

The cycles of mankind: begin from and ended back to nature

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Abstract. A classical problem of mankind that has transcended the boundaries of space and time is how to find the essence of life, and the search to find the form of life after death in the universe. Essentially, Taoism suggests that each person should appreciate and put into practice harmony and balance in their life, which will affect their afterlife. The main problem in this research, is to find what is the meaning of life after death from the perspective of Taoism? Methodologically, the approach used is a phenomenological one. Taoism explains that a person's physical body will go through the process of re-uniting with nature, and then nature will facilitate humans to again go through life, and so forth. Mankind will go through the cycles of coming from nature and reverting back to nature, this process has been recurring throughout the history of mankind, since the beginning when the universe was formed.

1. Introduction

Two of the classical problems that mankind has been grappling with, have transcended the boundaries of space and time, namely: the search to find the meaning of life, and the search for the most fitting form of relationship with the meaning of death. Both are always present and always give rise to sceptical attitudes that reinforces, and at the same time it may become the proverbial glue due to a shared identity and shared frames of reference with regards to leading our lives and taking a stand toward various life events that we live with. These social norms provide a shared guideline in dealing with life as well as death.

Belief systems provide the rules and regulations of how to lead a good (or a bad) life, and is very much influenced by our faith. Faith itself may be a matter of feeling or desires, not common sense. Moral knowledge comes from an association of specific ideas, without necessarily having a rational basis, but rather based on subjective choices that we believe in.

True believers would gladly experience great suffering and hardship, endure physical or mental anguish for prolonged periods, as long as the pain and suffering remains in line with their beliefs and they understand that it will guide them towards eternal life after death. According to Jacques Derrida [1], psychoanalysis has taught us that the dead—for example, dead person—may be more alive, stronger, and more fearsome compared with when they were still alive. The issue here is about spirits or ghosts. Death brings a person to enter life in another dimension. To live means to go on a journey towards eternity.

According to certain belief systems, a person's death is very much determined by their actions or beliefs while they were alive. The survival or sustainability of certain systems of belief is determined directly by the actions of the individuals who belief in said systems, and not by the decision of others.



A number of different religions have a shared belief, that life in another dimension awaits us when we die. Human life becomes only a part of the ritual of universal life that journeys towards death in order to fulfil new life. To become part of the universe, and then the universe creates a new life. The universe creates harmony and balance. The concept of harmony and balance are in line with the ideas put forth by the ancient Taoist philosophers. Taoism is one of the great philosophical and religious traditions, began at around the sixth century b.c.e. or between 500 and 400 b.c.e. [2].

Taoism is essentially a practical philosophy. Taoism suggests that everyone should appreciate and put into practice the principles of harmony and balance in their lives. Practicing balance and harmonization in life, does not always mean being well-planned or deliberate about it, but rather it could be practiced spontaneously while we are naturally performing our normal roles and functions. Without deliberately striving for it, balance and harmony may already be in line with certain local and traditional cultures and for the most part it is influenced by the practice of local values, ethics and morals.

Harmonization is an interesting phenomenon when there is a tendency towards differing perceptions. It becomes even more interesting as we enter the realm of perspectives. At a certain point a dominant group will appear, whose faith will become mainstream. At other times, domination always creates alternatives. It is our differences that enable us to exchange ideas, and to influence each other's ideas about life after death. On the other hand, openness may be interwoven with restrictions (limitations, or "closed"ness), even at the individual level.

Thus the main issue of this research is, what is the meaning of life after death from the perspective of Taoism?

What are the sources of life after death from the perspective of Taoism? On what basis can life after death be verified, according to Taoism? What is basically the relation of verifying life after death from the perspective of Taoism? What is the relevance of the principle of verifying life after death from the perspective of Taoism?

2. Theoretical foundation

The material object of this research is a philosophical reflection about one of the phenomena or actual situations that remains a controversial issue, namely, about life after death. Most of the population of the world today still live with religion. But what's considered as most important for academicians, especially those who are Western oriented, is the pattern of thinking. They seem to think that the human environment consists of all agnostic people who follow a secular philosophy that are cultivated at prominent campuses [3]. They endeavour to develop a rationalization, an environmental code of ethics based on agnosticism, as if this effort will have a major effect on the environmental crisis. As if it were important to realistically consider the world in which mankind lives. To understand the world we need to observe the world. To understand the human self we need to reflect on the human self [4].

The formal object is used to assess the world of the living in order to understand and give meaning to life after death using the perspective of Taoism.

The word "Tao"(or Dao) means 'way' or 'path', or people walking, or walking on a journey. The abstract meaning, which is based on this basic meaning, also covers the concepts of direction, rules, ideals, and operational principles of the universe. Taoism views life as a primordial cosmic symbol of unity and harmony and a manifestation of the phenomenon of duality, or the two main powers that govern the cosmic order of the phenomenal world.

Tao views the human body as a miniature of the universe that is manifested through the spirit (energy) of life. The important life energy is known as Qi. In Daoism, however, Qi is simply the natural operation of the universe, the basic pattern of expansion and contraction. In this more expanded cosmic view of Qi, the energy that gives life to our bodies is nothing less than the basic energy of the universe, which condenses in the form of matter to produce the tangible 'stuff' out of which all things are made. Things like rocks are composed of slow-moving dense Qi. Our bodies are a complex of moderately condensed Qi that forms the material parts (skin, organs, bones) and a relatively light and ethereal Qi that gives us our minds and our spirits. When the Qi or breath is flowing in and out then we have life; when the Qi or breath stops moving then we have death [5].

Although energy can be converted from one form to another, the amount of it is unchanged as time goes on. In other words, energy can neither be created nor destroyed, but is always “conserved,” which means that the amount of it stays the same as time goes on [6].

According to the Tao point of view, life should be lived in balance and harmony, mankind should live together in accordance with the harmony of the universe, that is, free from mere personal interest and personal wants. This harmony is reflected in the symbol of Yin Yang, a circle that consists of equal parts of black and white, in which each part is flowing into the other part. This circle describes the principle of nature, as it describes the pattern of interdependence. The Yin-Yang diagram shows two major magnetic poles of the universe, that is, darkness and light, life and death. Negative and positive, female and male, which exist in complete equilibrium and in which each force is equally powerful; together these two forces control everything that exists in nature.

3. Research methodology

Conducting research is a process of gathering and analyzing data, and information about life after death is gathered through an investigative process in order to search for and decide who will be the sources of information. For said purpose, the researcher selects the locations to be studied; then enters the world of the informant and engages in intensive interactions; then separates descriptive notes—portraits of the informant, dialogue reconstruction, explanation about the physical background, reports of specific incidents, and activities—as well as reflections—which provide opportunities to the researcher to make notes about personal thoughts, such as speculation, emotions, problems, ideas, estimates, impressions, and prejudices [7].

An empirical phenomenological approach involves the process of retelling an experience in order to get a fundamentally comprehensive description as a reflective structural analysis that encapsulates the essence of said experience [8].

This method allows the researcher to delve directly in order to understand what is happening, to understand pattern and interactions. In this case, basically the researcher has two roles to play: as a participant, and as an observer/researcher. To quote Lindhof and Taylor, the researcher’s interviews were conducted with the objective of developing a view about something that happens between individuals. The interviews that the researcher has conducted were dialogues that had a goal [9].

To analyze data in said research, the researcher will use inductive methods and a qualitative approach. Using this method enables us to bring to reality a theoretical construction, utilizing intuitive knowledge, in order to clarify a logical construct of a philosophical problem, so that the researcher will be able to describe the philosophical structure of the research object. The researcher will completely hold the position of final decision maker regarding any interpretation that is based on an inductive thinking pattern using phenomenological paradigms. The Research was done through February-July 2017 in Jakarta.

4. Results and discussion

An orientation towards earthly life can be either good, or bad. It is good, when daily life is based on behaviour that is in harmony with a valid value-system: a system of social values, law, and religion. It is bad when the reverse happens. The parameters of good and bad are subject to relativity. Social actions actually do not become a problem as long as it remains in the same community or society. Social actions only become a problem when the social interaction ‘cross-cuts’ between one group and a different group. The parameters of good and bad may be contradictory. Thus, a particular parameter may not be applicable to judge the behaviour of another group in another society which has a different value-system.

What about sacred behaviour? A human being’s sacred behaviour is a concrete manifestation of the acknowledgement of a bigger, more powerful and determinant force. Sacred behaviour refers to religious teachings, texts written in Holy Scriptures, sermons given by religious authorities, as well as the written and unwritten rules and regulations with regards to spirituality. Sacred behaviour that can be easily observed are, for example, the devout adherence towards rites that derive from religious decrees. But it is by no means easy to measure a person’s spirituality. At this point, spirituality becomes the most

private domain of human beings. There are no parameters, whether universal or particular, that are able to measure a human being's spirituality. The process of rationalization is inherent to various social structures, and in an individual's thinking and actions. The individual's actions, are a part of a system of rationality which hold a causal priority position in relation to other religions.

The search to find the essence of divinity has been an age-old problem. This search has never been fully completed. New questions always come up each time an answer is found, and the answers are many. Humans have always been contemplating, reflecting on his thoughts, pondering, thinking, and putting forward the classical existential question regarding life. This never ending effort becomes an important part of the search to find the essence of divinity and at a certain point is a part of the strategy of how to deal with life. Spiritual experiences are unique and very personal. Spirituality does not grow in a vacuum. Rather, it is forged, formed, and requires tenacity. There are a number of influential factors relevant to the search to find the essence of divinity.

Truth is highly correlated with evidence or with facts that have been verified, and merely having the right attitude, faith, or comprehension is not sufficient. Nevertheless, comprehension may be attained as the result of interpretation. Interpretation opens the door to multi-interpretation, even if the text or observable object used as a reference is the very same one. Multi-interpretations may arise due to the diversity of educational backgrounds, value-systems that we have lived by, and interests. As long as the social stake-holders remain consistent in the actualization of social norms, then social life will be harmonious. According to D. Hume [10], based on holy scriptures, and no man shall want to waste their lives, as long as his (her) life still has value to be lived. To lead a life is by itself a goal of life. Kierkegaard [11] has stated that an understanding of life can be attained from the past, however life itself should refer to the future, and that life is not a mere problem to be solved, rather it is a reality that we have to experience within social norms.

To Nietzsche [12] the world is an empty place. The world has no creator, it is able to exist and grow by its own strengths. In such a world, objective knowledge does not exist. What is needed to gain knowledge is just subjectivity, and the ability to make an interpretation. Those two factors, according to Nietzsche, come from the Will to Power itself. By having subjectivity and the ability to interpret, mankind is able to see causal relations in the world. With those two abilities, mankind is able to position itself, and also to position everything else in the world in its place.

The Will to Power drives humans to become an active subject on the journey of life, and at the same time humans are also the ones who interpret the world and who give the world meaning. Having the Will to Power, humans are able to create and organize the world. In this sense, the world is an inhuman place. The world acquires its meaning because of humans; with his subjectivity and his ability to interpret things, humans give it meaning, and thus "humanize" them. From this point we can see how Nietzsche was asking us to look at the world from a positive point of view, by comprehending life and by celebrating earthly life, because after all the world has been created and organized by none other than humans themselves.

The search to find the essence of divinity has never been fully completed. New questions always come up as humans are always contemplating, reflecting, pondering, thinking, and even asking the classical existential question regarding life. As a truth within the realm of religion, catharsis may be given the meaning of a transcendent experience that frees or cleanses the soul. At its apex, transcendental experiences may be in the form of a reverence towards humanity, a merciful attitude, treating human beings in a humane manner, taking an anti-violence stand, having an awareness of the wants and needs of human beings as a reality that has to be experienced within the social norms in going through the journey of life on earth.

On the other hand, the world is an empty place. The world is able to exist and grow by its own strength. In such a world, there is no objective knowledge. Life on earth has been engineered and is governed by mankind by itself, in accordance with their own respective beliefs. Belief systems provide a set of rules and regulations regarding life, in which the concepts of good and bad are very much influenced by subjective choices that one believes in. What common sense provides is merely information. Those who truly believe would gladly endure profound and prolonged pain, both physical

as well as mental agony as long as their suffering will bring them towards a life that leads them on a journey to eternal life.

Interpreting the journey of life towards death becomes interesting when we encounter different tendencies. It becomes even more interesting, as we enter the realm of perspectives. At a certain point, a dominant group will appear and become mainstream. At other points, domination always gives birth to alternatives. Having those differences enables us to exchange ideas and to influence each other's ideas. On the other hand, openness can be interwoven with restrictions (or 'closeness'), also at the individual level.

One can attain harmony in life by becoming mindfully aware of one's personal ability in comprehending the whole nature of the universe. Mankind's comprehension is indeed limited, while the mysterious complexity of the whole universe is infinite. Therefore, the effort required to change the sequence of spontaneity, to change an attitude towards life's changes through deliberate planned action on the part of humans, may result in unwanted consequences which may be terrifying. It can be dangerous when something that is full of limitations attempts to reach for something else that is infinite. The death of human mentality and an awareness of reality that is like molten silver that is in the process of changing its vitality to become metal, like an idea that once was a bright light.

In order to overcome this obstacle, Taoism—like other philosophies-- involves the search for truth that in some versions even contains elements of mysticism. The main objective, nevertheless, is to help humankind in going through life. Taoism provides guidance and strategies for individuals to go through their daily lives, although its greater objective is to provide insights about how to create and maintain harmony in society as a whole.

According to Taoism, human life depends on harmony, and harmony is a means to make a person become accustomed in his thinking, to accept and allow himself to experience paradoxes without having to eliminate either side: the black and the white, emptiness and fulfilment, personal interest or the greater interest of society in general. Society in general consists of individuals, ideally all that these individuals need to do is to strive to reach what is important for them only in their daily lives, in order to attain what is good. In their striving to reach for what is important, as a matter of course not everyone will be successful, even to the point of failing to get anything at all, except for emptiness.

From the Taoist's perspective, this condition is ideal, that is, the initial condition in which a person has not achieved or attained anything, which will later benefit him (or her), to attain what he (or she) dreams about. Thus, being consistent in accepting such failure, means that basically he (she) is already in the process to reach emptiness, which later on will enable him (her) to attain fulfilment with regards to their final objective. Whoever he is, he will never obtain fulfilment, if he has not yet experienced emptiness.

It is the paradox of emptiness and fulfilment, of fullness and emptiness, just like the harmony we find in the earthly cycle: originating from state of non-existence, then developing to existence, and ending up in the state of non-existence once again.

Having the paradox of emptiness and fulfilment tends to benefit society in life. Psychologically, a person will become more alert and will have more awareness to prepare themselves for what is happening and for what will be happening. A political condition which dominates businesses so that it enables business and industry to conspire against the consumers, will one day reach its end and be replaced by another political condition. When faced with political changes, having an attitude of full awareness will affect producers and merchants in their own interests, and in the long run also affect the lives of mankind.

According to Taoism, human beings must lead their lives by accepting things just the way they are, and each person should endeavour to play his or her own role and function. When humans are playing their respective roles and functions, each element and each component must be maintained. Maintaining the role and function of each element becomes important, because it will guarantee our ability to perform accordingly. Thus the condition of harmony will be attained.

Harmonious conditions will have an indirect and beneficial impact on the human body itself, as well as on society. Life on this earth will run its course by itself, without having human beings who want to

govern the world trying to establish their rules and regulations. Thus, the established harmony will no longer need to be ruled in order for life to run harmoniously the natural way.

Mankind's abilities are finite, whereas the complexity of the whole universe is infinite. All of life's elements have to go through the earthly cycles of harmony: originating from non-existence, growing into existence, and in the end reverting to non-existence, and so forth. In evolutive stillness, each element of the body changes; and thereby changing human lives; but for those who truly believe, these changes may even strengthen mankind's attitude of resolve and readiness to enter life in another dimension.

Living life in another dimension according to the Taoists' view is to return back to the natural universe. Taoists believe strongly that all things on earth possess an energy and an interconnected "unifying life force". Energy can be transformed—from mechanical to electrical, or from electrical to heat, for example—but it cannot be created from "nothing" or destroyed [13].

A human being's life does indeed end in physical death, however, in a very broad sense, according to Taoism each and every human being actually never dies. Human beings will be reborn in another form and activity. Death is but the last step taken in life in order to reach unity with the universe, in order to return to our origins before life and death, and in order to return into a new life, probably as a human being leading a new human life. Death is inevitable, and likewise, so is new life. Before life begins we have lost nothing; after death we have lost everything [14].

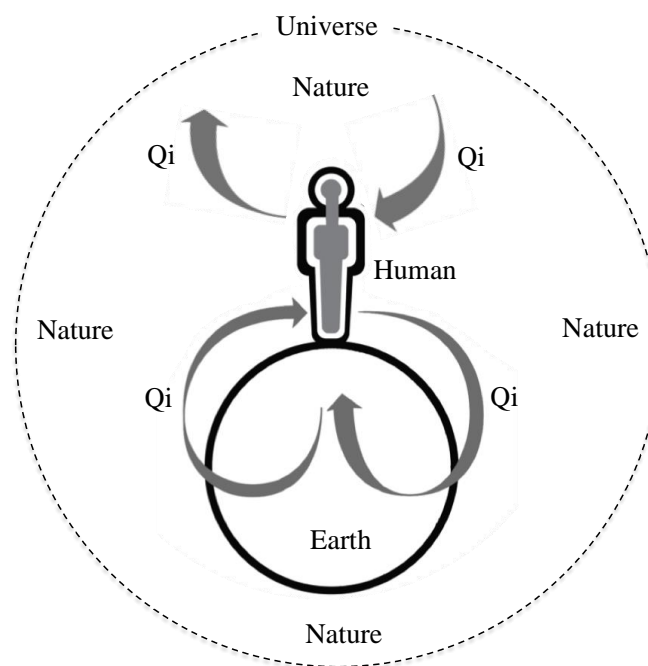


Figure 1. Human body, earth, and qi, united as the part of nature and the universe.

The human body and the earth are two microcosms as the nature, both interlinked not just to each other, but they also form a unity with the macrocosms: the universe. According to Tao philosophy, the human body is living on the earth, which is part of nature; nature provides what is needed, and what is regulated by humans. Mankind appreciates having air to breathe, the body will become whole through breathing, as breathing provides energy.

Energy or Qi regulates the process and movements of the elements of the body, each element has its own function to make the body interact with the cosmic universe. Energy that exits and enters the human body through the process of breathing [exhaling and inhaling] enables human beings to be at

one with the universe. Nature provides energy to humans, both to new-born babies as well to those who already exists, and so forth, as shown on Figure 1.

When a person is no longer able to breath, that person is said to be experiencing death. The physical body of humans then goes through the process of uniting with nature, and in turn nature will facilitate humans to have a life, and so it goes on and on. This would involve the most severe fine-tuning of any physical quantity known in nature, without the slightest idea how to adjust it [15].

Human beings go through cycles of coming from nature and reverting back to nature. As the human body transforms as it goes from birth (existence) to death (non-existence) and then again transforms as it goes through rebirth, and so on.

This process has been repeated throughout the history of mankind, since the formation of the universe. Life and death both have structured patterns within the universe.

Earth is in the middle of it, as earth facilitates, earth produces, and earth takes care of the life and deaths of all beings. Earth is both the source as well as the place where everything ends. Earth thus takes it place as the important controller; supporting the essence and the lives of mankind.

According to Taoism, the death of human beings is only a part of the process of universal life. Mankind is always in the process of becoming or reaching eternal life, so long as the universe exists. The universe has a power, a universal power that connects all that exists, to be in harmony with the life of mankind. The more human beings can accept this harmony, the more harmonious it may become. Tao regards the human body as a miniature of the universe, as part of the physical features of the universe, a multi-faceted manifestation of the spirit or energy of life. According to Tao, this important life energy is known as Qi, and having Qi enables objects and creatures to become individual entities. Qi is a vital cosmic energy that enables beings to survive, and it is this energy that connects them with the universe as a whole. The life of a person is the accumulation of Qi; when we are born we receive the primordial essence of Qi potential which is embedded in our physique.

Within the body, Qi regulates and organizes the circulation of air and food; the Qi energy can flow from one person to the next through sexual, emotional and social interactions.

However, humans can also lose their Qi by inhaling bad air, by burdening their bodies with food and drink, and by engaging in negative emotions, and by engaging in excessive sexual or social interaction. Therefore, Tao teachings introduce the concept of Wu Wei. Wu Wei is sometimes translated as an activity without action, which implies that there is no activity at all. The true meaning of Wu Wei is: an activity that is congruent with the natural pattern of the universe, and therefore completely independent from, and not in any way controlled by personal interest. According to Tao beliefs, mankind should live in balance and harmony, live together in harmony with the universe, free from mere personal interest. For example, this harmony is reflected in the symbol of Yin Yang, a circle consisting of a black side and a white side that flow towards each other. This circle represents the principles of nature, an interdependent pattern. Even though each element is the opposite of the other element, but both form a single and complete unity. The opposing elements could be day and night, happiness and sorrow, or action and inaction. According to Taoism, those opposing conditions can become harmonious parts that work together—whether during ebb and tide-- and together they form a perfect harmony. The two opposing forces are intertwined and inextricably tied together in one unity.

5. Conclusion

The search to find the essence of divinity has never been completed fully. Instead, what remains unanswered is the classical existential question about the meaning of life, after death. True believers would gladly undergo suffering, as long as their suffering will lead them to eternal life after death. The journey towards eternal life is a mystery, and according to Tao, the mystery of this journey to reach eternal life has an infinite universal complexity.

According to Tao beliefs, the meaning of life is about change that occurs in an evolutive stillness, in which each element of the body changes, and this will change the life of human beings; and this change will most probably strengthen and fortify a person's attitude of readiness to lead a new life in another dimension.

According to Taoism, life in another dimension means a return to the universe. All of life's elements always go through cycles in the earthly process of harmonization; originating from non-existence, then growing into existence, and again reverting back to non-existence, and so on.

The source of life after death as seen from the Tao perspective is describing mankind and the earth part of nature; nature provides what is needed and governed by mankind, using the energy that humans have received from nature. This energy is what regulates the flow and movement of the body's elements so that each of them will function to enable the body to interact with the cosmic universe. Nature provides this energy to mankind, beginning with newborn babies as well as the rest of humanity. When humans are no longer able to breathe, it is said that they are experiencing death.

The verification of life after death according to the Tao perspective is based on the view that humans will be reborn in another form and activity. Death will revert humans to enter a new life. Death is inevitable, as is new life. Tao regards the human body as a miniature of the universe, as a part that has the physical features of the universe, a manifestation of the spirit and energy of life. This spirit and energy enables creatures to continue with life after death, and connects them with the universe as a whole.

This basic relation that is a verification of life after death from the perspective of Taoism explains that a person's physical body will go through the process of re-uniting with nature, and then nature will facilitate humans to again go through life, and so forth. Mankind will go through the cycles of coming from nature and reverting back to nature, the human body transforms from existence to non-existence and then again to existence, and so forth. This process has been recurring throughout the history of mankind, since the beginning when the universe was formed.

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