

2022 Epicurus vs Buddhism Compare and Contrast Thread

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2022 at 4:34 PM

We have recently had a number of good new participants in the forum who have a lot of experience in Buddhism. We have one thread on this already, but rather than restart that one I'd prefer a brand new one which will probably make it easier to get input from the new participants, which I would greatly appreciate.

As before, we don't need a Buddhism-Bashing tone here - though I myself probably have tendency to be the most guilty of that. Part of my frustration comes from finding it relatively easy to pin down core positions of Stoicism, and therefore contrasting it to Epicurean viewpoints on the same issues, but regularly being told that Buddhism is so amorphous that it's really impossible to pin it down. The discussion usually then devolves into "such and such a figure said this" and "such and such a figure said that" with the result that there are so many rabbit trails that only those who are deep into Buddhism end up really caring about the results.

So if possible I'd like us to work on a thread for "the rest of us" - Epicureans in particular, of course, who want to get an initial grasp of what is fairly referable to as generic Buddhism from a Western perspective. That way we can hopefully get a grasp on at least a couple of core concepts.

To kick this off, I will post something that documents what I myself understand to be sort of a generic Buddhist position that I think Epicurus would find most unacceptable. Since we don't have direct Epicurean commentary, my best suggestion is to cite this in the form of two clips I came across this afternoon:

 <https://www.reddit.com> > r > Nietzsche > comments > 71uwla > nietzsche_on_buddhism

[Nietzsche on Buddhism : Nietzsche](#)

A core tenet of traditional **Buddhism** is that life is essentially unsatisfactory, which is a form of suffering; therefore, the goal is to escape the cycle of rebirth, i.e, to no longer exist. A core tenet of **Nietzsche's** philosophy takes the opposite view: one should will to live over and over even if life does involve suffering.

I finally found a short quote in The Will to Power that might begin to explain things, "weary Nihilism, which no longer attacks: its most renowned form being Buddhism: as passive Nihilism, a sign of weakness". Is it really fair for Nietzsche to accuse Buddhism of being nihilistic? People disciplining their mind to attain enlightenment is nihilism? I don't get it. Maybe I'm traveling down the wrong path anyways.

[Those clips came from here.](#)

Of course I said that this shouldn't be a "Bash Buddhism" thread and then I turn around and cite someone who never read "How To Win Friends and Influence People." But I cite this as an attempt to ground the discussion in the views of someone who was a far smarter person than I, who actually had some sympathies for Buddhism, and who apparently ended up finding a strong strain of Nihilism and Passivity in Buddhism which does in fact seem to me to be the standard criticism which I see repeated often in mainstream "Western" writing that ultimately seems to derive from the Greco-Roman-Epicurean perspective.

Hopefully these cites will help us focus on the really large questions including:

"Is Buddhism essentially nihilistic?"

Is the goal of Buddhism ultimately to cease to exist?"

Does Buddhism cultivate passivity?

And of course from our Epicurean perspective, "Is it fair to say that Buddhism has very little or any concern with pleasure as the goal of life?"

This is a start and I hope this time we can construct some commentary that would be useful in the future to our many visitors who have explored Buddhism prior to coming to this forum.