

Dualism in christianity: the spiritual and the material

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Dualism is defined as a doctrine which explains that the world or reality is formed by two opposite and irreducible major principles which account for everything that exists. This has played a key role in world religion (Shermer, 103). In world religion, the term dualism refers to the belief that there are two Supreme powers or a set of divine and demonic deities that are responsible for the existence of the present world (Boyer, 145). Many argue that this perspective is manifested in Christianity when referring to God and Satan. Although there is literature on dualism in Christianity, it is seen to be unbiblical because the Scriptures have no teachings that present universe is made up of opposites.

Also, there is no affirmation that Satan (Devil) and God can be by any means equal as well as opposing (Dawkins, 226). God as revealed in Scripture is presented to be infinitely greater than Satan. In essence, dualism has been imported into Christianity. For purposes of this essay aspects of dualism in Christianity will be discussed and compared with related concepts in Buddhism. Dualism in Christianity has an origin in the Gnostic Bible (known as the Nag Hammadi) which is a discovery of the 20th century. It was written and then compiled by the heretical groups of the Christian Church.

Gnostics are people who believed they were called in order join their God to battle against a powerful god that was seen as evil. Again, they believed that it was the knowledge of Christ that could provide them with supernatural power. This power would help them escape the evil that existed in their bodies. (Boyer, 187). Prior to the time the Gnostic Christians introduced the aspect of dualism to Christianity, the idea of dualism had an origin within Zoroastrianism which was a Persian religion.

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This was later adopted by the early church heresies. A popular book called 'This Present Darkness' propagates dualism. It presents the idea that the human flesh is 'evil' and the human spirit is 'good' which in Christianity presents a false dichotomy (Dawkins, 98). This puts forth the idea that Christians are called to go into battle where the supreme God fights against Satan and his fellow fallen angels. In Buddhism, dualism takes two principles that are impersonal and eternal. These two are spirit and matter.

According to Buddhist dualism, the human nature is in existence because the two principles are in union or in opposition. (Boyer, 157). They are not just evil or good but also present the negative and positive aspects of existence. Thus, human existence is a result of having both elements. In Buddhism, evil is not an independent entity. It is enhanced by impermanent causes.

This consequently results in a controversy between Buddhism and Christianity. Christianity emphasizes that there is a struggle between good and evil and the fundamental issue is the human will. In other words Christianity looks at which side an individual stands. There are only two sides, one is either on God's side or rebel against Him. This is in contrast with Buddhism which puts an emphasis on enlightenment and ignorance and here the fundamental issue is self knowledge (Shermer, 118).

Buddhism therefore, looks at the motivation that causes one to do either good or evil. The teachings of Buddhism on good and evil state that people suffer and bring suffering to other people because they are greedy, have ill will and are also delusional. The implication here is that when the actions of human beings are motivated by these vices the negative results will come

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back to haunt them. Buddhism requires mindfulness in ways of thinking. The distinction of the dualism that exist in good and bad comes only because an individual wants one, as opposed to the other (Shermer, 123).

Therefore, if an individual wants to do good then focus should be on avoiding evil. This implies that the meaning of one element can only be understood in dependence with the other principle. In Christianity, this is not the case. To attain purity, an individual focuses on doing good and not evil. A thought of the evil one is meant to avoid does not make one do good.

It is the actual articulation of the word of God as the Bible commands Christians to do. Both Christianity and Buddhism share some concepts of the dualism of good versus evil. There is a common teaching in these two religions that when one is struck on one cheek then they should turn the other (Dawkins, 105). Consequently, the two religions have a similar remedy to conquer the rift between good and evil. Love is the answer.

The only way to deal with evil is not to retaliate with another evil in an attempt to equal scores. There seems to be a general agreement that evil can destroy the fabric that holds society together. Unless society is engaged in good acts, then transformation cannot take place in the life of human beings (Boyer, 209). In summary, this short essay has found out that dualism of good versus evil is conceptual and it is the interpretation of the concepts that bring the differences between Christianity, and Buddhism (Shermer, 123). Whereas in Christianity evil represents acts that go against the will of God, in Buddhism evil is the result of lack of contentment with what one has. Thus, evil according to Buddhism is motivated by greed, delusion and ill will.

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Human suffering is seen as a failure in the way humans think about good and evil. Christianity has everything spelt out. If one is on God's side, then only good acts will come out of them because goodness is the nature of God. Opposition to God translates to evil (Hasker, 98)