

COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF ETHICS AND JUSTICE IN
EASTERN AND WESTERN TRADITIONS

Neha Appavoa

Philosophical researcher

Abstract: Ethics and justice are fundamental concepts in philosophical thought, shaping moral behavior and social order across civilizations. Eastern and Western philosophical traditions have developed distinct yet overlapping approaches to understanding ethical values and justice. This article provides a comparative philosophical analysis of ethics and justice in Eastern and Western traditions, highlighting their conceptual foundations, similarities, and differences. By examining key philosophical ideas from both traditions, the study emphasizes the importance of intercultural dialogue in addressing contemporary moral and social challenges.

Keywords: Ethics, justice, Eastern philosophy, Western philosophy, comparative philosophy, moral values

Introduction

Ethics and justice have occupied a central place in philosophical inquiry throughout human history. Every civilization has sought to define what constitutes a good life, moral conduct, and a just social order. While these concepts are universal in importance, their interpretation varies significantly across cultural and philosophical traditions.

Eastern and Western philosophies represent two major intellectual traditions that have profoundly influenced ethical and political thought. Western philosophy, rooted in ancient Greek rationalism and later shaped by Christian and Enlightenment ideas, often emphasizes individual rights, rational principles, and legal justice. Eastern philosophy, drawing from traditions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, tends to focus on harmony, moral duty, and social balance.

The aim of this article is to compare philosophical understandings of ethics and justice in Eastern and Western traditions and to explore their relevance in the contemporary global context.

Ethical Thought in Western Philosophy

Western ethical philosophy originated in ancient Greece with thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle. Plato viewed justice as harmony within the soul and society, where each part fulfills its proper role. Aristotle developed virtue ethics, emphasizing moral character and the cultivation of virtues as the foundation of ethical life.

In modern Western philosophy, ethical thought increasingly focused on individual autonomy and universal moral principles. Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics emphasized duty, rationality, and respect for human dignity. According to Kant, moral actions are guided by universal moral laws rather than consequences. In contrast, utilitarian philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill defined ethics in terms of maximizing happiness and overall well-being.

Justice in Western philosophy is often associated with legal frameworks, rights, and fairness. Modern political philosophers, including John Rawls, emphasized justice as fairness, advocating equal rights and social institutions that benefit the least advantaged members of society.



Ethical Thought in Eastern Philosophy

Eastern ethical philosophy developed within a different cultural and metaphysical context. Confucianism places strong emphasis on moral cultivation, social harmony, and ethical relationships. Ethics in Confucian thought is grounded in virtues such as benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), and respect for social roles. Moral behavior is understood as fulfilling one's duties within a network of relationships rather than asserting individual rights.

In Hindu and Buddhist traditions, ethics is closely linked to spiritual development and liberation. Concepts such as *dharma* (moral duty) and *karma* (moral causation) emphasize responsibility for one's actions and their consequences. Buddhist ethics focuses on compassion, non-harm, and the reduction of suffering, viewing justice as moral balance rather than legal enforcement.

Justice in Eastern philosophy is often implicit, embedded within ethical harmony and cosmic order rather than formal legal systems. Social justice is achieved through moral self-discipline and alignment with universal principles.

Comparative Analysis of Ethics and Justice

A comparative analysis reveals both differences and complementarities between Eastern and Western approaches. Western traditions tend to emphasize individual rights, legal justice, and rational principles, while Eastern traditions focus on moral harmony, social responsibility, and spiritual development.

However, both traditions share common ethical concerns, such as the pursuit of justice, moral responsibility, and human well-being. Western virtue ethics and Eastern moral cultivation both stress the importance of character development. Similarly, contemporary Western interest in care ethics resonates with Eastern emphasis on compassion and relational ethics.

Contemporary Relevance and Intercultural Dialogue

In an increasingly globalized world, understanding diverse ethical perspectives is essential for addressing global challenges such as social inequality, environmental crisis, and cultural conflict. Intercultural philosophical dialogue can enrich ethical discourse by integrating insights from both Eastern and Western traditions.

Rather than viewing these traditions as opposed, a comparative approach highlights their potential complementarity. Western emphasis on rights and justice can be balanced by Eastern focus on harmony and responsibility, contributing to a more holistic ethical framework.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ethics and justice in Eastern and Western philosophical traditions reflect distinct cultural and historical contexts, yet they address shared fundamental concerns of human life. Western philosophy emphasizes rational principles, individual rights, and legal justice, while Eastern philosophy focuses on moral harmony, duty, and spiritual balance.

A comparative philosophical analysis demonstrates that integrating insights from both traditions can enhance contemporary ethical understanding. Intercultural dialogue offers valuable opportunities for developing inclusive and balanced approaches to ethics and justice in the modern world.



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