

# Beliefs, philosophy and religion

[Religion](#)



One of the most notable conflicts that have been debated by many scholars since the medieval ages is the controversy regarding the place of philosophy and religion in a society. The two have been used to attack each other in order to uphold their own credibility. The study of Philosophy is directed towards the speculation of the things that govern the world and its processes, and the nature of man and his relationship with other individuals as well as with the world (Gasset, 1964). Philosophy attempts to scrutinize and make rational explication of almost everything that can be grasped by the human mind.

Yet, it does not really provide sufficient and concrete answers to all its queries. Religion, on the other hand, focuses its scope on explaining things and phenomena that cannot be explained by science and at some point even those that cannot really be made explicit by philosophy. It tries to give reason for everything that is happening. Its justification for every reason that it provides is primarily founded on faith (Nasr, 1996). Hence, by faith, it need not be verifiable. A strong faith or believe could suffice one's doubt and hesitation. However, philosophy would not really admit faith as the justification of something.

Reason cannot be supported by merely appealing to one's faith (Leahy, 2003). Philosophy moves away from dogmatism, which is a character present in religion. Philosophy has a character of skepticism. This means that not unless something is proven to be certain (that which is indubitable or cannot be doubted) philosophy would recognize its validity (Heidegger, 1956). It entails careful and keen analysis of the subject that is being

studied. Whereas in religion, it is enough that someone has faith on something in order for it to become valid (Nasr, 1996).

These are the most common distinctions that distinguish philosophy from religion. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how philosophy and religion are realized in particular Schools of Thought that influence China namely: Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism/Taoism. This paper will also compare and contrast these three Schools of Thoughts with Christianity by appealing to their own definitions of Philosophy and Religion. Schools of Thought Confucianism Confucianism is an anthology of ethical values and beliefs that is often equated with religion.

These values and beliefs were rooted and developed from the teachings of one of the great thinkers in China, Confucius. His teachings and philosophy were used as the foundations of laws and way of government China and later on in other Asian regions (Chai & Chai, 1973). The teachings of Confucius, like that of Socrates, were neither formally written nor published. Yet his students and disciples made the spread of his teachings. However, according to the Chinese History, most of the recordings of the Confucian teachings were burned up at some point in the Qin Dynasty (Chai & Chai, 1973).

Hence, there was a conflict of interpretation of the Confucian teachings that is evident in various strands of Confucianism. The rebirth of Confucianism was made during the Han Dynasty. It was the motivation for instituting the laws and set of rules of China. Nonetheless, it again faded after the fall of the Han Dynasty wherein Buddhism was introduced to China. Only in the seventh century that Confucianism was revived (Elman, 2002). The chief

ideas that the Confucian teachings has were directed toward the ruler, upper class and scholars.

Such is a great difference between Confucianism and Buddhism where the latter aims to include the common masses. The instillation of virtues to rulers and noble men is the most original concept in the Confucian teachings. The Golden Rule (Do not do unto others what you do not want others do unto you) is its most celebrated principle that which promotes harmony among all people (Chai & Chai, 1973). With this, Confucianism detests war and the employment of too many laws. Confucianism upholds its defined five most fundamental relationships which entails varying responsibilities.

These relationships include husband and wife, parent and child (filial piety), the elders and the younger ones, ruler and subject, and friendship (Elman, 2002). Among these five, filial piety is the most important relationship that is nevertheless accentuated these days in contemporary China. Lastly, Confucianism puts high regard with the notions of Heaven's decree, Great Men and Saints, as well as in performing rituals or Li. Buddhism As mentioned earlier, Buddhism's teachings are directed towards the general populace (Ch'en, 1972).

The very concept of Buddhism is founded on the idea of the Enlightenment (wherein Buddha is said to be the Enlightened One). From then on, the goal of Buddhism is to bring man into Perfect Enlightenment or Nirvana (Hanh, 1999). Siddhartha Gautama is the Buddha. He reached nirvana or the enlightenment period through passionate contemplation. Reaching nirvana would make one free from hunger and selfish desires. It also marks the end of suffering. Once one reaches the enlightenment period, his mind will have

everlasting peace (Hanh, 1999). Buddhism advocates the method of truthful inquiry. It tells man not to be overwhelmed by their blind faith.

It teaches man to become open-minded and skeptic about the things around him. In accordance with this suggested way of inquiry, Buddhism has established the Four Noble Truths. This tells man that: 1. ) all forms of being, human and other wise are afflicted with suffering, 2. ) the cause of suffering is craving (an illusion of the soul), 3. ) suffering has a lasting end in the experience of nirvana, and 4. ) enlightenment is achieved by a gradual training of the Eightfold Path. These eightfold path is directed towards the clearing of mind and action from indulgence and lustful desires (Ch'en, 1972).

Buddhism does not believe in a God or the likes. There is no one that can fully control one's own self than him alone. Thus, one has the fullresponsibilityof himself and his actions. And these are not predetermined by a Supreme Being. The concept of Karma is also one of the most distinct features in Buddhism (Ch'en, 1972). It pertains to the belief that all actions have subsequent consequences that are directed to the acting agent. Karma can be a good one or bad one. It depends on the nature of the action performed that produced the consequence that is reflected on the performer of such action.

The concept of Rebirth can be best understood by appealing to the principle or doctrine of Karma (Hanh, 1999). Taoism/Daoism Taoism is a school of thought pioneered by Lao Tze or Lao Tzu, also one of the great thinkers in China. Taoism means the path or the way of living to obtain a harmonious relationship with the world and all its definitive processes (Po-Tuan, 2001).

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Taoism was started as simple philosophical discourse but eventually evolved and took the form of religion. One of its beliefs is the concept of Tao which is defined as the root cause of everything.

Tao motivated the rise of the Yin Yang which causes the formation of the universe. Taoism highlights that man should live in harmony with the nature (Po-Tuan, 2001). And only when man achieves such harmony that he will leave in peace and prosperity. Taoism maintains the principle of Wu Wei or non-action which means that man should not go against the nature and must instead go with its operation (Taoist Association of China, 2002). Man need not act since the nature will do the action provided that man lives in harmony with it. Unlike, Buddhism, Taoism believes in multiple Gods.

It has hierarchy of Gods that represents system of government in the ancient China (Taoist Association of China, 2002). The ethics defined in Taoism is represented by the three Jewels that which symbolizes compassion, moderation and humility (Po-Tuan, 2001). Taoism encourages the people to examine their way of living by first making them realize that living with accordance to nature would mean peace. It also suggests that man should not overly use his being a man. It says that man should prioritize his needs and lessen his wants and desires. Lastly, it orders man not to become egocentric and egotistic.

Christianity in China Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are the prevailing religions in China. Before the entrance of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism are two most notable and most patronized religions in China (Legge, 2004). In fact, the two seemed to be opponents of each other primarily because of their consistent difference on particular viewpoints and issues.

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But the penetration of Buddhism marks a turning point with regards to the religious inclinations in China. When Buddhism entered China, it signaled the redistribution and reconstruction of religions all throughout China.

Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism have been even combined at particular regions to serve as one religion. Hence, China's religion cannot really be said to be concentrated with one of its three most recognized religions (Legge, 2004). In the seventh century A. D. , Christianity was introduced to China (during the Ming Dynasty) (Bays, 1999). Christianity is a very different religion as compared to the earlier religions in China. From then on, Christianity has been said to be the fastest growing religion in China. It is recorded that 40 million to 100 million of population in China are either Catholic or Protestant.

This means that China has started to embrace the western religion that is very unlike with their traditional and ancient religions (Bays, 1999). The arrival of Robert Morrison in China has started the spread of Christianity towards China. The Bible has been even translated to Chinese in order to communicate with Chinese people and for them to have easy access to it. Since then, several Christian missionaries have visited and taught the doctrine of the Christian Faith (Bays, 1999). Christianity The most celebrated feature of Christianity is the fact that it deifies one God. This God is the cause of everything and the director of everything.

All man's action is caused by this all-powerful and all-knowing God. But these descriptions do not suffice the notion of the Christian God. The concept of the Holy Trinity, salvation, and life after death are also included in the doctrine of the Christian Faith (Borg, 2004). The story of Jesus Christ and His

death on the Cross is also the highlights of the Christian Faith (Borg, 2004). It represents the martyrdom of the Son of the God in order to save mankind. All in all, the Christian Faith equates all the happening in this world to what God has originally ordained to occur.

And no one can interfere nor change what God has decreed. God and Fate or Destiny have been often characterized as the same thing (Borg, 2004). But the former has the most perfect and powerful character. Analysis: Compare and Contrast Confucianism and Christianity Among the other school of thoughts (discussed in this paper), Confucianism is the most compatible religion with Christianity. They both advocate that Heaven's decree is the most fundamental source of order in the world (Chai & Chai, 1973). Only that, in Confucianism, there is no stress given to a god or a deity to be worshipped (Elman, 2002).

Such obedience is directed to the Heaven itself. Whereas in Christianity, there is a God that is the end of one's being obedient (Borg, 2004). As mentioned in the introduction, the defining mark that distinguishes philosophy from religion is the fact that the former repudiates dogmas that tend to confine and limits one's way of thinking while the latter deliberately suggests and recommends particular doctrines in which one needs not to be certain of (Leahy, 2003). Philosophy speculates and examines the very concept of faith which is often used to justify religions and their established tenets.

The belief of the Confucianism and the Christianity about the notion of Heaven's decree obviously falls under the sphere of religion. It is primarily because the existence of such decree from heaven cannot be verified or

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confirmed yet can be justified through faith. Yet philosophy does not admit such finality. As cited, philosophy is still at the period of examining the very nature of faith as a source of justification of knowledge (Gasset, 1964). With regards to ethical patterns included in the Confucian and Christian faith implies that man should be virtuous in order for him to have a harmonious life.

Yet both have different ways of looking at the concept of a harmonious life. For Confucianism, a harmonious life is the achievement of order in human relationships (Chai & Chai, 1973). On the contrary, for Christians, a harmonious life is being free from sins which separate man from God (Borg, 2004). Seemingly Confucian notion of a harmonious life is philosophic in nature which really explains how harmony could be affected by human relationships – that is verifiable and can be validated. Conversely, the Christian notion of a harmonious relationship is really superficial and metaphysical.

One cannot really confirm the truthfulness of such statement. And it cannot even be explained by reasoning. But only faith can support it. Hence it is more of a religious belief rather than a philosophic one. Buddhism and Christianity On the other hand, Buddhism and Christianity is not really compatible with each other (as religions). As discussed above, Christianity advocates a religion that which is primarily directed towards the belief to a God. Yet Buddhism undermines the concept of a Supreme Being that which is all-powerful and all-knowing, and that which controls man's actions.

Buddhism maintains that man can have the full control over his life therefore he does not need a god that would provide guidance and direction for him

(Ch'en, 1972). Perfect enlightenment is the stage wherein a man successful reached the point of having a complete understanding of everything including his being (Hanh, 1999). For this reason, God and Buddha is never really equal to each other. Having such distinction, it can be inferred that Buddhism tends to avoid metaphysical speculation since it does not allow the concept of a supernatural entity as cause of man's actions.

Buddhism keeps its teachings to the moral standpoint and its reliance on experiential insight. Whereas, Christianity admits the existence of a God though there is no concrete and material evidence for such existence. The two can be analyzed in the light of a rationalist and an empiricist wherein Buddhism most likely supports the empiricist view of knowledge, that which lies in experience. However, Christianity supports the rationalist's view that only reason itself even without experience can prove God's existence. Thus, Buddhism and Christianity is really opposites of one another.

Nevertheless, both of them considers codes or doctrines that are needed to achieved their established purpose (Buddhism is for enlightenment; Christianity is for salvation). Hence both suggest dogma that which their disciples must follow in order to achieved theirgoals. This is where religion is obviously manifested. In the first place, one can go against these codes and doctrines and look for other ways that can also bring the actualization of their goals. Philosophy suggests that one should not limit himself from what is traditionally accepted as true or what is traditionally accpeted the right way of doing something (Heidegger, 1956).

Taoism and Christianity Like Buddhism, Taoism is also not compatible with Christianity. There are two major factors that make Taoism and Christianity

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very different with each other. The first one is that, Christianity is a monotheistic religion while Taoism adheres to multiple gods hence making it a polytheistic religion (Legge, 2004). For Christians, there is only one God (The Holy Trinity is a representation of One God) (Bays, 1999). For Taoists, they have different and particular deities that vary in different regions (in China) (Taoist Association of China, 2002).

Secondly, Christians believed that the order in the universe is predetermined and directed by God. On the contrary, Taoists believed that nature is responsible for whatever order the universe has. Such conceptions are significantly and obviously different. There is a semblance of philosophic character that is evident from the two. By appealing to ethical or moral principles, Taoism suggests that man should live in harmony with nature thus also implying that man should act in accordance with what nature ordained. This appears like the Natural Law Theory.

Nonetheless, Christianity upholds the Divine Command Theory which states that man's action and all the process in the world is ordered and commanded by God or a Divine Entity. Such regard for who or what implies the order of the universe and all its processes can be considered as a philosophical discourse. Yet such is not really explicit in Christianity. On the other hand, Taoism is most likely illustrating how nature directs and affects the universe and all the things that lie within it including the human persons and their relationship among each other (Po-Tuan, 2001).

Conclusion Philosophy and religion are two different spheres. Philosophy does not provide all answers to all the questions that one can give but can provide different ways and approaches on arriving at the possible answers.

Religion, in contrast, tends to have answers for all man's questions that are founded and based on particular doctrines that it has. Yet, it does not give man the chance of verifying the truthfulness of each doctrine by means of other method but faith. Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are the most recognize and extensively used religions in China.

But after the entrance of Christianity, the Chinese traditional culture and religion have changed significantly due to differences that are distinguishable from the three schools of thoughts and Christianity. The most important note here is the fact that before these schools of thought became religions themselves, they first became philosophical underpinnings which aim to make people realize the obscurity of the world. But eventually they became religions when people started to impose doctrines and rules that are grounded from these teachings in order to live harmoniously with the world.