Early Buddhism 3: Ethics



Word of the Buddha

- Dīgha Nikāya
- Majjhima Nikāya
- Saṁyutta Nikāya
- Aṅguttara Nikāya

Early & late Buddhism

- Ethic of intention vs. ethic of rules
- Many causes vs. kamma is all
- Kamma is malleable vs. kamma is deterministic
- Kamma during life vs. kamma at death

Scope

- Purpose of ethics
- Basis of ethics
- Practice of ethics

Purpose of ethics?

- Happiness
- Rebirth
- Awakening



Why ethical theory?

- Intuition and reason.
- Ethical dilemmas or lack of clarity.
- Positive ethics.
- Can be done

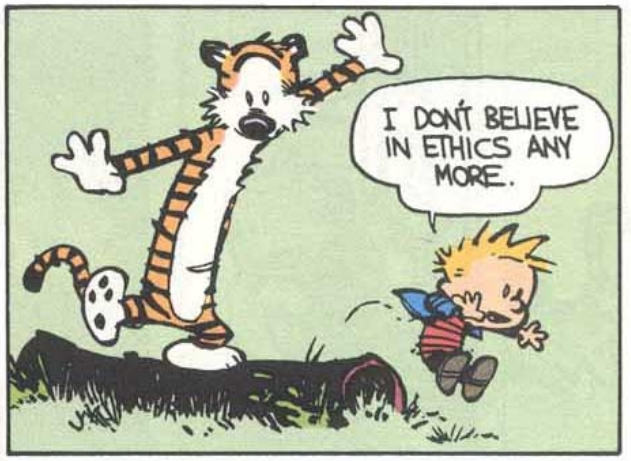
Intention—the root of ethics

- The good of oneself and others
- Motivation
- Ethics not black or white
- Basis of all ethical decisions & rules
- The role of precepts

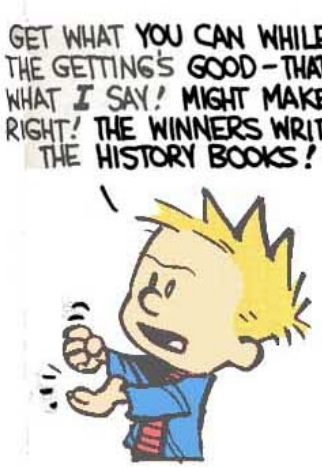

STOP!" said Angulimala to Buddha and he

Calvin and Hobbes

by Watterson















Happiness & intention

- If the intention is good, happiness results
- If happiness results, the intention was good
- We can know what happiness is
- We can know what good intentions are

Precepts (1)

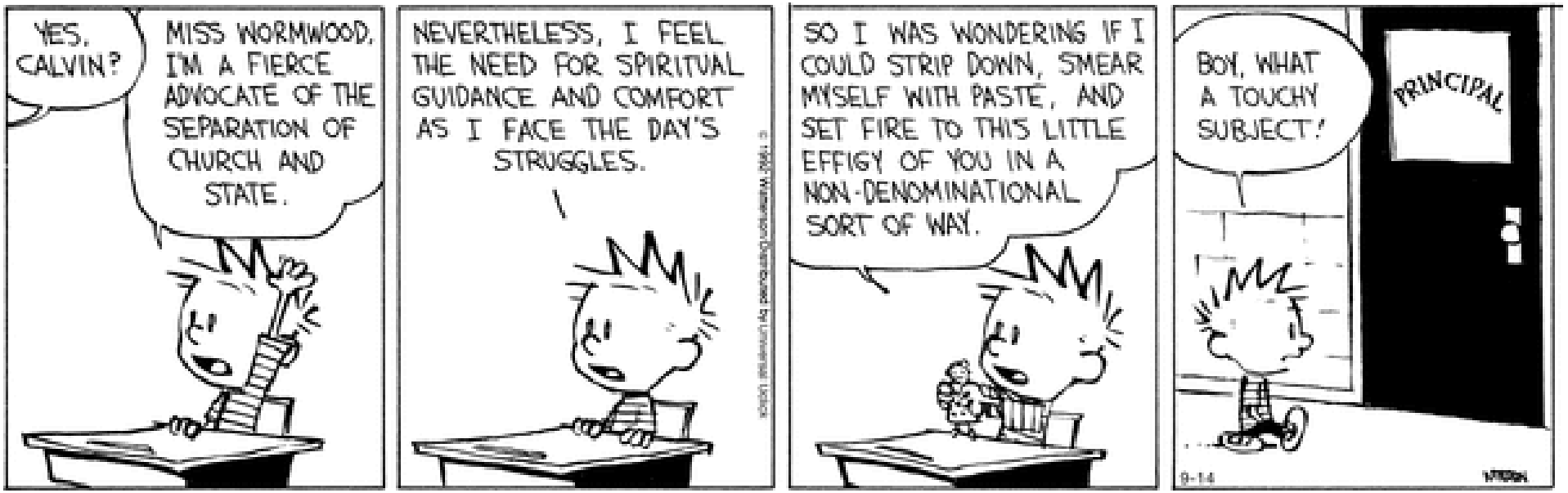
Body

- Not to kill
- Not to steal
- Not to betray partner
- Other ethical transgressions mentioned include drinking, pedophilia, addiction to gambling, etc.

Precepts (2)

Speech that is not

- Lying
- Backbiting
- Harsh
- Stupid


YES, CALVIN?
MISS WORMWOOD, I'M A FIERCE ADVOCATE OF THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE.
NEVERTHELESS, I FEEL THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE AND COMFORT AS I FACE THE DAY'S STRUGGLES.
SO I WAS WONDERING IF I COULD STRIP DOWN, SMEAR MYSELF WITH PASTE, AND SET FIRE TO THIS LITTLE EFFIGY OF YOU IN A NON-DENOMINATIONAL SORT OF WAY.
BOY, WHAT A TOUCHY SUBJECT!
PRINCIPAL
9-14

Precepts (3)

Mental behavior that is not

- Covetous
- Violent
- Pernicious view

Purpose of Ethics

- Live happily and without harming
- Lead to a good rebirth
- Foundation for meditation and awakening

Purpose of Ethics (2)

- Each precept specifically relates to obstacles to be overcome in meditation.
  - Non-killing → no hatred
  - Non-stealing, adultery → no greed
  - Not drinking, lying → no delusion

Purpose of Ethics (3)

- The most detailed presentation of monastic ethics in the Suttas comes in the gradual training.
- This includes the basic precepts and many more details, and covers livelihood.
- A comparable teaching of ethics for lay people is the Sigalovāda Sutta (DN31

Discussion topics

- How can we relate ethical choices to happiness?
- Is it possible to judge the happiness of another?
- Do we always feel happy if we do the right thing?

Discussion topic (1)

- What distinguishes Buddhist ethics?
- What ethical problems trouble me?
- Can my study of Early Buddhism help?

Should drug use be legal?

- What do the precepts say?
- What is the relation between what is right and what is legal?
- Do drugs make you happy?
- What kinds of harm come from drug use?
- What kinds of harm come from criminalization?
- What would happen if drugs were legalized?
- Should we distinguish between different kinds of drugs?