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Comparative Study of Emmanuel Kant and Bhagwad Geeta on the Theory of Karma

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Abstract:

Emmanuel Kant (22 April 1724 – 12 February 1804) was a German philosopher and one of the central Enlightenment thinkers. Born in Königsberg, Kant's comprehensive and systematic works in epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics have made him one of the most influential figures in modern Western philosophy. In his doctrine of transcendental idealism, Kant argued that space and time are mere "forms of intuition" which structure all experience, and therefore that, while "things-in-themselves" exist and contribute to experience, they are nonetheless distinct from the objects of experience. From this it follows that the objects of experience are mere "appearances", and that the nature of things as they are in themselves is unknowable to us. He developed his theory of experience to answer the question of whether synthetic a priori knowledge is possible, which would in turn make it possible to determine the limits of metaphysical inquiry. Kant drew a parallel to the Copernican revolution in his proposal to think of the objects of the senses as conforming to our spatial and temporal forms of intuition, so that we have a priori cognition of those objects.

In Bhagwad geeta the main characters are the Supreme Lord Krishna and Prince Arjuna, witnessed by four million soldiers led by their respective military commanders. After naming the principal warriors on both sides, Arjuna's growing dejection is described due to the fear of losing friends and relatives in the course of the impending war and the subsequent sins attached to such actions. Thus this chapter is entitled: Lamenting the Consequence of War. Arjuna accepts the position as a disciple of Lord Krishna and taking complete of Him requests the Lord to instruct him in how to dispel his lamentation and grief. This chapter is often deemed as a summary to the entire Bhagavad-Geeta. Here many subjects are explained such as: karma yoga, jnana yoga, sankhya yoga, buddhi yoga and the atma which is the soul. Predominance has been given to the immortal nature of the soul existing within all living entities and it has been described in great detail. Thus this chapter is entitled: The Eternal Reality of the Souls' Immortality.

Keywords: Bhagwad Geeta, Emmanuel Kant, Philosophy, Culture, Krishna, Yoga, Arjuna, Immortality

Introduction

The issue that vexed Kant was central to what 20th-century scholars called "the philosophy of mind". The flowering of the natural sciences had led to an understanding of how data reaches the brain. Sunlight falling on an object is reflected from its surface in a way that maps the surface features (color, texture, etc.). [1,2] The reflected light reaches the human eye, passes through the cornea, is focused by the lens onto the retina where it forms an image similar to that formed by light passing through a pinhole into a camera obscura. The retinal cells send impulses through the optic nerve and then they form a mapping in the brain of the visual features of

the object. The interior mapping is not the exterior object, and our belief that there is a meaningful relationship between the object and the mapping in the brain depends on a chain of reasoning that is not fully grounded. But the uncertainty aroused by these considerations, by optical illusions, misperceptions, delusions, etc., is not the end of the problem. Kant saw that the mind could not function as an empty container that simply receives data from outside. Something must be giving order to the incoming data. Images of external objects must be kept in the same sequence in which they were received. This ordering occurs through the mind's intuition of time. The same considerations apply to the mind's function of constituting space for ordering mappings of visual and tactile signals arriving via the already described chains of physical causation. It is often claimed that Kant was a late developer, that he only became an important philosopher in his mid-50s after rejecting his earlier views. While it is true that Kant wrote his greatest works relatively late in life, there is a tendency to underestimate the value of his earlier works. Recent Kant scholarship has devoted more attention to these "pre-critical" writings and has recognized a degree of continuity with his mature work[3,4]

In Bhagwad Geeta, Lord Krishna categorically and comprehensively explains how it is the duty of each and every member of society to carry out their functions and responsibilities in their respective stage of life according to the rules and regulations of the society in which one lives. Further the Lord explains why such duties must be performed, what benefit is gained by performing them, what harm is caused by not performing them. Plus what actions lead to bondage and what actions lead to salvation. All these points relating to duty have been described in great detail. Thus this chapter is entitled: The Eternal Duties of Human Beings. Lord Krishna reveals how spiritual knowledge is received by disciplic succession and the reason and nature of His descent into the material worlds. Here He also explains the paths of action and knowledge as well as the wisdom regarding the supreme knowledge which results at the culmination of the two paths. Thus this chapter is entitled: Approaching the Ultimate Truth. Lord Krishna delineates the concepts of action with detachment and renunciation in actions explaining that both are a means to the same goal. Here He explains how salvation is attained by the pursuance of these paths. Thus this chapter is entitled: Action and Renunciation. Lord Krishna reveals astanga yoga, and the exact process of practicing such yoga.[5,6] He explains in detail the difficulties of the mind and the procedures by which one may gain mastery of their mind through yoga which reveals the spiritual nature of a living entity. Thus this chapter is entitled: The Science of Self-Realization. Lord Krishna gives concrete knowledge of the absolute reality as well as the opulence of divinity. He describes His illusory energy in the material existence called Maya and declares how extremely difficult it is to surmount it. He also describes the four types of people attracted to divinity and the four types of people who are opposed to divinity. In conclusion He reveals that one in spiritual intelligence takes exclusive refuge of the Lord without reservation in devotional service. Thus this chapter is entitled: Knowledge of the Ultimate Truth. Lord Krishna emphasizes the science of yoga. Revealing that one attains whatever one remembers at the end of one's life the Lord emphasizes the utmost importance of the very last thought at the moment of death. Also he gives information on the creation of the material worlds as well as establishing a distinction between them and the spiritual world. Here he explains the light and dark paths in regards to leaving this material existence, the destination to which they each lead to and the reward received by each. Thus this chapter is entitled: Attainment of Salvation.[7,8]

At age 46, Kant was an established scholar and an increasingly influential philosopher, and much was expected of him. In correspondence with his ex-student and friend Markus Herz, Kant admitted that, in the inaugural dissertation, he had failed to account for the relation between our sensible and intellectual faculties. He needed to explain how we combine what is known as sensory knowledge with the other type of knowledge—i.e. reasoned knowledge—these two being related but having very different processes. He also

wrote a number of semi-popular essays on history, religion, politics and other topics. These works were well received by Kant's contemporaries and confirmed his preeminent status in 18th-century philosophy. There were several journals devoted solely to defending and criticizing Kantian philosophy. Despite his success, philosophical trends were moving in another direction. Many of Kant's most important disciples and followers (including Reinhold, Beck and Fichte) transformed the Kantian position into increasingly radical forms of idealism. The progressive stages of revision of Kant's teachings marked the emergence of German idealism. Kant opposed these developments and publicly denounced Fichte in an open letter in 1799[9,10]

In Kant's essay "Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?", he defined the Enlightenment as an age shaped by the Latin motto *Sapere aude* ("Dare to be wise"). Kant maintained that one ought to think autonomously, free of the dictates of external authority. His work reconciled many of the differences between the rationalist and empiricist traditions of the 18th century. He had a decisive impact on the Romantic and German Idealist philosophies of the 19th century. His work has also been a starting point for many 20th century philosophers.

Kant asserted that, because of the limitations of argumentation in the absence of irrefutable evidence, no one could really know whether there is a God and an afterlife or not. For the sake of morality and as a ground for reason, Kant asserted, people are justified in believing in God, even though they could never know God's presence empirically.

Thus the entire armament of reason, in the undertaking that one can call pure philosophy, is in fact directed only at the three problems that have been mentioned [God, the soul, and freedom]. These themselves, however, have in turn their more remote aim, namely, what is to be done if the will is free, if there is a God, and if there is a future world. Now since these concern our conduct in relation to the highest end, the ultimate aim of nature which provides for us wisely in the disposition of reason is properly directed only to what is moral[11,12]

Discussion

In Bhagwad Geeta, Lord Krishna reveals that the sovereign science and the sovereign secret. He explains how the entire material existence is created, pervaded, maintained and annihilated by His external energy and all beings are coming and going under His supervision. The subjects matters covered subsequently are primarily concerned with devotional service and the Lord Himself declares that these subject matters are most confidential. Thus this chapter is entitled: Confidential Knowledge of the Ultimate Truth. Lord Krishna's exalted position as the cause of all causes. Also specifying His special manifestations and opulences. Arjuna prays to the Lord to describe more of the opulences and the Lord describes those which are most prominent. Thus this chapter is entitled: The Infinite Glories of the Ultimate Truth. Lord Krishna is beseeched by Arjuna to reveal His universal form showing all of existence. Thus this chapter is entitled: The Vision of the Universal Form. Lord Krishna extols the glory of devotion to God. Along with this he explains the different forms of spiritual disciplines and discusses the qualities of the devotees who by performing their activities in this way become very dear to Him. Thus this chapter is entitled: The Path of Devotion. Lord Krishna reveals the distinct difference between the physical body and the immortal soul. He explains that the physical is transitory and perishable whereas the soul is immutable and eternal. The Lord also gives precise knowledge about the individual soul and the ultimate soul. Thus this chapter is entitled: The Individual and Ultimate Consciousness. Lord Krishna reveals matters pertaining goodness, passion and nescience which everything in the material existence is influenced by. He gives pertinent details on the essential characteristics of each individually, their cause, the level of their potency, how they influence a living entity affected by them as well

as the signs of one who has risen above them. Here he clearly advises to relinquish oneself from ignorance and passion and adopt the path of pure goodness until acquiring the ability to transcend them. Thus this chapter is entitled; The Three Qualities of Material Nature. Lord Krishna reveals the virtues, the glories and transcendental characteristics of God being omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Also He explains the purpose and value of knowing about God and the means by which He can be realized. Thus this chapter is entitled: Realization of the Ultimate Truth. Lord Krishna describes explicitly, explaining separately and in detail the divine properties, conduct and actions which are righteous in nature and conducive to divinity. Also he delineates the evil propensities and ill conduct which are unrighteous in nature and which determine the unrighteous and which are antagonistic to divinity. Thus this chapter is entitled: The Divine and the Demonic Natures Defined. Lord Krishna classifies the three divisions of faith, revealing that it is these different qualities of faith in the Supreme that determine that character of living entities. These three types of faith determine one's consciousness in this world. Thus this chapter is entitled: The Three Divisions of Material Existence. Lord Krishna sums up the conclusion of the previous chapters and describes the attainment of salvation by the paths of karma in chapters one through six and in jnana yoga section which are chapters thirteen through eighteen. The Lord explains that while doing so one must offer without reservation everything to God. The knowledge revealed gets progressively more and more confidential than in all the previous chapters. Thus this chapter is entitled: Final Revelations of the Ultimate Truth.[13,14]

According to Emmanuel Kant, The sense of an enlightened approach and the critical method required that "If one cannot prove that a thing is, he may try to prove that it is not. If he fails to do either (as often occurs), he may still ask whether it is in his interest to accept one or the other of the alternatives hypothetically, from the theoretical or the practical point of view. Hence the question no longer is as to whether perpetual peace is a real thing or not a real thing, or as to whether we may not be deceiving ourselves when we adopt the former alternative, but we must act on the supposition of its being real." The presupposition of God, soul, and freedom was then a practical concern, for Morality in itself constitutes a system, but happiness does not, except insofar as it is distributed precisely in accordance with morality. This, however, is possible only in the intelligible world, under a wise author and regent. Reason sees itself as compelled either to assume such a thing, together with life in such a world, which we must regard as a future one, or else to regard the moral laws as empty figments of the brain

Kant drew a parallel between the Copernican revolution and the epistemology of his new transcendental philosophy, involving two interconnected foundations of his "critical philosophy":

- the epistemology of transcendental idealism and
- the moral philosophy of the autonomy of practical reason.

These teachings placed the active, rational human subject at the center of the cognitive and moral worlds. Kant argued that the rational order of the world as known by science was not just the accidental accumulation of sense perceptions.[15,16]

Conceptual unification and integration is carried out by the mind through concepts or the "categories of the understanding" operating on the perceptual manifold within space and time. The latter are not concepts, but are forms of sensibility that are a priori necessary conditions for any possible experience. Thus the objective order of nature and the causal necessity that operates within it depend on the mind's processes, the product of the rule-based activity that Kant called "synthesis". There is much discussion among Kant scholars about the correct interpretation of this train of thought.

The 'two-world' interpretation regards Kant's position as a statement of epistemological limitation, that we are not able to transcend the bounds of our own mind, meaning that we cannot access the "thing-in-itself". However, Kant also speaks of the thing in itself or transcendental object as a product of the (human) understanding as it attempts to conceive of objects in abstraction from the conditions of sensibility. Following this line of thought, some interpreters have argued that the thing in itself does not represent a separate ontological domain but simply a way of considering objects by means of the understanding alone—this is known as the two-aspect view.[17,18]

The notion of the "thing in itself" was much discussed by philosophers after Kant. It was argued that, because the "thing in itself" was unknowable, its existence must not be assumed. Rather than arbitrarily switching to an account that was ungrounded in anything supposed to be the "real", as did the German Idealists, another group arose who asked how our (presumably reliable) accounts of a coherent and rule-abiding universe were actually grounded. This new kind of philosophy became known as Phenomenology, and its founder was Edmund Husserl. With regard to morality, Kant argued that the source of the good lies not in anything outside the human subject, either in nature or given by God, but rather is only the good will itself. A good will is one that acts from duty in accordance with the universal moral law that the autonomous human being freely gives itself. This law obliges one to treat humanity – understood as rational agency, and represented through oneself as well as others – as an end in itself rather than (merely) as means to other ends the individual might hold. This necessitates practical self-reflection in which we universalize our reasons.

These ideas have largely framed or influenced all subsequent philosophical discussion and analysis. The specifics of Kant's account generated immediate and lasting controversy. Nevertheless, his theses – that the mind itself necessarily makes a constitutive contribution to its knowledge, that this contribution is transcendental rather than psychological, that philosophy involves self-critical activity, that morality is rooted in human freedom, and that to act autonomously is to act according to rational moral principles – have all had a lasting effect on subsequent philosophy.[19,20]

Results

The Bhagavad Geeta 'The Song by God'), often referred to as the Geeta is a 700-verse Hindu scripture that is part of the epic Mahabharata (chapters 23–40 of book 6 of the Mahabharata called the Bhishma Parva), dated to the second half of the first millennium BCE and is typical of the Hindu synthesis. It is considered to be one of the holy scriptures for Hinduism. The Geeta is set in a narrative framework of dialogue between Pandava prince Arjuna and his guide and charioteer Krishna. At the start of the dharma yuddha (or the "righteous war") between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Arjuna is preoccupied by a moral and emotional dilemma and desponds about the violence and death the war will cause in the battle against his kin. Wondering if he should renounce the war, he seeks Krishna's counsel, whose answers and discourse constitute the Geeta. Krishna counsels Arjuna to "fulfil his Kshatriya (warrior) duty to uphold the dharma" through Karma ("selfless action"). The Krishna–Arjuna dialogues cover a broad range of spiritual topics, touching upon ethical dilemmas and philosophical issues that go far beyond the war that Arjuna faces. Numerous commentaries have been written on the Bhagavad Geeta with widely differing views on the essentials. According to some, the Bhagavad Geeta was written by the god Ganesha, as told to him by Veda Vyasa. Vedanta commentators read varying relationships between the Self and Brahman in the text: Advaita Vedanta sees the non-dualism of Atman (Self) and Brahman (universal Self) as its essence; Bhedabheda and Vishishtadvaita see Atman and Brahman as both different and not different; while Dvaita Vedanta sees the dualism of Atman (Self) and Brahman as its essence. The setting of the Geeta in a battlefield has been interpreted as an allegory for the

ethical and moral struggles of human life. The Bhagavad Geeta presents a synthesis of Hindu ideas about dharma, theistic bhakti, and the yogic ideals of moksha. The text covers Jñāna, Bhakti, Karma, and Rāja yogas (spoken of in the 6th chapter), incorporating ideas from the Samkhya-Yoga philosophy. The Bhagavad Geeta is the most revered of all the Hindu texts, and has a unique pan-Hindu influence. The Geeta's call for selfless action inspired many leaders of the Indian independence movement including Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi, the latter referring to it as his "spiritual dictionary".

The Bhagavad Geeta is the sealing achievement of the Hindu synthesis, incorporating its various religious traditions. The synthesis is at both philosophical and socio-religious levels, states the Geeta scholar Keya Maitra. The text refrains from insisting on one right marga (path) to spirituality. It openly synthesizes and inclusively accepts multiple ways of life, harmonizing spiritual pursuits through action (karma), knowledge (gyaana), and devotion (bhakti). According to the Geeta translator Radhakrishnan, quoted in a review by Robinson, Krishna's discourse is a "comprehensive synthesis" that inclusively unifies the competing strands of Hindu thought such as "Vedic ritual, Upanishadic wisdom, devotional theism and philosophical insight". Aurobindo described the text as a synthesis of various Yogas. The Indologist Robert Minor, and others, in contrast, state that the Geeta is "more clearly defined as a synthesis of Vedanta, Yoga and Samkhya" philosophies of Hinduism. [15,16]

The synthesis in Bhagavad Geeta addresses the question of what constitutes the virtuous path that is necessary for spiritual liberation or release from the cycles of rebirth (moksha). It discusses whether one should renounce a householder lifestyle for a life as an ascetic, or lead a householder life dedicated to one's duty and profession, or pursue a householder life devoted to a personalized God in the revealed form of Krishna. Thus Geeta discusses and synthesizes the three dominant trends in Hinduism: enlightenment-based renunciation, dharma-based householder life, and devotion-based theism. According to Deutsch and Dalvi, the Bhagavad Geeta attempts "to forge a harmony" between these three paths. The Bhagavad Geeta's synthetic answer recommends that one must resist the "either-or" view, and consider a "both-and" view. It states that the dharmic householder can achieve the same goals as the renouncing monk through "inner renunciation" or "motiveless action. One must do the right thing because one has determined that it is right, states Geeta, without craving for its fruits, without worrying about the results, loss or gain. Desires, selfishness, and the craving for fruits can distort one from spiritual living. The Geeta synthesis goes further, according to its interpreters such as Swami Vivekananda, and the text states that there is Living God in every human being and the devoted service to this Living God in everyone – without craving for personal rewards – is a means to spiritual development and liberation. According to Galvin Flood, the teachings in the Geeta differ from other Indian religions that encouraged extreme austerity and self-torture of various forms (karsayanta). The Geeta disapproves of these, stating that not only is it against tradition but against Krishna himself, because "Krishna dwells within all beings, in torturing the body the ascetic would be torturing him", states Flood. Even a monk should strive for "inner renunciation" rather than external pretensions.

Kant developed his ethics, or moral philosophy, in three works: *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797).

In *Groundwork*, Kant tries to convert our everyday, obvious, rational knowledge of morality into philosophical knowledge. The latter two works used "practical reason", which is based only on things about which reason can tell us, and not deriving any principles from experience, to reach conclusions which can be applied to the world of experience (in the second part of *The Metaphysics of Morals*). [17,18]

Kant is known for his theory that there is a single moral obligation, which he called the "Categorical Imperative", and is derived from the concept of duty. Kant defines the demands of moral law as "categorical imperatives". Categorical imperatives are principles that are intrinsically valid; they are good in and of themselves; they must be obeyed in all situations and circumstances, if our behavior is to observe the moral law. The Categorical Imperative provides a test against which moral statements can be assessed. Kant also stated that the moral means and ends can be applied to the categorical imperative, that rational beings can pursue certain "ends" using the appropriate "means". Ends based on physical needs or wants create hypothetical imperatives. The categorical imperative can only be based on something that is an "end in itself", that is, an end that is not a means to some other need, desire, or purpose. Kant believed that the moral law is a principle of reason itself, and is not based on contingent facts about the world, such as what would make us happy, but to act on the moral law which has no other motive than "worthiness to be happy". Accordingly, he believed that moral obligation applies only to rational agents.

Unlike a hypothetical imperative, a categorical imperative is an unconditional obligation; it has the force of an obligation regardless of our will or desires. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) Kant enumerated three formulations of the categorical imperative that he believed to be roughly equivalent. In the same book, Kant stated:

Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law. According to Kant, one cannot make exceptions for oneself. The philosophical maxim on which one acts should always be considered to be a universal law without exception. One cannot allow oneself to do a particular action unless one thinks it appropriate that the reason for the action should become a universal law. For example, one should not steal, however dire the circumstances—because, by permitting oneself to steal, one makes stealing a universally acceptable act. This is the first formulation of the categorical imperative, often known as the universalizability principle.

Kant believed that, if an action is not done with the motive of duty, then it is without moral value. He thought that every action should have pure intention behind it; otherwise, it is meaningless. The final result is not the most important aspect of an action; rather, how the person feels while carrying out the action is the time when value is attached to the result.[19]

Conclusions

The Geeta synthesizes several paths to spiritual realization based on the premise that people are born with different temperaments and tendencies (guna). According to Winthrop Sargeant, the text acknowledges that some individuals are more reflective and intellectual, some affective and engaged by their emotions, some are action driven, yet others favor experimentation and exploring what works. It then presents different spiritual paths for each personality type respectively: the path of knowledge (jnana yoga), the path of devotion (bhakti yoga), the path of action (karma yoga), and the path of meditation (raja yoga). The guna premise is a synthesis of the ideas from the Samkhya school of Hinduism. According to Upadhyaya, the Geeta states that none of these paths to spiritual realization is "intrinsically superior or inferior", rather they "converge in one and lead to the same goal". According to Hiltebeitel, Bhakti forms an essential ingredient of this synthesis, and the text incorporates Bhakti into Vedanta. According to Scheepers, The Bhagavad Geeta is a Brahmanical text which uses Shramanic and Yogic terminology to spread the Brahmanic idea of living according to one's duty or dharma, in contrast to the ascetic ideal of liberation by avoiding all karma. According to Galvin Flood and Charles Martin, the Geeta rejects the Shramanic path of non-action, emphasizing instead "the renunciation of the fruits of action". The Bhagavad Geeta, according to Raju, is a great synthesis of impersonal spiritual

monism with personal God, of "the yoga of action with the yoga of transcendence of action, and these again with the yogas of devotion and knowledge".

The Bhagavad Geeta manuscripts exist in numerous Indic scripts. These include writing systems that are currently in use, as well as early scripts such as the now dormant Sharada script. Variant manuscripts of the Geeta have been found on the Indian subcontinent. Unlike the enormous variations in the remaining sections of the surviving Mahabharata manuscripts, the Geeta manuscripts show only minor variations. [18,19]

According to Gambhirananda, the old manuscripts may have had 745 verses, though he agrees that "700 verses is the generally accepted historic standard". Gambhirananda's view is supported by a few versions of chapter 6.43 of the Mahabharata. According to Geeta exegesis scholar Robert Minor, these versions state that the Geeta is a text where "Kesava [Krishna] spoke 574 slokas, Arjuna 84, Sanjaya 41, and Dhritarashtra 1". An authentic manuscript of the Geeta with 745 verses has not been found. Adi Shankara, in his 8th-century commentary, explicitly states that the Geeta has 700 verses, which was likely a deliberate declaration to prevent further insertions and changes to the Geeta. Since Shankara's time, "700 verses" has been the standard benchmark for the critical edition of the Bhagavad Geeta.

Emmanuel Kant's influence also has extended to the social, behavioral, and physical sciences, as in the sociology of Max Weber, the psychology of Jean Piaget and Carl Gustav Jung, and the linguistics of Noam Chomsky. Kant's work on mathematics and synthetic a priori knowledge is also cited by theoretical physicist Albert Einstein as an early influence on his intellectual development, but which he later criticised heavily and rejected. He held the view that "if one does not want to assert that relativity theory goes against reason, one cannot retain the a priori concepts and norms of Kant's system". However, Kant scholar Stephen Palmquist has argued that Einstein's rejection of Kant's influence was primarily "a response to mistaken interpretations of Kant being adopted by contemporary philosophers", when in fact Kant's transcendental perspective informed Einstein's early worldview and led to his insights regarding simultaneity, and eventually to his proposal of the theory of relativity. Because of the thoroughness of the Kantian paradigm shift, his influence extends to thinkers who neither specifically refer to his work nor use his terminology.

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in Kant's theory of mind from the point of view of formal logic and computer science. [20]

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