into three classes as right thinking, right behaviour and right concentration is a therapeutic process for removing pain. One can easily see that it is the psychological side of the Advaitic metaphysical view that the Real is one alone without a second, and that the goal of Dharma is to refer and reduce man's whole life and all things to *rta*, the one origin without origin. Morality is relevant only to the phenomenal world.

v. Judaic Personalism

If the jungle experience of the Indo-Gangetic plain made the Indians turn to their own interior to look for the ground and source of their moral life, Judaism was born from a desert experience. At the beginning of their history Jews appear a nomadic or semi-nomadic people wandering up and down the desert with the cattle and herds of sheep. In the loneliness of the desert one asks who is out there for help and support. The nomads are closely knit in their tribal solidarity, based on blood relationship, with obligations of mutual support. Even God is seen very much like a powerful tribal chief who commits himself exclusively to the protection of the tribe over against other tribes and other inimical groups, and the tribe pledges total fidelity to him. This was the general pattern for all the peoples of the Middle East. The kings of Babylon, Assyria and other nations formulated their benevolent treaties with their vanquished subjects, recounting all the benefits the kings themselves had conferred on the people, demanding in return their absolute allegiance and also promising future benevolence and generosity. The Code of Ur-Nammu dated about 2050 B.C. and the Code of Hammurabi of Babylon issued about 1700 B.C. are well known documents of antiquity. This is in fact the model assumed for the divine covenant proclaimed in the Bible. A good section of what is promulgated under the name of Moses as the command of Yahweh is similar in content to the administrative regulations of Hammurabi. Rather than being direct borrowing from those ancient documents, the Biblical moral code only point to a similar social situation and a common outlook arising from the context.

The *Decalogue* containing the 'Ten Words' of Yahweh, (Ex. 20: 22-23; Dt. 5:6-21) do not appeal to the intrinsic nature of things as participations of the absolute Good according to the Greek perspective, nor to the dimensions of one's authentic self as in the Indian tradition. They are the personal injunctions of a paternal authority. They assume two forms, one apodictic, "You shall ..." or "You shall not..." The other form is

casuistic referring to a given situation: "If you take a man's cloak as security, you must return it to him at nightfall" (Ex. 22:25). These legal forms represent the two-dimensions of the interpersonal relationship, the vertical dimension to the common Father and Lord, and the horizontal dimension in the social solidarity. The proclamation of Yahweh's covenant with the people is presented in dual form, one at Sinai and the other at Horeb. The Sinaitic proclamation (Ex. cc. 19 & 24) has the appearance of a banquet in the presence of the Lord (Ex. 24:1-11) and it follows the popular Elohist thinking, a fellowship with the deities. The proclamation at Horeb (Ex. cc. 33 & 34) is of the Jahvistic tradition and emphasizes the solemn proclamation of the Laws of the Lord. Both, however, are complementary presentations of an interpersonal understanding of the ethical code.

The distinctive characteristic of the Judaic Law is that God is not merely a guarantor of the law as in other Oriental codes, but a party to it. The law was the charter of a treaty with God. So it contained the obligations undertaken by the people freely and deliberately, as is made clear in a re-promulgation of the covenant by Josue at Shechem (Josue c. 24). But it was also a body of teaching directed at the people, and hence its prescriptions are often supported by a justifying motive. For example, in juridical actions, gifts should not be accepted, "for the gift blinds the wise and perverts the words of the righteous." Ex. 23:8 and idolatry is forbidden, "for, I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God" (Ex. 20:5). This instructional function of moral law gave a particular place to the prophets. They appeared as spokesmen for God's word interpreting it in the concrete situation.

The Twelve Tribes of Israel were a federation of tribes with parallel examples among other Arab tribes. Though blood relation was the basis of solidarity, Judaic history shows that it has a broader range. Abimelek tells the whole clan of his mother: "I am of your bones and of your flesh," (Jg. 9:2) and David calls all the members of his clan his "brothers." In the precarious condition of the desert security was in solidarity. This was also the reason why great emphasis was placed on hospitality, a necessity of life in the desert. The guest is sacred, and the concern for him could sometimes lead even to immoral extremes (Gen. 19:1-8 & Jg. 19:16-24). The same brotherly preoccupation in a desert situation gave rise also to a law of asylum. In that type of society it was impossible and inconceivable that an individual could live all by himself, unattached to any tribe.

The distinctive character of Islamic morality was that it transformed the blood relationship of the tribe into a faithbond. The basic point of Islam is that God is a personal being who communicates his will to human beings, his creatures and servants. The *Qur'an* is accepted as God's word revealing His will. Revealed to Mohammed through angel Gabriel, it made God's Word present to man. The assumption behind it was that human beings are incapable of discriminating between right and wrong by their own unaided powers. So the moral code of the *Qur'an* provided a shared system of law, education, aesthetics and religion building up an Islamic identity in thought and life. Since Mohammed was the communicator and interpreter of God's law, prophethood had a central role in Islamic morality. Every rule and principle had to be referred back to some saying of Mohammed in the Hadith literature in order to establish moral validity. It was also community oriented. The true Muslim moved inwards to the heart of the community while the violators of the law fell outside. The movement was expressed horizontally, while the mystical "ascent" was rather suspect in the Islamic moral tradition.

Conclusion

What comparative ethics provides is the divergent convergence of ethical systems. It shows how the same moral conclusions common to all humanity can be arrived at through radically different methods of approach. The scientific approach which is becoming obsolete and inadequate in this post-scientific age, could go only by the principles of utility and practicality to justify acceptable behaviour. It relegated conscience and strict obligation to the private area of faith and religion, and morality became the code of public behaviour. But this division between private and public becomes increasingly unacceptable when one's private decisions inevitably affect public life as in various moral cases as those of abortion and euthanasia.

So in contemporary debates on what is moral one is naturally led back to the moral thinking of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In a similar situation of moral confusion created by poetic sentimentality, political expediency and public oratory they appealed to the rationality of human beings on the one hand, and on the other, to the common natures of things and the universality and immutability of moral ideals. Hence the moral orientation to the absolute good and goal of human life has to be through the virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and courage.

But modern world grown small through the mass media of communication cannot afford to ignore in a moral perspective for the whole of humanity the Oriental approach to ethics. Instead of looking upwards to the Good, the form of all forms, it searched in the interior of the human microcosm for the one Self of its own selfhood for an answer to the human problem of suffering. Its source and norm of all morality is *rta* or *wu*, the maternal womb from which all things emerged. Conformity to that maternal principle demands faith, truth, duty and righteousness in all one's behaviour. * Hence the basic dimensions of a moral life are right thinking, right behaviour and tranquillity centered in concentration of all one's forces.

Judaic and Islamic morality asks the question "who" and finds the answer in the existence of a God who created heaven and earth and particularly human beings and communicated his own will and law regarding human behaviour. This interpersonal approach to ethics makes every moral demand a personal command of God as well as the requirement of human co-existence as members of a community. Here the basic moral requirements are faith in God, obedience to his will and love of God and of one's fellow human beings.

These basic patterns of moral thinking are complementary since each of them expresses a basic human search for ultimate answers asking what, whence and why of things and who concerning the author of all things. But their paths, methods, problems and systems are radically different and cannot be fused into a common mould without destroying their identity. The proper procedure for a global ethic is to maintain these different traditions in mutual tension and recognize their convergence in conclusions regarding human life.