



Is Jediism a religion?

Nick Alchin uses a group inspired by a famous fictional religion to explore language and the nature of truth in religious knowledge systems

A recently published article asked if Jedis have created a new religion (www.tinyurl.com/bbcjedi) and a quick internet search shows that there are thousands of people around the world who would describe themselves as members of the Jedi religion.

Many people have a strong reaction to this claim. Some religious believers find it insulting to their own religion to be considered in the same category as something inspired by a movie, and

some atheists believe all supernatural beliefs to be equally unreliable.

The strong reactions to this situation illuminate two key TOK issues:

- the role of language
- the nature of truth

What is religion?

Whether Jediism is a religion or not depends on what you mean by *religion*. David Walker, Anglican bishop of

Manchester, suggests there are no hard and fast rules: 'We'd want to look at the Jedi for quite some decades before accepting them [as a religion].'

This might suggest that 'religion' is just a term we apply to certain groups — perhaps even that it is simply a political decision about what status in society a group should have.

Activity 1

Is Jediism a religion?

Before you continue reading, look at these three categorisations of religions:

- 1 www.religionfacts.com (does not contain Jediism)
- 2 www.humanreligions.info/religions.html (contains Jediism among other religions);
- 3 www.tinyurl.com/wikireligions (contains Jediism as a parody religion)
- 4 In light of these data, what you know about the word 'religion'?
- 5 Perhaps we can agree on all the facts about Jediism, but still differ on whether it is a religion or not. Is the question of whether Jediism is a religion mainly about religion, Jediism or language?
- 6 Can you think of other cases from TOK where this has also been the case?

Should we believe in Jediism?

If we take Jediism to be about the dysfunctional Skywalker family, then clearly it is not literally true. But perhaps we can be a little more charitable than that. This is more a matter of ethics or aesthetics than it is a question of science, so we should not even be looking for literal truth.

Many believers note that the most important aspect of their religion is the meaning that it provides to their lives. If that is true, then anything that works, well, works. The fact that it works may not guarantee that it is *true* — do things that work tend to be 'truer' than those

that do not? But it may make it worth believing — in much the same way that the evidence for a scientific theory is that it *works*.

There does seem to be much in Jediism that is laudable, as shown in the Jedi Doctrines (see Activity 2). For example, Jedi believe in helping all those who are in need, in whatever form, to the best of their abilities. We recognise that providing help sometimes requires courage in the face of adversity. Perhaps we are all closet Jedi already.

Activity 2

Is Jediism good to believe?

- 1 Review the Jedi doctrines as published by the Temple of the Jedi Order: www.tinyurl.com/oe9n8pv
- 2 There are many doctrines that have echoes in other religions, for example, Christianity or Buddhism. Sometimes, links with existing beliefs are considered strengths. Does this provide evidence *for* or *against* the doctrines? Justify your answer.
- 3 Do you agree with the doctrines? If not, why not? If so, does that mean that either you believe in Jedi doctrines or you believe the doctrines to be true?
- 4 It is commonly said in TOK essays that religions can be justified by the good their followers do in the world. Would you agree? What does this tell you about the truth (or otherwise) of these doctrines?
- 5 Analyse the use of the word 'works' when we say science 'works' and religion (in this case Jediism) 'works'.

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