

The View From the East Pole

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Topic

1. Normative Ideal (*platonic hedonism*): To live in places where the pleasures associated with
the good
the beautiful &
the true
intersect
2. Problem: Most or all familiar religions involve massive disrespect of the truth
3. Question: Are there any historical examples of spiritual traditions that are not disrespectful of the truth
4. Answer: Maybe

Strategy: Look to (some varieties of) Confucianism & Buddhism

- For critique of commonplace that religion & only religion can provide a foundation for morality.
- For prospects of rational/truthful (+/-) comprehensive tradition(s)
 - » That are pretty resilient & long-lived &
 - » Engender In-group Solidarity & Out-Group Tolerance

The Buddhist Attitude to Other Religions

K.N. Jayatilleke 1966

The Buddhist attitude to other religions has from its very inception been one of critical tolerance. But what is significant is that it was able to combine a missionary zeal with its tolerant outlook. Not a drop of blood has been shed throughout the ages in the propagation and dissemination of Buddhism in the many lands to which it spread and religious wars either between the schools of Buddhism or against other religions have been unheard of. Very rare instances of the persecution of heretical opinions are not lacking but they have been exceptional and atypical. Buddhism has also shown a remarkable degree of adaptability in the course of its historical expansion.

Buddhist Arguments vs. Personal Creator God

1. Infinite Regress acceptable. Most Likely.
2. Reductio ad absurdum: If God, then no personal responsibility. But there is personal responsibility, so no God.
3. Indic Version of Problem of Evil: If there existed a being powerful enough to create this world he would have done better, i.e., created the world absent all the suffering.

Why Be Moral?

- There is abundant suffering
- It is worth overcoming
- It can be overcome by seeing reality & then living in a certain way -- in accord with:
 - Wisdom
 - Virtue &
 - Mindfulness

Wisdom= Metaphysics

- Everything is *impermanent*
- I -- my self -- am one of the impermanent things (*anatman*)
- *Dependent Origination* = everything connected to everything else
- *Emptiness* = No intrinsic, non-relational, essences

Virtue = Ethics

- Conventional Virtues: honesty, modesty, no killing, peaceful work
 - » +
- bodhisattva's Virtues
 - Compassion
 - Lovingkindness
 - Sympathetic Joy
 - Equaniminity

First Complexity

- Buddhism (many varieties) is atheistic or quietistic when it comes to creator God/gods
- But opulently polytheistic when it comes to ghosts, spirits, heaven, and hell realms.

Second Complexity

- Karma Tame & Untame
- The universe is just & is governed (or embodies or operates in accordance with) a karmic payback system that works over uncountable rebirths

Third Complexity-- Soteriology

Salvation comes from extinguishing unwholesome desires/attachments

- Nirvana 1: Extinction by death
- Nirvana 2: Extinction by Enlightenment while alive
- Nirvana 3: Extinction by death as in N1, but after N2

Fourth Complexity

No successful *Buddhist* State

- Bhutan
- Myanmar
- Thailand
- Sri Lanka
- Tibet, etc.

Still approx. 500 million Buddhists (4th after
Christian, Islam, Hindu)

Confucius

- What is Morality?
- Why be Moral?

Virtues of *Junzi*

- Humaneness, Benevolence,
Reciprocity (ren)
- Filial Piety, Elder Respect (xiao)
- Respect for Customs, Rituals,
Mores, Proper Manners (li)
- Honesty, Justice, Righteousness (yi)
- Discernment / *Phronesis* (zhi)

Why be a Junzi?

- Productive of social order (Warring States Period).
- How the Sage Kings Behaved.
- Best form of Self-Cultivation for Humans
- Endorsed by heaven (tian), heaven's mandate (tian-ming)
- Moral Charisma: Virtue is Contagious, Vice is not cf. 9.14.

Complexities & Perplexities

- Interpretation of *tian* & *tian-ming* & how much work it is/are they designed to do
 - Serious metaphysical/theological work?
 - Motivational work?
- Ghosts & spirits & afterlife beliefs
 - Same questions

Conclusion

1. Buddhism & Confucianism are possibility proofs of non-standard ways -- relative to Abrahamic traditions -- of grounding a morality, providing moral motivation, in-group solidarity, and type(s) of out-group tolerance -- amidst zeal to convert others to a favored form of life.

2. Do they also provide possibility proofs that there are/can be fully naturalistic philosophical-ethical traditions that don't require massive false believing?

Maybe.