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Rodney Stark on Why There Are No Theologians in the East

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Rodney Stark, whose newest book, *The Victory of Reason*, is excerpted in Sunday's edition of *The New York Times*, provides a brilliant analysis of the most basic difference between the East and the West on the question of theology:

To fully appreciate the nature of theology, it is useful to explore why there are no theologians in the East. Consider Taoism. The Tao is conceived of as a supernatural essence, an underlying mystical force or principle governing life, but one that is impersonal, remote, lacking consciousness, and definitely not a being. It is the "eternal way," the cosmic force that produces harmony and balance. According to Lao-tzu, the Tao is "always nonexistent" yet "always existent," "unnamable" and the "name that can be named." Both "soundless and formless," it is "always without desires." One might meditate forever on such an essence, but it offers little to reason about. The same applies to Buddhism and Confucianism. Although it is true that the popular versions of these faiths are polytheistic and involve an immense array of small gods (as is true of popular Taoism as well), the "pure" forms of these faiths, as pursued by the intellectual elite, are godless and postulate only a vague divine essence-Buddha specifically denied the existence of a conscious God. The East lacks theologians because those who might otherwise take up such an intellectual pursuit reject its first premise: the existence of a conscious, all-powerful God.

Well said, and worth saying. I'll post a review of Stark's book in coming days.

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