

David Biale

EMANUEL RINGELBLUM DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR
OF JEWISH HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

Lawrence S. Cunningham

JOHN A. BRIAN PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, EMERITUS
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Wendy Doniger

MIRCEA ELIADE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE PROFESSOR
OF THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Donald S. Lopez, Jr.

ARTHUR E. LINK DISTINGUISHED UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR
OF BUDDHIST AND TIBETAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Jane Dammen McAuliffe

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

James Robson

PROFESSOR OF EAST ASIAN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF

WORLD RELIGIONS



HINDUISM

Wendy Doniger

JACK MILES, *General Editor*

DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND
RELIGIOUS STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE



W · W · NORTON & COMPANY
NEW YORK · LONDON

Parikshi: puh-rik'-shee
 pinda: pin'-duh
 Prajapati: pruh-jah'-puh-tee
 pravaha: pruh-vah'-huh
 Punarvasu: poo'-nar-vuh-soo
 rajas: rah'-jus
 saman: sah'-mun
 Sankhya: sahn'-kyuh
 sattva: sut-vuh
 Sharaloman: shuh-ruh-loh'-mun
 shuklapaksha: shook'-luh-puk'-shuh

Soma: soh'-muh
 Sumeru: soo-may'-roo
 sutra: soo'-truh
 Svadha: svuh-dah'
 tamas: tuh'-mus
 tantra: tun'-truh
 Vamaka: vah'-muh-kuh
 Varyovida: vahr-yo'-vih-duh
 Vasishtha: vuh-sish'-tuh
 Vayu: vah'-yoo
 Yama: yuh'-muh

MANU

There are many dharma texts (*dharma-shastras*), but the one that was most prominent in ancient India was by the author called Manu. This text was made even more prominent by the British when they ruled India and disastrously attempted to establish their legal codes on the basis of Manu. For Hindus cited Manu's text not as a practical guide (there were local village councils to offer legal advice) but as an ideal system, a philosophy of law. Manu himself was a mythological character said to be the first human being, like Adam (human beings are called *manavas* in derivation from his name). Indeed, the Puranas insist that there is a long chain of Manus, since a new Manu is born every time the world is re-created after the doomsday at the end of the Kali Age ("Puranas," p. 221; "The Four Ages," p. 228). The text that we have was the product of many hands, refining the verses over many centuries, but attributed to Manu.

The *Laws of Manu* (in Sanskrit, the *Manavadharmashastra* or *Manusmriti*, informally known as *Manu*) consists of 2,685 verses on topics as varied—but actually intimately interrelated in Hindu thought—as the social obligations and duties of the various castes and of individuals in different stages of life; the proper way for a just king to rule and to punish transgressors in his kingdom; the appropriate social relations between men and women of different castes, and between husbands and wives in the privacy of the home; birth, death, and taxes; cosmogony, karma, and rebirth; ritual practices; error and restoration or redemption; and such details of everyday life as settling traffic accidents, adjudicating disputes with boatmen, and atoning for sexual improprieties with one's teacher's wife.

The text is, in sum, an encompassing representation of life in the world—how it is, and how it should be lived. Probably composed sometime around the beginning of the Common Era or slightly earlier, *Manu* is a pivotal text of the dominant form of Hinduism as it emerged historically and at least in part in reaction to its religious and ideological predecessors and competitors. More compendiously than any other text, it provides a direct line to the most influential construction of the Hindu religion and Indian society as a whole. No modern study of Hindu family life, psychology, concepts of the body, sex, relationships between humans and animals, attitudes toward money and material possessions, politics, law, caste, purification and pollution, ritual, social practice and ideals, and world renunciation and worldly goals can ignore *Manu*.

TO EAT OR NOT TO EAT MEAT

Among many other subjects, the *dharma-shastras*, like the texts that precede them, wrestle with the question of vegetarianism. At first, Manu reflects the Vedic view of limited retribution for meat eaters in the Other World ("Bhrigu's Journey," p. 101), but then he switches to the Upanishadic view of transmigration ("Transmigration," p. 114) and to vegetarianism, including an expression of sympathy for the suffering of slaughtered animals. In one verse, he seems actually to punish a person for *not* eating meat at the proper time and to encourage people to eat meat—if they follow the rules; but elsewhere he describes meat eating as an addiction that some people cannot give up entirely. Clearly Manu has sympathy for the vegetarian, with his veggie cutlets, though also for the addicted carnivore. But since it is traditional to give the opponent's view first, and then one's own; and since Manu sanctions meat eating in only the first three verses and devotes the rest of his text to vegetarianism, we can assume that his own sympathies are with the vegetarians.

The commentators explain that a person should merely refrain from eating the meat specifically prohibited by the teachings. One verse implies that it is better to eat all sorts of foods except meat (or except certain meats) than to subsist on hermit food alone, and another verse implies that certain worldly activities are permitted under specified circumstances, but that, even then, it is better to refrain from them. Indeed, Manu suggests that it is, perhaps, better to refrain from engagement in life in general (*pravrtti*), which is here, as often, explicitly contrasted with a word that means disengagement (*nivrtti*) from life in general. The acts of engagement, which include all rituals and both moral and immoral acts, prolong worldly existence, either in heaven or in a good rebirth. The acts of disengagement, which include the pursuit of knowledge, meditation, and renunciation, curtail worldly existence and lead to *moksha*. Manu cares deeply for both of these goals.

Laws of Manu 5.27–56

Now I will tell the rule for eating and not eating meat.

You may eat meat that has been consecrated by the sprinkling of water, or when priests¹ want to have it, or when you are properly engaged in a ritual, or when your breath of life is in danger. The Lord of Creatures² fashioned all this (universe) to feed the breath of life, and everything moving and stationary is the food of the breath of life. Those that do not move are food for those that move, and those that have no fangs are food for those with fangs; those that have no hands are food for those with hands; and cowards are the food of the brave. The eater who eats creatures with the breath of life who are to be eaten does nothing bad, even if he does it day after day; for the Ordainer himself created creatures with the breath of life, some to be eaten and some to be eaters. 'Eating meat is (right) for the sacrifice': this is traditionally known as a rule of the gods. But doing it on

TRANSLATED BY Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty and Brian K. Smith.

1. That is, Brahmins.

2. A name of the Creator, Prajapati, also called the Ordainer and the Self-existent One. Here, he

seems to sanction meat eating in general, while elsewhere he seems to limit it to sacrifices.

occasions other than this is said to be the rule of ogres.³ Someone who eats meat, after honoring the gods and ancestors, when he has bought it, or killed it himself, or has been given it by someone else, does nothing bad.

A twice-born person⁴ who knows the rules should not eat meat against the rules, even in extremity;⁵ for if he eats meat against the rules, after his death he will be helplessly eaten by them (that he ate). The guilt of someone who kills wild animals to sell them for money is not so great, after his death, as that of someone who eats meat for no (religious) purpose. But when a man who is properly engaged in a ritual does not eat meat, after his death he will become a sacrificial animal during twenty-one rebirths. A priest should never eat sacrificial animals that have not been transformed by Vedic verses; but with the support of the obligatory rule, he may eat them when they have been transformed by Vedic verses. If he has an addiction (to meat), let him make a sacrificial animal out of clarified butter or let him make a sacrificial animal out of flour; but he should never wish to kill a sacrificial animal for no (religious) purpose.

As many hairs as there are on the body of the sacrificial animal that he kills for no (religious) purpose here on earth, so many times will he, after his death, suffer a violent death in birth after birth. The Self-existent one himself created sacrificial animals for sacrifice; sacrifice is for the good of this whole (universe); and therefore killing in a sacrifice is not killing. Herbs, sacrificial animals, trees, animals (other than sacrificial animals), and birds who have been killed for sacrifice win higher births again. On the occasion of offering the honey-mixture (to a guest), at a sacrifice, and in rituals in which the ancestors are the deities, and only in these circumstances, should sacrificial animals suffer violence, but not on any other occasion; this is what Manu has said.

A twice-born person who knows the true meaning of the Vedas and injures sacrificial animals for these (correct) purposes causes both himself and the animal to go to the highest level of existence.⁶ A twice-born person who is self-possessed should never commit violence that is not sanctioned by the Veda, whether he is living in (his own) home, or with a guru, or in the wilderness, not even in extremity. The violence to those that move and those that do not move which is sanctioned by the Veda and regulated by the official restraints—that is known as non-violence,⁷ for the law comes from the Veda.

Whoever does violence to harmless creatures out of a wish for his own happiness does not increase his happiness anywhere, neither when he is alive nor when he is dead. But if someone does not desire to inflict on creatures with the breath of life the sufferings of being tied up and slaughtered, but wishes to do what is best for everyone, he experiences pleasure without end. A man who does no violence to anything obtains, effortlessly, what he thinks about, what he does, and what he takes delight in. You can never get

3. The text may be echoing the *Gita's* division of people into well-behaving godlike people and evil people who are like demons (Asuras, or here, ogres, *rakshasas*) ("Salvation and Damnation," p. 183). But it also may be saying that gods eat meat only during sacrifices, while ogres (*rakshasas*) eat flesh all the time.

4. The first three of the four classes or *varnas*—the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas—are called twice-born because they are reborn dur-

ing their initiation, a ritual denied to the fourth class, the Shudras. But Manu often uses the term "twice-born" to refer to Brahmins alone; context suggests the best reading in each case.

5. Extremity (*apad*) is the escape clause of the Shastras, a time of famine or war when *all* the rules are suspended and even cannibalism is allowed.

6. This may be *moksha* or the highest heaven.

7. *Ahimsa*, in contrast with violence, *himsa*.

meat without violence to creatures with the breath of life, and the killing of creatures with the breath of life does not get you to heaven; therefore you should not eat meat. Anyone who looks carefully at the source of meat, and at the tying up and slaughter of embodied creatures, should turn back from eating any meat.

A man who does not behave like the flesh-eating ghouls⁸ and does not eat meat becomes dear to people and is not tortured by diseases. The one who gives permission, the one who butchers, the one who slaughters, and the one who buys and sells, the one who prepares it, the one who serves it, and the eater—they are killers. No one is a greater wrong-doer than the person who, without reverence to the gods and the ancestors, wishes to make his flesh grow by the flesh of others. The man who offers a horse-sacrifice every year for a hundred years, and the man who does not eat meat, the two of them reap the same fruit of good deeds. A man who eats pure fruits and roots, or who eats what hermits eat, does not reap fruit (as great as that) of refraining from eating meat. 'He whose *meat* in this world do I eat will in the other world *me eat*.'⁹ Wise men say that this is why meat is called meat. There is nothing wrong in eating meat, nor in drinking wine, nor in sexual union, for this is how living beings engage in life, but disengagement yields great fruit.

8. Pishachas, low-ranking demons.

9. Meat is called *mamsa* because he (*sa*) eats me (*mam*) in the other world if I eat him now. A similar pun is made in Vedantic texts on a metaphor

for the soul, the swan (*hamsa*), said to express the identity of the individual soul (*atman*) and the world-soul (*brahman*): "I am he" (*aham sa*).

THE DEPENDENCE OF WOMEN

Manu's misogyny is notorious. He is not alone in ancient India in this view, but he takes pains to justify wide-ranging repressive practices against women.

Laws of Manu 9.1–18

I will tell the eternal duties of a man and wife who stay on the path of duty both in union and in separation. Men must make their women dependent day and night, and keep under their own control those who are attached to sensory objects. Her father guards her in childhood, her husband guards her in youth, and her sons guard her in old age. A woman is not fit for independence.¹ A father who does not give her away at the proper time² should be blamed, and a husband who does not have sex with her at the proper time should be blamed; and the son who does not guard his mother when her husband is dead should be blamed.

TRANSLATED BY Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty and Brian K. Smith.

1. This idea evidently appeals to Manu; he expresses it, in slightly different words, at 5.148 as well.

2. The "proper time" to have intercourse is dur-

ing a woman's fertile season, the days immediately after she has finished menstruating and taken a ritual bath to purify herself.

Women should especially be guarded against addictions, even trifling ones, for unguarded (women) would bring sorrow upon both families. Regarding this as the supreme duty of all the classes, husbands, even weak ones, try to guard their wives. For by zealously guarding his wife he guards his own descendants, practices, family, and himself, as well as his own duty. The husband enters the wife, becomes an embryo, and is born here on earth. That is why a wife is called a wife (*jaya*), because he is born (*jayate*) again in her.³ The wife brings forth a son who is just like the man she makes love with;⁴ that is why he should guard his wife zealously, in order to keep his progeny clean.

No man is able to guard women entirely by force, but they can be entirely guarded by using these means: he should keep her busy amassing and spending money, engaging in purification, attending to her duty, cooking food, and looking after the furniture. Women are not guarded when they are confined in a house by men who can be trusted to do their jobs well; but women who guard themselves by themselves are well guarded. Drinking, associating with bad people, being separated from their husbands, wandering about, sleeping,⁵ and living in other people's houses are the six things that corrupt women. Good looks do not matter to them, nor do they care about youth; 'A man!' they say, and enjoy sex with him, whether he is good-looking or ugly. By running after men like whores, by their fickle minds, and by their natural lack of affection these women are unfaithful to their husbands even when they are zealously guarded here. Knowing that their very own nature is like this, as it was born at the creation by the Lord of Creatures, a man should make the utmost effort to guard them. The bed and the seat, jewellery, lust, anger, crookedness, a malicious nature, and bad conduct are what Manu assigned to women.⁶ There is no ritual with Vedic verses for women; this is a firmly established point of law.⁷ For women, who have no virile strength and no Vedic verses, are falsehood; this is well established.

3. This is an old saying, that can be traced back to the Brahmanas (*Aitareya Brahmana* 7.13.6).

4. Some commentaries interpret the verb "make love" (*bhāj*) as a reference to the physical act of sexual intercourse: some take it as an indication that the woman's heart must be given to the man at the moment of union for the child to resemble him.

5. By "sleeping," the commentaries specify sleeping at the wrong time, too much, or in the day;

one might also add, in the wrong place.

6. Manu is not merely the primeval lawgiver but also the son of the Lord of Creatures, and hence a creator himself. He thus "assigns" these qualities to women in both capacities: making them originally, and recognizing them in his laws.

7. This means that this opinion is sanctioned by a Vedic source, such as *Taittiriya Samhita* 6.5.8.2, which closely resembles this verse.

RETRIBUTION IN REBIRTH

Manu interweaves the problem of killing and eating with the theme of rebirth in various classes of creatures, and the animals that are the problem are also the solution: various crimes, some having nothing to do with animals, are punished by animals. Thus an adulterous woman is to be paraded on a donkey and reborn as a jackal, and thieves are to be trampled to death by elephants, while cow killing and various other misdemeanors may be atoned for by keeping cows company and refraining from reporting them when they pilfer food and water (8.370–71, 9.30,

8.34, 11.109–15). The distinction between good and bad people is further interwoven into the discussion of rebirth as animals.

Along the route of transmigration, we encounter various sorts of creatures: gnomes (Guhyakas), the servants of Kubera, the god of wealth; anti-gods, Daityas, the sons of Diti; the Amenable (Sadhyas), auspicious inhabitants of heaven; ghosts (Pretas), also designating dead spirits or dead bodies; and priest-ogres (Brahma-Rakshasas), a particular kind of ogre—for ogres have castes and classes just like everyone else.

The human body undergoes various transformations in death: first it dissolves into the five elements of which it is constituted (earth, water, air, fire, and ether) (12.21)—indeed, a common euphemism for death is “to dissolve back into the five elements”—in order for the transmigrating soul to take on a special, indestructible body to be tortured when the dead person goes to Hell, where Yama rules. But then another body is made of the five elements, this time a body to enjoy heaven. And after that the dying person may enter any one of a number of human or animal bodies, depending on how s/he has lived.

Laws of Manu 12.16–81

After the death of men who have done bad deeds, another solid body, designed to be tortured, is born out of the five elements. When (the living souls) here have suffered with that body the tortures given by Yama, (the bodies) dissolve, each part distributed into its own basic element. And after he has suffered for the faults that are born of attachment to the sensory objects and that result in unhappiness, his stains are erased and he approaches the two who have great energy.¹ Those two together tirelessly watch his religious merit and his evil, for it is through being thoroughly intermingled with that pair² that he attains happiness or unhappiness here on earth and after death. If he mostly does right and only a little wrong, he is enveloped in those very elements and experiences happiness in heaven. But if he mostly indulges in wrong and only a little in right,³ he is abandoned by those elements and experiences the tortures given by Yama. And after the living soul has suffered the tortures given by Yama and his stains are erased, he enters those same five elements again, each part distributed (into its own element). Seeing with his very own intellect these levels of existence of the living soul that result from right and from wrong, a man should always set his mind-and-heart on what is right.

Know that lucidity, energy, and darkness⁴ are the three qualities of the self, through which the great one pervades and endures in all these existences, without exception. Whenever one of these qualities entirely prevails in a body, it makes the particular quality predominant in the embodied (soul). Lucidity is traditionally regarded as knowledge, darkness as ignorance, and energy as passion and hate; this is their form, that enters and pervades all living beings. Among these (three), a person should recognize

TRANSLATED BY Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty and Brian K. Smith.

1. “He” is the individual soul. The “two who have great energy” are probably the highest consciousness and the world-soul (*brahman*) or the individual soul (*atman*) and the world-soul.

2. The pair are almost certainly the dead man's religious merit (*dharma*) and evil.

3. “Right” and “wrong” here translate *dharma* and

adharma.

4. Lucidity or goodness (*sattva*), energy or passion (*rajas*), and darkness or torpor (*tamas*), the three qualities (*gunas*) of matter, according to Sankhya philosophy, are here also regarded as the qualities of the self (“The Two Paths,” p. 178).

as lucidity whatever he perceives in his self as full of joy, something of pure light which seems to be entirely at peace. But he should recognize as energy whatever is full of unhappiness and gives his self no joy, something which is hard to oppose and constantly seduces embodied creatures. And he should recognize as darkness whatever is full of confusion, undifferentiated, whatever is sensual and cannot be understood through reason or intelligence.

Now I will also explain, leaving nothing out, the highest, middle, and hindmost fruits that result from these three qualities.

The recitation of the Veda, inner heat, knowledge, purification, suppression of the sensory powers, the rites of duty, and meditation on the soul are the mark of the quality of goodness. Delight in enterprises, instability, persistence in doing what should not be done, and continual indulgence in the sensory objects are the mark of the quality of energy. Greed, sleep, incontinence, cruelty, atheism, losing jobs, habitually asking for hand-outs, and carelessness are the mark of the quality of darkness.

The following should be regarded as the marks of the qualities in a nutshell, in order, as each of these three qualities occurs in the three (time periods).

When someone who has done, or is doing, or is going to do an act feels ashamed, a learned man should realize that that whole act has the mark of the quality of darkness. When someone hopes to achieve great fame in this world by a certain act, but does not feel sorry if it fails, that should be known as (an act with the quality of) energy. But when he longs with his all to know something and is not ashamed when he does it, and his self is satisfied by it, that (act) has the mark of the quality of lucidity. Pleasure is the mark of darkness, profit is said to be the mark of energy, and religion the mark of lucidity, and each is better than the one before it.⁵

Now I will tell you, in a nutshell and in order, the transmigrations in this whole (universe) that one achieves by each of these qualities: people of lucidity become gods, people of energy become humans, and people of darkness always become animals; this is the three-fold level of existence. But it should be realized that this three-fold level of existence, which is dependent on the qualities, is itself three-fold: lowest, middle, and highest, according to the specific act and learning (of the actor).

Stationary objects, worms and bugs, fish, snakes, turtles, livestock, and wild animals are the hindmost level of existence to which darkness leads. Elephants, horses, servants, despised barbarians, lions, tigers, and boars are the middle level of existence to which darkness leads. Strolling actors, birds, deceiving men, ogres, and ghouls are the highest level of existence to which darkness leads.

Pugilists, wrestlers, dancers, arms-dealers, and addicted gamblers and drunks are the lowest level of existence to which energy leads. Kings, rulers, the personal priests of kings, and those obsessed with the battle of words are the middle level of existence to which energy leads. Centaurs, gnomes, genies, servants of the gods, and celestial nymphs are the whole of the highest level of existence to which energy leads.

5. The three human goals (*purusarthas*: pleasure [*kama*], profit [*artha*], and religion [*dharmā*]) ("The Brahmins Explain Everything in the Shastras," p. 200) are thus correlated with the three qualities.

Ascetics, renouncers, priests, the hosts of gods who fly about on celestial chariots, the constellations, and the anti-gods are the first level of existence to which lucidity leads. Sacrificers, sages, gods, the Vedas, the celestial lights, the years, the ancestors, and the Amenables are the second level of existence to which lucidity leads. Wise men say that Brahma, the creators of the whole universe, religion, the great one, and the unmanifest are the highest level of existence to which lucidity leads.

All that results from the three sorts of action has thus been explained, the entire system of transmigration for all living beings, which is divided into three types, each of which is further subdivided into three. Because of their addiction to their sensory powers and their failure to uphold religion, the worst of men, who have learned nothing, undergo evil transmigrations. Learn, now, in full and in order, what particular womb this living soul enters in this world as a result of each particular action here.

Those who commit major crimes spend a great many years in terrible hells, and when that is over they experience the following transmigrations:

A priest-killer gets the womb of a dog, a pig, a donkey, a camel, a cow, a goat, a sheep, a wild animal, a bird, a 'Fierce' Untouchable, or a 'Tribal.' A priest who drinks liquor enters (the womb) of a worm, bug, or moth, of birds who eat excrement, and of violent creatures. A priest who is a thief (is reborn) thousands of times in spiders, snakes, and lizards, aquatic animals, and violent ghouls. A man who violates his guru's marriage-bed (is reborn) hundreds of times in grasses, shrubs, and vines, in (beasts) that are carnivorous or that have fangs, and (in people) who engage in cruel actions. Violent men become carnivorous (beasts); people who eat impure things become worms; thieves (become animals that) devour one another; and men who have sex with women of the lowest castes become ghosts. A man who has associated with fallen men or has had sex with the wife of another man or has stolen the property of a priest becomes a priest-ogre. A man who out of greed has stolen jewels, pearls, or coral, or the various gems, is born among goldsmiths.

For stealing grain, a man becomes a rat; for brass, a goose; for water, an aquatic bird; for honey, a stinging insect; for milk, a crow; for spices, a dog; for clarified butter, a mongoose; for meat, a vulture; for marrow, a cormorant; for sesame oil, an 'oil-drinker';⁶ for salt, a cricket; and for yogurt, a crane; for stealing silk, a partridge; for linen, a frog; for cotton cloth, a curlew; for a cow, an iguana; for molasses, a bat; for fine perfumes, a muskrat; for leafy vegetables, a peacock; for various kinds of cooked foods, a porcupine, and for uncooked food, a hedgehog. For stealing fire he becomes a heron; for household articles, a house-builder wasp; for stealing dyed clothes, he becomes a pheasant; for a deer or an elephant, a wolf; for a horse, a tiger; for fruit and roots, a monkey; for a woman, a bear; for water, a sparrow; for vehicles, a camel; for livestock, a goat.

Whenever a man has forcibly taken away another man's property, or has eaten an oblation when it has not been offered into the fire, he inevitably becomes an animal. Women, too, who steal in this way incur guilt; they become the wives of those very same creatures. But those classes who slip from their own innate activities when they are not in extremity pass through evil transmigrations and then became the menial servants of aliens.⁷ A priest

6. The "oil-drinker" may be a cockroach.

7. These are the *Dasyus*, who may be a particular ethnic group, or barbarians, or bandits.

who has slipped from his own duty becomes a 'comet-mouth' ghost who eats vomit; a ruler becomes a 'false-stinking' ghost who eats impure things and corpses. A commoner who has slipped from his own duty becomes a ghost 'who sees by an eye in his anus,' eating pus; a servant becomes a 'moth-eater' (ghost).

The more that sensual men indulge in the sensory objects, the more their weakness for them grows. Through the repetition of their evil actions, men of little intelligence experience miseries in womb after womb in this world: they are rolled about in dreaded hells like the hell of 'Darkness,' and are tied up and chopped up in hells like the 'Forest of Sword Leaves'; they suffer various tortures; they are eaten by crows and owls, burnt by scorching sand, and boiled in pots, which is horrible; they are reborn in bad wombs, which causes constant and overwhelming unhappiness, and are assailed with cold and heat and various terrors; over and over they dwell in wombs and undergo birth, which is horrible; wretched chains are theirs, and they are the menial servants of other men; they are separated from their relatives and dear ones and live with bad people; they make money and lose it, and they make friends and enemies; then comes old age, that cannot be held back, and the suffering brought by diseases, and various troubles; and finally death, that cannot be conquered. But a man reaps the appropriate fruit of any act in a body that has the qualities of the frame of mind in which he committed that act.⁸

8. That is, if he commits an act when his disposition is predominantly characterized by lucidity, he will be reborn in the body of a god, and so forth.

CHARAKA, HIRANYAKESHIN, AND VARAHAMIHIRA

The Shastras aim not at innovation but at consolidation. The spirit of the Shastras is totalizing and cosmopolitan, an attempt to bring together in one place, from all points in India and all levels of society, a complete knowledge of the subject in question. Totality was the goal of the encyclopedic range both of the subject covered in each text (everything you ever wanted to know about x) and of the span of subjects, including grammar, architecture, medicine, dancing and acting, aesthetics in fine art, music, astronomy and astrology, training horses and elephants, various aspects of natural science, and in particular mathematics. The following selections deal with medicine, funeral rituals, and astronomy/astrology.

THE ETIOLOGY OF DISEASES

Medicine is known in India as the science of long life (*ayur-veda*). Since the goal of many Hindu texts was to prolong and perfect the human life span (a goal not inconsistent with the ultimate goal of renouncing the rebirth of the body altogether), and since the moral and physical aspects of life were regarded as inextricably intertwined, medicine is a sacred science, a part of religion. The oldest medical text is that of Charaka, who may have lived in the first century C.E., though his text, the *Charaka Samhita*, may have been re-edited and supplemented as late as 800 C.E.

This passage from Charaka is typical of the way that all of the shastras strive to be open-minded and inclusive. Despite the equal time that this passage gives to various approaches, several of which represent major philosophical as well as medical traditions, there is, as always, hierarchy: not only is the final sage right, and the others presumably wrong, but he even has a retort ready in case they still do not grant that he is right ("It is hard to get to the truth when people take sides"). Yet since they do still refuse to give in to him, the subject remains open after all.

Charaka Samhita 1.1.15.3–34

Once upon a time, when all the great sages had assembled before lord Punarvasu, who was dharma incarnate, this dispute arose in order to determine the primordial origin both of this creature called the person—who is a mass of soul, senses, mind, and sense objects—and of his diseases. Then Vamaka, the king of Kashi,¹ who understood the subject, approached the assembly of sages, greeted them, and uttered this speech: 'Good sirs, is the origin of the person also thought to be the origin of diseases, or not?' When the king had said this, Punarvasu said to the sages, 'Every one of you has dispelled all doubts through your unlimited knowledge and understanding. You should dispel the doubt of the king of Kashi.'

Parikshi, the son of Mudgala, thought about this and said, 'The individual person is born from the Soul, and so the diseases are also born from the Soul; this is their cause. (The Soul) collects and enjoys karma and the fruits of karma. Happiness (health) and unhappiness (disease) cannot function without this seat of all consciousness.'

But Sharaloman said, 'No. The soul never by itself yokes the soul with diseases or other unhappinesses, for it hates unhappiness. But when the mind that is conscious of goodness (*sattva*) is overwhelmed by energy and darkness (*rajas* and *tamas*), then it causes the origin both of the body itself and of pathological changes in the body.'

Varyovida, however, said, 'No. The mind alone cannot be the cause. Neither the diseases of the body nor one's state of mind can exist without the body. But all creatures are born from *rasa* (the fluid essence of digested food), and so the various diseases are also born from *rasa*. And since the waters abound in *rasa*, they are said to be the causes of origins.'

But Hiranyaksha said, 'No. The soul is not regarded as born from *rasa*, nor is the mind, that is beyond perception by the senses. But there are diseases caused by sound and so forth. Indeed, the individual person is born of the six elements of matter (earth, water, fire, wind, space and mind or soul), and so diseases are also born from the six elements. That the person is a mass of the six elements is well known from the Sankhya school of philosophers, among others.'

But as he said this, Kaushika said, 'No. How could someone be born out of the six elements, without a mother and a father? A person is born from a person; a cow from a cow, and a horse from a horse. Diseases such as urinary disorders are known to be hereditary. So the two parents are the cause.'