

An analysis of the
contrast of beliefs
between the west and
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Spirituality, religion, and the divine creation of humans have been central topics for many years. From the texts we have read, we see a major distinction between Western and Eastern society's viewpoints. Western philosophy, as we have seen through our Ancient Greek texts, was focused on the divine, spirituality, and gods. Eastern Philosophy and views from philosophers such as Confucius, revolved around ethics, one's self, and connecting with nature.

Within The Epic of Gilgamesh, The Iliad, and The Aeneid, gods and spirituality are prevalent and given the utmost importance. Odysseus, Achilles, Gilgamesh, and more characters within Homeric texts relied on the gods for almost everything. The gods were in charge of nature, mortals, actions, cities, etc. The gods had the ability to bring about natural disasters and determine a person's place in the afterlife. This gained the gods a tremendous amount of respect and adoration. In Book 24 of the Iliad, when King Priam is speaking he says, " Revere the gods, Achilles! Pity me in my own right...." (145). This quote shows the respect that is expected for the gods during that time. All of the actions of the Trojan War were due to the gods themselves and the roles they played.

As we have read from the texts, we see that there isn't really a clear outcome for the future of the characters within the Iliad and Aeneid. The future was set to be controlled and predetermined by the gods. No matter how hard people tried, the gods were to decide on everything. A Greek poet named Hesiod who lived around the time of Homer, briefly touched on the importance of gods as well. Hesiod claimed that, " First there is emptiness, then earth, and only then do the gods appear. And, when the gods do appear

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on the scene, they behave in a rather disorderly way, and often bend the operations of nature according to their whims." These explanations for the gods can be seen as both philosophical and religion based. It is known that Greek philosophers during the Western time period were focused on primarily both of those two things.

Confucius and most Eastern philosophical teachings weren't ever too focused on the divine and gods. As mentioned prior, Confucius believed solely on "the realm of the concrete and human" (380). Going more into depth about this, Confucius believed strongly in morality and how humans were the ones who should be in touch with themselves. There were to be no other gods or spirits controlling things. We are in charge of our human capacities and everything that happens to us. He believed that it was crucial to be in tune with our selves and the nature around our Earth. We as humans in nature are all alike but, can be known for the habits of doing good or doing evil. Despite the evil doings of others, Confucius reflects on the love for humanity that we should have. He talks about this many times in The Analects while also further discussing the importance of human nature in humanity. "What nature puts together, habit separates." (392). I feel as though many Eastern philosophers saw things in that way and how they correlated so they sought out the pursuit of happiness through nature and discovering themselves.

Eastern and Confucian philosophy wanted to emphasize behavior and how an individual should act. For example, it was known that a child should respect their parents and superiors. "A man who respects his parents and his elders would hardly be inclined to defy his superiors. A man who is not inclined to defy his superiors will never foment a rebellion. A gentleman

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works at the root. Once the root is secured, the Way unfolds. To respect parents and elders is the root of humanity.” (380) Eastern philosophy was also intently focused on maintaining a set balance of life that they completely disregarded outside forces or anything else as having control over every day things. Ideal relationships were seen as balanced and ethically moral if followed by the system and what Confucius talked about.

Unlike what I mentioned before with Western philosophies, Eastern philosophy believed that your future was determined by the choices you made in your daily life and not by gods. There is a very ethical and “zen” way of thinking behind what Confucius and many other Eastern philosophers like Cheng Yi and Gandhi thought. With virtue and piety on the top of the mind, Eastern society realized that life was a journey not meant to be taken lightly. Everything in the universe was somehow connected to each other and you had the ability to change whatever you wanted about it.

Confucius’ Analects dealt with the inner and outward life of a human. The aesthetic that understanding yourself and one’s surroundings led to a happier life was outplayed a lot. Morality and doing “what was right” wasn’t focused on as much in Ancient Western Greek philosophy. We saw heroes defying gods and ultimately facing the consequences. We saw characters begging to gods for a desired outcome. Even the gods themselves begged to other gods. Take for example: in the Aeneid when Venus, Aeneas’s mother, begged Jupiter, king of the gods, to end the Trojans’ suffering. Overall behavior and moral ethics were put aside and were of less importance for the Greek characters within our texts. A lot of pride, arrogance, greed, and power-hungry events took place that the Eastern philosophy would not

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approve of. Moral power was more significant in Eastern philosophy than the term “ power” in Western aspects. Confucius said to, “ Put loyalty and faith above everything, and follow justice. That is how one accumulates moral power.” (389). In the Epic of Gilgamesh, power meant everything, but, not in terms of moral power. Gilgamesh wanted to be known as the highest and most admirable man there was. This need for importance was why Gilgamesh set out to kill Humbaba and prove himself to his people. In Eastern philosophical aspects, the need to “ prove oneself” would not even be prevailing in the first place.

As you can see, although both Western and Eastern philosophies had common values, the two were very different in a multitude of ways. Eastern philosophy established the real reason behind human existence and what a person’s purpose in the world was. All the while in Western Philosophy, starting off with the Greeks, there were only a few aspects that touched on the human condition and where it all began. Whether a person believed in multiple gods, the divine, or the realm of human nature- there is no denying that a lot can be learned from ancient times and applied to our daily modern life.