

# A Comparative Study Of Western And Indian Thought

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## ABSTRACT

*The idea of goodness, or the philosophy of dharma, is stressed as a fundamental value in the Upanisads. Indian ethics aspires to obey dharma, which emphasizes morality and good behaviour. The goal of life, referred to as Purusharthas in Upanisads, is to achieve the four aims advocated in the Upanisads. Dharma, Artha, kaama, and moksha are the four principles. These four goals assist in living a positive and ethical life. In everyone's life, all four segments are essential. "Ethics" means "good life" in Greek culture. Plato discusses what it means to know what is healthy. According to him, the concept of good is seen as the universal author of beautiful and perfect everything. Happiness, according to Aristotle, is the primary purpose, and it is contingent on the realization of one's rationality.*

*Happiness, according to Epicurus, entails serenity and can be attained by simple pleasures that promote bodily health and mental tranquilly. The ultimate purpose of a human being, according to Epicurus, is not a never-ending stream of sensual pleasures. Ataraxia is a state of tranquilly that relieves mental and physical pain. The fulfilment of natural desires leads to happiness by preserving bodily health and mental peace, and freedom from pain. Philosophy and the pursuit of knowledge will help one understand their goodness.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Indian Philosophy, Ethical Concepts, and Western Philosophy*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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*The Upanisads exemplify two types of knowledge – higher and lower knowledge. The lower knowledge is just an understanding of the phenomenal world. The higher knowledge is the knowledge of the supreme self, which is otherwise called atman. The Upanisads explain that experiencing oneness with the Supreme Being is the higher knowledge. The acquisition of lower knowledge is also advised because it helps us understand the nature of the world in which we live. In the process of acquiring lower knowledge, the faculty necessary to attain higher knowledge is developed.*

*Bhagavadgita says, "when you feel the suffering of every living thing in your own heart, is consciousness". The idea of goodness, or the philosophy of dharma, is stressed as a fundamental value in The Vedas and The Upanisads. Indian ethics aspires to obey dharma, which emphasizes morality and good behaviour. The goal of life, referred to as Purusharthas in Upanisads, is to achieve the four aims advocated in the Upanisads. Dharma, Artha, kaama, and moksha are the four principles. These four goals assist in living a positive and ethical life. Each of the four segments is important in everyone's life.*

*In Greek tradition, "ethics" means "good life". They aimed at discovering the nature of happiness. There are differences of opinion in defining the happiest life and the ways of*

accomplishing it. The writings of ancient philosophers regard duty and right as their chief ethical concepts and gave importance to a happy life. They viewed goodness as the basic concern of ethics. Socrates surprised his listeners when he said that there is something higher than justice, which is the idea of the good. He further explained that the idea of good is the highest knowledge, and all the other virtues would be fruitful only by their use of the idea of the good. The Greek tradition is the root of the western tradition.

Plato discusses what it means to know what is healthy. According to him, the concepts of good are seen as the universal author of beautiful and perfect everything. He also adds it is the parent of light and lord of height in this visible world. It is also the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectuals. Though Aristotle rejects Plato's view that moral evaluations of daily life are supposed to be true without proof, he tries to determine what people fundamentally desire. Aristotle finds goals such as wealth and honours are insufficient. Aristotle points out that self-sufficiency is the first and ultimate end for people. According to Aristotle, happiness is the primary goal, and it depends upon the actualization of one's rationality. A virtuous person lives, realizing his unique potentiality. He subdivides it as moral and intellectual virtues.

Moral virtues are habitual choices of actions in agreement with rational principles. Intellectual virtues are acquired through teaching, and it requires experience and time. Aristotle definition of happiness can be fully understood by understanding the nature of virtues. Aristotle says the nature of virtue relies upon the structure of the soul of both rational and irrational components.

The Indian religious text *Bhagavadgita* views philosophically the nature of life and advice people to be happy and virtuous.

*“Whatever has happened has happened for good.*

*Whatever is happening is happening for good.*

*Whatever will happen shall also happen for good.*

*What have you lost that you are actually crying for;*

*What did you bring; that you lost?*

*What did you create that was destroyed?*

*You came empty-handed,*

*Whatever is yours today, Whatever you have today was somebody else's yesterday,*

*And would be somebody else's tomorrow.”*

In the ancient texts related to Sanathana *Hindu Dharma*, the term *Satchidananda* is explained as sat-chit-ananda. *Sat* means existence, *chit* means awareness, and *ananda* is bliss. *Taittiriya Upanisad* describes the nature of bliss in the state of oneness with the Supreme Being, Brahman – the highest reality. *The Vedas, Upanisads* and *Gita* talk about eternal bliss, which has no rebirth. It explains the tradition of being united with God through various methods.

Philosophers like Adi Shankara, Ramanujacharya, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Ramanujacharya followed different paths to achieve happiness. There are four major paths, namely Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Raja Yoga.

*Bhagavadgita* talks about various methods of ethical life. *Bhakti yoga* is also called Bhakti marga. It refers to love and devotion towards any deity, which leads to moksha. *Jnana yoga* means the path of knowledge/self-realization. *Karmayoga* means working hard with responsibility and doing the right action. *Rajayoga* refers to the goals of yoga and the methods of attaining them. *Rajayoga* is also called *Astangayoga*. All are different paths to achieve happiness, peace, self-realization and liberation. Those who renounce the materialistic world and live according to the will of God believe that they end their birth cycles and rest in eternal bliss in union with God.

The four purusarthas referred to in Sanathana *Hindu Dharma* are “dharma”, “artha”,

"kaama", and "moksha". Dharma is a Sanskrit word that means "good deeds, virtuous conduct, and charity." Artha is a Sanskrit word that means "to give away one's hard-earned wealth." It also believes that the sole object of material possession is to benefit others. *Kaama (or) Desire* destroys dharmic thoughts; it is only through proper manner desires should be satisfied. In this process, maturity and wisdom are gained. Another significant purpose of religion is *moksha* which teaches to free one from all sorts of attachments. What makes human life enjoyable is right action (dharma), possession of wealth (artha) and sensual pleasure (kaama). The belief in an afterlife, which is moksha, reduces the fear of death.

Happiness, according to Epicurus, entails serenity and can be attained by simple pleasures that promote bodily health and mental tranquility. Epicurus' ethical theory was based upon the Cyrenaic doctrine formulated by Aristippus. Aristippus was a student of Socrates. He advocated the hedonistic principle that pleasure is the supreme good. But the concept of the pleasant life of Epicurus and Cyrenaics differ widely. Epicurus gave importance and emphasized the peace of mind, whereas Cyrenaic stressed the sensual pleasures.

In terms of general principles, they were in agreement. Both believe that people do what they believe will provide them with happiness while avoiding what they believe will cause them pain. He believes that a pleasant life is more desirable than a long life. He goes on to say that a wise man neither wants to flee life nor fears death because life neither offends him nor is death cruel. The Pleasant Life of Epicurus claims that the ultimate purpose of a human being is not a never-ending stream of intense sensual pleasures. It is a state of tranquility and serenity. He coined the word "ataraxia," which means "freedom from mental and physical suffering." "Nothing is made out of nothing," he states as one of his fundamental beliefs. "Nothing is obliterated into oblivion."

According to Epicurus' true philosophy, the fear of death, the inference of the gods, and the stern grip necessity have no basis in truth. Philosophy serves humanity and mankind. It is not only a necessary tool for living a happy life, but it is also one of the most enjoyable activities. He claims that humans have come to believe that death is nothing more than the loss of feeling. When the idea is grasped, it makes mortal life more enjoyable and removes the desire for immortality.

Epicurus' basic concepts for describing the essence of the universe are "nothing is made out of nothing" and "nothing is destroyed into nothing." Epicurus reaffirms that nature consists solely of atoms in motion in empty space; this Democritean doctrine supports his argument that natural causes operate globally. Epicurus tries to prove that soul is also mortal and corporeal. He argues everything is made up of material atoms. This applies not only to inanimate and living bodies but also to the soul. He is of the view that atoms of the soul are exceedingly fine. Sensation occurs in the human body through which the souls are encased within the body. He attacks the fear of death by explaining and analyzing what comes after death. Man becomes incapable of sensation when the atoms of the soul leave the body after death. So humans can't experience pain when they die or after death. The atoms of the soul are in themselves indestructible. So humans should take comfort when they come to know it and not to fear.

The ultimate purpose of a human being, according to Epicurus, is not a never-ending stream of sensual pleasures. Ataraxia is a state of mind and body that is free of both mental and physical pain. The good life's peace and repose are within reach. People should keep their desires to a minimum, and it's also important to differentiate between normal and vital desires and artificial desires. Artificial desires for money, wealth, excitement, prestige, fame, power, and strength are unnecessary for health and tranquillity and are also harmful to them. The fulfilment of natural desires leads to happiness by preserving bodily health and mental peace, and freedom from pain. Philosophy and the pursuit of knowledge will help

one understand their goodness.

*Katha Upanisad* enquires deeply into the mystery of life and death. It explains the eternal mystery beyond life through a conversation between *Yama* and *Nachiketa*. It explains man ripens like corn and born again like corn. It also describes the path of joy and wisdom. It emphasizes *Atman* is a supreme force, and it never dies. The idea is beyond *purush*; there is nothing and beyond the spirit in man is the spirit of the universe.

*Katha Upanisad* belongs to the Black Yajurveda of the Atharva Veda. Yama teaches Nachiketa the Atmic wisdom. Nachiketa seeks everlasting self-knowledge.

You teach me, Death, about the heavenly fire, Tell it to me, who have faith,  
The heavenly worlds share in immortality, and I choose this by way of my  
second boon (Roebuck. 316)

Epictetus was a Roman Stoic who developed his philosophy from the teaching of Zeno. The stoics understand that the God and the cosmic intelligence are the vital force. The vital force creates all things in the universe which are internally connected, and the cosmic intelligence governs the universe from within. Pantheism is the basis of the stoics for the ethical insights of the conception of the God. All human beings possess the ability to understand divine nature, and the good life refers to living in accord with it.

Epictetus showed more interest in metaphysics than Roman stoic and more loyal than stoics to the original position of *Stoa*. His speculation about the nature of things is more pious than probing, and he was more religious than philosophical and more practical than theoretical. The conditions of moral life and its limitation are already given in human nature. People are satisfied, he claims, when they admire virtue for its own sake. He explains further that virtuous people pursue reachable things and avoid things that are beyond them. People experience a lot of unhappiness because they desire what they cannot obtain, so wise individuals limit their desires and keep matters within their control. The passions and desires that cannot be satisfied are called "apathetic", and intelligent individuals do not feel about them. Their principle is whatever is beyond the control of an individual is irrelevant to ethics.

The Sanathana Hindu Dharma expresses similar thoughts (according to the discourse of HH Kanchi Shankaracharya Chandrasekharendra Saraswati). It states that the universal law has been in effect since the beginning of time. All in the universe is governed by this law. If it is disturbed, chaos and unhappiness will ensue. There is a statute for all of them and for everything. To be worthy, humans must possess specific attributes and virtues. Dharma, or ethics, is the law that governs human behaviour. Human beings are born with knowledge, and they violate their dharma by using it. Human beings can only live peacefully if they follow this rule for the sake of all humanity and mankind. Humans have an insatiable desire for something or another, assuming that it will please them. Humans who are only concerned about their material needs continue to break the dharma. They never know that only dharma will bring them joy, happiness, and a happy life.

Both the philosophies establish the fact that ethical values and principles are universal, whether they are from the Orient or the Occident. It also proves that great minds think alike, and significant religious and philosophical traditions have a common core, namely, human welfare, which includes happiness and peace.

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