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DEONTOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS ETHICS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MORAL DUTY ACROSS MAJOR RELIGIONS

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Abstract: This study explores deontological ethics within major world religions, focusing on how principles of duty-based morality manifest in religious doctrines. By examining primary religious texts and teachings, this research highlights how deontological concepts shape moral behavior, outlining key similarities and differences in their ethical frameworks. This comparative analysis provides insights into the role of duty and obligation in religious ethics, suggesting that deontological approaches contribute to both moral coherences within individual faiths and ethical dialogue across traditions.

Introduction

Deontology, originating from the Greek word *deon* (duty), refers to ethical systems that prioritize adherence to rules or duties as the basis of moral action (Alexander & Moore, 2016). Unlike consequentialist theories that focus on the outcomes of actions, deontology emphasizes the intentions behind actions and the importance of following moral laws, regardless of consequences. Within religious studies, deontology provides a lens for analyzing how religious traditions define moral obligations and rules that guide believers' actions.

This study examines how deontological principles are reflected in the doctrines of major world religions: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism. Each tradition incorporates unique moral frameworks grounded in duty, suggesting that religious ethics often align with deontological approaches.

How do deontological ethics shape the moral guidelines within Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism? Deontological ethics are central to the moral frameworks of various religions, grounded in divine commandments and doctrinal teachings that prescribe specific duties and obligations (Audi, 2011).

Method

This study employs a comparative textual analysis approach to examine key religious texts and interpretative works from each tradition. Following methodologies in comparative religious ethics (Fasching & deChant, 2011), the analysis includes three primary steps:

1. Selection of Texts: Key scriptures, such as the Bible (Christianity), the Quran (Islam), the Torah (Judaism), and the Bhagavad Gita (Hinduism), are selected based on their teachings related to duty and moral obligations.

2. Thematic Analysis: Using qualitative analysis methods, themes related to duty, command, and moral law are identified. Examples include the Ten Commandments in Christianity and Judaism, the Five Pillars in Islam, and Hinduism's dharmaprinciples.

3. Comparative Analysis: Variations in the conceptualization of duty across these religions are explored, with particular focus on understanding the commonalities and distinctions in how each religion articulates moral actions as duties rather than consequence-based decisions (Wainwright, 2005).

Results

The analysis reveals that deontological principles are present in each tradition, though their interpretations differ significantly.

- Christianity and Judaism: Both traditions emphasize adherence to divine commandments as a deontological framework for moral behavior. Christianity integrates Old Testament laws with Jesus's teachings on love, compassion, and forgiveness, reflecting a dual emphasis on obedience and relational duty (Lewis, 2001). Judaism's mitzvot (commandments), including the Ten Commandments, serve as explicit divine directives that bind adherents to a covenant with God (Solomon, 2002). These commandments encompass both ritual and ethical duties, emphasizing the Jewish concept of halacha, or "the path" (Neusner, 2004).

- Islam: In Islam, deontological ethics are evident in the concept of fard (obligatory actions) and haram (prohibitions), outlined in the Quran and Hadith. The Five Pillars of Islam, which include shahada (faith), salat (prayer), zakat (charity), sawm (fasting), and hajj (pilgrimage), represent duties that every Muslim is expected to fulfill (Esposito, 2005). These practices reinforce obedience to Allah's will, underscoring the idea that adherence to divine commandments is a primary moral duty (Kamali, 2003).

- Hinduism: Hindu ethics reflect deontological principles through the concept of dharma, which denotes duties and responsibilities based on one's social status, life stage, and context (Klostermaier, 2007). The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes the importance of fulfilling one's dharma as a path to spiritual progress, with moral duties articulated through the caste system and stages of life (Koller, 2004). Unlike the more rigid structures in Abrahamic religions, Hindu ethics provide flexibility, allowing duties to adapt to individual circumstances.

Discussion

The findings indicate that, although each religion incorporates deontological principles, the application of duty-based ethics varies significantly:

- Interpretational Flexibility: While Christianity and Judaism emphasize adherence to divine commands as non-negotiable duties, Hinduism's dharma allows for more interpretive flexibility, demonstrating a contextual approach to deontological ethics. This adaptability aligns with Hinduism's emphasis on individual responsibility and self-awareness in ethical decision-making (Sharma, 2011).

- Covenantal Duty and Obedience: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam emphasize a form of covenantal duty, where moral obligations are directly tied to obedience to God's will. In these religions, failure to adhere to divine laws is often seen as a breach of faith, suggesting that deontological ethics serve as a means of maintaining religious identity and community integrity (K?ng, 2004).

- Comparative Ethical Insight: Understanding deontological ethics across these religions reveals both universal values and unique ethical expressions. This comparative analysis contributes to interreligious dialogue by highlighting shared concepts of duty and differing approaches to moral obligations. While all four traditions view duty as integral to ethical life, the role of duty varies from strict commandment adherence to context-based duties, reflecting diverse interpretations of what constitutes moral action.

Conclusion

Deontological ethics play a significant role in shaping moral decision-making across religious traditions, reinforcing the importance of duty, obedience, and moral law in guiding adherents' actions. Although specific duties and interpretations differ, the commitment to duty-based morality provides a universal foundation for ethical behavior

in a pluralistic world. Future research may further explore how these ethical principles impact contemporary social issues and inform the development of interfaith ethical frameworks.

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