Prosper or inexistence: Path to Attaining Happiness in the Millennial Era from the Perspective of Eastern Philosophers and Students.

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Abstract

Background: The world we live in never ceased to be problematic even after the arrival of the new millennium. Technology has possessed and consumed people into state of emptiness, solitary and isolation. They began to suffer, become utterly mystified; they have nothing to hold on to. The only escape is to seek a way out of these conditions. Eastern philosophers are mankind's intellectual guidance of wisdom and the students of the millennium era are those who determine the course of the future. Both agents form a method adaptable to the mentality and livelihood of society, taking them to a place where peace is sustainable and eternal.

Objective: To research, compile, analyze, and synthesize the attitude on ways to attain happiness by eastern philosophers and students as a body of knowledge thereupon used as society's way of living and means to reach eternal and sustainable happiness.

Result: Identify ways to attain happiness conforming with the perspective and concept of eastern philosophers and students adaptable to the livelihood of the laypeople and society as a whole.

Discussion and Conclusion: For eastern philosophers and students, the core to attaining happiness lies in enriching of our spiritual level out of selfishness and adhering to religious principles, moral/ethical conducts, detachment from all defilement and desire,

the use wisdom to end suffering and attain peace of mind. Furthermore, it is about realizing the importance of harmonizing with nature and our surroundings.

Keywords: Happiness Philosophy Students Perspective

Introduction

The futility of technological advancement and economic supremacy in today's world demise the path to true and sustainable happiness. As such, the success of materialism comes with a price. It's proven that humans' overreliance on science and technology brings about suffering. The outcome of being deeply infatuated with modernity is the relentless desires to the point of social and cultural failure (Arun Suntaree, 2009: 2).

The time has come for us to acknowledge the true happiness found in the enrichment of our mind and soul accorded with the methods of eastern philosophers and Asian mentality. The new millennium sees eastern progression reaching an equivalent stance with the western world yet retains the core of old traditions, cultures, beliefs, faith, mentality, and livelihood, all of which signifies its identity. Anwar Ibrahim once said "Growth, development and the blossom of Asian society on the basis of good-will creates a society instilled with truth and the yearn for knowledge, justice, compassion, respect, perseverance, and freedom. It acts responsibly, with faith, and the practice of religion not limited to individuals but spreads to all walks of life. It is the power of religion and nothing else that makes this continent endless in diversity". (Anwar Ibrahim, 1996: 34)

This research is the result of the clash of valuable ideas between the students, leaders of creative thoughts in this new generation, and principles of eastern philosophers, representatives of the intellect and mental sublimity. We will find that the components of human cognitive lie in or resulted from human

emotions. Despite our knowledge from factual methods and evidences, subjective thinking is inevitable, and as such hinders us from understanding the truth of existence, led astray, and forever searching for answers. (Timothy Williamson, 2007: 279)

To this note, the researcher combined the ideas of both groups as a basis for research, study, analyze, differentiate, and distill of overlapping main points until a way to bring people to true and sustainable happiness is found.

Methodology

Data collection methodology involves primary and secondary sources. For primary sources the researcher employed purposive sampling approach, using five 1st to 4th year students from Srinakharinwirot University for semi-structured interviews. The questions are in line with the research objective while the analytical methodology is qualitative analysis in the form of content analysis.

Attaining Happiness

1. Humans should enrich their souls to attain true and sustainable happiness.

People nowadays experienced failures and frustration so repeatedly it has become part of us, or they are unable to fix everything that they had to put up facades and tell themselves the life they are living is normal. Most students viewed that society is experiencing mental crisis. Humans have become so materialistic, selfish, narrow-minded, and competitive. They should enrich their souls from such defilements that are devouring them. Only by finding mental or spiritual happiness is considered finding the true happiness. Saint Augustin likewise amplified the notion of spirit so profoundly and interestingly that humans are obliged to enrich their souls to reach God so that our spirits will be blessed and powerful by Him and He shall ignite the light of life and reveals sustainable happiness (Stanley Rosen, 2003: 127).

Such statement conforms to informant no. 1 who believe that soul enrichment means developing our conscience or what we are born with but can't control. For instance, bad people might have horrible souls, think negative thoughts, and defame others. Souls are part of what defines who we are so we

must enrich our souls into behaving and thinking positively. Despite not being 100% defining factor of our behavior, we still must enrich our souls so we can live in peace. If everyone has a good soul, I think we can become a civilized society. Buddhism is the method choosen to employ as it is able to change us into a good person from inside out. Buddhism teaches us to think and act positive and act as a spiritual anchor so we won't be led astray. If everyone practices Buddhism in their everyday life, I think that it is able to bring about an ideal society.

This is in line with the teachings of the Buddha on end of suffering by soul enrichment that worldly beings are full of suffering. The duty of human beings is to attain nirvana as it is a way to be unchained from suffering. Those drowned by worldly pleasures are considered fools and blinded. The Buddha advised us to avoid suffering entirely and walk in the path to nirvana. Despite Buddhist wisdom arises from pessimistic viewpoint, the ending is always about optimism and true happiness. Humans experience defilements every day. It is what drives us to exist in this world. The Buddha stated that "Worldly beings are consumed by fires of lust, hatred, suffer, senility, and death". He compared humans beings immolated by fires of suffering like a person poisoned by a poison arrow. The teaching of the Buddha therefore is the Four Noble Truth (Boonmee Tankaew, 2002: 90-91).

Lao Tzu dictates the importance of peaceful mind by soul enrichment. Taoism is a cult that acknowledges the value and meaning of attaining the state of peaceful mind. To reach such state, first step is to restrain one's senses namely eyes, ears, noise, tongue, body from all emotions. Uncontrolled senses causes agitation and chaos instead of peace. Lao Tzu viewed that a peaceful mind is everything as it leads to state of Tao. When Tao is reached, one possessed inhumane abilities. Understanding Tao, one will be able to destroy the walls of frustration, deprivation, slave of materialism, endless desires, infatuation and obsession with illusions. Tao will bring about true happiness (Sakol Nilawan, 1980: 180).

2. Abiding religious principles and religion as spiritual anchor

Setting oneself free from rules, disrespect of religion, living above the teachings of the wise, indulged in sinful thinking, acting under influence of desires will, in the end, be filled with confusion and emptiness in life. Pojman placed importance in religion that no art is able to better explain the true of all things in this world than religious teachings. Such teachings elaborate the universe to exhaustive extent and bestow humans the body of knowledge of the universe and the world (Louis P. Pojman, 1997: 68).

Furthermore Horne and Westacott incited on religion as a spiritual guidance and pillar of livelihood that philosophical religion differs from religion in the same way that philosophical science differs from general science. The destination of philosophical religion lies not in praying but the understanding of human civilization (Chris Horne and Emrys Westacott, 2003: 216).

Such statement agrees with the informant no. 2 who put value and awareness in the necessity of religion. The information viewed that modernists might perceived religion as unimportant and unnecessary, only laws and regulations is suffice for peaceful society. In truth that is not the case. If religion is in fact unnecessary, countries without national religion such as Japan where majority of the population have no religion but uphold “cult” practices, proved that religion holds the soul together. It differs from laws which are simply enforcement procedures with no sentimental value. Religion is imperative to the livelihood and the survival of humans because as long as humans exist, be it alone or as a society, religion is inevitable. Religion exists as an indicator of what is considered merit, sinful, right, wrong in the similar fashion as having a standard of measure in living. Such standard is set by scientific methods and assumed as a well-accepted universal standard. Likewise with good and bad, humans must have a universal standard acceptable by all, and a standard that measures justice or differentiate good from bad. No such standard can exceeds better than that of religion.

Humans not only desire materials but they also have mind and soul necessary for satisfying such desires. As

such apart from matters such as living, humans are trouble-minded creatures in that they question things such as “what is life?”, “why are we born?”, “where do we go after we die?”, “what is afterlife like?”, “who created the world?”, and many more. These questions hitherto unanswered by science, at least not to our satisfaction. However, they are answerable by religion.

3. Humans should live life adhering to moral and ethical conduct

Humans, past and present, took part in creating a chain reaction of a social issue revolving moral and ethical aspect. We are responsible for the crisis we created, knowingly or not. Humans are smartest of all creatures. We are free to make decisions we desire, by our greed or actions, keeping in mind the right and wrong, ethical and morality of it. Likewise, Jean Paul Satre explained that if we are nothing but what others make of us, the first principle of existentialism we see that if we are assumed like all other creatures we simply become nothing more than a rock or table (Lawrence Cahoone, 1996: 259).

The statement is similar to informant no. 3 who reflects this issue very clearly. The informant contemplated that those who attained enlightenment and created a social morality is a good thing as it help restore and develop a once decadent society. Enlightenment will bring about destruction of competition, crimes, corruptions, or even uncontrollable disasters. This is because enlightened individuals professed only love to all existence, be it humans, animals, or non-living things. When love is born, destruction dies. People will lend each other’s hand as we are mutually depend on each other and are equal. We oversee each other’s hardships. Such phenomenon only occurs when every individual is enlightened in wisdom and morality.

This concept conformed to that of Confucius who stated that “external appearance is nothing more than an internal expression. What is expressed outside only reveals what is inside. The wise only take interest in oneself”. Confucius believed that any path, be it heaven or human, is the path of morality which includes love, justice, propriety, and wisdom. These are path that humans should seek. Not only path that the heaven

bestow upon humans, but also nature. That is, humans are able to train themselves along such path. Confucius foresees the importance of self-improvement through morality. Confucius mentioned that the wise is wise as he endeavors to preserve his true nature and the fool does not feel appreciative towards any beauty. Confucius believed that a perfected person is a habitually decent person. That is, no longer the need to try or think to behave decently. Therefore behavior of a person with morale is automatic and frees (Panthip Supanakorn, 1999: 11-12).

4. Humans should eradicate endless defilements and desires

To release people from poverty and social crisis one is required to relinquish oneself from never-ending defilements, greed, and desires. He or she must also enrich the soul and bring about revolution and change in the way of thinking and behavior. It is necessary also to form an idea, a social value as a mean to find the meaning and purpose of life without greed, anger, and misguidance. Socrates, the Greek philosopher, once advised his people that a perfect life is a life where people argue about human perfection on a daily basis, through inspection of each other, as without inspect life has no meaning (William Irvin, 2004: 7).

Similarly, informant no. 4 reflected on how the world today is possessed materialism and defilements. One of the causes of suffering is that world has changed. We live in the world where we are the victim of material progression and allurements. We must look back at ourselves. If we all practice the path of enlightenment and attain to such status we will be able to understand and accept the truth of such condition. We will understand that no existence is permanent. It can exists just as it be inexistence. Nothing is ours, nothing we can feel attached to, nothing is permanent, and everything is suffering. We leave everything in this life when we die. The only thing we can bring with us is our merits and our sins. With that in mind we can be able to let go of all the objective materials and let go all subjective emotions, reaching a state of de-suffering and attain enlightenment.

When those who are enlightened or able to let go live together in a society,

that society will be peaceful and prosper. People will aid in improving a life without deception, demerit, immorality, and learn to be compassion. There will be no quarrel or disagreement as we feel love for one another, always lending hands, giving and generous, and no exploitation as we know that nothing is ours. We only strive for a peaceful and harmonic society.

Zhuang Zi previously elaborated on the aforementioned that we should always be up-to-date with the truth and should study and attain Tao. Only then will we be able to escape deception and illusions, no longer under the influence of defilements, fame and recognition, or pressured and chained by social norms. There won't be any comparison namely social classes. Comparison only leads to frustration which is not the truth.

Zhuang Zi also stated that a true happiness life is a life without comparison, be it high or low, wide or narrow, beauty or ugly, etc. If we perceive all things as equal, worldly emotions won't be of nuisance to us because in fact all existence is united and has Tao as a base. However, we saw it as a nuance as we have yet to attain Tao. As such we are deceived by outer appearances such as high and low. Zhuang Zi saw that there is no such thing as high or low in truth. It exists only in space meaning a mountain is high as long as we are beneath, yet can be beneath us if we are at its peak. Another example is a woman's beauty can be mesmerizing to society but can be just as meaningless to forest creatures. True beauty or ugliness does not exist and is a matter of preference (Sathien Bhodhinantha, 1989: 188-189).

The world eager to grasp whatever can provide them with convenience. I (Zhuang Zi) is baffled whether such convenience is true happiness or a false. I consider what the world desires and realize it is nothing more of a suicide attempt. Such happiness comes from pressure yet universally accepted as the true happiness. For me it is not happiness and it doesn't matter if it isn't. Does our world already have true happiness or nothing but counterfeited happiness? I, myself, consider living isolated and detached from everything is true happiness. Unfortunately such happiness is considered a great suffer for

majority of the world. Therefore I concluded that "true happiness must not come from physical matter, true honor must be rid of admiration and glorification". (Sathien Bhodhinantha, 1989: 187-188)

5. Human should employ wisdom to distinguish happiness from suffering

Wisdom and knowledge on life in actual sense, and the conduct based on wisdom, is the best way to enrich our soul and take us to true happiness and happiness for society as a whole. Pojman gave insight that we must find a way to access the truth and use of reason that we believe is true. We must learn how to distinguish truth from false as well as finding a reason to back up ambiguous beliefs (Louis P.Pojman, 2000: 41).

Informant no. 5 believed that wisdom and knowledge can change the world. There is reason and genesis attached to all phenomenon, and that all problems have a solution. The day every human uses wisdom and attain enlightenment they will think and act in conformity. Problems that occurred from differences will diminish as we realized the origin of such problem and how to fix it. If we all have identical belief, albeit different viewpoint at times, we will not be led astray as we have the same base to hold on to. The world will be at peace as it is filled with decent men and women. The social gap and disparity will vanish. Covetousness and desires will not arise. Our lifestyle will greatly transform. Once a person loving nothing but himself will learn to love others more. We will feel ashamed and fear of committing indecency. We will know right from wrong. We will have the same life destination which is the enrichment of a human soul.

Wisdom as a tool to foresee the truth of happiness and despair is the art eastern philosophers take great interest, and used by them as a cognitive guidance for society to see the truth and fused into their livelihood. Zhuang Zi has found the actual cause of happiness and suffering, and taught us that it is conclusive that the first type of happiness is worldly happiness formed from satisfactions and getting what we desire namely good health, wealth, fame, recognition and so on. This is also known as gratification. Worldly happiness is impermanent and ever-changing. It isn't

pure and mixed with suffering. It is vehement, rough, and ardent. It is inconsistent. We feel happy when our hope is fulfilled but the more we put our hopes up the more we suffer when it turns into a disappointment. Happiness out of comparison, when someone has a higher position, can also cause suffering. Relative happiness relies on other occurrences or material happiness. Happiness dependent on material doesn't spontaneously form.

The second type of happiness is dharma happiness. It is formed through peace of mind and awareness of the truth. It is smooth, calm, and independent from material things (immaterial happiness). This is deemed absolute happiness. According to Zhuang Zi "I consider living in peace, detached from all things, is true happiness. It does not come from bodily matters or worldly honors, but from honors deprived of recognition. Dharma happiness thus aims from peaceful mind and consider better and purer than worldly happiness (Fuen Dokbua, 1992: 166).

6. Humans should realize the importance and harmony of nature and surroundings.

Live while seeking a way to become happy empowers our mind and soul. Living in peace and aware of the importance of nature that surrounds us, we feel as if the meaning behind living is discovered. According to Moore and Bruder, philosophy and knowledge of nature is beneficial to our livelihood. We discover a profound systematic thinking process, expanding the territory of the knowledge of arts by way of observing and learning the principles of nature and the entirety of all living things (Brooke Noel Moore and Kenneth Burder, 2004: 64).

Informant no. 3 gave an interesting insight. Technology progression allows us to control nature and build facilitations and entertainment to our heart's content. This is a two-edge sword that backfired on the creator. The more we are infatuated by the facilitations and entertainment and the power to control nature, we lost sight that we come from nature. We are not God who created all things. We are soaked with defilements and desires. The more we are comfortable the more sensuality grows in us, to the point where we left behind all morale and act as if omnipotent (eventually

all things ends in nothing). When we have everything, there is nothing to strive for, nothing to live for, as we are clouded by the growing comfort and sensuality. If we look back we will realize that this is not true happiness and are blinded from the value of life. All the comfort and entertainments are taken for granted. All the things we created to satisfy our desires left us in a state of dejection, blinded from the value of our destination or even ourselves.

Conforming to the concept of Lao Tzu who viewed humans originally happy but become despair through the changes brought about by society. The truest way of happiness is detachment of civilization that has been assumed up until present. Live in peace and in harmony with nature. Live amongst the forests, streams, and mountains. Such viewpoint clearly distinguishes knowledge from Tao. Returning to nature is achieved by seeking knowledge and Tao on a daily basis. Those who neglect its benefits will lose their benefits every day until they have reached a peaceful state.

Furthermore,Lao Tzu viewed that we tend to live in contrast with the way of Tao. We act in defiance with nature. Humans are merely part of what exists in nature yet we separate ourselves from the laws of nature. This is the reason why the universe process smoothly and accordingly while we must face suffering endlessly.Lao Tzu perceived humans as originally happy but through time endures suffering as they strive to control their own fate. Such endeavor impeded the natural phenomenon. The best way to seek happiness is to live with our natural self and adjust to ordinariness in its true form (Sakol Nilawan, 1980: 181).

Conclusion

Francis Bacon forecasts that knowledge is power. He sees beyond that human beings can use knowledge to determine the fate of all existence. As such if we know how to attain happiness by means of perspective integration of eastern philosophers and students, we will possess a certain body of knowledge. We will be able to use them as a living code of conduct. That moment is when happiness is created in individual and society level.

Ways to attain happiness can be divided into main points as follow:

1. We should enrich our souls out of selfishness, defilements, greed in order to attain true and sustainable happiness

2. We should adhere to religious principles in our livelihood; perform merit and avoid sinfulness; use religion as a spiritual anchor

3. We should adhere to moral and ethical conduct and act meritoriously to the point where it entirely ingrained into our habit

4. We should dispose of defilements and endless desires; unchained from deception and illusion hidden under power and fame and recognition or possession

5. We should employ wisdom to contemplate the truth and ways to end suffering and attain true peace

6. We should be aware of the importance and live in harmony with nature as we are part or a condition of nature.

Recommendation

If our purpose is supreme happiness and macro happiness, we should walk the path of enlightenment. Such path leads to the management of our lives and the society we live in whilst fully acknowledging the valuable principles and ways to attain happiness. Such can be taken from this research to be adapted in individual level, community level, and national level. Such body of knowledge can also be a starter for expanding education in the fields of social sciences and philosophy, to be further implemented in the livelihood of modern generation.

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