

The Zen Socrates Archetype and the Priority of the Unanswerable Question

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Abstract : Socrates and Zen Buddhism are separated by time, distance, and cultures in a way that it is unlikely that they influenced each other. And yet the two have an amazing similarity in the principle that paradoxical and unanswerable questions can be a form of wisdom that produces a healthy psyche. Both have a sense that the limit of human awareness is a wisdom of this uncertainty. Both are at odds with the dogma of answers and of a western rationality that prioritizes the answer. Both have enigmatic answers that perpetuate the question. Both use the form of a dialogue of interaction with mutual illumination rather than the form of a lecture to passive recipients. If these premises are true, Socrates and Zen Buddhism has elements in common that reflect basic human needs for a good life. It can be argued that there is a joint archetypal experience of the wisdom of uncertainty and unanswerable questions in Socrates and Zen Buddhism.

Keywords : zen buddhism, socrates, unanswerable questions, aporia

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