

# Western and Asian Religious Views of Humanity

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1. Philosophical Anthropology
  - a. A study of the nature of the human
  - b. Western consensus: Division into body and soul (and sometimes spirit)
  - c. The soul is detachable and constitutes a complete human being even without the body
  - d. Human beings are created by a lawgiving deity, and purpose derives from that deity
  - e. One is fully a human being by virtue of having human DNA
2. India: Hinduism and Buddhism
  - a. Hinduism and Jainism
    - i. Concern with reincarnation
    - ii. How to preserve a stable identity over many lifetimes: what is the “I”?
    - iii. Answer: the *ātman* or *jīva*: unchanging, eternal, partless
    - iv. Subtle and minute, excludes almost everything by which we identify ourselves
  - b. Buddhism
    - i. Preserves reincarnation, but with no *āman*
    - ii. Living beings are not objects, but processes (example of a flame)
    - iii. Living beings are composite (example of chariot)
3. China: Confucianism and Daoism
  - a. Chinese language privileges doing, not being
  - b. The primary concept is that of the *dao* 道, or Way
  - c. Confucianism:
    - i. One is not a member of the moral community simply by virtue of being biologically human
    - ii. One is always growing toward or moving away from full humanity, but one never fully arrives (See Confucius’ autobiographical verse on back)
    - iii. If one is not doing what a human being does, then one is only an animal (See quotation from Mencius on back)
  - d. Daoism
    - i. Human beings are phenomena that arise from the Dao conceived as a field of possibilities (see story of Zhuangzi’s wife on back)
    - ii. Human beings attain their status through a particular proportioning of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 processes
    - iii. Result: human beings are more like tornadoes than statues
4. Conclusion
  - a. These ways of conceptualizing the human lead to different views on proper modes of behavior and religious practice

### I. Confucius' autobiographical statement:

At fifteen my mind/heart was set on learning;  
At thirty my character had been formed;  
At forty I had no more perplexities; / At fifty I knew the Mandate of Heaven;  
At sixty I was at ease with whatever I heard;  
At seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing moral principles.  
(Analects 2:4)

### II. Mencius (from the parable of Ox Mountain)

If, in spite of the respite a man gets in the day and in the night and of the effect of the morning air on him, scarcely any of his likes and dislikes resembles those of other men, it is because what he does in the course of the day once again dissipates what he has gained. If this dissipation happens repeatedly, then the influence of the air in the night will no longer be able to preserve what was originally in him, and when that happens, the man is not far removed from an animal. Others, seeing his resemblance to an animal, will be led to think that he never had any native endowment. But can that be what a man is genuinely like? Hence, given the right nourishment there is nothing that will not grow, while deprived of it there is nothing that will not wither away.

### III. Zhuangzi refuses to mourn his wife

When Zhuangzi's wife died, Hui Shih came to condole him. As for Zhuangzi, he was squatting with his knees spread out, drumming on a pot and singing. "When you have lived with someone," said Hui-Shih, "and brought up children, and grown old together, to refuse to mourn her death would be bad enough. But to drum on a pot and sing — could there be anything more shameful?" Zhuangzi replied, "Not so. When she first died, do you suppose I was able not to feel the loss? I peered back into her beginning; there was a time before there was a life. Not only was there no life, there was a time before there was a shape. Not only was there no shape, there was a time before there was the *qi*. Mingled together in the amorphous, something altered, and there was the *qi*; by alteration in the *qi* there was the shape, by alteration of the shape there was the life. Now once more altered she has gone over to death. This is to be companion with spring and autumn, summer and winter, in the procession of the four seasons. When someone was about to lie down and sleep in the greatest of mansions, I with my sobbing knew no better than to bewail her. The thought came to me that I was being uncomprehending towards destiny, so I stopped."