

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT

The problems facing society at this point in our history cannot be successfully met with the same attitude that created them. The fundamental problem facing humanity is the attitude of egocentricity and the subsequent development of attachment. Attachment has a deleterious effect on one's sense of autonomy and subjective well-being, as well as creating conflict with the environment. The ancient Indian principles known as the Vedantic tradition discussed the role of sacrifice in mediating human affairs. Sacrifice is the regulation of the mind's egocentric activities, through circumventing them. This is done through the application of an ideal. Effects of attachment and the role of sacrifice in human life are discussed.

Keywords: social integration; attachment; autonomy; sacrifice,

INTRODUCTION

It is now widely recognized that social relationships and affiliation have powerful effects on physical and mental health for a number of reasons.

Berkman, Glass, Brisette and Seeman(2000, pp. 843-844)

As a species, human beings are fundamentally dependent upon benign interactions with others to develop and mature both physically and psychically ... the one and the crowd are inextricably interdependent.

Clippinger (2007, p.151)

Integration is the removal of boundaries; combining parts into a whole; bringing the disparate into equal participation. Dis-integration is the separation of a whole into parts or fragments, and carries the pejorative sense of decay or deterioration. As part of an

international Social Summit, The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2005) defined social integration and highlighted its importance:

Social Integration can be seen as a dynamic and principled process where all members participate in dialogue to achieve and maintain peaceful social relations. Social integration does not mean coerced assimilation or forced integration.

The Social Summit focused on the need to move toward a safe, stable and just society by forming and mending conditions of social disintegration – social fragmentation, exclusion and polarization; and by expanding and strengthening conditions of social integration – including towards peaceful social relations of coexistence, collaboration and cohesion. (n.p.)

Supportive, integrated social relations are essential for human development, and a healthy society is characterised by such a network of relations. Society is a ground of mutual experience or web of relationships, the “web of communication or interaction, the reciprocal influence of persons taking each other into account as they act” (Stryker, 2006, p. 213). As Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan (1997, p. 9) state, “[w]e are all selves-in-relation to one another.” Stryker (2006) defines society as

the sum of the actions of persons occurring in situations constructed and reconstructed by those persons through interpreting the situations, identifying and assessing things that have to be taken into account in the situations, and acting on the basis of these assessments” (p. 216).

In this ‘interactionist’ model of a society, key factors influencing behaviour and relationships are: individual capacity to make accurate assessments; the basis from which the assessments are made; and the framework of ideas and attitudes that colour or determine the interpretations of situations. In a fragmented or polarised community, groups or individuals view and interpret situations through an attitudinal bias that engenders indifference, suspicion or enmity towards others. Members pursue their own local interests without consideration for external relationships or global interests. An integrated community’s members naturally perceive within the group shared values or ideals, and act based upon these. Groups can thus be integrated along lines that are familial, tribal, national, racial, political, religious, etc.

Meeting the challenges that all societies face requires group cohesion, integration. In a world that is becoming increasingly global (e.g. Clippinger, 2007), a wider common frame of reference needs to be recognised in order to ensure that integration spreads across a wider network of individuals and sub-groups. Thus, an understanding of factors promoting both social disintegration and integration would be relevant and beneficial. The current paper discusses the concepts of *attachment* and *sacrifice* as conceived in Vedānta philosophy. Attachment embodies an inherently egocentric perspective of the world, restricting one’s own

sense of personal freedom and subjective well-being, and promoting interpretations and actions that are destabilising to wider community relations. Attachment is an inevitable consequence of relating to the world without intellectual management of the mind. Sacrifice a method of directly addressing this limited perspective, expanding it and broadening the horizon of harmonious social relations.

To understand attachment and sacrifice, a philosophical perspective on the human constitution and the individual's relationship with the world must first be appreciated. Life is defined by Parthasarathy(2004, p. 11) as a "stream of experiences." The 'unit' of life then is the *experience*. Experience can itself be further divided into two components: an experiencing *subject* and an experienced *object*. The subject is the individual who undergoes the phenomenon of experiencing; the object is that aspect of the world to which the subject relates. Both the structure of the individual and the nature of the world determine the quality and nature of experiences and thus life. However, while both factors are necessary for an experience, they do not contribute equally to the quality or nature of experience. That is, the world contributes considerably *less* to one's sense of satisfaction than the state or structure of the personality, as it is the individual's *relationship with external conditions* that determines quality-of-experience rather than external conditions *per se*. The continued mis-prediction of what will make us happy or unhappy(e.g. Deiner & Oishi, 2005; Gilbert, 2004) can be attributed to the failure to recognise the higher contributory role of the personality in determining the quality of experiences: an expectancy develops for external conditions to bring inner happiness. Having ignored the role of personality in quality-of-experience, this expectancy cannot be fully realised, leading to a sense of life dissatisfaction.

The human personality relates to external conditions through the mind and intellect. *Mind* is the non-rational aspect of the personality; the seat of attractions & aversions, impulses, desires, emotions. The mind has no capacity for conscious self-governance: desires are not self-regulating; emotions do not self-select for appropriateness; preferences and aversions have no necessarily rational basis, they simply 'are.' Subtler than mind is *intellect*, the rational aspect of the personality. It is responsible for objective observation, discrimination, assessment & judgement, reasoning and forming conclusions. It is "the ability to think freely, logically. The faculty to reason and judge without bias" (Parthasarathy, 2010, p. 22). Crucially, it is the faculty which is employed to "guide, direct the mind and its emotions"(Parthasarathy, 2008, p. 12).

ATTACHMENT

Attachment is widely described in eastern philosophical traditions as the root cause of human suffering, "the prime cause of mental agitation and sorrow" (Parthasarathy, 2004, p. 219). As Nityaswrupananda states, "It is not the world but attachment to it that is the root of all misery" (Waite, 2007, n.p., Ch. 1, "Attachment"). The concept of attachment is not to be

confused with attachment theory as developed by British psychoanalyst John Bowlby after his studies of children orphaned during World War II (Pearce, 2009). There, attachment theory deals with a specific dynamic of human interaction, describing the relationships that children form with caregivers (it was later extended to adult relationships).

Attachment in the eastern tradition constitutes an ungoverned flow of thought or attention from the mind to a target object of value to the individual. The object of attachment may be concrete and material (e.g. car), a person or non-human being (e.g. those providing emotional intimacy, a sense of belongingness, security, etc.), environment & circumstance (e.g. wealth), status (i.e. one's physical, emotional or intellectual abilities), concept or ideology, deity, religion, et cetera.

The aetiology of attachment as described by Parthasarathy (2014, Ch. III) commences with the individual experiencing some object of interest. After the experience, thoughts of the object naturally arise in the mind as either stimulus-independent or stimulus-activated. This is not in itself problematic. However, without intellectual application, there is no scrutiny of the thought itself: its content & quality; meaning and accuracy; the consequence of allowing and following it. Thereafter, the thought is passively permitted to continue, exciting associated ideas and emotional connections within the individual.

The absence of discrimination or analysis means the individual has not *consciously chosen* to entertain the thought-flow: there is no distinct understanding & inner consensus that the mind's activities are directed at a known, stated purpose; no conviction that the subject matter is worthy of one's concentration. This discrimination can be made solely by the intellect. The mind is thus passively permitted to run where it wills. This has been described as rumination in the context of the mind musing upon distressing past experiences (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993, 1995; Lyubomirsky, Tucker, Caldwell, & Berg, 1999); and more generally as mind-wandering (Hasenkamp, Wilson-Mendenhall, Duncan, & Barsalou, 2012; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Mind-wandering interrupts tasks requiring sustained attention, and has been correlated with reduced individual happiness (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010).

Attachment is essentially a dependency relationship constraining personal freedom. The dependency arises as the mind 'learns' – either through direct experience or indirectly through external cues – that the target object satisfies some drive or urge. It then persists in dwelling upon thoughts of the target object. It attempts to recreate the joy of a past experience by reconstructing it through imagination, a sort of second-hand pleasure being derived. Or it imagines a certain future event, bringing a joyful expectation. The mind also hopes to recreate a past that it nonetheless knows cannot be, tingeing the joy with sadness, bringing nostalgia. The mind will even dwell upon objects-of-attachment when doing so produces no secondary pleasure, but actual frustration or sorrow (e.g. the sorrowful

ruminations of a jilted lover). This demonstrates attachment perhaps most starkly: the individual cannot arrest thoughts of the object, despite the desire to avoid the negative affect associated with them. This aetiology of attachment is predicated upon a personalised, ego-centred perspective. No perspective outside of one's own is recognised or considered: one considers only how events may advance or hinder one's own satisfaction. Under these premises, the mind seeks out and creates a mental bond with objects and beings.

A. *Negative Effects of Attachment*

A.1 *Individual – Loss of Freedom & Happiness*

Freedom is the absence of restriction upon the expression of individual potentials and inclinations; it is the ability to choose for oneself the thoughts, feelings and actions to be experienced and expressed. Uninfluenced, unbiased choice is the expression of freedom, and implicit in this is the conscious awareness of the choice made, the conviction of its correctness and the equally available option to choose differently. Unregulated, indiscriminate expression of inner tendencies implies the absence of conscious choice: the action has not been chosen *by* the individual, but *for* him – by his own mind. It is much as Jung (1969) expressed regarding complexes – we don't have complexes so much as complexes "have us" (p. 96). The locus of control of thoughts entertained and consequent actions undertaken is essentially outside one's sphere of influence. This is a violation of freedom: an inner compulsion restricts unbiased choice. The individual's freedom to choose – i.e. the ability to say 'No' to any given thought, feeling or action – has been dominated by attachment. All the more distressing to the individual is the fact that (paradoxically) the controlling attachment should lie within the personality but out of reach. Attachment may also be implicit, i.e. 'introspectively unidentified.' In fact one of the features that makes attachment so intractable is that it develops without conscious awareness. As Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner (2002) explain regarding attitudes in general, "... people do not have to be aware of the operation of attitudes for attitudes to be influential; attitudes can be implicit as well as explicit" (p. 62).

Aside from loss of autonomy, subjective well-being is further degraded through two other mechanisms. Firstly, while pleasure may be experienced in the presence of the object-of-attachment, a mundane emptiness or lacuna is felt in its absence, prompting re-contact. As the attachment relationship develops, the mind tends to repeat the thought-of-object, and to contact the object at increasingly shorter intervals. (Recall that the mind cannot self-regulate in this regard.) As with all enjoyments, the law of diminishing returns applies. Indiscriminate contact of any object brings a gradual reduction of the pleasure gained, and over time one comes to a state described by Parthasarathy (1992, Ch. V.22; 2008, Ch. 8) as *neutralisation*. Neutralisation has two aspects. Firstly, continued indiscriminate contact of an

object has led to a pleasure zero-point: *there is no further pleasure gained upon contact with the object*. However, the individual is still driven to contact, highlighting the second aspect of neutralisation: *there is extreme displeasure upon non-contact of the object*. The contact has become so habitual that one needs to be in the constant presence of the object to simply feel 'normal.' A dependency has developed to the extent that the individual is compelled to act upon the merest thought of the object. One develops what Joad (1935) described as "as an unconscious habit to satisfy an ever-present need" (p. 121).

Further, at any point in an attachment relationship, anxiety is experienced when the relationship is ostensibly threatened. By developing an attached relationship with an object, changes in external conditions are given the power to upset emotional balance. The stronger the attachment relationship, the less the individual is able to accommodate changes that impinge upon it. As the strength of attachment increases, so do dependency upon the object for psychological stability, anxiety at the prospect of threat to the relationship, and enmity towards the perceived threat. Such an immature, unstable relationship with the world is the death-knell for the emotional freedom and self-sufficiency that any mature human naturally craves.

A.2 Social – Group Attachment Creates Exclusion

Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all others because you were born in it. (George Bernard Shaw, Quoted in Galewitz, 2003, p. 48)

No other factor in history ... has produced so many wars as has the clash of national egotisms sanctified by the name of patriotism. (Preserved Smith, *ibid*)

By attaching oneself to those aspects of the world that (ostensibly) deliver happiness, one isolates himself from the rest of the world (e.g. Parthasarathy, 2004; Watts, 1970). And as Alan Watts (*ibid*) describes, "the penalties he pays for his isolation ... originate from and are most severe in his mind. What are these penalties? We give them the broad name of unhappiness" (p. 11).

Each person considers him or herself as part of some group. Implicit in the use of 'we' is the identification with at least one other with whom is shared some common ground, as Allport (1954) points out: "[i]t is difficult to define an in-group precisely. Perhaps the best that can be done is to say that members of an in-group all use the term we with the same essential significance" (p. 31). In-group creation embodies an implicit recognition of belonging to a particular group, and a feeling of belongingness that accompanies it.

However, the creation of an in-group implies a boundary defining and describing an out-group. For example, maintaining a national identity constitutes a boundary of identification – I am a Swede, I am not a Dane, Norwegian, et cetera. While group belongingness is a natural drive that demands healthy satisfaction, identification with a group can develop pathologically beyond a feeling of oneness into attachment. To extend the example, patriotism degrades to nationalism, to jingoism, thence to fanaticism. As Parthasarathy(2004) states, “attachment to an object or being generates an aversion to other objects and beings. When you are preferentially fond of anybody, you distance yourself from the rest”(p. 91). This attachment serves as a basis for actions that do not take into full consideration the needs or interests of others, since the individual is functioning to serve only his own egocentric demands. The ego or sense of self is centred upon that group alone. All those falling outside the boundary so created lie ‘beyond the pale.’ They are not considered part of the community and therefore are not afforded the rights and considerations that those within the group enjoy. Such an attached view is necessarily a distortion of reality: the broader Society of which all are by definition a part is broken up through this perspective into separate groups. As Watts (1973)describes it:

Our practical projects have run into confusion again and again through failure to see that individual people, nations, animals, insects, and plants do not exist in or by themselves. This is not to say only that things exist in relation to one another, but that what we call "things" are no more than glimpses of a unified process(n.p.).

Thus, while autonomous in-groups are not inherently destabilising (indeed, in so far as in-group memberships satisfactorily meet belongingness needs, they are a stabilising factor), they can become so if the group does not recognise itself as part of a larger whole. A hyper-autonomous or pathologically autonomous group fanatically pursues its own local interests without consideration for external relationships or global interests (which is of course counter-productive to its own local interests in the long-term, as local interests cannot be sustained in the absence of exchange with and support of the external environment). The fundamental cause for this is attachment to the in-group: to one’s nation within an international community; one’s state within a nation; one’s race or religion within a multi-cultural society; one’s family within a society; an individual within one’s acquaintances.

As adjacent, hyper-autonomous sub-units jostle within the common larger community, conflicts necessarily arise. In all cases, the disintegrating factor is exclusion, *otherness*. Attachment *negatively defines* a group, segregating individuals into an out-group based on them *not* embodying the defining in-group characteristic. We must of course distinguish between the rational understanding of difference (e.g. women are not men) and a prejudiced attitude which alienates that group (e.g. misogyny). In a benign form, otherness is a sense of indifference towards the subjective experiences of the out-group; in an aggressive form it

seeks to actively vilify and destroy of the out-group & its members(e.g. Nazi propaganda and actions against Jews in World War II).

Attachment thus exerts a restricting influence on individual freedom and a disintegrating influence on society. The purpose of Vedāntic literature is to facilitate individual freedom from all forms of limitation, which *necessarily* expresses as enhanced understanding of and empathy with others, i.e. harmonious social relations. Vedāntathus calls attention to the problem of attachment, and provides directional advice primarily concerned with the proper management of one's own mind. This inner management is effected by circumventing the mind's egocentric demands through the application of an *ideal*, a practice known as *yajña*, sacrifice.

SACRIFICE

Sacrifice denotes the practice of maintaining a disciplined mental state and optimum relationship with external circumstances. The idea was embodied in the Vedic period of India (ca. 2000 BCE) as *yajña*: a fire-ritual practised as a religious observance. The ritual is still observed throughout India today, although for contemporary proponents of Vedānta, the practical essence of the ritual is liberated from cultural & religious contexts to be incorporated into any action – secular or sacred. Sacrifice is a mode of acting with diminished ego and egocentric perspective, thereby avoiding and eliminating attachment relationships. It presents a method to circumvent the tendency to use the body-mind-intellect to satisfy egocentric demands, relinquishing the use of resources (material, physical, psychological) for purely personal ends. That is, activities are directed towards the advancement of an *ideal*.

A. *Sacrifice Promotes Social Integration*

An ideal is a goal set by the intellect that lies beyond egocentric interests, outside one's existing boundary of identification. Preferential attachment to a group – whether a group of 1, 10 or 10 million – promotes the creation of boundaries, social dis-integration. Transcending boundaries integrates society, but for any boundary to be transcended one must first conceive of doing so. The intellect thus takes the lead in the dissolution of boundaries through the conception of an ideal. The individual conceives of a whole larger than her current in-group, and then places herself as part of this. This re-setting of boundaries requires conscious intellectual application, not only to develop a clear conception of the ideal, but to elicit the equally vital emotional participation. Setting and recalling the ideal is not the perfunctory repetition of an affirmation. The mind must develop a genuine appreciation for the ideal, feel an affinity for it. This emotional appreciation comes about through proper intellectual reflection upon the ideal. With a clear understanding of the relevance and importance of an ideal and the personal growth that springs from its application, the mind develops a natural inspiration towards it. Thus both intellect and mind are 'attuned' to the

ideal, effecting a confluence of understanding and feeling – subjective integration. This confluence of intellect and mind imbues the ideal with sincerity i.e. one subjectively recognises oneself as part of the new group, marking an experience referred to as “expansion of the self” by Swami Rama Tirtha (2005, p. 15). With this wider perspective as the context of interpretation, one then acts taking into consideration the needs and culture of this new group. A limiting boundary is thus dissolved, the in-group under consideration enlarged. The practise of sacrifice suspends egocentric perspectives, eliminating indiscriminate thought-flow towards ego-based interests, thereby inhibiting attachment relationships and promoting expansion of the in-group. With continued intellectual-emotional training one naturally grows into a wider sense of identity, culminating in the eradication of otherness altogether: an in-group comprising all, an out-group of none.

In projecting or gaining a larger group’s perspective, nothing of one’s existing in-group belongingness is lost. Ideal-creation includes all previous groups and communities. While belonging to the wider group of Scandinavians, I remain a Swede. One retains the intellectual-emotional flexibility to psychologically ‘occupy’ a place within any sub-group, but with the limitation of exclusivity removed.

B. Sacrifice Promotes Individual Freedom

It goes without saying that society cannot free itself unless every individual is freed.
Engels (Anti-Dühring, 2013/1878, n.p.)

Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness (Declaration of Independence, 1776)

It is important to recognise that sacrifice, when performed as a conscious expression of one’s own choosing, does not take anything away from the practitioner. The mind attached to personal gain experiences anxiety over the prospect of having to forego it, reacting to the thought of sacrifice as a restriction on the freedom to acquire or enjoy. This fear is not entirely unfounded: the practice of sacrifice is essentially psychological self-restraint. However, it is externally-imposed restraint – coercion or peer pressure for example – that is experienced as oppression, as a violation of individual freedom. Even when internally-imposed, restraint can be problematic. Control of thoughts, desires and emotional impulses is a necessary ability if harmonious relationships with others and a healthy conception of oneself are to be achieved (Gross, 2007; Vandekerckhove, von Scheve, Ismer, Jung, & Kronast, 2008). Yet the improper application of mental control results in suppression. We may define suppression as “intentionally avoiding thinking about disturbing problems, wishes, feelings, or experiences” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 813) without a sufficiently strong inner consensus of the reason behind this avoidance. In this case, thought inhibition becomes associated with a number of undesirable physiological and psychological effects: the suppression of unwanted thoughts makes them more intrusive, more likely to

appear (Rassin, Merckelbach, & Muris, 1997, 2000; Wegner, Schneider, Carter III, & White, 1987; Wegner, Shortt, Blake, & Page, 1990; Wenzlaff, Wegner, & Klein, 1991); may lead to impaired memory for suppressed events (Richards & Gross, 2000; Wegner, Quillian, & Houston, 1996); incurs general physiological costs (Gross & Levenson, 1997; Gross, 1998; Petrie, Booth, & Pennebaker, 1998; Wegner et al., 1990), including short-term immunological consequences (Petrie et al., 1998); has been implicated in the aetiology of numerous mental disorders (Gross & Levenson, 1997; Gross & Muñoz, 1995; Muris & Merckelbach, 1997; Spinhoven & van der Does, 1999; Wegner, 1997); and significantly, provides little or no relief from the anxiety that one wishes to avoid (Gross & Levenson, 1997). Suppression has also been found to be “predictive of multiple adverse social outcomes” (Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John, & Gross, 2009, p. 893), inhibiting the formation of close and meaningful relationships.

Attempting to simply halt the flow of thought without offering it an alternative direction becomes problematic. As Wenzlaff et al. (1991) state, “the essence of *successful* suppression is turning the focus of one's attention away from the unwanted item and toward other thoughts” (p. 500, italics added). This is the role of the ideal. The intellect directs the mind away from ego-based thoughts and towards the more mature, healthy target that the ideal embodies. Hence the importance of correctly understanding and conceiving the appropriate ideal. Thought-control is successful only when the individual is personally convinced of its need and benefit. (Thus highlighting the problem of attachment becomes the essential primary task). The ideal set must have the effect of drawing the mind out of its egocentric perspective consistently and over the long-term. If the ideal is too far beyond the intellect to fully grasp, the mind does not become attuned, the ‘expansion of self’ does not occur and one falls into suppression. Further, if the ideal is not sufficiently high, the mind remains uninspired and has no target of expansion away from its current level of identification. Conversely, mental control occurs when one is intellectually satisfied with the reasons for inhibition of thought, desire, emotion or action. Under these circumstances self-imposed constraint is liberating rather than restrictive.

Having properly set and applied the ideal, the freedom that the mind fears will be lost is immediately returned to the practitioner. Sacrifice is a purely subjective phenomenon: one can only engender a sense of sacrifice towards that which one would *otherwise* seek to possess or maintain. (E.g. one who has never smoked cannot sacrifice smoking.) However, in the very moment of sacrifice this dependency is broken. The attachment or dependency is itself being sacrificed, and this is true freedom. Freedom is not the ability to cater to attachment demands at will, but rather to be psychologically unshackled from *the need to do so*.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER WORK

Sacrifice is a direct method of suspending one's limiting ego-centred perspective and adopting a wider one. It serves as a cognitive tool to maintain a healthy control over thought habits recognised as being counterproductive to subjective wellbeing. Its application inhibits the formation of attachment relationships; suspends the influence of existing attachment relationships; and gradually eliminates them. Further work should seek to substantiate these claims by correlating data of unselfish attitudes with subjective well-being.

It is the intellect that conceives of the ideal and governs the attention of the mind towards it. As the ideal becomes 'higher' or 'wider,' the attitude becomes less ego-centred, and the intellectual strength required to conceive and apply it is greater. Further work should thus expound the concept and practice of sacrifice in the broader context of intellectual development.

Further work should also provide a framework whereby the concept and practice of sacrifice can be made accessible on a wide scale, specifically focusing on the challenges this would entail, including:

- Overcoming bias arising from the (wrongful) association of these ideas as having a particular cultural or religious origin.
- Accommodating different levels of intellectual development and subsequent ability to set and maintain ideals.
- Ensuring proper understanding of sacrifice to inhibit wrong application (resulting for example in suppression, justification of ego-centred aims in the name of the ideal, developing ego-centric attachment to the ideal, etc).

New challenges are the unavoidable result of any growth. They should not deter us from taking a step in this direction. The challenges that humanity currently faces are serious and urgent. We must recognise the limitations of the modes of thinking and behaviour that brought us to our current level of development. Continuing with them cannot overcome the problems they have created. In seeking to overcome attachment one develops a fundamentally different perspective on the mechanism of human life.

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