

## The Place of Human Being in Reality: Modes of Different Religions

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### *Abstract*

We live in difficult times that raise many questions and challenges. One of them is related to the realization of the role and place of the human being in reality. This is especially important now, when the human being is increasingly threatening his *oikos*, the home he inhabits. On the other hand, the global world gives possibilities for mutual connections and transformations of different cultures. Each culture is connected with a particular religion or religions. Therefore, it is useful to discuss how different religions understand the place of the human being in reality. In this paper, I will compare the modes of this understanding developed in Christianity, Hinduism, Daoism and Buddhism.

*Keywords:* human being, reality, Christianity, Hinduism, Daoism, Buddhism.

### 1. Introduction

We live in stressful times that raise many questions and challenges. One of them is related to the realization of the role and place of the human being in reality. This issue is especially important now when the human being is not only increasingly threatening his *oikos*, the home he inhabits, but begins to lose awareness of the borders of reality since the modern technologies enable him “constantly to vary between the rules of the real and the virtual worlds” (Popova, 2019). On the other hand, the global world gives possibilities for “constant comparison of cultures that not only connects but rather transforms them” (Mireva-Ilieva, 2016). Every culture is based on a particular religion or religions. Therefore, it is useful to discuss how different religions understand the place of the human being in reality. In this paper, the modes of understanding of the human being’s place in reality according to Christianity, Hinduism, Daoism, and Buddhism are compared. This issue is regarded in different perspectives:

- in terms of relations of the human being with other parts or aspects of the universe;
- in terms of action – whether the human being is understood as an acting subject, passive object of influences or something else;
- from the perspective of his/her value.

## 2. The mode of Christianity

The place of the human being in the world, according to Christianity, is complex and multidimensional.

Humans are a part of creation and share all its characteristics being in a subordinate and dependent position towards his/her Creator. However, the human being has a special place within this creation: this is the only being created in God's image and likeness. From this follows that human is the only one who has free will and creative power. He/she is the only one who can change in one or other direction God's plan for the creation.

In such a way, the human being is the most important creature.

Actually, in the Bible, there are two versions that present creation and the creation of the human being. According to the older Yahwist version, man is the center of creation around which all other creation is arranged (Gen. 2). According to the Priestly version, humankind is the crown of the creation creating after other living beings (Gen. 1).

In both cases, the human is a unique being that is different from all other living creatures and receives special privileges and duties from God.

According to the Priestly version, the humankind received from God blessing and right to rule over all other beings: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Gen. 1:28).

According to the Yahwist version, man has a duty to take care of God's creation: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2: 15). Other living beings were created in the sake of man: "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Gen. 2: 18). The man received also the privilege to name other beings participating in such way in their creation: "So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals" (Gen. 2: 20).

So, in both versions, the human being has a special privilege place. The two versions, however, are very much different as well.

According to the Priestly version, humankind was made in image and likeness of God and is made both male and female. Human received blessing and right. This version "affirms the goodness of the created order as well as the inherent goodness of mankind. In fact, mankind, male and female, is created in God's image; mankind is portrayed as God's representative (representation in image and likeness) on earth" (DiMattei, 2012).

In the Yahwist version, the man was formed not in image and likeness of God but "from the dust of the ground" and "the breath of life" that God breathed into his nostrils (Gen. 2: 5). He was made only as a male. The female was made afterward as his helper. The man received a right to give names. He, however, also received duties to take care of the creation. Instead of blessing, he received strict commands and even a curse. This version "is a story of increasing disobedience, violence, and corruption. It starts with an etiological tale (Gen 2:4b-3:24) recounting how and why man has fallen from the presence of his god, specifically identified as Yahweh, and is consigned to toil a ground that has now become cursed to him, namely on account of his desire to follow his own will" (*Ibid.*).

So, human being, according to the Bible, is a complex creature. He is both insignificant and majestic, despised, and worthy. He has divinely determined power over the rest of the creation, and he has a duty and responsibility to this creation. It is the human being that enters the fall into the creation and provokes the unfolding of history. And it is the human being that should return the creation to its blissful state.

The fall in which man engages the whole creation is the beginning of history: a sequence of unique events that go from one to another point. According to Christianity, the direction of this movement is predicted. It should lead to a victory of good and obtaining of “a new heaven and a new earth”: “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Isaiah 65: 17); “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” (Peter II, 3: 13); “Then I saw” a new heaven and a new earth, “for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Rev. 21: 1).

In such a way, “A progressive, temporally oriented mythology arose, of a creation, once and for all, at the beginning of time, a subsequent fall, and a work of restoration, still in progress. The world no longer was to be known as a mere showing in time of the paradigms of eternity but as a field of unprecedented cosmic conflict between two powers, one light and one dark.” (Campbell, 1962: 23)

The idea of this lineal, teleological, predicted by God direction is “a potent mythical formula for the reorientation of the human spirit ... — pitching it forward along the way of time, summoning man to an assumption of autonomous responsibility for the renovation of the universe in God's name, and thus fostering a new, potentially political (not finally contemplative) philosophy of holy war” (Campbell, 1962: 24).

Having all rights and responsibilities, given by God, having a role in the cosmic conflict between powers of good and evil, the man at the same time is nothingness in front the God's might. In the Bible, the God's majesty and the vanity of man is outlined in many places: “You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure” (Psalm 39: 5).

All these characteristics of a man and his destiny, however, belong to the Old Testament and are shared by both Judaism and Christianity. Christianity developed new accents in the understanding of man.

According to Christianity, it is because of humankind that God sent His only Son to be a Saviour to the creation.

It is in order to save the humankind that the God-Son sacrificed Himself.

It is human nature along with the divine one that this Son possesses.

The main difference between Christianity and other Abrahamic religions, however, is the idea of Love.

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres” (Corinthians I, 13: 1-7).

What does love mean in Christianity? Christianity asserts that God is Love, and to have faith and to have love is the same. “The Christian faith is a religion of love because it teaches that the God of love has embraced humanity before the foundation of the world and that human love... is truly love when it is an echo of that divine love” (Volf, 2014: 462).

All love comes from God, and only this is true love:

“...let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us”. (John I, 4: 7-12)

In its essential teaching, Christianity calls human beings “to receive themselves, the world, and God as gifts of love and to become Love’s instruments themselves” (Volf, 2014: 471).

Therefore, according to the essence of Christianity, it is love that should penetrate all relations and attitudes: to ourselves, to other human beings, to the world, and to God. Christianity is a religion that establishes a personal relationship of human with his/her Creator, a relation of a kind I-Thou, God being the Eternal Thou in every relation.

### 3. The mode of Hinduism

In Hinduism, the human is both a unique being and a kind of unfolding of Oneness as are all other beings.

Human is a unique being because Hinduism depicts the primordial state of cosmos in anthropomorphic form as it is revealed in Purusha sukta. Besides, according to Hinduism, the primordial Oneness is unfolding in two main streams: a cosmic stream and a psychic stream. One stream is the unfolding of the Brahman into cosmos, passing three main states: the cosmic spirit or self-consciousness, *Ishvara*; the cosmic soul or vital energy of the world, *Hiryanagarbha*; the visible material world. The other stream is the unfolding of the Self from the individual self-consciousness through the mental or vital component of the self to the visible body. There are strict correlations between the three levels of both streams as well as between them and the particular state of consciousness perceiving them. According to the Vedic wisdom, there are three main states of consciousness: waking, dreaming and sleeping, and each of them perceive different level of reality both in terms of psyche and the cosmos. In Mandukya Upanishad it is presented as follows:

“This Self has four quarters. The first quarter is Vaiśvānara. Its field is the waking state. Its consciousness is outward-turned... It enjoys gross objects. The second quarter is *taijasa*. Its field is the dream state. Its consciousness is inward-turned. It enjoys subtle objects. The third quarter is *prājña*, where one asleep neither desires anything nor beholds any dream: that is deep sleep. In this field of dreamless sleep, one becomes undivided, an undifferentiated mass of consciousness, consisting of bliss and feeding on bliss.” (Mandukya Upanishada 2-5)

Therefore, we might say that the cosmos is essentially human and human is essentially cosmic.

In Hinduism, however, there is not simply a correspondence between human and psyche. There is a fourth, deepest and most important state from which these other states stem. “The highest Brahman which is Ananda is just Atman, as realized in the fourth of the *turiya* state. There the object and the subject are one. The seer, the seeing eye and the object seen merge together in one whole” (Radhakrishnan, 1923: 170). So, “the two great conceptions, Brahman attained cosmologically and atman attained psychologically” are merged (Woodburne, 1925: 53-54) and in their essence are equal. “Atman is Brahman”, state Upanishads in many places. And there is nothing but this unity.

From the intuition of this nondual unity, follow at least two consequences for the human being and its place in the universe.

First, the individual self is cosmic and divine; “that which you call the self or individuality is indeed the world-soul within one’s self” (Woodburne, 1925: 54).

Second, this individual self belongs not only to human beings. The essence of the human self is equal not only to the cosmic self, but to the essence of the self of each living being. It is the true essence of every creature:

*“(the essential self or the vital essence of man, atman) is the same as that in ant, same as that in gnat, the same as that in elephant, the same as that in these three worlds, indeed the same as that in the whole universe” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I. 3. 22)*

Therefore, humans are not some privileged beings; “according to Indian thinkers, from the ultimate philosophical point of view, man cannot be regarded as, in any way, standing apart from the universe, much less as enjoying any preponderance in it. Their speculations have, therefore, never tended to become anthropocentric. They look upon man just as part and parcel of the universe – just as one of the many forms in which the Supreme being is manifested in this universe” (Dandekar, 1962: 1).

In such a way, human has both a cosmic essence and the essence of the smallest creature. The self is simultaneously huge, embracing the vastness of the cosmos, and small, penetrating the slightest breath of the thinnest peace of grass:

*“He is my self within the heart, smaller than a corn of rice, smaller than a corn of barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller than a canary seed or the kernel of a canary seed. He is my self within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than heaven, greater than all these worlds... He, my self within the heart, is that Brahman” (Chandogya Upanishad, III, 14: 3-4).*

So, the Self of a human is undistinguishable from the self of every being and from the Self of all cosmos. Actually, there is only one Self, one without other, that is behind every individual self. As it is presented in the Purusha sukta “the whole world is pictured as one single being of incomparable vastness and immensity, animated by one spirit, including within its substance all forms of life” (Radhakrishnan, 1923: 41). Therefore, “the most distinctive feature of the speculative wisdom of the Indians is its essentially cosmic character” (Dandekar, 1962: 1). This cosmic character is at the same time spiritual and divine and “there is a cordial harmony between God and man in Indian thought, while the opposition between the two is more marked in the West” (Radhakrishnan, 1923: 41).

In such a way, human in Indian thought is essentially divine, as is each other creature. Human is not created or made in the image and likeness of God. He/she is God. Even more. He/she is not god but the primordial self that precedes even gods. He/she is the universe and the essence of the universe.

The deepest secret of Vedic wisdom “That thou art!” reveals exactly this nonseparation and identity of individual soul, or atman, and the Ultimate, or Brahman. In Vedic scriptures, this identity is interpreted and presented in several ways, indicating different states of approaching this truth. The famous expert in Indian thought Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan summarizes them as follows: (1) Non-dualism or Advaitism; (2) Pure monism; (3) Modified monism; and (4) Implicit monism (Radhakrishnan, 1923: 32). All these variations, however, are but different expressions of the deep Hinduist intuition of oneness.

Being undistinguishable aspect of the unfolding of primordial unity, humankind shares all the states of this unfolding. Like the humankind in Christianity, the humankind in Hinduism should undergo certain predestined states. While, however, Christianity speaks of a

linear and teleological process that has a determine starting point and aim, in Indian thought it is an endless sequence of involutions of the spirit to the matter and evolution of matter to the spirit, of unfolding of one into many and returning of these many to that one in a cyclic order. Unlike Christianity, in Hinduism there is no struggle of good and evil. There is simply a natural exchange of cosmic inhalation and exhalation, of cosmic nights and cosmic days, of cosmic death and cosmic births that have no ultimate beginning or end.

These rhythmic processes are ruled by the same law. Since the human is like the universe and the universe is like the human, the laws governing society are also the laws governing the universe. Vedic religion calls the law of cosmic and moral order *rta*, a path, thus emphasizing the dynamic nature of the existing and the importance of human behavior, the human way of following the path. The idea of *rta* was developed to the later concepts of karma and dharma.

The concept of karma is a complex and multi-layered one. Initially, it means action, but not every action, but a purposeful ritual action aimed at the gods. Later, karma begins to relate to each type of action. The concept of karma, however, involves not only the idea of action but, above all, the idea of the expected result as a result of this action. That is why karma is often described as a law of cause and effect in moral terms.

This law of karma is very important law regulating human behavior. It states that every action creates particular consequences that determine the next stage of development. This law explains the differences in living conditions and circumstances of the present existence. They are a direct result of previous human actions. Therefore, there is no other, outer, transcendent power, force, or authority that determines the present situation of an individual. Everything is a natural result of one's actions. Therefore, human beings have a great responsibility for the way they will live their life. Humans could hardly change the present circumstances since they are a result of their previous actions, but only humans themselves could determine and influence the next circumstances.

Karma, however, regulates not only the course of development of individual beings. It influences not only the individual but also the cosmic and even supra-cosmic development. According to Indian thought, the universe goes through vast periods of pulsation between expansion and collapse, manifestation, and peace. At each new period of beginning, a new Divine Principle that defines the basic directions of the new cycle is established or a new Brahma is "born". The nature of the new cycle, however, is to a large extent conditioned by the preceding cycle of development and the contribution of each individual to it. Therefore, the moral aspect of our existence at any moment is of utmost importance. Every thought, speech and action influences the whole; our behavior affects our present Brahma and eventually will impact the future Brahma and the entire future Universe that will unfold from it as well. In the system of Indian thought, everything is connected with everything else and everything affects everything else and is influenced by everything else. Therefore, according to Hinduism, human beings are responsible not only for themselves but also for the whole universe connected with them.

Karma determines the whole process of development of the universe and of human soul ruling the processes of reincarnation. Each individual life, however, has its own law or path. In Bhagavadgita, this way is called *svadharma* (one's own law). One has to understand this dharma and to act according to it. Only then the individual will receive true satisfaction and fulfilment. Deviation from his dharma is interpreted as the greatest deviation from the universal laws and the way of truth. It is even worse than murder, because it is betrayal of the true essence. Here the murder is a conditional one, because in a world of unity the killer and the killed are only two temporary and interchangeable aspects of the unchanging, unborn, infinite and indestructible essence:

*"He who thinks that the Spirit kills, and he who thinks of It as killed, are both ignorant. The Spirit kills not, nor is It killed. It was not born; It will never die, nor*

*once having been, can It cease to be. Unborn, Eternal, Ever-enduring, yet Most Ancient, the Spirit dies not when the body is dead. He who knows the Spirit as Indestructible, Immortal, Unborn, Always-the-Same, how should he kill or cause to be killed?"* (Bhagavadgita, 2: 18-20, tr. Shri Purohit Swami)

Thus, on the one hand, Bhagavadgita justifies every action as long as it stems from an understanding of following one's own path. Of course, each individual path should not be arbitrary but should follow *rta* – the moral path of human and of the universe. The true *svadharma* is only this that obeys higher moral laws.

On the other hand, in Bhagavadgita we can find the clearest and unambiguously expressed idea of tolerance, stemming from the understanding that the deepest reality is one, whatever names the different human beings might give it. The all-encompassing tolerance is a direct consequence from the idea of oneness. The deepest essence of the world manifests itself in different forms, and people could approach this deepest being on different paths, naming it with different names.

*"Howsoever men try to worship Me, so do I welcome them. By whatever path they travel, it leads to Me at last."* (Bhagavadgita, 4: 11, tr. Shri Purohit Swami)

There are many ways but the goal is the same. No one of the paths is better or worse than the others, as no *svadharma* is better or worse than the other. As long as one goes along his/her chosen path (either externally or internally), one will ultimately reach the point where all the paths merge and the question of their differences is insignificant. This external tolerance of Hinduism allows it to accept and ultimately melt, turn into his own, most of the religions it faces.

On the other hand, despite the notion of unity and oneness, Hinduism has a clear idea of the hierarchy of being. For example, Purusha's sacrifice is a cosmogonic act – an act of division and arrangement in which one becomes many. This arrangement is hierarchical. Divided parts of the unity give birth to division. The four castes in Indian society are related to four increasingly inferior parts of the Purusha's body. In such a way, the division in society is cosmologically predestined. The four castes have many different rights and obligations. Hinduism asserts that

*"It is better to do thine own duty, however lacking in merit, than to do that of another, even though efficiently. It is better to die doing one's own duty, for to do the duty of another is fraught with danger"* (Bhagavadgita, 3: 35, tr. Shri Purohit Swami).

In such a way, society is strictly divided, and everybody should follow his/her own path. From the higher point of view of the unity of the soul in time; however, this hierarchy is conventional because in different lives, it could have different roles.

*"There was never a time when I was not, nor thou, nor these princes were not; there will never be a time when we shall cease to be. As the soul experiences in this body infancy, youth and old age, so finally it passes into another. The wise have no delusion about this. Those external relations which bring cold and heat, pain and happiness, they come and go; they are not permanent."* (Bhagavadgita, 2: 12-14, tr. Shri Purohit Swami)

Besides, the deepest true of the unity reveal that the whole world is a unified entity in which the subjective and the objective, the inner and the outer, the microcosm and the macrocosm are only interrelated aspects. The deepest essence of the human is also the deepest essence of the universe. And the deepest essence of every person is the deepest essence of every other person, for Atman or Self is the absolute subject, one without the second, the knowing one, which could never be known.

So, in Hinduism, the human should know simultaneously the deepest unity and oneness of the whole cosmos from one hand, to know that his/her individual soul is equal to the

highest soul and therefore is “Eternal, Indestructible, Immeasurable”, “Unborn, Eternal, Ever-enduring, yet Most Ancient”, “Indestructible, Immortal, Unborn, Always-the-Same” (Bhagavadgita, 2). The human should know that he/she is one with the whole cosmos, one with each little manifestation of the highest soul, with smallest mosquito, one with other people as well.

On the other hand, he/she should be conscious of the requirements, aims and peculiarities of the concrete reincarnation following the duties that stem from it.

Being one with everything, he should realize his particular path following in the ideal the four stages of life: studying as *Brahmacharya*, fulfilment of duty to the society as *Grihastha* or householder, withdraw from active life and following the path of wisdom as *Vanaprastha*; and devotion to the truth as *Sannyasa* (renunciate).

According to Hinduism, the individual human soul could achieve liberation from the cycle of births and deaths and return to its initial state as unborn oneness. Hinduism reveals four paths to this aim: karma yoga or path of action, *gnyana* yoga – the path of wisdom, bhakti yoga – the path of love, and the *radja* yoga – the path of meditation.

Yoga is a name for all spiritual, mental and physical practices leading to a higher level of consciousness and eventually to liberation as well as a name of one of the orthodox Indian schools. The etymology of the word stems from the verb “to connect”, “to bind”, “to yoke” and suppose a connection with our true divine essence. The school of yoga is built on the philosophy of the school of *sankhya*; therefore it is based on the idea of separation between material world and spiritual essence. *Purusha* is the principle of consciousness; consciousness is not an attribute of *purusha*, but its very essence. It is a kind of eternal consciousness, pure spirit, outside the world of objects. It is entirely different from everything that stems from *prakriti*. The principle of the material world, *prakriti*, however, undergoes different phases in its unfolding and the subtlest of them might be confused with *purusha*. The first stage is Mahat (the Great) – the great germ of the manifested universe. It represents “the awakening of nature from cosmic sleep and the first appearance of thought, and therefore is also called the intellect – *buddhi*. Intellect, in its turn, gives rise to *ahamkara*, a kind of principle of individuality” (Stepanyantz, 1995: 392), “literally I-making or Egoism” (Moeller, 1919: 371). *Ahamkara* “produces the sense of subject, and in consequence of object also... there could not be subjectivation without simultaneous objectivation.” (Moeller 1919: 372). After the stage of *ahamkara* unfolding goes in two parallel lines – that of the subject and that of the object. In such a way, the manifestation of elements, belonging to the human psyche and mentality are developed in parallel with the development of the elements that build the body and the material universe. There is a strict correlation between these two lines – development of the carrier of the human essence and development of the scene where this carrier will act, i.e. the material universe.

The unfolding of each line depends on ratio of *gunas* that constitute *prakriti*. These *gunas* are three: *satva* connected with lightness and transparency; *radjas* – connected with activity, and *tamas* – providing inertness and resistance to impulses. In *prakriti*, all three constituents exist simultaneously, but in different proportions.

When *satva* prevails, the components of the subject are built. They are five organs of perception, five organs of action and *manas*, mind, called inner sense, which synthesizes the functions of the other senses.

When *tamas* prevails, the components of the object are built. These are five subtle elements: the potencies of sound, touch, color, taste and smell. Of these five subtle elements, five rough elements arise: ether (*akasha*), air, fire, water, and earth.

However, none of the manifestations of *prakriti* is the true human nature. Intellect is the subtlest manifestation of *purusha*, but it is not consciousness. The same is valid for the mind.

The true human nature is entirely different from everything that stems from *prakriti*. The true essence of the human is *purusha*, pure consciousness that is neither intellect nor mind. Yoga means to return to this pure consciousness and cease the identification with manifestations of *prakriti*.

In the real human being, however, *purusha* and *prakriti* complement each other. Each of them has what the other lack. *Prakriti* gives to *purusha* a vehicle and scene where he could pretend to have experience and action. Actually, *purusha* does neither experience nor act; he is not changed from the transformation of *prakriti*. His combination with *prakriti* is like the experiences of an observer watching a play. Despite how different the visions of *sankhya* and Vedanta might seem, they both represent in different manner the main Hinduist idea that only the spirit possess this reality that is important for the human.

#### 4. The mode of Daoism

In Daoist thought, like in Hinduism, the human being has no privilege position. Daoism asserts that *dao* is everywhere:

*“Dong-guo Zi asked Zhuangzi, saying, ‘Where is what you call the Dao to be found?’ Zhuangzi replied, ‘Everywhere’<sup>1</sup>. The other said, ‘Specify an instance of it. That will be more satisfactory.’ ‘It is here in this ant.’ ‘Give a lower instance.’ ‘It is in this panic grass.’ ‘Give me a still lower instance.’ ‘It is in this earthenware tile.’ ‘Surely that is the lowest instance?’ ‘It is in that excrement.’ To this Dong-guo Zi gave no reply.” (Zhuangzi, 22, 6, tr. Legge)*

So, nothing in the Daoist universe has a superior or a secondary position in relation to anything else. Daoism present un-hierarchical picture of reality where everything has an equal value with everything else.

One of the reasons for this is the Daoist vision that the world does not consist of persistent essences and substantial entities, but of energy processes that are constantly changing and transforming. These transformations and fluctuations could not be subordinated. Everything has its own value. Actually, it is equal to say that everything has no value because evaluation needs some coordinate system according to which we may arrange the estimated processes.

Assigning a certain value to the processes is a human activity. But it does not have place in the universe itself. Laozi especially outlines that the universe is not humane and the man of *dao* also does not act from the position of humanity:

*“Heaven and earth do not act from (the impulse of) any wish to be benevolent; they deal with all things as the dogs of grass are dealt with. The sages do not act from (any wish to be) benevolent; they deal with the people as the dogs of grass are dealt with.” (DDJ, 5).*

In the world empty from entities, there is no absolute reference point. Everything is relative. Human esteems might have a sense for humans but the human position is only one of the possible positions:

*“If a man sleeps in a damp place, he will have a pain in his loins, and half his body will be as if it were dead; but will it be so with an eel? If he be living in a tree, he will be frightened and all in a tremble; but will it be so with a monkey? And does any one of the three know his right place? Men eat animals that have been fed on grain and grass; deer feed on the thick-set grass; centipedes enjoy small snakes; owls and crows delight in mice; but does any one of the four know the right taste? The dog-headed monkey finds its mate in the female gibbon; the elk and the axis*

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, the text says that there is no place where there is no *dao*.

*deer cohabit; and the eel enjoys itself with other fishes. Mao Qiang and Li Ji were accounted by men to be most beautiful, but when fishes saw them, they dived deep in the water from them; when birds, they flew from them aloft; and when deer saw them, they separated and fled away. But did any of these four know which in the world is the right female attraction? As I look at the matter, the first principles of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of approval and disapproval are inextricably mixed and confused together - how is it possible that I should know how to discriminate among them?"* (Zhuangzi, 2)

The lacking of an absolute standpoint makes equal even such processes as life and death. Everything depends on a viewpoint and is relative:

*"How do I know that the love of life is not a delusion? And that the dislike of death is not like a young person's losing his way, and not knowing that he is (really) going home?"* (Zhuangzi, 2)

Therefore, the man of *dao* should not be attached to anything:

*"The True men of old knew nothing of the love of life or of the hatred of death. Entrance into life occasioned them no joy; the exit from it awakened no resistance. Composedly they went and came. They did not forget what their beginning had been, and they did not inquire into what their end would be. They accepted (their life) and rejoiced in it; they forgot (all fear of death), and returned (to their state before life)."* (Zhuangzi, 6)

Dao itself is not an absolute as well. It is not some transcendental or metaphysical reality that is one and self-sufficient. Dao, or way, is a name for possibilities for unfoldings or becomings of many new realities, in every moment. Processes of the world spontaneously follow *dao*, but this does not mean that they follow some prescribed path. They follow their self-suchness because *dao* follows suchness.

Actually, in this aspect human being has a special position in the universe. He is the only being that could resist to a spontaneous flow of *dao* and destroy the natural processes.

In Daoist universe, there is a special kind of people who are not like the others. These are people who understand that human mind and speculations are obstacles to real and fulfilling life. Daoist teaching is designed for them. These are the men of *dao* or the true men. Unlike all other people the men of *dao* "do not resist the way by their mind, do not substitute heavenly with humane" (不以心捐道，不以人助天) (Zhuangzi, 6). They have the natural position of accepting the processes as they come and leaving them when they go.

In fact, this neutral position is the privileged position in Daoism. It belongs neither to affirmation nor to negations. We may call it a zero position. This is the pure potentiality position when no actualization is realized and all the transformations are ahead and are possible. In Daoism, it is called "a pivot of *dao*",

*"As soon as one finds this pivot, he stands in the center of the ring<sup>2</sup>, where he can respond without end to the changing views; without end to those affirming and without end to those denying."* (Zhuangzi, 2)

To find the pivot of *dao* means to return to the spontaneous unfolding of *dao*, to reveal the natural flow of life again. In many aspects, Daoism is a teaching of how to follow the flow of the universe and of our own life.

Daoism calls for oneness with *dao*. This does not mean achieving and/or infusing into some external reality. Rather, it implies a free-drifting in the flow that continually unfolds through us, and which is ourselves and everything around us. This merging with the *dao* is one of the

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<sup>2</sup> Or the circle of the processes.

meanings of the Daoist principle of non-doing, *wuwei*. Another expression of this oneness with *dao* is spontaneity, 自然 *ziran*, or “by itself such”. Non-doing and spontaneity are two aspects of refers to what we can call “external” expression of oneness; spontaneity to what we can call “internal” expression. This pairs implies that man should neither considered himself as isolated entity within certain limits, nor to seek to impose his goals and intentions on the other processes, but rather to unravel and unleash the unending potential of recurrent and inexhaustible opportunities, because

“*Dao is empty, but its activity is inexhaustible.*” (Daodejing, 4)

Being empty, *dao*, the way, is unfolding a new every moment. There is no prediction where it will go. Every predisposition, every intention prevents the expansion of inexhaustible opportunities. Every fixation, every step towards one of the possible ends or poles would be a step towards mortality. Every fixation will lose the potential of unfolding. The wise human being should be aware of the richness and fullness of moments within the flow of changes. Therefore, the man of *dao* should not be fixed and determined. Rather, he should balance among different states and possibilities “like those who wade through a stream in winter” (DDJ, 15, tr. Legge).

Viewing the universe in terms of dynamic and change, Daoism reveals the power of now, the power of ever new creativity.

The unfolding of processes, however, is not arbitrary. Everything is in complex mutual relations. Because of mutuality and lack of subordinations, these relations are not as much relations of causality as relations of synchronicity. Synchronicity or response is an important idea of Chinese thought that is very different from the Western one. Synchronicity regards relations not in their consequences in time but rather in the connection in the elusive time-space moment of now-and-here. It means that each process is connected with everything else right now and everything influences and is influenced by the rest of the world. It also implies that these connections have meaning for the human being uniting his inner and outer space. According to Chinese thought, the human being is neither an external observer of the events in the world nor an independent entity that influences reality. There are mutual changes and transformations and they are trans-individual (see Jullien, 2001: 70). The mutuality implies subject-object coherence and reciprocity of internal and external, microcosm and macrocosm. In this reciprocity there could not be one-sided influence or effect; the linear casual relation are not as important as are the simultaneous, multidimensional and two-sided relations of synchronicity.

In these relations, neither humans nor their surroundings are regarded as fixed and self-sufficient entities. Therefore, unlike the Western tradition determined by Aristotle, where “the person was essentially defined (i.e. defined in terms of a unique essence one has that makes one a full-fledged person)”, in Chinese tradition “the person is progressively defined” (Santiago 2008). This means that “an individual’s nature is not pre-scripted simply in virtue of being born with a unique quality... That quality merely presents a range of opportunities for growth; they provide a set of possibilities for the ongoing development and maturation of one’s changing nature” (ibid.). This conclusion is true for the Chinese thought as a whole. Confucianism outlines the social aspect of these mutual connections – the attitudes among people in human society while Daoism pays more attention to the interrelations between humans and the universe. For both teachings, however, we may apply the words of Hans Georg Moeller regarding “Laozi”: these teachings “belonged to the core patterns of orientations within which the ancient Chinese interpreted their position within the state and the cosmos” (Moeller 2006: 2). In both cases “the human being is not something we are; it is something that we do, and become...not an essential endowed potential, but what one is able to make of oneself” (Ames & Rosemon, 1998: 49).

Therefore, in Daoism fusion with *dao* means at the same time forgetfulness of the “self”, a forgetfulness of all restricting ideas and believes that make us feel as unchangeable entities separated from the wholeness of the universe.

In such a way the human being is understood not as an acting subject, who imposes his will and intentions on the surrounding world, but as an integral part of the constant changes and transformations. Human being is not a passive object of influences of any external and alien will either. According to Chinese thought, everything is in mutual relation with everything else, each process is transformed by all others and in turn transforms them, drives everything else, and is driven by everything else. Processes flow through one another and every “inside” is also “external”, every “own” is also “the other”. Therefore, the dichotomies “active-passive”, “I-others”, “subject-object” are impracticable here. In the constant transformation of the universe everything is in mutual and functional dependence with everything else.

So, in the Daoist universe everything is in mutual connection and there is no a privilege position or being. Humans are as cosmic and natural as everything else. As Hans Georg Moeller points out, “human beings are one element or segment of the functioning of the cosmos... there is nothing special about humans. They were not created as the sole godlike species, are not the presumed master of the world, and are not even seen, in Heidegger terms, as the “shepherd of being”. Not only do humans lack the role of dominating nature or a special relation and responsibility toward „being”, they are not even recognized as cognitively privileged beings... Therefore... humans do not have a specific and unique “dignity”” (Moeller, 2006: 55).

At the same time, humans and human society are “the most volatile and unstable segment in nature” (*Ibid.*, 56). Daoism teaches how to return to the natural flow of life.

If you notice, everywhere in this text I determine human being in a masculine form. Daoism has a very special position towards sexes. From one side it accepts the common Chinese idea about harmony and complementarity of yin and yang, the female and male. From the other side, it metaphorically describes *dao* in terms of feminine. And from the third side, its rules and prescriptions are assigned for men. There might be different explanations for this fact. One might be that rulers in those ancient societies are predominantly men and the text of Daodejing for example is “about human leadership” (Moeller 2006: 57). The other reason might be the idea that women have a deeper and more natural connection with the flow of life and therefore it is not necessary to teach them how to live. From Daoist text about sexual relations one can make such conclusions.

## 5. The mode of Buddhism

In many aspects, the understanding of the place of man in Buddhism has similarities with Daoism. It understands the world we live in terms of change and interdependence. Buddhism, however, clearly distinguishes the state of movement and the state of peace, samsara and nirvana, and although Mahayana Buddhism sees them as two aspects of the same emptiness, the state of peace still seems preferable in Buddhism. Buddhism and Daoism shared similar vision about the complementarity of polarities. Daoism, however, seeks to achieve the pilot of *dao* from where all transformations are possible, to reach the eye of the storm, this point in the center of the wave, which will allow us to drift freely with the flow. The focus here is on the possibility of unfolding. Therefore, one of the important images in Daodejing is that of the door as a threshold between different opportunities, as a transition between different states. Buddhism, from the other side, emphasizes on staying in a state, it aims at achieving a state of tranquility, and a calm awakening that will allow us to reflect all the transformations without being attached to them.

Both Buddhism and Daoism teach us how to live in a world of changes. For Daoism, however, changes are the real state of the world and we should follow them without resistance, we should freely and joyfully merge with changes. To surf with the waves of changes is a mastery that should be developed. For Buddhism, like for the Indian thought in general, changes are connected

with suffering, therefore we should achieve a state of un-trembling consciousness where changes come and go without affecting us like reflections of clouds on the even surface of a lake.

Daoism is not interested in the nature of human being but in human action and behavior. Buddhism also presents a well elaborated path explaining how we should live and act. It tries to avoid entering into the trap of metaphysical considerations, but nevertheless it explains in detail what human beings are or are not and determines reasons for their contemporary situation.

The idea that the world is a place of suffering we should liberate from is common for Hinduism and Buddhism. Unlike Hinduism, however, Buddhism develops the idea of *anatman*, non-self, assuming that like everything else in the world of samsara, human beings have no essence, neither material, nor spiritual. The self has only nominal but not ontological existence. That which we perceive as our nature is only an aggregation of non-persistent psycho-physical states with almost no duration. These elementary states are called *dharmas*. We are streams of *dharmas* changing at every moment. Therefore, Buddhists call this aggregation “stream”. According to them as long as we hold on the vision that we are separate entities with our own nature, we will suffer because we will try to keep and preserve ever-changing nothingness.

In Buddhism, there are different visions about what *dharmas* are: momentary psychophysical states that spring every moment anew from the void or states that change their position in the stream of time passing from future to the present and to the past. In both cases, they are non-persistent and form the relative reality of “now”. This reality is relative because its components are empty and because it is in mutual relation and dependence with other as much empty and relative realities.

*Dharmas* are combined in five trends within the stream of personality. They are called *skandhas* or aggregates and are: *rupa* (form or body), *vedana* (sensations or feelings), *samjna* (perceptions), *sankhara* (mental activities and inclinations, including will) and *vijnana* (consciousness, knowledge, discernment).

These five *skandhas* cause attachment and cling to the idea of I, self, mine and these ideas are at the core of suffering:

*“There the Blessed One said this: ‘Bhikkhus, I will teach you the burden, the carrier of the burden, the taking up of the burden, and the laying down of the burden. Listen to that ....*

*“And what, bhikkhus, is the burden? It should be said: the five aggregates subject to clinging...*

*“And what, bhikkhus, is the carrier of the burden? It should be said: the person, this venerable one of such a name and clan. This is called the carrier of the burden...*

*“The five aggregates are truly burdens,*

*The burden-carrier is the person.*

*Taking up the burden is suffering in the world,*

*Laying the burden down is blissful.*

*Having laid the heavy burden down*

*Without taking up another burden,*

*Having drawn out craving with its root,*

*One is free from hunger, fully quenched.” (Samyutta Nikaya, III, 22, tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000: 871-2)*

The question about the bearer of the burden is a very ticklish question in Buddhism. Most of the Buddhist insist that “person” here (*puggala*) is just a concept, convention, label,

denoting five aggregates, but not some substantial reality. Buddhism denies the existence of a constant self-essence. From the other side, like Hinduism, Buddhism accepts the vision of karma. But if there is no constant entity that will experience the results of its previous actions, what is the place of the law of karma?

The false attachment to the idea of constant self is a reason that held together a certain set of inclination, creating the feeling that such self does exist. For Buddhism, the series of unconscious births are not as much results from deeds, but from desires that make us to act.

Desire and ignorance for the real state of things cause clinging to the chain of dependent arising that lead to a birth in the conditioned world of samsara. In accordance to the inclination of consciousness, the birth is realized in one of the six spheres: the realm of divine beings (*devas*), the realm of warring semi-deities (*asuras*), the realm of hungry ghosts (*preta*), the animal realm and the human realm. Beings in all these realms are subjects of ignorance, desire and suffering. There are only qualitative but not quantitative differences between these realms. Everywhere beings will eventually die and will be attracted to one or another realm or kind of existence.

In the realm of divine beings those who had performed great deeds were born. The existence there is long and happy, but *devas* “have neither wisdom nor compassion” (O’Brien 2018). The realm of *asuras* attracts those who are “always desiring to be superior to others, having no patience for inferiors and belittling strangers; like a hawk, flying high above and looking down on others, and yet outwardly displaying justice, worship, wisdom, and faith -- this is raising up the lowest order of good and walking the way of the *Asuras*” (the patriarch of the Tientai school Zhiyi (538-597), *Ibid.*). In the realm of *pretas* are born those “who is always looking outside himself for the new thing that will satisfy the craving within. Hungry ghosts are characterized by insatiable hunger and craving. They are also associated with addiction, obsession and compulsion” (*ibid.*). Hell beings are distinguished with anger and aggression. Beings in the animal realm “are marked by stupidity, prejudice and complacency”. Rebirth into the Human Realm “is conditioned by passion, doubt and desire” (*Ibid.*)

Although equal as aspects of the world of suffering, these realms are not equal in possibilities to leave it. Only the existence as a human being gives chance for liberation from the circle of samsara, achieving nirvana and awakening for the truth. Therefore, Buddhists highly estimate the birth in this realm.

The importance of the human kind of existence is obvious from the descriptions of these six realms as well. It is obvious that they present not only different aspects of the world but rather different states of our mind and our attitudes to the surroundings. This is not by chance; it is in accordance with one of the main characteristics of the vision of reality in Buddhism. According to this vision, different realms are unfoldings of the inclinations of the consciousness. The reality of samsara is actually a projection of our own mental attitudes. The reality of the awakened consciousness is that of emptiness.

In the first case, we can speak about reflection, and it is a reflection with the opposite sign – it is not the human that reflects reality, it is the reality he perceives, that reflects his condition. So, that which is the Ganges River for human beings is a stream of ambrosia for the beings of the divine realm, and a stream of impurity for the beings of the lowest realm.

Is there anything behind these perceptions that provokes them? For Mahayana Buddhism, “the true reality (if it is at all possible to speak about it) does not exist beside and outside the psyche, and thus the “true self” of the subject turns out to be identical with the true reality in general” (Solonin, 2006). This does not mean rejecting the reality outside the psyche. As Evgeni Tortchinov points out, “almost all schools of classical Indian Buddhism did not doubt the existence of the world outside the consciousness of the perceiving subject” (Tortchinov, 2000: 38).

Buddhists, however, “were completely and fundamentally not interested in this objective world”. They studied the world “already reflected in a human consciousness and, thus, included in this consciousness”. Therefore, “Buddhist cosmology describes not the physical universe, but the psycho-cosmos and mainly the psycho-cosmos of a human” (Tortchinov, 2000: 38).

Does not this psycho-cosmos resemble the Hinduist Atman? Buddhism denies the existence of a constant individual entity but it “says nothing about the Atman described in the Upanishads, that is, about the absolute subject, some supreme impersonal Self, the same for all beings and ultimately identical to the Absolute (*Brahman*). This Atman is not recognized and is not denied in Buddhism. Buddhism says nothing about him (at least in the early texts) at all. What is denied is precisely the individual “I”, the personality as an entity, a simple and eternal substance identical with itself. Buddhism does not find such entity in our experience and regards it as an illusory product of mental construction” (Tortchinov, 2000: 30). Or, in another words, “if this teaching negates the Upaniṣadic ātman in the sense of an unchanging, blissful essence, it would seem to be concerned with the ātman in its macrocosmic aspect (as *brahman*), for this is how the blissful ātman is considered in the early Upaniṣads. It does not make any sense, however, to read this teaching as a negation of a macrocosmic essence. While it might make sense to ask whether consciousness has the characteristics of the macrocosmic ātman (since a number of important early Upaniṣadic passages state that the ātman in its macrocosmic aspect is a nondual consciousness), it makes little sense to ask if form, sensation, apperception and volitions have the characteristics of an essence that transcends all phenomena... the teaching is not a straightforward denial of the macro-cosmic ātman...” (Wynne, 2010: 111-112)

Actually, being teaching of the Middle path, Buddhism neither deny nor affirm anything. Accepting the standpoint of one of the poles means that the consciousness is still not awakened. Therefore, Buddha says:

*“Atman is one extreme. An-atman is another extreme. What lies between atman and an-atman, what is without form, without external manifestations, without characteristics, this is called Middle way, regarding of dharmas in accordance with the truth.”* (Ratnakuta 57)

## 6. Conclusions

In each of the presented religions, human being has a special place within the universe. In Christianity, it is placed above all other creations and has a unique dignity. According to Buddhism, existence as a human is also the best kind of existence. Both Daoism and Hinduism regard the human as qualitatively identical with other beings. In Eastern teachings in general human is regarded as being in deep connection with the entire universe. Both Hinduism and Buddhism view the cosmos and psyche as eventually identical. Daoism and Buddhism regard everything, including human, as being in mutual interdependence. The idea of mutual connection is accompanied by the vision that there is no constant and substantial essence or entity. Both Buddhism and Daoism regard attraction to the vision of self as an obstacle to human development. It is very different from the Western tradition where “Kant regards belief in the immortality of the soul as one of the moral postulates. Buddhism, on the contrary, asserts that it is the feeling of “I” and the attachment to “I” that arises from it that is the source of all other attachments, passions and inclinations, all that forms *kleshi* – a darkened affection that draws a living being into the quagmire of sansaric existence” (Tortchinov, 2000: 30). The idea that we should not be attached to the superficial manifestations of the world and our self is strong in different trends of Hinduism as well.

Therefore, all Eastern religions developed well-elaborated various spiritual, mental, and physical practices aimed at managing the mental and physiological functions of the body in

order to achieve a sublime spiritual and mental state. In all these teaching, the human being alone should go on the path of improvement, should make personal efforts and overcome the limits of the little ego.

Christianity views the human being in his synthesis - both in his majesty and in his nothingness. It is about choice and free will. Actually, because the human is regarded as isolated, separate and independent being; it is possible to speak about love. Love is neither a relation of functioning, adjusting to functions, as is the relation in Daoism, nor wise and yet condescending compassion for those who have not yet been awakened, as is the relation in Buddhism, nor a recognition of oneself in another beings, as is the relation in Hinduism. Love in Christianity is precisely the love, at the heart of which the awareness and acceptance of differences could be found.

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