The Bhagavad Gita

Action in Inaction

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The Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita represents the intellectual heart of the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata is an ancient Indian Sanskrit epic, one of the longest literary works in history, composed of about 100,000 couplets. It is a complex story intertwining myths, legends, philosophy, and moral teachings, centered around the dynastic conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, two families of cousins fighting for sovereignty over the kingdom of Hastinapura. The text explores various philosophical and spiritual themes while offering narratives of bravery, betrayal, sacrifice, and love. This epic plays a central role in Indian culture and spirituality.

The Bhagavad Gita is a sacred Hindu text composed of about 700 verses. Set within the epic of the Mahabharata, it takes the form of a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Krishna, who reveals himself to be a divine incarnation. On the battlefield, just before a great war begins, Arjuna is overwhelmed with doubt and moral dilemma about fighting against his own kin, friends, and mentors in the opposing army. Krishna imparts to Arjuna spiritual guidance covering duty (dharma), right action (karma yoga), devotion (bhakti yoga),

meditation (dhyana yoga), and the philosophy of the soul (atman) and the divine (Brahman). The Bhagavad Gita explores themes such as good and evil, the self and the universal, liberation (moksha), and proposes a path towards spiritual realization while living according to ethical and moral principles.

The Bhagavad Gita is often studied as an independent philosophical and spiritual text, due to its profound exploration of morality, duty, spirituality, and the nature of the self. The four major existential concepts discussed are dharma (duty, morality, law), artha (prosperity, purpose), kama (desire and emotions), and moksha (liberation), which are considered the four goals of life in Hinduism.

It involves a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and his charioteer, Krishna, who is actually one of the most revered and complex deities in Hinduism. He is considered both an avatar (incarnation) of the god Vishnu and a supreme deity in his own right. Vishnu, a primary deity in the Hindu pantheon, is considered the god of preservation and protection of the universe, part of the Trimurti, which also includes Brahma, the creator, and Shiva, the destroyer. Vishnu maintains cosmic order and balance, thereby protecting the world from chaos and destruction. He is revered for his kindness, compassion, and commitment to restoring dharma (order and morality) whenever they are threatened by evil and adharma (chaos and immorality). To accomplish this task, Vishnu is said to descend to Earth in the form of an avatar, or incarnation, at critical historical moments. Krishna is one such example, celebrated for his wisdom, power, and miraculous deeds.

The Mahabharata plays a crucial role in moral and spiritual education in the Indian tradition. The stories it contains are used to teach values of loyalty, courage, devotion, friendship, sacrifice, and the importance of following one's dharma, even in the face of great difficulties. It aims to guide individuals in their conduct and spiritual understanding. The epic not only presents moral and ethical teachings but also explores the complexity of these principles in the real world. Through its narratives, the epic engages the reader in reflecting on the nature of dharma (moral duty and cosmic order) and demonstrates that moral decisions often pose dilemmas, which can be interpreted as a critique of moral certainty.

Dharma, the cosmic and moral law, is presented as a complex principle often subject to interpretation. In many situations, characters face moral dilemmas without clear solutions, forcing them to make difficult decisions that may seem contradictory or even contrary to established moral principles. This complexity suggests a critique of rigid moralism, indicating that reality demands a more nuanced analysis of morality. For example, Krishna sometimes advises strategies that seem to violate established rules of warfare, with the ultimate goal of preserving dharma. These actions highlight the idea that achieving the greater good may require moral compromises, questioning categorical and absolute moralism. Thus, the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna highlights the tension between moral principles and the demands of the situation, underscoring that understanding and applying dharma requires wisdom and discernment rather than rigid adherence to general and abstract moral rules.

It is worth noting that the Mahabharata, despite its grand themes of duty, morality, and cosmic struggle, contains examples of humor and jest. As a vast epic encompassing a wide range of human experiences, emotions, and characters, it naturally includes moments of lightness, wit, and even satire. These instances of humor can be found in various forms, such as playful and teasing interactions between Krishna and his friends or devotees. Krishna, in particular, is often portrayed with a playful side, engaging in witty jokes and clever repartee. Various actions, words, or situations bring out the lighter and more humorous aspects of the otherwise tragic story, including misunderstandings, cases of mistaken identity, or characters finding clever ways to outsmart others. The text also employs humor through wise sayings and proverbs with a humorous twist, yet conveying deeper ideas about life and human nature in a light-hearted manner. Sometimes, satire and irony are used to comment on social norms, the conduct of gods and heroes, and the follies of human behavior. These subtle moments are interwoven with the epic's broader and more serious themes.

Krishna's Teachings

Here are some key philosophical principles that Krishna shares with Arjuna:

Dharma (Duty/Righteousness): Krishna emphasizes the importance of dharma, which can be understood as the duty, morality, or law governing the universe. Morality is not human or cultural, but cosmic. For Arjuna, a prince, this means fulfilling his duty as a warrior (Kshatriya), even when faced with the moral dilemmas posed by waging war against his own family and people he admires and respects.

Karma Yoga (The Yoga of Selfless Action): Krishna encourages Arjuna to practice karma yoga, which is action undertaken without attachment to the outcomes. He teaches Arjuna to act according to his dharma, without desire for the fruits of his actions, leading to liberation (moksha).

Bhakti Yoga (The Yoga of Devotion): Krishna explains that through sincere devotion to the divine, one can reach the ultimate reality. Bhakti, or devotion, is presented as a means

to achieve an appropriate vision of spirituality and union with the divine.

Jnana Yoga (The Yoga of Knowledge): The importance of spiritual knowledge and understanding the true nature of the soul (atman) and the universe (Brahman) is highlighted. Krishna explains to Arjuna the eternal nature of the soul and the illusion of death.

The Divine Nature of Krishna: Krishna reveals his divine nature to Arjuna, showing his universal form (Vishvarupa), demonstrating that he is the incarnation of the supreme divinity, encompassing the entire universe, and emphasizing the unity of all existence. This is a significant example of the coincidence between the universal and the particular, between the absolute and the contingent, an important concept in Hinduism.

The Importance of Balance: Krishna advises Arjuna to maintain balance in life, avoiding extremes in emotions, actions, and thoughts. This reflects the concept of the middle way and balance in spiritual practice.

Detachment: A central theme is detachment from material and emotional ties, allowing the individual to focus on their spiritual path without being disturbed by the fluctuations of material life.

Krishna thus teaches how to live a righteous life, realize one's true self, and ultimately achieve spiritual liberation.

When Arjuna wonders why inaction is not better than action, Krishna explains that both inaction and action can transcend duality and karma, but selfless action is superior to inaction. It is through selfless action that order is established in the world, becoming an example for others who suffer because they cling to the objects of their desires.

At this point, two concepts seem crucial, which we will attempt to define.

Karma

Karma fundamentally refers to action and its consequences, governed by the law of cause and effect. This concept is neither exclusively negative nor purely positive; it encompasses both contrary aspects. The principle is that every action has repercussions that determine the future experience of the soul, either in this life or in future reincarnations. Righteous, ethical, and benevolent actions produce good karma, including acts of generosity, piety, devotion, non-violence (ahimsa), and other virtuous behaviors encouraged by Hindu teachings. Actions that contribute to the well-being of others and are in accord with dharma (moral duty and cosmic order) attract positive consequences for the individual, thereby promoting a better situation in this life and a favorable birth in future lives. Conversely, selfish, malicious actions, or those contrary to dharma generate bad karma, including violence, lying, stealing, and other reprehensible behaviors. Bad karma accumulated due to such actions leads to unfavorable consequences,

manifesting as suffering, difficulties, or an unfavorable condition in future reincarnations.

Karma, in its essence, is therefore a neutral principle of cause and effect that underscores each individual's personal responsibility for their actions. It teaches that everyone has the power to shape their destiny through their choices and actions. The ultimate goal is to purify one's karma through positive actions, spirituality, and self-realization, eventually leading to moksha (liberation) from the cycle of birth and death (samsara).

In summary, karma can be seen as a self-regulating mechanism that encourages individuals to live a life aligned with ethics and morality, recognizing that every action has significant consequences for oneself and for others. Nonetheless, moksha represents the final liberation of the soul from the cycle of birth and death (samsara), and by extension, the total liberation from the karma that binds the soul to this cycle of reincarnation. It is considered the ultimate goal of life in many Hindu traditions, marking the achievement of a state of complete spiritual realization where the soul (atman) reunites or realizes its unity with Brahman, the ultimate reality or universal consciousness. Karma, generated by actions and their consequences across successive lives, plays a central role in the unfolding of samsara. Positive and negative karma influences the circumstances of birth, life experiences, and individual dispositions, leading to a continuous succession of lives marked by desire, attachment, and suffering. Moksha thus involves the cessation of accumulating new karma and the dissolution of past karma. It means living in a state of pure knowledge,

peace, and bliss, free from the limitations and sufferings of material existence.

Duality

Duality manifests in various forms, including the conflict between good and evil, attachment to the outcomes of actions, and oppositions between pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat. It needs to be transcended to achieve a deeper spiritual understanding and liberation (moksha). Krishna teaches Arjuna that attachment and identification with these material dualities are sources of suffering and illusion (maya), as they distance from the ultimate truth and understanding of the eternal nature of the soul (atman). Thus, in this context, duality can be perceived as an obstacle on the path to spiritual realization. However, the Bhagavad Gita does not present duality as entirely negative; it is also seen as a natural characteristic of human existence in the material world. The central message of the Gita is to learn to act in the world (karma yoga) without attaching to dualities, by dedicating oneself to righteous action (dharma) with detachment and focusing on the divine. Krishna advises Arjuna to adopt a vision of equanimity (samatva), where one remains equal in happiness and sorrow, gain and loss. This equanimity is the key to transcending duality and achieving inner peace and liberation. In sum, duality is not categorically negative but rather represents the inherent challenges of life in the material world. The transcendence of duality through spiritual understanding, de-

tachment, and devotion is a major theme of the text, offering a path to ultimate realization and liberation.

The ultimate goal of these teachings, however, remains to help the individual transcend the duality of material existence, characterized by contingency and various types of oppositions, a structural dualism. By acting without attachment and remaining equanimous towards outcomes, one can maintain inner peace and avoid generating new karma that would bind to the cycle of rebirths. Thus, the individual advances on the path of liberation (moksha), where the soul is freed from samsara and reunited with the divine.

But the most crucial and problematic duality is that between atman and Brahman. Atman denotes the true, eternal, and immutable self that resides in every individual being. Brahman is the absolute or ultimate reality. Spiritual realization or awakening (moksha) involves the recognition that atman and Brahman are identical, and that the apparent separation results from ignorance, indicating that the true essence of each individual is undifferentiated and one with the entire universe.

Action and Inaction

The Bhagavad Gita primarily unfolds as a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Prince Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, just before the onset of a massive fratricidal war at the heart of the Mahabharata epic. Krishna, serving as a charioteer and spiritual advisor, addresses Arjuna's moral doubts and dilemmas. Arjuna is beset with anguish and confusion about his participation in the battle against his own kin, friends, and revered masters in the opposing army. Torn between his duty as a warrior (Kshatriya) to fight in the battle and his desire to avoid killing his loved ones, which would lead to sin.

Krishna enlightens Arjuna on various aspects of life, spirituality, morality, and philosophy, including yoga, dharma (duty), karma (action), bhakti (devotion), and moksha (liberation). This guidance aims to steer Arjuna toward understanding his responsibilities both as a warrior and as an individual seeking spiritual growth. It necessitates that Krishna reveals his divine nature to Arjuna, providing him with a cosmic perspective and his eternal role as a unique manifestation of the absolute. This explains to Arjuna how to lead a balanced, ethical, and spiri-

tually enlightened life, thus making decisions and acting in everyday life, especially in challenging situations.

A priori, even though as a prince he is supposed to lead the battle, Arjuna is tempted by the path of abstention, of inaction. Krishna replies that one can of course take the path of inaction, but that it is a difficult one, and not for everyone. For it means controlling one's mind and renouncing all desire, all attachment to the objects of the material world. For if we choose inaction, but keep in mind desires and thoughts of attachment to any object, this is a false pretence and a lie. So, selfless work done badly is better than inactivity and the temptation to let others do the work. To achieve inner peace, it is better to act in accordance with duty, but without focusing on the consequences.

If Arjuna refuses to perform his task because he does not want to face the practical and moral consequences of his actions, he will be dishonored as a warrior, as that is his function or nature. He would then have only the path of inaction, of total renunciation. Krishna describes to him the path of the yogi he must adopt to find peace in disinterested action. Arjuna realizes that he cannot follow a radical path of ascetic inaction; he likely will not be capable. Even if he chooses the path of inaction for a limited time, he will not find peace in this path; it will be unbearable for him. Sooner or later, his warrior nature, that of a man of action, will take over. And since he will be dishonored as a warrior, he will no longer have the opportunity to fulfill his duty normally; he will be condemned to wander. In other words, one must fulfill one's destiny, and one cannot change paths at any moment without getting lost. It is not

about altering one's trajectory based on impulse or whim. After considering these various scenarios and contemplating the consequences of each choice, Arjuna decided it was time to fight, to do what had to be done, and so be it.

Throughout the dialogue, Krishna explains that both inaction and action can escape duality and karma. Let us start by explaining these two possibilities:

Inaction (Jnana Yoga)

In Indian philosophy, ascetic inaction, the practice of total renunciation (Sannyasa), as means to transcend worldly attachments and desires, is considered a legitimate and revered path to salvation (Moksha). It involves giving up worldly possessions, social obligations, and family ties, to focus only on spiritual practices. It implies rigorous forms of fasting, meditation, and physical austerities to purify the soul and achieve liberation from the cycle of rebirth. It is a deeply internal process aimed at overcoming ignorance (Avidya) and realizing one's true nature or the nature of reality, primarily through accessing Brahman. Ascetic practices and the path of renunciation are thus highly respected in Indian philosophy as a profound and effective means to achieve the ultimate goal of salvation. Total renunciation, in the sense of a complete detachment from worldly possessions and desires, aligns closely with the path of "Jnana Yoga", the path of knowledge. It involves a deep, intellectual, and meditative inquiry into the nature of the self (Atman) and the realization of its oneness with the ultimate reality (Brahman). It is characterized by a process of discerning

the real from the unreal, leading to a detachment from the material world and the ego. This path requires a renunciation of not just physical possessions but also the renunciation of one's individuality and personal identifications, which are seen as the root of suffering and illusion (Maya).

So when Lord Krishna imparts spiritual wisdom to Arjuna, he covers various paths to liberation, including the path of renunciation (Sannyasa). However, Krishna advises Arjuna against immediate renunciation which implies abandoning his warrior duties. He rather introduces Arjuna to the concept of "Karma Yoga," the yoga of selfless action, since one can achieve the spiritual purity and dispassion of a renunciate, even while actively engaged in the world. This teaching suggests that Arjuna can practice a form of renunciation by fulfilling his duties as a warrior without personal desire for victory or fear of defeat. This form of renunciation is for him more accessible, it is presented as the most appropriate path for him, aligning with his nature and responsibilities as a Kshatriya (warrior).

Inaction, whether out of calculation, laziness, uncertainty or fear, can have many negative consequences, on an individual, cosmic and social level. Particularly when inaction means avoiding dharma, when we know that something should be done. It is then perceived as an existential and moral failure, since it means living in accordance with the cosmic and social laws that maintain order and harmony in the universe. Such avoidance can lead to imbalance, with negative repercussions for society and the natural world.

On a more personal level, inaction represents an obstacle to spiritual growth. Acting according to one's dharma, without attachment to results, is essential for the purification of the soul and spiritual progress. In contrast, inaction can lead to spiritual stagnation and prevent the individual from achieving liberation. Abstaining from action in situations where action is morally and spiritually necessary generates negative karma, further binding the soul to the painful wheel of rebirths (samsara).

Socially, inaction, refusal of challenge and confrontation, especially when motivated by fear or attachment, can lead to loss of honor and respect, affecting one's reputation and self-esteem, with lasting consequences. And on a practical level, this can have negative repercussions on society, on those we might otherwise help or protect. It can lead to injustice, oppression or suffering, accentuating social and moral imbalances. Psychologically, inaction, especially resulting from confusion, fear, doubt, or indecision, can have a negative psychic impact, leading to feelings of regret, guilt, or dissatisfaction. However, it is about determining the modality of our action, the strategy that seems most just or appropriate, to avoid acting on pure compulsion, emotionally and primarily, without procrastinating under the guise of "thinking" or waiting "to be certain" as an excuse for potential mistakes or better ideas later.

Therefore, inaction is a path to salvation, but it is a very demanding path, which is not appropriate for everyone. Such an inaction cannot constitute a momentary delay or avoidance, otherwise it has adverse consequences. Such a path is valuable

only if it is taken as an integral and continuous existential and intellectual commitment.

Selfless Action (Karma Yoga)

Krishna says: "You have the right to perform your actions, but you are not entitled to the fruits of the actions; do not be motivated by the fruits of actions; nor should you be attached to inaction".

He teaches that total inaction is impossible by the very nature of life. Even the choice not to act is in itself a form of action with consequences. The question is not whether to act or not to act but to choose the right actions that are in harmony with individual and universal dharma without being attached to the outcomes of those actions. This practice aims to cultivate spiritual discipline through engagement in the world while transcending personal attachments and desires that lead to the cycle of birth and death (samsara). It means fulfilling one's responsibilities and acting selflessly, for the sake of action itself and not for the rewards it may bring. By practicing karma yoga, an individual can transcend karma, as actions performed without attachment to outcomes do not create new karma that would bind the soul to samsara (the cycle of birth and death).

Paradoxically, Krishna also calls this "inaction in action". It does not mean total absence of action but rather an adequate awareness and understanding, allowing an individual to act in the world without being affected by dualities such as success and failure, joy and pain. This approach requires spiritual

understanding and mindfulness in each action so that, even while acting, the individual remains in a state of inner inaction or detachment. The reason this principle is called "inaction" is that it focuses on the individual's inner state while acting in the world. The goal is to act fully and effectively in one's duties and responsibilities (dharma) while maintaining emotional and mental detachment from the outcomes of those actions. Thus, even if a person is engaged in various activities, they can still be considered to practice "inaction" if their action is devoid of personal attachment to the fruits of action. The concept of "inaction in action" highlights a life approach where one is fully conscious and present in every moment and action but without being carried away by expectations, desires, or fears about the future or the outcomes of actions. This allows the individual to achieve a state of inner peace and clarity, freed from the chains of negative karma generated by attachment and desire.

Thus, Krishna clarifies to Arjuna, his interlocutor and disciple, that action itself is not the issue, but rather the emotional attachment and anticipation of the results of action. By acting according to one's dharma, without a desire for personal gain or concern for avoiding consequences, one realizes inaction in action. This means that, although one may be fully engaged in action, the inner state remains detached and centered, free from attachment to the fruits of action. This approach not only overcomes the attachment and duality inherent in the human experience but also contributes to maintaining cosmic and social order while pursuing one's spiritual liberation. Karma yoga, as a path of disinterested action, is seen

as a means to achieve moksha (liberation) by living an active life in the world without being bound by the chains of desire and ego, and improving the world.

This doctrine emphasizes the need for the individual to exercise discernment and choose the right action, based on a clear identification of one's role in the universe, rather than on personal calculations or egotistical motivations. It reveals a profound understanding of the dynamics between the individual and the cosmos, where action becomes an unimpeded vehicle for spiritual realization towards ultimate liberation. Thus, inaction in action, as taught by Krishna to Arjuna, is an invitation to live a life of ethical and moral engagement without being dominated by personal expectations and attachments, leading to a more balanced and harmonious existence, both personally and cosmically. Thus, it can be asserted that what is truly good for the individual is good for the cosmos, and vice versa. And that there exists the possibility of a coincidence between the individual soul (Atman) and the universal soul, beyond an apparently irreducible ontological dualism.

Difference between Christianity and Mahabharata

The philosophy of the Mahabharata is not always easy for Westerners to grasp. Thus, it seems useful to establish a brief comparison between Christianity and the Mahabharata, this crucial text of Hinduism, and their specific moral teachings.

Here are some general elements that characterize each of these two traditions.

Christianity: Christianity developed in a historical context marked by Roman domination over many cultures and was influenced by Greek philosophy, Judaism, and the religious movements of the ancient Near East. This diversity of sources helped shape a moral tradition that emphasizes universalism, the equality of souls before God, and the importance of the ecclesiastical community.

Mahabharata: The Mahabharata is rooted in the cultural and spiritual context of ancient India, reflecting the values and concerns of a society structured around the system of varnas

(castes) and ashramas (stages of life). It incorporates elements of Hinduism, such as yoga, meditation, and rituals, as means of spiritual realization and liberation (moksha).

The Christian moral system and that of the Mahabharata, although aiming to guide individuals towards a virtuous life, are distinguished mainly by their philosophical and spiritual foundations, as well as by the cultural and historical contexts in which they developed.

Christian Morality: Christian morality is fundamentally based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, as reported in the New Testament, and the traditions of the Church. It relies on the concept of a single God, creator and judge, and emphasizes love (agape), compassion, forgiveness of sins, and the pursuit of personal holiness. Christian morality is fundamentally individualistic, focused on the personal relationship between the individual and God, and highlights the importance of faith and divine grace as means of salvation and moral transformation.

Morality of the Mahabharata: The morality presented in the Mahabharata is intrinsically linked to the notion of dharma, which is both complex and contextual. Dharma encompasses duty, justice, law, and cosmic order, and varies according to caste, stage of life, and personal situation. The Mahabharata emphasizes the importance of fulfilling one's dharma to maintain harmony in society and the universe. It acknowledges the complexity of moral choices and promotes a nuanced under-

standing of morality, considering the consequences of actions within the framework of karma (the law of cause and effect).

The main difference between Christian morality and that of the Mahabharata can thus be summarized by their approach to spirituality and morality: the former is centered on faith in God and love as universal principles of conduct, while the latter focuses on the fulfillment of individual and social dharma within a framework of cosmic justice and the law of karma. It can be said that Christian morality is more transcendent, since it is based on revelations, on an interpersonal relationship between God, the prophets who are His intermediaries, and the community of believers, the chosen ones. Christianity tends to emphasize an orientation towards a spiritual realm that transcends the material world. Hindu morality, on the other hand, is more immanent, based on the laws of nature, the world and society. It is deeply rooted in the context of earthly life and social responsibilities. Moral guidance is immanent in the sense that it is embedded in the structures of society, individual roles and responsibilities.

Comparatives of ”Selfless Action”

The principle of karma yoga, ”selfless action” or ”inaction in action”, resonates within other cultural frameworks. After exploring the Hindu concept, it seems worthwhile to consider its equivalents in Taoism and Christianity.

Taoism - Wu Wei

Taoism is a philosophical and religious tradition originating from China, based on the teachings attributed to Laozi, primarily expressed in the classical text ”Tao Te Ching”. Taoism focuses on the concept of the Tao, often translated as ”The Way” or ”the Path”, which refers to the fundamental principle underlying the universe, governing nature and human life in a constant flow of change and balance. Taoist practices include meditation, martial arts, traditional Chinese medicine, and the pursuit of harmony with the Tao through Wu Wei, the principle of non-action aimed at leading a life of simplicity, authenticity, and inner peace. Taoism has had a significant influence on Chinese culture and spirituality over the centuries.

The concept of "wu wei" is a central principle of Taoism. "Wu wei" can be literally translated as "non-action," or more freely interpreted as "effortless action," "non-interfering action," "effort without effort," or "disinterested action." It embodies a way of being in which one acts in harmony with the Tao (the way or the universal principle) naturally, without forcing or controlling events, unconcerned with the outcomes. While "wu wei" and the concept of "action in inaction" from the Bhagavad Gita share certain similarities, such as the idea of acting without attachment to results and seeking harmony with the natural course of things or cosmic law, they arise from distinct cultural and philosophical contexts and have specific differences due to their respective traditions.

Wu wei entails a lifestyle and mode of action that is in perfect harmony with nature and the Tao. It means acting in a spontaneous and natural way, without unnecessary effort, allowing things to unfold without needless intervention. Wu wei is often associated with simplicity, spontaneity, and tranquility; it is seen as a means to achieve maximum efficiency with minimal effort. It also pertains to the specific nature of the individual, their way of being, their needs, as a fulfillment of their uniqueness. However, there exists a tension or ambiguity between the individual Tao and the universal Tao, as the real individual Tao must align with the cosmic Tao to realize its potential best. This realization generally occurs through work, representing a confrontation with the world and oneself.

"Karma yoga" primarily focuses on fulfilling duty (dharma) without attachment to the fruits of action. It is a path of selfless service and engagement in the world, where action is un-

dertaken as a sacred duty and an offering to the absolute, often represented by a deity such as Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita.

Thus, while "wu wei" and "action in inaction" share the idea of acting selflessly and without attachment to outcomes, the former places more emphasis on alignment and harmony with the Tao and nature, whereas the latter focuses on the fulfillment of duty and devotion within a Hindu spiritual framework. Both concepts promote a form of practical wisdom and spiritual liberation, but they are rooted in distinct cosmologies and ethical systems.

Here is a summary of their respective ontological anchors.

Taoism is grounded in the concept of the Tao, the ultimate principle and indefinable source of all that exists. Taoist cosmology values natural harmony and the dynamic interplay between the opposing and complementary forces of Yin and Yang. The universe is seen as a constantly evolving organism, where each element interacts with others in accordance with the principle of Wu Wei. Taoist ethics focus on returning to natural simplicity, spontaneity, and inner peace. It advocates for a life in harmony with the Tao, minimizing artificial desires and conflicts. Taoism encourages Wu Wei as a means to achieve harmony with the natural world and other living beings, fostering a laissez-faire attitude and an intimate understanding of nature. Taoism is a radical critique of Confucianism (Ruism), the traditional Chinese philosophy or ethics, as the latter is based on human and societal principles, while the former is founded on cosmic principles, such as Yin and Yang, Heaven and Earth.

The cosmology depicted in the Mahabharata is deeply rooted in Hindu tradition, featuring a complex view of the universe with multiple levels of reality, including a rich pantheon of gods and goddesses. Dharma, or the cosmic and social law, plays a central role, dictating moral duty and the universal order. Thus, the Mahabharata emphasizes the importance of Dharma in human life, highlighting duty, justice, and morality as the foundations of righteous action. The principle aims to guide individuals towards moksha, liberation from suffering and the cycle of rebirths.

Thus, Taoism focuses on harmony with the Tao and nature through a minimalist and spontaneous approach, while the Mahabharata emphasizes adherence to Dharma and the role of actions within the framework of karma and the quest for moksha. Taoism promotes non-action and simplicity as pathways to inner peace and cosmic harmony. In contrast, the Mahabharata underlines the importance of righteous action and duty within a moral and ordered universe. The cosmologies of Taoism and the Mahabharata reflect their respective cultural contexts, with a more monistic and natural vision for Taoism, more peaceful and harmonious, and a more theistic and hierarchical vision for the Mahabharata, where conflict is inevitable. Though in both cases, the principle of "inner peace" remains equally crucial.

Nevertheless, a further clarification is needed to better define Taoist ethics and its relationship to action, conflict and purpose.

Taoist philosophy is a contextual morality. It is characterized by its flexibility and adaptability to specific circum-

stances, rather than adherence to a fixed set of rules or commandments. "Wu-wei" emphasizes the importance of naturally adapting to situations without forcing things or intervening excessively. It suggests acting appropriately according to the context, following the natural course of events without unnecessary resistance, in order to discern the right and harmonious action in each specific situation. This contrasts with more absolutist or universalist approaches to morality, which prescribe specific actions regardless of context.

Thus, Taoist philosophy does not exclude direct confrontation, with the aim of overcoming an opponent. Taoism, contrary to a naive and common interpretation sometimes encountered, does not necessarily advocate for the total avoidance of open conflict. It is about minimizing unnecessary confrontations, reducing friction, and giving priority to harmonious tension resolutions, considered more effective. One of the best illustrations of this attitude is the development of martial arts, like Kung Fu inspired by Taoism, which does not exclude direct conflict at all; on the contrary, it teaches a calm and detached attitude, but also how to fight.

Another interesting example is the case of Sun Tzu, the author of "The Art of War," who is often associated with Taoism due to certain ideas and strategies reflecting Taoist principles, such as the importance of adaptability, the concept of acting in accordance with the natural flow of things, and the use of non-conflictual strategy to achieve victory. This work focuses on military strategy and war tactics, but it does so in a way that highlights wisdom, strategic thinking, and above all, self-knowledge and knowledge of the enemy. Its principles

reflect the importance of naturalness, adaptability, and economy of action, central themes of Taoism. And of course, the ultimate goal is to be victorious. Although the most beautiful victory is to defeat the opponent without needing to fight, like Zhuangzi's famous "wooden rooster," a fighting cock that scares away its opponents merely by its confident and tranquil posture. This type of victory is both the most effective and the one that causes the least damage to anyone. However, it can only be practiced if one does not care much about the outcomes and if one is no longer prisoner to one's own impulses and anxieties.

Christianity - Charity

In Christianity, although the exact concept of "action in inaction" as presented in Hinduism (Karma Yoga) or the principle of "wu wei" from Taoism is not explicitly formulated, there are teachings that encourage believers to act without expecting rewards or specific outcomes. Even though this still constitutes personal fulfillment and access to eternal salvation. Several elements of Christian doctrine emphasize the importance of acting with kindness, love, and generosity, without seeking personal benefit or recognition.

The crucial concept here is that of "charity" or "agape," defined as selfless love towards others, reflecting God's love for humanity. A perfect, ideal love that seeks the good of the other without expecting anything in return. It is one of the three theological virtues, alongside faith and hope, but it is considered the greatest of the virtues. Charity is mani-

fested through acts of kindness, aid, and compassion towards the needy and the suffering, without expecting a reward. It is also interpreted as brotherly love towards all, inspired by God's unconditional love for humans. In the Christian sense, charity goes beyond mere material aid; it encompasses love, tolerance, forgiveness, and a concern for the spiritual well-being of others.

Charity in the common sense generally refers to the act of helping those in need, through financial donations, services, or other forms of support, in order to alleviate poverty, provide education or medical care, in order to meet various social or individual needs. The meaning of the term we are dealing with here, enlarged and more substantial, less commonly used, is synonymous with compassion, care, kindness, or affection towards everyone. It implies an overall benevolent and welcoming disposition, an attitude of understanding and tolerance towards the faults and weaknesses of others, an altruistic inclination or motivation.

Here are some illustrations of the concept of christian "charity."

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew), Jesus teaches his disciples and the crowd that when they give to the needy, they should not do so ostentatiously to be seen by others, but rather discreetly, "and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." This teaching underscores the idea of doing good without expecting recognition or earthly reward.

In the same text, it is said: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist the wicked. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn

to them the other cheek also." This metaphor urges the believer towards non-violence and forgiveness, thus restraining the primary and natural impulse, the psychological satisfaction, motivated by a desire for revenge. Instead of responding to aggression with aggression, Jesus encourages his disciples not to participate in the cycle of vengeance or violence. This teaching aims to promote peace, humility, and compassion, even towards those who harm us. It emphasizes the importance of breaking the cycle of negative reciprocity with acts of love and patience, thereby showing a superior moral and spiritual strength. Thus, rather than focusing on our immediate primary interest and natural impulses, we are advised to act for the good, both of ourselves and others. Our higher good commands us to forsake the goods of this world.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke) also illustrates this idea: a wounded man, victim of brigands, abandoned by the roadside, is rescued by a traveler from Samary, who generously takes care of him without any expectation of reciprocity or reward. This story teaches the importance of compassion and providing assistance to those in need, regardless of their status or their relationship with us, out of a pure sense of gratuity, without expecting compensation or reciprocation.

These teachings and other similar passages in Christian Scriptures encourage believers to adopt an attitude of humility and service, to perform righteous and charitable actions for the glory of God and their own salvation rather than for immediate material benefit. While the conceptual frameworks and specific terms differ from one religious tradition to another, the underlying idea of living a life guided by high spiritual prin-

ciples, setting aside selfish desires and material expectations, is a common theme across many spiritual and religious traditions. Although it could be argued that in all cases, there is nonetheless a personal interest, albeit a sublimated one, less primary and less immediate.

In Christianity, morality and the concept of the good are anchored in the teachings of Jesus Christ, as presented in the New Testament. Unlike the Gita and the Tao, Christian morality is not cosmic and natural. It stems from a sacred revelation transmitted by humans following a personal encounter with a divine being. It is transcendent, not immanent. It is primarily interpersonal, a universal law exclusively reserved for humans. Thus, charity, love (agape) at the heart of Christian ethics, manifests through the love of God and neighbor. The ultimate good is associated with the believer's eternal life with God, achieved through faith in Jesus Christ, repentance of sins, and adherence to divine commandments. Christian ethical principles emphasize charity, forgiveness, humility, and the pursuit of justice. The moral life is guided by the principles of divine law, revealed through prophets and transcribed in the Holy Scriptures, and by the believer's active search for God's will, centered on universal love and eternal salvation. The ultimate good is union with God in the afterlife, achieved through faith and obedience to divine commandments. Christian ethics are universal and absolute, advocating love and forgiveness as responses to all situations, which implies, of course, avoiding conflicts.

However, paradoxically, the principle of conflict, which may involve using violent means to achieve a result, is not entirely

excluded, contrary to a rather common irenic vision of Christianity. For example, consider how Christ violently expelled the merchants from the temple because they were desecrating a sacred place with their commerce. Or when Jesus says, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'" (Matthew) In these instances, the action is not disinterested and loving, charitable and forgiving, but the violent pursuit of a result, despite the "holy" motivation behind this desire. Thus, even if Christianity advocates love as the universal rule, the combative and conquering dimension that followed in history will not be surprising.

In the Mahabharata, morality is strongly tied to the concept of dharma, which represents duty, justice, and the cosmic order simultaneously. Goodness is achieved by fulfilling one's specific dharma, determined by caste, life stage, and personal situation. The pursuit of goodness also includes spiritual realization and liberation (moksha) from suffering and the cycle of rebirths. The Mahabharata offers a complex ethical framework where justice, duty, and familial and social obligations are essential. The text acknowledges moral dilemmas and the relativity of ethical choices through the stories of its characters; morality is more relative, linked to social and personal circumstances. Nonetheless, the principle of selfless action and devotion to the gods is always present, with an emphasis on the cosmic and social order. Goodness is connected to

the correct fulfillment of one's dharma and spiritual progression towards moksha. However, ethics in the Mahabharata is contextual, flexible, and adapted to different life situations, recognizing the complexity and ambiguity of moral choices.

Castes

Arjuna is a prince, born into the Kshatriya caste, the warriors, and thus is expected to go to war. A modern Western reader might criticize this obligation, this caste system, seeing it as a primitive system where the individual is not truly free. In this sense, Arjuna's dilemma becomes artificial; he has no obligation to go to war if he does not wish to. Furthermore, war can be considered harmful in itself. Nevertheless, it seems to us that to fully grasp the text's value and transpose its ideas for ourselves, it is necessary to somewhat penetrate the scheme from the inside.

The caste system in India, known as "varna," is a traditional social structure, already mentioned in ancient Vedic texts. The word "varna" means "type," "order," or "color," and the system classifies society into four main groups. Here are the four traditional varnas and their roles and meanings in Hindu society:

Brahmins: This caste is placed at the top of the hierarchy and consists of priests, teachers, and scholars. The Brahmins were responsible for conducting religious rituals and teaching

the Vedas, the sacred texts of Hinduism. Their role was to preserve spiritual knowledge and transmit it.

Kshatriyas: The Kshatriyas were the warriors, kings, and administrators. Their role was to protect society and ensure its proper functioning, including defending the territory against invasions and managing state affairs. Courage, strength, and a sense of duty were qualities valued among the Kshatriyas.

Vaishyas: This caste encompassed merchants, farmers, artisans, and businessmen. The Vaishyas' role was to take care of the society's economy, including agriculture, livestock, trade, and craft production. Success in business and the ability to contribute to the economic well-being of the community were important for the Vaishyas.

Shudras: The Shudras were considered the base caste, including servants and laborers. Their role was to provide manual and service support to the other three castes. They handled tasks considered less pure or less honorable, not requiring the same spiritual or warrior qualifications expected of the other varnas.

Beyond the division into varnas, Indian society is made up of thousands of "jatis" or sub-castes, which are often specific to a geographical region and may have their own traditions, marriage rules and professions. They function as endogamous social groups, often arranged hierarchically within each varna. They make up a vast mosaic of social groups with their own

identities, customs and socio-economic status. Furthermore, at the bottom of the social ladder, below the four varnas, are the Dalits, often referred to as "untouchables". Historically, they were excluded from the varna caste systems and forced to perform the most impure and degrading work.

Historically, there was little flexibility to change varna, as this structure was deeply rooted in society and supported by religious texts and laws. However, there have been exceptions and movements within this rigid structure at different periods and in various regions. A specific way to escape this system was through spirituality and asceticism. The spiritual path, especially through renouncing the material world (sannyasa) and seeking spiritual realization, was a way to escape the caste principle. Ascetics and "saints," regardless of their caste origin, could be respected and revered solely for their spirituality.

Each caste promotes its own specific values, offering a determined possibility for personal fulfillment, through a certain mode of existence. Each group has duties (dharma) that are specific to it, and fulfilling these duties is considered a way to achieve personal and spiritual well-being. Here is how fulfillment could be envisaged in each caste:

Brahmins: Fulfillment for Brahmins would be achieved through in-depth study of sacred texts, the performance and conduct of religious rituals, and teaching. Spirituality, knowledge and purity were key values. Spiritual purity was considered essential to their way of life.

Kshatriyas: For kshatriyas, fulfillment would be linked to exercising power and responsibility with justice and honor, protecting society, and courage in battle. Leadership and a sense of duty to society are paramount.

Vaishyas: Vaishyas could fulfill themselves by succeeding in trade, agriculture or crafts, contributing to the economic prosperity of the community. Commercial success and business acumen are valued.

Shudras: For shudras, fulfillment could be found in the competent and faithful execution of their tasks, although their opportunities are more limited due to their position in society. Service and reliability would be valued aspects.

Beyond the sociological or ethnological aspect of this societal structure, what is interesting is the vision it presents of humanity, its activity, vocation, and identity. Certainly, the hierarchical aspect of this description might clash with our modern egalitarian sensibilities. Likewise, this specific hierarchy may no longer correspond at all to current reality, such as suggesting that the Vaishya caste, the businesspeople, now tops the social ladder. We might also criticize the importance given to warriors, as warfare is perceived very negatively today.

However, remember what Plato proposes regarding social division. He describes an ideal society divided into three main classes, each with specific functions and virtues.

Producers, which includes farmers, craftsmen, all those involved in the production of goods and services needed by so-

ciety. Their main virtue is temperance, which here means a sense of moderation and acceptance of their role without aspiring to a higher social status.

Auxiliaries: The auxiliaries, or assistant guardians, are the warriors charged with defending the city and maintaining order. Their virtue is courage, which enables them to fulfill their duty of protection without fail.

Guardians: At the top of the hierarchy are the Guardians, the city's leaders. They are chosen from among the auxiliaries for their wisdom and ability to govern rightly. Guardians must lead a simple life, without private possessions or family, to avoid any form of corruption and ensure that they act solely in the interests of the city. Their principal virtue is wisdom.

Plato explains that justice in society emerges when each class fulfills its own functions, acting according to its own virtue. Similarly, in each person, justice is achieved when the three parts of a person's soul - the rational, the ardent and the appetitive - function in harmony, in the image of a just society. Now let us try to explain these three functions of the soul.

The rational (logistikon): This part of the soul is associated with reason and intellect. It is responsible for making thoughtful decisions and discerning between good and evil. The rational is said to govern the soul, as it is able to understand the "eternal forms", including that of the Good, the ultimate value, and to direct the other parts of the soul towards true justice and well-being.

The ardent (thymoeides): This part of the soul is linked to courage, emotion and willpower. It concerns the ability to be appropriately angry, motivation and determination. The ardent supports the decisions made by the rational part and helps to implement these choices with courage and conviction.

The appetitive (epithymetikon): This part is the seat of desires and appetites, including hunger, thirst, sexual desires, and other bodily and material pleasures. The appetitive is the greatest and most demanding of the three aspects of the soul, constantly seeking to be satisfied. The virtue associated with the appetitive is temperance, which represents the control of these desires in view of a greater good.

The soul's justice, according to Plato, is achieved when the rational governs with wisdom, the ardent supports and executes its decisions with courage, and the appetitive is guided and controlled so as not to overstep its bounds. This internal harmony reflects the harmony and justice of the ideal society, where each class fulfills its appropriate role.

So it is interesting not to confine ourselves to a purely sociological view of the varna system, but to examine how our individuality is thus composed of such a structure, and to become aware of our own psychic dynamics with the help of these concepts. The caste system is not purely a matter of society, but an ontological question. It deals with the different archetypes, psychological inclinations and functions that structure the human being.

The Existential Dimension

Of course, the main problem with the varna system was its fixity: we have to pursue a specific vocation and carry out the corresponding duties throughout our existence, even if we feel totally alienated from the caste to which we belong. That said, even in traditional Western society, albeit less rigid, we could also feel alienated within the social group to which we belong, a problem which, while not having totally disappeared, is much less of an issue today.

So what remains interesting for the contemporary reader is the existential dimension of this question, over and above the purely sociological aspect of the phenomenon. Our suggestion is to bring Arjuna's dilemma closer to the existentialist perspective. Thus, Martin Heidegger proposes the concept of "Geworfenheit", often translated as "facticity", to qualify the arbitrarily "given" dimension of existence. That is, the "facts" of singular existence, considered as objective data, what is immediately "established" in an individual's life. This means that man is thrown into the world at birth, in an arbitrary place and time, in a random form, without preamble or explanation,

an initial drama that must then be "managed" as best as possible. Unless one eternally seeks some form of consolation.

These uncontrolled and arbitrary facts include circumstances, conditions, and aspects of life that are beyond the individual's control, conditions that are not chosen but with which we must deal. These facts are pre-existing or given before the individual can exercise any choice or influence over them. These include, for example, innate biological traits, place and time of birth, family and cultural background, the language we speak, and historical and personal circumstances - all kinds of parameters that shape our person, that determine our life, over which we have no direct control. In existentialist philosophy, the notion of "facticity" is used to underline the importance of these preconditions in the constitution of human experience and our existence. It designates a fundamental characteristic of our existence that underlines our vulnerability and dependence on circumstances beyond our control.

However, once this arbitrary determination dimension is acknowledged, the focus shifts to how the individual engages these facts of existence in their quest for meaning and authenticity, by embracing their finitude and possibilities. Here lies their freedom, their choice, the constitution of their existence. What matters is the individual's relationship with these facts and how they are integrated into their project of being-in-the-world. Thus, "facticity", while indicating what is "already produced" and immovable, invites reflection on individual freedom and responsibility in the face of these starting conditions. How can the individual live authentically and give meaning to their existence, considering this facticity without

being entirely determined by it? What allows transcending the freedom of being, accessing being, through various determinations? And here, the problem poses itself for the contemporary individual in the same way as for Arjuna.

The entirety of these unchosen conditions profoundly influences our being-in-the-world, i.e., our way of existing and relating to the world around us. Recognizing our facticity is central in the quest for an authentic mode of existence, as it confronts us with our limitations and the condition of being "thrown" into the world, without reducing us to it. This opens the path to exploring our ability to make sense of our lives and exercise our freedom within these given conditions, seeking to realize our potential and live authentically despite the constraints imposed by facticity. It is not about presenting ourselves as victims of circumstances and complaining but about taking charge of the context and data of our individuality and exercising our autonomy within them. This requires abandoning a fantasy of "absolute" freedom, an illusion of "all-powerfulness", and reconciling with our finitude. In this sense, Arjuna is very close to each of us.

Moreover, one might question the narrative choice of the Gita. Why did Krishna choose Arjuna as the interlocutor, and not a Brahmin, who are superior in the caste hierarchy? This choice seems significant. Let us try to explain it.

It shows the universality of divine teachings, not reserved for a specific, superior, more intellectual, and enlightened caste. Arjuna's situation is a dramatic representation of the dharmic conflict, as dharma is not an unchallenged path of pure contemplation but a struggle with oneself, a permanent

existential and psychological dilemma, a conflict between different facets of our being. This illustrates that the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita apply to all life aspects, not just a spiritual quest isolated from the material world. They are accessible to all individuals, regardless of their caste, situation, or stage of life. Spiritual realization and adherence to dharma are not limited to traditional religious activities but encompass all spheres of human action. The dynamic relationship between Krishna and Arjuna highlights the possibility of divine guidance in every individual's life. Furthermore, Arjuna's situation on the battlefield symbolizes the inner struggle every person faces in life, confronted with their desires, attachments, and moral dilemmas. The Bhagavad Gita teaches how to navigate these internal conflicts by dedicating oneself to a higher understanding of spiritual truth, duty, and liberation (moksha).

Anecdotally, Arjuna's dilemma reminds us of Shakespeare's Hamlet, which lies in his internal struggle to decide whether he should avenge the death of his father, the King of Denmark, murdered by his own brother Claudius, who then usurped the throne and married Hamlet's mother. It is manifested by the famous question "To be, or not to be?" where Hamlet contemplates existence, death, morality, and inaction in the face of injustice. He is torn between his moral duty to avenge his father and his aversion to the act of murder itself, leading to paralysis and deep introspection. He, too, questions the meaning and comparative virtues of action and inaction. His concern for the "good", his quest for the "right action", makes him doubt his existence itself. Here again, acting is inseparable from being, from existence.

The Warrior Instinct

The concept or warrior might seem foreign to the contemporary reader. A remote and exotic archetype, even considered primitive. From our modern perspective, there seems to be a clear syllogism: peace is good, war is bad, thus engaging in war is not a good thing. The warrior ideal is hardly in vogue, nor is honor and bravery, we rather appreciate comfort and well-being. What is more, anything that hurts is considered bad or evil.

Therefore, identifying with a warrior nature seems strange to us, and we cannot really relate directly to Arjuna. So we will transpose the problem in order to better understand the nature of this character, by presenting it as a fundamental vital impulse: the warrior instinct or the instinct for confrontation. No one can deny the existence of this impulse within themselves, which will manifest more or less depending on the circumstances. Despite the guilty conscience its presence might provoke in us. So let us provocatively name this impulse the "warrior instinct".

The warrior instinct in humans refers to a deep, often instinctive tendency towards confrontation, aggression, dissen-

sion or struggle, which can range from an innocuous friendly emulation to outright competition, or to some more dangerous conflict, even lethal. This tendency may be motivated or fueled by survival purposes, defense of values or ideas, protection of a group, territorial expansion, promotion of an ideology or religion, acquisition of goods, increase in personal power, or protection of one's image and reputation, or by a simple egotistic reaction. This violence can be experienced both individually and collectively. It can be expressed through words or actions.

Let us examine this impulse from various angles.

Sigmund Freud proposed the existence of two fundamental instincts in humans: Eros, the life instinct related to creation, protection, and love. And Thanatos, the death instinct associated with destruction, aggression, and chaos. The warrior impulse could thus be seen as a manifestation of Thanatos, where aggression and destructive tendencies are directed towards others.

From an evolutionary standpoint, we can consider that the warrior impulse could have represented an adaptive advantage at various points in our history. Conflicts and wars allowed a group to access resources, protect its territory, or ensure its survival against other groups.

Socio-cultural influences also play a role in the warrior impulse. Social norms, cultural values, education, and history can glorify conflict and aggression, thus encouraging warlike behaviors. Rituals, myths, and heroic narratives support the idealization of war and the warrior.

Economic and political structures may also encourage struggle as a means to resolve conflicts, expand power, or control resources. In this context, the warrior instinct is less an innate inclination than a consequence of certain systems and interests.

Conflict or confrontation play a significant role in defining and affirming personal identity and preserving integrity from a young age. Faced with challenges, oppositions, and various interpersonal conflicts, an individual is led to better understand their values, limits, and strengths. This understanding strengthens personal identity and promotes greater resilience. Conflict highlights differences between individuals, clarifying what makes a person unique compared to others. This can include differences in opinions, beliefs, or behaviors and can serve to preserve an individual's integrity by affirming their own psychological and moral boundaries. Even internal conflicts contribute to personality development.

Human existence is fundamentally characterized by freedom and choice, which inevitably implies conflicts with others. Sartre's famous phrase, "Hell is other people", captures the idea that the relationship with others is a source of conflict, though essential to consciousness and self-definition.

Anthropologically, we observe that conflict and competition rituals, such as sports or debates, can have an important social function in consolidating group and individual identity, as well as establishing and maintaining norms and hierarchies within society.

Thus, we can conclude that the warrior instinct is a necessary and inevitable component of human nature. However, it

can be quite primitive and impulsive, or it can be codified or sublimated according to cultural or philosophical patterns.

Buddhism and Hinduism

In order to better understand the specificity of the Hindu scheme, it seems interesting to compare it to the Buddhist one, both because it is different despite common roots, and also because Buddhism has become more familiar to Western readers in recent years. This comparison may help us understand why we are more attracted to Buddhism than to Hinduism, which is more worldly, vital, vigorous, and more heroic. Our contemporary disenchantment can more easily combine with Buddhism, more disembodied.

First, let's take the concept of struggle or combat. Buddhism and Hinduism approach it in distinct ways, reflecting their specific perspectives and teachings. Buddhism emphasizes inner peace, compassion, and non-violence (ahimsa) as means to achieve enlightenment and end suffering. Rather than focusing on physical combat, Buddhism encourages the inner struggle against mental afflictions such as ignorance, desire, and aversion. This "struggle" is conducted through the practice of meditation, the development of wisdom, and the cultivation of compassion and altruism. In Hinduism, texts like the Bhagavad-Gita explicitly discuss the duty (dharma)

to physically fight for justice and the protection of the social and spiritual order. Although this struggle is framed within a context of duty and moral obligation, it must be carried out without attachment to results and in a spirit of sacrifice.

While Buddhism focuses more on overcoming internal afflictions and achieving enlightenment through non-violence and compassion, Hinduism presents a more diversified approach that can include the notion of justified struggle or combat in certain circumstances, always within the broader framework of spiritual search and dharma. Nevertheless, Hinduism also teaches non-violence and promotes the practice of spirituality through meditation, yoga, and other forms of personal discipline aiming to realize the ultimate self (Atman) and unity with the divine (Brahman). Both traditions, however, value inner peace, self-control, and the importance of acting with moral and ethical consciousness.

In Hinduism, compassion (day) is also highly valued and considered an important moral virtue. It is linked to the concept of dharma (duty), where acting with compassion is seen as part of one's ethical responsibilities towards oneself and others. Hindu compassion is perceived within the context of reciprocal relationships and the cosmic order, promoting harmony and social well-being. The major difference lies in the context and ultimate goal of compassion in each tradition: in Buddhism, it is inherently tied to the quest for enlightenment and the liberation from suffering for all beings, whereas in Hinduism, it is more often integrated within the framework of dharma, with an emphasis on social and cosmic order and harmony. Human relationships are subsumed by the reality

of the cosmos. In Hinduism, the reality of suffering is interpreted through the prism of cosmic laws and dharma, leading to a certain relativization of individual suffering. This perspective suggests that suffering has a cause and function within the grand cosmic order, serving as a tool for learning and the spiritual evolution of the soul (tman) towards the ultimate liberation (moksha) from the cycle of rebirths. Thus, while suffering is acknowledged as a reality, it is also seen as temporary and surmountable through the correct understanding of dharma, self-realization, and alignment with cosmic laws. Suffering is thus relativized not in the sense of completely denying it, but rather understanding it as an integral part of the spiritual process that leads to a deeper comprehension of the ultimate reality (Brahman) and the emancipation of the soul.

Thus, in Hinduism, the notion of the warrior's path, or Kshatriya dharma, is integrated into a broader spiritual perspective. Warriors (Kshatriyas) have a defined role within the social and spiritual structure, where their duty is to protect society and maintain order and justice. The Buddhist tradition does not valorize the warrior's path in the same way as Hinduism in terms of spiritual journey. In the Buddhist pantheon, there are narratives of spiritual protectors or warrior figures, such as certain protective deities or Bodhisattvas who are sometimes depicted carrying weapons. But these representations symbolize the struggle against internal negative forces rather than promoting physical combat. There were, however, historical cases of wars waged by states or groups claiming Buddhism. However, these conflicts are generally not justified by Bud-

dhist teachings themselves, but rather by political, territorial, or power motivations. For example, in medieval Japan, where Buddhist sects like the Ikko-ikki, warrior monks, actively participated in conflicts to protect their interests or beliefs during the Sengoku period. Or the Kingdom of Siam, of Theravada Buddhist religion, under the reign of King Naresuan the Great (1590 - 1605), famous for having liberated Siam from Burmese domination after several decades of conflicts and wars.

Second, let's examine the status of daily life and practical activities. It can be argued that the Buddhist ideal is the monastic path, the privileged way towards spiritual awakening, as it allows for complete devotion to the practice of meditation, the study of sacred teachings, and adherence to moral precepts at a very strict level. Monastic life is the best means of eliminating distractions and attachments from the secular world, promoting faster progress on the path to liberation from suffering and the cycle of rebirths (samsara). Although Buddhism also recognizes the possibility of reaching high levels of spiritual realization for laypeople, by leading an ethical life, meditating, and cultivating wisdom within the context of daily life. Meditation is at the heart of Buddhist practices, considered essential for progress on the path to enlightenment and liberation from suffering. It serves as both a practice of mental calm or relaxation and a profound means of understanding the nature of reality, uprooting mental afflictions such as ignorance, desire, and aversion, by cultivating qualities such as mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom. The Buddhist ideal, therefore, is not meditation in itself but rather the use of meditation as a key tool for achieving a deeper understanding of

oneself and the universe, ultimately leading to enlightenment and the liberation of suffering for all beings. Nevertheless, enlightenment is not attained through practical activities.

While in Hinduism, practical activity, for example, a profession, is equally a path of awakening. Fulfilling one's duty (dharma) according to one's position in life and society is considered a path to spiritual realization. Hence the importance of castes, which assign to each individual a vocation to pursue. This approach is embodied in the concept of "Karma Yoga," one of the four main paths of yoga described in Hindu sacred texts like the Bhagavad-Gita. It is the path of selfless action, carried out as a means of devotion and offering to God, without attachment to the fruits or results of the action. It teaches that one can achieve enlightenment or liberation (moksha) through one's daily actions, including professional activity, provided that these actions are performed with the right attitude, such as action without attachment, which helps overcome ego and personal desires. One's work and actions are considered an offering to God, thus transforming daily activity into a spiritual practice. According to this perspective, almost any profession or activity can become a means of spiritual awakening if undertaken with the correct mindset. Karma Yoga emphasizes the importance of right action and moral duty as means to purify the mind and advance on the spiritual path. In Hinduism, the spiritual approach to daily life and professional activity is conceived as an integral and constitutive part of spiritual development.

Third, on social and economic issues: Buddhism is less concerned with maintaining established social structures and eco-

nomic relations than Hinduism. Buddha's teachings are focused more on individual moral development, mental purification, and the pursuit of enlightenment. This is quite visible on the "caste" issue.

The caste system created a highly structured society where everyone had a specific role and occupation. This clarity of social roles could contribute to order and predictability within the society, potentially leading to social stability. By dividing society into groups with designated occupations, the caste system ensured that various economic functions and duties were fulfilled. This specialization could contribute to efficiency in certain crafts and trades passed down through generations within a caste. Caste provided individuals with a strong sense of identity and belonging. Being part of a caste meant access to a community with shared customs, traditions, and rituals, which could offer social support and a sense of continuity. In the context of Hinduism, the caste system was intertwined with religious beliefs. It provided a moral framework that explained one's position in society as a result of past karma and prescribed specific duties (dharma) for members of each caste, contributing to a religiously sanctioned social order. Certain castes, particularly the Brahmin caste, were tasked with the preservation and transmission of religious texts, rituals, and knowledge. This specialization allowed for the maintenance of spiritual and educational traditions over centuries.

Buddha criticized the rigid caste system that was prevalent in ancient Indian society, which divided people into hierarchical categories based on birth, determining their social status, occupation, and even the people with whom they could in-

teract. His teachings emphasized the irrelevance of caste in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. He taught that spiritual liberation was accessible to anyone regardless of their caste, social status, or background. This inclusive approach was revolutionary and attracted followers from all levels of society, including those from lower castes who were often marginalized and denied religious and spiritual opportunities. One of the Buddha's fundamental teachings is that all beings have Buddha-nature and the potential to achieve enlightenment, which stands in contrast to the idea that one's birth determines one's spiritual worthiness. He ordained followers from various social backgrounds, including those considered "untouchables" (Dalit), effectively challenging the existing social hierarchy. He argued that one's actions and moral conduct (karma) are what determine one's worth, not their birth or caste. This perspective fostered a more egalitarian and compassionate community among his followers, known as the Sangha, where the emphasis was on ethical living, meditation, and wisdom as the means to achieve liberation. By teaching that enlightenment and moral virtue were accessible to all, regardless of caste, the Buddha laid the foundations for a spiritual community that transcended the social divisions of his time. It has a spiritual goal, much more than a social or economic one.

We should add that among the four aims of human life in Hindu philosophy, alongside Dharma (righteousness or moral values), Kama (pleasure or emotional fulfillment), and Moksha (spiritual liberation), there is Artha, which specifically refers to the pursuit of material prosperity and success. It en-

compasses wealth, career, and the means of life that allow an individual to live a comfortable and stable existence. It is considered important because it provides the necessary foundation for a household and societal stability, allowing individuals to pursue their duties, pleasures, and ultimately, spiritual liberation, within a structured and supportive environment. or course, Artha should be pursued in alignment with Dharma, ensuring that one's quest for material success does not compromise moral and ethical standards. Therefore, it is not merely about accumulation of wealth, but also about the responsibility that comes with it, including the welfare of society and the ethical means of acquiring and using resources. The balance between Artha and the other aims of life is essential for achieving a harmonious and fulfilling life.

Buddhism does not valorize Artha as a goal in itself. It accepts it, but it is mainly concerned in dealing with wealth in a way that supports ethical living, spiritual practice, and the well-being of others. Wealth is not seen as inherently bad, but attachment to it is considered a potential obstacle to enlightenment.

Fourth, about pleasure and emotional fulfillment (Kama): In Hinduism, Kama is considered one of the four Purusharthas, or aims of human life, alongside Dharma (righteousness), Artha (wealth), and Moksha (liberation). This classification underscores the acceptance of pleasure as a legitimate and natural aspect of human existence. Kama encompasses not only sexual pleasure but also the enjoyment of art, music, food, and the beauty of the natural world. The pursuit of pleasure, according to Hinduism, is acceptable and encouraged

as long as it is in harmony with Dharma—meaning it should be ethical, not harm others, and not obstruct one's spiritual progress. Kama is celebrated in Hindu literature, most notably in works such as the Kamasutra, which explores the aesthetics and ethics of love and pleasure. In Hinduism, fulfilling one's desires in a righteous manner is seen as a way to maintain social order and personal happiness, contributing to the overall balance and harmony of life.

Buddhism recognizes Kama as a natural part of human life but emphasizes the impermanent (anicca) and potentially unsatisfactory (dukkha) nature of sensory pleasures. The Buddha taught that attachment to sensual pleasures can lead to craving (tanha), which binds individuals to the cycle of suffering and rebirth (samsara). Therefore, while not condemning pleasure outright, Buddhism advises understanding its transient nature, warning us against its superficial dimension, therefore inviting us to rather practice non-attachment. The Middle Way, a central concept in Buddhism, advocates for a balanced approach that avoids the extremes of sensual indulgence and severe asceticism. The goal is to achieve enlightenment (Nirvana), a state of liberation from suffering and the cycle of rebirth, which requires overcoming attachment to sensual pleasures. Buddhism places a strong emphasis on mindfulness and ethical conduct, encouraging followers to find happiness in spiritual practice, ethical living, and the cultivation of positive mental qualities like compassion, loving-kindness (metta), and equanimity (upekkha), rather than in sensual pleasure, which can divert attention away from the pursuit of enlightenment. Hinduism's more embracing attitude toward

Kama reflects its broader acceptance of worldly life as a field for spiritual growth, whereas Buddhism's cautious stance highlights its focus on liberation from the cycle of birth and suffering, an escape from existence.

One final comparison, which we find interesting and revealing, about laughter and humor, and the relationship to life. Both Buddhist and Hindu traditions recognize the value of joy, happiness, and humor as part of spiritual life. Although they are expressed differently, depending on their spiritual narratives and doctrines. The depiction of laughter and joy is more manifest and more significant in the narratives and representations of Krishna than in those of the Buddha, mainly due to the differences between their roles and the contexts of their respective teachings. Krishna, a major deity of Hinduism, is often depicted as playful and joyful, especially in the narratives of his childhood and youth in Vrindavan. The playful aspects of the god, his mischief with the milkmaids, his pranks, his role in the joyful celebration of life, underscore a divine presence that is intimately involved in the world's pleasures and sorrows. His portrayal often includes laughter, dance, music, and a general celebration of life, illustrating a divine connection through joy and love. In contrast, the Buddha, as depicted in early Buddhist texts like the P li Canon, is more often portrayed in a serene and compassionate manner, but generally more somber. His teachings focus on overcoming suffering (dukkha) through understanding its nature, ethical living, mental discipline, and wisdom. While there are instances where the Buddha displays humor or a certain lightness, these are typically more subtle and discreet, serv-

ing to convey his teachings rather than to express joy or playfulness. The different emphases of these portrayals reflect the distinct goals and contexts of Hindu and Buddhist teachings. Krishna's "Lila" (divine play) communicates the joyous and loving nature of God's interaction with the world in Hinduism, while the Buddha's more measured demeanor underscores the path to enlightenment and liberation from suffering in Buddhism, beyond life itself. However, it is interesting to note that Chinese culture, more earthy and material, has altered the classical Buddhist iconography, that of a meditative and serious Buddha. Commonly found is the figure of Budai, an incarnation of Maitreya, the "Future Buddha" in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. He is depicted as a chubby, smiling Chinese monk with a large, bare belly that followers rub for luck. According to some legends, Budai was a 10th-century Chinese monk who had a joyful and kind character and was loved for his generous spirit and joyous nature. His representations often show him carrying a cloth bag filled with sweets, fruits, or treasures, which he distributes to children and the needy, symbolizing generosity and the distribution of fortune. His image is revered as a symbol of happiness, prosperity, and contentment.