Monotheism vs. polytheism

Monotheism and polytheism are two very different belief systems. Monotheism is the belief in one god and polytheism is the belief in more one than one god. The concept of morality can and does exist within cultures that have only one god, as well as cultures that have multiple gods.

Without morality, the world would be a place of extreme chaos and pandemonium. However, the foundation for morality within polytheistic religions is quite contradictory to the foundation for morality with monotheistic religions. Morality within polytheism is somewhat inconsistent and relative; whereas in monotheism, morality becomes more consistent and absolute. Morality exists throughout all cultures and religions of the world in some shape or form.

In monotheism, the fact that there is one god that sits in judgment over all of his followers is evidence of morality. For example, in Judaism, God gave his followers ten commandment outlining right and wrong for them. God then places judgment on his followers based upon their obedience to the commandments. Therefore, if there is one god judging the people's actions, deciding if their actions are right or wrong, then the people have a standard by which they try to live by or achieve. In most polytheistic religions, although not defined, the notion of good and bad conduct is present. This notion of good and bad conduct, or right and wrong conduct, is evidence of morality in polytheism.

For example, in Hinduism there is what is known as PAP and PUNYA. PAP means penalty for bad behavior, and PUNYA means credit for deeds. PAP and PUNYA assist in determining a follower's karma; karma determines one's life

form in the next life. (Fisher SOMETIME). The existence of morality is also evident in that there are certain gods whom have such titles as ' sustainer,' ' judge,' and ' protector of morals.

' For instance in Vedic Hinduism, a religion no longer practiced, one of the many gods known as Varuna was described as an " omniscient God and protector of the moral order of the world" (Novak 5). The fact the Varuna was the protector of ' moral order' is evidence that some sort of morality concept existed within the religion. However, the foundations for morality in polytheism and monotheism are quite different. In polytheism the foundation for morality seems inconsistent and relative. Polytheistic religions have no ultimate reality or god to set a standard for morality that all the followers must obey.

Instead, each of the many gods ' could' have their own set of standards for morality. The inconsistency of morality could theoretically lead one to be faced with the dilemma of which god is correct. Let's suppose one is having an extramarital affair and is not sure if she should continue the affair or stop. Should she pray to the goddess of lust and passion, to the god that is all-knowing or to the god of family and relationship? Not only does the inconsistency of morality standards cause followers to be faced with choosing which gods to embrace, but also cause them to be faced which god is appropriate to pray for moral guidance on different subjects. The notion that each of the multiple gods can set their standards for morality, allows for the follower to circumstantially pick and choose which god to follow. It is possible for a follower to be circumstantially selective because they do not have to answer to one specific god.

One can choose to follow a certain god because that particular god's set of morals allows them to fulfill some desire or need that would otherwise not fulfilled under other gods' morals. It also works in the aftermath of actions, meaning if one god does not sanction one's actions, one can look to another god that will give their moral consent. For instance, suppose one has performed an act that causes a god to become ' angry. Instead of receiving the wrath of that particular god, one decides to pursue another god that condones the act.

Therefore, the followers become free to behave as he or she feels fit, and morality in polytheism can be considered relative. However, in some polytheistic religions, the followers choose only one of the many gods to be their main god, accepting their god's definition of morality as their own. The followers acknowledge that there are other gods, but they do not accept the other god's definitions of morality. Followers understand other gods to be but aspects of the one god they have chosen to worship.

Therefore, each person has their own understanding of morality depending upon which god they choose to worship. The people do not impose their standards for morality on other another because they understand that each god has their set of standards for their followers. The concept of morality within these polytheistic religions is relative to which god is chosen as the main god, as well as inconsistent because one person is able o have a completely different set of standards as someone else in the same religion. The polytheistic system of religion provides flexibility and a relativistic lack of accountability. As mentioned before, a follower of polytheism is free to

behave as he or she sees fit because they do not have to answer to one specific god.

Immediate judgment by the gods is not a concern. Within Hindu Bhagavad Gita, man is instructed to basically act without worrying about the results or consequences (Novak, 32). In fact, if something does happen to go ' wrong' or ' bad,' it is not the people who are at fault. Instead that particular god has failed the people, and is to blame for the bad happenings.

For example, presume that a group of people went to war with a neighboring group and ended up losing the war. The people did not lose the war, the god lost the war. The god failed the people and is to blame for losing. There is a relativistic lack of accountability because the people are not held accountable but the gods are the ones whom failed. Polytheism creates an inconsistent and relative foundation for morality that provides flexibility and a lack of accountability.

The foundation for morality within monotheism is more consistent and absolute than the foundation in polytheism. In monotheistic religions, there is one ultimate reality or god that sets the standard for morality. Each and every follower is given the exact same rules to live by and expected to obey. In Judaism, as well as Christianity, God bestowed upon his followers the Ten Commandments, which is the one moral standard the all must obey. Instead of having to worry about pleasing many gods through their actions, followers only need to please one god.

There is a comfort found within absolute right and wrong because one knows what is expected of them and not expected of them. In monotheism, the

people must answer to the one god and are judged by the same god. If the people do not follow the set of standards for morality, the one god will judge them accordingly. In Islam, the followers are warned of a final judgment day, where they will be judged by their thoughts and deeds. The only way for one to find peace within Islam is by learning god's aws and living by them to the best of their ability (Fisher SOMEWHERE). One god sits as the final moral judge over his people.

The foundation for morality in monotheistic religions allows for little flexibility and a sense of accountable of each person. Monotheism more or less preaches an ' all or nothing' message to the followers. Islam calls for a " complete surrender to and trusting in God" (Fisher SOMEWHERE). One can not pick and choose which laws they want to follow, instead the option is given to either submit to all the rules or be judged.

The morality foundation in monotheism seems to hold each person, follower, accountable for both their individual and collective actions. For instance, if something goes ' wrong' or ' bad,' it is not the fault of the one god. Instead, the people are held accountable by that god. Some people may consider that monotheistic religions create harsh realities for its followers.

However, as mentioned before, the follower can find comfort in the fact that they can know exactly what is expected of them and avoid the wrath or judgment from their god because the standard for morality is absolute. Morality is a concept that strives to be consistent and absolute. Monotheism seems to be the belief system that exhibits a moral standard. In both polytheism and monotheism, free will still plays a large part.

Differences' can be found in the accountability concept, the one god versus many gods, and the one standard for morality versus the many. Additionally, all cultures believe in a natural moral code like all people can own property, not to take another's life, etcetera. These natural " rules" are expanded upon by religion. The figure heads, or gods, of each religion extend the laws to live by, they offer the concept of accountability and bestow penalties upon their followers for failing to live by their moral code. The question as to whether a polytheistic belief is less moral then a monotheistic belief, the answer is no.

Both beliefs perpetuate morality because in both cases there is good and evil. There are penalties for evil and rewards for goodness. The difference lays in the relativity of morality in polytheism versus absolute in monotheism.