



January 1997

### Book Reviews: "Dilemmas of Life and Death" and "Divine Nature"

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#### Recommended Citation

Coward, Harold (1997) "Book Reviews: "Dilemmas of Life and Death" and "Divine Nature"," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 10, Article 18.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1164>

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missionaries who hoped for the conversion and "enlightenment" of native peoples. Many Hindus were attracted to the new Western education as well as to the religion and ethics of Christianity. Some were converted and baptized; many seemed to be converted and later changed their minds and became fierce adversaries of Christianity. In the process, Śaiva Hinduism was revitalized and changed. Old elements were brought forward and reformulated, new elements were adapted from their protagonists.

Hindu apologists became adept in a form of Biblical criticism which seems to have been a blend of Christian Apologetics and traditional Hindu religious debate. To illustrate the nature and development of this *apologia* the authors have chosen major figures and examined their history and methodology in great detail. According to Capapatti, the Śaivite revivalist who is quoted at the beginning of this review, there were three giants who slew the Bible. Muttukumārak Kavirāyar first made the Bible "tremble", Ārumuka Nāvalar then "knocked it unconscious", and the *coup de grace* was delivered by a third critic, C. W. Tāmōtaram Pillai who struck it so hard that it now "lies dead". Two other apologists carried the arguments further, Caṅkara Paṇṭitar (1829-1870) and Poṇṇambalam

Ramanathan (1851-1930). Of these Caṅkara in particular used concepts from the sophisticated Śaiva Siddhānta in his critique of the Bible and Christianity. The detailed portrayal of these apologists illuminates both the intent and methodologies of the nineteenth-century Śaivite renewal in Śrī Lanka.

This book is an important contribution to the continuing study of regional Hindu revitalization movements. The bibliography covers a vast range of historical and literary material which provides a rich resource for further studies of the period.

It is not an easy book to read, though well worth the effort. The volume and variety of material encompassed is daunting. It does "map" the period, but it would be helpful to the reader to have an "insert" here and there to illuminate where we have been and how we got there! Students of the "Hindu Renaissance" who are unfamiliar with Tamil may find some difficulty with Tamil language, place names, family and caste designations, and methods of transliteration – inevitable challenges in regional studies.

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***Dilemmas of Life and Death: Hindu Ethics in North American Context.*** S. Cromwell Crawford. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995, ix+233 pp.

and

***Divine Nature: A Spiritual Perspective on the Environmental Crisis.*** Michael A. Cremo and Mukunda Goswami. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1995, xx+108 pp.

THE STUDY OF ethics in the Western world from the time of the Greeks right up to two decades ago has been focused on issues that were almost entirely human-centred or God-centred. Thus, for most of

its intellectual history the Western world, with its Greek and Christian leadership, has paid little attention to the ethical responsibilities humans may have in the interaction with plants, animals, earth, air, and water –

the very things that sustain us. Only in recent years, when our population explosion and our technological development have led us to use the non-human resources of nature at unsustainable levels, have Westerners begun to look to religious and secular thought for ethics to constrain and guide our use of nature. While the ancient Indian religions of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism have developed clear ethical guidelines for our human engagement with nature, Hinduism, especially, has been slow in applying its ethics to the contemporary population, consumption, ecology problematic. These two books offer a good beginning.

Cromwell Crawford's *Dilemmas of Life and Death* is a significant new contribution. It makes good use of the earlier *Hindu-Ethics: Purity, Abortion, and Euthanasia* volume that I wrote with Julius Lipner and Katherine Young in 1989 (Albany: SUNY Press). While our work was strong in its analysis of classical texts for their theoretical teaching on ethics, it had little discussion of practical applied issues and did not touch the question of the environment at all. Crawford's book fills the gaps and more. Crawford starts from a careful analysis of the ethical issues in their modern North American context and then critically relates Hindu ethical principles to the problems. He has separate chapters on abortion, suicide, euthanasia, and the environment. In each chapter he begins with a detailed analysis of the problem in its contemporary Western context and then goes on to discuss in an applied fashion the ethical wisdom that the Hindu tradition has to offer. For Indian diaspora communities in North America, this book offers important guidance on the difficult ethical challenges encountered in every-day life. But it is also a book for non-Asians in that it offers a needed alternative to the Western way of thinking and its assumption that there is a gulf between humans and other forms of life.

In the chapter on abortion, the author begins with Lipner's analysis of the ancient texts, especially the Upaniṣads, but adds

important material from the Satapatha Brahmana, and *smṛti* texts and the Ayurveda. He also engages contemporary legal discussion, such as the Indian Pregnancy Bill of 1971. Crawford's treatment of suicide carefully explores the contemporary Western dilemma and then brings to bear the Hindu answer in excellent fashion. The section on Ram Mohan Roy's view is especially good as is the discussion of *sati*. Crawford shows that the Hindu response to the question of suicide offers helpful openings not present in Jewish, Christian, legal, or medical opinion. In the Hindu view, once one's obligations to society have been met then, as a *sannyāsin* with insight, one may freely choose suicide as the supreme act of renunciation. But Hinduism also has a strong thrust toward suicide prevention for those who would take such an action of out immaturity, ignorance, addiction to drugs or alcohol, or as a result of coercion by others – recognizing that in such cases suicide attempts are usually calls for help and not an autonomous reaching toward the realization of one's higher self. This relevant, well-written chapter offers an important alternative to contemporary Western thinking and should be read by medical and legal specialists. Crawford's fine discussion of the ethics of suicide leads nicely into his equally solid consideration of euthanasia. After a review of Western views on the question, including the Greco-Roman, Jewish, Christian, and secular traditions, he summarizes the very different Hindu attitudes to active and other forms of euthanasia. The Hindu tradition supports the right to suicide under the principles of autonomy and rational choice, but only as a *religious choice* in the pursuit of the realization of the higher self. Crawford shows how such a choice can be morally responsible given the Hindu concepts of *karma* and rebirth, and the ultimate religious goal of *mokṣa* or release from rebirth. Classical Hindu sources as well as modern thinkers such as Gandhi are canvassed by the author and their teachings effectively related to current case

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problems. This is a nuanced and sophisticated discussion of the Hindu contribution to this complex contemporary problem that medical technology is making more difficult.

Crawford's final chapter on "The Ethics of the Environment" is a solid treatment of the subject after a detailed and factually accurate analysis of the various dimensions of the problem (biodiversity, global warming, pollution, waste, overpopulation, and the nuclear threat). Crawford details the Hindu response focusing on its teaching that all of creation is a manifestation of Brahman (the Divine) and therefore has ethical standing. After reviewing Vedic teaching on nature and especially its notion of *ṛta* or cosmic order and the Upaniṣadic teaching that all this (creation – including oneself) is Brahman, the author effectively sieves the Sankhya-Yoga and Vedānta schools for their wisdom on the environment. He concludes that the principle of *interconnectedness* present in the notions of *ṛta*, karma, and the transcendent unity of everything in Brahman, offers a strong environmental ethic. This wisdom is then applied to the environmental challenges identified in the first half of the chapter.

I particularly appreciated Crawford's careful and sensitive grappling with the problem of overpopulation in the context of Hinduism's traditional pro-natal stance and its emphasis on sons. He is very critical of the latter and argues that the *śrāddha* rites are magical superstitions not supported by Hindu philosophy and therefore should be done away with – especially because of the discrimination against daughters such rites induce. Crawford comments, "In today's world of exploding populations there is a more ethical way to affirm the continuity between generations ... by performing good deeds – the most dharmic of which may be limiting the size of the family" and honouring daughters (pp.198-9). Crawford concludes that the bottom line of Hindu environmental ethics is that harmony between humans and nature is already there, we have only to discover it. "Since Brahman

and Nature are one, we must see the Supreme Being in the whole world, and the whole world in him" (p.202). On the whole this is one of the better treatments of the Hindu contribution to environmental ethics. It displays solid scholarship and deals head-on with the hard questions. My only regret is that the author did not include the excellent contributions of Hindu feminist scholars in his analysis.

The second book, *Divine Nature*, focuses only on the environmental crisis and offers a Hindu response from the ISKCON perspective. It too is well done, on a more popular level. Designed for lay readers, this small but solid volume by Michael Cremo and Mukunda Goswami also does a good job of getting the scientific facts straight and not dodging the difficult questions. In a thumbnail sketch, chapter 1 documents the current ecological crisis with sections on wildlife, rain forests, soil loss, garbage, toxic waste, air and water pollution, etc. Following Jeremy Rifkin's *Beyond Beef*, the analysis then centres on meat eating as the major problem of the modern West and offers the Hindu solution of a vegetarian diet together with a purification of consciousness as a simple but attractive solution to the global crisis. Nor is the solution left at a purely theological level. Throughout the book impressive examples are offered as to how ISKCON individuals are operationalizing the Hindu answer with impressive results. This is especially evident in the more than forty self-sustaining rural communities ISKCON has established world-wide on the principles of simplicity, cow and ox power, and meatless diets. Although it is written from an ISKCON advocacy position, it is well done and, together with Crawford's volume for added breadth and depth, could be used in the classroom. The many photos and attractive design of the ISKCON volume would make a good book for lay study groups.

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