

The Nature of God

Read the following quotes and then have a go at the activities at the end.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1)

10 Commandments: Worship no Gods but Me: Do not worship idols: Do not blaspheme: Keep the Sabbath day holy: Honour your parents: Do not murder: Do not commit adultery: Do not steal: Do not lie: Do not be jealous (Exodus 20)

I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, says the LORD; (Jeremiah 21:14)

Lord's Prayer: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-15)

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. (Matthew 25:35)

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16)

Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)

¹¹ Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."²² But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a

robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ ‘Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” ³¹ Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.””

Activities

1. Produce a mind map to show what these quotes suggest about God. For example, God is a creator, God is loving etc
2. For each idea on your mind map try to think of a reason why this might not be true. Try to think of a different reason for each one and you cannot just say that God does not exist! That is too easy!!!!

What is Ethics?

Read the following information and then have a go at the activities at the end

Ethics is the philosophical study of good and bad, right and wrong. Theories about right and wrong are described as being either relative or absolute.

Absolute Ethics:

- Believe in moral truths that are fixed for all time and all people
- Believe that moral actions are right or wrong in themselves, irrespective of circumstance, culture or opinion.
- Deontological thinkers are concerned with acts and not consequences.
- Plato, believing that goodness itself really exists beyond this world
- Absolutism provides a fixed ethical code to measure actions
- Absolutism gives clear guidelines for behaviour
- The UN declaration of Human Rights suggests a set of absolutes that apply to all people no matter where they live

However:

- Absolutism cannot take into account the circumstances or situations

- Absolutism can seem intolerant of cultural diversity in the way European nations were in the past (slavery)

Relative Ethics:

- Believe that moral truth varies depending on culture, time, place and religion.
- Believe that there is no fixed objective moral reality – or if there is, that it cannot be discovered
- Believe that moral are subjective – subject to culture, religion, time and place
- Protagoras “man is the measure of all things”
- J L Mackie, there are no objective values- different culture’s ethics are evidence against the existence of moral absolutes and people participate in different ways of living.
- Relativism explains the existence of different values that people hold.
- Relativism supports cultural diversity
- Relativism stops one culture being dominant
- Relativism is a flexible ethical system that can accommodate the wide diversity found in the modern world.

However;

- The existence of different views does not meant that they are all equal
- The Nazi culture was morally wrong, and not ‘right for them’
- Cultural relativists are unable to criticise a different culture for example if wife beating is acceptable then relativists would have to accept it as morally right
- If relativism was adopted universally then it would become a moral absolute which is self contradictory!

Activities:

1. Why might absolute ethics be better than relative ethics? Explain your ideas.
2. Why might relative ethics be better than absolute ethics? Explain your ideas.
3. Which is better relative or absolute ethics? Why?

Buddhist Ethical Teachings

Read the following three Quotes and then attempt the activities at the end

Karaniya Metta Sutta (Sutta Nipatta 1:8)

Who seeks to promote his welfare,
Having glimpsed the state of perfect peace,
Should be able, honest and upright,
Gentle in speech, meek and not proud.

Contented, he ought to be easy to support,
Not over-busy, and simple in living.
Tranquil his senses, let him be prudent,
And not brazen, nor fawning on families.

Also, he must refrain from any action
That gives the wise reason to reprove him.

(Then let him cultivate the thought:)
May all be well and secure,
May all beings be happy!

Whatever living creatures there be,
Without exception, weak or strong,
Long, huge or middle-sized,
Or short, minute or bulky,

Whether visible or invisible,
And those living far or near,
The born and those seeking birth,
May all beings be happy!

Let none deceive or decry
His fellow anywhere;
Let none wish others harm
In resentment or in hate.

Just as with her own life
A mother shields from hurt
Her own son, her only child,
Let all-embracing thoughts
For all beings be yours.

Cultivate an all-embracing mind of love
For all throughout the universe,
In all its height, depth and breadth —
Love that is untroubled
And beyond hatred or enmity.

As you stand, walk, sit or lie,
So long as you are awake,
Pursue this awareness with your might:
It is deemed the Divine State here.

Holding no more to wrong beliefs,
With virtue and vision of the ultimate,
And having overcome all sensual desire,
Never in a womb is one born again.

Explanation:

This sutta is also called the hymn of universal love. It shows that a Buddhist should wish all beings well, live simply (not spending lots of money) and not get angry or harm anything (including the environment).

It suggests that love is universal and is the one thing which will help a person to achieve Nibbana.

Diamond Sutta 4

Even the Most Beneficent Practices are Relative

Furthermore, Subhuti, in the practice of charity a Bodhisattva should be detached. That is to say, he should practice charity without regard to appearances; without regard to sound, odour, touch, flavour or any quality. Subhuti, thus should the Bodhisattva practice charity without attachment. Wherefore? In such a case his merit is incalculable.

Explanation:

A bodhisattva should be perfectly charitable and not give to gain any kind of reward. If they do give without expecting a reward they will be rewarded anyway and this reward is enlightenment.

Buddhists would try to behave like this so that they are acting like a Bodhisattva, they hope it will either lead to enlightenment or even just a better rebirth.

Diamond Sutta 23

The Practice of Good Works Purifies the Mind

Furthermore, Subhuti, This is altogether everywhere, without differentiation or degree; therefore it is called "Consummation of Incomparable Enlightenment." It is straightly attained by freedom from separate personal selfhood and by cultivating all kinds of goodness.

Explanation:

This suggests that enlightenment comes from giving up being selfish and practicing being good.

"Cultivating all kinds of goodness" often means develop good thoughts, words and deeds. By thinking speaking and acting in a good way then a person becomes a good person. A person cannot do just one of these.

Activities

1. Buddhism is known for using meditation to find peace of mind. How do you think a Buddhist would use meditation to help them to behave morally?
2. Why might good moral behaviour be important in finding peace of mind?