
UNIT 4 BEING AS GOOD

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

Being is the term that is the most expansive. Anything and everything that is or exists can be classified under this umbrella concept. Indians stretch its denotation to the extent of including within it even possible beings which do not exist now in the real sense. Hence for them, only things that involve a self-contradiction are absolutely non-existent (*atyantabhava*) and are outside the purview of being. It follows then that being includes all beings.

Is existence the only aspect that a being shares with all other beings? One of the foremost things we notice when we observe beings is that they are heterogeneous. But even the heterogeneous beings share certain attributes or properties with all the rest primarily because these attributes flow from the very essence of their existing. We call them transcendental properties of beings because with such properties the varied beings transcend their differences. Unity, truth and goodness are the transcendental properties of beings.

After a survey of the transcendental properties of unity and truth, we now come to the third property of goodness.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

While the transcendental property of oneness or unity concerned a being’s relation to itself, the transcendental property of truth concerns a being’s relation to an intellect.

Moving further, we are going to examine being as an object of will. Will is the desiring faculty or the faculty of appetite in man. It will be seen that every being by the fact of its sheer existing can serve some appetite of a will. Put differently it can be said that every being has a capacity to arouse an appetite in a will. Therefore, every being will also be regarded as good. It is by virtue of its goodness that a being becomes the object of a willing faculty.

4.2 BEING AS THE OBJECT OF WILL

A being comes to be regarded as good only insofar as it becomes the object of a will. Will is the faculty of appetite or desire. The word “appetite” is derived from the combination of two Latin words - *ad+petere*, meaning ‘to incline towards,’ ‘to tend to,’ etc. Appetite is an inclination or a movement from within towards something. Accordingly there are a moving out (of the desiring subject to the desired object) and a corresponding moving in (of the object desired towards the desiring subject) respectively termed “inclination” and “fruition.” In the stage of inclination, a restlessness or disquietude marks the subject; this restlessness gives way to rest and fulfillment in the stage of fruition where the subject has already attained the object it desired. Appetite must be understood as involving both the stages of inclination and fruition. We may then define goodness as conformity of one’s appetite with the thing. Depending upon the conformity, a being is lovable, desirable, joy-giving, etc., which are further characterizations of being good.

4.3 GOODNESS OF BEING AND FINITE WILLS

Our conclusion so far is that the goodness of a being is dependent on its lovability or desirability or joy-giving ability with respect to an inclining or desiring will. This immediately leads us to the question, Can a being not exist at all as necessarily good without being desired or loved? Our answer is that although the goodness of a being is necessarily related to its lovability, it can nevertheless exist as good without being loved by the finite wills of us humans. Being outside the domain of our knowledge and hence being not loved and desired does not cancel a being’s existence as a good being. Things exist even as unknown to human beings. In the same manner, beings can exist as good beings even as unloved and undesired.

However, every being insofar as it is good and is judged to be good moves a will towards it. There is a complementarity between a being and a will. Thus a thing elicits responses in two faculties of a subject (i.e., human being). While it moves the intellect to judge it (i.e., to assent to its presence) and lets itself be rendered true, on the other hand it moves the will to incline to it and lets itself be rendered good. Not surprising then, Indians called being *sat*. *Sat* primarily means existent. It also means true as well as good. *Sadguru* is a true guru as well as a good guru. *Sadsangha* is the company of good people. Accordingly Indians regard being as existent, true and good.

4.4 GOODNESS OF BEING AND THE INFINITE WILL

It is to be emphasized that our will does not make a being good, nor does our intellect make it true. That does not, however, mean that a being is good independent of any will. A being is lovable and hence good to the extent it is existent, to the extent it has

being. Every finite existence receives its existence from another efficient cause. Traditionally such an efficient cause is referred to as God. It follows then that any being is good insofar as God wills its existence. Existence is the highest perfection for a being. The higher the degree of its existence, more perfect and more lovable it is.

Existence is the highest perfection for a being. Higher the degree of its existence, more perfect and more lovable it is.

4.5 GOODNESS, APPETITE AND KNOWLEDGE: A RELATION OF MUTUALITY

It is already seen that goodness has a necessary relation to the will and hence to its appetite. Going further, we will now see that goodness can vary depending upon the quality of the appetite. Quality of the appetite is determined in tune with the knowledge of the person that wills.

Although when speaking of appetite, we are concerned with the appetite of intelligent beings like human beings and even God, even unconscious beings can be thought of as having appetite. For example, every being has the appetite to continue in existence. This is an unconscious appetite requiring no preceding knowledge. Appetite with preceding knowledge can be classified into sensible appetite and intellectual appetite. Sensible appetite is preceded by sensible knowledge. Animals have only sensible knowledge and hence sensible appetite.

Human beings stand out from the rest of the beings in that even as they share with other beings unconscious appetite, and with animals, sensibly conscious appetite, they have also intellectual appetite. The intellectual appetite is superior to sensible appetite not only in degree but also in kind. Its superiority is expressed in its being an elicited appetite. Elicited appetite as the very name suggests is elicited or aroused by a judgment of the object or the thing in question as good. Once the intellect judges an object as good, the will follows it up by pursuing it or by inclining towards it.

4.6 HIERARCHY OF APPETITES AND NATURE OF HUMAN AS A TRANSCENDING BEING

It has been shown that appetites differ according to the nature of beings. Non-conscious beings have non-conscious appetite; sensibly conscious beings have sensible appetites; intellectually conscious beings intellectual appetites. Human will and its appetite is a unique case; as the only being in the world having a spiritual nature and hence with a spiritual appetite, he is the most perfect of all the beings in the world. Man is a unique case because he finds in himself a multiplicity of appetites ranging from non-conscious appetite to spiritual appetite. The appetites in man can be enumerated in a well-defined hierarchy. Since man shares his spiritual nature with God, the creator being, the spiritual appetite should be deemed the most superior.

Although we spoke of the hierarchy of appetites in human being, the appetites are not so found in him arranged in a well-ordered hierarchy. Such a hierarchy is not a fact in man; it is rather a responsibility for him. It is a project to be completed at any given time in man. This responsibility is an unenviable one since the different appetites in a human being are often in conflict with each other for supremacy. As mentioned above, human beings share their spiritual nature with God. Hence it is with their spiritual

appetites that human beings transcend above their mere natural level. The lower appetites in man are not to be denied outright. Human responsibility is to prioritize the various appetites in such a way that there is no blind pursuing of lower appetites at the cost of the higher ones.

4.7 VALUE AND THE PROBLEM OF THE RELATIVITY OF GOOD

If human responsibility involves saying ‘no’ to certain appetites for some good, it would mean that the good of a being is relative to the willing will. A being is good only relative to a will that wills it. A being is not good intrinsically. Not good in itself. It amounts to saying that a being has no value in itself. Any being is valuable only in so far as its value is constructed by a will. Here, one is at the heart of relativism propounded by Protagoras when he said that “man is the measure of all things.” Such an understanding opens up a technological understanding of all beings. That is, a being is good only insofar as it works for another. The theory or stand that denies intrinsic good to a being or thing would lead to **ontological nihilism**.

There is a double relativism here. First, good of a being is relative to a willing will, namely human beings; second, there is no univocal goodness for a being with respect to all human beings. What is good for one need not be good for another. What *is* good *for you* is good *for you*; what *is* good *for me* is good *for me*.

Ontological nihilism goes against the stand that good is a transcendental property of being. Good can be a transcendental property only if every being is good in all circumstances. The final position regarding this issue is that being is good always and everywhere and therefore good remains being’s transcendental property. This is justified because the primary goodness of being lies in its existing. To be is to be good, or inversely, to be good is primarily to be.

The Bhagavad Gita offers some strong arguments against the relativism of good. There, Krishna is the charioteer for Arjuna and so will lead the battle from the front. But he does not only steer the chariot and offer tips to Arjuna. After each day’s battle he would tend the horses, wash them and take care of them. Goodness of a thing is not relative to his status. Whatever be his status, all things remain good for him. Secondly, when Arjuna wavers in his dharma as a fighter for righteousness because he tries to read his dharma relative to his relation with those who are arrayed against him in the battle field, Krishna advocates a non-relativist reading of dharma.

So we conclude that ontological nihilism in the sense of denying the intrinsic goodness of beings is unacceptable. It was shown that good of beings cannot be relative to finite wills. But what about the infinite will? Is something good because God wills it or does God will a particular thing because it is good? Descartes was more inclined to the former position. But Leibniz, on the other hand, was favorably disposed to the latter position. God, according to Leibniz, was faced with many potential or possible worlds at the moment of creation. God did not whimsically choose any one from among them to confer to it existence. Rather, he grants existence to that particular world which has the potency for maximum perfection. This reinforces the view that goodness of a being is inherent to it.

4.8 UNQUALIFIED GOODNESS

The primary sense of goodness of any being is, as seen already, its existence. That does not, however, make it unqualifiedly good. Existence grants it only its primary perfection, namely, the perfection of its substantial existence. A thing can be called unqualifiedly good only if it has the perfection of all the accidents which are due to it. A person has qualified goodness insofar as he or she exists. But it is almost always the case that the perfection of at least some of the accidents like intellectual capacity, health, talents, right aptitudes and attitudes, ideals, etc. are absent in that person. That leads to the conclusion that finite or limited beings are only qualifiedly good. An infinite and unlimited being alone, for example, is unqualifiedly good and therefore, absolutely lovable.

Check Your Progress I

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.
- 1) Explain why goodness can be called a transcendental property of being showing the relation between the goodness of beings and wills, both finite and infinite.
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- 2) The plurality of appetites in a human being invests in him/her with a responsibility. Explain.
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- 3) Show how metaphysics dismisses the problem of the relativity of good.
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4.9 EVIL: THE OPPOSITE OF GOODNESS

Everything that exists is good, at least qualifiedly. So the primary metaphysical attitude towards any being should be one of optimism and gratitude. Before something good, one can only be optimistic and grateful. But the presence of evil has been a problem we have had to grapple with from time immemorial. A central concern of religion and philosophy and many human initiatives was to explain and resolve the problem of evil in the world. Metaphysics is called upon to reconcile these two conflicting positions namely, that every existent thing is good and that there is evil in the world. There are fundamentally three possible positions regarding evil.

- i) Evil is a positive entity
- ii) Evil is purely negative
- iii) Evil is privation of a necessary good

Evil as a Positive Entity:- The greatest proponent of this position was Zoroaster, a Persian philosopher who suggested that there are two primary principles – a principle of good and a principle of evil. The ultimate cause of goodness in the world is *Ormazd* and that of evil, *Ahriman*. These principles are in continuous strife with each other for supremacy. Zoroaster predicted that the final victory will be of the principle of good. What is important for the issue here is that according to the Zoroastrian conception evil in the world is directly generated by the primary principle of evil and is hence very much a real entity.

Evil as a positive entity is a position that is not philosophically tenable because such a position directly contradicts the premise that any thing on account of its existence itself has a claim to be good.

Evil as Purely Negative:- If regarding evil as a positive entity was an extreme position, another equally extreme position is to regard it as purely negative. This means, any absence of perfection will be evil. This position is also philosophically not sustainable. For, any being will be less or differently perfect relative to other beings. For example, not all human beings are as intelligent as Einstein was and that lesser intelligence will be evil in them! Or, human beings cannot fly as birds do. And this lesser good about human beings will be evil in them! The fact is that any absence cannot be regarded as evil. The untenability of these two extreme positions lead us to a middle position that evil is the lack of a necessary perfection in a being.

Evil as the Privation of a Necessary Good:- This is to say that evil is the absence of a perfection for which a being has a potency and need. It is apparent that evil, according to this conception, is not a mere absence of any perfection. Only those absent perfections will be called evil for which the being in question has a real potency and demand. Absence of intelligence in a block of rock is not evil because it did not at all have a potency or capacity for intelligence in the first place. But the absence of intelligence in a human person must be viewed as evil because a human person has a potency for it. Or, we may say that intelligence is a necessary perfection in a human being lack of which must be regarded as evil.

In short, it can be said that evil is not a positive entity. Evil does not exist in a positive sense. Only beings exist. They are good insofar as they exist. Existent beings can lack some perfections which are accidents which they should generally have. Such a lack makes them deficient beings. It is this deficiency that is referred to when we say that they are evil.

4.10 KINDS OF EVIL

Evil is generally divided into two – physical and moral. Physical evil is the privation of a perfection for which the nature of a being has a potency. Blindness or deafness in a person is a physical evil. Here, physical is not to be equated with corporeal or physiological. Theoretically speaking, even beings which have no material bodies (like angels) can have physical evil if their nature lacks a perfection for which it has a real potency. The term ‘physical’ is derived from the Greek word, *physis*, meaning “nature.”

Moral evil is the absence of a moral perfection in human beings. Lack of sincerity and honesty can be counted as examples of it. Moral evil is called sin. An action becomes sinful when it does not serve the total goodness of man. We have seen above that man is a complex entity with sensual, intellectual and spiritual appetites. In selecting goodness, one should keep in mind all one’s appetites in their proper order and priority. Pursuing lower appetites at the cost of higher ones retards the *total* goodness of man. This is sin.

Can there be ontological evil? Ontological evil will mean a positively evil entity. But we have already shown that any position regarding evil as a positive entity is philosophically untenable.

4.11 CAUSE OF EVIL

One last issue that remains to be discussed in this section is the issue of the cause of evil. It is undeniable that there is evil in the world, although not as a positive entity. If there is evil, who or what causes it? Cause is generally classified into four – efficient cause, material cause, formal cause and final cause. There can be no direct (*per se*) efficient cause of evil since no agent intends evil as such. However, there can be an indirect (*per accidens*) efficient cause of evil since a defect in the agent can result in the deficiency of the action. An old and physically frail carpenter in spite of his best intentions and efforts may manage to shape furniture that falls short of perfection. There can be a material cause for evil. A deficient material cause may thwart the action of the efficient cause resulting in an imperfect result. Evil has no formal cause since what we call evil does not have a form originally intended for it. Finally, there cannot be a final cause of evil as final cause is always the good intended. In evil the intended final cause does not materialize.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
- b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

- 1) What are the three possible philosophical positions regarding evil?
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2) Distinguish between physical evil and moral evil. Why cannot God be the cause of evil?

4.12 LET US SUM UP

From the above exposition of the transcendental property of goodness, it becomes all too apparent that goodness is not a cosmetic quality of a thing. Any thing that makes an appearance on the stage of existence is necessarily good because goodness is not something merely attached to it as if from outside but flows from its essence itself. This calls for a positive and creative attitude towards all beings. Hence metaphysics encourages everyone to shed all cynical attitudes or approaches to anything.

4.13 KEY WORDS

- Evil : Evil is the privation of perfection due to a being.
- Privation : Privation is the absence of perfection expected of a being.
- Negation : Negation is the absence of perfection not expected of a being.

4.14 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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4.15 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Goodness can be called a transcendental property of being because as far as this property is concerned, the beings which are many and diverse, transcend all their differences. Goodness flows from the very essence of every being irrespective of

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the differences in their mode of existing. The proof of the goodness of every being consists in its capacity to satisfy the appetite of a will. As far as the wills of the finite beings are concerned, the agreement between a thing and the will may not be evident. But in the case of the will of the infinite being, the agreement is total and evident because without such an agreement the things will not come into existence.

- 2) Human beings are complex entities since there are sensible, intellectual and spiritual faculties in them. There are as many appetites as there are faculties too since the appetites are controlled by these different faculties. As a result there is a conflict of interests in a person and calls for a right decision or choice. With this one is in a domain of ethics. The ethical responsibility of man is to arrange his different appetites in a hierarchy giving each its due. Man would fail in his responsibility if he were to serve his lower appetites at the expense of higher appetites.
- 3) The problem of the relativity of good has its root in the philosophical supposition that the goodness of a being is determined by its serviceability. In other words, a thing is good only insofar as it serves the appetite of a will. This position deprives the beings of their intrinsic goodness or value and thereby makes redundant as well the premise that goodness is a transcendental property of being. Metaphysics dismisses this problem of the relativity of the good altogether by the emphasis that goodness of a being lies primarily in its existence itself rather than in its lovability. Any being is good on account of its sheer existing. Any being is lovable and desirable because it exists. To be good is to be and conversely, to be is to be good.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) We experience evil in its manifold expressions. Nevertheless evil defies a univocal explanation. In philosophy, there have been mainly three explanations of evil. The first understands evil as a positive entity. But if evil is a positive entity, at least some of the beings (which we call evil) will not be good. So goodness cannot be called a transcendental property of being. The second explanation shows evil as a negative entity. Evil is the absence of a perfection. This explanation will render every being that is not the infinitely perfect being evil because only an infinitely perfect being can claim all perfections in itself. Hence the need of a third explanation. According to it, evil is the absence of a perfection for which the being has a real potency.
- 2) Physical evil refers to the absence of a perfection for which the nature of particular being has a claim or potency. Moral evil, on the other hand, consists in a choice that a person makes which is detrimental to his/her total goodness.

A cause of evil has to be its material, efficient, formal or final cause. Such causes imply a deficiency in the material, agency, form or intention giving rise to the thing. Since God is a being with all possible perfections, regarding him as the material, efficient, formal or final cause of evil would imply a contradiction. God cannot be the cause of evil unless he has evil in himself, physical or moral.