

A Comparative Analysis on the Buddhist and Christian Criterion of Ethics

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Abstract: Ethics is defined as the philosophical study of morality, can be recognized as the base of all philosophies and religions. Finding answers systematically to such questions as ‘What is good? What is bad? How does it become good? How does it become bad?’ etc., can be explained as ethics. It is well believed that all the ethical theories are based on the “reciprocal” or “two-way” relationship between one's self and others that involves both sides [equally](#), and in a mutual fashion. This reciprocal nature is simply elaborated as, “One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself”. This general fact has been elaborated in Buddhism and Christianity in two different ways on different criteria. Bible itself supports to the idea that Christian principles of ethics inform us how we should act based on the Word of God. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you [Mat. 6:33]”. But Buddhist principle of ethics deals with the self-reflection which depends on very simple rules as “would this action I wish to do lead to my own affliction, to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both.” (M.N: 524p). Despite the removal of an independent self-acting as an agent, Buddhists retain the notion of free will irrespective to the fact that Buddhism recognizes limitations of the same. Buddhism goes as far as to say that Buddhism requires free will, “without which liberation from the life cycle is impossible”. Free will allows the individual to achieve the ultimate goal: the escape from the suffering of life. Without free will, humans are unable to behave in the way that allows them to escape from this suffering. Within a completely deterministic worldview, the actions of the individual would never warrant escape that leads to nirvana. A parallel argument may be applied in Christianity, in which it is necessary for individuals to choose to live in particular ways to achieve salvation. The individual must be personally responsible for his or her own actions for the ultimate escape from suffering to occur. While Christian ethics clearly maintains the idea that we have free will but we are not free agents, Buddhism maintains that we have free will and we are the agents of what we are doing. In Buddhist ethics divine superiority is totally denied. But in the Christianity divine authority has been recognized as the ultimate criterion of ethics. In this research Buddhist and Christian ethics will be examined on a comparative basis with special reference to Pāli Buddhist canon and the Bible.