

COLLEGE GUILD  
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# PHILOSOPHY

Unit 5 of 6  
Eastern Philosophers

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Eastern philosophy includes the various philosophies of Asia. They include Chinese philosophy, Iranian/Persian philosophy, Japanese philosophy, Indian philosophy, and Korean philosophy. These are the oldest philosophy systems in human history.

Because of their origins within the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), some Western philosophies have formulated questions on the nature of God and God's relationship to the universe based on the belief in the existence of one god (monotheism). This has created a division among some Western philosophies between secular (things not considered sacred) and religious philosophies about the nature of God and the universe.

Eastern religions have not been as concerned with questions relating to the nature of a single god as the universe's sole creator and ruler, but rather with humans' relationships with each other and nature/Spirit. The dichotomy (or division) between the religious and the secular tends to be much less sharp in Eastern philosophy. Thus, some people accept the so-called metaphysical principles of an Eastern philosophy/religion such as Buddhism without going to a temple and worshipping.

**1. In a poem, Rudyard Kipling wrote: "East is East and West is West, and never the twain (two) shall meet." How do you interpret that statement?**

Confucius (traditionally 551–479 BCE) – Confucius was a Chinese teacher, editor, politician and philosopher. He emphasized personal and governmental morality, correctness of social relationships, justice, and sincerity. Confucius's principles had a basis in common Chinese tradition and belief. He championed strong family loyalty, ancestor worship, respect of elders by their children, and of husbands by their wives. He also recommended family as a basis for ideal government. He adopted the well-known principle, "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself", an early version of the Golden Rule. His words were, "*What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.*"

**2. Write about the Golden Rule as you understand it; discuss whether or not this is a useful tool in human relationships. How about in governmental policy? In the criminal justice system?**

The *Analects*, also known as the *Analects of Confucius*, is the collection of sayings and ideas attributed to Confucius and his contemporaries, traditionally believed to have been written by Confucius' followers circa 500 BCE. Here are three of them.

- *The Master said, "At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right."*

- *Tsze-chang asked Confucius about perfect virtue. Confucius said, “To be able to practice five things everywhere under heaven constitutes perfect value.” The questioner begged to ask what they were and was told, “Gravity, generosity of soul, sincerity, earnestness, and kindness. If you are grave, you will not be treated with disrespect. If you are generous, you will win all. If you are sincere, people will trust in you. If you are earnest, you will accomplish much. If you are kind, this will enable you to employ the services of others.”*
- *Someone said, “What do you say concerning the principle that injury should be recompensed with kindness?” (Recompense means to return in kind.) The Master said, “With what then will you recompense kindness? Recompense injury with justice, and recompense kindness with kindness.”*

**3. Choose one of these three Analects and write about it: what it means to you, how it can be put into practice (or, can it be put into practice?) and any other observations.**

Lao Tzu (generally pronounced “lhow – seh”) (specific dates not known: 6th century BCE, approx.). It is with philosopher Lao Tzu (or ‘Old Sage’) that the philosophy of Taoism (pronounced “Dow-ism”) really began. Some scholars believe he was a slightly older contemporary of Confucius; others debate whether he really existed at all. The writings of the *Tao Te Ching* (translated as “The Way and the Power” pronounced “Dow De Jing”) are attributed to Lao Tzu, but other scholars feel it is a compilation of poems written by several Taoists using the pen-name Lao-Tzu. Taoism and Confucianism have been seen as two distinct responses to the social, political, and philosophical conditions of life in China 2,500 years ago. Whereas Confucianism is greatly concerned with social relations, conduct, and human society, Taoism has a much more individualistic and mystical character, greatly influenced by nature.

Taoist ethics tend to emphasize “action through non-action”, simplicity, spontaneity, compassion, moderation and humility. Taoist ethics are concerned less with *doing* good acts than *becoming* a good person who lives in harmony with all things and people.

**4. Write what you think “action through non-action” means?**

**5. Write an example of “action through non-action”.**

The *Tao Te Ching* fascinates many writers and there are many translations, sort of like the many translations of the Bible, in order for people to better understand it. Here are two translations.

- *We guard and cherish these three treasures:  
The first is compassion,  
The second is simplicity,  
And the third is not presuming  
That we come ahead of others. (Translated by Guy Leekley)*
- *Throw away holiness and wisdom,  
and people will be a hundred times happier.  
Throw away morality and justice,  
and people will do the right thing.  
Throw away industry and profit,  
and there won't be any thieves.*

*If these three aren't enough,  
just stay at the center of the circle  
and let all things take their course.* (Translated by Stephen Mitchell)

**6. Again, take one of these sayings and write about what it means to you, how it can be put into practice (or, can it be put into practice?) and any other observations you may have.**

Gautama Buddha (463 BCE – 563 BCE) was a spiritual teacher born in Nepal and on whose teachings Buddhism was founded. To many, Buddhism goes beyond religion and is more of a philosophy or 'way of life'. It is a philosophy because philosophy 'means love of wisdom', and the Buddhist path can be summed up as: (1) to lead a moral life, (2) to be mindful and aware of thoughts and actions, and (3) to develop wisdom and understanding.

**7. Buddhism is often associated with “compassion”. What do you think compassion is, and how does it differ from “sympathy” or “empathy”?**

The Buddha based his philosophy on the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Path. The Four Noble Truths are:

1. The truth of suffering
2. The truth of the cause of suffering
3. The truth of the end of suffering
4. The truth of the path that frees us from suffering

The First Noble Truth is often translated as "Life is suffering." Many people new to Buddhism tune out as they hear this. But it also refers to anything that is temporary or conditional and that all things are impermanent, i.e. nothing lasts forever. Even something precious and enjoyable can be suffering, because it will end. Related to the nature of life is the nature of self. Are we not also temporary, conditional, and compounded of many parts? We can understand that life is impermanent, but are we, also, impermanent? The Buddha taught that before we can understand life and death, we must understand the self.

The Second Noble Truth teaches that the cause of suffering is craving, meaning we continually search for something outside ourselves to make us happy. But no matter how successful we are, we never remain satisfied. The Buddha taught that this craving grows from ignorance of the self. We go through life grabbing one thing after another to get a sense of security about ourselves. We attach not only to physical things, but also to ideas and opinions about ourselves and the world around us. Then we grow frustrated when the world doesn't behave the way we think it should, and our lives don't conform to our expectations.

**8. What do you think suffering is? In general, what do you think causes suffering?**

The Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths are sometimes compared to a physician diagnosing an illness and prescribing a treatment. The first truth tells us what the illness is, and the second truth tells us what causes the illness. The Third Noble Truth holds out hope for a cure. Ending the hamster-wheel chase after satisfaction is enlightenment ("awakening").

In the Fourth Noble Truth, the truth of the path that frees us from suffering is the Eight-Fold Path: Right View, Right

Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

- *Right View*: It means to see and to understand things as they really are and to realize the Four Noble Truths. As such, right view is the conscious aspect of wisdom. It means to see things through, to grasp the impermanent and imperfect nature of worldly objects and ideas.
- *Right Intention*: Right intention can be described best as a commitment to ethical and mental self-improvement.
- *Right Speech*: Positively phrased, this means to tell the truth, to speak friendly, warmly, and gently, and to talk only when necessary.
- *Right Livelihood*: Right livelihood means that one should earn one's living in a righteous way and that wealth should be gained legally and peacefully.
- *Right Action*: Right action means to act kindly and compassionately, to be honest, to respect the belongings of others, and to keep sexual relationships harmless to others.
- *Right Effort*: Without effort, which is itself an act of will, nothing can be achieved, whereas misguided effort distracts the mind from its task, and confusion will be the consequence.
- *Right Mindfulness*: In the practice of right mindfulness, the mind is trained to remain in the present, and to be open, quiet, and alert, contemplating the present event. All judgments and interpretations have to be suspended, or if they occur, just registered and dropped.
- *Right Concentration*: Concentration in this context is a state where all mental faculties are unified and directed onto one particular subject.

### 9. How do the ideas in the Eightfold Path carry into our current, Western world?

### 10. In your personal situation, explain whether or not it is possible for a person to practice the Eightfold Path.

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895 – 1986) was a writer from East India and speaker on philosophical and spiritual subjects. His subject matter included psychological revolution, the nature of the mind, meditation, human relationships, and bringing about positive change in society. He constantly stressed the need for a revolution in the psyche (mind) of every human being and emphasized that such revolution cannot be brought about by any external entity, be it religious, political, or social.

Krishnamurti was raised as a Hindu and later became a Theosophist (a form of philosophy based on a mystical insight into the divine nature, i.e. existence is an unfolding wondrous and exciting experience). He eventually disavowed Theosophism and went on to cast off not only all connections with organized religions and ideology, but denied his own spiritual authority as well.

Krishnamurti constantly emphasized the right place of thought in daily life. He saw knowledge as a necessary but rather mechanical function of the mind. The capacity of mind to record can present barriers, however. For example, hurtful words spoken in a relationship may become memories that influence actions. Thus, according to Krishnamurti, knowledge can present a division in a relationship and may be destructive.

- *"Without love we are destroying each other, we are living in fragments, one fragment in aggression with the other, one in revolt against the other."*

- *“The world is not something separate from you and me; the world, society, is the relationship that we establish or seek to establish between each other. So you and I are the problem, and not the world, because the world is the projection of ourselves, and to understand the world we must understand ourselves. That world is not separate from us; we are the world, and our problems are the world’s problems.”*

- 11. What do you think Krishnamurti means by “love” in the first quotation? Explain whether or not you think there is/are a single (or even multiple) solution(s) to aggression in the world, as well as between people.**
- 12. Looking at these four philosophers and their teachings, describe one common thread you see that links them.**
- 13. If you could learn more about one of these four Eastern philosophers, which of these would you choose and why?**

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*Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes*