

The Penumbra Series (6 of 6): the Ancient Philosophers

There are non-Christians who recognize Jesus as a great Philosopher, and indeed He was. They look at what Jesus taught and find parallels among Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Siddhartha Gautama, Confucius, and other greats of the East and West. And well they should, as the Ancient Philosophers honestly sought the Truth with open minds, and Jesus claimed to be the Truth incarnate. But no other great philosopher before or since Jesus claimed to *be* the Truth. Without exception, the great philosophers of East and West looked at the Truth as something to be sought after but never found. Tao de Ching is credited as saying: The Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao; The name that can be defined is not the unchanging name.

So, without going further, we see what is perhaps the most fragile of all the Penumbra theories explained so far. It should not be hard to separate the Light of the Truth from the Dark that inspired the greats to seek the Truth. Yet somehow, this distinction is lost on a great many non-Christians (as well as a number of Christians). As usual, once we identify this fundamental and radical difference, other differences just seem to pop out on their own.

For starters, there are no moral platitudes (cliches used to either calm people down or to settle a disputed concept) coming from Jesus. Jesus spent much of his time warning people they were too comfortable for the good of their souls, and this was always in the form of a question designed to get people to think about things. The only "calm" Jesus ever promised is "peace" amid Earthly turmoil. Most philosophers will defend their theories; Jesus only defended his authority, never his lessons. Most philosophers will describe what their teachings *are*; Jesus described how to *live* His teachings. Philosophers will *suggest* a certain lifestyle; Jesus *commands* one. For the philosophers in the West, following a moral code will make for a better society which, in turn, makes for a better life of those who follow it. Jesus does not teach how to make a better society; He teaches how to enter a perfect society. The fact that following His commands does indeed improve life here on Earth is only a reminder of what the Earth was supposed to have been like, but that is of secondary importance. The Eastern philosophies will teach these same morals so that one can escape the illusion of this imaginary world for the realness of non-existence. Jesus does, superficially, also teach the wisdom in escaping this world for the next, but He does not deny the realness of this world, nor does He teach that what follows this is nothingness.

Part of the timelessness of the Ancient Philosophers is the fact that they were made with the idea of a constantly changing world. Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is still read by those whose profession involves conflict (especially the military and corporate professions) while Aristotle's idea of Eudaimonia is present today in the popularized phrase "Don't forget to be awesome!" Their philosophies withstood the test of time because they embraced the changes the world goes through and were not restricted to cultural norms. They were written with the idea that this journey would never end, only that the travelers would change over the years. But, again alone of all the great philosophers, the teachings of and about Jesus all focus on how the journey must end.

As early as the third chapter of the first book in the Bible, we see a prophecy of the death of Jesus. Death searched for Jesus just days after his birth, and we see many written accounts of how Jesus eluded Death until the proper time. Jesus's teachings all pointed to His death, directly or indirectly. About half of the writing covering His public ministry takes place as He knowingly heads to Jerusalem for his execution. By seeing the end, the philosophies of Jesus had something no other great philosopher had: a purpose. Jesus was not trying to distract His followers with things to occupy their

minds until they died; He wanted them to think about what death would lead to. The teachings of Jesus were not open-ended; they had a specific goal in mind.

But perhaps the most amazing of all that has been said here is how well the Gospels captured all this, especially the Gospel of Saint John the Beloved. As a known disciple of Jesus, Saint John wrote of firsthand experiences, yet identified himself in the gospel account in the third person. We see Saint John placing himself to be witness to the actual trial of Jesus: Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Now the other disciple was known to the high priest, and he entered the courtyard of the high priest with Jesus. (John 18:15) For this reason, we can look at the following well-known exchange of words between Jesus and Pontius Pilate:

So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38).

I don't know if Saint John recognized this particular significance or not, but as a scribe for God it does not matter as his writing was guided by the Holy Spirit. We see in this scripture Pilate speaking for the Western Philosophers by asking "What is truth?" when Truth is standing there before him. And if we look at Matthew's account of what happened shortly afterwards (and this is a credible account because there would have been thousands of witnesses to it), we see Pilate speaking for the Eastern philosophies: When Pilate saw that he was not succeeding at all, but that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. *Look to it yourselves.*" (Matthew 27:24, italics mine). Rather than face the realities of the world, he sought to escape them. In all likelihood, Pilate and Matthew were ignorant of the significance of this statement. But if Jesus was who He said He was, then the Holy Spirit which moved Matthew to pen those words was certainly *not* ignorant of the parallel.

If we take an honest look at the great philosophers, then we see that the Dark taught man how to either distract himself in this life or to escape into nothingness, while the Light taught man how to use this life to prepare for the next life. It is only by standing in the Penumbra that one can possibly confuse Jesus as just another great philosopher.

Christianity has not been a failure. It has been so successful that it is almost impossible to imagine what this world would be like without it. Even the most devout Christian often takes the Penumbra for granted. Satan has waged one of his most successful campaigns by convincing Christian and non-Christian alike that Christianity is merely just another aspect of this world. We assume the Penumbra is a natural state and fail to recognize what it is: a blend of Light and Dark. But the gray will not last forever and the Light and the Dark will finally separate for good. When it does, the reality of each will be plain for all to see. One would be wise to know which side does what.

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