

# The Ethical System in Sankara and Swedenborg

## A Comparative Analysis\*

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If one believes in spiritual destiny, he must act in the world in the light of that faith. In religion, moral conduct determines spiritual destiny. The function of ethics is to assist the transition from the temporal to the eternal.

A man's temporal existence imposes upon him several dilemmas. For instance: is man created good, and is he free to fulfil the eternal commandments; or is he inherently evil and helpless who can be saved only by the grace of the Eternal? The Protestant tradition rejects Pelagius's view of man's goodness and freedom and accepts St Augustine's view that the natural man is basically depraved and his spiritual salvation lies through God's grace, a view which, as we will presently see, is also shared by Swedenborg. The other dilemma, the religious person faces is that both Hinduism and Christianity tell him that the Absolute is not dependent upon the universe, and could not be so because He is unchanging while the world is ever changing; yet, the mortal man tends to perceive the Absolute through the empirical world. In Christianity especially, man faces the dilemma whether to live up to the ideals of the brotherhood of man, or fatherhood of God. The ideals of brotherhood beckon him to extend his humanism and to assert social values. This is the religion of the love of one's neighbour. It is prescribed in Christianity and it is also enjoined in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Yet both in Christianity and in Hinduism there is a compelling other worldly tradition. 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him' (1 John 2:15), may, on the other hand be interpreted as the negation of social ethics. Even Schweitzer who criticizes the Hindu for being life-negating is compelled to admit that the teaching of the historical Jesus was purely and exclusively world renouncing.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the Sermon on the Mount 'is a proclamation of unworldliness

\*This article is part of a larger study, *Two Religions, Two Seers: Hinduism and Christianity, Sankara and Swedenborg*, which is in progress. I am indebted to the Swedenborg Foundation for financial support, to Clayton Priestnal, Tomas Spiers and Sig Synnestvedt for intellectual encouragement and Elaine Germano for research assistance.

<sup>1</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 249, cited by S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 69.

in its extremist form'.<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that in Christianity and Hinduism worldly attachments limit the search for the Absolute. But should man give up all worldly association?

Both Sankara and Swedenborg would agree that public deeds, infused with ethical awareness, are quite important. The function of spiritual life is not, however, to associate with the world as it exists, but to transform it according to divine dictates. This is what St Peter seems to have meant when he wrote that 'the end of all things is at hand'. In other words, the temporal existence is to be seen as preparation for spiritual destiny. *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad* declares that as one acts, so does he become; as is his desire, so is his will; as is his will, so is his action (4.4.5). Therefore, spiritual will and worldly action need to be brought into harmony. In this respect, both the Christian and the Hindu agree. The kingdom of God is within us; the Brahman is within us. But the mere knowledge that the kingdom of God is within us is of no value unless one lives a life consistent with the values of this kingdom,<sup>3</sup> or as Swedenborg puts it, truth becomes alive when embodied in actions.<sup>4</sup> In Sankara's system likewise, the truth of Brahman must be realized, only then can man be freed from the temporal illusion of history. Only through spiritual realization can we see the limitedness of the temporal world. But as long as we live for the fulfilment of private worldly wishes, spiritual destiny is not possible. Yet, as Sankara points out, man's true kingdom is not of the temporal world—however noble and pious his worldly life may be.<sup>5</sup>

To Swedenborg moral rules and public deeds represent practical religious philosophy. Man to him is a universal being. He is everywhere the same irrespective of his station in life. And this universal man, according to Swedenborg, is in the Lord's kingdom when 'the good of his neighbour, the general good, and the good of the Church and of the Lord's kingdom are the ends regarded in everything he does'.<sup>6</sup> These three ends are equivalent, by his own definition, to the good of charity. Though Swedenborg at length describes what charity itself does, numerous aspects of the 'good' of charity, and the different ways in which a man who seeks to be an embodiment of charity should act, he does not distinctly define charity, the quality upon which his entire ethical system is based, because the meaning of charity is implicit in his metaphysics. Swedenborg sees the internal of the Christian church to be love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbour. The doctrines of the church, he argues, serve merely to teach man how to

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Gore cited by Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Freedom, Rationality and Catholicity*, edited by B. F. Barrett (Philadelphia: E. Caxton, 1881), p. 125. Cited hereafter as *FRC*.

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Swedenborg, *Charity, Faith and Works*, edited by B. F. Barrett (Philadelphia: E. Caxton, 1881), p. 107, Cited hereafter as *CFW*.

<sup>5</sup> M. K. V. Iyer, *Advaita Vedanta* (Bombay: Asia Publishing, 1964), p. 178.

<sup>6</sup> *FRC*, p. 256.

live, and are true in so far as they are based on charity. In fact, Swedenborg felt that many varieties of the explanations of the mysteries of faith were possible and that an individual could accept which of these he wanted, according to his conscience, as long as love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbour were the guiding principles of his faith.<sup>7</sup> This is why Swedenborg felt that the existence of many denominations of Christianity was wrong, that there should be only one Christian church, consisting of those people who live according to the truth of the faith, that is those who live the life of charity. His concept of church is not that of the external organization of religious doctrines; the church is *in* man, not outside him, and is equal to that which constitutes heaven in man (that is, love and charity).<sup>8</sup>

Not infrequently, Swedenborg uses the term charity synonymously with love, with good, with love and wisdom, with faith—essences which produce moral deeds and spiritual actions. But, he also uses the term charity synonymously with the deeds themselves, with the thoughts, speech, and action which come from a man who is an embodiment of charity.<sup>9</sup> The methods by which one becomes an embodiment of charity, and the subsequent works prescribed are specifically and carefully laid out. The first step in charity is to avoid evils, evils which compromise man's will. One must examine one's actions and especially one's thoughts, recognize sins in oneself, confess them to God, and repent. Repentance is essential for any 'good of charity' because charity is a gift from God, and God cannot enter into a man to do good through him until the man is free from evil. Avoiding evil and doing good are two distinct things and do not cancel each other out. Those who do good in some respects but do not avoid evils in others are not doing 'goods of charity', for the goods of charity are works qualified by inner motivation, works motivated by love or spiritual affection. Doing evil is contrary to the good of love<sup>10</sup>, and comes from a different motivation. Works undertaken as a result of any other motivation are works just from the man, and are not works of charity. Thus, when one is doing good works from love for one's neighbour, or for the sake of good and truth, this is a manifestation of God acting through man, and God cannot enter into a man if there is any evil in him. To do evil to one's fellow citizen and to society is, specifically, to act contrary to the Ten Commandments, and this constitutes sin against God. The moral law is not to kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet, etc. Yet, a man who obeys the moral law and avoids evils only because of the fear of worldly punishment, like loss of reputation, is seen to be morally guilty, and is to be considered as engaging into evil. Intention and motivation, therefore, are of utmost importance. Take for example murder. According to Swedenborg, murder is of three varieties: natural, spiritual and higher. Enmity, hatred, feeling of revenge constitute

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>9</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Charity* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1931), p. 66, Cited hereafter as *Charity*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

**murder in the natural sense inasmuch as a murderous spirit is harboured. Swedenborg bases this assertion on the authority of the Gospels:**

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment'. But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5:21-22).

**Murder in the spiritual sense involves the 'various and manifold methods' of destroying the souls of men, which Swedenborg describes no further. Murder in the highest sense is the hatred of the Lord. These three kinds of murder make one, and cohere together; for whoever is disposed to kill the body of man in this world, is also disposed after death to kill his soul, and even to destroy the Lord; 'for he burns with anger against Him, and is desirous to put out his name'.<sup>11</sup> Swedenborg also believes that man is born with these murderous desires but learns to cover them with civil and moral conduct, which is of no avail unless man also frees his internal or spiritual part from these evil desires. In his examples of other sins—lying, adultery and theft—Swedenborg again distinguishes between the natural and the spiritual, and in every case freedom from evil on the natural level means nothing, is not true, unless one is correspondingly free from evil on the spiritual level. 'Man has a natural mind and a spiritual mind. The natural is beneath, and the spiritual is above: the natural is the mind of his world, and the spiritual is the mind of his heaven. . . . It is likewise by virtue of this mind (spiritual) that he lives after death. . . .'<sup>12</sup> Swedenborg's concept of salvation will be discussed later; what is to be stressed here is this distinction between the natural and the spiritual, for this distinction is present throughout his entire ethical system, even when not expressly stated. The only deeds which are truly of charity are those that are correctly motivated internally, or spiritually. Civil good, that which a man does in accordance with civil law, and moral good, works in accordance with moral law, are both natural, and only a man principled in spiritual good is also a moral and civil man.<sup>13</sup>**

The second basic step in charity is: 'Do goods for the reason that they are uses'.<sup>14</sup> And uses are the faithful performance of everyone's duty in his respective station in life, which means serving one's country, one's society, and one's neighbour from the heart. A man loves his neighbour when he performs uses,<sup>15</sup> and loving one's neighbour as oneself is essential in Swedenborg's system, but with one reservation. One's neighbour is to be discreetly chosen, for not all men are equally the neighbour, and only the neighbour who is good and true is to be loved. Genuine charity is prudent and wise, and when one loves a neighbour out of genuine charity, one must ask what the man is like and benefit him according to the quality of his good. 'Good' is

<sup>11</sup> *CFW*, p. 206.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>14</sup> *Charity*, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> *FRC*, p. 175.

qualified in degrees, again, of spiritual, moral, and civil; spiritual good is the basic requirement in the neighbour to be loved.<sup>16</sup> In order to love the neighbour, a man must himself be an embodiment of charity, which he becomes from doing uses from affection and with pleasure. The whole idea is somewhat circular, for the second step in charity is to perform uses which include duties to one's neighbour, and yet in order to perform these duties to the neighbour one must be an embodiment of charity. However, the actual workings of the idea are not as important as the essential part of the idea, which concerns the motivation behind all these actions. And Swedenborg here quotes Paul:

Love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. Especially thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:8-10).<sup>17</sup>

Moral life, which is the same as a life of charity, is in its essence a life according to both human and divine laws. These include the ten commandments, and moral and civil duties. Man's duty in his lifework is to perform this work sincerely, justly, and faithfully. Swedenborg also enjoins specific duties to priests, magistrates, judges, officials, military leaders, farmers, sailors, labourers, etc. One must also perform public duties of charity, which include paying tribute and taxes, performing civil duties of deference and obedience, and doing both sincerely and good-naturedly.

A man's domestic duties include providing for his wife, children, and servants, and also include his parental love for his children and his *conjugal* love for his wife. 'Conjugal', which refers to his concept of the sexual and spiritual union in marriage, is a term only used by Swedenborg, and he devotes an entire work to defining, and describing the uses and benefits of, conjugal love. In complete opposition to Sankara's doctrine of divorcing oneself from all desires for the pleasures of the senses, Swedenborg states that it is *not* forbidden to enjoy corporeal and sensual pleasures, as long as these pleasures are for the sake of uses. He further states that recreations of the senses, such as viewing shows and engaging in social conversation, listening to music, eating at banquets and feasts, relax the mind. The mind would become dull if unrelaxed, and needs rest and variety to keep it sharp.<sup>18</sup> The pleasures arising from possession of lands and money, from social position and social honours are all of use, for a man must procure for himself the necessaries of life to put himself in a position which will enable him fully to exercise charity to the neighbour. According to Swedenborg, man should have concern for his body, should feed it, clothe it, and let it enjoy the delights of the world; but all this for the sake of the soul, so that the soul is able to act rightly and correspondingly in a sound body.<sup>19</sup> All the pleasures of the senses have their origin in the interior man, or his soul, and if the man is an em-

<sup>16</sup> *Charity*, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> *CFW*, p. 74.

<sup>18</sup> *Charity*, p. 111.

<sup>19</sup> *FRC*, p. 251.

bodiment of charity, these affections are from good and truth and charity and faith, which all come from God. All these pleasures which are derived from charity are a delight to man because of their use, and the more exalted the use, the greater the delight. 'Thus, for instance, conjugal love, which is the seminary of human society, and from which is formed the Lord's kingdom in the heavens, performs the most important of all uses, and is therefore attended with so great a delight that it is heavenly happiness'.<sup>20</sup>

The equation of Swedenborg's conjugal love to heavenly joy is extremely interesting. For Sankara, one of the first steps for the attainment of the heavenly bliss of liberation, *moksa*, is to renounce all desire for any pleasures of the senses. Sexual intercourse, being the ultimate pleasure of the senses, would probably be the first to go. For Swedenborg, on the other hand, sexual intercourse itself, though it must adhere to his specifications, is the main component of conjugal love, and produces heavenly happiness. Swedenborg's description of conjugal love, its uses and its reward, its ultimate holiness, and his description of those who may partake in it, is again somewhat circular. He states that heavenly joy consists solely in the delight of doing something that is useful to ourselves and to others, and that this delight derives its essence from love and its existence from wisdom.<sup>21</sup> He later states that a state of heavenly life is essentially derived from love and wisdom in use, which is the same as charity, faith, and good works. (Charity=love; faith=truth, from which wisdom is derived; good works=uses.)<sup>22</sup> Uses, again, are of the utmost importance; they are the bonds of society. To live for others is to perform uses. The use of conjugal love, which is to propagate the species, is of 'superior excellence' because the chief end of creation is to populate the angelic heaven.<sup>23</sup> The angelic heaven is populated with the souls of deceased humans; hence the more humans those who partake in conjugal love produce, the more human souls there are to populate the angelic heaven. Obviously, this could not be the sole reason for the extreme pleasure of conjugal love, because sexual love, which Swedenborg admits exists, though he maintains its distinctions from conjugal love, also produces more humans who are subsequently capable of salvation, and therefore sexual love is also capable of performing the good use of populating the angelic heaven. Swedenborg is able completely to ignore this problem because of his other qualifications of conjugal love. These other qualifications, however, merely define and describe conjugal love without giving any other spiritual reasons for its unsurpassable delight. Swedenborg's description of love, in general, is consistent with his descriptions of most things in that he maintains the dichotomy of natural love and spiritual love. 'Love of the sex' is of the natural man, and is a desire only for an external conjunction and the bodily pleasures thus derived, while conjugal love is of the

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Conjugal Love* (New York: American Swedenborg Printing, 1863), p. 10. Cited hereafter as *CL*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

spiritual man, and is a desire for internal conjunctions and the spiritual satisfactions thus derived.<sup>24</sup> Though the love of the sex is the very first rudiment of conjugal, conjugal love is very different from the love of the sex, for it is the angelic love of the sex. It is a chaste love and is the very essential delight of the mind and therefore also of the heart. It is also indescribable, that is, its 'delights are of too interior a nature, and too abundantly pleasant, to admit of any description in words'.<sup>25</sup> It is first a love of the spirit and then of the body, while an unchaste love of the sex is first a love of the body. Any man who is not in charity, that is, is not performing good works or uses, is not capable of knowing conjugal love, and is thus involved in the evils of lust, lasciviousness, fornications, adulteries, etc.<sup>26</sup>

Swedenborg also describes the spiritual and holy union of a married couple in conjugal love as corresponding to the marriage of God and the church. Here he is describing it in lofty terms, as the foundation love of all other loves of heaven and the church, as originating in the marriage of good and truth, and as an exclusive privilege given only to 'those who approach the Lord and love the truths of the church and practice its goods'.<sup>27</sup> On a more physical level, he describes the supreme benefits of conjugal love metaphorically: 'Conjugal love expands the inmost principles of the mind, and at the same time the inmost principles of the body, as the delicious current of its fountain flows through and opens them'.<sup>28</sup> This statement itself very aptly illustrates one basic difference between Swedenborg and Sankara: Swedenborg absolutely maintains that the mind and body work together; while Sankara maintains that the self is totally unconnected to the body, and that this realization is necessary for any personal salvation. And this serves further to indicate, as has been mentioned, the very basic difference of Sankara's attitude toward the ultimate irrelevance of action, and the extreme importance of all action which is recognized by Swedenborg.

Sankara's ethics is primarily concerned with self-discipline. Its purpose is the purification of human existence and the deepening of inner spiritual life in order that the individual be liberated from the web of temporal existence. The ethics of social welfare plays a less important role in Sankara's system, and it is not an end in itself. The general trend of Sankara's thought can be best summed up in the words of the *Gita*: 'Let a man be lifted up by his own self; let him not lower himself; for he himself is his friend, and he himself is his enemy. To him who has conquered himself by himself, his own self is a friend, but to him who has not conquered himself, his own self is hostile, like an external enemy' (VI, 5-6). Self-discipline is emphasized in Hinduism for a variety of reasons. In the first place, society is seen as an aggregate of individuals, and so intense is the emphasis on individuality in Hinduism that it is taken as an axiom that social welfare will follow

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

automatically if individuals choose the path of spiritual progress. Furthermore, the impermanence of the empirical world tends to reduce the importance of social ethics. Since the temporal world is impermanent, its values are temporary. In such a world of imperfection good and evil, pleasure and pain, will always exist. Therefore, social morality cannot have an intrinsic value. Such morality is merely an instrument which points the way to freedom and liberation from temporal existence. Yet the value of social ethics is not denied. Good actions are enjoined. Says the *Katha Upanisad*: Self-knowledge is denied to him who has not engaged in good actions (I. ii. 24).

An action is judged good if it involves a denial of personal pleasure (*tapas*), and the renunciation of the fruits of action (*nyasa*) on the doer's part. If everyone became austere, the phenomenal world could not go on. Material pleasures are felt by sense-organs. Hence, a person practising *tapas* must give up sensual yearnings, craving for wealth, and desire for power. The entire body of *Upanisads*, upon which Sankara's philosophical system is based, demands austerity.<sup>29</sup> Whereas Swedenborg sees correspondences between the idea of spiritually-motivated sensual pleasure and the ideal of good, the *Upanisads* reject a compromise between the two. Of course, contrary to prevalent opinion, austerities do not mean mortification of the body or sense-organs. Sankara emphasizes the necessity of discrimination and willpower as two important elements in the practice of self control. Such self control must be temperate.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, in Sankara, in addition to the *Upanisadic* strain is the influence of the *Bhagvad Gita*. The *Gita* demands social duties. These duties must be selflessly performed.

The renunciation of worldly activities and their unselfish performance both lead to the soul's salvation. But of the two, the unselfish performance of works is better than their renunciation.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, ethical social action purifies a man because the selfish impulse is destroyed. Sankara reconciles the *Upanisads* with the *Bhagvad Gita* by declaring that eventually ethical social action becomes irrelevant to man's quest for the Transcendental. This is because Sankara believes that any attachment to the phenomenal world, however selfless it be, still binds one to the finite world. For the sake of the higher end even selfless attachment must be given up. Ethical actions do not directly produce man's liberation from this phenomenal, impermanent world. But they do generate in him the desire for knowledge. Morality is therefore the mediating cause of liberation or transcendence. But true liberation comes as a result of knowledge.

Sankara's term for this true knowledge is *jnana*. This true knowledge defines the relationship of the individual being to the Supreme Being, and also its distinction from matter and time. Discipline,

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad*, III. v. 1, *Taittiriya Upanisad*, III. 2, *Chandyoga Upanisad*, II. 23.

<sup>30</sup> Commentary on the *Bhagvad Gita*, XVII. 6; IV. 17.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, V. 2.



however, is necessary for the study of *Upanisads* wherein these relationships are defined. But merely mental knowledge is not enough for the attainment of liberation; such knowledge must be accompanied by an appropriate life style. Morality, therefore, is helpful to the aspirant of liberation. A person eligible for the study of *Upanisads* must exhibit certain qualities, such as renunciation of sensual desires, and the cultivation of such virtues as restraint, fortitude, and concentration. For the attainment of right knowledge, the seeker must go through three stages. The first is *sravana* (literally constant hearing) in which formal study of the *Upanisads* is made under the guidance of a preceptor. The guru helps the student detach himself from worldly affairs, affecting the very depths of the student and thus spiritually regenerating him. The second stage, *manana* (right reasoning) is a stage of reflection in which the student must exercise independent thinking. The third is *nididhyasana*, a constant and uninterrupted contemplation which includes meditation on the phrase '*Tat tvam asi*' or 'That thou art'. This meditation is to transform the instruction from the teacher, which is indirect, into an immediate and direct experience of realization within the student.<sup>32</sup> Note that these three final and most important stages have nothing to do with moral actions. Religious works and sacrifices may be helpful to the aspirant, but they are definitely not necessary. Ethical social action at most is an aid to the arousal of a desire for the highest knowledge, for such action does bring purity of mind. A state of mental purity is attained when one is cleansed of such qualities as selfishness and egotism. All activities, mental, verbal, and physical, of a person who has not realized his true Self are rooted in a pleasure-seeking desire, that is, in ego gratification or in sensuous satisfaction. Such activities are bad and must be redirected and transformed to lead one to the good. Good is equated with spiritual wisdom and self-knowledge. Therefore, actions, desires, and thoughts which lead one along the path to self-realization are morally justified, though they still are not more than remote aids.<sup>33</sup> 'Moral virtues such as compassion, charity, self-control, and non-injury may be supports for the attainment of the spiritual end', but only because they will lead to a rebirth in a higher being, a being who will be closer to the possibility of attaining liberation.<sup>34</sup>

There are several specific reasons given by Sankara as to why *karma* alone cannot be used as a means to *moksa*. Most important is that *karma* entails a distinction between the doer and the deed, a duality by definition, and dualism is not permitted in the recognition of Brahman as Atman. In fact, even the processes of investigating and worshipping are a hindrance to the recognition of Brahman as Atman, for they also separate subject from object.<sup>35</sup> Also, empirical knowledge, gained from processes like investigating and worshipping,

<sup>32</sup> Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> Deutsch, Eliot, *Advaita Vedanta* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1969), p. 101.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> Deussen, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

is wholly subservient to egoism, which causes one to seek for what is desired and avoid what isn't. *Jnana* negates all such distinctions and transcends all dualism because it is specifically a knowledge relating to the identity of the individual self with the supreme. The person who has just about attained this realization, known as a *Sadhaka*, does not feel the lack of anything, while *karma* involves the feeling that something has yet to be realized, for it implies a lack of fulfilment through the tension incurred by its stress upon the effect of one's actions on one's future state of being. Sankara does admit that the discipline of *karma* can progress side by side with the pursuit of *jnana*; but when the aspirant rises above all sense of dualism, *karma* ceases to exist for him.<sup>36</sup> For the person who attains knowledge, there is nothing to be toiled after or avoided because 'there is nothing that reaches beyond his own Self (Atman).'<sup>37</sup> It is true that this person has a body, but he knows that the body is merely an illusion, for he has realized his own true nature. One's own true nature is hidden by ignorance, the ignorance which superimposes a body, a mind, and the sense-organs on the Self, and it is these three superimpositions which bring trouble and misery to the self. Specifically, the identification of the Self with the body is the cause of all misery.<sup>38</sup> To the person who is subject to the illusion of the body, the illusion of duties still persists. Both empirical knowledge and action can exist only when one considers the body and the sense-organs to be part of the self. The duties and works of one's former existence, and thus the works and actions of each existence, are both determined by the former existence and have effect upon the later existence. All works, both good and evil, demand retribution in the following existence; therefore no performance of works will ever lead to liberation. Even after the retribution of works there is still a residue left, and it is this residue which determines the nature of one's rebirth. This residue is explained by Deussen by distinguishing two classes of works, one class consisting of works which influence life in the Beyond, the other consisting of works which influence rebirth here.<sup>39</sup> Deussen also feels that Sankara tends toward equating the ritual works of the Veda with those which influence life in the Beyond, and the works resulting from moral conduct or character with those which influence rebirth. However, Sankara did not openly state this, and this idea did not prevail in the Vedanta school.<sup>40</sup>

Comparable to Swedenborg's distinction between natural and spiritual is Sankara's distinction between the natural (or corporeal) and the incorporeal. All works enjoined by the person who has not attained *moksa* are the product of motives and character, the motives and character which consist in the natural disposition to activity and enjoyment. The only way to destroy this natural disposition to action is through perfect knowledge, and perfection is of the spiritual realm.

<sup>36</sup> Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup> Deussen, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

<sup>38</sup> Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>39</sup> Deussen, *op. cit.*, p. 389.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393.

*Moksa* is not a goal to be reached after a long period of progress, because progress is of the realm of matter. Progress is in time, and represents a change which serves one's purpose, which is totally subjective. Perfection is out of time and involves no action or movement because it is a sudden awakening to an ever-present reality. When this sudden enlightenment is attained, everything is seen in a new light, all old values are changed and reformed, and a spiritual transformation takes place.<sup>41</sup> The person's true nature is revealed as pure spirit, and the 'consciousness of the Absolute is transformed into Absolute Consciousness'.<sup>42</sup> Perfection is inward and spiritual, and it is ignorance which causes one to look for perfection through the world of matter, that is, to look for perfection through the senses and the intellect; it must be intuitively realized. As there is no passage from progress to perfection, there is no 'passage from the realm of relative good to the realm of absolute good either by gradual shedding of vices or by the acquisition of virtues'.<sup>43</sup> That is, the shedding of vices and the addition of virtues are the sources of improvement, and this improvement, or moral purification, does not result in liberation. This is because liberation is comprised of the realization of one's identity with Brahman, and Brahman has no faults, and already is perfection and this is not capable of being improved upon. In addition, though liberation is a quality of the self, purification of the self through actions has no effect on attaining liberation because of the very nature of actions. Actions bear corporeal fruits, pleasure and pain, which cannot affect the incorporeal liberation. Actions also change the objects to which they relate, and the Self (*Atman*) is changeless, so it cannot be an object of any action.<sup>44</sup>

Also, *moksa*, by definition, is the realization of one's own true nature, not the acquisition of something one did not already possess. The *jiva*, or individual soul, merely sheds its limitations and thus achieves its full stature. Sankara is emphatic about the fact that only the highest knowledge leads to this emancipation. Therefore, the ascetic order of life is finally necessary for *moksa*.<sup>45</sup> The aspirant for liberation must renounce all thoughts of enjoying pleasures of the senses both in this world and the next. Again, the difference between Sankara's opinions concerning sensual pleasures and Swedenborg's views on the subject are rather extreme. Swedenborg is both in favour of sensual pleasures (if they are of the right use) and also against a renunciation of the world.

A life of abstraction from secular concerns is a life of thought and faith separate from a life of love and charity; and in such a life the principle which prompts man to desire and promote the good of his neighbour, must necessarily perish. In order, therefore, that man may receive the life of heaven, it is necessary that he should

<sup>41</sup> Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>44</sup> Deussen, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>45</sup> Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

live in the world and engage in the various offices and businesses of life.<sup>46</sup>

But once the aspirant of *moksa* who has renounced the world reaches his goal and recognizes himself as Brahman, it is possible for him to be of this world but not as before. He becomes a sage, a *jivanmukta*, a free soul, in this world, but not of this world.

Swedenborg and Sankara are identical in their emphasis on doing good for others. Swedenborg's conception of the desired state of being, that is, the life of charity, is one which consists of 'man's thinking well of others, desiring their good, and perceiving joy in himself at their salvation'.<sup>47</sup> On the empirical level recognized by Sankara, in the proper performance of the duties and obligations of moral life, emphasis is placed on the good of all creation, not oneself. Sankara extends his love to all creatures, not only to human beings. When he asks us to love our neighbour, he also reminds us that every living being is our neighbour. This all embracing attitude is based upon the belief that created beings have souls, though each one of us has a different level of spiritual growth. Sankara's universal love not only demands preclusion of all hatred, but also any indifference. Sankara rejects the anthropocentric view that man is at the centre of creation; for him all living beings have a fundamental oneness. One must love his neighbour as himself, because in Sankara's system the neighbour is him. Even the aspirant who is renouncing all sense-pleasures of the world does not completely shut himself off from other people, but is still interested in promoting the spiritual welfare of other people. And because of his communion with Brahman, his services will be even more effective.<sup>48</sup> Once the aspirant has realized himself as Brahman, he does not cease to act, but acts spontaneously, and always acts in the right way. His liberation from action does not mean that he ceases to act, but that his actions cease to be binding on him. It is admitted that an existence without works is impossible, and it is in the nature of works to produce fruits (such as pleasure and pain). But the knower of Brahman is not an agent, for he knows that the Self is wholly unconnected with the body, and since there can be no action without the body, the Self is never an agent of action. Therefore, the works done by the knower of Brahman do not cleave to him. His actions will be purely voluntary, 'arising from his love and compassion and not in obedience to any command or out of deference to any obligation'.<sup>49</sup> He will not be bound by duty, yet he will spontaneously lend a helping hand to those who need it. 'Love will become the law of his life. . . . Actuated not by pity but by pure love, he will engage in service'.<sup>50</sup> Compare this with Swedenborg: 'The very life of man is the love; as his love is, such is his life, and such is

<sup>46</sup> *FRC*, p. 175.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Iyer, p. 185.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

the whole man'.<sup>51</sup> Though these two statements represent a point which may seem identical in both Swedenborg and Sankara, they come from very different sources. The main difference lies in the fact that man as seen by Swedenborg is bound to duties and obligations of charity, and must himself view his actions as duties so that he will not place merit on them. He should perform these duties 'from affection and with pleasure' and from love for his neighbour, but they are still *duties* which he is bound to if he wants to become an embodiment of charity; whereas for Sankara, the actions of a man who has achieved spiritual enlightenment are merely incidental, for the *jivanmukta* (one who is enlightened) is not bound by any codes or convention of ordinary morality, including the Veda. His actions will be spontaneous and done with complete sureness; he will have no tensions or doubts or conflicts over these actions. 'His actions will be difficult for ordinary people to understand. Nor will he be perturbed by their praise or blame. (. . . society is incompetent to sit in judgment over his actions.)'<sup>52</sup> Also, he will always do the right things automatically, for he will have no selfish aims or unfulfilled desires. He is essentially completely beyond all concept of good and evil, for he is totally egoless. The very condition of existence is morality, though it is 'above the level of ordinary morality, . . . a universal love born of the vision of the unity of all beings'.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the difference lies in the fact that for Swedenborg these actions of love and service to the neighbour are conscious efforts to do good, while for Sankara these same actions are not at all conscious efforts to do good, they simply issue forth from the enlightened man automatically and spontaneously. There is a further point, however, concerning the source of these unselfish actions, which the two men have in common: that these pure and loving acts come directly from God. Sankara states that the *jivanmukta* who, almost by definition, is acting from a totally impersonal point of view, is so completely purged of all selfishness that his body acts totally as an instrument of God, 'as a channel . . . through which a supernatural life flows down into the world'.<sup>54</sup> Also the *jivanmukta* does not even consciously enjoy his condition of having attained *moksa*, because he has lost all sense of individuality, his will being totally subordinated to the will of God.<sup>55</sup> Swedenborg repeatedly states that all good acts come from God. A basic step a man must take to become an embodiment of charity is to rid himself of evil so that the Lord can come into him and do acts of charity through him. In fact, good works are defined as 'all things which a man does . . . not from himself but from the Lord'.<sup>56</sup> When a man lives according to the laws of his religion, for example, the ten commandments, his works will be good because he will be doing them for their own sake instead of for himself. In these works, he will be led and taught not by any perceptible inspira-

<sup>51</sup> CFW, p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> Iyer, p. 193.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>56</sup> CFW, p. 170.

tion, but by a spiritual influx from God. This metaphor of Swedenborg's is identical to the one used by Sankara when describing the supernatural life flowing down into the world through the body of the *jivanmukta*. Swedenborg further states that this man will appear to act from himself, though he knows in his heart that his actions are from God, and thus he will not place merits on his works, for they are not literally *his* works, but God's.<sup>57</sup> The idea of not placing merit on one's good works appears throughout Swedenborg's writings. One is to uphold this idea mainly for the reasons that one should do good works for the sake of the good itself, because it is part of one's religion and thus one's duty, and because all good works come from the Lord anyway, and not from oneself. Yet, both in Sankara and Swedenborg reference is made to evil works that carry demerits. In Hinduism a person will be reborn in a lower spiritual status if his actions in his present life are not ethical. But there is a difference. In Sankara, an action is judged meritorious if it is inspired by selflessness (*nyasa*) and denial of personal comfort (*tapas*), though the immediate action may not be helpful to the immediate well-being of others. Sankara's follower thus, for example, does not take a categorically imperative attitude towards life. He can kill, if need be, so long as it is not for personal gain or comfort, and as long as the killing, as in war, is righteous. This is because both lawful and unlawful actions depend on relative egotism. Once egotism is removed, all actions are beyond good and evil. Nor should we forget that worldly actions in Sankara's system are considered at a lower empirical level. Swedenborg is concerned with spiritually-good and charity-motivated actions in this empirical world.

Activity is not, according to Advaita Vedanta, the real nature of the soul, because 'without release from activity, the attainment of the goal of man is impossible'.<sup>58</sup> This attainment of the 'goal of man', that is, man's salvation, is the prime reason for the moral codes (or lack of them) of these two religious systems. The very nature of Sankara's conception of salvation, the attainment of *moksa*, has been shown to account for his seeming neglect of ethics. Salvation is attainable during one's life-time, and does not deal with anything like the finite merging with the infinite. The man who achieves salvation does not merge in anything other than himself, his Self being an ever-present reality. So salvation, according to Sankara, comes about through the transformation of knowledge, and has nothing to do with actions, moral or otherwise. Swedenborg's idea of salvation consists in an eternal state and place of being after death, called heaven. His elaborate descriptions of heaven will not be dealt with here; our concern is with the relationship of his ethics to his idea of salvation. He states that the means of salvation are manifold, but they are all referable to charity and faith.<sup>59</sup> If a man is to be allotted eternal life, he must first approach the Lord, then learn the truths of faith from the Bible, truths which teach man what is to be believed and what is to

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>58</sup> Deussen, p. 317.

<sup>59</sup> *CFW*, p. 95.

be done, and then live according to these truths. Whoever lives well will be saved, and whoever lives wickedly will be damned. Even a man who is not of the Christian church however, if he lives a good life according to his religion, will be saved. A man is saved according to his works, and to prove this fact, Swedenborg cites several passages from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke in the New Testament. Every passage deals with a parable about men or women who either toil in their life, or perform with intelligence works which bear fruit, or do good for the neighbour (as in the story of the good Samaritan, Luke 10:30-37), and are thus saved because of their actions. Swedenborg was very much against those who held to the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, because this doctrine says nothing about a man's deeds or his way of living, and ascertains that he need only have faith to be saved. It is man's works which ensure his entrance into heaven, and the greater the works, the greater the rewards in heaven. Swedenborg cites countless passages from the New Testament which support this statement, such as that of Luke 6:35, 'But love your enemies and do good, and lend expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High'. Thus Swedenborg's conception of salvation is based on a transformation of one's will as shown through one's actions, as contrasted to Sankara's, which is based on a transformation of one's knowledge. It is this essential difference that accounts for the contrasting view and use of ethics of the two men.

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