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IRRESPONSIBLE RELIGIOSITY? THREE ASIAN RELIGIONS

Definitions

Some religions can be called “irresponsible”. Their precepts do not derive from popular demand nor fluctuate with public opinion. Small account is taken of the effects the precepts will have upon society at large. Some precepts are “hearer-promoting” in the sense that they consult the hearers’ requirements irrespective of third parties; some, on the contrary have an unlimited target. The point is not always clear. “Do not separate men fighting with knives” is “hearer-promoting”: the knife-fighters are not addressed. To protect the environment is of general interest, going beyond the hearers. “Do as you would be done by” is difficult: since the hearers’ initiative and criteria are assumed the precept is really hearer-promoting. “It is sweet and seemly to die for one’s country” or “for one’s god” really consult the interests of others than the apparent target: they may even be self-serving of the propounder.

A hearer-promoting precept cannot be “impracticable” *per se*, since when obstructions are removed (e.g. ability, inclination) a precept even such as “Go to the moon” can attain fulfilment. “Do not walk into traffic” does come beyond our definition as its objects are general. But what of “Do not eat snails”, likewise “Men must not wear women’s clothing” (cf. Deuteronomy (Dt) 22.5)? Although rabbis know that many apparently capricious biblical commandments (e.g. Dt 14.19) are designed for human benefit, justifications have to be

sought with ingenuity. “Do not wear garments of mingled stuff, wool and linen together” (Dt 22.11) is obviously hearer-promoting, leaving third parties unaffected. The alleged motive (to prevent Jews looking like heathen priests) does not touch any third party (save tailors?).

A precept does not cease to be “hearer-promoting” even if it is concerned solely with third parties and their mutual interaction. Where the onus of implementation lies upon the hearer, not upon the third parties, the particulars are merely incidental. At *Manu* V.147-8 women are declared unfit for independence – but this is a concealed precept directed to their guardians. So at *Matthew* (Mt) 18.18 the parties to worldly disputes are bound by disciples’ decrees which, by definition, will be registered in heaven: the onus is on the church, not upon any litigant, to act righteously according to the standards of *that* court.

There are aspects with which I am not concerned. Some precepts can be used to the detriment of the hearers’ reputation. Christianity has in practice tolerated evils. In a sense this confirms a hearer-promoting set of injunctions; the same might be said of the Caste system as it has worked through the millennia. My particular problem will be clarified if we commence with a little-known Buddhist example.

Buddhism

Pali Buddhism has a canonical passage in the *Sutta-piṭaka* which is frank. It selects precepts which apply to lay-followers as well as monks and nuns, a series of prohibitions critically examined in the same way. Whereas some moralists begin from the effect on third parties of the behaviour of the hearer, (“Respect your elders and betters” is an example) the Buddha’s approach was different. At *Āṅguttara-nikāya* iv. 247-8, §4, we find the following ¹.

“Monks, taking life, when pursued, practised, increased brings one to hell, to an animal’s womb, to the Peta (ghosts’) realm: the altogether trifling ²

1. A translation is to be found at E.M. Hare, trans. *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, vol. 4, London, Pali Text Society, 1978 (original edition 1935), p. 169.

2. *Sabba-lahusa* is rendered *parittaka* (“insignificant”) in the Pali commentary. *Lahu* is *laghu*, i.e. “light”. *Lahun karoti* is “to be frivolous”, Pali Text Society’s *Pali-English Dictionary*, s.vv. *lahu*, *lahuka*, *lahusa*.

result is the shortening of a person's life... Stealing when practised... increased brings one to hell...: the altogether trifling result is a person's loss of wealth. Fleshly lusts bring one to hell...: the trifling result is rivalry and hatred. Lying brings one to hell...³: the trifling result being slander. Backbiting... breaking-up of friendships. Harsh speech... a noise disagreeable to someone. Frivolous talk... unacceptable speech⁴. (So), monks, drinking strong drink, when pursued, practised, increased brings one to hell, to an animal's womb, to the realm of ghosts: what is the altogether trifling result of drinking strong drink is a man's madness".

With illustrations taken from the most to the least serious breaches of *vinaya* (cf Mt 5.21-26) the author reveals that Buddhist ethics, the *sikkhāpadas*, are "hearer-promoting". The effects of wrongdoings are outside the concern of the teacher, who can leave them to lawyers and politicians, whatever the efficiency of the latter⁵. The hearers of the precepts sought to control their own appetites and reflexes: they were the only actors in their drama; the roles of victims were off-stage.

The Buddha was interested marginally in the procedures of criminal courts as a (not altogether convincing) analogy for a monk's self-command in ethics⁶. Just as an offender outside the *saṅgha* goes to court to suffer whatever penalty is fixed for him, whether for his reformation or death, the monk, the "hearer" should consider himself as liable to go before some invisible tribunal, whether the *saṅgha* in its judicial capacity, or Yama, or whatever agencies send the offender to hell, or an animal birth, to the *preta*-realm or otherwise. The Buddha never expected his monks or nuns to meddle with royal or community courts or their procedure. That the lay public might be sceptical of the *saṅgha*'s disciplinary system was often in his mind, and the answer

3. With this series cf. Manu XII.6.

4. Cf. Manu VIII.267-278; XII.6.

5. *Samyutta-nikāya* i. 74, trans. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, *Book of the Kindred Sayings*, vol. 1, London, Pali Text Soc., 1979 (original edn. 1917), pp. 100-101; cf. *Majjhima-nikāya* iii. 34, trans. I.B. Horner, *The Middle Length Sayings*, vol. 3, London, Pali Text Soc. 1977 (original edn. 1959), p. 86.

6. *Aṅguttara-nikāya* ii. 242, trans. F.L. Woodward, *Book of the Gradual Sayings*, vol. 2, London, Pali Text Soc. 1973 (original edn. 1933), pp. 245-8. J.D.M. Derrett, *Law and Morality*, Northampton, Pilkington Press, 1998, p. 97.

was to treat the *vinaya* as grounded in the ineluctable process of the after-death migration of the non-*arhat*, the imperfect.

The Buddha's precepts were conceived from the standpoint of lay-followers, monks or nuns; the admitted inconvenience of victims of any breach of a *sikkhāpada* was relatively irrelevant. Buddhism and brahminism are different cultures, but they have this character in common.

The Bhagavadgītā

It is "hearer-promoting". Third parties are neglected. Their sufferings are none of the hearer's affair. Arjuna complains that rather than kill or maim his relatives he would rather be slain himself (I.46; cf. Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians 6.7). He feels compassion for them, an established virtue (II.7; cf. X.11; XVI.2). Hatred he abhors: it is self-diminishing (XI.55). Krishna reproves him on a complex basis, which Hindu tradition accepts. First those actually slain in battle are not really slain (II.19-20,30). Rebirth awaits them (II.13; VI.41-42; XVI.19). The maimed are neglected. The idea that by slaying some one causes a break-down of *dharma*⁷, and therefore of caste – as a result of which one merits hell (I.41-43) is scouted. All people must be viewed equally (VI.5; XII.18-19; cf. Mt 5.44-48), and therefore relatives are not privileged.

*uddhared ātmanātmānam nātmānam avasādayet
ātmaiva hyātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ* (VI.5).

Moreover Arjuna must perform his caste obligation (as a warrior) (II.31-33,37; IV.13). One must perform the work appropriate (*dharma*) to one's own caste and station in life: the *dharmas* of others are no substitute.

7. It is too narrow to translate *dharma* by "religion". The nearest equivalent is "righteousness". Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998 (original edn. 1973), pp. x-xi ("duty") and pp. 3,4 and n. 5, 95 n. 42, 225, 226 nn. 228-9; and J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999 (original edn. 1968), index, "*dharma*".

*śreyān sva-dharmo viḡuṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt
sva-dharme nidhanaṃ śreyaḥ para-dharmo bhayāvahaḥ* (III.35).
*sahajaṃ karma Kaunteya sadoṣaṃ api na tyajet
sarvārambhā hi doṣeṇa dhūmenāgnir ivāvṛtāḥ* (XVIII.48).

One is bound to engage in works appropriate to one's own *dharma*.

*sanyāsaḥ karma-yogaśca niḥśreyasa-karāv ubhau
tayostu karma-saṃnyāsāt karma-yogo viśiṣyate* (V.2).

Work is both prescribed in Scripture (XVI.24; XVIII.9) and a constraint of nature (XVIII.59-60). Works are necessary (III.4-5,7; IV.2); some even for the welfare of the world (theoretically) (III.19,25; V.25). On the other hand Wisdom *detaches* one from these works (IV.36-37; V.22), for the *motive* for work must not be its fruit (II.39,47,49,51; IV.14,20).

*karmaṇyevādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana
mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stvakarmaṇi* (II.47).

Motivelessness is distinctly virtuous (IV.19 XII.16). Desire for "fruit" hinders attainment of *nirvāṇa* (II.72; V.24-26). But there is an alternative. Krishna the charioteer requires Arjuna to fight (III.30; XI.34) for Krishna himself is the setter-up of righteousness, itself a kingly quality.

*paritrāṇāya sādḥunāṃ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām
dharma-saṃsthāpanārthāya saṃbhavāmi yuge yuge* (IV.8).

Through faith in *dharma* one may come to him (VII.1,23-30; VIII.5,7; IX, 3,25). The idea of *abiding in Krishna*, which is never described and has no locality, is a version of "taking refuge" in him, whereby all doubts are resolved, and the goal of all works is achieved. The idea of this "abiding" figures at VI.31; VII.1; IX.29; XVIII.66.

*Mayyāsaktamaṇaḥ Pārtha yogam yuñjan madāṣrayaḥ
asaṃśayaṃ samagram māṃ yathā jñāsyasi tacchrṇu* (VII.1).

In fact persons of any origin or livelihood, even women, artisans and Śūdras (let alone warrior princes) may tread the “highest way” through worship of Krishna (IX.30-34).

*api cet sudurācāro bhajate mām ananyabhāk
sādhur eva sa mantavyaḥ samyag vyavasito hi saḥ* (IX.30).
*mām hi Pārtha vyapāśritya ye 'pi syuḥ pāpayonayaḥ
striyo vaiśyās tathā śūdrās te 'pi yānti parām gatim* (IX.32).

The oddity of a prince being counselled in this delicate matter by his charioteer (who turns out to be a god) is lessened when one realises that the *sūta* (see Manu X.11,47) is not only a horse-manager and guide (cf. Manu 11.88)⁸, but also a parent (as it were) to his passenger and also an oral poet, and inspired narrator.

The question of caste *dharmas* arises largely in Manu, for whom they are important as *indicia* to guide the king’s or his delegate’s courts.

The Manu-dharma-śāstra

The Manu *smṛti* is an encyclopedia of “hearer-promoting” precepts. As we shall see, the numerous verses concerning others than the “hearers” in fact develop the requirements of the *dharma* of the latter. For example the reception of guests (III.94-115) is not framed as a means of pleasing the guests but a definition of the host’s duties and therefore his status. Manu deals with the *dharmas* of the four (major) castes and the mixed castes (I.2,87-91; IX.325; X). There are indeed common *dharmas*: it is well understood that *dharma* itself has no visible (e.g. pecuniary) object.

8. The parallels between the “charioteer” images in Hinduism, Buddhism and Plato remain to be worked out. The Buddha is called *anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi*, “Incomparable charioteer of men fit to be trained” (*passim*). *Sārathi* is “horse-trainer”. Plato’s image of uncontrolled horses appears at the *Phaedrus* 246-8, 253-4. That management is philanthropy, ethics and value-based appears in N.V.P. Unithiri, ed., *Indian Traditions of Management*, University of Calicut, 2002, where we find Krishna as “manager” is not “dictator” but “consultative” and so an appropriate role-model. The book is reviewed by N.R. Ramanujachary at *Adyar Library Bulletin* 67 (2003), pp. 236-7.

*ahimsā satyam asteyaṃ śaucam indriya-nigrahaḥ
etaṃ sāmāsikaṃ dharmam cāturvarṇye 'bravīn Manuḥ (X.63).*

One must refrain from oppression, and non-violence is praised.
Dharma itself is a kind of treasure.

*dharmam śanaih samcinuyād valmīkam iva puttikāḥ
para-loka-sahāyārthaṃ sarva-bhūtānyapīdayan (IV.238).
yo 'himsakāni bhūtāni hinastyātma-sukhecchayā
sa jīvaṃśca mṛtaścaiva na kvacit sukham edhate (V.45).*

Enmity is to be avoided:

*bhadraṃ bhadraṃ iti brūyād bhadram ityeva vā vadet
śuśkavairam vivādaṃ ca na kuryāt kenacit saha (IV.139).*

Therefore, as ever, Hindu “truth-telling” is singular:

*satyaṃ brūyāt priyam brūyān na brūyāt satyam apriyam
priyam ca nānṛtaṃ brūyād eṣa dharmah sanātanaḥ (IV.138).*

But apart from such generalisations Manu will even describe how a living may be made in adversity (*āpad*) (X.81-129). One's own *dharma* must be followed (I.109-110) subject to such limitations. The sources of *dharma* from tradition and even from individuals *ad hoc* are stated (II.6,12; XII. 108,112,118). *Dharma* is superior to *artha* and *kāma* (II.13). Since they are this-worldly and transient one must prefer *dharma* (IV.176). The king must be an adept at all three (VII.26), though if he fails in his own *dharma* and tolerates *adharmā* he goes to hell:

*tasyāhuḥ sampraṇetāraṃ rājānaṃ satya-vādinam
samikṣyakāriṇaṃ prājñaṃ dharmakāmārtha-kovidam (VII.26).
anapekṣita-maryādaṃ nāstikaṃ vipra-lumpakam
araksitāram attāraṃ nṛpaṃ vidyād adhogatim.
adhārmikaṃ tribhir nyāyair nigṛhṇiyāt prayatnataḥ
nirodhanena bandhena vividhena vadhena ca (VIII.309-310).*

Obedience is required (II.224-229,231-237). The image of the charioteer appears (II.88). The duties of the Vedic student (II.108ff.) lead to the idiom of seed and soil (II.112; IX.32; X.69-73), and begging (II.49,182; XI.9-10). There is privileged theft (VIII.339,341; XI.16-21: but one must not eat the food of disreputable people (IV.207,220) or kings (III.84-85) (!) or be addicted to gifts (IV.186-191). *Giving* proper gifts leads to heaven (IV.229-234), therefore one must avoid dishonest gains (IV.174). Marriage, its many styles (III.20-44), loss of caste (III.12-17), and the duty of women (however radiant: III.58-59) to be obedient (for their duties see IX.5-16) and to remain non-independent (IX.3) confirm that *dharma* is a quality of people, irrespective of the reactions of third parties. So the aphorism that women corrupt men (II.213) does not enjoin women but men. However, though there is no doubt but that women must suffer (V.156,158), mutual fidelity between husband and wife is their joint *dharma*:

anyonyasyāvyaabhīcāro bhaved āmaraṇāntikaḥ
eṣa dharmāḥ samāsena jñeyaḥ stri-puṃsayoḥ paraḥ (IX.101).

Meanwhile a host's intercourse with Śūdra women can have disastrous effects on *śrāddha* rituals (III.191,250).

Śrāddha is a good example of "hearer-promoting" ritual, the benefits conferred on deceased ancestors being notional. See III.82,122-167. Similar material concerns the livelihood of Brahmins and taboos (IV); doting upon the wife of another (IV.13; cf. Jeremiah 5.8; Mt 5.28) shortens one's own life. The right to beat a son or pupil (IV.164; VIII.299-300) is likewise "hearer-promoting" (the son's or pupil's benefit is not an issue); *dharma* is an asset which endures (IV.239)⁹, and Manu's is a *dharma-śāstra* after all.

Many topics are wholly hearer-related: pollution by others' deaths (V.59-100) and purification; the hermit's life and householders who decide not to become hermits (VI); the whole duties of kings and the role of punishment (in the interests of the king), though convicts can

9. For the "treasure in heaven" concept see J.D.M. Derrett, *The Bible and the Buddhists*, Bornato in Franciacorta, Sardini, 2000, p. 77.

benefit spiritually as a by-product of the application of *daṇḍa* (VIII.318). The questions of wages and taxes (VII.126-132,137; VIII.215-218) are as much *dharma* as *artha*, for the king goes to hell for taxing without protecting the taxed public (VIII.307). The king's *dharma* arises from protecting his subjects (VIII.304; cf. 386). His typical vices figure at VII.40-47 – his wretched subjects are not mentioned – and we are told he should die in battle (IX.323).

Lawsuits may involve individuals' *dharmas* (VIII.390). The king or his deputy hears cases (VIII.1-3,9). Proper proceedings ensure the king goes to heaven (VIII.420). *Dharma* is justice: VIII.15-17. The king will make void anything done by fraud:

*yogādhamana-vikrītaṃ yoga-dāna-pratigrahaṃ
yatra vāpyupadhiṃ paśyēt tat sarvaṃ vinivartayet* (VIII.135).

The king should oppose gambling and betting (IX.220): the gamblers' views are not considered.

The subject of penance (XI.44ff., 181ff.) is wholly hearer-promoting, likewise the topic of the supersensory effects (e.g. horrid re-births) of uncounteracted sins (XII). The king must punish those who omit their penances and even fine those who have performed them:

*caturṇāṃ api caiteṣāṃ prāyaścittam akurvātām
śārīraṃ dhana-saṃyuktaṃ daṇḍam dharmyaṃ prakalpayet* (IX.236).
*prāyaścittam tu kurvānāḥ pūrve varṇā yathoditam
nāṅkyā rājña lalāṭe ayur dāpyās tūttama-sāhasam* (IX.240).

So penances become part of the king's remit. Right into the nineteenth century titular rajas retained the right to readmit offenders to caste.

Many particulars, such as proper occupations (III.64-66), boundaries, road transport and accidents (VIII.290-298), and tolls and ferries (VIII.407), are not directed to third parties but to the royal administrator who must know *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, letting none of these eclipse the others.

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon offers rewards (Mt 5,2-12) so it is no surprise that it is treated as impracticable¹⁰. It is a compendium, including maxims which are little codes in themselves. Yet it is fair to take the Sermon as it stands as characteristic of Jesus's teaching.

Before Christ the Essenes and Qumran community¹¹ practised righteousness eschewing the law of Israel under Herod the Great, the tetrarchs or procurators. Opinions of Pharisees and others interested them as examples of what did *not* bind them. The heaviest emphasis was placed on the purity of the Qumran community itself, the rest of the sect taking them as models. Postulants, probationers and full members were meticulously controlled. Penalties for delinquents were severe. Some "sins" were trifling (e.g. falling asleep during lectures).

Christianity chronicled the miracles of Jesus and his eccentric teaching (Mt 7.28-29). The latter irritated the conventional mind. It directed hearers exclusively to "righteousness" which, like *dharma*, was a personal characteristic. The precepts of the Sermon prepare the hearer to face not the tribunals of the Jewish state nor the pious students of Moses (John 9.28), but the pre-rabbinical law *plus* the jurisprudence of heaven. The Torah of Moses was defective and righteousness went beyond it to observe the spirit of the pentateuch and what heaven would require in situations not considered by a *paramparā* (Mishna, 'Avôt I.1-12) of Jewish moralists¹².

The Beatitudes (Mt 5.3-12) congratulate the "poor in spirit",

10. For a good critical account of the Sermon itself see W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1988, pp. 429-731 (with large bibliographies). Misconstruction of the Sermon is as old as Augustine, but curious reactions to it (e.g. "a counsel of perfection") are handled by Howard Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and its Readers*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2003, ch.3.

11. Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, revised edn., London, Penguin, 2004; Florentino G. Martínez and Julio T. Barrer, *The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Their Writings, Beliefs and Practices*, Leiden, Brill, 1995; Michael A. Knibb, *The Qumran Community*, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

12. The jurisprudence of heaven is illustrated by Z.W. Falk, *Introduction to Jewish Law of the Second Commonwealth*, vol. 1, Leiden, Brill, 1972, pp. 29-30. Joseph Bonsirven, *Textes rabbiniques des deux premiers siècles chrétiens*, Rome, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1955, index, p. 717, "Ciel (tribunal du)". Baba Meši'a 49a.

unambitious, pure in heart, peacemakers, hungering arid thirsty for righteousness, persecuted by others, victims of calumny (5.11). Nevertheless we are told at 5.13-16 that they are an essential, which can lose its quality. They are a light in a dark universe, like a conspicuous city, like the littlest light that can illuminate others, mainly by “good works”, which are to be attributed to God himself, the hearers’ Father. Such remarks are obviously “hearer-promoting”.

Mt 5.17-20 is vital. The hearers must aim to surpass text experts and Pharisees in point of righteousness. No doubt the Law of Moses (cf. Mt 19.18-19; 22.24) and the prophets are infallible, but they are not exhaustive (Lk 16.16). The Kingdom of Heaven (Jesus’s ideal society) *will* contain reformers who would amend Moses, but they are not to be imitated (5.19). Text-based Judaism, however, is not enough.

When we come to the so-called Antitheses (5.21-48) which teach perfection (5-48), distinguishing Christians from the “wicked” and pagans, the jurisprudence of heaven is illustrated. Slaying incurs state penalties, but anger places one before God’s tribunal (cf. Job 15.22; 19.29), so also terms of abuse (let alone maiming: Mt 5.38-39). Saying “Fool!” can earn one hell. A “brother’s” claim (justified or not) forces you to come to terms before you catch God’s ear, lest the heavenly court sentence you irrevocably. Surely hearer-promoting, this precept prorogues to God’s court the merits in previous friction. Adultery likewise introduces the preparatory sin of desire (cf. Exodus 20.17). Precautions to avoid hell may have to be desperate. The preference is the hearer’s; the desirable female is not consulted.

Hell is the destination even of those neglecting to do acts of charity (Mt 25.41,46): the hearer-promoting precept does not concern itself with the poor, sick, prisoners, for these are not the object of Jesus’s concern. Strategies to become “righteous” interest him, not swarms of beggars (Mt 26. 9,11).

Oaths, required at law to avoid payments or to obtain property, and diverted to other uses by Qumran¹³, recruit God as witness. The divine court knows the nature of such manipulation, and accepts no evasions

13. Special oaths were insisted on at Qumran. Community Rule V. 8; Damascus Document XV.1,2,6-8; XVI.7; Thanksgiving Hymns, hymn 4 (formerly 21) VI (formerly X1B), 17.

which suggest guile. Here Jesus and the Greeks agree: the goddess Athena says “Ὀρθοίς τὰ μὴ δίκαια μὴ νικᾶν λέγω”¹⁴. Injustice should never triumph thanks to an oath. *Retaliation* is as old as humanity and is God’s prerogative (Dt 32.35; Epistle to the Romans 3.5; 12.19; To the Hebrews 10.30). Compensation for injuries had taken the place of Exodus 21.24; Leviticus 24.20; Dt 19.21. Jesus taught one must yield, even in litigation (courts being unpredictable), and likewise if legally impressed for a porter. The idea was not ridiculous (cf. 1 Corinthians 6.7). Beggars should be given something, and borrowers should be helped even if “borrow” turns out to be a euphemism for “take as a gift” or worse (Exodus 3-22!). In fact one should give expecting nothing in return (Luke 6.35; cf. Bhagavadgītā XVII.20-21), for giving, even by way of a loan, reinforces the giver’s prestige. Here the donee/creditor is not considered: and many a gift has equivocal implications¹⁵. The heavenly court can sort out merits. All hints of unrighteousness can be left with the aggressor. Perhaps the hearer’s righteousness is increased at the expense of his purse. He can afford the risk.

The command given by Moses to identify with one’s neighbour and, as the psalmist and Qumran understood¹⁶, “hate” one’s enemy (cf. Bhagavadgītā II.63; XII.13) is imperfect if “neighbour” includes every child of God (Mt 5.44-48; cf. Gītā VI. 9)¹⁷. The reaction of “enemies” is not considered.

14. Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 432.

15. An extreme example is the Trojan Horse. Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.49.

16. Exodus 34.11; Dt 7.1-2; 25.19; 2 Samuel 5.8; Psalms 130.21-22. (Qumran) Community Rule IX.16,21-22: “He (the Master) shall love and hate (according to his spirit)”; “Everlasting hatred in a spirit of secrecy for the men of perdition”. Marius Reiser, “Love of enemies in the context of antiquity”, *New Testament Studies* 47/4 (2001), pp. 411-27.

17. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.30-37), ostensibly interpreting the doubtful Leviticus 19.18 (cited at Luke 10.29), has been accused of want of logic at 10.37. There is concealed humour. If *A* is a neighbour of *B*, then *B* must be a neighbour (geographically) of *A*. True. But Jesus’s point is this: when the injured Jew discovered that he had been rescued by a Samaritan he would have been alarmed (as when a Hindu is rescued by a Muslim). He might have repudiated friendship and merely thanked God! But when he realised the Samaritan could not sue for his expenses in a Jewish court the Samaritan, not a “brother” or “neighbour” in the courts of men must have been entitled in equity in the courts of heaven. Not a “neighbour” in Judea he was one in heaven. J.D.M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, Eugene OR, Wipf & Stock, 2005 (original edn., London, 1970), pp. 218-9.

Alms-giving, prayer, and fasting (Mt 6.18) are to be private. God knows all motive and people's reactions are superfluous to "righteousness". Alimentation is not needed beyond God's use for one (6.11). One is not forgiven unless one has forgiven one's own "debtors". Who is perfectly righteous (6.13)? God likes one to forgive others (5.15) for *his* purposes. Is this for the benefit of third parties (as at 5.39-42)? But the "debtor" is simply used to aid one's righteousness. Some wrongdoers do not want to be forgiven ("What I did was fully justified!"). Mt 6.1-18 expounds the view that if one uses conventional religion for one's social advantage one is simply serving oneself, a logical position.

"Treasure in heaven" (obviously "hearer-promoting") was known to Persians, Greeks, Buddhists and Jews¹⁸. God's court has a mass of account books. Righteous behaviour is useful on the Day of Judgement. Monetary security is quite insignificant (cf. 5.42). Meanness hampers judgement (6.23). Envy likewise. Jesus, like the Buddha, applauds generosity, no matter how small one's means (Mark 12.42). One cannot be a slave of both God and mammon (cf. 6. 15,21,24). To be preoccupied with alimentation and clothing (fashion) reveals a want of "faith", of perspective. God knows both wants and incentives, providing ingenuity and means. Whatever challenges (physical or moral) face one they are to be met as they arise. The divine court disparages hoarding (Luke 12.20) which may disadvantage third parties, but ambition should only exist in the arena of righteousness (5.3,6). Jesus speaks about priorities and preferences, both hearer-promoting.

Ch. 7 contains generalities. Judging others is futile while one lacks the knowledge of angels and the skill of saints (Mt 19.28). Persistence will solve problems (Luke 18.5-7); as will Christian prophecy, to be tested by such prophets' teaching (7.15-20). Rivals are to be unmasked (7.15), even amongst his disciples (7.21-23). Yet loop-holes ask for would-be legislators (6.34).

The portmanteau precept at Mt 7.12, "Do everything to others as you would wish them to do to you", though stated with emphasis

18. See n. 9 above. It became evident that one must not purchase righteousness at the expense of one's dependants: First Epistle to Timothy 5.8.

(οὗτος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται) – a precept by no means applicable to God himself (Exodus 17.14-16) – is hearer-promoting, since the hearer retains the initiative and it is his criteria which count, not any third party's. The negative form of the Golden Rule, which is better known, is no better. What third parties (e.g. masochists) would prefer is not considered.

The inward orientation of the precepts, their “hearer-promoting” quality could not be demonstrated more clearly than by that which forbids disciples to disclose the set to pagans, the people with whom Christians may contrast themselves (Mt 5-47) and amongst whom confirmed dissidents must be classified (18.17). Folk who cannot visualise the jurisprudence of heaven cannot appreciate the Sermon, but call it “impracticable” or even “impossible”, which it is so long as they remain unconverted. Meanwhile the careless statement by Professor J. Macquarrie that Jesus was a teacher of practical philosophy obscures the fact that Jesus left all that to others.

Precepts and Preceptors

Old Testament commandments are framed in the style “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not”. Sometimes they purport to serve the good of both preceptor and pupil. Dt 22.8 about building a parapet serves the family and their visitors alike. In some the hearer's interests are not apparent, e.g. the laws against seething a kid in its mother's milk (Exodus 23.19) and forbidding taking the mother bird with her young (Dt 22.6-7). However, Dt 23.24-25, authorising a restricted pilfering, seems to further social harmony. When we come to rabbinical laws the effects of decisions upon the public are recalled. Ritual arrangements such as circumcision (Genesis 17.10-12) stand aside from this discussion, a mere fraction of the six hundred and more precepts.

This Asian emphasis on commanding individual hearers, rather than deriving laws from the current political, economic, or ecological conditions is striking. Sometimes precepts declare their nature: one is bound to honour parents, not for *their* benefit but so that the child may live long (Exodus 20.15). The explanation of our phenomenon may lie in the chronic political instability and incompetence of social control

by any other method, autocratic or tribal. Law courts were unreliable (Luke 18.1-5; cf. 12.13-14) and judges corrupt, so that honest men avoided judgeships. And the state interfered with religion and ignored morality freely. Moreover wisdom declared that wealth *was* no defence for the man who insolently trampled on the altar of Justice (βωμὸς Δίκας)¹⁹. Asian societies are said to be “collective”, and solidarity is prized. But they are riven with faction, and peace is hard to sustain, while any fight can send the loser into the camp of a common enemy.

The model preceptor is the senior able member of the extended family, who maintains authority by force if necessary, if the tradition of the ancestors is insufficient. The age of a precept is its great merit (Gitā IV.8). The biblical threat regarding the “stubborn and rebellious son” (Dt 21.18-21) is actually an *amelioration* of earlier barbarity. The docility of Asian children is remarked upon even today. A way of escape from chaos was to concentrate on personal “righteousness”, his *dharma*, unstealable, flexible, demanding in theory, since along with it came mythical rewards and divine punishments. A scripture directed to inculcating such a “righteousness” cannot be “impracticable” since the hearer is the goal. Whether or not he *can* or *will* obey it, it is tailored to his presumed capacity. Remarks such as “bribes blind the eyes” (Dt 16.19; Psalm 26.10; Isaiah 33.15) are platitudes making silent demands on the individual whether he assents or not.

In sum, the irresponsibility of the preponderance of “hearer-promoting” precepts belongs to a non-democratic age in which responsibility was thought to rest, if anywhere, with the self-appointed sage and his hearer. Consequently even admirers of Hinduism have perceived that moral commandments cannot be absolute²⁰.

19. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 381-4. Moreover the gods are not unsuspecting of the rich: *ibid.*, 462.

20. Keith Ward, *The Case for Religion*, Oxford, Oneworld, 2004, p. 130; J.D.M. Derrett, “Morality not to be codified”, *Bibbia e Oriente* 48/3, no. 229, 2006, pp. 181-190.

