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Jörg Hardy / George Rudebusch (eds.)

Ancient Ethics

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Note on Conventions

The abbreviations for Ancient authors and works are normally those used by H. G. Liddell / R. Scott. A Greek-English Lexicon, with a revised supplement, Oxford 1996, and P. G. W. Glare (ed.), Oxford Latin Dictionary, Oxford 1983. Abbreviations for Ancient Indian sources are included in the contribution of J. Bussanich in this volume. All Ancient authors and works cited in the contributions of this volume are included in the general bibliography, section "Ancient sources", at the end of the volume. All secondary works cited in the contributions are included in the section "Modern works" of the general bibliography (cited by author and date). References to earlier modern philosophers (e. g. Hume, Kant) are normally to recent editions.

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Ancient Ethics: Introduction

Non-European Tradition: *Bussanich* interprets main themes of Hindu ethics, including its roots in ritual sacrifice, its relationship to religious duty, society, individual human well-being, and psychic liberation. To best assess the truth of Hindu ethics, he argues for dialogue with premodern Western thought. *Pfister* takes up the question of human nature as a case study in Chinese ethics. Is our nature inherently good (as Mengzi argued) or bad (Xunzi's view)? Pfister observes their underlying agreement, that human beings are capable of becoming good, and makes precise the disagreement: whether we achieve goodness by cultivating autonomous feelings or by accepting external precepts. There are political consequences: whether government should aim to respect and empower individual choices or to be a controlling authority.

Early Greek Thinking: *Collobert* examines the bases of Homeric ethics in fame, prudence, and shame, and how these guide the deliberations of heroes. She observes how, by depending upon the poet's words, the hero gains a quasi-immortality, although in truth there is no consolation for each person's inevitable death.

Plato: *Santas* examines Socratic Method and ethics in *Republic* 1. There Socrates examines definitions of justice and tests them by comparison to the arts and sciences. Santas shows the similarities of Socrates' method to John Rawls' method of considered judgments in reflective equilibrium. *McPherran* interprets Plato's religious dimension as like that of his teacher Socrates. McPherran shows how Plato appropriates, reshapes, and extends the religious conventions of his own time in the service of establishing the new enterprise of philosophy. According to *Taylor*, Socrates believes that humans in general have the task of helping the gods by making their own souls as good as possible, and Socrates' unique ability to cross-examine imposes on him the special task of helping others to become as good as possible. This conception of Socrates' mission is Plato's own, consisting in an extension of the traditional conception of piety as helping the gods. *Brickhouse and Smith* propose a new understanding of Socratic moral psychology—one that retains the standard view of Socrates as an intel-

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lectualist, but also recognizes roles in human agency for appetites and passions. They compare and contrast the Socratic view to the picture of moral psychology we get in other dialogues of Plato. *Hardy* also proposes a new, non-reductive understanding of Socratic eudaimonism—he argues that Socrates invokes a very rich and complex notion of the "Knowledge of the Good and Bad", which is associated with the motivating forces of the virtues. *Rudebusch* defends Socrates' argument that knowledge can never be impotent in the face of psychic passions. He considers the standard objections: that knowledge cannot weigh incommensurable human values, and that brute desire, all by itself, is capable of moving the soul to action.

Aristotle: *Anagnostopoulos* interprets Aristotle on the nature and acquisition of virtue. Though virtue of character, aiming at human happiness, requires a complex awareness of multiple dimensions of one's experience, it is not properly a cognitive capacity. Thus it requires habituation, not education, according to Aristotle, in order to align the unruly elements of the soul with reason's knowledge of what promotes happiness. *Shields* explains Aristotle's doctrine that goodness is *meant in many ways* as the doctrine that there are different analyses of *goodness* for different types of circumstance, just as for *being*. He finds Aristotle to argue for this conclusion, against Plato's doctrine of the unity of the Good, by applying the tests for homonymy and as an immediate consequence of the doctrine of categories. Shields evaluates the issue as unresolved at present. *Russell* discusses Aristotle's account of practical deliberation and its virtue, intelligence (*phronesis*). He relates the account to contemporary philosophical controversies surrounding Aristotle's view that intelligence is necessary for moral virtue, including the objections that in some cases it is unnecessary or even impedes human goodness. *Frede* examines the advantages and disadvantages of Aristotle's virtue ethics. She explains the general Greek conceptions of happiness and virtue, Aristotle's conception of phronesis and compares the Aristotle's ethics with modern accounts. *Liske* discusses the question of whether the Aristotelian account of virtue entails an ethical-psychological determinism. He argues that Aristotle's understanding of hexis allows for free action and ethical responsibility: By making decisions for good actions we are able to stabilize our character (*hexis*).

Hellenistic and Roman: *Annas* defends an account of stoic ethics, according to which the three parts of Stoicism—logic, physics, and ethics—are integrated as the parts of an egg, not as the parts of a building. Since by this analogy no one part is a foundation for the rest, pedagogical decisions may govern the choice of numerous, equally valid, presentations of Stoic ethics. *Piering* interprets the Cynic way of life as a distinctive philosophy. In their ethics, Cynics value neither pleasure nor tradition but personal liberty, which they achieve by self-sufficiency and display in speech that is frank to the point of insult.

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Plotinus and Neoplatonism: *Gerson* outlines the place of ordinary civic virtue as well as philosophically contemplative excellence in Neoplatonism. In doing so he attempts to show how one and the same good can be both action-guiding in human life and be the absolute simple One that grounds the explanation of everything in the universe. *Delcomminette* follows Plotinus's path to the Good as the foundation of free will, first in the freedom of Intellect and then in the "more than freedom" of the One. Plotinus postulates these divinities as not outside but within each self, saving him from the contradiction of an external foundation for a truly free will.

General Topics: *Halbig* discusses the thesis on the unity of virtues. He distinguishes the thesis of the identity of virtues and the thesis of a reciprocity of virtues and argues that the various virtues form a unity (in terms of reciprocity) since virtues cannot bring about any bad action. *Detel* examines Plato's and Aristotle's conceptions of normativity: Plato and Aristotle (i) entertained hybrid theories of normativity by distinguishing functional, semantic and ethical normativity, (ii) located the ultimate source of normativity in standards of a good life, and thus (iii) took semantic normativity to be a derived form of normativity. Detel argues that hybrid theories of normativity are—from a modern point of view—still promising. *Höffe* defends the Ancient conception of an art of living against Modern objections. Whereas many Modern philosophers think that we have to replace Ancient eudaimonism by the idea of moral obligation (Pflicht), Höffe argues that Eudaimonism and autonomy-based ethics can be reconciled and integrated into a comprehensive and promising theory of a good life, if we enrich the idea of autonomy by the central elements of Ancient eudaimonism.

Some common themes: The topics in Chinese and Hindu ethics are perhaps more familiar to modern western sensibilities than Homeric and even Socratic. Anagnostopoulos, Brickhouse and Smith, Frede, Liske, Rudebusch, and Russell all consider in contrasting ways the role of moral character, apart from intellect, in ethics. Brickhouse / Smith, Hardy, and Rudebusch discuss the Socratic conception of moral knowledge. Brickhouse / Smith and Hardy retain the standard view of the so called Socratic Intellectualism. Shields and Gerson both consider the question whether there is a single genus of *goodness*, or if the term is a homonym. Bussanich, McPherran, Taylor, and Delcomminette all consider the relation between religion and ethics. Pfister, Piering, Delcomminette, and Liske all consider what sort of freedom is appropriate to human well-being. Halbig, Detel, and Höffe propose interpretations of main themes of Ancient ethics.

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Lauren F. Pfister

Classical Debates about the Moral Character of Human Nature in Ancient China

Prolegomenon to Questions about Human Nature in Ancient China

Is human nature inherently good or bad, or initially neutral, or even of a mixed kind so that it can develop either toward excellence or evil? Or are there different kinds of human nature that are based upon a variety of factors that are not universal, even though they may be generalized to a certain extent? These questions involved issues for Chinese intellectuals, ancient and contemporary, that entailed further questions about personal cultivation, public education, religious orientation, and political policies. As a consequence, these questions became themes which all major ancient Chinese thinkers addressed in the years before the initial unification of the Chinese mainland under the Qín 秦 emperor (221 BCE).

The main arguments regarding whether human nature was good, neutral or evil appeared in what 21st century sinologists and Chinese philosophers consider to be the major classical works reflecting key interpretive trends in pre-Qín Ruist ("Confucian") and Daoist teachings. Though archeological findings in the late 20th century have shed some special interpretive light on these debates, the main arguments are still found in two influential texts: the book associated with Master Mèng (c. 370-c. 289 BCE), known as the *Mencius* or *Mèngzǐ* 孟子and the book of essays written by Master Xún (340 – 245 BCE), known as the *Hsun-tsze* or *Xúnzǐ* 荀子.

Our approach to these arguments about human nature found in these two major ancient Chinese texts also follows a generally agreed upon historical understanding of the timing of their appearance. The dates related to the texts of the *Mèngzǐ* and the *Xúnzǐ* reflect the dates for the historical persons related to them, and so we will similarly assume that they are properly ordered in this way, the former appearing probably sometime in the early years of the 3rd century BCE (the 290s) and the latter several decades later. As we will see, internal evidence within these texts confirms this historical conclusion.

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As a consequence, then, we will begin by summarizing the arguments presented by Master Mèng, pointing out in the following section why these arguments appear to be vulnerable to a variety of criticisms. Following this, we will present the counter arguments addressing the question of human nature articulated by Master Xún. In our concluding statements, we will compare the basic positions taken by these two ancient Chinese philosophers, and consider the significance of their differences as well as offer a final evaluation regarding the style and character of their argumentation.

I. The Character of Arguments on Human Nature in the *Mèngzǐ*

Though there is a number of passages within the *Mèngzǐ* which discuss the problem of the status of human nature, there are two key passages which reveal what has been called Master Mèng's major arguments related to his position that "human nature is good" (*xìng shàn lùn* 性善論). Both passages refer to his theory of the Four "Sprouts" of human nature (*sì duān lùn* 四端論 which D. C. Lau refers to as four "germs", as seen in the Appendix). In this section we will first of all focus on the development of Master Mèng's arguments within the earlier passage, and then compare and contrast those arguments with those in the latter passage. In the following section we will point out certain apparent logical weaknesses that made his arguments vulnerable to criticism. This will lead us into a new section where discussion of Master Xún's self-conscious response to the problematic created by Master Mèng's ambiguous claims and insufficiently strong arguments will be described and evaluated.

As will be seen by an initial reading of *Mèngzǐ* 2A : 6 (see the first passage in the Appendix), Master Mèng starts his argument by giving a story in order to explain how it is that no human lacks an inner sensitivity which is not responsive to others' sufferings. After telling this famous story regarding a man seeing a small child about to fall into a well (which in ancient Chinese settings was always simply an open hole in the ground, without any protecting wall around it), Master Mèng justifies his claim by offering important counter possibilities. Essentially, he argues that the inner sensitivity of that man, which was catalyzed into consciousness by the perceived danger the young child faced, was generated spontaneously from within him, and not because of other "external" reasons that he would have considered or calculated before taking up that sympathetic concern. On the basis of this story, then, Master Mèng goes on to argue that all human beings have all four of these "sprouts" or "germs" of moral life within them. Put into a simple chart, they can be summarized as follows:

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Initial "Sprout" or "Germ"	*Related Virtue or Virtuous Attitude*
Heart of compassion	Benevolence / Cultivated Humaneness
Heart of shame	Dutifulness / Right(eous)ness
Heart of courtesy and modesty	Observance of the rites (or propriety)
Heart of right and wrong	Wisdom

When ancient Chinese persons spoke about the "heart" (*xīn* 心), they were referring to an inner organ within the human body that generated feelings, responded to external stimuli, and was capable of rational analysis. Because of this, some English translations of the term in its use within Ruist texts refer to it as "heart-mind", placing the "heart" first in order to emphasize the emotional dimensions engaged and expressed by this inner human organ. Nevertheless, as we have seen in the chart above, the four sprouts involve not only explicit emotional components that putatively are spontaneously arising in human consciousness in various contexts, but also a rational component that allows for the discernment of "right and wrong". On further reflection we may suggest that this fourfold basis for moral growth, while being analytically descriptive of different states of orientation toward others as well as toward situations, are not meant to imply that these four "heart-mind" conditions are unrelated to each other. In fact, in another part of the *Mèngzǐ* (4A: 27), Master Mèng explicitly places these four virtues into two separate levels: benevolence and dutifulness are identified as the foundational virtues specifically nurtured within familial relationships, while propriety and wisdom help to refine these two foundational virtues by adding a panoply of cultured expressions and activities which make it possible to embody them (propriety) as well as justifications and insights into their moral value for personal growth and social engagement (wisdom).

Not only are each of these sprouts already within human beings, they are the seeds of moral maturity that can grow within any person's life. Master Mèng indicates this first of all by relating each sprout ('S') to a virtue ('V'), describing that initial state of feeling and consciousness as the "S of V", so that S^1 is the S of V^1, S^2 is the S of V^2, and so on. In order to indicate how these sprouts are related to a person, Master Mèng compares them to a person's arms and legs; this is to say, these moral sprouts are intimate to that person's living and acting in the world.

This spontaneous capacity for each sprout to mature into a virtuous state is explained by another pair of analogies. If a person "is able to develop" these sprouts, then they will advance toward becoming mature virtues; their growth will be just like a fire that consumes all that is combustible once it is started, and a spring of water that continues to flow once its subterranean source has been tapped, so that the water is made accessible to people on the terrestrial surface.

Woven into this argument are two other elements that are not fully explained,

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but are adequately described, so that the direction of Master Mèng's argument is manifest. First of all, it is possible for a person not to develop these sprouts, and when this happens, even the most basic attitudes and actions necessary for familial harmony (he specifies "serving one's parents") will not be realizable. On the other hand, when a person does cultivate these sprouts so that they become the basis for a virtuous and mature life, the implications are that such a person will be a significant social and cultural agent of stability. For this reason, Master Mèng also insists that subjects in a country or kingdom should not deny the reality of these sprouts in the life of their ruler or "prince", because it is by means of such a virtuous life that the leader would be able to provide social stability for all in the country or kingdom.

Later in his book (6A: 6, the second passage in Appendix), Master Mèng once again addresses the problem of human nature by reference to the four sprouts. Yet in this passage there are a few differences from the first passage that are noticeable. First of all, the third sprout is not a "heart of courtesy and modesty", but one described as "a heart of respect". In the original Chinese text, the former may be seen as a passive aspect, involving "yielding" to others, while the latter describes an active approach to others through the positive expression of respect. In this sense they appear to be describing the same basic attitude from two different perspectives, and so are not seen as contradictory in any logical sense of the term. Secondly, though the initial statement of Master Mèng in response to the question he is asked underscores his belief that humans "are capable of becoming good", and in another passage he defines what is good as "the desirable" (7B: 25). In this way, then, Master Mèng confirms what would seem to be an awareness of the difference between the potential state of the sprouts and the actualized state of their related virtues. Nevertheless his following statements involve a form of argument which does not appear to coincide with this claim. When put into symbolic formulae to indicate the character of his argument at this point, Master Mèng writes in Chinese what would be the most simple sentence possible: $S^1 = V^1$, $S^2 = V^2$, and so on.[1] When compared with the formulae employed in the earlier passage (S^1 is the S of V^1, S^2 is the S of V^2, and so on), the two kinds of statements are not logically compatible. In fact, this single problem has been a source of discussion among Ruist scholars ever since.

While this second passage indicates that the will of a person is central in "seeking" to have these sprouts develop into their virtuous glory, Master Mèng adds a further clarification about how these seedlings of virtue relate to one's person. They are not the result of "external" factors, that is, of education or something coerced from outside the specific person. In fact, they are what the

1 The translator D. C. Lau uses a clever locution here, "is pertaining to", as seen in the Appendix, but this is his interpretive addition to the text.

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translator calls a "native endowment" in one place, and here, something in me "originally". The problem here is that the term "originally" in the standard Chinese text is not so strong or clearly descriptive; the term's meaning is more like the word "certainly" or "unquestionably". But for something to be "in me unquestionably" does not mean that it is necessarily in me "originally". Here is where a further quandary developed in the history of the interpretations of Master Mèng's theory. One of the major tendencies developed by later commentators, particularly a group of famous Ruist scholars who lived nearly 1500 years later during the Sòng 宋dynasty, was to add new metaphysical concepts in order to explain this problem in the manner that is mirrored in the translator's rendering in the Appendix.

II. Problems in Master Mèng's Argument that "Human Nature is Good"

We started our account of Master Mèng's arguments in support of his thesis that "human nature is good" by referring to the story of a person (*rén* 人) who responds with emotional concern ("compassion") when seeing a small child of about two or three years of age (*rú* 孺) in danger. Wandering instably around a public square in a village setting, this young child is apparently unaware of the danger in its immediate environment, and all of a sudden finds itself about to fall into a deep well. Though it is unstated, the possibility that such a child would survive a fall into a well of this sort is unlikely, and so this heightens the tension within the story. Nevertheless, when we consider the details of the story and its related claims, a number of counter-arguments might be raised, particularly once we (as 21st century readers) consider what is being said in this nearly 2300 year old Chinese text.

It is significant that the "man" or "person" who observes this small child is presumably an adult, one who is already socially attuned to general human relationships and probably also knows the parents of the child (as would have been the case in any ancient village or face-to-face community). What if we made this observer another child of the same age? Would the reaction be the same? Or would there be a similar lack of self-consciousness that might be relatively or completely unaware of the impending danger? The initial point to consider here, then, is whether the Chinese concept of *rén* found here in the *Mèngzǐ* carries the same universalist implications found in our modern concepts of the generic "man", "human" or "person". It seems highly possible that a child of a similar age as the one about to fall in the well would *not necessarily* have the same spontaneous anticipation of perceived danger and compassion (though it may

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respond to some degree with a sense of distress or confusion after the playmate has fallen into the well, survives the fall, and begins crying). The hidden advantage in Master Mèng's story is that the observer he chose to include in this vignette is already a mature person, a person who is assumed to be fully socialized into the Chinese lifeworld in which she or he is placed.[2]

This train of questioning becomes all the more pertinent when we consider other claims made by Master Mèng about the status of the "four sprouts" of human moral life. On the one hand, he tells us that they can be "lost", but on the other hand, he insists that they are a "natural endowment" and that every "human" has them. So, we might continue to ask, what happens to a human who "loses" one or more of these sprouts? Is that person then considered to be non-human, or a dehumanized humanoid who simply looks like they are human, but in fact are not so? If a "human" in Master Mèng's sense of the term necessarily possesses all four sprouts, are there "humans" who do not have all four, or who are so young that they are not yet aware of them, and yet are still human? Is there some calculus which discerns that a human may become non-human because they at any point in time have acted inhumanely or are unable to respond humanely? For example, mentally deficient ("mentally challenged") persons, senile persons, children below the age of three, those who are ill and unable to respond: Would any or all of these kind of persons be considered vulnerable to this kind of reclassification?

Though these kinds of questions reveal a moot point never addressed by Master Mèng in his extensive writings, the significance of this inquiry leads us toward a more substantial problem. If a child of two or three years of age does not have a "heart of compassion" like an adult, and in fact may not be culturally sensitive and self-conscious enough to demonstrate shame or propriety, much less to be spontaneously aware of what is understood to be right or wrong in any larger social context, then there is a major problem in understanding when and how a person becomes aware of these facets in their life. If these four sprouts are like one's own four limbs, the fact is (we might argue from a 21st century non-Chinese setting) that one may have an accident, lose an arm, and yet still be alive and be considered as fully human. Is that the case also for a humanoid who loses one of these moral sprouts? If it is claimed that these sprouts are internal and not given to one from outside one's own embodied consciousness, then when do these sprouts become "activated" or "functional" in a normal human being's experience? Must one be five years old, eight years old, or twelve years old before one has reached the age of moral sensitivity and accountability? Unfortunately, Master Mèng answers none of these questions, even though we know that his

2 As a side comment it should be noted that the Chinese concept of *rén* ("human") is not necessarily gender oriented, and so might be either a female or a male person.

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understanding of the "goodness" of humans is that they "can become good" at some point.

We have already noted above that the two passages in the *Mèngzǐ* portray two different accounts of the relationship between the sprouts and their virtues, so that a logical inconsistency troubles the general theory about these four sprouts. But an even more puzzling problem arises from how Master Mèng in the first passage deduces his claims about the four sprouts from the story mentioned above. After telling the story about a person who shows a spontaneous "heart of compassion" towards the small child in danger, he draws the reader to a conclusion: "From this it can be seen that whoever. . ." Now the question that comes to mind at this point can be stated as follows: If the story informs us about one of the four sprouts, then how could its helpful lesson be used to indicate that *all four sprouts* exist in a person? Is the "heart of compassion" somehow involved necessarily with all the others? Since it is not yet a full expression of benevolence (for example, Master Mèng never says that the observing adult runs over to pick up the child and save it from falling into the well, which a truly benevolent person would do), does it still entail the existence of the other three moral sprouts? From this point of view, it appears that Master Mèng has not fully justified his claim that the story reveals how all four sprouts exist within human beings, and so we might ask whether there are other stories that might support his case. Unfortunately, there are no easily identifiable and similarly clever stories in the *Mèngzǐ* which provide clear answers to our questions here.[3]

Ultimately, we are left with a few very basic problems that do not receive clear answers from Master Mèng's teachings. Significantly, outside of his explanation of what he means by "good", we find no guiding definitions for the key terms employed in his argument (particularly "human nature" or "nature"). Beyond this, there is no clear explanation about when the four moral sprouts become activated within a person's life and consciousness. Are they "inborn" or not? This is never explicitly stated by Master Mèng in any of his writings. Furthermore, we have shown that his claim that the story's meaning entails the conclusion that "all four moral sprouts exist in human beings" is not fully justified. It is difficult to understand how he can logically link up the content of

3 Later on in *Mèngzǐ* 6A: 10, Master Mèng does refer very briefly to two situations – one involving a beggar, and another a poor wanderer or tramp – who both refuse food offered by persons who mistreat them. Though the context reveals this has something to do with "observance of the rites" or a sense of propriety, whether or not it also involves the "heart of shame" or the "heart of right and wrong" is very unclear. More significantly, Master Mèng did not explain these features of these two illustrations with the same detail that he did with regard to the story of the young child about to fall into a well. Because of this, unfortunately, we cannot reach a comprehensive account of how he justifies the spontaneous and inner nature of all four of the sprouts on the basis of the stories or analogies he provides within the *Mèngzǐ*.

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the story to the other three moral sprouts that are not explicitly mentioned there. Otherwise, if he had offered us some other clever stories to indicate the spontaneous arising of these three remaining sprouts, we would welcome them, but there are no such articulate and demonstrable vignettes in the text. Finally, we are troubled by the inconsistency in the way Master Mèng relates each of the sprouts to its accompanying virtue. Significantly, we are not the only one's who finds these problems puzzling or frustrating. These questions were obvious enough to some of Master Mèng's readers that they provoked a vigorous and thorough challenge in the writings of his younger contemporary, Master Xún.

III. Master Xún's Response to the Argument that "Human Nature is Good"

Among the 32 chapters of the book prepared by Master Xún, one is specifically devoted to the question about human nature raised by Master Mèng.[4] Though the title of the essay by Master Xún assumes what appears to be the diametrically opposite position to Master Mèng's claims, a more careful study of the key terms as defined by Master Xún in the essay suggests that it should be rendered more sensitivity as "[human] nature is bad" (*xìng è* 性惡). Unlike his predecessor, Master Xún defined both "good" (shàn 善) as "what is correct, in accord with natural principles, peaceful and well-ordered" (*zhèng lǐ píng zhì* 正理平治) and "bad" as "what is wrong through partiality, what wickedly contravenes natural principles, what is perverse, and what is rebellious" (*piān xiǎn bèi luàn* 偏險悖亂).[5] As can be seen from these definitions, Master Xún is not merely interested in "moral goodness" in some internal virtuous sense, but in a social goodness that stands in contrast to what is disorderly and chaotic. In this regard, he is concerned with what we would generally call "bad", for it may be morally neutral ("wrong through partiality"), and can be made "good" once it is properly dealt with. Neither is it an "evil" that is incorrigible, as we will see by following his argument carefully.[6]

4 This is chapter 23, which the most recent translator and commentator to the work, John Knoblock, entitles "Book 23: Man's Nature is Evil". We take it, that that this title should be rendered in a different manner. Nevertheless, the paragraph and page numbers of Knoblock's translation will be the standard English rendering referred to in the following discussion. See Knoblock 1994: *17 – 32*.

5 Knoblock 1994: 155, sec. 23.3a.

6 So also Knoblock himself explains that the term we render above as "bad" is not like "evil" because it "does not carry the sinister and baleful overtones of the English word". Similarly, it does not suggest that humans are "inherently depraved and incapable of good" (Knoblock 1994: 139). For this reason and other reasons developed in further explanations of Master

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The main position argued by Master Xún in contrast to Master Mèng (whom he directly names four times in the essay[7]), summarized in a statement that is repeated numerous times in the essay, is that "human nature is bad; any good in humans is acquired by conscious exertion".[8] What Master Xún intends by the terms "[human] nature" (*xìng*性) and "conscious exertion" (*wèi* 偽) is made explicit by definition once more. Essentially they are seen to be opposites. The former is "what is spontaneous from Nature, what cannot be learned, and what requires no application to master".[9] He illustrates this claim by pointing out that once born, babies see with their eyes and hear with their ears without having to learn the basic functions of "seeing" and "hearing"; in contrast to Master Mèng, he goes on to argue that "what is desirable" to the eyes and ears tends to satisfy the selfish desires of a newborn and growing child, and so these natural desires need to be groomed until they respond with appropriate civility and concern for others in order to become "good". If "nature" is therefore "inborn nature", its opposite is one that leads to the attainment of goodness. For this reason, Master Xún defines *wèi* 偽 as "what must be learned before a man can do it, and what he must apply himself to before he can master it, yet is found in man".[10] While he also uses metaphors to illustrate this quality of human experience, paralleling the learning from a good teacher or the application of law and punishment by a ruler as actions similar to a carpenter's shaping of a piece of wood or a potter's creation of a shapely jar from a lump of clay, Master Xún cleverly applies his own specific definitions to indicate how Master Mèng's arguments must be wrong. Human nature cannot be good from birth, because a newborn child's desires are selfish and not yet sensitized to respond to values such as respect and deference to elders and social politeness in the context of competing desires. These must be learned by conscious exertion applied from outside, by either the cultivated means ("ritual and moral principles") of a good teacher, or by the more forceful means of restrictive disciplines or penalties applied by a ruler, depending on the relative degree of responsiveness or resistance that a particular person may manifest.

While agreeing with Master Mèng that all humans have the same nature, and that they all can become sages, Master Xún explains the differences in the characters of human beings on the basis of the varying degrees of their

Xún's interest in social order (see Knoblock 1994: 149 – 150), a more appropriate rendering of the term *è* 惡 seems to be "bad".

7 See Knoblock 1994: 152, 155 and 156, at sec. 23.1c, 23.1d, 23.3a, and 23.3b.

8 For the repetitions of this central claim, see Knoblock 1994: 150 – 153, 155 – 158, generally appearing at the very end of a section; specifically secs. 23.1a, 23.1b, 23.1e, 23.2b, 23.3a, 23.3b, 23.3c, and 23.4a.

9 Knoblock 1994: 152, sec. 23.1c.

10 Knoblock 1994: 152, sec. 23.1c.

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realization of their same inner capacities. It is not that they have "lost" something that was internally present as a "germ" or a "sprout", but their characteristic differences occur because of different levels of "valor" (*yǒng* 勇) which lead to different attainments in "knowledge" (*zhì* 知), ultimately leading to attained goodness. All humans have the same capacity (*néng* 能), but they apply their will and thoughtfulness to this capacity in varying degrees. This is what distinguishes the attainments of the sage from the "scholar and gentlemen, the petty man, and the menial servant".[11]

Logically, however, there appears to be an Achilles' heel within this argument, one that appears to generate an endless series of causal assumptions (classically referred to as a *reductio ad absurdum*) that threatens the justifications employed in Master Xún's argument. If all human beings are inherently bad in nature and require a teacher or guide to teach them how to be good, then even a sage must have such a teacher. But, we need to continue to ask, how did *that* teacher become good? This teacher must also have a teacher as well, and so the problem of an "originally good teacher" appears. If there is a teacher who is "originally good" and does not require another to teach her or him, then all humans do not have the same nature. So, it seems, Master Xún's argument either leads us into a logical series of unending precedents, or it must admit a contradiction to the main premise of his claim that "all human beings have the same nature". Does Master Xún offer any resolution to this problem?

He does. By "accumulating thoughts and ideas" the sage is able to breakthrough the selfish tendencies of inborn nature and so can practice what is acquired by this means, leading to the creation of ritual and moral principles as well as laws and standards needed by other humans.[12] This suggests, then, that the sage's "knowledge" is at another qualitative level than most humans, but it is a form of knowledge possible for all humans to attain. What distinguishes the sage is her or his capacity to "accumulate thoughts and ideas" without the guidance of a teacher. All other human beings still need an "acquired exertion" that leads to the constructive and creative achievement of the ritual and moral standards as well as legal and punitive measures that will lead them to the same kind of awareness. In this sense, then, Master Xún's position is a consistent and carefully thought out alternative to Master Mèng's claims.

11 Explicitly described with characteristic straightforwardness and detail in Knoblock 1994: 160 – 161, sec. 23.6b.

12 Quoted and summarized from Knoblock 1994: 153 – 154, sec. 23.2a.

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IV. Summary and Conclusions

From the accounts provided above, we can see that the differences in Master Mèng's and Master Xún's arguments about human nature appear to have some similar conclusions, but they are in principle based upon different basic positions. Both ancient Chinese philosophers argue that human beings are capable of becoming good, and that they may all become sages. But while they agree on these basic points, they disagree on the status of human nature and the means by which human beings are able to become good. For Master Mèng, one can achieve goodness by cultivating the inner and desirable sprouts of moral attunement already inherent within one's natural endowment. This Master Xún denies in principle, because normal human beings are bad, and the vast majority are unable to realize the goodness that is required of moral life in and of themselves. Though he admits that a sage may do so by the conscious effort of creative thinking and accumulation of experiences from those meditative exercises, the vast majority of human beings cannot do so and therefore require the external guidance of a good teacher or a determined ruler. Precisely in this sense, therefore, these two ancient Chinese philosophers develop overall positions about human nature that carry significantly different implications for personal cultivation and educational development. Though both men argued that education was important for society, these educational institutions were necessary for personal cultivation in Master Xún's scheme, while they are helpful but not necessary in Master Mèng's account. Also, Master Xún clearly admits that there are human beings who are not only morally questionable but are willfully rebellious, and so his description of the possible negative qualities which human character can develop varies widely from the more limited account of "losing one's sprouts" as described by Master Mèng. For this reason, Master Xún anticipates the need for rulers to apply laws and punishments to the resistant and most rebellious characters, while Master Mèng in principle avoids this political implication, believing it would counter his understanding of the nature of benevolent government. On this basis, then, even though they share a hope for the moral amelioration of human beings, the social implications of the arguments of these two ancient Chinese philosophers are significantly different and lead to distinct kinds of institutional development.

From the view of the nature of the arguments both Chinese philosophers employ, it has been asserted that Master Mèng's style of argumentation lacks thoroughness and clarity. This occurs because his use of stories and analogies are not always consonant with his subsequent claims, even to the point that some deductions are unwarranted. He leaves a reader guessing what he might actually mean in concrete details, and offers very few helpful definitions of the key terms in his arguments. Contrary to these tendencies, Master Xún offers a remarkably

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well thought out series of definitions and logical deductions from his basic premise that "human nature is bad". His engagement of Master Mèng's arguments shows that he was aware of the weaknesses in his predecessor's account of human nature, and that he himself realized that an alternative position must take up a more consistent and alternative way of accounting for the diversities of human character by describing how their shared natures can be developed in conscious ways which differ in the degree of knowledge and valor that they apply to their nature. Rhetorically speaking, Master Xún cleverly inserts his own definitions of key terms into Master Mèng's arguments. In this way, while he is not being "fair" to his predecessor in trying to explain what he probably meant by those statements, Master Xún nevertheless indicates how Master Mèng's arguments are inherently contradictory. Intriguingly, both men considered "knowledge" or "wisdom" to be a basic quality of human nature, but it is Master Xún's advantage that he employed it to resolve his own logical problem related to the nature of the sage, and so his general argument appears to be more consistently articulated and carefully considered.

Appendix

Relevant Passages from the *Mencius* (*Master Mèng* 孟子)
(translated by D. C. Lau)

2A: 6[13]
"My reason for saying that no man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others is this. Suppose a man were, all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child. From this it can be seen that whoever is devoid of the heart of compassion is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of shame is not human, whoever is devoid of the heart of courtesy and modesty is not human, and whoever is devoid of the heart of right and wrong is not human. The heart of compassion is the germ of benevolence; the heart of shame, of dutifulness; the heart of courtesy and modesty, of observance of the rites; the heart of right and wrong, of wisdom. Man has these four germs just as he has four limbs. For a man possessing these four germs to deny his own potentialities is for him to cripple himself; for him to deny the potentialities of his prince is for him to cripple his prince. If a man is able to develop all these four germs that he possesses, it will be

13 Lau, D. C. (trans.) 1970: 82 – 83.

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like a fire starting up or a spring coming through. When these are fully developed, he can take under his protection the whole realm within the Four Seas, but if he fails to develop them, he will not be able even to serve his parents."

6A: 6[14]

"Kao Tzu [Master Gào] said, 'There is neither good nor bad in human nature,' but others say, 'Human nature can become good or it can become bad, . . . ' Then there are others who say, 'There are those who are good by nature, and there are those who are bad by nature. . . . ' Now you say human nature is good. Does this mean that all the others are mistaken?"

"As far as what is genuinely in him is concerned, a man is capable of becoming good," say Mencius [Master Mèng]. "This is what I mean by good. As for his becoming bad, that is not the fault of his native endowment. The heart of compassion is possessed by all men alike; likewise the heart of shame, the heart of respect, and the heart of right and wrong. The heart of compassion pertains to benevolence, the heart of shame to dutifulness, the heart of respect to the observance of the rites, and the heart of right and wrong to wisdom. Benevolence, dutifulness, observance of the rites, and wisdom are not welded on to me from the outside; they are in me originally. Only this has never dawned on me. This is why it is said, 'Seek and you will find it; let go and you will lose it.'"

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14 From D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius*, London 1970: 162 – 163.

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John Bussanich

Ethics in Ancient India

Ancient India is rich with reflection on perennial ethical questions: "How ought I to live?" "What kind of person should I be?" "What are the sources of good conduct?" "What is the purpose of human existence?" However, access to Indian ethical thought for western philosophers is complicated by the fact that much of it does not fit within familiar disciplinary and cognitive categories. In ancient India philosophy was not conceived as a discipline separate from religion or other arts and sciences, nor were rational argument considered to be at odds with tradition, faith, or imagination. With their biases against tradition and extra-rational sources of authority, contemporary western philosophers have often dismissed Indian ethical ideas because of their connections with the soteriological commitments of various religious communities. At the same time, progress has been made in the critical analysis of Indian metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of language. Yet beyond the particular interests of contemporary analytic philosophers it is also to be noted that the principles and doctrines of Indian ethical thought display striking affinities to those found in pre-modern western philosophy. Ancient and medieval philosophers also vested authority in tradition, including scriptures in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophy. Greek ethical thought, with its emphasis on community values, virtue-ethics, and philosophy as a way of life, offers many parallels to classical Hindu thought. Of course, cross-cultural comparisons present unique challenges to philosophers, with their penchant for abstraction and analytical precision. Moreover, as Alasdair MacIntyre has pointed out, each tradition "has its own standards and measures of interpretation, explanation, and justification internal to itself" and there are "no shared standards and measures, external to both systems and neutral between them to which appeal might be made to adjudicate between [them]."[1] Contemporary western philosophers in particular should be wary of applying a post-Enlightenment, secularized notion of rationality and of the autonomous individual to understanding ethical thought in

1 MacIntyre 1991: 109.

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ancient India. This essay is written in the conviction that debate and dialogue between Indian and western ethical philosophies is possible and can be fruitful even if, ultimately, they are incommensurable.

Hindus, Buddhists, and Jainas were engaged in ethical reflection beginning from the late Vedic period (ca. 8th c. BCE). The present essay focuses on Hindu philosophy through the classical period, i. e., up to the Muslim conquest at the end of the first millenium CE. Hindu philosophers accepted the authoritative testimony (*śabda*) of the Veda (scriptures and other traditionas) as a valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) in the areas of ritual praxis, religious wisdom, cosmology, and social ethics, whereas Buddhists and Jainas rejected the Veda's authority. While detailed discussion of Buddhist and Jaina thought is not possible here, it should be noted that debate (and mutual influence) among thinkers in the three traditions was continuous throughout the classical period. The six systems or schools (*darśanas*) of Hindu philosophy are conventionally arranged into three pairs Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya-Yoga, and Pūrva Mīmāṃsā-Uttara Mīmāṃsā (i. e. Vedānta). Each school's philosophers wrote commentaries on foundational sūtra texts – or sub-commentaries on commentaries – which critically explored standard topics and problems: Nyāya / logic and epistemology; Vaiśeṣika / realist physical ontology; Sāṃkhya / dualistic cosmology & metaphysics; Yoga / spiritual practice; Pūrva Mīmāṃsā / Vedic exegesis; and Vedānta / mystical teachings of the *Upaniṣads*.

§ 1. Roots of ethical thought in the Veda: Sacrifice, Order and Dharma

The sources of Indian thought and religious practice were roughly divided into two categories: (1) *śruti* ("heard"), the Vedic texts revealed to ancient seers (*ṛsi*); and (2) *smṛti* ("remembered"), later *sūtra* and *śastra* texts compiled by sages and wise men (Dharma books, Epics, and Purāṇas). Originally considered secondary revelations, *smṛti* texts appropriated authority in a variety of ways through the centuries into the first millenium CE, which significantly impacted the development of ethical thought. The early Veda, a remarkably complex web of scriptures written down by four schools (Ṛg, Sāma, Yajur, and Atharva), was the authoritative source of Vedic theology, ritual, and magic. Each school progressively compiled texts with distinct concerns: verse *Saṃhitā* (collections of mantras and liturgical formulas for sacrifical use, roughly dating from ca. 1500 – 900 BCE) and the subsequent commentaries on them, viz. the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āranyakas*, and *Upaniṣads* (ca. 800 – 200 BCE). These three, mostly prose, compilations contain increasingly elaborate speculations on the meaning of

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ritual actions and their hidden connections with parts of the cosmos, of divinities, and of persons.

Vedic religionists, drawing on the magical efficacy of primordial word and sound, praised and supplicated the gods in the pursuit of prosperity and, ultimately, of heaven.[2] At the center of a life-affirming ethos was the Vedic fire sacrifice: fire – both element & god (Agni) – connected the domain of sacrifice to the divine and cosmic realms. Another divine-human exchange was conducted in the potent juice from the *soma* plant (perhaps ephedra or a magic mushroom). *Soma*, a priestly god, was also the drink in the bowl that inspired the seer, producing visions which transmitted the wisdom of the Vedic hymns. The regular performance of these and other sacrifical actions (*karma*) ensured that all members of the community received tangible benefits in the form of food, sons, wealth, victory in war, etc. On a personal level, the human self was ritually constructed and its life-phases clearly demarcated through sacrifice and initiatory rites.

Reciprocity between gods and humans depended on the correct performance of ordinances and rituals (*dharma*) in the sacrifice, which maintained order (*ṛta*) in the universe. Closely linked to truth (*satya*), *ṛta* symbolized the entire cosmic order – the laws of nature, the regulative principles of divine rule of the cosmos, and the moral principles governing human life – which humans supported through sacrifice and recitation of revealed mantras and hymns: "O guardians of order (*ṛta*), you whose ordinances are true (*satya-dharman*), you ascend your chariot in the highest heavens. . . . Wise Mitra and Varuṇa, by means of *dharman* and your divine power you guard the ordinances. You govern the entire world by means of *ṛta.* You placed the sun in the heaven as an effulgent chariot."[3]

Correlations of nature and law are prominent in the late *Ṛg Veda* hymn 10.90, the *Puruṣa-sūkta* ("Hymn to the Cosmic Man"), which recounts how the gods created parts of the universe and the substances employed in sacrificial ritual. In the primordial disintegration of the cosmic man (*puruṣa*), the three regions of his body corresponded to the three cosmic regions and individual parts of his body to the elements and, notably, with the four social classes (*vaṛna*). From his mouth came the priests (*brāhmaṇs*), from his arms kings and warriors (*rājanya, kṣatriya*), from his thighs the common people, i. e. merchants, craftsmen, farmers (*vaiśyas*), and from his feet servants (*śūdras*). The hymn concludes: "with the sacrifice the gods sacrificed to the sacrifice: these were the first ritual laws (*dharmas*)" (ṚV 90.16). Epitomizing the vertical and horizontal correspondences between the cosmic totality and individual entities (gods, humans,

2 On Indian conceptions of heaven see F. M. Smith 1998a.
3 *ṚV* 5.63.1, 7, tr. Holdrege 2004: 216.

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animals, and substances), the hymn concretely depicts the interdependence of metaphysical realities and moral principles and provides a mytho-poetic stimulus to philosophical reflection. The concept of *dharma* embraced both divine upholding of the cosmos and human support of its order through correct performance of Vedic ritual. The metaphysical and normative aspects of *dharma* comprise the inherent connections (*bandhu*) and distinctions among gods, humans, and nature. "All subsequent human *dharma* is perpetuation and renewal of the primeval upholding…of those primordial cosmic and social divisions and polarizations which are the very condition of ritual and ethics" (Halbfass 1988: 318).

The principle of reciprocity was applied in the commentary literature (*Brāhmaṇas* and *Āraṇyakas*) to explicate the hidden meanings of the rituals and trace their resonances deep within the self. Key concepts like *dharma*, *karma*, and duty (*vidhi*) assumed more explicitly ethical meanings. In the early *Upaniṣads*, *dharma* began to be conceived as general moral and religious law: Brahman (the Absolute) created the Law (*dharma*), "a form superior to and surpassing itself. And the Law is there the ruling power standing above the ruling power. Hence there is nothing higher than the Law. Therefore, a weaker man makes demands of a stronger man by appealing to the Law, just as one does by appealing to a king. Now, the Law is nothing but the truth (*satyam*). Therefore, when a man speaks the truth, people say that he speaks the Law…They are really the same thing" (BU 1.4.14). Similarly, a teacher advises his pupil: "speak the truth. Follow the Law" (TU 1.11.11). This admonition to righteous Brahmins includes duties and obligations to gods, ancestors, the guru, and family; producing offspring, preserving health and wealth, and cultivating common virtues: "This is the secret teaching of the Veda." As the linchpin of the Āryan religious and socio-cultural system, *dharma* was the universal principle of goodness and justice as well as an umbrella concept covering customs and duties calibrated by class, country, and circumstance. This sacrificial discourse was promulgated by priests to legitimate the Brahmanical hierarchical social order.

The widely accepted doctrine of karma also originated in the early *Upaniṣads.* Comprising a non-fatalistic nexus of causal relations between actions and results in the wheel of births and deaths (*saṃsāra*), it suffused ethical theories of all Indian schools, including those of Buddhists and Jainas. The impact of the law of karma, with its stress on just deserts, on Indian ethical thought cannot be exaggerated. Max Weber considered it "the most consistent theodicy ever produced."[4]

4 Matilal 2002: 39.

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§ 2. From Ritual to Socio-cultural practices

In post-Vedic literature (roughly, after 500 BCE) the meanings of *dharma* and *karma* extended beyond correct performance of sacrifice (*karma* = ritual action) to embrace a wide range of ethical and social practices. The emergence of a comprehensive dharma-ethics was fueled by social and cultural changes too complex to discuss here, but they include urbanization and the rise of mercantilism and individualism, the appearance of Buddhism, and the spread of ascetic ideals and practices. In the present context three developments are noteworthy. First, the number and type of sources of *dharma* increased. Second, the Pūrva or Early Mīmāṃsā school explicated Vedic *dharma* as the symbol of Brahmanical identity. Third, the *Dharmasūtras* and *Dharmaśāstras* wove an intricate fabric of social, political, and legal morality.

Vedic legitimacy extended beyond revealed texts (*śruti*) to other traditional (*smṛti*) texts, viz. the *Dharma Sūtras* and *Dharmaśāstras* (dating, roughly, from the third-first c. BCE), Epics, and Purāṇas. Two justifications were given for ascribing authority to these post-Vedic texts: (a) they were believed to contain material "remembered" from lost or forgotten Vedic texts; (b) those learned in the Veda themselves became living authorities. The second factor is particularly interesting. For *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*

> The Righteous (*dharma*) and the Unrighteous (*adharma*) do not go around saying, 'Here we are!' Nor do gods, Gandharvas, or ancestors declare, 'This is righteous and that is unrighteous.' An activity that Āryas praise is righteous, and what they deplore is unrighteous. He should model his conduct after that which is unanimously approved in all regions by Āryas who have been properly trained, who are elderly and self-possessed, and who are neither greedy nor deceitful. In this way he will win both worlds. (A 1.20).

The same view was promoted in the most celebrated of the *dharma* books, the *Manu Smṛti* or *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* (compiled from the 2nd c. BCE to 3rd c. CE). "Learn the Law always adhered to by people who are erudite, virtuous, and free from love and hate, the Law assented to by the heart" (2.1). "The root of the Law (*dharma*) is the entire Veda; the tradition (*smṛti*) and practice (*śīla*) of those who know the Veda, the conduct (*ācāra*) of good people, and what is pleasing to oneself" (Manu 2.6). But in the *Dharmaśāstras* the conduct of the good was not an independent source of knowledge of *dharma* because the Veda remained the ultimate source of ethical principles. And, "what is pleasing to oneself" is not, despite appearances, an appeal to subjective inclination. The objectivity of Vedic principles remained unchallenged, while increasing prominence was given to state of mind and intention in moral evaluation, a trend encouraged, perhaps, by the silence of Vedic texts on many issues and because of the inward turn of

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renouncers. Manu cites the dharmic person's assent to right action in terms which recall both Kant and Aristotle. "What a man seeks to know with all his heart and is not ashamed to perform, at which his inner being rejoices – that is the mark of Goodness (*sattva-guṇa*)" (12.37). Pleasure should not be construed here as sensual or aesthetic satisfaction, but rather as joy in fulfilling Vedic duties. Manu's point recalls Kant's claim that people feel self-contentment, which is distinct from their happiness, when they do their duty for its own sake not for their own satisfaction.[5]

Affinities with Greek virtue-ethics are also noteworthy. Manu's dharmic Brahmin can be compared to Aristotle's man of practical wisdom, who exercises moral authority because he feels the proper emotions and judges difficult situations correctly, when moral rules and maxims are unavailable. For Aristotle the right course of action "is determined by reason and in the way the man of practical wisdom would determine it" (NE 1107a1 – 2). He knows the good, chooses good actions for their own sakes, has an unshakeable character (1105a30 – 33), and takes pleasure in just actions (1099a10 – 20).[6] That Aristotle, and Plato too, embed the individual's pursuit of the good within the broader context of communitarian ethics also recommends comparing these traditions.[7]

§ 3. Justification of Dharma in Pūrva or Early Mīmāṃsā

The great Indologist Wilhelm Halbfass observed that although "the Hindu philosophical systems show a lack of critical reflection upon the specific contents of dharma; yet the concept of dharma has been taken up in a variety of ways in theoretical and philosophical discourse" (Halbfass1988: 324). While the six systems shared many views – the authority of the Veda, the Brahmanical scheme of values, liberation as the goal of human existence – they usually addressed distinct problems. Each school's primary works were commentaries on foundational *sūtra* texts, which possessed an almost revelatory status. Because *sūtra* texts are notoriously terse and ambiguous, interpreting them generated considerable disagreement. The Pūrva Mīmāṃsā school was preeminent in its defence of the Brahmanical system of *dharma*, partially in response to the wide dispersion of Buddhist teachings about *dharma* under the emperor Aśoka in the third century BCE. Taking enlightened beings rather than scriptures as au-

5 Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*. 377 – 378.

6 The moral ideal of developing one's ethos or character by cultivation of the virtues is also central to Buddhist ethics. See Harvey 2000: 50 – 51.

7 Mohanty's comparison of Greek and Hindu dharma ethics argues, unconvincingly in my view, that neither grounds ethical theory in their respective metaphysics. Cf. Mohanty 1997: 295 – 296.

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thoritative, the non-orthodox Buddhists (and Jainas) rejected the validity of the Vedas, Brahmanical claims to authority, and the linkage of heredity and ethical goodness.

The *Pūrva Mīmāṃsāsūtra* attributed to Jaimini (c. 300 – 200 BCE) begins with the definition of *dharma* as "a beneficial end (*artha*) indicated by an injunction (*codanā*)." For Mīmāṃsā the Veda was eternal and authorless. Thus, its prescriptive statements were considered intrinsically true without verification and could be relied upon as authoritative guides to happiness and salvation. However, the two great 7th century CE Mīmāṃsā philosophers differed on the character of an injunction. Kumārila argued that Vedic injunctions served as means towards desired ends and so motivated agents in conjunction with desired results, while Prabhākara saw them as unconditional obligations, as ends in themselves; for him, hearing an imperative was sufficient motivation to act.[8] The latter formulation resembles Kant's categorial imperative, but the comparison shouldn't be pressed too far. First, Vedic injunctions differ from Kantian imperatives in not being universally applicable: Vedic *dharma* applied only to Āryans who lived in the Brahmanical homeland (roughly, north-central India) and who were conversant with the Sanskrit text of the Vedas. Non-Āryan barbarians were excluded. Moreover, even within Brahmanical society, duties and proper conduct varied considerably by class and birth. Second, neither Mīmāṃsā nor the other systems sought theoretical, rational grounds independent of revealed truth for concepts of the good or principles of conduct. Kant's notions of human dignity, moral freedom, and the "good will," by contrast, are grounded in rational agency. Certainly, for most Hindu philosophers, reason (*yukti*) and argument (*nyāya*) could be employed to defend Vedic injunctions and traditional norms. The *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* even claimed that Vedic injunctions were based on logical inference (*anumāna*). But, generally, without reliance on Vedic truth the power of logical reasoning was limited. Manu's perspective is typical: "The Veda is the eternal eyesight for ancestors, gods, and humans; for Vedic teaching is beyond the powers of logic or cognition" (12.94). "Perception, inference, and treatises coming from diverse sources – a man who seeks accuracy with respect to the Law must have a complete understanding of these three. The man who scrutinizes the record of the seers and the teachings of the Law by means of logical reasoning (*tarka*) not inconsistent with the Vedic treatise – he alone knows the law" (12.105 – 106).

A more universalist attitude to moral principles emerged in Buddhism and among Hindu renouncers, though the latter continued to accept the truth of the Veda. Compare Mīmāṃsā and the Buddhists on the principle of 'non-violence' (*ahiṃsā*). For Kumārila the truth of *ahiṃsā* did not depend on rational justifi-

8 See further Taber, J. A. 1998.

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cation or social acceptance but solely on the authority of the Veda. Hence, Buddhist critiques of sacrificial violence towards animals sanctioned by the Vedas were refuted by Mīmāṃsā thinkers, on the grounds that Buddhist reliance on reason and conscience blinded them to the axiomatic religious truths taught by the Veda. Kumārila also criticized the Buddha's compassion because it did not pertain to the class-duty (*varṇa-dharma*) of the princely class (*kṣatriya*). Interestingly, the tendency to universalize principles like non-violence to all regardless of caste and birth, so prominent in Buddhism, also appeared in popular Hindu literature like the *Mahābhārata* and *Pañcatantra.*[9]

§ 4. Individual and Social Ethics

The *Dharmaśāstras,* which embodied emerging cultural patterns, worked out the *varṇāśrama-dharma*, the new ethics of class (*varṇa*) and stages of life (*āśrama*). Echoing the Hymn to the Cosmic Man cited earlier, Manu endorsed the Veda's divine-cosmic legitimation of the four classes (*varṇa*): "For the protection of the whole creation, that One of dazzling brilliance assigned separate activities for those born from the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet" (1.87); "The four social classes, the three worlds, and the four orders of life, the past, the present and the future – all these are individually established by the Veda" (12.97). The classes, with their respective characteristics, duties, and virtues, were not contingent social constructions, but rather were rooted in the nature of things. Commencing at age five with the rite of initiation, "twice-born" males of the three highest classes entered the four stages of life: (a) the celibate life of the Vedic student (*brahmacārya*); (b) the householder married life (*gṛhastha*), which included performance of sacrifices and household duties; (c) withdrawal from society to live as a forest-dweller (*vanaprastha*); and, finally, (d) the life of a complete renouncer (*saṃnyāsa*). The fourth stage involved total renunciation of household, fire, and thus of sacrifice and cooking.

The present context does not permit a detailed consideration of the origins and complexities of the *āśrama* system.[10] Classical Hindu social ethics organized normatively the increasing variety of choices in life. The earliest texts conceived the latter three *āśramas* as distinct ways of life, each one of which a twice-born male could enter after completion of the initial student-phase. *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* 2.21.1 – 5, for example, recognized that each of the alternatives could lead to "peace" (*kṣema*). But by the beginning of the common era, the *Dharmaśāstras* (see Manu chs. 2 – 6) canonized the four as successive phases in

9 Cf. Halbfass 1988: 330.
10 See Olivelle 1993, the definitive work on the subject.

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an idealized sequence for the high-caste man. Yet, Manu valorized householders because they supported the others (Manu 3.77 – 78, 6.87 – 90). The householder's life was the best for "anyone who desires undecaying heaven (*svarga*) and happiness (*sukha*) on earth" (3.78), a view shared by the influential *Mahābhārata.*[11]

In ancient Brahmanical society class-duties and life-stages did not answer all aspects of the question "how should I live?" Also significant was the cosmic law of karma, according to which each individual is propelled from one life to the next, determining both the objective circumstances of one's life, i. e. birth and class, and the internal constituents of one's own nature, a unique mixture of qualities and dispositional tendencies (*saṃskāra*) accumulated over countless incarnations. The early *Upaniṣads* state the principle clearly, echoed later by the *Gītā:*

> People say: "A person here consists simply of desire." A man resolves in accordance with his desire, acts in accordance with his resolve, and turns out to be in accordance with his action:
> A man who's attached goes with his action,
> to that very place to which his mind and character cling.
> Reaching the end of his action, of whatever he has done in this world –
> From that world he returns back to this world, back to action. (BU 4.4.5 – 6)
>
> As a man discards worn-out clothes to put on new and different ones,
> so the embodied self discards its worn-out bodies to take on other new ones. (BG 2.22)

Reliance on the invisible, causal law of karma and on the human and cosmic participation in *dharma* enabled Indian thinkers to connect non-moral facts and moral goods, the metaphysical and normative, shunning the fact-value distinction enshrined in western philosophy since Hume. But a pre-modern analogy can be found in Platonic ethics: "wise men claim that partnership and friendship, order, self-control, and justice hold together heaven and earth, and gods and men, and that is why they call this universe a world-order (*kosmos*)" (*Gorgias* 508a).

Individual and social ethics depend on the Indian metaphysics of the self. According to Hindu cosmological doctrine the reincarnating self is composed of three qualities (literally "strands" = *guṇas)* of nature or matter (*prakṛti*): (1) pure being, light, or truth (*sattva*); (2) energy, activity, or passion (*rajas*); and (3) darkness or inertia (*tamas*). This tri-*guṇa* scheme had wide applications from medicine to metaphysics, e. g., the divine realm is purely *sattvic* whereas *rajas* permeates the human world.

11 Cf. Olivelle 1993: 148 – 51.

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One should understand Goodness (*sattva*), Vigor (*rajas*), and Darkness (*tamas*) as the three attributes of the embodied self (*ātman*), attributes by which Mahat, "the Great," remains pervading all these existences completely. When one of these attributes thoroughly suffuses the body, it makes the embodied self dominant in that attribute. Goodness is knowledge, tradition tells us; Darkness is ignorance; and Vigor is passion and hatred. These are their pervasive forms that inhere in all beings. (Manu 12.24 – 26)

In Manu's scheme, the three qualities had links to the three basic values in ancient Indian society: wealth or worldly success (*artha*), sensual or aesthetic pleasure (*kāma*), and righteousness (*dharma*). "Pleasure is said to be the mark of Darkness; Profit, of Vigor; and Law, of Goodness" (12.38). The one-to-one correspondence among the three qualities and three goals was complicated by the addition of the fourth goal, *mokṣa*, discussed below.

When combined with the three qualities, *varṇa* (literally 'color') symbolically represented the social classes: Brahmans – white for purity, Kṣatriyas – red for passion and energy, Vaiśyas – yellow, for earth, and Śūdras – black, for darkness and inertia. General *dharma* applied to all members of society in the form of universal virtues such as non-violence, truthfulness, abstention from anger, purification, self-control, not stealing, hospitality, gift-giving, and freedom from envy (Manu 10.63). Distinctive virtues, occupations, rituals, and obligations were specified for each class and caste (*jāti*, literally 'birth') and even for different regions, clans, guilds, and one's historical age. These latter stipulations fall under the rubric of particular *dharma* (*svadharma*), which is relative to the psychological mixture produced by one's class and one's nature. The entire scheme is summarized in the *Gītā:*

> There is no being on earth or among the gods in heaven
> free from the triad of qualities that are born of nature.
> The actions of priests, warriors, commoners and servants
> are apportioned by qualities born of their intrinsic being.
> Tranquillity, control, penance, purity, patience, and honesty,
> knowledge, judgment, and piety are intrinsic to the action of a priest (*Brahmin*).
> Heroism, fiery energy resolve, skill, refusal to retreat in battle,
> charity, and majesty in conduct are intrinsic to the action of a warrior (*kṣatriya*).
> Farming, herding cattle, and commerce are intrinsic to the action of a commoner (*vaiśya*):
> action that is essentially service is intrinsic to the servant (*śūdra*).
> Each one achieves success by focusing on his own action (*svakarma*);
> hear how one finds success by focusing on his own action.
> By his own action a man finds success, worshiping the source
> of all creatures' activity, the presence pervading all that is.
> Better to do one's own duty (*svadharma*) imperfectly than to do another man's well;
> doing action intrinsic to his being (*svabhava*) a man avoids guilt. (BG 18.40 – 48)

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One notices immediately in this famous passage that distinctive virtues and proper behavior are ascribed only to the two highest classes (priests and warriors), whereas the two lower classes are characterized exclusively by their social activities. The ethical pyramid had rather steep sides, even more so for women and *śūdras.* They also were subject to *svadharma*, but since the stages of life strictly applied only to twice-born males, women and *śūdras* occupied the periphery of the classical *varṇāśrama-dharma* system: neither could study the Vedas, offer sacrifices, nor become renouncers, though of course they could marry. The *Dharmaśāstras* were quite explicit about criminal penalties for violations: "If a śudra has sex with an Ārya woman, his penis should be cut off and all his property confiscated… [I]f he listens in on a Vedic recitation, his ears shall be filled with molten tin" (G 12.2, 4). Women's *svadharma* required deference to and service of males, e. g., procreation in marriage and assisting husbands in meeting family obligations. When a wife fulfilled her *dharma* by serving her husband as a god (Manu 9.31 – 55), she was deemed an embodiment of Śri, the goddess of prosperity, and thus was to be venerated in turn as the source of good fortune for the family. For high-caste women the paragon of female virtue was Sītā, the loyal, modest, and devoted wife of Lord Rāma.[12]

Lest it be thought that classical Indian social ethics was an exotic Oriental growth without western parallels, recall Plato's account of justice in *Republic* IV. Having divided the state's citizenry into three classes – guardians/philosophers, auxiliaries/warriors, and producers (slaves don't comprise a distinct class) – Socrates argues that the top two classes should have distinct virtues and that the lowest has none – just as the *Gītā* does. Similarly, Plato's concept of justice links hereditary endowment with moral excellence to promote virtue and happiness in the whole society: "everyone must practice one of the occupations in the city for which it is naturally best suited" (433a5 – 6); "the city is just because each of the three classes in it is doing its own work" (441d8 – 10). Note also the Platonic counterpart to Hindu *svadharma.* Manu: "Far better to carry out one's own Law (*svadharma*) imperfectly than that of someone else's perfectly, for a man who lives according to someone else's Law falls immediately from his caste" (10.97). Plato: "each one of us in whom each part [of the soul] is doing its own work will

12 Stephanie Jamison summarizes a complex situation: woman "plays a crucial role in knitting together her community. By producing sons, she insures the linkage of generations and the continued veneration of the ancestors. By dispensing food and hospitality, she forges harmonious links between different segments of secular Aryan society. By her role in the srauta ritual (and by making such ritual possible), she links gods and men and allows the religious life of the community to proceed." But, she continues, "this is a very rosy picture of the life of an ancient Indian wife," which "puts a deceptively positive spin on the conceptual position of the wife." "[A]ll the linkages just mentioned are perilous and anxiety producing. Allotting the woman important roles there essentially make her into cannon fodder" (Jamison 1996: 254).

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himself be just and do his own" (441d12-e2). The *Republic* also echoes Manu's strictures against mixing classes: "meddling and exchange between the three classes is the greatest harm that can happen to the city" (434b9-c1). The parallels are compelling despite the fact that Plato's theory of justice reflected contemporary social realities less than did Hindu class-*dharma*.

§ 5. Well-being and the goals of life

Living a dharmic life was not simply a matter of fulfilling Vedic duties and obligations. Both philosophical and non-theoretical texts also analyzed the role played in a happy or successful life by intrinsic and instrumental goods, which motivated by attraction. Traditionally, the four values or ends of human life (*puruṣārthas*) were: wealth or worldly success (*artha*), sensual and aesthetic pleasure (*kāma*), righteousness (*dharma*), and liberation (*mokṣa*). Apart from liberation, the first three goals circumscribed an embodied person's active engagement (*pravṛtti*) in everyday life.[13]

The conception of happiness (*sukha*) as *artha* and *kāma* is generally descriptive, things as they are, but since one was expected to pursue them rightly, that is, in accordance with *varṇāśrama-dharma* and one's *svadharma*, the scheme is also prescriptive, things as they should be. Manu is inclusivist: "Some say that Law (*dharma*) and Wealth (*artha*) are conducive to welfare (*śreyas*), others Pleasure and Wealth; and still others, Law alone or Wealth alone. But the settled rule is this: the entire triple set is conducive to welfare" (2.224). Pragmatically, *dharma*, both as excellence in ritual performance and as correct behavior, probably functioned for many primarily as the means to obtain pleasure and prosperity. And while each of the three *arthas* is intrinsically good, Manu and other authorities also saw them as instrumental for the attainment of the chief good, viz. heaven or "equality with the gods" (12.90). As cited earlier: "Pleasure is said to be the mark of Darkness; Profit, of Vigour; and Law, of Goodness. Each later one is superior to each preceding" (12.38). Ideally, Law and Goodness were best exemplified by Brahmins, whose Vedic knowledge, priestly virtues, and exemplary conduct "are the highest means of securing the supreme good." (12.83). Lending further support to the analogies drawn earlier between Hindu and Greek ethics, I suggest that the virtuous Brahmin is not unlike the

13 Deviating from the consensus, the threefold scheme was rejected by the Cārvāka philosophers, atheistic materialists, who repudiated *dharma* and championed *artha* and *kāma*, thus promoting a form of sophisticated hedonism not unlike Epicureanism, with the notable difference that Epicureans defined the highest pleasure as simply the absence of pain, which is superior to the episodic 'kinetic' pleasures championed by the Cārvākas.

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Platonic-Aristotelian philosopher, allowing for the fact that the latter is not a sacerdotal type.

With respect to the teleological dimension of Hindu ethics, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers analyzed the concepts of desire, pleasure, and happiness more precisely than Manu. Praśastapāda (c. 550 CE) employed the general term for pleasure, *sukha*, to designate both ordinary sensual gratification and the "happiness of the wise." Here *sukha* was "a dispositional happiness based on the inner resources of a person. Its condition is not the gratification of desires, but their transformation and transcendence."[14] Another Nyāya thinker, Uddyotkara (6th c. CE), argued that the four goals were not independent motivational ends, but rather were reducible to the pursuit of happiness and avoidance of pain.[15] Thus *dharma*, an intrinsic good, was also the means to generate good karma and heavenly reward.

The three types of good – *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma* – and the general concept of happiness depend on the prudential principle that everyone desires the good. Aristotle's eudaimonism presents an analogous teleological ordering of the goods of pleasure/wealth, honor, and rational virtue directed to the final end, i. e. the highest good (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* I.4 – 7). Like Aristotle, Manu and many philosophers thought *dharma* and cultivation of the virtues to be constitutive of well-being. It would be a mistake to conclude, however, that Hindu eudaimonism was egoist, that is to say, that all reasons for action were to maximize the agent's own good. As we have seen, altruistic values were deeply embedded in the social fabric and in the individual's conscience (if the term is not anachronistic) through class-duties: care for others (e. g., the virtue of compassion), active promotion of the well-being of others, as well as respect for gods, gurus, and other superiors. Thus, the scope of agency in Hindu ethics lacks the individualist framework of modern western philosophical morality, whether it be Kant's deontology, Mill's consequentialism, or Nietzsche's romantic perfectionism, to name a few well-known alternatives.

§ 6. Dharma and Mokṣa

While *dharma* literature regulated *saṃsāric*, embodied existence by stipulating imperatives, goals, and virtues, renouncer traditions focused intensely on the fourth goal of liberation from the wheel of births and deaths, i. e. from all suffering and all worldly goods as well as from afterlife rewards and punishments. Though conceived differently by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jainas, *mokṣa* or

14 Halbfass 1997: 152.
15 *Nyāyavārtikka* 1.1.1, cited in Halbfass 1997: 158 – 59.

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mukti represented an extreme perfectionist ideal incapable of attainment by the practice of *dharma* ethics. Since a superhuman effort was required to completely deconstruct one's nature, renouncers invariably pursued the virtues of celibacy, nonviolence, poverty, truthfulness, and nonstealing as means towards the ultimate end. The attenuation of self-interest and the pursuit of altruism are familiar in western moral theories, but the complete annihilation of the individual self and its total absorption by a personal divinity or in an impersonal absolute as ends in themselves are found only in a few western mystics, e. g. Meister Eckhart. In India, conceptions of *mokṣa* and its relationship to *dharma* differed in important respects. I shall consider Manu's *Dharmaśāstra,* the renunciant traditions, exemplified by Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Vedānta, and the *Bhagavad Gīta*, which synthesized several competing ideals.

Manu acknowledged the renunciant's way of life and liberation as the fourth goal of human life, but marginalized its importance: it counseled that one should pursue *mokṣa* "only after he has studied the Vedas according to rule, fathered sons in keeping with the Law, and offered sacrifices according to his ability," otherwise "he will proceed downward" (6.36 – 37). Householders' engagement (*pravṛtti*) with sacrificial duties and the pursuit of prosperity was contrasted with the detachment (*nivṛtti*) of renunciants (*saṃnyāsins*) who pursued liberation:

> "Acts prescribed by the Veda are of two kinds: advancing (*pravṛtta*), which procures the enhancement of happiness (*sukha*); and arresting (*nivṛtta)*, which procures the supreme good. An action performed to obtain a desire or in the hereafter is called an 'advancing act', whereas an action performed without desire and prompted by knowledge is said to be an 'arresting act'. By engaging in advancing acts, a man attains equality with the gods, by engaging in arresting acts, on the other hand, he transcends the five elements" (12.88 – 90).

Manu accommodated within *dharma* ethics the quest to transcend it by limiting yogic practice to the last phase of life. Still, it acknowledged that through suppression of the senses, practice of austerity and meditation (*dhyāna-yoga*) (6.79), "freed from all the pairs of opposites, he comes to rest in Brahman alone" (6.81). "For a Brahmin, ascetic toil and knowledge are the highest means of securing the supreme good; by ascetic toil he destroys impurity and by knowledge he attains immortality" (12.104); "When a man thus sees by the self all beings as the self, he becomes equal towards all and reaches Brahman, the highest state" (12.125). Even in Manu, not an explicitly Vedāntic text, the monistic metaphysics of the self shapes the conception of the highest good.

The *Upaniṣads* and post-Vedic ascetic movements generally promoted renunciation of the householder's life, external values, and the life-affirming ethics

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which ordered them. Aspiring to *mokṣa* as quickly as possible, rather than only in the final stage of life, renunciants sought to realize the absolute:

> "'Ours is this self, and it is our world. What then is the use of offspring for us?' So they gave up the desire for sons, the desire for wealth, and the desire for worlds, and undertook the mendicant life."… From this perspective, *mokṣa* is the state of being in which the individual realizes identity of the self (*ātman*) with the absolute reality *(Brahman*), having transcended the illusions of duality, e. g. birth and death, ordinary goals, and egotism. This immense, unborn self…there, in that space within the heart, he lies – the controller of all, the lord of all, the ruler of all! He does not become more by good actions or in any way less by bad actions. (BU 4.4.22)

Other Hindu philosophical schools disagreed with Vedānta on the metaphysics of the self and thus conceived of liberation in different terms. Committed to a plurality of selves, Sāṃkhya-Yoga, for example, defined liberation as "isolation" (*kaivalya*) of the individual self or pure consciousness (*puruṣa*) from the suffering (*duḥkha*) caused by association with matter or nature (*prakṛti*), which includes the mind, faculties, the three qualities (*guṇa*), and all their transformations. Liberation was conceived in negative terms by Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Mīmāṃsa, and Nyāya. The individual self must be freed from both pain and pleasure, because pain (*duḥkha*) and pleasure (*sukha*) are inextricably linked: both are transient and produce anxiety. Buddhists too located the roots of suffering in desire and impermanence. Some western interpreters have attacked this ideal of liberation of the individual self as a form of extreme egoism.[16]

In the classical Advaita-Vedānta of Śaṃkara (8th c. CE), absolute reality (*brahman*) was non-dual, without attributes, infinite, unmanifest, inactive, and conceived as being, consciousness, and bliss. The realization of one's essential nature as the absolute could only be achieved through knowledge (*jñana*) and by abandoning all action. Besides *mokṣa* all other values (*artha, kāma, and dharma*) were the product of ignorance (*avidyā*). However, Śaṃkara agreed with the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā school in accepting the validity of Vedic injunctions and duties: "knowledge of virtue and vice is derived from the scriptures…Vedic rites are pure since they are practiced by good people" (BSBh iii.1.25). Indeed, far from rejecting the *varṇāśrama-dharma,* Vedantins, as Halbfass has pointed out, considered it "the precondition for the possibility of liberating oneself from it. Only a person who is entitled to study the Vedas and to carry out the Vedic sacrifices can be entitled to liberate himself from these. The *saṃnyāsin* [renouncer] continues to draw his legitimation from that very *dharma* from which he is liberating himself."[17] Advaita-Vedānta's twofold concept of the truth, which distinguished the absolute (*paramārtha*) and the conventional (*vyavahāra*),

16 A notable example is Danto 1972.
17 Halbfass 1991: 384.

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enabled the school to ascribe legitimacy to *dharma* with respect to the goals and activities of *saṃsāric* existence. Viewed from the absolute perspective of the true Self, "rites and duties enjoined by the Vedas are meant only for one who is unenlightened and is possessed of desire"; "The Lord Himself…saw that the coexistence of knowledge and rites and duties (*karma*) is not possible in the same person, they being based on the convictions of nonagentship and agentship, unity and diversity (respectively)."[18] Strikingly, Śaṃkara asserts that "even *dharma* is injurious or harmful to a seeker of liberation as it causes bondage."[19] "Action does not constitute the means to the highest good. Nor do knowledge and action in combination. Further, knowledge, which has liberation as its result, can have no dependence on the assistance of action, because, being the remover of ignorance, it is opposed to action."[20] From the absolute perspective, therefore, responding to Vedic injunctions and pursuing goals are functions of ignorance (*avidyā*), which superimposes duality, ego, and agency on the real self which is itself devoid of all qualities and activities. Nevertheless, a limited preparatory role can be ascribed to the performance of Vedic rites and duties since they can create "the tendency to turn towards the in-dwelling Self. Although the means be unreal, still it may be meaningful in relation to the truth of the purpose it serves."[21]

Śaṃkara's paradoxical formulation did not go unchallenged by later Vedāntins, many of whom conceived *dharma* and *mokṣa* in more complementary terms. Rāmānuja (11th c. CE) claimed that *brahman* with attributes as personal God and supreme Person was superior to Śaṃkara's notion of *brahman* without attributes. Having also rejected his predecessor's view that the world and individual selves are illusions, he argued that *dharma* can lead to *mokṣa.* Since God's nature is morally perfect and liberation is the realization of the self as a part of the absolute (but not identical, as Śaṃkara held), those seeking *mokṣa* should act in accord with *dharma* in order to attain the final goal. Nevertheless, he agreed with Śaṃkara that action is not the *cause* of *mokṣa.* But righteous action is effective "for works enjoined by Scripture have the power of pleasing the Supreme Person, and hence, through his grace, to cause the destruction of all mental impressions obstructive of calmness and concentration of mind. Hence calmness of mind and the rest are to be aimed at and practised by householders also."[22] In his commentary on the *Gītā* Rāmānuja asserted that *karma-yoga* is superior to *jñāna-yoga* because it is easier.[23] Meditation (*dhyāna*) also con-

18 Śaṃkara on *BG* 2.11, tr. p. 39.
19 Śaṃkara on *BG* 4.21, tr. p. 143.
20 Śaṃkara on the *BG* 18.66, tr. p. 743.
21 Śaṃkara on the *BG* 18.66, tr. p. 759.
22 *Śrībhāṣya* 3.4.27, tr. p. 701.
23 Rāmānuja, *Commentary on BG* 18.48, p. 582.

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tributes to the quest for freedom by eliciting divine favor: "Meditation is originated in the mind through the grace of the Supreme Person, who is pleased and conciliated by the different kinds of acts of sacrifice and worship duly performed by the devotee…so knowledge, although itself the means of release, demands the cooperation of the different works."[24] Rāmānuja's position, therefore, lies between Śaṃkara and the *Gītā*, whose devotional orientation influenced him greatly.

The state of liberation itself was described in very different terms among Hindu thinkers. Contrary to Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Mīmāṃsa, and Nyāya philosophers' negative conception of liberation as freedom from pain and suffering, Vedāntins espoused the *Upaniṣadic* doctrine that the true self (*ātman*) consists of pure bliss (BU 3.9.28, cf. BG 6.27). Nyāya philosophers raised pragmatic and theoretical objections against the Vedāntic view. First, if liberation were just a more intense form of happiness, the extirpation of desire, a necessary precondition for liberation on their view, would be impossible. The Naiyāyika Vātsyāyana stressed the psychological challenge involved in conceiving liberation as an attractive goal like pleasure: "Unless we abandon our attachment to eternal happiness, final liberation cannot be attained, because attachment itself is known to be bondage."[25] Likewise, Udayana raised concerns that the desire for liberation qua happiness would inevitably attach to more worldly objects of satisfaction.[26] Only if *mokṣa* were completely devoid of both pleasure and pain could one be assured of achieving purity and non-attachment. Second, on logical grounds, Vātsyāyana argued that if the bliss of liberation had a beginning it must also have an end. Udayana, echoing Meno's paradox, also raised ethical objections to the Vedāntic identification of *brahman* and *ātman* : "Since it is said to be eternal it cannot be sought. One does not search for what one already possesses."[27] Later Vedāntins responded sarcastically that the Nyāya's notion of liberation was like the unconsciousness of a stone. How, they asked, could such a negative state of liberation motivate anyone soteriologically? Which is the more attractive goal: absence of pain or complete bliss? It is an old question, and one debated also in western thought. Among Greek philosophers the choice would be between Epicurus and Plotinus. In some respects the Vedāntic position is more appealing, but it is not without difficulties, for it depends simultaneously on rejecting our goal-oriented psychology while also insisting that liberation be pursued ceaselessly without hope of results. For Vedānta everything depends on the conviction that all desires of the embodied self – excepting the desire for *mokṣa* – are

24 *Śrībhāṣya* 3.4.26, tr. pp. 699 – 700, cited in Perrett 1993: 58.
25 *Nyāyabhāṣya* 1.1.22 quoted in Halbfass 1997: 155.
26 *Nyāyadarśana* p. 459 cited and discussed in Chakrabarti 1983: 170 – 72.
27 *Ātmatattvaviveka* p. 442, cited in Chakrabarti 1983: 175.

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