

## The Intersection of Ancient and Non-Western Moral Philosophies with Contemporary Western Theories of Educative Leadership

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the intersections between ancient and Non-Western moral philosophies and modern educative leadership theories, offering insights for strengthening ethical leadership. It explores Greek moral thought (Presocratic, Socratic, and Post-Socratic) alongside Egyptian, Indian (Hinduism and Buddhism), and Chinese philosophies, revealing key alignments. Confucianism and Buddhism's emphasis on moral growth aligns with transformative leadership, while Socratic ethics parallels instructional leadership's focus on knowledge. Hindu Dharma and Confucian Li, stressing duty, resonate with distributed leadership's collaborative nature. Ethical leadership draws from Egyptian Ma'at and Aristotle's virtue ethics, both emphasizing fairness and character. By linking these traditions with Western leadership models, the study highlights the potential for more inclusive, culturally responsive, and ethically grounded leadership.

**Keywords:** Ancient Greek ethics, Ancient Non-Western ethics, educative leadership, transformational leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership, ethical leadership

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### Introduction

The question explored by this paper is how ancient and non-Western moral philosophies may contribute to the further development of contemporary educative leadership theories in practice, theories originally defined as being “*educative* in intent and outcome” (Duignan and Macpherson, 1992, p. 1). This definition engages both deontological ethics based on duties, rules, and principles (Kant, 1997) and teleological ethics using consequences (Bentham, 1988; Mill, 2001).

Research into educational leadership and management in the vertically aligned cultural systems that typify East Asian societies (Walker, 2015) and an overview of theories and practices in Hong Kong, Singapore, China, Thailand, Korea and Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia (Notman, 2020) both found comparable and historical ethical systems in unique socio-political contexts. In Malaysia, the state sponsored a project where principals collaborated to develop an indigenous theory and practice of educative leadership (Bajunid, 1996; Bajunid, et al., 1996). There have also been instances where transformational and distributive leadership concepts have been used when decision-making authority has been vested in school principals and where principals have engaged the talents of teachers in their schools (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013).

Given these examples, it appears reasonable to use philosophical analysis to compare the relationship between ancient Greek and non-Western ethics, that originated in Egypt, India and China, and contemporary Western theories and practices of educative leaders.

### Context

Some Hellenistic moral philosophers travelled extensively, especially in the aftermath of Alexander the Great's conquests. Pre-Socratic, Socratic, and Post-Socratic moral philosophies exhibit both similarities and differences with non-Western moral philosophies, suggesting some degree of cross-cultural influence in addition to independent development.

Another feature of context is a significant degree of conceptual intersection. It will be explained below that Pre-Socratic philosophers, such as Heraclitus and Parmenides, focused on cosmological and metaphysical inquiries rather than explicitly moral concerns. However, their emphasis on the fundamental principles governing the universe shares common ground with Eastern philosophies like Daoism and Hinduism, which also explore the underlying order of reality and the interconnectedness of all things. The concept of the Dao in Daoism, for instance, bears resemblance to Heraclitus's notion of the *Logos* as the universal principle of change and harmony.

Further, Socrates introduced a shift towards ethical inquiry centred on human conduct and virtue. His emphasis on self-knowledge, moral integrity, and the pursuit of wisdom resonates with the ethical teachings of Eastern traditions such as Confucianism and Buddhism. Confucian ethics, for example, prioritize moral cultivation, social harmony, and filial piety, reflecting similarities with Socratic virtues like justice, temperance, and piety.

Finally, Post-Socratic philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, further developed ethical theories that continue to shape Western moral thought. Plato's theory of the Forms and his allegory of the cave illustrate a

quest for transcendent truths and the importance of moral enlightenment, themes that find echoes in Eastern philosophies' pursuit of spiritual liberation and enlightenment. Aristotle's virtue ethics, emphasizing the cultivation of virtuous character and the pursuit of *eudaimonia* (human flourishing), shares affinities with the ethical frameworks of Daoism and Confucianism, which also prioritize moral cultivation and harmonious living.

While there are these distinct parallels between Western and non-Western moral philosophies, there are also differences in cultural contexts, metaphysical assumptions, and religious traditions that have led to different philosophical traditions. Despite these distinctions, the shared emphasis on moral cultivation, spiritual enlightenment, and the pursuit of harmony suggests a degree of universal human concern with ethical conduct and the good life across diverse philosophical traditions.

### **Ancient Egyptian Moral Philosophy**

Ancient Egyptian ethical thought evolved over millennia, deeply intertwined with the religious and cultural fabric of the society. Central to this moral framework was the concept of *ma'at*, representing truth, balance, order, harmony, law, morality, and justice. This principle was not only a cosmic order but also a guideline for ethical behaviour, deeply embedded in the daily life and governance of Ancient Egypt (Lichtheim, 1973).

The foundations of Egyptian moral philosophy were laid during the Early Dynastic Period (c. 3100–2686 BCE), where the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt necessitated a cohesive ethical system to govern the newly centralized state. *Ma'at* emerged as a cardinal principle, dictating that the pharaoh, as the divine ruler, must maintain this cosmic and social order (Assmann, 2002).

By the Old Kingdom (c. 2686–2181 BCE), *ma'at* was firmly established in the state ideology. Ethical instructions began to be formalized, as seen in the "Maxims of Ptahhotep," a collection of wisdom literature that provided guidelines on virtuous living, emphasizing humility, respect for elders, and justice. These texts were primarily aimed at the elite, reflecting the hierarchical nature of Egyptian society.

The Middle Kingdom (c. 2055–1650 BCE) saw *ma'at* becoming more democratized. Wisdom literature such as the "Instructions of Amenemhat" and the "Instructions of Amenemope" proliferated, offering ethical advice to a broader audience. These texts underscored the importance of truthfulness, social harmony, and the avoidance of arrogance and greed, reflecting a more inclusive approach to moral instruction (Lichtheim, 1976).

During the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1077 BCE), the ethical dimension of *ma'at* was further elaborated. The "Book of the Dead," a compilation of spells and incantations, vividly described the judgment of the soul in the afterlife, where one's heart was weighed against the feather of *Ma'at*. This reinforced the belief that ethical living had direct consequences for one's fate after death (Allen, 1974).

In the Late Period (c. 664–332 BCE) and during Ptolemaic rule, Egyptian moral philosophy began to interact with Greek thought. The Greeks, influenced by Egyptian culture, incorporated elements of *ma'at* into their own ethical frameworks. Conversely, Egyptian ethics absorbed aspects of Greek philosophy, leading to a synthesis of ideas (Thompson, 2012). This period marked a significant evolution in Egyptian moral philosophy, integrating new concepts while retaining the core principles of *ma'at*.

Three major strengths of Ancient Egyptian moral philosophy are, therefore:

1. **Universality and Practicality:** One of the key strengths of Ancient Egyptian moral philosophy was its universal applicability. The principle of *ma'at* was relevant to all levels of society, from the pharaoh to the common citizen, fostering a shared ethical framework that promoted social cohesion (Assmann, 2002). The practical nature of Egyptian ethics, which focused on everyday behaviours and relationships, provided clear guidelines on how to live a virtuous life. Texts like the "Instructions of Ptahhotep" offered actionable advice on honesty, kindness, and respect, making ethics accessible and applicable to daily life (Lichtheim, 1973).
2. **Integration with Religion:** The integration of ethics with religion in Ancient Egypt reinforced moral behaviour through divine oversight. The gods, especially *Ma'at*, were seen as enforcers of ethical conduct, ensuring that individuals adhered to moral standards. This religious underpinning provided a strong incentive for ethical behaviour, as it linked moral conduct with both divine favour and cosmic order (Allen, 1974).
3. **Emphasis on Social Harmony:** Egyptian moral philosophy's emphasis on social harmony and community well-being was another strength. The focus on maintaining balance and harmony within society helped create a cohesive and stable community. This communal approach to ethics fostered a sense of collective responsibility and mutual respect among individuals (Assmann, 2002).

Four limitations of Ancient Egyptian moral philosophy are:

1. **Static Nature:** A significant limitation of Egyptian moral philosophy was its relatively static nature. Grounded in the concept of *ma'at*, the ethical principles did not evolve significantly over time, which sometimes failed to address the complexities and changes in societal norms and individual circumstances (Thompson, 2012). This rigidity could lead to challenges in adapting to new situations and cultural influences.
2. **Elitism:** While *ma'at* was a universal principle, the ethical texts and instructions were often written by and for the elite. This created a disparity in the dissemination of ethical knowledge and could lead to a disconnect between the ethical standards of the elite and the common people (Lichtheim, 1976). The emphasis on elite instruction sometimes marginalized the ethical development of the broader populace.
3. **Overemphasis on the Afterlife:** The heavy emphasis on the afterlife and the judgment of the soul could sometimes overshadow the importance of ethical behaviour in the present life. The focus on posthumous rewards and punishments might have detracted from the intrinsic value of ethical conduct in the here and now (Allen, 1974). This afterlife-centric view could lead individuals to prioritize future consequences over present actions.
4. **Limited Individual Autonomy:** The integration of ethics with a highly hierarchical society and a strong centralized authority system limited individual autonomy. Ethical behaviour was often dictated by the need to conform to societal and religious norms, leaving little room for personal moral reasoning or dissent (Assmann, 2002). This top-down approach to ethics sometimes stifled individual ethical exploration and development.

Common ground developed between Ancient Egyptian and Hellenistic moral philosophy from the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE to the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE. Greek culture spread across the territories conquered by Alexander and led to a blending of Greek and Eastern cultural elements. The interaction between Egyptian and Greek cultures during the Hellenistic period also led to a significant exchange of ethical ideas. Greek philosophers, such as Pythagoras and Plato, were influenced by Egyptian concepts of cosmic order and moral conduct. Conversely, Hellenistic ethics, with its emphasis on virtue and the good life, resonated with the Egyptian principle of *ma'at* (Thompson, 2012).

The three major dimensions of integration are:

1. **Shared Emphasis on Virtue and Harmony:** Both Egyptian and Hellenistic moral philosophies emphasized the importance of virtue and social harmony. In Egyptian ethics, virtues such as truthfulness, justice, and respect were central to maintaining *ma'at*. Similarly, Hellenistic ethics, particularly in the works of Aristotle, focused on virtues as essential qualities for achieving a good life and societal harmony (Aristotle, 2004).
2. **Ethical Instruction and Wisdom Literature:** The tradition of wisdom literature in Egypt, which provided practical ethical guidelines, found a parallel in Greek philosophical teachings. The instructional texts of Ptahhotep and Amenemope were akin to the moral instructions found in Greek philosophical works, such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Lichtheim, 1973; Aristotle, 2004). Both traditions valued the transmission of ethical knowledge through written and oral teachings.
3. **Integration of Religion and Ethics:** The integration of religion and ethics was another common ground. In Egypt, ethical behaviour was deeply connected to religious beliefs and practices, with the gods serving as moral exemplars and enforcers. Similarly, in Greek thought, particularly in the works of Plato (2002), ethical conduct was often tied to a higher, divine order. This shared integration underscored the belief that moral behaviour was not only a social obligation but also a divine imperative.

To conclude this section, Ancient Egyptian moral philosophy, centred on the principle of *ma'at*, provided a comprehensive framework for ethical conduct that influenced both individual and societal behaviour. Its strengths lay in its universality, practicality, integration with religion, and emphasis on social harmony. However, it also faced limitations due to its static nature, elitist dissemination, overemphasis on the afterlife, and restricted individual autonomy.

The interaction with Hellenistic thought during the later periods of Egyptian history led to a fruitful exchange of ideas, highlighting common ground in the emphasis on virtue, harmony, and the integration of religion with ethics. This cross-cultural synthesis enriched both Egyptian and Greek moral philosophies, leaving a lasting legacy on subsequent ethical and philosophical traditions.

### Hindu Moral Philosophy

The Vedic Period (c. 1500–500 BCE) marks the foundational era of Hindu philosophy, characterized by the composition of the earliest scriptures, the Vedas. These texts—*Rigveda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*—introduce the concept of *rita*, the cosmic order governing the universe. Maintaining *rita*, essential for social and natural harmony, was achieved through rituals and righteous actions (Frawley, 1992).

The Brahmanas and Aranyakas further elaborate on these early philosophical ideas, setting the stage for deeper inquiries into existence and morality. The early Upanishads (c. 800 BCE) begin introducing abstract concepts such as *Brahman* (the ultimate reality) and *Atman* (the inner self), preparing the ground for later philosophical development (Olivelle, 1996).

The Upanishadic Period (c. 800–200 BCE) saw a significant shift towards introspection and metaphysical exploration. Texts like the *Chandogya Upanishad* and *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* focus on the pursuit of *moksha* (liberation) through knowledge of the self and Brahman. Yajnavalkya, a key sage of this period, emphasized self-knowledge and ethical living as paths to spiritual liberation (Radhakrishnan, 1953). This period laid the groundwork for later Hindu ethical thought by linking moral behaviour with spiritual enlightenment.

The Epic Period (c. 400 BCE–400 CE) saw the composition of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which provided practical ethical guidance through narrative. The *Bhagavad Gita*, part of the *Mahabharata*, is critical from this period, where Krishna instructs Arjuna on the importance of performing one's *svadharma* (individual duty) without attachment to results (*karma yoga*) (Miller, 1986). This period emphasizes duty, righteousness, and the moral complexities of life, with Vyasa and Valmiki exploring and disseminating complex ethical teachings through their epics.

During the Classical Period (c. 200 BCE–300 CE), texts like the *Manusmriti* (Laws of Manu) and *Yajnavalkya Smriti* codified social and moral laws. These texts provided guidelines on various life aspects, including duties associated with one's caste (*varna*) and life stage (*ashrama*) (Doniger, 1991). Key figures like Manu and Yajnavalkya formalized a structured ethical framework that balanced ritual duties with moral principles.

From the fourth to the tenth centuries, six classical schools of Hindu moral philosophy developed—Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, and Vedanta—each contributed uniquely to ethics. Nyaya and Vaisheshika focused on logic and reality, while Samkhya emphasized dualism between spirit (*purusha*) and matter (*prakriti*). Yoga, systematized by Patanjali (c. 400 CE), provided a comprehensive ethical framework through *yamas* (restraints) and *niyamas* (observances) (Feuerstein, 1979). Mimamsa focused on Vedic rituals and karma's ethical implications, while Vedanta, particularly through Shankaracharya, emphasized non-dualism and the importance of knowledge and ethical living in achieving liberation (Isayeva, 1993).

The Bhakti and Medieval Period (c. 800–1700 CE), emphasized personal devotion to God and ethical living through love and compassion. This period saw a democratization of spiritual practices, transcending caste distinctions. Influential figures like Ramanuja, who advocated *Vishishtadvaita* (qualified non-dualism), and *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* promoted devotional and ethical living (Carman, 1974). Saints like Kabir, Mirabai, and Tulsidas highlighted devotion and ethical conduct rooted in love for the divine.

In the Modern Period (c. 1700–present), Hindu moral philosophy adapted to new social, political, and cultural contexts. Reform movements led by thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy modernized Hindu practices and addressed social issues like caste discrimination and women's rights. Swami Vivekananda emphasized the universal aspects of Hindu philosophy, promoting ethical living and spiritual unity (Hay, 1989). Mahatma Gandhi integrated principles like *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satya* (truth) into his philosophy of *Satyagraha* (truth-force), foundational for his non-violent resistance against British colonial rule (Dalton, 1993). Philosophers like Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Aurobindo Ghose explored intersections between traditional Hindu ethics and modern humanistic concerns, advocating for a synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophical traditions (Radhakrishnan, 1929).

Hindu moral philosophy shares several intersections with Western ethical traditions, particularly virtue ethics and deontological ethics:

1. **Virtue Ethics:** Similar to Aristotle's emphasis on virtues, Hindu philosophy emphasizes qualities such as compassion (*karuna*), patience (*kshama*), and non-violence (*ahimsa*) as essential for moral development (Dasgupta, 1922).
2. **Deontological Ethics:** The concept of *dharma*, with its emphasis on duty and righteousness, parallels Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics, which focuses on adherence to moral duties and rules (Kant, 1997).

3. *Ahimsa*: Gandhi's principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence) influenced Western thinkers like Martin Luther King Jr. and the broader civil rights movement, demonstrating the cross-cultural impact of Hindu ethical principles (King, 1963).

Hindu moral philosophy intersects with Hellenistic thought in several ways, particularly with Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Neoplatonism:

- **Stoicism**: Stoicism, founded by Zeno of Citium, emphasizes virtue as the highest good and aligns with the Hindu concept of living according to one's *dharma*. Both traditions stress the importance of self-control, ethical behaviour, and inner peace. For instance, the Stoic idea of *apatheia* (freedom from passions) is akin to the Hindu practice of detachment (*vairagya*), where one is encouraged to act without attachment to the results (Gosling, 1987). The Bhagavad Gita's teaching on performing one's duty without attachment parallels the Stoic idea of focusing on what is within one's control and accepting what is not (Miller, 1986).
- **Epicureanism**: Epicurus advocated for a life of modest pleasure, friendship, and the pursuit of knowledge to achieve *ataraxia* (tranquillity). Similarly, Hindu philosophy, particularly in its yogic and ascetic traditions, values the control of desires and moderation (Brahmacharya and Aparigraha) to attain peace and liberation (Feuerstein, 1979). Both traditions view pleasure and tranquillity as outcomes of virtuous living and wise choices rather than indulgence.
- **Neoplatonism**: Neoplatonism, developed by Plotinus, emphasizes the One (similar to *Brahman*) as the ultimate reality from which everything emanates. This parallels the Upanishadic view of *Brahman* as the source of all existence and the goal of spiritual pursuit. The ascent towards the One in Neoplatonism mirrors the Hindu quest for *moksha* (liberation) through self-realization and unity with *Brahman* (Armstrong, 1993).

The seven core principles of Hindu ethics are:

1. **Dharma** (Righteousness): Dharma remains central, guiding individuals to perform their duties according to their nature and societal roles. It is a dynamic and contextual moral law that sustains social and cosmic order (Bhattacharyya, 1965).
2. **Karma** (Action and Consequences): The principle of karma continues to influence ethical behaviour, with the understanding that actions have consequences affecting future lives. This encourages moral responsibility and accountability (Zimmer, 1951).
3. **Ahimsa** (Non-violence): Ahimsa advocates non-violence in thought, word, and deed. It extends to respect for all living beings and influences dietary practices, social interactions, and political activism (Bondurant, 1958).
4. **Satya** (Truthfulness): Truthfulness promotes honesty and integrity in personal and public life, essential for spiritual growth and social trust (Singh, 2001).
5. **Asteya** (Non-stealing): Respect for others' property and rights encourages fairness and justice in all interactions (Chapple, 1986).
6. **Brahmacharya** (Celibacy or Self-restraint): Interpreted as self-control and moderation, Brahmacharya guides individuals in managing desires and focusing on higher spiritual goals (Vivekananda, 2001).
7. **Aparigraha** (Non-possessiveness): This principle advocates simplicity and contentment, helping individuals avoid greed and foster generosity (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1972).

To conclude this section, Hindu moral philosophy is a dynamic and comprehensive system integrating ethical conduct with spiritual aspirations. From the Vedic period's emphasis on cosmic order to the Upanishadic focus on self-realization, the practical ethics of the epics, the structured codes of the *Dharmashastras*, the diverse philosophical schools, the devotional fervour of the Bhakti movement, and modern reinterpretations by reformers and philosophers, Hindu ethics have continually adapted to address life's complexities. Today, the core principles of *dharma*, *karma*, *ahimsa*, *satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya*, and *aparigraha* provide a holistic guide for ethical living and spiritual fulfillment, reflecting an enduring commitment to balancing individual duties with broader cosmic principles.

### **Buddhist Moral Philosophy**

Buddhist moral philosophy has evolved through centuries, originating from the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, in the fifth century BCE. Central to Buddhist ethics is the concept of *śīla* (moral conduct), which forms one of the three foundational practices alongside *samādhi* (meditation) and *prajñā* (wisdom). This ethical framework is built upon the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, guiding individuals toward achieving *nirvana* (liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth).

The Four Noble Truths lay the groundwork for understanding the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), its origin, cessation, and the path leading to its cessation. The Noble Eightfold Path provides a practical guideline encompassing right understanding, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration (Rahula, 1959).

Right action, speech, and livelihood directly pertain to moral conduct. These precepts emphasize non-violence, truthfulness, and ethical living, which are crucial for personal and communal harmony. The Five Precepts further articulate ethical behaviour, advising against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication (Harvey, 2000).

As Buddhism spread across Asia, it adapted to various cultural contexts, leading to diverse interpretations and practices of Buddhist ethics. In Theravāda Buddhism, the focus remains on individual liberation through adherence to monastic codes and meditation. In contrast, Mahāyāna Buddhism, which developed around the first century CE, emphasizes *bodhisattva* ideals, where the ultimate moral goal is to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings (Keown, 2005).

The *bodhisattva* path incorporates the Six Perfections (*Pāramitās*): generosity, morality, patience, effort, meditation, and wisdom. These virtues extend moral responsibility beyond self-interest to universal compassion and altruism, showcasing a significant development in Buddhist moral thought (Nattier, 1993).

There are four main strengths of Buddhist moral philosophy:

1. **Holistic Approach:** Buddhist ethics is not just a set of rules but part of a comprehensive path to spiritual development. It integrates moral conduct with mental discipline and wisdom, ensuring that ethical behaviour is rooted in a deep understanding of reality and compassion (Keown, 1992).
2. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Buddhist ethics has shown remarkable adaptability across cultures, allowing it to remain relevant. The core principles can be applied to various contexts, making it a dynamic moral philosophy (Harvey, 2000).
3. **Emphasis on Compassion and Non-Violence:** The central tenet of non-violence (*ahimsa*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) forms a robust ethical stance against aggression and harm, promoting peace and empathy on both individual and societal levels (Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998).
4. **Practical Guidelines:** The Eightfold Path and the Five Precepts provide clear and actionable guidelines for ethical conduct, making the principles accessible and practical for everyday life (Rahula, 1959).

There appears to be four main limitations of Buddhist moral philosophy:

1. **Cultural and Historical Contingencies:** As Buddhism spread and evolved, some ethical practices became intertwined with local customs and traditions, which might dilute or alter the original teachings. This can lead to variations in ethical standards across different Buddhist communities (Keown, 2005).
2. **Monastic vs. Lay Ethics:** The distinction between the moral expectations of monks and laypeople can sometimes create a hierarchical ethical framework. Lay practitioners may find it challenging to adhere to the stringent precepts designed for monastic life (Harvey, 2000).
3. **Interpretation Challenges:** The reliance on ancient texts and the need for interpretation can lead to differing opinions on ethical issues. This can cause ambiguity in applying moral principles to modern dilemmas (Keown, 1992).
4. **Ascetic Tendencies:** The emphasis on renunciation and detachment may be perceived as neglecting worldly responsibilities. Critics argue that this might limit the application of Buddhist ethics in addressing contemporary social and political issues (Gethin, 1998).

The encounters between Buddhist and Hellenistic cultures, particularly following Alexander the Great's campaigns, reveal intriguing parallels and intersections. Both traditions emphasize the cultivation of virtue and wisdom as paths to the good life.

1. **Ethical Parallels:** Stoicism, a prominent Hellenistic school of thought, shares significant similarities with Buddhism in its emphasis on inner tranquillity, self-control, and the understanding of natural law. Both Stoicism and Buddhism advocate for a detachment from external circumstances and focus on the mind's role in achieving peace and happiness (Sellars, 2006).
2. **The Role of Wisdom and Virtue:** In both traditions, wisdom is central to ethical living. Stoics emphasize *sophia* (wisdom) and *aretê* (virtue) as crucial for *eudaimonia* (flourishing), much like how Buddhist ethics values *prajñā* (wisdom) and *śīla* (moral conduct) for achieving *nirvana* (Long, 2002).
3. **Universalism and Altruism:** The Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* ideal closely aligns with the Stoic concept of cosmopolitanism, where moral duty extends beyond personal or local concerns to embrace the welfare of all humanity. This universalism underscores a shared ethical vision of altruism and compassion (Nussbaum, 1994).

In conclusion, Buddhist moral philosophy, with its roots in the teachings of the Buddha, has developed into a comprehensive ethical framework emphasizing non-violence, compassion, and wisdom. Its adaptability and holistic approach make it a resilient and practical system for ethical living. However, challenges such as cultural variations and interpretation issues highlight the need for ongoing dialogue and contextual understanding.

The intersections between Buddhist and Hellenistic ethics reveal shared values in the pursuit of wisdom, virtue, and universal well-being. These parallels offer rich opportunities for cross-cultural ethical reflections, contributing to a more profound understanding of global moral philosophies.

### Chinese Moral Philosophy

Chinese moral philosophy has a rich and complex history, characterized by its practical focus on social harmony, ethical behaviour, and proper governance. Central to this tradition are the teachings of Confucius, who lived around the same time as the Buddha and was primarily concerned with ethical philosophy. Confucius (1997) sought to create a harmonious society through the cultivation of two key human qualities: *ren* and *li*.

*Ren* (仁) is often translated as “humaneness” or “benevolence.” It encompasses all the qualities required for ideal behaviour between people, including kindness, empathy, and moral integrity. Confucius regarded *ren* as the highest principle, essential for achieving a moral and harmonious society. He proposed that the Golden Rule, “Do not do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you,” should guide all actions (Confucius, 1997). This principle underscores the importance of empathy and reciprocity in human interactions.

*Li* (礼), on the other hand, refers to ritual, propriety, and the observance of traditional norms and customs. It encompasses the behaviours appropriate for different relationships and social roles, ensuring that societal functions and personal conduct align with cultural expectations and historical precedents. *Li* embodies the structure and discipline necessary for maintaining social order and harmony.

Two significant figures who expanded on Confucian thought were Mencius (Mengzi) and Xunzi. Mencius (c. 372–289 BCE) emphasized the innate goodness of human beings. He believed that individuals naturally possess the seeds of *ren* and that moral cultivation involves nurturing these inherent qualities through proper education and environment (Mencius, 2004).

Xunzi (c. 310–235 BCE), in contrast, argued that human nature is inherently selfish, and that ethical behaviour is achieved through rigorous education and the enforcement of *li*. According to Xunzi, societal order is maintained by instilling discipline and proper conduct, suggesting that human nature requires cultivation and correction (Xunzi, 1999).

While Confucianism focuses on social harmony and ethical behaviour within a structured society, *Daoism* (Taoism) offers a complementary perspective emphasizing harmony with the natural world and spontaneity. Founded by Laozi (Lao Tzu), Daoism advocates for *wuwei* (non-action or effortless action), encouraging individuals to align their actions with the natural flow of the universe (Laozi, 2003).

The Daoist concept of *de* (virtue) aligns with *ren*, but it emphasizes an innate, effortless morality arising from living in accordance with the *Dao* (the Way). Daoism provides a balance to the structured ethical framework of Confucianism, highlighting the importance of naturalness and simplicity in achieving moral and spiritual harmony (Laozi, 2003).

Another significant and realist school of thought is Legalism, which emerged during the Warring States period (475–221 BCE). Legalists like Han Feizi argued that human beings are naturally inclined toward selfishness and that strong, centralized control and strict laws are necessary to maintain order and stability. Legalism prioritizes law and order over moral education, focusing on the pragmatic enforcement of rules rather than cultivating virtue (Han Feizi, 2003).

Four strengths of Chinese moral philosophy are:

1. **Holistic Approach to Society and Morality:** Chinese moral philosophy, particularly Confucianism, offers a holistic approach that integrates individual moral cultivation with societal harmony. The concepts of *ren* and *li* ensure that personal ethics are closely tied to social responsibilities and traditions, promoting a well-rounded moral development.
2. **Emphasis on Social Harmony:** The primary focus on social harmony and collective well-being is a significant strength. Confucian ethics encourages cooperation, respect for social roles, and the importance of family and community, which are crucial for maintaining societal stability (Confucius, 1997).
3. **Adaptability and Integration:** Chinese moral philosophy has shown remarkable adaptability over centuries, integrating various schools of thought like Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism. This pluralism has allowed Chinese ethics to remain relevant and resilient in diverse contexts (Laozi, 2003; Han Feizi, 2003).

4. Practical and Realistic: The practical nature of Chinese moral philosophy, particularly in Confucianism and Legalism, offers clear guidelines for behaviour and governance. This pragmatic approach ensures that ethical principles can be applied effectively in real-world scenarios, providing a stable foundation for personal and societal conduct (Xunzi, 1999).

Four limitations of Chinese moral philosophy are:

1. Rigidity and Conservatism: The emphasis on *li* and adherence to tradition can lead to rigidity and conservatism, potentially stifling innovation and adaptation in rapidly changing societies. This strict adherence to traditional norms may limit personal freedom and creativity (Confucius, 1997).
2. Hierarchical Tendencies: Confucian ethics' focus on social roles and hierarchies can reinforce existing power structures and inequalities. The emphasis on obedience and respect for authority might perpetuate patriarchal and hierarchical systems, potentially leading to social injustice (Mencius, 2004).
3. Neglect of Individual Autonomy: The collective focus of Chinese moral philosophy, particularly in Confucianism, might overshadow the importance of individual autonomy and personal rights. This collective orientation can sometimes undermine personal freedoms and individual expression (Xunzi, 1999).
4. Theoretical vs. Practical Tensions: While Confucian and Daoist ideals emphasize moral virtues and harmony, the practical implementation can be challenging. Legalism's strict approach to governance often contradicts the moral idealism of Confucianism and the naturalism of Daoism, creating tensions in balancing these philosophies in practice (Han Feizi, 2003).

The intersections between Chinese moral philosophy and Hellenistic ethics reveal shared values and complementary perspectives:

1. Virtue Ethics and Moral Cultivation: Both Confucianism and Hellenistic ethics, particularly Stoicism, emphasize the cultivation of virtue as central to ethical living. The Confucian concept of *ren* parallels the Stoic idea of *aretê* (virtue), where moral excellence is achieved through self-cultivation and rational behaviour (Long, 2002).
2. Role of Social Harmony: Similar to Confucianism's focus on social harmony, Epicureanism in Hellenistic ethics values friendship and social bonds as essential for a happy life. Both traditions recognize the importance of harmonious relationships in achieving personal and communal well-being (Nussbaum, 1994).
3. Practical Guidance: Both traditions provide practical guidance for ethical behaviour. Confucianism offers the Five Precepts and the Noble Eightfold Path, while Stoicism provides practical exercises for maintaining tranquillity and moral integrity, highlighting the pragmatic nature of both ethical systems (Sellars, 2006).

To conclude, Chinese moral philosophy, rooted in the teachings of Confucius and expanded by figures like Mencius, Xunzi, and Laozi, offers a rich and nuanced approach to ethics. Its strengths lie in its holistic integration of individual and societal ethics, its adaptability, and its practical application. However, its limitations include potential rigidity, hierarchical tendencies, and the neglect of individual autonomy.

The intersections with Hellenistic ethics, particularly Stoicism and Epicureanism, reveal shared values in the cultivation of virtue, social harmony, and practical ethical guidance. These connections highlight the universal aspects of moral philosophy, bridging cultural and historical divides.

### Analysis

The development of moral philosophies across different ancient civilizations provides a fascinating glimpse into the diverse ways human societies have approached ethics. Comparing the moral philosophies from ancient Egypt, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism with Western moral philosophies of the same periods reveals both striking similarities and significant differences.

Ancient Egyptian moral philosophy (from c. 3100 BCE) was deeply intertwined with religion. Central to their ethical system was the concept of *Ma'at*, representing truth, balance, order, and justice (Assmann, 2002). *Ma'at* was both a deity and an abstract principle that governed both the universe and human behaviour. Egyptians believed in a cosmic order that individuals had to adhere to, ensuring harmony and balance. Ethical behaviour was seen as alignment with *Ma'at*, which included honesty, fairness, and respect for others.

Hindu moral philosophy (from c. 1500 BCE), as expressed in the Vedas and later texts like the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, revolves around the concepts of *Dharma* (duty, righteousness) and *Karma* (the law of cause and effect). *Dharma* varies according to one's class (*varna*), stage of life (*ashrama*), and individual circumstances, emphasizing duties specific to one's role in society (Flood, 1996). *Karma* dictates that

every action has consequences, influencing one's future lives through the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*). Ethical behaviour involves performing one's duties selflessly and adhering to the moral order.

Buddhist moral philosophy (from c. 300 BCE), as taught by Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), centres on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path offers a practical guide to ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom, including Right Understanding, Right Intent, Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood (Harvey, 2000). Central to Buddhism is the concept of compassion (*karuna*) and the alleviation of suffering (*dukkha*). Moral actions are those that lead to the cessation of suffering for oneself and others.

Confucianism (from c. 300 BCE), developed by Confucius, focuses on the cultivation of virtue and maintenance of ethics within a structured society. Key virtues include *Ren* (benevolence), *Li* (ritual propriety), and *Xiao* (filial piety). Confucian ethics emphasize the importance of harmonious relationships and social roles, advocating that moral behaviour arises from proper conduct in these relationships (Riegel, 2013). The family is seen as the foundation of society, and ethical living is achieved through fulfilling one's roles with integrity and respect.

In Western moral philosophy during these periods, there were early developments in Greek ethics and later Roman thought. Around 3100 BCE, Western societies were in the early stages of development, with moral thinking not yet formalized into philosophical systems. By the time of classical Greek philosophy (c. 500 BCE), figures like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle began to explore ethical concepts systematically.

Socratic ethics (c. 470-399 BCE) emphasized the importance of knowledge and virtue, proposing that ethical behaviour stems from understanding what is good (Irwin, 1995). Socrates argued that individuals naturally do what is right once they know what is right, linking morality to rationality and knowledge.

Platonic and Aristotelian ethics (circa 400-322 BCE) theorized the existence of objective Forms or ideals, with the Form of the Good being the highest (Plato, trans. 2002). Moral behaviour involved aligning oneself with these eternal truths. Aristotle, a student of Plato, introduced virtue ethics, focusing on the development of good character traits (virtues) through habituation (Aristotle, trans. 1999). He emphasized achieving *eudaimonia* (flourishing or happiness) through the practice of virtues such as courage, temperance, and justice.

There are similarities in these systems of ethical thought:

1. **Virtue and Character:** Both Confucianism and Aristotelian ethics emphasize the development of good character and virtues. Confucius' *Ren* and Aristotle's virtues both focus on the cultivation of personal qualities that lead to ethical behaviour.
2. **Social Harmony:** Confucianism and Egyptian *Ma'at* both prioritize social harmony and proper relationships. Egyptian ethics sought cosmic and social balance, similar to Confucian emphasis on harmonious relationships.
3. **Duty and Role:** Hindu *Dharma* and Confucian *Li* both emphasize performing one's duties according to social roles, reflecting a sense of responsibility and proper conduct within societal structures.

At the same time, the major differences are:

1. **Metaphysical Foundations:** Western ethics, particularly Platonic thought, often involves abstract metaphysical ideals, whereas Eastern philosophies like Buddhism and Hinduism incorporate practical, everyday principles guided by spiritual beliefs like *karma* and rebirth.
2. **Approach to Suffering:** Buddhism uniquely focuses on the alleviation of suffering as the core of its moral philosophy, differing from the Greek pursuit of *eudaimonia* or the Confucian emphasis on social roles.
3. **Religious Integration:** Ancient Egyptian and Hindu moral systems are deeply integrated with their respective religious beliefs and practices, unlike Greek philosophies, which although influenced by religion, often pursued ethics as a more independent discipline.

### Conclusion

There are notable similarities in these systems of ethical thought. Both Confucianism and Aristotelian ethics emphasize the development of good character and virtues. Confucius' *Ren* and Aristotle's virtues both focus on the cultivation of personal qualities that lead to ethical behaviour. Similarly, Confucianism and Egyptian *Ma'at* prioritize social harmony and proper relationships. Ancient Egyptian ethics sought cosmic and social balance, akin to the Confucian emphasis on harmonious relationships. Additionally, Hindu *Dharma* and Confucian *Li* both emphasize performing one's duties according to social roles, reflecting a sense of responsibility and proper conduct within societal structures.

However, significant differences also exist. Western ethics, particularly Plato's thought, often involves abstract metaphysical ideals, whereas Eastern philosophies like Buddhism and Hinduism incorporate practical, everyday principles guided by spiritual beliefs such as *karma* and rebirth. Buddhism uniquely focuses on the

alleviation of suffering as the core of its moral philosophy, differing from the Greek pursuit of *eudaimonia* or the Confucian emphasis on social roles. Furthermore, ancient Egyptian and Hindu moral systems are deeply integrated with their respective religious beliefs and practices, unlike Greek philosophies, which although influenced by religion, often pursued ethics as a more independent discipline.

These ancient moral philosophies can also be conceptually linked to modern educative leadership theories, such as transformative, instructional, distributed, and ethical leadership. To illustrate, transformative leadership (Shields, 2010; Burns, 1978) aligns with Confucianism's focus on developing individuals' potential and fostering moral and ethical growth. Transformative leaders inspire and motivate followers to achieve higher levels of morality and ethics, similar to Confucian emphasis on cultivating virtue and proper conduct. Additionally, Buddhism's focus on compassion and alleviating suffering aligns with transformative leadership's emphasis on empathy, understanding, and improving the well-being of all members within an educational environment.

Instructional leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood et al., 2004) can be related to Socratic ethics, where the emphasis on knowledge and rationality aligns with instructional leadership's focus on enhancing teaching and learning. Effective instructional leaders prioritize educational excellence and ethical standards, guiding teachers and students toward intellectual and moral development.

Distributed leadership (Spillane, 2001; Harris, 2004) resonates with the concept of *Dharma* in Hindu philosophy, which emphasizes duties specific to one's role, paralleling distributed leadership's focus on shared responsibilities and collaborative practices within an educational institution. This approach promotes a collective effort to achieve common goals, reflecting the interconnectedness seen in Hindu ethics. Similarly, Confucian *Li*'s emphasis on fulfilling roles within a structured society parallels distributed leadership, which involves delegating authority and responsibilities, ensuring all members contribute to the institution's success through proper conduct and collaboration.

Ethical leadership (Ciulla, 2004; Brown et al., 2006) can be conceptually related to the Egyptian concept of *Ma'at*, which represents truth, balance, and justice. Ethical leadership's commitment to fairness, integrity, and moral principles resonates with *Ma'at*, fostering an environment of trust and respect. Furthermore, Aristotle's focus on virtues and character development aligns with ethical leadership's emphasis on moral behaviour and leading by example. Leaders who embody virtues such as honesty, justice, and courage inspire similar conduct in others.

In summary, both ancient non-Western and Western moral philosophies offer profound insights into contemporary theories of educative leadership. Ancient concepts such as virtue, social harmony, duty, and ethical behaviour, inherent in these philosophies, resonate with modern leadership models by underscoring the significance of moral development, collaborative practices, and ethical standards within educational contexts. The assimilation of these enduring principles into current leadership approaches has the potential to bolster both the efficacy and moral underpinnings of educational institutions. Moreover, applying non-Western philosophies to the realm of educative leadership can elucidate the contextual and cultural influences on ethical practices and contribute to a more nuanced, universal understanding of leadership in education.

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## Bio

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