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Ethics of Buddhism

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ETHICS OF HINDUISM

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SOURCES

Basic Trio (Prashthana-traya) of Hinduism:

1. Vedas
2. Upanishads
3. The Bhagavad-Gita

ETHICS IN THE VEDAS

ETHICS IN THE VEDAS

- Indian Philosophy begins with the Vedas, considered “the sacred books of India.”
- “Veda” literally means “knowledge”.
- 4 divisions:
 1. Samhitas (hymns)
 2. Brahmanas (precepts)
 3. Aranyakas (forest-books)
 4. Upanishad (end of Vedas)

ETHICS IN THE VEDAS

- Search for universal moral principle within the context of division between celestial and terrestrial.
- Vedic pantheon of gods divided into these two spheres.
- Individual gods worshipped at different times depending on need of worshipper.
- Against this background emerged the concept of *ṛta*.

ETHICS IN THE VEDAS

- Initial concept of *rta* is the order in the physical universe, the uniformity in nature.
- *Rta* as moral order is guarded by Varuna who became a chief god.
- *Rta* as moral and physical order being celestial, is binding to all earthlings.
- But it does not follow that human has capacity to emulate this order (being celestial).

ETHICS IN THE UPANISHADS

ETHICS IN THE UPANISHADS

- *Rta* concept eventually replaced in the Upanishad
- Upanishad is the knowledge portion of the Vedas, the end of the Vedas.
- Literally meaning “sitting near devotedly,” it consists of instructions given by guru to the student.
- Concepts “atma” and “brahma” replaced concept of *rta*.

ETHICS IN THE UPANISHADS

- Atma is the ultimate reality within the human and the outside world.
- Brahma is the ultimate value from which is derived the four social classes and their duties (dharma). Brhadaranyaka 1.4.11

ETHICS IN THE UPANISHADS

- This universe, before it was created, existed as Brahman. Brahman created out of himself priests, warriors, tradesmen, and servants, among both gods and men. Then he created the most excellent Law. There is nothing higher than the Law...

ETHICS IN THE UPANISHADS

- 4 castes came as result of the sacrifice of mythical person Purusa by the gods.
- Mouth: priestly caste (brahamana)
- Arms: warrior, kings, nobles (ksatriaya)
- Thighs: productive segments of society (vaisya)
- Feet: servants (sudra)
- Dharma, duty, is created after the caste; therefore, it is the duty particular to the caste one belongs to.

ETHICS IN THE UPANISHADS

- Ultimate freedom is achieved by identity of atman and brahman.
- Tat vam Asi: That thou art
- Salvation consists in the realization that the Absolute without is the Absolute within.

ETHICS IN THE UPANISHADS

2 Paths to Realization:

- 1) Self-Control: austerity, giving love & compassion, speaking the truth.
- 2) Meditation: first, hearing from guru & reflection, then concentration (adapted to pupil) by means of mantra, then meditation.

ETHICS IN THE UPANISHADS

Example of a mantra:

OHM or AUM, which stands for the beginning, the middle and end of anything.

ETHICS IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA

ETHICS IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA

- Part of the epic Mahabharata, an account of the war between 2 royal families, the 5 sons of the Pandavas and their cousins, the hundred sons of Dhritarashtra (also called the Kauravas).
- In the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Arjuna, leader of the Pandavas, hesitates to fight his own kin.
- Krishna, his charioteer, but actually the incarnation of the god Vishnu, advises him to fight.

ETHICS IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA

- Why does Krishna advise Arjuna to fight?
- Background: caste system, further elaborated in the Gita by means of the gunas (natural qualities).
- sattwa (bright, light): brahmana
- rajas (active): ksatriya
- tamas (dark, heavy): vaisya and sudra

Dharma : one must do one's duty according to his class.

ETHICS IN THE GITA

2 arguments why Arjuna must fulfill his dharma:

- Rational: the destruction of human psychophysical personality does not annihilate ultimately the real self, Atman.
- Empirical: insight of yogin, process of yoga.

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- Yoga literally means “yoke”: union with the Absolute.
- True freedom is union with Brahman through logic, love and life.
 1. Jnana : knowledge
 2. Bhakti : devotion
 3. Karma : action
 4. Raja : meditation

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- The Gita emphasizes the doing of one's own duty free from attachment to the fruits of one's labor.
- “Better is the doing of one's own duty, however imperfectly carried out, than the duty of another carried out imperfectly.”

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- When Krishna persuades Arjuna to fight, he is not supporting war as such; war is only an occasion for Krishna to indicate the spirit in which all work will have to be performed: the spirit of renunciation.

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- It is this “work as a sacrifice” (work without attachment) which furthers the basic principle of the universe, helps it towards completeness and perfection.

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- In the performance of one's duty, one renounces individual claims for the sake of world-solidarity (loka-samgraha), for the welfare of the world, the maintenance of social order.
- Help turn the “wheel” of the principle of creation, “wheel of righteousness and justice.”

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- Yoga is equanimity and indifference to failure and success.
- Arjuna is asked to go into battle in a yogic state, not identifying himself with his actions in the psycho-physical plane, for such actions are creations of gunas of Primal matter (prakriti).

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- In acting with this attitude, work loses binding effect, and one sees inaction (contemplation) in action.
- Arjuna is finally convinced of Krishna's discourse only after he was asked to abandon "all duties" and take refuge in the Divine alone.
- Abandoning all duties implies renunciation of human nature because Brahman transcends terrestrial life.

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- In Hinduism, there is a passage from epic poem Mahabharata, of which the Gita is a part.
- “One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself. This is the essence of morality. All other activities are due to selfish desire.”

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- This is a formulation of the Golden Rule.
- One should regard others as similar to oneself and avoid doing harm to them on the basis of that similarity.
- Harmful actions grow out of selfish desire, and desire is the great enemy of dharma.

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- This formulation of the Golden Rule points towards an ethical principle, that of ahimsa.
- Ahimsa: non-harming or nonviolence.
- Ahimsa became the ethical principle of Mahatma Gandhi.

ETHICS IN THE GITA

- For Gandhi, non-violence is not passive but active.
- It is satyagraha, the force of truth.
- And the search for truth for Gandhi is the search for God, the union of Atman (the Self) with Brahman, the Absolute.

IN SUMMARY

Hindu Ethics is:

1. to follow the order in nature and society (rita) by
2. doing one's duty (dharma) corresponding to one's stage or role in life with detachment from the fruits of one's labor, and to promote
3. non-violence, in union with the Absolute.

IN SUMMARY

“The strength of a man is not seen in the width of his shoulders but in the width of his arms that embrace his neighbor.”