Philosophy as a Way of Life: Interplay of Reason and Faith within Spinoza's *Ethics* and the *Bhagavad Gita*

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the ancient world, philosophy or philo-sophia (the love of wisdom) was a way of life. As Pierre Hadot explains, "philosophy was a mode of existing-inthe-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual's life." Today philosophy takes on numerous definitions; however, I wish specifically to limit this thesis to examining works that make broad gauged attempts to get their audience to conceptually rethink themselves and their world, and on the basis of this rethinking to transform themselves and their world. Philosophies of this sort provide myriad paths that attempt to help an individual in this process of transformation. Two such paths in particular stand out: on the one hand are philosophical texts that pivot around our faculty of reason, and on the other stand philosophical-religious texts that explicitly function around faith. The question is: are these mutually exclusive? It must be conceded that there exists a strong tension between reason and faith. After all, faith in this context is defined as "a firm belief in something for which there is no proof." One would think this is the very antithesis of reason. Thus, the conventional view is that works bent on promoting self-transformation are either philosophical in the strict sense (that is, they function in terms of providing rational arguments for their large scale visions of reality) or philosophical in some very loose sense of this term or, more properly, theological (that is, they function in terms of offering revealed

¹ Hadot, 265

² Merriam Webster Dictionary

metaphysical truths and ask of their adherents for an act of faith). While this dichotomy fits some obvious cases (*The Republic is* clearly different in kind from the *Gospel According to Mark*), that it covers all the relevant cases of philosophy as a way of life is not at all clear.

It is the goal of this thesis to explore the relationship (if any) between reason and faith within the framework of applying philosophy to our lives. To aid in this project it shall draw on two works—Spinoza's *Ethics* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Why these two? Because both these works exemplify the project of philosophy as a way of life, and because they are paradigmatic of the two sorts of approaches just adumbrated: *Ethics* is the epitome of the rationalist conception of philosophy, whereas the *Bhagavad Gita* is generally read from a religious point of view and is commonly conceived as revolving around a notion of faith, as it is the most important text belonging to the Hindu tradition. Thus they provide excellent case studies to explore whether programs intent on providing philosophical systems that aspire to take readers from bondage to liberation can operate entirely in terms of reason, or entirely in terms of faith, or whether some combination of the two is either required or desirable.

Spinoza's philosophy, as Hadot aptly describes it, "teaches man how to transform, radically and concretely, his own being, and how to accede to beatitude". Similarly, the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna serves as the illuminating medium through which man can transcend to a level of freedom and blessedness. Thus, both these works provide us with a new conceptual

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³ Hadot, 271

framework within which to conceive reality, but a framework whose ultimate goal is to guide our actions and to hence help us implement change in our lives.

But what makes these two works especially important for this particular thesis?

Spinoza's *Ethics* presents a theoretical basis of understanding and seeing the world in the service of offering therapeutic advice on how best we can achieve its recommended state of liberation and transformation. What sets this work apart from others is that it attempts to achieve its goal *purely* through reason. However, although such a strong and extreme reliance on reason is admirable, the thesis will expose a fundamental shortcoming in this endeavor. Indeed, it will reveal the implicit role of faith within the supposedly rationalist system of *Ethics* (faith defined as trusting/committing to something without a rational justification for that commitment).

It will do this by first examining the nature and vital function that definitions serve for Spinoza's system to see what they ultimately rest upon. Second, drawing on Michael Della Rocca's recent work it will bring to light the fundamental role of the Principle of Sufficient Reason within *Ethics*; in particular, it will examine the "explicability argument" defense that supposedly rationally justifies this Principle and it will argue that this defense doesn't succeed. By carefully looking at Spinoza's definitions and the implicit yet integral role of the Principle of Sufficient Reason in his system, the presence of faith (although implicit) will become clear. After uncovering the presence of faith, the thesis will inquire into whether or not the presence of faith undermines Spinoza's project, and in this process it discuss the role of theoretical and practical reason in

justifying fundamental life commitments. As the goal of this thesis is ultimately not to uncover something about Spinoza particularly, but about the role of reason and faith in the entire endeavor of philosophy as a way of life, if there is a role for faith in the system that *Ethics* presents, then it is likely to have similar implications in all endeavors that attempt to "transform the whole of an individual's life" by means of rational persuasion.

Although the *Bhagavad Gita* is not traditionally treated as a work in philosophy, as Ithamar Theodor convincingly shows, "the Bhaqayad Gita can make sense as a coherent theological-philosophical treatise".4 After all, much like Plato's *Republic*, the *Gita* is presented to us as a dialogue between two interlocutors hoping ultimately to uncover and change our understanding of the world. The Bhagavad Gita, whose literal translation is "song of God," consists of a dialogue between God (Krishna) and man (Arjuna). Through the course of this dialogue, Krishna hopes to show Arjuna the path to *liberation* or *moksha.*⁵ In this venture, it presents us with a theoretical understanding of the world and universe that is backed up by its specific metaphysics; however, more importantly, it also presents pragmatic solutions aiming to bring about the transformation at the individual worldly level. What distinguishes this particular work for the purpose of this thesis is that it is fundamentally seen as pivoting around faith. By explicitly acknowledging the need for faith, not only does it stand in direct opposition to Spinoza's *Ethics* but it thereby provides an

⁴ Theodor, 24

⁵ *moksha* or liberation refers to the Hindu idea of liberation from the cycle of birth and death. It is the ultimate way of obtaining union with the universe (God).

alternative lens through which to look at systems of faith-based philosophy promising transformation. However, as the thesis will demonstrate, the commonly held view that the *Gita* is a work of faith, is one-sided: reason also plays a fundamental position in it as well.

To show this, the thesis shall first examine the opening dialogue of the *Gita* and attempt to draw out the implicit yet vital role that reason plays in the very foundation upon which the rest of the *Gita* is built. Second, it shall scrutinize the knowledge that Krishna presents Arjuna with regard to liberation, and it will demonstrate that reason plays a deeply important role here as well. Once we are able to recognize that reason plays a part not only in the very foundation upon which Krishna builds his entire worldview but also in the knowledge that Krishna presents, then we will be in a position to make certain general claims regarding the role of reason in faith-based (in at least some) philosophical systems bent on prompting self-transformation.

To accomplish its purpose the thesis has deliberately set up a contrast between a work that portrays itself as being understood solely through reason and a work that seems to explicitly revolve around faith. However, the thesis gradually brings to light how this is a false dichotomy. Instead of being mutually exclusive, both these works revolve around not only reason *or* faith but faith *and* reason. Such a discovery opens up the possibility that intrinsic to many works in practical or transformative philosophy are components of both faith and reason. In these cases, works that help us to radically re envision our world and ourselves and thereby actively affect change in the way we lead our lives at the

practical level require a prudent combination of faith and reason. In addition to showing that this is the case, the thesis also attempts to show why this should be so.

Chapter 2: Does Faith Play a Role in Spinoza's Ethics?

The *Ethics* epitomizes the project of transformative philosophy. To achieve its goal of presenting a method of liberation, it places all its trust in reason and rationality. Emulating Euclid's style, Spinoza writes *Ethics* in the geometric method. Starting with definitions, followed by axioms and propositions, the *Ethics* attempts to unveil the mysteries of the universe through a rigorous logical analysis of the world and us. However, although it might appear that *Ethics* is based solely on reason, I shall bring to light the vital yet implicit role that faith plays in *Ethics*; subsequently, I will examine and analyze the implications of this for the endeavor of philosophy as a way of life.

To help me accomplish this end, I will first scrutinize the essential characteristics of definitions within *Ethics* and attempt to figure out what they are ultimately grounded in. Second, by drawing on Michael Della Rocca's recent work, I will reveal the fundamental role that the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) plays in *Ethics* and then examine the "explicability argument" defense of the PSR. By making a case against Della Rocca's "explicability argument," and with my analysis of Spinoza's definitions in hand, I will bring to light the leap of faith that is inherent in *Ethics*. I will then proceed to examine the consequences of this discovery to determine whether the presence of faith undermines Spinoza's project in *Ethics*. In this inquiry, I will particularly focus on the split between theoretical and practical justifications with regard to commitments that transformative philosophy necessarily demands (in order to change our current

state of existence). Ultimately, the goal of this chapter is not to discover something about Spinoza particularly, but to delve into the role of reason and faith in the realm of philosophy as a way of life. The chapter will thus conclude with an analysis of the nature of the leap of faith that *Ethics* requires and this will help us better understand the relationship among reason, faith and, transformative philosophy.

I. Basis of Spinoza's Definitions

Definitions are not only the fundamental starting point of Spinoza's system, such that without them there would be no propositions or demonstrations of propositions, but they also serve as a dynamic medium that allows *Ethics* to unfold smoothly. Thus, definitions are the crucial basis of Spinoza's system and they provide the logical energy that keeps it developing. The question is, how does Spinoza see these definitions?

Definitions can be either "nominal" or "real". Definitions are nominal when they are purely stipulative, that is, when they assign a meaning to something specific within a particular convention or system. Examples of such definitions are the definitions of technical terms within a particular system. For instance, the definition of a point within Euclid's geometry is a nominal definition. Now, as long as the term defined is used consistently with regard to its designed role, it is a valid stipulative definition within that system. However, this means that nominal definitions can be absolutely arbitrary. On the other hand, a definition may attempt to describe the way a thing "really is," and in

doing so bear a truth-value; such a definition is a *real* definition. For example, a real definition of "dog" will be true only if it accurately captures what a dog really is. Thus, "real" definitions attempt to actually portray things as objective entities that have a reality independent of the definition. Even things that do not actually exist, such as unicorns, have real definitions, i.e. the definition attempts to accurately convey what a unicorn *is*, and what it is is not dependent on the definition.

Which category do the definitions in *Ethics* fall into? When Spinoza defines 'God' or 'Freedom' or any of his other terms, is he trying to present us with what 'God' or 'Freedom' actually truly is, or, rather, does he want us to take his definitions as nominal, and, as such, merely serve a stipulated role for the sake of his greater argument?

On the surface, it might appear as if Spinoza's definitions fall into the nominal category; after all, most of them have the structure "By x, I understand...," and many of them (such as "attribute" and "mode") are highly technical and seem designed only to work within his system. However, upon taking a deeper look, the definitions in *Ethics* do not seem to be simple stipulative definitions that might not necessarily be true, merely in place so that *Ethics* can unfold effortlessly; rather, as Nadler puts it, Spinoza "sees *Ethics* as laying out the truth." The definitions in *Ethics*, as well as the entire work itself, attempt to capture reality the way it actually is through an intense commitment to rationality. By defining 'Freedom', Spinoza is not recommending an arbitrary

⁶ Nadler, 47

⁷ Ibid

meaning of the term; rather, Spinoza believes that this is what freedom actually is, and his definition of it is thus *true*.

If Spinoza's definitions are not arbitrary, then on what grounds should we accept his definitions as real and hence true? On the one hand, it seems as if Spinoza treats a true definition the way he treats a true idea—"He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing" (E2P438).9 For Spinoza, definitions are true and their truth is *rationally self-evident*. In this he does not attend to the possibility that bothered Descartes, namely, that because of the machinations of an evil spirit, that which appears rationally evident to us may not in fact be true. This led Descartes to justify his "clear and distinct ideas" criterion for truth by appealing to the benevolence and veracity of the God who created him with his faculty of thinking. Spinoza does not seem to have any epistemological concern regarding the justification for his definitions.

On the other hand, we might be able to find the basis for his definitions in his deep commitment to the geometric method. Spinoza believed that the principles that were applicable to geometry were also applicable to reality. In geometry, one can only be certain of a real definition if on its basis one is able to construct the figure defined. The relevant point here is that the definition of a figure also serves as the rule for its construction. Put another way, from the construction of a figure we can deductively understand all of its properties.

Applying this to Spinoza's definitions of reality, we only have a true or distinct

⁸ E2P43 is *Ethics,* Part 2, proposition 43.

⁹ Nadler, 48

idea of something provided that "we know its 'proximate cause' and can see how its properties necessarily follow from this cause." Hence, the way one knows whether one has achieved a real definition that is true (that is, that captures the essence of the thing being defined) is to understand its proximate cause in such a way that this cause necessarily produces the thing defined as its effect.

However, proceeding in this way will lead to an infinite regress unless the chain of causes can come to an end with something that has the reason for its existence built into itself. Thus, if "x" is caused by "y", "y" by "z", and so on without any ultimate starting point, then we are stuck in a never-ending chain of causes because no cause (in this chain) is self-caused. However, if the chain of causes comes to an end with a cause that is, as it were, self-explanatory, and can be related to every other explanation as its base, then the regress is avoided and the system of definitions can function as it is supposed to. This is why God—God defined as *causus sui* (cause of itself)—is the basis of Spinoza's whole system, and why in the last analysis all the definitions ultimately rest on the definition of God.

Note that this defense of Spinoza's realist account of definitions only works as long as there are *no* entities for which there is no rational explanation for their being. If the chain of definitions included one that could not be rationally warranted, then the whole system of definition would lose its grounding and it would fall apart. Thus, within Spinoza's system, there is no free-floating entity that is not ultimately connected to the definition of God. If there

¹⁰ Craig, 92

were an entity that was not explicable in terms of the other entities within Spinoza's system, then this would lead to an internal incoherence that would undermine the very project of *Ethics*. To prevent any incoherence, *Ethics* is a tightly knit rational system in which everything is explainable and this explicability rests upon God (as its starting point).

Thus, at the heart of Spinoza's conception of definition is the Principle of Sufficient Reason (hereafter the PSR). (According to the PSR, "everything that exists has a rational explanation. Each fact, under the PSR, can be explained and this explanation is "enough—sufficient—to enable one to see why the fact holds,"¹¹ On the other hand, if there is no such sufficient explanation for a fact, then that fact is a *brute* fact, i.e. a fact that has no grounding in a legitimate explanation.)

If one wants to understand Spinoza's implicit defense of his realist conception of definition we need to explore his use of the PSR. (This is the case even though Spinoza himself never used the term "PSR".) In fact, the defense of the PSR is not only essential for a legitimate defense of Spinoza's realistic account of definitions but it is also required to defend *Ethics* in its entirety.

II. The Debate Surrounding the Principle of Sufficient Reason

Spinoza sees reality as fully explainable: through reason we can grasp and understand why everything is as it is. This is why, according to Michael Della Rocca, we can best understand Spinoza's commitment to intelligibility by

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¹¹ Della Rocca, 4

recognizing his deep commitment to the PSR, a commitment that goes beyond accounting for the realism of his definitions to include the entire enterprise of *Ethics*. Spinoza's *Ethics* stands firmly as an example of this commitment, and we can find explicit evidence of this within its metaphysics.

The strongest evidence of Spinoza's commitment to the PSR can be found in E1P11D2¹²—"For each thing there must be assigned a cause or reason both for its existence and for its nonexistence." Interestingly enough, this very demonstration is used to prove the necessary existence of God (and the existence of God is the necessary basis for Spinoza's definitions). To add to this, Spinoza asserts in E1A2¹⁴ that everything must either be conceived through itself or through another thing. As I noted above, within *Ethics* conceiving of something corresponds to explaining that thing; therefore, in claiming that everything must be conceived through something (E1A2), Spinoza also accepts that everything can be *explained*. Hence, the PSR, or the notion that everything is intelligible, is built into Spinoza's metaphysical system. Indeed, it is clear that the PSR is what *drives* Spinoza's project.

But on what basis should we accept the PSR? After all, even though Spinoza's deep commitment to intelligibility, and thus the PSR, is admirable, if we do not have adequate rational justification for the PSR, then it would seem that by its own lights *Ethics* rests on a precarious foundation and fails in its self-appointed task.

¹² E1P11D2 is *Ethics* Part 1, propostion 11, demonstration 2.

¹³ Della Rocca, 4

¹⁴ E1A2 is *Ethics* Part 1, axiom 2.

Spinoza himself does not provide any explicit justification for it; however, on Spinoza's behalf, Della Rocca proposes what he calls an "explicability argument" in the defense of the PSR. Now, an explicability argument is one where "a certain state of affairs is said not to obtain simply because its obtaining would be inexplicable – a so-called brute fact." Della Rocca draws on one of Leibniz' examples to clarify the way the explicability argument works. He presents the (Archimedean) case of a scale or balance: if we hang equal weights on each side, we infer that the balance will remain still. That is because there is no reason why one side should hang down; if one side were to hang down, it would be inexplicable. Della Roca doesn't claim that this case shows that explicability arguments are in general legitimate (such that then the PSR would also be legitimate because the PSR is simply the dismissal of inexplicability). This is fortunate because in this case one can accept the conclusion by being committed to physics rather than the PSR.

Let us look at more examples to determine the legitimacy of explicability arguments. Consider two objects that qualitatively have the same molecular structure and also identical physical features. Now, if one of these objects is disposed towards dissolving in water, then it would seem right to think that the other object would have the *same* disposition. That is, given their exact similarities, it would seem implausible for there to be any difference in disposition between the two objects, and as a result, we can reject the case where there might be such a difference (where, for example, one is disposed to

¹⁵ Della Rocca, 306

dissolve in water and the other is not). This is another "uncontroversial" use of the PSR; however, like the first example, this conclusion can also be reached independently by invoking *scientific* principles rather than the PSR.

An important point that Della Rocca stresses here is that it is not the explicability argument that forces us to embrace the PSR but it is the rejection of inexplicability in general that does. Thus, at this juncture, after having provided us with these intuitively appealing "uncontroversial" uses of explicability arguments, Della Rocca proposes that we try and see how far we can push this line of reasoning. He wishes to draw our attention to two "controversial" yet intuitive cases.

Della Rocca points out that for a causal reductionist there has to be *something* because of which a causal relation either occurs or doesn't. Thus, in any specific case the questions are, Why are certain events causally related and others not, and what makes those events causal? The point is that denying any deeper explanation with regard to causal relations in certain cases would be to treat some instance of causation as a primitive or brute fact. Della Rocca contends that such brute causation should be seen as undesirable much like brute dispositions (as shown in an earlier cases of the Archimedean weights or the identical molecules). Therefore, the causal reductionist seems to rely on rejecting inexplicability in this case, similar to the rejection of inexplicability in other cases. Moreover, "this rejection of the inexplicability of causation does have considerable intuitive appeal." However, again note that accepting a

¹⁶ Della Rocca, 308

demand for a causal explanation does not (on its own) commit us to the PSR, just as the rejection of inexplicability in this case does not necessitate the rejection of inexplicability in *every* case. But it adds to the idea that explicability is the default case and that we need to provide reasons for accepting inexplicability in any particular case (let alone making it the default).

Having warmed us up with these examples, Della Rocca contends that just as we may (with varying degrees of "controversy") demand an account of what is behind causation, dispositions of molecularly similar objects, and why the balances do not move in the case of the Archimedean example, in a similar fashion it should seem "natural" to demand an account of existence. To put it simply, isn't it clearly legitimate to expect an answer to the question, why is it that some particular thing exists? Just as we demand an account for what causes something, or in virtue of what is a thing causally related, Della Rocca believes that it should be "natural" to demand a similar explanation for the issue of existence. Thus, what explains something as a case of existence or, in virtue of what explanation can we understand a thing as existing? Della Rocca encourages us to use an explicability argument to make the case of existence understandable. Therefore, each thing that has existence should thus be explicable.

Why is the case of applying an explicability argument to existence special? Well, what differentiates existence from the previous examples is that in the case of other examples, accepting the explicability argument did not by itself commit us to the PSR; however, the explicability argument with regard to

existence, i.e. insisting on an explanation for the existence of things, is to assert the PSR itself!¹⁷ Della Rocca clarifies that what exactly the account for existence is, is an issue that does not need to be dealt with here. Rather, the point is that by accepting explicability arguments with regard to less controversial cases, it can seem *intuitively natural* to try and apply it to the case of existence, and in this way to rationally justify the PSR.

Drawing on the apparent pressure to apply the explicability argument to the case of existence, Della Rocca argues that a non-rationalist who wishes to reject the PSR in this case must draw a principled distinction between explicability arguments that he accepts from those that he doesn't. The point is that there needs to be a *rational* basis for accepting certain "uncontroversial" explicability arguments and rejecting other "controversial" ones. To appeal to an unprincipled arbitrary line of distinction is not legitimate in such a case because doing so is to appeal to a *brute* fact, a rationally unsupported claim that contends that "there is no explanation as to why the line between legitimate and illegitimate explicability arguments is to be drawn here; it just is drawn here." But within this context, to appeal to a brute fact is to basically presuppose the falsity of the PSR, and such a move must be seen as illegitimate because it begs the question at issue.

Della Rocca claims that just as in the case of the balance in the

Archimedean case, that of molecular structure and dispositions, and that of
causality more generally, and in many other cases, we are quite comfortable in

¹⁷ Della Rocca, 309

¹⁸ Ibid

invoking an explicability argument for our epistemic judgments, it ought also to be apparent that in general the onus is on those who wish to deny this argument. He believes that it is not clear how we can draw a principled line of distinction between accepting explicability in "uncontroversial" cases and accepting the PSR in its entirety. However, until such a line is found, there is a genuine and natural pressure to accept the PSR because accepting certain cases of explicability and not others would lead to an internally inconsistent and incoherent system. On the other hand, accepting the full-blown PSR results in a position that is completely coherent and consistent.

Although I see this line of argument as promising, there are pertinent objections against it. The examples that Della Rocca uses when he talks about "uncontroversial" cases of the explicability argument fall within the realm of science. In fact, he admits that the conclusions we draw with regard to the Archimedean example and the example of similar molecular dispositions can be reached independently of any general commitment to explicability. A commitment merely to science provides us with the same conclusions. Thus, the two "uncontroversial" examples appear to be uncontroversial because they rest on scientific principles that have been appropriated logically and rationally through the means of science; as a result, and most important for the explicability argument, these cases do not in themselves require or push us toward the more general PSR.

On the other hand, cases where Della Rocca admits that the explicability argument is "controversial" are instances of *metaphysical* inquiry.

Understanding the role of causality, at least with our current state of knowledge, requires inquiry that transcends the realm of the natural sciences. Thus, these "controversial" examples appear to be controversial because there is no indubitably true and justified basis in which to ground them. The point is that metaphysical concepts go well beyond a scientific foundation, and there are many metaphysical claims that are consistent with what science has taught us about our world. The realm of metaphysics, at least right now, transcends the scope of scientific inquiry (we haven't come up with a chemical formulation for existence!).

Della Rocca uses uncontroversial cases of the explicability argument to put a "natural" and "intuitive" pressure on the non-rationalist to accept controversial cases of the explicability argument, and he asserts that the non-rationalist can't provide what he must to warrant his position, namely, a principled distinction between what is explicable from what is not. But his examples unwittingly provide just such a line, namely, one between uncontested scientific cases such as the Archimedean example and the example of similar molecular dispositions, on the one hand, and cases that are beyond the scope of scientific inquiry, on the other hand. It might be useful for us to pursue inquiry beyond the scientific realm by using methods we inherit from science; however, until we can sufficiently ground ideas in metaphysics in an indubitably rational base (the way science does), these cases will continue to be controversial with good reason. Furthermore, by deflecting the onus of truth on the opponents of the PSR, Della Rocca does not show us that PSR must in fact hold; rather he

unwittingly shows that it *is* a controversial principle to buy into. If it weren't, there would be no pressure to push the responsibility of disproving the PSR onto its opponents.

The line of reasoning that I have advanced against Della Rocca attempts not to disprove the PSR but to bring to light its controversial characteristics. I have presented a principled line that seems to be free from inconsistencies; however, more importantly, this counter-argument serves as a basis to directly engage and bring to the surface discrepancies in Della Rocca's argument.

Ultimately, the PSR continues to be a contentious and disputable principle. This issue is a hotly debated topic and there does not seem to be any reconciliation with regard to its truth-value in the near future.

III. The Leap of Faith within *Ethics*

With regard to Spinoza, where does this leave us? Having determined that the PSR is far from an undisputed principle, we realize that there is no rationally compelling reason to believe or accept it. Yet, the PSR is ingrained within *Ethics* and Spinoza's entire system is committed deeply to the PSR. Without the PSR, the definitions and the metaphysics of *Ethics* would fall apart. But without rational justification, on what basis does Spinoza commit himself to such a controversial principle? Having defined faith as a commitment without adequate rational justification, we can conclude that at the fundamental core of Spinoza's project there is a leap of *faith*. Since *Ethics* appears to depend on a leap of faith

(with regard to commitment to the PSR), does this undermine the entire project of that masterwork?

In a *theoretical* sense, yes, it is undermined. It becomes a victim of the thing it was trying to fight against. It aimed at providing a rationally intelligible system that does not require anything else other than rationality for it to function. However, if it requires faith/commitment (as I have shown) to the PSR, which is the driving force of *Ethics*, then an unjustified belief in rationality seems to form the very foundation of the whole project. The point is that without any rational justification for the belief in rationality itself, we are left with a project that *does* require us to take a leap of faith (before we start with respect to the PSR). Spinoza would scorn such a suggestion, but faith does seem to form an integral part of *Ethics*.

On the other hand, even if Spinoza's entire system is based on the PSR and this is without adequate theoretical justification, *Ethics* is first and foremost a work of *practical* philosophy. The *Ethics* aims to help us change our lives and move us away from a state of "bondage" towards "liberation". Reading Spinoza's philosophy as a method for a way of living, we realize that it attempts to empower us in the face of our own servitude in an otherwise inexplicable world of events.

Now, for philosophy to be a way of life, it must provide us with an explanation of our situation and then proceed to prescribe a path that will help us *improve* our current scenario. Within this framework, the gap between philosophical theory and philosophically *living* life is bridged. In a sense, we are

constantly required to practice and apply the wisdom that we might gain from philosophical inquiry to better our lives. An ideal example to further elucidate my point is the Stoic tradition. The Stoics did not treat philosophy as an abstract discipline but used it to gain an understanding of the world around them and then applied these learnt principles to their daily lives. By distinguishing between what was within their control from that which wasn't, the Stoics (Epictetus in particular) attempted to train themselves to maintain a calm countenance against external events. Thus, within the Stoic framework there are certain philosophical ideas and principles that are agreed upon with regard to the world (the distinction between what is in my control and what is not, the idea of externals, etc.). However, these ideas are not just kept in the abstract realm but help to lay out the foundation for the way we deal with life on a daily basis. The point is that theory and practice come together and we see that theory is applied *practically* to our real world experiences, and that this application is the point of Stoic philosophy.

From this perspective of philosophy as a way of life, the PSR is vital to the project of effecting action that can lead to change: if there weren't reasons for our sufferings or for the possibility that by changes in our life we could address these sufferings, there would be no basis for undertaking any action whatsoever. Thus, even if the PSR is theoretically unjustifiable, it is a practical necessity, and the fact that it is provides a rational basis for believing in it. In short, though there isn't a theoretically rational reason for accepting the PSR, there is a practically rational basis for doing so.

In the specific case of *Ethics*, a commitment to the PSR, although theoretically unjustified, provides us the basis on which to begin the process of changing the way we live. As opposed to remaining inactive in the face of events—which is what would result if we give up the PSR—belief in the PSR gives us the basis to develop a particular understanding of our issues (as conceived by the Spinozistic system) and then provides a path of action to transform those issues. So while the failure to provide a theoretically rationally compelling case for PSR is devastating for *Ethics*, this is compensated by the practically rational basis it offers because it is ultimately a philosophical system bent on transforming our way of life—it is a work in practical philosophy, and the practically rational justification it provides for the PSR is arguably enough for the work to do its job.

One might summarize this by saying that accepting the PSR is not like taking a *blind* leap of faith; rather, our act of commitment to the PSR is *practically* rational. This is because we require such a commitment to begin applying philosophy at the level of practical action. The PSR empowers an agent and allows an agent to be active in the face of otherwise unexplainable events. Thus, from a practical point of view, there is reason to believe and accept the PSR as it empowers an agent to engage in practical action.

Chapter 3: Role of Reason in the Bhagavad Gita

In contrast to *Ethics*, the *Bhagavad Gita* presents us with a path to liberation that explicitly acknowledges the vital role of faith. Krishna explains that it is only "The faithful who aspires for it (liberation) and who has mastered his senses attain this knowledge" while "he who is without faith, ignorant and riddled with doubt" fails. Conventionally seen more as a religious work than a philosophical work, the *Gita* is considered to pivot around a conception of faith; however, I shall shed light on the crucial role that reason plays in it alongside faith.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is clearly a work in transformative theology, a work that is meant to help an agent attain a state of liberation. Thus, if we can show the crucial role reason plays in a work such as this, and accurately map out the relationship between faith and reason within it, then we will be in a position to better understand the interplay of reason and faith as applied broadly to works intent on effecting a transformation in their readers.

Keeping this goal in mind, I will first examine the implicit yet necessary role that reason plays in the foundational dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna. This dialogue is an essential part of the *Gita* as it serves as the groundwork upon which Krishna can present Arjuna with the path to liberation promised in the *Gita*. Second, I shall scrutinize the knowledge that Krishna presents with regard

¹⁹ Theodor, 53

²⁰ Ibid

to liberation and subsequently attempt to understand the role of reason (if any) and the nature of the explicit leap of faith that Krishna ultimately asks Arjuna to take. Finally, I will make certain general claims about the relationship among reason, faith, and practical action based on what I have shown about the *Gita*.

I. Reason in the Gita's Opening Dialogue

The Gita opens with Arjuna being submerged in an ethical and spiritual crisis. On the one hand, Arjuna's commitment to dharma²¹ requires him to go to battle and carry out his duty as a warrior; however, on the other hand, this battle is no ordinary one. It involves "killing his family members, confronting his teachers in battle, destroying the dynasty, acting against dharma and performing grave sins, deeds which may not only throw the world into chaos, but also inflict upon him suffering in future lives."22 Arjuna is caught in the middle being pulled in two opposite directions. In response to this dilemma, Arjuna proceeds to makes five crucial arguments against fighting. First, by employing a simple utilitarian model.²³ Ariuna contends that even if he were to win the battle, he would not gain from it but would lose because he would not have family members with whom to enjoy his victory (to win he would have to slay the other army that is composed of his teachers, family, and relatives). Second, from a *dharmic* utilitarian standpoint, he would lose in the larger scheme of things because in this battle he would be going against the laws of dharma and would

²¹ "Dharma" can be translated as "religion, duty, morality, law and order."

²² Theodor, 27

²³ Utilitarian in terms of its basic meaning and not in terms of Mill's *Utilitarianism*

thus suffer in his subsequent life. Third, this battle would lead to a weakening of *dharma* and this would in turn "cause the deterioration of the social order through class miscegenation, and subsequently the world would be thrown into chaos and suffering."²⁴ Finally, Arjuna believes that he has two options to choose from. He can either actively participate in the world and its affairs or he can relinquish this participation and choose the path of solitary spiritual introspection. Since the spiritual path is superior to the worldly one, he reasons that it would be wiser for him to remove himself from worldly affairs altogether.

On the basis of these arguments Arjuna provisionally concludes that he should retire from worldly engagement altogether, but then he rejects this position and reiterates the uncertainties that plague him. Arjuna tells Krishna that, on the one hand, "it would be better to live in this world on alms, a beggar, and not slay these noble men, my gurus, than to slay these covetous gurus and enjoy worldly pleasures bought by their blood,"25 but on the other hand, Arjuna believes that he will lament the deaths of his family and his gurus, be sorrowful and in a confused and unhappy state if he goes to war. Thus, Arjuna does not know what duty *dharma* dictates in this situation. He is unsure as to what the proper course of action to take is.

Symbolic of Man, Arjuna is presented as a confused being that is at an ethical crossroad. What path should he take? At this crucial juncture, Lord Krishna steps in and begins his dialogue with Arjuna. This dialogue between the despondent Arjuna and the divine Krishna comprises the entire *Bhagavad Gita*.

²⁴ Theodor, 29

²⁵ Ibid

By critically engaging Arjuna and his arguments, in a format that is much like a Platonic dialectic, Krishna (the reincarnation of God) reveals the knowledge of the *Gita*.

Krishna begins by confronting Arjuna's arguments and exposing the faulty assumptions on which they rest. His arguments come from two different ethical positions. We can categorize them as 'first tier' and 'second tier'²⁶ arguments. At first, Krishna uses a 'second tier' approach to argue against Arjuna. He points out to Arjuna that what he (Arjuna) considers to be wise is actually not wise, as it is not rooted in wisdom. According to Krishna, the wise do not lament over the living or the dead. From the outset, we see Krishna undermining Arjuna's argument regarding the death of his relatives. But why shouldn't we lament over the living or the dead? The reasoning that Krishna provides is ontological and is based in the idea that the soul is eternal and "as childhood, youth and old age befall the soul within this body, so it comes to acquire another body."27 Furthermore, the wise realize that things such as "heat, cold, happiness and distress" are produced by "sensual perception alone" and are thus impermanent and come and go. Therefore, these temporary and impermanent sensations do not perturb the wise; rather they remain "even tempered in both happiness and distress."28 Krishna pushes on in this 'second tier' mode, implicitly contrasting the nature of the soul with that of the body to

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²⁶ This is the way Theodor classifies Krishna's arguments—'First tier' arguments represent Krishna's knowledge of societal norms and rules in this world and 'second tier' arguments represent Krishna's complete understanding of the metaphysics of the universe by virtue of him being the reincarnation of God.

²⁷ Theodor, 30

²⁸ Theodor, 30

show Arjuna that he must never lament or mourn anyone's death because "the soul is eternal and primeval, it is not subjected to birth or death, it changes bodies just as one changes garments," 29 while the body is mortal and transient by nature.

Before proceeding any further, allow me to make some important clarifications. We quickly realize that the only way Arjuna can be convinced of accepting Krishna's advice is if Krishna shows Arjuna that he (Krishna) *knows* and *understands* the issues that Arjuna is struggling with and can present Arjuna with the right advice to overcome his ethical dilemma. Although we do not directly see rational argument playing a role here, implicitly, by carefully refuting Arjuna's claims, Krishna *is* appealing to Arjuna's rationality in the way he connects the ontological facts he adduces with the ethical conclusions he draws from these facts, and in the way he connects these ethical conclusions to the specific dilemma faced by Arjuna. But the role of rationality goes much further than this. In fact, seeing that Arjuna has a faculty of reason but is still limited by an inadequate cognition of the world, Krishna employs two levels of reasoning to rebut Arjuna's arguments. As of now, we have only seen Krishna employ a 'second tier' approach. Let us proceed and see his 'first tier' use.

After his use of 'second tier' arguments, Krishna moves to a 'first tier' mode in which he shows Arjuna that even from his (Arjuna's) own narrow standpoint his arguments are faulty. We see Krishna employing three major arguments to prove his point. First, from a simple utilitarian point of view, if

²⁹ Theodor, 32

Arjuna does not fight, he will be looked upon as a coward by generals and will accrue dishonor. Now since honor is preferable to dishonor, it would be advisable to fight. (It is important to note that for a warrior honor was held to be the most important value and thus one that takes precedence over other values.) Second, it is beneficial for Arjuna to fight because he wins either way: according to the principles of *dharma*, warriors that die fighting a *dharmic* war go to heaven (so if he is slain, he will go to heaven), but if he does not die fighting and his side wins, he will gain the earthly realm that he was fighting for. This argument can be seen as employing a kind of "dharmic utilitarianism" to convince Arjuna to fight. Finally, Krishna believes that "Arjuna must follow his duty for its own sake, adhere to his dharmic duty regardless of calculations of a utilitarian nature and fight for the sake of fighting."³⁰

The use of 'first tier' arguments is crucial to Krishna's project of reasoning (on equal footing) with Arjuna. By having broken down Arjuna's arguments, Krishna sets himself up to provide Arjuna with an account of his (Krishna's) world-view. In a simpler sense, we see Krishna preparing Arjuna to be in a position where he can accept what Krishna has to offer. The point to be stressed here is that without an appeal to Arjuna's rationality, Krishna would be presenting Arjuna with advice that would be devoid of any rational grounding. If Krishna merely exposited and expected Arjuna to follow him, then Arjuna's acceptance of Krishna's prescribed path of action could only be justified on the basis of a blind leap of faith. However, through the course of this dialogue it

³⁰ Theodor, 33

becomes clear that Krishna does not expect Arjuna to accept what he has to say without an adequate and reasonable foundation. In fact, by patiently arguing with Arjuna on multiple levels, one can make the claim that Krishna values Arjuna's faculty of reason and hopes to help Arjuna not by forcing him to blindly accept something but by persuading Arjuna to see reason in the advice he has to offer.

But this introduces another question: is what Krishna has to offer itself a matter of reason?

II. Reason and the Path to *Moksha*

Krishna clearly expresses to Arjuna that the ideal to aspire to is *liberation* (moksha). If we are to accept this ideal as our end goal, then we must examine the path that will help us attain this state of liberation. In the previous section, many of Krishna's 'second tier' arguments rested on an ontological base, and his 'first tier' arguments are broadly utilitarian in character; however, with regard to figuring out a way to achieve liberation, Krishna's discourse takes on a deontological edge. In this regard, the essential question revolves around how one should act in order to reach a state of freedom.

Krishna begins to answer this question by drawing a dichotomy between two types of people. On the one hand, there are people who strive to attain *enlightenment*, and on the other hand, there are people who aim solely at worldly pleasures. The latter are full of desires and are attached to "pleasure and power (and) thus have their thoughts and insight stolen away; therefore, the

resolute determination and enlightenment to be found in the state of *samadhi*³¹, do not come to them."³² In stark contrast to these people, Krishna emphatically urges Arjuna to rise above such worldly desires and attachments. Here Krishna presents Arjuna with one of the *Gita's* best known decrees—"Your sole entitlement is to perform *dharmic* activity, not ever to possess its fruits; never shall the fruit of an action motivate your deed and never cleave to inaction. O Dhananjaya, perform activities while you are fixed in *yoga* (enlightened action); relinquishing attachment, be equally accepting of both success and failure, for this equanimity is called *yoga*."³³ Thus, we see Krishna urging Arjuna to see through the delusion of using earthly desires as a means of motivating action; rather, all action should be motivated by the ideal of enlightenment.

Intrigued by this concept of enlightenment, Arjuna begins to question Krishna about it. Krishna explains that one who attains a state of steady enlightenment is one who is "not agitated despite all kinds of distress, whose aspiration for happiness is gone, and who is devoid of passion, fear and anger."³⁴ Thus, we see Krishna describing the enlightened being as one who is absolutely indifferent to the external world; however, this person experiences an inner satisfaction marked by a vision of the supreme.

For one to be in this ideal state, one must restrain and have complete control over one's senses. Delving into human psychology, Krishna explains that "Although the wise may strive to control his mind, the turbulent senses

³¹ Samadhi translates into "release or moksha"

³² Theodor, 34

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Theodor, 37

nevertheless forcibly carry it away."³⁵ Indeed, the main impediments in the path to enlightenment are the senses. Krishna elaborates on this and explains that from the contemplation of the objects of the senses, an attachment to them is born. In turn, desire arises from this attachment; desire then gives birth to anger. From anger, delusions are formed within the mind. Ultimately, delusion obfuscates the mind and leads to a loss of *intelligence*—in this way this chain reaction takes individuals away from the ideal of enlightenment. Therefore, "The mind that follows the wandering senses carries away the intelligence just as a wind carries away a boat on the sea."³⁶ This state of sensory attachment and unenlightenment is a turbulent one. In this turbulent setting, Krishna maintains that one cannot be happy because one is not at peace.

We come to realize that Krishna's characterization of the human mind and his reflection on the senses has parallels to Spinoza and to the Stoics. To attain the state of enlightenment or to even attain a state of peace, it seems imperative that one should be able to control one's senses. What Krishna seems to mean by this idea of sensory control is that although one might not have control over external stimuli and influence, one can control one's reactions to externals. Thus, Krishna seems to be pushing the Stoic idea of mastering and developing control over one's mind's reactions to sensory stimuli. This is of vital importance to an agent as it prevents the agent from being passive in the face of events and also prevents the agent's mind from being carried away from the ideal of peace or liberation. From a rational standpoint, we can see that Krishna's

35 Theodor, 38

³⁶ Ibid

reasoning here is of utmost importance. Even if we are to keep the metaphysical questions on hold, it appears that Krishna presents Arjuna with a therapeutic angle with regard to sensory control—namely the attainment of a state of peace. To emphasize explicitly, in this particular discourse Krishna presents Arjuna with a rationally grounded assessment of the nature of the human mind and its relationship with the senses. We do not see Krishna merely telling Arjuna that mastery of one's senses is crucial; rather, Krishna reasonably explains to Arjuna why such mastery is necessary. Thus, we begin to realize that the role that reason plays here is much more explicit than one might expect. If Krishna did not value reason and argument, then he would not be engaging Arjuna in this way. But, the very fact that Krishna presents Arjuna with a carefully reasoned out theory points towards the essential role of reason in this discourse.

At this critical juncture, Arjuna poses a very pertinent question. He asks Krishna why, if enlightenment is the ideal to be strived towards, should he engage in battle (as explained in section I)? The point is that Arjuna first encountered Krishna and listened to him because he was confused with regard to what he should do—should he fight or should he focus on attaining liberation?—and he rightfully expects Krishna to address this specific confusion. To this Krishna explicitly responds and explains that "in this world there are two paths; for those who uphold reasoning, it is the path of *jnana* or intellectual *yoga*, whereas for those who uphold action, the path of *karma yoga*, or *yoga* of activity exists."³⁷ In a pluralistic and tolerant spirit, we see Krishna pointing out two

³⁷ Theodor, 41; There is a third path—The Path of Devotion or *Bhakti yoga*

methods of attaining liberation. Underlying Arjuna's question is the assumption that *dharma* or active ethical engagement in worldly affairs is mutually exclusive from the attainment of *moksha* or liberation. Indeed, Arjuna saw the path of *moksha* to be one that rests on the renunciation of the world in favor for inner contemplation. From Krishna's reply, we come to realize that this is not the case. Rather, Krishna does not see the categories of action and enlightenment, or *dharma* and *moksha*, as being separate. He sees both of these as *yogic* paths that can ultimately lead to liberation.

However, Krishna does make a distinction between the two paths, and although the path of knowledge is commendable, it is much harder to follow conscientiously; hence, the path of action is preferable. He explains that based on the nature of our material bodies, we are at all times helplessly driven towards action. We have to eat, sleep, and perform bodily functions. Therefore, it is better to act and operate in *karma yoga*, and thereby convert our state of constant action into a *yogic* practice, rather than outwardly practice asceticism in order to contemplate the divine/the Truth, while at the same time be forced to endure sensory disturbances by virtue of our material nature. The point that Krishna is making is pivotal—Sure, if one can perfect the practice of *jnana yoga*, he or she should go ahead and take that path; however, with regard to most people the path of yogic action is preferable as it presents an easier journey towards moksha. Thus, in regard to Arjuna, Krishna's answer is that he (Arjuna) must engage in the war as it is part of his *dharmic* duty, but for this action to be a *yogic* practice he must not perform this duty "out of a desire to reap the fruits of his

deeds, but as a way to engage his body in activity under the injunctions of dharma, and with the aid of his mind he controls his senses and organs of action."38

It becomes clear from all this that reason has a crucial role to play even in the advice that Krishna offers to Arjuna. Specifically, Krishna presents a rationally practical reason as to why the path of action is preferable to the path of knowledge as a means to liberation.

III. Leap of Faith in the Gita

Having brought out the distinct role of reason both in the preamble to the core teachings in the Gita (in which Krishna provides reasons to Arjuna as to why he should attend to Krishna's words), as well as in its very core teachings, what can we say about faith within this work? At the very outset, we encounter faith from two different perspectives. From one angle, everything that Krishna talks to Arjuna about while speaking in his 'second tier' mode of elaboration requires an act of faith on Arjuna's part. Krishna does not present Arjuna with any concrete or rationally derived evidence regarding the metaphysical doctrines that he speaks about. For example, the theory of *karma* is not justified in any way. From this perspective, we are in no position to question Krishna regarding the truth-value of the metaphysical world that he proposes. Rather, it is up to us whether or not we do accept what Krishna has to say, and in this way it is then an act of faith on our part if we do.

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³⁸ Theodor, 43

On the other hand, if we are to keep the metaphysical questions aside for a moment, then we come to see that Krishna is presenting Arjuna with a solution to the lack of clarity and knowledge that is so deeply troubling him. Krishna is presenting Arjuna with a guided path, a path that is meant to lead him to a state of liberation. While expounding on this path, we encounter Krishna presenting rationally compelling arguments regarding sensory control as a starting step (towards liberation). Followed by this, Krishna exposes the differing paths of *yoga* that one can take towards the goal of *moksha*. The path one takes (whether of knowledge or action) is dependent on the agent and what suits the agent's disposition best. With the case of Arjuna, as earlier explained, the path of action is probably the better path for him to take. Either way, the correct implementation of the *yogic* practice into life is what will help take us to a state of enlightenment and liberation. So, where does faith fit in here? In answering this crucial question, let us examine the two most essential objections that Arjuna brings up against this entire system of *yoga* as propounded by Krishna.

After having heard Krishna's discourse on the discipline of *yoga* (including its metaphysical consequences), Arjuna contends that the very foundation that *yoga* rests on is *impractical*. Arjuna states, "This system of *yoga* and equanimity you have just propounded, seems not founded on firm ground, because the mind is so capricious. For the mind is restless, impetuous, mighty and unyielding, O Krishna, I think restraining it would be as difficult as restraining the blowing wind." Thus we see Arjuna presenting a counter

³⁹ Theodor, 66

argument to the very first premise on which Krishna's path to liberation rests—control over the mind and the senses. Since such control is very difficult to actually put into practice because of the nature of the mind, Arjuna believes that the entire project of liberation through *yoga* is futile. In response, Krishna accepts that the path of yoga is riddled with challenges and is no doubt extremely hard; however, Krishna reiterates that through constant practice restraint, and ultimately control, are possible.

Although not completely satisfied, Arjuna brings up his second objection. He questions Krishna metaphysically and asks him about the person who commits to the path of yoga faithfully but who, because of the weakness of his or her mind, is not able fully realize and attain the state of liberation. Wouldn't this person lose both this world and the promised freedom that enlightenment guarantees? To this Krishna replies "O my friend, one who does good (yoga) will never reach an evil destination. Having attained the worlds of the righteous and dwelled therein for endless years, he who has deviated from the path of *yoga* is reborn in the home of pure and righteous people, or in a prosperous aristocratic family. Or else, he is born into a clan of enlightened *yogis*."40 Thus, we see Krishna talking from his 'second tier' mode of knowledge and reassuring Arjuna that no matter what ends up happening, the path of yoga, even if not realized in this life (due to lack of proper mental restraint or whatever other reason), can always be resumed and realized in the next. In fact, the chances and possibilities to achieve the end goal of enlightenment are more in subsequent rebirths

⁴⁰ Ibid

because of the nature of the family that one might be born into. Ultimately, to rid Arjuna of his doubts, Krishna emphatically states—"O Arjuna, be a *yogi*! And of all *yogis*, he whose inner self is absorbed in me, and who worships me with faith and love, him I deem to be the best of all *yogis*."⁴¹ Thus, Krishna explicitly asks Arjuna to cast aside all doubts and to devote himself with faith to the path of *yoga*. Furthermore, it is only through this act of faith that one can ultimately achieve the liberation offered by Krishna.

IV. Faith, Reason and Transformation

Having explicitly delved into the role that reason and faith play in the *Gita*, we can continue with our project of unearthing and explaining the link between reason and faith in projects whose goal is self-transformation and whose goal is, therefore, to stimulate practical activity. Within the *Gita*, Arjuna is in a despondent and confused state with regard to what his duty in this world is. Krishna steps in and begins to argue with Arjuna, addressing the issues that perplex him. Here, reason and argument play an integral role in convincing Arjuna to listen to Krishna. This first step is extremely important as it prepares Arjuna to receive the wisdom of God (Krishna). At the same time, the metaphysical concepts that Krishna does engage Arjuna with in the opening section of the *Gita* are concepts that Arjuna already subscribes to (they are not alien to him even though he lacks proper understanding of them). Thus, here

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⁴¹ Theodor, 67

Arjuna is not required to take a leap of faith, but readers who are not already believers in Krishna's metaphysics are required to take such a leap.

As Krishna progresses and expounds on the teachings of the *Gita*, we are presented with a theory of liberation that is grounded in a reasonable and practical base. Krishna presents a theory of the mind and different methods of restraining it that echo the sentiments of Spinoza and the Stoics. The idea of detached action, inner renunciation of attachment, and equanimity are ideas that have a significant pragmatic grounding. There are compelling rational reasons as to why we should strive towards accomplishing such states. At the same time, achieving these states is difficult and requires us to restrain our minds (a difficult task, as pointed out by Arjuna). Furthermore, this is but a step along the path of liberation as espoused by Krishna. It seems that to carry on further, as Krishna mentions, one must devote oneself (to Krishna/God) and continue the *yogic* practice with *faith*. Thus, reason alone is not sufficient without the anchor of faith to actually realize the enlightenment and liberation that Krishna propagates.

If we are to commit ourselves with faith to the end of enlightenment, then what is the nature of this act of faith? Is it irrational and uninformed? Is it merely blind fanaticism? I am compelled to argue that the leap of faith that Krishna asks Arjuna to take is rationally informed and is grounded in pragmatism. After all, what sorts of people revert to systems of philosophy that attempt to transform their existence? People who are seeking a transformation! As Krishna puts it—
"Four kinds of pious men worship me, O Arjuna: the distressed, the seeker of

knowledge, the seeker of wealth and the wise."42 The point here is that people who are unhappy with the status quo (for whatever reason) come to texts such as the Gita in search for a way to effect change in their lives. This is the starting point for transformative philosophy. Thus, we saw Arjuna in a state of distress asking Krishna for guidance. In response, as opposed to asking us to do something irrational (such as to jump into a well or to give up all our material needs), Krishna patiently prescribes the numerous paths of yoga that we can take to liberate ourselves. If the paths prescribed appeal to our rationality, then we must begin to apply the prescribed knowledge into our lives. For this to happen and for us to remain steadfast along our path to transformation, we need a coming together of faith and reason. Thus, Krishna explicitly mentions how important faith is with regard to ultimately achieving *moksha*; however, at the same time, reason is vital to inform us about the reasons for undertaking the transformative journey that he recommends, as well as the various dimensions of this path itself, to clearly distinguish what he demands from us from blind fanaticism.

To conclude, I have brought to the surface the often over looked place of reason within the *Gita*. Reason often times serves a navigational purpose of steering one away from systems of philosophy that are akin to and foster blind fanaticism. But the Gita shows that, at least in its case, for us to truly transform our lives and to achieve a state of wakefulness and enlightenment, we need both reason and faith to come together. It is only through this combination that we

⁴² Theodor, 71

can actually begin to practically transform our existence in a way that isn't blind and foolhardy.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Spinoza's *Ethics* and the *Bhagavad Gita* have provided us with an insight into systems of philosophy that aim at helping individuals transform their lives. For this project of transformation, Spinoza attempted to rely solely on reason. However, through careful analysis I brought to light the inherent leap of faith that one must take for Spinoza's project to function. On the other hand, we came to realize by carefully scrutiny that the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is quintessentially a work of religious faith, does not rely wholly on faith. Rather, reason plays a fundamental role within the *Gita* and this has an impact on the leap of faith that we are explicitly asked to take. Thus, by drawing on these two books, I have attempted to point out that there exists a very strong relationship between reason and faith; at least for these paradigm instances of transformative philosophy to be applied at a practical level of action, reason and faith are both required, and they both must work in tandem.

From my analysis of Spinoza's *Ethics* specifically with regard to the role of faith in the acceptance of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), a dichotomy between theoretical and practical justification for such a move arises. Before revisiting this dichotomy, allow me to recapitulate briefly the PSR. The Principle of Sufficient Reason, or, the notion that everything is intelligible through rationally justifiable means, is the driving force of *Ethics*, and is intrinsic to Spinoza's metaphysics; however, Spinoza provides no adequate theoretically rational justification for the PSR; upon reflection, this should prove not to be

surprising, because the Principle is such that it cannot be grounded in rational argument without presupposing itself. Thus, the leap of faith that one is required to take with regard to the PSR is not theoretically groundable in reason, as *Ethics* would demand. But does this mean that it has no rational basis whatsoever? No—we do still have reason to accept the PSR on rationally warranted *practical* grounds. But why is this so? *Ethics* is a work in transformative philosophy and as such it presents us with a specific path to liberation. In this enterprise, Spinoza attempts to empower us by presenting rationally reasoned out theories regarding human nature, our senses, desires, and passions, and to do so by setting them within a broader metaphysical picture of the universe as a whole. By assimilating and incorporating these ideas into our daily existence, Spinoza hopes that we will be able to realize that the way we conventionally think of ourselves is woefully misguided, that we have to think of ourselves in radically new terms, and that on the basis of this rethinking we can revolutionize our existence and free ourselves from a state of bondage. But this means that the only way to confirm or deny whether Spinoza's theories work is by actually putting them into action in our lives and then assessing the therapeutic benefits promised. Such an empirical test provides us with a rational basis upon which we can assess the practical results of Spinoza's theory of liberation. But this shows that there is a practically rational basis for acting on the propositions of Ethics even if they cannot be rationally warranted theoretically.

But this isn't the only basis for asserting that there is a practical reason for belief in the PSR and, beyond it, in *Ethics* as a whole. There is the more

Kantian idea that even if we don't have theoretical justification for a belief in the PSR we have a practical reason for doing so: without it we would have no basis whatsoever to ground our action, and we would be left helpless in the face of untoward events. Without the PSR there would be no consistent way to guide or motivate our action. We would be like a rudderless boat being tossed about by waves in a stormy sea. Thus, instead of being in a position where we throw our hands up and concede a nihilistic lack of agency, we realize that in our acceptance of the PSR we find the means to empower and motivate an active sense of agency in the face of incidents that come our way. This approach of empowerment of the agent lines up with the very project of transformation that Spinoza and the *Bhagavad Gita* emphatically push for. Hence, from the perspective of pragmatically affecting change in our existence, it is logical to accept the PSR and begin the process of metamorphosis.

Thus, although it is true that at the bottom of Spinoza's system there exists a theoretical leap of faith, this leap of faith is not blind or irrational but is rationally grounded on a practical basis. For both reasons of assessing the worth of Spinoza's new conceptual framework and its attendant ethics, and for needing the PSR in order to accept any practically oriented philosophy, we can conclude that it makes practical sense to accept the leap of faith that the PSR requires us to take.

A similar situation, in which reason and faith require and supplement each other, can be found in the *Bhagavad Gita*. By working our way through the opening dialogue of the *Gita*, we come to see that the knowledge that Krishna

presents Arjuna with in regard to liberation, and the explicit leap of faith that Krishna asks Arjuna to take, is not the sole motivating force: reason concurrently plays an integral part in the this dialogue as well. With regard to its opening, the back and forth between Krishna and Arjuna serves as the very foundation upon which Krishna can build and present Arjuna with his theory of *moksha*. At this basic level, I have pointed out and stressed the fundamental role that reason plays in this dialogue. Instead of merely stating his theory, Krishna first works towards convincing Arjuna that he (Krishna) is the right person to enlighten him. Krishna does not do this by revealing to Arjuna that he is an incarnation of God; rather, he does it by arguing with Arjuna from two different modes. The 'second tier' mode that Krishna first employs signifies his adequate and complete knowledge of the metaphysics of the universe. Krishna uses this elevated position to show Arjuna that his (Arjuna's) understanding of ontology is inadequate and fallacious. Since this is not the case with Krishna's understanding, it makes sense for Arjuna to accept that Krishna has a better understanding of the ontological world. On the other hand, Krishna's use of 'first tier' arguments engage Arjuna directly and are used by Krishna to show Arjuna that even with regard to worldly affairs and their functioning (putting metaphysics aside), Krishna better understands the world. Thus, this two-tier approach is further indicative of the value that Krishna places on the process of reasoning. After all, why would Krishna go through the trouble of reasoning with Arjuna if he didn't value reason? Furthermore, after having won over Arjuna's trust, Krishna proceeds to present his theory of liberation that has its starting

point in sensory control. Once again, Krishna does not merely state that sensory control is a prerequisite to progress towards liberation but actually presents a theory of the nature of the human mind and logically moves through arguments that eventually lead to the conclusion that such control is necessary to attain peace and enlightenment.

Subsequently, while delineating the path of action from the path of knowledge, Krishna once again relies on rationally grounded insight to inform Arjuna that the path of action is the preferable path to take.

Ultimately, of course, Krishna does acknowledge that for one to completely realize his theory of enlightenment, one will have to explicitly take a leap of faith and put theory into action. However, it is important to stress that this explicit leap of faith is *informed by reason*. Since Arjuna has been adequately convinced by the arguments that Krishna has presented up to this point, it seems pertinent for Arjuna to follow Krishna's advice and actually implement changes into his worldview. However, if Krishna had merely asserted and stated the changes that Arjuna should make without any recourse to rationally grounding his statements, then it would be quite right for Arjuna to be hesitant in taking a leap of faith with regard to Krishna's advice. In fact, if Arjuna were to simply accept what Krishna had to say without any opposition, then it would be valid to argue that Arjuna is blindly accepting Krishna's advice purely on faith. However, Krishna does not expect Arjuna to jump on board with his theory of liberation on the basis of faith alone; rather, through reason and argument Krishna brings Arjuna to a point where Arjuna's acceptance of the leap of faith becomes

rationally warranted. Thus, it is this process of reasoning that allows us to make the distinction between a blind leap of faith (or to put it simply, blind fanaticism) and a rationally pragmatic leap of faith. Of course, in the *Gita* Arjuna follows the path of the latter.

By bringing the conclusions drawn from these texts together we become equipped to entertain certain general claims regarding the enterprise of transformative philosophy. It seems that the implementation of philosophy at the level of our everyday existence (that is, for practical action with regard to philosophy), there needs to be a judicious combination of both reason and faith. The *Ethics* unwittingly shows us through its failure at the theoretical level to provide a theory of transformation based entirely on rationally warranted foundations, for its failure to explicitly acknowledge that faith is important, and for its failure to it provide a practically rational foundation for its approach and recommended way of being. At the same time, the *Gita* appears to show that we need (practical not theoretical) reason to inform and motivate the kinds of religious/faith-based journeys that we do decide to undertake. In this case, it is reason that helps distinguish between blind fanaticism and rationally grounded leaps of faith. Finally, putting both of these together, it seems that for philosophy to be "a conversion, a transformation of one's way of being and living," 43 faith and reason must go hand in hand in critical theories intent on enlightening their audience about their actual nature and situation and, on the basis of this enlightenment, emancipating them from their shackles—or at least, this mutual

⁴³ Hadot, 275

reinforcement between faith and reason seems necessary in enterprises that wish to avoid fanaticism.

To have provided grounds for this general claim is one of the chief aims of this thesis, along with its more narrow claims that in two important works of philosophy (broadly construed) in which philosophy is conceived as a way of life this mutual reinforcement between faith and reason obtains. These narrow claims are in themselves interesting, as these works are usually taken to be paradigmatically works of *either* reason *or* of faith. But at least in their cases, and perhaps in all the cases of their sort, it isn't a matter of reason *or* faith, but instead one of reason *and* faith.

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