

RLST206IH (ORIGINS OF GOD) COVID RESPONSES

Discussion prompt:

View the [Buddhist dharma](#) lecture and the [Taoism lecture](#).

Discuss at least 4 concepts (two from each) . For each concept, discuss EITHER how it compares or contrasts to earlier material we have covered in this class OR how it could be applied to help explain or deal with our current global pandemic; or the experience of social distancing.

Please write freely and be as creative as you want. Then, pose a question for further discussion and respond to at least two classmates.

Karlee Branson

Hello all! I hope everyone is finding peace and hope in these hard times. I think this section fits in well with the pandemic that is uprooting all of our daily lives because it discusses many different ways to interpret stressful situations. The concept of Tao is the cosmic order of the universe that occurs in a spontaneous way. In my opinion this pandemic occurred in a spontaneous way and there was nothing we could do to stop it from infecting the earth. Similar to Ying and Yang, this horrible pandemic is a negative event that is happening to balance all of the good. Complementary opposites occur all the time during our lives and while some interpret it as punishment for something they've done in the past or because they are supposed to learn something from it, Taoism explains the good and bad as a natural ebb and flow of the universe.

I found it interesting that instead of learning while living, Taoism teaches to unlearn in order to be at peace in the world. It discusses how to be free you must discard the baggage of conventional values... humans choose their own suffering. This should speak to us in this time because of all the media constantly in the background. The media has been giving us information, good and bad, and how we perceive it effects our actions. During the COVID-19 pandemic I decided to only listen to credible sources such as the CDC and WHO websites. As a microbiology major I know that these website aren't going to skew the reality of the virus. The mass hysteria that is happening right now was caused by listening to statistical analysis of the pandemic that could happen, but hasn't and believing people who aren't experts that are trying to scare us into obedience. In this time it is crucial to find the truth in all the madness and follow guidelines that have proven to stop the spread of the virus, not just blindly follow a celebrities or politicians view on what is happening. In order to get out of these rough times we have to respect the elderly who are at high risk, social distance, benefit from our time in isolation, and discover what we can do to cease the spread. Instead, people are blindly trying to stockpile for the end of time and not following guidelines put forth. Follow the Tao and go along with your inherent nature. Follow your Te and grasp your virtue, integrity and inner essence. Trust yourself and RELAX. Only after these things occur normalcy will return.

The Buddhist term *Dukkha-Dukkha*, explains the world right now. With everyone feeling discontent we all have a *Trsna* or thirst for selfish things within our hysteria and boredom. In order to keep balance at this time we have to work together to get to the end and reach a sense of *Nirvana*, where craving will be

removed and suffering will cease. Unlike Taoism, Buddhist don't fear a large government that takes control of society. Right now in the best thing we can do is to listen to our leaders and social distance ourselves and admit that we are sick or are weak at this time. The world is full of impermanence and our country need to realize that things are changing and if not for the best right now, for later and for future generations. I believe we will learn from this pandemic and hopefully be ready for the next one to come because it will. The next pandemic might not have a super low mortality rate like this one and if so, everyone will be more affected and disrupted by the *Anitya* caused by it. The 1918 influenza pandemic killed more people than in World War 1 and 2 combined and they didn't have anywhere near as much travel that we have now. We have to be ready for an increasing evil, even if it doesn't come. I think that if there is a positive to this situation it has to be the practice of dealing with all of our discontentment and impermanence and how everyone as a community comes together to find a solution. Especially right now we need to watch our own selves and be our own therapist, have the right speech and action (*sila*), have the right view and resolve (*prajna*), and have the right effort and mindfulness (*Samadhi*). When everyone works together to create their own pyramid of peace we can find nirvana.

My question to all of you is what have you been doing during social distancing to find your path or nirvana? What are things that you regret doing if any and what can you do to fix it?

Jack Guthrie

Dukkha-Dukkha→ This can be understood today as suffering caused by disease, suffering from the death of loved ones, or suffering caused by separation from friends and family because of quarantine. Dukkha-dukkha can cover the slight to the extreme forms of suffering that are felt because of the current pandemic situation. I think pretty much everyone would agree that they have felt some form of discomfort because of covid-19, and whether it is as small as being unhappy that you can't conduct your normal work or school routine, see your friends that you are used to seeing often, or go certain places, or as large as dealing with the death of a loved one or someone else you know. All of these types of suffering fall under the umbrella of dukkha-dukkha.

Viparinama-dukkha→ This type of suffering is slightly different from dukkha-dukkha, in that it stems from anitya, or impermanence. This type of suffering results from the fear or uncertainty that lies with impermanence. For many, this could be a time when they are suddenly worried that their time left may be cut short, or they could worry about what things will be like after the pandemic ends. When thinking about impermanence, people could also suffer because they don't know how long the situation will last.

Wei-wu-wei→ This can be described as action without consideration, or empty actions in the sense that you are not thinking about how your actions will contribute to how others view you, you are simply acting on your own. I think that this could be observed in some people in the forms of what they do during quarantine. It might be a stretch, but given the circumstances, with the government mandates to stay at home, people will take to doing various activities, and some may feel pressure to do certain things, especially with social media showing what exactly people are doing. So I think Wei-wu-wei could be applied here to remind people to do things that they themselves are drawn to, not doing things that they think will make them fit in with or live up to other peoples standards.

Tao→ This term means the way. It is the way things are, the natural course of events that contains both positive and negative, difficult and easy, and many other dualities. I think this term is applicable at any time, but may be more impactful when times are hard and people are worried. I think that is important to remember that struggles and hardships are a fact of life, and that they are a necessary part of the balance that is life. We must accept these hardships, and recognize that things will not be this way forever. And while things remain hard, we can gain valuable growth and insight resulting from our circumstances. Although we may be restricted to our homes, separated from our friends and loved ones, we have been given a time to learn new skills, develop new areas of interest, or begin projects we have been waiting to start.

Marlene Ortiz-Martinez

Buddhism

One of the three marks of existence is defined as discontentment or insatiability—*dukkha*. *Viparinama-dukkha*, however, can be applied more specifically to the current pandemic that plagues the globe. To be exact, *Viparinama-dukkha* means the insatiability or “suffering” that arises from the impermanence (*anitya*). The COVID-19 pandemic in and of itself has given rise to the discontentment with life. What does the future hold for those that have lost their job? This can be particularly challenging, a time of suffering for those that consider their employment as the only source of income. I think this quite evident around the country as lower- and middle-class Americans struggle to make ends meet and bring in money to sustain their families. Nonetheless, this goes beyond current conditions. This discomfort has had Americans question what the future holds for each and every one of us. There is great discomfort also because the pandemic has us in a limbo. What will be of us in the day of tomorrow?

Nirvana – This can in some form be related to our lecture on Christianity. Dr. Grether mentions that it cannot be compared to Christian heaven rather it is state of mind that is reached once all obstacles are removed—that’s passion, aversion and ignorance. However, I do think that in some sense the Christian heaven and *Nirvana* do relate. In Christianity, the believer’s ultimate goal and reason for believing, and abiding Christian teachings is to one day dwell in the “promised land” where wickedness will cease to exist. Those that live up to Buddhism and its teachings also desire to reach a goal: *Nirvana*—a state of perfect freedom from passion and the like. Therefore, I do think there is a similarity between Christianity and Buddhism as both advocate/teach what objective (whether it be heaven or state of mind) a believer must strive for!

Taoism

Tien & Di – *Tien* (heaven) and *Di* (earthly realm of humans) can’t be thought of apart from each other. They, together, form a cosmos representing the gods and spirits accessibility to humans. However, more importantly, it was the leader’s primary responsibility to preserve the harmonious relationship between *Tien-Di*. I think that this concept can be related to Zoroastrianism’s system of beliefs. In the *yasna* ritual, the *barsom*, *hom*, etc. were used to make offerings to Ahura Mazda and to maintain cosmic order. However, more interesting, was that to the *barsom*, *hom*, etc. were, what they considered, a sample of what could be found in the cosmos. This could be related to *Tien* and *Di* as there seems to be no distinction between the physical realm and the unseen in Zoroastrianism like in Taoism beliefs. Likewise,

the yasna ritual was meant for the purpose of maintaining order and righteousness just as Taoism seeks to preserve the harmonious relationship between Tien-Di.

Tao – This is a particularly interesting concept that ties into the current pandemic. Things/events before the pandemic seemed to naturally be, people carried about their lives. However, just as Taoism points out, everything evil (bad people, events, etc.) happens when things move against the flow of the Tao—more precisely, ways things are naturally. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be disastrous, creating an interruption for all humankind, and as Taoism beliefs argue, opposition of what naturally occurs in the cosmos. However, we must be reminded that this pandemic is part of nature—something that has occurred throughout various times in history. Like Taoism points out, “nature is continuous ebb and flow of opposites—rise & fall, comes & go, emerge & die, etc.”.

I think I touched on some points that could relate to both Buddhism and Taoism; however, are any other connections that can be made with the current COVID-19 pandemic and the lectures?

Sarah Rordam

The current pandemic is an exemplification of the Taoist yin yang and an example of the Taoist governance. Just like there is darkness so humanity knows light or wet and dry humanity knows sickness and health. To explain the cause of the current pandemic crisis, the exuberant lifestyle of the rich and powerful could be the cause of all the suffering. This pandemic is a means to balance the lack of Asha and moving against the Tao, and the Tao is always good. Although that could be seen as a very cold and inhuman view, in the Taoist perspective death is only the opposite of life and is part of cosmic duality.

The 3 marks of existence according to the Buddhist dharma are Anitya (impermanence), Anatman (insubstantiality) and Dukkah (discontentment/insatiability). The only constant is change, and although the planet is suffering and people are dying, this pandemic is not permanent, and just like other pandemics, at some time or other, they subside. When Buddha sat under the tree and meditated he isolated himself and was forced to look inside himself, which eventually led to Nirvana. Quarantining and social distancing is sending humanity back inside their homes as well as giving much of humanity time to spend with themselves and evaluate their life paths and “unlearn” some habits or mindsets that are destructive.

Mckenzie Stumne

Hello everyone! Hope you are all staying healthy and enjoying this time as much as you can. These two lectures were very interesting to me, in particular Buddhism. I had little prior knowledge of either religion and learning just a little bit about them made me want to learn more.

Learning about Buddha and Buddhism left an impact on me. It had some very powerful words that were very interesting to me and the concepts were cool to learn about. One thing that especially stood out to be was the 3 marks of existence. In particular, Anitya, the realization that nothing is permanent. This is something that I think about often. Nothing in this world is permanent or guaranteed, which is a very daunting thought. Change is constantly happening, which can easily relate to the pandemic we are in currently. There have been very little times in history where there has been this much change to daily

life in such a short time, not to mention worldwide. Almost everything has personally changed for me, where I am living, who I see everyday, my schedule etc. This brings on a lot of anxiety and fear, which compared a lot to Viparinama Dukkah, the discontentment felt by the realization of impermanence. This is being felt by many people world wide, especially as the virus spreads, the impermanence is felt in your own health as well as the health of others. One way that I thought that Buddhism contrasted from other religions we have learned about comes from a quote from Buddha. In this quote he said, "Monks, just as the wise accept gold after testing it by heating, cutting and rubbing it, so are my words to be accepted after examining them, but not out of respect for me." This contrasts a lot with many religions, where it is protocol to believe the words, no matter what they are, because of the great people who said them. This was very interesting to me because Buddha is saying the opposite, that you should not only believe him because of who is his, but because you did the research yourself and you believe it too. This can also relate to the world today, as we have a tough time stopping the spread of fake information due to the lack of research and people blindly following

Taoism was different in many ways from religions we have previously learned about. There was one major way that Taoism differed that stood out to be, which was the viewpoint on good and evil. Taoism was one of the first religions that did not believe in a definitive good and evil, but rather a mix of the two. Taoism believes that its way of life, the Tao, contains both good and bad being created by one another. This highly contrasts most religions we have learned about, who normally believe in two divine figures, one good and one evil, and you must choose one to follow. In Tao, it is not believe that evil is created by choosing to follow the evil spirit, rather than evil happens when you go against the Tao, or your human nature. Tao also includes Yin/Yang. Yin and Yang were not what I originally thought, where they do not contrast each other, but compliment. Overall, this shows how a very important aspect of Taoism is the belief that there is not two separate paths of good and evil, but rather only Tao, which contains both. This can also relate heavily to the pandemic that is going on around us. This pandemic is bad in nature, people are getting ill and dying, many people are losing jobs and opportunities. But even in this bad time, a lot of good has come in many different ways. There are a lot of ecosystems that are now thriving due to the human interference decreasing. This has created a time of relaxation for some, as people can now work and go to school in the comfort of their own homes. It has created more free time for people to work on bettering themselves and doing the things they are passionate about. So relating that back to Taoism, the idea that good can come from evil and evil can come from good can really be a nice way of thinking during a scary time like this. The idea that just because it is evil in nature, does not mean that there is no good.

My question for you guys is, what aspect of either religion resonated most with you? and why?

Shayne Utter

"If you can't go outside; go inside"

Through this unprecedented time, each and every one of us is undoubtedly having a unique and personally challenging experience, the likes of which we have not experienced before and hopefully never will again. While each individual is processing and living through this period of uncertainty differently, I have noticed a widespread curiosity regarding how this pandemic can and will change society for the better and what life will look, feel, and be like short term and long term in the aftermath

of COVID-19. I feel like this general concern, optimism and looking toward the future into a level of the unknown is all tied to the same inherent aspect of human-ness that drives the seemingly eternal search for God and a higher form of living through trials of human tragedy and struggle.

As we learned this week, a main tenant of Buddhism is the continuous goal to unlearn what we think we know about life and the world around us in order to be free of the limitations that “learning” and “knowing” place on our existence. I feel that whether intentional or by coincidence, that this self quarantine experience and the uncertainty of life in even the most advanced and industrialized society has both provided the opportunity and, for many, forced individuals to unlearn norms that comprised so much of our identity on an individual and national level just a mere few weeks ago. The American tenants of personal freedom, and the ability to and pride in exercising said freedom boldly and for the most part without consequence have been greatly challenged during this time. I feel, and think that Buddha would agree, that rather than fight this temporary norm, that we take it as an opportunity to reassess the often negative aspects of our lives that make us feel that we must cling to these artificial freedoms such as the unfortunately exacerbated need to work, the fear of slowing down or being alone. This is a great opportunity to see the flaws in the American employment structure and expectations as well as to break free from the idea that solitude is something to be feared.

Building off of this, I feel that the disgruntlement seen amongst people regarding the premise of being at home and slowing down life for the better of others is greatly rooted in the human condition of Dukkha. That this unnecessary and constant push to be productive, to work toward the next goal, to have immediate answers and return, makes people uneasy with any amount of decrease in pace, regardless of the repercussions.

Despite the moral struggle being seen between those that support social distancing and those that are reluctant, Lao Tzu’s premise that people will grow weary of living in social decay and eventually look to break away from this downward trajectory is as apparent as ever. In the face of uncertainty, fear, and instability, individuals are pushing for and yearning for light and betterment to come out of the darkest global situation for over a century. A huge social issue that is becoming apparent through this experience is the lack of willingness to change one’s habits and behavior for the sake of others. I hope that eventually, this mindset will simply no longer be tolerated and that empathy and consideration for others will at least be an expectation if not the norm, if not, what was the purpose of all this life lost and the hardships faced by those attempting to protect it?

A similarity amongst nearly every religion examined in this course and that I have personally researched, is the recognition of a Cosmos and the implications that this often delicate and vital concept entails. While some religions see it as a stark contrast between a heavenly realm and the physical, others see it as a fluid existence, with a higher experience accessible to all at any time. What is most interesting is the general consensus that an imbalance between the two can often have extreme consequences in the physical/earthly world. I have seen many people turning inward and upward toward whichever deity they recognize for answers and assistance during this time and some even are certain that this pandemic was prophesized, cautioned and must be acquitted through the work of prayer and conversion.

In what ways have you turned inward during this pandemic?

