

he/she can decide whether his or her behavior is good or bad? Or is there no fixed standard, but only the variable, relative, changing standard of what the members of a society at a given moment can agree on concerning what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable behavior? Or is there no such thing as right or wrong, so that the very idea of a standard of right and wrong conduct becomes meaningless?

Among the world religions there are certainly some forms of behavior considered right or wrong, but there are no fixed authoritative scriptures that claim to be from God except those of Islam (the Koran), which are heavily dependent on the Bible, and those of orthodox Judaism (the Talmud) which are heavily dependent on the Old Testament, especially the Mosaic Law.

Hinduism emphasizes selflessness, self-renunciation, and asceticism, but also stresses freedom to approach God (in His many forms) by various paths. Hinduism has no fixed authoritative scriptures. It does employ the Vedas (1,000 B.C.), the Bhagavad-Gita (500 B.C.), and the Upanishads (800 B.C.), but has no authoritative standard of morality.

Buddhism is divided into many schools, each with its own set of scriptures. It has no original scriptures; only many forms of continuing tradition. For four hundred years after Siddhartha Gotama's death in 438 B.C., nothing of his teaching was written down. There are four major schools of Buddhism, each with its own view of what Buddhism is: the Theravada (Doctrine of the Elders), the Mahayana (large vehicle), Tibetan Buddhism, and Zen school of Japan. Although the "noble eightfold path" that leads eventually to nirvana comprises "right belief, right intention or resolve, right speech, right conduct or action, right occupation or livelihood, right effort, right contemplation or rightmindedness, and right ecstasy," each man must find his own way along that path.

Confucianism was originally atheistic, based on the ethical teachings of K'ung Fu-tse (Confucius) in China about 500 B.C. His teachings are collected in the Analects and the writings of Mencius. This system stresses the maintenance of right relationships, especially by following the Confucian Golden Rule: treat those who are subordinate to you as you would wish to be treated by those in positions superior to yours. Nevertheless, emphasis is placed on the middle way, the avoidance of extremes.

Shintoism (the national religion of Japan) is based on animistic beliefs (the beliefs that all objects have spirit or consciousness, and that these "spirits" must be appeased), and is more an unsystematized set of rituals and customs than a well-developed church. The three collections of beliefs and customs -- the Kojiki (A.D. 712), the Nihongi (A.D. 720), and the Yengi-shiki (A.D. 1050) -- contain no authoritative standard of moral conduct.

Taoism is a philosophical religious system found by Lao-tze about 600 B.C. It stresses many gods and man's need to escape from all desire and striving through mystical contemplation and the following of the Tao, the path natural events take. It has no fixed standard of moral conduct.