

Care of the soul

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We find an outline of a methodology of care of the soul presented by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*. The soul is portrayed as having three faculties, which are usually translated as appetite, spirit and reason. Here we will use the word ardor in place of spirit, to avoid confusion. Elsewhere in this book the word spirit is used to mean the nonmaterial energy behind animate symptoms, whereas Plato's intention is different. According to the dictionary, his sense of the word spirit is equivalent to ardor.

The appetitive faculty is lowest of the three. It consists of the drives for physical enjoyment (of food and sex) and for the avoidance of pain. Ardor is the middle faculty. It is excitable, aggressive and pugnacious, and seeks adventure and honor. Highest is the faculty of reason. It expresses itself as inquiry into the truth, and as worthy activity. Reason seeks beauty, truth and goodness. The appetites can be compared to a herd of sheep, ardor to a sheepdog, and reason to a shepherd. Care of the soul means to keep the three faculties in harmony, so that they don't meddle in one another's purpose. The

purpose of appetite is to see to it that the body is properly cared for. Ardor's purpose is to fight fear and complacency. The purpose of reason is impose order upon the other two, to maintain harmony, to care for the soul. Reason gets its sense of correct order and harmony by contemplation of the Good, which Socrates described as a transcendental state of Being, a realm of eternal, unchanging forms. When reason harmonizes human life with the Good, the soul is freed from human ignorance and suffering.

Within the Western philosophical tradition, there is no further development of this ancient Greek outline for care of the soul. But the outline is strongly reminiscent of the doctrine of the *tri-guna*, the three modes of material nature, taught in the *Bhagavad-gita*. It is not within our scope here to speculate how Greek philosophy was influenced by the *Bhagavad-gita* or other Vedantic scriptures from ancient India. It is enough to note that this influence is admitted by Western scholars. Here we shall be content to pursue the philosophical parallels to see whether it is plausible that the ancients did have a spiritual science for the removal of suffering.

The modes of material nature

A concept from Western philosophy provides us with an insightful

introduction to the doctrine of the three modes of material nature.

This is the idea of *natura naturans* (creative nature) and *natura naturata* (created nature). According to Baruch Spinoza, a contemporary of Descartes, creative nature is a single divine substance that manifests the created nature (the material world of physical and mental variety) through modes. In Latin, the language Spinoza wrote in, the word *modus* means "measure." Creative nature (without modes) is immeasurable, hence it cannot be humanly perceived. Created nature (with modes) is measurable, hence it can be humanly perceived. *Modus* also means "a manner of activity." When creative nature acts, it assumes modes of behavior that are measurable and thus perceivable.

The fourteenth chapter of *Bhagavad-gita* (verses 3-5) presents a twofold description of material nature as *mahat yoni*, the source of birth, and as *guna prakrti*, that which acts wonderfully through modes. Material nature as the source of birth is also termed *mahad brahman*, the great Brahman. *Mahad brahman* is nature as the divine creative substance (cf. *natura naturans*), which is the material cause of everything. "Material cause" is a term common to both classical Western philosophy (as *causa materialis*) and Vedanta philosophy (as *upadana karana*). It means the source of ingredients that comprise creation. We get an example of a material cause from the Sanskrit word

yoni, which literally means womb. The mother's womb provides the ingredients for the formation of the embryo. The clarity of this example forces a question: what about the father, who must impregnate the womb first before it can act as the material cause? This question is answered by Krsna, the speaker of the *Bhagavad-gita*, in verse 4: *aham bija pradah pita*, "I am the seed-giving father." In Vedanta philosophy, this factor of causation is termed *nimitta-matram* (the remote cause), and in Western philosophy *causa motiva* (the motive force). It is important to note that by presenting creation as the result of the union of two causes (the material and the remote), the *Bhagavad-gita* rejects the tenet that Spinoza called *Deus sive natura*, "the identity of God and nature." In short, though creative nature may be accepted as the direct cause of creation, it is not the self-sufficient cause of creation. The seed with which Krsna impregnates the womb of creative nature is comprised of *sarva-bhutanam*, all living entities (verse 3).

Soul and matter

The living entities, or spirit souls, are termed *aksaram brahma paramam* in the eighth chapter of *Bhagavad-gita*, verse 3. This means they are indestructible transcendental substance. Both the creative material nature (*mahad brahman*) and the spirit souls are Brahman, or

substance. They are real as immutable primary energy that remains intact in all transformations. But yet these two energies, spirit and matter, are always distinct from one another in all combinations, as is summed up in *Bhagavad-gita* 7.5. The material nature is *apara*, inferior, because of being unconscious. The living souls are *para*, superior, because of being conscious. In chapter 8, verse 3, self-consciousness is said to be the *svabhavo'dhyatmam*, the eternal nature of the living souls. Consciousness is the living force (*cetana*, from chapter 10, verse 22). It is by consciousness, and the lack of it, that spirit and matter are distinguished from one another.

Bhagavad-gita 14.5 explains that when the souls are placed within the womb of material nature, their consciousness is conditioned by three modes, or *tri-guna*. These are the features of created nature (*guna prakrti*, or *natura naturata*) that are accessible to the living entities. More specifically, the modes are three measures of interaction between conscious spirit and unconscious matter. The modes may be compared to the three primary colors, yellow, red and blue, and consciousness may be compared to clear light. The "conditioning" (*nibhadnanti*) of consciousness upon its entry into the womb of material nature is comparable to the coloration of light upon its passing through a prism. The color yellow symbolizes *sattva-guna*, the mode of goodness. This mode is pure, illuminating, and

sinless. Goodness conditions the soul with the sense of happiness and knowledge. The color red symbolizes the *rajo-guna*, the mode of passion, full of longings and desires. By the influence of passion the soul engages in *karma*, works of material accomplishment. The color blue symbolizes *tamo-guna*, the mode of ignorance, which binds the soul to madness, indolence and sleep. As the three primary colors combine to produce a vast spectrum of hues, so the three modes combine to produce the vast spectrum of states of conditioned consciousness that encompasses all living entities within the universe. The term *tri-loka* is often found in Vedic scriptures. *Tri-loka* means "three worlds." The universe is divided by the three modes into three worlds, or realms of consciousness: *bhur*, *bhuvah* and *svar* (the gross region, the subtle region and the celestial region). In *svargaloka* or the celestial heaven, superhuman beings called *devatas* exist, enjoying a life that in human terms is almost unimaginable. In the subtle region exists ghosts and elemental beings. And in the gross or earthly realm exist human beings and other creatures with tissue-bodies, including the animals and plants. There is also a subterranean region where powerful demons reside. And there is a region known as *naraka*, hell. The total sense of "the vast spectrum of states of conditioned consciousness that encompasses all living entities" can be summed up in one word: egoism. The word ego is traced to the Sanskrit *aham* by way of the Greek *egon*. The word egoism is similarly

related to the Sanskrit *ahankara*. *Ahankara* is best translated as "false ego." The real ego is *svabhavo'dhyatmam*, the eternal nature of the soul as the self. The false ego is explained in *Bhagavad-gita* 3.27 as a kind of bewilderment by which the soul wrongly identifies itself as the doer of physical and mental activities that are actually carried out by three modes of material nature.

A detailed description of the threefold false ego is given by Krsna to Uddhava. This is recorded in the eleventh canto of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. What we shall now draw from there is somewhat suggestive of the Platonic "three faculties of the soul." By false ego in goodness (technically called *vaikaraka*), the living entity identifies with the mind. What is the mind? The mind is the living entity's subtle medium of reflection, comparable to a mirror. By its own nature of goodness, the mind is a suitable medium for reflecting the eternal absolute truth. But it can also reflect the objects of the senses and thus become absorbed in the temporary appearances of the material world. The *Amrta-bindu Upanisad* therefore declares, "For man, mind is the cause of bondage and mind is the cause of liberation. Mind absorbed in sense objects is the cause of bondage, and mind detached from the sense objects is the cause of liberation." By false ego in passion (*aindriya* or *taijasa*), the soul identifies with the physical senses and the creative intellect by which the senses are

skillfully employed in work. By false ego in ignorance (*tamasa*), the soul identifies with the objects perceived by the physical senses, i.e. what is heard, what is felt, what is seen, what is smelt and what is tasted. Krsna says that the false ego is *cid-acin-mayah*, that which encompasses both spirit and matter. It binds together the two aspects of Brahman, the conscious (*cid*) and the unconscious (*acid*).

Krsna consciousness

Socrates says reason should impose order upon the lower two faculties, and in this way reason should care for the soul. Reason gets its strength to care for the soul from contemplating the Good, the transcendental state of Being. When reason harmonizes human life with the Good, the soul is freed from human ignorance and suffering. This suggests the process of *yoga* meditation that Krsna summarizes as follows. "The mind can be controlled when it is fixed on the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Having achieved a stable situation, the mind becomes free from polluted desires to execute material activities; thus as the mode of goodness increases in strength, one can completely give up the modes of passion and ignorance, and gradually one transcends even the material mode of goodness. When the mind is freed from the fuel of the modes of nature, the fire of material existence is extinguished. Then one achieves the transcendental platform of direct

relationship with the object of his meditation, the Supreme Lord."

(*Bhag*. 11.9.12)

The Supreme Personality of Godhead is Krsna Himself, the Supreme Soul. The transcendental platform of direct relationship with the Supreme Soul is the state of absolute being. How the *yogi* perceives this state is described in *Bhag*. 11.14.45. "He sees the individual souls united with the Supreme Soul, just as one sees the sun's rays completely united with the sun." The sun is *jyotisi*, the source of light. Similarly, Krsna, the Supreme Soul, is the source of the light of consciousness of all living entities. Sunlight is composed of photons, which are tiny units of light. Similarly, each individual soul (technically called the *jiva-atma*) is a tiny unit of consciousness. The Sanskrit word *yoga* means "connection;" through *yoga,* the consciousness of the individual soul connects with its source, Krsna. This is called Krsna consciousness.

By Krsna consciousness, *Bhag.* 11.14.45 explains, the identification with *dravya-jnana-kriya*, or material objects, knowledge and activity, is extinguished. These refer again to the three modes: material objects are generated from the mode of ignorance, material knowledge from the mode of goodness, and material activities from the mode of passion. When the clear light of consciousness

connects with the prism of the material nature, *dravya-jnana-kriya* appear. And just as colored light appears to be *separate* from the clear sunshine, so objects, knowledge and activities appear to be *separate* from Krsna consciousness. The apparent separation of objects, knowledge and activities from Krsna is called Maya, or illusion. *Vedanta-sutra* 1.4.9 describes Maya as *jyotir-upakrama*, "she whose beginning is light." The *jyoti* (light) is the eternal spiritual effulgence of the *jyotisi*, the sun-like Supreme Personality of Godhead. Where this divine light, comprised of countless individual units of consciousness, separates into the three modes of material nature, and where objects, knowledge and activities seem to exist without a necessary relationship to God, is where Maya begins.

Maya consciousness

Maya is the two-fold ignorance Socrates identified as the cause of suffering. Socrates said that one feature of ignorance is to be "so beguiled by the body and its passions and pleasures that nothing seems real to it but those physical things which can be touched and seen and eaten and drunk and used for sexual enjoyment." The other feature is to be "accustomed to hate and fear and avoid what is invisible and hidden from our eyes, but intelligible and comprehensible by philosophy." Vedanta philosophy attributes two *saktis* (powers) to

Maya: *avaranatmika* and *praksepattmika*. The *avaranatmika-sakti* is the covering potency, by which the soul is satisfied to accept the objects, knowledge and activities of even a dog or a hog. The *pratsepattmika-sakti* is the dragging potency, which pulls the soul away from the path of spiritual progress back to absorption in material objects, knowledge and activities. In these two ways, then, Maya holds the living entities captive. The consequences of this captivity are described by the Vedas with the words *dosa-grbhita-gunam*. This means that the living entities suffer from faults (*dosa*) imposed upon them by the *tri-guna*.

For instance, being captivated by the material body, believing bodily well-being to be all-important, we dedicate ourselves to our body's protection, service and enjoyment. Yet the body can only reward our loving concern with suffering, for it is subject to the faults of birth, death, old age and disease. Likewise, we are captives of the mind, which is pervaded with faults like lust, anger, greed, madness, illusion and envy. These faults give rise to untold psychological suffering. We are held captive in our relationships with other living entities. Every one of these relationships is hopelessly faulted and must end in suffering. We are captivated by the natural world around us. For all its splendor, the world is riddled with countless faults and their consequent sufferings. Finally, we are captives of time.

Krsna, in the eleventh canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, describes the effect of time with the words *bhutani bhavanti na bhavanti*, "the creation and destruction of material bodies," which is comparable to the constant flickering of the flame of a lamplight. At first glance, the flame of a lamp appears to endure in time, and so in conventional language we speak of "the flame" as a thing having steady existence. But a closer look at the flame reveals it does not endure from moment to moment. It flickers. It comes into being, exists for an instant, then vanishes, to be immediately replaced by a new flame. Similarly, the material body appears to be a steadily existing thing. But in reality it constantly undergoes transformations of time. The transformations of time are simply changes in the modes of nature-- passion, the mode of creation, changes to goodness, the mode of maintenance, which changes again to ignorance, the mode of destruction. These changes take place at different rates of frequency at different levels of the bodily constitution. Thus the body is not "the same" from moment to moment. And just as the "present" body changes moment by moment from infancy to youth to old age, so at the moment of death it changes into a different body within the womb of our next mother. Yet from moment to moment we believe the body to be one and the same. This is the major fault of our existence in the material world: what we take to be real here, is not real. "You can't step in the same river twice," Heraclitus said, for the river you stepped in yesterday is

gone, just as the river you are stepping in today will be gone tomorrow. "The sun is new every day," but in illusion we think the river and the sun are the same as the day before.

Now, it could be argued that the analogy of the lamplight cannot be applied beyond the present lifetime. When I look at a flame, I think it is the same, even though it is constantly changing, *because I remember it in time*. Similarly, I think my present body is the same as the one I had seven years ago because I can remember all my bodies in time. The analogy holds so far. But I am not able to remember bodies from a lifetime prior to this one. So how can I believe that the body from my present mother will be seamlessly replaced by a new body within the womb of my next mother at the moment of my death? Krsna gives the answer in *Bhag*. 11.22.41. Every night in sleep we accept a dream body that upon waking we relinquish and forget. Every night we die to this life and are born into another life, and every morning we die to that life and are born to this one again. "Living and dead, and the waking and sleeping--the same," Heraclitus said. "For these transposed are those, and those transposed again are these." We know that we change bodies in time, while awake and while asleep. This truth is not weakened by our forgetting it.

Victory over Maya

In *Bhagavad-gita* 2.16, Krsna says, "Those who are seers of the truth have concluded that of the nonexistent [the material body] there is no endurance and of the eternal [the soul] there is no change. This they have concluded by studying the nature of both." To forget the truth, then, means to forget one's own eternal nature. And in that state of forgetfulness, or Maya, one identifies the self with that which does not endure, indeed, with that with which we cannot say exists in an absolute sense at all: the material body. This profound forgetfulness of the self is not easily thrown off. *Daivi hy esa guna-mayi mama maya duratyaya*: "My divine energy, Maya, consisting of three modes, is very difficult to overcome." (*B.g.* 7.14) The power of knowledge of the individual soul is not sufficient to overcome the ignorance imposed by the three modes of material nature. For example, Descartes based his efforts for certain knowledge upon the strength of his own subjective consciousness. He attempted to work from there to the objective truth about the external world. Certain that his revolutionary approach to knowledge would free humanity from an infinity of maladies, he wrote at age forty-two that he would be surprised if he lived less than over a hundred years. Unfortunately, he died at age fifty-four.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead has unlimited names. One of

them is Ajita (the Unconquerable). The Vedas therefore pray, *jaya jaya jahy ajam ajita*, "Victory, victory to You, O unconquerable one! Please defeat the eternal power of Maya." With her powerful modes of illusion, Maya defeats all souls who come under her influence. The Sanskrit word *maya* is linguistically related to the Greek word *magikos*, from whence (via Latin and French) comes the English word magic. Indeed, one of the meanings of *maya* is magic. Krsna sports with his *maya-sakti* (power of Maya) like a magician. By that power, the conditioned souls are kept under a spell of belief that the unreal is real. But that spell may be instantly broken by the Supreme Soul: *mam eva ye prapadyante mayam etam taranti te*, "those who have surrendered unto Me can easily cross beyond Maya." (*B.g*. 7.14)

Bhagavad-gita 15.16, 17 states, "There are two classes of beings, the fallible and the infallible. In the material world every living entity is fallible, and in the spiritual world every living entity is called infallible. Besides these two, there is the greatest living personality, the Supreme Soul, the imperishable Lord Himself, who has entered the three worlds and is maintaining them." We may want to know how it is that some souls are fallible, and why, if the material existence is Maya, does the Supreme Soul enter and maintain the three worlds (the good, passionate and ignorant regions of the universe). Krsna says (*B.g*. 15.7) that the fallible souls are

amsa, or eternal parts of His personal spiritual energy. In essence they are the same as the Supreme Soul and the infallible souls in the spiritual world. The fallible souls are separated from Krsna only by desire. Spiritual desire seeks its object in Krsna, but material desire seeks its object in Maya, where the fallible souls hope to become masters and possessors of material nature. Out of compassion for His wayward parts and parcels, the Supreme Soul enters the three worlds as Adhiyajna, the Lord of sacrifice. From His divine breath comes the primal vibration a-u-m, which nourishes and guides the three modes of nature as they manifest the material creation. The *mantras* (spiritual sounds) of the Vedas are revealed within the syllable *aum*, and these *mantras* reveal in turn that the material world exists only for sacrifice. The method of sacrifice is taught by great sages to the fallible souls so that, firstly, all passionate and ignorant aspects of human life may be brought up to the mode of goodness. Thereafter, as sacrifice is undertaken in the mode of goodness, it becomes the means to transcendental knowledge (*B.g*. 4.33) by which the soul is liberated from Maya altogether. As Krsna Himself declares, *nityam yajne pratisthitam*, "the all-pervading Transcendence is eternally situated in acts of sacrifice." (*B.g*. 3.15)

The English word sacrifice comes from the Latin *sacrificium*, "an offering to God." *Sacrificium* comes from *sacri facere*, "to make

sacred." The system of Vedic sacrifice makes sacred the *dravya-jnana-kriya* (objects, knowledge and activities) of human life by offering them to Krsna. This is explained in *Bhagavad-gita* 4.24. The person who offers something to Krsna, as well the thing offered and the means by which Krsna accepts it, all attain the same absolute nature.

Bhagavad-gita 3.13 gives an illustration: foodstuff offered in sacrifice is purified of sinful reactions, and therefore the partaking of food offered to Krsna is a liberated activity. The eating of unoffered food for the satisfaction of the tongue leads to suffering in the cycle of repeated birth and death.

The engagement of our thoughts, words and deeds in sacrifice to the Supreme Soul situates our activities even within this material world upon the eternal ground of Brahman, the absolute truth. So the Vedas declare. It may then be asked, "Earlier it was explained that the spirit souls and the material nature are eternal Brahman energies, and that the modes of illusion manifest out of Brahman. So aren't human beings always situated in Brahman no matter what they do? Why must we perform sacrifice to be so situated?" To answer to this question, first we must know Krsna's position with respect to Brahman. Krsna says *brahmano hi pratisthaham*, "I am the basis of Brahman." (*B.g*. 14.27) As such, He is *param brahma*, the Supreme Brahman (*B.g*. 10.12), who is the controller of both the spirit souls and

matter, which are the conscious and unconscious aspects of Brahman. Maya is *jyotir upakrama*, she whose beginning is the Brahmajyoti, the light of Brahman. Thus the basis of Maya is Brahman, just as the basis of Brahman is the Parambrahman, Krsna. The difference between Maya and Brahman is simply the difference between liberated and nonliberated activities. "The all-pervading Brahman is eternally situated in acts of sacrifice;" "a human being who does not follow the cycle of Vedic sacrifice certainly leads a sinful life, living in vain only for the satisfaction of the senses." (*B.g*. 3.15, 16) A sinful human being is situated in Brahman the way an imprisoned criminal is situated in society. Because of his unlawful activities, a criminal is put into prison by the government. While it is correct to say that he was taken out of society by being sent to prison, still the prison system is an aspect of society. So it is not incorrect to say that the criminal is still within society while in prison. But he does not enjoy the rights of a free citizen. Similarly, Krsna directs that a human being who is sinful be imprisoned by Maya. Maya is based upon Brahman, so in that sense the sinful person is situated on Brahman too. But he is not free to enjoy Brahman. Due to lawlessness, he must suffer. By lawful sacrifice in Krsna consciousness, the soul is free to enjoy Brahman, which is "immortal, imperishable and eternal and is the constitutional position of ultimate happiness." (*B.g*. 14.27)

The best sacrifice

We have been inquiring here about a method to know the absolute truth without doubt. If the method is sacrifice, then how is sacrifice to be performed? There are many volumes of Vedic instruction on sacrifice. Although following them all in detail is probably impossible for us, we can follow them in essence. The essence is that sacrifice is meant to satisfy the Lord of Sacrifice, Krsna. In *Bhagavad-gita* 10.25, Krsna reveals that there is one sacrifice out of all that is His very self: *yajnanam japa-yajno 'smi*, "of sacrifices I am the chanting of the holy names." Chanting the holy names of Krsna immediately immerses one in the nectarean ocean of Krsna consciousness. This is praised by the Vedas as true wisdom, for it removes all the suffering of material existence.

*iti tava surayas try-adhipate 'khila-loka-mala
ksapana-kathamrtabdhim avagahya tapamsi jahuh*

"Thus those who are wise get free of all suffering by diving deep into the nectarean ocean of topics about the Lord of the three worlds, which washes away the contamination of the material universe." (*Bhag*. 10.87.16) The Vedas then explain with great precision how suffering is removed: *sva-dhama-vidhutasaya-kala-gunah*, "spiritual strength

dispells the influence of the material modes and the passage of time upon consciousness." Fortunate souls in Krsna consciousness attain *ajasra-sukhanubhavam*, "the experience of uninterrupted bliss." Although occupying a material body, they do not identify with it, but rather identify with the eternal bliss of Krsna consciousness. Like Socrates' true philosophers who make dying their profession, to whom death is least alarming, Krsna conscious persons do not grieve at the prospect of quitting their bodies. "Remembering me alone at the time of death," Krsna says in the eighth chapter, verse 5 of *Bhagavad-gita*, "one attains My nature without a doubt." Krsna's nature is different from material nature, which is sometimes manifest as created nature, and sometimes unmanifest as creative nature. Krsna's nature is eternal, supreme, and never annihilated. When all in this world is annihilated, that part, where Krsna and the liberated souls dwell, remains as it is. (*B.g*. 8.20)

Krsna's nature is actually always our nature, for we are Krsna's eternal parts and parcels. That nature--Krsna consciousness--is to be revived by the method of sacrifice, especially by the chanting of Krsna's holy names. We may believe in God and even try to prove His existence in our own way like Descartes, but if nonetheless we think and act for sense gratification instead in sacrifice for Krsna, we will surely suffer material miseries. Sense gratification means

that in a practical sense we identify with the body, even though we may argue theoretically that we are spirit soul.