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DESTINY AND HUMAN INITIATIVE IN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

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TO JUTTA

Preface

This dissertation explores the ongoing polemic in the Mahābhārata regarding the powers that are thought to determine the course of human action, starting from the desire behind the act, to the act itself and its results. These include *puruṣakāra* (literally "that which is done by a human being" — from the radical *√kṛ* = to do, and *puruṣa* = human being) and *Daiva* (that which comes "from the gods" — from *deva* = god which, in turn, is derived from the radical *√div* = to shine, though also to gamble), terms roughly equivalent to what we would recognize as "human initiative" and "destiny" respectively. We seek to determine the respective roles of these powers, their relationship to the process of karma, and their implications with respect to the epic's notions of self-determination and human freedom.

The main contribution of this dissertation to the field of Mahābhārata studies lies in the light it sheds on the epic's vision of the human journey towards the special type of freedom known as *mokṣa*. This involves a quantum shift in self-identity in which the human ego (*ahaṃkāra*), together with its sense of agency (*kartṛtva*), is "sacrificed" (or transcended) in favor of a larger system of identity, described in the Bhagavadgītā as "the self of the self all beings" (*sarvabhūtātmabhūtātma*). *Puruṣakāra* based on ideas of "I" (*aham*) and "mine" (*mama*) is thus fated to dissolve with the dissolution of the ego, to be replaced by devotion to the higher purposes of the Cosmos. These higher purposes are known as *Daiva*, and they are represented in the epic by Kṛṣṇa, the incarnation of God (*avatāra*) who has descended to Earth to restore the moral order (dharma). From this perspective *Daiva* is the driving force behind the great macrocosmic cycles of world creation and destruction. However, it is also active in the microcosmic world of character and behavior, experienced in human life as the various obstacles to the fulfillment of desire (*kāma*). In terms of the karma theory, *daiva* (with a small d) is the inexorable "fate" resulting from the desire-prompted initiatives of the past. In effect, these notions of *Daiva* and *puruṣakāra* are tied to two perspectives of human nature, the perspective of the *karmasthā*,

"those who take their stand in action," and the perspective of the *sattvasthā*, "those who take their stand in the truth," i.e. the truth that ultimately, the ego and its sense of agency is a mental fiction—a case of mistaken identity.

The analysis nevertheless also reveals that, in spite of the pre-eminence of *Daiva* in the cycles of the Cosmos, of human society, and of individual birth and death (*saṃsāra*), *puruṣakāra* is essential to the spiritual growth, as well as to the material betterment, of the ordinary mortal, most notably that of the king. Without initiative, drive, the energetic pursuit of his goals, both the king and his kingdom are lost. To carry out his responsibilities (*kṣatriyadharma*) in the proper manner, however, the king must abandon all thought of personal gain, and forever seek the welfare of the world (*lokasaṃgraha*) in a spirit of detatchment (*vairagya*) and devotion (*bhakti*) to Kṛṣṇa. In this manner, all human behavior, including the inhuman violence and "sacrifice" of the battlefield, may be transformed into a new devotional path leading to *mokṣa*.

This dissertation also makes an important contribution to clarifying the complex relationships between these ancient Indian ideas about *Daiva* and *puruṣakāra*, and modern concepts, such as autonomy, self-determination and freedom, that tend to be loaded with connotations markedly different from their epic Sanskrit equivalents. To cite one example: the modern English word "freedom" (the state of being free) is often chosen to translate the epic *mokṣa*, a desiderative form of the Sanskrit verbal root √*muc*. This is a defensible choice at first reading, since the two terms both carry the rather similar sense of to loosen, untie, undo, release, etc. In fact, however, the connotations of the two terms are radically at variance with one another. In contrast to the this-worldly loosening associated with the English word (which traces its genealogy to the civil conditions of old English feudal society), the Sanskrit equivalent points beyond society, beyond what we might recognize as the human "person," to a supreme loosening of the Lilliputian strings that bind the individual to the world itself.[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer has wisely observed that: "Every time must understand a text handed down to it in its own way; for this text is subject to the whole of the tradition in which the times takes a material interest, and in which this time seeks to understand itself....The meaning of a text surpasses its author not only occasionally, but always."[2] This is even more true when we are dealing

with an Indian text so far removed from the modern western reader, not only in time, but by all that separates the western and Indian traditions.

Duplicating the complex of meanings conveyed by the Sanskrit original in a modern western terminology was no easy task. Erazim Kohak has pointed out that ideas are necessarily incarnated in a language with an inertia of its own. No translation can thus hope to be "a perfectly transparent glass, affording the reader a direct, undistorted view of the original work."[3] A partial solution to this dilemna has been found by the practice of repeating the key Sanskrit terms in brackets behind their English equivalents in most translations of Sanskrit text (to which considerable prominence must necessarily be given). All translation into English, including that from French and German secondary sources, is my own. However I have been guided in the case of the Sanskrit by the excellent English version of the Critical Edition (unfortunately only the first five books and the Bhagavadgītā) by J.A.B. van Buitenen, and (for the remainder) have had occasion to consult the now dated translation of Kesari Mohan Ganguli, who worked primarily with the Calcutta Edition of the text.[4] When given without a prefix, reference numbers point to the volume (*parvan*), chapter and verse of the Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata, the Sanskrit text published in nineteen volumes by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Poona.[5] Bhagavadgītā sources include both the reference to the Critical Edition and the Chapter number of this famous dialogue. The occasional reference to other Sanskrit sources is prefaced by the name of the source text, the only exceptions being the Gītā commentaries by Śaṃkara (SBG) and Rāmānuja (RBG) respectively.

Sanskrit words are highlighted by *italics*. However, certain terms in common English use such as karma, yoga, and dharma, are given without italicization when they appear alone within, or in conjunction with, an English sentence. Sanskrit words are not capitalized except when they appear at the beginning of an English sentence or constitute a proper name (including the personified forms of Dharma, Kāla, the goddess Earth, etc.). The term *Daiva* (destiny) is an exception to this rule. This word is capitalized when it appears within an English sentence to convey the meaning of a Macrocosmic power in contrast to the destiny (with a small d) reflecting the

temporality of the individual human microcosm. English terms for the Divinity in His Supreme aspect (referred to by the masculine He, His etc.) are also capitalized in contrast to the lower forms of the divinity such as the divine incarnation (*avatāra*). Of course I bear full responsibility for any weaknesses that remain with regard to the translations and other matters.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the encouragement and assistance of my supervisor, Professor Katherine Young of the Faculty of Religious Studies of McGill University. In fact, if it was not for her continual urging this endeavor would have been stillborn. Her own *puruṣakāra* has been truly remarkable. I would also like to thank my most cherished supporter, Mrs Jutta K. Lehmann, for her patience and long-suffering through days of semi-seclusion, punctuated by long and passionate discussions on the different aspects of this enterprise. I am eternally grateful that she was able to stay the course.

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[1] The corollary is also true. We do not find the modern sense of freedom or "freedom of the will" conveyed by any single Sanskrit term in the epic.

[2] "Eine jede Zeit wird einen überlieferten Text auf ihre Weise verstehen mussen, denn er gehort in das Ganze der Überlieferung, an der sie ein sachliches Interesse nimmt und in der sie sich selbst zu verstehen sucht....Nicht nur gelegentlich, sondern immer übertrifft der Sinn eines Textes seinen Autor." Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzuge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik 3., erweiterte Auflage (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1972), p. 280.

[3] Erazim V. Kohák, "The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur," in his introduction to Paul Ricoeur, Freedom and Nature, translated by Erazim V. Kohák (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. xxxiii.

[4] J.A.B. van Buitenen (trans. and ed.). The Mahābhārata, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973-78); and The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata: a bilingual edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). Kesari Mohan Ganguli (trans.), The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa, 2nd Edition. 12 vols. (Calcutta: Oriental Publications Co., 1952-62).

[5] V.S. Sukthankar, P.L. Belvalkar, P.L. Vaidya, et al., (eds.). *The Mahābhārata, for the First Time Critically Edited*, 19 vols. plus 6 vols. of indexes (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933-72).

Abstract

This dissertation explores ideas about human agency and conduct as these are expressed in the Indian epic known as the Mahābhārata (the "Great Bhārata"). Two concepts in particular retain our attention: *daiva*, the power that comes from the gods, and *puruṣakāra*, the power that comes from human beings (*puruṣas*). One current of thought holds that human life and the course of history are governed exclusively by external agencies ("the gods" or chance). On the other hand, the epic also carries the commanding message that the lives of individuals and societies may be changed for the better through human initiative (*puruṣakāra*) in accordance with the dharma, the moral order sanctioned by religious tradition. The issue is finally reduced to the question: who is the real agent of action?

The analysis concludes that the question can only be resolved in the context of epic ideas about the nature of the human being. But humanity is simply a stage in the spiritual evolution of all life towards the realization of the unity of existence as the manifestation of a Supreme Person (paramapuruṣa; puruṣottama) or a Supreme Self (paramātman). Souls (*ātmans*) are embodied as human beings at the stage when consciousness develops into the self-consciousness of an ego (*ahaṃkāra*), which arrogates to itself the notion of self-determination or "freedom." In reality, however, the soul is not free but trapped in a cycle of rebirth, which can be broken only by the abandonment of all notion of agency, action and control over the fruits of the action. The epic therefore operates at two levels. In terms of the mundane tasks and responsibilities of daily life, particularly the responsibilities of the king, the human being is regarded as enjoying a modicum of freedom and self-determination to chart the course of his or her future evolution. From the higher perspective of the unity of all life, however, this self-concept is inherently flawed. The actions of such a being spring from unconscious motives prompted by the higher purposes that govern the course of the cosmos as a whole.

Résumé

Cette thèse explore les idées sur l'activité et la conduite humaine telles qu'exprimées dans l'épopée connue sous le nom de Mahābhārata (le "Grand Bhārata"). Deux concepts en particulier retiennent notre attention: *daiva*, le pouvoir qui découle des dieux, et *puruṣakāra*, le pouvoir qui découle des êtres humains (*puruṣas*). Un courant de pensée tient que la vie humaine et le cours de l'histoire sont gouvernées exclusivement par des agents externes ("les dieux" ou la chance). Par contre, l'épopée porte le message impératif que la vie des individus et des sociétés pourraient être changée pour le mieux par l'initiative humaine (*puruṣakāra*) en accord avec le dharma, l'ordre moral sanctionné par la tradition religieuse.

L'analyse conclut que la question ne pourrait être résolue que dans le contexte d'idées épiques quant à la nature de l'être humain. Cependant, l'humanité n'est qu'une étape dans l'évolution de la vie entière vers la réalisation de l'unité de l'existence comme manifestation d'une Personne Suprême (paramapuruṣa; puruṣottama) ou d'un Soi Suprême (paramātman). Les âmes (*ātmans*) sont incarnées comme des êtres humains au stade où la connaissance développe vers la conscience d'un ego (*ahaṃkāra*), qui se prévaloit de la notion de l'autodétermination ou du libre arbitre. En réalité, cependant, l'âme n'est pas libre mais prise dans un cycle de renaissance qui ne pourrait être brisé que par l'abandon de toute notion d'autodétermination, d'action et de contrôle sur les fruits de l'action. Or, l'épopée opère à deux niveaux. En ce qui concerne des tâches et des responsabilités de la vie quotidienne, les responsabilités du roi en particulier, on accorderait à l'être humain une certaine liberté et une libre disposition de diriger les pas de sa propre évolution. Cependant, de l'optique supérieure de l'unité de la vie entière, ce concept de soi serait essentiellement défectueux. Les actions d'un tel être découlent des motivations inconscientes, actionnées par des intentions supérieures qui dirigent le cours du cosmos tout entier.

I — Introduction

The history of philosophical and religious speculation about the vicissitudes of human life is characterized by two principal lines of thought. There is the more optimistic view that men and women, though dwarfed by the powers and immensities of the Cosmos, nevertheless have it within themselves to change themselves and the societies in which they live, and to conquer Nature. The opposite, and more pessimistic, view is that human beings are forever the victims of circumstances beyond their control, hostages to implacable and irrevocable fate.

These two positions, or rather attitudes to life, are seen in the writings of both the West and the East. In classical Greece, Plato held that the human soul, though lost in the shadows of its own prejudices and passions (*ekasia*), can nevertheless escape this unhappy condition through an epistemological ascent to the vision of the Good, "...the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful,... the authentic source of truth and reason."[1] This offers a stark contrast to the world of fifth century tragedy, as Clytemnestra stands over her murdered husband and the chorus chants, "Alas, it is the will of Zeus, Who caused and brought it all to pass. Nothing is here but was decreed in heaven."[2] Christianity retains the eschatological hope, but often at the implied cost of human impotence in the face of the power and glory of God,[3] or of utter demise without the saving Grace of His Son, Jesus Christ.[4]

In India, too, these two traditions have a venerable antiquity. In the early Rgvedic hymns, human beings are largely subservient to the whims of the gods, who are praised for the favours they bestow in the sacrifice (*yajña*). This supplicatory tone is also evident in the expiatory sacrifices designed to mollify the wrath of Varuṇa or to remove guilt (often with the help of Agni), which is felt as some kind

of defilement or disease. This dependence on the whims of the gods changes dramatically, however, when the priests gain control of the gods by their knowledge of the ritual. A new sense of power emerges in the Brāhmaṇas, reinforced, in part, by a magical tradition which had received a stamp of approval in the Atharvaveda. (In addition to the sacrifice, the powers of the cosmos may be harnessed by means of various ascetic practices (*tapas*) and by use of appropriate *mantra* and incantations.)

On the other hand, this new ritual knowledge still left the human agent at the mercy, as it were, of external forces. The secret of the cosmic power had passed into human hands, but only to the leading social group (*varṇa*), not to the individual. Lacking is that sense of depth and coherence of inner life that would point to the existence of what we would call a "person", an autonomous, self-directing center of willing and doing. The desires (*kāma*) themselves are one's own, but they are fulfilled not directly, but mediately through an esoteric knowledge of the general order of the world over which one would otherwise have little or no control. While one is accountable for what one does, one can have little confidence in one's inherent abilities to shape one's own destiny. Private actions are vain, impotent or even illusory when set against the inexorable tide of events.

Such conditions do little justice to the creative potential within human nature itself, which lends dignity and uniqueness to the individual person, and hardly provide an adequate explanation for moral responsibility and human conduct in general. To the extent that one attributes one's actions to external agencies, one is determined and thereby diminished. To the extent that one attributes these same actions to oneself, one is at least potentially free to choose one's own ends, to be called to account for what one does, and to accept some responsibility for the conditions of one's own life.

In ancient Greece, a similar clash of ideals gave rise to the tragic situation of the hero who faces an impasse (*aporia*) involving an

agonizing choice on which his entire fate depends. However, he is never actually free to choose between these two possibilities — only to recognize the tragic path he has to take, and, in so doing, to understand the purpose of his life. This conflict was never pushed to such extremes in classical India, but the human agent nevertheless remained suspended, as it were, between the external forces that bear down upon him and a margin of free choice that finds its most developed expression in the moral causality of karma, the doctrine that the hard facts of human life are the inevitable fruit of past behavior, whether in this or in some previous life. The natural corollary of this more human-centred view is that humanity is capable of determining the shape of its future all by itself, without the need to propitiate the gods — or the sacrificial experts among the brahmins. The human subject can, in this manner, finally become the sole center and source for his or her own subsequent self-development as a spiritual being.

The first movement in this direction was the appropriation, by Varuṇa, of the role of dispenser of divine justice (e.g. Rkveda I.24.9) Other gods subsequently assumed this function. In the Mahābhārata (III.218.9-10):

> *indro diśāti bhūtānāṃ balaṃ tejaḥ prajāḥ sukham|*
> *tuṣṭaḥ prayacchati tathā sarvān dāyān sureśvaraḥ||*
>
> *durvṛttānāṃ saṃharati vṛttasthānāṃ prayacchati|*

"Indra assigns to all beings their strength, glory (*tejas*), offspring, and happiness. When satisfied, the king of the gods distributes all good things (*dāya*). He denies them to evil-doers but grants them to the good." Yama (V.42.5) and Dhātar (IV.19.10) also appear in this role. These developments eventually lead to the idea of the Divine Grace of Viṣṇu or Śiva as a reward for the conduct of the devotee. The conflict is never completely resolved, but as a general rule, we find that the ascetic (and generally more orthodox) traditions lean towards the goal of individual self-mastery through self-knowledge, while for the devotional cults, justice is often meted

out by the Supreme Divinity according to the karma of the devotee. However, this karma doctrine progressively gained the ascendancy, even in the *bhakti* cults, and, "Leaving out the rank materialists who are very few and far between, the entire structure of Indian culture from one end of the country to the other is dominated by the ideology associated with the doctrine of karma."[5]

The Mahābhārata is an ideal sourcebook from which to study human agency and conduct in the Indian context. Here, in fact, is an entire gamut of ideas on the subject from those reminiscent of the early Vedas to the role of divine grace and the mature doctrines of karma. The earlier notions are echoed in the various attempts to seek favours of the gods — the need for Arjuna to secure divine weapons by propitiating Indra and Śiva or the efforts of Ambā to secure a boon from Śiva to kill Bhīṣma (V.188.7-13). More common is the brāhmaṇic (i.e. orthodox) perspective of the many passages comparing the brahmins to the gods (e.g. III.197.20; XII.329.13; XIII.129.2; etc.). Several passages even describe them as "the gods of the very gods" — *devānāmapi devatāḥ* (e.g. XII.60.41; XIII.35.21; XIII.136.16-20). Furthermore, we are told that there is a constant rivalry — *sadā vigraha* — between the gods and the forest sages or *ṛṣi* (XIII.6.25). The gods are also occasionally assimilated to the powers of the senses, which, of course, the yogī must control (e.g. XII.316.16).

Hopkins was the first to recognize different strata of ideas in the Indian epic literature by contrasting the karma theory with one in which, "man owes what he gets, not to his anterior self, but to the gods. What the gods arrange is, in any case, whether good or bad, the appointed lot; the arrangement, *vidhi*, is fate. If the gods bestow a share, *bhaga*, of good upon a man, that is his *bhāgya*, luck, divinely appointed, *diṣṭa*. As divine, the cause is *daiva*, which later becomes fate, and is then looked upon as a blind power, necessity, chance, *haṭha*." [6]

These terms and ideas are of particular interest since they lead directly to the specific focus of the present investigation, namely, the

ongoing polemic about the springs of human action in the Mahābhārata. This often takes the form of a radical opposition between *daiva*, i.e. what comes "from the gods" (*deva*) and *puruṣakāra* or *pauruṣa*, i.e. what comes "from human beings" (*puruṣa*), in short, human initiative.[7] On the one hand, human life and the course of history are seen by many epic characters as governed exclusively by *daiva* (and the other external forces noted by Hopkins), or by *svabhāva*, a term that suggests something inherent (*sva*) in the nature (*bhāva*) of a thing that makes it act as it does. Human effort or *puruṣakāra* is inconsequential, ephemeral, or even futile in the face of the overwhelming tide of events, whether these are the result of socio-political conditions or natural forces, beyond the power of the individual to change. Such a position is exemplified by the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, so much so that Dumézil, for example, takes him to be "the very image, if not the incarnation of Destiny, Bhaga."[8] All the king can do is to see in his thoughts the destruction of the Kurus (V.50.58):

manye paryāyadharmo'yaṃ kālasyātyantagāminaḥ|
cakre pradhirivāsakto nāsya śakyaṃ phalāyitum||

"This, I think, is the law of the course of time (*paryāyadharma kālasya*) that goes on for ever: all are fixed to the wheel like its rim; there is no escaping its effects." Many other characters in the epic speak in the same vein in their troubled moments or when they feel powerless against overwhelming odds. However, Dhṛtarāṣṭra not only expresses these sentiments, he is overwhelmed by them to the point of actually becoming the chosen instrument of *daiva*.

And yet, paradoxically, the epic also carries a commanding message that the lives of both individuals and societies may be changed for the better through human initiative (*puruṣakāra*) in accordance with the dharma, the moral order sanctioned by religious tradition. This is, indeed, the teaching that Kṛṣṇa is at pains to convey to Arjuna in the Bhagavadgītā. Kṛṣṇa himself always acts for the welfare of the worlds (*lokasaṃgraha*) and he urges Arjuna to do

the same. Action not only can but *must* be taken in fulfillment of one's dharma. Arjuna must get up and fight (*uttiṣṭha bhārata*)! And he is finally (VI.40/BG.18.63) urged to make up his own mind about what he should do (*yathecchasi tathā kuru*).

Such sanction by the Lord himself suggests that this more positive outlook is not the exuberance of youth or the ignorance of the blind but is justified by the very conditions of existence. However, there is little consensus on the degree to which humans can change or stem the tide of events that appear as if governed by a greater divine force with a will of its own. Moreover — and this will also claim our attention — there is still some question as to whether the work of the human agent flows from a truly personal decision in the first place. This creates a constant tension between the two opposed poles.

The most revealing summary of the prevailing state of learned opinion on this score is provided by Vyāsa himself, the reputed author of the text, when he states that (XII.224.50-52):

> *kecitpuruṣakāraṃ tu prāhuḥ karmavido janāḥ|*
> *daivamityapare viprāḥ svabhāvaṃ bhūtacintakāḥ||*
>
> *pauruṣaṃ karma daivaṃ ca phalavṛttisvabhāvataḥ|*
> *traya ete'pṛthagbhūtā navivekaṃ tu kecana||*
>
> *evametacca naivaṃ ca yadbhūtaṃ sṛjate jagat|*
> *karmasthā viṣamaṃ brūyuḥ sattvasthāḥ samadarśinaḥ||*

"Some authorities in the science of action say that effects [are due to] human initiative (*puruṣakāra*). However, other authorities [say they are due to] destiny (*daiva*), [while] the materialists [say] that nature (*svabhāva*) [is the cause]. But yet others [say that] effects are driven by [a combination of] human initiative, destiny and nature; that these should not be distinguished [but regarded as] a triad. In reality, however, the world unfolds both in this manner and not in this manner ." This clash of view is somewhat disconcerting at first sight. Vyāsa, however, immediately follows with the assurance

that: "[It is only] those who take their stand in action (*karmasthā*) who would say that [the world] is a paradox (*viṣama* = lit. uneven, disparate). Those who take their stand in the truth (*sattvasthā*) look upon [all things] with an equal eye (*samadarśina*)."[9]

This is also suggestive of a second radical opposition that occurs throughout the epic, and indeed through all great works of Indian literature, namely, the contrast that is often drawn between the confusions of ordinary men and women and the truths entertained by the person of wisdom who is able to reconcile all opposites in a unitary vision. As Sukthankar has noted, this literature is "infused with the idea of penetrating behind the phenomena to the core of things, and they represent but so many pulsating reflexes of one and the same central impulse towards seeing unity in diversity, towards achieving one gigantic all-embracing synthesis."[10] What the real truth is, in this case, is not given directly in the text cited above. However, it offers the suggestion that the differences expressed above are perhaps not mutually exclusive, but point to an underlying vision of human nature, action and purpose, accessible only to "those established in the truth" (*sattvasthāḥ*).

The task of this enquiry will, therefore, be to explore the ambiguities of the conceptions of action, freedom and human nature implied by these two positions, and to establish how those established in the truth of things (*sattvastā*) are able to reconcile the apparent inconsistencies involved. To do this, we must identify the various levels of meaning that lie hidden in these epic notions of *daiva* and *puruṣakāra*. How far do these notions penetrate to the very roots of human action itself? Does the initiative come only from the human agent or from both within and without, the same character appearing now as agent, source of all action and instrument of change (*puruṣakāra*), and now as acted upon, engulfed in a force from beyond that sweeps all before it (*daiva*)? Or does this divine causality only come into play once the human action has been initiated, to block, counter or divert its effects? In short, how does human purpose fit into the sequence of arrangements made by the gods? If human beings are like machines (*yantra*) moved by a

higher design — as suggested by Kṛṣṇa in VI.40/BG.18.61 — what freedom can they really enjoy to shape their own destinies and those of the societies in which they live? Or, finally, is the idea of "human nature" itself so relative in the epic that issues of human volition and "freedom" must be presented in an entirely different manner?[11]

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[1] Paul Shorey (trans.), "The Republic," 517c. In The Collected Dialogues of Plato Bollingen Series LXXI, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 517c, p. 749.

[2] George Thompson (trans.), "Agamemnon," in Aeschylus: The Oresteia Trilogy, transl. George Thompson (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1974), p. 62.

[3] See for example, Isaiah 40.22.

[4] See for example, II Corinthians 8.9.

[5] Koshalya Walli, Theory of Karma in Indian Thought (Varanasi: Bharata Manisha, 1977), p. 277.

[6] E.W. Hopkins, "Modifications of the Karma Doctrine," in The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 38 (1906): 584-585.

[7] The word *deva* comes from the sanskrit root √*div* which means "to shine" — though also, significantly, "to gamble." The term *puruṣa* is used in two senses. It often simply connotes "Man" or "a man", but in the more philosophical sections of the epic (e.g. in the Bhagavadgītā) it is used to indicate the spiritual essence of human nature to be realized by each and every individual man and woman.

[8] Georges Dumézil, Mythe et épopée: l'idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens, 3 vols. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1967), vol. I, p. 170.

[9] Cf. also XII.230.4-6 for a similar exposition (*pauruṣaṃ kāraṇaṃ kecidāhuḥ karmasu mānavāḥ| daivameke praśaṃsanti svabhāvaṃ cāpare janāḥ|| pauruṣaṃ karma daivaṃ ca phalavṛttisvabhāvataḥ| trayametatpṛthagbhūtamavivekaṃ tu kecana|| evametanna cāpyevamubhe cāpi na cāpyubhe| karmasthā viṣamaṃ brūyuḥ sattvasthāḥ samadarśinaḥ||*). The different emphases given to the relative strengths of *daiva* and *puruṣakāra* has been partially catalogued by Kane. According to him, *daiva* is represented as all-powerful at I.1.186-87; I.84.6-9; II. Appendix I, no. 30, line 33; II.43.32; II.52.14; III.176.27-28; V.8.35; V.40.30; V.156.4; V.187.17; and XV.16.2. *Puruṣakāra* is useless against it. A golden mean is advocated at I.114.15; II.15.11; V.77.4-5; X.2.3; and also at XII.56.14-15. However, many other passages—specifically those at VII.127.17; XII.27.30; XII.58.13-16; XII.149.46; XIII.6.1ff.; X.2.12-13 and X.2.22-23—indicate that *puruṣakāra is superior to daiva*. Cf. P.V. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, III (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968-77), p. 168.

[10] Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata* (Bombay: The Asiatic Society of Bombay, 1957), p. 109.

[11] The problem faced by the epic author is somewhat analogous to the conflict faced by Kant between "the starry heavens above and the moral law within," namely, how to explain the apparent paradox of our participation in two worlds, the world of Nature with its

deterministic system of causalities, and the world of moral obligation which implies freedom? The presuppositions about human nature, world, moral obligation and freedom are, of course, entirely different in the two cases.

II—Methodological Issues

Before we begin, it is necessary to discuss certain methodological issues related to the task at hand. We proceed by first describing the nature of the Mahābhārata itself, its age and the key differences from Western epic literature that give rise to scholarly concerns about the best way of approaching the study of its various elements. This is followed by a review of scholarly controversies, and how these have led to a growing post-war convergence of Western and Indian views that the epic is not a hopeless jumble of diversity but is the product of a conscious literary design expressing its central ideas in myth. The emerging consensus concerning the overall unity of aim and plan in the epic as a whole permits us to take up the study of our particular theme of destiny and human effort with some confidence.

1. Nature of the Text

The Mahābhārata (or "Great [Tale of the War between] the descendants of Bharata") appears to have been composed, in metrical stanzas designed to be recited or sung, sometime between the fourth century B.C. and the fourth century A.D.[1] The prevailing view is that the poem passed through the three stages of: 1) oral composition and recital; 2) written compilation by a group or school of priestly savants, or even by a single poetic genius, to 3) a final stage of transmission involving supplementary accretion and interpolation by different hands. However, the details of this process will likely never be known.[2] We incline to the view of van Buitenen (echoed by Ruth Katz and others) that, "there is organic growth in the Mahābhārata, in the sense that an interpolation was not extraneous to the text but was attracted, even at times provoked, by an incident in the 'original'."[3] The result is a remarkable compendium of ancient lore, containing all manner of mythic, legendary, didactic, and folkloric material—including even an abridged version of the Rāmāyana (the second great Indian epic) and, of course, the famous Bhagavadgītā or "Song of the Lord."[4] The editors of the version we now

have in the Critical Edition (used by most scholars, including this one) have claimed no more than that it constitutes, "a modest attempt to present a version of the epic as old as the extant manuscript material will permit us to reach with some semblance of confidence."[5]

The Critical Edition is based on review of over one thousand manuscripts, mostly written Sanskrit, a language belonging to the Indo-European linguistic group. However, while the constituted poem does have affinities with European epics and sagas as Dumézil and others have shown, it also differs from these in a number of respects.[6] It differs, firstly, in terms of sheer size. The received texts that were consulted contain up to 200,000 lines of verse, longer than the united extent of all the European epics—eight times as long as the Iliad and the Odyssey put together. It differs too in its encyclopedic scope. In an oft-quoted verse the poem itself claims that, "whatever is here of dharma (rules of human conduct), *artha* (material prosperity), *kāma* (sensual enjoyment), and *mokṣa* (liberation, i.e. from bondage to the other three of life's goals) may be found elsewhere. But what is not here is nowhere else."[7]

However, perhaps the most significant difference with respect to Western epics is the continuing allegiance the poem commands to this day as the most popular and influential of the canons of modern Hinduism. The Mahābhārata itself claims to be one of the *saṃhitas* ("collections") associated with the four Vedas, in effect a "fifth Veda" (I.1.19). Its spiritual function is suggested in a colorful analogy by Abhinavagupta, writing around 1000 A.D. Scripture, he says, "teaches after the fashion of a master, by giving direct commands. The story literature edifies us more gently, after the fashion of a helpful friend, by presenting interesting examples of what fruits befell the actions of others in the past. And poetry instructs us in the most effective way, after the fashion of a beloved woman, by so delighting us that we are scarcely aware of an underlying purpose."[8] The avowed intent is always to prompt the mind of the reader/listener to greater awareness of spiritual truths, and ultimately, to lead it to the joy that springs from the presence of God. "*Aham gururmahābāho manaḥ śiṣyaṃ ca viddhi me* — I am the guru, O mighty armed one, and know that the mind is my pupil" (XIV.51.45).

This spiritual thrust also suggests that the method of communication is more than exemplary or even didactic; it is therapeutic insofar as seekers are challenged to change themselves through confrontation with the kaleidoscopic play of name and form (*nāma rūpa*)—the panorama of life itself—viewed through the allegories and images of the poet. This method of fostering spiritual insight and emotional calm and control, leading to liberation (*mokṣa*), is taken for granted by subsequent commentators, including Arjunamiśra (c. 1450-1500 A.D.), Caturbhujamiśra (c. 1350-1550 A.D.), Devabodha (?), Nīlakaṇṭha (c. 1700 A.D.), Ratnagarbha (?), Sarvajña-Nārāyaṇa (c. 1100-1300 A.D.) and Vidyāsāgara (c. 1350 A.D.).[9] "The Mahābhārata," says Ānandavardhana, the great Sanskrit literary critic of the ninth century A.D., "teaches man ultimately to renounce the vanity of earthly glories and attain dharma (truth and righteousness), vairagya (renunciation), śānti (eternal peace), and mokṣa (salvation). Vyāsa himself remarks in his epic that he has sung the glory of the Lord and that his epic is the Nārāyaṇa Kathā, 'The Story of the Lord', thus clearly indicating what the message of his epic is; for the story of the Pāṇḍavas is only an occasion, the purpose being to reveal the greatness of the Lord."[10]

2. *Initial Divergences of Modern Scholarly Opinion*

While this spiritual/therapeutic purpose has been the source of the greatness and abiding fascination of the work, the extraordinary scope and complexity of the composition, and the apparent doctrinal divergences to be found there, present methodological difficulties for scholars interested in the study of specific themes. Norbert Klaes puts the matter succinctly when he writes that, "one of the main difficulties of scholarly work on this immense poem up to now has been how to approach it and with which method to criticize the various sections. In other words, before discussing single episodes, one should first know, whether the whole Mahābhārata is conceived according to a single literary design, whether central ideas or purposes govern it and justify the collection of multifarious elements, or whether the poem is just a more or less accidental collection of both very old and new material."[11]. Individual components or particular themes can only be understood in terms of one's understanding of the poem as a whole. As the history of scholarly examination has shown, this understanding tends to

depend, in turn, on one's view of the process of composition that made the Mahābhārata what it is today.

Prior to the Second World War scholarly opinion tended to polarize between those who saw the text as a confused assemblage of heterogeneous material originating from various sources and belonging to different historical and philosophical strata, and those who saw it as the expression of some central guiding agenda.[12] The first view regarded the text as consisting of two fundamentally incompatible elements, an original epic core and an undigested mass of later accretions that could be weeded out by the surgical skills of higher criticism. For this first group, the Mahābhārata problem "reduces itself to the discovery of criteria which will enable us to analyze the poem and to dissect out the 'epic nucleus' from the spurious additions with which it is deeply incrusted. This is the 'Analytical Theory' of the origin and character of the Mahābhārata, which was espoused by the majority of the Western critics of the Great Epic of India, chief among them being Lassen, Webber (sic), Ludwig, Sörensen, Hopkins and Winternitz."[13] To this list we must add the name of Adolf Holzmann the younger who propounded an extravagant "Inversion Theory" (subsequently discredited) to explain the so-called "sins" of the Pāṇḍavas, arguing that it was, in fact, the Kauravas (i.e. rather than the Pāṇḍavas) who were the embodiments of righteousness in the original epic.

The second group of scholars, led by Joseph Dahlmann around the turn of the century, propounded what was later dubbed (by Hopkins) as the "Synthetic Theory" of the origin and character of the poem. "This theory categorically repudiates as utterly fantastic the modern notion that the Great Epic is but a haphazard compilation of disjointed and incoherent units. It insists on the other hand—as the name of the theory already suggests—that the Mahābhārata is primarily a synthesis, a synthesis of all the various aspects of Law, in the widest sense of the term covered by the Indian conception of Dharma, cast by a master intellect into the alluring shape of a story, of an epic....The poem is, as Indian tradition has always implied, a conscious product of literary art (kāvya) of the highest order, with a pronounced unity of conception, aim, and treatment."[14] Instead of separating the narrative from the didactic portions of the epic as the first group attempted to do, this synthetic view saw the didactic material, including the

Bhagavadgītā, as an essential part of the poem—indeed so essential that the story itself could well have been invented for the purpose of illustrating the moral and ethical ideas of the author(s).[15]

3. *The Post-war Convergence*

While Dahlmann himself had toyed with the idea of symbolism as a key to the inner meaning of certain aspects of the plot (the polyandrous marriage of Draupadī, for example), it was not until the post-war work of Wikander and Dumézil in the field of comparative mythology that attempts to explain the poem as a reflection of historical events gave way to the opposite conception, namely that the poem constitutes a sort of historicized mythology.[16] Thus, for Dumézil: "The problem is not to explain how the poem developed from a nucleus of real events for which no evidence remains, but to determine how, at what point of the story, at what generation of the heroes, the link with history was forged."[17] The poem itself is not modelled after historical events but on an alleged eschatological myth dating from Indo-European times, and featuring a trifunctional hierarchy of gods.[18] Dumézil argues that:

> In essence, the Mahābhārata is the transposition of a vast system of mythic representations into the world of men. The principal gods, centered on the hierarchy of the gods of the three functions, as well as a number of demons were related to the main heroes not as an afterthought but as their models, and the conceptual links between these gods were transferred to the heroes in the form of ties of kinship (brothers, wife) or of alliance, friendship, hostility. The storyline of the poem is itself the transposition of a myth related to a great world crisis: the confrontation of the forces of Good and the forces of Evil develops to a paroxysm of destruction which results in a renaissance....
>
> The transposition was a well thought out literary project, rigorously followed with no deviation by skillful and talented technical specialists, who fully explored the possibilities inherent in the mythic material. A team working along the same lines and under firm direction, is the hypothesis that best takes account of the scope and success of the operation. And not only a team: a school, since, with the exception of

> out-of-context interpolations, of innumerable narrative or philosophical excursions that are easily detached, we recognize revisions, associated variations, certain proliferations (such as the fourth book), which attest to the successive efforts in this direction, and in support of the transposition.[19]

In his view, the transition from myth to history is not made until the very end of the epic when rule passes from Arjuna—the mythical transposition of the warrior god Indra—to his grandson Parikṣit.

This emerging Western view of the Mahābhārata as a symbolic whole is in keeping with the traditional conception of the epic espoused by indigenous commentators who based their own interpretations, in part, on this aspect of the matter. A typical example is the *Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya* of Madhvācārya. This eminent 13th century authority proposes that the poem may be read on at least three levels, including the symbolic. "The meaning of the 'Bhārata,' in so far as it is a relation of the facts and events with which Śri Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas are connected, is called *āstikādi* (historical). That interpretation by which we find lessons on virtue, divine love, and other ten qualities, on sacred study and righteous practices, on character and training, on Brahmā and the other gods, is called *manvādi* (religious and moral). Thirdly, the interpretation by which every sentence, word, or syllable, is shown to be the significant name, or to be the declaration of the glories, of the Almighty Ruler of the Universe, is called *auparicara* (transcendental)."[20]

This manner of reading the text has not been lost on Indian writers of more modern times. A similar three-dimensional interpretation of the Mahābhārata was offered by Sukthankar, the first editor of the Critical Edition, in a well-known series of four lectures given in 1942. He reads the story on the mundane level as the realistic account of a fierce fratricidal conflict involving the epic characters. He goes on to interpret this war of annihilation on the ethical level as the conflict of dharma and *adharma*, of the principles of good and evil, justice and injustice. At this level the contending parties are incarnations of gods (*devas*) and demons (*asuras*) and the war ends in the victory of the gods and of dharma. However, beyond these struggles of dharma and *adharma*, Sukthankar also sees a third or transcendental level. This is the perennial struggle between our higher and

lower natures, a struggle that can only be resolved in our own minds. He captures what he believes is the basic thrust of the epic by juxtaposition with modern science: "Modern scientists are interested in breaking the Atom, which we are told is a solar system in miniature, in order to release the captive energy for the exploitation of Nature. The Ṛṣis of ancient India were interested in breaking the tangled knot of personality, which is the very cosmos in miniature, in order to release the captive energy for the sublimation of Nature."[21]

Krishna Chaitanya also follows tradition in adopting an aesthetic view of the author(s) intentions (albeit with Western existentialist overtones). The poem, as he sees it, is a unique literary product,

> which tried to discover, through art, what philosophical thinking and related modalities had tried to find out: how man can realize the greatest possible meaning, the maximum value, in his living, in the conditions of incarnate existence. The most liberated state of being (*moksha*) can be attained only if one exists first. And existence has evolved on earth through the tremendous impulsion of an *elan vital*, surfacing in man as his libido (*kama*) which gives him the drive for acquiring the resources of a secure material existence (*artha*). But the drive of the libido and the desire for economic means have to be tempered by the discipline of normative living (*dharma*) if man is to attain liberation. These are the hierarchically arranged goals of man outlined by prior thought and the epic explicitly states that it is in one respect the science of these goals (I. 62). But the tremendous thrust of the libido, which isolates man and sets him against his brethren and nature, had to be grasped in its fullness and intensity with far greater understanding than in the rather bloodless speculations of philosophy. Vyasa lays bare the structural violence that is deeply embedded in the life of this world, the role it plays in creating balances, before he proceeds to explore ways of securing harmony in less ruthless ways. The germinal metaphor of the wood and the tigers expands to colossal dimensions in the carnage of the Kurukshetra battle-field. But solutions that can end this type of carnage are also offered in the great discourse in the very same field. A comprehensively conscious artistic intelligence is behind the creation of this work.[22]

This Indian exegetical tradition has since inspired Western readers such as Ruth Katz, who interprets the epic and the character of Arjuna at the heroic, human and devotional levels. In her view, "the creation of order by sacrifice seems to be the heroic meaning of the Kurukshetra War and the epic as a whole."[23] The human dimension is marked by the moral ambiguities involved in fulfillment of this task, while the devotional imperative is the "sacrifice" by which the hero abandons his ego in acceptance of the divine plan of Kṛṣṇa (equivalent to his "fate").[24] She explicitly acknowledges her debt to Sukthankar (going back to Madhvācārya) by noting: "The three levels of Arjuna's personality correspond in part to those noted by Vishnu Sitaram Sukthankar as running through the epic as a whole." She acknowledges the existence of a "metaphysical" (in contrast to devotional) dimension but feels that this is better illustrated by the character of Yudhiṣṭhira than by that of Arjuna who is "never strictly a philosopher in the epic."[25]

Ritual has also received attention in recent years as a symbolic repository of the inner meaning of the text. For example, Heino Gehrts sees the Mahābhārata as "the consequent development of one central idea: the consecution of events as well as the characters and the distribution of its heroes are regulated by the form of one of India's ancient rituals of royal consecration, by the *rājasūya*....the author of the Mahābhārata is convinced, that the *rājasūya* is a dangerous ritual, that it may lead — under the influence of demoniacal perturbations — to the extermination of the warrior caste."[26] Alf Hiltebeitel is also attracted by the sacrificial model.[27] Starting with the tri-functional Indo-European model of Dumézil, Hiltebeitel concludes by proposing a somewhat different view of the relation of myth (concerning the gods) and epic (concerning the heroic exploits of men). The way in which the epic poets composed/compiled the Mahābhārata "would seem to have been not so much through a process of 'transposition' as through a process of correlation between two levels of continually changing and growing tradition: myth and epic. The epic poets would thus emerge not so much as programmers, transposing one set of information into another form, but as ṛṣis, in this case the ṛṣis of the 'Fifth Veda' whose 'school' is covered by the name of the elusive but ever-available ṛṣi Vyāsa."[28] In this context, he sees the "sacrifice of battle" (*raṇayajña*) as the fundamental

symbolism shaping the Mahābhārata war, with Kṛṣṇa performing the role of sacrificial priest.[29]

Recently, Hiltebeitel has been influenced by the French structuralist Madeleine Biardeau, to whom we owe perhaps the most thoroughgoing analysis of the Mahābhārata as a whole.[30] Her path-breaking examination of the poem has clarified a number of anomalies of form and content, casting the epic as the product of an emerging "Hindu" devotional (*bhakti*) world view. We ourselves, are particularly indebted to her work in what follows. Like Dumézil, she treats the events themselves as pure myth, without any necessary basis in historic fact.[31] While there may well be a germ of historical truth in the central narrative, she argues that the work as a whole is driven by what she calls a "mythical necessity." This prompts her to argue against a factual treatment of the material. "The perspective must be reversed; when describing a *sal* or wine palm, the reason is not that it is part of the environment familiar to the poet — clearly a cultivated man, a brahmin rather than a bard. On the contrary, it may be because it is part of his mental landscape by virtue of the symbolic meaning(s) attached to it. More generally, different landscapes are portrayed, not for their actual location on the map [sic], but for the positive or negative values they carry."[32]

Under these conditions, it is not the historical facts, or even how the various materials were assembled to form the text we now have, that is exegetically important. Rather it is the intentionality and preoccupations of the brahmin composers/compilers that count and how this basic agenda has transformed the original materials (whatever they may have been) to give them new meaning and value. While these preoccupations and materials no doubt have a history, they must be used without their history for the most part, "stripped of their date, of their origin, but organized and hierarchized according to a system of values drawn from inside the atemporal vision which the Hindu has of the universe...."[33]

Biardeau reveals how the symbolic form of the Mahābhārata is modelled after the cyclic eschatology of the traditional Purāṇic accounts of divine incarnation known as *avatāra*. However, it is not an avatāric myth per se but a conscious attempt by a disaffected brahmin hierarchy to extend the

possibility of salvation to the king. This effort turns out to be revolutionary in its impact on subsequent events. In recognition of its primary intent she calls it a royal myth, "a teaching given to kings where the ideal sovereign appears indissolubly linked to the *avatāra* for whom he is a substitute."[34] In her view, the curriculum for this royal instruction was designed by orthodox brahmin priests, the spiritual custodians of the community and its rulers, at a time when the Indian principalities were being undermined by a growing ascetic trend on the part of the ruling caste of warrior kings (*kṣatriyas*).[35] She explains: "For an individual brahmin there is no real problem: a simple change from the status of householder to that of renunciate is all that is required. But what becomes of the kingdom if the king abandons the sacrifice to seek his personal salvation? In short, the choice between life in the world and renunciation cannot be left free of all constraint. What is needed is to reconcile the eternity of the world—that no one wishes to see end—with the discovery of the possibility of a definitive personal salvation."[36]

A path to salvation for a king who remains within the world could only be found by somehow incorporating the functions of the king. This could not but raise the issue of ritual impurity associated with the use of violence (*hiṃsā*), for while the problem of the ritual killing of animals had already been solved in the legal texts known as the Dharmaśāstras,[37] the brāhmaṇic priesthood of the time still faced the delicate matter of the royal killing of human beings in defense of the social order. Somehow, a religious sanction had to be found for the royal exercise of *daṇḍanīti*, the duties incumbent upon the king in the administration of justice (leading to the possibility of salvation for the king). This was eventually accomplished by extending the notion of "sacrifice" to include even the most abject functions of the king (such as war), provided this activity was undertaken in a spirit of yoga, i.e. with an attitude of non-attachment, ready to lose all — even life itself.

This notion of renunciation in action (in contrast to the upaniṣadic renunciation of action itself) eventually opened the door to salvation for the lower caste strata (*varṇas*) as well. Ultimately, human activities could be undertaken as a form of worship by dedicating the fruits to the Lord, typically in the form of the divine incarnation (*avatāra*) who acts for the

welfare of the world (*lokasaṃgraha*). This involved a virtual revolution in values leading to the rise of a new religion of devotion (*bhakti*) towards a Supreme God (who may be conceived in personal terms). *Bhakti* salvation could henceforth be open to men and women alike, and even to those who had been evildoers (VI.31/BG.9.32).

While Biardeau acknowledges her debt to Dumézil, she thus views the Mahābhārata, not as the transposition of a pre-vedic mythology of social function, but as a transformation of orthodox brāhmaṇic values of sacrifice and renunciation into the values of this new *bhakti* religious system (of which the epic may be regarded as the "founding charter").[38] This transformation of values is nowhere more evident than in the imagery and symbolism surrounding the "sacrifice" of the eighteen-day war itself, regarded as the centerpiece of a triad of sacrifices that includes the *rājasūya* (royal consecration) and the *aśvamedha* (horse) sacrifices.[39] "In other words, this episode of the central myth seeks to transpose the ritual values into a truly epic key. We are not dealing with a reduction of the myth (concerning the gods) into an epic (with respect to heroes), but with a new reading of ancient values, where what was not sacrifice, becomes sacrifice."[40]

4. *Biardeau's Structural Analysis of the Narrative Events*

The multi-dimensionality of the "central myth" is progressively uncovered with the help of the structuralist methodology developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. In one sense, the pouring of the two armies into the fires of war is the "sacrifice" of *adharma* (the decayed social order). But the reign of Duryodhana (incarnation of the demon Kali) is only the culmination of a social malaise originating in the progressive breakdown of the traditional functional relationship between the *kṣatriya* and the brahmins, the two pillars of epic society. Beginning with the *kṣatriya* Śāṃtanu — whose very name evokes the renunciation of the brahmin (*śānti* = peace) — and the brahmin Parāśara ("the destroyer"), the father of Vyāsa, one can follow what amounts to a progressive reversal of the natural order of things over the course of the succeeding generations.

That king Śāṃtanu himself marries a princess (Satyavatī) born from a fish is itself suggestive of disorder (*mātsyanyāya* is the "rule of the fish," i.e.

the Indian law of the jungle where the big fish eat the little fish). Bhīṣma — the *pitāmaha* or (honorary) grandfather — must also bear his share of the responsibility. Though a *kṣatriya*, he opts for a higher dharma reserved for the brahmin by his renunciation of both *artha* (the throne) and *kāma* (his marriage rights). The result is that he cannot fulfill the duties incumbent upon his royal status, which would have involved marrying the princess Ambā, and providing a legitimate heir to the throne, the responsibility for which is delegated to his brahmin half-brother Vyāsa.[41] This succession is defective from the start, and his nephew king Pāṇḍu finally abandons his duties to devote himself to the traditional royal vices of lovemaking and the chase, leaving the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra (his half-brother) to covet the kingdom in his absence. There follows the extraordinary situation of the generation of the protagonists in which the god Viṣṇu (in the form of Vyāsa, his brahmin representative) engineers the birth of the demons (*asuras*), while the god Śiva (in the form of the irascible sage Durvāsas) sets the stage for the birth of the gods (*devas*).

The circumstances leading to the crisis itself are no less irregular. Droṇa, incarnation of the priest of the gods (Bṛhaspati) and mundane representative of the brāhmaṇic power, is found to be in the service of the *asuras*. Furthermore, he no longer serves as priest but assumes the role of commander-in-chief of the demon army (on the death of Bhīṣma). This involves a double corruption of Dharma. Service on behalf of the *asuras* is substituted for that of the *devas*, and the brahmin usurps the functions of the king. As for his son, Aśvatthāman, he embodies the collective venom of Mahādeva (=Śiva), Antaka (death), Kāma (desire) and Krodha (anger) which almost succeeds in foiling the restoration of the dharma symbolized by the resurrection of the dead Parikṣit, the rightful heir to the Pāṇḍava throne. Karṇa too is a strange mixture, being of divine descent (he is illegitimately fathered by Sūrya, the Sun, on Kuntī, the mother of the Pāṇḍavas) but linked to the *asura* Naraka. Bhīṣma (Dyaus = the Heavens) and Vidura (Dharma) are both captives to the *asura*. It is evident that the *asuras* have usurped the *brāhmaṇ* power to their own advantage, a situation that clearly calls for the intervention of the *avatāra*.

However, since intervention by the *avatāra* inevitably involves destruction on a cosmic scale (or at least on the scale of the three worlds known as the *trailokya*), the Mahābhārata war has been dramatized by the epic author as a cosmic sacrifice analogous to the destruction of the worlds at the end of the *yuga* — *yugānta*. The weapons of war are compared to the fire at the end of a *yuga*, and,

> this image is among the most frequent of the whole account. The war is thus a crisis, not only terrestrial, but of the *trailokya*, which suggests the juncture of two *yugas*. We can even say more precisely, between the end of a Kaliyuga and the start of a Kṛtayuga. In fact, since the epic is still a myth, it is not enough to say that the conflict is the image of a *yugānta*. Rather, it is the symbolic transformation, the re-employment of this idea at another level. It is this level, where the *yugas* become asuric princes and the cosmic conflagration becomes war, that defines the epic.[42]

This destruction is represented as a gigantic funeral pyre in which the old order of the world, Pāṇḍava and Kaurava alike, must perish to give way to a new order established with the assistance of the divine incarnation Kṛṣṇa from the remnant represented by Parikṣit, the perfect monarch embodying the qualities of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa.

5. Religious Significance of Symbolic Structures

The question is: what is the significance of this symbolism? In Biardeau's view, it reveals and reflects a sweeping transformation of the ritual values attached to the traditional notion of the Vedic sacrifice. It must be recognized that the,

> victory is not only that of dharma over adharma. The order to be restored is also that taught by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna at the start of the war in the Bhagavadgītā. Instead of imitating the brahmin, the *kṣatriya* should fulfill his royal duties in a spirit of detachment and devotion to Kṛṣṇa, transforming each of his violent actions, beginning with war, into a sacrifice. This is the sense of the year of living incognito prior to the war, corresponding to the period of consecration for the sacrifice: the

war being the sacrifice par excellence for the *kṣatriya* who offers himself as victim with the hope of substituting his enemy for himself.[43]

This leads to the idea that death in battle — the sacrifice of the self (*ātmayajña*) on the battlefield — is the appropriate sacrifice for the *kṣatriya*. His bow is his sacrificial stake, his bow string the cord for tying the victims, his shafts are the small ladle and his sword the large one. His chariot is the altar and the blood he pours on the battlefield is the clarified butter. His wrath is the fire of the sacrifice and the four steeds yoked to his vehicle are the four sacrificial priests (*hotṛ*). After pouring his own life-breath (*prāṇa*) and that of his foes as libations upon the sacrificial fire of the battlefield, he becomes freed from sin, and secures a place for himself in heaven (*svargaloka*) (XII.24; also XI. Appendix I, no 1.33-40; XI.2.11; XI.8,1-4). The initiation theme (*dīkṣā*) of the forest exile clearly emphasizes the sacrificial character of the war and the yogic preparation necessary for this. This, in turn, leads to the idea that an inner conquest is required to assure victory in the external combat of battle (cf. V.34.52-55; XII.69.4-5).

In this manner, the sacrifice of battle becomes a form of total renunciation (*tyāga*; *saṃnyāsa*) in which one puts one's own life on the line (*ātmayajña*). Arjuna (i.e. the ideal king) can neither abandon his responsibilities nor pursue his own narrow self-interest. Instead, he is called to dedicate his life to the wider goals of human welfare (*lokasaṃgraha*), undistracted by family ties, and without attachment to the results of his actions. The sacrifice he performs becomes an act of yoga, marked by one-pointed concentration (*ekāgra*; *apramatta*) on the task at hand. In this manner the notion of sacrifice is internalized to become a new ideal of human conduct, a new path to salvation.

This epic symbolism is authenticated, in Biardeau's view, by close purāṇic parallels to the cosmogonic myths of the epic, whatever chronology of textual development is adhered to (the Purāṇas were written down at a later period than the epics). The epics and Purāṇas both project the old ritualistic and upaniṣadic ideals into a cosmic panorama of space and time; what began as the mystical adventure of an individual aspirant in the upaniṣads develops into a collective spiritual march through a hierarchy of

worlds constituted by the creator god Brahmā, the perpetually transmigrating cosmic person whose lifespan is the birth and death of the Universe as a whole. As the mythical personification of the sacrificial power of the brahmin priest (known as the *brāhmaṇ*), he symbolizes the orthodox this-worldly religion (*pravṛttidharma*) with it's Veda and sacrificial system. In contrast, the upaniṣadic alternative of turning away from the world and its values (*nivṛttidharma*) is projected on to the divine figure of the *puruṣottama* ("Supreme Person"), another mythical transformation with antecedents going back to the Praśnopaniṣad and to the Puruṣasūkta hymn of Rgveda X.90. This epic/purāṇic symbolism constitutes a sort of cosmic backdrop to the human events used to dramatize what amounts to a complete transposition of traditional brāhmaṇic religious values into a new system of *bhakti* devotionalism.

6. *A Hierarchy of Perspectives (Darśana)*

The work of recent Western scholarship thus serves to confirm, in a more methodical manner, what generations of Indian readers have intuitively understood; that despite its enormous bulk and diversity, the Mahābhārata does indeed constitute a single literary design with unity of purpose and continuity of meaning. However, since the work as we have it is myth rather than historical fact (though possibly based on distorted memories of some distant fratricidal conflict), this meaning is couched in a complex symbolism. This allows it, like any good myth:

> to function like a perfect prism through which are refracted simultaneously all the possible ways of regarding the problems encountered in the myth. The first level we encounter is the narrative, usually quite a good story, though often with a rather predictable ending. Closely related is the divine level, which concerns mythology as it used to be understood by scholars of the classics: the metaphorical struggles of divine powers and personalities. Above this is the cosmic level of the myth, the expression of universal laws and processes, of metaphysical principles and symbolic truths. And below it, shading off into folklore, is the human level, the search for meaning in human life.

> Great myths are richly ambiguous and elusive; their truths cannot be filed away into the scholar's neat categories.[44]

Clearly, the epic is not a "horizontal" unity of a single strata but the unity of a vertically arranged hierarchy of strata, of which the narrative (or "historical") dimension is the least important, particularly from the Indian point of view. In order to understand these levels it is necessary to delve below whatever surface contradictions may be found in the poem to the symbolic keys that provide access to the hierarchy of levels that reveal the unity of the whole.

Unfortunately, this task is complicated by two characteristic features of Hindu religious tradition. In the first place, the need to preserve the sanctity and priority of the Vedas leads to a hermeneutic in which the concepts and ideas of prior forms of thought are never rejected, but simply re-evaluated and reworked into new hierarchies of meaning and value. As Chaitanya has noted: "The concepts of all the systems are closely studied; but because of their insufficincies (sic), they are radically transformed, deepened in meaning, integrated into a unitary system of great stability, a world-view to which the most advanced modern thinking in a multiplicity of fields becomes a foot-note. Vyasa's Purusha and Prakrti are not the Purusha and Prakrti of Samkhya; his Karma is not the Karma of the Mimamsakas; his Yoga is not the Yoga of Patanjali. His treatment of the four ends of human existence (purushartha) is radically new. And here we come to the profundity of his final achievement."[45] The view of Hiltebeitel is that, "the epic narrative itself has been structured in part to bridge the gap between the Vedic and Purāṇic mythologies, conserving the former (and conserving pre-Vedic themes as well) and embracing it within the new 'universe of *bhakti*' of the great gods of epic and Purāṇic Hinduism."[46]

This task is further complicated by what we noted earlier; that the very intent of the poem is to foster the progressive spiritual insights that bring the mind to a liberating vision of human existence as a whole. The fact that the epic was originally designed as a work of kingly instruction should not lead us into thinking that what it instructs is of no concern to the ignorant masses. "Everyone is king in his own home" (*sarvaḥ sve sve gṛhe rājā*) as far as the epic is concerned (XII.308.147), and the epic view is clearly that we

experience a kaleidoscope of different perspectives or *darśanas* according to the meaning and insights we (as spiritual seekers) receive as we move to successively higher vantage-points. Hiltebeitel has observed how, through various devices, the epic poets are able to present "countless *darśanas*, perspectives, on the drama that forms its core."[47]

Far from denying the overarching unity of the epic as a whole, therefore, these hierarchies of content and perspective (*darśana*) form part of its very structure. The diversity of different levels, and the juxtaposition of didactic and narrative sequences, elusive and ambiguous as they may appear on the surface, conceal a remarkable coherence of aim and plan. This has prompted Biardeau to acknowledge that: "Even fifteen years of (good) housekeeping is not enough to grasp the complexity of such a partner, but I see it rising before me as an increasingly coherent monument, astonishing in its unity, dizzying in the depth of meaning and level of detail that is achieved."[48] This unity is, of course, the unity of the new "Hindu" devotional universe of meaning and value, forged—by mythical necessity—out of traditional religious didactic and narrative material.

7. *Relevance to the Present Study*

These insights of recent scholars, coupled with our own reading of the text, offer sufficient evidence for the unity of the epic as a whole to allow us, with some confidence, to explore our chosen theme in what follows. In keeping with the emergence of the new devotional *bhakti* world-view, we can postulate that the concepts and ideas about destiny and human initiative have evolved out of prior tradition, becoming progressively transformed as they are taken up within more inclusive systems of meaning and value. This will become clear from the manner in which, as we shall see in Chapter VIII and elsewhere, the poem builds upon the sedimentary layers of its Vedic, Brāhmaṇic and Upaniṣadic antecedents. Since what we are working with is the unity achieved by the extant epic that we now have in the Critical Edition, it matters little, for our purposes, whether any postulated "original" was a composition/compilation by a body or school of priestly savants (such as the Bhārgavas or the Pāñcarātrins) or by a single creative genius in one lifetime. In spite of the importance of this issue in other contexts, it is

therefore largely for stylistic reasons that we refer to an "epic author" according to the name Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa by which he is known to posterity, whoever he (or they) might have been.[49]

Furthermore, whatever "history" may lie behind the events narrated in the story (and we do not discount the possibility of at least some basis in historical fact, however mythologized), we incline to Biardeau's view that the work as a whole is driven largely by a kind of mythical necessity. This is not to suggest that we can ignore or gloss over the obvious contradictions and inconsistencies in the language, style or doctrines of the poem. It simply means we must probe beneath the surface contradictions to determine to what extent they may be reconciled at another level, always remembering that,

> ...the more that study of the epic strengthens the conviction of its profound unity, the more one faces the need to approach it from different angles. A single structure, no matter how subdivided to account for all the details, will never surrender its full significance. The unity resides in an interweaving of structures that we can claim without great risk, are without flaw.... On the contrary, we must seek to isolate bundles of relationships that can eventually be separated from different schema to reveal different meanings: each bundle, each schema, each meaning being indissolubly bound up with the whole. We must admit that in this dense forest, we often have no other method of exploration than trial and error.[50]

Since our own agenda is a much more limited one, we have been able to profit from the insights of others, using them as a foundation and point of departure to proceed inductively by exploring the different contexts in which the two fundamental sources of human motivation and activity are illustrated or discussed. The next chapter, for example, profits largely from Biardeau's comparative analysis of epic and purāṇic cosmogony to illustrate the cosmological setting of *Daiva* (destiny; fate). This eschatological vision is an important driving force in the responses of individual protagonists to the critical situations faced by them and that they are inevitably forced to explain to themselves. We therefore also examine the discussions concerning human

initiative and destiny that arise in these various situations, as also in the wisdom teachings and discourses of the didactic sections of the poem, in homilies and parental exhortations, in the secondary tales (*upākhyāna*) and, most important of all, in Kṛṣṇa's famous call to action in the Bhagavadgītā.

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[1] Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook translated from the Sanskrit (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 17. She bases her estimate on review of the work of previous authors such as Farquhar, Gonda, Pargiter, Pusalkar and Winternitz. Needless to say, the dates for the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* are the subject of continuing controversy. Pāṇini (fourth century B.C.?) teaches the formation of the word Mahābhārata in sūtra 6.2.38 of his Grammar. However, the Greek traveller Megasthenes, who was in India about 315 B.C., makes no mention of the epic. Weber found that it was known to Dion Chrysostom in the second half of the first century A.D. (though whether in its present form is unclear). We do know from epigraphic evidence that by the fifth century A.D. the epic was already recognized as a work of 100,000 stanzas composed by the great ṛṣi Vyāsa. We thus do well to heed the warning of Whitney, that: "All dates given in Indian literary history are pins set up to be bowled down again. Every important work has undergone so many more or less transforming changes before reaching the form in which it comes to us, that the question of original construction is complicated with that of final redaction." Cf. William Dwight Whitney, "Brief Account of the Indian Literature." Sanskrit Grammar (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1973), p. xix.

[2] For a good discussion of this issue, see Ruth Katz, Arjuna in the Mahābhārata: Where Krishna Is, There is Victory (Columbia, S.C. University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 11—15.

[3] van Buitenen, Mahābhārata III, p. 19. Cf. Ruth Katz, Arjuna, p. 10 and p. 14; also see A.K. Ramanujan, "Repetition in the Mahābhārata." Essays, p. 441-442, who argues that, in order to enhance the symbolic integrity of the whole, "new incidents are added only in certain places where there seems to be a need for them, one thinks of such an analogy with crystal growth."

[4] As will be clear from discussion in Chapter VI, the Bhagavadgītā serves to highlight important issues intrinsic to epic ideas of destiny and human effort. Opinion is nevertheless divided as to whether this key text is an integral part of the Mahābhārata or a later interpolation. The present author favors the view of van Buitenen (supported by many recent scholars, including Biardeau, Hiltebeitel, Katz etc.) who believe that: "The Bhagavadgītā was conceived and created in the context of the Mahābhārata. It was not an independent text that somehow wandered into the epic." Cf. J.A.B. van Buitenen, The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 5. However, for a recent contrary view, see Georg von Simson, "Die Einschaltung der Bhagavadgītā im Bhīṣmaparvan des Mahābhārata," Indo-Iranian Journal 11 (1968-69): 159-74. Various formulations of the interpolation theory are proposed by former scholars such as Hopkins and Winternitz.

[5] V.S. Sukthankar, "Critical Principles followed in the Constitution of the Text." Prolegomena to Book I of The Mahābhārata: for the First Time critically edited (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933), p. 103. See also pp. 76-77 for reasons behind rejection of traditional Western methods of text reconstruction, and pp. 86-92 for details of the criteria on which the final text is based. It should be noted that not all scholars agree on the merits of the Critical Edition. Thus Biardeau, following Sylvain Lévi, believes that: "What appears to many people as an unmanageable overgrowth of myths in epics and *purāṇas* is actually an invaluable source of information for a better understanding of each of them." Cf. her "The Story of Arjuna Kārtavīrya without Reconstruction." Purāṇa 12 (July, 1970): p. 293. The article illustrates her method of revealing the inner meaning of the epic by means of a comparative analysis of

different versions of text. In her view: "Any kind of variation is possible, provided the intended significance of the whole remains clear." (Ibid, p.299).

[6] Evidence for Indo-European epic roots may be found in Georges Dumézil, Mythe et épopée: l'idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens: 3 vols. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1968). Cf. also the works of Stig Wikander, particularly "Pāṇḍavasagan och Mahābhāratas mytiska forutsattningar." Religion och Bibel, Nathan Soderblom-sällsapets Årsbok, VI, 1947, pp. 27-39. More recently, Alf Hiltebeitel, The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976).

[7] *Dharme cārthe ca kāme ca mokṣe ca bharatarṣabha| yadihāsti tadanyatra yannehāsti na tatkvacit||* I.56.33 and XVIII.5.38.

[8] Gary A. Tubb, "Śāntarasa in the Mahābhārata" in Arvind Sharma (ed.), Essays on the Mahābhārata (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), p. 172.

[9] On Mahābhārata commentary, see Sukthankar, "Notes on Mahabharata Commentators," in Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata. Vol. I of Sukthankar Memorial Edition. Ed. P.K. Gode (Bombay: Karnatak Publishing House, 1944), pp. 263—267.

[10] Quotation of a passage from Ānandavardhana's Dhvanyāloka in Swami Prabhavananda, The Spiritual Heritage of India (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1979), p. 94. See also Gary A. Tubb, Op cit, p. 199. quoting a similar passage to the effect that the true purpose of the Mahābhārata is, "the highest human aim characterized by liberation, and, from the poetic point of view, the flavor [*rasa*] of peace [*śānti*], characterized by the fostering of the happiness produced by the extinction of craving [*tṛṣṇa*], as the predominant *rasa*." Tubb takes the Sanskrit original from Ānandavardhana's Dhvanyāloka published in Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Kashi Sanskrit Series 135, 1940 (Pt. Pattābhirāma Śāstrī, ed.), p. 533.

[11] Norbert Klaes, Conscience and Consciousness: Ethical Problems of Mahābhārata (Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 1975), p. 2.

[12] We are indebted here to the excellent summary of modern scholarship on the Mahābhārata contained in "Lecture I: The Mahābhārata and its Critics" in his Meaning of the Mahābhārata, pp. 1-31. Cf. also A.D. Pusalker, "Twenty-five Years of Epic and Puranic Studies." R.N. Dandekar (ed.), Progress of Indic Studies 1917-1942 (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1942), pp. 101-152.

[13] Sukthankar, Ibid, p. 11.

[14] Ibid, pp. 19-20.

[15] This idea had appeared in India by the seventh or eighth century A.D. in the works of the philosopher Kumārila. Cf. Barend A. van Nooten, The Mahābhārata attributed to Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 87. It would seem from the quotation from Dhvanyāloka (Swami Prabhavananda op cit) that this was also Ānandavardhana's view.

[16] Both sides of the ongoing debate on the historicity of the central story are represented among articles contained in D.C. Sircar (ed.), The Bhārata War and Purānic Genealogies (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1969). Cf. also S.P. Gupta and K.S. Ramachandran (eds.), Mahābhārata: Myth and Reality: Differing Views (Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1976) and Ram Chandra Jain, Jaya: The Original Nucleus of Mahabharata (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1979). The position of the present author is well summarized in the view that: "The historical character of the persons celebrated in epic poetry is not in question. But their historicity does not long resist the corrosive action of mythicization. The historical event in itself, however important, does not remain in the popular memory, nor does its recollection

kindle the poetic imagination save insofar as the particular historical event closely approaches a mythical model." Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return or Cosmos and History, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series, 46 (1954; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 42.

[17] Dumézil, Mythe et épopée I, p. 242.

[18] Ibid, p. 222 ff.

[19] Ibid, pp. 238-239.

[20] Quoted in A.D. Pusalkar, "The Mahābhārata: its History and Character," in The Cultural Heritage of India, 4 vols., eds. Haridas Bhattacharya et al. (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission, Institute of Culture, 1953-62), vol. II, "Itihāsas, Purāṇas, Dharma and other Śāstras," p. 68.

[21] Sukthankar, On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata, p. 30. Significantly, Sukthankar draws his "meaning" not from the Critical Edition, but from the Bombay edition of the text, a fact seized upon by Biardeau in support of her views on textual reconstruction in the Indian context. Cf. Biardeau, "The Story of Arjuna Kārtavīrya without Reconstruction." Purāṇa 12 (July 1970), p. 302, footnote 14.

[22] Krishna Chaitanya, The Mahābhārata: a literary study (New Delhi: Clarion Books, 1985), p. 23-24.

[23] Ruth Cecily Katz, Arjuna in the Mahabharata: Where Krishna Is, There Is Victory (Columbia, S.C. University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 118.

[24] Ibid, p. 234.

[25] Ibid, note10, p. 21.

[26] Heino Gehrts, Mahābhārata: das Geschehen und seine Bedeutung (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1975), p. 292. For the *rājasūya* as a model for Book II, see J.A.B. van Buitenen, The Mahābhārata (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), vol. 2, pp. 5-6, and "On the Structure of the Śabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata." India Maior, Festschrift J. Gonda 1972, p. 68-84.

[27] Alf Hiltebeitel, "The Mahābhārata and Hindu Eschatology." History of Religions 12, 2 (November 1972): 95-135.

[28] Alf Hiltebeitel, The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 359. On the tri-functional nature of the Pāṇḍavas, cf. Ibid p. 195.

[29] Ibid., p. 318. Cf. also p. 9. Ruth Katz takes a similar position from within her interpretation of the epic at the heroic level: "The metaphor of the Kurukshetra War as a sacrifice captures the central meaning of the epic at the heroic level, which is built upon the structural opposition of order and disorder, both represented by the imagery of fire and sacrifice." See Arjuna, p. 115.

[30] Ibid, p. 140 where he writes: "I have tried to suggest here, although in Part Three I will steer a middle course between them, that the Indo-European perspective of Dumézil and the Purāṇic, one might say 'Hindu,' perspective of Biardeau are both valid, and that, to borrow from a Sāṃkhya similitude, they may at some points be as necessary to each other, in making a way through the Mahābhārata forest, as the blind man and the lame." Cf. also Ruth Katz, Arjuna, note 21, p. 120.

[31] Van Buitenen has criticized her for this. He claims a middle position. "While I have much sympathy for those who argue that a text like the *Mahābhārata* should not be cut up in pieces but should be viewed as a work that, whatever its various origins, functioned as a whole, I do think that a middle position can be taken. It is only *after* we have learned to discern what disparate parts have gone into the making of the

Mahābhārata that we are allowed the question *why* these parts were felt to be compatible so that the text as a whole made sense." (The Mahābhārata: Introduction to Book IV, p. 20. Cf. also his detailed critique in Introduction to Book V, pp. 142-184).

[32] Madeleine Biardeau, L'hindouism: anthropologie d'une civilisation (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), pp. 15-16.

[33] Ibid, p.21.

[34] Madeleine Biardeau, "Etudes de mythologie hindou (IV)," Bulletin de l'école française d'Extrême Orient 63 (1976): 173. Cf. also "The Salvation of the King in the Mahābhārata." Contributions to Indian Sociology (New Series) 15 (Jan.- Dec. 1981): 75-97.

[35] Farquhar believes that this occurred during the Śunga dynasty, a period of brāhmaṇic revivalism, that arose after the collapse of the Buddhist-leaning Mauryan empire in the second century B.C. Cf. J.N. Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, Ist Indian rpt. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), p. 78

[36] Madeleine Biardeau and Jean-Michel Péterfalvi, Le Mahābhārata: Livres I à V (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1985), p. 29.

[37] See Laws of Manu V.39-40: "Svayambhū (the Self-existent) himself created animals for the sake of sacrifices; sacrifices (have been instituted) for the good of this whole (world); hence the slaughtering (of beasts) for sacrifices is not slaughtering (in the ordinary sense of the word). Herbs, trees, cattle, birds, and (other) animals that have been destroyed for sacrifices, receive (being reborn) higher existences." Quoted from Georg Buhler, trans., The Laws of Manu, the Sacred Books of the East, vol. 25 (1886; rpt. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), p. 175.

[38] "Every hindu knows at least implicitly, that in relying officially on the Veda and keeping it as the supreme reference, the MBh is in fact the foundation charter of what in India is called the religion of bhakti, of devotion, and that the vedic texts hardly lend themselves to this new interpretation" Cf. Madeleine Biardeau and Jean-Michel Péterfalvi, Ibid, p. 28. It should be noted that this *bhakti* is not the mystical exuberance of the later sectarian cults but a religious system based on a more positive valuation of the world and the activities that keep it in place. No longer is salvation to be had only through the abandonment of society and its rituals (*karmasaṃnyāsa*) but may be found at the heart of any and all activity, provided this is undertaken in a spirit of detachment and service to the Lord (*karmayoga*).

[39] The so-called "three sacrifices" (*trimedhā*) announced by a celestial voice at the birth of Arjuna (I. 114. 33). The *rājasūya*, specifically the dicing episode, is the "sacrifice" of the Pāṇḍava by the forces of Duryodhana/Kali. Instead of being killed they are banished to the forest for thirteen years. The *Brahmāstra* episode and the *aśvamedha* symbolize the restoration of the Dharma and the recreation of a golden age with the recovery of the sovereignty by the royal line (cf. Ibid, pp. 212-217).

[40] Madeleine Biardeau, "Conférence de Mlle Madeleine Biardeau" in Annuaire de l'école pratique des hautes études: Vième section: sciences religieuses 81 (1972-73): p. 136.

[41] Not forgetting that as a Vasu in *svarga*, he gives a cow — source of a brahmin's power — to an earthly princess.

[42] Biardeau, "Etudes (IV)," pp. 172-3.

[43] Biardeau, Annuaire 85 (1977-78): 165.

[44] Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, Hindu Myths: a Sourcebook translated from the Sanskrit (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), pp. 21-22.

[45] Chaitanya, Mahābhārata, p. 449.

[46] The Ritual of Battle, p. 139.

[47] The Ritual of Battle, p. 140. Cf. also n. 33 at the bottom of p. 127. See also the general statement quoted from Sukthankar on p. 7.

[48] Biardeau, Mahābhārata, p. 14.

[49] "Vyāsa" is not a proper name but means "arranger," "editor," "compiler," etc., in Sanskrit.

50 Biardeau, Annuaire 85 (1977-78): 167.

III — Daiva as Time

While the merits of human initiative (*puruṣakāra*) are frequently extolled throughout the text, the epic characters are invariably marked by *daiva* in some manner. Celestial voices are heard at their birth, prophesies are made about them by sages and seers, and several on the Kaurava side, including Duryodhana, are actually possessed by demons. All without exception are preoccupied at critical points by the weight of *daiva* in their own lives — almost continually haunted by it in the case of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. We sense the frustration and despair of individuals who find themselves caught in a vast web of causality over which they have no control. It is this pervading mood of *daiva* that tends to set the tone of the epic as a whole. Kṛṣṇa himself refers briefly to this influence when he reminds Arjuna in the Bhagavadgītā that the Lord (Īśvara) "causes all beings to move like a machine by the power of illusion (*māyā*)."[1] What is the source of these ideas? And how does the way of thinking of these epic characters come about?

A first, and rather general, answer to this question is suggested when we look beyond the mundane events of the narrative to the cosmic setting in which the human drama takes place. For the earth is not the only battleground and human beings are not the only actors in the drama. The fate of the three worlds (*trailokya*) is at stake,[2] and beyond this we glimpse the inexorable course of a cosmos governed by the yogic rhythm of the Supreme Divinity (*puruṣottama*). To understand the role of *daiva* in the epic, we must examine the law of the course of time (*paryāyadharma kālasya*) experienced by Dhṛtarāṣṭra in relation to the creative Life of the Divinity, and to the life of the *trailokya*, specifically to the decline of the socio-cosmic moral order or dharma (which becomes a function of time rather than of human conduct).

Insofar as it is linked to the Divinity and to the seven worlds of epic cosmology, macrocosmic *Daiva* (distinguished with a capital D) is time (*kāla*), an inexorable cyclic process of creation, manifestation and destruction of the cosmos. In the puraṇic material studied by Biardeau, this occurs at two levels of the Divinity and unfolds according to a twofold arrangement of time. In His highest form (Viṣṇu[3] or Śiva as *Puruṣottama*, *Paramātman* etc.), the Divinity is a master yogī (*mahāyogin*) who periodically emerges from His yogic absorption (*yoganidrā*) to manifest the worlds. From the psychological perspective He is a projection of the human *yogin*. At this level of events, the period of time between the primary creation (*prakṛtasarga*) and the complete absorption of the cosmos that occurs at the end of a life of Brahmā (*prakṛtapralaya*) is a *mahākalpa*. However, this Divinity also operates at a lower level at which he becomes functionally divided into three forms (*trimūrti*), Brahmā, the creator; Viṣṇu, the preserver; and Śiva, who finally acts to destroy the Universe at the end of a *kalpa*.[4] In contrast to the Divinity who remains forever uninvolved in the activities of the cosmos, Brahmā is the eternally transmigrating cosmic person whose life is the existence of the cosmos itself. The *kalpa* is the period of time between the secondary creation of the cosmos that occurs at the dawn of each new day of Brahmā (*pratisarga*) and the corresponding withdrawal of the world system that accompanies the onset of night (*naimittikapralaya*). Since the life of Brahmā is taken to last for a period of 100 divine years of 360 days each, the number of *kalpa* in a *mahākalpa* works out to 100 x 360, or 36,000. These time periods will be described in more detail shortly.

In effect, the epic and puraṇic cosmogony is the macrocosmic equivalent of the yogic process of absorption and return to empirical consciousness — in reverse order. Indeed, Biardeau argues that the various cosmogonic stages may be traced to the yogic process documented in the Kaṭhopaniṣad, with the addition of *ahaṃkāra* (as cosmic ego), taken from other upaniṣadic (vedāntic) sources. The yoga involved in the Purāṇas is also described as *prabhavāpyayau*,

i.e. emergence and absorption. Looked at in this manner, the kaleidoscopic effects we call life and world are regarded as the mind (*manas*) or thought-stuff (*saṃkalpa*) of the *puruṣottama*, who contemplates His manifestation for a while before withdrawing it once again for a period of latency, often symbolized as a cosmic night.

Evidence for a similar view in the Mahābhārata is not hard to find, as in the following description of the secondary absorption (*pralaya*) (XII.225.10)

...abhivyaktātmakaṃ manaḥ|
manaso vyaktamavyaktaṃ brāhmaḥ sa pratisaṃcaraḥ||

"Brahmā is the mind. This mind, which is the soul of the manifest, though itself unmanifest, withdraws what has been manifested by mind." In an earlier account by Bhṛgu at XII.175, this creative source is actually personified as Mind (*manas*).

However, there is another aspect of the matter. As a creation of mind, the universe itself is a figment of mind (*māyā*) established in accordance with the desires (*kāma, icchā*) and actions (*karma*) of the living beings (*jīva*) who make it what it is. The emergence awakens the latent tendency of creatures to act (*pravṛtti*); the absorption inaugurates the movement back to the primal state of quiescence (*nivṛtti*). The very purpose of the ritual activities (*karma*) associated with the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) is to ensure that the *trailokya*, the centerpiece of this system as far as human activity is concerned, functions in an orderly fashion for the benefit of all (cf. III.101.1-5; XII.329.7; also VI.26/BG.3.10-11). In effect, as XII.204.6-7 states:

ajñānakarma nirdiṣṭam etat kāraṇalakṣaṇam||

tatkāraṇairhi saṃyuktaṃ kāryasaṃgrahakārakam|
yenaitad vartate cakramanādinidhanaṃ mahat||

"It has been declared [in the scriptures] that this [the universe], having the character of a cause, is the work of ignorance. That [ignorance] which produces the totality of effects is itself connected to causes. As a result, this great wheel [of existence] revolves without beginning or end." *Pravṛtti* , the tendency to act that keeps the *trailokya* in being, is prescribed for the vast majority who wish to improve their lot in the form of rebirth in higher worlds and states of existence. Only by way of the *bhakti* renunciation of acts and their fruit (involving, as we shall see, a transformation of the upaniṣadic notion of *nivṛtti*) can one attain to *mokṣa*, to absolute freedom from this wheel of existence. The path of *pravṛtti* is invariably associated with Brahmā in his activity of creating the world, the path of *nivṛtti* with the *puruṣottama* in His state of yogic absorption (XII.210.3-6). Humans in the Mahābhārata have the option of following one or the other of these two paths in accordance with the functional requirements (*svadharma*) of their caste status (*varṇa*).

Epic accounts of this world process are more difficult to follow than those of the Purāṇas since they are less structured or complete and tend to emphasize a particular aspect or detail of the fundamental myth. Furthermore, the time-scales and levels at which creation and destruction take place are also not always clearly delineated. Finally, the epic author has a habit of substituting a *yuga* symbolism for that of the *kalpa* (a matter that Biardeau has studied in great detail). In spite of these anomalies, however, these descriptions offer a coherent vision of cosmic events that make it much easier for us to understand the collective significance of *Daiva* in the minds of the epic author and his characters.[5]

A complete description of the primary cycle of creation and destruction of the cosmos — i.e. of a *prakṛtasarga* followed by the corresponding *prakṛtapralaya* — is offered by the sage Yājñavalkya at XII.298-306. The cosmos unfolds, in the puraṇic manner, according to the twenty-five principles (*tattvas*) enumerated in the proto-*sāṃkhya* system of philosophy; and Brahmā finally emerges

from a golden embryo (*hiraṇyagarbha*) made of these primary constituents of the Universe. (In other accounts, e.g. at I.1.27, Brahmā is depicted as emerging from a large egg — *bṛhadaṇḍa*). The durations of time deviate somewhat from the standard versions of the Purāṇas but the juxtaposition of the temporal cycles is in agreement with the purāṇic scheme.

During the destructive phase (*prakṛtapralaya*), the *puruṣottama* (in the form of Brahmā) urges Mahārudra (a form of Śiva) to destroy the *trailokya* by fire. Mahārudra thereupon assumes the destructive form of the Sun (Sūrya) divided into a twelve-part fire. Fire is followed by flood, and the creative process is then taken in reverse, each element being swallowed up by the following element according to its degree of subtlety. Water is absorbed by fire, fire by wind (in eight forms), wind by space, and space by mind (*manas*). Mind is swallowed up in its turn, and what remains is the undecaying and immutable, i.e. the Supreme Person (*puruṣottama*), in a state of total yogic absorption (*nirvikalpasamādhi*).

A brief account of the secondary cycle of existence, i.e. of the *pratisarga* and the corresponding *pratipralaya*, is given at verse 7 of the ninth chapter of the Bhagavadgītā. "All beings, O son of Kuntī, return to Me at the end of the *kalpa*, whereupon I send them forth once again at the beginning of the (subsequent) *kalpa*."[6] The same process is described at verse 17 of the previous chapter, but with the substitution of "one thousand *yugas*" for what should, technically, be a *mahāyuga* (= a *kalpa*). This substitution of temporal symbols is common throughout the Mahābhārata. Biardeau believes that this is the result of the fact that the epic is a double myth involving dimensions that are royal (the *yugas* are also associated with the actions of the king) as well as cosmic (the *avatāra* intervenes at times of cosmic crisis).

According to a separate account by the sage Markaṇḍeya, at the end of a thousand *mahāyuga* (i.e. of the *kalpa*), the *puruṣottama* as Nārāyaṇa takes the form of most terrifying Time (*kālātidāruṇa*),

destroys the Universe, and then goes to sleep for the same period of time — until he awakens as Brahmā. Then, once again (III.187.46):

tato vibuddhe tasminstu sarvalokapitāmahe|
ekībhūto hi srakṣyāmi śarīrād dvijasattama||

"But then, when the grandfather of all the worlds has woken up, O best of the twiceborn, I, having become one, shall send forth [the universe], from this body of mine." The universe is the body of God.

For the structural elements of time itself, we turn to the account given by the narrator of the action, the poet Vyāsa, to his son Śuka at XII.224-5. He begins at the human level by enumerating the divisions of the day and explains that a month of human time is equal to a day and a night of the ancestors (*pitṛs*), i.e. to the light and dark fortnights of the lunar cycle. Extending this logic, the human year is made equal to a twenty-four-hour period of the gods (*devas*), based on the *ayanas*, the two equinoctial periods when the sun moves north and south respectively.

Moving to the level of human society, he explains how social conditions are governed by the temporal succession of the four *yugas* which together constitute a *devayuga*, a period of 12,000 divine years, i.e. 12,000 x 360 = 4,320,000 human years. During the *kṛtayuga*, the dharma and its parts, together with truth, were all part of the vedic curriculum. Nothing was accomplished in a manner not in accord with the dharma ordained by the Vedas. However, this dharma progressively declined by a quarter in each of the *tretā-*, *dvāpara-*, and *kali-yugas*. *Adharma* grew progressively as a result of theft, falsehood (*anṛta*) and illusion (*māyā*).[7]

He finally proceeds to the cosmic level of time by explaining: "They say that a day of Brahmā [the secondary periodicity of the universe] extends for a thousand *yugas* (= *mahāyuga*), and his Nights for a similar period."[8] According to such reckoning, the interval between a *secondary* creation and the subsequent *naimittikapralaya* or *secondary* dissolution, extends over a period of

4.32 billion human years (one is tempted to relate this to the life of our galactic system). However, remembering that there are 36,000 *kalpa* in the life of Brahmā, the interval between a *primary* creation and the onset of the succeeding *prakṛtapralaya* (not dealt with here by Vyāsa) extends the life of the universe as a whole to 155,520 billion human years, a time scale well in excess of that currently entertained by modern science.

For the final moments of social decline represented by the *kaliyuga* we once again turn to the account of the sage Markaṇḍeya. What happens is somewhat reminiscent of what he has already described for the end of the *kalpa* (p. 37), except that the emphasis is social rather than cosmic. The final breakdown of the social order results in a period of drought followed by a conflagration of seven suns. In place of a flood (as at the end of a *kalpa* or one thousand *mahāyugas*), the rains simply come out of season.

However, the main difference lies in what happens next. In an inexplicable change of course (III.188.86, 89, 91):

tataḥ kālāntare'nyasminpunarlokavivṛddhaye|
bhaviṣyati punardaivamanukūlaṃ yadṛcchayā||

kalkiṃ viṣṇuyaśā nāma dvijaḥ kālapracoditaḥ|
utpatsyate mahāvīryo mahābuddhiparākramaḥ||

sa dharmavijayī rājā cakravartī bhaviṣyati|
sa cemaṃ saṃkulaṃ lokaṃ prasādamupaneṣyati||

"Then, at another point in time, *Daiva* will again unexpectedly (*yadṛcchayā*) be disposed to foster the world....A brahmin by the name of Kalki Viṣṇuyaśas will arise, impelled by time (*kālapracodita*), of great energy, wisdom, and courage....He will be a king, a turner of the wheel (*cakravartī*), triumphant by the dharma, and he will bring peace to this turbulent world." Kalki (the new incarnation of God) will deliver the earth to the twice-born on the occasion of a gigantic horse sacrifice, and reestablish the moral order (*maryādāḥ śubhāḥ*) that the self-existent lord has ordained (*vihita*)

(III.189.1-2). Why fate turns favorable is not too clear, but it evidently has more to do with the nature of time than with the intervention of the divinity. Kalki himself is "prodded by time."[9]

It is important to note that as soon as the microscope is lowered to observe conditions on the earth, we not only pass to a third cycle of time (from *mahākalpa* to *kalpa* to *yuga*) but to a third form of divinity (the human incarnation or *avatāra*) much closer to the human world and its concerns. The passage of succeeding *yugas* brings a gradual decline of the social and spiritual fabric of society, followed by an abrupt restoration of the dharma with each transition from one *yuga* or *mahāyuga* to another. This transition is marked by a "descent" of the Lord to earth (*ava* √*tṛ* = to descend). The Śāntiparvan version of XII.337.28-32 explains that after creating the world Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) suddenly realized that poor Earth (here personified as a goddess) would suffer under the increasing weight of creatures. Furthermore, the asceticism (*tapas*) of the demons (*asura*) would so inflate them with power and pride that they would begin to threaten the sages (*ṛṣi*) and the deities (and presumably also the dharma, the socio-cosmic moral order controlled by them). Nārāyaṇa thereupon promises to rescue the earth by returning in whatever animal or human form the situation demanded. The Bhagavadgītā is more direct (B.G.4.7-8):

yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata|
abhyutthānamadharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṛjāmyaham||

paritrāṇāya sādhūnāṃ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtāṃ|
dharmasaṃsthāpanārthāya saṃbhavāmi yuge yuge||

"Whenever the dharma falls away O Bhārata, and *adharma* rises up I give myself forth. From *yuga* to *yuga* I come into being for the protection of the good, the destruction of the wicked, and the re-establishment of the dharma."[10] We can easily imagine how these periodic catastrophes and interventions by the *avatāra* might foster

the sense of a divine play (*līlā*—here in the sense of a childrens' game) experienced in the form of a *Daiva* opposed to human effort.

In the Mahābhārata itself, the intervention of the *avatāra* Kṛṣṇa takes place at the close of the *dvāparayuga*, the great war of the Bhāratas being the result of the decline of the *dharma* due to the growing power and wickedness of demonic kings who bring the world to a catastrophe. In Biardeau's view, introducing Kṛṣṇa at this juncture serves to heighten the cosmic symbolism of a war that involves not only the earth and its terrestrial kings, but also the gods and the demons, symbolizing the cosmic struggle of good and evil. It is only from the ashes of this violent conflagration involving not only the earth, but the *trailokya* as a whole, that a new and more perfect dharma can arise. Significantly, the Machiavellian Śakuni and the ambitious Duryodhana are portrayed as incarnations of Dvāpara and Kali, personifications of the respective *yuga* in the form of demons (*asuras*). Furthermore, the *yugas* themselves carry the names of the throws of the Indian dice, clearly implying the intervention of a power beyond the collective will of human beings. In Biardeau's view, this yuga symbolism is an important key to understanding the epic since: "It is [the symbolism of] the end of the *yuga* that creates the unity of the symbols employed by the authors and the characters of the epic. This unity is that of a socio-cosmic crisis in which the regions governed by the *dharma* are implicated."[11]

In such a vast arena of space and time, linked to the inexorable rhythm of a Divine Yoga, it is not surprising that attention should focus on *Daiva* in the form of time. The whole universe is borne along by the mighty river of time (*kālodakaṃ mahat*) whose currents are difficult to cross (XII.227.13ff.). Like the flow of rivers, the days and nights are continuously carrying away the periods of life of human beings. The body is *phenapātropamā* — froth on the surface of water (XII.309.6). The ceaseless succession of the lighted and dark fortnights is wasting all mortal creatures without respite, and the rising and setting sun is continuously cooking the joys and sorrows

of everyone (XXI.318.5-7). In the words of Vyāsa to his son Śuka (XII.230.19-21):

visṛtaṃ kālanānātvamanādinidhanaṃ ca yat|

dhātedam prabhavasthānaṃ bhūtānāṃ saṃyamo yamaḥ|

sargaḥ kālo dhṛtirvedāḥ kartā kāryaṃ kriyāphalam|

"This profusion of Time without end is the source and destroyer of that [i.e. the creatures].... It is time that makes them come and go, that is their originator (*Dhātā*), their support, their Lord and controller, the destroyer of all beings....Time is creation, constancy and the Veda. Time is the agent, the action, and the result of action." And Saṃjaya assures Dhṛtarāṣṭra that (I.1.188-9):

kālaḥ pacati bhūtāni kālaḥ saṃharati prajāḥ|
nirdahantaṃ prajāḥ kālaṃ kālaḥ śamayate punaḥ||

kālo vikurute bhāvānsarvālloke śubhāśubhān|
kālaḥ saṃkṣipate sarvāḥ prajā visṛjate punaḥ|
kālaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu caratyavidhṛtaḥ samaḥ||

"Time ripens all beings; time rots them; and time again softens the time that destroys all beings. Time unfolds all beings in the world, pure and impure; time shrinks them and expands them again; time, unwavering and impartial, moves in all things." Many other similar passages could be cited.

This sense of the inevitable is further heightened by the conviction that each period of manifestation is the same as every other period. People, things and events do not change. "Whatever creatures have come into being and passed away, they will be in the future; whatever are living now, they are all the creatures of time...."[12]. Everything lost in the *pralaya* is acquired anew at the dawn of the new creation. The Vedas are recovered by the same Brahmā, the branches (*aṅga*) by the same Bṛhaspati, the political treatises (*nītiśāstras*) by the same Śuka, the art of music by the same

Nārada, the martial arts by same Bharadvāja, etc. (XII.203.17-19). And this occurs over and over again throughout an eternity of time (XII.326.104):

mahākalpasahasrāṇi mahākalpaśatāni ca|
samatītāni rājendra sargāśca pralayāśca ha||

"Thousands and hundreds of *mahākalpa* and creations and absorptions have already passed away, O King of Kings." The earth has seen it all before, and will see it all again. This conveys the feeling of a single script written in advance and played repeatedly according to the periodicities of time — that time and *Daiva* are one and the same. [13]

Additional confirmation for this view is provided by the events leading to the birth of the protagonists and to the conflict between the two sets of cousins. In one sense, there is no beginning to this story of conflict and war, for the wheel of time (*kālacakra*) has no real beginning, as we have just seen. However, we may begin with the story of Rāma Jamadagni (I.58.5ff), the *avatāra* whose passage brought the earth to new destructive heights at the junction of the *tretā*- and the *dvāparayuga*. After the world is rid of the warrior class (*kṣatriya*) twenty-one times over, there is a brief *kṛtayuga* featuring the rise of a new brood of warriors (*kṣatriya*), who reign over the earth in strict accord with the dharma (I.58.22 and 24):

svakarmaniratāścāsansarve varṇā narādhipa|
evaṃ tadā naravyāghra dharmo na hrasate kvacit||

evaṃ kṛtayuge samyagvartamāne tadā nṛpa|
apūryata mahī kṛtsnā prāṇibhirbahubhirbhṛśam||

"All the castes (*varṇa*) devoted themselves to their own tasks, O king, and thus, tiger among men, the dharma was in no way diminished in that age....And the *kṛtayuga* (the age of the winning throw of the dice) continuing in this way, the whole earth quickly became filled with many creatures."[14]

However, this idyll does not last long. Soon, the demonic (*dānava* and *daitya*) hordes, who had been defeated by the gods, are born among the various creatures and also among the kings of the earth. Bloated with power and strength, they roam the world killing and looting and, worst of all, tyrannizing the brahmins. Feeling overwhelmed, the goddess Earth takes refuge with Brahmā the creator and grandfather of the worlds (*pitāmaha*), who agrees to help by ordering the gods (I.58.46):

asyā bhūmernirasitum bhāraṃ bhāgaiḥ pṛthakpṛthak|
asyāmeva prasūyadhvaṃ virodhāyati cābravīt||

"to throw off the burden of Earth, you must each be born with a part (*bhāga*) of yourselves on her to hinder them." With Indra in the lead, these gods then ask Nārāyaṇa-Vaikuṇṭha (i.e. Viṣṇu) to join them (I.59.3-4):

te'marārivināśāya sarvalokahitāya ca|
avateruḥ krameṇemāṃ mahīṃ svargāddivaukasaḥ||

tato brahmarṣivaṃśeṣu pārthivarṣikuleṣu ca|
jajñire rājaśārdūla yathākāmaṃ divaukasaḥ||

"And so the sky-dwellers (*divaukasa*) descended, one after the other from heaven to this earth, for the destruction of the enemies of the gods (*amarāri*) and the well-being of all the worlds; thereupon they were born in the lineages of brahmin sages and in the families of royal sages, as they saw fit, O tiger among kings."

From this perspective, the epic drama is but an episode in the recurrent bid of the demons (*asura*, *dānava*, *daitya*) for the destruction of the gods (*devas*) and the sovereignty of the *trailokya*. As Vyāsa explains, first to the grieving Dhṛtarāṣṭra (XI.8.12-44) and later to Gāndhārī when the epic action is all but complete — the eternal secret of the gods (*devaguhyaṃ sanātanam*) is that the course of things is decided by them *ab æterno* (XV.39.5-7 and 16):

bhavitavyamavaśyam tatsurakāryamanindite|
avaterustataḥ sarve devabhāgairmahītalam||

gandharvāpsarasaścaiva piśācā guḥyarākṣasāḥ|
tathā puṇyajanāścaiva siddhā devarṣayo'pi ca||

devāśca dānavāścaiva tathā brahmarṣayo'malāḥ|
ta ete nidhanaṃ prāptāḥ kurukṣetre raṇājire||

evamete mahāprājñe devā mānuṣyametya hi|
tataḥ punargatāḥ svargaṃ kṛte karmaṇi śobhane||

"O virtuous [Gāndhārī], the work of the deities could not but be accomplished. It was for this purpose that they all descended (*ava* √*tṛ*) to the surface of the Earth as portions of gods. Various heavenly creatures such as *gandharva* and *apsaras*, *piśāca* and *guḥyarākṣasa*, divine sages (*devarṣi*) charged with spiritual powers (*siddhas*), deities and demons, and brahmin sages (*brahmarṣi*) without blemish, they all went to their deaths on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra....Thus, O thou of great wisdom, the deities came in human form, and returned to heaven when they had accomplished their splendid purposes." In the concluding chapter of the epic (XVIII.6 — not included in the Critical Edition), Vaiśaṃpāyana also adds that, "The deities of Heaven, O ruler of the Earth, came to this world for sport. Having achieved their task, they ascended once more to Heaven." [15]. The sphere of the action (*karmabhūmi*) is the earth, but the script is written in *brahmaloka*, the highest sphere in the cosmic hierarchy.[16]

This higher influence on human life is also suggested in the way the gods and the demons come and go to shape events. Before she leaves him, the goddess Gangā informs King Śaṃtanu that it was to accomplish a purpose of the Gods (*devakāryārtha*) that she had been with him (I.92.49). The five Pāṇḍava are born from the gods for the continuance of the dynasty (*devabhyaḥ samapadyanta saṃtānāya kulasya*) (I.107.2). Vyāsa, the brāhmaṇic representative of Nārāyaṇa in the epic, engineers the birth of the hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra — including the evil Duryodhana — through a boon to Gāndhārī.[17]

Using special powers (*siddhi*), Nārada, Markaṇḍeya and Loma also circulate freely within the three worlds (*trailokya*).

It may be noted in passing that, considered in practical terms, this higher influence is no longer completely in the hands of a brāhmaṇic orthodoxy (represented by the traditional vedic gods). It must call on the assistance of the Supreme Divinity of *bhakti* (Viṣṇu) to restore the dharma. It should also be noted that the seven worlds of the cosmos (*loka*) that culminate in *brahmaloka* are more than just locations in space.[18] They constitute the soteriological hierarchy of the *saṃsāra* representing seven states of experience through which the soul must wander for a period of ten *kalpa* before reaching the final resting-place beyond all name and form, merged into the Supreme Divinity at the final dissolution (*prakṛtapralaya*) of the Universe (XII. 280). These worlds are thus an integral part of the psychology of the egocentric personality (*jīva*).[19] In the course of this spiritual journey, the *jīva* displays various spiritual powers and is subject to a graduated mix of happiness and misery in its numerous embodiments from Brahmā to a blade of grass (*brahmādi tṛṇānta*) (III.2.68). A worm can become Brahmā himself, provided he always practices the dharma of his particular status in this celestial ladder of being (XIII.118-120). Prior to final liberation (which occurs as a collective event according to Biardeau's analysis of the purāṇic material), these various bodies appear to be subject to *daiva* in inverse proportion to their spiritual merits.[20]

In this manner, the major protagonists, most of whom are human embodiments of higher powers, reflect the qualities and characteristics of their celestial forebears. In one sense, the five Pāṇḍava alone have all that it takes to secure the final victory. Indeed, this is the human task to which they are called, the very purpose of their sojourn on earth. In another sense, just as the gods need the help of the Supreme Divinity (in the form of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa) to vanquish the demons, it is inconceivable that their heroic enterprise on the earth could have succeeded without the close association and guidance of His incarnation in the form of

Kṛṣṇa. While technically a non-combatant in the great war, it is he who directs the major figures in the drama and pulls all the strings of the play. His cheerful acceptance of the curse of Gāndhārī to die thirty-six years after the end of the war even hints that his human destiny is sacrificed to his own higher purposes as the Supreme Being (XI.25).

Viewed from this vast cosmic background of creation, preservation and destruction dependent on the machinations of higher beings, it is hardly surprising that the protagonists would tend to view the terrible avalanche of war as the work of universal *Daiva* made manifest in the history of temporal events. From such a perspective, the script for this drama of history and human life was written *ab æterno* and the ensuing events constitute but a single brief scene in a dramatic extravaganza that repeats itself over the successive days and nights of Brahmā. All is under the governance of the Great God who, in a variety of intermediate forms — as the triumvirate (*trimūrti*) of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva or as the mythological Nārāyaṇa who sleeps on the cosmic ocean — is also a personification of this *Daiva* (III.187.20-22):

> *kāmaṃ krodhaṃ ca harṣaṃ ca bhayaṃ mohaṃ tathaiva ca|*
> *mameva viddhi rūpāṇi sarvāṇyetāni sattama||*
>
> *prāpnuvanti narā viprā yatkṛtvā karma śobhanam|*
> *satyaṃ dānaṃ tapaścogramahiṃsā caiva jantuṣu||*
>
> *madvidhānena vihitā mama dehavihāriṇaḥ|*
> *mayābhibhūtavijñānā viceṣṭante na kāmataḥ||*

"You must know that desire, anger, joy, fear, and confusion are all forms of mine, and so is what wise men obtain by doing great acts (*karma śobhanam*), speaking the truth, making gifts, performing fierce austerities (*tapas*), and harming no one. My moral code (*vidhāna*) is enjoined on all who live in bodies; they act, not by their own volition (*kāmata*), but with their minds controlled by me." The descent of the gods and the demons, the transfer of their eternal feud

to the mundane plane, the brief ascendency of the forces of *adharma*, the cosmic restoration by Kṛṣṇa, all may be viewed and experienced as the play of this overwhelming cosmic agency.

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[1] *bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni, yantrārūḍhāni māyayā* (VI.40/BG 18.61).

[2] The three worlds or *trailokya* include the Earth (*bhūrloka*), heaven (*svarloka* or *svarga*), and the intermediate (*bhuvarloka*) or, later, the nether regions (*naraka*). They form part of a hierarchy of seven worlds or *loka* (although 33 are mentioned at III. 247.25). The cosmography of the seven *dvīpa* of the Earth with their various countries (*varṣa*) is detailed in the Bhīṣmaparvan (VI.6-13).

[3] Viṣṇu is the highest Divinity and also one of the Āditya (cf. I.59.17).

[4] *sṛjate brahmamūrtis tu rakṣata pauruṣī tanuḥ, raudrībhāvena samayet tisro'vasthāḥ prajāpate.* The reference is taken from Appendix 27 of Book III which follows after III.256.30 in the Critical Edition.

[5] It must be remembered that the epic is not specifically interested in cosmogony and cosmology per se, in contrast to the Purāṇas. However, as Biardeau has indicated, "If, from one perspective it is true to say that the epic is anterior to the purāṇas, this is certainly not true of its doctrinal content". See Biardeau, "Etudes (IV)," p. 135.

[6] *sarvabhūtāni kaunteya, prakṛtiṃ yānti māmikam, kalpakṣaye punas tāni, kalpādau visṛjāmy aham.* (VI.32/BG.9.7).

[7] Biardeau has drawn attention to the fact that the *yuga* are not related to the life of the *avatāra* in the same manner as the *mahākalpa* and the *kalpa* are related to the two higher forms of the Divinity. The link is with the moral life of the *trailokya* rather than to the life of the Divinity as such. In fact, he could just as well be absent. "We thus realise that in fact, we can describe the succession of the yuga without any reference to an *avatāra*. It was impossible to describe a creation or end of the world without introducing the corresponding form of the divinity. With the *yuga*, the harmony is broken. The state of the earth is described but in fact it is the triple world that is at stake since the *dharma* does not allow us to dissociate the earth from heaven and the hells. As far as the supreme divinity is concerned, he can simply be absent. This means that his presence is not absolutely essential to the temporal structure of the *yuga* and to the idea of a progressive decline of the *dharma*. It is true that this is often connected with time, the destructive role of which is well known, but this reference only adds to the difficulty of reconciling individual karma and the cyclic socio-cosmic process." See Biardeau, "Etudes (IV)", pp. 122-123. The apparent contradiction involved in accommodating a collective socio-cosmic process unrelated to human conduct to the karma of individual action is never fully resolved.

[8] *sahasrayuga paryantam, aharyad brahmaṇoḥ viduḥ, rātriṃ yugasahasrāntāṃ.* (XII.224.31).

[9] The decline and restoration of the dharma is blamed on the demons in a later story (XII.283.7-18). After multiplying on the earth in the bodies of men, the deities decide to impart their collective energies to Śiva, who thereupon destroys the main culprits in the form of desire, anger, and greed, as well as the Great Delusion (*mahāmoha*) who is the chief among them.

[10] In Śāntiparvan the reason is given as *nigraheṇa ca pāpānāṃ sādhūnāṃ pragraheṇa ca* (XII.337.32).

[11] Biardeau, "Etudes (IV)," p. 135.

[12] *ātītān āgatāṃ bhāvā, ye ca vartanti sāmprajam, tān kālanirmitān* (I.1.190).

[13] The Greek image of the "fates" is duplicated in the epic image of the two (rather than three) women who weave the threads of past and present, night and day, at I.3.147ff.

[14] I will on occasion use the van Buitenen translations of the *yugas* as they succeed, to some extent, in conveying the sense of the dice. Thus, *kṛtayuga* — "Age of the Winning Throw," *tretāyuga* — , "Age of the Trey," *dvāparayuga* — "Age of the Deuce," and *kaliyuga* — "Age of Discord."

[15] Kesari Mohan Ganguli (trans.), The Mahābhārata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa: Published by P.C. Roy, (Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Co., 1952-62), Vol. XII, p. 293.

[16] The Earth is the world of acts, while heaven is regarded as the world of the fruit. Cf. III.247.36; XII.185.19.

[17] There is some confusion here. Mention is made of a boon by Śiva at I.103.8, but by Vyāsa at I.107.8. By contrast, the birth of the Pāṇḍava is ultimately the work of Śiva through his representative Durvāsas. This paradox is noted by Biardeau.

[18] "The ancient Indians structured their space differently. Space was shaped like two pyramids joined at their bases. The four corners of the joint base represent the four points of the compass, the top of the upper pyramid the zenith, the top of the inverted, lower pyramid the nadir. At the zenith is the World of Brahmā, 'on the roof of the beam of heaven'...." Cf. van Buitenen, The Mahābhārata, vol. 2, p. 10.

[19] This is not without contradiction, as Biardeau has noted. "On reflection, the fact that the Supreme Divinity of the yogin Himself becomes a great yogin, and submits himself — for the salvation of the creatures potentially within himself — is not without problem. Is it not true to say that, from the point of view of the creatures, deliverance from the round of rebirth means precisely that they will once again be forever united with this Divinity? Why then make them leave in the first place?" Cf. Madeleine Biardeau, Le Sacrifice dans l'Inde ancienne, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), p. 107.

[20] Those in the blissful worlds of heaven enjoy luminous bodies "born from ones deeds" (III.247.14).

IV — Mundane Daiva

Further ramifications of this notion of *Daiva* become evident when we make the transition from the Macrocosm (*Daiva* with a capital D) to the microcosm of human life (*daiva* with a small d). In the first place, the modern reader is struck by certain inconsistencies or anomalies that arise when *daiva* is viewed in the context of human aspirations. These include the problem of reconciling divine and human intentionality and purpose (what Nicolai Hartmann calls the antinomy of providence), the implications of *daiva* with respect to epic valuations of personal effort and achievement (a theme taken up by Yudhiṣṭhira in a different context), and the emergence of a linear doctrine of human evolution against the larger background of a cyclic vision of history and human society. Further complexities are evident in the variety of forms in which *daiva* is presented throughout the epic: in the symbolic link with the dice game; in the visionary statements of saints and sages about the divine purposes of the heroes; and in the manner in which Kṛṣṇa himself is able to influence the course of events. These and other subsidiary issues will be taken up in what follows.

As we have seen, at one level the dynastic struggle of the Mahābhārata is an episode in the eternal conflict of the gods and the demons fought by proxy on the earth. At another level, however, it is the boundless appetite for sensual satisfaction (*kāma*) and self-aggrandizement (*artha*) of human beings — or gods and demons incarnated as human beings — that have brought the world to this point of crisis. This suggests it would be spurious to attribute the entire course of history (*itihāsa*) to the controlling influence of *Daiva* alone — or at least to a *Daiva* of Vedic gods who are themselves caught up in the cycle of these events. Nor is this a Manichaean classification of good and evil where the gods are necessarily on the side of the good. Rather, it involves the proper balance of good (*dharma*) and evil (*adharma*) in the cosmos, witnessed by the fact that a number of gods are represented on the side of the demons. Indeed, the changing relationship between these two cosmic forces, symbolized by this eternal struggle of gods and demons,

would appear to be governed by a divine intentionality above and beyond these celestial beings.

But whatever the ultimate source (and we may suspect it is Divinity at the very highest level), the divine intentionality of *Daiva* is revealed as a sort of transcendental scenario from which many lines of causality converge to an explosive but momentously regenerative event. Somehow or other, the Divine purpose is able to channel the intricate causalities of the world through the collective actions of society as a whole. But it is evident that the individual members of this epic society have at least a modicum of freedom to choose plans and purposes of their own, and it is necessary to ask how it is possible for a divine controller to weave the activities of such vast multitudes into the single strand of events that culminate in this particular axial period of history. Clearly, great ingenuity is needed to achieve such a subtle blend of interacting causalities.

While the epic itself does not address the issue directly, the contextual use of the term reveals two broad areas in which we meet this macrocosmic *Daiva* as the microcosmic *daiva* confronting the lives of the protagonists. The divine influence may be revealed in the form of a subtle influence from within, whether by creating conflict or appearing as the conscious or unconscious motivations behind the choices and actions of the protagonists. Or such influence may confront the individual from without, whether in the form of the objective conditions he or she is called upon to face, or as a force that guides the trajectory of actions already undertaken. The implication in the first case is that character itself is *daiva*; the second suggests that human action counts for little in furthering human purposes and progress.

This, in turn, raises a second issue (at least for the modern observer), namely, that of the ultimate value of personal effort and achievement — and of the value and dignity of human life in general — in a world driven by what appears to be an imperative necessity. This issue does come up for discussion in the epic as we shall see, but only in the context of concern over the efficacy of the vedic sacrifice. The various modes of expression of *Daiva/daiva* will become evident as we venture more deeply into the

thought-world of the epic by tracing its path in the objective circumstances of the story.

In doing so, however, we cannot fail to note a third anomaly, this time in the form of an apparent paradox at the heart of epic notions of material and spiritual progress. On the one hand, epic descriptions of the descents of the various *avatāra* suggest a linear succession of evolutionary progress, "the water creature Fish (Matsya), the amphibian Tortoise (Kurma), the land animal Boar (Varaha), the 'Missing Link' Man-Lion (Narasimha), the Hunter 'Homo Erectus' Rama-with-Axe (Parashu-Rama), the feudal divinity Rama (hero of the *Ramayana*, which is also an *itihasa*, the earlier avataras being recorded in *puranas* or ancient texts), the sensitively-loving and erotic divinity Krishna (in the *Mahabharata* seen as an adviser and guide, but revealed in his full eighth avatara personality in the *Harivamsha* and the *Bhagavata Purana*), followed by the ascetically compassionate, sex-renouncing Buddha (or, alternatively, in orthodox Hinduism, Kalki, the still-to-come white apocalyptic horse."[1]

This contrasts radically with the fact that, left to its own devices, human society is doomed to an irreversible fall from perfection (the *kṛtayuga* inaugurated by the previous *avatāra* Rāma Jamadagni) to an almost Hobbsian state of anarchy (*kaliyuga*) leading to renewed calls for divine intervention. Again and again humanity is lifted up in this manner, and again and again it returns to chaos under the rule of evil kings. On this basis, history is nothing but an endless succession of cycles of essentially similar content; for the rejuvenation of society (and presumably of the individuals of which it is composed) is dependent on the *avatāra*, but this only initiates a new period of decline. The clockwork repetition of these events — clearly under the control of *Daiva* — is a reflection of the wheel of the *saṃsāra* as it turns at the level of human society, analogous to the eternal recurrence of the cosmos that takes place over the more extensive *kalpa* cycle.

As if to remind us of the ubiquitous role of *Daiva* in this process, this theme is made to recur, as a sort of echo, at different points in the story itself. As we proceed down the generations of the Kurus, for example, we notice that each generation is given a period of glory from which there is an

inexorable decline. Thus, the early reign of Śāṃtanu, the great-great-grandfather of the protagonists, is portrayed as an ideal time in which Hastināpura was ruled without lust or passion (*kāmarāgavivarjitaḥ*) and the four *varṇa* all knew their respective places (I. 94.9).

brahma paryacaratkṣatraṃ viśaḥ kṣatramanuvratāḥ|
brahmakṣatrānuraktāśca śūdrāḥ paryacaran viśaḥ||

"The *kṣatriya* served the brahmins, the *vaiśya* were sworn to the *kṣatriya*, and the *śūdra* — devoted to both the brahmins and the *kṣatriya*, served the *vaiśya*." This constitutes a description — indeed a virtual definition, of a *kṛtayuga*. The first hint of a decline from these ideal conditions is the "fall" of Śāṃtanu himself for the fisher princess Satyavatī.[2] This initiates a chain of circumstances that leaves the kingdom without an heir and eventually leads the family and the world to the brink of ruin. However, as Biardeau comments, "let us not look for the first in the line of guilt: there is no one. All is combined in such a manner that we can never tell who is responsible: everyone is, because *daiva* alone is in charge and everyone plays his part in the game set up by it."[3]

Whatever Śāṃtanu's part in this may be, it is certainly compounded in the next generation by his son Bhīṣma[4], incarnation of Dyaus (= the sky) and a man of undoubted wisdom and courage. He also demonstrates great filial piety and self-sacrifice (*ātmayajña*) in doing service to his father. However, in renouncing his claim to the throne (*artha*) and to the joys of married life (*kāma*) he seriously compromises the future of the dynasty by committing one of the cardinal sins of the Mahābhārata — performing the dharma of another by adopting the *saṃnyāsa* (renunciation) of the brahmin in place of the *svadharma* (the caste duty) of a warrior prince born to rule and to beget heirs to the throne. As a result, he spends much of his early career securing brides for other members of the family, including his two younger half brothers and his three nephews (Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu and Vidura). And he unwittingly lays the groundwork for his own demise, in spite of good intentions, by his disastrous abduction of the princess Ambā (who is secretly betrothed to an asuric king). Ambā is regarded by Biardeau as "a good

symbol of this wounded earth which Bhīṣma can neither wed nor kill" (since Sky and Earth can never meet).[5]

The problems of the dynasty really begin when his two half-brothers (children of Śāṃtanu and Satyavatī) die without issue, the first after his overweening pride gets him into a fight with a *gandharva* , the second when he succumbs to venereal disease as a result of an amorous nature (*kāmātma*). He is portrayed as deluded by a net of lust (*kāmajālavimohita*) (I.110.2), not untypical for the rulers of the day. This leaves the kingdom not only without an effective ruler (though now under the de facto control of Bhīṣma) but with no succession in sight. Hungry for offspring (*putragṛdhinī*), Satyavatī is forced to call on her illegitimate brahmin son Vyāsa to beget heirs on the two surviving queens. These unfortunate ladies have little choice but to submit — ungraciously as it turns out — to the dynastic plans of their mother-in-law.

Prospects for the first child do not look good when Queen Ambikā, the first who is called to this task, is unable to look at the matted orange locks and fiery eyes of the sage. Prompted by divine injunction (*vidhinā saṃpracodita*), Vyāsa has to inform the impatient Satyavatī that her daughter-in-law's lack of virtue (*vaiguṇya*) has condemned the would-be heir to be born blind, effectively disqualifying him from carrying out the royal sacrifices and other functions normally expected of a king.[6] His blindness suggests an incapacity with respect to the dharma, and Biardeau adds that, "he can be even less of a warrior, a royal function just as essential as the sacrifice."[7] He will nevertheless be a great royal sage (*rājārṣisattama*) with the life-force of a troop of elephants (*nāgāyutasamaprāṇa*), wise (*vidvān*), highly fortunate (*mahābhāga*), of great spirit (*mahāvīrya*) and intelligence (*mahābuddhi*), and father to a hundred sons.

Ambālikā, the second of the surviving queens, also fails in her duties by paling at the ugliness of the man, and is told that her son (Pāṇḍu = "pale") will come into the world with a sickly pallor. The final attempt also miscarries as a result of the substitution of a slave girl by Ambikā, who is appalled at the thought of a second night with the wild-eyed sage. However, the girl is rewarded for her good services by the birth of Vidura, the partial incarnation of dharma. He is thus the only one of the three brothers who is an

incarnation of a god.[8] The problem with this form of dharma in the flesh — apart from the fact that he is of mixed blood and can therefore have no claim to the throne — is that his sagacious advice is never heeded.

While the future already looks somewhat unpromising, the actual childhood of these children is represented as an interregnum (under the regency of Bhīṣma) of perfect pastoral and social harmony — in fact a *kṛtayuga* (I.102.1-14). Pride (*māna*), anger (*krodha*) and greed (*lobha*) have lost their hold and we are given typical descriptions of plentiful harvests, trees dripping with juicy fruit, and bustling cities where a devout and cheerful citizenry help one another in mutual affection. We are explicitly told this time that (I.102.5) the *kṛtayuga* age prevails in all sections of the country (*pradeśeṣvapi rāṣṭrāṇāṃ kṛtaṃ yugamavartata*), and that the wheel of the dharma (*dharmacakra*) rolls through the land (I.102.12). These good times are captured in the adage that:

vīrasūnāṃ kāśisute deśānāṃ kurujāṅgalam|
sarvadharmavidāṃ bhīṣmaḥ purāṇāṃ gajasāhvayam||

"Of all mothers of heroes (the best are) the daughters of Kaśi (i.e. Ambikā and Ambālikā), of all countries the Jungle of the Kurus, of those who know the dharma in its entirety, Bhīṣma [is superior], of all cities, it is the City of the Elephant."

As the story moves to the third generation from the reign of Śāṃtanu, the aging Bhīṣma voices a certain satisfaction at having established the "threads of the line" (*kulatantu*) as he puts it (I.103.3). He has made Pāṇḍu king, and proceeds to secure brides (and the alliances that come with them) for all three brothers. These include Gāndhārī (daughter of the king of Gāndhāra) for Dhṛtarāṣṭra; Pṛthā and Madrī (daughter of the king of the Madras) for Pāṇḍu; and the mixed-caste daughter of king Devaka for Vidura. The choice of Pṛthā (clearly a symbol of the Earth — from *pṛthivī* = earth) is of great importance for the subsequent course of events, since she is the sister of Vasudeva, the father of Kṛṣṇa. Indeed, it is almost as if her choice of Pāṇḍu from among the thousands of princes assembled at her *svayaṃvara* is the work of *Daiva*.

This time the early years of the new ruler are not painted in the same ideal imagery of a *kṛtayuga* (they are probably too close for that), but they do follow the characteristic rise to a peak — in this case a peak of material splendor from which there is a sudden and characteristic decline. After returning with the spoils of his successful military campaigns, Pāṇḍu spreads delight among his subjects by distributing largesse in abundance. He enjoys the gratitude of parents and friends by showering them with all the good things they could desire. But then, deciding he has won a well-earned rest (*jitatandrī*), he abandons his administrative duties and takes to the forest to enjoy the hunt in the company of his two wives. It is here that the five Pāṇḍava are born, spending their childhood on holy mount Himavat (I.115.27). Dhṛtarāṣṭra ensures he is well supplied with whatever he might want of pleasure (*kāma*) and joy (*bhoga*) — all the while establishing himself and his sons ever more firmly in the seat of power. The stage is being set for the breach (*bheda*) to occur between the two sides of the family.[9]

To complete the record of these echoes of *Daiva* down the generations of the Mahābhārata, we follow the rise and fall of the Pāṇḍava themselves — the fourth generation from our point of departure — after their return to Hāstinapūra on the death of Pāṇḍu — another royal victim of *kāma*. His *śrāddha* (ancestral ritual) introduces a sombre note as Vyāsa advises his mother (Satyavatī) to withdraw to the forest to avoid having to witness the destruction of the dynasty. He offers some prophetic words (I.119.6-7).

atikrāntasukhāḥ kālāḥ pratyupasthitadāruṇāḥ|
śvaḥ śvaḥ pāpīyadivasāḥ pṛthivī gatayauvanā||

bahumāyāsamākīrṇo nānādoṣasamākulaḥ|
luptadharmakriyācāro ghoraḥ kālo bhaviṣyati||

"The times of happiness are over and a dreadful period lies ahead. Things are deteriorating by the day, and the earth is losing her youth. [I see] a period of great confusion (*māyā*), abounding in many vices. It will be a dreadful time when all the acts and practices of the dharma will be violated." She leaves with her two daughters-in-law after persuading Ambikā (I.119.9):

ambike tava putrasya durnayātkila bhāratāḥ|
sānubandhā vinankṣyanti pautrāścaiveti naḥ śrutam||

"Ambika, we have heard that the imprudent conduct (*durnaya*) of your son (i.e. Dhṛtarāṣṭra) will destroy the Bhāratas together with their followers and their grandsons." She is referring to the tragic pattern of inertia of the blind king, arising out of his secret desire to secure the royal succession for his eldest son Duryodhana. In contrast to the five sons of Pāṇḍu who are particles descended from a portion of the gods (*aṃśāvatareṇa devabhāgā*) (I.109.3) this Duryodhana is Kalipuruṣa — the demon Kali in human form (I. 61.80; XI.8.27). Later (III.240.6), we are told that the demons obtained him from Śiva long ago in recognition of their asceticism (*tapas*). It has been suggested that, in the aggregate, Duryodhana and his ninety nine-brothers symbolize "the brood of ego-centric desires and passions like lust, greed, hatred, anger, envy, pride, vanity, and so on, to which the empirical ego is firmly attached and to which it clings desperately."[10]

Duryodhana grows up with a passionate envy and hatred of his cousins, particularly of the powerful Bhīma who continually torments him and his brothers when they are at play. The failure of his various schemes to drown Bhīma, put snakes in his bed, and poison his food serves only to intensify his bitterness and animosity (I. 119.30 ff.). When it becomes clear that Yudhiṣṭhira, as rightful heir, is also the preferred choice of the population to be king, he can contain himself no longer. He urges his father to destroy the dreadful thorn in my heart (*ghoraṃ śalyaṃ hṛdi*) by removing the Pāṇḍavas to the provincial town of Vāraṇavāta on the pretext of a festival (I.130.20; I.131.1-10).

This is the first of the many occasions that Dhṛtarāṣṭra allows himself to be swayed by the ambitions of his willful son. In the words of the brahmins (I.133.7):

viṣamaṃ paśyate rājā sarvathā tamasāvṛtaḥ|
dhṛtarāṣṭraḥ sudurbuddhir na ca dharmaṃ prapaśyati||

"Completely blinded by *tamas*, the evil-minded king Dhṛtarāṣṭra sees the problem but does not see the dharma." When Dhṛtarāṣṭra learns that the

Pāṇḍava have survived the lacquer-house fire (*jatugṛhadāha*) engineered by his son's clique, and that they are now married to Draupadī (the daughter of the king of the Pāñcālas), he is in a quandary. He wants the kingdom for his son but is wary of the power of the Pāṇḍava, particularly when allied with Drupada. He takes the side of Duryodhana and his other sons but gets conflicting counsel from Karṇa (who advocates a preemptive strike) and Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Vidura (who advocate conciliation). This time, however, he follows the path of prudence, forms an alliance with Drupada, and agrees to partition the kingdom among the two sets of cousins (I.199.25).

Almost immediately, the fortunes of the Pāṇḍava begin to change. They agree to settle for a tract of largely uninhabited wilderness (Khāṇḍavaprastha) where they build a radiant city, which, true to its name — Indraprastha (the city of Indra) — is like the unshakeable world of heaven (*svargavadacyuta*) (I.119.27). Prospects improve further with Arjuna's abduction of Subhadrā (sister of Kṛṣṇa), thus cementing this alliance, the birth of their son Abhimanyu on Arjuna's return to Indraprastha after a year of self-imposed exile, the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest at the behest of Agni, and the subsequent construction of a magnificent *sabhā* or assembly hall by the demon (*asura*) Maya. With his star clearly on the ascendant, Yudhiṣṭhira has no difficulty endorsing Nārada's suggestion that he legitimize his sovereignty by performing the *rājasūya*, the traditional Indian ritual for consecrating the king as a universal monarch (*cakravartin* or *samrāj*).

It looks as if the world is rapidly moving into a new and more prosperous age of social harmony, a new reign of dharma in the form of Yudhiṣṭhira, the king of Dharma incarnate — in short a *kṛtayuga* (though this term is not used). The signs are all there (I.214.1-14; II.30.1-9 etc.). With the help of his brothers, he conquers the four quarters of the world. The elements all work in his favour: crime, pestilence and disease are banished from the land, all the citizenry are bent upon their own tasks, and not a false word is heard about him. But then suddenly — at the height of his power and glory, when the accumulated income of his treasury cannot be spent in "hundreds of years" (II.30.8) — he loses this vast fortune and prosperity in a dice game, together with the kingdom and his whole family, including

himself. With this symbolic collapse of the dharma, the pattern of history has repeated itself for the fourth time in as many generations. It will repeat itself again — this time at the scale of the whole earth, when the rise of the *adharma* of Duryodhana is terminated by the almost total destruction of the known world — to make way for a new age of dharma under the ægis (or the *Daiva*?) of Parikṣit. When Yudhiṣṭhira has recovered the kingdom free of thorns (*akaṇṭakam*) and the funeral rites of the dead heroes are over, life again returns to conditions reminiscent of a *kṛtayuga* (XIV.15,1ff; XIV.51.6). These scenes of pastoral and social harmony are climaxed by the discourse of the Anugītā (XIV.16-50) and the events leading up to the Aśvamedha sacrifice of Yudhiṣṭhira (XIV.84-91).

Beyond these echoes of the cosmic play of *Daiva*, the *rājasūya* and the dicing are of great symbolic significance in themselves for understanding this process of *Daiva*. The central role of the *rājasūya* episode has already been noted by a number of scholars. As mentioned (cf. p. 10), Heino Gehrts has argued that the epic as a whole, including the characters and the distribution of the heroes, is governed by the structural elements of this ritual. Van Buitenen holds that the Sabhāparva (Book II) constitutes a dramatization of the *rājasūya* ceremony, including the dicing episode that forms an integral part of the ritual process. Chaitanya focuses on the dice contest, suggesting that it is,

> perhaps the most crucial episode in the whole epic. Animosities simmering over the decades come to a boil here in appalling wrongs. These in turn trigger chain reactions of sombre causalities that become critical thirteen years later in the terrible implosion of Kurukshetra. Guilt may originate in the self-betrayal of individuals like Duryodhana. But the social group is an interactive field where responsibility necessarily becomes shared; and the reaction when it matures at last is also a social phenomenon and a mass effect, which cannot make nice distinctions, in its aspect as nemesis, between those who endorsed the guilt actively like Dussasana, and those who virtually endorsed it by apathetic tolerance like the vassals in the assembly. The great tragedy is that this mass effect is too gross to have the fine discrimination to spare even sensitive types like Vikarna. He deeply sympathized with Draupadi, but he certainly could not be expected to break away from his

family on this issue. And nemesis engulfs him too, along with the others.[11]

We would substitute the word *Daiva* for nemesis in this instance.

However, once again we must turn to Madeleine Biardeau for the most penetrating analysis of this episode and its symbolism. For her, the *rājasūya* of Yudhiṣṭhira is the central link in a chain of sacrificial symbolism that runs through the Mahābhārata. As one of the three sacrifices (*trimedhā*) announced by a celestial voice at the birth of Arjuna (I.114.33), it constitutes the moment at which the *avatāra* transfers his functions to Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers. The myth is revealed in its dual nature as a royal myth in addition to a myth modelled after a traditional avataric myth. This functional shift is also important for understanding what she sees as the double symbolism at work throughout the story, reflecting the different perspectives that may be taken. From the more comprehensive cosmic standpoint, one may detect behind the events of the ritual, "the enthronement of the king of the dead, who will reign throughout this period for the re-establishment of the equilibrium that has been endangered or to realize the decrees of *daiva*, according to the point of view one may adopt."[12] In effect, a sombre prediction by Vyāsa (described at II.46 of Biardeau's Citrashala Press edition and at Appendix I. No.30 of the Critical Edition) followed by his announcement of a dream in which Yudhiṣṭhira would see an inauspicious form of Rudra turned towards the south — the direction of Yama — suggest a symbolic link between Yudhiṣṭhira and the king of the dead, and "from the point of view of the *avatāra*, the *rājasūya* is like the coronation of Yama by Rudra, and the work of his reign is relentlessly pursued under the auspices of Rudra-Śiva, thanks to the take-over by Duryodhana. At the level of the royal myth, the banishment of the Dharmarāja leaves *adharma* sovereign and prepares the war for the restoration of the dharma."[13] Aided and abetted by Śakuni/Dvāpara, the *rājasūya* - dicing episode thus has the paradoxical effect of inaugurating the reign of Duryodhana/Kali which it is the task of the *avatāra* — through the person of the legitimate king — to overthrow. In this respect, the *rājasūya* is the starting point for the events leading to the war, "with all its good and evil consequences, in short, to war and to the salvation of the world that this will make possible."[14]

The most striking finding of Biardeau about the *rājasūya*, however, is the inner connection with the dicing that follows. Significantly, the one thing that Yudhiṣṭhira and the Pāṇḍava do not lose is their common wife Draupadī, the incarnation of Śrī symbolizing the prosperity of the earth and the realm.[15] Of course, Yudhiṣṭhira actually loses twice after being saved on the first occasion by the obstinate challenge of Draupadī regarding the dharmic legitimacy of the wager.[16] There is no doubt that Draupadī is, "the real stake, not only of the dice, but of the entire drama. Yudhiṣṭhira has submitted to the two games of dice in a fatalistic spirit, without any illusion as to the outcome. In the end, he is forced in this manner, together with his brothers and their common wife, to live in exile in the forest for a period of twelve years, following which the six of them must live for a year without being recognized by anyone."[17]

Significantly, the Pāṇḍava leave for the forest as *dīkṣitāḥ* (according to the Citrashala Press variant of C.E. II.68.1), that is to say, as initiates who must undergo the necessary ritual preparation for a sacrifice, suggesting the sacrifice of the war to come.[18] What is most striking about these events, also noted by Biardeau, is that they are in direct contrast to the descriptions of the actual ritual in the Brāhmaṇas, an integral part of which is a ceremony in which the king is required to win a game of dice for which a cow (Draupadī?) is the stake.[19] This raises the question as to why the author of the Sabhāparva would choose to separate the dice episode from the *rājasūya* episode and transform the outcome into a *loss* of the power and possessions of the rightful king.

It is evident that this loss of kingdom and subsequent exile is directly related to the situation with which the epic opens — the eternal conflict of the gods and the demons. This is confirmed by Duḥśāsana when he gleefully exults as the Pāṇḍava are leaving (II.68.3-4):

pravṛttaṃ Dhārtarāṣṭrasya cakraṃ rājño mahātmanaḥ|
parābhūtāḥ Pāṇḍuputrāḥ vipattiṃ paramāṃ gatāḥ||

adya devāḥ saṃprayātāḥ samairvartmabhirasthalaiḥ|
guṇajyeṣṭhāstathā jyeṣṭhā bhūyāṃso yadvayaṃ paraiḥ||

"The reign of the great-spirited king, the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, has begun. The sons of Paṇḍu have been defeated, and have fallen into extreme misfortune. Today the gods have gathered here by their smooth aerial pathways. But we [i.e. the demons] are their elders, more cunning and more numerous than they."[20] In the absence of the *avatāra* (Kṛṣṇa is away battling the demon king Śālva — cf. III.15-23), the first round in this cosmic war (the dicing) is won by a subterfuge on the part of the demons, and this is followed by the expulsion of the gods from their lawful place in heaven and their exile in the nether regions (symbolized by the forest). The natural order of the world is suddenly turned on its head, and we have a break in the course of time, symbolized by the passage from a *Dvāpara* to a *Kaliyuga*.[21]

The significance of these momentous events is heightened by the evident associations with *Daiva*, for which the game of dice is the ideal tangible and etymological symbol.

> Whatever it be, from the time the decision is taken by Dhṛtarāṣṭra to allow the game to proceed, one is convinced that the dice game puts the destiny of men in the hands of *daiva*, that mysterious cosmic agency which decides the harmonious or chaotic march of events as a whole, and which we translate, for want of a better word, by Destiny. But *daiva*, related to *deva* (god), and to the radical *div-* (the sky) (nominative: *dyaus*, the name of the god incarnated by Bhīṣma on the earth), is also related to the radical *div-* (to gamble) (the game: *devana* or *dyūta*, the player: *devitar*...). We know that Śiva plays dice with his wife. In short, we must never ignore the ambiguity of the dice game which places mankind under the aegis of a divine power that is pitiless and apparently blind. At the same time we note that Kṛṣṇa is the son of Devakī (the player — the divine?), that Yudhiṣṭhira enjoys a second wife in his gynaeceum by the name of Devikā (the bad player?) who, strictly speaking, plays no role in the epic but may characterize that of her husband, and, finally, that Vidura is married to a daughter of mixed blood of king Devaka. *Daiva* is thus not so much the equivalent of the Graeco-Latin *fatum* as the global expression for all that concerns the welfare of the gods (and of the earth), the great manipulator of which is Kṛṣṇa together with his counterpart Śiva.[22]

In spite of dire warnings by Vidura, who pictures the dice scheme as the gate of Kali (*kalidvāra*) and the face of doom (*vināśamukha*), Dhṛtarāṣṭra is foolishly drawn into this net of intrigue by Duryodhana's threat of suicide and his own love for his son (*putrasneha*). In any case, he tells his brother (II.45.54 and 57):

aśubhaṃ vā śubhaṃ vāpi hitaṃ vā yadi vāhitaṃ|
pravartatāṃ suhṛddyutaṃ diṣṭametanna saṃśayaḥ||

daivameva paraṃ manye yenaitadupapadyate|

"Whether good or bad, beneficial or otherwise, the friendly game of dice will go on, for it has clearly been divinely appointed (*diṣṭa*). I believe that this has occurred as a result of supreme Destiny (*daivaṃ paraṃ*)." This is evidently an expression of *Daiva* in the objective conditions of the world. When Vidura raises the possibility of a split (*bhinna*) or a breach (*bheda*) in the family, he can only reply (II.51.25):

neha kṣattaḥ kalahastapsyate māṃ
na ceddaivaṃ pratilomaṃ bhaviṣyat|
dhātrā tu diṣṭasya vaśe kiledaṃ
sarvaṃ jagacceṣṭati na svatantram||

"A quarrel in this matter will not trouble me, *kṣattṛ* (addressing Vidura as "son of a slave-girl"); provided that *Daiva* will not be so opposed This entire cosmos does not run by itself but is obedient to the will of Dhātṛ (the one who disposes)."

But when Dhṛtarāṣṭra has finally got what he secretly wanted all along, his worries begin to mount, and we catch him in a rare moment of introspection (II.72.8-11):

yasmai devāḥ prayacchanti puruṣāya parābhavam|
buddhiṃ tasyāpakarṣanti so'pācīnāni paśyati||

buddhau kaluṣabhūtāyāṃ vināśe pratyupasthite|
anayo nayasaṃkāśo hṛdayānnāpasarpati||

anarthāścārtharūpeṇārthāścānartharūpiṇaḥ|
uttiṣṭhanti vināśānte naraṃ taccāsya rocate||

na kālo daṇḍamudyamya śiraḥ kṛntati kasyacit|
kālasya balametāvad viparītārthadarśanam||

"The gods take away the reason (*buddhi*) of the man to whom they bestow defeat. He sees things reversed. When his mind is confused and destruction is upon him, the wrong course looks like wisdom and cannot be dislodged from his heart. When his end is near, wrong (*anartha*) has the appearance of right (*artha*), and right takes the form of wrong. Rising up before a man, they lull him into complacency. Time (*kāla*) does not raise the rod of justice (*daṇḍa*) and come down on his head; the power of time is just this perverse view of things." This is an example of *Daiva* (or Time) sowing confusion from within, specifically in the *buddhi*, the function of the mind used to discriminate what is right (*artha*, here equivalent to dharma in the sense of the appropriate course of action) from what is wrong (*anartha* =*adharma*).

Yudhiṣṭhira also finds himself in the net of *Daiva*, for he has filial obligations to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and has foolishly taken a vow that he would never refuse a challenge (II.52.15-16 and II.53.13). Thus he too falls prey to inner conflict and confusion (II.52.18):

daivaṃ prajñāṃ tu muṣṇāti tejaścakṣurivāpatat|
dhātuṣca vaśamanveti pāśairiva naraḥ sitaḥ||

"It is said that *Daiva* obscures our reason as glare blinds the eye. As if bound by nooses, Man is controlled by Dhātṛ." And when he is recalled for the second game of dice, he resigns himself once again to his fate (II.67.3):

dhāturniyogādbhūtāni prāpnuvanti śubhāśubham|
na nivṛttistayorasti devitavyaṃ punaryadi||

"It is by order of the Dhātṛ that creatures obtain success or failure. There is no escape from either of these two if we must play again."

Additional confirmation for the existence of a divine plan for the world is given by the roles that define the lives of the major characters themselves. The course of life of individuals appears to be charted in much the same manner as the path of the Sun about the great Mount Meru has been charted, not in accordance with his own desires and purposes but by divine decree (III.102.2-4). This information is often given in the form of oracular statements. We are told, for example, that the portion of Kali that is Duryodhana has been born for the destruction of the world (*lokasaṃhārakāraṇāt kaleraṃśaḥ samutpanno*) (XI.8.27), and that his friend Karṇa was ordained in a former time (*vṛttam purā*) for the purpose of provoking a general war (XII.2.4-5). Ghaṭotkaca, the good (*rākṣasa*) son of Bhīma is created by Indra in order to neutralize the javelin (*śakti*) he gave to Karṇa (I.143.38). He is finally sacrificed in place of Arjuna on the thirteenth day of the war (VII.154.58). Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the son of king Drupada of the Pañcāla, is born for the destruction of Droṇa (*droṇavadhāya*) (I.155.40) and the function of his twin sister Draupadī (Kṛṣṇā = the dark lady) is to lead the warrior caste to their destruction (*kṣayaṃ kṣatraṃ ninīṣati*) (I.155.44).

These oracular pronouncements are supplemented by the prophecies and predictions of sages with spiritual vision or advance warning of what is fated to happen. Vyāsa's predictions about his own sons as well as his sombre warning at the death of Pāṇḍu have already been mentioned. He has long seen in his mind the perfidy of the Kaurava (I.144.7) and is able to comfort Uttarā with information concerning her son Parikṣit (XIV.61.10) as well as Gāndhārī by enumerating the divine histories and purposes of all the main characters of the story (XV.39.5-16). Markaṇḍeya, — from the report of his cosmic journey through the body of the child Kṛṣṇa (III.186.90ff.) — and Nārada are also important mercurial figures who bring their divine knowledge to bear on the meanings of the lives of the major actors. Not only is Nārada given a preview of the present cosmic cycle (to be described shortly), he is able to shed considerable light on the role of Karṇa (XII.2-5) and on the post-war period (XV.27.15).

Disembodied voices (*vāguvācāśarīriṇī*) heard at the birth of the Pāṇḍava also comment on the roles they are called upon to play. For example, Yudhiṣṭhira will be (I.114.6) the greatest of the upholders of the dharma

(*dharmabhṛtāṃ śreṣṭa*) ...glorious (*yaśas*), and full of energy (*tejas*) and good conduct (*vṛtta*). And a wise brahmin added that he would rise again after meeting great misfortune (V.132.9). Bhīma (I.114.10) will be the greatest of all the men of strength (*sarveṣāṃ balināṃ śreṣṭhaḥ*), while the twins (I.115.18) will surpass their peers in beauty (*rūpa*), courage (*sattva*) and virtue (*guṇa*).

The most revealing of these visionary statements is that which accompanies the birth of Arjuna (I.114.29-35; V.88.65; V.135.2-5). The seven verses at I.114.29-35 make it quite clear that it is Arjuna — the equal of Rāma Jāmadagnya and the peer of Viṣṇu in strength (*viṣṇutulyaparākrama*) — to whom the future destiny of the world has been entrusted, not Yudhiṣṭhira, the incarnation of the god Dharma. Arjuna is, of course, the son of Indra, king of the gods (I.114.22). These associations (Rāma Jāmadagnya is the previous *avatāra*) suggest that his task is no ordinary one. With the help of his brothers, says the voice, he will offer up three sacrifices (*trimedhā*) which, according to the consensus of subsequent tradition, include the *rājasūya*, the sacrifice of the war, and the *aśvamedha* that follows. Like Rāma, he is destined to vanquish the kings (*mahīpālān*) and recover the prosperity (*śrī*) of the realm. In effect, he is given the part of the *avatāra*, since Kṛṣṇa takes no active part in the fighting. These associations also prepare us for the truth about his inner relationship to Kṛṣṇa — he was the ṛṣi Nara who dwelt with Nārāyaṇa at Badarī in a previous age (I.210.5; I.219.15; III.37.29; III.45.19 etc.). His association with Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva in his present embodiment is also foretold at V.135.4.

This avatāric mission is later confirmed by Yama, the king of the dead and world guardian (*lokapāla*) of the south just before Arjuna is to visit his father in *svarga* (III.42.17-23). He is told he is the mighty ancient seer Nara who, at the command (*niyoga*) of Brahmā, has now become a mortal to pacify the *dānava* and the *nivātakavaca* demons. Together with Viṣṇu, he will lighten the burden of the Earth, etc. These statements certainly have the ring of the *avatāra* about them. In this respect, victory over the *nivātakavaca* in *svarga* is among a number of tests he must undergo prior to his main mission. He has already shown his command of men and gods (in the form of Indra himself at Khāṇḍava), and he must now show that he is a worthy opponent for the more powerful forces of *adharma*. Purging the heavens of

these troublemakers will show he is fully capable of mastering all the powers of the three worlds.[23]

With all this advance knowledge about the assigned roles of the protagonists (presumably engineered by *Daiva*), we might wonder how any of them can have any confidence in his or her capacity to influence what has all the appearance of an inexorable current of time. How could Duryodhana, for example, imagine for one minute that he could prevail against the combined forces of the gods, particularly after witnessing the *viśvarūpa* of the *avatāra* himself during Kṛṣṇa's personal attempt to mediate a settlement (V.129.1-16). This cavalier "blindness" with respect to the forces arrayed against them is particularly characteristic of the Kauravas. It is only after the horrendous carnage of war has virtually annihilated his side of the family that Dhṛtarāṣṭra himself is made aware of the eternal secret of the gods (*devaguhyaṃ sanātanam*) (XI.8.34), something that Yudhiṣṭhira has known since the warning by the sage Nārada at his *rājasūya* to the effect that (XI.8.33):

pāṇḍavāḥ kauravāścaiva samāsādya parasparam|
na bhaviṣyanti kaunteya yatte kṛtyaṃ tadācara||

"The Pāṇḍava and the Kaurava will mutually destroy each other. Therefore, O son of Kuntī, do what has to be done." The blind king, too, has been an instrument for the unfolding of events that have been ordained from all eternity. What place is there for grief under such circumstances? Vyāsa's counselling eventually has its effect, since after Dhṛtarāṣṭra is finally granted the vision of his dead sons on the banks of the Ganges, he is able to say that the purpose of his life has been fulfilled (*prayojanaṃ ciraṃ vṛttaṃ jīvitasya ca me'nagha*) (XV.44.20).

But the real secret of secrets is revealed a few days later when Yudhiṣṭhira finally learns (from Bhīṣma) that Nārada had been privileged with this information by Kṛṣṇa himself — though not in this birth but in the preceding *kṛtayuga*. Not content with his meeting with Nara and Nārāyaṇa, the two forms of the Lord residing at Badarī, Nārada decides to go to the white island (*śvetaḥ dvīpaḥ*), a mysterious land of the blessed in the ocean of milk (*kṣīrodhiḥ*) beyond Mount Meru. Here he hopes to see the Supreme

Deity in his primeval nature (*prakṛtiṃ ādyāṃ*) (XII.322.2). Other *ṛṣī* have tried and failed in this enterprise, but due to his extreme devotion (*bhakti*), the Lord is moved to appear before him in his Universal Form (*viśvarūpa*) (XII.326.1ff.). Not even Brahmā himself has seen this form, he is told. But more than this, Nārada is offered a synopsis of the course of the three worlds over the forthcoming cosmic cycle down to the birth of Kalkin, the *avatāra* who will re-establish dharma in the subsequent *kṛtayuga*. The linear succession of *avatāra* (through the evolutionary forms of the boar, the man-lion, Rāma, etc.) will eventually pass to Kṛṣṇa. After recounting his early deeds, Nārāyaṇa proceeds to delineate his own role, together with that of Arjuna, in the events of the Mahābhārata itself (XII.326.89; 846*; 90; 848*; 91-92):

jarāsaṃdhaśca balavānsarvarājavirodhakaḥ|
bhaviṣyatyasuraḥ sphīto bhūmipālo girivraje|
mama buddhiparispandādvadhastasya bhaviṣyati||

śiśupālāṃ vadhiṣyāmi yajñe dharmasutasya vai|

samāgateṣu baliṣu pṛthivyāṃ sarvarājasu|
vāsaviḥ susahāyo vai mama hyeko bhaviṣyati||

yudhiṣṭhiraṃ sthāpayiṣye svarājye bhrātṛbhiḥ saha|

evaṃ lokā vadiṣyanti naranārāyaṇāvṛṣī|
udyuktau dahataḥ kṣatraṃ lokakāryārthamīśvarau||

kṛtvā bhārāvataraṇaṃ vasudhāyā yatheṣṣitam|
sarvasātvatamukhyānāṃ dvārakāyāśca sattama|
kariṣye pralayaṃ ghoramātmajñātivināśanam||

"Jarāsaṃdha will become king at Girivraja, a proud and powerful demon (*asura*) who will quarrel with all the kings of the earth. His death will be engineered in accordance with my plans (lit. by the movement of my *buddhi*). I shall then kill Śiśupāla at the (*rājasūya*) sacrifice of the son of Dharma (i.e. Yudhiṣṭhira), to which all the kings of the world will bring tribute. The son of Vāsava (i.e. Arjuna) will be my only assistant. I shall then re-establish Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers in their own kingdom. This world

will know me as the great Nara and Nārāyaṇa when, putting forth effort (*udyukta*), I will destroy the *kṣatriya* for the sake of the world (*lokakāryārtham*). After the burden of the earth has been lifted as I see fit, I shall wipe out (lit. undertake the re-absorption of — *pralaya*) all the leading members of the Sātvata (Kṛṣṇa's people) as well as the great city of Dvārakā, by the destruction of my sublime self-knowledge (*ātmajñāti*)." All individual events appear to depend upon the contemporary stage of development of the whole, effectively eliminating the possibility of free action. The use of the term *pralaya* suggests that, from the perspective of the Supreme Divinity, this history is part of the larger wheel of time involving the periodic creation and destruction of the world. However, and perhaps more importantly, this passage is revealing for the light it sheds on the ultimate source of *Daiva*. For there can no longer be any doubt that this compelling power from the gods derives from no ordinary (i.e. vedic) god, but from that (new *bhakti*) God of gods, the primæval Nārāyaṇa Himself (XIII.App.I.No.16.203). Kṛṣṇa Himself is eternal Time with bloodshot eyes and club in hand (*kālo lohitaraktākṣaḥ kṛṣṇo daṇḍī sanātanaḥ*.). Nārāyaṇa, *kāla* and *Daiva* are one and the same.

In order to understand how this supreme arbiter of *Daiva* is able to accomplish the purposes of the gods (*surāṇāmartha*) in this world, we must be ready to shift our perspective, as required, from that of Kṛṣṇa as the source and substance of the world, the *ādideva*, to that of the multiplicity of the things and beings in the world. From the perspective of the world (i.e. *saṃsāra*), including that of Kṛṣṇa as one of the beings in the world, the secret of his success is *yoga* or *upāya*, the skillful means that enable him to turn the course of events to his advantage. Kṛṣṇa is master of yoga (*yogeśvara*), and in the Gītā itself yoga is defined as skill in action (*karmasu kauśalam*) (VI.24/BG.2.50).

A good example of such skill is the death of Ghaṭotkaca, killed by Karṇa with a magic javelin (*śakti*) that could be used only once, and had always been intended for Arjuna. According to Biardeau, "In the killing of Ghatoṭkaca by Karna we find the central motive of the avataric myths: the invincible gift of Indra, father of Arjuna, to the asuric warrior Karṇa, has been neutralized by the intervention of Kṛṣṇa. Henceforth, the non-combattant status of Kṛṣṇa may be doubted."[24] As the Pāṇḍava turn in

horror and dismay from the sight of the huge body lying on a full company (*akśauhiṇī*) of Kaurava troops, they are shocked to see Kṛṣṇa dancing about in transports of joy and delight like a tree shaken by a tempest (VII.155.3). Kṛṣṇa attributes this lightness of heart to the success of a long-held plan to use this *rākṣasa* son of Bhīma to divest Karṇa of the one asset that remained to him for the destruction of Arjuna (he had already been divested of his natural armour and golden earrings). Furthermore, the otherwise invincible Karṇa is now vulnerable to attack when the opportunity comes to Arjuna at the time appointed for his chariot-wheel to sink into the earth (in fulfillment of the curse of a brahmin sage). He is now like a man (i.e. implying he is no longer like a god). The other Kaurava leaders had not ceased urging him night after night to employ his magic spear against Arjuna (or Kṛṣṇa) the following morning. However, in some mysterious way that the text does not venture to explain, Kṛṣṇa had always managed to stupefy (*√muh*) the son of Rādhā (VII.157.37) so that he would forget about his javelin as soon as he entered the field of battle.

Kṛṣṇa goes on to list a number of incidents in which he has had a hand, including several episodes in which it was not hitherto apparent that he was in any way involved. Jarāsaṃdha, the king of Magadha who had visions of world dominion through the sacrifice of a hundred kings incarcerated at Girivraja, was killed by Bhīma shortly before the *rājasūya* of Yudhiṣṭhira. However (Kṛṣṇa now reveals), this was possible only because he had arranged for the neutralization of a mace carried by Jarāsaṃdha that was capable of slaying all creatures. Furthermore, there are hints that he was also behind the decision of Droṇa to ask for the thumb of Ekalavya, a rival of the young Arjuna from the *niṣāda* tribe. Without this claim for payment on the part of his guru (*gurudakṣinā*), the *niṣāda* would have been incapable of defeat by the assembled multitudes of *deva*, *dānava*, *rākṣasa* and *uraga*. Later, Kṛṣṇa Himself dispatches Śiśupāla, the king of the Chedi, to the abode of Yama. Thus (VII.156.22-23):

vadhārtham tasya jāto'hamanyeṣāṃ ca suradviṣām||

tvatsahāyo naravyāghra lokānāṃ hitakāmyayā|
hiḍimbabākakirmīrā bhīmasenena pātitāḥ|

"I was born to slay him and the other enemies of the gods, with your assistance, tiger among men, out of a desire for the good of the worlds. Hidimba and Baka and Kirmira have all been killed by Bhīmasena." This implies that these deaths were also engineered by him. As he explains in the case of Ghaṭotkaca (VII.156.24-25):

haiḍimbaścāpyupāyena śaktyā karṇena ghātitaḥ||

yadi hyenaṃ nāhaniṣyatkarṇaḥ śaktyā mahāmṛdhe|
mayā vadhyo'bhaviṣyatsa bhaimaseniraṭotkacaḥ||

"I have also slain Hiḍimba's son by skillful means (*upāya*) — i.e. through Karṇa. If Karṇa had not slain him with his javelin in a great battle, I myself would have had to slay Ghaṭotkaca, the son of Bhīma." He then assures Arjuna that, when the time comes, he will tell him the *yoga* by which he will be able to slay Karṇa himself.

Other heroes on the Kaurava side whose deaths are later ascribed to the dubious machinations of Kṛṣṇa include (in order of their demise) Bhūriśravas (by Sātyaki), Jayadratha (at the hands of Arjuna), Droṇa (by Dhṛṣṭyadumna), Karṇa (killed by Arjuna) and Duryodhana (by Bhīma). His knowledge of other minds (*vittajña*) (VIII.49.2) enables him to direct events by prompting quite uncharacteristic modes of behavior, including the use of stratagems repugnant to the accepted norms of the dharma. The death of Bhuriśravas, leader of the Bāhlika tribe allied to the Kaurava, occurs on the fourteenth day of the war. Just as this famous elephant warrior is about to decapitate Sātyaki, a staunch ally of Yudhiṣṭhira,[25] Kṛṣṇa urges Arjuna to shoot off the upstretched arm that holds the sword, an ungallant act according to the rules of single combat (VII.117.62). This enables Sātyaki to reverse the situation by decapitating Bhuriśravas when he subsequently withdraws in *praya*-meditation. This Bāhlika warrior, whose name translates as "a strong sound of neighing," evokes the horse which is produced from the churning of the milky ocean (Uccaiḥśravas). According to Biardeau, he is "at the same time the somic victim and the substitute for Duryodhana, the reigning king of the lunar dynasty (*soma* = moon and squeezing)"[26] — in fact the somic victim of an abortive horse sacrifice of Duryodhana, for which Jayadratha is the horse.

This incident is thus related — if we accept Biardeau's analysis of the symbolism — to this brother-in-law of Duryodhana (married to Duḥśalā). Jayadratha has been a thorn in the side of the Pāṇḍava ever since his failed abduction of Draupadī during their forest exile (III.248). The extreme *tapas* he performed as a result of this humiliation netted him a boon from Śiva that he would be able to keep all the brothers at bay in battle except Arjuna, a boon that created the necessary conditions for the tragic death of Arjuna's young son Abhimanyu (finally clubbed to death by the son of Duḥśāsana). The web of causality is always tightly woven in the Mahābhārata, with one event leading inexorably to another. In this case, Arjuna is traumatized to the point of making a vow to kill Jayadratha before the sun goes down the following evening, failing which he will commit suicide by entering the blazing fire.

Suddenly Jayadratha is the great stake of the battle, and the Kaurava make Herculean efforts to ensure that the Sindhu king is kept far to the rear of the main body of troops. But the saindhava is still alive and well protected by six mighty and heroic car-warriors of the Kaurava army as the sun is sinking towards the Asta mountain. So critical is the situation that Kṛṣṇa decides on drastic action. I will resort to skillful means (*upāya*) and (create) a covering of darkness over the sun (*srakṣyāmyahamupāyaṃ tamādityasyāpavāraṇe*) (VII.121.1009*.6). Then, profiting from the immediate joy and relief of the opposing side, he orders Arjuna (VII.121.16) to:

dhanaṃjaya śiraśchindhi saindhavasya durātmanaḥ|
astaṃ mahīdharaśreṣṭhaṃ yiyāsati divākaraḥ||

"Cut off the head of the evil-minded king of the Sindhu, Dhanaṃjaya. The sun wishes to go to the great mountain of Asta."

Now this is a highly perilous enterprise, since before retiring to the woods to perform *tapas*, Jayadratha's father Vṛddhakṣatra had uttered a curse to the effect that the head of the man who would cause his son's head to fall on the ground would break into a hundred pieces. Here we have yet another example of destiny being known at birth from a hidden voice (*antarhitā vāṇī*) (VII.121.18). Duly warned by Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna is able to charge his magic

arrows with *mantra*, snatch away the head like a hawk snatching away a smaller bird, and by repeated shots, direct the airborne head to the lap of Vṛddhakṣatra who just happens to be praying in the nearby woods. As the father rises from his prayers, the head falls to the ground and his own head splinters into a hundred pieces. When light returns, the Kaurava realize to their cost that the darkness (*tamas*) had been an illusion (*māya*) created by Vāsudeva (VII.121.1025*.3).

If we accept, once again, the interpretation of Biardeau, this death of Jayadratha is an important turning point of the war. It announces the end of caste disorder, symbolized on the one hand by Vṛddhakṣatra (a *kṣatriya* affecting the life of a brahmin) and, on the other, by Droṇa (a brahmin affecting the life of a *kṣatriya*), the next major figure to be killed. Droṇa's appetite for battle is first undermined by the hosts of heaven who inform him in the midst of the fighting that his time has come and that he should lay aside his weapons for them to escort him to Brahmāloka. His taste for life itself is then destroyed when Kṛṣṇa counsels Yudhiṣṭhira — the son of Dharma no less — to lie about the death of his son Aśvatthāman, charging that under the conditions of the moment "falsehood (*anṛtaṃ*) is superior to truth (*satyam*)" (VII.164.98). Bhīma has just killed an elephant by the same name. When Yudhiṣṭhira confirms the fact that "Aśvatthāman is dead" — adding the word "elephant" in an indistinct whisper — Droṇa completely loses heart and is beheaded by his own student Dhṛṣṭadyumna when in a state of yoga (*yogayuktavān*) (VII.165.35).[27] In this respect, his death symbolizes not only the end of caste disorder, but also the epic teaching regarding the sacrifice of battle as being the proper sacrifice of the warrior — who thereby becomes the sacrificial victim, priest, and patron of the sacrifice all in one. Furthermore, Droṇa's assumption of a yogic trance and the fact that he is, in any case, a warrior-brahmin, also suggest that, in order to be effective, this sacrifice should be a yogic act, undertaken without self-seeking, and for the welfare of the worlds.[28]

This dramatic event is immediately followed by a terrible onslaught against Bhīma by the real Aśvatthāman, who is understandably furious at this deception. He unleashes the Nārāyaṇa, a magic weapon symbolizing the universal force of the "*brahman*" against which the *kṣatra* power of Bhīma is

powerless. The *yuga* symbolism is particularly appropriate when one knows the role of Aśvatthāman, the incarnation of Mahādeva (=Śiva), Antaka (death), Kāma (desire) and Krodha (anger), who is given the task of completely annihilating the remnants of the Pāṇḍava forces at the end of the war (VII.171.6).

yathā dagdhvā jagatkṛtsnaṃ samaye sacarācaram|
gacchedagnirvibhorāsyaṃ tathāstraṃ bhīmamāvṛṇot||

"As the yuga-fire which consumes the entire universe with its mobile and immobile creatures when the hour of dissolution comes, at last enters the mouth of the creator, even so the weapon of Droṇa's son began to penetrate the body of Bhīmasena." Once again, however, it is Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna — this time as Nārāyaṇa and Nara, the One Being in the form of these two friends — who come to the rescue. Diving into the field of energy investing the body of Bhīma, they resort to the power of *māyā* (VII.171.11) and manage to neutralize (*prati √han*) the power of the Nārāyaṇa by forcing Bhīma to lay down (i.e. sacrifice) his own weapons.

The death of Karṇa has already been predicted by Yama just prior to Arjuna's sojourn in *svarga* (III.42.1ff.). Karṇa is the tragic anti-hero of the Mahābhārata who exhibits a strange mixture of pride, arrogance and malignity, yet is also capable of great generosity to brahmins and loyalty to his friend Duryodhana. This loyalty is carried to the point of refusing a suggestion by Kṛṣṇa to change the course of history by exposing his true identity to Yudhiṣṭhira (V.138.6ff.). He knows that a script has been written for him but accepts his fate with equanimity. Caught between his duty to Duryodhana and the realization that his cause is hopeless, he opts for the tragic path of loyalty to the one who has befriended him. He sees the coming war as the great abortive sacrifice of Duryodhana in which he ends up as the victim with his army playing the part of the wife (V.139.29-49). He tells Kṛṣṇa (V.139.46-49):

yadā drakṣyasi māṃ kṛṣṇa nihataṃ savyasācinā|
punaścitistadā cāsya yajñasyātha bhaviṣyati||

duḥśāsanasya rudhiraṃ yadā pāsyati pāṇḍavaḥ|

ānardaṃ nardataḥ samyaktadā sutyaṃ bhaviṣyati||

yadā droṇaṃ ca bhīṣmaṃ ca pāñcālyau pātayiṣyataḥ|
tadā yajñāvasānaṃ tadbhaviṣyati janārdana||

duryodhanaṃ yadā hantā bhīmaseno mahābalaḥ|
tadā samāpsyte yajño dhārtarāṣṭrasya mādhava||

"When you see me cut down by the left-handed archer, it will be the repiling of the fire of their sacrifice. When the Pāṇḍava drinks the blood of Duḥśāsana, bellowing his roar, it will be the soma draught. When the two Pāñcālya fell Droṇa and Bhīṣma, that will be the conclusion of the sacrifice, O Janārdana. When the mighty Bhīmasena kills Duryodhana, then the great sacrifice of the Dhārtarāṣṭra will end." And he admits his own part in the destruction that looms ahead (V.141.2). As Chaitanya puts it, in Karṇa:

> we have a splendid portrait of a man who triumphed over the tragic to relish its austere yet resplendent beauty. Karṇa sees the war that is imminent as a tremendous ritual sacrifice where the lives of courageous men will be offered and burnt up in the fire to the ritual music of the war-drums, trumpets and conches. He describes what he sees in his mind and so vivid is the vision that he says that it causes horripilation in him — an important detail because this psychosomatic reaction is repeatedly mentioned in later texts on poetics and dramaturgy as a feature in aesthetic experience and relish. Karṇa knows that he will be burned up in this flaming sacrificial fire. But no regret lingers; instead, there is a surging euphoria, because his death will be a heroic lay that will be sung by men as long as the great earth with its mountains and rivers will last. The exaltation here is not one of unbalanced hypertrophy of emotions. The finest perceptions of Karṇa occur at this moment so near to his death, a death he longs to meet as if it were a beloved. He realizes that the only chance for a finer world to be born is this tremendous holocaust; he recognizes that Yudhiṣṭhira will be a better man for the reconstruction than himself or Duryodhana; he asks Kṛṣṇa not to disclose his real identity as the son of Kuntī since Yudhiṣṭhira would not be able to take up the role for which he is the fittest person.[29]

Karṇa obviously already had an inkling about his role in provoking the war of the Mahābhārata. He dreams of Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers ascending to a thousand-pillared palace, while Kṛṣṇa drapes the blood-fouled earth with entrails (V.141.27-29).

The purpose of his existence — decided, once again, by the gods — was to pave the way for the warrior caste to get to heaven (XII.2.4-5):

kṣatraṃ svargaṃ kathaṃ gacchecchastrapūtamiti prabho|
saṃgharṣajananastasmātkanyāgarbho vinirmitaḥ||

sa bālastejasā yuktaḥ sūtaputratvamāgataḥ|

"How, my Lord, the *kṣatriya*, cleansed by weapons, should attain to regions of bliss. For this, a child was conceived in a maiden's womb, capable of provoking a general war. Endowed with great *tejas*, he became the son of a *sūta* ." As Biardeau points out, "Being the son of Sūrya is not a curse per se, quite the contrary since the regular course of the sun is necessary for the well-being of the world. But to be born out of wedlock and abandoned by his mother takes the son of Sūrya out of the ordinary. He then becomes the replica of the dreadful sun, which rises at the end of a cosmic period to destroy the world by fire."[30] He is thus a sort of anti-Arjuna to the extent that his relationship to Duryodhana is symmetrical with that of Arjuna to Yudhiṣṭhira. In Nārada's own brief summary of his trajectory through this world (XII.5.11-15):

brāhmaṇasyābhiśāpena rāmasya ca mahātmanaḥ|
kuntyāśca varadānena māyayā ca śatakratoḥ||

bhīṣmāvamānātsaṃkhyāyāṃrathānāmardhakīrtanāt|
śalyāttejovadhāccāpi vāsudevanayena ca||

rudrasya devarājasya yamasya varuṇasya ca|
kuveradroṇayoścaiva kṛpasya ca mahātmanaḥ||

astrāṇi divyānyādāya yudhi gāṇḍīvadhanvanā|
hito vaikartanaḥ karṇo divākarasamadyutiḥ||

evaṃ śaptastava bhrātā bahubhiścāpi vaṇcitaḥ|

"As a result of a Brahmin's curse (*abhiśāpa*), as also of the curse of the great Rāma (Jamadagni), of the boon (*vara*) granted to Kuntī and the illusion (*māyā*) practised on him by Śatakratu (=Indra) of his being counted by Bhīṣma in a disrespectful manner as only half a chariot-fighter, of the destruction of his energy caused by Śalya, of the behaviour of Vāsudeva, and of the celestial weapons provided to Arjuna by Rudra and Indra (*devarāja*) and Yama and Varuṇa and Kubera and Droṇa and the great-souled Kṛpa, the wielder of the Gāṇḍiva succeeded in slaying Vikartana's son Karṇa, shining like the Sun (*divākara* = Sūrya). Such was (the lot of) your brother, cursed and shunned by many." The envy arising from the unfortunate circumstances of his birth drives him to supplement his royal status (improperly conferred by Duryodhana) with the brāhmaṇical powers that would ensure his triumph over Arjuna. When these powers are for ever denied him through these two curses, his doom is sealed.[31] Still, the final confrontation of the two on the afternoon of the seventeenth day of the war is dramatized as a duel of giants performed before the celestial hosts of the three worlds (VIII.63.30ff.). As might be expected, the gods (notably Indra) are on the side of Arjuna and the demons (plus the god Sūrya as the renegade sun) are on the side of Karṇa. Differences and disputes arise on all sides, but Brahmā must clearly throw his support to Arjuna in the interests of the gods (*devakāryaṃ*). The outcome is never really in doubt since, as Kṛṣṇa points out to his protégé, a victory for Karṇa would be the final end of the whole universe (VIII.63.77).

As the two chariots approach each other, the warriors are compared to Indra and Vṛtra and the battle itself, involving untold multitudes of men and animals, is compared to the battle in former days between the gods and the *asuras* (VIII.64.1013*; 65.7). The tension builds to a fever pitch, and as the hour of Karṇa's death draws near (VIII. 66.1122*; 1123*):

kālo hyaddaśyo nṛpa vipraśāpā-
nnidarśayankarṇavadhaṃ bruvāṇaḥ|
bhūmistu cakraṃ grasatītyavoca-
skarṇasyatasminvadhakāle'bhyupete|

brāhmāṃ mahāstraṃ manasi pranaṣṭaṃ

yadbhārgavo'pyasya dadau mahātmā|

"At that time, when the hour of Karṇa's death had come, O king, Kāla (i.e. Time personified), approaching invisibly, alluding to the curse, and desirous of informing Karṇa that his death was near, told him 'the earth is devouring your wheel.' Indeed, when the time of his death had come, the great Brahmā-weapon that the Bhārgava had given him escaped his memory." Karṇa pleads for time, but Kṛṣṇa has no compunction about urging a reluctant Arjuna to take this opportunity to finish him off. As Arjuna inspires his magic arrow ("resembling Nārāyaṇa's discus") with mantra into a mighty force, the entire universe of mobile and immobile creatures begins to shake. He finally strikes off his enemy's head "like Indra striking off the head of Vṛtra" (VIII.67.24) and a light is seen leaving the lifeless corpse to pass into the sun.

The symbolic necessity of his life becomes even more apparent, according to Biardeau, when we discover the parallel between his death at the hands of Arjuna-Kṛṣṇa and the cosmic process associated with the end of the world.

> At the same time as he promotes the destruction of the war, Arjuna's task is also to limit it and to prepare the fecundity of the 'remnant.' As grandfather of Parīksit and close associate of the *avatāra*, this is effectively the part he plays, but this part necessarily includes the death of Karṇa: it is Nārāyaṇa's task to preside over the 'humid' and fecund period of the *pralaya* after putting an end to the conflagration with the help of the clouds brought by Vāyu. At the epic level it is the responsibility of the king, Indra's son, to put limits on the fires of war. This is the meaning of the death of Karṇa: in symbolic terms it promises the death and the end of the reign — the *cakra* — of Duryodhana, and through this the end of the war, the disappearance of the evil *karman*, fomenter of *adharma*, just as the death of Jayadratha announced the death of Droṇa and the end of the disorder of the *varṇa*. We are thus able to understand the final scene when Arjuna kills Karṇa by profiting from the instance when the wheel — *cakra* — of the hero's chariot sinks into the earth and he tries in vain to free it.[32]

As Karṇa himself had been only too aware, the concluding rite of the great sacrifice of the Dhārtarāṣṭra in this war is the death of Duryodhana at the hands of Bhīma. Here, too, the work of Kṛṣṇa is much in evidence. Duryodhana has been located hidden in a lake called Dvaipāyana (suggesting the deluge of the *pralaya*) the waters of which he had solidified by the power of his "*māyā*" (IX.29.7). Kṛṣṇa immediately urges Yudhiṣṭhira (IX.30.6-7):

māyāvina imāṃ māyāṃ māyayā jahi bhārata|
māyāvī māyayā vadhyaḥ satyametadyudhiṣṭhira||

kriyābhyupāyairbahulairmāyāmapsu prayojya ha|
jahi tvaṃ bharataśreṣṭha pāpātmānaṃ suyodhanam||

"With your own powers of illusion (*māyā*), O Bhārata, destroy the illusion of this master of illusion (*māyāvin* = Duryodhana). A master of illusion should be slain with illusion. This is the truth, O Yudhiṣṭhira. With acts (*kriyā*) and means (*upāya*) and applying your power of illusion (*māyā*) to these waters, slay, O best of the Bhārata, this Suyodhana who is evil incarnate." He then goes on to illustrate how the gods themselves prevailed over the demons by means of "acts and means," providing a list of various episodes in the lives of the gods (IX.30.8-14). Then, when Yudhiṣṭhira — out of compassion (*anukrośa*) — gives Duryodhana the choice of arms in single combat with any one of the Pāṇḍava, Kṛṣṇa is furious (IX.32. 7):

tadidaṃ dyūtamārabdhaṃ punareva yathā purā|
viṣamaṃ śakuneścaiva tava caiva viśāṃ pate||

"You have once again initiated a dangerous game of chance similar to the one in former days between yourself and Śakuni, O lord of the people." In fact, the situation constitutes a reversal of the original dice game since, as Biardeau has noted, "In the light of the fixed game of dice of the beginning, we now have a duel with the mace — thus a veritable confrontation of warriors, but modelled as closely as possible on the dice game because everything must be resolved at a stroke — though this time it is Yudhiṣṭhira who has a substitute to fight in his place and to cheat, something he cannot do himself."[33] However, Kṛṣṇa is understandably worried since he knows

that none of the brothers is a match for Duryodhana with the mace, not even the powerful Bhīma who boldly offers a challenge.

Before the battle can begin, however, Balarāma arrives (from a long pilgrimage) and suggests they all return to Kurukṣetra (IX.54.5-6). Kurukṣetra is:

prathitottaravedī sā devaloke prajāpateḥ||

tasminmahāpuṇyatame trailokyasya sanātane|
saṃgrāme nidhanaṃ prāpya dhruvaṃ svargo bhaviṣyati||

"That spot in the world of the gods (*devaloka*), that is known as the northern sacrificial altar of Prajāpati. Thus, he that dies in battle on that eternal and most auspicious of all the places in the three worlds is sure to reach *svarga* ." Duryodhana is henceforth assured of a heavenly reward in spite of his boundless greed and will to power. But, in the context of the epic, this is only right since Duryodhana has, after all, faithfully accomplished the purposes of (the goddess) Earth according to the divine strategy agreed upon at a celestial conclave long before his birth (XI.8.24):

duryodhana iti khyātaḥ sa te kāryaṃ kariṣyate|
taṃ ca prāpya mahīpālaṃ kṛtakṛtyā bhaviṣyasi||

"He who goes by the name of Duryodhana is the one who will accomplish your purpose. Once he is king, your business will be accomplished." And, as the learned Samba indicates in absolving the Kaurava of all responsibility for the crimes against humanity they have committed (XV.16.1-2):

na taddduryodhanakṛtaṃ na ca tadbhavatā kṛtaṃ|
na karṇasaubalābhyāṃ ca kuravo yatkṣayaṃ gatāḥ||

daivam tattu vijānīmo yanna śakyaṃ prabādhitum|
daivaṃ puruṣakāreṇa na śakyamativartitum||

"The destruction that has overtaken the Kuru dynasty was not brought about by Duryodhana. It was not brought about by you (i.e. Dhṛtarāṣṭra). Nor

was it brought about by Karṇa or the son of Subala (i.e. Śakuni). We know full well that it was brought about by *daiva* and that there was no avoiding it. There is no way that *daiva* can be resisted by human exertion (*puruṣakāra*)." He concludes that since everything is due to destiny (*sarvaṃ daivakṛtaṃ* — v. 9), Duryodhana should be allowed to sport blissfully in *svarga*.

For the final act (*avabhṛtha*) of the sacrifice of the Dhārtarāṣṭra to be concluded, however (VII.77.18), it is imperative that Duryodhana be killed.[34] It is the task of Kṛṣṇa, the master controller of *Daiva* , to give the necessary push in the right direction, and, once again, he does this by urging the Pāṇḍava to resort to what amounts to unfair means. The term he uses is "*anyāyena* " — by a method which is not according to rule (*nyāya*), as opposed to "*dharmena*," i.e. according to the dharma (IX.57.17). Arjuna is therefore encouraged to give Bhīma a sign that the time has come to fulfill his vow and to break the thighs of his adversary with a low blow of the mace.

The resulting sense of shame and dishonor in the Pāṇḍava camp in the face of the angry denunciations of Balarāma and others prompts a vigorous response from Kṛṣṇa that not only offers an interesting lesson in epic morality but also throws light on his own role in the fighting. In his view, such a stratagem is justified by the fact that the Pāṇḍava had lost the kingdom by unfair means in the first place and also by the need for Bhīma to fulfil his vow. But beyond this is the bitter truth that the Machiavellian forces of *adharma* are far too powerful to be dislodged in an equal contest by the gentle forces of the dharma. Such a task calls for the kind of extraordinary means that the gods themselves are wont to employ against the *asura*. Kṛṣṇa then goes on to admit that he himself is responsible for their demise (IX.372*; IX.60.57; 61-62):

naiṣa śakyaḥ kadācittu hantuṃ dharmeṇa pārthivaḥ|
te vā bhīṣmamukhāḥ sarve maheṣvāsā mahārathāḥ|
mayānekairupāyaistu māyāyogena cāsakṛt|
hatāste sarva evājau bhavatāṃ hitamicchatā|
yadi naivaṃvidhaṃ jātu kuryāṃ jihmamahaṃ raṇe|

kuto vo vijayo bhūyaḥ kuto rājyaṃ kuto dhanam|

upāyā vihitā hyete mayā tasmānnarādhipāḥ|
anyathā pāṇḍaveyānāṃ nābhaviṣyajjayaḥ kvacit||

na ca vo hṛdi kartavyām yadayaṃ ghātito nṛpaḥ|
mithyāvadhyāstathopāyairbahavaḥ śatravo'dhikāḥ||

pūrvairanugato mārgo devairasuraghātibhiḥ|
sadbhiścānugataḥ panthāḥ sa sarvairanugamyate||

"It would have been impossible to kill the king (i.e. Duryodhana) according to the dharma or any of these great chariot-warriors and archers with Bhīṣma at their head. It is I who killed them on the battlefield with the use of various stratagems (*upāyā*) that include my *māyā* and my *yoga*, for I desired your welfare. Indeed, had I never acted in this deceitful manner (*jihma*) during the battle, what would have happened to your victory, your kingship and your riches? It was my *upāya* that sealed the fate of these kings who could not be vanquished in any other manner by the Pāṇḍava....Do not worry about the fact that your enemy has been killed. I had to kill your more numerous enemies by means of these dubious stratagems (*mithyopāya*). This is the path followed in former times by the gods in order to slay the demons. It is the path followed by men of goodwill, and the whole world follows their example." Needless to say such justification is hardly acceptable to Aśvatthāman for whom Duryodhana was brought down "by a most infamous act" (*sunṛśaṃsena karmaṇā* — IX.64.33).

We introduce these lines not for the moral issue, interesting though this may be, but for what they reveal of the central and indispensable role of Kṛṣṇa in the destruction of the Kaurava and of their great war machine. Evidence for this has been growing throughout the war, but in order to understand the real nature of his relationship to the conflict as a whole we must return to an event that took place just before the outbreak of hostilities (V.129.1-15). After a last-ditch appeal to Duryodhana had failed, Kṛṣṇa offers dramatic proof of his divine power in the form of a theophany reminiscent of the subsequent manifestation of his Universal Form (*viśvarūpa*) for the benefit of Arjuna in chapter 11 of the Bhagavadgītā. At first sight, this extraordinary display before the entire Kaurava court might

appear to symbolize the traditional opposition between the party of the gods and the party of the *asura* (now led by Duryodhana). However, as Biardeau has noted, "a closer look reveals Rudra among the divinities present — Rudra who appears in Aśvatthāman and even in Kṛpa in the form of the Rudra — as well as Brahmā — whose presence is assured in the Duryodhana camp in the form of Droṇa, incarnation of Bṛhaspati, and the Sun — the true father of Karṇa."[35] We find additional support for this view in the fact that Kṛṣṇa leaves the assembly hand-in-hand with both Sātyaki (who will fight on the side of the Pāṇḍava) and Kṛtavarman (who has already offered his services to Duryodhana).[36] And he already has one foot in the Kaurava camp in the form of the *gopī nārāyaṇa* army bequeathed to Duryodhana — following his own recruitment by Arjuna as a non-combattant in the Pāṇḍava forces (V.7.15).

Although the *trimūrti* of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva (or Rudra) is explicitly mentioned on only one occasion in the epic (following III. 256. 30 of the Critical Edition as per Appendix 27), the three gods are assimilated to each other on numerous occasions, notably in the Nārāyanīyaparva section of the Śāntiparva where Kṛṣṇa makes the claim that (XII.328.21; 23; 24):

ahamātmā hi lokānāṃ viśvānāṃ pāṇḍunandana|
tasmādātmānamevāgre rudraṃ saṃpūjayāmyaham||

yastaṃ vetti sa mā vetti yo'nu taṃ sa hi māmanu|

rudro nārāyaṇaścaiva sattvamekaṃ dvidhākṛtam|

"I am the soul of all the worlds, O son of Pāṇḍu. And Rudra is my very soul; therefore I always adore Him....He who knows Rudra knows Me; he who follows Him follows Me also. Rudra is Nārāyaṇa. Both are One Being in two forms" (cf. also III.187.5-6; XII.330.64). And Kṛṣṇa goes on to explain how (XII.330.67-70):

mayā tvaṃ rakṣito yuddhe mahāntaṃ prāptavāñjayam||

yastu te so'grato yāti yuddhe saṃpratyupasthite|
taṃ viddhi rudraṃ kaunteya devadevaṃ kapardinam||

kālaḥ sa eva kathitaḥ krodhajeti mayā tava|
nihatāṃstena vai pūrvaṃ hatavānasi vai ripūn||

"Under my protection you have won a great victory in battle. Know, O son of Kuntī, that He whom you saw going before you in battle was none other than Rudra, that god of gods known as Kapardin and also as Time (*kāla*). They say He was born of my wrath. Those foes you [think you] have slain were, in fact, first slain by Him." This only confirms what Arjuna already knew from previous conversations with Kṛṣṇa (VI.33/BG.11.33) and Vyāsa (VII.173.2ff.) respectively — that he had been the instrument of the Supreme Divinity during the battle (*nimittamātraṃ*), revealed in the "terrible" form of Viṣṇu or in the form of a mysterious figure, lance in hand, who destroys all his foes ahead of him (which turns out to be Śiva). This prompts Janamejaya to remark that (XII.331.9):

na citraṃ kṛtavāṃstatra yadāryo me dhanaṃjayaḥ|
vāsudevasahāyo yaḥ prāptavāṇjayam uttamam||

"With Vāsudeva as his ally my ancestor Dhanaṃjaya accomplished nothing extraordinary in achieving that great victory at Kurukṣetra."

In effect, what the Supreme Divinity in the form of Kṛṣṇa reveals by these happenings is not so much His opposition to the party of the *asura* (or his partiality for that of the gods) but His omnipresence on the battlefield — His encompassment of *both* sides in this conflict. As the *avatāra*, Kṛṣṇa necessarily takes the side of the dharma. However, this preference merely reflects the conditions obtaining at a particular point in the socio-cosmic cycle of the *yuga* when the divine assistance of the *avatāra* is called for. In His true nature *sub specie æternitatis*, He embodies a *Daiva* which transcends the destiny of the three worlds with their petty jealousies of gods and *asura*.

Kṛṣṇa (and the *Daiva* He controls) thus emerges as the driving force behind the conflict as a whole, and whatever partiality is shown for the Pāṇḍava is an expression of a greater fatality of which they are only dimly aware (cf. also VI.29/B.G.7.6; XII.337.905*; XII.337.68-68 etc.). His vital role is later acknowledged in a profusion of *bhakti* sentiment as Kṛṣṇa

prepares to return to Dvāraka after the funeral rites of the slain heroes have been concluded. After worshipping him as the Lord of the Universe who creates, maintains and destroys the cosmos of mobile and immobile creatures (*sthāṇujaṇgamam*) for His playful sport (*ratiḥ krīḍāmayī*), Arjuna continues (XIV.51.17-20 and 45):

idaṃ cādbhutamatyarthaṃ kṛtamasmatpriyepsayā|

yatpāpo nihataḥ saṃkhye kauravyo dhṛtarāṣṭrajaḥ|
tvayā dagdhaṃ hi tatsainyaṃ mayā vijitamāhave||

bhavatā tatkṛtaṃ karma yenāvāpto jayo mayā|
duryodhanasya saṃgrāme tava buddhiparākramaiḥ||

karṇasya ca vadhopāyo yathāvatsaṃpradarśitaḥ|
saindhavasya ca pāpasya bhūriśravasa eva ca||

iyaṃ hi vasudhā sarvā prasādāttava mādhava|
asmānupagatā vīrya nihatāścāpi śatravaḥ||

"The destruction in battle of the Kaurava, the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, that you (i.e. Kṛṣṇa) have undertaken out of friendship for us, is a great accomplishment. For that host which was vanquished by me in battle was (in fact) destroyed by you. It was thanks to your actions (*karma*) that victory is mine. It was the power of your mind (*buddhi*) that showed the way (*upāya*) for effecting the destruction of Duryodhana in battle, as also of Karṇa and the evil Sindhu king (i.e. Jayadratha) and of Bhūriśravas." And Yudhiṣṭhira adds (v. 45): "It is through your grace (*prasāda*), O Mādhava, that the whole earth, great hero, has been subjugated by us, and our enemies have all been slain." Though not an active participant in the fighting, Kṛṣṇa has somehow managed to turn the course of events to their advantage — not, of course, in their personal interests or as a reward for good conduct but in accordance with the needs of this particular juncture in the course of time.

In a later dialogue, the dying Bhīṣma also reminds Yudhiṣṭhira that what he has won is due only to the subtle behind-the-scene maneuverings of Kṛṣṇa/Nārāyaṇa. Using the sacrificial imagery found throughout the Mahābhārata, he reveals that (XIII. App. I. No. 16. 175-187):

tava pārtha jayaḥ kṛtsnastava kīrtistathātulā|
taveyaṃ pṛthivī kṛtsnā nārāyaṇasamāśrayāt|
ayaṃ nāthastavācintyo yasya nārāyaṇo hṛdi|
sa bhavānbhūmipāadhvaryū raṇāgnau hutavānnṛpān|
kṛṣṇaḥ sruveṇa mahatā yugāntāgnisamena vai|
duryodhanastu śocyo'sau saputrabhrātṛbāndhavaḥ|
kṛtavānyo'budhaḥ kopāddharigāṇḍīvavigraham|
daiteyā dānavendrāśca mahākāyā mahābalāḥ|
cakrāgnau kṣayamāpannā dāvāgnau śalabhā iva|
pratiyoddhuṃ na śakyo hi mānuṣaireṣa saṃyuge|
nihīnaiḥ puruṣavyāghra sattvaśaktibalādibhiḥ|
jayo yo'yaṃ yugāntābhaḥ savyasācī raṇāgragaḥ|
tejasā hatavānsarvaṃ suyodhanabalaṃ nṛpa|

"Your complete victory, O son of Pṛthā, your matchless achievements, and the dominion you have achieved over the whole earth are all due to the protection of Nārāyaṇa. Because you have the inconceivable Nārāyaṇa in your heart, you have become an Adhvaryu for pouring multitudes of kings as libations on the blazing fire of battle. This Kṛṣṇa was your great sacrificial ladle resembling the all-destroying fire that appears at the end of the *yuga*. Duryodhana, with his sons, brothers and kinsmen was much to be pitied inasmuch as, moved by wrath, he made war with Hari and the wielder of Gāṇḍīva (i.e. Arjuna). Many sons of Diti (i.e. demons), many foremost of Dānava, of huge bodies and vast strength, have perished in the fire of Kṛṣṇa's discus like insects in a forest conflagration. How incapable, then, must human beings be of battling against that Kṛṣṇa, — human beings who, O tiger among men, are destitute of strength and might. As regards Jaya (i.e. Arjuna), he is a mighty yogin resembling the all-destroying *yuga*-fire in energy. Capable of drawing the bow equally with both hands, he is always in the vanguard of the fight. With his energy, O king, he has slain all the troops of Suyodhana."

The reference to Kṛṣṇa as Nārāyaṇa, the intermediate form of the Supreme Divinity who contains the worlds within himself at the end of a cosmic period (*kalpa*), suggests, according to Biardeau, a symbolic link between his various tricks and stratagems and his divine powers as master of yoga (*yogeśvara*).[37] Finally, the deference shown to him is also revealing

since, "it is in this manner that the teachings of the Bhagavadgītā are put into practice, and we witness heroic warriors renouncing the glory of battle. They fought truly for the dharma and not for themselves".[38]

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[1] P. Lal, The Mahabharata of Vyasa (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980), p. 8.

[2] We have already drawn attention to the association in the Indian context with the "law of the fish," equivalent to our "law of the jungle," a premonition that the big fish will soon start eating the little fish.

[3] Biardeau, "Études de mythologie hindou (V)," in Bulletin de l'école française d'Extrême Orient 65 (1978): 223. In the Mahābhārata itself, this dilution of responsibility is justified in the conversation between Death and Gautamī with Kāla and the Fowler and the serpent. Cf. XIII.1.1ff.

[4] Bhīṣma is the son of Śamtanu by the goddess Gangā who is cursed by the sage Vaśistha to endure an earthly existence as an expiation for the celestial folly of stealing the cow of plenty.

[5] Biardeau, Annuaire 85 (1976-77): 183.

[6] *"Kiṃ tu mātuḥ sa vaiguṇyād, Andha eva bhaviṣyati"*. I.100.10. We sense a touch of irony in the earlier epithets — Dhṛtarāṣtra was hardly blessed with *mahābhāga*. In addition, it may be noted that Dhṛtarāṣtra is not the deserving victim through any fault of his own, but must pay the price for "the fault of his mother and the wrath of a sage" — *māturdoṣād ṛṣeḥ kopād* (I. 61.78).

[7] Biardeau, "Etudes (IV)" p. 223.

[8] Dumézil claims that Dhṛtarāṣtra and Pāṇdu are, in fact, the respective incarnations of the pre-vedic gods Varuṇa and Bhaga, and that Vidura is the incarnation of Aryaman (cf. Mythe et Épopée I, p. 156). However, this is not born out by the facts of the story itself. Dhṛtarāṣtra is an incarnation of a gandharva king.

[9] This is the first of a traditional three-part division of the Mahābhārata. The other two are war (*yuddha*) and the eventual victory (*jaya*) of the new dharma that rises out of the ashes of the old world order. (cf. I.54.19). This bringing of a new dharma by the *avatāra* could only result in the inauguration of a new *kṛtayuga*, probably symbolized by the reign of Parīkṣit. Of course, the Puranic tradition locates the Mahābhārata war at the junction of the *dvāpara* and the *kaliyuga*. But how can the *avatāra* inaugurate a *kaliyuga*? Biardeau has made an extensive analysis of this issue.

[10] Sukthankar, The Meaning of the Mahābhārata, pp. 44-45.

[11] Chaitanya, The Mahābhārata, pp. 184-185.

[12] Biardeau, "Etudes (V)" p. 104.

[13] Ibid, p. 105.

[14] Ibid, p. 103. The salvivic tone is suggested by the parallel she finds between the death of Śiśupāla, particularly the manner in which his *tejas* "salutes" (*√vand*) and is "absorbed" (*viveśa*) into Kṛsna prior to the ceremony (II. 42.23-24), and the absorption of the worlds into Kṛṣna described in chapter 11 of the Bhagavadgītā.

[15] Cf.II.72.28. *Eṣā Pāñcālarājasya; sutaiṣā śrīranuttamā; Pāñcālī Pāṇḍavānetān; daivasṛṣṭopasarpati.*

[16] The second game is symbolically required to provide for a "remnant" to ensure the renaissance of the world and of the *dharma* Cf. Biardeau, Annuaire, 80 (1971-72): 132.

[17] Biardeau, "Etudes (IV)" p. 206.

[18] Biardeau points out that from the point of view of the Kaurava, the Pāndava are the sacrificial victims that have been released instead of being killed. Cf. Annuaire 80 (1971-72): 130.

[19] Biardeau, "Etudes (IV)," pp. 206-207 and "Etudes (V)," pp. 101-106.

[20] The *deva* and the *asura* were both fathered by Kaśyapa, the *asura* being the older brothers (cf. I.60.33; III.34.58).

[21] Both the *rājasūya* and the dicing have their counterparts heralding the ultimate demise of Duryodhana/Kali. Thus the *goharaṇa* or cattle raid — also an integral part of the *rājasūya* ceremony — will result in the humiliation of Duryodhana in Book IV. Cf. Annuaire 86 (1977-78): 152. The events of the dicing will be re-enacted during the mace duel between Duryodhana and Bhīma in Book IX. This time, however, Duryodhana is the one who fights alone while Yudhiṣṭhira is represented by Bhīma who wins by a single "throw" of the mace — also involving a ruse. Cf. Annuaire 90 (1981-82): 147.

[22] Madeleine Biardeau, Le Mahābhārata I (Paris: Flammarion, 1985), p. 206.

[23] It may be noted that he also has allies in the underworld in the form of Ulūpī, daughter of the king of the snakes — he has a child by her (I.206.34); and he has mastered the *gandharva* (in a night battle with Citraratha, king of the *gandharva*, who gives him a clairvoyant power — I.158.40).

[24] Madeleine Biardeau, Le Mahabharata II (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), p. 138.

[25] "On the contrary, Satyaki — whose name denotes the totality of things — is that aspect of the presence of Krsna in the Pandava camp by which he prepares for the renewal of the world and of the dharma by protecting a 'remnant' of human existence. Bhurisravas on the other hand, is a Kuru, grandson of a younger brother of Samtanu and son of Somadatta" Cf. Biardeau, Annuaire 86 (1977-78): 145.

[26] Biardeau, Annuaire 90 (1981-82): 151.

[27] Because of this falsehood, Yudhiṣṭhira's chariot, which had always floated a few inches above the ground, now comes down to the earth.

[28] Biardeau, "Etudes (IV)," p. 252.

[29] Chaitanya, The Mahābhārata, pp. 444-445.

[30] Biardeau, Annuaire 86 (1977-78): 143.

[31] The first curse denies him the brahmanic power and the second takes away the royal powers he obtained from Duryodhana (and later also from Jarāsamdha).

[32] Biardeau, "Etudes (V)," pp. 174-175. Dumézil regards this combat involving the son of the Sun and the son of Indra as the earthly transposition of the old myth where Indra himself triumphs over the Sun by "tearing off" or "stealing" or "sinking" one of the wheels of his chariot. Cf. Dumézil, Mythe et Epopée I, p. 137.

[33] Biardeau, Annuaire 89 (1980-81): 249.

[34] The *avabhṛtha* mentioned by Kṛṣṇa here is the final bath undergone by the person performing the sacrifice.

[35] Biardeau, Annuaire 84 (1975-76): 171-2.

[36] It may also be noted that, although supporting the Pāṇḍava as a result of a wise decision by Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa has already seen to it that his *gopi* Nārāyaṇa army will fight — highly successfully as it turns out — on the side of the Kauravas.

[37] Cf. Biardeau, Annuaire 87 (1978-79): 150.

[38] Biardeau, Le Mahabharata II, p. 321.

V — *Puruṣakāra*

The evidence so far presented would suggest that *Daiva* has a number of aspects depending on the perspective taken. On the one hand, *Daiva* is the eternal rhythm of the Supreme Divinity (*puruṣottama*, Kṛṣṇa as primal God or *ādideva*) in his socio-cosmic role as regulator of the various classes of mobile and immobile creatures (*carācara*; *sthāṇujaṇgama*). For example we are told at V.66.12-13 that:

> *kālacakraṃ jagaccakraṃ yugacakraṃ ca keśavaḥ|*
> *ātmayogena bhagavānparivartayate'niśam||*
>
> *kālasya ca hi mṛtyośca jaṇgamasthāvarasya ca|*
> *īśate bhagavānekaḥ satyametadbravīmi te||*

"The blessed Keśava (= Kṛṣṇa) ceaselessly drives the wheel of time, the wheel of the Universe, the wheel of the *yuga* in a ceaseless round by means of his own *yoga*. What I say is the truth. The Lord alone governs time and death, and the mobile and immobile creatures." The world is kept in motion by the great Mahāyogin "as if in play" — *krīḍanniva* (V.66.10), and the rise and fall of human societies are part and parcel of the eternal *mahāyoga* that governs the various phases of time. From this perspective *Daiva* and *Kāla* (cosmic time) are one, although, from our limited vantage point, the mechanics of the process must remain a mystery. All we see are the effects in terms of the progressive "fall" of the old society and its values to the greed and ambition of evil kings, symbolized by the *asura* who banish the gods and their values (Yudhiṣṭhira as king Dharma) to the forest wilderness, i.e. to the outer peripheries of the human world.

Significantly, *adharma* is not a product of tyranny (Duryodhana was generally loved by the citizenry of Hāstinapura), but is fostered

by a reversal of the traditional functional relationships of society. Instead of fulfilling their leadership role as kings and protectors, the *kṣatriya* are seen to abandon their responsibilities for lives of partial renunciation (e.g. Bhīṣma) or pleasure (e.g. Pāṇḍu). Brahmins such as Droṇa and Aśvatthāman also deviate from their appointed role by employing their spiritual energies for the accumulation of material wealth and to achieve supremacy in the art of weaponry, both traditional preserves of the *kṣatriya*.

On the other hand, a significant shift occurs when the matter is viewed from the level of the *avatāra*, i.e. from the perspective of the divinity engaged in the affairs of the world. The same passage (V.66.8, 11, 14-15) reveals that while Kṛṣṇa could reduce the world to ashes with His *manas* (i.e. as the Mahāyogin He could easily erase all thought of the world from His consciousness), He now acts as if to confuse the world (*lokaṃ saṃmohayanniva*), giving the impression of a powerless peasant (*kīnāśa iva durbalaḥ*) and using the Pāṇḍava as a "cover" (*satraṃ*). In this manner, He is able to deceive the worlds with His *māyāyoga* (*vañcayate lokānmāyāyogena*).

This kind of behavior follows from the fact that the role of the *avatāra* is a human one. As Kṛṣṇa points out to the sage Utanka, he is a human being (*mānuṣa*) among other human beings and must therefore think and act like any other human being (XIV.53.16-19):

yadā tvahaṃ devayonau vartāmi bhṛgunandana|
tadāhaṃ devavatsarvamācarāmi na saṃśayaḥ||

yadā gandharvayonau tu vartāmi bhṛgunandana|
tadā gandharvavaccesṭāḥ sarvāśceṣṭāmi bhārgava||

nāgayonau yadā caiva tadā vartāmi nāgavat|
yakṣarākṣasayonīśca yathāvadvicarāmyaham||

mānuśye vartamāne tu ...|

"When, O descendant of Bhṛgu, I live in the order of the gods, then I quite naturally act in every respect like a god. When, O descendant of Bhṛgu, I live in the order of the *gandharva*, I act in every respect like a *gandharva*, O Bhārgava. When I live in the order of the *nāga*, or in that of the *yakṣa* or the *rākṣasa*, or in the order of humanity, I must act accordingly." With no purpose to achieve in the human sense (VI.25.22/BG.3.22), he nevertheless works tirelessly behind the scenes to shape the course of events. In most accounts he accomplishes this by means of *māyā*, that is, he plays upon the natural propensity of human beings to misrepresent the real facts of existence. This term *māyā* is not always used in the sense of illusion, but it does imply that human beings are generally ignorant of the roles they are called upon to play upon the stage of life. This leads to the mistaken belief that the only lines they have to follow are the ones written by their own desires and inclinations. In fact, however, these desires and inclinations are strings in the hands of the Supreme Puppet-master (V.39.1; V.156.15). As Kṛṣṇa himself explains the matter to Arjuna (VI.40.61/BG.18.61):

īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ hṛddeśe'rjuna tiṣṭhati|
bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā||

"The Lord abides in the heart of all beings, Arjuna. He makes all beings turn by his *māyā* [as if] mounted on a machine." Living beings do not act by virtue of their own power (*svavaśa*) but at the behest of the Lord (XIV.3.1—2); they have no volition (*kāmata*) of their own but function with their minds controlled by Me (*mayābhibhūtavijñāna*) (III.187.22).

Kṛṣṇa himself is a product of this *māya* (cf. VI.26.6/BG.IV.6), but he is also the supreme *māyāvin*, the master magician with the power to chart the course of human events by creating subtle shifts in the perceptions and awareness of those around him. These perceptual and mental tricks are most commonly described by the terms *yoga* and *upāya*. The darkening of the sun is an example of his ability to create a perceptual illusion (*saṃmoha*) by transforming

the appearance of a natural phenomenon. He even has to warn Arjuna in advance (VII. Appendix I, No.16.10) to: make sure you don't imagine that the sun is really going down (*vyapekṣā naiva kartavyā gato'stamiti bhāskaraḥ*). These powers are also evident in the creation of thousands of separate forms of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa on the battlefield that sow confusion among the *saṃśaptaka* warriors (VII.18.11-13).

The power of truth (*satya*) is preferred by Kṛṣṇa in commanding the resuscitation of the dead Parikṣit, killed in the womb of his mother by Aśvatthāman. This truth command is accomplished through an exchange of energies; the energy of the Brahmāstra weapon that killed him is withdrawn and replaced by the *tejas* of the infant king, which is seen to illuminate the room as it returns to his body (XIV.68.18-24; XIV.69.1). Truth is clearly a more potent instrument that is used in cases involving a permanent change in the natural order. A similar example, this time involving a transmutation of energy, is the conversion of the destructive energy of the *vaiṣnava* weapon of Bhagadatta into a victory garland on Kṛṣṇa's breast (VII. 28.17-18). The means employed are not mentioned in this case, although it is clearly the result of a magical power of some kind.

The terms *māyā* and *upāya* both convey a sense of subterfuge, ruse or magical trick that sows confusion or turmoil in the opposing camp. In some cases this may be nothing more than what we might consider a shrewd sense of human psychology or, as the epic puts it, a knowledge of place and time — *deśakāla* (e.g. XII.79.31; XII.297.16). "Skill in action is yoga" (*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*), says Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgītā (2.50). As with so many of these ruses, the Bhagadatta case also raises a moral issue, the issue here being whether the violation of Kṛṣṇa's prior commitment of non-participation in the battle is justified by the need to save Arjuna's life. Here too, the conditions of place and time form the critical element. As Bhīṣma explains to Yudhiṣṭhira (XII.79.31-32):

bhavatyadharmo dharmo hi dharmādharmāvubhāvapi|

kāraṇāddeśakālasya deśakālaḥ sa tādṛśaḥ||

maitrāḥ krūraṇi kurvanto jayanti svargamuttamaṁ|
dharmyāḥ pāpāni kurvanto gacchanti paramāṃ gatim||

"Dharma becomes *adharma*, and *adharma* becomes dharma according to the conditions (*kāraṇa*) of place and time (*deśakāla*). Such is the power of place and time (i.e. in determining the character of human acts). Even by doing acts of cruelty friends have reached the highest heaven (*svarga*). Even by doing sinful acts good people have achieved the highest state." The course of the dharma is subtle indeed.

Finally, the intrusion of *daiva* may also be observed through the eyes of the protagonists themselves as an outrageous fortune that thwarts their most cherished desires, or the source of an agonizing choice that immobilizes or destroys them. This is most clearly apparent in the case of the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra. As the war progresses, the mounting Kaurava losses appear to him as a superior fortune opposed to reason and human volition. Four types of battle situation have been noted by Dumézil:

> 1. Whenever a great warrior of his army falls or fails, he sees such misfortune as proof of the overriding power of an opposing destiny: otherwise, how could such a man be vanquished? 2. In contemplating total defeat, a massive retreat of his army, the proof is of a similar nature: were it not for destiny, how could such troops, well-armed, well trained and commanded as they are, give way? 3. In judging a 'train of blows' where his side is merely checked, this is proof once again: without destiny, why would success and failure not be evenly divided? 4. When, in seeking to explain this inequality in the effects, he is forced to concede an inequality at the level of cause, in other words that in all areas the Pāṇḍavas are superior to his army, this is again proof: natural law is flawed from within, with respect to the very resources and relations of protagonists who should be equal (in

terms of their birth, education, technical know-how), and are not.[1]

Dumézil represents the blind king as the incarnation of the vedic god Bhaga, the traditional distributor of the "shares" (*bhāgā, bhāgya, bhāgadheya*) allotted to each man and woman at birth. As such, he is an ambiguous figure, associated, on the one hand, with unjust chance (*haṭha*)[2] — the "blind Bhaga" of classical mythology — and, on the other, with love and marriage and general good fortune (*phālguna*, the spring marriage month is "*bhagadaivata*", i.e. bestower of conjugal felicity). This ambiguity is expressed, according to Dumézil, in the division of the king's life into an earlier period marked by the disastrous events leading to the death of Duryodhana, and the post-war period marked by his reconciliation with the Pāṇḍava and with his own past.[3]

There is no ambiguity about his growing troubles through most of the action, however, leading to an endless litany of complaints against cosmic justice as he becomes more and more convinced that he is the victim of an opposing *daiva*. The modern reader would be more inclined to agree with Saṃjaya in tracing his difficulties to a weakness of the will, a failure to take action where action is due. Although the blind king has the eyesight of insight (*prajñācakṣu*), he is unable to exercise it. As he admits (V.156.4-6):

diṣṭameva paraṃ manye pauruṣaṃ cāpyanarthakam|
yadahaṃ jānamāno'pi yuddhadoṣānkṣayodayān||

tathāpi nikṛtiprajñaṃ putraṃ durdyutadevinam|
na śaknomi niyantuṃ vā kartuṃ vā hitamātmanaḥ||

bhavatyeva hi me sūta buddhirdoṣānudarśinī|
duryodhanaṃ samāsādya punaḥ sā parivartate||

"It is fate (*diṣṭa*) that is superior in my view, and man's efforts (*pauruṣa*) are of no value. While I fully realize that the evils of war will bring destruction, I cannot restrain my deceitful son who

cheated at gambling nor act in my own interest. My mind (*buddhi*) does indeed see that it is wrong, O bard, but on encountering Duryodhana, it goes into a spin."

Duryodhana is clearly the very opposite of his father. Driven by hatred of the Pāṇḍava and an unbridled will to power, he knows exactly what he wants and is determined to spare no effort to see his ruthless ambitions fulfilled. His references to *daiva* in the days of Pāṇḍava ascendency (e.g. I.192.10; II.43.30; II.44.1) are an expression of despondency and frustration at the growing fortunes of his cousins who have not only thumbed their noses at all his evil schemes, but married the Pāñcāla princess, gained half the kingdom, and made themselves masters of the world to boot. Śakuni reassures him by telling him not to worry about the good luck (*bhāgadheya*) of the Pāṇḍava but to trust in Śakuni's own superior knowledge of the dice (*akṣeṣvabhijñāta*). In judging the subsequent course of events, Yudhiṣṭhira himself looks upon the game as the product of an uncompromising *daiva* which cannot be avoided, even at the prospect of losing all. His predicament is rooted in what he sees as a categorical imperative imposed by a conflicting dharma of filial obligations and duties imposed by an ill-conceived vow.[4]

These differences in response to individual circumstance suggest that the problems of epic characters in relation to their fellows and to the society and world around them are the product of complications and contradictions inherent in their own being. Although not acknowledged in so many words, there is a sense that *daiva* is often a function of character (*śīla; svabhāva*). Bhīṣma, for example, tells Yudhiṣṭhira (XII.172.11):

svabhāvādeva saṃdṛśya vartamānāḥ pravṛttayaḥ|
svabhāvaniratāḥ sarvāḥ paritapye na kenacit||

"When I consider that the propensities for action (i.e. *pravṛtti* in contrast to *nivṛtti*) proceeding from nothing but nature (*svabhāva*) are all determined by nature (*svabhāva*), I am not tormented by anything." According to a statement by Vyāsa, this character (*śīla*) is

fixed at birth (III.9.10), a view supported by the absence of any notable case of a *jīvanmukta* (one who becomes enlightened during the course of life) in the epic.[5] On the other hand, as Klaes and Chaitanya have shown in the cases of Yudhiṣṭhira, Karṇa, and others, there is clear evidence of character development, the realization of the potentials of a person contained, in germ, at birth.

Given the countless occasions for frustration or impotence before the weight of opposing circumstance in the Mahābhārata, it might seem surprising that human beings are given any credit at all for what happens in the world. Nevertheless, we discover that the human estate is privileged with an agency free enough not only to choose their own ends with respect to *kāma* (sensual and aesthetic pleasures), *artha* (material security and well-being), dharma (virtue) or *mokṣa* (liberation), but also the means to achieve them, fair or foul as it pleases them. Most importantly, it provides the all-important opportunity for spiritual advancement (XII.286.31-32):

caṇḍālatve'pi mānuṣyaṃ sarvathā tāta durlabham|

iyaṃ hi yoniḥ prathamā yāṃ prāpya jagatīpate|
ātmā vai śakyate trātuṃ karmabhiḥ śubhalakṣaṇaiḥ||

"The status of humanity is exceedingly difficult to obtain, even that of an outcast (*caṇḍāla*). For the foremost of births, O lord of the earth, is that by attaining which the soul (*ātman*) can be rescued by pure acts." This suggests that, in contrast to the instinctual determinisms of lower life-forms, a human embodiment offers at least some potential for initiative and self-determination.

This is not, however, to suggest that there is free will in the modern sense, for it is abundantly clear that for the epic author, and for Indian tradition generally, it is not the so-called "will" of the empirical self (*jīva*) that is free but the self-realized transcendental self or *ātman*. The empirical self can, at best, identify with particular motives, cast its lot with them, and, to that extent, "will" them. But this so-called "will" is only the instrument of an entity whose true freedom is effectively blocked by its identification with the various

dispositions and impulses that collectively constitute what is subjectively experienced as "I" (*ahaṃkāra*) and objectively described as "person" (*puruṣa*). The great problem of human life is precisely the bondage (*√bandh*) of this will, a fact that may explain why, as R.N. Dandekar has noted, "the theoretical question as to whether the human will is free or not does not seem to have particularly bothered a Hindu."[6] This may also explain why epic Sanskrit has no term to express the "free will" of an embodied self.

Significantly, this state of bondage is not traced to any moral transgression but to an epistemological "fall" into ignorance (*avidyā*). This process of self-forgetting is outlined by one of the brahmins accompanying the Pāṇḍava in the Kāmyaka forest, — the very name of which is associated with *kāma* = desire (III.2.63-68. See also VI.24.62-63/BG.2.62-63):

ṣaḍindriyāṇi viṣayaṃ samāgacchanti vai yadā|
tadā prādurbhavatyeṣāṃ pūrvasaṃkalpajaṃ manaḥ||

mano yasyendriyagrāmaviṣayaṃ prati coditam|
tasyautsukyaṃ saṃbhavati pravṛttiścopajāyate||

tataḥ saṃkalpavīryeṇa kāmena viṣayeṣubhiḥ|
viddhaḥ patati lobhāgnau jyotirlobhātpataṃgavat||

tato vihārairāhārairmohitaśca viśāṃ pate|
mahāmohamukhe magno nātmānamavabudhyate||

evaṃ patati saṃsāre tāsu tāsviha yoniṣu|
avidyākarmatṛṣṇābhirbhrāmyamāno'tha cakravat||

brahmādiṣu tṛṇānteṣu bhūteṣu parivartate|
jale bhuvi tathākāśe jāyamānaḥ punaḥ punaḥ||

"When the six senses (*indriya*) are focused on their respective objects (*viṣaya*), the mind (*manas*), prompted by habitual modes of thinking (*pūrvasaṃkalpa* = 'the ordered thoughts of the past'), is set in motion. With the mind provoked in this manner by the various

objects of the senses, desire (*utsukya*) is born and action (*pravṛtti*) is initiated. Then, with the desires (*kāma*) stimulated by the arrows of the sense objects and amplified by force of habit, he falls into the fires of greed (*lobha*) as a moth falls from its attraction to the light. Caught up in fun and feasting he finally sinks into the jaws of the great delusion (*mahāmoha*), and forgets who he really is. In this way, he falls into the *saṃsāra*, spinning about in womb after womb, his mind afflicted by ignorance (*avidyā*), *karma* and thirst (*tṛṣṇā*). He cycles through the forms of existence from Brahmā to a blade of grass, born again and again in water, on land, or in the air." This is the path of the ignorant (*abudhānāṃ gati*) determined by antecedent conditions, in contrast to that of the wise who delight in freedom (*vimokṣarati*), freedom being defined as free of love and hatred (*rāgadveṣavinirmukta*).

Freedom may be a major casualty of this epistemological fall but it is not entirely obscured or obstructed at the level of humanity. Nonetheless, there is an important distinction between the freedom of *mokṣa* and the human powers which allow for self-effort (*yatna*) and initiative (*puruṣakāra*). *Mokṣa* is a freedom of being comparable to what Rollo May describes as *essential freedom* in contrast to *freedom of doing*. Whereas the latter refers to the genesis and course of an action the former "refers to the context out of which the urge to act emerges. It refers to the deeper level of one's attitude and is the fount out of which 'freedom of doing' is born. Hence, I call this second kind of freedom essential freedom."[7] Modern talk of freedom tends to focus on freedom of doing but the term is often so loosely employed that William James even argued for its abandonment. He complained that: "Nowadays, we have a *soft* determinism which abhors harsh words, and, repudiating fatality, necessity, and even predetermination, says that its real name is freedom; for freedom is only necessity understood, and bondage to the highest is identical with true freedom."[8] Rollo May compares this ambiguity to "a flock of white butterflies bestirred in front of you as you walk through the woods: rising in cluster they flit off in an infinite number of directions."[9] Paul Ricoeur comes closest to the crux of the issue when he asks: "Where is freedom? In the removal of all

dependency? In the lack of determination? In the anxiety of choosing oneself? Or does it coincide with the discovery and understanding of an inner necessity, deeper than any choice and any kind of autonomy? In a word, does the highest degree of freedom consist in the surging up of an absolute power of choosing or in the love of fate?"[10]

From the epic point of view, the essential freedom of *mokṣa* is the summum bonum and final end of *all* life. But it is not until the advent of *human* life that the necessary powers of right effort (*yatna*) become available as an essential (though clearly not a sufficient) condition for its accomplishment. Freedom of doing emerges as a potential only with the advent of powers that can override the instinctual determinisms of the animal world. Recognized among the most important of these powers in the epic is the ability to choose between the moral order of the world (dharma) — recognized through external prescription or inner imperative — and a life of unbridled self-indulgence, seeking refuge in desire (*kāmamāśritya*) (VI.39/BG.16.10). The great majority of humans show little promise of spiritual advancement. Dependent on other forces (*paritantra*) like lumps of clay (XII.277.19) they are worthless (*niḥsāra*) as the pith of the banana-plant (XII.287.16). Even the wise (*prājñā*) engaged in spiritual practices (*abhyāsa*) are compared to blind men who finally succeed in moving about their own house (XII.287.18).

We must postpone more detailed discussion of this important issue until Chapter IX. Suffice it to say that the necessary conditions of moral choice include an ability to discriminate between "right" and "wrong" actions (however defined) and the power to choose the preferred alternative. An "ought" must imply a "can." This principle is implicitly acknowledged in the epic by the fact that it is the actor himself or herself to whom the moral responsibility — in the form of the fruits (*phala*) of the action — is assigned. It would be the greatest hoax (*vipralambho'yamatyanta*), says Yudhiṣṭhira (III.32.26), if acts were fruitless. The connection between act and fruit is the guarantor of the entire structure of vedic morality, the whole edifice of the

dharma with its duties and rewards. He is, nevertheless, forced to admit (vv.33-34) that:

karmaṇāmuta puṇyānāṃ pāpānāṃ ca phalodayaḥ|
prabhavaścāpyayaścaiva devaguhyāni bhāmini||

natāni veda yaḥ kaścinmuhyantyatra prajā imāḥ|
rakṣyāṇyetāni devānāṃ gūḍhamāyā hi devatāḥ||

"The distribution of the fruits of acts, both good and bad, their origin (*prabhava*) and disappearance (*apyaya*), are mysteries of the gods, my angry wife. Nobody knows them, these creatures are in the dark about them, they are guarded by the gods, for the *māyā* of the gods is a dark secret." Note the use of the same term as that used in the mythology to describe the creation and disappearance of the cosmos (*prabhavāpyayau*. cf. p. 25).

Beyond the incipient freedoms that constitute the mysterious inner sources of human action itself is the ability, once action has been initiated, to overcome the resistances of the world that thwart the realization of human purposes. These resistances, experienced as *daiva*, may include the untoward results of past behaviour (such as the *daiva* that plagues the life of Dhṛtarāṣṭra) as well as natural impediments such as cold and heat, rain, hunger and thirst (cf. V.75.8-10). It is this drive to succeed that constitutes *puruṣakāra* (or *pauruṣa*), a term that suggests, etymologically, the power to realize (*√kṛ* = to make) something human (*puruṣa*), that is to say, to effect a result in accordance with one's desires (or will). In effect, *puruṣakāra* has a more limited sphere of application than *daiva* to the extent that the latter may intervene at any stage in the genesis and course of an act; in determining the purpose or end sought (e.g. II.45.54), in deciding to act or not to act (e.g. II.67.3), in the choice of alternative courses of action (e.g. II.72.8-11), and as an untoward interference in the production of the result. *Puruṣakāra*, on the other hand, is normally restricted to describing the instrumental capacity to realize one's purposes in the form of an external worldly event. In the vocabulary of freedom it is the freedom to enjoy the fruits of action

in accordance with the inner pressures of organic life covered by the term *kāma* (desire).

The respective roles of divine and human agency impinging on the individual from his inner and outer environments would thus include destiny (connoted by terms such as *daiva*; *diṣṭa*; *iśvaranirdiṣṭa*; *vidhi*; *bhavitavyaṃ*; *vidhātṛvihitaṃ*, etc.), chance or luck (connoted by terms such as *haṭha*; *yadṛcchā*; *bhāgadheya*; *bhāgya*; *saṃgati*, etc.), and various powers attributable to human self-determination and initiative (collectively represented by a variety of terms which include *puruṣakāra*; *pauruṣa*; *puruṣārtha*; *puruṣaprayatna*; *mānuṣya*; *utthāna*; *vyāyāma*; *īha*; *svaceṣṭita*; *svakarmatā*; *dākṣya*; *vyavasāya*, etc.). Together, these are the three determinants (*traidha*) of any successful human endeavor or the three doors to worldly success (*tridvārāmarthasiddhi*). They are reviewed by Draupadī as follows (III.33.30-32):

sarvameva haṭhenaike diṣṭenaike vadantyuta|
puruṣaprayatnajaṃ kecittraidhametannirucyate||

na caivaitāvatā kāryaṃ manyanta iti cāpare|
asti sarvamadṛśyaṃ tu diṣṭaṃ caiva tathā haṭhaḥ|
dṛśyate hi haṭhāccaiva diṣṭāccārthasya saṃtatiḥ||

kiṃciddaivādhaṭhātkiṃcitkacideva svakarmataḥ|
puruṣaḥ phalamāpnoti caturthaṃ nātra kāraṇam|
kuśalāḥ pratijānanti ye tattvaviduṣo janāḥ||

"There are those who hold that everything is done by chance (*haṭha*), those who hold that it is fate (*diṣṭa*), and those who hold that everything springs from human effort (*puruṣaprayatna*). These are called the three determinants (*traidha*). But there are others who think that this is not enough to account for what happens (*kārya*). But we cannot really determine whether it is chance or fate that brought it about; for we only see the causal connection of events (*saṃtati*), springing either from chance or fate. Some comes from destiny, some from chance, some from one's own doing

(*svakarmatā*); and it is thus that a man gets the fruit; there is no other causal factor (*kāraṇa*); so profess capable men, wise in first principles (*tattva*)."

Kṛṣṇa enumerates the following three marks of action in response to Bhīma (V.75.8-12):

sumantritaṃ sunītaṃ ca nyāyataścopapāditam|
kṛtaṃ mānuṣyakaṃ karma daivenāpi virudhyate||

daivamapyakṛtaṃ karma pauruṣeṇa vihanyate|
śītamuṣṇaṃ tathā varṣaṃ kṣutpipāse ca bhārata||

yadanyaddiṣṭabhāvasya puruṣasya svayaṃkṛtam|
tasmādanavarodhaśca vidyate tatra lakṣaṇam||

lokasya nānyato vṛttaḥ pāṇḍavānyatra karmaṇaḥ|
evaṃbuddhiḥ pravarteta phalaṃ syādubhayānvatāt||

ya evaṃ kṛtabuddhiḥ sankarmasveva pravartate|
nāsiddhau vyathate tasya na siddhau harṣamaśnute||

"However well intended and conducted and however effectively carried out (*nyāyata* = according to rule), human action (*karma*) may be opposed by fate (*daiva*). On the other hand, some activity (*karma*), or something left undone by *daiva*, may be salvaged by human effort (*pauruṣa*) — like cold and heat, as well as rain, hunger and thirst, Bhārata. And again, an action personally undertaken by a man with the right understanding may not be impeded by fate (*diṣṭa*). These are known as the [three] distinguishing marks (*lakṣaṇa*) of action. Action (*karma*) is the only way of creating an effect (*vṛtta*) in the world, O Pāṇḍava, and the smart man (*buddhi*) will carry on fearlessly, whatever the result (*phala*) may be. One who has come to realize this (*kṛtabuddhi*) will perform action without being discouraged by failure or overjoyed with success (*siddhi*)."[11] The successful realization of human purposes in the world is subject to the interplay of the various causalities of self and other, here designated as human effort and fate. Chance as a third ingredient is

not mentioned, presumably because it would complicate matters and contribute nothing to the main purpose of the discourse — which is to prompt a change of attitude on the part of Bhīma.

Kṛṣṇa is thus in substantial agreement with Draupadī that human beings have certain powers of their own for realizing their desires in the world. Their respective triads both recognize the fact that *puruṣakāra* is impeded or assisted by a complex web of causality already operating in the world (*saṃsāra*) out there. Tampering with this intricate fabric can affect the world and ourselves in an unforeseen manner. When the attempt to realize our desires fails, as is often the case, the advice of Kṛṣṇa is to accept the situation with equanimity. This, of course, calls for a rather different sort of capacity within human beings, the power to effect a change of attitude rather than circumstances. Is this also *puruṣakāra*?

In contrast to this position is the claim that the very notion of agent (*kartṛ*) is an erroneous one, implying the denial of *puruṣakāra*. This position is typical for the privileged few who enjoy the essential freedom of release (*mokṣa*) from the conditions of the world. Questioned by Yudhiṣṭhira as to whether or not the agent is the doer of an action, Bhīṣma quotes the "good" *asura* Prahlāda, advising Indra as follows (XII.215.17-18):

> *yastu kartāramātmānaṃ manyate sādhvasādhunoḥ|*
> *tasya doṣavatī prajñā svamūrtyajñeti me matiḥ||*
>
> *yadi syātpuruṣaḥ kartā śakrātmaśreyase dhruvam|*
> *ārambhāstasya sidhyeranna ca jātu parābhavet||*

"Whoever believes himself to be the author of acts good or bad suffers from an erroneous understanding, indeed is the very epitome of ignorance in my opinion. If, O Śakra (= Indra), the person were really the agent, then all those acts undertaken for his own benefit would certainly be crowned with success, and none of them would ever come to grief." He then goes on to argue that it is not the agent

(*kartṛ*) but *svabhāva* (inherent nature) that is responsible for the fruits of action (XII.215.24-27):

karmaṇāṃ viṣayaṃ kṛtsnamahaṃ vakṣyāmi tacchṛṇu||

yathā vedayate kaścidodanaṃ vāyaso vadan|
evaṃ sarvāṇi karmāṇi svabhāvasyaiva lakṣaṇam||

vikāráneva yo veda na veda prakṛtiṃ parām|
tasya stambho bhavedbālyānnāsti stambho'nupaśyataḥ||

svabhāvabhāvino bhāvānsarvāneveha niścaye|
budhyamānasya darpo vā māno vā kiṃ kariṣyati||

"I will instruct you in full on the subject of action (*karma*). Now listen! Just as a crow eating some food causes it to be known [to other crows] by the sound it makes, all our acts are an expression of nature (*svabhāva*). He who does not know the highest state of nature (*prakṛti*) but only her transformations (*vikāra* = the forms of the world) becomes stupefied in consequence of his ignorance [literally his childlike perplexity]. But he who is capable of understanding that everything here is really the result of nature (*svabhāva*) is never at a loss. In consequence of one's certain conviction in this respect how could one ever be affected by pride or arrogance?"

From this perspective, there is no agent since all the effects that we know as the world, including the effects of human action, flow from the nature of things (including what we label as character in human beings). The word *svabhāva* is used as a generic term that describes the inherent tendency for any being or thing to express its own inner nature. Just as it is the nature of the sun to shine, so it is the nature of a particular human being to express his desires and purposes in action. There is no agent with a liberty of indifference between acting in one way rather than in another.

This emphasis on the inner life may also be observed in another discussion of the three elements (including the element of chance). The interest in this case centers on the substitution of *pūrvakarma*

(previous acts), for the more concrete term *puruṣakāra* (human initiative). After voicing the belief that (V.156.14):

na hyeva kartā puruṣaḥ karmaṇoḥ śubhapāpayoḥ|
asvatantro hi puruṣaḥ kāryate dāruyantravat||

"A man is not the agent of his good and evil deeds: he is helplessly manipulated like a wooden puppet (*yantra*)," Saṃjaya adds (V.156.15):

kecidīśvaranirdiṣṭāḥ kecideva yadṛcchayā|
pūrvakarmabhirapyanye traidhametadvikṛṣyate||

"Some people are fated (*nirdiṣṭa*) by the Lord, others by chance (*yadṛcchā*), others by previous acts (*pūrvakarma*). It is this triad (*traidha*) that is being torn apart." A link is thereby established between past and present action on which any doctrine of karma must be based, the implication here being that even *puruṣakāra* is in some way fated by the habitual patterns of behaviour we would call character.

Review of discussion on these matters in the epic clearly shows that a certain freedom of manoeuvre is acknowledged with respect to activities that have little to do with essential freedom of being or *mokṣa*. These include the power to choose among a variety of secular and spiritual goals of life falling under the general headings of sensual/aesthetic satisfaction (*kāma*), personal security and well-being (*artha*), moral striving (dharma) and commitment to achieving the final beatitude of *mokṣa* (freedom of choice), the capacity to realize these aspirations by taking the initiative (*puruṣakāra* or freedom of doing) and, last but not least, the ability to accept or reject the moral imperatives of conscience and community in so doing (moral freedom). Significantly, the respective values attributed to these goals appears to divide fairly consistently between those firmly attached to the conditions of this world and quite content to seek happiness in the satisfaction of their desires, and those committed to severing the bonds of attachment to the things and

beings of the world (*saṃsāra*). This is evident throughout the Mahābhārata, but particularly in the Śāntiparva and, most notably, in the Bhagavadgīta (VI. 23-40).

A prime example of this dichotomy is the differences of view among the Pāṇḍava themselves revealed at the conclusion of the Rājadharma section of the Śāntiparva (XII.161.1-48). They are returning home from their first visit to Bhīṣma who lies dying on the field of Kurukṣetra when Yudhiṣṭhira suddenly asks the question (XII.161.2):

dharme cārthe ca kāme ca lokavṛttiḥ samāhitā|
teṣāṃ garīyānkatamo madhyamaḥ ko laghuśca kaḥ||

"The course of the world depends upon dharma, *artha* (material and psychological well-being) and *kāma* (sensual pleasures, but also desire). Which among them is the most important, which the second, and which the least in importance?" Not surprisingly, Vidura argues for the supremacy of dharma. By this he does not mean the socialized rules of caste or stage of life (*varṇāśramadharma*) but the inner values and attitudes essential to a meaningful life of spiritual accomplishment (*ātmasaṃpada*). He emphasizes a mix of orthodox and *bhakti* values such as scriptural study (*bahuśrutya*), asceticism (*tapas*), self-surrender (*tyāga*), faith (*śraddhā*), the performance of sacrifices (*yajñakriyā*), forbearance (*kṣamā*), purity of heart (*bhāvaśuddhi*), compassion (*dayā*), truth (*satya*) and self-restraint (*saṃyama*). He is the mouthpiece of tradition (*ucyate* = "it is said that") in concluding that (XII.161.8):

dharmo rājanguṇaśreṣṭho madhyamo hyartha ucyate|
kāmo yavīyāniti ca pravadanti manīṣiṇaḥ||

"It is said, O king, that dharma is the best in point of merit, that *artha* is the second, and that *kāma* is said by the wise to be the least significant."

As a man of action rather than reflection, it is only natural that Arjuna would support the *arthavān* (v.8), the king who cherishes his dependents with objects of enjoyment and chastises his foes with the rod of punishment (*daṇḍa*). The world is a field of action (*karmabhūmi*), and it is *artha* that constitutes the sum and substance of all acts (*karmaṇāmavyatikrama*). Without a social order (*ṛta*) based on *artha*, there would be no dharma or *kāma* (v.11). Nakula and Sahadeva also agree that *artha* must be pursued in a firm and vigorous manner (*dṛḍhaṃ kuryādyogairuccāvacaih*), but they add the important caveat that it must be based on dharma. They thus adopt the middle position that (XII.161.26):

dharmaṃ samācaretpūrvaṃ tathārthaṃ dharmasaṃyutam|
tataḥ kāmaṃ caretpaścātsiddhārthasya hi tatphalam||

"The first to be practiced should be dharma followed by *artha* based on (the principles of) dharma. Pleasure (*kāma*) comes only at the end, for it is dependent on the successful accomplishment (*siddhārtha*) of the other two."

At this point we are jolted out of our orthodox comfort with what looks like a defence of sensual pleasure (*kāma*) by Bhīma who is, of course, the embodiment of the impetuous force and passions of the wind (Bhīma = Vāyu). This turns out to be a false alarm, however, when we realize he has shifted the focus of debate from the notion of *kāma* as a *goal* of life (i.e. a *puruṣārtha*) to the more penetrating and vital truth that (XII.161.28):

nākāmaḥ kāmayatyarthaṃ nākāmo dharmamicchati|
nākāmaḥ kāmayāno'sti tasmātkāmo viśiṣyate||

"Without desire (*kāma* i.e. in the sense of motivation), one would have no desire for worldly prosperity (*artha*). Without desire, one would have no wish for dharma. One destitute of desire has no wish for anything. It is for this reason that *kāma* is superior." He points out that the very *ṛṣi* engaged in austere *tapas* in the forest are prompted in their activities by *kāma*, not to speak of more ordinary

folk engaged in the mundane tasks of life. Everyone in this world is driven by desire and (v.33):

nāsti nāsīnnābhaviṣyadbhūtaṃ kāmātmakātparam|
etatsāraṃ mahārāja dharmārthāvatra saṃśritau||

"The man or woman beyond the reach of desire is not, was, and never will be seen in this world. This, O king, is a fact. Both dharma and *artha* are thus based on desire." It is the very source (*yoni* = literally the "womb") without which the various activities of the world would no longer be seen (*na vividhā lokaceṣṭā dṛṣṭāḥ*) (425*). From these very valid premisses he draws the conclusion that (v.38):

dharmārthakāmāḥ samameva sevyā
yastvekasevī sa naro jaghanyaḥ|
dvayostu dakṣaṃ pravadanti madhyaṃ
sa uttamo yo niratastrivarge||

"Dharma, worldly prosperity (*artha*) and pleasure (*kāma*) should receive equal attention. The one who attends to only one of them is an inferior person. He is said to be mediocre who devotes himself to two of them. But superior is the one who attends to all three." This conclusion is illegitimate in that he shifts the focus back to the sense of *kāma* as a goal of human activity (the word *trivarga* implies the notion of *puruṣārtha* regarded as a triple system).

In spite of these obvious deficiencies, however, the passage is important in providing the foil for the response of Yudhiṣṭhira in what follows. He has long been caught between the need to protect the legitimate rights of the family and a sincere conviction that war is an unmitigated evil. This conflict is the source of his constant inclination to abandon the kingdom in favour of a life of renunciation in the forest — which has been denied him under the dharma of the warrior prince (*kṣatriyadharma*). It is thus easy to understand why he would wish to break the bondage of desire. In his opinion (XII.161.42):

yo vai na pāpe nirato na puṇye
nārthe na dharme manujo na kāme|
vimuktadoṣaḥ samaloṣṭakāṇcanaḥ
sa mucyate duḥkhasukhārthasiddheḥ||

"The man who is not attached to good or evil deeds; the one who is not attached to *artha* or dharma or *kāma*, who is free of all faults, who looks equally at gold and a clod of earth, he is liberated from all worldly ambitions that are productive of pleasure and pain." Interestingly enough, Yudhiṣṭhira uses the very buddhist-sounding term *nirvāṇaparā* — supreme extinction (of all desires) — to describe this state of being. For him, the state of emancipation (*mokṣa*) is the best of all possible worlds. From this perspective we are all governed by divine decree (*vidhi*) (XII.161.45-6):

etatpradhānaṃ na tu kāmakāro
yathā niyukto'smi tathā carāmi|
bhūtāni sarvāni vidhirniyuṇkte
vidhirbalīyāniti vitta sarve||

na karmaṇāpnotyanavāpyamarthaṃ
yadbhāvi sarvaṃ bhavatīti vitta|
trivargahīno'pi hi vindate'rthaṃ
tasmādidaṃ lokahitāya guhyam||

"This [view] is the best. We cannot do as we please. I act as I am bound to act. All creatures are governed by divine decree (*vidhi*). All of you should realize that this divine decree is the greatest influence (i.e. in our lives). What is unobtainable can never be had by means of acts. You must realize that everything happens as it is meant to happen. *Artha* is only really understood by one who is free of the triple system (of the *puruṣārtha*). This is indeed the invaluable secret of the world." We must discover what subtleties of interpretation are hidden in these divergences.

[1] Dumezil, Mythe et Epopee I, p. 166.

[2] Van Buitenen notes that *hatha* literally means "violence," i.e. a violent interference in the established pattern. Cf.van Buitenen, The Mahābhārata, vol. II, p. 822.

[3] Dumezil, Mythe et Epopee I, p. 254. The evidence for this link is somewhat tenuous, however, particularly in view of the statements made on at least two occasions in the Mahābhārata that Dhṛtarāṣtra is the incarnation of a king of the Gandharva (I.61.77; XV.39.8).

[4] Yudhiṣṭhira later admits to a less commendable motive, his own desire for power and prestige (III.35.2; XII.1). Balarāma also puts the blame on Yudhisthira, even suggesting that it was he who initiated the challenge. (V.2.9-11).

[5] It may be noted that the Pāṇḍavas themselves are not destined for *mokṣa* in this life. Even before their death Bhīṣma informs them that their sojourn in devaloka will be followed by rebirth in human form. It is only in the next creation (*visarga*) that they will attain to the status of a perfected soul (*siddha*) among the gods. Cf. XII.272.68-69.

[6] R.N. Dandekar, "Man in Hindu Thought," in Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 43, 1-4, (1962): 54.

[7] Ibid. p. 55.

[8] William James, The Will to Believe and other Essays in Popular Philosophy (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p. 149.

[9] Rollo May, Freedom and Destiny (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 52.

[10] Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophy of Will and Action" in The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: an Anthology of his Work, eds. Charles E Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 65.

[11] In the Anuśāsanaparva (XIII.143.24) there is mention of the four weapons (*caturastra*) attached to the body (represented as Kṛṣṇa's chariot), identified in the English translation by Ganguli as Destiny, etc.

VI — Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti

It is apparent that Bhīma and Yudhiṣṭhira represent contrasting poles of the epic spectrum of values. On the one hand, there is the man firmly anchored in the affairs of this world for whom fulfillment consists in the satisfaction of his desires; on the other, a troubled soul committed to escape from what it regards as an impossible burden. Biardeau goes even further in depicting these two personalities as "the two extreme values that command the cyclical 'history' of the universe. Creation occurs to allow individuals to crave for *mokṣa*, and to ensure the continuity of that process, the world of *kāma* should be kept constantly recurring through alternating cosmic days and nights (the cosmic nights being equated to the yogic sleep of the Puruṣottama at the highest level, or of Nārāyaṇa between two *kalpas*)."[1] As advocate of the world of *kāma*, Bhīma would be a natural ally and sponsor of a desire-driven freedom of doing (*puruṣakāra*), while the more reflective Yudhiṣṭhira might be more conscious of the unfreedom inherent in the very nature of human desire.

This contrast of values is reflected in religious practice by an important distinction that runs through the epic between the *pravṛttidharma*, based on the injunctions and social rules contained in the ritual sections of the vedic corpus and the Dharmaśāstras, and the *nivṛttidharma* advocated in the Upaniṣads. The former governs the lives of the vast majority of epic humanity desirous of the various worldly or heavenly rewards of the *saṃsāra* — all of which are necessarily temporary since they are conditioned by time (*kālaparimāne*). The *nivṛttidharma* — involving the abandonment of all ritual and social obligations (*saṃnyāsa*) — is proposed for those seeking a permanent solution to the problems of human life in the form of liberation (*mokṣa*) from the eternal round of birth and death (*saṃsāra*).

The conflicting injunctions of the Veda in this respect were clearly the source of a considerable amount of confusion and misunderstanding in epic times. As Vyāsa himself must concede, they constitute something of "an

enigma" (*gahvara*) for most people (XII.233.4). And his disciples, including his own son Śuka, find it necessary to ask why the Lord would sanction two *dharmas* leading to such radically different states of existence (XII. 327)?

As might be suspected, the reason lies ultimately in the yogic nature of the cosmic process whereby the Supreme Divinity emerges from His *mahāsamādhi* to create a new world system at the beginning of each *kalpa*. The *pravṛttidharma* is thus the human counterpart of the active phase of the Supreme Divinity in the form of Brahmā (the creator) and Viṣṇu (the preserver). The sacrificial system on which it is based is a form of generalized reciprocity designed to keep the three worlds with their various orders of being in a state of good order and prosperity. The *nivṛttidharma*, on the other hand, corresponds to the destructive phase of the *pralaya* during which the Supreme Divinity returns to a state of quiescence. It is the human equivalent of the reabsorption of the outgoing cosmic energies (*pra√vṛt* = to go forth), expressed at the microcosmic level in the form of *kāma* (here neutralized by the withdrawal of *saṃyāsa*).

The *bhakti*-inspired Nārāyaṇīya section of Śāntiparva legitimizes these two religious paths in the mythological history of two groups of celestial sages (*surarṣaya*), seven of whom, — the so-called *vedācārya* (preceptors of the Veda) — are associated with the *pravṛttidharma*, while the remaining seven — the *mokṣaśāstrācārya* (preceptors of the scriptures on liberation, probably referring to the Upaniṣads), are associated with the *nivṛttidharma* (XII.327). First among created beings (they are all mind-born sons of Brahmā), the seven *vedācārya* are immediately faced with the issue (XII.327.37): how should the entire system of worlds be upheld and kept in operation (*lokatantrasya kṛtsnasya katham kāryaḥ parigrahaḥ*)? Since Brahmā himself had no answer to offer, they all decide to seek the guidance of Nārāyaṇa in His unmanifest form as the Mahāpuruṣa (i.e. the Supreme form of the *bhakti* divinity). But they first have to get His attention (He is, after all, engaged in perpetual *samādhi*). This they do by performing *tapas* for a thousand celestial years on the northern shores of the Ocean of Milk for the well-being of the worlds (*lokahitārthina*) (v. 39).

Their devotion (*ārādhanakāmya*) has the desired effect. The Lord assigns each a cosmic function and orders a sacrificial system in which each level of being agrees to offer a share (*bhāga*) of the sacrificial offerings to the level above in exchange for a share in the general well-being that results. Brahmā is established as the master (*guru*) and grandsire (*pitāmaha*) of all the worlds (XII.327.46). The gods receive their respective marks of authority (*adhikāra*) in exchange for the dedication of their sacrificial offerings to Nārāyaṇa (v.47). Owing to their propensity for action (*pravṛtti*), these gods are granted the possibility of temporary enjoyments only (*āvṛttilakṣaṇa* = marked by return. i.e. to embodied existence in the *saṃsāra*) (v.52). These enjoyments include a share in the sacrificial offerings associated with the sacrifices performed by human beings (v.54). Significantly, Nārāyaṇa also promises that (v.55):

yo me yathā kalpitavānbhāgamasminmahākratau|
sa tathā yajñabhāgārho vedasūtre mayā kṛtaḥ||

"I will accord a share (*bhāga*) to whoever gives Me a share of these great sacrifices, (as stated) in the Vedasūtras."

In this manner, the deities become the custodians of the world system, and they are supported in this work by the sacrificial activities of mankind. Each level of being supports the other and enjoys the [temporary] fruits that the higher level is able to bestow (vv.56-58). Everyone eventually gets back the equivalent of what he or she gives up in the sacrifice — a parallel to the renunciation (*saṃyāsa*) involved in the *nivṛttidharma* (and a perfect model for a karmic theory of retribution in which one reaps what one sows). On the other hand, such an arrangement does not appear to offer any freedom for creatures to choose their own way of life, at least in a single life. Creatures are created for different purposes, some for the active path of *pravṛtti* associated with return (*āvṛtti*), and some for the path of *nivṛtti* — leading to a permanent state of beatitude (XII.327.68):

yo yathā nirmito janturyasminyasmiṃśca karmaṇi|
pravṛttau vā nivṛttau vā tatphalaṃ so'śnute'vaśaḥ||

"Different creatures have been created for different types of work. But whether on the path of *pravṛtti* or on that of *nivṛtti* they have no control over what happens." The gods themselves are granted control over the acts of creatures (*karma*) as well as over their path (*gati*) and span of life (*kāla āyūṃṣi*) (v.72). In the last analysis, it is the Lord Himself who reserves the *nivṛttidharma* for those whose dharma is the indestructible path (*gatimakṣayadharmiṇāṃ*), i.e. the path which yields fruits that are indestructible. At the same time He creates the *pravṛttidharma* to give variety to the world (*kṛtvā lokasya citratām*) (v. 88).

In practice, as Vyāsa explains to his son Śuka in an earlier passage (XII.233), the two dharmas were established to cater to the great diversity of need and aspiration among human beings, most of whom are caught in a predicament they are unable to understand, let alone resolve. He replies to his son's questioning as follows (vv. 6-9):

dvāvimāvatha panthānau yatra vedāḥ pratiṣṭhitāḥ|
pravṛttilakṣaṇo dharmo nivṛttau ca subhāṣitāḥ||

karmaṇā badhyate janturvidyayā tu pramucyate|
tasmātkarma na kurvanti yatayaḥ pāradarśinaḥ||

karmaṇā jāyate pretya mūrtimānṣoḍaśātmakaḥ|
vidyayā jāyate nityamavyayo hyavyayātmakaḥ||

karma tveke praśaṃsanti svalpabuddhitarā narāḥ|
tena te dehajālāni ramayanta upāsate||

"These are the two paths upon which the Vedas are based; the duties (dharma) characteristic of *pravṛtti*, and those based on *nivṛtti* that have been so well expounded [i.e. in the Vedas]. Through acts (karma — here primarily in the sense of ritual activity), a living creature is bound [i.e. to a life of unfreedom]. By means of knowledge (*vidyā*), however, he is liberated. For this reason, clear-sighted yogins never perform [ritual] acts (karma). The result of acts is rebirth after death with a body composed of sixteen elements. Through knowledge, however, one is reborn into that which is eternal, immutable and imperishable. There is, however, a class of persons of the

very lowest intelligence whose needs are satisfied through acts. In consequence of this they are trapped in a ceaseless dance of [different] bodies."

The path of *nivṛtti* is here associated with knowledge (*vidyā*), and leads to a state of existence and experience very different from the path of acts (v.11-14):

karmaṇaḥ phalamāpnoti sukhaduḥkhe bhavābhavau|
vidyayā tadavāpnoti yatra gatvā na śocati||

yatra gatvā na mriyate yatra gatvā na jāyate|
na jīryate yatra gatvā yatra gatvā na vardhate||

yatra tadbrahma paramamavyaktamajaraṃ dhruvam|
avyāhatamanāyāsamamṛtaṃ cāviyogi ca||

dvaṇdvairyatra na bādhyante mānasena ca karmaṇā|
samāḥ sarvatra maitrāśca sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ||

"The results that flow from acts consist of pleasure and pain, of existence and non-existence. By knowledge, however, one attains to a state of being from where there is no occasion for grief; from where there is no chance of death or rebirth; from where there is no possibility of growing up or growing old; the highest state of that Brahmā which is unmanifest, deathless, secure, unrestricted, above the reach of pain, of the quality of nectar, inalienable; where no one is bound by the pairs of opposites (*dvaṇdva*) or troubled by mental agitations. Persons in this state look at everything with an equal eye and revel in friendship and goodwill to all beings." While he is not explicit about the role of human initiative (*puruṣakāra*) in choosing one path over the other, Vyāsa does suggest that it is somehow linked to what constitutes the source of action itself (v.20):

sacetanaṃ jīvaguṇaṃ vadanti
sa ceṣṭate ceṣṭayate ca sarvam|
tataḥ paraṃ kṣetravido vadanti
prāvartayadyo bhuvanāni sapta||

"They say that it is the *guṇas* of the conscious individuality (*jīva*) that acts and causes all bodies to act. Those acquainted with the field of reality (*kṣetravid*) recognize that beyond the conscious individual is He who keeps the seven worlds in motion (*pra √vṛt*)."

We compare this response, given to a brahmin (Śuka), with Kṛṣṇa's response to a similar question by Arjuna, a *kṣatriya* with caste duties that preclude the traditional vedic *saṃyāsa* according to epic tradition. Vyāsa's commentary on the respective merits of action (karma) and knowledge (*vidyā*) is in response to his son's perplexity over the conflicting vedic injunctions to act (*kuru karma*) and to "abandon" action (*tyaja karma*) respectively (XII.233.1). Arjuna too is puzzled by the fact that (VI.27/BG5.1):

saṃyāsaṃ karmaṇāṃ kṛṣṇa punaryogaṃ ca śaṃsasi|
ydcchreya etayorekaṃ tanme brūhi suniścitam||

"On the one hand you praise the renunciation (*saṃyāsa*) of actions, Kṛṣṇa. And then again also yoga . Please make it clear to me which of these two is the most beneficial?" Kṛṣṇa, too, had introduced the idea of a twofold dharma as early as the second chapter of the Bhagavadgītā (v.39) by drawing a distinction between the *sāṃkhye buddhi* and the *yoge* [*buddhi*]. In the introduction to his commentary on chapter 3, Śaṃkara specifically relates these two paths to the *nivṛttidharma* and the *pravṛttidharma*, respectively. However, in contrast to Vyāsa (and much to the discomfiture of Śaṃkara), Kṛṣṇa specifically comes out in favour of the yoga of action — *karmayoga*, over *karmasaṃyāsa* (VI.27/BG.5.2).

saṃyāsaḥ karmayogaśca niḥśreyasakarāvubhau|
tayostu karmasaṃyāsāt karmayogo viśiṣyate||

"The abandonment of action and also yoga both lead to the highest bliss; but of the two, *karmayoga* is favoured over *karmasaṃyāsa*." This change of emphasis has to do with the reversal of Upaniṣadic values brought about by the *bhakti* attempt to extend the prospect of salvation to all classes. As we have already seen in the case of sacrifice (*yajña*), this involved extending many of the traditional vedic notions. As Chaitanya puts it, "The concepts of all the systems are closely studied; but because of their

insufficincies [sic], they are radically transformed, deepened in meaning, integrated into a unitary system of great stability, a world-view to which the most advanced modern thinking in a multiplicity of fields becomes a footnote. Vyasa's Purusha and Prakrti are not the Purusha and Prakrti of Samkhya; his Karma is not the Karma of the Mimamsakas; his Yoga is not the Yoga of Patanjali. His treatment of the four ends of human existence (purushartha) is radically new."[2]

We see this here in the case of karma. The action advocated by Kṛṣṇa is no longer undertaken for the satisfaction of personal desires but for the welfare of the world (*lokasaṃgraha*) (VI.25/BG.3.25) and the benefit of all beings (*sarvabhūtahita*) (VI.27/BG.5.25). Kṛṣṇa has nothing but scorn for the *kāmātma*, the person dominated by attachment to pleasure and power (*bhogaiśvaryaprasakta*) (VI.24/BG.2.43-44). In contrast to the traditional ritual goals of progeny, prosperity, heaven etc., the practice of *karmayoga* is extended to any action undertaken in a spirit of non-attachment to the results (VI.24/BG.2.47-48). What must be sponsored in the sacrifice (*yajña*) is not personal gain, but the ecological cooperation of the gods (*deva*) responsible for the administration and good order of the revolving cycle of life (*pravartita cakra*) (VI.25/BG.3.16). What is taken from the natural environment must be returned. Only a thief enjoys the gifts of the gods (i.e. the bounties of nature) without offering anything in return (VI.25/BG.3.12), and the person concerned only with his own sense pleasures (*indriyārāma*) lives in vain (VI.25/BG.3.16).

This preliminary extension of the vedic notion of *karma* as *yajña* is broadened considerably in the next chapter to include the entire gamut of religious practices (VI.26/BG.4.24-33). Kṛṣṇa thus rejects all notion of a physical abandonment of action, pointing out that action is part and parcel of embodied life (VI.25/BG.3.8) and vital to the very existence of the world (VI.25/BG.3.24). However, while all ritual and caste obligations constitute a duty (VI.40/BG.18.9), the actions themselves must be surrendered to the Lord (VI.25/BG.3.30; VI.34/BG.12.6; VI.40/BG.18.57). Performed in this spirit, Kṛṣṇa says (VI.26/BG.4.23), the various activities of life simply melt away (*karma samagraṃ pravilīyate*).

In this manner, Kṛṣṇa is able to transform action itself into a form of non-action (renunciation-in-action) analogous to the traditional *karmasaṃyāsa* (renunciation-of-action) of the upaniṣadic *nivṛttidharma* — reserved for the traditional brahmin *saṃnyāsin* in the epic or for the *kṣatriya* at the very end of his active life (exemplified by Dhṛtarāṣṭra in Book XV or by the Pāṇḍava brothers themselves in Book XVII). According to Hiriyanna: "The negative way of *nivṛtti* still continues to be more or less the same as it was originally, but the positive one of *pravṛtti* has become profoundly tarnsformed [sic] by the incorporation in it of the essence of the other....What particularly marks the later conception of *pravṛtti* as distinguished from the earlier, is the *total* exclusion of self-interest from it. It does not aim at merely subordinating the interests of the individual to those of the community, or of any other greater whole to which he may be regarded as belonging, but their entire abnegation."[3] Furthermore, all the activities of life (dictated by one's *varṇāśramadharma*) performed in this spirit now become a legitimate *sādhana*. Indeed, they are transformed into a form of worship of the Lord (VI.31/BG.9.27):

yat karoṣi yadaśnāsi yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat|
yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam||

"Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer, whatever you give, whatever *tapas* you perform, O son of Kuntī, do this as worship of Me." In all he wills and does, Arjuna must henceforth be totally subservient to the Lord.

This higher form of *karmayoga* — dubbed by the later *bhakti* commentators as *bhaktiyoga* — is characterized by Kṛṣṇa as the greatest of all secrets (*sarvaguhyatamaṃ*) and My supreme word (*paramaṃ vacaḥ*) (VI.40/BG.18.64; cf. also VI.31/BG.9.1). The true *saṃnyāsin* is no longer confined to the brahmin who ritually abandons his ritual obligations for a life of mendicancy (VI.28/BG.6.1), but is open to anyone who is *karmaphalatyāgī* (VI.40/BG.18.11), i.e. one who abandons the fruits of action (or one who abandons both action and its fruit according to certain commentators). The way of salvation is opened to all, including women, *vaiśya*, and even *śūdra* (VI.31/BG.9.32). All classes can reach perfection

(*siddhi*) by performing their own line of work (*svakarma*) (VI.40/BG.18.45-46). Even the greatest of all sinners (*pāpakṛttama pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ*) can cross over all sin with this raft of wisdom (*jñānaplava*) (VI.26/BG.4.36). Indeed, "all actions in their entirety, O Pārtha, culminate in wisdom" (*sarvaṃ karmākhilaṃ pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate*) (VI.26/BG.4.33).

In this manner, the *kṣatriyadharma* itself — war at its most violent, including the sacrifice of oneself on the field of battle — is promoted to a legitimate way of salvation (*mokṣa*). Conduct that would otherwise lead to bondage and grief (as Arjuna had earlier feared), is transformed into a means of liberation from bondage. The author is no longer soiled by such behaviour since his actions are consumed by the fire of wisdom, (*jñānāgnidagdha*) (VI. 26/BG.4.19). Biardeau comments:

> We are far from a sanctification of violence pure and simple, even if the result is the same. In effect, it is not enough that violence be a sacrifice for it to be justified and fully salvific for its author. It must also be completely detached. The king is the representative of the supreme divinity, thus a form of *avatāra* on earth, who must watch out for all that threatens the *dharma*. His violence is exclusively in the service of the *dharma*, that is to say of the only order capable of safeguarding the integrity of the three worlds and their place at the center of the universe. On this condition, which implies perfect devotion to the Lord of *bhakti*, his violent acts do not soil him, since he seeks no fruit for himself. Here we leave the orthodox world of the *Manu-smṛti* which is still the world of *kāma*, of egocentric desire. One sacrifices because one desires a certain personal good, albeit only heaven after death. It is this link between the act — *karman* — and the fruit reaped by its author that must be broken.[4]

But this transformation of social values is only the surface reflection of what is happening to Arjuna on the psychological plane. Arjuna's despondency and confused babbling over his dharma point directly to the source of the problem, his identification with that part of himself which derives from the material element of his personality (*prakṛti* in the form of his present incarnation as the body, senses and mind of Arjuna). This leads

him to regard his *kṣatriyadharma*, viewed as a means to the enjoyment of kingdom and power (*bhogaiśvarya*), as an unmitigated disaster for all concerned. Kṛṣṇa is particularly disturbed by Arjuna's brief flirtation with the idea of abandoning his responsibilities by enjoying the life of a beggar (VI.24/BG.2.5). He knows that Arjuna cannot exchange the battlefield of life for a mendicant existence. "Better the performance of one's own *dharma*, though deficient, than the *dharma* of another well-performed," Kṛṣṇa warns him on two occasions (VI.25/BG.3.35; VI.40/BG.18.47). But he understands too, that Arjuna will get up and fight (*utthiṣṭha bhārata*) only when he realizes the real truth about himself.

What this real truth is has been a subject of continuing debate down the centuries in both India and in the West. We favour the *viśiṣṭādvaita* reading of Rāmānuja, since we find that, by and large, his commentary better reflects the form and content — and certainly the spirit — of the text than, for example, the *advaitic* interpretation of Śaṃkara.[5] Arjuna's predicament is directly related to his state of embodiment, since embodiment necessarily involves "a fall into the flowing stream of the *guṇas*" (*guṇapravāhapatita*) (RBG.13.4). As a result, says Rāmānuja, his natural omniscience (i.e. as a spiritual entity or *ātman*) becomes veiled (*āvṛta*) by a kind of trick of the mind (*dehātmābhimāna*), and he begins to relate to the things and beings around him with false notions of "I" (*ahaṃkāra*) and "mine" (*mamatā*) (RBG.3.16).[6] In short, he identifies with that part of himself that derives from the material element of the personality (*prakṛti*) in the form of his body (*śarīra*), senses (*indriya*) and mind (*manas*). This identification is reflected in language when he says (identifying with the body), "I am hungry;" or (identifying with the senses) "I am blind;" or (identifying with the mind) "I am happy, sad, angry" etc. (RBG.13.1). The person (i.e. the embodied being as a composite of spirit and matter — *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*) thus becomes subject to desire (*kāma* ; *rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*), fear (*bhaya*), anger (*krodha*) and other false feelings that prompt him to engage in egocentric activities (*kāmyakarma*) resulting in pleasure (*sukha*) and pain (*duḥkha*) and the formation of unconscious drives or archetypes in the mind (*vāsanā*, *saṃskāra*).

These traces (*pada* = lit. "footsteps") of the past prompt further activity leading to similar situations in the future, perpetuating a vicious cycle of birth and death (cf. RBG.5.15; 7.20; 13.21; 15.7 etc.). In this manner, desire-prompted karma becomes the motive force that drives the entire wheel of *saṃsāra* and constitutes the main cause (*pradhānakāraṇa*) of the blatant inequalities (*viṣama*) of embodied existence (RBG.4.14).

The most unfortunate effect of this veiling of the natural light of the *ātman* is that it estranges the resultant personality from its own vital source and makes it impossible, without outside assistance, to escape this abject state of delusion (*moha*). It also veils the fact that the Universe itself is the Body of the Supreme Divinity (dramatically demonstrated in the eleventh chapter), who is also the inner Self of all sentient (*cit*) and insentient (*acit*) things and beings. Although, in fact, inseparable from the Lord Himself, "He" is not part of "his" self-understanding. Arjuna can thus have no experience, or even conception, of the unsurpassable bliss (*niratiśayasukha*) of communion with Him. What Arjuna needs is, first, the basic facts about his own real nature (introduced at VI.24/BG.2.12-30) and then some direction or path that would lead him to the experience of Brahman (*brahmānubhava* or *brahmabhūya*), the supreme goal of human existence. This is the main topic of the Bhagavadgītā. In the meantime, however, he has no inkling that his own *kṣatrīyadharma* — now seen as a recipe for disaster — can serve as a legitimate *sādhana* that provides a far better means of escape from his abject condition than the mendicant life, provided he is able to reverse the mind's attention and attachment from the *prakṛti* (i.e. the habitual extrovertedness of the mind through the senses to their objects) to the *ātman* itself.

The situation he has brought upon himself through *karma* can thus be undone through other forms of *karma* (*karmayoga* and *bhaktiyoga*) based on self-knowledge (*ātmajñāna*). God Himself can be attained only through the higher form of karma known as *bhaktiyoga* (introduced by Kṛṣṇa at BG.6.47 according to Rāmānuja). Arjuna must first wake up to the vanity of the world and change the direction of his life by abandoning all goals but that of liberation (*mokṣa*). Kṛṣṇa mocks the *vedavādaratha* (VI.24/BG.2.42), i.e. the person who delights in the Vedic formulæ for securing worldly fruits

(*bhogaiśvārya*). He exhorts Arjuna, "*nistraiguṇyo bhavārjuna* " (VI.24/BG.2.45), i.e. be free of the realm of *prakṛti* and its *guṇas*, free of the play of opposites (*dvandva*), free of the desire to have and to hold (*yogakṣema*). Seek the *ātman* alone in all you do! Arjuna must be introduced to a way of transforming himself from an *indriyārāma* (VI.25/BG.3.16), i.e. a person attached to the objects of the senses (including his kinsmen in the opposing ranks) to an *ātmarati*, i.e. one who revels in the *ātman* (VI.25/BG.3.17). This way passes through the destruction of *ahaṃkāra* and all sense of possession (*mamatā*) that goes with it, by progressively shedding the illusory identity with the body-mind-intellect complex, and with the senses and their objects. These modifications (*vikāra*) of the *prakṛti* are owned by God alone (i.e. as His Body), not by any egocentric self.

Having made this initial change of focus, the actual practice of *karmayoga* can begin in earnest. For once Arjuna has accepted *mokṣa* alone as the goal of life, the worldly ties to action (such as war in his case) will tend to weaken by themselves. He will be less inclined to fret about who wins and who loses, who lives and who dies. The very shift of goals will initiate and facilitate the readjustment of attitude with respect to the conduct and outcome of the war. However, since desire in any form is a form of bondage (even the desire for *mokṣa*), Kṛṣṇa adds the significant warning that: to work alone is your right, never to its fruits (*karmaṇyevādhikāraste mā phaleṣu kadācana*) (VI.24/BG.2.47). Arjuna has no choice but to play his pre-ordained role on the stage of life. However, he can play it in one of two ways. He can identify completely with the role he has been given and panic about the outcome. This is a recipe for bondage. Or, he can play it as "he" is in reality, the *ātman*, free of involvement with the role. This is the way of knowledge and freedom from bondage.

He cannot immediately follow this advice completely since he has only an intellectual understanding of his true nature at this stage (provided by Kṛṣṇa at VI.24/BG.2.12-30). However, the very attempt to do so is a *sādhana*, a means of weakening the unconscious drives of the mind (*vāsanā*), and hence of removing the causes of his present state of ignorance (*avidyā*) about himself. However, Kṛṣṇa (according to Rāmānuja) has little faith in the ability of the human species to pull itself up by its own *puruṣakāra* and, in the final analysis, the sublimation of these energies into knowledge is the

work of the Lord Himself. Rāmānuja comments that, "one who strives to conquer the senses with the weight of his own exertions (*svayatna*) and without fixing his mind on Me in this manner, becomes lost" (RBG.2.61).[7] What happens is that (RBG.3.9) "pleased by sacrifices and other such works, the paramapuruṣa bestows on him the undisturbed vision of the self (*ātmāvalokana*), after eradicating the traces (*vāsanā*) of the actions [of the person] which have accumulated from time immemorial".[8]

The second line of VI.24/BG.2.47: Be not the cause of action or its fruit; neither be attached to inaction (*mā karmaphalaheturbhūr mā te saṇgo'stvakarmaṇi*), is of great significance, both for Rāmānuja and for our main topic. The second part of the line (*pada*) is simply another warning to Arjuna against taking the escapist route of false abandonment of action — the rajasic form of abandonment later criticized by Kṛṣṇa at VI.40/BG.18.24. However, the first segment leads directly to our main issue since it deals with the ambiguous status of the agent (*kartṛ*) in a world (*saṃsāra*) of mistaken identity (*abhimāna*). For if the spiritual nature (*ātman*) is confused into identifying with the body (*śarīra*), senses (*indrīya*) and mind (*manas*) i.e. with the material element of personality (*prakṛti*), who then is the actor (*kartṛ*), and who reaps the fruit of "his" or "her" acts? The warning "Be not the cause of action and its fruit" is, in fact, the first hint of the truth of the matter, which Kṛṣṇa progressively reveals in the following chapters where He points to the *prakṛti* (nature) or to *svabhāva* (character) as the source of all desire to act in the *saṃsāra*.[9]

The first clear statement appears at VI.25/BG.3.27 where He says:

prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ|
ahaṃkāravimūḍhātmā kartāhamiti manyate||

"All actions without exception are performed by the material qualities of nature (*guṇa*). Deluded by the sense of 'I' (*ahaṃkāra*), the *ātman* thinks, 'I am the actor' (*kartṛ*)." Commenting on this verse, Rāmānuja defines *ahaṃkāra* as "the mistaken notion of 'I' in regard to the *prakṛti* which is not the thing denoted by 'I' (*anahamarthe prakṛtau aham iti abhimānaḥ*)." The actor is thus not the *ātman* but the qualities (*guṇa*) that make up what we would regard as the personality of the individual, derived from the material

element of the human composite (i.e. the *prakṛti*). So powerful is this belief in one's own personality that even the man of knowledge (*jñānavan*) is forced to follow the dictates of the *vāsanā* and confront his two enemies of love and hatred (*rāgadveṣau*). As Kṛṣṇa points out: living creatures follow their nature (*prakṛti*). What use is there to fight it (*prakṛtiṃ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṃ kariṣyati* (VI.25/BG.3.33)? And these inner drives have nothing to do with the Lord Himself, since (VI.27/BG.5.14):

na kartṛtvaṃ na karmāṇi lokasya sṛjati prabhu|
na karmaphalasaṃyogaṃ svabhāvastu pravartate||

"The Lord of the world is responsible neither for agency (*kartṛtva*), nor the work performed (*karma*), nor for the link between work and its results (*phala*). It is the character (of a person = *svabhāva*) that is responsible." Rāmānuja explains (RBG.5.14-15) that, "*kartṛtva*, *karma* and *phala* have nothing to do with the intrinsic nature of the *ātman* (*ātmasvarūpa*) but are the result of unconscious drives (*vāsanā*) arising from the mistaken identity (*abhimāna*) of the *ātman*, on account of the entanglement (*saṃsarga*) with *prakṛti* in the form of gods, men etc., born of a karmic inheritance (*pūrvapūrvakarma*) stretching back to beginningless time." In effect, the various embodiments of the *ātman* act out their natures (*svabhāva*) as a direct result of this accumulation of inherited tendencies (*vāsanā*) leading to further activities (*karma*) in a perpetual cycle of error as follows (RBG.5.15): "Knowledge is veiled (*āvṛta*), that is to say, contracted (*saṃkucita*) by the accumulation of previous karma opposed to knowledge, contracted in this manner in order that the *sādhaka* might reap the experience of his own fruits (*svaphalānubhāva*). As a result of this karma, which forms a veil over knowledge (*jñānāvaraṇarūpeṇa*), union with the bodies of gods etc. and delusion (*moha*) in the form of the false identification (*abhimāna*) of the *ātman* with these bodies is produced. In this manner, there arise the *vāsanās* of the false identities of the *ātman*, and the *vāsanās* in favour of karma suitable for them. From these *vāsanās* arise the mistaken identity (*abhimāna*) of the *ātman* with that which is contrary to it [viz. the body], and the performance of karma ." And so the cycle is perpetuated.

However, since these agents ultimately belong to the transcendent Lord who owns them as His Body, the ultimate seat and source of all action must be in Him alone (as the Inner Self and Controller of all beings). Kṛṣṇa therefore makes the further suggestion (VI.25/BG.3.30) that Arjuna free himself of all anxiety over the battle by surrendering all actions to Me with a mind [identified with] the *ātman* (*mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi saṃnyasyātmacetasā*). In effect, the *sādhana* proposed by Kṛṣṇa is an attempt to reverse the focus of the mind through abandonment of the three most important causes of bondage, the sense of agency involved in the action (*kartṛtva*), the action itself (*karma*) and the fruits (or ends) of the action (*phala*). The rationale for this is briefly summarized by Rāmānuja in his commentary on Kṛṣṇa's remarks at VI.40/BG.18.4. The first part of the teaching is designed to eradicate the sense of doership (I do) in the action by attributing the source of all activity to the *guṇa* or to their ruler who is the Lord Himself. Thus:

> *sarveśvarekartṛtvānusaṃdhānenātmanaḥkartṛtātyāgaḥ*
> *kartṛtvaviṣayastyāgaḥ*||

"Abandonment (*tyāga*) of the sense of agency (*kartṛtvaviṣaya*) is abandonment [of our own idea] of ourselves as an agent by attributing all agency to the Lord." The second part of the teaching is designed to eliminate the sense of ownership (*mamatā*) in something that can only belong to the Lord. Thus:

> *madīyaphalasādhanatayā madīyamidaṃ karmeti karmaṇi*
> *mamatāyā parityāgaḥ karmaviṣayastyāgaḥ*||

"Abandonment of the activity itself (*karmaviṣaya*) is the complete abandonment of the sense of possession (*mamatā*) with respect to the action, thus abandonment [of the idea] that this action belongs to me and is the means (*sādhanatā*) for the realization of my own ends (*phala*)." Finally, abandonment of the ends (*phala*) should involve the notion that:

> *karmajanyaṃ svargādikaṃ phalaṃ mama na syāditi*
> *phalatyāgaḥ*||

"The fruits (*phala*) that result from action such as heaven and so forth should not be mine. These results should be abandoned." The results clearly belong to the Lord who resides in the heart of all beings (*sarvabhūtānāṃ hṛddeśe tiṣṭhati*) (VI.40/BG.18.61).

In this manner, the practices and techniques proposed by Kṛṣṇa together constitute a sophisticated programme of "deconditioning" designed to introduce Arjuna to his real self, i.e. to his *ātman* which exists in an inseparable relation (*apṛthaksiddhi*) to the Lord Himself. As he progressively detaches himself from his identification with the material constituents of his nature (i.e. with the *prakṛti* and its *guṇa*), he will begin to act in the world in the knowledge that it is not "he" that is really acting, that "the *guṇa* act among the *guṇa* " — *guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti* (VI.25/BG.3.28). These *guṇa* will certainly compel him to act in the world (VI.40/BG.18.59-60). But with a being that has, to a large extent, been purified (*ātmaśuddha*) of the *vāsanā*, he will henceforth express the quality of *sattva* in his actions and fight without attachment in total submission to the *avatāra* (VI.40/BG.18.23).

In place of the traditional practices that constitute the *pravṛttidharma* — the desire-prompted rites and activities (*kāmyakarma*) that keep the world in being (albeit at the cost of entrapment in the cycle of the *saṃsāra*) — Kṛṣṇa thus substitutes a new *dharma* of unattached action (*naiṣkarmya*) leading to liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*mokṣa*). The principle of *saṃnyāsa* (abandonment) is internalized by taking it out of its traditional *varṇāśrāmadharma* context and building it back into the individual psyche as a set of attitudes by which all the functions of life and society must henceforth be undertaken. The traditional opposition between *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* is resolved by linking the goal of liberation (*mokṣa*) to the active principle. In doing this, however, the individual must abandon the autonomy he possesses within the traditional *pravṛttidharma* (i.e., actions prompted by desire leading to bondage). The embodied being is a unity of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* (with the Lord Himself in the "heart"), but all action is associated with the *guṇas* or modes of the *prakṛti*, the driving force of the personality. He is thus unable to fulfill the ends of his true individuality, the *ātman* who must experience the effects of his conduct and character in the form of pleasure and pain. His real goal is the Supreme Divinity in the heart (*hṛdi*)

who permits (*anumantā*) all action to take place, although he does not know this (since his consciousness is veiled from the truth), — cf. VI.35/B.G.13.21-23. This compartmentalized anthropology necessarily leads to a denial of all agency in human action together with the action itself and its results. Such conditions hark back to the upaniṣadic path of *nivṛtti* as exemplified in the discourse of Vyāsa on behalf of his son Śuka.

In light of the above considerations, we might expect to observe a tendency for the epic author to extol the merits of human exertion (*puruṣakāra*) in the context of the traditional *pravṛttidharma* — i.e. activities undertaken in pursuit of the three worldly ends of human existence (the *trivarga* of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*), and ignore it when the perspective shifts to sages and seers who have already transcended the cycle of the *saṃsāra*. Clearly, for one convinced that *nirvāṇaṃ paramaṃ saukhyaṃ dharmo'sau para ucyate* (XII.330.16), that "the greatest dharma and the highest felicity for anyone to attain is extinction of individual consciousness [i.e. by dissociating oneself from the *prakṛti*]," the very notion of human agency, a major part of the problem, must be extirpated at all costs (VI.35/B.G.13.28-33). And we find that this stance is, indeed, typical of beings who have transcended the dualities (*dvandva*) inherent in a world of actors, actions and their fruits.

Most of the noteworthy examples given by Bhīṣma in the Mokṣadharmaparva section of Book XII are taken from stories of demons (*daitya* or *asura*) who attain *mokṣa* as a result of reflection on the adversities of the embodied state (defeat at the hands of the gods in their case). The result is a stoic resignation before a world that brooks no human (or demonic) tampering with its ineluctable course, a quietism (*nivṛtti*) of indifference rather than one of despair. In addition to the case of Prahlāda (XII.215) who, as we have seen, attributes the source of action to *svabhāva* ("nature" in the sense of inherent character), this position is exemplified in the views of Namuchi (XII.219), who attributes the happenings of the world to the Ordainer (*śāstṛ* or *dhātṛ*), Bali (XII.216-217; 220), who attributes them to time (*kāla*) and to chance (*haṭha*), and, finally, to the Lord Himself (*prabhu*), and Vṛtra (XII.270-273), who attributes them all to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa.

The example of Namuchi is perhaps the most extreme of an *asura* totally reconciled with his loss of celestial prosperity and powers at the hands of Indra. A sense of loss and sorrow can have no place when it is clear that (XII.219.8-13):

ekaḥ śāstā na dvitīyo'sti śāstā
garbhe śayānaṃ puruṣaṃ śāsti śāstā|
tenānuśiṣṭaḥ pravaṇādivodakaṃ
yathā niyukto'smi tathā vahāmi||

bhāvābhāvāvabhijānangarīyo
jānāmi śreyo na tu tatkaromi|
āśāsu dharmyāḥ suhṛdāṃ sukurv-
anyathā niyukto'smi tathā vahāmi||

yathā yathāsya prāptavyaṃ prāpnotyeva tathā tathā|
bhavitavyaṃ yathā yacca bhavatyeva tathā tathā||

yatra yatraiva saṃyuṇkte dhātā garbhaṃ punaḥ punaḥ|
tatra tatraiva vasati na yatra svayamicchati||

bhavo yo'yamanuprāpto bhavitavyamidaṃ mama|
iti yasya sadā bhāvo na sa muhyetkadācana||

paryāyairhanyamānānāmabhiyoktā na vidyate|
duḥkhametattu yaddveṣṭā kartāhamiti manyate||

"There is one Ordainer (*śāstṛ* = "divine lawmaker") and no second. His control extends to the human being resting in the womb. Controlled by the Ordainer, I continue down the path to which I am confined, like water running down an inclined slope. Though fully cognizant of the merits of both existence [i.e. as a *jīva* or embodied soul] and non-existence [i.e. liberated from this condition] and knowing full well which of the two is to be preferred, I do nothing [to achieve either of these states]. Leading my life according to the dharma resulting in pleasure, and also the contrary [i.e. non-virtuous activities leading to pain], I go on as I am impelled to do. Whatever one is to achieve will be achieved and whatever destiny (*bhavitavya* = that which is to be) awaits one is what one gets. Again and again we are placed in

whatever conditions of birth the Ordainer (*dhātṛ* = "the one who bestows") so wishes without the slightest choice in the matter. But one is never upset if, having achieved a certain state of being, one is always able to adopt the attitude that, 'This is what has to be (*bhavitavyam*). People are governed by alternating periods of pleasure and pain. There is only sorrow if one thinks, 'I am the agent' (*kartṛ*)." And he concludes by saying (XII.219.21-23):

yadevamanujātasya dhātāro vidadhuḥ purā|
tadevānubhaviṣyāmi kiṃ me mṛtyuḥ kariṣyati||

labdhavyānyevalabhategantavyānyevagacchati|
prāptavyānyeva prāpnoti duḥkhāni ca sukhāni ca||

etadviditvā kārtruryena yo muhyati mānavaḥ|
kuśalaḥ sukhaduḥkheṣu sa vai sarvadhaneśvaraḥ||

"I will suffer the consequences of whatever the Ordainer (*dhātṛ*) decided before I was born. [Under such conditions] what can death do to me? One achieves the success that is due to one; one goes wherever one has to go; one experiences the joys and sorrows that are one's lot in life. Knowing what it is that creates the false impression of agency, a man is indifferent to pleasure and pain and becomes master of all circumstances."

The *asura* Bali (now living as an ass in an empty room after losing the sovereignty of the three worlds) takes a similar position by attributing all change of fortune to the workings of time (*kāla*) and chance (*yadṛcchā*), both of which are really only extensions of the Supreme Divinity. He first warns Indra not to flaunt his newfound prosperity by reminding him that (XII.217.25):

kālaḥ sarvaṃ samādatte kālaḥ sarvaṃ prayacchati|
kālena vidhṛtaṃ sarvaṃ mā kṛthāḥ śakra pauruṣam||

"It is time (*kāla*) that gives all and takes all. Everything is ordained by time. Do not brag about your great manliness (*pauruṣa*), O Indra". The new Lord of heaven is mistaken in attributing what has occurred to his own doing, since (XII.217.35-36 and 39):

naitadasmatkṛtaṃ śakra naitacchakra tvayā kṛtaṃ|
yattvamevaṃgato vajrinyadvāpyevaṃgatā vayam||

na karma tava nānyeṣāṃ kuto mama śatakrato|
ṛddhirvāpyatha vā naṛddhiḥ paryāyakṛtameva tat||

kālāḥ sthāpayate sarvaṃ kālaḥ pacati vai tathā|

"What we have now become, O Indra is not because of anything we have done. Nor is your present fortune, O Indra, due to anything you have done. You have done nothing, O thunderbolt-wielder, by which you are now enjoying this affluence; nor have I done anything by which I am now divested of this affluence....It is time that maintains everything, and it is also time that destroys all things."

These conditions are subsequently attributed to chance in a passage in which the claim is made that (XII.217.45):

nāhaṃ kartā na caiva tvaṃ nānyaḥ kartā śacīpate|
paryāyeṇa hi bhujyante lokāḥ śakra yadṛcchayā||

"I am not the agent, — *kartṛ* [of acts that appear to be mine]; nor are you the agent of other acts [that appear to be performed by you], O Lord of Śaci. It is chance (*yadṛcchā*), O Śakra, that governs the worlds."

Finally, however, all agency is attributed to the Lord who controls the forces of time and of chance (XII.220.84):

nāhaṃ kartā na kartā tvaṃ kartā yastu sadā prabhuḥ|
so'yaṃ pacati kāło māṃ vṛkṣe phalamivāgatam||

"I am not the agent; nor are you the agent. It is the Lord (*prabhu*) who is always the agent. Thus it is time (*kāla* being synonymous with *prabhu*) that ripens me like a fruit emerging from a tree."

The evident tension between these two paths is well illustrated in the story of Vṛtra, a well-known brahmin *asura* who falls foul of Indra's ambitions and is eventually killed by him with the help of Viṣṇu and Śiva (XII.272). The account of the spiritual education of Vṛtra (the Vṛtragītā) is

first introduced by Bhīṣma to reassure Yudhiṣṭhira (who wishes, as usual, to abandon his duties for a life of *saṃnyāsa*) that there will some day be an end to his tormented life. Since all things in this world come to an end, and even the cycle of rebirth must have an end, he is able to tell the king that (XII.270.7-8):

udyogādeva dharmajña kālenaiva gamiṣyatha||

iśo'yaṃ satataṃ dehī nṛpate puṇyapāpayoḥ|
tata eva samutthena tamasā rudhyate'pi ca||

"Your determination, O knower of the dharma, will pull you through in time. But always [bear in mind], O king, that the embodied soul (*dehi* = *jīva*) is never the author of his merits and demerits [resulting from his activities in the world]. It is from the darkness (*tamas* = the darkness of ignorance) that envelops him that these [merits and demerits] take their rise." This cryptic statement reminds Bhīṣma of how Vṛtra first failed the test of his guru Uśanas (his knowledge being limited at this point to the immediate consequences of the *pravṛttidharma*), whereupon he is exposed to the wisdom of the sage Sanatkumāra about the extended wanderings of the soul (*jīva*) through the seven world-systems over a period of many *kalpa*. Most noteworthy is what he reveals about the role of action (*karma*; *pravṛtti*) in this immense spiritual pilgrimage to the abode of Viṣṇu. Whatever the practices undertaken for this purpose (scriptural study, *tapas*, sacrifice, etc.), they are far from useless (as some might claim) since the *jīva* (XII.271.10-12):

bāhye cābhyantare caiva karmaṇā manasi sthitaḥ|
nirmalīkurute buddhyā so'mutrānantyamaśnute||

yathā hiraṇyakartā vai rūpymagnau viśodhayet|
bahuśo'tiprayatnena mahatātmakṛtena hi||

tadvajjātiśatairjīvaḥśudhyate'lpenakarmaṇā|
yatnena mahatā caivāpyekajātau viśudhyate||

"attains the infinite reaches of these higher worlds by relying on external practices (*karma*) and acts of mind to purify his (nature) with his own

understanding (*buddhi*). Just as a goldsmith, through repeated effort (*atiprayatna*), is able to purify the (unrefined) metal by (repeated castings of the metal into) the fire, the *jīva* is likewise able, as a result of his noble activities, little by little to purify himself over the course of some hundreds of births. Some, with great efforts (*yatna*) may even succeed in purifying themselves in the course of a single birth" (see also XII.194.11). Reference to "purification" probably refers to the elimination of mental habits (*vāsanā*) that have accumulated from time immemorial. He is thus driven to conclude that (XII.271.16):

evaṃ jātiśatairyukto guṇaireva prasaṅgiṣu|
buddhyā nivartate dośo yatnenābhyāsajena||

"In this manner, problems (*dośa*) arising from attachment to the *guṇa* [i.e. to the charms of the material element of the world — *prakṛti*] are dispelled by the understanding (*buddhi*) over the course of some hundreds of births by dint of repeated efforts (*yatna*)."

Human effort is thus given a role but only in so far as the *ātman* is not yet "cleansed" of the inherited tendencies arising out of its false identification with the *prakṛti*. This emphasis on the cleansing nature of noble [i.e. sāttvic] acts is a recurrent feature in the epic, exemplified by Kṛṣṇa's description of the yogī who "abandoning attachment (*saṅgaṃ tyaktvā*) performs actions with the body (*kāya*), the mind (*manas*), the intellect (*buddhi*), and even with the senses (*indriya*), for the sole purpose of purification of the *ātman* (*ātmaśuddhi*)" (VI.27/BG.5.11; see also VI.40/BG.18.5). In such a case the goal is not self-indulgence (*kāma*), worldly success (*artha*), or the practice of *dharma* for the sake of temporary relief in heaven or in the next life (with the prospect of further entanglement in the *saṃsāra*) but the experience of *mokṣa* in the form of inseparable union with the Lord Himself. Vṛtra is thus told that he (XII.271.28-29):

ekasya viddhi devasya sarvaṃ jagadidaṃ vaśe||

nānābhūtasya daityendra tasyaikatvaṃ vadatyayam|
jantuḥ paśyati jñānena tataḥ sattvaṃ prakāśate||

"should know that this entire universe is under the control of one divine being (*deva*). The unity of all the various creatures is implied in this fact, O prince of demons. A living being who sees this (unity) as a result of wisdom (*jñāna*) will be imbued with noble qualities (*sattva*)". This divine being is the infinite Viṣṇu, the author of the universe propelled by the wheel of time (XII.271.7-8):

śṛṇu sarvamidaṃ daitya viṣṇormāhātmyamuttamam|
viṣṇau jagatsthitaṃ sarvamiti viddhi paraṃtapa||

sṛjatyeṣa mahābāho bhūtagrāmaṃ carācaram|
eṣa cākṣipate kāle kāle visṛjate punaḥ||

"Listen, O demon, to this complete account [*sarvaṃidaṃ* also implies 'the universe'] of the supreme greatness of Viṣṇu. Know, O scorcher of foes, that the entire universe is supported by Viṣṇu. It is He who engenders the teeming throng of mobile and immobile creatures, O mighty-armed one; and, in the course of time (*kāle kāle*), it is He who destroys them, and once again brings them into existence."

This leads to the conclusion that the fruit of all action undertaken in the embodied state ultimately leads to a new self-understanding whereby the *ātman* shifts its vision from the material embodiment with which it has long been identified (*deha*; *prakṛti*) to Nārāyaṇa (= Viṣṇu) Himself. The fruit of all action, as well as the fruit of all renunciation of action is thus conceived as Nārāyaṇa Himself. He is *karmaphala* as well as *akarmaphala* (XII.271.24-25).

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[1] Madeleine Biardeau. "The salvation of the king in the Mahābhārata," in Contributions to Indian Sociology (New Series), 15, 1-2 (1981): 92.

[2] Chaitanya. The Mahābhārata p.449.

[3] M. Hiriyanna. Popular Essays in Indian Philosophy (Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1952), p. 36.

[4] Biardeau, "Etudes (V)", p. 196.

[5] Cf. Julian Woods, "The Doctrine of Karma in the Bhagavadgītā." In *The Journal of Studies in the Bhagavadgītā* VIII-IX, 1988-1989: 47-81. Śaṃkara's views are clear enough. In the Introduction to Chapter 5 of his Gītābhaṣya he states, for example, that, "it is impossible to imagine, even in a dream, that a realized being (*ātmatattvavid*) would derive any benefit from *karmayoga*, so opposed to right

knowledge (*samyagdarśana*), and entirely based on illusory knowledge (*mithyājñāna*)". (*kartavyatvopadeśāt ātmatattvavidaḥ samyagdarśanaviruddhaḥ mithyājñānahetukaḥ karmayogaḥ svapne'pi na sambhāvayitum śakyate*). All karma is a product of *avidyā* since it is only possible in a pluralistic world of individual actors and instruments of action. For him, therefore, Kṛṣṇa's emphasis on action in Chapter 3 of the Gītā is significant only in comparison to the kind of false renunciation of action described in VI.26/BG.3.4 as mere renunciation and again at VI.26/BG 3.8 as non-action (*akarma*).

[6] In contrast to the *adhyāsa* theory of Śaṃkara,this trick of the mind takes effect at the individual (*vyaṣṭi*) rather than at the collective (*samaṣṭi*) level of reality. Furthermore, the resulting human estate is considered by Rāmānuja as "real" in the sense that it is a real (i.e. not illusory) composite of soul (*ātman*) and body (*śarīra*; *deha*; *piṇḍa*, etc.).

[7] *evaṃ mayi aniveśya manaḥ svayatnagauraveṇa indriyajaye pravṛtto vinaśyo bhavati ityāha—*

[8] *yajñādibhiḥ karmabhiḥ ārādhitaḥ paramapuruṣaḥ asya anādikālkillapravṛttakarmavāsanāṃ samucchidya avyākulātmāvalokanamdadātītyarthaḥ||*

[9] Cf. VI.25/BG.3.5; 3.27-28; 3.33; VI.27/BG.5.14; VI.35/BG.13.30; VI.36/BG.14.19 etc.

VII — The Kṣatriyadharma

The foregoing analysis suggests that epic attitudes to human action are dominated by two separate perspectives. From the cosmic vantage-point that "*sa kartā sa karyam* " — He is the actor, and He is what has to be accomplished (XII.327.89; also XIII.143.12) — *puruṣakāra* would be regarded as the product of a fictional ego-identity whose very existence is predetermined by the ignorance (*avidyā*) that invests it with reality. On the other hand, as active subject in confrontation with an objective world, this fictional ego-identity appears to enjoy a measure of control over the course of events "out there" (since *ahaṃkāra* literally means"I do," from *aham* = I and *√kṛ* = to do). It is the ultimate source of this ability (material nature, the "Lord in the heart," character etc.) and the causal effectiveness of its interventions in the world that are in question.

We have already noted examples of the attempts made to distinguish the various causalities involved (cf. pps. 89-91). In the Bhagavadgītā (VI.40/BG.18.14), five factors (*kāraṇa*) are enumerated, including the material basis of the action (*adhiṣṭhāna*), the actor or doer (*kartṛ* = *ahaṃkāra*), the instruments used (*karaṇa*), the various energies involved (*pṛthak ceṣṭā*), and destiny (*daiva*) as the fifth. At the same time, since the right form of action leads to purification of the mental faculties (and eventually to liberation), there must also be a certain potential within the human composite for changing the prevailing conditions "in here."

We will ignore for the moment any question about the reality of these influences and potentials and concentrate on the manner in which the epic deals with them in the light of its main message. And it would appear (cf. p. 13) that this is primarily a message of hope intended for the king, for whom "the dharma consists in the administration of justice, O king, not the shaving of the head" (*daṇḍa eva hi rājendra kṣatriyadharmo na muṇḍanam*) (XII.24.30). The *kṣatriya* path is *not* the renunciation of the brahmin (*nivṛtti*) which would be the dharma of another, but the active path of renunciation-

in-action, the *pravṛttidharma* advocated by Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgītā. This is why the *kṣatriya* who turns away from confrontation (as Arjuna was initially tempted to do) or from his royal duties (as Yudhiṣṭhira is inclined to do throughout) becomes an object of censure. *Puruṣakāra* may be a product of mistaken identity, but for the *kṣatriya*, particularly with respect to the duties of the king (the *rājadharma*), it is the key ingredient.

Debate over *puruṣakāra* arises primarily in connection with family differences over Yudhiṣṭhira's character and policies.[1] As events unfold, his atypical (for a *kṣatriya*) passivity appears more and more to belie the promise of his name, "firm in combat." Eventually, this "son of Dharma" becomes the storm center of the conflict between the two dharmas, expressed by his own personal conflict between his responsibilities as householder and king (that is to say, his duties according to the traditional *pravṛttidharma*), and his natural preference for the *nivṛttidharma*. This fault line in his character is dramatically revealed in the pressure of the war's aftermath by a sudden shift from the one dharma to the other, as Yudhiṣṭhira makes a final bid to abandon his responsibilities in favour of the life of a forest sage. As Klaes has pointed out: "Thus Yudhisthira stood before the dilemma that the renunciation of his kingdom was sinful according to the law and that war, the means of regaining the kingdom, was sinful according to his conscience....The problem was, which dharma ruled in which way: whether the caste-dharma prevailed by the active destruction of the anti-social adharma or the ethical dharma by its own moral strength converting adharma into dharma and thus guaranteeing the order of society."[2] Three examples of family differences arising out of this pacifist streak in his nature and behavior stand out. The first is prompted by Draupadī during the period of forest exile, the second by his mother Kuntī shortly before the outbreak of the hostilities, while the third is the final crisis of conscience that follows the war. The resolution of this latter conflict — most significant in length and intensity — leads directly to the questioning of Bhīṣma concerning the *rājadharma* that Yudhiṣṭhira now reluctantly agrees to follow.

Ironically, the debate of the forest exile (III.27-33) is sparked by concern over the most appropriate policy for recovering the worldly life and kingdom he will subsequently wish to abandon in a last desperate bid to return to the

forest. It occurs while the brothers and their common wife are residing at beautiful Lake Dvaitavana, portrayed as an idyllic time of social concord when the vedic chants of the brahmins blend in perfect harmony with the song of the bowstring (i.e. of the *kṣatriya*). In short, we once again have a scene like the world of Brahmā himself (*brahmalokasama*), reminiscent of a *kṛtayuga* for which Yudhiṣṭhira might be expected to have a natural affinity (III.27.2ff.). In fact, the very contrary is the case, and we find them all mired in grief. One evening, Draupadī turns to Yudhiṣṭhira to enquire how it is possible, under the circumstances, that he has no anger for the Kaurava. A *kṣatriya* without anger is unheard of in her experience, but Yudhiṣṭhira is just the opposite (III.28.34). "Why doesn't your anger grow?" she enquires repeatedly (*kasmānmanyurna vardhate*). A *kṣatriya* is expected to show his mettle (*tejas*). This is a time for revenge, not forgiveness, and she seeks to bring the point home with an old discourse of Prahlāda and Bali Vairocana to this effect (III.29).

After listening to Yudhiṣṭhira extol the merits of patience (*kṣamā*), finally concluding that it is the "eternal dharma (*dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ*) of those who have mastered themselves" (III.30.50), her own patience runs out. She begins to berate him for the kind of dharma he protects (which certainly smacks of the *nivṛttidharma*), but which — as she points out — has been incapable of protecting him (III.31.8). How could the situation arise in which, all of a sudden, he is seized with the spirit of gambling? (v.18). She suddenly recalls an old *itihāsa* which leads her to conclude that he is somehow in the power of the *dhaṭṛ* (the one who bestows), who, we are told, manipulates all living creatures like wooden dolls (*dārumayī yoṣā*) (v.22). Human beings have no control over themselves or over others (v.24), since the *dhāṭṛ* operates from within their bodies and uses them as mere instruments to realize his own good or evil purposes (v.30). Spreading confusion with his *māyā* (v.31), he plays with their fortunes like a child with its toys (v.36).

Now this, in itself, sounds like a pure *nivṛtti* perspective which, under other circumstances, Yudhiṣṭhira might be willing to entertain. In this case, however, he is appalled at what he considers a heresy (*nāstika*) (III.32.2). He defends his policy of appeasement with a strong appeal to the need for governing standards of morality, but in this instance the standards he supports are those governing the traditional *pravṛttidharma* of his caste and

station of life (he describes himself as *gṛhānāvasatā* — a person established in a household). He himself obeys this dharma not for the rewards (*phala*) it brings, however, but because it is his very nature (*svabhāva*) to do so (v.4).[3] Famous seers and teachers greater than the gods have all reached their positions of eminence and power through strict adherence to this *dharma*. Casting doubt upon it and upon the motives of the *dhātṛ* is thus a dangerous course (v.10-14). Without a standard (*pramāṇa*), human beings would each become standards unto themselves (*ātmapramāṇa*) and, driven by desire and greed (*kāmalobhānugā*), fall into hell (v.18). Nor can there be any doubt about acts bearing fruit, since if the various religious practices laid down by the Veda were without effect, it would be the greatest hoax of all time (*vipralambho' yamatyantaṃ*), and the men of old would have abandoned them (v.25-26). As Bruce Long has noted, "Yudhiṣṭhira counters Draupadī's condemnation of God with essentially the same message as that delivered to Job by the voice in the whirlwind: "Dharma always bears [appropriate] fruit...[and] is never fruitless....The fruition of acts, good as well as bad, their appearance and disappearance, are the mysteries of the gods."[4] The wizardry of the gods is obscure, but neither the dharma nor the *deva* should be doubted just because the results are not seen (*adarśina*) (v.36). In the words of Brahmā to his sons, "work has its rewards — this is the eternal dharma " (*karmaṇāṃ phalamastīti tathaitaddharma śāśvatam*) (v. 37). The dharma (here clearly the *pravṛttidharma*) should under all circumstances be obeyed, and Draupadī should abandon her lack of faith.

Yudhiṣṭhira's vigorous defence of the merits of action performed in accord with the *pravṛttidharma* forces Draupadī to abandon what was, in effect, a *nivṛttidharma* perspective (III.33). She does not, of course, really understand either position (she admits that she is babbling from grief), but what she now says is revealing, if a trifle confusing. She is now willing to admit — repeating what she once overheard from a brahmin visitor to her father's house — that the survival of all living things from the *dhātṛ* and the *vidhātṛ* down to the crane in the water is dependent on effort (*utthāna*) (v.7). "*Svakarma kuru mā glāsīḥ* " — do your own duty and do not slacken (v.8) — for one's task is to increase and to preserve what one has (v.9). Without action the whole system of life in the world would collapse (v.10). The key

ingredient is thus the thought behind the action (*karmabuddhi*), not the elements of fate (*diṣṭa*) and chance (*haṭha*), since (v.18):

evaṃ haṭhācca daivācca svabhāvātkarmaṇastathā|
yāni prāpnoti puruṣastatphalaṃ pūrvakarmaṇaḥ||

"Whatever happens to a man from the combined effects of chance (*haṭha*), destiny (*daiva*) and natural causes (*svabhāva*), as well as from the work put into it (*karma*) is the result of all the acts performed by him previously (*pūrvakarma*)." This sounds like the classical *karma* theory that one reaps what one sows. However — and this is where the situation remains confused — it appears that living creatures are still subject to external agencies (in this case the *dhātṛ*) governing the apportionment of these previous actions (v.19):

dhātāpi hi svakarmaiva taistairhetubhirīśvaraḥ|
vidadhāti vibhajyeha phalaṃ pūrvakṛtaṃ nṛṇām||

"The Lord in the form of the *dhātṛ* ordains one's role in life (*svakarma*) as a result of a chain of causes, and distributes the fruits of the previous actions performed by men." It would thus appear that the Supreme Being is still regarded as first in the chain of causes, a notion seemingly at odds with the following two verses, which make it clear that the seed of action germinates in the human mind (v.23-24):

manasārthānvinikṣitya paścātprāpnoti karmaṇā|
buddhipūrvaṃ svayaṃ dhīraḥ puruṣastatra kāraṇaṃ||

saṃkhyātuṃ naiva śakyāni karmāṇi puruṣarṣabha|
agāranagarāṇāṃ hi siddhiḥ puruṣahaitukī||

"After deciding what one wants (*artha*) with one's mind (*manas*), man, as a rational being (*dhīra*), thereafter becomes the cause of what happens (*kāraṇa*) as a result of previous thinking (*buddhipūrva*). It is not possible to enumerate the chain of acts, O bull among men, [but] the success of houses and towns is due to human intervention." It is by one's own mind (*dhī*) that the means (*upāya*) to effect the action becomes known (v.25). It is, of course, impossible to know what portion of the final result is due to chance or destiny as contrasted with man's own efforts (*puruṣaprayatna*), since we do

not have a complete view of the chain of causes leading to the present state of affairs (vv.30-31). Why, then, does the *dhātṛ* have a place? Seemingly for the reason that (vv.33-34):

yadi na syānna bhūtānāṃ kṛpaṇo nāma kaścana||

yaṃ yamarthamabhiprepsuḥ kurute karma pūruṣaḥ|

"If he did not exist, none of the creatures would be wanting in anything whatsoever. A man could perform an act to achieve whatever purpose he had in mind." In this manner, the Lord has become the link between past and present actions and their results. But whoever (or whatever) is responsible, the most important thing is to act since there is glory even in failure, provided that the act was well planned and executed. If the monsoon fails after the peasant has tilled the soil and planted the seed, what fault is it of his? (vv. 44-45). The smart man (*dhīra*) thus uses his intelligence (*medhā*) to evaluate the conditions of place and time (*deśakāla*), applying various means (*upāya*) according to his strength (*bala*) and capacity (*śakti*), not forgetting an appeal to "good luck" (*maṇgalaṃ svasti*) (v.49). These arguments of Draupadī do apparently have the desired effect on this occasion, since Yudhiṣṭhira is later reported to have agreed to slay Duryodhana and "enjoy the earth" (cf. XII.14.8-11). As Biardeau suggests: "Throughout this dialogue, the princess evidently plays the role of śakti for the king. This is well within the logic of her personality, the human projection of the Goddess, the active element in the creation but at the same time (within the logic) of philosophy."[5]

Of course, this is not the end of his perverse tendency to compromise and to avoid confrontation at all costs. His compliant approach to the impending crisis becomes the subject of an impassioned plea by his mother Kuntī shortly before the outbreak of hostilities (V.130). She begins (v.6) by rating him an ignorant fool (*mandaka*), the likes of a *śrotriya* (a brahmin scriptural scholar) with nothing but a rote understanding of the Veda, and inspired by a single dharma (*dharmamekaikamīkṣate*). She even calls him a failure (*avṛtti*) (v.25). She clearly feels he must be weaned away from the dharma he is following (presumably the *nivṛttidharma*) and galvanized into action (v.7):

aṇgavekṣasva dharmaṃ tvaṃ yathā sṛṣṭaḥ svayaṃbhuvā|
urastaḥ kṣatriyaḥ sṛṣṭo bāhuvīryopajīvitā|
krūrāya karmaṇe nityaṃ prajānāṃ paripālane||

"Come now! you should observe the dharma promulgated by the self-existent Lord (*svayaṃbhu*). The *kṣatriya* was born from his chest to live by the strength of his arms, to act forever harshly for the protection of his subjects." In other words, he should follow the *pravṛttidharma* of the *kṣatriya* attested by the primal sacrifice described in the *puruṣasūkta* hymn of Rgveda X.xc.12. As she subsequently points out (V.130.28):

brāhmaṇaḥ pracaredbhaikṣaṃ kṣatriyaḥ paripālayet|
vaiśyo dhanārjanaṃ kuryācchūdraḥ paricarecca tān||

"The brahmin should live as a mendicant, the *kṣatriya* should protect, the *vaiśya* should generate wealth, and the *śūdra* should serve the rest of them". And she further buttresses her argument with the significant statement that (V.130.15-16):

kālo vā kāraṇaṃ rājño rājā vā kālakāraṇam|
iti te saṃśayo mā bhūdrājā kālasya kāraṇam||

rājā kṛtayugasraṣṭā tretāyā dvāparasya ca|
yugasya ca caturthasya rājā bhavati kāraṇam||

"To the question: 'is it the time that is the cause (*kāraṇa*) of the king or the king the cause of the time?' you should have no doubts. It is the king who is the cause of the time. It is the king who initiates the *kṛtayuga*, the *tretayuga* and the *dvāparayuga*, and it is also the king who is the cause of the fourth age (i.e. the *kaliyuga*)." This echoes similar statements made in the Rājadharma section of Book XII (e.g. XII.92.6; XII.139.7).

She also exhorts him further with an ancient history (*itihāsa*) called "*jaya* " (victory) to be heard by one who wishes to triumph (*śrotavyo vijigīṣuṇā*) (V.134.17). This is cast in the form of a dialogue (*saṃvāda*) between a mother (Vidurā) and her son Saṃjaya (completely demoralized from defeat at the hands of the Saindhava king). Vidurā provokes him to action in no uncertain terms, telling him to stop wallowing in self-pity and to have some

backbone. When a man shows courage he has nothing to be ashamed of, since success or failure is not a matter of concern to the learned (*alabdhvā yadi vā labdhvā nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ*) (V.131.15). It is superiority over others that is the measure of a man, whether in sacred knowledge (*śrutaṃ*), *tapas*, good fortune (*śrī*), or gallantry (*vikrama*). However, being a *kṣatriya* she must warn him (V.131.23):

na tveva jālmīṃ kāpālīṃ vṛttimeṣitumarhasi|
nṛśaṃsyāmayaśasyāṃ ca duḥkhāṃ kāpuruṣocitām||

"Do not pursue the contemptible existence of a mendicant, vile, dishonorable, wretched, practised by people of dubious reputation (*kāpuruṣa*)." A man is called *puruṣa* because he is a match for a city (*pura*) (V.131.33). Instead of lying down like a beaten dog, "the time has come for action" (*āgate kāle kāryaṃ*), she tells him (V.133.5). To fight and to win is the task of the *kṣatriya* on this earth, and "to act forever harshly for the protection of his subjects" (*krūrāya karmaṇe nityaṃ prajānāṃ paripālane* [V.133.11, repeating the third line of V.130.7 quoted above]). Without desirable possessions a man soon becomes a non-entity (*abhāva*) "like the Ganges flowing into the ocean" (V.133.16). This, of course, is a common image employed in the Upaniṣads (i.e. in the *nivṛttidharma*) to symbolize the dissolution of the ego in a man of realization; it is here employed in the pejorative sense of one lacking in ambition. She admits that the fruit of action is always impermanent, but (V.133.24-25):

anityamiti jānanto na bhavanti bhavanti ca|
atha ye naiva kurvanti naiva jātu bhavanti te||

ekaguṇyamanīhāyāmabhāvaḥkarmaṇāṃphalam|
atha dvaiguṇyamīhāyāṃ phalaṃ bhavati vā na vā||

"Those who know that it is impermanent (*anitya*) may prosper or they may not. However, those who do nothing never get anywhere. Apathy (*anīha*) has but one consequence: nothing. Exertion (*īhā*) has two. There is either a result, or there is not." The right attitude is always to think, "this is going to be" (*bhaviṣyati*) (v.27). Her admonitions finally lead Saṃjaya to announce

that he will rise up (*ud √yam*), subdue his enemies and win victory (V.134.14).

As already mentioned, Yudhiṣṭhira's congenital desire for *saṃnyāsa* reaches its peak immediately after the war is over and the enormity of the destruction hits home. In contrast to Arjuna whose personal crisis had been resolved before the onset of hostilities, Yudhiṣṭhira becomes paralyzed by grief and a sense of guilt when it is all over. This is due to the fact that the victory he had gained as a king "was a complete defeat for him as man, since he was disloyal to his own nature."[6] In particular, he must come to terms with the knowledge that his own covetousness (i.e. rather than the *kṣatriyadharma* per se) was responsible for the death of thousands of brave warriors, including his elder brother Karṇa. As Chaitanya notes, his motive had been "personal aggrandizement through the acquisition of a realm that could be regarded as a personal possession, not a trust involving great moral responsibility."[7] This triggers his natural propensity to abandon all worldly responsibilities, and, addressing Arjuna, he reflects on what might have been (XII.7.3):

yadbaikṣamācariṣyāma vṛṣṇyandhakapure vayam|
jñātīnniṣpuruṣānkṛtvā nemāṃ prāpsyāma durgatim||

"If we had led a life of mendicancy in the cities of the Vṛṣṇi and the Andhaka, we would not have had to put up with this hard life as a result of our kinsmen." All anger and remorse is turned against the *kṣatriya* values, and he bursts out (XII.7.5):

dhigastu kṣātramācāraṃ dhigastu balamaurasam|
dhigastvamarṣaṃ yenemāmāpadaṃ gamitā vayam||

"Fie on *kṣatriya* practices, fie on might and valor and wrath, all of which have brought us to this calamity." Further indictment of the evils of war and disclosure that grief is the only legacy of his initial hatred and anger at the enemy is followed by his announced intention of leaving for the woods (XII.7.36):

sa dhanaṃjaya nirdvandvo munirjñānasamanvitaḥ|

vanamāmantraya vaḥ sarvāngam[illegible]vāmi paraṃtapa||

"Therefore, Dhanaṃjaya, disregarding the pairs of opposites, I will go to the woods, O scorcher of foes, and become a *muni* dedicated to the path of knowledge." His natural propensities have led him to abandon the *pravṛttidharma* of the *kṣatriya* and adopt the *nivṛttidharma* of the brahmin. His brothers and friends, and the company of sages who had come to offer consolation and comfort to the king, are understandably appalled, this being tantamount to the "rājasic abandonment" already condemned by Kṛṣṇa (VI.40/BG.18.8), as well as involving "the dharma of another," also condemned by Him (VI.25/BG.3.35; VI.40/BG.18.47).

The subsequent debate between him and his well-wishers throws into sharp relief the differences in character and world-view represented by the various interlocutors as well as showing the inevitable convergence of ideas linking *puruṣakāra* with the proponents of the *pravṛttidharma* of the warrior-king (*kṣatriyadharma* ; *rājadharma*). As the debate proceeds between the two sides (with Yudhiṣṭhira seeking to justify his desire for the forest mode of life), his opponents are forced more and more into philosophical arguments about human action in general and, more specifically, about the vital necessity for the king (and, by implication, for other human beings) to exercise his power of *puruṣakāra* in the form of the *daṇḍa* or "rod of chastisement," to guide the course of events in the realm and in his own life.

The first to speak out (XII.8) is Arjuna who, as might be expected, makes the point that without material well-being (*artha*), there can be no religious life at all. He begins by asking rather pointedly why, after performing the dharma of his own order well enough to win the entire earth, Yudhiṣṭhira now wishes to throw it all away. Why then did he slay all these kings of the earth in the first place? (v.5). If he abandons the kingdom now to adopt the miserable life of a mendicant (*kāpālin*), what will people think of him? (v.7). Making no provision for the morrow may be all right for a recluse, but Yudhiṣṭhira has been born into a race of kings, and the *rājadharma* depends entirely on material prosperity (*dhana*) (v. 12). Indeed, practically everything in life — religious duties (dharma), pleasure (*kāma*), heaven, courage, anger, learning (*śrutaṃ*), and human dignity (*dama*) — are all grounded in material

prosperity (*artha*) (vv. 17; 21), the purpose of which is to perform sacrifices (v.27). The very gods have acted in this way, slaughtering their own kinsmen (i.e. the *asura*) in the process. He suggests Yudhiṣṭhira should perform a horse sacrifice as a means of cleansing himself and his subjects (vv.34-37).

Needless to say, this line of argument does not sit very well with Yudhiṣṭhira (XII.9). Rather than the course advocated by Arjuna, he would abandon the pleasures and practices (*sukhācārā*) of men and wander the forest, living with the animals on fruits and berries, and performing the strictest *tapas* (*mahattapa*) (v. 4). Looking to others like a blind and deaf idiot (*jaḍāndhabadhirākṛti*), he plans to live contentedly by deriving happiness from his own soul (v.15). Why do this? He says it is all the result of his reflection on the conditions of existence. He sees how human beings are caught in relations of cause and effect by everything they do in life, such as looking after their wives and children and supporting their kinsmen. And when it is all over and they leave this world, the consequences, good and bad, must then be born by them alone. No one else is responsible (vv.30-31). This makes him realize that (vv.32-33):

evaṃ saṃsāracakre'sminvyāviddhe rathacakravat|
sameti bhūtagrāmo'yaṃ bhūtagrāmeṇa kāryavān||

janmamṛtyujarāvyādhivedanābhirupadrutam|
asāramimamasvantaṃ saṃsāraṃ tyajataḥ sukham||

"In this manner, doing what they have to do, the world's creatures all come into this wheel of life (*saṃsāracakra*) that resembles the wheel of a chariot. Coming here, they meet with their fellow-creatures. Whoever abandons the *saṃsāra* — which is worthless and insubstantial, being soon afflicted by birth, death, old age, disease and pain — is a happy man." When even the gods and great *ṛṣi* in Heaven itself stand to fall from their positions of power and eminence, what better then, on the strength of this nectar of wisdom (*prajñāmṛta*), than to opt for what is permanent (*avyaya*), eternal (*śāśvata*), and secure (*dhruva*) (v. 36)?

It is now Bhīma's turn to brand his elder brother "an ignorant fool (*mandaka*) of a *śrotriya* with nothing but a rote understanding of the Veda" (XII.10.1).

He repeats the verbal jab made by Arjuna. Why tell us all this now, after a battle that could otherwise have been avoided? He acts like a person who gets covered in mud from digging a well but refuses to drink the water. Other similar unflattering comparisons are made. However, the main thrust of his argument is that a king should fulfil his responsibilities. He points out that (XII.10.17-19):

āpatkāle hi saṃyāsaḥ kartavya iti śiṣyate|
jarayābhiparītena śatrubhirvyasitena ca||

tasmādiha kṛtaprajñāstyāgaṃ na paricakṣate|
dharmavyatikramaṃ cedaṃ manyante sūkṣmadarśinaḥ||

"It has been laid down that *saṃnyāsa* is to be adopted [by kings] only in times of distress, when defeated by foes, or overcome by old age. Therefore, the wise do not approve of renunciation (*tyāga*) in this case. Indeed, those that understand the subtleties of things believe that such [a course of life] involves a violation of the dharma." And he concludes that (XII.10.26):

tatha cedātmabhāgyeṣu nānyeṣāṃ siddhimaśnute|
asmātkarmaiva kartavyaṃ nāsti siddhirakarmaṇaḥ||

"Just as success in life (*siddhi*) is won on the strength of one's own good fortune (*bhāga*) and not on that of another, you should do your own duty (*kartavyaṃ* — i.e. not that of another). Success is not won by doing nothing (*akarma*)." This leads Arjuna to emphasize the importance of the domestic mode of life (*gṛhasthāśrama*) in the form of a story. When a number of young brahmin boys decide to leave home for a life of *tapas* in the forest, Indra appears as a bird to convince them that true *tapas* can be obtained only through a life of domesticity (XII.11.20).

The baton is then passed to Nakula who carries this theme a step further (XII.12). One who adopts the next mode of life by abandoning his responsibilities as a householder is an *ātmatyāgī* (one who abandons his own self) (v.8). The domestic mode is the foundation of all the other modes of life. When the four modes were once weighed in a balance, he claims, it required the three other modes on one scale to balance it on the other (v.12).

But more importantly — and here the discussion moves to another level — the true renouncer is not the one who escapes to the woods, but the one who fulfils all his domestic duties in the right spirit (XII.12.15):

abhimānakṛtaṃ karma naitatphalavaducyate|
tyāgayuktaṃ mahārāja sarvameva mahāphalam||

"It is said, great king, that the action undertaken in a spirit of vanity is not productive of fruit; but that those acts that are performed in a spirit of renunciation (*tyāgayukta*) are productive of abundant fruit." If Yudhiṣṭhira wishes to renounce his wealth, he should perform sacrifices such as the *rājasūya* and the *aśvamedha* (v.26). A king is the very embodiment of Kali who does not provide for his subjects (v.27). The true yogī is the king who abandons all internal and external attachments, not the one who abandons his worldly responsibilities for dwelling in the woods (v.33).

This argument is, of course, strongly supported by his twin brother. However, he adds the significant warning that (XII.13.2-4):

bāhyadravyavimuktasya śārīreṣu ca gṛdhyataḥ|
yo dharmo yatsukhaṃ vā syāddviṣatāṃ tattathāstu naḥ||

śārīraṃ dravyamutsṛjya pṛthivīmanuśāsataḥ|
yo dharmo yatsukhaṃ vā syātsuhṛdāṃ tattathāstu naḥ||

dvyakṣarastu bhavenmṛtyurtryakṣaraṃ brahma śāśvatam|
mameti ca bhavenmṛtyurna mameti ca śāśvatam||

"The abandonment of all external objects by one who still covets them himself leads to a perverse form of dharma and happiness. On the other hand, the rejection of material attachments by one who governs the earth, leads to an auspicious form of dharma and happiness. The two-syllable word '*mama*' (mine) should be regarded as the equivalent of death. The three-syllable word '*na mama*' (not mine) should be regarded as the equivalent of eternal Brahmā."

Draupadī, too, puts in a word here. She recalls what he had planned while in forest exile at the Dvaita lake (XII.14.8-11) and reminds him that friendship

towards all creatures (*mitratā sarvabhūtānāṃ*), charity (*dāna*), study of the scriptures (*adhyayana*), and *tapas* constitute the dharma of the brahmin, not that of a king (v.15). It was not by study, gift-giving, mendicancy, or sacrifice that he has won the earth (v.18). She even goes as far as to suggest he is on a path of madness (*unmārga*) and needs medical treatment (v.34).

Arjuna once again urges the king to look to the natural course of things (*svabhāvaṃ paśya laukikam*) and take up his duties (v.4). The world is dependent on the rod of chastisement (*daṇḍa*) wielded by the king. There is no way that one can live without inflicting some injury to others. In fact, the whole universe with its mobile and immobile creatures has been ordained by the gods (*vidhānaṃ devavihitaṃ*) as food for living beings. There is no point in getting upset by it; *yathā sṛṣṭo'si rājendra tathā bhavitumarhasi* ("you have to adapt to the role created for you, O king") (v. 23). Even in the woods he would be killing living beings (v.24). His task is to protect his subjects by a judicious application of the *daṇḍa*, which constitutes the root of all civilized life. Our acts are dependent on our level of material prosperity (*artha*), but this in itself is dependent on the *daṇḍa* of the king. It is *daṇḍa* alone that prevents matters from degenerating into the law of the jungle (v.48). Better by far to injure from righteous motives than not to injure from fear of sin; for there is no act in this world that is wholly meritorious or wholly sinful. In all acts something of both are seen (v.50). In any case (as Arjuna himself remembers from VI. 24/BG.2.19), we must remember that whoever is slain in this process, is not really slain (vv.56-58). Bhīma adds in this connection that his elder brother now has a battle on his hands even more critical than the battle just fought with Bhīṣma, Droṇa and his other enemies. This is the battle for his own mind, which, if he does not conquer before he dies, will bring him back to this earth to fight these very foes again (XII.16.20-23).

Yudhiṣṭhira uses this as an opportunity for some well-chosen words about Bhīma's notorious appetite for food and for the pleasures of the world (XII. 17). Appetite for worldly things has no bounds. Only those who have renounced all enjoyments and have subdued the demands of their bodies by *tapas* can attain to the highest state of beatitude (*sthānamanuttamam*) (v.6). He challenges him to free himself from the great burdens of dharma and *adharma* with which the nature of kingship is invested (v.7). Enjoyments in

this world are a form of bondage (*bandhana*), and have also been called action (*karmehokta*). The highest state is attained only when one is liberated (*vimukta*) from both enjoyment and action (v.16). This is exemplified by king Janaka, who reportedly made the claim that (v.18):

anantaṃ bata me vittaṃ yasya me nāsti kiṃcana|
mithilāyāṃ pradīptāyāṃ na me dahyati kiṃcana||

"Truly immense is my wealth, yet I have nothing. If the whole of Mithila were reduced to ashes, nothing of mine would be burned." Human beings have a faculty of understanding (*buddhi*) that should be used to rise above the obvious and ccme to broader understanding of the whole (v.20). The way to Brahmā is to see the one homogeneous essence behind the infinite diversity of things (v.22).

This is all very well, Arjuna interjects at this point (XII.18), but you have forgotten the serious doubts that were raised by Janaka's wife about whether he did, in fact, truly abandon his attachment to the things of this world. If it is true as you claim (she challenges him) that the kingdom and a handful of barley are all the same to you, what basis then your desire to abandon the kingdom (v.20)? And what has become of your duties as householder (as support to your wife and family) and king (as support to the true mendicants who depend on you for their existence)? Only those who are unattached in the midst of attachments (*asakta saktavad*), who are independent of the world (*niḥsaṇga*), who have broken their bonds (*muktabandhana*), and who look on friend and foe with an equal eye are truly liberated (*mukta*) (v. 30). And this apparently does not apply to the king in his present life. His place in the scheme of things has been ordained by the very fact of his birth as a *kṣatriya*, and his prospects for *mokṣa* will depend on the spirit in which he is able to fulfill the role he has been given to play in this life. She therefore exhorts him to keep his senses under control and "win the worlds, O king"(*rāja jaya lokān* — i.e. the interim rewards of heaven) by supporting those given to his charge (v.34).

Yudhiṣṭhira is not yet prepared to accept any of this (to his mind, misleading) advice, particularly from a younger brother (XII.19). He responds in a rather patronizing tone by suggesting that Arjuna may well

know all there is to know about the art of weaponry (*astrajña*) and the practices of heroes (*vīravrata*), but he has little sense for the scriptures (v.3). He proceeds to give Arjuna a short pep-talk on religious practice, although "you may have difficulty (*duḥkha*) understanding it" (v.15). Although most people look for salvation in the wrong places, there is indeed a path, the path of knowledge, that leads there. What purpose, then, in relying so much on material prosperity (*artha*), which leads to all sorts of problems (v.21).

With neither side prepared to budge from their original positions, the discussion is showing signs of degenerating into a dialogue of the deaf. One of the assembled sages, Devasthāna, decides that the time has come to resolve the issue once and for all (XII.20). Both parties have only part of the truth they claim for their respective positions. Salvation is no doubt the goal of all existence, but having won the whole earth according to the dharma (i.e. the dharma of kings), "you should not abdicate on impulse, O king" (*na vṛthā rājaṃstvaṃ parityaktumarhasi*) (v.3). And he lays down an important criterion. A king should pass through all four modes of life that have been laid down by the Veda, one after another (v.4). His role is to perform great sacrifices involving large amounts of material wealth (*artha*) in the form of *dakṣiṇā* (v.5). He emphasizes that *karmaniṣṭhā* (persons dedicated to the path of action) are to be found even among the ranks of the sages themselves (v.6). The truth is that (XII.20.10):

yajñāya sṛṣṭāni dhanāni dhātrā
yaṣṭādiṣṭaḥ puruṣo rakṣitā ca|
tasmātsarvaṃ yajña evopayojyaṃ
dhanaṃ tato'nantara eva kāmaḥ||

"The Ordainer (*dhātṛ*) created wealth for sacrifice, and he designated human beings to take care of it. For this reason, the whole of one's wealth should be applied to the performance of sacrifice. Pleasure (*kāma*) will follow soon after." For this reason everything should be offered in sacrifice — *tasmādyajñe sarvamevopayojyam* (v.14). It is the satisfaction (*saṃtoṣa*) that comes from mastering both desire and aversion (*kāmadveṣau*) that human beings are seeking above all else (XII.21.2-4). However, the ways of achieving this are many and various. Some opt for a life of tranquillity

(*śama*), others for an active life (*vyāyāma*), some practice sacrifice (*yajñā*), others renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*), charity (*dāna*), indulgence (*pratigraha*), meditation (*dhyāna*), sovereignty (*rājya*), or just prefer to be alone (*ekāntaśilina*) (vv.7-9). But one born to rule (*yo hi rājye sthitaḥ*) should vigorously (*prayatnena*) practice the dharma laid down by Manu, keeping himself forever in control (*śaśvadvaśī*) without preference for what is dear and what is not (*tulyapriyāpriya*) (vv.12-13). The extinction of all desires (*nirvāṇa*) is difficult to reach (*suduṣpāra*) and attended by all sorts of obstacles (*bahuvignā*), the implication being that Yudhiṣṭhira is not yet ready for such a path (v.16). Yudhiṣṭhira should not grieve for what is past (Arjuna interjects). In any case, death in battle is the highest sacrifice for the *kṣatriya*. *Tapas* and *tyāga* are the duties of the *brāhmaṇa* (XII.22.4). Rather than wallow in remorse (*saṃtāpa*) he should "Be ready for action" (*daṃśito bhava karmaṇi*) (v.9). Having conquered the earth he should now conquer himself (*vijitātmā*) and perform sacrifices on the model of Indra (v.10).

Judging the time is right for him to throw the weight of his considerable authority behind these arguments, Vyāsa now also intervenes in support of the domestic mode of life (XII.23). What Arjuna has just said is true. The forest life has not been ordained for him (v.3), and Yudhiṣṭhira should shoulder the burdens of his ancestral kingdom like an ox (v.7). He reiterates the leading principles of the *kṣatriyadharma*, which include, significantly, exertion (*saṃutthāna*) and discontent with present prosperity (*asaṃtoṣaḥ śriyaṃ prati*), i.e. Yudhiṣṭhira has more work to do before he is ready for the *saṃtoṣa* that Devasthāna mentioned as constituting the goal of life (v.10). He emphasizes that the real misery of his forest exile has ended. Stretching before him is a period of happiness (XII.25.4) in which he can enjoy the material rewards of life (dharma, *artha* and *kāma*) with his brothers (v.5). Only after he has fulfilled his obligations to the mendicants, the ancestors and the gods, will he be ready to practise other modes of life (v.6). In the meantime, he should perform the *sarvamedha* and the *aśvamedha* sacrifices (v.7) and see to it that his subjects — particularly the *brāhmaṇas* — are well protected. Exertion is particularly important since (XII.25.20-21):

sumantrite sunīte ca vidhivaccopapādite|
pauruṣe karmaṇi kṛte nāstyadharmo yudhiṣṭhira||

vipadyante samārambhāḥ sidhyantyapi ca daivataḥ|
kṛte puruṣakāre tu nainaḥ spṛśati pārthivam||

"It is not contrary to the dharma, O Yudhiṣṭhira, if an act is performed with vigor (*pauruṣa*), after due deliberation (*sumantrita*) and with the good counsel of men well-versed in the scriptural ordinances. Human enterprises (*samārambha*) succeed or fail on account of destiny (*daivata*). However, if the king acts with initiative (*puruṣakāra*), he is free of sin (*enas*)." To make his point, Vyāsa recounts the story of king Hayagrīva who is now sporting in the world of the gods (*modate devaloke*) after pouring his own life-breaths on to the field of battle in the great sacrifice of war (vs. 24-33).

But with the lamentations of the wives of the dead heroes still ringing in his ears, Yudhiṣṭhira finds little joy at the prospect of earthly sovereignty, and Vyāsa decides he must raise the level of the discussion (XII.26.5-7). He quotes from what appears to be a traditional adage of some kind (the metre changes from *anuṣṭubh* to *triṣṭubh*).

na karmaṇā labhyate cintayā vā
nāpyasya dātā puruṣasya kaścit|
paryāyayogādvihitaṃ vidhātrā
kālena sarvaṃ labhate manuṣyaḥ||

na buddhiśāstrādhyayanena śakyaṃ
prāptuṃ viśeṣairmanujairakāle|
mūrkho'pi prāpnoti kadācidarthā
nkālo hi kāryaṃ prati nirviśeṣaḥ||

nābhūtikāle ca phalaṃ dadāti
śilpaṃ na mantrāśca tathauṣadhāni|
tānyeva kālena samāhitāni
sidhyanti cedhyanti ca bhūtikāle||

"Nothing is achieved by action or thought, nor is anything given to another. The vidhātṛ has laid it down that the course of time be the means of acquisition (*yoga*). Man acquires everything through time. No desirable object can be obtained by intelligent planning or scriptural study if the time

is not ripe (*akāle*). There are times when even a fool can enjoy material prosperity (*artha*). For time is the efficient cause by which all things are accomplished. In difficult times (*abhūtikāle*) neither technical skills (*śilpa*) nor *mantra* nor medicinal herbs will give the desired result. In good times (*bhūtikāle*), on the other hand, these same acts, if well-prepared, are favoured by time and achieve success." This is not, as it appears to be at first sight, a denial of *puruṣakāra* (which he will endorse soon enough). What Vyāsa seems to be saying here is that things happen in this world in cyclic fashion, modelled on what we would now call the "laws of nature", some examples of which he now provides, such as the cycle of the seasons, the diurnal cycle of day and night, other motions of sun and moon, of the tides etc. Happiness and sorrow alternate in a similar pattern, and there is thus no point in indulging in grief if things do not turn out the way one expects. Ignorant fools (*mūḍhatama*) or spiritual masters may enjoy happiness here, but the vast majority of us have to accept these conditions (v.28). And, of course, those who are upset at other people's problems will clearly never be happy (v.31). Translating the *kṣatriyadharma* into the forms of religious practice, he says (v.32):

dīkṣāṃ yajñe pālanaṃ yuddhamāhu-
ryogaṃ rāṣṭre daṇḍanītyā ca samyak|
vittatyāgaṃ dakṣiṇānāṃ ca yajñe
samyagjñānaṃ pāvanānīti vidyāt||

"To be an aspirant for battle is said to be the sacrifice for a king; due attention to the science of punishment (*daṇḍanīti*) in the kingdom is his yoga; and the *dakṣiṇā* payments in the sacrifice is his "renunciation" of wealth (*vittatyāga*). These should all be known as acts that sanctify him."

When Yudhiṣṭhira continues to blame himself for the deaths of so many of his kinsmen, and even threatens to starve himself to death XII.27.25), Vyāsa intervenes once again to advise that "all this is destiny" (*diṣṭametaditi*) (v.27), since (vv.28-29):

saṃyogā viprayogāśca jātānāṃ prāṇināṃ dhruvam|
budbudā iva toyeṣu bhavanti na bhavanti ca||

sarve kṣayāntā nicayāḥ patanāntāḥ samucchrayāḥ|
saṃyogā viprayogāntā maraṇāntaṃ hi jīvitam||

"Life-forms entering this world are sure to pass through stages of union (*saṃyoga*) and dissolution (*viprayoga*). Like bubbles in the water, they exist for a time and then they are gone. All things composed of parts are sure to be destroyed and all things that rise are sure to fall. Union ends in dissolution, and life ends in death". On the other hand (v.30):

sukhaṃ duḥkhāntamālasyaṃ dākṣyaṃ duḥkhaṃ sukhodayam|
bhūtiḥ śrīrhrīrdhṛtiḥ siddhirnādakṣe nivasantyuta||

"Idleness, though pleasant in the beginning, ends in sorrow; Right effort (*dākṣya*), though painful in the beginning, ends in happiness. Affluence (*bhūti*), prosperity (*śrī*), modesty (*hrī*), fortitude (*dhṛti*) and success (*siddhi*) do not proceed from idleness (*adakṣa*)." In other words, without troubling himself about the grand scheme of things that happen as a result of the very nature of the world, Yudhiṣṭhira should focus instead on making the best of his own responsibilities. Happiness and misery do not depend on what happens in the world, but on the attitude taken to the role one has been given to play. And in Yudhiṣṭhira's case (v.32):

yathā sṛṣṭo'si kaunteya dhātrā karmasu tatkuru|
ata eva hi siddhiste neśastvamātmanā nṛpa||

"Son of Kuntī, do what the *dhātṛ* has ordered for you. Success abides in work alone. There is no way for you to escape work, O king." Further authority in support of these themes is offered in the Aśmagīta that follows (XII.28). It is useless to grieve for those who are dead and gone. The circumstances in which he finds himself have all occurred as a result of time — *vicitraḥ kālaparyayaḥ*, "wonderful is the course of time" (v.22). Creatures meet and separate like logs on the ocean (v.36) or travellers at a wayside inn (v.39). We have no lasting companionship with our own bodies, let alone with those of others (v.51). Yudhiṣṭhira is therefore once again exhorted, in a phrase reminiscent Kṛṣṇa's exhortation to Arjuna at VI.26/BG. 4.42: *muñca śokamuttiṣṭha* — "throw off your grief and rise up" (v.58) to fulfill your dharma as householder and king! But all to no avail.

Similar positions taken by Kṛṣṇa and Nārada also fail to strike a responsive chord in the despondent king (XII.29-31). This wisdom and good advice about the true dharma of kings is all well and good, Yudhiṣṭhira agrees, but his conduct of the war was motivated by more than just a royal duty to ensure that justice be done (XII.32). It is his covetousness and desire for rulership that are the real source of his despondency. He killed not because it was his duty to do so, but "for the sake of sovereignty" (*rājyakāraṇāt*) (v.10). Vyāsa thus realizes the need for more radical arguments to deflect his sense of guilt. He therefore goes directly to the heart of the moral issue by seeking to show that this sense of responsibility is misplaced. For who is *really* responsible for human action and for what happens as a result of it? This, of course, brings him directly to a discussion of our theme, and we will, therefore, cite the relevant verses in full (XII.32.11-20).

īśvaro vā bhavetkartā puruṣo vāpi bhārata|
haṭho vā vartate loke karmajaṃ vā phalaṃ smṛtam||

īśvareṇa niyuktā hi sādhvasādhu ca pārthiva|
kurvanti puruṣāḥ karma phalamīśvaragāmi tat||

yathā hi puruṣaśchindyādvṛkṣaṃ paraśunā vane|
chettureva bhavetpāpaṃ paraśorna kathaṃcana||

atha vā tadupādānātprāpnuyuḥ karmaṇaḥ phalam|
daṇḍaśastrakṛtaṃ pāpaṃ puruṣe tanna vidyate||

na caitadiṣṭaṃ kaunteya yadanyena phalaṃ kṛtam|
prāpnuyāditi tasmācca īśvare tanniveśaya||

atha vā puruṣaḥ kartā karmaṇoḥ śubhapāpayoḥ|
na paraṃ vidyate tasmādevamanyacchubhaṃ kuru||

na hi kaścitkvacidrājandiṣṭātpratinivartate|
daṇḍaśastrakṛtaṃ pāpaṃ puruṣe tanna vidyate||

yadi vā manyase rājan haṭhe lokaṃ pratiṣṭhitam|
evamapyaśubhaṃ karma na bhūtaṃ na bhaviṣyate||

athābhipattirloksya kartavyā śubhapāpayoḥ|
abhipannatamaṃ loke rājñāmudyatadaṇḍanam||

athāpi loke karmaṇi samāvartanta bhārata|
śubhāśubhaphalaṃ ceme prāpnuvantīti me matiḥ||

"Is it the Lord who performs the action or is it the man himself? Is everything that happens in the world the result of chance (*haṭha*) or is it to be considered the result of [previous] action, Bhārata? If human beings, O king, are driven to perform good and evil actions by the Lord, then the responsibility for them [*phala* = for the results] should belong to the Lord. For if a man cuts down a tree in the forest with an axe, it is certainly not the axe that incurs the sin (*pāpa*) but the one who does the cutting. Alternatively, the axe being only the material cause, the responsibility (*phala*) for the action could be attributed to the man who made the instrument of punishment (*daṇḍaśastra* — in this case, of the tree). This, however, is hardly credible. If this [untenable position] that one should assume the responsibility (*phala*) of an act undertaken by another be rejected, son of Kuntī, then, on this basis, the responsibility should be assumed by the Lord. If, on the other hand, the human being himself is the perpetrator (*kartṛ*) of all his good and evil acts, then there is no higher [i.e. no Supreme Lord], and you may do whatever you find appropriate [i.e. without incurring sin]. There is no way, O king, that anyone can avoid destiny (*diṣṭa*). But, [by the same token] it is not fair to attribute the responsibility (*pāpa* = "sin") to him who 'fashioned the means of punishment' (*daṇḍaśastrakṛta* — i.e. Yudhiṣṭhira is in the same position as the man who made the axe that cut down the tree). If, O king, you believe that the world is ruled by chance (*haṭha*), then it is clear there is no such thing as an evil deed, and there never will be. If you need to know what is good and evil in the world, look to the scriptures. There it has been laid down that kings should stand with the *daṇḍa* uplifted in their hands. I think, O Bhārata, that actions continually revolve in this world, and that men receive the fruits of the good and evil deeds [that they do]." The implication of these lines is that we are not punished *for* what we do (since we are either not responsible for our actions in the first place, or, if we are, there is no one above that judges us), but we are punished *by* what we do (since we will inevitably experience the causal effects of our past actions as they

"continually revolve" — *sam-ā √vṛt* — in this world). This karmic argument is, of course, designed to urge Yudhiṣṭhira to perform his scriptural duties, i.e. according to the *pravṛttidharma* of kings (*rājadharma*): for Vyāsa adds significantly (v. 22) that *even if the acts themselves are reproachable* (*sāpavāde'pi*), the king should still adhere to his own dharma (*svadharma* = *rājadharma*) and then perform the necessary expiations (*prāyaścitta*).

Unfortunately, Vyāsa muddies the waters of this karmic doctrine by bringing in the instrumentality of time (*kāla*). In reply to Yudhiṣṭhira's self-incriminating allegation that he is guilty of an infinite sin (*pāpamanantakam*) (XII.33.11), he argues (XII.34.4-12) that it was time, not any human being (and certainly not Yudhiṣṭhira) who was responsible for this killing (vv.4-5). It is time that distributes the just deserts of the good and bad actions of creatures, working through other creatures (vv.6-7). The responsibility, in fact, must be attributed to the dead soldiers themselves, since it was their own past acts which (through the instrumentality of time) were the cause of their demise (vv.7-8). Yudhiṣṭhira himself is totally blameless, being forced by the faults of others to act in the manner he did. In effect, says Vyāsa, he was forced to it by *vidhi* — fate itself (v.9), adding (v.10):

> *tvaṣṭreva vihitaṃ yantraṃ yathā sthāpayiturvaśe|*
> *karmaṇā kālayuktena tathedaṃ bhrāmyate jagat||*

"This universe moves by actions controlled by time in a manner similar to that of an instrument made by a carpenter which is under the control of the person handling it." Although created by the Supreme Carpenter, it is now time that appears to control the operations of the Universe (presumably because the Divinity in his supreme form is forever in a state of *samādhi*). The message, however, is clear; whatever the cause, it has nothing to do with Yudhiṣṭhira (in v. 11 the responsibility is further shifted to chance = *yadṛcchā*). However, if he persists with this insidious entanglement of the heart (*vyalīkaṃ cittavaitaṃsikaṃ*) (v.12), he may, if he still so desires, perform an act of expiation such as a horse sacrifice. After a detailed review of the available expiations (XII.34-37), Yudhiṣṭhira is finally persuaded to cast off his grief and anxiety (XII.38.28).

As Vyāsa had predicted, Yudhiṣṭhira now begins "to enjoy a period of great happiness" (XII.42.12). Following the coronation (XII.41) and the *śrāddha* rites for the dead warriors (XII.42), Kṛṣṇa urges him to seek the guidance of Bhīṣma about the traditional *pravṛttidharma* (XII.46.22). As a veritable treasure-house of the ancient wisdom of king-craft (*rājadharma*), this grandsire (*pitāmaha*) is the key link in the chain of transmission to the new generation, and Kṛṣṇa does not wish to see this go to waste with his passing (v.23). And it is interesting to note that from the very first question (XII.56.2), Bhīṣma is very specific about the importance of personal initiative on the part of the king, insisting (vv.14-15):

utthāne ca sadā putra prayatethā yudhiṣṭhira|
nahyutthānamṛte daivaṃ rājñāmarthaprasiddhaye||

sādhāraṇaṃ dvayaṃ hyetaddaivamutthānameva ca|
pauruṣaṃ he paraṃ manye daivaṃ niścityamucyate||

Yudhiṣṭhira, you should always be ready to put forth effort (*utthāna*) my son; for without the merit of exertion, destiny (*daiva*) is not a sufficient condition to realize the purposes (*artha*) of kings. While both exertion (*utthāna*) and destiny are causal factors, I believe that exertion (*pauruṣa*) is superior, for destiny is said to be governed by it." And a little later he quotes three *ślokas* reportedly spoken by Bṛhaspati, the priest of the gods (XII.58.13-16):

utthānaṃ hi narendrāṇāṃ bṛhaspatirabhāṣata|
rājadharmasya yanmūlaṃ ślokāṃścātra nibodha me||

utthānenāmṛtaṃ labdhamutthānenāsurā hatāḥ|
utthānena mahendreṇa śraiṣṭhyaṃ prāptaṃ divīha ca||

utthānadhīraḥ puruṣo vāgdhīrānadhitiṣṭhati|
utthānadhīraṃ vāgdhīrā ramayanta upāsate||

utthānahīno rājā hi buddhimānapi nityaśaḥ|
dharṣaṇīyo ripūṇāṃ syādbhūjaṃga iva nirviṣaḥ||

"Bṛhaspati has said that the exertion (*utthāna*) of kings is the very foundation of the duty of kings (*rājadharma*). Listen to the verses pronounced by him. 'It

was by exertion that the *amṛta* was obtained; it was by exertion that the *asura* were slain; it was by exertion that Indra won the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. The man who acts decisively is greater than the man of strong words alone. The great men of words worship and revere those who act decisively. For the king who is destitute of exertion (*utthāna*), even though possessed of intelligence (*buddhi*), is always overcome by his enemies like a snake bereft of poison."

Somewhat later (XII.120), Yudhiṣṭhira asks Bhīṣma to summarize the key points to make it easier for him to remember them, and Bhīṣma once again emphasizes the merits of exertion (vv.43-44):

vidyā tapo vā vipulaṃ dhanaṃ vā
sarvametadvyavasāyena śakyam|
brahma yattaṃ nivasati dehavatsu
tasmādvidyādvyavasāyaṃprabhūtam||

yatrāsate matimanto manasvinaḥ
śakro viṣṇuryatra sarasvatī ca|
vasanti bhūtāni ca yatra nityaṃ
tasmādvidvānnāvamanyeta deham||

"Knowledge, *tapas*, great wealth, and indeed everything else is possible through exertion (*vyavasāya*). As it occurs in embodied creatures, exertion is governed by Brahmā. For this reason, exertion (*vyavasāya*) is regarded as of utmost importance. Here [i.e. in embodied beings] is where reside many intelligent creatures such as Indra, Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī and other beings. No sensible person should thus ever dismiss [the importance of] the body." While the power of exertion still derives from within, there is more than a hint in this case that it comes not from the individual himself, but from various spiritual beings that have taken up residence within him.

However, this does not detract from its importance, as witness the conversation of king Brahmadatta with the bird Pūjani on the subject of trust (XII.137). Brahmadatta argues for a continuation of their friendship, in spite of the fact that his friend has just put out the eyes of his son in revenge for the unfortunate slaying of Pūjani's son by the young prince. He is prepared to

exonerate the bird on the strength that it is really time (*kāla*) that does every act (vv.45-49). "Who, therefore, injures whom?," he asks. If neither of them is the cause of the other's sorrow, there is no reason why Pūjani should not continue to live at the palace as before.

But Pūjani is too astute to be taken in by this line of argument (v.50-53). If time be the cause (*pramāṇa*) of all acts, no one would harbor any feelings of animosity towards anyone else. Why, then, he asks, do friends and family seek to avenge one another? Why, indeed, did the gods and the *asura* slay each other in days of yore? If it is time that is the cause of happiness and misery (*sukhaduḥkha*) and birth and death (*bhavābhavau*), what need is there of medicines for the sick (*bheṣajaiḥ kiṃ prayojanam*)? More importantly (v.53), how could dharma be acquired through human agency (*kasmāddharmo'sti kartṛṣu*)? The animosities they bear for each other cannot be washed away in a hundred years (v.63). Putting one's trust in the injured party (Brahmadatta in this instance) would be the height of folly and lead to great misery.

While it is common sense to avoid doing certain things (walking with sore feet, opening sore eyes against the wind etc.), there are many occasions when action is indicated, and Pūjani concludes that (vv.78-80):

daivaṃ puruṣakāraśca sthitāvanyonyasaṃśrayāt|
udāttānāṃ karma tantraṃ daivaṃ klībā upāsate||

karma cātmahitaṃ kāryaṃ tīkṣṇaṃ vā yadi vā mṛdu|
grasyate'karmaśīlastu sadānarthairakiṃcanaḥ||

tasmātsaṃśayite'pyarthe kārya eva parākramaḥ|
sarvasvamapi saṃtyajya kāryamātmahitaṃ naraiḥ||

"Destiny (*daiva*) and exertion (*puruṣakāra*) exist in mutual dependence on each other. Persons of good character perform great feats while eunuchs pay court to destiny (*daiva*). Whether it be harsh or mild, a person should act in his own interests (*ātmahita*). The unfortunate man of inaction (*akarmaśīla*) is always overtaken by all sorts of problems. Therefore, in the midst of all doubts, one should energetically do what has to be done (*kārya eva*

parākramaḥ). Abandoning all else [in the sense of concentrating on the task at hand], people should do what is in their own interests (*ātmahita*)." Needless to say, Pūjani follows his own advice about acting in his own interest by leaving the palace never to return.

These attitudes are further elaborated in the conversation between a jackal and a vulture (*gṛdhrajambukasaṃvāda*) (XII.149). Effort (*prayatna* or *yatna*) must be supplemented by confidence in one's own abilities (*anirvedena dīrgheṇa* = constant expectancy) and steadfastness of purpose (*niścayena dhruveṇa*). In this story (*itihāsa*), the parents of a dead child finally obtain the grace (*prasāda*) of Śaṃkara (=Śiva) to revive their dead son (v.112). This is due to the advice of a jackal (with his own interests at heart) who is made to say (vv.46-47):

yatno hi satataṃ kāryaḥ kṛto daivena sidhyati|
daivaṃ puruṣakāraśca kṛtāntenopapadyate||

anirvedaḥ sadā kāryo nirvedāddhi kutaḥ sukham|
prayatnātprāpyate hyarthaḥ kasmādgacchatha nirdayāḥ||

"It is always through right effort (*yatna*) that one succeeds through destiny (*daiva*) in getting things done. Destiny in conjunction with human exertion (*puruṣakāra*) is what produces the result. Things should be undertaken with confidence. How can there be happiness in despondency? For prosperity (*artha*) can be won only through exertion (*prayatna*). Why go so heartlessly?"

Finally, Yudhiṣṭhira comes directly to Bhīṣma with the question (XIII.6.1): which of the two is the most powerful, destiny or human exertion (*daive puruṣakāre ca kiṃsvicchreṣṭhataraṃ bhavet*)? Adding the weight of orthodoxy to his own considerable authority, Bhīṣma responds with a most interesting twist to traditional imagery in the form of an old *itihāsa* entitled "The relative strengths of destiny and exertion" (*daivapuruṣakārabalābalam*), purporting to be Brahmā's answer to a similar query by Vaśiṣṭha. Here the analogy of the seed and the field is introduced to suggest that, while *daiva* (here characterizing current conditions as the effect of the past) is fruitless without human effort (*puruṣakāra*), it also forces us to confront our circumstances and serves as an important goad to further effort in the

direction of inner transformation and change. They are thus seen to depend on each other (vv.7-8):

yathābījaṃ vinā kṣetram uptaṃ bhavati niṣphalam|
tathā purusakāreṇa vinā daivaṃ na sidhyati||

kṣetraṃ puruṣakārastu daivaṃ bījam udāhṛtam|
kṣetrabījasamāyogāttataḥ sasyaṃ samṛdhyate||

"Just as the well-prepared field remains fruitless without the seed, so without individual effort (*puruṣakāra*) destiny (*daiva*) is of no avail. But the field is [also] said to be effort, while the seed is the destiny [i.e. which prompts it]. It is from the union of the field and the seed that the harvest is produced." This reversal of the traditional imagery of the field and the seeds has been noted by Chaitanya whose views will be taken up in the later discussion of the various causalities of karma (cf.p.196). What is important to observe here is that the quality of the fruits, when they come, appears to depend entirely on the quality of the seed in the form of human effort rather than destiny (v.6):

yādṛśaṃ vapate bījaṃ kṣetram āsādya karpakaḥ|
sukṛte duṣkṛte vāpi tādṛśaṃ labhate phalam||

"The farmer reaps the fruits, good or bad, as he sows the seed in his field." *Puruṣakāra* in the sense of the inner power to act is, of course, also a necessary condition for any theory of individual moral responsibility. Brahmā introduces what looks like the beginnings of such a theory in what follows, claiming that (v.9):

karmaṇaḥ phalanirvṛttiṃ svayam aśnāti kārakaḥ|
pratyakṣaṃ dṛśyate loke kṛtasyāpyakṛtasya ca||

śubhena karmaṇā saukhyaṃ duḥkhaṃ pāpena karmaṇā|
kṛtaṃ sarvatra labhate nākṛtaṃ bhujyate kvacit||

"It is for all the world to see that the doer reaps the fruits of the actions he performs, as well as of those he does not perform; that noble actions lead to good while evil actions lead to sorrow; that actions performed always produce results but lead nowhere if not performed." But he quickly returns to

what is his first interest: to demonstrate the value of individual initiative in the pursuit of human needs and ends (v.12-13):

tapasā rūpasaubhāgyaṃ ratnāni vividhāni ca|
prāpyate karmaṇā sarvaṃ na daivādakṛtātmanā||

tathā svargaśca bhogaśca niṣṭhā yā ca manīṣitā|
sarvaṃ puruṣakāreṇa kṛtenehopapadyate||

"By applying oneself (*tapasā*), one is able to acquire beauty, good fortune, and riches of various kinds (*ratna* = jewel). Everything is possible through work (*karma*) but not through destiny (*daiva*) by one without initiative. Heaven, worldly enjoyments, and all the desirable things of the earth can be acquired by well-directed individual exertion". Work is the secret of the success of all those who have attained to high status, including the heavenly bodies, the gods, and various other beings (v.14). Different types of activity are prescribed for the various castes — pure living (*śauca*) for the brahmin, prowess (*vikrama*) for the *kṣatriya*, initiative (*puruṣakāra*) for the *vaiśya*, and service (*śuśrūṣā*) for the *śūdra* (v.16). Men would become mere idlers (*udāsīna*) if events happened through destiny alone (v.19). The source of all our frustrations in life is then traced to the jealously of the gods. (vv.22-29):

kṛtaḥ puruṣakārastu daivameva nuvartate|
na daivamakṛte kiṃcitkasyaciddātumarhati||

yadā sthānānyanityāni dṛśyante daivateṣvapi|
kathaṃ karma vinā daivaṃ sthāsyate sthāpayiṣyati||

na daivatāni loke'sminvyāpāraṃ yānti kasyacit|
vyāsaṅgaṃ janayantyugramātmābhibhavaśaṅkayā||

ṛṣīṇāṃ devatānām ca sadā bhavati vigrahaḥ|
kasya vācā hyadaivaṃ syādyato daivaṃ pravartate||

kathaṃ cāsya samutpattiryathā daivaṃ pravartate|
evaṃ tridaśa loke'pi prāpyante bahavaśchalāḥ||

ātmaiva hyātmano bandurātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ|

ātmaiva cātmanaḥ sākṣī kṛtasyāpyakṛtasya ca||

kṛtaṃ ca vikṛtaṃ kiṃcitkṛte karmaṇi sidhyate|
sukṛte duṣkṛtaṃ karma na yathārthaṃ prapadyate||

devānāṃ śaraṇaṃ puṇyaṃ sarvaṃ puṇyairavāpyate|
puṇyaśīlaṃ naraṃ prāpya kiṃ daivaṃ prakariṣyati||

"Applied in the right manner, *puruṣakāra* enhances *daiva*; but when not properly applied, *daiva* (alone) leads to nothing whatever. When we see that the positions of even the deities themselves are not eternal, how could the affairs of the gods be upheld without acting (*karma*). The gods do not always lend their support to the pursuits of others (*vyāpāra* = occupation). Fearing their own demise (*ātmābhibhava*), they put great difficulties in the way of others. [In this way] there is constant rivalry (*vigraha*) between the gods and the sages. It is thus not true to say that *daiva* does not exist, since it is *daiva* that moves everything else. What, then, is the purpose (*samutpatti* = lit. origin) of this (i.e. human *karma*) if it is *daiva* that moves everything? The answer is that it allows for the development of innumerable virtues (*chala*), even in the heavenly spheres (lit. the thirty-three worlds). We are our own friend and our own enemy, and we are also the witness of what we have done and not done. Whatever happens in terms of good or ill is accomplished through work (*karma*). But work is not sufficient to achieve everything one desires. Merit (*puṇya*) is the refuge of the gods. Everything is attainable through good deeds. For a man of righteous behavior (*puṇyaśīla*), what remains for *daiva* to do?"

The reason we do not get exactly what we want is because our best efforts are often thwarted by the actions of the gods (*daiva*). But in an ironic twist of fate, it is these petty celestial jealousies that provide the challenges we need to develop the stirling qualities (*puṇya*) required for our further spiritual advance (i.e. towards a cleansing of soul (*ātmaśuddhi*), and eventual enlightenment, although this is not the issue here). Once again, it is not success or failure that really counts, but the attitude we adopt in confronting these divine obstacles. It is in this sense that we are our own friend — as also our own worst enemy.

[1]Cf. Bhiṣma's graphic description of his character at XII.76.18-20. Yudhiṣṭhira is kind (*ānṛśaṃsa*), soft (*mṛdu*), patient (*dānta*), very noble (*atyārya*), highly principled (*atidhārmika*), unmanly (*klība*), and addicted to righteousness and mercy (*dharmaghṛṇāyukta*).

[2]Klaes, Conscience and Consciousness, p. 96.

[3]Biardeau notes here: "This is already the teaching of Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā, the teaching given to Arjuna by the avatāra of Viṣṇu who does not directly take part in the action. The role of Yudhiṣṭhira is therefore very close to that of the avatāra, a logical one for the son of Dharma, but he must above all count on the activity of Arjuna in conformity with the ideal he proposes". Madeleine Biardeau, "Conférence de Mlle Madeleine Biardeau" Annuaire (1972-3): 138.

[4]J. Bruce Long. "The Concepts of Human Action and Rebirth in the Mahābhārata". In Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (Ed.). Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions. Berkeley. University of California Press, 1980. p. 47.

[5]Madeleine Biardeau. "Conférence de Mlle Madeleine Biardeau" Annuaire (1972-73): 136.

[6]Klaes, Conscience and Consciousness, p. 113.

[7]Krishna Chaitanya, The Mahābhārata: a literary study, p. 281.

VIII — Karma as retributive causality

Whatever interpretation we give to these nuances of meaning there is little doubt that *puruṣakāra* is a valued asset for all four classes (including the majority of orthodox brahmins) who, by their birth and natural disposition (which are theoretically synonymous), are fitted for an active role in epic society (*pravṛtti*). For success (*siddhi*) in any field of endeavor related to the three worldly ends of human life (the *trivarga* of *dharmārthakāma*), and more particularly for the *kṣatriya* king it is regarded as absolutely essential. It is one of the four topics of the *rājadharma* as Hiltebeitel notes: "When Bhīṣma introduces Yudhiṣṭhira to the subject of *rājadharma*, the 'duty of kings,' he begins by breaking the subject down into four topics: attendance on gods and brahmins, truth (*satya*), exertion (*utthāna*), and the maintenance of prosperity (*śrī* ; 12:56,12-20)."[1] The king may be thwarted by the gods (i.e. by *daiva*), but he cannot abandon his responsibilities (*svadharma*) without dire consequences (as Yudhiṣṭhira is repeatedly warned). These challenges also have a positive side in being a goad to the spiritual advance of the soul in this and future lives. When blocked, the drive to master our environment (*puruṣakāra*) can become the spur we need to master ourselves.

In spite of its obvious practical importance however, we are still in the dark about its ultimate source. The epic psychology of action is reasonably clear. The stimulus is the desire (*kāma*) that seeks its satisfaction in the outer world, desire itself being the expression of the qualities (*guṇa*) of the material component (*prakṛti*) of the embodied soul (*jīva*). However, the mythological language suggests a mysterious inner connection between *daiva* and *puruṣakāra*. We are told that when suspicious or fearful of human ambitions (often symbolized by the *tapas* of the *ṛṣi*), the gods may thwart our plans in one of two ways: they may strike at the root of human action by provoking doubt or inner conflict, or they may bend or blunt the effects of human interventions in the outer world (III.33.33-34).

We have already met the symbolic representation of this inner connection in a variety of contexts: as Kṛṣṇa, "the Lord in the heart of all beings" (VI.40/BG.18.61): the *dhātṛ* that operates within our bodies (II.52.18; II.67.3; III.30.30): the seven celestial custodians of the *pravṛttidharma* who control our acts and course of life (XII.327.72): various gods and other beings who inhabit our bodies (II.72.8-11; XII.120.44): the god Śiva (XII.149.112) etc. These may all be regarded as symbolizing a particular aspect or level of *daiva* that prompts action from within (cf. XIII.6.25). We have also noted that the emphasis is continuously shifting between the plurality of individuals who act (*pravṛtti*), and those who seek their source in the divine or cosmic Mind (*nivṛtti* — where individuals and their actions tend to merge back into the all-embracing unity of Being). From this latter perspective, the Universe itself is seen to be governed by the *śāstṛ* or Supreme Governor (XII.219.8): the *prabhu* or "Lord" (XII.220.84): the god Viṣṇu (XII.271.7): the *ādideva* (XIII.Appendix I. No. 16.171) who appears as Kṛṣṇa wielding divine "powers" (including, as we have seen, *māyā*, *upāya* or, simply, "*yoga* "): or, most commonly, by time itself (I.1.188-189; XII.217.25 and 39; XII.230.19-20, etc.). In the final analysis, the desire (*kāma*) that moves all creatures, including the gods and the demons, is Nārāyaṇa Himself (XIII. App. I. No. 6.164-165):

sa kāmaḥ sarvajantūnāṃ sarvabhāgavato nṛpa|
surāṇāmasurāṇāṃ ca caratyantargataḥ sadā||

"He is that *kāma* that exists in every creature and every state of being, O king. He is the one who forever moves within the hearts of both gods and *asura*." Cf. also VI.29/BG.7.11. On this basis, *Daiva* sets the course of the things and beings of the Universe either outward, to the world system in which we find ourselves (*pravṛtti*), or inward, to the divine source from which we originate (*nivṛtti*).

However, while God and the gods are all active within us, they are all part of the causal system of action and reaction and cannot tamper with the world with impunity. Though actions do not soil (*√lip*) him as they do ordinary mortals (VI.26/BG.4.14), Kṛṣṇa himself is a manifested being who must submit to the temporal effects of his own cosmic agenda. Thus when cursed

by Gāndhārī for being indifferent to the plight of the world, Kṛṣṇa accepts her sentence of death "smiling awhile" (*abhyusmayanniva*) as if everything was proceeding according to plan (XI.25.43-44). This is later confirmed by Vyāsa after the various curses have done their worst, and Arjuna is left grief-stricken and confused. What are a few curses, Vyāsa asks him rhetorically, to a being such as Kṛṣṇa who is fully capable of altering the course of the three worlds if he so wished (XVI.9.27)? He urges Arjuna to follow the example of Kṛṣṇa in willingly accepting the loss of his own powers (vv. 33-35):

kālamūlamidaṃ sarvaṃ jagadbījaṃ dhanaṃjaya|
kāla eva samādatte punareva yadṛcchayā||

sa eva balavānbhūtvā punarbhavati durbalaḥ|
sa eveśaśca bhūtveha paurarājñāpyate punaḥ||

kṛtakṛtyāni cāstrāṇi gatānyadya tathāgatam|
punareṣyanti te hastaṃ yadā kālo bhaviṣyati||

"All this is rooted in time, O Dhanaṃjaya, which is the source of the Universe. And again it is time that withdraws everything when it sees fit (*yadṛcchayā* = also "by chance"). After being mighty for a time, one becomes weak once again. From having enjoyed power in the past, one again recovers the control of cities. Having achieved their purpose, your weapons have gone back whence they came. They will again come into your hands when the time is ripe." Symbolized in the case of Arjuna by his weapons, *puruṣakāra* itself is eventually repossessed by time.

The important difference between gods and humans in this respect is that the gods are not *morally* accountable for what they do (XII.283.28):

mānuṣesu mahārāja dharmādharmau pravartataḥ|
na tathānyeṣu bhūteṣu manuṣyarahiteṣviha||

"Dharma and *adharma* apply only to human beings, O king. They do not exist in this world among creatures other than man." But as we have seen, they are often shown to play an important moral role in apportioning the results of human action according to the very standards of the dharma they escape. We have already drawn attention to the activities of Indra (III.218.9-

10), the *dhātṛ* (IV.19.10), and Yama (V.42.5) in this regard (cf. page 3). In the famous story of the origins of the Kuru dynasty, Śakuntalā uses these words in condemning Duḥṣanta's refusal to acknowledge their son Bharata (I.68.27-31):

eko'hamasmīti ca manyase tvaṃ
na hṛcchayaṃ vetsi muniṃ purāṇam|
yo veditā karmaṇaḥ pāpakasya
yasyāntike tvaṃ vṛjinaṃ karoṣi||

manyate pāpakaṃ kṛtvā na kaścidvetti māmiti|
vidanti cainaṃ devāśca svaścaivāntarapūruṣaḥ||

ādityacandrāvanilānalau ca
dyaurbhūmirāpo hṛdayaṃ yamaśca|
ahaśca rātriśca ubhe ca saṃdhye
dharmaśca jānāti narasya vṛttam||

yamo vaivasvatastasya niryātayati duṣkṛtam|
hṛdi sthitaḥ karmasākṣī kṣetrajño yasya tuṣyati||

na tu tuṣyati yasyaiṣa puruṣasya durātmanaḥ|
taṃ yamaḥ pāpakarmāṇaṃ niryātayati duṣkṛtam||

"You think you are alone with yourself, but are you not aware of the ancient seer (*muni*) in your heart; the one who knows your evil deeds? It is before him that you speak this false testimony (*vṛjina*). An evil-doer always thinks, 'no one knows me.' But the gods and the inner man (*svāntarapūruṣa*) know him. Sun, Moon, Wind, and Fire, as well as Heaven and Earth, Water, and his heart (*hṛdaya*) and Yama, and Day and Night, and Dawn and Dusk, and the dharma — all know the character (*vṛtta*) of a man. When the *ātman* (*kṣetrajñā* = knower of the field), the witness of all actions in the heart (*hṛdi karmasākṣī*), is content with a person, Yama Vaivasvata destroys the evil that one has perpetrated. But when the *ātman* is not content with the wicked man [in whom it dwells], Yama snatches away the evil-doer himself." In this case it would seem that the final judge is the man himself (or his *ātman*). However, it is the god Yama who dispenses justice. This amoral link with

human morality probably stems from the traditional ritual idea that the gods return a share (*bhāga*) of what they themselves receive in the sacrifice.

It is never clear whether judgement may involve the same action for which the same gods, as *daiva*, were responsible in the first place. However, the very idea that humans are judged for actions inspired by others is demeaning of human dignity, and must have appeared increasingly unjust to enquiring minds. This inchoate feeling of cosmic injustice no doubt contributed to the birth and increasing popularity of what must originally have been the revolutionary idea that character and the vicissitudes of life, including the conditions of birth (*jāti*), length of life (*āyus*), and day-to-day experiences of pleasure and pain (*bhoga*) are not due to the machinations of any god (or to *daiva*) but to the individual's own actions in the past, whether performed in this or in some previous life. "Judged by historic standards, the Karma theory did much to raise man's status and to wean him from coaxing gods through sacrifice and prayer."[2] One of the earliest formulations of the effect of choice and action on character, is the statement of Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad IV.4.5:

> *yathākārī yathācārī tathā bavati|*
> *sādhukārī sādhur bhavati|*
> *pāpakārī pāpo bhavati|*
> *puṇyaḥ puṇyena karmaṇā bhavati|*
> *pāpaḥ pāpena|*

"As a man acts, as he behaves, so does he become. Whoever does good (*sādhu*), becomes good: whoever does evil (*pāpa*), becomes evil. By good works (*puṇyena karmaṇā*) a man becomes holy (*puṇya*), through evil [works] he becomes evil." In the so-called 'pure' form that emerged in the later philosophical literature, it was accepted that:

> every act, whether good or bad, produces a certain result or return which cannot be escaped. In the physical world there is the universal law of causation. The doctrine of Karma extends this inexorable law of causality to the mental and moral sphere.... This doctrine of Karma emphasizes three things; firstly it regards an existence as a sort of expiation for the doings of a previous existence or existences; secondly, an evil deed cannot be expiated by works of merit but its punishment

must be borne; thirdly, the punishment for wrong is automatic and personal. Under the doctrine of Karma there is no such thing as chance or luck.[3]

However, H.D. Bhattacharyya is no doubt correct in arguing that: "The doctrine of Karma had neither a single beginning nor a single growth. All through its history, it has assumed diverse forms according to the emphasis laid upon its different elements, and to-day it is difficult to say which is the pure form and which the debased."[4]

The historical diversity of these ideas is nowhere more evident than in the ferment of opinion regarding the source of action and the locus of individual moral responsibility in the Mahābhārata (XII.137.53). However it is a diversity that marks a distinct shift in the balance of power from the gods to the possibility of the fully self-determined act of a morally autonomous individual. In effect, the self-imposed impulses of past karma (*pūrvakarma*) are seen to progressively take over the role of external material and spiritual agencies as the source of human character and circumstance. Furthermore, while the karmic law appears to duplicate the divine intentionalities visible in the course of events it also provides the needed challenges to human transformation and freedom.

These ideas may be traced in a logical, if not a strictly chronological, arrangement of textual material, starting with a variety of mixed formulations that recognize the link with past acts, but which rely on an external catalyst of some kind (the elements, time, a god, etc.) to precipitate the consequences of past acts into the present. Bhīṣma, for example, introduces the elements of nature herself (*bhūta*) as a medium of retributive transmission (XII.36.36-37):

śubhāśubhaphalaṃ pretya labhate bhūtasākṣikaḥ|
atiricyettayoryattu tat kartā labhate phalam||

tasmāddānena tapasā karmaṇā ca śubhaṃ phalam|
vardhayedaśubhaṃ kṛtvā yathā syādatirekavān||

"At his death, the person obtains the pure and impure fruits [of what he has done], as witnessed by the elements (*bhūtasākṣika*). The agent experiences the measure of the two of them [i.e. virtue and vice]. It is thus that one may enhance one's fortune (pure fruits) by charity, *tapas*, and [good] works, and that impure acts lead to misery."

The role of time itself is reduced from a primary to a secondary role in this process. In the discussion of XII.34, Vyāsa clearly states that (v.7):

karmamūrtyātmakaṃ viddhi sākṣiṇaṃ śubhapāpayoḥ|
sukhaduḥkhaguṇodarkaṃ kālaṃ kālaphalapradam||

"Know that time is made up of actions; that it is the witness of pure and impure deeds; that it bestows the fruits of time, [that is to say] the results of the actions (*udarka*) distributed in the form of happiness and misery." In another discourse Bhīṣma indicates that these past acts mature in their own time (*svakāla*) without external compulsion, after the manner of flowers and fruit (XII.174.8-18):

suśīghramapi dhāvantaṃ vidhānamanudhāvati|
śete saha śayānena yena yena yathā kṛtaṃ||

upatiṣṭhati tiṣṭhantaṃ gacchantamanugacchati|
karoti kurvataḥ karma chāyevānuvidhīyate||

yena yena yathā yadyatpurā karma samācitam|
tattadeva naro bhuṇkta nityaṃ vihitamātmanā||

svakarmaphalavikṣiptaṃ vidhānaparirakṣitam|
bhūtagrāmamimaṃ kālaḥ samantātparikarṣati||

acodyamānāni yathā puṣpāṇi ca phalāni ca|
svakālaṃ nātivartante tathā karmapurākṛtam||

saṃmānaścāvamānaśca lābhālābhau kṣayodayau|
pravṛttā vinivartante vidhānānte punaḥ punaḥ||

ātmanā vihitaṃ duḥkhamātmanā vihitaṃ sukham|
garbhaśayyāmupādāya bhujyate paurvadehikam||

bālo yuvā ca vṛddhaśca yatkaroti śubhāśubham|
tasyāṃ tasyāmavasthāyāṃ bhuṇkte janmani janmani||

yathā dhenusahasreṣu vatso vindate mātaram|
tathā pūrvakṛtaṃ karma kartāramanugacchate||

samunnamagrato vastraṃ paścācchudhyate karmaṇā|
upavāsaiḥ prataptānāṃ dīrghaṃ sukhamanantakam||

dīrghakālena tapasā sevitena tapovane|
dharmanirdhūtapāpānāṃ saṃsidhyante manorathāḥ||

"Whatever has been determined (*vidhāna* = as a result of past acts) overtakes [the doer] however swiftly he runs. It sleeps when he sleeps and does whatever else he does. Like a shadow, the karma [of the past] rests when he rests, follows when he moves, acts when he acts. A man is always made to experience [the fruits of] whatever acts have accumulated in the past as a result of his own doing (*ātmavihitam*). Time (*kāla*) severely afflicts all creatures [already] destined to be unsettled by the consequences of their past acts. Action undertaken in the past (*karma purākṛtaṃ*) matures in its own time (*svakālam*) without external compulsion, just as do flowers and fruits. At the end of their ordained course (*vidhānte*), actions undertaken (*pravṛttā*) are continuously transformed into honor and dishonor, gain and loss, growth and decay. A creature experiences the joy and suffering ordained as a result of his own acts (*ātmanā vihitaṃ* = ordained by himself) in a former body while still in the womb. Whenever he does a good or a sinful act, whether in childhood, youth, or old age, he will always experience the results of it at the same period in every birth. The acts of a previous life (*pūrvakṛtaṃ karma*) catch up with the agent like a calf that locates its mother among thousands of cattle. Drenched in water a garment is made clean. [Similarly], those who are burning as a result of their acts obtain endless happiness by abiding in a state of abstinence. Those whose sins have been destroyed according to the dharma, by taking up residence in the woods and performing *tapas* for a long period of time, succeed in obtaining the objects they desire." Life is now ordained by oneself (*ātmavihitam*),and it is only the pattern of unfolding that remains in the hands of time.

In a long conversation between Gautamī and the fowler Arjunaka, the previous acts of the murder victim catch up with him via the circuitous route of a second agent who escapes responsibility for his own (inherently culpable) act of violence. The onus is progressively shifted from the helpless agent (in this case the snake who stands accused of the death of the old lady's son) and the personified form of Time (who also disclaims responsibility) to Gautamī and then to her son, both of whom must suffer the "destiny" of their past acts. This story is one of a number designed to relieve Yudhiṣṭhira of his sense of guilt and therefore avoids reference to the influence of any previous acts by Yudhiṣṭhira. Why do you consider yourself (or your *ātman*) to be the cause, Bhīṣma challenges Yudhiṣṭhira (XIII.1.8), when your actions are dependent (*paratantra* = i.e. dependent on other causes, in this case the perfidy of Duryodhana)? The fowler in the story that follows employs all the usual arguments against the obvious perpetrator of the crime. The serpent must die since it is guilty of the death of the old lady's son. Such punishment will provide a remedy for anger and grief (the case for revenge) and also a protection for others who may otherwise be bitten in the future. Gautamī, however, pleads for release of the serpent, arguing that nothing will be gained by its death and certainly not the restoration of her son. Such an attitude may be appropriate for a self-contained person (*svastha*), replies Arjunaka, but hardly for one plunged in grief (v.17). The practical person (*arthavid*) seeks solace (*samīpsanta*) in revenge rather than assigning everything to the course of time (v.18). The argument then proceeds to trade the merits of forgiveness (*kṣamā*) and compassion (*mārdava*) against those acquired by the serpent himself as a sacrificial victim.

While they are thus arguing back and forth, the serpent suddenly begins to speak in its own defence (v.28). It argues that the sin (*doṣa* ; *kilbiṣa*), if there be any, is not his since he is not his own master (*asvataṇtra*) and had no choice (*kāmya*) in the matter. Death (*mṛtyu*) is responsible (v.29). But the fowler thereupon suggests that the serpent must at least bear part of the blame, since he is the instrumental cause (*kāraṇa*) in the same manner as the potter's wheel and rod and other instruments are instrumental causes of the pot. But such instruments are not independent causes (*asvavaśa*) of the pot, replies the serpent (v.33). If there be any sin in the death of the boy, it must somehow be shared among all the various causes (*hetusamavāya*).

At this point, Mṛtyu himself appears to reveal he was guided by Time (*kāla*), and that neither he, nor the serpent are therefore responsible for the child's death (v.43). He continues (vv.44-49):

yathā vāyurjaladharānvikarṣati tatastataḥ|
tadvajjaladavansarpa kālasyāhaṃ vaśānugaḥ||

sāttvikā rājasāścaiva tāmasā ye ca kecana|
bhāvāḥ kālātmakāḥ sarve pravartante hi jantuṣu||

jaṇgamāḥ sthāvarāścaiva divi vā yadi vā bhuvi|
sarve kālātmakāḥ sarpa kālātmakamidaṃ jagat||

pravṛttayaśca yā loke tathaiva ca nivṛttayaḥ|
tāsāṃ vikṛtayo yāśca sarvaṃ kālātmakaṃ smṛtam||

ādityaścandramā viṣṇurāpo vāyuḥ śatakratuḥ|
agniḥ khaṃ pṛthivī mitra oṣadhyo vasavastathā||

saritaḥ sāgarāścaiva bhāvābhāvau ca pannaga|
sarve kālena sṛjante hliyante ca tathā punaḥ||

"Just as the clouds are tossed about by the wind, I too, like the clouds, O serpent, am under the influence (*vaśānuga*) of Kāla. All conditions of life (*bhāva*) related to *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are governed by Kāla, and operate in all creatures. All mobile and immobile creatures in heaven and earth, indeed this whole universe, O serpent, are influenced by Kāla. Everything that happens in this world, whether tending to action (*pravṛtti*) or to quiescence (*nivṛtti*), and all changes (*vikṛti*), are said to be influenced by Kāla. All existent and non-existent objects (*bhāvābhāvau*), including the Āditya and the Moon, Viṣṇu, Water, Wind, Indra, Fire, Sky, Earth, Mitra, plants and the Vasus, and rivers and oceans, are created and destroyed by Kāla." Our very moods of joy and anger (*harṣakrodhau*) are *kālapracodita* — determined by Time (v.60).

Finally, the personified form of Kāla himself appears before them, bringing the rather startling revelation that (vv.64-68):

akarodyadayaṃ karma tanno'rjunaka codakam|
praṇāśaheturnānyo'sya vadhyate'yaṃ svakarmaṇā||

yadanena kṛtaṃ karma tenāyaṃ nidhanaṃ gataḥ|
vināśahetuḥ karmāsya sarve karmavaśā vayam||

karmadāyādavāllokaḥ karmasaṃbandhalakṣaṇaḥ|
karmāṇi codayantīha yathānyonyaṃ tathā vayam||

yathā mṛtpiṇḍataḥ kartā kurute yadyadicchati|
evamātmakṛtaṃ karma mānavaḥ pratipadyate||

yathā chāyātapau nityaṃ susaṃbaddhau nirantaram|
tathā karma ca kartā ca sambaddhāvātmakarmabhiḥ||

"It was the karma of this child, O Arjunaka, that acted as the driving force (*codaka*) in this matter. Nothing else was the cause (*hetu*) of this child's death. He was killed by his own actions in the past (*svakarma*). He met his death as a result of the other actions he performed. It is his karma that was the cause (*hetu*) of his destruction. All of us are subject to our actions (*karmavaśa*). Karma is inherited in this world, which is marked by the bondage of action. It is karma that drives the activities of the world, just as others drive us (to action). Men make their own destiny (karma) from actions performed in the past (*ātmakṛtaṃ karma*) just as a person (*kartā*) may fashion whatever he wants out of a lump of clay. The agent (*kartā*) and his actions (karma) are bound together by his [previous] actions as sunlight and shadow are forever bound up with each other." Men cycle through the three worlds according to their own karma (*svakarma*), Yudhiṣṭhira is told, and he should, therefore, free himself of responsibility for something which the Kaurava, through their own actions, brought upon themselves (v.74).

In light of this clear disavowal by Time, the tale ends on a decidedly contradictory note, however, when Bhīṣma concludes this passage (*adhyāya*) by telling Yudiṣṭhira that (v.75):

na tu tvayā kṛtaṃ pārtha nāpi duryodhanena vai|
kālena tatkṛtaṃ viddhi vihatā yena pārthivāḥ||

"What has happened was not your doing, nor, indeed, was it Duryodhana's. Know that it was Time (*kāla*) that was responsible for the deaths of these kings." This suggests either the possibility of interpolation of the words of Time about the responsibility of the child (i.e. of verses 62-74), or the existence of lingering doubts about the real truth of the matter. Bhīṣma himself describes the discussion as *dharmāthasaṃśaya* (v.62) or "doubts regarding the subject of morality."

The increasing emphasis on the role of past karma in the formation of current conditions inevitably calls into question the role of other agencies, including God Himself. Despondent at the rising fortunes of the Dhārtarāṣṭra, Yudhiṣṭhira (who is in exile at this point) thinks that (III.181.5):

karmaṇaḥ puruṣaḥ kartā śubhasyāpyaśubhasya ca|
svaphalaṃ tadupāśnāti kathaṃ kartā svidīśvaraḥ||

"Man is the agent of his good and evil acts, and that he reaps the fruits. What then does the Lord do?" And he asks the sage Mārkaṇḍeya (v.6ff.):

atha vā sukhaduḥkheṣu nṛṇāṃ brahmavidāṃ vara|
iha vā kṛtamanveti paradehe'tha vā punaḥ||

"Is it true, O greatest of brahmin scholars, that the acts of men follow him in this life or in another birth?" In establishing a doctrine in the matter (*sthityartha*), Mārkaṇḍeya begins by explaining how, in the beginning, Prajāpati created immaculate bodies for the housing of souls. However, as a result of lust and anger (*kāmakrodhau*), greed and confusion (*lobhamohau*) overcame them, they began to live by tricks and deceit (*māyāvyājau*), and the gods deserted them (v.17). Over time, this god-created body has become the repository of vast quantities of good and bad acts (v.23), and when it dies the person is instantly (*yugapad*) reborn (v.24) together with all his previous acts. These follow him like a shadow (*svakṛtaṃ karma chāyevānugataṃ*) to create the joys and sorrows of the new life (v.25). Those with a past history of good behavior are reborn with good characters (*śubhalakṣaṇa*) into good families (*śubha-yonyantaragata*) (v.29), grow up with little fear of illness or bondage (*alpabādaparitrāsa*), and are likely to encounter few obstacles

(*nirupadrava*) in life (v.30). On leaving this world of acts (*karmabhūmi*), they proceed to the abode of the gods (*surālaya*) (v.31).

Having established his theory, however, Mārkaṇḍeya immediately waters it down by concluding that (v.32):

kiṃciddaivāddhaṭhātkiṃcitkacideva svakarmabhiḥ|
prāpnuvanti narā rājanmā te'stvanyā vicāraṇā||

"Some is the result of destiny (*daiva*), some the result of chance (*haṭha*), and part of what men get is the result of their own acts (*svakarma*), O king. Think no more about it." The question of the role of the Īśvara is left hanging, except through this oblique reference to destiny (*daiva*). The emphasis is clearly on one's *svakarma* which, in addition to creating the conditions of the present, is also an important determinant of the future "world" in which the greatest happiness (*paraśreyas*) will be found (v.33). Those in pursuit of wealth (*dhana* = *artha*) will find it in this world and not the next; those in pursuit of yoga (*yogayukta* presumably = *mokṣa*) will find it in that world not this (*asau nāyam lokaḥ*); those in pursuit of dharma will find it in both this world and the next; while self-indulgent people who do nothing (implying dedication to *kāma*) will find it neither in this world nor in the next (vv.35-38). Mārkaṇḍeya then assures the Pāṇḍava that their fortunes will change, since their own acts (*surakāryahetu*), determined by the purposes of the gods (v.39), will win them the highest heaven where good men dwell (*svargaṃ paraṃ puṇyakṛtāṃ nivāsaṃ*) (v. 41). There is some suggestion here that the gods (and presumably īśvara) constitute a final cause, creating the teleological conditions responsible for their ultimate destiny.

Less uncertainty is evident in the story of the brahmin Kauśika who is directed for spiritual guidance to a pious butcher (*dharmavyādha*), a most unlikely preceptor from the orthodox standpoint (though living in the perfect society of king Janaka of Mithilā). The brahmin is initially ill-at-ease at finding himself in the presence of this loathsome form of livelihood — *ghora karma* (III.198.18), but the butcher explains that (III.199.1-3):

yadahaṃ hyācare karma ghorametadasaṃśayam||

vidhistu balavānbrahmandustaraṃ hi purākṛtam|
purākṛtasya pāpasya karmadoṣo bhavatyayam|
doṣasyaitasya vai brahmanvidhāte yatnavānaham||

vidhinā vihite pūrvaṃ nimittaṃ ghātako bhavet|
nimittabhūtā hi vayaṃ karmaṇo'sya dvijottama||

"This occupation of mine is no doubt loathsome. However, the weight (*vidhi* = injunction) of our previous deeds is powerful and difficult to circumvent, O brahmin. I am obliged to do this evil work as a result of evil acts performed in the past, and I make every effort (*yatna*) to kill it off. When such a thing has been ordained by previous injunction [i.e. of his own acts], the killer is but the instrument. For we are but the instruments of these [previous] actions, O best of the twice-born." Nevertheless, a place is still reserved for "the one who bestows" (*dhātṛ*) the results of good and evil deeds when he continues (vv.14-17):

svadharma iti kṛtvā tu na tyajāmi dvijottama|
purākṛtamiti jñātvā jīvāmyetena karmaṇā||

svakarma tyajato brahmannadharma iha dṛśyate|
svakarmanirato yastu sa dharma iti niścayaḥ||

pūrvaṃ hi vihitaṃ karma dehinaṃ na vimuñcati|
dhātrā vidhirayaṃ dṛṣṭo bahudhā karmanirṇaye||

draṣṭavyaṃ tu bhavetprājña krūre karmaṇi vartatā|
kathaṃ karma śubhaṃ kuryāṃ kathaṃ muchye parābhavāt|
karmaṇastasya ghorasya bahudhā nirṇayo bhavet||

"This is my dharma; and this being so I will not give it up, best of the twice-born. I know that it is the result of my deeds in the past, and I earn my livelihood by this work. Here [i.e. in this kingdom of orthodoxy which is Mithilā] it is considered contrary to the dharma to abandon one's own work. When one is engaged in one's own work it is considered to be the dharma [i.e. the task of that person in life]. For an embodied being cannot escape the karma previously ordained for him. The Dhātṛ looks upon this ordinance (*vidhi*) in a number of ways when determining one's work. A man who is

working at a grisly task, O wise brahmin, must find out how he can make it pure, how to avoid being destroyed by it. The final judgement on this gory job will [thus] be varied." He then provokes Kauśika to reflection by questioning whether anyone can be an absolute practitioner of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) in this cannibalistic world? There follows a number of examples of how difficult this is, punctuated by repeated admonitions of "and what do you think of that" (*kiṃ pratibhāti te*)? Even those most devoted to non-violence such as the ascetics (*yati*) do harm to other creatures (v.29), e.g. by simply walking about (v.25).

But the dharma is more than just difficult to follow; it is confusing by its very nature (III.200.2) — *sūkṣmā gatirhi dharmasya bahuśākhā hyanantikā* — "the way of the *dharma* is subtle with a multitude of endless branches."[5] Under certain conditions, a lie can become truth and a truth a lie, but whether the act is judged (by the *dhāṭṛ* ?) good or bad — *avaśyaṃ tatsamāpnoti puruṣo nātra saṃśayaḥ* — "there is no doubt whatsoever about the inevitability of the resulting consequences for the man himself" (v.5). If the result of actions were not dependent on something over and above (*parādhīna*) the current action, men would not experience the various difficulties and obstacles they meet in life (v.8ff.). Or to put it another way (v.19):

na mriyeyurna jīryeyuḥ sarve syuḥ sārvakāmikāḥ|
nāpriyaṃ pratipaśyeyurvaśitvaṃ yadi vai bhavet||

"If men were subject to their own wishes, no one would die, no one would grow old, all would have their desires fulfilled, and no one would experience any unpleasantness." But, at death, the soul (*jīva* = here the *ātman* together with the subtle body) moves on, and (vv.27-28):

anyo hi nāśnāti kṛtaṃ hi karma
sa eva kartā sukhakuḥkhabhāgī|
yattena kiṃciddhi kṛtaṃ hi karma
tadaśnute nāsti kṛtasya nāśaḥ||

apuṇyaśīlāśca bhavanti puṇyā
narottamāḥ pāpakṛto bhavanti|

naro 'nuyātastviha karmabhiḥ svai-
stataḥ samutpadyati bhāvitastaiḥ||

"No one else inherits the deeds that were done. The doer (*kartṛ*) himself has the share (*bhāga*) of good and bad. For he gets whatever karma he has done; there is no such thing as the destruction of what has been performed. The evil-natured man becomes good; the best of men becomes an evil-doer. For the man in this world is followed by his own deeds [of the past]. His [new] existence is prepared by them in this manner, and then he is (re)born." One is thereby consigned to a life of wandering through the *saṃsāra* as if on a wheel (*parikrāmati samsāre cakravatbahuvedanaḥ*), suffering great pain until one is freed from bondage (*nivṛttabandha*) by the performance of pure acts (*viśuddhakarma*), and attains to the worlds of the virtuous (*sukṛtalokā*) where suffering is no more (vv.37-38). Successful performance of one's own duties (*svadharmaphala*) leads to tranquillity of mind, accompanied by meaningful personal relationships and worldly influence (*prabhutvaṃ*) (v. 46).

In the long run, however, even this *dharmaphala* (fruits of dharma) is not satisfying (v.47), particularly when one has realized the fragile nature of the world (*dṛṣṭvā lokaṃ kṣayātmakam*). When this point comes, a person first undertakes to renounce everything (*sarvatyāge yatate*), though he still does not abandon his duties, and "then strives for liberation, not by the wrong means but by the right" (*tato mokṣe prayatate nānupāyādupāyataḥ*), presumably through the punctilious performance of his duties (vv.48-49). It is interesting to observe the emphasis on effort in this process through use of the root √*yat* = to strive, endeavor, etc.

In light of the foregoing, it is easy to understand how destiny (in the form of *kāla* or *daiva*) eventually came to be synonymous with the results of past acts. A link with *daiva* is evident in remarks made by the sceptic (*pūrvapakṣa*) in the course of a long, and rather rambling, account of the matter given by Parāśara, the father of Vyāsa, in response to a question by King Janaka (XII.279). After explaining (v.7) that the essence of the dharma for embodied creatures is contained in the scriptural ordinances laid down on the subject of action (*dharmātmakaḥ karma vidhirdehināṃ*), he continues (v.10-12):

sauvarṇaṃ rājataṃ vāpi yathā bhāṇḍaṃ niṣicyate|
tathā niṣicyate jantuḥ pūrvakarmavaśānugaḥ||

nābījājjāyate kiṃcinnākṛtvā sukhamedhate|
sukṛtī vindate sukhaṃ prāpya dehakṣayaṃ naraḥ||

daivaṃ tāta na paśyāmi nāsti daivasya sādhanam|
svabhāvato hi saṃsiddhā devagandharvadānavāḥ||

"As a pot when dipped into gold or silver (takes on the qualities of these precious metals), so do people become subject to their past karma (*pūrvakarma*). Nothing grows without a seed. No one can prosper and enjoy life without action. On the destruction of the body, a person obtains happiness as a result of good acts. (It is only the sceptic who argues), 'I do not, my dear sir, see anything that is the result of destiny (*daiva* here equated with present circumstances the result of past actions). There is no evidence that destiny has any cause. It is in consequence of their own nature (*svabhāva*) that the gods, the *gandharvas*, and the demons have prospered." This position (i.e. that *svabhāva* is the cause) is then refuted by Parāśara who argues that, on the contrary, one inevitably experiences the consequences of past conduct, whether this be by the "eye," mind, speech, or by physical action (vv.15-18).

cakṣuṣā manasā vācā karmaṇā ca caturvidham|
kurute yādṛśaṃ karma tādṛśaṃ pratipadyate||

nirantaraṃ ca miśraṃ ca phalate karma pārthiva|
kalyāṇaṃ yadi vā pāpaṃ na tv nāśo'sya vidyate||

kadācitsukṛtaṃ tāta kūṭasthamiva tiṣṭhati|
majjamānasya saṃsāre yāvadduḥkhādvimucyate||

tato duḥkhakṣayaṃ kṛtvā sukṛtaṃ karma sevate|
sukṛtakṣayādduṣkṛtaṃ ca tadviddhi manujādhipa||

"One receives an equal measure of which ever of the four kinds of action one performs, (action performed) in a suggestive manner (lit. with the eye), mentally, in speech, or in (physical) action. Karma always leads to mixed results, O king; but whether these tend to good or evil, these results are never

destroyed. Sometimes, O good sir, the results of good acts are not apparent (lit. 'remain as if hidden') to one sinking in the [ocean of] the *saṃsāra* until such time as he is released from his sorrows. Once these sorrows have been exhausted, he begins to enjoy [the fruits of] his good acts. And know [also], O king, that the exhaustion of [the effects of] good acts are followed by those of evil."[6]

Parāśara goes on to assure the king that the consequences of one's deeds do not last for ever, neither is one ever made to enjoy or suffer the deeds of another (v.21). The only way to control karma is to control the chariot of the body with the mind, by curbing the horses of the senses with the reins of knowledge (XII.280.1). In this manner, the wise man is able to "exert himself for the purpose of spiritual advancement by means of righteous acts" (*utkarṣārthaṃ prayatate naraḥ puṇyena karmaṇā*) (v.3). Numerous mythological examples are harnessed to demonstrate the validity of what became the great moral assumption of Emmanuel Kant, namely that virtue (here practiced over the course of many lives) will ultimately lead to success and happiness (XII.281.12ff.). He concludes that if the dharma could be preserved, the whole world would be happy, and the heavens would rejoice (XII.282.13).

In addition to one's social duties (*varṇāśramadharma*), the practice of virtue also has an individual component. This consists in the performance of *tapas* — here regarded as an antidote to the erroneous belief that happiness follows from the gratification of the senses. As Parāśara points out (XII.284.6):

> *kṛtārtho bhogato bhūtvā sa vai ratiparāyaṇaḥ|*
> *lābhaṃ grāmyasukhādanyaṃ ratito nānupaśyati||*

"Believing, as a result of attachment to pleasure (*ratita*), that life's accomplishments (*kṛtārtha*) consist only in sensual enjoyments (*bhoga*), the man who is devoted to pleasure cannot imagine that there is anything to be gained beyond sexual intercourse." But, as is well-known (v.10):

> *tapo hi buddhiyuktānāṃ śāśvataṃ brahmadarśanam|*
> *anvicchatāṃ śubhaṃ karma narāṇāṃ tyajatāṃ sukham||*

"Happiness is obtained by those persons who are endowed with intelligence, who are always looking to the eternal Brahmā, who are devoted to pure conduct, and who abstain from actions driven by desire [alone]." In the opinion of Parāśara (v.35):

aprayatnāgatāḥ sevyā gṛhasthairviṣayāḥ sadā|
prayatnenopagamyaśca svadharma iti me matiḥ||

"Whatever objects of the world come of themselves (*aprayatna* = without any effort on our part) may be enjoyed without reservation by householders. However, it is my belief that their *svadharma* [i.e. their social responsibilities] should be vigorously pursued (*prayatnena* = with effort)." Roy refers, by way of a footnote, to the commentary by Nīlakaṇṭha in which he, "points out that the object of this Verse is to show that everything one owns or does is not the result of the past acts. Spouses, food, drink, &c., one obtains as the result of past acts or 'praravdha karma.' In respect of these, 'purushakara' or Exertion is weak. Hence, to put forth Exertion for their acquisition would not be wise. As regards the acquisition of righteousness, however, there Exertion is efficacious. Hence, one should with Exertion, seek to conform to one's own duties as laid down in the scriptures. Without such a distinction between destiny (praravdha) and Exertion (purushakara), the injunctions and interdictions of the Scriptures would be unmeaning."[7] The term *prārabdhakarma* would here be synonymous with *pūrvakarma* which, as we have seen above, is associated with *daiva* (destiny that happens to one).

The body itself is part of the chain of effects flowing from such desire-prompted actions of past existences (XII.286.17):

bhavitaṃ karmayogena jāyate tatra tatra ha|
idaṃ śarīraṃ vaideha mriyate yatra yatra ha|
tatsvabhāvo'paro dṛṣṭo visargaḥ karmaṇastathā||

"As a result of its association with acts, this body is always (re)born under corresponding conditions [i.e. conditions determined by these acts]. Furthermore, O king, whatever the circumstances of death, it is observed that

the nature of the following birth is a product (*visarga* = spreading out) of [past] actions." And, contrary to the views of Mārkaṇḍeya (vv.18-19):

na jāyate tu nṛpate kiṃcitkālamayaṃ punaḥ|
paribhramati bhūtātmā dyāmivāmbudharo mahān||

sa punarjāyate rājanprāpyehāyatanaṃ nṛpa|
manasaḥ paramo hyātmā indriyebhyaḥ paraṃ manaḥ||

"The soul (*bhūtātmā*) does not, O king, obtain a new birth immediately but wanders through the sky like a great cloud. Obtaining a new embodiment, O king, it is reborn once again. The soul (*ātman*) is superior to the mind, and the mind is superior to the senses."

Those whose souls have been perfected (*kṛtātmānaḥ*) to the point of knowing the true condition of the *ātman* (*ātmapratyayadarśina*) are never afflicted by the fruits of their acts (XII.287.8), the key being freedom from attachments (v.10):

vītarāgo jitakrodhaḥ samyagbhavati yaḥ sadā|
viṣaye vartamāno'pi na sa pāpena yujyate||

"The one who is free of attachments and who has conquered his anger is never affected by sin, though he be in the midst of worldly objects." Once this hankering after worldly enjoyments (*bhogāṃstyāga*) has been abandoned, one is assured of happiness (v. 24). By contrast, the sensualist (*śiṣnodaraparāyaṇa* = lit. one devoted to his penis and his belly) goes around the cycle of births in a thick mist without seeing his way, like one afflicted with congenital blindness (v.25). Thus (vv.26-29):

vaṇigyathā samudrādvai yathārthaṃ labhate dhanam|
tathā martyārṇave jantoḥ karmavijñānato gatiḥ||

ahorātramaye loke jarārūpeṇa saṃcaran|
mṛtyurgrasati bhūtāni pavanaṃ pannago yathā||

svayaṃ kṛtāni karmāṇi jāto jantuḥ prapadyate|
nākṛtaṃ labhate kaścitkiṃcidatra priyāpriyam||

śayānaṃ yāntamāsīnaṃ pravṛttaṃ viṣayeṣu ca|
śubhāśubhāni karmāṇi prapadyante naraṃ sadā||

"As traders crossing the ocean make profits in proportion to their investment, creatures who ply this ocean of mortality attain to ends in proportion to the way they act. Death wanders through the days and nights of this world in the form of decrepitude, devouring all creatures like a snake devouring air. When born, a creature is responsible for his own acts. There is nothing, whether agreeable or disagreeable, that is obtained other than as a result of acts performed in the past. Whether lying or moving, sitting or dealing with the objects of the world, a person is always meeting the result of the pure and impure acts [of the past]." And he summarizes his view in what appears to be a ringing endorsement of personal initiative (vv.39-40; 42-44):

sarvāni karmāṇi purā kṛtāni
śubhāśubhānyātmano yānti jantoḥ|
upasthitaṃ karmaphalaṃ viditvā
buddhiṃ tathā codayate 'ntarātmā||

vyavasāyaṃ saṃāśritya sahāyānyo 'dhigacchati|
na tasya kaścidārambhaḥ kadācidavasīdati||

āstikyavyavasāyābhyām upāyādvismayāddhiyā|
yamārabhatyanindyātmā na so 'rthaḥ parisīdati||

sarvaḥ svāni śubhāśubhāni niyataṃ karmāṇi jantuḥ svayaṃ
garbhātsaṃpratipadyate tadubhayaṃ yattena pūrvaṃ kṛtam|
mṛtyuścāparihāravānsamagatiḥ kālena vicchedità
dāroścūrṇamivāśmasāravihitaṃ karmāntikaṃ prāpayet||

svarūpatāmātmakṛtaṃ ca vistaraṃ
kulānvayaṃ dravyasamṛddhisaṃcayam|
naro hi sarvo labhate yathākṛtaṃ
śubhāśubhenātmakṛtena karmaṇā||

"All the actions done in the past, whether pure or impure, return to the person himself. Knowing that everything that takes place [in the present] is the result of [past] action, the inner soul urges the mind (*buddhi*) to act

accordingly. [In this manner], the different projects (*ārambha*) that may be undertaken will never fail, [provided that] one relies on one's own efforts (*vyavasāya*) and on such other assistance as there may be. The business (*artha*) of a worthy man of blameless soul, who acts without pride and anxiety, putting forth effort (*vyavasāya*) with the necessary skill (*upāya*), is never lost. From the very outset in the mother's womb, a person is invariably responsible for all the pure and impure acts he has performed in the past. Death, which is irresistible (*aparihārava*) and responsible for the destruction of life, together with time (*kāla*), leads all creatures to their end like sawdust scattered by the wind (*samagati*). As a result of pure and impure acts performed by himself in the past, the person obtains whatever he has and has accomplished in life, including his family and associates, his fame and fortune and everything else he has done of his own accord." The only caveat in all of this would appear to be the activities of Death and Time from which there is no escape whatever one does.

This link between past karma and the *daiva* of present circumstances is also evident from remarks made by Bhīṣma at the very beginning of the Mokṣadharma section of Śāntiparva (XII.168.37-39a):

> *pūrvadehakṛtaṃ karma śubhaṃ vā yadi vāśubham|*
> *prājñaṃ mūḍhaṃ tathā śūraṃ bhajate yādṛśaṃ kṛtam||*
>
> *evameva kilaitāni priyāṇyevāpriyāṇi ca|*
> *jīveṣu parivartante duḥkhāni ca sukhāni ca||*
>
> *tadetaṃ buddhimāsthāya sukhaṃ jīvedguṇānvitaḥ|*

"The [results of] what has been done in a previous incarnation, whether pure or impure, are visited upon the wise and the foolish, as well as on brave persons, according to one's just deserts. It is even thus that living creatures have these good and bad experiences, together with joy and sorrow. Once aware of this, the man endowed with the qualities of his material nature (*guṇa* — thus character) lives happily."

The mechanism by which the acts of the past are transmitted to the present is dealt with in the Anugītā section of the Aśvamedha-parvan (XIV.16ff.) where Kṛṣṇa recalls a dialogue between two brahmins, one of whom,

Kaśyapa, puts a number of questions about death and rebirth and the role of action (*karma*). Bruce Long[8] has drawn attention to a disjunction in this text between a naturalistic account of death and rebirth (XIV.17 and 18.1-13) and the theistic account of the original creation of bodies by Brahmā that follows (XIV.18.24-34). It is in the first segment that the propensity of action to leave habit-forming traces in the mind is introduced. The entire process is driven exclusively by actions undertaken in the past, i.e. by *pūrvakarma*. (XIV.17.28-29):

sa jīvaḥ pracyutaḥ kāyātkarmabhiḥ svaiḥ samāvṛtaḥ|
aṇkitaḥ svaiḥ śubhaiḥ puṇaiḥ pāpairvāpyupapadyate||

brāhmaṇā jñānasaṃpannā yathāvacchrutaniścayāḥ|
itaraṃ kṛtapuṇyaṃ vā taṃ vijānanti lakṣaṇaiḥ||

"Dissociated from the body, the *jīva* is surrounded on all sides by his own acts. He is endowed with "marks" (*aṇkita*) of his pure and good and bad deeds. Brahmins endowed with knowledge, and duly conversant with the conclusions of scripture, know by these indications (*lakṣanaiḥ*) about his good and evil deeds." The terms *aṇkita* and *lakṣana* are no doubt equivalent to the *vāsanā* and *saṃskāra* that are given prominence in the later philosophical literature. That the mind itself is the repository of these "marks" is clear from what follows (XIV.18.1-4):

śubhānāmaśubhānāṃ ca neha nāśo'sti karmaṇām|
prāpya prāpya tu pacyante kṣetraṃ kṣetraṃ tathā tathā||

yathā prasūyamānastu phalī dadyātphalaṃ bahu|
tathā syādvipulaṃ puṇyaṃ śuddhena manasā kṛtaṃ||

pāpaṃ cāpi tathaiva syātpāpena manasā kṛtaṃ |
purodhāya mano hīha karmaṇyātmā pravartate||

yathā karmasamādiṣṭaṃ kāmamanusamāvṛtaḥ|
naro garbhaṃ praviśati taccāpi śṛṇu cottaram||

"Pure and impure actions ripen upon the attainment of body after body (*kṣetra* = a field, i.e. of action). They are not subject to destruction. As a

fruit-bearing tree (*phalī*) brings forth much fruit when the season comes, the actions performed by a pure mind result in much merit (*puṇya*). And the actions performed by an evil mind are productive of sin (*pāpa*). The soul (*ātmā*), led by the mind (*manas*), sets itself to action. Hear then how the person who is governed entirely by his [past] acts (*karmasamādiṣṭaṃ*), being overwhelmed by desire and anger, enters the womb." Clearly a mind that is *śuddha*, i.e. cleansed of the mental habits (or marks) that direct it into sinful paths, would no longer be *karmasamādiṣṭaṃ*. This is evident from the statement that (vv.11-12):

yadyacca kurute karma śubhaṃ vā yadi āśubham|
pūrvadehakṛtaṃ sarvamavaśyamupabhujyate||

tatastatkṣīyate caiva punaścānyatpracīyate|
yāvattanmokṣayogastham dharmaṃ naivāvabudhyate||

"Whatever the acts, pure or impure, performed [by the person] in a former body, he will go through [the effects of] all of them whether he likes it or not. By this means, [the effects of] former acts are exhausted, while others accumulate once again until such time as the person becomes aware of the *dharma* related to the means of liberation." It is thus the acts themselves that are responsible for rebirth (v.22):

evaṃ pūrvakṛtaṃ karma sarvo janturniṣevate|
sarvaṃ tatkāraṇaṃ yena nikṛto'yamihāgataḥ||

"A living being thus always meets the action previously performed by him. All these [acts] constitute the cause (*kāraṇa*) by which he comes into this world in a debased form (*nikṛta*, i.e. in a body)." As noted once again by Bruce Long: "That the embodied state of being (*dehin*) is thought to be an abnormal condition for the *jīva* is indicated by the standardized use of the term *doṣa* (impurity, fault, pollutant) in referring to the basic humors in the body."[9]

In contrast to this naturalistic account, the creation of the first (macrocosmic) body is the work of a supernatural agent in the form of Brahmā-Prajāpati, who creates his own body before creating the *pradhāna* or material cause of all the other (microcosmic) bodies of mobile and immobile creatures (vv.24-

25). As in the Bhagavadgītā, every *puruṣa* is a duality, consisting of a destructible body (*kṣara*) and an indestructible soul (*akṣara*), that migrates from body to body. Instead of time, however, it is Brahmā himself who assigns the temporal limits to exit (*parivṛtti*) and return (*punarāvṛtti*) to each state of embodiment (v.28). Nowhere is there any mention of the contribution of the individual and his acts to this process. Bruce Long concludes that: "This passage supports a position midway between philosophical Vedānta and devotional Kṛṣṇa-ism, by attributing all primary causative action to god while, at the same time, identifying that Creator as Brahma-Prajāpati rather than Kṛṣṇa. We might be justified in assuming that the idea of karma is the underlying assumption of every statement on human destiny in the MBh., but taking this text as it stands, the responsibility for the creation of the world-order and the actualization of human destiny lies with the divine being, with no contribution of any magnitude from man himself."[10]

Perhaps the most "pure" enunciation of the karma doctrine in the Mahābhārata is given by Vidura as part of his continuing efforts to lift the spirits of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. This time the blind king is grieving over what must be the most perfect example of the maturation of past action (or, in his case, failure to act) in the epic — the destruction of his entire family (XI.3.6-17). Willy-nilly, says Vidura, we must all accept responsibility for our own actions (v.8). It is in accord with such actions that creatures are born and destroyed, some while yet in the womb, some shortly after birth, some in youth, some in middle and some in old age, just as pots produced by a potter may break at any time, even on the potter's wheel (vv.9-14). Life's difficulties are all the result of past behavior, which, in turn, is governed by the degree of insight into the workings of the world. Those with little insight come under the dominion of greed (*lobha*) which brings them to ruin (no doubt Vidura has the king himself in mind). By contrast, those who are wise (*prājña*), established in truth (*satya*), and conversant with the comings and goings of beings in this world (*saṃsāra*), attain to the very highest end (v.17). The results of this past behavior accompany the person at birth (*pūrvakarmabhiranvita*) to produce what we have come to regard as "character" (XI.4.5). Bound by the chains of the senses (*baddham indriyapāśaiḥ*) to family, wealth, and the other sweet things of life, i.e. by

attachments (*saṇga*), he continues to act (v.8). The person is then paid out of this accumulated deposit of desire-prompted acts in the form of the various calamities (*vyasanāni*) encountered in this life, including his own death at the appointed time (v.9). This process is seldom seen for what it is on account of greed, anger, lust, and madness (*lobhakrodhamadonmatta*) that deceive the whole world, including ourselves (v.11). Others are then blamed for what we have brought on ourselves (v.13):

mūrkhāniti parānāha nātmānaṃ samavekṣate|
śikṣāṃ kṣipati cānyeṣāṃ nātmānaṃ śāstumicchati||

"We speak of others as ignorant fools, but never take a look at ourselves. One is quick to instruct others, but has no wish to instruct oneself."

One familiar with the nature of freedom (the *mokṣavid*) looks at the world as a place to avoid. This is illustrated by the famous "parable of the wilderness of life" — *saṃsāragahanopamāna* (XI.5.1-22) which recounts the wanderings in the great world of human experience (*mahāsaṃsāra*) of a certain brahmin who enters a large forest teeming with beasts of prey. He has no apparent way of escape since the forest is surrounded by a net and guarded on all sides by huge five-headed snakes reaching to the sky (*nabhaḥspṛśa*). A dreadful woman with arms reaching over the net is also to be seen. Running hither and thither to avoid these horrible creatures he inadvertently falls into a well (*salilāśaya* ; *kūpa*) by the side of a great tree. He ends up hanging by his heels halfway down the well, caught in a tangle of creepers that breaks his fall. But this is not all. Looking down he sees a large and powerful snake at the bottom of the well and looking up he sees a gigantic elephant with six faces and twelve feet approaching the mouth of the well. Killer bees in the tree above are buzzing about a honeycomb that releases intermittent streams of honey into the well, while the roots of the tree are being gnawed away by a troop of black and white rats. His thirst is unquenchable even after repeated draughts of the honey that continues to fall into the well. In spite of his almost impossible predicament, however, the unfortunate brahmin never abandons attachment to life, and even strives to prolong it.

This graphic imagery is clearly designed to open the eyes of the blind king (supposedly endowed with "the eyesight of insight" — *prajñācakṣu*) to the true nature of the human condition (XI.6.1-12). Such insight, says Vidura, is all that is needed to secure happiness (*sugati*) in the higher worlds (*paralokāḥ*). The wilderness is the *saṃsāra* as a whole, he explains, while the great forest is the more limited sphere of one's own life. The beasts of prey are the various diseases to which we are subject, and the woman of gigantic proportions (*nārī bṛhatkāyā*) with arms outstretched is the prospect of decrepitude (*jarā*) that awaits us. The well or pit is the physical embodiment into which we "fall," continually buzzed by desires (bees) that are never fully satisfied, no matter how much pleasure (honey) is available for their gratification. Our condition would seem hopeless, yet, suspended by creepers of hope, we continue to hang on to our pathetic ego-centred existence.

From the *nivṛtti* perspective of one with knowledge of freedom (*mokṣavid*), human effort (*karma, prayatna, puruṣakāra*) is of little consequence in the face of time (*kāla*), here represented in its threefold destructive aspect. The nights and days (black and white rats) are gnawing away at the very roots of the tree of life (of the embodied soul), clearing the way for the approaching elephant (of the years) with six faces (seasons) and twelve legs (months). And finally there is the embodiment of Time as Death in the form of a huge snake, who waits patiently at the bottom of the pit for the rats to complete their task. Suitably impressed and now fully roused from his former state of emotional collapse, Dhṛtarāṣṭra presses Vidura to continue.

The situation may be grim, but it is not entirely hopeless, Vidura hastens to re-assure the king (XI.7.1-20). The course of existence can well take the form of a long journey (*adhvāna*) through a forest of adversity, punctuated by frequent "falls" into different embodiments. However, this is only for the ignorant (like the king himself). Men of wisdom are aware that these fierce beasts are nothing but the concretization of their own *svakarma* and are no longer disturbed by them (v.8). And he proceeds to illustrate the different degrees of control that may be exercised over one's life by the analogy of handling a chariot (vv.13-14):

ratham śarīram bhūtānām sattvamāhustu sārathim|
indriyāṇi hayānāhuḥ karmabuddhiśca raśmayaḥ||

teṣām hayānām yo vegam dhāvatāmanudhāvati|
sa tu saṃsāracakre'smiṃścakravatparivartate||

"The body of creatures is called a chariot, and the driver is the living principle (*sattva*). The senses are represented by the horses, and our acts and understanding are the reins. Whoever is carried along by these impetuous steeds has to return to the *saṃsāra* in a perpetual round of rebirths." This is the "chariot of Yama" that confuses the ignorant (v.15). On the other hand (vv.19b-20):

damastyāgo'pramādaśca te trayo brahmaṇo hayāḥ||

śīlaraśmisamāyukte sthito yo mānase rathe|
tyaktvā mṛtyubhayaṃ rājanbrahmalokaṃ sa gacchati||

"Self-restraint (*dama*), renunciation (*tyāga*) and vigilance (*apramāda*) are the three horses of Brahmā. Whoever controls the chariot of the mind to which the reins are firmly attached by good character (*śila*), casting off all fear of death, is destined, O king, for the world of Brahmā (*brahmaloka*)." The key to control of one's life and spiritual betterment lies in control of the "mind," suggesting control of the emotions through knowledge (though it is not clear whether *puruṣakāra* is equivalent to the power of this mind). The alternative is to fall victim to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (*daiva*) in the manner of a Dhṛtarāṣṭra, dragged by his own emotional attachments from one disaster to another. Of course even full control is not true freedom, since the very need for control implies a state in which the horses of the senses are drawn — by attachment — towards their objects.

In this connection, we must remember the lines of Vyāsa quoted at the beginning of our inquiry (cf. p.7) to the effect that: "It is [only] those who take their stand in action who say these things." We are still in the realm of *saṃsāra* and of *pravṛtti*. Chaitanya has nevertheless observed a curious parallelism between the karmic mechanics of epic events and the divine intentionalities of higher powers. He writes: "if for expressing his very subtle

concept of a superordinate transcendental intentionality, Vyāsa indicates an event as designed from above, he carefully matches it with a Karmic causality that is self-sufficient in terms of the world's processes and human reactivities."[11] His examples are the destruction of the Yādava, and the culpability of Arjuna in the death of Bhīṣma. In the first instance the divine intentionality is suggested by the willing submission of Kṛṣṇa to the fate meted out to him and his countrymen; in the second by the revenge of the Vāsus in the (temporary) death of Arjuna at the hands of his own son (XIV.79-81). These events are also precipitated in karmic fashion, the former through the absence of Kṛṣṇa during the dice game; the latter through the killing of Bhīṣma perpetrated by Arjuna for his own advantage, even though the former had sought death as a solution to problems of his own. The final demise of Duryodhana is a further example. As Chaitanya explains: "The reactions of the world, the objective situation, harden when the provocations continue and beyond a certain stage they become unalterable and confront the doer as his destiny."[12]

Chaitanya, with typical existentialist verve, also sees the deterministic thrust of past conduct into the present as a necessary confrontation with a "destiny" that challenges the exercise of an inherent freedom to shape oneself and one's own future. He offers the example of Karṇa in this regard.

> The confidential dialogue with Krishna in the chariot was Karna's hour of illumination and perhaps it was even more profound than the illumination of Arjuna in the dialogue of the Gita. Life had throughout heaped misfortunes on him. But they ceased to have any significance for him at this hour; he does not even remember them. The empirical effects initiated by his past misdeeds — but not his own misdeeds alone, the web of causalities was too intricately woven for such simplist reading — had jelled into a situation which squarely confronted him with destiny. He could have become king; but he chose a different road, knowing full well that at the end of the road he chose, death would be waiting for him. But he has no thought for his own certain death either. He transformed what loomed up as a dark Karmic fatality into a personally wrought destiny and fulfillment. By the position he took up

in his freedom in regard to the fruition of the past as the present on the empirical plane, he changed punishment into redemption.[13]

Chaitanya makes much of the ladder of human initiative implied in the different uses of the agricultural metaphor of sowing. In the Vanaparvan, for example (III.33.45), the farmer fulfills his duty simply by sowing the seeds (*puruṣakāra*) in a field that has already been ploughed. Here the text simply suggests that he cannot thereafter be faulted if the monsoon fails to arrive. In the Udyogaparvan, however, Kṛṣṇa insists that the farmer should make further efforts to water the field by hand, implying that the husbandman should not just be resigned to his fate if the rains do not come (V.77.1-5). But this metaphor, which assimilates *puruṣakāra* to the seed, is later completely transformed by Bhīṣma (XIII.6.7-8) when he suggests that, "man's initiative becomes the field and Daivam or the design of the webbed causalities of the world becomes the seed. Trials and tribulations can also thus become seeds that can yield splendid fruit, depending on the field, which is human initiative. Vyasa incorporates his theory of human actions and consequences into his overall conceptualization of a benign intentionality behind creation even while underscoring man's responsibility to strive."[14] The objective conditions of life created by our past behavior now confront us as an existential challenge to mobilize our inner resources for a quantum leap into new conditions of life. But just how far we ourselves are responsible for this existential leap is a moot point which he refers back to the assertions of the epic: "As to whether events are finally determined by human volition or the fortuitous patterns of the world's multiple and intricately webbed causalities (Daivam, or what we call act of God in legal parlance), there are repeated assertions that human volition is effective and that man must rely on his initiative."[15]

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[1] Alf Hiltebeitel, The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 214.

[2] T.G. Kalghatgi, Karma and Rebirth (Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute of Indology, 1972), p. 43.

[3] P.V. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, 5 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1977), vol. V: II, p. 1561.

[4] H.D. Bhattacharyya, "Vicissitudes of the Karma Doctrine," in Malaviya Commemoration Volume (Benares: Benares Hindu University, 1932). Quoted in Benoy Gopal Ray, Gods and Karma in Indian Religions (Santiniketan: Center of Advanced Study in Philosophy, Visva-Bharati University, 1973), p. 89.

[5] This formulation is common in the Mahābhārata.

[6] These verses were subsequently used by Śaṃkara to bolster the "pure" theory of *karma* expressed in his commentary on Vedāntasutra III. 1. 8.

[7] Kesari Mohan Ganguli (trans.), pp. 390-391.

[8] J. Bruce Long, "The Concepts of Human Action and Rebirth in the Mahābhārata," in Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions, ed. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 52-57.

[9] Ibid, footnote (39), p. 56.

[10] Ibid, p. 57. Unfortunately, the article is too short to provide the necessary support for his "underlying assumption" about the contribution of karma to human destiny.

[11] Chaitanya, The Mahābhārata, p. 337.

[12] Ibid, p. 338.

[13] Ibid, pp. 341-2.

[14] Ibid, p. 343.

[15] Ibid, p. 342.

IX — The Path of Self-Determination

The varied explanations for the vicissitudes of human life and conduct in the Mahābhārata may be viewed in two ways. As we have seen, the diachronic arrangement suggests the gradual emergence of a more autonomous "person" in classical India.[1] This evidence is corroborated by analysis of other texts. De Smet, for example, notes that the human endeavor of the early Vedic period was marked not by personal but by a collective concern for the good order of things, particularly for the maintenance of *ṛta* — the physical and moral order of the world. This collective interest is later superseded by a promethean quest for the *brahman*, the mysterious power behind the cosmic system, identified (in the Brahmaṇa texts) with the sacrifice itself and later internalized in the Upaniṣads as being one with the *ātman*, the supra-personal "self."[2] Indra, Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī and other epic gods that take up residence in the human body (XII.120.44) are subsequently reduced to the status of mental functions.

However, these materials may also be regarded synchronically as symbolic expressions of patent differences in human beings that become particularly evident in times of crisis. Epic characters naturally express their momentary states of mind in images and ideas drawn from the rich cultural lore available to them. From this perspective, what seems a haphazard collection of ideas may be interpreted as a reflection of the disparate confusions of individual minds struggling to make sense of the various predicaments in which they find themselves. We have noted the vast range of feeling involved, from experiences of complete powerlessness and/or frustration to various levels of control and responsibility for a given action or situation. Paralyzed by ties of greed and affection, King Dhṛtarāṣṭra is forced to accept what happens to him as fate (*daiva*), experiencing himself as the "blind" victim of cosmic forces over which he has no control. Other characters, too, reach back into the stock of traditional imagery to express helplessness or anger in cases of seemingly irreconcilable conflict of duty (*dharmapāśa*), or apparent injustice (*adharma*). We can think of Yudhiṣṭhira when cornered into participating in

the dice-game (II.52.18), or of Draupadī angrily contemplating the discomforts of a fourteen-year forest exile resulting from her husband's adherence to a dharma she fails to understand (III.31.21ff.). References to *daiva*, or to a particular god, or to karma, in these situations here suggests an increasing scale of personal autonomy. Explaining the present in terms of the past actions of the agent himself (*pūrvakarma*) may, on this view, simply reflect a heightened sense of autonomy and moral responsibility on the part of the speaker.

Both the diachronic and synchronic readings are supported by a mythology that suggests that the human drive for autonomy and self-determination is an important milestone in the evolution of embodied life (*jīva*). We saw in Chapter III how the cosmic process was modelled after the yogic passages of Kaṭhopaniṣad III.9-11 and IV.7-8 taken in reverse. The Creation appears as a sort of "fall" from knowledge to ignorance (*avidyā*; *moha*), from subtle (*sukṣma* = sāttvic) to gross (*sthūla* = tāmasic) forms of existence, from Brahma down to a blade of grass (*brahmādi tṛṇānta*). The *nirvikalpasamādhi* (rippleless consciousness) of the Supreme Divinity is shattered into a multiplicity of individual energy centers, all of which are impelled by a desire (*kāma*) to return to their source. This leads to the vision of an eschatological journey through successive embodiments and states of experience (*loka*) (XII.199.3; XII.271.36ff; XII.292.1ff; XII.296.47-49, etc.).

This movement of energy centers through time and space is, as J. Bruce Long has noted, "clearly articulated in the Sanskrit term for metempsychosis, or rebirth. The term *saṃsāra* means literally the act of going about, wandering through, coursing along, or passing through a series of states or conditions, specifically the passage through successive states of birth, death, and rebirth. The basal universal energy (*tejas*, *tapas*, *śakti*) is a kind of élan vital, which creates, supports, and (according to certain 'schools of thought') constitutes *substantively* all living things."[3] A lowly worm may rise to become Brahmā as a result of spiritual advances over many lives (XIII.118-120).

The earth provides an appropriate locale (*loka*)—the second of the seven *lokas* (cf. chapter III. n. 2), for the consciousness of this evolving *jīva* to

emerge into self-consciousness, including the faculty of conscience. This is the critical phase where the (now human) individual becomes responsible for his or her own further evolution in the context of the interactional confrontation of the "I" (*ahaṃkāra*) with the "other" of the world. Human beings are the only species with the right mix of awareness (*prakāśa* = light) and pain (*duḥkha*) to prompt them to act continuously, either to satisfy desire (*pravṛtti*) or, by reflection, to turn away from its objects (*nivṛtti*).

This spiritual entelechy is characterized, in the more philosophical mode of the Bhagavadgītā, as the progression of nature (*prakṛti*) towards the possibility of the fully self-determined act, that is to say, towards control over the springs of one's own action.[4] This possibility is illustrated at VI.30/BG.7.4-5 where Kṛṣṇa makes the distinction between "the segmental processes of nature, which he generically groups as *Apara Prakrti*, and nature as a holistic and superordinate principle that manifests itself at every level of material organization, giving a directionality to the numerous components of material entities and processes that otherwise do not recognize each other or act in concert. At this creative level, nature is distinguished as *Para Prakrti*."[5] Unfortunately, instead of abruptly disappearing with the advent of human life, most of the deterministic features of the lower *prakṛti* go underground "to create fantastic complications, though their ultimate indication still is that freedom is a reality even if it can be realized only by a great striving."[6] This inner drive towards freedom (which is generally expressed by the term *yatna* in the epic) becomes *puruṣakāra* when this drive is diverted into satisfying mundane desires in the external world.

All the complex of forces at work behind the human events of the epic may be interpreted in light of this cosmic journey of the soul. Such a vision reveals the epic conflict as the climax, on the "stage of action" (*karmabhūmi*) that is this world, of the drama of inner struggle that takes place on the "field of values" (*dharmakṣetra*) between our lower organic heritage, and our higher nature acting as proxy for the human spirit (*puruṣa*) who takes no active part in the war. This inner war is the constant attempt by the self-centered forces of desire (*kāma*), aversion (*dveṣa*) and anger (*krodha*), to usurp the throne of the higher values and ideals (*dharma*) that point the way to a transcendent mode of being. The stakes are nothing less than the future of human evolution and of human society to come. In contrast to the

animals—governed by instinct, humans have the power to resist the atavistic drag of impulse, and this capacity for spiritual advance, in modern parlance, goes by the names of autonomy, self-determination and "freedom." The epic author would have no quarrel with Dr. Bhattacaryya's definition of the (human) individual as one "who is not entirely an item of Nature, accepting unquestioningly what Nature offers and submitting blindly to its forces, but one who often resists it and initiates new actions, one, in other words, who is as much above Nature as in it. This over-natural status of man is called 'freedom'."[7] While this modern sense of freedom has no direct equivalent in epic Sanskrit, it is clearly implied in the choice between "the good" (*śreyas*) and "the pleasant" (*preyas*) of Kaṭhopaniṣad II.1.2; in short the choice between a life of moral commitment and the pursuit of unbridled self-interest. Present satisfactions must be "sacrificed" in exchange for assurances of a higher state of existence in the future.[8]

As we pointed out in Chapter V, this self-determination or autonomy is not complete freedom in the epic sense of *mokṣa* but is a progressive loosening of the net of attachments (*kāmajāla*) that bind the embodied soul (*jīvātman*) to the cycle of life (*saṃsāra*).[9] *Mokṣa* is not a freedom of the will related to the ego (*ahaṃkāra*). Nevertheless, we are assured by Indra (in the form of a jackal) that the human estate enjoys incomparable advantages that make it the envy and aspiration of all lower orders of being (XII.173.8ff.). Our humanity, flawed as it is, puts us on the staircase to heaven (*sopānabhūtaṃ svargasya*) (XII.309.79; cf. also XII.286.31-32). On the other hand we need not be reminded that these advantages also carry the risk of deviating from the path of spiritual evolution in a manner that has no parallel among the things and beings governed by the causal laws of (lower) *prakṛti*. In this respect, the human endeavor is "finer than the edge of a razor and grosser than a mountain" (XII.252.12). Humans have achieved a certain "freedom" to pilot their own evolution but, depending on how they use this, they may degenerate into the self-seeking demonic type or enjoy a meteoric rise to functional similarity (*sādharmya*) with the Supreme Being (VI.37/BG.XIV.2). Self determination (or autonomy) is a necessary condition of the ultimate freedom of *mokṣa*, but it can also lead to a pernicious inflation of the ego, which makes it possible for a man like Duryodhana to resist the divine plan.

This weakening of instinctual controls clearly poses a serious threat to the stability and well-being of society, particularly in the context of the progressive decline of the *yuga* (leading to Hobbsian conditions in which the big fish eat the little fish—*mātsyanyāya*). At the instigation of the lesser gods, Brahmā, the story goes (XII.59.13-141; XII.91.16), is prompted to introduce moral standards (*dharma*), backed by a system of rewards and punishments, to control the libidinal (*kāma*) and materialistic (*artha*) excesses of the community. Regulation of social life (*lokarakṣaṇakārika* — literally "measures taken to protect the world", XII.59.77; cf. also XII.251.25) had, during the formation of the epic, become enshrined in complex formal codes of duties "to be done" (*kārya*) according to caste (*varṇa*) and stage of life (*āśrama*). The *āśramadharma* is technically restricted to brahmins (XII.62.2), though the epic is replete with examples of kings who retire to the woods when their social responsibilities have been fulfilled (Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the heavenly ascent of the Pāṇḍavas etc.). It may be distinguished from the *varṇadharma* by the fact that: "Whereas the organization of Āśrama-dharma approaches life from the side of nurture (śrama), training it through successive stages; the organization of Varṇa-dharma approaches life from the side of nature (guṇa), defining the role of the individual in society by virtue of natural tendencies and innate dispositions."[10] The "legal" aspect of relations between the individual and the group was part of the responsibility of the king (*rājadharma*), to be enforced by means of the *daṇḍa* or rod of chastisement (XII.59.77-78).

However, these social norms are viewed in the epic within the much broader ethical context of human aspirations in general (*puruṣārtha*), including the vital quest for inner harmony, and for a more meaningful integration within the cosmic system as a whole. In this context, emphasis on the regulatory aspect of the dharma tends to give way to normative disciplines designed to bring the mind to a greater radius of awareness and a finer grain of being. Thus, in addition to the fulfillment of one's social duties in a spirit of "sacrifice" (that is to say for the welfare of the community rather than one's own), more encompassing norms or *sādhāraṇadharmas*—such as non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), charity (*dāna*), and truth (*satya*)—are encouraged as an integral part of spiritual and moral disciplines (*sādhana*; *abhyāsa*) directed to personal growth and self-realization. Thus, (using the Mokṣaparvan example of XII.266.6-7), the merits of patience (*dhairya*) are the antidote to desire

(*icchā*), aversion (*dveṣa*) and lust (*kāma*), and study (*abhyāsa*) is encouraged to dispel confusion (*bhrama*), ignorance (*pramoha*) and doubt (*āvarta*).[11] The idea is to gradually transform these moral imperatives, through discipline, into the attitudes and behaviors that reflect the spiritual passage of the individual from bondage to liberation (*mokṣa*). "Where the dharma is, there is victory" (*yato dharmas tato jayaḥ*, etc.) is an oft-repeated expression that suggests spiritual as well as temporal victory.[12]

This movement from the social to the personal, from objective to more subjective standards of value, itself reflects a progressive spiritual evolution. As S. Cromwell Crawford points out:

> Objective Ethics constitutes the first stage of Hindu *Dharma*. On this stage morality is represented by social codes demanding external conformity. Psychologically understood, this is the stage of socialization and introjection. The voice of conscience is the interiorized voice of the group. The essence of conscience is a 'must'. The feel of conscience is that of fear of punishment for duties not done. Hindu *Dharma* further teaches that one should progress from the 'must-consciousness' to the 'ought-consciousness'.... This is the Subjective stage known as *Cittaśuddhi* or purification of the mind. Subjective Ethics is an advance over Objective Ethics because 'virtues are superior to duties.' Whereas duty represents external sanctions, virtue represents internal sanctions. Duties are related to experiences of prohibition and fear, but virtues arise from experiences of preference and the feeling of self-respect.[13]

Of course this moral progression did not escape the ambiguities posed by the relativity and incommensurability of values built up layer upon layer since the Vedic period. By the time of the epic the dharma had proliferated into a confusion of multiple doors (XII.342.16), varying according to place and time (*deṣakāla*) (XII.297.16) and according to the respective capacities of human beings in different *yuga* (XII.252.8). *Sūkṣmā gatirhi dharmasya bahuśākhā hyanantikā* — "the way of the dharma is subtle and has many branches without end" is the oft-repeated complaint (III.200.2. cf. also XII.108.1; XII.254.35-36; XIII.10.2; XIII.10.32).[14] Not even the venerable Bhīṣma can say exactly what it is (XII.109.9-11). However, following its etymological meaning of 'bear' or 'support' (from √*dhṛ*), he defines it, in part,

as "that which supports all creatures" (*dhāraṇāddharma ityāhurdharmeṇa vidhṛtāḥ prajāḥ*), its purpose being, "the growth and well-being of creatures" (*prabhāvārthāya bhūtānāṃ*). This suggests that the ultimate good is self-realization, but that this goal must wait upon the need for social regulation when the cause of justice or the life of the community as a whole is at stake (a particularly difficult lesson for Yudhiṣṭhira). It also reveals that the inner struggle is not restricted to the conflicting forces of dharma and adharma but may involve a conflict of different systems of value — different "dharmas."[15] This leads, finally, to the recognition that no act is wholly good or wholly bad (VI.40/BG.18.48; XII.15.50).

The vedic and dharmaśāstra prescriptions (the "eyes of the virtuous" — XII.28.53) came to be supplemented by other sources of authority such as the conduct of the good (*sadācāra*), the purpose (*artha*) of the act (XII.251.3) or what we would recognize as the inner voice of conscience (*ātmatuṣṭi*).[16] We have seen that the final judgement is frequently reserved for some god (such as Agni at I.5.23) or for "the Heart" (I.68.27). The latter, though sounding more autonomous, is really the inner voice of the *ātman*, "a particle of Myself in the world of the living" (VI.37/BG.15.7). We also find that these paradigms of behavior have been adapted, in many cases, to the needs of the nascent *bhakti* worldview, such as the distinction between the traditional dharma of punishment and reward, and the so-called *sanātana dharma* of duties performed in a manner free of desire for reward.[17]

Humanity thus provides the bridge between the worlds of value and actuality, forever called to practice the good (or dharma) in face of the ever present possibility of evil (or *adharma*). In the context of the inexorable karmic law, the spiritual return for what one accomplishes in this respect is progressively deposited to the account of the individual psyche in the subtle form of merit (*puṇya*) or sin (*papa*), with whatever consequences for future entanglement this may entail.[18] On the other hand, this is precisely what makes it possible to reverse the entanglement with the world by moving from the *pravṛttidharma* of the Veda (i.e. the desire-prompted ritual activities that uphold the cosmic system) to the new renunciation at the heart of action itself, the renunciation-in-action, or *bhakti* form of *nivṛtti*, that purifies the mind by destroying these subtle accumulations of past karma (*pūrvakarma*). This radical change of direction is specifically designed to lead the aspirant

away from the notion of "own action" (*mama*) in favour of one that is *nirmama* and *nirahaṃkāra* (i.e. that is not related to the ego and its desires). As we shall see, these ideas are important for understanding the inner connection between *daiva* and *puruṣakāra*.

There are also suggestions that good and evil (*puṇyapāpau*; *śubhāśubhau* etc.) are endemic to this new-found freedom of humanity to chart its own course (cf. VI.24/BG.2.33 and 38). This is perhaps the central intuition of the mythological churning of the primeval ocean by the demons as well as by the gods (I.15.5ff). The creative churning brings prosperity (Śrī; Lakṣmī) and other good things but also a poisonous effluent that has to be contained and controlled in the throat of Śiva to prevent the destruction of the cosmos. "Due to the accession of freedom, man can rise to godliness or descend to be a devil. In that sense, and using the language of symbolic metaphor, there is a god as well as a devil in every man. But the world is the creation of deity and he ever abides with man; in fact he is the deepest self of the self of man that has been evolved by nature, again under the direction of deity, out of the materiality of the incarnate world, the world of becoming. Evil arises out of the denial of this indwelling deity, due to the abuse of freedom and the embracing of wrong self-images."[19]

The inner clash of dharma and adharma is thus projected into a mythology of cosmic struggle between divine and demonic forces, leading inevitably to the triumph of the superior legions of adharma were it not for the direct intervention of the *avatāra* on the side of the dharma (cf. VI.27/BG.4.7-8). Thus the name of Kṛṣṇa is sometimes substituted for the term dharma in the above-mentioned adage that: "Where the dharma is, there is the Victory" (e.g. at VI.21.12 and 14). In some miraculous way the karmic energies that promote the good automatically spring into action to destroy evil whenever the divine spark within (*ātman*) is denied in favor of self-interest and self-indulgence. The defiance of a Duryodhana is inevitably "shattered against the throne of God, which is the world and its law."[20] He discovers to his cost that: "The reactions of the world, the objective situation, harden when the provocations continue and beyond a certain stage they become unalterable and confront the doer as his destiny."[21]

This self-determination—the freedom to choose evil as well as good — implies a power of moral discernment which, it is agreed in the epic, is exercised by the *buddhi*, a faculty with intellectual as well as moral overtones. In its sāttvic mode of operation, this *buddhi* distinguishes true and false as well as what ought to be done (*kārya*) from what ought not to be done (VI.40/BG.18.30). This dual role produces a blurring of the dividing-line between the practical and the theoretical reason, a phenomenon that goes back to the epic tendency to regard morality in relative terms as a necessary antidote to the fundamental error (*avidyā*) to which the *jīva* is subject. Action is prompted by *kāma* in the form of desire (XII.171.37), but the object of one's desires is a function of knowledge or lack of it (XII.246.1ff.). "Knowledge, the object of knowledge and the knower are the threefold source of action," says Kṛṣṇa (VI.40/BG.18.18). Volition is intellectualized in the absence of our modern distinction between moral discernment and moral decision. It is not the result of a separate "act of will" (which has no direct equivalent in Sanskrit) but is seen to follow automatically upon a direct act of knowledge (in the sense of a "seeing" or *darśana*).[22] Knowledge (i.e. of the truth=*satya*) becomes the highest virtue. Indeed: "It is the virtue of virtues. If one is able, for instance, to *see* the absolute truth, there is little left for the will to do. The will is quieted. It is absorbed in the truth."[23] In keeping with Indian tradition, the epic thus inclines to the view that man is a "rational animal" (to borrow the definition of Aristotle).

On the other hand, the human endeavor is certainly not a matter of intellect alone but involves a commitment of the whole person to action that is initially painful, but eventually becomes the source of enduring delight (*sukham ātyantikaṃ*) (VI.29/BG.6.21). Such a commitment spurs a progressive change in the system of identities to which the individual is bound (i.e. his character) according to the meaning and insights he receives as he moves to successively higher vantage-points. At the emotional level the aspirant learns to transform his functioning into "a motivation that does not have the compulsive, deterministic, obsessional power of a drive or a blind instinctual mechanism."[24] It is here one is confronted with the struggles and confusions arising out of competing claims for allegiance. The human entity is neither a wholly spiritual being who would follow the imperatives of the dharma as essentially his own, nor a wholly physical being who would follow it unconsciously. He is always "tempted to defy its operation in him

because he is neither wholly unconscious like the physical beings nor wholly conscious like the Supreme Being or God. It is for this reason that the moral law makes its power and presence felt in man as the categorical imperative."[25]

The highest categorical imperative of the epic is Kṛṣṇa's call to raise ourselves by our own efforts and to transform what looks like fate into a heroic self-affirmation. As he puts it (VI.29/BG.6.5-6):

uddhared ātmanātmānaṃ nātmānam avasādayet|
ātmaiva hyātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanaḥ||

bandhurātmātmanastasya yenātmaivātmanā jitaḥ|
anātmanas tu śatrutve vartetātmaiva śatruvat||

"One should uplift oneself by the self and not degrade the self. Thus the self alone is the friend of the self, and the self alone can be the enemy of the self. For he who has conquered his self by himself the self is a friend. But for him whose self is not conquered, the self is hostile, like an enemy." And, Kaveeshwar adds that: "In this self-uplift there need be no real impediment other than the weakness of the individual's own will (sic) and effort."[26] Moreover, an important corollary to this self-uplift is to act, through the redemptive possibilities inherent in one's particular situation (*daiva*), as an accessory (*nimittamātraṃ*) to the realization of the divine program for the world; in short, to rise to a similarity in functioning (*sādharmya*) with Kṛṣṇa himself (VI.37/BG.14.2). This is made possible precisely through that victory on the field of dharma (*dharmakṣetra*) that frees the soul (*puruṣa; ātman*) from the residual determinisms of nature (*prakṛti*). This "winning the battle of the mind" is later confirmed in the aftermath of the war when Kṛṣṇa warns Yudhiṣṭhira (XIV.12.11-14, echoing similar advice by Bhīma at XII.16.20-23) that:

manasaikena yoddhavyaṃ tatte yuddhamupasthitam|
tasmādabhyupagantavyaṃ yuddhāya bharatarṣabha||

paramavyaktarūpasya paraṃ muktvā svakarmabhiḥ|
yatra naiva śaraiḥ kāryaṃ na bhṛtyairna ca bandhubhiḥ|

ātmanaikena yoddhavyaṃ tatte yuddham upasthitam||

tasminnanirjite yuddhe kāmavasthāṃ gamiṣyasi|
etajjñātvā tu kaunteya kṛtakṛtyo bhaviṣyasi||

etāṃ buddhiṃ viniścitya bhūtānāmāgatiṃ gatim|
pitṛpaitāmahe vṛtte śādhi rājyaṃ yathocitam||

"The battle you now face is the battle which each must fight single-handedly with his mind. Therefore, O bull of the Bhāratas, you must be prepared to carry the struggle against your mind; and freeing yourself by your own efforts (*svakarma*) you must transcend the [powers of the] unconscious mind (*avyakta* = unmanifest). In this war there will be no need for arrows nor for attendants or friends. The battle that is to be fought alone and single-handed is now upon you. And if vanquished in this struggle, you will be lost in [a flood of] emotion (*kāma*). Knowing this, O son of Kuntī, and acting accordingly, you will fulfill the purpose of your existence. And acknowledging this wisdom (*buddhi*) and the way of all creatures, and in accordance with the conduct of your ancestors, you should properly administer your kingdom." Like Arjuna before him, Yudhiṣṭhira finds in his own crisis of conscience the inner strength to triumph over his lower nature and see where his duty lies — to administer the kingdom that Arjuna and the others have won back for him. Vyāsa has already told him that if he wants to rule in complete non-attachment, he can dedicate the realm to God and administer it as a servant (XII.32).

On the other hand, the ambiguity about the non-active presence of Kṛṣṇa leaves one wondering whether this victory can, in fact, be won without the tacit alliance or grace (*prasāda*) of God Himself. After performing awesome austerities (*tapas*) in his quest for divine weapons (of self-control needed to accomplish the work of the gods—*devakārya*), Arjuna is attacked by a wild boar (symbol of untamed nature?) which he shoots at the same instant as a *kirāta* (tribal or "savage") who had suddenly appeared out of the forest (III.40.16). When his claim to the dead animal (actually a *rākṣasa* in the form of a boar) is challenged by the *kirāta*, his heroic efforts fail him and he is reduced to a sacrificial oblation (*piṇḍa*) in the dramatic encounter that follows (v.50). The *kirata* turns out to be the god Śiva who restores his powers and "grants him eyesight" (III.40.54). When Arjuna thereupon falls

to the ground and worships him, his powers are multiplied immeasurably by the gift of the dreaded Brahmaśiras and various other divine weapons. Possession of a weapon by the name of Brahmaśiras suggests to Biardeau that Arjuna has supplemented his *kṣatra* powers with the divine potentials embodied in the power of the *brahman*, a truly lethal combination that, she argues, reveals his association with the *avatāra*.[27] But just how much of this is his own doing is debatable. Commenting on this episode, Chaitanya asks rhetorically, "Can man's action have fruition, if the intentionality behind the working of the world does not endorse it?," adding that the total inadequacy of the Gāṇḍiva on this occasion, "indicates the deep spring whence flows the efficacy of all the instrumentalities and processes of the manifested world."[28]

The varied agencies introduced to explain the sources of the human predicament testify not only to the great range of spiritual dispositions (*svabhava*) but also to the huge stakes that are gambled in this struggle for human betterment. As we have seen, we may arrange the winners and the losers in this game of life on a great evolutionary ladder leading from complete moral blindness and identification with nature, those who, in the words of Kṛṣṇa at VI.32/BG.9.8, are "powerless by the forces of nature" (*avaśaṃ prakṛter vaśāt*), to successively higher states of moral awareness and emotional detachment (*vairāgya*), culminating in freedom (*mokṣa*) from the determinations that come from false identification with the causal system of nature. The line of this evolution is traced by the various combinations of the *guṇas* or modalities of nature. Those with a preponderance of the quality of *tamas* (from √*tam* = to faint) show a tendency to drift as a result of a failure to be in touch with reality. "*Tāmasika* movements are biological and therefore uncontrollable and unfree."[29] Dhṛtarāṣṭra is the prime example of such a type, a man so governed by unconscious drives that he acts (or fails to act) *yantrārūḍha*, — "as if mounted on a machine" (VI.40/BG.18.61). He acknowledges the authority of the dharma (or of his conscience in the form of Vidura) but can do nothing about it and falls victim to circumstances (i.e. to *daiva*). According to Sukthankar, "he is the perfect symbol of the vacillating ego-centric self, pandering to its own base passions and weaving its own evil designs, engrossed in self-esteem and bent on self-aggrandization, alternately gloating over transient gains and moaning over inevitable losses."[30]

The conventional order of humanity is marked by a predominance of *rajoguṇa*, — activity directed to the satisfaction of libidinal-æsthetic (*kāma*) and material (*artha*) ends of life based on attachment to the fruits of its endeavour (*phalākāṅkṣī*).[31] "Rājasika movements are propelled by strong passions of love (*rāga*) or hate (*dveṣa*) and are therefore also unfree even through [sic] the person knows these actions to be his own."[32] The progressive type accepts the moral order of the world (dharma), while the deviant form is the demonic type (*āsurīsaṃpad*) of VI.38/BG.16.7-21 that falls away from the line of evolution. The first type is exemplified by the person of Arjuna who listens to the advice of his guide. He is (in Sukthankar's reading), "the symbol of the jivatman, not indeed of the ordinary mortal, the ego-centered personality, but the Superman (Narottama), who by practice of self-control and discipline, has purified himself, conquering the baser part of his own nature."[33] The asuric type is exemplified by Duryodhana who pays lip-service to the dharma while ruthlessly pursuing his quest for power (*bhogaiśvarya*).[34] Sukthankar sees him and his ninety nine brothers as symbolizing "in their aggregate the brood of ego-centric desires and passions like lust, greed, hatred, anger, envy, pride, vanity, and so on, to which the empirical ego is firmly attached and to which it clings desperately."[35]

The higher form of humanity is characterized by a predominance of *sattvaguṇa*. Actions undertaken under the influence of *sattva* are characterized by freedom to the extent that they incorporate detachment (*vairāgya*). This *sattva* is the intellectual acumen of the spiritual seeker (*mumukṣu*) who, by adopting a program of self-discipline (*sādhana* ; *abhyāsa*), gradually becomes free of attachment (*muktasaṅga*) and egocentricity (*anahaṃvādī*), steadfast (*dhṛti*) in his determination (*utsāha*), and unshaken whatever the outcome (VI.40/BG. 18.26). The hierarchical aspect of this discipline is portrayed by Kṛṣṇa in the following manner (VI.25/BG.III.42; cf. also XII.240.2; XII.267.16):

> *indriyāṇi parāṇyāhurindriyebhyaḥ paraṃ manaḥ|*
> *manasastu parā buddhiryo buddheḥ paratastu saḥ||*

"It is said that the senses are high; greater than the senses is the mind (*manas*); greater than the mind is the intellect (*buddhi*); but greater than the

intellect is he [i.e. the *puruṣa*]." Commenting on this verse, Crawford remarks that: "The outward life of sense is least free because consciousness is constricted by the sway of senses. Freedom emerges when the senses are made dependent on the mind. Freedom is enhanced when the mind is yoked with intelligence. Greatest freedom is achieved when intelligence is informed by the consciousness of the Self."[36] In addition to saints and sages this type is represented by famous *kṣatriya* kings of yore such as Janaka.

The epic ideal of human autonomy is perfectly captured in the image of the charioteer (*ātman*) who is able to guide the chariot of the body by taming the wild horses of the senses with the reins of the *buddhi* (XI.7.13-14; XII.280.1; XIV.50.4-5. cf. also III.202.21 and V.34.57 which use the same image without referring to the reins). This image is, of course, duplicated by the presence of Kṛṣṇa (symbolizing the *ātman* or *puruṣa* who is not an active participant in the fighting) as the charioteer and guide of the embodied soul represented by Arjuna. Returning to the image of victory (*jaya*), the epic view of self-determination is the victory of the rational element (*buddhi*) over the self-seeking impulses of desire and aversion (*rāgadveṣau*) for the objects of the senses, marked by enhanced self-sufficiency and control. The epic would not contest that involuntary bodily movement is governed by natural causality (*prakṛti*). However, action prompted by desire or aversion is driven, in turn, by the accumulated *puṇya* and *pāpa* resulting from the desire-prompted activities (*kāmyakarma*) of past lives, currently maturing as the existing personality. We are only "free" to the extent we can resist (*vairāgya*) patterns of behavior contrary to the path of evolution (regarded as sin). Without this capacity, however, the sense of freedom that accompanies our activities is really only an illusion rooted in the sense of agency involved in viewing the action as "mine". Commenting on the psychological significance of the Gītā's analysis, Crawford notes that:

> it does not fall into the customary traps of modern Behaviourists or Existentialists who argue either for freedom or determinism. Instead of taking a polaristic position, the Gītā tries to do justice to all ranges of human experience. On the lowest range, it concurs with Behaviouristic thought that nature is determined. But, unlike the Behaviourists, the Gītā does not stop there. In existentialistic fashion it proceeds to qualify the determinism of nature by man's mental and spiritual capacities to

> control nature. The lower self is progressively brought under the control of the higher Self, but in so doing, the lower is not abrogated by the higher. Instead, the interests and activities of the empirical self are sublimated, so that all aspects of personality are made to function helpfully and harmoniously.[37]

At some point along this evolutionary road we arrive at that key crossroads of choice between the broad (easy) avenue of pleasure and power (*bhogaiśvarya*) or the narrow path of non-attachment leading to true freedom (*mokṣa*). As we have noted in the case of Arjuna, the acquisition of power through the performance of *tapas* is a legitimate — indeed, a necessary path for the *kṣatriya* to follow, but in the interests of society rather than of self. Bhīṣma argues strongly for the selfless exercise of power as guarantor of the dharma (XII.132). On the other hand (VI.24/BG.2.41-44), this quest for power can easily turn demonic when pursued by desirous natures (*kāmātma*) concerned only with what they can appropriate for themselves (*yogakṣema*). One should therefore strive, by constant spiritual practice (*abhyāsa*), to act without attachment to the fruits of action (*phalākāṅkṣī*; *niṣkāma* etc.). And this purifies and prepares the mind for the essential freedom that "consists in my accepting or not what stands determined for me, whether by Nature itself or by scriptures, saints, sages, and others."[38]

This ultimate realm of freedom is no longer the freedom of doing that stands on this side of good and evil and is capable of either, but the higher freedom of being in which the individual (if we can still describe him as such) aligns himself with the cosmic teleology of the *avatāra*, and indeed no longer enjoys the freedom to be good or bad. Paradoxically, it is only the imperfect will that needs to be free to choose between good and bad courses of action. "The transition to the perfect will, which no longer has an Ought over it, takes place in freedom. But in this unique and final act of freedom the will 'exhausts' its capacity, it 'uses up' the substance of its freedom; and then for it there is 'at the root of its Being no freedom left over'. According to this view, man's true act of freedom is the self-annihilation of the ego and of the Ought."[39] This is clearly the view of the epic author (albeit without the notion of "will" as such).

As suggested above, this raises the issue as to whether a freedom beyond good and evil may not also transcend our commonly accepted (Western) notions of the human person? We have already learned from the Gītā that *mokṣa* involves the sacrifice of the affective bonds of the little ego-self in favor of a larger system of identities that enables one to progressively expands one's perspectives and ego-boundaries to the point at which one is able to identify one's self with the self of all beings (the *sarvabhūtātmabhūtātmā* of VI.27/BG.5.7). The dharma clearly has no value or purpose at this point, since behavior is no longer governed by external prescription or inner imperative but is the spontaneous expression of a being whose actions are no longer his (or hers). Like flowers or the sun which scatter their splendors freely according to their nature, such a person has become, in every respect, God's instrument (*nimittamātraṃ*) on earth (XII.276.28-30).

In psychological terms, the ego with its deficiency needs are replaced by a plenitude of being (*niṣkāma*) and a feeling of companionship with all life (*samatva*) that seeks the welfare of the world (*lokasaṃgraha*). This is the dissociation of the *puruṣa* from the *prakṛti* that comes from calming the restless mind by means of the various spiritual practices (*abhyāsa; abhyāsayoga*) recommended in the Bhagavadgītā (VI.28/BG.6.35). *Vairagya* and *abhyāsa* together provide a sāttvic bridge from the world of causal determinism (which is the *saṃsāra*) to the transcendental freedom of *mokṣa*. This reveals the strange paradox that what was the source of the bondage of the soul (i.e. nature herself) becomes, in her higher teleological mode of operation (*sattva*), a means of releasing the *puruṣa* from its previous attachments and spurious identifications with itself (VI.35/BG.13.21).

Only in this manner can we reconcile the apparent contradictions between the so-called free will statements and the determinism of the Gītā. As S.K. Belvalkar has noted, it is evident that Arjuna "does not doubt for a moment that he is a free agent, free to fight or not to fight."[40] But this is only because he identifies so completely with his nature (*prakṛti*) in the form of a particular body, mind, and intellect (*buddhi*). He regards what he does as "my actions" whereas, in reality, they do not derive from his true self at all (the *ātman*) but from the modalities of nature (*guṇas*) expressed through him. What he regards as his personality (*svabhāva*) is a product of the past

(VI.28/BG.6.43), and his habitual modes of thinking and acting are therefore completely determined by the causal energies of nature (VI.25/BG 3.5; 3.27-28; 3.33; VI.27/5.14; VI.35/13.20; 13.29; VI.36/14.19; VI.40/18.59-61).

The only way out of this impasse, Kṛṣṇa instructs him, is to abandon this identification with the *guṇas* by purifying the *buddhi* of its habitual mode of thinking *kartaham iti* — "I am the doer" (VI.25/BG.3.27). He follows with some practical techniques on how to accomplish this. Arjuna should first seek to renounce the fruits of his actions either by offering these fruits as a sacrifice or *yajña* (VI.26/BG.4.23), or by dedicating his actions and their fruits to the Lord who dwells in the heart (VI.25/BG.3.30; VI.27/5.10; VI.34/12.6; 12.10; VI.40/18.57). But the significant further suggestion is that he replace the thought of himself as the doer with alternatives more in keeping with the reality of things such as, *guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti* — "the *guṇas* work among the *guṇas*" (VI.25/BG.3.28), *naiva kiṃcitkaromīti* — "I do nothing at all" (VI.27/BG.5.8), *indriyāṇīndriyārtheṣu vartanta iti* — "the senses work among the objects of the senses" (VI.27/BG.5.9), *vāsudevaḥ sarvmiti* — "Vāsudeva is all" (VI.29/BG.7.19), *guṇā vartanta ityevam* — "It is only the *guṇas* working" (VI.36/BG.14.23). These seeds are all planted to cultivate in him the idea that he (i.e. the *puruṣa* or *ātman*) is not really the actor, and thus untouched by the actions of *prakṛti* (VI.35/BG.13.32). These practices combine with others (such as meditation) to sever all ties to nature's field of activity (*kṣetra*) until he gets to the point at which he knows (*jñānacakṣusā* = "with the eye of knowledge") what it is to be free of nature (*bhūtaprakṛtimokṣa*), and can proceed to the supreme state (VI.35/BG.13.34).

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[1] The term "autonomy" comes from the Greek *autos* ("self") and *nomos* ("law"). Hence the reference is to "that which gives law to itself", or "that which is its own law". We use the word interchangeably with the term "self-determination" (the determination of one's actions by oneself without compulsion). The term "person" is from the Latin *persona*, a translation of the Greek *prosopon*, both words signifying the mask worn by actors onstage. The term is appropriate since, as we have already learned from Chapter VI, the epic "person" is ultimately a case of mistaken identity.

[2] R.V. De Smet, S.J., "Early trends in the Indian understanding of man," in Philosophy East and West 22: 3 (July 1972), pp. 259-268.

[3] J.Bruce Long, "Human action and Rebirth in the Mahābhārata," pp. 57-58.

[4] Kane defines moral self-determination as the sole or ultimate dominion of the agent over the choice "in the sense that (i) the agent's making the choice at t rather than doing otherwise, or vice versa (i.e. choosing from duty or self-interest), can be explained by saying that the agent 'rationally willed at t to do so' in the sense of 'endorsed reasons or motives at t for choosing as he or she did choose rather than doing otherwise' (the motives of duty or of self interest as the case may be), and (ii) no further explanation can be given for the agent's choosing rather than doing otherwise (or vice versa), or for the agent's endorsing the set of reasons he or she did endorse at t, that is an explanation in terms of conditions whose existence cannot be explained by the agent's choosing or rationally willing something at t." R. Kane, Free Will and Values (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 153.

[5] Chaitanya, The Mahābhārata, p. 237.

[6] Ibid, p. 256.

[7] K. Bhattacharyya, "The Status of the Individual in Indian Metaphysics," in the Indian Mind: essentials of Indian philosophy and culture, ed. Charles A. Moore with the assistance of Aldyth V. Morris (Honolulu: East-West Center Press and University of Hawaii Press, 1967), p. 300.

[8] A distinction must be made here between practical, prudential and moral choice. Practical choices involve no conflict between what the agent believes ought to be done and what he wants to do. In prudential choice the conflict is between immediate satisfactions and the agent's own long-range interests whereas in moral choice both short and long-range self-interest conflict with the demands of some moral prescription or imperative. It is generally agreed that the highest expression of freedom is to be found in moral choice.

[9] As Kaṭhopaniṣad II.1 shows, even the choice of the good is able to "chain a man" (*puruṣaṃ sināti*). The epic uses the image of the net (e.g. I.110.2; XII.239.11ff.; XII.295.23) as well as that of the cocoon which the embodied soul, in its ignorance, spins about itself (cf. XII.136.28-29; XII.212.47; XII.309.14; XII.316.28-29).

[10] S. Cromwell Crawford, The Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideas (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1974), p. 216.

[11] These two functions are contrasted at III.149.34-36 as follows: *dvijānāmamṛtaṃ dharmo hyekaścaivaikavarṇikaḥ| yajñādhyayanadānāni trayaḥ sādhāraṇāḥ smṛtāḥ || yājanādhyāpane cobhe brāhmaṇānāṃ pratigrahaḥ| pālanaṃ kṣatriyāṇāṃ vai vaśyadharmaśca poṣaṇam|| śuśrūṣā tu dvijātīnāṃ śūdrāṇāṃ dharma ucyate| bhaikṣahomavratairhīnāstathaiva guruvāsinām||* Of course the *sādhāraṇadharmas* go far beyond the virtues of sacrifice, study and charity promoted here.

[12] Cf. V.2.14; VI.21.11; VI.61.16; VI.117.33; IX.62.58; XI.13.9; XI.17.6; XIII.150.8 etc.

[13] Crawford, Hindu Ethical Ideas, p. 223.

[14] According to Katz, these moral ambiguities or impasses of dharma are a mark of the "human" dimension of the epic heroes, particularly of Arjuna. In addition to Bhīṣma's problem, examples include the battlefield dilemma of the Gītā (VI.23/BG.1.24ff.), Arjuna's self-doubt prior to the death of Bhīṣma (VI.102.36-37), his dubious assistance to Sātyaki (VII.116-118), deceit associated with the killing of Jayadratha (VII.121) and Karṇa (VIII.66), as well as moral issues surrounding the deaths of Droṇa (VII.164) and Duryodhana (IX.57).

[15] According to the case built by Klaes (Conscience and Consciousness), Yudhisthira's problem is of this nature. Thus, he is caught between the categorical imperative of his own conscience and the demands of the traditional *varṇāśramadharma* espoused by Kṛṣṇa.

[16] The mark of a good action, viz. that it be undertaken in a spirit of detachment (*vairagya*; *niṣkāma*) for the welfare of others (*lokasaṃgraha*), cannot be left to individual judgement unless he or she is already in a state of detachment. Hence the need for written codes.

[17] Cf. XIII.150.692*.7-8. Biardeau also suggests a connection between epic dharma and music and dance as the harmony of the Divine *līlā* which it is the duty of the king to maintain. Thus, Arjuna must learn the Veda of the Gandharvas during his sojourn in *svarga* to prepare him for his royal duties. Cf. "Etudes (V)," p. 190.

[18] However, the epic has no sense of "radical evil". For a discussion of the origins of *puṇya* and *pāpa* see C.L. Prabhakar, "The Idea of Pāpa and Puṇya in the Rgveda," in Journal of the Oriental Institute of the University of Baroda 24: 3-4 (March-June 1975), pp. 269-283.

[19] Chaitanya, The Mahābhārata, p. 305. The churning process may well be modelled after the pressing of the soma during the Vedic Soma sacrifice. See Katz, Arjuna, p. 75.

[20] Ibid, p. 364.

[21] Ibid, p. 340.

[22] The closest Sanskrit equivalents of "will" would perhaps be *saṃkalpa* = purpose, intention, resolution, or *abhisaṃdhitā* = decision.

[23] G.R. Malkani, "Philosophy of the Will," in World Perspectives in Philosophy, Religion and Culture, ed. Ram Jee Singh (Bombay: Bharati Bhawan, 1968), p. 196.

[24] Chaitanya, The Mahābhārata, p. 272.

[25] Balbir Singh, The Conceptual Framework of Indian Philosophy (Delhi: Macmillan Co. of India, 1976), p. 50.

[26] G.W. Kaveeshwar, The Ethics of the Gītā (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), p. 173.

[27] Biardeau regards this episode as a consecration (*dīkṣa*) for the battle with the *asuras* that Arjuna will undertake on behalf of the gods in *svarga*. She notes that Kṛṣṇa himself incorporates the *kṣatra* and *brahman* powers through his line of descent from Yadu, eldest son of Yayāti and Devayānī, daughter of the brahmin Śukra, priest of the demons (and grand-daughter of Indra on her mother's side). The *brahmaśiras* is the power inhering in the part of the sacrificial victim which is offered in the sacrifice. The awesome extent of this power may be measured by the fact that it is equivalent to the *paśupata*, the instrument that "kills" the sacrifice of Dakṣa. According to Biardeau, this story refers to the cosmic death of the sacrifice itself, "a monstrous sacrifice, the end of all others, a cosmic funeral," equivalent to the end of the world. Cf. "Etudes (V)," p. 154-6. Katz notes the death/rebirth structure of this encounter with the *kirata* which she views as a shamanic initiation emphasizing the ascetic side of Arjuna's "heroic" character. Cf. Ruth Katz, Arjuna, pp. 90-104.

[28] Chaitanya, The Mahābhārata, pp. 203-204.

[29] Crawford, Hindu Ethical Ideas, p. 224.

[30] Sukthankar, Meaning of the Mahābhārata, p. 104.

[31] Described by Kṛṣṇa at VI.40/BG.18.34.

[32] Crawford, Hindu Ethical Ideas, p. 224.

[33] Sukthankar, Meaning of the Mahābhārata, p. 107.

[34] Neither Duryodhana nor his father can claim any measure of personal autonomy. The difference is that the former seemingly escapes the pain of moral conflict (though not the pain of defeat) while the latter is subject to recurrent bouts of "fear and trembling".

[35] Sukthankar, ibid., p. 105.

[36] Crawford, Hindu Ethical Ideas, p. 129.

[37] Ibid, p. 129-130.

[38] K. Bhattacharyya, "The Status of the Individual," p. 319.

[39] Nicolai Hartmann, Ethics, 3 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951), vol. 3, "Moral Freedom," p. 116.

[40] S.K. Belvalkar, "The Bhagavad-gītā: A General Review of its History and Character," in The Cultural Heritage of India, 4 vols. eds. Haridas Bhattacharyya et al. (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1962), vol. II, "Itihāsas, Purāṇas, Dharma and other Śāstras," p. 140.

X—Conclusion

Thus we find that the quest for essential freedom leads the soul (*jīvātman*) to abandon its own self-identity in favour of a greater identity as *puruṣa* (spirit) or *ātman* (self). This *puruṣa* or *ātman* is identified or associated in some manner with a Supreme Person (puruṣottama; paramapuruṣa) or a Supreme Self (paramātman). While the status of this *puruṣa* became an important topic in later commentaries, the Mahābhārata itself is not definitive as to whether there is ultimately only one or a multiplicity of *puruṣas* (cf. VI.37/BG.15.16-17; XII.338). Our interest focusses on the implications of this passage from one form of self-experience (as the *jīvātman* or *puruṣa* associated with *prakṛti*) to another (as *puruṣa* disassociated from all determinations by *prakṛti*) for what, at the beginning of this investigation, we noted regarding the divergence of ideas about the role of *puruṣakāra* and *daiva* in the conduct of life.

This leads us back to the two distinct categories of learned opinion mentioned at XII.224.50-52—repeated at XII.230.4-6—regarding the factors contributing to worldly success. These are characterized in our translation on page 6 as, "those who take their stand in action" (*karmasthā*) and, "those who take their stand in the truth" (*sattvasthā*), respectively. What is involved in these two points of view on action may be now gleaned from what we have learned so far about the complexities (*viṣama* = lit. "uneven") faced by those who argue from the perspective of action. Even the ancient bards are confused (*mohitāḥ*) about the mysterious course of action (*gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ*) (VI.26/BG.4.16-17).

A major complexity is the succession of stages (or 'moments' in Ricoeur's terminology) involved in the course or *gati* of a voluntary action, each of which is liable to determination by karmic or alien forces, *daiva* (fate) or *haṭha* (chance) as the case may be. Perhaps the clearest outline of the etiology of action is offered by the following exposition to Bṛhaspati attributed to Manu-prajāpati (XII.199.5-8):

yathā hyekarasā bhūmiroṣadhyātmānusāriṇī|
tathā karmānugā buddhirantarātmānudarśinī||

jñānapūrvodbhavā lipsā lipsāpūrvābhisaṃdhitā|
abhisaṃdhipūrvakaṃ karma karmamūlaṃ tataḥ phalam||

phalam karmātmakam vidyātkarma jñeyātmakaṃ tathā|
jñeyaṃ jñānātmakaṃ vidyājjñānaṃ sadasadātmakam||

jñānānāṃ ca phalānāṃ ca jñeyānāṃ karmaṇāṃ tathā|
kṣayānte tatphalaṃ divyaṃ jñānaṃ jñeyapratiṣṭhitam||

"Just as plants in the soil are dependent on the one earth, the *buddhi*, with the inner self as witness, [is dependent upon] the actions associated with it (i.e. on past conduct). [Just as] the propensity to act (*abhisaṃdhitā*) is born of past desire [and] desire (*lipsā*) is born of prior habits of thought (*jñānabhava*), the fruit of action (*phala*) is rooted in action (karma), and action in a prior propensity to act. [In effect], the fruit is produced by the action, action [arises] from knowledge (*vidyā*) which [in turn] is produced by the intention (*jñeya* = lit. the object of knowledge). The intention is made up of concepts (*jñāna*). [This] *jñāna* is produced from knowledge (*vidyā*) consisting of truth and error. The destruction of [this chain of] actions, intentions, results of action and concepts [leads to] the establishment of that divine fruit called the [true] object of knowledge (i.e. Brahman)." The human predicament thus arises as an effect of past conduct, producing a "personality" with a tendency to perpetuate these past patterns of conduct into future cycles.

This also reveals what we have suspected all along, namely that *puruṣakāra* is but *daiva* in disguise. Whether the driving force behind this cycle is a god, demon or karmic causation (the *daiva* of unconscious motivations) would make no difference. As Manki muses on losing all his worldly wealth to the waywardness of a camel (XII.171.13):

yadi vāpyupapadyeta pauruṣaṃ nāma karhicit|
anviṣyamāṇaṃ tadapi daivam evāvatiṣṭhate||

"If there should occur anything that might be called exertion (*pauruṣa*), on being examined, it would, in fact, turn out to be destiny (*daiva*)."

While these determinations may intervene at any point in the cycle of action (*karmaṇo gati*), those moved by desire for worldly gain naturally tend to focus on the *daiva* of unforeseen or untoward events in the external social or natural environments. As we have seen, Kṛṣṇa counts this form of *daiva* among the contributory causes involved in the furtherance of human purposes (VI.40/BG.18.14), and Nārada wryly comments that (XII.318.9):

> *yo yamicchedyathākāmaṃ kāmānāṃ tattadāpnuyāt|*
> *yadi syānnaparādhīnaṃ puruṣasya kriyāphalam||*

"Were it not that the results of action were governed by other circumstances persons would obtain whatever object they desired." The aging process and other human calamities would be unknown (vv.37-40). Unlike Nārāyaṇa (who is able to fulfill his plans without the least impediment), the fruits of our endeavors do not always conform to our desires (XII.337.905*). Our own control over nature appears to be proportional to the degree of control we are able to exercise over our own natures (XII.263.53):

> *vihāyasā ca gamanaṃ tathā saṃkalpatārthatā|*
> *dharmācchaktyā tathā yogādyā caiva paramā gatiḥ||*

"The powers (*śakti*) gained by the practices of virtue and yoga enable one to roam the heavens at will, to realize all one's purposes and to attain the highest state of existence." This is because the *prakṛti* controlled from within ("own nature") is the stuff of the world itself ("external nature"). However, since power corrupts, there is an acute danger of inflation of the ego leading to an abuse of power and eventual destruction at the hands of the *avatāra* (exemplified in the cases of Duryodhana, Jarāsaṃdha, Śiśupāla and other epic characters).

From Manu's description, the only possibility of escape from this vicious circle is by breaking the chain of causality. However this introduces additional complications arising out of the conflicting vedic injunctions to "perform action!" (*kuru karma*) and "abandon action!" (*tyaja karma*)

respectively (cf. XII.233.1). For if the chain of action can be broken only by renouncing all active social involvement (the *nivṛttidharma* of the brahmin *saṃnyāsin*), what are the prospects for the salvation of the *kṣatriya* king, or for anyone else called to active social duty (*pravṛttidharma*)? This conflict is greatly intensified in the case of Yudhiṣṭhira, when he finds himself forced by circumstances (*daiva*) to exercise the most deadly force (*daṇḍa*; *hiṃsā*) — one of the most negative values of the vedic tradition — with all the vigor (*puruṣakāra*; *utthāna*, etc.) at his command.

The genius of the solution proposed by Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgītā—namely *karmayoga* and its higher amplification in the form of *bhakti*—is that *puruṣakāra* becomes the hallmark of successful endeavor that is no longer judged for its outward form or function but for the inner spirit that animates it. This implies a revolution of traditional values that may be understood in cosmic as well as in psychological terms. Cosmically, the world and its driving forces are no longer depreciated as a "fall" from the pristine Consciousness but become objects of worship as the "wonders" (*vibhūtis*) of God's Creation (VI.32/BG.10.19ff.). The model for the *nivṛttidharma* of the upaniṣadic *saṃnyāsin* was the cosmic *pralaya* in which the processes of the world are dissolved into the yogic quiescence from which they came. In the ritual of entry into *saṃnyāsa* the brahmin aspirant formally abandons the world of action (*karmabhūmi*). Summarizing the analysis of Biardeau Hiltebeitel describes how the, "one who performs this ceremony symbolically renounces the three sacrificial fires and the three saṃsāric worlds and enters into the enlarged universe in which there are four additional worlds beyond those of the ordinary person, there to find himself in the company of the Devas and the Pitṛs, 'all of these, like himself, being admitted to deliverance at the moment of the cosmic *pralaya*'."[1] Human activity (*karma*) and initiative (*puruṣakāra*) thus tended to be devalued. In place of the external ritual of the sacrifice the *saṃnyāsin* is enjoined to perform a libation of his senses and mind into the fire that dwells in his own heart (XII.237.28).

But this *pralaya* model is abandoned by *bhakti* in favour of a new model of salvation based on the creative phase of the cosmic cycle. Practically and psychologically, the promise of *mokṣa* is not only extended to all members

of society (including women) but may be realized at the heart of the most abject activities, including the "reprehensible duties" (*svadharma sāpavāde'pi*) of a king (XII.32.22) and even the duties of a butcher (III.198.20ff.). By replacing the physical abandonment of actions (*karmasaṃnyāsa*) with actions (i.e. *pravṛtti*) undertaken with an inner attitude of renunciation (i.e. *nivṛtti*) the aspirant can have the best of both worlds. The unconscious mind is gradually purified of the atavistic pattern of identifications (*saṃskāras*) that fetter the human spirit (*puruṣa*) to the causal cycles of nature (*prakṛti*). *Puruṣakāra* is thereby rehabilitated in the vigor of duties performed without self-involvement (*nirmama*; *nirahaṃkāra*) (VI.24/BG.2.71) and self-interest (*naiṣkarmyam*) (VI.25/BG.3.4), dedicating all actions and fruits to Kṛṣṇa (VI.25/BG.3.30). *Karmasaṃnyāsa* remains open to the brahmin, and is even preferred over the traditional *pravṛttidharma* of a vedic ritualism motivated by a desire that perpetuates the cycle of rebirth (cf. XII.233.6-8). However *karmasaṃnyāsa* must be closed to the *kṣatriya* king since it is opposed to his *svadharma* as a warrior (VI.25/BG.3.35). It is also beyond the competence of a *rajasic* personality such as Arjuna (VI.27/BG.5.6).

We must recognize, however, that while *puruṣakāra* becomes a leading virtue of the active life, and perfectly consistent with the quest for true freedom, it is clearly fated to dissolve with the dissolution of the ego (*ahaṃkāra*) and its sense of agency (*kartṛtva*). In the last analysis, the perspective of those who take their stand in action (*karmasthā*) is the perspective of a *puruṣa* particularized by a given body, mind, and intellect, in short the perspective of the human personality (*jīvātman*) entangled in the causal cycles of *prakṛti*. However, the actions themselves are no illusion (as Śaṃkara asserts in his Introduction to SBG.5), since the world of *bhakti* is an objectification of the Lord Himself, and He works tirelessly to sustain it (VI.25/BG.3.22-23). On the other hand, the activities of the human personality are truly "self"-determined (by the *puruṣa*) only to the extent that the notion of "I do" has been shed; that is to say that the attitude of the agent is *nirahaṃkāra* — without the feeling that his or her actions are "mine" (*nirmama*).

The question then becomes: who is the real agent? This subject is not addressed directly in the Mahābhārata itself, but important later

commentators of the Bhagavadgītā suggest that, ultimately, it is the Supreme Divinity (*puruṣottama*) who is the agent. While this is in line with the cosmogony of the Divine Yoga, it does leave the twin issues of human responsibility and the status of the vedic injunction very much in limbo. Śaṃkara and Rāmānuja both approach the issue in the context of their respective theories about the relationship between the *puruṣa* and the *puruṣottama*. Arguing from the relative standpoint (*vyavahārikasatya*) in his Brahmasūtrabhāṣya II.III.42 Śaṃkara reverts to the traditional mode of thinking that the *jīva* is driven by a god. The major difference is that, in this case, the god in question is the manifested form of the Lord (i.e. Īśvara) acting in accordance with the previous efforts (*pūrvaprayatna*) of the *jīva* itself: "For though agency (*kartṛtvam*) is derived from above, it is nevertheless the *jīva* who really acts. As he acts so also does Īśvara. Furthermore, Īśvara acts in accordance with [the *jīva's*] previous efforts (*pūrvaprayatna*), and He acts earlier in accordance with even earlier efforts. Thus, since the *saṃsāra* is beginningless (*anādi*), this view is above reproach."[2] From the ultimate standpoint (*paramārthikasatya*), however, the *jīvātman* and all else are a product of the divine projection of the world which is *māyā*.

In Śrībhāṣya I.III.41 Rāmānuja too argues that the Lord is the source of all agency. However, more conscious of preserving the integrity of the vedic injunctions he wishes to salvage some responsibility for the individual by falling back on his theory of qualified difference (*viśiṣṭādvaita*). But though the *puruṣa* is independent (*svatantra*) of the Supreme Self and thus can act on its own, it is still the latter who, by means of "granting permission" (*anumatidānena*) to the *jīvātman* to act, must be allowed the final say in the matter. This idea of "*anumati*" is clearly inspired by VI.35/BG.13.22 which reads:

upadraṣṭānumantā ca bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ|
paramātmeti cāpyukto dehe'sminpuruṣaḥ paraḥ||

"The *puruṣa* in this body is called the witness (*upadraṣṭā*), the permitter (*anumantā*), the sustainer, the enjoyer, the Great Lord and the paramātman."[3]

The initial direction of human development is thus towards a "freedom of doing" made possible by increased self-control and insight into the truth about the abject state of the embodied *puruṣa* (*jīvātman*). But this enlargement of vision also brings a progressive shift in self-identity and sense of agency from the characteristic "I do" of *ahaṃkāra* to the realization that the real "I" (the *puruṣa*) is inherently free of the *prākṛtic* encumbrances of body, mind and intellect governed by natural causality. Whether divine particle (*aṃśa*) or divine totality, this *puruṣa* is, in reality, the passive subject of experience, the witness (*upadraṣṭā*) and enjoyer (*bhoktā*) of the cosmic play of name and form. Embodied as the *jīvātman*, its task is to dissociate itself, that is to say, to sacrifice the *ahaṃkāra* and to offer the body as a pure channel for the higher divine agency expressed through it. This renunciation of attachment to self-interest (*nirahaṃkāra*) brings the essential freedom of *mokṣa*.

True *self*-determination thus involves the mutation of the ego-bound personality whose claim to autonomy and freedom is ultimately founded on a misconception of its own true nature. All that may be claimed for the freedom of one who takes his stand in action (*karmastha*) is a freedom-in-bondage that reminds us very much of the "liberté seulement humaine" (only human freedom) of Paul Ricoeur. Such a freedom necessarily falls short of the ideal limit that lies beyond the limitations of space and time and the frictions of matter, beyond all particularity of existence and limitations of knowledge. In the epic context such an ideal can only be realized by one who takes his or her stand in the truth (*sattvastha*), that is to say, by a *self* that no longer identifies with the body-mind-intellect complex of personality (or with Ricoeur's "incarnate cogito") but with the Grand Design of Kṛṣṇa. It is no longer the *ahaṃkāra* that acts but the Lord who uses this body as His instrument — *nimittamātraṃ bhava savyasācin* (VI.33/BG.11.33). This is the essential freedom (*mokṣa*) beyond identification with the causal system of *prakṛti*. From this higher vision of liberation, the *puruṣa* freely accepts the determination of the Lord in the heart of all beings, whose form of agency is *daiva*.

From the perspective of the *ahaṃkāra* the course of action is a mystery (*gahana*), since it moves from the necessities received from the past towards

an uncertain future state determined by a mix of individual and cosmic forces. Here we sense the only too human condition of the incarnate will as the unity of the voluntary and the involuntary, and Ricoeur's analysis offers tantalizing parallels to epic notions of the *ahaṃkāra* as the unity of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. The Bhagavadgītā is, of course, quite clear in relating *prakṛti* with the realm of the involuntary. In contrast to Ricoeur's person, however, the epic person is moved not so much by a will as by atavistic impulses (*kāma*; *krodha* etc.) modulated by a power of insight (*viveka*) into the nature of the *puruṣa* and its human predicament. While not directly the actor, the witnessing *puruṣa* is nevertheless the *catalytic agent* of human activity in proportion to the visionary insight sparked in the *buddhi*. This *buddhi* progressively reins in the runaway horses of the passions, producing more sāttvic modes of behavior and a shift in the focus of attention from mundane striving (*puruṣakāra*) to the quest for liberation (*mumukṣu*). In sum, the epic personality is a mental fiction that dissolves in the visionary insight, together with the cycle of desire (*lipsā*; *kāma*), propensity to act (*abhisaṃdhitā*), action (*karma*) and fruit (*phala*) that fuels the eternal round of *human* initiative (*puruṣakāra*).

Here, too, the parallel with Ricoeur is instructive. The complexities involved in the movement from *decision*, to *movement*, and finally to *consent* to the conditions of absolute necessity in human life (his equivalent of *daiva*) reveal a hierarchy of freedoms based on the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary, action and condition for action.[4] "Deciding is the act of the will which is based on motives; moving is the act of the will which activates abilities or powers; consenting is the act of the will which acquiesces to a necessity—remembering that it is the same will which is considered successively from different points of view: the point of view of legitimacy, of efficacy, and of patience."[5] And do not our epic characters, too, enjoy these contingent freedoms? They enjoy a "freedom of choice" in which they are motivated (that is to say conditioned, determined, circumscribed) by the horizon of reasons and values represented by their *svadharma*; they exhibit a "freedom of movement" (or of doing) in which they are governed by the limits of their various capacities as human beings; and they are urged to a "freedom of consent" by which they can (potentially at least) say a final "yes" to the karma received from the past in the form of character (*śīla*), the unconscious tendencies of the mind (*vāsanā*; *saṃskāra*), and "the necessity

that comes from living in a particular place, being born on a particular day,"[6] (rendered by the absolute karmic necessities of *jāti* — birth, *āyus* — length of life and *bhoga* — our preordained quanta of pleasure and pain). Each stage is marked by a polarity of activity and receptivity. In decision, for example, "there are choices which tend toward a simple obedience to reasons not questioned at the moment of choice, and other choices which, in confusion of motives, tend toward a risk, even the throw of the dice."[7] We are reminded of Yudhiṣṭhira's decision to participate in the dice game and of Śiva playing dice with Pārvatī at I.189.14ff. (dice being the symbol of *Daiva par excellence*). Human effort itself (*puruṣakāra*) is a measure of the resistance of self and world that must be overcome. The ebb and flow of all aspects of life are both willed and endured; we are all "fated" to act from given conditions.

Ricoeur also makes the important further point that this only human freedom "responds to the no of condition with the no of refusal....In effect, *what* we refuse, is always, in the last analysis, the limitation of character, the shadows of the unconscious, and the contingence of life."[8] Whether in the form of surrender or a Promethean defiance; "At the core of refusal is defiance and defiance is the fault. To refuse necessity from below is to defy Transcendence. I have to discover the Wholly Other which at first repels me. Here lies the most fundamental choice of philosophy: either God or I."[9] The figure of Duryodhana is surely a prime example of the demonic drive for absolute sovereignty that comes from his refusal to accept any limit to his human condition. His last words are a magnificent demonic gesture of defiance before the awesome power of Divinity. Significantly, this defiance is greeted by a heavy rain of fragrant flowers out of heaven accompanied by the music and song of *gandharva* and *apsara* (IX.60.47-53; XI.63.18-39). [10]

Of course we must be careful not to carry these parallels too far in view of the obvious differences between the epic *ahaṃkāra* and Ricoeur's *cogito* (which is no mental fiction but the prime datum of consciousness). In particular, his notion of consent falls far short of the *bhakti* transformation of human agency and identity, yet he sees no possibility of its achievement. "Who can say *yes* to the end, without reservations? Suffering and evil, respected in their own shocking mystery, protected against degradation into a problem, lie in our way as the impossibility of saying an unreserved *yes* to

character, the unconscious, and life and of transforming the sorrow of the finite, the indefinite, and of contingence perfectly into joy."[11] But this is precisely the achievement of the *sattvasthā* who, from the sublime heights of their vision, can freely consent to this divine agency — *Daiva* — at work in themselves and in the world around them.

The antinomy between *puruṣakāra* and extrahuman agencies such as *daiva* or *haṭha* can only be reconciled in the light of this quantum shift of self-identity that takes place at the vanishing point of the *ahaṃkāra*. This (symbolic) death of the I-center is the prelude to a new rebirth in which the play (*līlā*) of the sense objects ceases to evoke the incessant demand to "be mine" (*mama*). No longer directed to filling a lack, human striving (*puruṣakāra*) gets transformed into a plenitude of divine energy which may be viewed as the *Daivalīlā* of Kṛṣṇa playing in the world through the flute of the human body. Seen from the macrocosmic perspective of the mythology, the combinations of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* follow the Supreme Spirit (paramapuruṣa) through His triple forms (states) as Brahmā — creator of the cosmic *ahaṃkāra* and Lord of *pravṛtti*, Viṣṇu — supporter of this process in time, and Śiva — who returns the process to a state of quiescence = *nivṛtti*. The gulf that separates the *karmasthā* from the *sattvasthā* is thus a gulf between two views of the universe and human nature according as the movement is towards *pravṛtti* or towards *nivṛtti*. This, in turn, constitutes the basis for two views of self-identity and human agency. Limited by their own confusions, the *karmasthā* can only struggle towards the limits of their "only human freedom;" while the *sattvasthā* abandon this useless struggle for the greater freedom that comes from (freely) *consenting* to the part they are given to play in the divine drama of the world.

This dichotomy of view is also reflected in the two distinct connotations of the word given to the term *daiva* in the epic, the first constituting a mark of self-centerdness, the other based on the true state of things (*sat*). From the self-centered perspective of the *ahaṃkāra*, the term is typically used to express the sense of powerlessness that emerges as a result of untoward reversals of fortune. The *daiva* (with a small d) that continually thwarts the cherished hopes and plans of king Dhṛtarāṣṭra provides an eloquent example of someone who falls victim to his all-too-human attachments. On the other hand, the cosmic Time referred to by the various sages and reformed demons

met with in the Śāntiparva (Bāli, Namuchi, Vṛtra etc.) points to a transcendent *Daiva* (with a capital D) that governs the course of things as a whole, including human society and the microcosmos of embodied existence. The world process is an expression of the one divine power that works not only beyond us but also through us. From this perspective everything is seen "with an equal eye" (*samadarśina*), that is to say as an expression of the one cosmic power of *Daiva*. Under these conditions the only course is to align oneself — like Arjuna after the divine theophany in the eleventh chapter of the Gītā — with what we know of the cosmic purpose, and to accept what comes in the knowledge that success and failure, victory and defeat, pleasure and pain, are endemic to the temporal cycle of *saṃsāra*.[12]

On the other hand, the epic author himself does not appear to be aware of the basic contradiction posed by the juxtaposition of a finalistic teleology that permeates the course of the world, and our God-given freedom to choose between the good (*śreyas*) and our own self-indulgence (*preyas*). In the light of the cosmic determinism of *Daiva* human self-determination is reduced to a groundless phantom. This is Hartmann's *antinomy of providence* in which the ethos of man "is annihilated, his will paralyzed. All initiative, all setting up and pursuit of ends is transferred to God....In this way the finalistic determinism of divine providence abolishes ethical freedom. But if we grant validity to personal freedom, it inevitably abolishes the finalistic determinism of divine providence. Each stands in contradiction to the other, as thesis to antithesis."[13]

It was left to the medieval commentators to wrestle with this nagging tension, a tension that could only intensify with the *bhakti* emphasis on the life-affirming values of human activity in society. This led to a spirited defense of the vedic injunctions and the traditional structure of the *varṇāśramadharma* against the world-denying tendencies of the upaniṣadic *saṃnyāsa*. Human life is exalted when the individual is made accountable for transgressions against *svadharma*, the complex system of religious duties and obligations to which he or she is subject. Without the human power to effect results, says Yudhiṣṭhira (III.32.25-27), there would be no reason why the *ṛṣi* or anyone else should follow the dharma. Age-old prescriptions regarding

tapas; *brahmacārya*; *yajña*; *svādhyāya*; *dāna*; and *ārjavam* would go down as the greatest hoax of all time (*vipralambhātyanta*). And Draupadī concurs that human advancement must depend on freedom of choice (III.33.23-24):

> *manasārthānvinikṣitya paścātprāpnoti karmaṇā|*
> *buddhipūrvaṃ syayaṃ dhīraḥ puruṣastatra kāraṇam||*
>
> *saṃkhyātuṃ naiva śakyāni karmāṇi puruṣarṣabha|*
> *agāranagarāṇāṃ hi siddhiḥ puruṣahaituki||*

"One first makes up one's mind on what one wants to do and then acts on it. Endowed with reason (*dhīra*), the man himself is responsible (*kāraṇa* = cause) for what follows, based on prior deliberation (*buddhipūrva*). While it is not possible to provide an exact accounting of the [chain of] acts involved, domestic and social progress are the result of human choice." This echoes the oft-repeated claim (e.g. at V.130.15-16; XII.92.6; XII.139.7), already noted on page 142, that it is the conduct of the king that determines the conditions of the time (*kāla*) and the different ages of the world (*yuga*).

Here we find another instance of this antinomy of providence. What may be true for a world of human agents is hardly consistent with a mythology of *yuga* determined by the strictest periodicities of time. But are we asking too much of our epic author, as Biardeau suggests?

> The difficulty we have is only conceptual and would not be a problem for the mythographers.... At times we are told that *daiva* is all-powerful to the point where no one is responsible for the great carnage of the battle, at other times however it is Dhṛtarāṣtra or Duryodhana, or even Yudhiṣṭhira who bear the burden of the catastrophe. The intervention of the *avatāra*, invariably set at the meeting point of two *yuga*, is necessarily a product of inexorable *daiva* which any attempt to avoid would be useless. If on the other hand, we take the point of view of the king who, by his action, introduces the reign of this or that *yuga*, thereby imposing a human causality on the course of time, *daiva* can be overcome and the role of the king is to turn it to the advantage of his kingdom. When the epic narrative is set at the meeting point of two *yuga* it is the first perspective that prevails. When on the other hand, attention is centered on the war to be declared or avoided, it is the

human drama that is the main issue. But it is in the nature of this double myth to keep these two types of causality together whatever difficulty we might have — conceptual once again — of thinking them together.[14]

Biardeau traces these two perspectives to her view of the Mahābhārata as a "double myth" — a royal myth to justify the acts of the king (who makes the *yuga*) that is modelled on the traditional myths of the *avatāra* (who invariably appears at the end of a *yuga*). This leads her to miss the deeper ambivalence of the epic view of human nature, based on the two antithetical views of self-identity discussed above. It is to these two forms of self-identity exemplified by the *karmasthā* and the *sattvasthā*, that the ultimate source of this dichotomy of opinion on the subject of human agency must be traced. The antinomy is solved by Śaṃkara by losing humanity and the world to the divine illusion (*māyā*). In his view, human beings (*jīva*) are fictional self-identities performing unreal activities out of attachment for the objects, emotional states and ideas about a world that never really was. Commenting on VI.37/BG.15.7 he writes: "'Myself' (*mama*): that is to say a spark, i.e. a portion, of Myself, i.e. the paramātman, Nārāyaṇa, manifests as the eternal, i.e. age-old embodied soul (*jīvabhūta*) in *jīvaloka*, i.e. in *saṃsāra* as the doer (*kartṛ*) and the enjoyer (*bhoktṛ*). He is like the sun (reflected) in water. The (reflected) sun is but a spark of the (real) sun; and once this has disappeared on the removal of water the (reflected) sun does not return but remains as it is in itself. Or, it is like the space (*ākāśa*) in a jar which is limited by the form (*upādhi*) of the jar. On the destruction of the jar this portion (*aṃśa*) of space becomes one with (infinite) space and does not return" (SBG.15.7).[15]

Rāmānuja, on the other hand, seeks to save the world and its karma with a Divine Power that "permits" the self-centered activity of real individual entities until the proper order of things (which is the *dharma*) deteriorates to the point at which the Divinity is forced once more to intervene, in the form of the *avatāra*, to destroy the perpetrators of social chaos (*adharma*) and re-establish a new order of society upon the ashes of the old. In this reading — much closer to the spirit of the text — the things and beings of the world are fully real. The source of human misunderstanding is not with objective reality as such, but with the relationships that apply between the entities involved, namely the paramāpuruṣa (or paramātman; Īśvara), the individual

souls or *puruṣas*, and the material evolutes of *prakṛti*. A living being is a real composite of soul and body involved in a real cycle of change. "This *prakṛti*, active from time immemorial, having evolved into a field of experience (*kṣetra*), and being in association with the *puruṣa*, becomes the cause of the bondage (of the *puruṣa*) through its own modifications such as desire and aversion (*icchādveṣau*). This (same *prakṛti*), through other modifications such as humility (*amānitvam*) etc., becomes the cause of salvation (*apavarga*) of the *puruṣa*" (RGB.13.19).[16]

Biardeau is probably correct in her view that the epic author would have tended to see this issue in the context of the practical needs of his reader/listeners, not as a problem to be solved intellectually. His message is directed, not to the scholar, but to the practical men and women of his day. This is born out by the stirring exhortation of the Bhāratasāvitrī (the "Essence of the Bhārata") with which the epic concludes—clearly designed to galvanize the nameless multitudes travelling his vision of the great human journey (XVIII.5.47-50):

mātāpitṛsahasrāṇi putradāraśatāni ca|
saṃsāreṣvanubhūtāni yānti yāsyanti cāpare||

harṣasthāna sahasrāni bhayasthāna śatāni ca|
divase divase muḍham āviśanti na paṇḍitam||

urdhvabāhur viraumyeṣa na ca kaścicchṛṇoti me|
dharmādarthaśca kāmaśca sa kim artha na sevyate||

na jātu kāmān na bhayānna lobhād
dharmaṃ tyajejjīvitasyāpi hetoḥ|
nityo dharmaḥ sukhaduḥkhe tvanitye
jīvo nityo heturasya tvanityaḥ||

"Thousands of mothers and fathers, and hundreds of sons and wives come and go in this world. Others too (will similarly come and go in the future). There are thousands of occasions for joy and hundreds of occasions for fear. These come day after day to the ignorant but never to the wise. With uplifted arms I cry aloud but nobody hears me. Dharma is the foundation for *artha*

and *kāma*. Why is it not respected? For the sake of neither pleasure nor of fear nor greed should anyone cast off dharma — not even for the sake of life itself. Dharma is eternal but pleasure and pain are not eternal. The *jīva* is eternal but its cause [i.e. ignorance] is not eternal."

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[1] Alf Hiltebeitel, The Ritual of Battle, p. 115.

[2] *parāyatte'pi hi kartṛtve karotyeva jīva | kurvantaṃ hi tamīśvaraḥ kārayati | apica pūrvaprayatnamapekṣyedānīṃ kārayati pūrvataraṃ ca prayatnamapekṣya pūrvamakārayaditynāditvāt-saṃsārasyetyanavadyam|*

[3] In discussing the compexities of the Hindu dharma Paul Hacker observes that: "Der Hindu-Theismus hat sich zwar auf verschiedene Weise bemuht, dem hochsten Gott einen Einfluss auf das Karmangeschehen einzuraumen. Aber so wenig wie der Hindu in der Lage war, den Dharma konsequent als Willen Gottes zu verstehen, ebensowenig konnte er die Auswirkung des getanen oder verfehlten Dharma als Belohnung oder Bestrafung von Verdienst oder Schuld auffassen. Die Rolle des hochsten Gottes in dem Mechanismus der Dharma-Adharma-Kausalitat blieb die eines eigentlich entbehrlichen Aufsehers." ("Hindu theism has sought in various ways to find a place for the highest God to influence the process of karma. But it was as difficult for the Hindu to conceive of the dharma as the Will of God as it was to imagine the consequences of dharmic or adharmic acts as reward for merit or punishment for sin. In practice, the role of the highest God in the causal mechanics of dharma-adharma remained that of a virtually dispensable supervisor"). See Paul Hacker, "Dharma im Hinduismus," in Hacker's Kleine Schriften (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag Gmbh., 1978), p. 506.

[4] Paul Ricoeur, Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary, trans., with an Introduction by Erazim V. Kohak (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966).

[5] Ibid, p. 341.

[6] Paul Ricoeur, "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea", in The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: an anthology of his work, eds. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 16.

[7] Ibid, p. 19.

[8] Ricoeur, Freedom and Nature, p. 463.

[9] Ibid, p. 477.

[10] Ricoeur's view is that ultimate consent must pass through this stage of refusal as one of two "Copernican revolutions." In his introduction to Freedom and Nature, Ricoeur's translator writes that: "While the first Copernican revolution won the Cogito by placing man at the center of the universe, the note of adoration makes consent possible by replacing man with Transcendence as the center of reality. Only because the first revolution won the Cogito can the second revolution be a consent rather than a surrender." Cf. Erazim V. Kohák, "he Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur," in ibid, p. xxviii.

[11] Ibid, p. 479-480.

[12] Ruth Katz would appear to be in substantial agreement. However, she casts the issue in light of the decline of the *yuga*, the onset of the *kaliyuga* being the signal for a transition from the "heroic" to more "human" modes of conduct. Human effort and fate work in harmony with each other at both the heroic and devotional levels of interpretation, the former giving the priority to effort the latter to fate. "At the heroic

level, there is no doubt that effort will succeed: fate and effort will not be in opposition to one another. At the human level, the Kaliyuga represents the interference of fate." Cf. Arjuna in the Mahabharata, p. 179. From the transcendent perspective of the Kṛṣṇa theophany of VI.33/B.G.11.32 she notes that: "The fate-effort opposition of the human level is thus transcended in favor of a fuller recognition of fate." Ibid, p. 228. This is the devotional mode in which, "the significance of all actions taken throughout the *Mahabharata* is altered radically: action is no longer seen as something apart from fate or opposed to fate; fate is supreme, but action harmonizes with it to fulfill the *Mahabharata's* paradoxical conception of united fate and effort as the components of success." Ibid, p. 234. The way to transcendence, whether along the path of knowledge or the path of devotion to Kṛṣṇa, thus involves a devaluation of the ego and its efforts. "Clearly, in underrating the role of the individual ego, both [i.e. paths] underrate the role of individual accomplishment." Cf. Ibid, p. 227.

[13]Nicolai Hartmann, Ethics III, p. 267.

[14] Biardeau, "Etudes V," p. 87-88.

15 *mama iti || mama eva paramātmanaḥ nārāyaṇasya aṃśaḥ bhāgaḥ avayavaḥ ekadeśaḥ iti anarthāntara jīvaloke jīvānāṃ loke saṃsāre jīvabhūtaḥ kartā bhoktā iti prasiddhaḥ sanātanaḥ cirantanaḥ yathā jalasūryakaḥ sūryāṃśaḥ jalanimittāpāye sūryameva gatvā na nivartate tenaiva ātmanā gacchati evameva yathā vā ghaṭādyupādhipariccchinnaḥ ghaṭādyākāśaḥ ākāśāṃśaḥ san ghaṭādinimittāpāye ākāśam prāpya na nivartate ityevam* | For more information on Śaṃkara's conception of human nature see Paul Hacker, Kleine Schriften (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag Gmbh., 1978), "Śaṃkara's Conception of Man", pp. 242-251.

[16] |*puruṣeṇa saṃsṛṣṭā iyam anādikālāpravṛttā kṣetrākāraparināmā prakṛtiḥ svavikāraiḥ icchādveṣādibhiḥ puruṣasya bandhahetuḥ bhavati. Sa eva amānitvādibhiḥ svavikāraiḥ puruṣasyāpavargahetuḥ bhavati ityarthaḥ* ||

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