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A Contentious study in ethics and religious thoughts -Analytical analysis-

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Abstract:

Although it seems that ethics and religion should be related, ancient research suggests blend of interpretations and incomes. The current paper argues that such controversial results are mostly due to methodological and conceptual limitations. Therefore, the research attempts to develop hypotheses. Implications for research and practice are discussed through the following steps:

- Investigates the resources available to address common problems confronting Abrahamic faiths, and how each faith explains and defends its moral viewpoints.
- Draws on a range of moral issues, such as examples arising from friendship, marriage, forgiveness and its limits, the death penalty, the environment, warfare, and the meaning of work, career, and vocation.



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• Looks at both ethical reasoning and more importantly, how that reasoning reveals insights into a religious tradition.

• Offering concrete topics for interfaith discussions, this is a timely and insightful introduction to a fast-growing field of interest.

الملخص:

يُعرّف علم الاخلاق بأنه جملة المبادئ النظرية والقواعد العملية التي على المرء إتباعها ليحيا وفق طبيعته بوصفه كائن اجتماعي . لهذا كان سقراط أول من رأي أن الأخلاق علم، حينما قال : الفضيلة علم والرذيلة جهل . فلا مجتمع بشري بدون قيم خلقية تكون ضابطة لسلوكيات الأفراد. من هنا قيل أن الانسان وحده هو الذي يحمل صفة الكائن الاخلاقي لأن القيم الأخلاقية أصبحت تقترب من ضرورات وحاجات البيولوجية .

تناقش هذه الورقة البحثية علاقة الأخلاق بالدين وبيان طبيعة العلاقة الجدلية القائمة بينهما وهل انما علاقة توافق ام تعارض، وأيها الاصل وأيها الفرع، وفي ذلك اقوال ومذاهب تتبنى طرحها هذه الدراسة المتواضعة حيث يخلط الكثير من الناس بين الأخلاق والدين، بل نجد البعض يصرح أن لا أخلاق بدون دين! فالأخلاق هي المنظومة الضابطة للمسلوكيات المقبولة التي تتوافق عليها الجماعة، ومن جهة أخرى هناك أعمال مستهجنة ومرفوضة لا يقبلها الذوق الاجتماعي، ولا تتوافق مع طبيعة العلاقات الانسانية الاجتماعية! فالمبادئ الأخلاقية وجدت في المجموعات البشرية قبل نماذج الأديان المعروفة، وخاصة الكتابية ونجدها مختلفة، متعددة ونسبية عند الشعوب.



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قد نجد أخلاق وقيم راقية وحضارية وتعتبر من العادات السائدة عند شعب، بينما تجدها غير مقبولة ومموججة ومستهجنة عند شعب آخر مع أنهم يقعون تحت مُسمى نفس الدين.

إن إعطاء نمطية دينية أو أخلاقية للإنسان في منطقة جغرافية محددة، هو إعطاء المعتقدات والشرائع والملامح الأخلاقية صفة التورث، أي إعطاء عملية تورث الأفكار والأخلاق صفة الإطلاق والتعميم، كما هو تورث الصفات الجسدية! كما أن حشر الأخلاق داخل النصوص الدينية يعني إضفاء صفة القدسية وجعلها سماوية، وبدلاً من أن تكون الغاية من وجود الأخلاق خدمة الإنسان في الحياة بتنظيم علاقاته الاجتماعية، تصبح أن لا غاية من وجود الإنسان إلا خدمة الأخلاق المقدسة! وتعبير آخر، لم توجد الأخلاق لخدمة الانسان، بل وُجد الانسان لخدمة الأخلاق! على الرغم من أنه يبدو أن الأخلاق والدين يجب أن يكونا مرتبطين، فإن الأبحاث تشير إلى استنتاجات متباينة حول العلاقة.

نشير إلى أن هذه النتائج المتباينة ترجع في معظمها إلى القيود المنهجية والمفاهيمية. وفي هذا السياق نحاول من خلال هذا البحث مناقشة عدّة فرضيات، واستشراف الأبعاد المترتبة على البحث والمفعلة من خلال الخطوات التالية:

- يعتمد وينطلق البحث من مجموعة من القضايا الأخلاقية، مثل الأمثلة الناشئة عن الصداقة، والزواج، والكذب، والمغفرة وحدودها، وعقوبة الإعدام، والبيئة، والحرب، ومعنى العمل، والوظيفة،
- ينظر إلى كل من التفكير الأخلاقي والأهم من ذلك، كيف يكشف هذا المنطق عن رؤى حول التقاليد الدينية



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- التحقيق في الموارد المتاحة لمعالجة المشاكل الشائعة التي تواجه الديانات الإبراهيمية، وكيف يفسر كل دين ويدافع عن وجهات نظره الأخلاقية
- طرح مواضيع محددة للمناقشات بين الأديان، والتي من شأنها تعزيز رؤية مشتركة ذات الاهتمام والأبعد التي تُخدم الانشغالات المصيرية الراهنة والتي تمثل مجال اهتمام وانشغال سريع النمو في آن

-The article body:

The current research paper attempts to display a spectrum of views about how religion and ethics are related—from the view that religion is the absolute bedrock of ethics to one that holds that ethics is based on humanistic assumptions justified mainly and sometimes only, by appeals to reason. These two extremes tend to be argued in a way that offers little room for compromise or pragmatic solutions to real issues we face every day.¹

Religious ethics concerns teachings and practices of what is right or wrong, good or bad, virtuous or vicious, from a religious point of view. The definition of “religion” is controversial. A definition favored by the Supreme Court is that religions are traditions that are anything like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism.

¹- Singer, P. (1993) Practical Ethics, 2nd edition (p.10), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press-P44



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A more detailed definition to consider is: A religion is a tradition and practice based on a conception of what is real and significant (God, Allah, the Tao, Brahman, etc.), and the belief that sin, vice, disillusionment, and illusion may be overcome by grace, meditation, practices, and living in harmony, unity, or wise concord with what is real and significant.

A Christian ethic, for example, may be informed by Jesus' radical teaching about loving one's neighbor, being a Good Samaritan, loving one's enemies, and the like. And here are the main concerns of the study,

Why bother studying religious ethics? What is religious ethics?

Why care about religious ethics? Do Ethics Require Religion?

Does it mean that the true need on this planet is not religious justification?

But a sweeping morality that addresses and enlightens us to the true needs and priorities on the planet, for all life, that seeks for utopia for all life regardless of religious prejudices?

Does it mean both can exist on its own? What is the Relationship between Ethics and Religion?

The relationship between religion and ethics is about the relationship between revelation and reason. Religion is based in some measure on the idea that God (or some deity) reveals insights about life and its true meaning. These insights are collected in texts (the Bible, the Torah, the Koran, etc.) and presented as "revelation." Ethics, from a strictly humanistic perspective, is based on the tenets of reason: Anything that is not rationally verifiable cannot be considered justifiable. From this perspective, ethical principles need not derive their authority from religious doctrine. Instead, these principles are upheld for their value in promoting independent and



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responsible individuals—people who are capable of making decisions that maximize their own well-being while respecting the well-being of others.

Even though religious and secular ethics don't derive their authority from the same source, we still must find a way to establish common ground between them; otherwise we're condemning ourselves to live amidst social discord and division.

I believe we can accommodate the requirements of reason and religion by developing certain qualities that we would bring to our everyday ethical discussions. Aristotle said that cultivating qualities (he called them "virtues") like prudence, reason, accommodation, compromise, moderation, wisdom, honesty, and truthfulness, among others, would enable us all to enter the discussions and conflicts between religion and ethics—where differences exist—with a measure of moderation and agreement. When ethics and religion collide, nobody wins; when religion and ethics find room for robust discussion and agreement, we maximize the prospects for constructive choices in our society.

-Exploring Religious Ethics in Daily Life

Religious ethics are the moral principles that guide religions and that set the standard for what is and isn't acceptable behavior. Surprisingly similar from one religion to the next, these fundamental principles flow from the core beliefs and ancient wisdom of religion, as well as its teachers and traditions.¹

¹- Simon, Blackburn (2001). *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p90.



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Virtues are standards for ethical, moral conduct — they enable you to look at yourself in the mirror every morning without cringing. Personal virtues, such as humility, gratitude, and hope honor God or, in Eastern religions, reflect a higher state of being.

-The golden rule: A universal principle

As a small child, you may have grabbed a toy from your playmate, who, of course, immediately started to wail. You'd then hear your mom/dad/teacher say something like, "Well, how would you like it if someone did that to you?!"

Sound familiar? The lesson these adults were trying to teach is what is popularly known in the West as the "golden rule." This rule commands people to get beyond their own selfishness and self-absorbed isolation. The golden rule serves as a reminder that what hurts us hurts others, and that what heals us, heals others.¹

In nearly all the world's religions, personal morality begins with this simple concept: Treat others as you would like to be treated. As such, the golden rule is perhaps the most basic of the personal virtues.

The different faiths all have their own version of this universal message:

- "Not one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself" (40 Hadith of an-Nawawi 13, Islam).

¹- Damien Keown The Nature of Buddhist Ethics Macmillan 1992; Peter Harvey An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics Cambridge University Press 2000- p 58



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• "Wound not others, do no one injury by thought or deed, utter no word to pain thy fellow creatures" (The Law Code of Manu, Hinduism).

• "Do not do to others what you would not like yourself" (The Analects 12:2, Confucianism).

• "If you do not wish to be mistreated by others, do not mistreat anyone yourself" (Counsels of Adurbad 92, Zoroastrianism).

• "We obtain salvation by loving our fellow man and God" (Granth Japji 21, Sikhism).

• "Having made oneself the example, one should neither slay nor cause to slay. . . . As I am, so are other beings; thus let one not strike another, nor get another struck. That is the meaning" (Dhammapada, Buddhism).

• "One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself. This is the essence of morality. All other activities are due to selfish desire" (Anusansana Parva 113.8, Hinduism).

• "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18, Judaism).

• "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." (Matthew 7:12, Christianity).

-The dimension of Compassion

The word *compassion* means, "to suffer with." Having compassion means that you can feel others' pain. In Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, showing compassion to others is how believers imitate the infinite kindness and mercy that God showers upon them. Although humans' capacity for compassion and kindness isn't limitless, as God's is, believers



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strive to nurture it, even when doing so is hard, because it brings them closer to God.¹

One of the central virtues of Buddhism is *karuna*, understanding and identifying with the suffering of all living beings. *Karuna* is the reason that some people who achieve enlightenment return to this world as Bodhisattvas to teach others. Their compassion is so great, they return to a world that needs them. In Hinduism, compassion is called *daya*, and, along with charity and self-control, it is one of the three central virtues in Hinduism.

-The depth and dimension of Humility

In the monotheistic religions, humility is a sign of respect for God and awareness that all blessings flow from God to whom all thanks are due. In Judaism, for example, Moses is considered virtuous primarily because of his humility.

Christianity provides the classic religious statement of humility in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed be the meek for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). Jesus' point here, which other religious traditions echo, is that the secular world recognizes and rewards power and wealth, but the religious world lifts up the ones whom the world has passed over and crushed. Humility, therefore, is not just a virtue, but also an opposite virtue from the ones that the nonreligious world prizes.

In Islam (which itself means *surrender*), humility is a primary virtue. Muslims demonstrate their awareness of the greatness of God and humankind's place in the world by

¹ - Carl Olson, *The Different Paths of Buddhism* p58-61.



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observing the Five Pillars of their faith. Each pillar reinforces the proper order of the universe.

Taoism focuses believers' thoughts on the awesome beauty and wonder of Nature. As you ponder the magnificence of Nature, you learn to respect our place relative to the stars and the seasons — a humbling experience.

Through humility, Buddhists can release anger and learn to live a life free from attachments and suffering.

-The insight and dimension of Hope

Many of the sacred Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts and rituals include the idea of hope. In Christianity, it's one of the three cardinal virtues (the other two being faith and love). In Islam, it's the understanding that Allah knows all; what happens, happens for a reason, and the faithful will be rewarded in paradise and the irreligious punished in hell.

In the world's religions, hope is made possible by human limitations. Most people don't know the future and, because they don't know it, they fear it. Hope reduces this fear. In religion, hope is closely linked with what comes after death.¹

For Christians, the hope that sustains them is the hope for the speedy second coming of Jesus as the Christ and eternal life in Heaven. This hope sustains Christians through what they often perceive to be the immorality of the earthly kingdom.

In Zoroastrianism, Islam, and, to a lesser extent, Judaism, the hope is life or some form of existence after death. That belief in the world to come is a sustaining virtue. Knowing that death isn't the end helps people believe that no burden is too

¹ - Carl Olson, The Different Paths of Buddhism p.73



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great to bear and that they won't be separated forever from the people they love.

Of course, monotheistic faiths aren't the only ones that consider hope a virtue. In Buddhism, hope springs from the idea that *any* person can attain enlightenment.

Religious hopefulness is not the same thing as optimism. Optimism is the attitude that things are great. Religious hopefulness is actually built upon the idea that things aren't so great, but that we don't see the whole picture. The incompleteness of human knowing is met by the hope that the world holds more promise than we can see from our limited perspective.

In Mathew Arnold's opinion, "Religion is nothing but morality touched with emotion." This view does not; in anyway, distinguish between religion and ethics.

According to many scholars, including Pringle Pattison and Bradley, ethics and religion are very intimately related. According to Bradley, "It is a moral duty not to be moral and this is the duty to be religious. But to be moral, is not a duty just as eating, drinking, sleeping etc, are not.

In Samuel Alexander's words, "There is infact no duty to be religious any more than there is a duty to be hungry." Religion is a natural human tendency and it may take any form of manifestation. From the above opinion, it is inferred that religion is based upon emotion but ethical sense is based upon reason. People who believe in the identity of religion and ethics lead to forget their differences.¹

¹- Bodhi (1994). For other examples of Buddhist discourses that promote ethical behaviors among laity see, for instance, the Sigalovada



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James has written correctly “Live love, like wrath, like hope, ambition. Jealousy, like even other instinctive eagerness and impulse, it adds to life an enchantment which is no’ biologically deducible from anything else. If religion is to mean anything definite for us, it seems to me, we ought to take it as meaning this added dimension of emotion, this enthusiastic espousal, in religion where morality strictly so called can only bow the head and acquiesce.¹

-Relationship of Ethics to Religion:

There can be no two opinions about it that religion to be real and high must be related to ethics. In Sanskrit, Dharma means the moral order of the universe. There can be three points of view about the interrelation of ethics and religion. Religion precedes ethics, ethics precedes religion or ethics and religion are interdependent.

-Religion precedes morality:

Descartes, Locke, Paley and others believe that religion precedes morality, the latter arising from the former. It is God’s will or veto which decides good or bad.

God’s laws are the ethical criterion. God creates ethics of his own desire and is not bound by any ethical law.²

Sutta (referred to as "the Vinaya of the householder" by Buddhaghosa) and the Dhammika Sutta. p 107 -109

¹- Stephen H. Phillips & other authors (2008), in Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, & Conflict (Second Edition), ISBN 978-0123739858, Elsevier Science, Pages 1347-1356, 701-849, 1867

²- Ethics Sanskrit English Dictionary -Singer, P. (1993) Practical Ethics, 2nd edition (p.10), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press- P 221-223



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We know his mandates through saints and research books. This opinion makes Gods unrelated to ethics. It is true that God cannot be bound by any law of 'ought' but even then if ethics is not subjective or a mere faith. God should tend towards good. A fundamental postulate of ethics is the moral order of the universe. Morality is objective.

God himself is a treasure house of ethical qualities. He orders good and rejects evil. Ethics is based not on his absolute desire but on his ethical nature.

Activities are not good or bad because religious texts say so but the goodness or badness of activities lies in the recognition or knowing of God's order and dictate. Neither religion nor ethics can stay if God is believed to be either unethical or different or morality.

Religion satisfies the emotional aspect of man. Ethics satisfies the volitional aspect of man. If the complete and all round development of man is desirable, ethics and religion should be complementary.

-Religion succeeds morality:

According to Kant, religion is based upon ethics and the existence of God is due to existence of ethics. Kant believes that happiness invariably accompanies virtue in complete good, the highest happiness in included. Virtue is of course the ultimate good but without bliss it is not complete good.¹

But in the ultimate analysis virtues are not always accompanied by happiness. It is seen quite often that while

¹- Alban G. Widgery (1930), The Principles of Hindu Ethics, International Journal of Ethics, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Jan., 1930), pp. 232-245



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good people suffer in a number of ways, the bad enjoys themselves. But if the ethical order is true it should not be so.

Thus, Kant imagines a God who arranges for pleasure with virtue and pain with vice in this world. It is God who conjoins pleasure with virtue because while virtue depends upon our volitions, pleasure depends upon the concord of external conditions. Thus according to Kant, God is a postulate of ethics. Martinea also believes this opinion.

According to Mathew Arnold, "Religion is nothing but morality touched with emotions."¹

-The basis of ethics and religion are different:

But this school forgets the true nature of religion. It is the urge for realisation of God, the first step towards which is ethical attitude. God exists not only in the soul but also in the world.

Thus the aspirant must serve living beings because all the living creatures and their order are God's creation. In this way, as the author of Gita has said, God is the source of moral obligation.

The basis of moral obligation can neither be man nor society. The individual is the source of moral obligation when he realises the true soul. When the soul is truly recognised, no difference between it and god remains; everything in the world is also appearing to be God. At that stage man spontaneously becomes ethical. Moral obligation becomes the normal law of everything internal and external.

¹- Roderick Hindery (2004), Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions; pages 268-72;



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In such stage the volitions of the individual become identical with God's will. But this does not destroy his freedom. Real freedom lies in becoming God's instrument because God is the self. His law is the law of self and real freedom is in proceeding along the law of self.¹

Being based on emotion rather than reason, the religious, state maybe beyond the ethical one but it is still a state of good. Its path passes through ethics. A man with bad qualities cannot be religious. Unethical religion is merely a blind faith. An immoral God is the nature of the devil.

Thus, ethics is essential for religion. But religion does not follow ethics, because both are found on dissimilar grounds. Volitions and emotions should develop simultaneously, not successively. A person is not first ethical and then religious or first religious and then ethical but he is both ethical and religious at the same time. Only an integral outlook can carry man to perfection.

To finally raise the conclusion that,

-Religion and Morality are interdependent:

Thus, the view that both religion and morality are based on each other is better than both the foregoing one sided view points. Religion is the ideal basis of the ethics. Moral is the expression, in society, of our spiritual consciousness.

A person who sees God in every object turns to social service, unconsciously. A truly religious person sees the entire world permeated by Good. Religion and ethics both make

¹- Crawford, S. Cromwell (1982), The evolution of Hindu ethical ideals, Asian Studies Program, University of Hawaii Press-p33-38



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important contributions to the development of the human personality. Their sources are different.¹

Religion is concerned with the relations between God and the individual. Ethics depends upon volitions and religion upon psychic emotions. In human development, both ethics and religion develop side by side and influence each other. It is possible that in some circumstances religion may be unethical, in which Case it would be inappropriate to call it a true religion. A true religion is faith in the realization of God and the state of God realization cannot be unethical. Religious fulfillment satisfies our whole personality. Thus, it must be ethical, because without being ethical it cannot satisfy our volition aspect.

Emotion without action is one sided and lifeless. Religion is incomplete without ethics. Thus ethics acts upon religion and makes it pure and refund. Religion reacts upon ethics and motivates it. Neither ethics can replace religion nor can religion substitute ethics. Both religion and ethics are indispensable for the complete and integral development of the relations between the individual, society and God.²

-The existence of God is a postulate of both ethics and religion: Religion and ethics both share the postulates concerning the existence of God and the immortality of soul.

¹ - Becker and Becker (2001), Encyclopedia of Ethics, 2nd Edition, Routledge, pages 845-848

² - Steven Rosen (2006), Essential Hinduism, Praeger, , page 31-45



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Whatever is ideal in the world becomes real in God. It is this same spiritual Reality behind our obligation of ethical 'ought'.¹

Human spirit is the incomplete manifestation of divine light. Thus he is naturally disposed to that perfect one. In volition, the ideal of ethics is the disposition towards that perfect one without the basis of God ethical ideal is more imagination.

Urban expresses it in this way, "when he thinks out what is implied in moral conduct and moral judgment, we are led necessarily to a view of the world or universe which is, in principle at least, the same as that which is held by reflective religion. In other words, we are led to postulate the reality of what the religionist calls God.

Unless ethical laws are founded in truth, they cannot become obligatory. Ethical deals motivate us because they are based on that perfect light by whose effulgence we are all illuminate. God is manifest perfection, the treasure of virtues, the reservoir of all values.²

-Both ethics and religion postulate the immortality of the soul:

Similarly, ethics also demands that the soul be immortal. Human life is short and limited, ethical ideal is great and unlimited. The attainment of its ideal in this short life is

¹ - Kane, P. V. (1962). Kane, P.V. (1962), History of Dharmasastra (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India),. Pune: Bhandarkar Press. pp. Volume 1, pp 2-10.

² - Phillip Wagoner, see Foreword, in Srinivasan, Dharma: Hindu Approach to a Purposeful Life. p 87



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manifestly improbable. Ethical ideal can be attained only successively in an unlimited life.

The unrestricted urge of the human being for the realization of knowledge, beauty and good cannot be satisfied in one life. An ethical life is itself, if the proof of the immortality of the soul.

In this way, both ethics and religion take man, by the path of volition and emotion respectively to the ultimate good, beauty knowledge and complete. Perfection and God both impress each other and both are indispensable for the integral development of human being.

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3. Carl Olson, *The Different Paths of Buddhism* p.73

4. Bodhi (1994). For other examples of Buddhist discourses that promote ethical behaviors among laity see, for instance, the Sigalovada Sutta (referred to as "the Vinaya of the householder" by Buddhaghosa) and the Dhammika Sutta.

5. Stephen H. Phillips & other authors (2008), in *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, & Conflict* (Second Edition, Elsevier Science, Pages 1347-1356, 701-849, 1867

6. *Ethics Sanskrit English Dictionary*



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7. Alban G. Widgery (1930), The Principles of Hindu Ethics, International Journal of Ethics, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Jan., 1930), pp. 232-245

8. Roderick Hindery (2004), Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions; pages 268-72;

• The Hindu scripture notes the interrelationship of several virtues, consequentially. Anger springs from covetousness; (the vice of) envy disappears in consequence of (the virtues) of compassion and knowledge of self p163;

9. Crawford, S. Cromwell (1982), The evolution of Hindu ethical ideals, Asian Studies Program, University of Hawaii Press

10. Becker and Becker (2001), Encyclopedia of Ethics, , 2nd Edition, Routledge, pages 845-848

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