

# 2022 Epicurus vs Buddhism Compare and Contrast Thread

Post by "Cassius" of January 27, 2022 at 5:48 PM

Here is another clip that might advance this conversation:

Quote

Quote

Both Nietzsche's and Buddhist writings share the fact that they are a direct response to nihilism, however was he right in characterizing Buddhism as advocating a negation of the will, as a will to nothingness, or was this a misunderstanding stemming from his reading of Buddhist texts through the works of Schopenhauer?

I can speak less strongly to Nietzsche than I can to Buddhism, but let me say this: Buddhism is (and has been for than a millennium) as stricken by sectarianism as any Western religion. In the particular case of the approach to will, consider two almost orthogonal cases:

1. Theravada Buddhism. To vastly oversimplify, Theravadins practice something that approaches an ascetism. In a very real way, Theravada practice focuses on denying--and thus subduing--the will and any sense of desire. I think this most completely meshes with Nietzsche's conception of Buddhist thought as a negation of the will and a will to nothingness. This conception is very easily supported--and is supported in Theravada--through the Second and Third Noble Truths ("Desire is the root of suffering." and "There is a path to the cessation of desire.").
2. Zen Buddhism. Most notably in its theoretical form, Zen looks almost nothing like Theravada in respect to its approach to will and nothingness. Zen thinking relies heavily on the Diamond and Heart Sutras, which pretty explicitly say that the Buddhist conception of nothingness envelops even the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. As such, Zen practitioners reach for a stillness of mind that manifests as a totally natural motion of mind. This looks almost identical to Taoist Wei-Wu-Wei (action without action), which is harmonious natural activity. In Zen (as in most forms of Buddhism when practiced in their highest forms), the fullness of nothingness is recognized: it is not a negation of anything, but rather an affirmation of everything which is in the phenomenally experienced world. In Zen, it is said that "It is right to want flowers and to hate weeds." This is quite

obviously NOT a negation of will, but perhaps rather an attempt to free one's will from what Zen would call the confines of ego-bound or conceptual thought.

The point is that Nietzsche's interpretation of Buddhist will and nothingness is quite defensible, and it is a very natural conclusion from certain forms of Buddhism--especially many of those that are approached in a more scholarly and academic fashion. On the other hand, there are Buddhist schools in which there is no reasonable way to reconcile Nietzsche's conception with what the practicing Buddhists talk about.

Unfortunately, however, there is a massive caveat to this, and that is that most practicing Buddhists (even those who practice Sutra-driven forms of the religion) will tell you that Buddhism cannot be completely accurately expressed in academic words. There is a requirement for the suspension of self that requires the suspension of thought, and "nothingness" (to most Buddhists) is simply a word-symbol that points to the unencapsulable idea that is that suspension and the access it gives.

The only serious way to enquire about the philosophical validity of Western takes on Buddhism that are laden with basic philosophical conceits regarding thought, self, and truth is in terms of their psychological and cultural impact, and that's a completely different question.

That's from here: <https://philosophy.stackexchange.com/questions/3452...que-of-buddhism>