

WHAT IS THE SELF (HPPH7014)

An evaluation of the extent to which eastern and aspects of western philosophy can be perceived to present conflicting views of the self (personal identity, individualism, collectivism, and consciousness).

L A Hartley 30th September 2024



Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

Declaration Form

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Name. LEOROY ANTHONY HARTLEY

Date 30/09/2024.

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA Dissertation (Philosophy) (HPPH7014)

Name LEOROY ANTHONY HARTLEY

Date 30/09/2024.

3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

A bibliography is appended.

Name LEOROY ANTHONY HARTLEY

Date: 30/09/2024

4. I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying, inter- library loan, and for deposit in the University's digital repository

Name LEOROY ANTHONY HARTLEY

Date 30/09/2024.

Supervisor's Declaration.

I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student's own efforts.

Signed:

Date:

CONTENTS

Abstract Page 1

Introduction Pages 3-4

The Self in Hindu philosophy.	Pages 4-5
Essential understanding of Hinduism	Pages 5-6
Brahman	Pages 6-7
Atman	Pages 7-9
Schools of Vedanta	Pages 9-10
Advaita Vedanta	Page 10
Visistadvaita Vedanta	Pages 11-12
Dvaita Vedanta	Pages 12-13
Rene Descartes	Pages 13-15
Overview	Pages 15-16
 Buddhism	 Pages 16-17
The historical context of Buddhist philosophy	Pages 17-18
Anatman (non-self)	Pages 18-21
Heraclitus	Page 21
David Hume	Pages 22-23
 Confucianism	 Pages 23-25
Mencius	Pages 25-27
John Locke	Pages 27-28
 Taoism	 Pages 28-29
Without exerting effort	Pages 29-30
De as Power	Pages 30-31
Zhuangzi	Pages 31-33
 Summary	 Pages 33-37
 Conclusion	 Pages 37-40
 Bibliography	 Pages 41-42

Abstract

The initial aim and objective of this paper will be to make overarching distinctions on the differences and similarities of how the self is viewed in eastern and western philosophy.

Having made the distinction of these differences and similarities in philosophical thought on the self, the aim and objective will be to periodically show how these conceptual abstract views of the self are manifested into aspects of individualism, and collectivism particularly in Eastern culture.

The general premise of this dissertation is (a) to demonstrate that the abstract social construct of self whether coming from eastern or western philosophies, is a similar construct that when deconstructed, is the mutual fundamental core element that is a common denominator connecting the human family. (b) It is my hypothesis that because of the geography of thought due to the dispersion of people in eastern and western cultures, this has resulted in differing philosophies which have an inclination towards either ideologies of individualism or collectivism. Not because of nature of the self, which is similar in eastern and western thought, but because of the emphasis placed on whether the self is perceived as part the whole or separate. This seemingly gives rise to the divergence between eastern and western philosophy of the self. In conclusion in eastern philosophies particularly Taoism, Confucianism and Hinduism, the true self was likely to be found within the collective as opposed to individualism. However, with access and growth of social media, cultures of the world are gaining knowledge and understanding of different world cultures, thereby become more interconnected.

Introduction

COVID 19 struck the UK in 2020. This was the beginning of an unprecedented time. Although compared to the Spanish flu, this pandemic swept through countries and populations like a bush fire causing illness and death throughout the world. As a consequence, governments throughout the world strived to develop vaccines in order to prevent the virus spreading and causing further devastation. At the height of the transmission a number of countries developed the strategy of 'lock down' which meant only essential services could remain operational such the NHS, Police, and delivery services. Consequently, the rest of the country was made to remain in doors and only communicate with people via the 2-3-meter distance rule. This essentially meant isolation, where people were stuck in doors with only their immediate family members or on their own. The world and everyday life as we knew it, came to a standstill!

With this closing down or slowing down of the interaction of people in their daily lives, differing activities were required to fill their time. Consequently, Netflix the movie

streaming company became extremely popular; people went for daily walks, whilst maintaining the social distancing guidelines; and communities and individuals engaged in charitable pursuits in order to assist the less fortunate in society and their local communities.

This involuntary retreat into our homes presented me with the opportunity to pursue the age-old question of “Who am I?” This question has also been with me, throughout my adolescence, then middle age and now moving towards my senior years, this enquiry has become more prominent in my psychology. I am unsure if this is because I am becoming more acquainted with my own mortality through experiences, or if it is just a lifelong interest which I share with others. Nevertheless, I could not allow this opportunity to pass me by. With the unexpected time that was presented during the COVID 19 pandemic, I decided to study this question, hoping to find some clarity. I enrolled on this philosophy course, having been an undergraduate 25 years earlier. The course itself was Eastern and Western Philosophy, with my interest being predominately in eastern philosophical thought originating out of India, Nepal and China; specifically focusing on Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. This dissertation will concentrate on the philosophy of ‘the self’ found within these religions and philosophies. However, interspersed throughout the body of this work will be comparable western philosophers, which will be used to give an idea of how the self is perceived in western schools of thought. For clarity when referring to the self in this body of work, it is a collective term which incorporates the individual self, personal identity and consciousness which can be categorised as either being individualism or collectivism.

The self in Hindu philosophy

The subject of the self might seem complex within the context of Hindu philosophy, but this is because without a clear understanding of basic Hinduism, several factors make gaining an appropriate viewpoint difficult. This includes comprehending the philosophy of Hinduism concerning the self, and studying a different culture to the one that is not your own is very different from one which you have been born into.

Hinduism is one of the oldest and largest faiths in the world and it also has an extensive body of knowledge that has been widely interpreted. Hinduism is a religion and a philosophy which has different abstract conceptions of the self within various schools of thought. Given these factors, I believe the exploration of the construct self can still be critiqued with the aid of sound reasoning and objectivity.

The schools of Vedanta form part of Hindu philosophy and religion. To aid with the critique the subject matter will be divided into three categories in order to acquire some understanding; without which, it would be increasingly difficult to comprehend and logically evaluate the main Vedanta schools of thought in relation to the concept of the Self (Atman) and Brahman. I will firstly look at the basic historical framework of Hinduism. However, since this is not the premise of my dissertation, I have no intention of going into any great depth in this area. Secondly, I will explain the close relationship between Brahman and Atman, as well as how Brahman is portrayed in the Vedas and Upanishads. Atman will also be analysed in light of the Upanishads and Vedas. Thirdly, the arguments regarding Atman within the Vedanta Schools will be studied. There are various Vedanta schools, each with its own understanding of the self. Consideration will be given to the three opposing viewpoints: none dualism, a qualified none-dualistic school of thinking, and dualistic schools of thought on Atman and Brahman.

Essential understanding of Hinduism

In the southern region of India, in the valley where the Indus River flows, Hindu philosophy, cultures, societies and rituals evolved from the Mohenjo-daro, Harappan, and Dravidian civilizations were the local native populations at the time. This occurred around the third millennium. The nomadic Aryans from Persia came around 1500 BCE, and these cultures merged to start the philosophical and religious growth of Hinduism, which is derived from the Persian term Sindhu. In earlier times, several of the local civilizations came to recognize and adhere to what is known as Sanatana Dharma the:

Eternal and divine ordering of the cosmos as revealed in the Vedas, the sacred text of the Hindus.

(Littleton C Scott, 1996.p18)

The sacred text is frequently divided into two sections, Smriti (remembering) and Shruti (hearing). The Vedas (knowledge), which are divided into the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda, are the earliest of these writings. The Brahmanas (sacrificial rites), Aranyakas (esoteric rituals), and Upanishads (which focus on the self and one's relationship to the universe) are additional works found within these Vedas. The ego and the absolute, or more specifically the Brahman (the global soul) and Atman (the innermost self or soul), are the two parties in this connection. The Upanishads, which mean "to sit," focus primarily on a number of philosophical issues, including:

What is the cause of Brahman? Why are we born? By what do we live? On what are we grounded? Are we to think of it as time, inherent nature, fate, chance, the elements, a womb, and a person? Or a combination of these?

(Cohen Signe, 2018.p153)

This dialogue is taken from the Svatasvatara (the one whom owns a white mule) and it is for those who speak of Brahman. These fundamental questions are to help conceptualize the nature of Brahman. In fact the Upanishads as a religious and sacred text for Hinduism is essential to understanding the philosophical thought on Atman, Brahman, along with other aspects such as salvation through knowledge, karma, devotion and reincarnation. I think it is rational to say the Upanishads are a primary piece of work that is essential to understanding the various schools of thought in regard to conflicting ideology that Vedanta groups present in regard to understanding Atman (The self).

Brahman

From a philosophical perspective, it is important to comprehend this principle, or idea of Brahman (ultimate reality or from the Sanskrit root meaning to grow, expand, or increase). However, due to the various descriptions, it is rather challenging to conceptualize this. Although this abstract of Brahman is generally believed to be beyond human knowledge, it can be defined in essence as the force that supports, underlies, and animates all of existence, including all living beings. The profound and secret teachings of the forest, Brihad Aranyakas Upanishads, are the largest and oldest Upanishads, and they attempt to identify the unifying ontological mono feature of the

Universe. In this Upanishad, the sage Yajnavalkya and the philosopher Gargi Vacaknavi discuss the fundamental nature of the universe and the basis for all existence. The query is posed,

"Since this whole world is woven back and forth on water, on what, then, is water woven back and forth?" Yajnavalkya responds initially: "On air, Gargi."

(Stevenson & Haberman, 1998.p47)

The conversation continued back and forth while largely retelling the same incident, until the sage Yajnavalkya, was compelled to identify Brahman as the supreme reality because his initial response was insufficient. The teacher Yajnavalkya and Vidagdha Shalala had a second disagreement in the same Upanishad about the number of Gods that existed. The question is asked.

"How many Gods are there?" the answer of 'three and three hundred, and three and three thousand.'

(Stevenson & Haberman, 1998.p47)

Once again, this response is inadequate, and the process continues until one God, known as Brahman, is said to be the solution. The underlying concept of the abstract, we can see from the preceding talks that the basic descriptions continuously reject the notion that Brahman is the sole reality or existence. The three primary Vedanta schools of thought will be discussed more in the section on how this ultimate truth is seen.

Atman

The Upanishads (the books of the self) uses the term Atman to refer to the self in a variety of ways. The Brihad Aranyaka Upanishads depict the Atman as unfathomable, unreachable, the life force, the unborn self, never withering, the creator of everything, etc. One of the main lessons of the Upanishads is the close connection between Brahman and Atman. Because Brahman is given the same names or attributes as Atman, the concept of this relationship may seem contradictory and confusing to western philosophy. For instance, both are described as "the very source of all life" or "the root of all existence". However, this paradoxical relationship is the same but

different, similar to the relationship between "I" and "i," where they are both the same but different depending on the context. The Hindu philosopher Jay Lakani distinguishes between Brahman, the expression of everything, and Atman, the manifestation of each individual. As a result, Brahman is the creator, whereas Atman is the entity that appears before our sight. Even those who study Hinduism may struggle to understand this concept because it is so complex and difficult to grasp. Despite the fact that this is a philosophical paper, a metaphor that could be used is Einstein's famous equation, $E=mc^2$.

In principle, the equation asserts that mass and energy are interchangeable, or that energy simply changes forms rather than being created or destroyed. As a result, mass and energy are constantly moving. Mass corresponds to Atman (the individual manifestation or self), whereas Brahman corresponds to energy (the universal expression). Brahman could also be equated as the eternal sun, with Atman representing the sun's rays. Finally, if Brahman is like a sea, then Atman is like the splashes or waves on that sea. It is vital to avoid confusing this fundamental self (the ego Ahamkara). It is depicted in the Upanishads as being distinct from other selves and moving through time. Most people identify with this self, which is influenced by their bodies, societies, and surroundings. This self more closely resembles what Scottish philosopher David Hume thinks people can discover about themselves through introspection.

People are nothing but a bundle or collection of perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. They are the successive perceptions only that constitute the mind.

(Hume David 2007 p.47)

In other words, humans are just a group of psychological extensions (individual souls), with no central personality (Hume's quotation above will be explored in the section on Buddhism). This ego self is not the supreme self or the true self of each individual person, contrary to Hindu philosophy. The core and true self is known as Atman. The ego self-hides the true self and, as a result, the human circumstances of discovering true identity.

The school of thought that interprets the Upanishads determines how the ideas of Brahman and Atman are defined and seen within Hinduism's philosophical framework.

To be more explicit, one's perspective will influence how one sees Hinduism's intellectual and spiritual traditions. Metaphorically the lenses will influence how you understand Brahman and Atman. The interpretative lenses are as follows:

Schools of Vedanta

Vedanta (the end of the Vedas) is divided into two categories: Karmakanda spiritual exegesis (consisting of the samhitas and Brahmanas) and Jñānakanda a part of knowledge (consisting of the Upanishads and, to some extent, the Aranyakas).

The first section discusses ceremonies, while the second section provides knowledge that can end the cycle of rebirth and death. The Vedanta schools are made up of three major schools of thought, each promoting a distinct intellectual philosophy that critiques the Upanishads. These elements fit best into the following categories:

1. Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism).
2. Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedanta (Qualified non-dualism)
3. Dvaita Vedanta (dualism).

In terms of epistemology, the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutra, and the Bhagavad Gita are all similar to Shabda, or abda (Sanskrit for "speech sound"), despite the fact that each of the aforementioned philosophical schools espoused different approaches to their critique of the Upanishads. There are philosophical dichotomies resulting from interpretations of the Upanishads, particularly those of the Aranyakas, in the understanding of Brahman as the absolute ultimate reality that underpins reality, and the opposing philosophical thought, which emphasises a personal relationship with the absolute reality Brahman. Within the framework of Hinduism, these two competing schools of thought have resulted in a range of rites and behaviours.

Advaita Vedanta

Shankara, a philosopher who flourished between 788 and 820 AD, was the most prominent proponent of the Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism) philosophical school of thought. He was well-known in both the West and India, where he was a popular

philosopher. This could be due to his monotheistic understanding of Hinduism, which is similar to some proponents of Christian theology. Parallel questions exist, such as "Who or what is Brahman?" What does it mean to understand the truth as it stands? What is the relationship between individual souls and Brahman? How does the absolute and the reality we perceive via our senses connect to one another? These questions can be found in Christian theology in the relationship between God the Father, and Jesus the Son. However, from the Hindu perspective, Shankara responded to these questions by claiming that Atman is Brahman. Therefore, Atman can be utilised to identify Brahman, hence there are no distinctions between the two. The concept of monism is the unity of all things. Pure truth, or Brahman, is the ultimate and deepest self. If one accepts the argument that there is no duality, a critical question arises. What is this world of many forms and shapes? if the basic reality is Brahman. According to Shankara's fullest understanding of Brahman as the sole true reality, this cosmos of differentiation is ultimately unreal or represents a significant conceptual philosophy of Maya (illusion). This mistake leads to the creation of the world of shape and form (differentiation). To clarify, the forces of the formless are what give the form its existence. However, this is ultimately caused by our spiritual ignorance, which is the outcome of Maya, which is concealing the absolute reality that underpins Brahman's existence. To overcome this illusion, one must first acquire essential information. Shankara does not claim that the world takes numerous forms and that what we see with our senses is either fictional or unreal. It more closely matches how someone with inferior vision (ignorance) would perceive a person or item. They first have difficulty distinguishing between the object and the person, which can generate confusion or even fear. Although the sensations are valid existentially, everything becomes clear only when the correct eyewear (the ultimate understanding that all is Brahman) is worn and the item or person is regarded in its full light. Continuing with the vision analogy, a person with glaucoma (ignorance) will only be able to see the world more clearly after having them surgically treated (ultimate knowledge). According to Shankara, the Atman is the true self, your pure eternal consciousness. However, when the illusion (Maya) of ignorance is removed, this specific Atman is revealed to be none other than Brahman, the everlasting self.

Visistadvaita Vedanta

The Visistadvaita Vedanta (qualified nondualism) school of thought questions Advaita Vedanta. Ramanuja, a theologian and interpreter of sacred texts, was the prominent proponent of this philosophical school of thought. His interpretation of many Upanishad passages diverged significantly from Shankara's recommendation. He concluded that:

Atman was not identical to the absolute reality of Brahman.

(Routledge Taylor & Frances p.194)

Both living and inanimate objects are a part of the divine body that is the absolute, which is composed of composite elements. This critical philosophical analysis caused a significant rift among the Vedanta schools. He actually reasoned that Brahman, which is Sanskrit for "God," is still the only reality but has taken on bright, infinite qualities. This is an example of pluralism. These characteristics set these objects apart. This interpretation is a major departure from the teachings of Shankara, who maintained that Brahman is pure undifferentiated mind. Ramanuja further argues that since knowledge depends on object differentiation, Brahman cannot be pure undifferentiated mind. To put it plainly, this is polarity; both of these metaphors are dependent on observation and comprehension; to know what is up, one must also know what is down, or what is cold and what is hot. However, understanding knowledge requires an awareness of both opposites. From a Western perspective, how can someone know God if they do not know the Devil? Though Ramanuja's mental grasp of Brahman is still emancipating, the Maya (world of form and shape) remains real and vital. Actually, this is the longing to become many and the creative activity/power of Brahman. In addition to the role of Bhakti (devotion) with a close relationship to God, experience of this world of plurality is a means of obtaining liberating knowledge. This is in contrast to the Shankara Advaita Vedanta perspective, which views devotion to Vishnu as a lower kind of understanding, and views Maya as an illusion that must be conquered. According to Ramanuja, Maya represents the creative part or force of God (Brahman). What is the proper way to view or conceptualise the soul according to the Ramanuja school of thought? Since the soul is a component of Brahman's conceptual body, it is both distinct and non-differentiable, or it can be both an object and a subject. According to

Ramanuja, the soul is immortal since it is a component of Brahman's (God's) conceptual body. An aspect of Brahman that is unique is called Atman. It differs from fire in the same way that a spark does. In the end, each individual is a part of the ultimate reality. The individual person could not exist apart from God. Shankara, on the other hand, believes that Brahman is the sole genuine self and reality, and that each individual soul is a false illusion. Ramanuja has a qualified viewpoint that is somewhat akin to western Christian theology, which regards God as both Father and Son, and more of a middle ground between the two schools of thought.

Dvaita Vedanta

Madhva, who lived in 1200 CE, was one of the principal proponents of the Dvaita Vedanta (Dualism) school of thought. This school of thinking interprets the sacred text conceptually in a very direct way with respect to Brahman and Atman. He reasoned as a theologian that the Upanishads' sacred text described Brahman and Atman as dualism. Because of this, the individual self is distinct from the Lord; in contrary to Ramanuja's theory of the parts constituting the whole, the self is not a facet or quality of God. Madhva conceptualises distinctions in every facet of existence, such as how the earth differs from both the universe and from both living and non-living substances. Every object has distinct differences, which Madhva classifies into five groups:

between the lord and the self: (Jivatman) between innumerable selves; between the lord and matter (Prakrti); between the self and matter; and between phenomena within matter.

(Gavin flood .1996, p 259)

Despite differentiation, akin to Ramanuja's aspects contributing to the whole, this is in contrast to both Advaita, Vedanta and Visistadvaita Vedanta. Madhva goes further to explain that things are different (pluralism), independent, unique, and distinct, and that nothing exists outside the will of Brahman. When the soul is freed, it keeps its own identity. Once more, this stands in stark contrast to Shankara's and Ramanuja's theologies and philosophy. The latter of these two interpretations argues that the soul is only a part of the absolute, and claims that there is only Brahman and the Ramanuja school of thinking. Liberation consists of a blend of devotions (bhakti) and divine

favour Prasada (Bartley,2015, p 250). In this case, Vishnu saves in addition to comprehending the five categories mentioned above, much like in Christian traditions where Christ saves. The material principles are created and sustained by God, who also acts as their ruler. This stands in stark contrast to the school of thought of Shankara and Ramanuja, which holds that Brahman is the only genuine reality. Only knowledge, which dispels ignorance, can make one free from Maya (illusion) and Ramanuja, where dedication is the means of achieving liberation.

Rene Descartes

This renowned 16th century western philosopher was born in France on the 31st of March 1596, in a small village named La Haye, in the province of Poitou. His family was recognised as nobility. His family consisted of lawyers, doctors, and army officers. Descartes was initially educated in his adolescent years at a Jesuit school. He then went onto what we would call today higher education at the University of Poitiers, where he studied law and in his later years, and through study became known as a scientist, mathematician, and philosopher.

Descartes developed a profound construct for which he is probably best known for in his philosophical statement of ‘Cogito ergo sum’, which when translated into the English language means “I think, therefore I am”. To arrive at this construct, Descartes reasoned that in natural discourse it was sometimes necessary to pursue opinions which one was unsure of to arrive at the truth. However, this way of thinking was flawed because opinions were not necessarily based on the truth. So, with this rational he decided to reject everything where doubt could be found. He said:

And because there are men who make mistakes in reasoning, even about the simplest elements of geometry, and commit logical fallacies, I judged that I was prone to error as anyone else, and I reject as false all the reasoning I hitherto accepted as valid proof.

(Maclean,2006, p28-29)

Descartes employed a system of elimination or radical doubt, meaning he stripped away all sensory perceptions, all aspects of the physical world and even mathematical

rationales to reach a baseline or foundation of unqualified certainty. This is how he arrived at and came to his declaration of ‘Cogito ergo sum’, or “I think, therefore I am”.

The letter ‘I’ in Descartes declaration is connected to the cognitive function of thinking, which can use imagination, will, understanding, doubt along with perception, essentially these are a person’s higher faculties of which memory, reason and intuition are also a part of a human being cognitive abilities. For Descartes this is the nonmaterial self.

Descartes was a rationalist, meaning his philosophy was dictated by reason and action which was a logical process. This was in an age where philosophers, academics and ordinary people still believed in the religious construct of a supreme being or God for action and reasoning. In searching for truth Descartes further arrived at the above critique by deducing that while even in a dream or waking state, thoughts could come to you which could be true or false and:

It was necessarily the case that I, who was thinking them, had to be something.
(Maclean,2006. p28-29)

This ‘something’ Descartes speaks of is the cognitive faculties or the self, which establishes his first principle of Philosophy, the ‘I think’ part.

A subtle distinction then takes place in Descartes statement which fundamentally is where the separation takes place between the ‘I think’, element (non-material) and body which is material. This is where Descartes arrives at the concept of mind body dualism. He reasoned that his whole being was to think completely independently of the material body. To put this another way, if I use Descartes declaration, “I think, therefore I am” and the statement is split into two elements, A) I think (non-material) and B) I am (material body). A is the thinking process, intellect, cognition, knowledge, and desire contained within the mind or the self. Whilst B is a comparison to the body which is not dependent on the A to exist because it is shape, motion and size which is completely independent from the mind.

This cognitive separation between mind and body is understood as the eternal soul a

biblical reference. Therefore, the mind is equated to the self.

As previously noted, Descartes studied at a Jesuit college and associated with theologians in Paris, so it is possible that these experiences affected his logic and led him to formulate the idea of cogito ergo sum. This is mere conjecture, however, it should be emphasised that Descartes' logic is dualistic, as it separates the intellect from the body but emphasises the individual. Therefore, if the mind maintains its ability to reflect and think, then it will continue.

Overview

The three major schools of Vedanta all present a different philosophical and religious interpretation of the Upanishads particularly in regard to Brahman and Atman. This in turn has produced opposing ideologies, differing philosophical and religious understanding of Hindus sacred text, which is not just confined to Hinduism. In fact, if you look at the worlds three major religions of Christianity, Islam and Hinduism all have conflicting understanding of their own religious text. This has produced different schools of thought and splits within the religions, as well as physical encounters. Why different interpretations? is a question that could be accounted for particularly in Hinduism, because the three major advocates of the Vedanta schools are all born at a different period of time and are subject to different education, communities, and variants of the Hindu culture. This factor has contributed to the individuals (Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva) social and environment conditioning, which has formed their perception. This in turn has contributed to the different interpretation of the Upanishads or sacred text. As a metaphor this is similar to an elephant in a room: with three blind sages embracing a different aspect of the elephant (Brahman, Atman, or Vishnu), perceiving this to be the only truth, not realizing that there is more to the truth than just their critique and their perspectives which have contributed to their unique standpoint.

Considering the term dualism, one can see the similarities of both Descartes and Madhva are speaking on the same aspects of dualism however in western philosophy Descartes concept of dualism is distinct from the perspective dualism presented by one of the East's main advocates for Dvaita Vedanta (Dualism) school of thought, which was Madhva. Rene Descartes dualism is distinct in regards to the physical separation

of mind and body of the individual person. Whereas Madhva conception of dualism is more of a construct of two abstract concepts of Brahman and Atman, which are separate and distinct from each other. Also, his dualism is broken down into five different areas. Similarly, the self or the soul when liberated, retains its individuality which is similar to Descartes' concept of the self.

The other two proponents: Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism) and Visistadvaita Vedanta (Qualified non-dualism) could contribute to the ideology of collectivism in eastern families and societies. This is evidenced in that some eastern families, living in the west still live in extended families consisting of grandparents, sons, and daughters as well as grandchildren. This became apparent in the COVID 19 pandemic where the spread of the virus was devastating, resulting in a high death rate, particularly in Asian households, because of intergenerational living conditions. Although not all families of eastern origin live within an extended family, as the younger generations have grown up in the west and appeared to have adopted some of the family structural norms and traits of western family structure. However, hierarchical decision making within Asian families in some instances, is still made by those senior in the family. This is evident when it comes to marriage, as parents and sometimes grandparents still have influence in the decision-making process regarding arranged marriages. Parents can still matchmake other families, sons and daughters for marriage into their own families. Again, with the western cultural influence one could assume that the younger generation growing up in the west would depart from eastern values, traditions and practices in the arranged marriage context. However, in the paper (Dale. The university Manchester 2008-02) it was found that the younger generation were still inclined to embrace traditional arranged marriages, putting the family first before the desires of the individual.

Buddhism

Like Hinduism, Buddhism originated in India and spread across the continent to such places as Tibet, Mongolia, Burma, Thailand, Japan, Korea, and China. Buddhism consists of three major branches or schools of thought: namely Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. For the purpose of this section, there will be a focus on the branch of Mahayana Buddhism, as this school of thought is practiced throughout China, Korea

and Japan which can be considered to be a geographical representation of the East.

The historical context of Buddhist philosophy

In the western hemisphere, the philosophy and religion of the Buddha are widely recognized. It is known that the Buddha was a descendent of a noble family in the Nepal region. He belonged to the Kshatriya caste, which is higher up the caste scale and consists of soldiers, administrators, and rulers. He was a prince born into an aristocratic family, and the prevailing belief was that he would grow up to be a great ruler or religious figure like a Buddha. The monarch made the decision that he would prefer his son to succeed him as a ruler than as a religious figure. He concealed the prince inside the palace, encircling him in splendour and extravagance. This would shield him from the outside world, where he might become an ascetic. Additionally, he got married and had a child. After leading a sheltered life until the age of 29, he made the decision to venture outside the palace gates with his charioteer, Chana, where he came across four realities: Dukka: the truth of suffering, Samudaya: the truth of the origin of suffering, Nirodha: the truth of the end of suffering and Magga: the of the path that leads to the end of suffering.

After witnessing these unfavourable sides of life, the prince was upset by the misery he saw. When he encountered an acetic, who had dedicated himself to meditation this gave him hope for a solution to life's suffering and the cycle of death and rebirth (Samsara). Having departed from his home on his journey to achieve enlightenment he studied under two teachers of meditation, however, both practices were insufficient. Consequently, the prince then practiced extreme forms of fasting and breath control over a period of six years. All of which failed to give him the answers to suffering. He then accepted food from a woman one day which broke his fast, following which he regained his strength and begun to meditate.

This synopsis of the prince's (Buddha's) early life is somewhat recognised in the west, although the general public is less familiar with Buddha's philosophy. Sitting under a Bodhi tree to mediate and determined not to stop until he was awakened. Three types of information were obtained by the prince during this contemplative state:

Recalling his past incarnations, the end of metal intoxication, and the divine sight

through which one can perceive karmic destinies. The prince therefore became the Buddha as a result of this wisdom.

Essential understanding of Buddha's philosophy

The core elements of Buddha's philosophy or his teachings can be found in his Sutras which contains the following areas:

- a) The two extremes to be avoided
- b) The Middle way
- c) The Four Noble Truths
- d) the Eightfold path.

The two extremes, which are to be avoided, are firstly sensual pleasure, which is vulgar, ignoble and unbeneficial; and secondly, self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble and unbeneficial. These elements are representative of polarities, for example, weak and strong, love and hate, or even hot and cold. When awakened the Buddha moved away from polarities and established the middle way, which is said to lead to peace, direct knowledge and finally to enlightenment. This Middle Way is called the Noble Eightfold path, which is a core teaching of the Buddha.

Awareness by the Buddha into the human condition identified suffering (Dukkha) as a primary conditioned state of existence. This is conveyed in the Four Noble Truths. A translation of Dukkha is "suffering" but paradoxically it can also be associated with the word pleasure, which is also Dukkha. In Sanskrit it is also opposite to another word Sukha that means satisfaction, hence, sometimes the word Dukkha can be interpreted as dissatisfaction. To go further Dukkha comes from the Sanskrit word that means wheel out of kilter. This is likened to:

If we think of a wheel as one that performs some important function, such as a potter's wheel then the out of true wheel creates a constant hardship for us every time we try to make a clay vessel.

(Hagen, 1997.p.25-26)

This repeated wobble, rise and fall can be likened to pleasure and suffering just like the human condition, where moments of brief happiness followed by vexation and suffering, can manifest as physical, mental or emotional pain. This is the wheel of Kilter. This is the first truth. The second noble truth is the origin of suffering which is an unwholesome state of mind manifesting as pride, greed, hatred, fear, ignorance and other unpleasant states of mind. Greed, hatred and ignorance in Mahayana Buddhism are called the three poisons. The fourth truth, which is the end of suffering is the extinguishment of the three poisons.

Anatman (non-self)

The eightfold path represents a means by which the human family can be liberated from the delusion of a conditioned false reality. In addition to these concepts and one which is central to Buddhism, is the construct of impermanence, which is notable in the teaching relating to Anatman (non-self). Impermanence is obviously the opposite of permanence - meaning nothing lasts forever, just a limited time or changing from one state to another. In Buddhist philosophy and religion, the Buddha spoke on this theme extensively. The Buddha thought that all conditioned phenomena such as the world, universe and living things feeling were impermanent. This is the reality of our existence. However, the human state of mind, within the context of social conditioning in both western and eastern thought, believes or seeks permanence as a state of existence when in fact there is only constant change or flux. This kind of thinking is caused by clinging to or craving for physical and mental permanence in the world. This includes feelings, ideas, thoughts and even identity. According to Buddhist philosophy, this leads to Dukkah or what we call suffering, because we as human beings attach ourselves to things that are impermanent. This reality or construct can be seen in the natural world where we can see life and death or growth and decay. For example, we have the four seasons which represent cyclical change in the natural world. These changes are visible and we can psychologically manage these transformations because they are cyclical and form part of everyday life experience. However, ageing, sickness, and death have a greater degree change or suffering attached to them because we want these states of being not to be the reality of our existence. This craving and attachment to this ideal causes pain and suffering. Yet if logically processed within our deepest thoughts, we can understand and distinguish between the reality of permanence and

impermanence of all things. Being attached to this state of mind, is the kind of thinking within Buddhist philosophy which contributes to suffering.

Continuing with this construct of impermanence within Buddhist philosophy, it is a logical progression to come up with the concept of Anatman (non-self). This conception is one which is diametrically in opposition to the notion of Atman found within the philosophy of Hinduism. Buddha would have been totally familiar with the understanding of Atman, as his experience and environment was that of Hindu culture. Therefore, this understanding and knowledge of Atman possibly contributed to the concept of Anatman (non-self).

This social construct of 'the self' is common not only to eastern and western thought but also to the human family; and such terms as personal identity, individualism, and consciousness are used to express and convey this idea or the feeling of 'the self'. Considering this concept and within his philosophy, the Buddha considered this concept of the non-self, and not wanting to give a polarised view of the construct non-self and self, Buddha found the middle ground to convey this concept to his followers. He subsequently developed the idea of the five SKANDHAS, meaning aggregates or groups, consisting of:

1. form
2. feelings sensations
3. perception
4. mental formation
5. consciousness.

All of these five items are what we as human beings constitute as being the self, however, these elements are impermanent. If we consider the concept of a house, it consists of roof tiles, roof battens, a chimney, windows, doors, and other groups of materials put together. It is not therefore the individual elements on their own that make the house, but instead the grouping of each individual aggregate working collectively together which is called a house. Yet over time these elements will decay and break down and will be subject to change or replacement. This analogy equates to the five aggregate of human experience which is all subject to change. Whether it be our bodies or even our consciousness, all will change from one state to another. From a Buddhist

perspective the question of ‘What is the self?’ is then logically the construct of Anatman (non-self). However, in contrast we as the human family, have a strong belief in this construct of the self particularly in western cultures which promotes individualism and the autonomy of the self. This can be seen in the political landscape of the west and east, where democracy is the underlining political system of governance, in the west and in the east, there is still an inclination towards socialism and communism which are orientated more towards collectivism, where group identity, norms and values can take precedence over individual identity, norms, and values.

Heraclitus

In the classical period of ancient Greek philosophy we have Heraclitus, who is known for his contributions to the theory of knowledge, criticism of Ionian philosophy, moral and political theory, physical theory and the doctrine of Flux and the Unity of opposites. It is in this later construct of Heraclitus that some similarities can be drawn with Buddhism. Both Plato and Aristotle thought that Heraclitus held extreme views which led to logical incoherency. This was particularly evident within the doctrine of Flux and the Unity of opposites, where Heraclitus states “*Upon those who step into the same rivers, different and ever different waters flow down*” (Kirk and J.E. Raven 1983.p 187). In this quotation Heraclitus is denoting that some things are in a constant state of flux or change. This is very much a similar analogy to that of the Buddha who uses the construct of impermanence and Anatman to illustrate his philosophy of change. However, Heraclitus reasons that although the waters are in a constant state of change, the river over time can stay the same and it is for this reason the waters are continually changing (flowing) that we have rivers instead of ponds and lakes. The construct being because somethings are in a continual state of change or flux, this change makes it possible for another element to exist, in this case the water is continually changing which makes it possible for the river to exist. This change may be a support mechanism for higher forms of existence. Heraclitus appears to believe in the unity of opposite, but on closer examination, this unity is not identity but more of a transformation of one thing to another.

David Hume

This construct of none-self found in Buddhist philosophy is not an exclusive concept located in the east. Much later than Heraclitus in the west we have David Hume an 18th century scottish philosopher, who presents a critique similar to the concept of the non-self-construct found in Buddhism teachings when he conveys:

We have no experience of a simple, individual impression that we can call the self-where the “self” is the totality of a person’s conscious life.

(Wrenn, 1995, S.7)

He further commented that with self-introspection in what is called ‘the self’ he came across some particular perceptions, i.e. hot or cold light or shade, love or hate and even pleasure or pain. Human beings are constantly searching for knowledge; however, this knowledge is not part of our natural make up or even our minds. Instead, it permeates the mind via our senses and experiences which Hume refers to as our perceptions. He categorises perception into two areas. Firstly, impressions, which include everything that has been perceived by the human senses, are the foundation of the mind; and secondly, ideas, on the other hand, are just duplicates of impressions that come from thinking back on what you have been given. These occur as a result of impressions. The concept of knowledge arises from the connection between ideas, which is characterised by a bond or associating quality that naturally leads from one idea to another. Therefore, our knowledge is limited to our impressions and ideas, which are subjective states and do not provide definitive evidence of an external reality beyond the human mind. Hume's construct prompts us to contemplate and gain a deeper understanding of our perception of the self. Hume introduced the concept commonly referred to as the Bundle Theory. According to this idea, the self is not a static and immutable entity, but rather a compilation of constantly evolving perceptions and experiences. According to Hume, our concept of self, arises from the continuous stream of these sensations. Hume's inquiry also encompasses the notion of individual identity.

Notably, like his predecessor Heraclitus, Hume uses the analogy of a river to illustrate this point: just as a river is composed of water in motion, the human being is a collection of shifting perceptions. No immutable, fixed personality exists beneath these

perceptions. This contradicts the traditional concept of a stable and enduring identity. In order to comprehend Hume's tenets regarding the self, it is critical to perceive his differentiation between impressions and ideas. Impressions, he argues, are immediate, vivid sensations, whereas ideas are mere reflections or reproductions of said impressions. Hume contends that our conception of self is an inference drawn from the ideas and impressions we encounter. Hume suggested that the formation of our self-concept is contingent upon the tenets of customs and habits. Our minds develop patterns of expectation and association over time. By establishing a sense of continuity and coherence in our experiences, these patterns contribute to our self-awareness. Hume's philosophy carries significant ramifications for our self-perception and our perception of others. Through its critique of the conventional notion of the eternal self, he promotes a greater receptiveness to transformation. This comprehension also encourages us to contemplate the complex interplay between our perceptions and the manner in which they influence our perception of reality. Hume's analysis of the ego signifies a significant deviation from traditional western philosophical thought.

Confucianism

Confucius was and still is a highly influential philosopher from the East. The ideology he presents represents a distinctive philosophy that seems to contrast with schools of thought offered in the west such as individualism opposed to collectiveness. In the philosophy of Confucius, the concept of individual self is established by adhering to a systematic and practical application of what one might refer to as codes of behaviour. These codes are derived from a hierarchical framework of social interaction, beginning with families, communities, and institutions within a given culture and society. The Analects, also known as Lunyu, contains concise sayings attributed to Confucius. The designation Confucius is a Latinized rendition of the Mandarin Chinese Kong Fuzi, which translates to Master Kong.

The identification and cultivation of the individual self cannot be avoided within Confucius philosophy and concepts. The construct of (Ren) Humaneness is a particular principle that is associated with Confucius, although it is mentioned in some texts such as the book of Poetry (Shi jing), which predates Confucius. There are several meanings

that are associated with (Ren) however one example is Ethical Wisdom (Lia, 2008, p.40) which is found in the Analects and is given five attitudes:

1. deference,
2. tolerance
3. making good one's word.
4. diligence
5. generosity.

(Leys, 2014, p.52)

These examples of ethical values are a means by which the identification and cultivation of the self is undertaken.

Confucius used several means of personal development in the Analects, like for example ceremonies, moral instruction, music, and internal powers like willpower, to aid moral improvement for the individual self or gentleman (junzi). The concept of the gentleman represents an ideal state of being for an individual. Examining one of the instruments, Confucius addresses the overarching matter of ceremony. In the Analects (Leys, 2014, p.7 verse 3.4) when one of his followers asks about Li. In answering, the master advises that it is preferable to be frugal rather than extravagant. Within the same verse, the master also states that at a burial ceremony it is preferable to be directed by one's sadness rather than just according to the prescribed routine. Frugality can be defined as the practice of being prudent and avoiding wastefulness. This attribute can be categorised as virtuous. However, of more significance in the latter portion of the verse, the master imparts the idea that one's sorrow may surpass the importance of a customary practice. In the framework of the individual self, grieving is inherently a human emotion that is both natural and can be expressed by the individual self. While there are prescribed rituals for the burial that must be followed by the bereaved, there is also acknowledgment that individuals should be allowed to express their emotions, such as grief, in their own way. In Analects (Leys, 2014, p.7 verse 3.4) clarifies the incorporation of good conduct within the ritual, while acknowledging the possibility for individual expression.

Both virtuous behaviour and individual expression stem from the principle of Li, which refers to behavioural propriety.

(Lia, 2008, p.41).

The concept of Li possesses significant versatility in its Confucian interpretation, one aspect of which refers to the established norms or ethical principles in traditional Chinese society. Li, as a core Confucian principle, serves as a means of imparting spiritual knowledge and directing behaviour. This refers to the process of imparting cultural values and norms to individuals through socialisation. The notion of the individual self in Confucianism is a subject of philosophical discourse among scholars, particularly due to the manner in which individuality is manifested and the ethical development of the individual. Illustrations of this concept can be found in the discussion between Mengzi and Xunzi inside the Analects, where Mengzi emphasises the importance of moral conduct as a means of developing moral character. Nevertheless, Xunzi's philosophy involves a shift from the inherent development of moral values to the adoption of prescribed behavioural norms that have received official approval from institutions. Confucian promotes the idea of achieving equilibrium between the two ways. His philosophy suggests that ethics are developed from knowledge and the social relationships among families, communities, and government organisations. This is the process by which an individual undergoes metamorphosis into a more elevated version of themselves.

Mencius

When examining Confucius, it is inevitable to consider Mencius as he wholeheartedly embraced and disseminated the teachings of Confucius. Mencius, like Confucius, is a Latinized rendition of his authentic Chinese name, Meng. He was commonly known as Master Meng by his students or followers. Mencius, like Confucius, had his writings recorded in a book titled Mencius, the book of Mencius was authored by his followers after his demise. The historical validity of the text is questioned due to the writers' potential inclination to embellish their writing to align with the political objectives of the era. However, Mencius disseminated and revitalised the teachings of Confucius, employing his own unique approach that can be characterised as more intellectually stimulating, diverse, and refined compared to Confucius, if such a comparison is feasible. He devised conflicting frameworks that were imaginative and groundbreaking in relation to self-development and the essence of humanity. Mencius engages

in the development and stimulation of a more intellectually sophisticated argument compared to Confucius in two specific domains.

(I) The concept of the self and the process of self-cultivation, Mencius suggests that human nature is inherently ethically virtuous. Mencius diverges from Confucian philosophy by emphasising the importance of internalising self-cultivation. He argues that this can be accomplished through the individual's inherent moral faculties or human nature, rather than relying solely on external authority. The physical body serves as the origin of cosmic power for the development of one's identity. This contrast is exemplified in Mencius 2A which involves a conversation about the concept of moral agency.

Here is why I say that all human beings have a mind that commiserates with others. Now, if anyone were suddenly to see a child about to fall into a well, his mind would be filled with alarm, distress, pity, and compassion. That he would react accordingly this is not because he would hope to use the opportunity to ingratiate himself with the child's parents, nor because he would seek commendation from neighbours and friends, nor because he would hate the adverse reputation [that could come from not reacting accordingly]. From this it may be seen that one who lacks a mind that feels pity and compassion would not be human; one who lacks a mind that feels shame and aversion would not be human; one who lacks a mind that feels modesty and compliance would not be human; and one who lacks a mind that knows right and wrong would not be human.

(Bloom, 2009, p.58)

These lines from Mencius emphasise the notion that human beings are inherently interconnected by their shared humanity. In the face of specific circumstances, individuals may respond with compassion. The natural response and emotions are inherent to human nature, and it would be inhumane to act or respond in a certain scenario without sympathy, compassion, shame, humility, and submission. These include intrinsic cognitive reactions to specific events, as well as the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. (II) In verse 6A6 (Eno 2016, p. 154) Mencius mentions four seeds: commiseration, which represents humanity (ren), shame, which

represents righteousness (Yi), respect, which represents righteousness (li), and right and wrong, which represents wisdom. These virtues are inherent in human nature and can be developed via mental effort to achieve self-actualization or unity with the universe.

By fully developing one's mind, one knows one's nature. Knowing one's nature, one knows Heaven. It is through preserving one's mind and nourishing one's nature that one may serve Heaven. It is through cultivating oneself in an attitude of expectancy, allowing neither the brevity nor the length of one's life span to cause any ambivalence, that one is able to establish one's destiny.

(Bloom, 2009, p.176)

Human nature is the individual self-connected to the cosmic order authority (Tao) and this is possibly from where your ethics or virtue emanate. Therefore, one's individual self can be seen as part of the cosmic self. Again, this connection to the whole is the ideology where the emphasis is placed on the collective.

John Locke

Confucian in the east was a collectivist, as his philosophy was engaged with structural hierarchy, centred around individual relationships, ethical and moral behaviour within a society, which is supposed to lead to harmony within that civilization. In contrast to Confucius, although at a much later period in time, we have the English philosopher and physician John Locke who was born on the 29th of August 1632 in Wrington. Historically Locke is known as the father of Liberalism, which can be understood as a political and social philosophy that promotes individual rights, civil liberties, democracy, and free enterprise. His philosophical contribution to the ideology on personal identity and the self are well known in western thought. In his paper entitled 'An essay concerning human understanding' and the 1693 treatise 'some thoughts concerning education' Locke's philosophical hypothesis on the self, centres around his construct of the Tabula Rasa, a Latin term meaning blank slate, and his treatise concerning the education of a gentleman.

Essentially Locke's hypotheses are that at birth, the human mind is purely a blank slate or blank canvas, devoid of any knowledge or ideas. It is only when that blank slate is filled with knowledge, experience, and the capacity to reflect, that humans begin to

understand the self or personal identity. The primary means by which this knowledge and experience is obtained is via our senses. Namely our abilities to smell, touch, taste, hear, see, and feel. The cognitive capacity of memory, reason, doubt, belief, and reflective thought, enables the mind to understand and analyse the sensory environmental data over a duration of a person's life. Locke's premise is that conscious awareness and recollection of earlier experiences are fundamental to the knowledge of the self.

In essence, our identity and memories are formed by the accumulation of our knowledge, experiences, and ideas. Our personal identity is about the crucial function of memory and how, as we think back on our prior experiences, our identities are rooted in the persistence of consciousness and memory. Moreover, a distinction between identification and consciousness, wherein memory acts as a bridge between the past and the present and consciousness, on the other hand, refers to our awareness of our ideas and deeds in the present, even though memory declines as does consciousness as we approach the end of our lives. Locke's Tabula Rasa theory emphasises the importance of education and environment in moulding an individual's cognition and personality. He writes:

“I think I may say that of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not by their education”.

(Delph Classics ,2017. p 1404)

Given that the mind initially lacks any pre-existing knowledge or beliefs, the experiences that an individual encounters are of utmost importance in shaping their growth and development. Hence, a key component of Locke's philosophy is his conception of the self, which he writes about in his essay "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding". Locke's theory of personal identification is predominately related to his conception of the self, which ultimately is an individual's identity which is not contingent upon their physical form, but rather on the enduring memory and consciousness that transcends time. Again, like Descartes, Locke's hypothesis is open to criticism because if the memory fails or dementia sets in then this theory collapses.

Taoism

The philosophy of Taoism is derived from the Tao Te Ching (The book of the way),

which one could describe as a philosophical or religious text. Its author Lao Tsu is believed to have lived approximately around the 6th- 5th Century BCE. (Littleton, 1996, p.120) This construct of Tao in the opening verse gives the following impression of the Tao:

The Tao that can be told is not the external Tao.

The name that can be name is not the external name. The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth. The named is the mother of ten thousand things.

(Gia-Fu Feng & Jane English, 1972, p.3)

This verse states that the Tao is beyond thought and words and cannot be comprehended. It is the cosmic or universal principle. The same verse goes on to say: Tao and Its creation are one in essence. This source or essence Tao is translated to mean 'the way', essentially representing the source of everything that is in existence. The self then is not something that is separate from the Tao, but instead is an essential part of the Tao. One of the major objectives of Taoism is for the individual self to become or to realise oneness with the Tao. One of the key concepts that can be used to achieve this objective of oneness with the Tao is Wu Wei (Non-Action).

Without exerting effort

This is a fundamental component of Taoist philosophy. Though it is more popular to refer to this idea as non-action, it can be considered to be without exerting effort. Though conceptually this seems contradictory, this is a question of perspective. More significantly, it refers to a phenomenological cognitive and transcendental experience that materialises in physical time and space as some action, thought or expression in a selected discipline. This is somewhat different from what is happening in physicality time and space, which is referred to as non-action. Wu Wei's experience is one of spontaneity and synchronisation with the physical or mental work at hand. This is not to say that someone in the state of Wu Wei disregards their thinking or their specific training; rather, the performance is executed with ease. One of the stories of the Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi which is referred to as "cutting up an ox," is used to illustrate the state of being in Wu Wei. In this story, a dialogue is occurring between Lord Wen Hui and his cook, Ding, who is describing and displaying how he effortlessly carves an ox. He claims that because he does not use his eyes and his senses are dormant, his soul is

unrestrained and operating without a plan; instead, his instincts guide his blade as he dissects the ox. Chopping through a joint without hitting any bone. The dissection is completed without effort and with ease. It is this act that leads Lord Wen Hui cry out.

“My cook has shown me how I ought to live my life”.

(Merton ,1969, p 47)

Although Wu-Wei is a Chinese concept, nevertheless in the western hemisphere there is a similar medium which is often expressed in sports ‘the phrase ‘being in the zone’. This state of being from a western perspective, is viewed more as an experience when engaged in an activity, the individual loses themselves in the fluidity of performing the activity. In contrast to just being an experience, in the east Wu-Wei is not only viewed as an experience of something that is encountered when one is engaged a sporting activity or even working in a discipline but is also considered to be a transcendental state of being where the experience connects the individual to the greater natural cosmic entity.

The Tao Te Ching also defines the individual self in terms of common traits that can be found in human personality. These characteristics are presented throughout the text include, egotism and vanity, which are elements of the personality or qualities connected to the self.

De as Power

Again, in order to reach a condition state of peace and enlightenment, a person must transcend their body and mind to become one with the Tao. The idea of De (Morality, goodness, or virtue) is one tool that can help with this transcendence and self-cultivation. There are several interpretations of this principle, however one translation that is relevant is ‘De’ as Power. This force can range from magical strength to moral virtue (Karyn Lai p.101). De could further be interpreted as the power of an individual to achieve self-realization. De is a part of the Tao or originates from the Tao. In the Tao Te Ching Verse 51 says:

Therefore, all things arise from Tao. By virtue, they are nourished, Developed,

cared for, sheltered, comforted, protected. Creating without claiming, doing without taking credit. Guiding without interfering. This is primal virtue.

(Gia-Fu Feng & Jane English, 1972, p.54)

De as a construct is therefore the power for moral virtue and self-cultivation which comes through Dao as opposed to the autonomous individual self. This is consequently another means by which one transcends personal traits such as the ego and vanity to achieve oneness with the natural self. Another central principle to the cultivation of the self is understanding the concept of Yin and Yang, which is characterised by complementarity opposite which are present throughout the universe. In the Tao Te Ching Verse 2 says:

Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness. All can know good as good only because there is evil. Therefore, having and not having arise together; Difficult and easy complement each other.

(Gia-Fu Feng & Jane English, 1972, p.4)

The autonomous individual self has both yin and yang traits, and balancing these forces internally is important for cultivating, balancing and harmonisation of the natural self.

Zhuangzi

Another significant author, previously referenced in Taoism is Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou). He lived between 370 and 300 BCE- in China. Zhuangzi like his predecessor Lao Tsu, promotes union with the Tao by transcending the mind-body self or autonomous individual self, in order to become the higher cosmic transient self which is linked to freedom and liberation. However, similarly Lao Tsu, does not provide or give clear separate distinction to the individual self.

Individuals are not valued in and of themselves, but through their connection with a higher authority or power. Realized in individuals, the goal in Zhuangzian thought are not unique, autonomous individuals who stand apart from external powers, but unique manifestations of the workings of a shared Tao.

(Internet Encyclopaedia, s.6)

The Tao's agent is capable of self-cultivation. This is the innate nature of humans. Zhuangzi goes farther than Lao Tsu in the next verse, where he advocates the existence of this innate nature.

The men of ancient times who practiced the way, employed tranquillity to cultivate knowledge. Knowledge lived in them, yet they did nothing for its sake. So, they may be said to have employed knowledge to cultivate tranquillity. Knowledge and tranquillity took turns cultivating each other, and harmony and order emerged from the inborn nature. Virtue is harmony, the way is order. When Virtue embraces all things, we have benevolence.

(Burton Watson, 2013. p.308)

This natural quality could be understood as the higher cosmic self that is developed or awakened by the collaboration of wisdom and peace, resulting in harmony and virtue. Morality does not originate in the autonomous individual self; rather, it arises from that self when it is nurtured and inspired by virtue, before becoming a part of the collective unique expressions of the Tao.

This eastern idea of the self has produced a lot of discussion in the arena of western philosophy and has given rise to a number of schools of thought. However, there are two primary schools of thought leading the way. The first adopts a position arguing that the term 'autonomous individual self' cannot be applied to discussions of culture and society, especially when discussing historical China. In his book 'Against individualism' Henry Rosemont Jr. makes the argument that Chinese culture tends to be centred more towards collectivism. Whilst through the lenses of western thought, the culture is oriented towards duty and duties to external authorities and institutions, such as family, society, and political organisations.

In a way, moral and ethical standards of behaviour plus conduct, are more crucial to the smooth functioning of society than individual self-expression. The individual is a part of the whole that represents the greater good 'being human is only possible with other humans' (Rosemont, 2015. p 35) and generally, this philosophy is collectivism. However, from a western individualistic cultural perspective, any restriction or infringement on the rights of the autonomous individual self-expression and liberties, could be interpreted as tyranny or even dogmatism.

The second school of thought acknowledges the concept of collectivism that exists throughout the eastern cultural landscape. However, it also acknowledges the independent individual self, and goes on to state that if the term is ignored, individual objectives, goals, and values are undermined. One may rationally argue that the manifestation of the individual self can be found in the arts, such as painting, music, writing, and other forms of individual expresses of the self. The English language has had a significant influence on our understanding of the term "individual self," but we do not need to limit its meaning when employing it in the context of the individual self in Chinese expression. From a western perspective, the word itself denotes individuality, separation, distinctness, autonomy, and free will. Similar principles may also be found in Chinese culture and society. Although this may also be expressed in context of the framework of the family, social, political, and cultural landscape.

Conceptually a football manager may be managing their team to play in a certain way and structure. The footballers on the football pitch will be playing the game in their individual designated positions, in different areas on the pitch. However, the way in which they their express themselves in their individual positions, will be different from everyone else playing in the same game under the guidance of the manager which metaphorically speaking is a representation of the state. One could contend that this expression of the individual self is like the framework of family, society, political, and cultural order; and the expression of individual self is no less distinct, separate, and autonomous than individual expression found in the west. One could also say that this construct of the individual self is one which needs to be understood from a cultural perspective, as there are those academics and philosophers who see this term being both a part of the collective universal self, and as independent individual from the universal self.

Summary

In the opening section of this dissertation, I started with the investigation of the self as seen within the philosophy of Hinduism. This proved to be somewhat complex and complicated as there are several schools of thought when analysing how the self is viewed. Due to these complex perspectives, it was also beneficial to investigate the more popular known schools of thought found and understood in the western hemisphere. These are:

1. Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism)
2. Visist Advaita Vedanta (Qualified non-dualism)
3. Dvaita Vedanta (Dualism)

The major differences on how the self (Atman) is viewed is contextualised within these three schools of thought. Non-dualism is where Brahman and Atman are one and the same construct, there is now separation, Brahman is the ultimate reality or consciousness. Qualified non-dualism is where Brahman is still the ultimate consciousness, self, or reality however Atman is merely an aspect of Brahman that is unique. It differs like the sun in the same way that a ray of sunlight comes from the sun. We are all a part of this cosmic self, not separated from whole of creation but infinitely we are all a part of this ultimate reality. As individual people we could not exist apart from the ultimate consciousness reality. Both philosophies of non-dualism and qualified non-dualism fall under the ideology of collectivism. The third school of thought is dualism. In this philosophy the relationship between Brahman and Atman has a distinct separation. The individual self, Atman, is differentiated from Brahman in that matter is independent, unique, and distinct on the plane of existence and exists only by the will of Brahman. Atman the soul or consciousness when liberated keeps its own individual identity outside that of Brahman. Rene Descartes declaration of 'I think therefore I am' is a construct that hypothesises that the self is a thinking conscious being because of its capacity to think and self-awareness. This is where the separation of physical and nonphysical occurs, which is similar to the school of thought presented in Hindu Dvaita Vedanta dualism. Here the emphasis is placed on the distinct separation of the body from consciousness or the individual self. It could be debated that both Descartes and Dvaita Vedanta fall under the ideology of individualism.

In the philosophy of Buddhism, we are presented with the construct of impermanence which is connected to the construct of non-self or Anatman. Impermanence as understood within the philosophy of Buddhism maintains that all things are in a constant state of transition, moving from one state to another. This constant state of fluidity is to be found in all conditioned phenomena which includes our experiences, thoughts, the material world, emotions, and sensations. Understanding the inherent nature of impermanence one can only conclude that there is none-self (Anatman). In

western thought we have both Heraclitus and David Hume proposing a similar construct to that of impermanence and none-self. However, Hume's Bundle theory is more akin to the Buddhist construct of impermanence and none-self (Anatman).

Both these two constructs of none-self and impermanence do not derive from either the ideologies of individualism or collectivism, however, Buddhism does have a bearing on how they can be understood. Individualism emphasises self-autonomy, individual rights, and freedoms. However, the construct of impermanence and none-self (Anatman) states clinging to self-identity can only lead to suffering, as the self is non-existent. Buddhism also encourages awareness of one's actions, thought and deeds towards others, because of the fluidity of the self which is interconnected to others. This interconnectedness is more in keeping with the ideology of collectivism. Consequently, if one acknowledges the concepts of both none-self and impermanence, this can foster a sense of interdependency and interconnectedness which are tenants of collectivism principles, emphasising the well-being of the group over the individual. Compassion and Altruism realising that everything is temporary and linked, can make one more compassionate and altruistic, stimulating actions that help everyone. However, this does not mean losing one's own identity in the group. Instead, it means knowing how different people affect and help each other. The ideas of non-self and impermanence can help people build communities based on mutual respect, understanding, and support. This can lead to more harmony and fewer conflicts that happen when people are too rigidly individualistic or too collectivist. A balanced approach using the philosophy of Buddhism can help to find balance, whereby there is recognition of unique accomplishments and a sense of knowing one's place in the community as a whole.

The construct of the self within the philosophy of Confucianism is not defined as a self-autonomised independent entity, but more in terms of its relationship within the family and society, along with the roles played in the framework of the family and the wider society. The five basic relationships that Confucian ideology emphasises are ruler-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, and friend-friend. These relations and partnerships are paramount to social harmony and cohesion.

The development of the self is extensively about fostering virtue including compassion,

righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and loyalty. Individual development is considered as a moral road map towards becoming a superior person. The philosophy and framework presented by Confucians sits within the ideology of collectivism, because it emphasises the importance of social structure and harmony, through roles and relationships of individuals within society.

In contrast to Confucianism, in the West we get the philosophy of John Locke, who views the self as a blank slate. He disagreed with the idea of innate ideas put forward by earlier philosophers such as René Descartes and thought that all knowledge emanated from experience and sensory information. John Locke's ideas about the self are deeply rooted in independence. He concentrated on people's freedom, responsibility, and the importance of each person's rights. His philosophical framework supports the idea that people are rational beings who can rule themselves and deserve freedom and respect. Locke also focused on personal identity, based on the continuation of consciousness and memory, which supported the idea of individualism by stressing the importance of being morally responsible and aware of oneself. This point of view has impacted significantly on how human rights, politics, and ethics are perceived in the western hemisphere.

In the philosophy of Taoism, the self is defined through the construct of the Tao. The Tao is viewed as the fundamental source and pattern of everything in the universe. Everything has a natural order, fluidity, and interconnection to the Tao. The natural self can only be realised when all artificial constructs are released, and the self is realised as being a part of the natural order and pattern of the Tao. To achieve this harmonisation with the Tao the construct of Wu Wei (non-action) becomes an effortless way of living with the natural flow of existence. This natural flow embraces a simple way of living and spontaneity in existence. The harmonisation of yin and yang forces within the individual further contributes to realisation of the natural true self. From a western perspective the philosophy of Taoism does not sit categorically in either ideology of individualism or collectivism, but instead aspects of Taoism can be found in both categories. Aspects of Taoism, see the self as connected to the Tao, which is everything in the universe. This point of view supports collectivist ideals because it emphasises the value of interconnectedness and how everything is linked. Taoism further emphasises the importance of balance and harmony because it takes into consideration

the care of both individuals and the environment. It encourages people to engage in deeds that are of mutual benefit, which is also an ideal of collectivism. Taoism highlights the importance of finding inner peace harmony with the Tao. This process is very much centred around the individual and their self-cultivation. This aspect of Taoism falls under the ideology of individualism. The construct of Wu Wei emphasises existing and performing naturally and in accordance with the Tao, regardless of whether that means going against societal expectations and pressures. This concept also falls under the veil of individualism. Taoism therefore sometimes transcends the ideology of both individualism and collectivism, as it is concerned with balance and harmony which can embrace concepts of both individualism and collectivism, neither ranking one over the other.

Conclusion

How the construct of the self has been viewed down the ages in both western and eastern philosophies is not too dissimilar. From ancient to more modern times philosophies deriving from both the eastern and western hemisphere have arrived at similar concepts of the self. The construct of non-self, found in Buddhist philosophy shares a similar construct of the self as the philosophies of Heraclitus and David Hume. All of which have a perspective centred around the non-existence of the self as either a fiction, illusion, or fluidity. Likewise, Hinduism and Rene Descartes share similar constructs of the self. It can then be understood that the view of the self when stripped down to its core concept is found to have similar features whether from an eastern or western perspective. Where conflicting standpoints can be found in eastern and western thought derives from the predisposition towards individualism or collectivism within the society. To be clear cultures that are geographically located nearer to China seem to view the self with varying degrees in the ideology associated with collectivism. This is not to say that other cultural aspects of that society do not sit in the camp of individualism. Take for instance the rise of social media, which has given rise to individual expression, influencers, and personal stories in eastern cultures.

Cultures found in the west such as America and most of western Europe, are inclined towards individualism. However, again this is not to say that there are not aspects in western culture that do not lean towards collectivism, for example the welfare state and

healthcare system seek to benefit whole societies. Also, sports, particular team sports such as football which promote team effort and working together, which are deemed as collectivism ideology.

‘How the self is perceived’ by different cultures seems to be the question instead of ‘what is the self’. In the book, ‘The Geography of Thought, How Asians and Westerners Think Differently’, the psychologist and author Richard E. Nisbett makes the case that western and eastern cultures think and perceive the world differently. This is not to say one is superior to the other, but instead that there are different ways in which cultures and people in these societies view the world.

One day early in our acquaintance he said, “you know the difference between you and me is that I think the world is a circle, and you think it is a line”.

(Richard E. Nisbett, 2003 p xii)

The above passage taken from the Richard E. Nisbett book, where a conversation is taking place between himself a professor and a Chinese student studying psychology. The student is pointing out to his professor that people generally think and see the world through the lenses of constant change, interdependency and impermanence which is a fundamental principle in Buddhist philosophy. Eastern cultures tend to adopt a holistic perspective, meaning they take into consideration a wide range of concepts and their relationship to each other, thereby seeking to understand the whole picture before individual elements within it. In contrast cultures in the west tend to be linear, creating a deterministic world view which is understood using a more individualistic perspective often not relating to the larger picture. Consequently, they think that by understanding the laws that govern the behaviour of the element or object one is better placed to control events.

These are two distinctive ways in which cultures from the east and the west perceive the world. If this is the case, then the question is ‘Why do these cultures think so differently?’ Through his research and comparative studies Richard E. Nisbett sets out to provide evidence as to why they are two distinct ways of thinking. He begins by examining *historical* factors particular in the founding civilisations of the Greeks in the

west and the Chinese in the east. Nisbett make the observation that the Greeks would travel for several days consecutively in harsh conditions to Epidauros a Greek theatre in order to listen to poetry readings and attend plays. This may not seem to be of significant importance to us in the modern world today. However, in that classical period of the sixth to the third century B.C, where other ancient civilisations such as India, Persia, the middle east, and China existed, it is possible that only the Greeks felt free enough to undertake such a journey purely for entertainment. Even though the citizens lived in an autocratic society, where the Kings word was law, and to defy it could mean death. Greek citizens also would refrain from work in order to attend or participate in the Olympics games without fear of repercussion. The Greeks almost had an innate sense of individual identity, and they were in charge of their own personal lives. This individualism gave them the sense they could live a life free from constraints in the pursuit of happiness and excellence. This sense of personal agency contributed to a society that encouraged public debate, where even a common citizen could debate with the King and if found right, could influence the decision-making process in that community. This is possible a contributing factor to the beginning of the democratic process.

In the east, particularly in China in a similar period as the Greeks, when there was a holiday or public occasion, the Chinese would take the opportunity to visit friends and family instead of attending poetry readings or plays. In contrast to the Greeks sense of personal agency, in Chinese culture this was replaced by a sense of harmony. Within Chinese culture the individual sees themselves as a part of a collective which could be in the family, clan, village, or society at large where harmony between members of the collective is of the utmost importance. Roles and responsibilities in a hierarchical system of governance was a way in which harmony was maintained in the social collective. Confrontation such as debating was discouraged in contrast to that found in the Aristotle Greek societies of a similar period. This harmonious existence is not to be mistaken for conformity. Confucius gave praise to those persons who sort to harmonise and distinguish themselves from the lonely petty person desire for conformity. Eastern Asian *cultures* particularly the Chinese have a saying:

“The peg that stands out is pounded down”.

(Richard E. Nisbett, 2003, p48)

Cultures from the east are less concerned about the individual self or self-importance than their counterparts in the west, they are more concerned with social relationships over personal achievement. Group success and achievement often takes precedence over individual achievement and success. The individual is likely to have an enhanced self-worth and be seen as successful, because they have met the groups expectations. As a generalisation western culture, particularly America, characteristically want distinction from the group. Personal preferences can determine the outcome in group choices. In some situations, individuality takes preference over collectivism in relationships and membership of a group can be seen as a barrier to individual achievement and success. People want equality in relationships instead of status dictating treatment, and if there is hierarchy in a relationship then the superior positions are coveted because it is the lead position.

Other ways in which eastern and western cultures differ, can be found in art, and music. In some Chinese landscape paintings, individuals are depicted as a part of the landscape blending into whole painting. In western landscape painting the individual is prominent to the landscape. Classical Chinese music tends to be more monotone in comparison to western classical music. These aspects show the differences in cultural perspective and thinking, which has contributed to this notion of conflicting schools of thought regarding how the self is perceived in eastern and western thought. This is not because of the nature of the self, but because of how the self is perceived - meaning it is seen as a self-autonomous individual and independent, or a part of a collective which is interdependent.

Neither viewpoint is right or wrong but more of a question of cultural inclination towards individualism or collectivism. However, with the rise of technology and particularly social media such as YouTube, TikTok and other social media platforms, different cultures throughout the world have become more interconnected. This in turn has led to greater knowledge and understanding of each other's cultural differences and thinking. From a positive standpoint maybe with this cultural appreciation and perspectives this will lead to a more harmonious human family.

Bibliography

- Bartley, C. (2015) *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*. London: Bloomsbury
- Bilimoria, P. & Rayner, A. (2018) *History of Indian Philosophy*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Frances Group
- Bloom, I. (2009) *Mencius* edited by Philip, J. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cohen, S. (2018) *The Upanishads a complete guide*. New York: Routledge
- Dale, A. The University of Manchester (2008-02) *Migration, marriage and employment amongst Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi residents in the UK*. Available at: <https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/cmist/archive-publications/working-papers/2008/2008-02-migration-marriage-and-employment.pdf> (Accessed 29th September 2024)
- Flood, G. (1996) *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Feng, G. & English, J. (1972) *Tao Te Ching*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Hagen, S. (1997) *Buddhism Plain and Simple*. London: Penguin
- Hume, D. (2007) *A Treatise of Human Nature, Book I, part iv, sec vi*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kirk, G.S. and Raven J.E. (1983) *The Presocratic Philosophers*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Lai, K. L. (2008) *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lai, K. Edited by Cooper, D.E (2006) *Learning from Chinese philosophies. Ethics of Interdependent and Contextualized Self*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd,
- Leys, S. edited by Nylan, M. (2014) *The Analects by Confucius*. 1st edi. New York: Copyright by W.W Norton & Company Inc.
- Littleton, C. S. (1996) *Eastern Wisdom an illustrated guide to the religions and philosophy of the East*. London: Macmillian.
- Locke, J. (2017) *Complete Works of John Locke*. Series Eight. East Sussex: Delphi Classics Publishing
- Maclean, I. (2006) *Rene Descartes. A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- Merton, T. (1969) *The Way of Chuang Tzu*. New York: New Direction
- Nisbett, R. E. (2003) *The Geography of Thought, How Asians, and Westerners Think Differently*. London: Nicolas Brealey.
- Rosemont, H. Jr. (2015) *Against Individualism*. London: Lexington Books.

Stevenson, L. & Haberman, D. L. (1998) *Ten Theories of Human nature*. 3rd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Watson, B. (2013) *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*. Translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wrenn, C. B. (1995). *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/> (Accessed: 1st January 2024).

Wrenn, Chase B. (1995). *Internet Encyclopaedia. Philosophy Individualism in the Zhuangzi* <https://iep.utm.edu/ind-chin/#H6> (Accessed: 29th September 2024)