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EASTERN DHARMA VS. WESTERN NATURAL LAW

This study undertakes a comparative conceptual analysis of the concepts DHARMA and NATURAL LAW, two central moral constructs of Eastern and Western traditions. The purpose of the research is to define the notional, imagery, and axiological components of these concepts, to reveal their shared and unique features, determine their conceptual overlap, and map the domains in which they operate. The object of the study is the concepts DHARMA and NATURAL LAW as culturally rooted moral-philosophical systems. The subject is the lexical units dharma and natural law – the names of the corresponding concepts. The material for the study was obtained by continuous sampling from lexicographic sources and electronic discourse databases. DHARMA, rooted in South Asian religious traditions, denotes duty, virtue, and cosmic alignment. It derives from the Sanskrit root √dhr («to sustain») and spans metaphysical, ethical, and social domains. It includes context-bound obligations shaped by age, caste, and life role, as well as truths sustaining the universe. NATURAL LAW, from Greco-Roman Stoicism and Christian thought, refers to a rational moral order embedded in nature and accessible by reason. Emphasizing ethics, justice, and law, it forms a basis for Western legal and rights-based systems. Despite different civilizational origins, the concepts converge in four shared conceptual domains: COSMOLOGY, where they reflect universal order; ETHICS/MORALITY, as frameworks for virtue and right action; RELIGION/THEOLOGY, linking morality to divine or cosmic principles; and LAW AND ORDER, guiding social norms and justice. DHARMA is relational, experiential, and practice-based, while NATURAL LAW is abstract, universalist, and reason-based. By bridging Eastern and Western traditions, the research contributes to intercultural moral philosophy, enriching global dialogue on ethics and human flourishing.

Key words: *cognitive linguistics, concept, dharma, eastern culture, natural law, western culture.*

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КОНЦЕПТИ DHARMA / ДХАРМА І NATURAL LAW / ПРИРОДНИЙ ЗАКОН: СХІДНА ТА ЗАХІДНА ТРАДИЦІЇ

Дослідження здійснює порівняльний концептуальний аналіз концептів DHARMA і NATURAL LAW – двох центральних морально-етичних конструктів східної та західної традицій відповідно. Метою дослідження є виокремлення поняттєвого, образного та аксіологічного складників зазначених концептів, виявлення їх спільних і відмінних ознак, визначення зони концептуального перетину та окреслення доменів, у межах яких ці концепти функціонують. Об'єктом дослідження виступають концепти DHARMA і NATURAL LAW як укорінені у культурі морально-філософські системи. Предметом дослідження слугують лексичні одиниці dharma та natural law – імена відповідних концептів. Матеріал дослідження було зібрано методом суцільної вибірки з лексикографічних джерел та електронних дискурсивних баз даних. DHARMA, що має витоки у релігійно-філософських традиціях Південної Азії, означає обов'язок, доброчесність та гармонію з космічним порядком, походить від санскритського кореня √dhr («утримувати», «підтримувати») та охоплює метафізичні, етичні й соціальні виміри. Вона включає обов'язки, зумовлені віком, кастою й соціальною роллю, а також істини, що підтримують світовий лад. NATURAL LAW, сформоване в рамках стоїцизму та християнської думки античного та середньовічного Заходу, позначає раціональний моральний порядок, закладений у природі й доступний пізнанню через розум. Зосереджуючись на етиці, справедливості й праві, NATURAL LAW становить підґрунтя західних правових і правозахисних систем. Попри різні цивілізаційні витоки, обидва концепти реалізуються у чотирьох спільних концептуальних доменах: COSMOLOGY, де вони відображають універсальний порядок; ETHICS/MORALITY, як системи доброчесної поведінки; RELIGION/THEOLOGY, у зв'язку моралі з божественним чи космічним началом; та LAW AND ORDER, як засади соціальної організації та справедливості. Концепт DHARMA є реляційним та заснованим на практиці; натомість NATURAL LAW – абстрактним, універсальним й раціонально обґрунтованим. Здійснюючи концептуальне поєднання східних і західних традицій, дослідження робить вагомий внесок у розвиток міжкультурної моральної філософії, сприяючи поглибленню глобального діалогу щодо етики та людського добробуту.

Ключові слова: дхарма, західна культура, когнітивна лінгвістика, концепт, природний закон, східна культура.

Introduction. Western culture has developed from a blend of ancient ideas in philosophy, law, religion, and humanism. It brings together Greek logic and reason, Roman legal traditions, Judeo-Christian moral teachings, and the focus on human dignity and progress from the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Together, these influences have shaped Western values such as science, democracy, and individual rights (Aristotle; Aristotle, 2016; Daly, 2013; Hofstede, 2011; Plato, 1997; Vinney, 2024). One of the key features of Western culture is the focus on the *individual*. In societies like those in North America and Northern Europe, people are encouraged to be independent, express themselves, and communicate openly. This is reflected in Hofstede's research on cultural values, where these regions score high in individualism (Hofstede, 2011). Western thinking is based on the idea that *reason* and *observation* are the best ways to understand the world. These ideas go back to philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. As a result, modern Western societies often rely on science and data when making decisions (Aristotle; Aristotle, 2016; Plato, 1997). The Renaissance brought humanism – a belief in the value, creativity,

and dignity of each person. These ideas still shape Western education, politics, and the arts, where reason and ethical freedom are seen as more important than religious authority (Daly, 2013). Western culture also strongly believes in progress. People expect that science, technology, and reforms can make life better. This belief helped drive events like the Industrial Revolution and continues to push innovation and change today (Vinney, 2024). Western political systems have roots in Athenian democracy and Roman law. These traditions evolved into modern governments that are based on voting, equal rights, and the rule of law (Vinney, 2024). Lastly, Western societies tend to support meritocracy – the idea that success should come from talent and effort, not social background. This supports entrepreneurship, creativity, and opportunities for people to move up in society (Vinney, 2024).

Eastern cultures are shaped by long-standing religious and philosophical traditions such as Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. These systems emphasize *group over individual*, harmony in relationships, respect for social hierarchy, and sensitivity to social context (Halim, Kesuma,

2019; Hall, 1976; Matsumoto, 1999; The Analects of Confucius, 1910). In these cultures, people tend to define themselves through their roles in family and community rather than as independent individuals. Confucian values, in particular, promote loyalty, cooperation, and responsibility within one's group (Matsumoto, 1999). Social hierarchies are widely accepted. According to Hofstede's concept of "power distance," many Eastern societies recognize and support unequal power relationships (Hofstede, 2011). Confucianism teaches respect for elders and authority, both in families and in politics, through the principle of *filial piety* (xiao) (The Analects of Confucius, 1910). Harmony is a central goal, both within the person and in society. Eastern philosophies stress virtues like kindness, justice, proper behavior, wisdom, and integrity. These values guide behavior and help maintain social balance. Rituals and proper conduct help organize social life and support respect for order and tradition (Halim, Kesuma, 2019; The Analects of Confucius, 1910). Communication in Eastern societies is often indirect. Edward T. Hall classifies these cultures as «high-context», meaning that people rely on nonverbal cues, silence, and relationships to understand meaning. This helps avoid conflict and preserve harmony (Hall, 1976). Eastern moral systems focus on virtues and character rather than fixed rules. For example, Confucian ethics encourage moral growth through everyday rituals and adapting to each situation with care and respect (Hall, 1976; The Analects of Confucius, 1910).

Research by Hofstede and others confirms these patterns: Eastern societies score low on individualism and indulgence, and high on power distance, collectivism, and long-term thinking. They tend to accept hierarchies and focus on social roles in both family and public life (Aristotle; Aristotle, 2016; Daly, 2013; Halim, Kesuma, 2019; Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2011; Matsumoto, 1999; Plato, 1997; The Analects of Confucius, 1910; Vinney, 2024).

Eastern and Western cultures have developed through different historical and philosophical paths, yet they share some important similarities in how they think about ethics and human life. Despite surface-level contrasts – individualism vs. collectivism, direct vs. indirect communication, legalism vs. ritualism – Western and Eastern cultures share fundamental cultural merits, such as ethical living, human potential, knowledge cultivation, and concern for social order. These parallels suggest the possibility of cultural dialogue and integration, rather than opposition, especially in a globalized world (Halim, Kesuma, 2019; Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2011; Matsumoto, 1999; The Analects of Confucius, 1910).

A key concept in many Eastern systems is DHARMA, which has several meaningful dimensions, including moral responsibility, social role, and alignment with the natural or spiritual order. In Hinduism, DHARMA refers to a person's duties, shaped by their age, caste, and life situation, helping to guide both personal behavior and social order (Paranjpe, 2013). In Buddhism, DHARMA also means the Buddha's teachings and the underlying truths of existence (Karmakar, 2021). Dharma is not a rigid rule, but a flexible guide for doing what is right in a specific situation, based on one's role and awareness of the broader whole.

A similar idea in Western thought can be found in the concept of NATURAL LAW, especially in the works of Stoic philosophers (The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers, 1940) and Christian thinkers like Thomas Aquinas (Aquinas). NATURAL LAW suggests that there is a moral order built into the universe, which people can understand through reason. While NATURAL LAW often focuses on universal principles and individual rights, it also sees morality as connected to human nature and the greater good (Natural Law Theories). In contrast, DHARMA emphasizes how a person's duties are shaped by their social and cosmic context (Karmakar, 2021; Paranjpe, 2013).

Despite these differences, both DHARMA and NATURAL LAW aim to create a meaningful and moral life, to support social order, and to help people flourish. Studying these concepts together highlights both the unique qualities of each and the shared goals they pursue. Comparing Eastern DHARMA with Western ideas of NATURAL LAW, virtue, and civic duty can lead to a deeper, cross-cultural understanding of how people live ethical lives within larger systems of meaning.

Methodology and Research Methods. The **purpose** of the research is to define the notional, imagery and axiological (value-related) components of the concepts DHARMA and NATURAL LAW, to determine their shared and unique traits, to detect their integral zone and to define the conceptual domains within which the concepts extend. The concepts DHARMA and NATURAL LAW can be considered the **object** of this research. The names of the concepts DHARMA and NATURAL LAW – *dharma* and *natural law*, accordingly, are the **subject** of the research. The comparative study of concepts DHARMA and NATURAL LAW is highly **relevant**, especially in a global context shaped by cultural diversity and ethical challenges. These two moral traditions – rooted in Indic and Greco-Christian civilizations – offer different but complementary

views on human responsibility and moral order; studying them side by side helps build ethical bridges between Eastern and Western thought, supporting deeper cross-cultural understanding. It also broadens moral philosophy by showing how values and duties are shaped by different worldviews. In today's interconnected world, this kind of knowledge is essential for dialogue, education, and peaceful cooperation across cultures. By the method of continuous sampling, the **material** of the research was obtained from lexicographic sources and discourse fragments presented in electronic resources.

This study adopts a linguistic approach to the comparative analysis of the selected concepts. Language provides insight into how different cultures understand and prioritize key ideas. We apply a cognitive linguistics approach, as cognitive linguists argue that language reflects how people conceptualize the world through the lens of shared cultural models (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980; Evans, Green, 2006; Dirven et al., 2007). Concepts are not universally fixed but are shaped by the experiences and values of a given speech community (Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2011).

In our research we employ the following methods: etymological analysis of the lexemes denoting the concepts; examination of dictionary definitions to establish conventional meanings; semantic analysis supported by illustrative examples drawn from electronic linguistic corpora and databases; identification of both shared and distinct features of the concepts; determination of the conceptual overlap, or integral zone, between them; specification of conceptually unique characteristics; mapping of the conceptual domains in which each concept operates; articulation of the imagery and axiological dimensions embedded within the conceptual structures under investigation.

The concept of DHARMA.

DHARMA – its lexical root, historical depth, and doctrinal range – constitutes one of the most elaborate moral-cosmological ideas in the intellectual history of South and East Asia (Dharma Religious Concept). In both Vedic and post-Vedic traditions, the concept of DHARMA brings together the idea of cosmic order and social responsibility, where personal duties are tied to one's position in society and are aimed not only at maintaining social harmony but also at achieving spiritual liberation (Dharma Religious Concept; Karmakar, 2021). DHARMA is seen both as a moral quality and as a subtle substance that enables movement, highlighting the concept's wide-reaching cosmological role

(Paranjpe, 2013). What unites these interpretations is that DHARMA does not separate moral behavior from the nature of reality. It serves at once as a guide for ethical action, a foundation for social order, and a basis for legal systems (Dharma Religious Concept; Rai, Dwivedi, 2024). Crucially, DHARMA is never a fixed or universal rule. It is always applied in context, taking into account factors like age, gender, occupation, and specific life circumstances (Garg Kumar, Manhas, 2022). In today's world, marked by cultural diversity and differing moral perspectives, DHARMA offers an alternative to both moral relativism and rigid universalism. While it upholds enduring values like truthfulness, non-violence, and generosity, it also allows for ethical flexibility based on context. This makes DHARMA a valuable tool for thinking about ethics in cross-cultural dialogue, legal systems that respect diversity, and global discussions about shared responsibility (Dongre, 2024; Thankappan, 2024). Furthermore, the view of *dharma*s as constantly changing experiential units resonates with modern debates in cognitive science about the Self as a process rather than a fixed entity (Dongre, 2024). When examined through philology, legal theory, and comparative philosophy, DHARMA emerges as a complex and layered concept. It connects cosmological principles with ethical practice and social life. Studying DHARMA can deepen our understanding of how ancient civilizations connected the structure of the universe with moral behavior – and can enrich contemporary efforts to think about law, ethics, and human flourishing across cultures.

The concept of DHARMA: an etymological layer.

The etymology of the lexeme *dharma* – the name of the concept DHARMA – reveals a rich semantic evolution deeply embedded in the linguistic, philosophical, and cultural history of ancient India. The Sanskrit term *dharma* (धर्म) originates from the verbal root \sqrt{dhr} (धृ), which conveys the meanings «to hold», «to support», «to bear», and «to sustain» (Agarwal, 2015; Bronkhorst, 1985; Dharmakarma, 2024; Dharma; Dongre, 2024). The nominalizing suffix *-ma* transforms this verbal root into an abstract noun, yielding the sense of «that which upholds» or «that which sustains» (Agarwal, 2015; Dharmakarma, 2024). In its most fundamental conception, therefore, *dharma* refers to the sustaining principle of order – cosmic, moral, and social (Bronkhorst, 1985). This etymological structure aligns with the earliest occurrences of the term in Vedic literature, where *dharma* denotes the principle that maintains the harmony of the universe, encompassing both its

physical processes and ethical dimensions (Bronkhorst, 1985; Dharmakarma, 2024). The root \sqrt{dhr} is cognate with a range of terms in other Indo-European languages, highlighting a broader semantic field centered on notions of support and stability. For instance, Latin *firmus* («firm, stable»), Greek *thronos* («throne» as a supporting structure), Old English *prōwan* («to endure»), and Avestan *darāta* («he holds») all reflect similar conceptual underpinnings (Dongre, 2024; Dharmakarma, 2024; Dharma). These linguistic parallels underscore the Indo-European heritage of the idea of sustaining order, which in Sanskrit develops into a robust philosophical and ethical construct with both metaphysical and practical implications. In the *Rgveda* (Rgveda), the term *dharma* is often associated with *rta* – the cosmic order or truth. In many contexts, the two terms are nearly interchangeable, both pointing to the ideal of maintaining ritual and cosmic balance (Agarwal, 2015; Bronkhorst, 1985; Dharmakarma, 2024; Dharma; Dongre, 2024). As the Vedic tradition evolved into the Brāhmanical and Upaniṣadic periods, and subsequently into the epic literature of the *Mahābhārata* (Menon, 2012) and *Rāmāyaṇa* (The Ramayana, 2018), *dharma* began to acquire a more explicit moral and socio-ethical significance. It came to denote righteous action, ethical obligation, and the fulfillment of duties defined by one's position within the social and ritual hierarchy – particularly as articulated through the compound *varṇāśrama-dharma*, which links caste (*varṇa*) and life stage (*āśrama*) to specific codes of conduct (Agarwal, 2015; Bronkhorst, 1985; Dharmakarma, 2024; Dharma).

The etymological and semantic trajectory of *dharma*, thus, reveals a profound interrelation between language, cosmology, and ethics. Arising from a verbal root signifying support and continuity, *dharma* emerges as a foundational concept that spans diverse domains of thought – including metaphysics, jurisprudence, morality, and psychology. Its enduring relevance and conceptual adaptability across different historical periods and philosophical systems underscore its central role in shaping South Asian approaches to law, ethics, and the human condition.

The concept of DHARMA: a semantic layer.

The following represents a comprehensive compilation of definitions of the term *dharma*, as derived from the most authoritative English–English dictionaries and reference sources (Cambridge Dictionary; CDET; CET; LDCE; Merriam–Webster Dictionary; Online Etymology Dictionary; OED; CDP, 1999 : 231). These definitions collectively illustrate the term's complex, multi-dimensional semantic

field, encompassing its diverse applications and interpretations within Hinduism, Buddhism, and broader philosophical and religious discourses:

1. law and order (cosmic law / divine order): «*Rta (dharma) is the natural law or order that is the governing principle of the universe and its events*» (Boddupalli, 2023), «*Rta (dharma) is the natural law that governs the rains, the flows of rivers, and the light of the sun*» (Mahmoudi, 2024);
2. duty / righteous conduct (social, familial, caste-based): «*Considering your dharma, you should not waver. For a warrior, there is nothing more honorable than a war against evil*» (Bhagavat Gita As It Is, 1972);
3. virtue / morality: «*Just as Yama is a villain for evil forces, my character in 'Yaman' is also a villain against those who don't follow dharma*» (Dharma Quotes);
4. religious duty: «*What I found particularly fascinating and satisfying about the Hindu tradition was its spirit of inclusiveness. In Sanatan Dharma, or what is commonly called Hinduism, I discovered the basic truths of all religions in a way that the oneness of God and religion is comprehensively understood*» (Dharma Quotes);
5. doctrine / teaching (e.g., Buddha's teachings): «*Non-violence is the essence of the entire Buddha's teaching, and the practice of non-violence is the entire essence of the practice of Buddha dharma, Buddhist spirituality, in one's life*» (Dharma Quotes); «*The Dharma is the truth that all natures are pure. By this truth, all appearances are empty*» (Bodhidharma Quotes);
6. essential nature of something (character of person or cosmos): «*It is his dharma as a warrior to fight for justice*» (Bhagavat Gita As It Is, 1972);
7. social and customary practice: «*Dharma is that which is enjoined by the holy books, followed by the sages, interpreted by the learned and which appeals to the heart*» (Gandhi);
8. principle / truth (in philosophy): «*So, all of the music had reference, or is inspired by something of the dharma that I've come in contact with*» (Dharma Quotes); «*Dharma is an ancient word for truth*» (Lenz);
9. phenomena and constituent realities (esp. in Buddhism): «*The word Dharma, especially when used in the plural, means things, or conditions, or realities, both mental and physical*» (Nichiren: the Buddhist prophet);
10. justice and righteousness: «*Where there is dharma, there is victory*» (Menon, 2012);
11. support / sustaining principle: «*Only that which promotes sustenance is dharma*» (Ganatra).

By mapping DHARMA onto five domains: COSMOLOGY (1), ETHICS/MORALITY (2, 3), RELIGION/THEOLOGY (4, 5, 7), METAPHYSICS (6, 8, 9) and LAW AND ORDER (1, 10, 11), we see how its meanings cohere into an integrated worldview where universal order is realized through ethics, social structures, and philosophical insight. DHARMA encompasses a rich and multifaceted semantic field, referring simultaneously to cosmic or divine order (like *Rta*), moral duty and righteousness tied to one's social role, personal virtue and religious obligations, as well as doctrinal teachings (e.g., Buddha's Dharma) and the very essence or nature of things. It also extends to broader philosophical truths, customary practices, and the fundamental sustaining principles underlying both human society and the universe.

The axiological and imagery layers of the concept DHARMA.

DHARMA is deeply axiological, serving as the moral compass within Hindu-Buddhist traditions. In Hindu thought, dharma functions as the *king of all goals* in the system of *puruṣārthas*, out-ranking *artha* (wealth) and *kāma* (pleasure) in moral significance (Balkrishna, 2018). Dharma outlines universal virtues – truthfulness, non-violence, self-restraint, compassion, forgiveness – that are intrinsic to both individual flourishing and cosmological harmony (Shatavadhani, 2015). It is not mere rule-following; it is context-sensitive situational ethics, discerning actions that serve the collective good, even if they transgress conventional norms. Indian philosophy does not rigidly separate value from being; dharma is ontological and axiological simultaneously – what *is* also inherently embodies *what ought to be* (Giri). Among the key axiological roles of DHARMA are the following: defining virtues and rights/duties per caste, stage of life, cosmic order; directing individual goals toward *niḥśreyasa* (highest good), integrating ethical pursuit with spiritual ends; utilizing moral reasoning and context (e.g. *yama/niyama* in Yoga) rather than blind adherence.

The symbolic frameworks, cosmic imaginaries, and metaphysical narratives that shape DHARMA are as follows. Dharma is rooted in the *cosmic imagination* of *Rta* – an embodied image of cosmic order that anchors ritual and moral life within a living universe (Sondhi). Rituals (like *yajña*) and mythic frameworks not only enact dharma outwardly, but also internalize cosmic story into personal and communal identity. In Buddhism, Dharma as *dhmma* comprises the fundamental «properties» (*svabhāva*) of existence – impermanent phenomena, psychological processes – making abstract

metaphysics experientially accessible (Vaibhāṣika). These symbol-laden practices and theories form an *imaginary edifice* that enables individuals to occupy a position within the cosmic–ethical order – through myth, ritual, and meditative metaphor (Vaibhāṣika).

In its axiological aspect, Dharma provides a value-laden ethical framework – a richly textured set of virtues, duties, and moral reasoning that integrates personal, societal, and spiritual aims. In its imagery dimension, it offers a cosmic and metaphysical imagination – one that situates individuals within a universe of symbols, narratives, and ontological properties. Together, these components form a coherent worldview wherein moral action is both guided by and embedded within a living «participatory imagination» of cosmic order and human purpose. This duality between value and imagination is central to Dharma's enduring influence and its capacity to both ground moral judgment and inspire spiritual identity.

The concept of NATURAL LAW. The inception of the term *natural law*.

Natural law represents a cornerstone of philosophical and legal thought in the Western intellectual tradition, profoundly shaping the development of political theory, ethics, and legal systems. Particularly influential in the realms of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy and Christian theology (Aquinas; Aristotle; CDP, 1999 : 599; Inwood, 2023; Plato, 1997; West, 2023), the concept asserts that universal principles of right and wrong are inherent in nature, human reason, or divine will, and can be discerned through rational reflection and observation. From its inception in classical antiquity to its role in contemporary debates on human rights, natural law remains a pivotal element of Western thought (CDP, 1999 : 599).

The origins of the term *natural law* trace back to the philosophy of ancient Greece, where it found early expression in the works of Plato and Aristotle (Aristotle; Plato, 1997; Sfekas, 2008). Plato's theory suggested that ethical truths exist independently of human perception and societal conventions (Daly, 2013). Yet it was Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, who first offered a systematic account of natural law (Aristotle). Aristotle proposed that objective moral principles, derived from human nature and reason, govern human conduct, with virtue serving as the mean between extremes (Aristotle). According to Aristotle, humans possess an inherent rational capacity to discover these principles, grounding morality in the very essence of human nature (Aristotle; Sfekas, 2008).

The Stoics, including figures such as Cicero and Seneca, further developed the natural law tradition within the context of Roman thought (Inwood, 2023; Natural Law). They conceived of natural law as part of the divine order, accessible to all rational beings through the exercise of reason (Inwood, 2023; West, 2023). In his *De Re Publica*, Cicero argued that there exists a law that is right by nature, unchanging and eternal, transcending all human enactments (West, 2023). This law could guide both personal conduct and public affairs, providing a universal foundation for justice that surpassed local customs and legal systems (The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers, 1940).

In the medieval period, Christian theologians such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas integrated natural law into Christian doctrine (Aquinas; Saint Augustine, 2015). St. Augustine, in his *City of God*, acknowledged the existence of a natural moral law governing human behavior, which could be understood through reason but required divine revelation for its full apprehension (Saint Augustine, 2015). St. Thomas Aquinas made perhaps the most profound contribution to the natural law tradition in his *Summa Theologica* (Aquinas). Following Aristotle, Aquinas argued that natural law constitutes the rational creature's participation in the eternal law – God's divine order for the universe (Aquinas). Aquinas contended that through human reason, individuals could discern the fundamental principles of natural law, such as the preservation of life, the procreation of offspring, and the pursuit of knowledge, all of which are aligned with God's will (Aquinas).

The emergence of John Locke's theory of natural law in his *Two Treatises of Government* (Locke) marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of political philosophy, especially within the framework of liberal democratic thought. Locke's natural law theory centered on the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property, which he argued were granted to individuals by God and could not be infringed upon by governments (Locke).

In the modern era, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) reflects the enduring legacy of natural law by asserting rights grounded in human dignity and equality. These principles echo the natural law tradition, especially the notion of inherent human rights that cannot be abrogated by governments or societies.

Throughout its long intellectual history, the concept of NATURAL LAW has played a decisive role in shaping Western thought, particularly in relation to ethics, law, and the notion of human rights.

From its early expressions in Greek philosophy to its integration into Christian theology and subsequent influence on modern political and legal systems, natural law has remained an essential framework for contemplating morality, justice, and the function of law in society.

The concept of NATURAL LAW: an etymological layer.

The term *natural law* carries deep etymological roots in Latin, tracing the meanings of both *nature* (from Latin *natura* «to be born or inherent») and *law* (from Old English *lagu*, «something laid down or established») (Online Etymology Dictionary; OED). Combined, the phrase refers to a set of universal moral principles that are inherently part of nature and human reason, as opposed to laws imposed by human authorities. Over time, this concept has evolved, but its etymological underpinnings continue to emphasize the universality and intrinsic quality of these laws. The development of the term in Western philosophy, particularly through the works of thinkers like Cicero (West, 2023) and Aquinas (Aquinas), further reinforces its foundational place in moral and legal thought.

The concept of NATURAL LAW: a semantic layer.

The term *natural law* is multifaceted, with various meanings depending on the intellectual, legal, and philosophical context in which it is used. Below is a detailed list of the meanings based on authoritative and respected English-language dictionaries, encyclopedias, and philosophical sources (Cambridge Dictionary; CDET; CET; LDCE; Merriam–Webster Dictionary; OED; Natural Law; Emon et al., 2014; CDP, 1999); each meaning of the term *natural law* – the name of the concept NATURAL LAW – is supported by an example that demonstrates its practical application:

1. a set of universal moral principles accessible by human reason, inherent in nature: «*Science has sometimes been said to be opposed to faith, and inconsistent with it. But all science, in fact, rests on a basis of faith, for it assumes the permanence and uniformity of natural laws – a thing which can never be demonstrated*» Tryon Edwards (Natural Laws Quotes); «*If Mr. Einstein doesn't like the natural laws of the universe, let him go back to where he came from*» Robert Benchley (Natural Laws Quotes);

2. the rational order of the universe: «*Beauty is a manifestation of secret natural laws, which otherwise would have been hidden from us forever*» Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Natural Laws Quotes); «*Music is all about training in harmony,*

training to understand and use musical energy for our greater pleasure by attuning to the natural laws of the universe» Jane Siberry (Natural Laws Quotes);

3. a foundation for legal systems (positing that laws should reflect universal moral principles): «*To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law*» Martin Luther King, Jr. (Natural Law Quotes); «*The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on Earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but only to have the law of nature for his rule*» Samuel Adams (Natural Law Quotes);

4. a moral law given by God / divine providence: «*It is evident that an acquaintance with natural laws means no less than an acquaintance with the mind of God therein expressed*» James Prescott Joule (Natural Laws Quotes); «*There is a natural law, a Divine law, that obliges you and me to relieve the suffering, the distressed and the destitute*» Conrad Hilton (Natural Law Quotes);

5. human rights and individual freedoms: «*Every person has free choice. Free to obey or disobey the Natural Laws. Your choice determines the consequences*» Alfred A. Montapert (Natural Laws Quotes); «*Every man, and every body of men on earth, possesses the right of self-government. They receive it with their being from the hand of nature. Individuals exercise it by their single will; collections of men by that of their majority; for the law of the majority is the natural law of every society of men*» Thomas Jefferson (Natural Law Quotes);

6. ethics: «*No man-made law ever, no matter whether derived from the past or projected onto a distant, unforeseeable future, can or should ever be empowered to claim that it is greater than the Natural Law from which it stems and to which it must inevitably return in the eternal rhythm of creation and decline of all things natural*» Wilhelm Reich (Natural Law Quotes).

The concept of NATURAL LAW manifests across various domains, each highlighting distinct facets. Below is a classification of the domains within which the meanings of the term *natural law* – the name of the concept – are realized: COSMOLOGY (1, 2); RELIGION/THEOLOGY (4); LAW AND ORDER (3, 5); ETHICS (6). The concept of NATURAL LAW encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings, each shaped by its respective intellectual, legal, or philosophical context. Ranging from universal moral principles inherent in nature to the divine law that governs human conduct, NATURAL LAW has had a lasting impact on diverse fields, including ethics, jurisprudence, and human

rights. The varying interpretations and applications of the concept highlight its pivotal role in the development of moral reasoning and the structuring of societal frameworks across history.

The axiological and imagery layers of the concept NATURAL LAW.

The concept of NATURAL LAW encompasses not only profound intellectual and philosophical significance but also rich axiological (value-based) and imagery dimensions. The axiological dimension addresses the value-laden nature of NATURAL LAW, particularly its association with inherent moral goodness and ethical principles. NATURAL LAW is often viewed as a foundational source of universal, objective moral values, which underpin notions of justice, fairness, and human rights. John Finnis notably argued that *natural law* extends beyond a mere legal framework, functioning instead as an ethical system that provides essential moral guidance (Finnis, 2011). Central to this dimension is the idea that natural law reflects the inherent goodness embedded in human nature, as emphasized by St. Thomas Aquinas (Aquinas), where he asserts that *natural law* is rooted in God's eternal law and can be apprehended by human reason to reveal what is just, virtuous, and morally right (Aquinas).

On the other hand, the imagery dimension of NATURAL LAW presents it as an idealized, perfected moral order – a vision of justice and societal harmony. In this conceptual space, NATURAL LAW is often understood as UTOPIA, offering a symbolic representation of an ideal political and social system. For instance, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (Rousseau), natural law functions as a blueprint for an ideal social order where individuals, in their natural state, enjoy freedom and equality. Rousseau's notion of a social contract based on natural law reflects a vision of governance aligned with natural rights and justice, wherein individuals voluntarily consent to be governed in harmony with the general will (Rousseau).

Thus, the axiological dimension of NATURAL LAW underscores its essential role in grounding moral values, justice, and human dignity, offering a firm basis for ethical and legal frameworks. Simultaneously, the imagery dimension serves as a conceptual ideal, framing NATURAL LAW as a symbolic guide to understanding justice, morality, and human rights within a harmonious societal order or Utopia. Together, these dimensions highlight the enduring significance of NATURAL LAW in philosophical and practical discussions, showcasing its lasting impact on ethical thought and societal structures across history.

Eastern DHARMA and Western NATURAL LAW: comparative analysis.

The comparative analysis of the meanings of *dharma* and *natural law* – the names of the concepts DHARMA and NATURAL LAW, accordingly – highlights their shared and unique traits. This comparative view illustrates how both concepts offer normative guidance for human conduct and social order, while differing in cosmology, epistemology, and cultural embedding.

Both DHARMA and NATURAL LAW are profound, multilayered concepts rooted in moral, metaphysical, and societal discourses. Though emerging from different civilizational matrices – DHARMA from South Asian religious-philosophical traditions (primarily Hinduism and Buddhism), and NATURAL LAW from Western Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian, and Enlightenment traditions – the two concepts demonstrate remarkable thematic overlap as well as crucial distinctions.

Shared traits of DHARMA and NATURAL LAW: at their core, both DHARMA and NATURAL LAW refer to a universal moral order or principled structure that governs individual behavior and social life. They both carry the notion of *law* that is not merely human-made but reflects a deeper cosmic, rational, or divine structure. DHARMA is described as *cosmic law, principle, truth, and support/sustaining principle* – corresponding to NATURAL LAW's meanings such as *rational order of the universe* and *moral law given by God*. Both concepts include morality and virtue as core elements: DHARMA as *virtue/morality* aligns closely with NATURAL LAW as *ethics* and *universal moral principles*. Justice and righteousness (under DHARMA) parallel the moral foundation of legal systems and human rights (under NATURAL LAW).

Unique traits of DHARMA: DHARMA goes beyond abstract law to integrate duty-bound action in specific social roles – familial, caste-based, and religious. It also encompasses customary practice, doctrine, and teaching (particularly Buddhist), as well as constituent realities (*dharmas* in Buddhism). Moreover, DHARMA reflects an entity's *essential nature*, which may not have an exact counterpart in the NATURAL LAW framework. Thus, *dharma* is more contextual and experiential, often embodying a lived path rather than an abstract system.

Unique traits of NATURAL LAW: NATURAL LAW, on the other hand, is distinctly shaped by rationalism and legal philosophy. It underpins human rights, individual freedoms, and the legitimacy of legal systems, making it more formalized in juridical and political terms. It also explicitly emphasizes

accessibility through reason, and its divine origin is conceptualized in terms of *providence* and *creation*, unlike DHARMA's more intrinsic and impersonal cosmological role. In this sense, NATURAL LAW is more universalist, juridical, and reason-based, while DHARMA is more relational, experiential, and practice-based.

DHARMA and NATURAL LAW are both expressed within the domains of COSMOLOGY, ETHICS/MORALITY, RELIGION/THEOLOGY, and LAW AND ORDER, showing their shared aim: to guide human behavior according to a higher, universal order. Both connect the divine with the moral and the cosmic with the social. However, DHARMA is expressed within the domain METAPHYSICS, offering a unified view of reality that combines the structure of the universe, personal nature, social duty, and philosophical truth. NATURAL LAW, on the other hand, focuses more on reason and law, shaping ideas about rights, freedoms, and legal systems.

Conclusion. The comparative study of the concepts DHARMA and NATURAL LAW reveals two highly developed, multidimensional frameworks that serve to align human behavior with a higher order – be it cosmic, moral, or rational. Both concepts, though arising from distinct civilizational and philosophical backgrounds – South Asian for DHARMA and Western for NATURAL LAW – converge around several core domains: COSMOLOGY, ETHICS/MORALITY, RELIGION/THEOLOGY, and LAW AND ORDER. In these domains, they function as normative systems grounded in the belief that morality is not merely a human construct, but part of a greater universal structure.

Despite this thematic overlap, their unique traits reveal different orientations. DHARMA, rooted in the Sanskrit root *√dhr* («to sustain»), integrates metaphysical depth and contextual praxis, encompassing not only moral law but also personal essence, social role, religious obligation, and even ontological truths. It is practice-based and relational, emphasizing lived duties and cosmic balance. In contrast, NATURAL LAW is shaped by rationalist and legal traditions, presenting a more abstract, systematized model of moral reasoning grounded in nature and accessible through human reason. It strongly informs political philosophy, legal systems, and the articulation of human rights and freedoms.

Ultimately, while both concepts aim to articulate the moral foundations of the universe and society, DHARMA embodies a holistic, experiential path shaped by cosmological and metaphysical interde-

pendence, whereas NATURAL LAW expresses a with justice, virtue, and order but also illuminates the cultural logics that shape differing visions of the comparison not only highlights shared concerns human condition and its ethical grounding.

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