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The Eco-Theology of the *Bhagavad Gītā*: A Multi-Layered Ethical Theory

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Abstract: I argue that a normative environmental ethical theory can be coherently derived out of the theological matrix of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. I build upon Ithamar Theodor's articulation of the *Gītā*'s underlying unifying structure to depict how the *Gītā* conceives of three possible relationships with nature. This allows me to tease out three concurrent worldviews in the *Gītā*—a world-affirming worldview, a world-renouncing worldview and a *bhakti* worldview, which is simultaneously world-affirming and world-renouncing. I show how three distinct theories of motivation—three different reasons for acting in the world—emerge from the interconnected normative, soteriological and ontological dimensions of each of these three worldviews. More importantly, the motivation to act for the welfare of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, can be legitimately derived from these three theories of motivation. I contextualize the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s environmental ethics by placing it within the larger framework of the text's distinctive multi-layered approach to ethical theory, in which the foundational teleological *mokṣa* theory grounds and explains the plurality of more superficial normative foundational theories.

Keywords: *Bhagavad Gītā*; environmental ethics; ontology; soteriology



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1. Introduction

Lawrence Sullivan (Sullivan 2000, p. xiii) has observed that religious traditions and their lived manifestations offer “a treasury of motives, disciplines, and awarenesses” that can facilitate earth-friendly living and it is certainly in this spirit that scholars of religion and environmental studies alike have turned to Hindu texts and traditions. The term ‘Hindu’ does not, of course, denote an easily defined, homogeneous, monolithic tradition. What generally goes by the name of Hinduism represents more a “galaxy of worldviews emerging over centuries in India” (Valpey 2020, p. 1). It is not part of my task in this article to defend or explain the use of the term ‘Hindu’ or ‘Hinduism,’ but along with Julius Lipner, I propose that “‘Hinduism’ is an acceptable abbreviation for a family of culturally related traditions” (Lipner 2010, p. 33). Despite the obvious heterogeneity of the Hindu cosmos, it is not too much of a stretch to claim that the *Bhagavad Gītā* has singularly informed Hindu self-representations since the turn of the nineteenth century. Gavin Flood (1996) notes that the immense popularity the *Bhagavad Gītā* now enjoys in India only occurred after the emergence of Hindu revival movements of the nineteenth century. The text had, of course, already gained prominence prior to this, as evidenced by commentaries upon it by famous Hindu theologians such as Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva in the *Vedānta* tradition and Abhinavagupta in the Śaiva tradition. (Throughout this article, I have, for the most part, shortened the title *Bhagavad Gītā* to “the *Gītā*.” When specific verses are referenced, the chapter number appears first, followed by the verse number.) Richard Davis notes that the *Gītā* “is a vital text for modern Hindus of many persuasions” and outside the Indian subcontinent, the text “is frequently taken as the first and most representative work for those first seeking to understand Hinduism” (Davis 2015, p. 23). Davis goes on to write: “It appears regularly as a primary reading in hundreds of college courses on Hinduism and Asian religions throughout North America and elsewhere” (Davis 2015, p. 24). The *Bhagavad*

Gītā, along with the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahmasūtra*, also forms the triple foundations of *Vedānta*, the “most influential school of theology in India” (Flood 1996, p. 238). Graham Schweig highlights the *Gītā*’s theological impact when he writes that the *Gītā* “is, since the seventh century, the most widely read and commented on holy text in all of India” (Schweig 2007, p. 13), and Klaus Klostermaier similarly underlines the text’s influence by claiming that the seven hundred verses of the *Bhagavad Gītā* constitute the “most popular book of the entire Hindu literature” (Klostermaier 1994, p. 145).

Given the *Bhagavad Gītā*’s significance within the Hindu cosmos, it is noteworthy that Lance Nelson has argued that the ontological vision and soteriological goal promoted by the *Gītā* is fundamentally hostile to environmental ethics. In his ecological critique of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Nelson writes that the *Gītā*’s “hierarchical, fundamentally dualistic outlook” which elevates “pure spirit above matter” implies that nature is “finally irrelevant to the *Gītā*’s soteriological goals.” From this, Nelson concludes that the *Gītā*’s “ideals are in many ways antithetical to ecological ethics as we know it” (Nelson 2000, pp. 140, 151). My reading of Nelson’s critique is that he is arguing that the task of constructing a normative environmental ethical theory from the metaphysical infrastructure provided by the *Gītā* is an incoherent project. That is, the genesis of environmental ethics from the *Gītā*’s metaphysical commitments is philosophically problematic. Nelson’s critique is part of a scholarly trend claiming that since Hindu soteriology is primarily focused on liberation from *saṃsāra*, the cycle of birth and death, it is inherently world-negating and is thus incapable of fostering “a deep sense of belonging to the universe,” the kind of belonging that is deemed to be a necessary psychological condition for environmental engagement and action (Nelson 2000, p. 151). John Passmore (Passmore 1980) has thus argued that the doctrine of stewardship—which entails a regard for nature—is incompatible with the Eastern religious quest for salvation achieved by freeing oneself from every kind of earthly bondage. J. Baird Callicott (Callicott 1994) has similarly opined that because the *Upaniṣads* proclaim the undifferentiated and unmanifest *Brahman* to be the source and ground of all manifest and differentiated things, the Hindu religious tradition regards the empirical world of manifest and differentiated things as something less than morally significant, because it is not ultimately real. Lance Nelson (Nelson 1998) has also argued that the classical *Advaita Vedānta* of Śaṅkara—which he deems to be the central viewpoint of the modern Hindu renaissance—encourages attitudes of devaluation and neglect of the natural universe. Against this interpretation of ‘Hinduism’ as a world-negating religion incapable of inspiring environmentalism, David Haberman (Haberman 2006) has argued that most Hindus identify themselves with theistic, Purāṇic, and world-affirming traditions that include immanent strands within their theologies and has buttressed his argument with many examples of Indian environmentalists who draw their inspiration from such traditions.

However, what, then, of the *Bhagavad Gītā*? Is the text world-affirming or world-negating? More to the point, if the text is fundamentally unsuited to a favourable ecological reading, then the oft-repeated claim that the *Gītā* transmits “an eternal teaching that has universal relevance” becomes severely impoverished (Davis 2015, p. 18). Against this conclusion, I argue that the *Gītā* lends itself to a favourable ecological reading on many levels. To demonstrate how so, I will build upon Ithamar Theodor’s articulation of the unifying structure of the *Gītā* and its attendant moral psychology. This will allow me to show that the *Gītā* contains three concurrent worldviews—a world-affirming worldview, a world-renouncing worldview and a *bhakti* worldview, which is simultaneously world-affirming and world-renouncing. More specifically, I will argue that these three worldviews correspond to three different theories of motivation and that the motivation to act for the welfare of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, can be coherently derived from the interconnected normative, soteriological and ontological dimensions of each of these three worldviews. In making this argument, I will begin by looking at the context of the *Gītā*.

2. The Context of the *Bhagavad Gītā*

The eighteen chapters of the *Bhagavad Gītā* appear as chapters twenty three through forty in the Book of Bhīshma, the sixth of the eighteen books that comprise the great epic poem *Mahābhārata*. The text is set on a battlefield with the sons of the congenitally blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra leading his army into battle against the sons of his deceased younger brother, Pāṇḍu, who inherited the throne due to his older brother's blindness. When the noble and righteous Pāṇḍu passed away, his five sons, the Pāṇḍavas, were too young to inherit the throne. Their uncle Dhṛtarāṣṭra took over the kingdom and ruled for many years during which time his eldest son, Duryodhana, driven by greed and animosity, conspired to murder the Pāṇḍavas. In the events leading up to the war, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons, the Kurus, led by the eldest son, Duryodhana, have steadfastly denied Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas, his kingdom, have humiliated the Pāṇḍavas' wife Draupadī, and have repeatedly harassed the Pāṇḍavas in many other ways. War seems imminent because Draupadī wants revenge, and Yudhiṣṭhira wants his kingdom. Dhṛtarāṣṭra is nominally still the king, and therefore with great reluctance, the Pāṇḍavas' great-uncle and their beloved teachers have bound themselves in duty to the king to fight against the Pāṇḍavas.

Looking across the battlefield, the mightiest warrior of his time, Prince Arjuna, one of the five Pāṇḍava brothers, sees his teachers and uncles, as well as his hostile cousins and their followers. Faced with the prospect of a fratricidal war in which he will have to fight an army composed of many of his esteemed teachers, friends, and the Kuru warriors with whom he shares family bonds, Arjuna is perplexed about his *ṣṣatriya-dharma*, his duty as a warrior, and is overcome by debilitating despair. Even though Arjuna recognizes that the Kurus, led by Duryodhana, had cruelly and unjustly usurped the Pandavas' kingdom, at 1.28–30, Arjuna claims compassion for his kinsmen and refuses to fight for justice. After trying to defend his position with a medley of socio-moral arguments, Arjuna collapses in anxiety and thus ends the *Gītā*'s first chapter. In the second chapter, at 2.6–7, Arjuna continues to voice his indecision about whether he should dutifully fight or whether he should refrain from fighting but then confesses that he is paralyzed due to miserly weakness and cannot ascertain his *dharma*—his duty, and consequently, he is unable to act. Following this confession, Arjuna surrenders to his dear cousin, charioteer and friend Kṛṣṇa as his disciple and asks Kṛṣṇa to enlighten him and resolve his inner conflict and dissipate his grief.

Even though the *Gītā* proceeds as a conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, it really is Kṛṣṇa's response to Arjuna's deep despondence and through Arjuna's despondency the text grapples with a perennially relevant question: How ought we to act in this world, beset as it is with conflict and suffering? More precisely, the *Gītā* asks this question through the existential and ethical dilemma faced by the warrior Arjuna. *Ṡṣatriya dharma* dictates Arjuna should uphold *loka-saṅgraha*—the *dharmaic* order that sustains the world. That is, Arjuna is duty bound to uphold justice and protect the virtuous, but how can Arjuna fight an enemy army composed of loved ones and gurus? In responding to Arjuna's dilemma, Kṛṣṇa begins his teachings in the second chapter of the *Gītā* and over the course of the rest of the text, Kṛṣṇa offers a *variety of reasons* to persuade Arjuna to fight. The compendium of reasons Kṛṣṇa gives Arjuna to motivate him to fight constitutes the narrative arc of the *Gītā*. To draw out the internal consistency and coherence of this compendium of reasons, I turn to Ithamar Theodor's articulation of the underlying unifying structure of the *Gītā* through "the metaphor of a three-storey house" (Theodor 2016, p. 5).

3. The Three-Tiered House of the *Bhagavad Gītā*

Edwin Bryant has termed the *Bhagavad Gītā* "a Vedānto-Sāṃkhyan text" in that it expresses the "theism of the older Sāṃkhyan traditions" (Bryant 2014, p. 33). *Sāṃkhya* is often labelled as a monolithic non-theistic tradition, but in fact, most strains of *Sāṃkhya* were theistic, as evidenced in the *Mahābhārata* and highlighted by Edwin Bryant (Bryant 2009). The *Gītā* explicitly accepts *Sāṃkhya* (5.4–5, 13.24), and claims to be transmitting *Sāṃkhya* (2.39, 18.13) and also of Kṛṣṇa originally teaching *Sāṃkhya* himself (3.3). Not surprisingly,

Sāṃkhya language and taxonomy undergird the narrative of the *Gītā*. The *Gītā*'s theistic *Sāṃkhya* speaks of three irreducible ontological categories: *prakṛti*—the primordial matrix of matter, *puruṣas*—eternal self-conscious subjects and *puruṣaḥ paraḥ*—the Supreme Person, the autonomous independent entity who sustains and is the ultimate cause of both *prakṛti* and innumerable selves (*puruṣas*). This ontology is expressed at 7.4–7. There have been, of course, a variety of *Vedāntic* approaches to the *Gītā*'s ontology, but here I am informed by the twelfth century Vaiṣṇava theologian Rāmānuja's reading of the *Gītā*. The text identifies Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Person, or the supreme deity (7.7, 10.2–3, 10.8, 11.37–46, 15.18–19) and as such, is an exemplar of Indic theistic, or more accurately, panentheistic thought (I will highlight the panentheism embedded in the text further on in the article). Like other *Vedāntic* texts, the *Gītā* advances the view that reality is hierarchical. That is, there is a higher, absolute reality, and a lower, relative reality. The lower-level reality corresponds to the world of *prakṛti*, it corresponds to the empirical and conventional, the changing and the finite. The lower-level reality, which includes the human or worldly realm, also pertains to *dharma*, the world of duty, morality and justice. The higher-level reality corresponds to the permanent, absolute, infinite, trans-*prakṛtic* realm, it corresponds to the liberated state of *mokṣa*.

Through Arjuna's ethical dilemma, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* is navigating the deep tension between the *dharmic* ideal (whose origins can be traced back to the ancient *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* school) of pursuing a moral and prosperous life within the world of *prakṛti* and the *Upaniṣadic* ideal of completely relinquishing the world of *prakṛti*, characterized as it is by *samsāra*, the cycle of birth and death, in order to attain the imperishable and eternal state of liberation or *mokṣa*. The tension between *dharma* and *mokṣa* also epitomizes the tension between action and knowledge. The *dharma* tradition is imbued with a performative flavour and seeks to act in this world and organize it according to principles derived from a purported eternal moral order whereas the *Upaniṣadic* tradition favours renunciation of action and worldly involvement in order to 'know' *Brahman* (ultimate reality). This tension is exemplified twice in the *Gītā*, at 3.1–3 and 5.1–2, when Arjuna expresses his confusion whether one should choose the path of action, or alternatively, the path of relinquishing action.

The *Gītā* unequivocally prescribes the path of action. Each time Arjuna expresses his confusion over whether he should act or cease acting altogether, the text has Kṛṣṇa tell Arjuna at 3.8, to "perform your *dharmic* duty, as action is superior to inaction" and similarly, at 5.2, that "*karma yoga* or *yogic* action exceeds renouncing action altogether." (I have used Ithamar Theodor's translations of *Gītā* verses for this article (Theodor 2016)). Thus, Kṛṣṇa encourages Arjuna throughout the entire *Gītā* to follow his *dharma* and fight. Yet, the *Gītā* also teaches that *through* action, one may progress to the state of liberation or *mokṣa*. What is the rationale underpinning the *Gītā*'s view? Ithamar Theodor (Theodor 2016, p. 5) has argued that the coherence of the *Bhagavad Gītā* as a theological-philosophical text is made apparent when we grasp the *Gītā*'s unifying theme or structure. To access the *Gītā*'s unifying structure, Theodor offers the metaphor of a three-storey house:

This house not only has three floors, storeys, or tiers, but has a staircase or ladder, leading the residents from the first floor to the second, and from the second to the third. The lower floor represents human life in this world, the second floor is an intermediate floor, whereby one relinquishes worldly life and seeks the state of liberation, and the third floor represents full absorption in the liberated state. The stages of the staircase or the ladder are comprised of various states of action categorized according to their underlying motivation; at the lower stage one's acts are motivated by some utilitarian principle or gain; a stage still higher is when one seeks gain beyond this life in the heavenly world, and a higher stage is the stage of relinquishment of action's fruits, thus acting for the sake of duty or *dharma* alone. A state still higher is the performance of one's *dharmic* duty as a practice of *yoga*, i.e., considering the performance of duty to be the means by which the mind may be subdued. The highest state is the state of

performing one's *dharmic* duty while being liberated and entirely immersed in the supreme. In this way, the *Bhagavad Gītā* adheres to both ideals; it supports social responsibility, morality and *dharma*, and at the same time, it endorses the *Upaniṣadic* path of self-realization, which leads one from the depth of material existence all the way up to liberation". (Theodor 2016, p. 6).

This conceptualization of the *Gītā*'s internal schema implies that we progress from the unenlightened state to the highest liberated state by elevating our motives or reasons for performing action, and not by renouncing action. Thus, even though Arjuna is encouraged all along by Kṛṣṇa to follow his *dharma* and fight, the text has Kṛṣṇa exhorting Arjuna to progressively refine his motives for fighting. That is, the variety of reasons Krishna gives to Arjuna form an "ethical ladder of motives" for fighting (Theodor 2016, p. 24). This ladder of motives corresponds to three different tiers or levels of the text, such that as we ascend the *Gītā*'s ladder of motives, we are simultaneously moving from a lower tier of the text to a higher one.

The pertinent question: How do we distinguish between the *Gītā*'s three tiers? Theodor contends that to differentiate between the *Gītā*'s three tiers, we need to examine their underlying assumptions in terms of being and values (Theodor 2016, p. 19). Before we can clarify these underlying assumptions, a closer look at the *Gītā*'s core ontological presupposition is in order. The *Gītā* pivots around the idea that a human being (and all living organisms, for that matter) is a composite of three parts: a physical body, a subtle mental body and an irreducible, beginningless, self-aware subject or *puruṣa*. The 'subject' part of 'self-aware subject' denotes an entity capable of conscious experiences. The 'self-aware' part of 'self-aware subject' denotes an entity that is aware of oneself. By the term self-aware subject, then, I mean an entity that is aware of themselves *as themselves*; it is manifest to a self-aware subject that they themselves are the object of awareness. This implies that a self-aware subject, while perceiving any other thing, also perceives their own existence, implying that awareness entails self-awareness. On this view, both the physical body and the mental functions of the subtle body belong to the inert and unconscious category of *prakṛti* but the *puruṣa* is ontologically distinct from *prakṛti* in that the *puruṣa* being a non-material entity inherently consists of pure subjectivity or self-luminous conscious awareness. (In this article, I will use 'awareness' to denote the inherent subjectivity of the *puruṣa*). In keeping with the characteristically *Vedāntic* project of distinguishing the real self from the not-self, the *Gītā* (2.13, 2.20 and 13.6–7) consistently demarcates the physical and subtle mental body from the *puruṣa*, claiming that only the *puruṣa*—the diachronically unchanging eternal self-conscious subject that observes the constantly changing mind-body complex—is the real self, whereas the subtle and physical body belong to the category of not-self.

What does it mean, then, to say that the *Gītā* speaks of three different levels of being? For *Vedāntic* theologians, phenomenological subjectivity, i.e., the first-person experience of being, is an act where the *puruṣa* identifies with something. Theodor (Theodor 2016) consequently writes that someone on the *Gītā*'s first-tier identifies with one's *prakṛtic* embodiment or one's mind/body complex. Someone on this tier views oneself as a human being and other living beings similarly, that is, as humans, animals or plants, and values a just and moral society and the pursuit of worldly happiness and prosperity. The *Gītā*'s third or highest tier represents the liberated state of *mokṣa* itself. Immersed in the liberated state one identifies as transcendent self-luminous awareness (an impersonal account of the liberated state) or as an eternal servant or lover of the Supreme Person (a theistic account of the liberated state). Someone on this level values the experience of *brahmananda* (the bliss of *Brahman*) or in case of the theist perspective, the experience of being constantly absorbed in the worship and glorification of the Supreme Person. The *Gītā*'s second storey or the intermediate level may be termed the *yogic* level as it connects the first-storey or the level of *dharma* with the third-storey or the state of *mokṣa*. The *yogic* level is characterized by the endeavour to escape *samsāra* while simultaneously trying to yoke oneself to the state of *mokṣa*. Someone on this level identifies all living beings as units of self-luminous awareness

transcendent to the mind-body complex, and values indifference to the happiness and distress produced by the three *guṇas* comprising *prakṛti* along with the endeavor to yoke oneself to *Brahman* or the eternal state of *mokṣa*.

Theodor's conceptualization of the three-tiered house of the *Gītā* is based on mapping the possible relationships that may exist between the *puruṣa* and *mokṣa*; on the first tier are those *puruṣas* who are not seeking *mokṣa*, on the second tier are those *puruṣas* who are actively seeking *mokṣa* and on the third tier are those *puruṣas* who have already attained the state of *mokṣa*. Instead of articulating the *Gītā*'s moral psychology by mapping the possible relationships between the *puruṣa* and *mokṣa*, I will approach the *Gītā*'s moral psychology by mapping the possible ways the *puruṣa* may relate to *prakṛti*. To do this, I draw on the *Gītā*'s depiction of the *puruṣa*'s intrinsic nature as an eternal self-conscious subject, which stipulates that the *puruṣa* can never be not conscious or not aware and so, if the *puruṣa*'s inherent constitution requires that it be always aware of something, what is it that awareness ends up being aware of? I contend the *Gītā* text answers this question by claiming that the *puruṣa* has three basic choices: to be absorbed in *prakṛti*—the world of matter, to be absorbed in its own nature as self-luminous awareness, or to be absorbed in devotion to and loving service of *Īśvara*, the source of both *prakṛti* and selves (*puruṣas*). Within the *Gītā*'s theological structure, these three choices that can be made by the *puruṣa* result in three different theories of motivation which add up to three different predispositions toward the world of *prakṛti*—a world-affirming approach, a world-renouncing approach and a *bhakti* approach, which is simultaneously world-affirming and world-renouncing.

In sum, the *Gītā* depicts the *puruṣa* relating to *prakṛti* in three possible ways and mapping this allows me to draw out the *Gītā*'s environmental ethics. That is, I will argue that the motivation to act for the welfare of animals and plants can be legitimately derived from the *Gītā*'s three theories of motivation and their corresponding predispositions toward the world of *prakṛti*. Moreover, I will contextualize the *Gītā*'s environmental ethics by placing it within the framework of the *Gītā*'s overarching ethical theory. I interpret the *Gītā* as advancing a *mokṣa*-based teleological ethical theory that evaluates choices and actions in terms of whether they contribute to and ultimately achieve the overarching ultimate telos of *mokṣa*. However, I will show in the following sections that the *Gītā*'s ethical theory is also multi-layered, meaning that the foundational *mokṣa*-based teleological ethical theory grounds and explains more superficial foundational normative theories.

4. World-Affirming Environmental Ethics in the *Gītā*

The argument for environmental ethics from the world-affirming worldview in the *Gītā* can be conceptualized as follows:

Premise One: There is a world-affirming worldview in the *Gītā*.

Premise Two: The world-affirming worldview applies to those who identify with their *prakṛtic*

Premise Three: The soteriological goal of the world-affirming view is to improve one's existential situation within *prakṛti*.

Premise Four: Following the codes of *dharma* is the means to improve one's existential situation within *prakṛti*.

Premise Five: Rules advancing the welfare of animals and plants is included in the codes of *dharma*.

Conclusion: Therefore, a normative environmental ethical theory can be derived from the world-affirming worldview in the *Gītā*.

Premise One: The *Gītā* subscribes to the *Sāṃkhyan* theory that conceives of nature as consisting of three subtle entities called the *guṇas*, the highest *guṇa* of *sattva* representing goodness, insight and wisdom, the intermediate *guṇa* of *rajas* representing passion, activity and attachment, and the lowest *guṇa* of *tamas* representing ignorance, indolence and darkness. Though the *guṇas* are often rendered as 'qualities', they are, as Jitendra Mohanty writes,

more accurately represented as “affective components” of *prakṛti* (Mohanty 2000, p. 25). That is, the *guṇas* are described in terms of qualia—they are subtle entities or substances that can be known through their effects on the subjectivity of the *puruṣa*. Specifically, the *guṇas* that pervade and comprise all phenomena born of *prakṛtic* stuff are supposed to induce an innumerable variety of emotional and cognitive states. This idea of the *guṇas* is foundational to the *Gītā*’s metaphysical narrative and elaborate descriptions on how the *guṇas* influence the *puruṣa* take place throughout the text, especially in chapters fourteen, seventeen and eighteen. The *Gītā* goes onto claim that *puruṣas* embedded in *prakṛti* seek to ‘taste’ experiences born of the permutations and combinations of the *guṇas*. Consequently, a world-affirming worldview in the context of the *Gītā*, is one which affirms the pursuit of experiences born of the *guṇas*. In this section, I wish to show that this type of a world-affirming worldview occurs on three different levels in the *Gītā*.

At its lowest stage, Kṛṣṇa asks Arjuna to fight the battle simply to gain fame and honour since by withdrawing from the battle he will accrue infamy and dishonor (2.34–36). At the next stage of the world-affirming view, Kṛṣṇa augments his persuasive strategy with scriptural authority, specifically the idea that *kṣatriyas* or warriors who die in a righteous battle attain the celestial dimension of existence in their next life. This stage is higher than the previous argument to try and avoid infamy because at this stage, Arjuna is being advised to follow *dharma* to achieve some end not just in this life, but in the next life (2.48). By claiming that an agent is permitted to act to secure a desired outcome for oneself, the *Gītā* here advances a version of agent-relative consequentialism. A consequentialist approach to normative ethics claims that normative properties depend only on consequences. That is, we can judge the moral rightness of an act based solely on the consequences or outcomes of the act. Consequentialists thus argue that we can choose from among a range of actions by ranking the outcomes of those actions, such that I am permitted to perform an act A if and only if there is no alternative act B whose outcome ranks higher than A on my ranking scale. Agent-neutral consequentialists maintain that different agents will rank a set of outcomes in the same manner but agent-relative or subject-focused consequentialists recognize that different agents will potentially rank the same set of outcomes differently.

Now, the *Gītā* advances the view that different *puruṣas* exhibit different behavioural patterns because of being influenced by different permutations of the *guṇas*. Based on this view, the *Gītā* categorizes human society into four *varnas* or social classes. These four classes are that of the *brāhmaṇas* (teachers, intellectuals, priests), *kṣatriyas* (warriors, administrators, rulers), *vaiśyas* (bankers, farmers, business people) and *śūdras* (artisans, laborers). The *Gītā*, at 4.13, claims that humans naturally fall into these four social classes not based on birth, but because of exhibiting specific behavioural traits that spring from specific *guṇa* combinations. All this means that human subjects have four archetypal natures, and these four natures are attracted to different sets of values. When I speak of different human natures, I refer to the traits and behaviors exhibited by the mind-body complex. Because one can come under the influence of different *guṇas* at different times, human nature is potentially malleable. At the same time, the *Gītā* seems to hold the position that there are four archetypal human natures that spring from specific *guṇa* combinations. Accordingly, the reasons given by Kṛṣṇa here to persuade Arjuna are not arbitrary reasons but they are reasons that are supposed to specifically appeal to the set of values that characterize a *kṣatriya* nature. At 18.41–44, the text outlines the different sets of values that characterize the four archetypal human natures. Here, Kṛṣṇa is appealing to the values of valor, honor and heroism that typify a *kṣatriya* nature. My argument, then, is the *Gītā* here is advancing a version of agent-relative consequentialism, where it is recognized that different agents are attracted to different sets of values and consequently rank the same set of outcomes differently.

The third and highest stage of the world-affirming view occurs at 2.38 when Kṛṣṇa requests Arjuna to follow *dharma* for its own sake, or he asks the agent to perform one’s duty for the sake of duty. In contrast to the agent-relative consequentialist approach expressed at the two lower stages of the world-affirming view, the text now shifts to a deontological

approach to normative ethics. The idea is that each of the four social classes have settled duties and while performing those duties one should purge one's mind of the *intent* to enjoy the perceived beneficial outcome of those duties. The stage of performing one's duty for the sake of duty, free from the motivation to enjoy the outcomes accruing from action, represents action born out of *sattva guṇa*. The *Gītā*, at 18.45, claims that when one performs one's *dharmic* duty for the sake of duty, free from the motive to enjoy the perceived beneficial outcomes of the action, one experiences deep contentment—a characteristic of *sattva guṇa*. By giving three reasons that affirm the pursuit of happiness born of the *guṇas* that comprise *prakṛti*, the *Gītā* effectively affirms that the world of *prakṛti* is valuable and consequently, the motivation to maintain moral order and harmony within the *prakṛtic* world is valuable as well.

Premise Two: Considering that the *Gītā* maintains that the *puruṣa* is ontologically distinct from unconscious *prakṛti*, who does the world-affirming view apply to? The answer is succinctly expressed at 13.21–22:

It is said that material nature is the cause in the matter of producing causes and effects, and that the living entity is the cause in the matter of experiencing pleasure and pain. The living entity situated in material nature experiences the *guṇas* that are the product of material nature. While its association with the *guṇas* is the cause of birth in a good or bad womb.

These two verses convey the familiar *Vedāntic* theme of a self-aware subject (*puruṣa*) identifying with *prakṛti* or the mind-body complex and thus desiring to enjoy the experiences that are generated by the mind-body complex. Even though ontologically distinct from the mind-body complex, the *puruṣa* becomes completely absorbed in the mind-body complex due to intense meditation on the objects of the senses (2.63). When the *puruṣa* becomes totally absorbed in the mind-body complex, then the *puruṣa* makes the mind-body complex one's own and thus also becomes totally absorbed in the experiences generated by the *guṇas* that make up both the mind-body complex and the objects of the senses. Here, the text also makes the significant claim that the *puruṣa* generates the specific circumstances of its future rebirth according to how the *puruṣa* interacts with the *guṇas*.

Premise Three: For those who identify with their *prakṛtic* embodiment, the soteriological goal—the highest good—is to aspire for the best kind of experiences *prakṛti* can offer. Here, the *Gītā* seems to concur with the *Mīmāṃsā* notion that the highest experience *prakṛti* can offer is celestial existence or life in heaven. In keeping with Indic thought in general (by 'Indic' I refer to Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain commonalities), the *Gītā* advances a cosmological view in which the *prakṛtic* domain contains numerous celestial realms—*svārga*—the abodes of the *devas* or celestial beings or demigods—which are the destination of those with sufficient *karmic* credit (which, sooner or later, expires). I have noted how Kṛṣṇa tried to persuade Arjuna to fight based on the idea that if Arjuna wins, he will win the earthly kingdom, but if he is killed, he will attain heaven, since according to the principles of *dharma*, warriors killed in fighting a *dharmic* war attain heaven. At 2.42–43, Kṛṣṇa acknowledges that those who abide by the *dharmic* injunctions and rituals laid down in the *Veda*, get "good karma, good birth and good fruits of action. Full of desires and with heaven as their aim, these people practice an abundance of rituals, with the purpose of achieving pleasure and power." At 9.20, the text has Kṛṣṇa reiterate that those who perform the sacrificial rituals of the *Vedas* with a desire to attain heaven, do indeed reach "the meritorious world of Indra, the lord of the gods," where "they enjoy the celestial joys of the gods." Finally, at 14.15, the text specifies that for one who has attained the state of *sattva*, meaning someone whose actions are primarily influenced by *sattva guṇa*, is destined to be reborn in "the pure worlds of those possessing the highest knowledge" after giving up their present human body. We can conclude that for a *puruṣa* who identifies with his *prakṛtic* embodiment, the soteriological goal is to improve one's existential situation within the *prakṛtic* domain. For the *Gītā*, improving one's situation within the *prakṛtic* domain is tantamount to attaining the higher dimensions of the cosmos, where one can experience different grades of celestial existence.

Premise Four: The *Gītā* prescribes the path of following *dharma* as the means to improve one's existential situation within the world of *prakṛti*. In Premise one, I have clarified the *Gītā*'s position that one can act in accordance with *dharma* but with the desire to enjoy the outcomes of actions (an agent-relative consequentialist approach), or better still, *dharma* can be performed in a mind-set characteristic of *sattva guṇa*, that is, one can perform *dharmic* duty for the sake of duty—a deontological approach (an idea explicitly stated at 17.11–12). For the *Gītā*, acting in *sattva guṇa* is the ideal one should aim for and “as such, being established in the *guṇa* of goodness, one finds oneself adhering to *dharma*” (Theodor 2016, p. 10). At 18.6, Kṛṣṇa thus claims: My final judgment, Pārtha, is that these actions should be performed out of duty, abandoning attachment and interest in their fruits. 18.23 further specifies “an action is of the nature of goodness when performed according to the injunctions of *dharma*, without attachment, devoid of attraction or repulsion, by one who desires not its fruits.” Why does the *Gītā* try to coax agents to gradually shift their allegiance to ideals born out of *sattva guṇa*? One answer is what I have already previously mentioned, shifting to *sattva guṇa* is the way to improve one's existential situation within the domain of *prakṛti*. In this sense, the *guṇas* represent existential pathways through *sāṃsara* with those *puruṣas* predominated by *sattva guṇa* being reborn into favourable circumstances in higher celestial dimensions of the cosmos. However, I contend there is a deeper motive driving the *Gītā*'s agenda to persuade *puruṣas* to act within the jurisdiction of *sattva guṇa*. The clue to this deeper motive is found in chapter fourteen of the text, a chapter that explicitly engages with the topic of the three *guṇas*. The chapter begins with Kṛṣṇa claiming that the knowledge he is about to speak is of a distinctly soteriological flavor and twice in the chapter, at 14.14 and 14.17, Kṛṣṇa equates *sattva guṇa* with knowledge.

When the embodied soul meets death influenced by goodness, it attains the pure worlds of those possessing the highest knowledge.

From goodness arises knowledge.

The question arises: What kind of knowledge is this? The answer is specified at 18.20:

Know that knowledge to be of the nature of goodness, through which one sees a single imperishable reality in all beings, unified in the diversified.

Here, the text is indicating that shifting to *sattva guṇa* qualifies one to perceive the underlying transcendent unity pervading all things. We can infer then that *sattva guṇa* is the necessary pre-condition or the launching pad to attain the state of *mokṣa*, a state characterized by the ability to *constantly* perceive the underlying transcendent unity pervading the diversity of phenomena. The *Gītā*'s agenda to persuade *puruṣas* to act within the jurisdiction of *sattva guṇa* can thus also be seen as a way of preparing a fertile existential ground where the pre-condition for *mokṣa* can take root and sprout. Put differently, the text seems to suggest that by doing one's *dharmic* duty for the sake of duty one gradually qualifies oneself to attain the liberated state. On this view, the framework of *dharma* becomes the instrumental device to attain the highest good—the ultimate *Upaniṣadic* telos of *mokṣa*. In this context, the *Gītā* is advancing a multi-layered ethical theory where the foundational telos of *mokṣa* grounds and explains a plurality of more superficial foundational normative theories. In approaching this idea, let me observe that to see how theories in normative ethics differ it is useful to “distinguish between normative *factors* and normative *foundations*” (Perrett 2005, p. 325). Ethicists readily acknowledge a variety of normative factors—factors relevant to determining the moral status of a choice—outcomes, rules, constraints, obligations, virtues, and so on. However, the point of contention is which factor is most basic and most important and how to rank various normative factors in the likely event of conflict. The normative foundations of an ethical theory are supposed to clarify these issues by offering a conceptual device that justifies establishing one type of normative factor as most basic and most important. Normative ethical theories differ, then, because they offer competing foundational conceptual devices which allow one to rank normative factors differently and consequently claim that in making sense of the moral universe, one normative factor grounds and explains all other normative factors.

Now, where a pluralist at the factorial level holds that more than one normative factor has significance, a pluralist at the foundational level holds that the different factors are grounded in different foundational devices. Roy Perrett suggests that there are two routes to justify the latter position:

One is right to insist that that there is an ultimate and irreducible pluralism at the foundations of normative ethics. The other is a bit more exotic: a foundational pluralism which also admits of the possibility of multilayering. The idea here is that there may be at a deeper foundational level still some single foundational theory that grounds and explains the plurality of more superficial foundational theories. (Perrett 2005, p. 327)

I contend that the *Gītā* advances exactly such a multi-layered ethical theory. First, Kṛṣṇa persuades Arjuna to perform his *dharmic* duty with the desire to enjoy the outcomes of actions and this is, as I have argued, an agent-relative consequentialist approach. However, then Kṛṣṇa tries to persuade Arjuna to perform his *dharmic* duty for the sake of duty, a deontological approach, or in the terms of the *Gītā*, a *sattva guṇa* approach. The *Gītā* clearly favours the *sattva guṇa* approach. My argument is that the deeper motive behind the *Gītā*'s agenda to recommend actions within the jurisdiction of *sattva guṇa* is that *sattva guṇa* is the pre-condition for attaining *mokṣa*. In this sense, the foundational teleological *mokṣa* theory grounds and explains the more superficial foundational normative theories of agent-relative consequentialism and deontology.

Premise Five: Considering that the *Gītā* holds that *dharma* is synonymous with *sattva guṇa*, the question is: does the *Gītā* text specify *dharmic* ideals, ideals that are supposed to emerge out of *sattva guṇa*? Along with Theodor (Theodor 2016, p. 13), I contend that 16.1–4, offers a list of such ideals, “ideal qualities to be pursued while living in accordance with *dharma*” (Theodor 2016, p. 13):

Fearlessness, purification of one's whole being, firmness in spiritual knowledge, generosity, self control and sacrifice, studying the Veda, austerity, righteousness, nonviolence, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, tranquillity, avoiding vilification, compassion for all beings, absence of greed, gentleness, modesty, reliability, vigour, tolerance, fortitude, purity, absence of envy and pride—these are the qualities of one born to divine destiny, O Bhārata.

I consider these ideals to be synonymous with *sattva guṇa* because at 18.5, the text specifies these “qualities lead to liberation” (*daivī sampad vimokṣāya*) and as I have discussed in premise four, the text considers that *sattva guṇa* bestows the type of salvific knowledge which is a precondition to attaining liberation. Note that this list includes two significant ideals: *ahiṃsā* (nonviolence) and *dayā bhūteṣu* (compassion or kindness toward all living entities). One can legitimately derive prescriptive moral injunctions about obligatory and forbidden actions that advance the welfare of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, from these two ideals. In this context, it is worth noting that the *Manu Smṛti* or *Mānava Dharma Śāstra*, widely considered to be the most important text of the Dharma Śāstra genre, contains numerous injunctions proscribing the injury of animals and plants and even imposes religious penalties (*prāyaścitta*) as well as civil penalties for injuring trees. Mary McGee notes that the authors of the Dharma Śāstras derived their laws for the protection of plants and trees from several perspectives, one of which is “a recognition of plants as sentient beings with consciousness, which therefore should be protected from harm (advocacy of *ahiṃsā*)” (McGee 2000, p. 93).

In conclusion, the world-affirming worldview of the *Gītā* applies to those *puruṣas* who identify with their *prakṛtic* embodiment and seek to improve their existential situation within *prakṛti*. The *Gītā* prescribes *dharmic* activity as a means to improve one's existential situation within *prakṛti* and this includes living by the *dharmic* ideals of *ahiṃsā* and *dayā bhūteṣu*, from which we can legitimately derive specific injunctions for protecting and caring for animals and plants. Therefore, a normative environmental ethical theory can be legitimately derived from the world-affirming worldview in the *Gītā*.

5. World-Renouncing Environmental Ethics in the *Gītā*

The argument for environmental ethics from the world-renouncing worldview in the *Gītā* can be schematized as follows:

Premise One: There is a world-renouncing worldview in the *Gītā*.

Premise Two: The world-renouncing worldview applies to those who identify as units of transcendent awareness ontologically distinct from their *prakṛtic* embodiment.

Premise Three: The soteriological goal of the world-renouncing view is to disconnect from *prakṛti* and achieve extinction in Brahman.

Premise Four: Engaging in activities advancing the welfare of all beings is the means to achieve the state of extinction in Brahman.

Premise Five: Activities that advance the welfare of animals and plants falls within the category of activities that advance the welfare of all beings.

Conclusion: Therefore, a normative environmental ethical theory can be legitimately derived from the world-renouncing worldview in the *Gītā*.

Premise One: The world-renouncing worldview appears in a number of places in the *Gītā*, but I think the most systematic articulation of this worldview is at 13.7–11:

Absence of pride and arrogance, nonviolence, forbearance, honesty, attendance upon the guru, purity, firmness, self control, lack of attraction to sense objects, absence of ego-notion, visioning the distress and evil of birth, death, old age and disease, detachment, aloofness from sons, wife, home and the like, constant equanimity toward desired and undesired events, single-minded devotion to me supported by yoga, preferring of solitary places and avoiding the crowds, constant contemplation of knowledge of the self, envisioning the purpose of knowledge concerned with the truth—all these are declared knowledge, whereas all else is ignorance.

These verses seem to encourage an ascetic mode of living, wherein the primary purpose driving action is to relinquish the world of *prakṛti* altogether while simultaneously trying to connect to the unchanging, eternal, transcendent self that is the essential “I.”

Premise Two: The world-renouncing worldview applies to those who identify as transcendent awareness, ontologically distinct from *prakṛti*. From this perspective, one considers one’s mind-body complex to be external to oneself and consequently, also considers one’s entanglement in *prakṛti* to be circumstantial and an obstacle to realising one’s true state of being (see, for example, 13.3, 13.32, 13.33 and 13.34).

Premise Three: The soteriological goal—the highest good—of the world-renouncing worldview is liberation from *samsāra*—the cycle of repeated birth and death that the embodied *puruṣa* is said to undergo in the world of *prakṛti*. The world-renouncer does not simply wish to transcend the *prakṛtic* world, however, but simultaneously seeks to achieve the state of *brahma-nirvāṇa*, literally, “extinction in Brahman.” I take this to mean that the world-renouncer intends to detach from the *prakṛtic* composite that makes up one’s empirical personhood and solely retain awareness of self-luminous awareness itself. Kṛṣṇa uses the phrase *brahma-nirvāṇam* three times, in three consecutive verses, at 5.24–26, a section of the *Gītā* dedicated to delineating the world-renouncer’s soteriological goal:

He who can withstand the urges originating from lust and anger in this world, before release from the body, is yoked and is a happy person. He whose happiness is within, whose pleasure is within, and his enlightenment too is within is actually a *yogī*; with his whole being absorbed in *Brahman*, he attains to extinction in *Brahman*. The seers whose evils have been eradicated, who are free from doubt, self-controlled and who wish all beings well, attain extinction in *Brahman*. For those freed from lust and anger, who are ascetics of controlled minds and who know the self— for them close at hand lies extinction in *Brahman*.

Premise Four: Given the *Sāṅkhya* framework underpinning the *Gītā*'s conception of nature or *prakṛti*, the world-renouncer's attempt to relinquish the world of *prakṛti* is tantamount to transcending the *guṇas* comprising *prakṛti*. Indeed, the *Gītā*, at 14.25, defines the liberated person as *guṇātītaḥ*—having gone beyond or transcended the *guṇas*. From the world-renouncing perspective, what does it mean to transcend the *guṇas*? Recall that according to the *Gītā*'s underlying *Sāṅkhya* framework, the *guṇas* make up everything within the world of *prakṛti* and thus the endless variety of experiences perceived by the *puruṣa* entangled in *saṁsāra* are all generated by various permutations and combinations of the three *guṇas*. Significantly, the text, at 3.27–29, characterizes ignorance as the inability to discern that conventional action in the world is performed under the influence of the *guṇas*.

Although actions in every respect are performed by the *guṇas* of material nature, the spirit soul, confused by the ego thinks: 'It is actually me who is the doer'. But, he who knows the truth, O mighty Arjuna, regarding the separation (of the soul) from both the *guṇas* and activity, and sees clearly that the *guṇas* act among themselves—he is not attached. Those thus bewildered by the *guṇas* of material nature, are attached to actions within the *guṇas*' scope. However, he whose knowledge is complete may not disturb those fools whose knowledge is incomplete.

According to this analysis, in conventional existence in the world, when ignorant of the real nature of the *puruṣa* as being ontologically distinct from *prakṛti*, one actively pursues experiences born of *prakṛtic* objects and evaluates everything in terms of its instrumental value to the fulfilment of *bhoga*—*prakṛtic* enjoyment. To be "attached to actions within the *guṇas*' scope", then, is equivalent to identifying with the mind-body complex made of *prakṛtic* stuff. The *Gītā* claims that the *ahaṁkāra* or ego, a most subtle aspect of the *prakṛtic* psychological mechanism, is the glue that binds awareness to the mind-body complex and the *prakṛtic* world. Jonathan Edelmann notes: "The etymological meaning of *ahaṁkāra* is 'I-maker', for it provides the self with the sense of being an individual, or an 'I'. When the ego is applied to the body and mind, the result is a false concept of personal identity, or a sense of 'I and mine'" (Edelmann 2012, p. 65). This false sense of 'I and mine' causes the *puruṣa* to associate one's sense of identity with the mind-body complex the *puruṣa* is presently embodied in. Specifically, the *puruṣa* feel a sense of possessiveness or ownership over this particular mind-body complex, and all the other *prakṛtic* objects connected with this mind-body complex (e.g., family members, wealth, fame, nation, etc). As long as the *puruṣa* remains under the influence of the *ahaṁkāra*, the *puruṣa* actively seeks to 'possess and own' *prakṛtic* objects that can generate 'good' experiences for the *prakṛtic* mind-body complex one is embodied in and this disposition ensures that the *puruṣa* continues to remain under the influence of the *guṇas*, and continues to be reborn in various types of *prakṛtic* bodies according to the *karmic* merit and demerit one acquires. To gain release from *saṁsāra*, then, one has to become indifferent to the deep-rooted psychological disposition to 'possess and own' the experiences generated by the *guṇas* that make up the world. This is diametrically opposed to the world-affirming worldview, where one is motivated to act to possess the fruits of one's actions (the experiences generated by the *guṇas*). From the world-renouncer perspective, the motivation for action is to transcend the *guṇas* by not desiring to possess the fruits of action but by desiring solely to yoke oneself to *Brahman*, as described in chapter two (2.45, 2.47, 2.48, 2.51):

O Arjuna, rise above the three *guṇas*' realm! Be free from duality, always planted in the truth, free from the desire to possess and preserve, and established in the self. 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 Dhanañjaya, perform activities while you are fixed in *yoga*; relinquishing attachment, be equally accepting of both success and failure, for this equanimity is called *yoga*. The wise who are rooted in this enlightenment relinquish indeed the fruits born of actions; thus they are freed from the bondage of rebirth, and go to that place which is free from any pain.

To counter the *puruṣa*'s false sense of ownership and possessiveness, the text is advising the world-renouncer to develop equanimity (*sama*) toward the *guṇas*. Indeed, the text seems to suggest that developing equanimity toward the psychological flux produced by the *guṇas* is the necessary condition for the *puruṣa* to embark upon the project of liberation from *saṃsāra* (see 14.21–25). To develop equanimity toward the *guṇas*, is to become detached from the influence of the *ahaṃkāra*, because it is the *ahaṃkāra*, which focuses the awareness of the *puruṣa* upon his *prakṛtic* embodiment and the false sense of “I and mine” that comes from this absorption. This false sense of “I and mine” is what drives the *puruṣa* to seek endless configurations of *guṇa* experiences, experiences that arise when the mind and senses which are made up of the *guṇas* come in contact with sense objects, also made up of the *guṇas*. To become detached from the *ahaṃkāra*, then, is to become indifferent to the inevitable duality of pleasure and pain that arises from the senses coming in contact with their sense objects, which is, in effect, means relinquishing the pursuit of *guṇa*-born experiences. All this, of course, leads to the question: What is the ethical means through which the world-renouncer can give up the pursuit of *guṇa* experiences and develop equanimity toward the influence of the *guṇas*?

I believe the answer to this question is found in the phrase *sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ*, which appears in that same form, twice in the *Gītā*—5.25 and 12.4. The first time it appears, in 5.25, Kṛṣṇa uses the phrase to qualify the person fit to attain *brahma-nirvāṇa*, or extinction in *Brahman*. Kṛṣṇa again uses the same phrase, in 12.4, to qualify the person fit to attain *akṣaram avyaktam*—that is, the imperishable and unmanifest *Brahman*. The phrase *sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ* may be translated as “concerned with the welfare of all beings” or “engaged in the welfare of all beings.” I believe *sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ* is the primary ethical principle through which the world-renouncer is supposed to develop equanimity toward the influence of the *guṇas*. The rationale behind this idea is that by focusing on acting for the welfare of all beings, the *puruṣa* can relinquish the *ahaṃkāra*-centred pursuit of *guṇa* experiences within *saṃsāra*, which further allows the *puruṣa* to detach from the *ahaṃkāra* itself and develop “constant equanimity toward desired and undesired events,” brought about by the *guṇas* (mind and senses) interacting with the *guṇas* (sense objects). The idea of “constant equanimity toward desired and undesired events” is conveyed in the phrase “*nityam ca sama-cittatvam iṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu*”, one of the qualities of the world-renouncer described at 13.10.

Premise Five: Sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ is a broad principle, but I contend that the lowest common denominator of this principle is the promotion of non-violence and non-possessiveness toward animals and trees. Christopher Chapple has made the case that non-violence to animals, trees, and self, when combined with non-possessiveness can result in ecological awareness:

[T]he solutions that Gandhi proposed to counter the ills of colonialism can also be put into effect to redress this new and ultimately deleterious situation. The observance of nonviolence, coupled with a commitment to minimize consumption of natural resources, can contribute to restoring and maintaining an ecological balance. (Chapple 1993, p. 73)

According to Chapple, Gandhi and others who follow ascetic ideals such as non-possession, celibacy, and non-violence, serve as exemplars for limiting resource-consumption and minimizing their ecological footprint and can thus serve as an inspiration for environmental ethics. *Sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ* can also mean a more proactive brand of social activism that includes environmental activism. The inspiration for this interpretation comes from chapter six of the *Gītā*, a chapter dedicated to discussing classical yoga, a psychosomatic manual of meditative practice aimed at helping one realize the actual nature of the *puruṣa*. At 6.32, the text has Kṛṣṇa declare:

O Arjuna, one who in relation to himself sees all beings equally, whether in happiness or distress, is considered the supreme *yogī*.

Vedāntic theologians often gloss this verse as one offering a vision of universal empathy—just as I do not desire to remain in a state of pain and endeavour to mitigate my pain, so it is for all living beings (see, for example, Śaṅkara’s gloss to this verse). Lance Nelson, while acknowledging this, quotes Rāmānuja’s commentary on this verse as saying that the highest *yogī* is cognizant of the sameness of all *puruṣas* (selves), in that, being of the nature of *Brahman*, *puruṣas* are ultimately disconnected from and indeed, untouched by the pleasure and pain incurred in embodied existence in *saṃsāra*. Nelson argues that this vision is “ecologically unnerving” because by claiming that “spirit is untouched by mere empirical calamities” *Vedāntic* thought minimizes the significance of empirical calamities such as the degradation of the environment (Nelson 2000, pp. 143, 151). Nelson’s claim implies that upon attaining *Brahman* absorption, one would view the pain incurred by selves in embodied existence with ‘transcendental indifference’ and do nothing to mitigate it, since, after all, *Brahman* is untouched by matter. On this view, Rāmānuja should have done nothing to mitigate the suffering of embodied beings, knowing that *Brahman* is untouched by matter. Yet, Rāmānuja devoted his life to spreading the teachings and practices of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, which, for him, was clearly the means to mitigate the suffering brought about by empirical calamities. In exactly the same vein, Pankaj Jain asks: “If the world was an illusion, *māyā*, for Śaṅkara why would he work to “defeat” Buddhist tradition and other ideologies in the popular discourses as captured in the Śaṅkara-Digvijaya?” (Jain 2011, p. 12). The question is: If the highest *yogī* is supposed to be completely indifferent to the events of the empirical world, as suggested by Nelson, then why would such a person initiate reform movements aimed at bringing about change in the empirical world? Put precisely, if *Brahman* is untouched by empirical calamities, then why do *Vedāntic* theologians go to such great lengths to spread the teachings and practices of their respective *Vedāntic* schools, which for them, is ostensibly an endeavour to help *puruṣas* be liberated from empirical calamities?

I contend that an answer to this question requires that we read *Brahman* absorption as having a rather different effect than what is suggested by Nelson. The vision of universal empathy articulated at 6.32 comes after a series of verses depicting the *yogī* attaining *brahma-bhūtam* (absorption in *Brahman*), *brahma-saṃsparśam* (contact with *Brahman*) and *sama-darśanaḥ*—equal vision perception—by virtue of seeing the Supreme Person everywhere and everything in the Supreme Person (see 6.27–31). I take this to mean that *sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ* is not just the ethical means to attain immersion in *Brahman* but is also the symptom of one who has attained immersion in *Brahman*. The rationale for this interpretation is reinforced by the fact that the *Gītā* does not present inaction as a permanent option for the *puruṣa*. This being the case, the question may be raised: How does the *puruṣa* who has attained absorption in *Brahman* act? Eliot Deutsch posits that the world-renouncer who has attained *Brahman* absorption is now free and can act “without destructive intentions” (quoted in Jain 2011, p. 9)). Anantanand Rambachan says that when a spiritually perfected self dispels the veil of ignorance, they do not view the world as illusory, but rather, they see the world as non-different from *Brahman* (Rambachan 2006, pp. 79–80). Building on all this, I read *Brahman* absorption as having the effect of freeing the *puruṣa* from the *ahaṃkāra*-centred instrumentalist vision of seeing the world as a means to fulfilling one’s schemes for *bhoga*. However, apart from the emancipatory effect of *Brahman* absorption, I read *Brahman* absorption as having an ‘activist’ effect as well. On this view, the *brahma-bhūta yogī*’s seeing the world as non-different from *Brahman* is equivalent to being fully sensitive to the inherent pain of embodied existence. That is, the *brahma-bhūta yogī* may know that the eternally changing *Brahman* is completely unrelated to matter, but the *brahma-bhūta yogī* also knows that *puruṣas* under the influence of *māyā* (ignorance) do acutely experience the inherent pain of embodied existence in *saṃsāra*. Therefore, the *brahma-bhūta yogī* ‘works’ to help all beings (re)discover their true ontological status as beings partaking of the inherent bliss of *Brahman*. Being proactive about ecological concerns can thus be a legitimate subset of the world-renouncer *yogī*’s compassionate outreach to mitigate the pain of embodied beings, both in the stage of yoga practice and in the stage of perfection (*Brahman* absorption).

By mandating the world-renouncer to engage in activities for the welfare of all beings, the *Gītā* is advancing a virtue ethics approach to normative ethics. This is because whether at the stage of practice or of perfection, the *Gītā* has defined the world-renouncer in terms of virtues. At 13.8–12, the text lists the virtues that characterize the world-renouncer at the stage of practice and at 5.19–26, the text lists the virtues that characterize the world-renouncer at the stage of perfection. That is, from the world-renouncer perspective, virtue is the foundational normative concept and other normative notions are grounded in virtue. Therefore, when the *Gītā* asks the world-renouncer to advance the welfare of animals and plants, it does so because this is the virtuous thing to do. At the same time, the world-renouncer is intent on attaining *brahma-nirvana* or *Brahman* immersion. In this sense, the text is taking what I call a *mokṣa*-based virtue ethics approach. This is similar to the eudaimonist versions of virtue ethics which define virtues in terms of their relationship to *eudaimonia*—a key term in ancient Greek moral philosophy usually translated as “flourishing” or “well-being.” A virtue is a trait that contributes to or is a constituent of *eudaimonia* and we ought to develop virtues, the eudaimonist claims, precisely because they contribute to *eudaimonia*. In the same way, the world-renouncer is asked to express the virtue of *sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ* because expressing the virtue is necessary for the world-renouncer to attain the state of *brahma-nirvana* or from the perspective of the perfected world-renouncer, *sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ* is a virtue that is a constituent of *Brahman* immersion. Again, this exemplifies the *Gītā*’s multi-layered approach to ethical theory, where the foundational teleological *mokṣa* theory grounds and explains a more superficial foundational normative theory, in this case, virtue ethics.

Some commentators imply that from the world-renouncer perspective, the duality of virtue and vice does not exist, since the world-renouncer only sees, or is aiming to see, the non-dual *Brahman*. It seems that such an imperative to transcend duality also implies transcending the categories of moral and immoral altogether. Without acknowledging the dual categories of moral and immoral, what is the basis for any kind of ethical imperative, including the imperative to care for animals and plants? Nelson expresses this concern when he writes: “In the Upaniṣads and in the *Gītā*, as elsewhere in the tradition (especially in Tantra), there is a marked drift toward an ultimate amorality (or perhaps transmorality) in the absolute realm, one that may not bode well for ecological awareness” (Nelson 2000, p. 144).

In addressing this concern, I contend that when the *Gītā* speaks of transcending duality, it is referring to transcending the mentality of categorizing experiences as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in relation to one’s *ahaṃkāra*-centred enjoyment. However, even for the world-renouncer, there still exists the dual categories of virtue and vice. The *Gītā* makes this point at the beginning of chapter eighteen. The chapter begins with Arjuna asking Kṛṣṇa to clarify the meaning of renunciation (*tyāga*) and the meaning of the renounced stage of life (*sannyāsa*), and the difference between them. At 18.3, Kṛṣṇa notes that some great thinkers claim that all types of actions should be abandoned, since they are inherently faulty, yet other sages maintain that acts of sacrifice (*yajña*), giving (*dāna*) and austerity (*tapāḥ*) should never be abandoned. Then, at 18.5, the text has Kṛṣṇa give his opinion on the matter:

Acts of sacrifice, giving and austerity are not to be given up, but rather should be performed, as sacrifice, giving and austerity purify even the wise.

Now, if the world-renouncer is to continue acts of sacrifice, giving and austerity, then clearly there must be a basis for him to differentiate between actions that count as acts of sacrifice, giving and austerity, and those that do not. This basis, as I have argued, is provided by the soteriological goal of the world-renouncer, the intent to achieve extinction in *Brahman*. For the world-renouncer, then, virtuous actions are ones that help oneself and others attain *Brahman* immersion. A world-renouncer who has already attained *Brahman* immersion continues acts of sacrifice, giving and austerity, to help other *puruṣas* attain *Brahman* immersion.

In summary, the world-renouncing worldview of the *Gītā* applies to those *puruṣas* who identify as self-luminous awareness, ontologically distinct from their *prakṛtic* embodiment.

The soteriological goal of the world-renouncer is to achieve the state of extinction in *Brahman* or to realize the true status of self-luminous awareness freed from its entanglement with *prakṛti*. Engaging in activities for the welfare of all beings is the ethical means to achieve extinction in *Brahman* as well as the symptom of one who has achieved extinction in *Brahman*. Activities to care for and protect animals and plants is included in the category of engaging in activities for the welfare of all beings. Therefore, a normative environmental ethical theory can be legitimately derived from the world-renouncing worldview in the *Gītā*.

6. Bhakti-Inspired Environmental Ethics in the *Gītā*

The argument for bhakti-inspired environmental ethics within the *Gītā* can be systematized as follows:

Premise One: There is a *bhakti* worldview in the *Gītā*.

Premise Two: The *bhakti* worldview applies to those who identify as an eternal servant or worshipper of *Īśvara* or the Supreme Person.

Premise Three: The soteriological goal of the *bhakti* worldview is to attain the state of eternal devotion to and loving service of *Īśvara*.

Premise Four: To glorify and worship *Īśvara* is the means to be absorbed in devotion to *Īśvara*.

Premise Five: Activities that advance the welfare of animals and plants falls within the category of activities that glorify and worship *Īśvara*.

Conclusion: Therefore, a normative environmental ethical theory can be derived from the *bhakti* worldview in the *Gītā*.

Premise One: The *bhakti* worldview appears throughout the text of the *Gītā* but is most succinctly articulated in the concluding verse of the ninth chapter, 9.34, as follows:

Always think of me and become my devotee, worship me and pay homage unto me; thus yoked to me and intent on me as your highest goal, you shall come to me.

This verse depicts a state of being where the *puruṣa*'s awareness is completely absorbed in the Supreme Person, and is widely considered to be one of the climaxes of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The significance of this *bhakti* ideal in the *Gītā*'s overall presentation can be gauged from the fact that the verse appears again almost verbatim at the end of the *Gītā*'s epilogue at 18.65. Numerous times throughout the text, Kṛṣṇa reiterates the ideal of total absorption in him, the bliss of exchanging loving relations with the Supreme Person and the ultimate goal of returning to the supreme deity's *dhāma* or abode (see, for example, 8.14–15).

Premise Two: The *bhakti* worldview applies to those *puruṣas* who identify themselves as eternal servants or lovers of the Supreme Person. That is, the identity of the *bhakti* is defined and constructed through one's relationship with the Supreme Person. The ontological infrastructure for the *bhakti* worldview rests on the notion of *Īśvara*, a supreme *puruṣa* ontologically different from and indeed, *higher* than all other *puruṣas*. This idea is explicated in some detail in the last five verses of the *Gītā*'s fifteenth chapter. At 15.16, the text asserts there are two types of *puruṣas*, *kṣara-puruṣas*, perishable beings, and *akṣara-puruṣas*, imperishable ones. The *kṣara-puruṣas* are all living entities, *sarvāṇi bhūtāni*, and the *akṣara-puruṣas* are *kuṭastha*, literally, situated on the top. The term *kuṭastha* is used twice in the *Gītā*, in 6.8 to refer to the enlightened *yogī* and in 12.3 to refer to the quality of the highest truth realized by the enlightened *yogī*. On this account, we can infer that the *kṣara-puruṣa* refers to the unenlightened being, and the *akṣara-puruṣa* refers to the enlightened being. Significantly, 15.17 goes on to describe another, highest *puruṣa*, the *paramātmā*, the supreme self who pervades the three worlds and supports them, and uses the term *Īśvara* to designate this highest *puruṣa*. 15.18 again reiterates that this highest *puruṣa* is higher than both *kṣara* and *akṣara puruṣas* and is celebrated both in the world and in the *Veda*-derived literature *aspuruṣottama*—Supreme Person, 15.19 claims that one who knows this Supreme Person to be Kṛṣṇa knows all that there is to know and finally, 15.20

concludes the chapter by asserting that this knowledge of the supreme self is the most confidential scriptural teaching. Thus, in consonance with other schools of theistic Indic thought, the *Gītā* advocates a vision of *Īśvara* as a special *puruṣa* belonging to a different ontological category from other *puruṣas*, while at the same time the *Gītā* puts a name to this *Īśvara*—Kṛṣṇa.

Premise Three: In contrast to the world-renouncing worldview where the *puruṣa* seeks *Brahman* immersion, a state where awareness is absorbed in its own nature, the soteriological goal of the *bhakti* worldview is two-fold: to be perpetually absorbed in loving devotion to *Īśvara* and upon attaining final liberation (through the grace of *Īśvara*), to enter *Īśvara*'s eternal personal abode to perpetually engage in loving relationships with *Īśvara*. The theistic Vedāntins who articulated this view (for example, Rāmānuja's commentary to Vedānta Sūtras I.1.21) would characterize *Īśvara*'s personal realms as *saguṇa-brahman*, realms within *Brahman* that are made of self-luminous awareness—*Brahman*—but that nonetheless contain forms, individuals, and personalities. Foundational to this view, is the idea that *Īśvara*'s mind and form are not made of *prākṛtic* stuff, even in its purest *sāttvic* potential, but made of *Brahman* and thus part of the essential nature of *Īśvara* rather than an external *prākṛtic* covering as is the case with *puruṣas* embedded in *saṁsāra*. Moreover, the liberated *puruṣas* who attain *Īśvara*'s personal *Brahman* realm again become re-embodied, but this time not in a temporary form made of the evolutes of *prākṛti* but in an eternal trans-*prākṛtic* *Brahman* form—a form made of self-luminous awareness in which bliss is inherent and ever-expanding. It is with mind and senses made of *Brahman* stuff that the liberated *puruṣas* see, hear, think about, and lovingly interact with *Īśvara* in these *Brahman* realms. A number of *Gītā* verses seem to support this soteriological goal. At 8.21, the text has Kṛṣṇa characterize *paramāṁ gatim*—the supreme destination to be attained—as *tad dhāma paramaṁ mama*—“that is My supreme abode.” The text again gets Kṛṣṇa to use the same phrase *tad dhāma paramaṁ mama* in 15.6 to characterize the destination of those liberated *yogīs* “constantly absorbed in the supreme self” who will never again return to the *prākṛtic* realm. At 18.61–2, the text asserts that *Īśvara* abides in the heart of all living beings and exhorts Arjuna to take refuge in *Īśvara* in all respects (*sarva-bhāvena*) for by *Īśvara*'s grace (*tat-prasādāt*) “you shall attain supreme peace and the eternal abode.” Approaching the *Gītā*'s finale, at 18.65, the text again has Kṛṣṇa declare:

Always think of me, become my devotee, worship me and pay your homage unto me, and thus you shall undoubtedly come to me; I promise you this as you are dear to me.

Premise Four: The means to be absorbed in devotion to *Īśvara* is to worship and glorify *Īśvara* as expressed at 9.13–14:

But those great souls whose nature is immersed in the divine, worship me intently, O Pārtha, knowing me to be the imperishable source of all beings. Ever striving to glorify me with fortitude, bowing down to me in devotion, they are ever absorbed in worshipping me.

Additionally, again in 10.9–10:

Those whose consciousness is absorbed in me, for whom I am everything, enlighten one another about me, constantly speaking of me; thus absorbed, they are delighted and content. Those thus constantly absorbed in me, who worship me with love, I endow with the understanding by which they can come to me.

This constant absorption in *Īśvara* is supposed to help one transcend the influence of the *guṇas*, and attain *Brahman* status, but as opposed to the world-renouncer perspective wherein one seeks to detach from one's empirical personhood composed of *prākṛtic* stuff to become immersed in *Brahman*, in the *bhakti* worldview, attaining *Brahman* status is tantamount to being constantly and unwaveringly engaged in the worship and service of *Īśvara*. At 14.26 the text thus claims that one who serves Kṛṣṇa constantly through *bhakti-yoga*, “unswervingly and without going astray,” transcends the *guṇas* and at 18.54 the text presents the idea that one attains supreme devotion to Kṛṣṇa after attaining *Brahman* status.

Premise Five: The case that acting for the benefit of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, constitute worship and glorification of *Īśvara* is linked to the *Gītā*'s panentheistic conception of the divine. Panentheism is the view that God is simultaneously immanent in the world and transcendent to the world. In the terms of the *Gītā* this means that *Īśvara* is simultaneously immanent in *prakṛti* and transcendent to *prakṛti*. A panentheistic vision appears throughout the *Gītā* text (7.12 and 9.4):

Know that all states of being, be they characterized by *sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas*, have their source in me alone; but I am not in them—rather they are in me.

I pervade the entire world in my unmanifest form; all beings rest in me, but I do not rest in them.

Rāmānuja, the founding theologian and hierarch of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community articulates this panentheistic vision in his theology of *viśiṣṭādvaita*—‘differentiated nonduality’—an interpretation of *Vedānta* which is as an exemplar of Indic panentheism. Eric Lott has shown that this panentheistic vision does not owe itself to Rāmānuja, rather, it has deep roots in Hindu texts (Lott 1976). Rāmānuja posited an eternal tripartite differentiation within *Brahman* or ultimate reality: *Brahman* as supreme personal Being, or *Īśvara*, whom he correlated with Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa; *prakṛti* or matter; and *puruṣas* or selves. Rāmānuja claimed these are eternal and real ontological categories but these categories do not compromise the essential nonduality of *Brahman* since everything emanates from, and remains wholly contingent on *Īśvara* for their existence. *Viśiṣṭādvaita* affirms that *Īśvara* includes, penetrates and sustains the entire universe, so that the conscious selves (*puruṣas*) and unconscious matter (*prakṛti*) that constitute this world are inseparable from *Īśvara*'s being and exists in *Īśvara*, but, as opposed to pantheism, this panentheistic vision claims that *Īśvara*'s being is still distinct from and transcendent to the universe. Rāmānuja clarified this relationship between *Īśvara*, *puruṣas* and *prakṛti* through the analogy that the world consisting of *puruṣas* and *prakṛti* is the body of the supreme personal *Brahman*, or *Īśvara*. Just as in the relationship of self and body, the body, although distinct from the self, is inseparably dependent on and controlled by the self, the world made up of *puruṣas* and *prakṛti*, although distinct from *Īśvara*, is inseparably dependent on and controlled by *Īśvara*.

Śrī Vaiṣṇava soteriology, which I take to be an archetype of the *bhakti* soteriological goal articulated in the *Gītā*, says that to eternally glorify, worship and serve *Īśvara* is the ultimate destiny of the *puruṣa* on account of one's inherent subservience to and dependence on *Īśvara*. The tradition teaches that the life of a *prapanna*, one who has surrendered to *Īśvara*, is one of service to and worship of *Īśvara*. Significantly, Śrī Vaiṣṇava theologians say that the *prapanna*'s worship of *Īśvara*, here on earth, takes primarily three forms: first, one serves *Īśvara*'s divine form in his *murti* manifestation (*arcavatara*) in the temple; second, one serves *Īśvara*'s *bhaktas* (devotees), those whom *Īśvara* especially loves and whom he regards as his very self, and third, one works for the welfare of the world—*loka-saṅgraha*—by supporting the *dharmic* order that sustains the world (Mumme 1998).

This third aspect of the *prapanna*'s worship of *Īśvara* needs some elucidation. After all, if the ultimate goal and destiny of the *puruṣa* is to attain a state of salvation outside of this world, then why should one work for the welfare of this world? To answer this question, let us begin by noting that the term *loka-saṅgraha* appears twice, at 3.20 and 3.25, in a part of the *Gītā* where Kṛṣṇa is seeking to motivate Arjuna to fight the battle as a form of detached (*asaktaḥ*) *dharmic* duty. The question may justly be raised: If one is detached from acquiring any type of *prakṛtic* gain, then why should one continue to act in the world of *prakṛti*? In the context of the *bhakti* worldview, the answer is that the *bhakta*'s (or *prapanna*'s) desire to work for the welfare of the world by supporting the eternal *dharmic* order is an expression of the *bhakta*'s devotion to *Īśvara*. Indeed, the *Gītā*, at 4.7–8, famously depicts *Īśvara* repeatedly descending to this *prakṛtic* world to maintain *dharmic* order. Therefore, the *bhakta*'s motivation for supporting *dharmic* order is to serve and glorify *Īśvara*, as opposed to those who subscribe to the world-affirming worldview described earlier, who also follow *dharmic* codes, but not out of a motive to serve *Īśvara* but because they are driven by the purpose of improving their existential situation within *prakṛti*. It is in this sense that the

bhakti worldview is simultaneously world-affirming and world-renouncing. *Bhaktas* seek to be detached from pursuing *guṇa*-born experiences involving any kind of *prakṛtic* object and in this sense, because they do not see the world as a means to fulfil *ahaṅkāra*-centred purposes, they can be said to have renounced the world. At 12.13, the text delineates the qualities of the ideal *bhakta* and specifically claims that the ideal *bhakta* is *nirahaṅkāraḥ* (without false ego) and *nirmamaḥ* (with no sense of proprietorship). However, at the same time, *bhaktas* read the *Gītā* as saying that the world exhibits the power and excellence of *Īśvara* and is a divine manifestation expressing *Īśvara*'s glory (*vibhūti*) (see 10.16 and 10.41). Moreover, *Īśvara* is invested in maintaining the *dharmic* order that sustains the world and it is therefore incumbent upon the *bhakta* to work for the welfare of the world according to *dharmic* codes because by doing so one worships *Īśvara*.

In this vein, Patricia Mumme (Mumme 1998) has argued that service to the earth and the living beings she supports is consistent with all three forms of service to *Īśvara* that the *prapanna* is supposed to undertake. Since, in the panentheistic vision of Śrī Vaiṣṇava theology, the earth and the living beings she supports are also *Īśvara*'s body, so service to them is also akin to serving *Īśvara*'s body, no less than serving his form in the temple. Moreover, *Īśvara* loves all *puruṣas* in this world, for these are his body, which he regards as his self, and for whose salvation and protection *Īśvara* has often descended into this world. Furthermore, Mumme argues that Śrī Vaiṣṇavas have an incentive to undertake ecological activism since service that advances the welfare of the world—*loka-saṅgraha*—is included within service to *Īśvara*, which is the *puruṣa*'s ultimate goal and destiny, even for *puruṣas* that have attained the ultimate soteriological goal of completely surrendering (*prapatti*) to *Īśvara*.

I contend that these three reasons for engaging in ecological activism constitute a *mokṣa*-based virtue ethics approach to normative ethics. However, as opposed to the world-renouncer's conception of *mokṣa* being equivalent to attaining extinction in *Brahman*, the *bhakta* equates the state of *mokṣa* to a state of being where one is constantly absorbed in worshipping and glorifying *Īśvara*. The *Gītā* specifies that the *bhakta* or *prapanna* ought to express a host of virtues because expressing those virtues are necessary to please and serve *Īśvara*. For example, the last eight verses of the twelfth chapter of the text, 12.13–20, catalogues a list of virtues distinguishing the *bhakta* who is dear (*priyaḥ*) to *Kṛṣṇa*. The list claims that the ideal *bhakta* is *adveṣṭā* (nonenvious), *maitraḥ* (friendly) and *karuṇaḥ* (compassionate) to *sarva-bhūtānām* (all living entities). Note that the *bhakta* expresses these virtues in relation to the ultimate telos of becoming dear to Krishna or worshipping *Kṛṣṇa*. That is, the *bhakta* sees the ontic equality of all *puruṣas*, as they are all part of *Īśvara*'s being and are equally loved by *Īśvara*, and therefore, the *bhakta* knows that when one expresses the virtue of being compassionate to all living entities, one simultaneously pleases *Kṛṣṇa*. In this way, the *Gītā* indicates that to serve and worship *Kṛṣṇa* one must also express a host of other virtues or put differently, the state of serving and worshipping *Kṛṣṇa* constitutes a set of virtues such as being compassionate to all living entities. This is another instance of the *Gītā*'s multi-layered approach to ethical theory, where the foundational teleological *mokṣa* theory grounds and explains a more superficial foundational normative theory, in this case, virtue ethics.

In conclusion, despite the evidently other-worldly soteriological goal of the *Gītā*'s *bhakti* worldview, the ethical means to achieve this goal can include this-worldly environmental activism. The *Gītā* advances a panentheistic conception of the divine that sees the world of *prakṛti* as both real and valuable to *Īśvara*, so much so that *Īśvara* specifically descends to this world to uplift and maintain the *dharmic* order that sustains it. Therefore, *puruṣas* who identify as eternal servants of *Īśvara* can serve *Īśvara* by acting for the benefit of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, because such activities are a legitimate subset of activities that support the *dharmic* order that sustains the world, and by acting to support the *dharmic* order one pleases *Īśvara*.

7. Conclusions

In his work presenting coherent accounts of an *Advaitic* and a *Viśiṣṭādvaitic* theory of divinity, being and self, as they emerge from the *Gītā* commentaries of the *Vedāntic* theologians Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi writes:

A disorienting feature of the contemporary scholar's encounter with these commentaries is that the issues of moral psychology—what are Kṛṣṇa's arguments to get Arjuna to fight (and more generally to get us to act in a moral framework), and whether his arguments work philosophically—play hardly any role at all in what Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja take to be the great lessons of the *Gītā* (Chakravarthi 2013, p. 77).

The contemporary environmental philosopher is similarly vexed in trying to ascertain the *Gītā's* environmental moral psychology. That is, what (if any) are the *Gītā's* arguments to get us to act in a way consonant with environmental ethics and whether such arguments 'work' philosophically. In this article, I have engaged with the *Gītā's* theological framework to address this concern and even though my argument can be expanded to include additional points, I hope I have made enough of a case to alleviate the misapprehension that the *Gītā* is fundamentally unsuited to a favorable ecological reading. I have argued that the *Bhagavad Gītā's* environmental ethical theory is embedded in the interlocking normative, soteriological, and ontological matrix of the text. As a subset of this project, I showed that the *Gītā's* environmental ethics is set within the text's multi-layered ethical theory in which the overarching foundational teleological *mokṣa* theory grounds and explains a plurality of more superficial foundational normative theories.

My argument drew on Ithamar Theodor's articulation of the unifying structure of the *Gītā* and its attendant moral psychology. This allowed me to tease out three specific worldviews in the *Gītā*—a world-affirming worldview, a world-renouncing worldview and a *bhakti* worldview, which is simultaneously world-affirming and world-renouncing. I showed that the distinct ontological commitments and soteriological goals of these three worldviews lead to three different theories of motivation. These three different theories of motivation provide three distinct reasons for acting in the world and more specifically, they provide three different reasons that justify and warrant actions that advance the welfare of animals and plants. Environmental ethics, for the world-affirmer, are part of the *dharmic* codes which help to improve one's existential situation within *prakṛti*. Environmental ethics, for the world-renouncer, is an aspect of acting for the welfare of all beings, which is the primary means to achieve extinction in *Brahman*. Environmental ethics, for the *bhakta*, is an aspect of the *bhakta's* expression of devotion to *Īśvara*.

William Wainwright has observed that for a religious system to be deemed coherent the claims of that system ought to "hang together" appropriately (Wainwright 1999, p. 182). That is, the fundamental claims of the religious system should not only be logically consistent with each other but that they should be rationally interconnected to each other in a way that is both clear and appropriate. My case for the green *Gītā* is in this context of 'coherence,' that is, the motivation to act for the welfare of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, 'make sense' within the inter-connected, ontological, soteriological and normative dimensions of the text.

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