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THERAVĀDA BUDDHIST ETHICS

Wit Wisadavet

Among philosophical circles there are two fundamental ethical questions which are a focus of interest for philosophers of various schools. The first is the question of the supreme objective in life; the second is the question of what is to be used as a gauge for good and evil actions, for deciding which actions are right and which are wrong. We will be examining the Buddhist perspective on these two questions.

The supreme objective in life

According to the Buddhist view the objective of life can be looked at from two perspectives: the negative and the positive. The negative perspective is the escape from suffering. The positive perspective is attainment of happiness. People tend to look on Buddhism in the sense of escaping suffering, which is the negative perspective. This perspective arises from the core teaching of Buddhism, the four noble truths, which deal with the presence of suffering, the cause of suffering, the state of cessation of suffering, and the way for attaining the cessation of suffering. Thus it seems that Buddhism stresses suffering, which, while true in a sense, is not the whole truth, as we shall see.

Buddhism believes that suffering arises from people not seeing things as they really are, according to their true nature. According to Buddhism human beings create the world by giving value and meaning to things. Once they have given meaning to a something, people expect that thing to proceed a certain way. But things fare according to their own nature and are not within our capacity to control completely. When they do not fare as we wish them to we experience disappointment and suffering. While human beings are able to control things in some areas, our desires are endless, so we assign meanings to the world endlessly and impatiently expect things from the world. So human suffering arises repeatedly.

The important agent for our giving meaning to the things of the world, which eventually causes us to suffer, is *taṇhā*. *Taṇhā* means wanting, but it is not all kinds of wanting. When someone is thirsty and wants to drink water, or is cold and wants to put on a coat, this is not *taṇhā*. It may be

called a natural need. *Arahants*, who are done with *taṇhā*, can have such wants. It is said that an *arahant* is one with few wants (*appiccho*). The wanting that is *taṇhā* is wanting that is not in accordance with nature, or that is excessive, such as feeling cold and wanting not just a coat but an expensive and beautiful one. We conceive *taṇhā* when there is greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) in the mind. These three motivations are expressions of the one thing, and that is the feeling that there is an *I* or self. Greed (*lobha*) is the desire to have something that is not one's right or which is beyond one's capacity. It arises because of the feeling that things have to be 'mine.' Anger arises because of the feeling that the *I* is being hurt or criticized. Delusion arises because there is the feeling that there is an *I* that knows and is everything. Thus if we were to speak more profoundly we would have to say that suffering arises from giving meaning to the world, and that giving meaning to the world is the work of *taṇhā*. Ultimately *taṇhā* arises from the feeling that 'this is me.' The transcendence of suffering can only arise when this feeling is destroyed, and that happens when we see things according to the truth.[1]

Buddhism teaches not only escaping from suffering, but also experiencing happiness, but it lays emphasis on suffering because before one can experience happiness it is necessary to transcend suffering. A man with a toothache suffers. If he applies medicine and the pain goes way this does not mean he is happy, but only that he has escaped the suffering. But once his toothache is healed and he can read a favorite book, then he can be said to experience happiness.

Philosophers of almost every school will agree that the most valuable thing in life is happiness, but different schools have different ideas of what happiness is. Buddhism teaches that happiness is what is of value in life, but happiness in the Buddhist understanding contains aspects that are both similar to and different from other schools. Buddhism divides the levels and kinds of happiness in many different ways,[2] but regardless of the kind of classification they encompass the same meaning. Here I will

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[1] See Wit Wisadavet, 'Treatment of anattā in the suttas,' *Research Journal*, Chulalongkorn University, June 2519, pp. 91-105.

[2] See Phra Rājavaramunī, *Buddhadhamma* (Bangkok: Mahāchulālongkorn University Press, 1986), p. 565.

divide happiness according to the Buddhist threefold classification: (1) sensual happiness; (2) *jhāna* happiness; (3) *nibbāna* happiness.

Kāmasukha: sensual happiness

Most unenlightened beings (*puthujjana*) have some *taṇhā*, more or less. Their having *taṇhā* causes them to attribute meanings to the world and place expectations in it. Sometimes they get what they want and experience happiness, but sometimes they are disappointed and experience suffering. The happiness that arises in this way is physical or material. It is called *kāmasukha* (sensual happiness) and broadly speaking it may be said to encompass social kinds of happiness, such as rank and honor, the pleasure of friendship, etc. They are all experiences of happiness from things in the world outside the person (i.e., material objects, plants, animals and fellow humans). If the experience of happiness from the outside world is allowed to go unchecked, it becomes suffering. Being excessively engrossed in and abandoned to this kind of happiness not only puts oneself in a state of inability to experience happiness again, but also causes unrest in society, leading to contention, exploitation and injustice. Society may fall into such a state of turmoil that no one has a chance to experience this kind of happiness.

A country's laws may help to prevent this state of turmoil, but laws can only help to an extent. They may be able to prevent other people from snatching away the food we are eating, but they cannot force them to give us food when we are hungry and have nothing to eat. Laws cannot make people friendly to each other or respect each other. These things arise from principles of practice other than laws. However, the most important thing that laws cannot give us is an inner state of mind that is conducive to the experience of sensual happiness. As a simple example, people whose minds are constantly prey to envy, to covetousness, or to thoughts of revenge will have no chance to experience happiness from the outside world.

Buddhism teaches that the experience of sensual happiness can only proceed smoothly when people have morality (*sīla*). The elementary level of morality is the five precepts: not destroying life, not wrongfully taking things belonging to others, not telling lies, not committing sexual

misconduct and not taking intoxicants. These five precepts are elementary training rules that minimize the obstacles to enjoying sensual happiness. If the 'five dhammas' are also practiced, those obstacles are reduced even further. The five dhammas are having goodwill and kindness, making a living honestly, constraining and controlling oneself in respect to sensual pleasures, being honest, and having mindfulness and heedfulness at all times.

Buddhism does not see the enjoyment of happiness from the outside world, or sensual happiness, as an evil; it merely states that there are higher kinds of happiness.[3] There are many levels on which sensual happiness can be experienced. If it is enjoyed immorally or deludedly it will lead to more suffering than happiness. If it is enjoyed morally, not harming others, with restraint and moderation, always bearing in mind that enjoyment of sensual happiness entails a mixture of both happiness and suffering, then when one is disappointed one can accept that disappointment as only natural, and when one is successful one does not become inflated over it. If one can practice in this way sensual happiness is not an evil, but something of value to unenlightened beings. The highest level of enjoyment of sensual happiness is enjoying only enough to enable life to proceed comfortably in order to seek the higher levels of happiness—but this may not be sensual happiness at all.

The Buddhist view on material happiness is a middle way between two extreme views. The first is the view of the religious ascetics in India in the Buddha's time, who believed that in order to attain the highest state it was necessary to discard the body and thereby more easily purify the mind. The Buddha had used the method of self-mortification but found that it was not the way to reach truth. The Buddha's disciples were often denigrated by other groups of renunciants as not truly pure because they did not denounce the body. The other extreme is the view of ordinary people who see pleasures of the flesh as the highest happiness, and believe that we should search for as much of them as we can. This too is not the way to truth. The Buddha walked the middle way, not abandoning himself

[3] Tipiṭaka: 13/398. (The *Tipiṭaka* used by the author in this paper is the *Royal Thai* version; the first number refers to the volume and the second number refers to the passage-*editor*.)

to sensual happiness, and not seeing the body as a prison binding the mind as some religions and philosophical schools believed.

Jhānasukha: the happiness of absorption

While sensual happiness is not an evil, it is a coarse and ephemeral form of happiness. Devas enjoy sensual happiness in the heaven realms, but even though the happiness of the heaven realms is so refined and exalted, it is not as subtle as the next level of happiness. The objects that provide sensual happiness are limited in number: there is not enough for everyone, so contention and argument follow.

> On account of sensual pleasures, king contends with king, brahmin contends with brahmin... mother contends with son, son contends with mother... father contends with son, son contends with father... friend contends with friend...[4]

Awareness of moderation in the search for sensual happiness has a good effect both on society and on oneself. The next level of happiness up from sensual happiness is the happiness of the absorptions (*jhāna*). It may be called mental happiness. *Jhāna* translates as 'stare,' referring to the state of mind that has reached a certain level of concentration (*samādhi*). *Jhāna* happiness is the frontier between sensual happiness and the happiness of *nibbāna*, which is the highest kind of happiness. *Jhāna* happiness does not arise from contact through the five senses, or enjoyment of the five sense pleasures (forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches). It is a happiness that is not tainted with suffering like sensual happiness. *Jhāna* happiness arises from the cultivation of the mind known as meditation practice. The mind that has developed concentration up to the level of absorption (*jhāna*) has temporarily escaped from defilements and craving (if the escape is final it is called *nibbāna*). It is characterized by peace, serenity, clarity and the power to attain the highest level of truth.

In the mental training leading up to the attainment of *jhāna* it is necessary to overcome five important obstacles (known as the five *nīvaraṇa* or hindrances). They are 1. *kāmachanda*, desire for this and that; 2. *byāpāda*, anger and resentment; 3. *thīnamiddha*, dullness and depression; 4. *uddhaccakukkucca*, restlessness and anxiety; and 5.

[4] Tipiṭaka: 12/198.

vicikicchā, doubt and uncertainty about the results of one's practice. When the five hindrances have been given up and the mind is clear, there arises a feeling of mental satiation, which is directly opposite to physical satiation. It is a purely mental kind of well-being independent of sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tangible sensations. The person who shakes off the five hindrances is compared to a person who has recovered from an illness: he is stronger and ready to work for the higher kind of happiness. *Jhāna* happiness may be called the happiness that arises from concentration, as it what results when concentration is developed to a certain level.

Jhāna happiness is similar to sensual happiness in that it still requires certain conditions to provide feelings. Feeling is called *vedanā* and it arises when the mind cognizes certain objects. The things the mind cognizes are called *ārammaṇa*. Sensual happiness is the pleasant feeling (*sukhavedanā*) that arises from cognizing *ārammaṇa* in the form of sights, tastes, smells, sounds and tangibles; i.e., the physical sensations. *Jhāna* happiness is also a feeling (*vedanā*), a pleasant feeling (*sukhavedanā*), just like sensual happiness. It differs in that its object (*ārammaṇa*) is mental objects (*dhammārammaṇa*): not physical sensations but thoughts, mental images, or mental states. *Jhāna* happiness has two levels. The initial level has 'materiality' (*rūpadhamma*) as object. It is the happiness that arises from concentrating on the in and out breaths, for example. The higher level has immaterial objects as object. It is the happiness that arises from concentration on emptiness, for example. (In some cases mental objects can also be objects of sensual happiness.) While *jhāna* happiness is not the happiness that results from material things, it still requires certain objects (even if they are not material), and so it can still be cause for clinging (*upādāna*). Thus it is not the highest kind of happiness.

Nibbānasukha: the happiness of nibbāna

Buddhism holds *nibbāna* to be the highest or supreme happiness (*paramasukha*).[5] *Nibbāna* is an experience that each person must have for him- or her-self. One who attains it may describe it to others, but one's listeners have no way of knowing what one experienced. Even so, the

[5] Tipiṭaka: 25/25.

Buddha did talk about this experience and it is related in the *Tipiṭaka*. Scholars, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, have interpreted these passages in all sorts of ways, but there are a number of core points to these interpretations.

Nibbāna is usually explained as cessation, here meaning the cessation of *taṇhā*, craving, or *upādāna*, clinging. The Buddha sometimes explained *nibbāna* as the state in which desire (*rāga*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*)[6] come to cessation. When a person still has desire, aversion and delusion, this creates clinging. Clinging is what causes people to create the world by giving it meanings and values, as already stated. The world is not seen as it actually is. *Nibbāna* is seeing the world as it actually is rather than as we would want it to be. Controlling the defilement of craving enables people to see the world as it is:

> He who realizes all worlds, knows all worlds as they actually are, separates himself from the world, has no defilements in the world, controls all mental states and has thrown off all defilements is one who experiences *nibbāna*, which is the highest peace...[7]

The phrase 'separates himself from the world' does not mean that in order to attain *nibbāna* one must close one's eyes and ears and refuse to know anything about the outside world. There is still awareness of the outside world, but it is awareness that is without desire, aversion and delusion, as in, for instance, 'seeing a form with the eye he is not delighted or offended but abides in equanimity though mindfulness and clear comprehension.'[8] It is seeing with impartiality, not anger, greed or delusion. Greed, anger and delusion arise as a result of clinging to a self (*attā*), attaching a self to everything. For example, one donates money to a charitable cause because one hopes that one's name will be printed in the newspaper. When one does not see it one is disappointed. This is because the donation was made with self. If the donation was made simply to help one's fellows without any expectation of anything in return, not seeing one's name in the paper would not cause suffering. This is 'separating

[6] Tipiṭaka: 18/497.
[7] Tipiṭaka: 21/23.
[8] Tipiṭaka: 11/429.

oneself from the world.' Separating oneself from the world, one still lives in this world but one is not attached:

> Monks, a lotus, a red lotus, a white lotus, takes root in the water, grows in the water, rises above the water, but the water does not stick to it. In the same way, the *Tathāgata* arises in the world, grows in the world, but he conquers the world. He is not stained by the world.[9]

One of the characteristics of one who attains *nibbāna* is '*nirāsa*.' Phra Rājavaramunī explains this as follows: the word literally means 'void of hope,' but actually it should rather be translated as 'beyond hope.' That is, ordinary unenlightened beings live with hope. This hope is based on desire. People who are disappointed may give up hope because they know there is no way of fulfilling their hope. Deep in their hearts they still desire that object, but they do not know how to get it. Those who are beyond hope are those who have no desires. There is nothing they need to hope for. They live without the need for hope and are perfect and contented within themselves.It is impossible for them to be disappointed.[10]

The happiness of *nibbāna* differs from sensual happiness and *jhāna* happiness in that the two latter are 'pleasant feeling' (*sukhavedanā*); that is, they are happiness in response to certain things, certain things feed them, and what feeds them is objects (*ārammaṇa*). *Jhāna* happiness feeds on mental objects (*dhammārammaṇa*), while sensual happiness depends on all kinds of objects, especially the five sense pleasures. While *jhāna* happiness is independent of material things, it can still lead to clinging. The mind is not really, wholly pure. The happiness of *nibbāna* is an experience that is not dependent on any object. It is a subtle kind of happiness perfect within itself. It is not a happiness that arises from feeding a desire or filling a lack, but a happiness that arises and exists of itself. It is an experience in and of itself, not a way of experiencing something else. It is not concerned with anything in the world, not even with the experience of emptiness, which is the purest kind of mental experience.

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[9] Tipiṭaka: 17/241.

[10] See Phra Rājavaramunī, *Buddhadhamma* (Bangkok: Mahāchulālongkorn University Press, 1986), p. 246.

Phra Rājavaramunī explains that while one who attains *nibbāna* is one who has happiness, he will not be attached to any happiness, even the happiness of *nibbāna*. When the *arahant* cognizes an external object he still experiences feeling contingent on that object, be it pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant, just like ordinary people. But he differs in that his experience of feeling is devoid of defilements. For him feeling does not lead on to craving (*taṇhā*). It is an experience of physical feeling, not mental feeling. So while the six objects may change, the *arahant* does not experience suffering.[11]

In the practice for attaining *nibbāna* there are three stages: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). Morality can enable people to experience initial happiness, but on its own it cannot lead to the attainment of *nibbāna*. Morality is a necessary provision for *nibbāna*, but it is not enough. That is, without morality it is not possible to proceed to *nibbāna*, but morality alone is not enough to take one there. Morality helps to make the mind normal and prime it for the development of concentration, but concentration on its own, again, does not lead to *nibbāna*. It can bring only *jhāna* happiness. The final stage for attaining *nibbāna* is wisdom. Concentration prepares the mind to use wisdom to contemplate things as they really are, to see with insight (*vipassanā*).

Attainment of *nibbāna* is not absorption with God because *nibbāna* is not God. *Nibbāna* did not create the world and does not support the world in a moral sense or in terms of its continuation. *Nibbāna* is not an 'entity,' not a material or mental object. Devas and hell beings are 'entities.' Even though ordinary people cannot see them, people who have developed concentration to a certain level can see them. *Nibbāna* cannot be seen with the divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*), but it can be seen with the wisdom eye (*paññācakkhu*). Thus *nibbāna* is not an entity as are heaven and hell.

In the *suttas* certain words are used to describe *nibbāna* which may lead to the conception that *nibbāna* is a metaphysical entity. For example it is said that *nibbāna* has the characteristics of being *abhūta* (unchanging), *akata* (uncreated), *ajāta* (unborn), and *amata* (undying).[12] These words

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 248.
[12] Tipiṭaka: 25/159.

invite us to think of *nibbāna* as something eternal, uncreated, existing of itself, not born from anything and continuing on, i.e., not dying. The *Abhidhamma* texts encourage even more the understanding that *nibbāna* is a metaphysical entity in its division of ultimate realities (*paramattha-dhamma*) into four categories: materiality (*rūpa*), mind (*citta*), mental concomitants (*cetasika*), and *nibbāna*,[13] inviting the deduction that *nibbāna* is an ultimate reality.

However explanations occurring in other parts of the *Tipiṭaka* do not at all invite the deduction that *nibbāna* is a metaphysical entity. The descriptions of *nibbāna* given above are more likely to be referring to the non returning of one who attains *nibbāna* to be born or die again, since he has transcended the cycle of *saṃsāra*. The term *nibbāna* is used to describe the state of the mind having utterly transcended craving and clinging. It is a state in which the mind experiences certain things which cannot be experienced in a life for which happiness means merely the fulfilling of desires. *Nibbāna* may be said to be a psychological state—not one that ordinary unenlightened beings know of, but one experienced only by those who have developed their minds to a certain level.

Summarizing, the objective of life according to Buddhism is to develop the attainment of happiness as far as one can from the lower levels up to the highest. People who are living with morality have a certain level of happiness, the development of concentration yields a subtler kind of happiness, and ultimately the use of wisdom yields the highest kind of happiness.

Comparison with Western philosophy

Western philosophy has many different ideas on the highest value in life, but they can be divided into two main groups: those who search for what is of value in the outside world, and those who search for what is of value internally. Within the first group are the Romantics who believe that emotion is of the highest value, that emotion is more important than reason because it is conducive to individual expression, that good and evil are conventional realities, and that freedom of expression without

[13] Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, Division I.

constraints is a good thing. We can clearly see that this kind of thinking is far removed from Buddhism.

Another school of the first group is the hedonists, who hold that happiness, especially physical happiness, is of the highest value, that human beings all seek happiness and it is impossible for them to seek anything else. Some of the important thinkers in this group, such as Mill, tried to divide happiness into low and high levels, i.e., physical and mental happiness, but they stated that the higher level, mental happiness, was higher than the lower happiness because it was more stable, safer, and more economical, in which case the difference between the two is merely a superficial one, not a substantial one. Thus happiness in Mill's view would correspond with the sensual happiness of the Buddhist interpretation, and hedonism is also very different from Buddhism.

Among those who sought happiness internally is the school known as the Stoics. They believed that mental happiness was the most valuable thing in life, that peace of mind did not arise from struggling to find desire objects but from quenching the desire itself, and that people should master their minds. If they are still deluded by external things and tie themselves too tightly to them they will experience only disappointment. Happiness and suffering are in the mind. External objects cannot really do anything to us if our minds are strong. Thus if thieves burgle our home and we suffer, we should not be angry at the thieves but at ourselves for not being able to prevent ourselves from feeling sad at our loss.

This idea is very similar to Buddhism. The Stoics differ in that they taught people to separate themselves from desire and that was all. They did not offer a different kind of experience that people could obtain. That is, their teaching went only so far as the negative aspect of experience, it did not deal with the positive aspect. In Buddhism, however, human beings are capable of experiencing two higher levels of happiness: *jhāna* happiness and *nibbāna* happiness, the happiness arising from concentration and the happiness arising from wisdom. Peace, according to the Stoics, while entailing fleeing material things, was nevertheless related to them. The *jhāna* happiness and *nibbāna* happiness of Buddhism, on the other hand, are new, a different kind of psychological experience, quite different from the normal kind.

In this second group are the 'intellectuals,' a term which may be used to refer to views that are Aristotelian in nature. Aristotle stated that what is of value in life is happiness, which may be divided into three levels. The first level is creature happiness, the happiness arising from eating and sleeping. The second level is human happiness, the happiness people obtain from living together in a society, such as friendship, honor, shows of bravery and expressions of justice. According to Buddhism, these are both included within sensual happiness.

Aristotle called the highest level of happiness 'higher vision,' meaning realization. It is the vision that arises from pure wisdom, not the knowledge used for seeking the first two kinds of happiness. It is a 'rest' obtained through wisdom, not physical or mental rest taken in order to continue activity refreshed, which is rest with an ulterior objective. Higher vision is true rest in and of itself with no ulterior objective. It is the enjoyment of happiness for its own sake, an experience that is perfect within itself, requiring nothing else for its support. Aristotle called higher vision 'celestial happiness.' [14]

Aristotelian happiness is very close to *jhāna* happiness and *nibbāna* happiness in Buddhism, and it would be very difficult for someone without experience of both to say whether they were the same or different. They are similar in that the *jhāna* happiness of Buddhism is a way of resting for those who have developed concentration up to a certain level. *Nibbāna* and *higher vision* are both 'seeing' with wisdom, experiences that are perfect within themselves requiring no support from anything else. But where they do differ is that Buddhism organizes and analyzes methods for attaining this point in detail, while Aristotle does not give any method, believing that whenever there was a search for truth for its own sake, with no ulterior motive, this is searching for higher vision.

Criteria for actions

Regarding Buddhist criteria for judging whether actions should or should not be done, whether they are good or evil, it can be broadly said that good action is any action that arises from the roots of skillfulness

[14] Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle* (London: Penguin Books, 1956), pp. 303-309.

(*kusalamūla*) of non-greed, non-anger, and non-delusion, which render the mind clear, pure, calm and untroubled, while evil actions are actions that arise from the roots of unskillfulness (*akusalamūla*) of greed, hatred and delusion, which render the mind troubled, agitated, unclear and impure.[15] These are the basic criteria. There are other factors that need to be taken into account as will be discussed presently. The author feels that if the Buddhist view on the subject is compared with the views of a number of well-known philosophers it will be more clearly seen.

Buddhism and Kant

The world's most eminent ethicist is the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). His ethical idea is very similar to, but not quite the same as, the Buddhist view. He felt that the most valuable thing in life was not happiness (by which he meant what Buddhism refers to as *kāmasukha*), but morality or good actions. Good actions must never arise from emotion, regardless of whether it is positive or negative. To help a person in need out of pity is not a morally good action because pity is an emotion. Morally good actions must arise from reason and wisdom. A person who acts on wisdom is one who completely shakes off his emotions, instincts and self interests and holds to the moral law. Kant's moral law is 'Follow the principle that you would wish to see as a universal law.' This means that in deciding to do something one must adhere to some kind of principle as a guideline. If when doing that action one would wish the principle to which one is adhering to be followed by everyone, the action is right, but if one wishes to follow that principle alone the action is wrong. If one were the supervisor of a certain job and one helped one of one's relatives to gain a position there, knowing full well that one's relative was not as good as another person, adhering to the principle 'Help your relatives fair or foul,' then this is a wrong action because it is not possible that one would want this principle to be followed by everyone. One would want other people to follow the principle 'Fairness tales precedence over relatives and partisanship.'

Kant and Buddhism are the same in that both are 'absolutist.' Absolutism is the idea that an action is good or evil not because of the

[15] See Phra Rājavaramunī, *Buddhadhamma*, pp. 162-180.

results it leads to, but because it conforms with certain fixed and absolute criteria. As soon as the action is done it can be determined as good or evil without having to wait to see whether its results are good or bad. In this sense, theistic religions are absolutist in that good actions are actions that conform with the decree of God. God and his decrees are fixed and absolute, they do not change with time and place. Kant's philosophy was absolutist because he saw good actions as actions that conformed to the moral law, and the moral law is fixed and absolute since it was not thought up by human beings to fit a certain time. It is rather a law that conforms with the core of human nature, which is wisdom. Wisdom is the true element of all human beings, even though different people use it to different degrees.

Buddhism is absolutist in that the three roots of skillfulness and the three roots of unskillfulness are the fixed and absolute criteria for judging actions. To say that the three roots of skillfulness are criteria for judging actions is tantamount to saying that *nibbāna* is the criterion for judging

Actions that lead to *nibbāna* can be called good actions, while actions that lead away from *nibbāna* can be called bad actions. *Nibbāna* is *akāliko*, beyond time. While *nibbāna* is not a metaphysical entity, it is a state that has a fixed nature. It does not change according to people's feelings and thoughts. In regard to the results of actions, while Buddhism does not take results to be a principle for judging action, they should be taken into consideration (as will be discussed below). As for Kant, results do not come into the consideration at all.

Societies of different times and places may have different laws, customs and traditions. They reward actions that conform to these conventions and punish actions that oppose them. These rewards or punishments may be physical, mental or social. While people living in different societies may have different social lives, they are all people just the same. As people they live under the same moral law—that people who do things without greed, hatred and delusion are clear, their minds are pure and conducive to the attainment of *nibbāna*, so their actions are said to be good, while people who do things with minds full of greed, hatred and delusion are confused, their minds are impure and not conducive to attaining *nibbāna*, so their actions are wrong.

A society's morality may or may not conform with natural moral law. The things a society deems to be good may lead to mental impurity, make people more agitated and more contentious and lead to an increase in greed, hatred and delusion. If that is so, then they are good according to that society but wrong according to the natural moral law. For example, while drinking alcohol is approved of by society, it has a negative effect on the mind and so is wrong. Sometimes social conventions conform with moral laws: theft, for instance, is wrong both socially and morally. Wrong actions are always wrong, whether their perpetrators are aware or not that they are doing something wrong. In the *Milindapañhā* the question is asked: who will incur the most wrong between a person who does something knowing that it is wrong and knowing its consequences, and another person who does not know. The answer is given that the person who does not know incurs more wrong. This seems odd because a person who breaks the law may be granted leniency if he does not know it. However, such matters cannot be compared with social laws. They must be compared with natural reality:

> There is a ball of iron that has been fired red hot. One person knows that it is red-hot iron, another person does not know: if both of those people were made to take hold of the red-hot iron ball, which of them would grasp it more tightly and be burned by it more severely?
>
> Would the person who knew grasp it firmly? Only the one who did not know would grasp it fully, and so he would be more severely burned.
>
> In the same way... one who does not know that actions are wrong and how much harm there is in them has no compunction and may do fully as he wishes. He can commit even very evil deeds, unaware that in doing them he must receive a dire result... For this reason I say that the one who does not know incurs more wrong.[16]

According to Buddhism whatever people do they must receive the consequences, regardless of what they or society feels about it. Right and wrong are fixed and absolute. Another point on which Buddhism and Kant have very similar views is the idea that one who does good actions is one who has transcended the view 'I and mine,' as already stated. For Kant, the person who does good is one who is fully prepared to have the

[16] Milindapañhā (Thai Version), pp. 107-108.

principle he adheres to in doing that action become a principle for all people. We could say that he is prepared to have his personal principle for action become a universal principle. The wrong doer wants a special privilege; he wants to see the principle to which he holds apply only to himself, and a different principle apply to other people. Kant's view therefore reduces one's own sense of self-importance, reducing one's 'self' to equal status with others.

In Buddhism human actions have two kinds of motivations. The first is the three roots of unskillfulness (greed, anger, delusion), the second is the three roots of skillfulness (non-greed, non-anger, non-delusion). Actions arising from the roots of unskillfulness are actions performed under the ontrol of the feeling of self:

> For any action that is led by greed, arisen from greed, has greed as cause, has greed as source, the state of self in that action arises and the action produces results. When results arise, the doer experiences the results of that action... for any action that is led by aversion... for any action that is led by delusion... a state of self arises in that action...[17]

Greed, anger, and delusion lead to the feeling of self. These three motivations for action cannot be separated from the self or 'me.' Greed has 'me' as a supporting base, anger has 'me' at its core, and delusion is the foolishness and delusion in 'me.' Greed, anger and delusion are thus merely three different expressions of 'me.' Actions that are free of greed, anger and delusion 'attain to cessation, are uprooted and made like a palm tree stump, with no chance of arising again.' This means that they lead to escape from the cycle of *saṁsāra* and ultimately to *nibbāna*. Thus we can interpret wrong actions as actions entailing a self, and right actions as actions done without a self. Those who do the highest good are those who see with right wisdom as it is that 'that is not mine, I am not that, that is not my self.' Buddhism and Kant are similar on this point only partly. Kant believed in a God and that human beings had an immortal soul. He did not teach *anattā* (not-self) as does Buddhism. According to Buddhism not-self is a natural reality, but most people are deluded. They must come back to the reality. Kant's idea may lead to the problem of, since there is a

[17] Tipiṭaka: 20/473.

self, how it can be reduced, but the problem is beyond the scope of this article.

An interesting point to be considered in regard to Buddhism and Kant is the role of wisdom in morality. Kant believed that human beings possessed two motivations for deeds, wisdom and impulse, the latter referring to instinct, self interests and character traits created by learning and environmental influences. As long as human beings live under the domination of the impulses they will not conduct themselves according to moral laws, but once they have transcended those impulses they will conduct themselves according to wisdom, which will cause everyone to see harmoniously in regard to right and wrong. There are two motivations in Buddhism also (each of them further divided into three):

> Monks, there are three conditions that cause the arising of deeds. Greed is a source of deeds, aversion is a source of deeds, delusion is a source of deeds... There are another three conditions that cause the arising of deeds. Non-greed is a source of deeds, non-aversion is a source of deeds, non-delusion is a source of deeds...[18]

The first kind of motivation is the three roots of unskillfulness. The second kind of motivation is the three roots of skillfulness. The roots of unskillfulness, which are greed, anger and delusion, can be compared with the impulse of Kant. Buddhists call them base human impulses or defilements (*kilesa*). The roots of unskillfulness arise from ignorance (*avijjā*) and clinging to the self. They are the impulses that lack rational reflection. The three roots of skillfulness are wisdom, which Buddhism holds to be an important human potential capable of continuous development to ultimate attainment of *nibbāna*.

The point of difference is that for Kant wisdom is something given to human beings by nature to use for opposing the impulses. Morality is a state of friction between wisdom and the impulses. Moral actions must involve resistance between the two motivations in which wisdom is the winning side. Actions in which there is no resistance between the two motivations have no moral value. For instance, when a man forces himself to help an enemy in distress, this shows that wisdom has successfully resisted the impulses. If he were to act according to his impulses he would

[18] Tipiṭaka: 20/473.

have left his enemy to be destroyed. His conscience of right and wrong was awakened, causing him to reflect that people should help each other. But suppose there was another person who, be it through natural gift or through training, always helped his fellows, no matter who they were. For him helping an enemy would be a natural action. There would be no resistance between what he should do and what he wanted to do. In this case, Kant would regard the action as having no moral value.[19] It is like rain falling naturally—we need not praise it when it enables us to plant things or damn it when it causes a flood.

In Buddhism, the ideal person, the one who has attained *nibbāna*, has gone beyond resistance between the roots of skillfulness and the roots of unskillfulness. That the roots of unskillfulness do not come to harass him, and the roots of skillfulness are the leaders of his actions, are natural. His liberation is absolute. Phra Rajāvaramunī writes that one who has attained *nibbāna* "has true selflessness of a kind that is a natural product of having destroyed clinging to the self with the wisdom that sees the true nature of things... Since it is a manifestation that arises naturally, he can act selflessly without having to force himself."[20]

In fact the ideas of Buddhism and Kant may not be as different as they seem to be. Kant may not have believed that his hypothetical person—one who from birth would help all people (even enemies) without having to force himself—could actually exist. Buddhism may not believe that a person could be that way from birth, but it does believe that a person is capable of training himself to a level where he no longer has to force himself, and goodness becomes his very nature. Kant probably believed that among ordinary people there would be none who could go beyond the level of having to resist, because if there were such a person Kant would see him as a loving God.

Kant held this resistance or forcing to be suffering. Nature provides human beings with wisdom as well as the base impulses. For Kant, the fact that nature provided human beings with wisdom shows that nature did

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[19] Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York: The Little Library of Liberal Arts, 1941), pp. 15–16.

[20] Phra Rājavaramunī, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 274.

not intend human beings to be happy.[21] Nature wanted human beings to be "moral creatures." The thing of highest value in life is not happiness, be it physical or mental, but to be a moral creature, to be someone who has a constant sense of right and wrong, good and evil. When people follow the desires of their impulses they are happy, but wisdom is the "spanner in the works" that resists the impulses, and that resistance sometimes causes people to suffer. In real life, a good person need not be happy. For this reason Kant went on to believe that God must exist, and consciousness (soul) must be immortal, because if this were not so the good person and happiness, which should go together, would never meet.

Buddhism states that a good person will experience happiness, here meaning mental happiness. A good person is one who is motivated by wisdom or skillful roots. Such a person will be clear in mind. Buddhism calls the person who conquers craving with wisdom a "self-conqueror." He is one who has mental happiness, with mind calm and untroubled. Kant goes too far with his idea that resistance is suffering. Conquering one's own mind leads to a certain kind of mental happiness. Kant also differs in that he views wisdom as a cause for people attaining virtue and morality, which for him are the most excellent things in life, but for Buddhism morality is simply a quality of elementary value. While wisdom can make people moral, it can take people further than that, to another kind of experience called *nibbāna*, which lies beyond the normal capacity of most people but is something that according to Buddhism can be attained.

Buddhism and utilitarianism

The philosopher who made utilitarianism widely known and influential on ethical thinking was the Englishman John Stuart Mill (1806–1875). His doctrine held that an action was deemable right or wrong on the basis of how many people benefited from it: the more people it benefited, the better. This is called the principle of greatest happiness. The same done in societies of different localities, or different times, or on different occasions, may benefit different numbers of people, or in one situation may lead to happiness but in another lead to suffering. Thus it is possible

[21] Immanuel Kant, *op. cit.*, pp. 12–13.

that in some situations a certain action may be deemed good, but in others deemed bad, or sometimes very good, sometimes only mildly good, depending on the happiness or suffering it produces. The doctrine of utilitarianism is therefore relativistic: unlike absolutism, which holds that deciding factors are fixed, it holds that good and evil are not fixed because of the fluctuation of determining factors.

Some parts of the Buddhist teachings invite the deduction that Buddhism is relativistic. For example, in helping others or practicing generosity, according to the Buddhist teachings the merit "that arises from giving is of different quantities. For example, if the person giving is moral, but the person receiving is not, there is only a moderate amount of merit. If neither the person giving nor the person receiving are moral, very little merit is gained. If the person giving is not moral but the person receiving is moral there is a moderate amount of merit. If both the person giving and the person receiving are moral there is a great amount of merit, like owing seeds of good quality on good earth: they will ripen into a good fruit for the sower."[22] Phra Rājavaramunī explains, with help from the Commentaries, that killing living beings carries different amounts of fault (or wrong) depending on different factors. Killing a working animal carries more fault than killing a vicious beast. To kill an *arahant* carries more fault than to kill an unenlightened being. The more effort expended in the act of killing, the more wrong is incurred. Killing with anger carries more fault than killing out of self defense. Lying carries more or less fault depending on the interests that are damaged by it, and whether it is over a major matter or a minor one. For example, if a thief asks us for our money, and we say we have none, there is only little fault incurred, but if we are a witness who gives false evidence there is much wrong incurred. Sexual violation carries more or less fault depending on the virtue of the person violated.[23]

From the above some people may come to the conclusion that Buddhism is relativistic, believing that good and evil change according to various factors, but ultimately Buddhism is absolutist. Giving to one who

[22] See Phra Sobhonkhanaphorn, *Answering Questions on Buddhism*, pp. 40–41.
[23] Phra Rājavaramunī, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 773.

is in need is always right; killing is always wrong. Other factors merely make the right or wrong weaker, just as putting a lump of salt in a river does not make the water as salty as putting the same lump into a glass of water, even though salinity does arise in the river. However, whether wrong is great or small is still open to question because we are talking about merit (*puñña*) and demerit (*pāpa*), which are concerns of the wheel of *saṁsāra*. Getting a lot of merit means being reborn in a very good destination, while gaining a lot of demerit means getting reborn in a very low destination. But in terms of Buddhism's highest destination or standard, giving with a mind that is free of greed, anger and delusion, regardless of the receiver, makes the mind pure, clear, and peaceful, and this must surely be a kind of good.

Mill, one of the most important of the utilitarian thinkers, thought that the mental motivation behind an action is of no consequence in determining the action's goodness or badness. He cited the example of a man who saves another from drowning, whose action is morally right regardless of whether his motivation was an expectation of reward or sheer humanitarianism with no thought of reward. Kant would probably regard helping through expectation of reward as merely an investment void of any moral value. Buddhism would probably agree with Kant more than Mill. Helping to get something in return is certainly not evil, but the action has arisen from an unskillful root, which in this case is the desire to get money. Thus we could not call the action truly good, and it would not have the effect of creating peace and clarity in the mind. Mill held that the deciding factor for whether an action was good or evil was the result it led to, and that result must be visible. Mental motivation is a personal attribute known only to the doer. Looking solely at the visible results of the action can allow us to argue convincingly on good and evil. For Buddhism and Kant results are dependent on the mental motivation, which is the main deciding factor on action, and motivation is something only the doer of the deed can know.

Buddhism and Hobbes

A comparison of Buddhist ethics with the thought of another philosopher may help us to more clearly understand the Buddhist position. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) posed the question "Why do we help

another person? Why do we consider the interests of others?" His answer was "for our own interests." He saw that doing things that were beneficial to others was indirectly helping oneself. If we did not help each other society would be in turmoil and we could not be happy, and when we fell on hard times no one would help us. Human beings are dominated by selfish instincts. They have to give a little otherwise they would be forced to give more. People should not be ashamed of being selfish because there is no choice.

Kant would certainly not agree with this answer. His answer was that nature provided mankind with wisdom, not so that people could take advantage of each other, but in order to suppress their instincts and become good, moral people. Wisdom helps people to see that acting according to the moral law (such as by helping one's fellows) is a way of making oneself a true person, one who is above the animals, through morality.

Mill tried to answer this question too. For Mill, the question of why we should bother to help others is an important one, because he felt that good actions were actions that were useful to the majority. He devoted the third chapter of his book *Utilitarianism* to an examination of this question. His answer was that the idea that we should help others is simply a feeling. Within human beings there is a tendency for people to help each other and live together in harmony, sharing each other's joys and tribulations. For people who do not have this feeling education may help to produce it.

Buddhism teaches to give up to others. Ordinary unenlightened beings have different motivations for actions, but "The wise (*paṇḍita*) do not give in order to obtain *upadhisukha* (happiness stained with mental defilements), but in order to eliminate defilements."[24] That is, the wise give things and help others in order to purify their minds and so bring them closer to *nibbāna*. There are those who wonder whether this is a kind of selfishness. One Western scholar, for example, felt that for Buddhism killing was wrong not because it entailed destroying another life or creating unrest in society, but because it upset the peace of mind of the

[24] Tipiṭaka: 29/825.

one who kills.[25] If we consider along these lines we will have to proceed to decide whether it is selfish to give not to help other beings but in order to help one's own mind to be peaceful and pure and lead it to *nibbāna*, which is a personal liberation.

There are passages in the texts which may induce the misunderstanding that Buddhism teaches people to give more weight to their own interests than those of others, but if such passages are read carefully such a misunderstanding will not arise. In the *Dhammapada*, for instance, there is the statement "Do not jeopardize one's own interests for the sake of another."[26] And in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* it is said that people in this world can be divided into four groups as follows: (1) Those who practice neither for their own benefit nor the benefit of others. (2) Those who practice not for their own benefit but for the benefit of others. (3) Those who practice for their own benefit but not the benefit of others. (4) Those who practice both for their own benefit and for the benefit of others. It goes on to state that the first group is of least virtue, the fourth group is of greatest virtue, while between the second and third groups, the Buddha regards (3) as better than (2).[27] It seems strange that the Buddha would teach that one who practices for one's own benefit but not for the benefit of others is better than one who practices not for his own benefit but for the benefit of others.

However, if we understand "one's own benefit" and "the benefit of others" in the Buddhist sense we will understand the problem more clearly. There are two kinds of benefit: physical and mental. Things that are of physical benefit are limited in number: one person's gain is another person's loss, or at least an obstruction to his gaining. Things that are of mental benefit are not limited. When one person gains them, others can still gain them, or at least are not obstructed from gaining them.

According to Buddhism, benefit means mental benefit, not physical benefit. The Buddha went on to explain that one who practices for his own benefit but not for the benefit of others is one who practices to eliminate greed, anger and delusion in himself but who does not encourage others to

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[25] Winston King, *In the Hope of Nibbāna*, (La Salle: Open Court, 1964), p. 72.
[26] Tipiṭaka: 25/22.
[27] Tipiṭaka: 21/95.

do so. One who does not practice for his own benefit but who practices for the benefit of others is one who does not practice to eliminate greed, anger and delusion in his own mind but encourages others to do so.[28] Thus it is not strange that the third kind of person is better than the second kind of person: how can one who does not eliminate his own defilements encourage others to do so?

One who seeks material benefit for himself contributes to other people's loss of material benefit (and perhaps, indirectly, mental benefit too), but one who seeks mental benefit for himself must give up material benefit, so he is contributing to the material benefit of others (and indirectly their mental benefit). Thus there is the fourth kind of person, one who practices for his own benefit and the benefit of others, and Buddhism regards such a person the best of all.

Translated from the Thai version by *Bruce Evans*

[28] Tipitaka: 21/96.

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A CONCEPT OF RIGHTS IN BUDDHISM

Somparn Promta

There are a number of scholars who think that Buddhism does not give teachings on the subject of rights as known in Western philosophy. The rationale for this conclusion is that the Buddhist system of morality can be seen to be based on the individual as agent (*agent*-based morality). It is not a system of morality based on demands for rights (*right*-based morality). A right-based morality utilizes the concept of rights as a gauge for judging an action as right or wrong. For example, Mr. Black steals money from Mr. Red. Mr. Black's action is wrong because it violates Mr. Red's property rights. An agent-based morality utilizes the concept of individual worth as a gauge for judging an action as good or evil. If an action raises the human worth of its agent it is a good action, and if it lowers that person's human worth, it is a bad one. In the example above, according to the agent-based morality, Mr. Black's action is wrong not because it infringes on Mr. Red's property rights, but because it lowers Mr. Black's own personal worth.

Scholars who believe that Buddhism has no teachings on rights maintain that when Buddhism deems a certain action to be immoral, it means that the action lowers our personal worth, and in deeming a certain action to be good, it means that the action raises our personal worth. Thus it may be said that the Buddhist system of morality is of the agent-based theory, not the right-based one.

All these views arise from a failure to discern that the Buddhist system of morality actually contains two superimposed systems. Before going into the various problems, I would like to begin by dividing the Buddhist system of morality into two different systems. Once this point has been clarified, the way to creating a Buddhist social philosophy will be clearer, and in the process we will find out whether it is right to state that Buddhism has no teachings on rights.

The two systems of morality in Buddhism

Buddhism looks at the human being from two perspectives. Firstly, human beings are individuals. In this sense, Buddhism believes that human

beings are under the control of natural laws known as *niyāma.*[1] Of the five *niyāma* described in Buddhist teachings, one is directly related to our discussion of morality, and that is *kammaniyāma,* the law of *kamma.* The law of *kamma* is the aspect of natural law which governs those human actions which have some ethical or moral value. It is the law that determines the results that certain actions will produce. For example, on his way home one day Mr. Green helps save a drowning child. His action in this case is one that entails a moral value. *Kammaniyāma* or the law of *kamma* determines that his action is a good one. When the action in time produces a result, with the ripening of the deed, it will be a result that is good for Mr. Green.

Thus, *kammaniyāma* is the natural law which governs all individuals insofar as their deeds (*kamma*) are concerned. Whatever a person may do, no matter when or where, if the action entails some moral value (deeds that entail some moral value are deeds that can be said to be either good or bad; deeds that cannot be determined as good or bad, such as winding up a clock, or tying one's shoe laces, are not considered to be deeds entailing moral value), the law of *kamma* will 'record' those actions and give rise to *vipāka* (result) at the appropriate time. This system of effecting results is one kind of natural cause and result process. Buddhism holds that this process works just the same as other kinds of cause and result processes in nature, such as physical cause and result (*utuniyāma*). When we smoke a cigarette we receive some repercussion from the cigarette. This is a natural law. The process of *kamma* fruition is a natural law just like the natural law governing the smoking of cigarettes (*utuniyāma*). Nature has its own systems of settlement, and the fruition of deeds in their results is one of nature's systems of settlement.

When spreading the *dhamma* the Buddha gave teachings about the law of *kamma.* In terms of the teaching, the law of *kamma* is a vast subject, but its essence can be summarized in the following passage:

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[1] Saṅyutta Nikāya, Nidānavagga. Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 16/61; Dīgha Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, vol. 2, pp. 26-27. (There are two versions of the Pāli Tipiṭaka in Thailand: the *Syāmraṭṭha Pāli Tipiṭaka* and the *Mahāchulālongkorn Pāli Tipiṭaka.* The one used by the author in this article is the *Syāmraṭṭha Pāli Tipiṭaka* and its commentaries-*editor.*)

Whatever seed a person plants,
That is the fruit he receives.
One who does good receives a good result,
one who does bad receives a bad result.[2]

Essentially, Buddhism teaches that all people have the status of individuals. As an individual, each person is obliged to take responsibility for his or her own actions. All people are conducting their lives under the control and supervision of the law of *kamma*. Thus, whatever anybody may do, and wherever they do it, if that action entails a moral value the law of *kamma* will inevitably 'record' that action, and, at the appropriate time, produce an appropriate resulting effect in accordance with the quality of the deed. If the deed is a good one, it will produce a favorable result. If the deed is bad, it will produce a detrimental result. Within good and evil there are again different levels of intensity of resultant effects, depending on the nature of the deeds that led to them.

I would like to refer to this Buddhist system of morality for individual practice as '*individual morality*.' Note that individual morality is based on the law of *kamma*, and since the law of *kamma*, like other natural laws, is absolute and unchanging, knowing no relaxation or compromise, this moral system is characterized by fixity: wrong is wrong and right is right, there are no exceptions.

Buddhism not only looks on human beings from the perspective of individuals, but also from a second perspective, as components of society. In this sense, human beings are not separate individuals but members of communities. The Buddha gave a number of teachings as guidelines which may be used as a 'handbook' for community living, and among these the most well-known among students of Buddhism is the teaching on the six directions.[3]

This teaching essentially maintains that all individuals, when living in society, must relate to six groups of people, which the Buddha compared to the six directions, as follows:

1. Parents, including grandparents and senior relatives, are compared to the forward direction.

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[2] Saṅyutta Nikāya, Sagāthavagga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 15/903.
[3] Dīgha Nikāya, Pāṭikavagga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 11/198-204.

2. Teachers and mentors are compared to the rightward direction.
3. Wife and children are compared to the rearward direction.
4. Friends and associates are compared to the leftward direction.
5. Servants, employees or subordinates are compared to the nadir.
6. Religious men or monastics of the religion one upholds are compared to the zenith.

Simply speaking, human beings must have parents, grandparents and senior relatives; they have teachers, they have children and wives or husbands; they have friends; they have subordinates or superiors; and lastly there are monks or religious persons whom they revere. People do not live alone. Even though some people may not have all six directions of relationship, they must have at least some of them, and as such they are not islands unto themselves. All six directions described by the Buddha can be seen to represent relationships between two people, and between those two people he taught the proper code of conduct for each to the other, as follows:

1. In the forward direction, parents and children (including grandparents or senior relatives and the children of the family), each side has a proper code of conduct as follows:

a. The duties of children to parents:

1. Having been raised by them, supporting them in return.
2. Helping them with their work.
3. Continuing the family line.
4. Behaving as is fitting for a family heir.
5. Performing acts of merit and dedicating the merits in their name when the parents have passed away.

b. The duties of parents to children:

1. Protecting them from evil.
2. Teaching them and establishing them in goodness.
3. Providing them with an education.
4. Arranging suitable spouses for them.
5. Bequeathing the inheritance to them at the appropriate time.

2. The rightward direction, teachers and students, have the following duties to each other:

a. The duties of a student to a teacher:

1. Rising to greet him.

2. Approaching him to serve him and receive advice.
3. Applying oneself to learning.
4. Being at the teacher's service.
5. Learning with respect.

b. The duties of a teacher to a student:

1. Training him to be a good person.
2. Teaching him so that he understands clearly.
3. Teaching him all the knowledge one has.
4. Praising him openly.
5. Providing him with a protection for when he must go out into the world (preparing the student to be able to get along in the world on his own).

3. In the rearward direction, husband and wife, each side has appropriate duties to the other as follows:

a. The duties of a husband to a wife:

1. Giving her the honor due to her station.
2. Not looking down on her.
3. Committing no adultery.
4. Giving her the authority of the household.
5. Providing her with occasional gifts of jewelry.

b. The duties of a wife to a husband:

1. Seeing that the house is kept in order.
2. Being helpful to relatives on both sides of the family.
3. Committing no adultery.
4. Protecting the wealth that her husband makes.
5. Being always diligent in her duties.

4. In the leftward direction, between friends and friends, each side has the following duties toward the other:

a. Our duties to our friends:

1. Being kind to them.
2. Speaking politely to them.
3. Conducting ourselves in a way that is beneficial to them.
4. Sticking with them in times good and bad.
5. Being faithful to them.

b. Our friends' duties to us:

1. Protecting us when we are heedless.

2. Protecting our wealth when we are heedless.
3. Being a refuge to us when we are in danger.
4. Not deserting us when we are down.
5. Respecting our relatives.

5. In the nadir, employers and employees (or superiors and subordinates), each side has appropriate duties to the other as follows:

a. The duties of an employer to his employees:
1. Giving them work commensurate with their strength and abilities.
2. Awarding them appropriate food and wages.
3. Looking after them when they are sick.
4. Sharing with them any special gains that accrue.
5. Giving them holidays from time to time.

b. The duties of an employee to an employer:
1. Rising to begin work before him.
2. Stopping work after him.
3. Taking only what is given by the employer.
4. Doing well the work appointed by the employer.
5. Spreading a good reputation of one's employer when the chance arises.

6. As to the zenith, the monastics and the lay people, each side has duties to the other as follows:

a. The duties of a layman to monk:
1. Performing any actions that affect the monks with goodwill.
2. Saying any words that affect the monks with goodwill.
3. Thinking any thoughts that affect the monks with goodwill.
4. Always opening one's door to receive them.
5. Providing them with the four supports [food, clothing, shelter and medicine].

b. The duties of a monk to a layman:
1. Protecting them from evil.
2. Teaching them and establishing them in goodness.
3. Assisting them with a benevolent mind.
4. Teaching them things they have never heard before.
5. Explaining things they have already heard.

6. Teaching them the way to heaven.[4]

The reader may have noticed that the teaching on the six directions is essentially a description of the moral obligations to be upheld by people in a society with respect to each other. Living in a complicated society, we must meet and interact with a great many people, but when we analyze our relationships down they can be reduced to the six pairs described above. Thus the teaching on the six directions describes the totality of moral obligations for people in a society.

If we were to compile the teaching on the six directions and other teachings dealing with moral obligations for people in a social context into a system of morality, the result could be called '*social morality.*' This kind of morality differs from the individual morality already described in that it is a law or schedule for supervising social behavior, unlike individual morality which serves as a schedule for supervising individual behavior.

Social morality also differs from individual morality in that it is not based on the natural law of *kammaniyāma.* It is based instead on social convention. Since it is not based on natural law, social morality is not fixed and absolute, but subject to change or modification according to time and place. Taking an example from the teaching on the six directions, specifically the section dealing with the relationship between employer and employee, the examples given in the *Tipiṭaka* are based on the social situation of those times. Nowadays society is much more complicated, and the relations between employers and employees are more complex and more abstract. We cannot demand that workers rise to work before their bosses or stop working after them. All that we can reasonably demand in today's employment situation is that workers work efficiently and use their work time to really work.

Thus the Buddha's teaching on the six directions is very broad, suitable for use and adaptation even by later generations of Buddhists in societies that differed from that of the Buddha's India. That the Buddha gave the teaching in a form that could be relaxed and adapted, opening the way for interpretation or adaptation to changing social conditions, indicates that social morality arises from the collective nomination of a society's

[4] For a detailed point-by-point explanation of the teaching on the six directions, see the *commentary* to the Dīgha Nikāya, vol. 3, pp. 144-151.

members. Even though the Buddha at first established them on his own authority, his intention to have social morality seen as a collective issue in which all people contribute their intelligence to establishing conventions appropriate to the occasion, is clear in his statements just before the *parinibbāna* (final passing away), in which he allowed the *saṅgha* (monastic Order) to in future modify any of its lesser regulations that appear to be at odds with prevailing social conditions.[5]

The relationship between the two moral systems

The Buddha's enlightenment enabled him to see that human life proceeds under the direction of natural laws. Among those natural laws there is one called the law of *kamma*. This law has the function of apportioning appropriate results for each of the actions people commit. There is no human action that escapes the supervision of this law of *kamma*. All acts of *kamma* will be 'recorded' to await the time for their fruition, regardless of whether those acts are done secretly or openly. Once the Buddha had seen into the fruition of *kamma* he taught its workings to other people. Buddhism regards understanding the law of *kamma* as of great benefit because it enables us to practice in conformity with that law. Those who understand the law of *kamma* are able to derive benefit from that law, just as people who understand the laws of nutrition are able to derive benefit from that knowledge by choosing food that is useful and avoiding food that is harmful.

The law of *kamma* teaches us that it is each individual's responsibility to supervise his own life. Once he knows that nature has its own standard based on *kamma*, it is each person's responsibility to choose those actions that lead to his own benefit and happiness. The system of morality that is based on an understanding of the law of *kamma* and people supervising themselves within that law is what I have referred to as individual morality.

The Buddha stated that this natural law governing human circumstances exists regardless of whether a Buddha arises in the world or not.[6] Expanding on this, as far as the law of *kamma* goes, regardless of whether

[5] Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāvagga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 10/141.
[6] Saṅyutta Nikāya, Nidānavagga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 16/61.

a Buddha arises to teach humanity that they are living under the supervision of the law of *kamma* or not, this law exists and quietly and constantly goes about its functions. People in ancient times who did not know of the Buddha's teaching (because Buddhism had not yet arisen) were inevitably affected by the law of *kamma*, but they did not know it. We may call this morality of the law of *kamma* an unwritten moral.system. It is unwritten in that it is a purely abstract law, 'floating,' as it were, in nature, in the wind, in the sunlight, in the forests and mountains, and in communities. Whenever someone commits an act of *kamma*, this abstract moral law has a clear and unbiased system for apportioning results appropriate to that person's action. This system is an invisible one; it cannot be experienced by the senses.[7]

Once the Buddha had begun spreading the teaching and people began to seek ordination, the monastic Order (*saṅgha*) came into existence. At first the monastic community was small and problems did not arise, but as the community grew larger problems began to arise. There was, for example, the problem of the quality of individual *saṅgha* members. At first the Buddha personally selected those who were to be ordained as monks, but as the community grew larger, and more and more people expressed a wish to join the Order, it was no longer possible for the Buddha to personally screen every candidate for admission, so he allowed a quorum of members of the Order to ordain candidates. This opened the way for people of inferior quality to gain admission into the Order, and once they were admitted problems began to arise.

It is related in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*[8] that there was one monk who hated crows. Before he became a monk he had been an archer. Around the monastery where he was staying there were many crows, and, using a bow and arrow, he shot and killed many of them. He cut off the heads of the crows he had shot and impaled them on spikes circling his hut. People reported the matter to the Buddha. After investigating and ascertaining the truth of the matter, the Buddha declared the *vinaya* regulation forbidding

[7] Dhammapada, Khuddaka Nikāya, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 25/11.
[8] Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvibhaṅga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 2/631.

monks from killing living beings, imposing a *pācittiya* offense for whoever did so.

Note that this *vinaya* rule is like all other *vinaya* rules for *bhikkhus*, (of which the Buddha established, one by one as appropriate occasion arose, a total of 227 during his time; i.e., it is a written law (by 'written' here I also include the spoken word). What is of particular note to the reader in regard to these *vinaya* rules is that the Buddha was well aware that all individuals are already subject to and supervised by the law of *kamma*. The crow-shooting monk was no exception: his killing of crows was bad *kamma* (*pāpa*), and that bad *kamma* was instantly recorded by the law of *kamma*. That monk would inevitably have to pay the karmic retribution for that act at some time in the future. Nature already has its own perfect way of punishing wrongdoers, but that is a different matter from the establishment of the *vinaya* rules. That monk held two kinds of status: the first as an individual human being, the second as a member of the monastic community. From the perspective of the first status, the law of *kamma* was already taking care of that monk's actions, but from the perspective of his second status, it was up to the monastic community to deal with, as that monk's actions also had an effect on the community. The Buddha, using his authority as head of the Order, thus established the rule forbidding monks from killing living beings. This law was established on behalf of the monastic community to serve as a standard for punishment over and above the punishment already to be expected from the natural law of *kamma*.

Summarizing so far, while for all individual human beings there is the law of *kamma* meting out rewards and penalties for their actions, since people are also members of communities, they must also take responsibility for any actions that affect the community. When we analyze the case of the monk related above, we find that: (1) He held the status of individual human being whose behavior was supervised by the law of *kamma*. His killing of crows was an individual act of *kamma*, and that *kamma* would certainly bring forth results at some future time. (2) Over and above his status as an individual, he held the status of a member of the monastic community. In this latter sense, his killing of crows also had an effect on the monastic community because it was an action that lay people would criticize. Before laying down the rule, the Buddha censured the

monk's actions as "not for the instilling of faith within those as yet unendowed with faith, or for the increase of faith in those already endowed with faith." Thus it can be seen that the main consideration in the Buddha's establishment of the *vinaya* was social, and this rationale can be seen at work in the following statement:

> For this reason, monks, I lay down the training rules for monks with the following ten objectives: 1. For the virtue of the Order; 2. for the well-being of the Order; 3. for the restraint of shameless ones; 4. for the comfort of monks of pure morality; 5. for the prevention of evil from arising in the present; 6. for the destruction of any evil that will arise in the future; 7. for the arising of faith in those as yet without faith; 8. for the increase of faith in those who have faith; 9. for the firm establishment of the true teaching; and 10. to serve as a model for fine and graceful ways.[9]

The *vinaya* is a code of morality for the Order. We may call this code of morality a written moral system. In general, any action that is determined as evil by the law of *kamma* will also be perceived as an evil by human beings. In other words, certain kinds of deeds are wrong both from the perspective of individual morality and from the perspective of social morality.

Be that as it may, some kinds of deeds, while not actually determined as an evil by the *kammaniyāma*, do have an effect on the monastic community, and for these the Buddha laid down *vinaya* rules imposing penalties on those who break them. An example of these is the *vinaya* rule against eating food after midday.[10] Members of the Order must preserve a decorum that inspires faith. Indulging in sloppy eating habits and eating playfully are not wrong according to the law of *kamma*, and a monk who eats sloppily cannot be taken as wrong from the perspective of individual morality, but he is wrong from the perspective of social morality.

The necessity of social morality

After reading the above, the reader may begin to see that while all human beings already fall under the control and supervision of law of

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[9] Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvibhaṅga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 1/20. For an explanation of the benefit of laying down each of the *vinaya* rules, see the Vinaya Aṭṭhakathā vol. 1, pp. 262-265.

[10] Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvibhaṅga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 2/850.

kamma, which may be called the moral system that oversees all individual actions, that system of morality is not sufficient. Its insufficiency may be simply illustrated with the following example: Mr. Green is an individual person. He does not believe the law of *kamma*. Because of his disbelief he takes pleasure in the occupation of being a thief. Mr. Green's actions have a destructive effect on the community. From the perspective of individual morality, Mr. Green must certainly pay for his actions at some point in the future, regardless of whether he believes in the law of *kamma* or not. One day the people who have been adversely affected by Mr. Green's actions gather at the local meeting hall to determine a course of action for alleviating the trouble. Mr. Mee proposes establishing a law to punish thieves, and explains the benefits to be expected from having such a law. Another man gets up and says, "It isn't necessary to have any laws, because nature has its own standards for punishing those who do wrong. Just let that thief go and let the law of *kamma* sort him out. We don't have to waste our time over him." Although that man's attitude accords with the Buddhist perceptive, it is not right because it considers only one side, the perspective of individual morality. As already stated, when we join a society we hold two kinds of status. The first is as human individuals, the second is as members of the community. Since we have these two kinds of status, the responsibility we have must also be of two kinds: personal responsibility and social responsibility.

When Mr. Green steals other people's belongings, he has two levels of responsibility: the first is personal responsibility, the second is responsibility to the community. The first responsibility is taken care of by the law of *kamma*, but for the second level of responsibility the people of the community must devise their own system for ensuring it. In suggesting that the community should establish a law to deal with Mr. Green, Mr. Mee is suggesting some kind of system for ensuring the social responsibility that Mr. Green must have.

Responsibility is a moral concept. When Mr. Green steals money, Buddhism explains that: (a) From the perspective of the individual, the action is wrong because it arises from the unwholesome roots of action. Simply speaking, Mr. Green's action is immoral because it springs from the bad natural impulses within him which are greed, hatred and delusion. According to the law of *kamma*, actions arising from the unwholesome

roots must inevitably result in suffering. The natural law known as *kammaniyāma* already has within it the system by which justice is maintained in this case. *Kammaniyāma* says: you can steal money if you want to, but once you have stolen you must take responsibility for that by paying the retribution—by going to hell, for example. (b) From the perspective of society, since stealing causes trouble for others and infringes on their property rights, personal responsibility is not enough. In this respect Buddhism gives a lot of leeway: if a society wishes to establish a system for demanding social responsibility for certain actions which disturb the well-being of the community, it is that society's duty and responsibility to determine that code for itself. To this end, Buddhism suggests a number of moral principles (to be detailed later) which may be used as guidelines in designing that system. These principles act as foundations from which the people within a community can derive the details.

In his time the Buddha did not devise a political system for procuring social responsibility (for whatever reason that may be), but in regard to the monastic community, which the Buddha administered, he did establish a very clear system. The monks' *vinaya* was the Buddha's system for demanding acceptance of social responsibility by the monks. When a monk killed crows, he would have to accept social responsibility over and above the personal responsibility he was subject to with the law of *kamma*, and that was to be in the form of an offense (*āpatti*) imposed upon him.

In my view, the example provided by the Buddha may be used as a paradigm for establishing a system of social responsibility. Simply speaking, if we believe that Thai society is a Buddhist society and wish to use Buddhist principles as a basis for determining a system for demanding social responsibility in our country, we may use the guidelines and methods laid down for the monastic community as a case in point, and when I presently speak of a system for demanding social responsibility according to the Buddhist perspective, I will be using the guidelines the Buddha used with the Order as my model.

The five precepts and social responsibility

It is related in the *suttas* how at one time the Buddha was traveling through the town of Veḷudvāra, a village in the Kingdom of Kosala. The

villagers came to see the Buddha and asked him for a teaching which would be of help to them as family members involved in the worldly concerns of mundane society. In response to the villagers of Veḷudvāra's request, the Buddha gave the following teaching, known as the seven *attūpanāyikadhamma*:

> Householders, I will teach you the *attūpanāyikadhamma*, please pay attention. Now, householders, what are the *attūpanāyikadhamma*? The *attūpanāyikadhamma* are as follows: A noble disciple in this Teaching and Discipline, householders, considers thus: "I wish to have life, I do not wish to die; I want happiness, I abhor suffering. If anyone were to kill me, I who wish to have life, who does not want to die, who wants happiness and abhors suffering, that person's actions would not be pleasing to me. And if I were to kill someone else, one who wanted to live, did not want to die, who wanted happiness and abhorred suffering, my action would not be pleasing o that person... If someone were to take something I had not given... commit adultery with my wife... lie to me...slander me... utter harsh words to me... utter frivolous speech to me, that person's actions would not be pleasing to me. And if I were to take something another person had not given... commit adultery with his wife... lie to him... slander him... utter harsh words to him... utter frivolous speech to him, my actions would not be pleasing to that person." [11]

The Buddha's *attūpanāyikadhamma* are in effect a gauge for determining what things people in a community should observe or respect in regard to one another. In essence, the principle is one of asking oneself how one would feel if someone else did the same thing to one. The Buddha mentioned seven actions—killing, stealing, and committing adultery (these three being bodily actions), and lying, slandering, uttering harsh speech, and uttering frivolous speech (these four being verbal actions)—instructing the villagers of Veḷudvāra to ask themselves whether they would be pleased if someone were to do these seven things to them. The answer was naturally that they would not. When the householders had answered in this way, the Buddha continued that it is the same for other people: if we did these things to them they would also not be pleased. We may call these *attūpanāyikadhamma* 'principles for gauging right and wrong based on comparing the feelings of others with one's own' (the self-

[11] Saṅyutta Nikāya, Mahāvāravagga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 19/1458-1465.

comparing principle). According to this principle, any action we feel we would not want others to do to us is a wrongdoing.

In our lives there are many actions in regard to which we could ask ourselves as above and come to the conclusion that they are wrong, but of the examples given by the Buddha to the townspeople of Veḷudvāra for reflection and practice there were only seven. These seven can be included in all but the last, drinking liquor and intoxicants, of the five precepts. Having reached this point there is one other conclusion we can draw: not only are the five precepts a personal ethic, as is well known, but also a social ethic. They are social ethic in that, as can be seen from the teaching on the *attūpanāyikadhamma*, the source of the five precepts, what the Buddha used as a basis for justification for not violating the five precepts, was simply the rationale that we do not have the right to do so. Why do we not have the right? Because that life we are going to take belongs to someone else; the possession we are going to steal belongs to someone else; the partner we are going to commit adultery with belongs to someone else; the person we are going to lie to is the one who gets hurt, not us. Since they are not us and do not belong to us, we do not have the right to violate them. This explanation indicates that the five precepts are partly a social ethic. As a social ethic, we may further explain that the Buddha established the five precepts not only as a personal ethic for the individual (i.e., as principles of practice for leading to individual transcendence of suffering), but also as means for demanding social responsibility. We should not kill animals, steal, commit adultery or hurt people with false speech because these actions will drag down our own lives (according to the personal ethic) and we have no right to do so (according to the social ethic). If we want to know which actions we do not have the right to do, the Buddha's teaching on the *attūpanāyikadhamma* can be used as a gauge.

Personal morality is based on the concept of the agent; social morality is based on the concept of rights

From all of the above, it may be concluded that:

a. The Buddhist system of morality can be divided into two systems: individual morality and social morality.

b. One and the same principle may be looked at as individual morality or as social morality. This is so because the violation of some principles is not only wrong in terms of the *kammaniyāma*, but also in terms of society, and this latter kind of wrongdoing, if analyzed down to its roots, can be seen to be wrong because it is a violation of other people's rights. Some principles may be interpreted solely as individual morality and not as social morality because the violation of such principles is wrong from the perspective of *kammaniyāma*, but not socially. Some principles may be interpreted as purely social morality, and cannot be interpreted as individual morality, because the violation of those principles is a social wrong but is not wrong according to the *kammaniyāma*.

At the beginning of this article I stated that there are a number of scholars who understand Buddhist morality to be strictly the agent-based morality, not the right-based morality. Having reached this point the reader may now see that this view is not correct. Correctly speaking, it must be said that Buddhist morality has two systems: the first is individual morality and the second is social morality.

Rights in the Buddhist view

There are other scholars who state that Buddhism does not deal with rights for different reasons from that of the previous group. They do not base their conclusions on the teachings, but on the word itself. They feel that the word 'rights' is a Western concept appearing in political philosophy and in modern western society. We do not find the word 'rights' in Buddhist texts because Buddhism is an ancient system of belief. In my view, the word is not the important thing. The important thing is the meaning. A system of thought may not mention the word 'rights' at all, and yet the content of that system of thought teaches something that corresponds with the meaning of the word 'rights' as understood in Western philosophy. I would say that such a system of thought deals with rights. In this way, although the word 'rights' does not appear as such in the Buddha's teachings, if we can demonstrate that the principles taught by the Buddha do deal with that which is essentially the same in meaning as the concept of rights in Western philosophy, then we can emphatically say that Buddhism does speak of rights.

Natural rights

The first thing we will consider is what Buddhism believes in regard to natural rights. In the West there are two opposing schools of thought on this subject. One maintains that there are rights in nature, while the other maintains that natural rights are simply a concept coined as a rationale to explain legal rights, and that there are no 'natural rights' as such. To begin with I would like to investigate how Buddhism stands in relation to these two views.

Some students of Buddhism think that, according to Buddhism's teaching of *anattā*, human beings cannot claim ownership to anything at all, even the five *khandhas* they occupy. Since that is so, human beings cannot claim any rights in nature. This view arises from not discerning that there are two levels of teaching in Buddhism: one level is that which deals with *paramattha sacca* (ultimate truth), the other is that which deals with *sammutti sacca* (relative or conventional truth).

It is often understood that among the Buddha's teachings, that part which deals with the *paramattha sacca* is truer than that which deals with *sammutti sacca*. This is a misunderstanding. In fact both levels of truth are equally true, but in different senses. *Sammutti sacca* is the truth that appears through the senses; *paramattha sacca* is the truth that arises from analyzing any given thing until its ultimate reality is perceived. For example, suppose that right now you are sitting talking to two friends. Let us call the first friend 'Green' and the second friend 'White.' Green is a northerner, of pale complexion, and he is an engineer. White is a southerner, of dark complexion, and he is a lecturer in a university. In terms of the *paramattha sacca*, these two friends, when analyzed down to the most fundamental level, are simply two piles consisting of five aggregates (*khandha*). On the level of *paramattha*, no state of being 'Green' or 'White' can be found, there are only the pure natural phenomena which have come together to form these two people, conventionally referred to as 'Green' and 'White.' From the perspective of *sammutti sacca*, however, these two people have their own peculiar identities as distinct from other people. Green is different from White, and White is different from Green. This is the peculiar individuality each of them has. If one were to ask whether in reality these two people were simply compounds of five aggregates or were individual persons with

there own peculiar characteristics as they appear to be, Buddhism would answer that from the perspective of *paramattha sacca*, those two people are simply two sets of *khandhas* with the same nature—subject to the three characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), stressfulness (*dukkha*) and not self (*anattā*)—but from the perspective of *sammutti sacca*, these two people are individual people, each with their own peculiar features. Both of these truths are equally true.

The two kinds of truth are related to the two levels of morality explained above. In other words, that Buddhism teaches these two levels of truth is in order to conform to the two systems of morality. When dealing with individual morality, Buddhism teaches us to look at the world from the perspective of *paramattha sacca*, but when it comes to dealing with social morality we cannot look at the world in terms of the *paramattha sacca*; we must look at it from another perspective, the perspective of *sammutti sacca*.

Let us take an example: suppose we are grieving over a dear friend who as been killed in an accident. Buddhism's ethical principle for the individual level says: Why don't you look at your friend as in reality, as simply the five *khandhas* arising and ceasing? By looking at the death of our friend as merely a natural phenomenon that happens, no different from a sand castle melting into the sea when the tide rises and the waves wash over it, we can alleviate our grief. In this case it can be seen that *paramattha sacca* plays a pivotal role, and the role it plays is a very appropriate one.

Suppose we are in economic dire straits and cannot keep up our payments on the television set we have bought on hire purchase. We find that our neighbor tends to leave his house door open while he is taking his bath, and in the house we can see where he keeps his money. One day our neighbor goes into the bathroom to bathe and leaves his door open, so we sneak into the house and steal some money, enough to enable us to comfortably make our TV payments for the month. In justification, we explain our actions to ourselves in terms of the *paramattha sacca*: that our neighbor is merely a composition of the five *khandhas*, and that the money he thinks he owns is merely *rūpakhandha*. According to the principle of *anattā*, no one can claim ownership of anything. Thus on the ultimate level that money doesn't belong to anybody. That we, who are simply a

composition of the five *khandhas*, broke in and snatched a pile of *rūpakhandha*, which was money, which another composition of five *khandhas* deludedly believed to be his, is in no way a violation of moral principles.

This kind of explanation was used by some of the philosophical schools in the Buddha's India to comfort certain groups of people who had to live lives based on hurting, plundering or killing others, such as soldiers or bandits. These philosophies began with a view of the world in terms of the *paramattha sacca*, just as Buddhist philosophy does, but unlike Buddhism they believed that only *paramattha sacca* is true, and *sammutti sacca* is false,[12] while Buddhism gives equal validity to both levels of truth. Thus in the Buddhist view the episode described above is a misuse of *paramattha sacca*. Here we are dealing with social morality. We are stealing our neighbor's money, performing an action that will adversely affect the rights of another person. We must explain the situation in terms of the second level of ethical principles, social morality.

That Buddhism embraces equally both levels of truth has important philosophical implications: in the Buddhist view, higher philosophy and social philosophy have equal status. Buddhism does not give any more importance to the world view that penetrates into the source or core of things than the world view based on common sense, nor does it give any more importance to looking at the world with common sense than it does to looking at the world on the ultimate level. On the contrary, Buddhism believes that both levels of world perception are equally important. Human beings live in the natural world and in the world of convention: natural truth (*paramattha sacca*) and conventional truth (*sammutti sacca*) are equally meaningful. Even though in terms of the *paramattha sacca* Buddhism maintains that human beings have no right to claim ownership of anything, passages such as the following may be found which indicate that, in terms of *sammutti sacca*, Buddhism concedes that human beings may rightfully claim ownership of things:

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[12] Examples of these philosophies may be seen in the views of the philosopher known as Pakudha Kaccāyana and the views appearing in the Bhagavad Gīta. See Dīgha Nikāya, Sīlakhandhavagga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 9/97; Bhagavad Gīta 2. 16-72.

> Brahmin! What is *ārakkhasampadā*? Brahmin, a son of good family has wealth acquired through his own labor, by the sweat of his own arms, righteously gained. He organizes protection for that wealth, thinking, 'How can I make it so that kings will not come and take my wealth, thieves will not steal it, fire will not destroy it, floods will not sweep it away, and my evil relatives will not make off with it.' This, Brahmin, is *ārakkhasampadā* (endowment with protection).[13]

The passage above was addressed by the Buddha to a Brahmin. It deals with the principles for maintaining a happy life in the present moment, known as the four *diṭṭhadhammikattha* (conditions for welfare in the present moment), consisting of *uṭṭhānasampadā,* industriousness in making a living, *ārakkhasampadā,* knowing how protect the wealth one has gained, *kalyāṇamittatā,* knowing how to associate with people who an serve as good examples, and *samajīvitā,* using wealth neither too xcessively nor too stingingly. What is of particular note to the reader in .he above passage is that the Buddha acknowledges that when *A* honestly and industriously makes a living, the wealth that accrues from his labors is rightfully his (*uṭṭhānaviriyādhigatā bāhābalaparicitā sedāvakkhittā dhammikā dhammaladdhā*). *A* has full rights to that wealth. That the Buddha acknowledged that ownership of such wealth is righteous has two fundamental implications: 1. *A* has full rights to the wealth; 2. it is the duty of other people to respect those rights. Whoever misappropriates *A*'s money or defrauds him of it is considered in Buddhism to have violated the precept on stealing. He has violated the moral precept because his action is not righteous, and the action is not righteous because it violates *A*'s rights.

Note that property rights, according to the Buddha's statement above, are contingent on a very important and fundamental right, which is the right to one's own body. In terms of the *sammutti sacca,* Buddhism begins its explanation of moral events with reference to the individual. Buddhism acknowledges that each person is the owner of his body and his life. As owners, people have full rights to do whatever they like with their bodies and their lives. Buddhism regards killing other people to be a violation of

[13] Aṅguttara Nikāya, Aṭṭhakanipāta, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 23/145.

the precepts against killing, but not so suicide.[14] Buddhism maintains thus because it bases its system of morality on the assumption that each person is the owner of his or her life, and as the owner is entitled to do whatever he or she wishes with his or her possessions. Killing other people is immoral because it infringes on other people's rights to life. Conversely, killing oneself does not infringe on anybody else's rights, and thus committing suicide is not a violation of the precept against killing (*pāṇātipāta*).

Human rights

We may summarize the above by saying that Buddhism begins its views about natural rights at the body and life of the individual. All people have these rights equally, regardless of the situation of their birth, be they deformed or perfectly healthy, of high birth or low birth, rich or poor, male or female, clever or stupid. People may differ in these respects, but those differences are not the essence of their being human. Buddhism accepts that all people have equal status as human beings. Being human in this respect is defined by the presence of all five *khandhas*, and within these five *khandhas* there are the vital mental *khandhas* (*nāmakhandha*) of mind and its concomitants. This portion of the *khandhas* expresses itself in the feeling of self-love and desire for that which is good.[15] Simply speaking, all people, while differing in their external features, are equal in that they aspire to excellence and to lead their lives toward that excellence. From this perspective, we see that human beings do not have the right to use their fellow men as means to achieving their own ends. Buddhist ethics teaches us to relate to other people as fellows in birth, aging, sickness and

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[14] Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā, p. 145; Vinaya Piṭaka Ṭīkā, vol. 1, p. 278. Regarding suicide, the reader should also bear in mind that we are here discussing it in terms of social morality, not in terms of individual morality. Simply speaking, we are here investigating the question of how Buddhism sees suicide from the social perspective. The answer is that it is not wrong because it does not infringe on other people's rights. People who commit suicide are using the rights they have to their own lives. When they no longer wish to live, it is their proper right to put an end to their own life. From the social perspective their action cannot be criticized. However, if considered from the perspective of individual morality, Buddhism sees suicide as wrong, since it is an action that arises from one of the unwholesome mental roots of action, delusion.

[15] Dhammapada, Khuddaka Nikāya, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 25/20.

death. The essence of this ethic is recognizing that all human beings cherish themselves and aspire to that which is good. This is the essential quality of being human. We must honor this essential quality and relate to our fellow human beings in conformity with it. Buddhism teaches us to relate to our fellows as beings with the same value and meaning as ourselves (i.e., as 'ends' rather than 'means'). Using other people as means to achieving selfish objectives is regarded as immoral in Buddhism. For example, Mr. Green is Mr. White's employer. He pays Mr. White less than he deserves. This action is immoral because (1) Mr. White is just as much a human being as Mr. Green; (2) as a human being Mr. White has hopes in life just the same as Mr. Green: just as Mr. Green wants his life to progress, Mr. White also wants his life to progress; (3) suppressing Mr. White's wage is not acknowledging the value which is Mr. White's aspirations for excellence in life; (4) thus Mr. Green's action is immoral.

The Buddhist view on human rights is based on its views on natural rights; in other words, human rights are simply natural rights. According to Buddhism, both human rights and natural rights really do exist within the individual human being. They are something that people obtain automatically at birth. Some people are born unintelligent; they fail to catch on to the deceptions of other people and do not even realize it when they have been duped by others. Buddhism considers taking advantage of others in this way to be immoral. Our friend may not know that he is being deceived. Not knowing, he may not be troubled by it, but since he is a human being he has been born complete with the natural right to not be exploited. No one can specify this right for another, and no one can institute it for anyone else: it is rather a natural process. When we are born, all of us, regardless of whether we are clever or stupid, aspire to that which is good for ourselves. Self esteem, the desire for the best that can possibly be obtained for oneself, is the essence of being human. This applies also to our unintelligent friend. When we deceive him we are committing a wrong. It is wrong because we are not respecting the right, which our friend has in full, to not be exploited as a means for personal advantage by others.

Some natural rights can be transferred, some not

We may divide natural rights into two categories: the first is *primary* natural rights, the second, *secondary* natural rights. Primary natural rights

are the most fundamental level of rights. Secondary natural rights are the rights that are built on the foundation of primary natural rights.

When we use our energy (be it manual or mental labor) to produce something—suppose we work in a company and receive a wage of five thousand baht per month—the reward of our labor, the five thousand baht, is the product we have obtained from our expenditure of labor. Buddhism explains that we have full rights to that five thousand baht. This right to the five thousand baht is a natural right. Even though society may not state that we have a right to that money, we have a natural right to claim ownership. Note that this right to the money earned is not a fundamental right because it is possible to pose the question: on what foundation does this right rest? Simply speaking, when we say that we have a right to claim ownership of that five thousand baht, a friend may ask us why and on what basis we make the statement. Rights that are not fundamental in this way are what I refer to as 'secondary natural rights.'

When asked why we think we have a right to claim ownership of that five thousand baht, we may answer that it is because we have obtained it from the strength of our own labor. Since we are the owner of our own body and our own life, when we use them to produce something the product of our efforts naturally belongs to us. This is a right, is it not? Note that, having answered this far, there are no further questions. When we state that we are the owners of our lives, the statement is clear in itself. To ask why we believe we own our lives is a meaningless question. Rights to life and one's own body are the most fundamental level of rights for which no further basis can be found. This kind of right is what I refer to as 'primary natural rights.'

In summary, in the Buddhist view, rights to the body and to life are basic rights, the most fundamental level of rights requiring no other basis. Human ownership of the body and life is a fact that needs no rationale or explanation to support it. Rights to the body and to life are primary natural rights. When we use this body to produce something, we naturally have full rights to that product. The rights to the products resulting from bodily effort are secondary natural rights.

Among these two kinds of natural rights, the secondary natural rights are transferable. When we use our bodily strength to produce something and amass it as wealth, we have the right to that wealth. Any wealth that

we do not want we can transfer to others. Such kinds of transfer, as in acts of generosity (*dāna*), or bequeathing inheritances, are transferences of rights to wealth. In the precept against stealing (*adinnādāna*) we find that the act of appropriating wealth is only wrong when the owner of the wealth has not transferred it out of his ownership. The word *adinnādāna* in itself indicates this: 'Taking what the owner has not given.'

Note that when we give something away or bequeath an inheritance, we are transferring our rights to that wealth to new owners. The people who receive the transfer of wealth then have natural rights to the wealth they have received. Thus the transference of wealth does not merely mean the transference of wealth, but more essentially the transference of rights. The important factor is rights; the wealth is simply what comes with those rights.

Primary natural rights differ radically from the secondary kind. Primary rights cannot be transferred. There are stories in the *Tipiṭaka* of monks who were disgusted with their lives and asked their fellow monks to kill them. When the Buddha heard of the matter, he adjudged that the monks who did the killing were wrong.[16] Notice that in this case the monks who were killed were fully prepared to die and in fact had asked someone to kill them, but their acquiescence to the act was not enough to justify it.

In the same *Tipiṭaka* passage it is related how a number of monks, disgusted with their lives, killed themselves. In this case the Buddha adjudged that the monks who so killed themselves were not wrong, but that their actions were merely 'inappropriate for a recluse (*samaṇa*).' In the *Vinaya*, a monk who commits suicide is not considered to be guilty of a *pārājika* offense, while one who kills someone who asks him to do so is guilty of such an offense.[17] The two cases are very different. Over and above the *Vinaya*, suicide is not considered to be an act of killing (*pāṇātipāta*), while killing another person who asks one to do so, or out of compassion, to relieve them from intense suffering, is adjudged by Buddhism to be an act of *pāṇātipāta*.

[16] Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvibhaṅga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 1/176-179.
[17] Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvibhaṅga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 1/176-179.

That Buddhism has this perspective is based on the subject of rights to the body and life under discussion here. *A* is the owner of his body and his life. *A* has full rights to that body and life, but the right, according to Buddhism, is strictly *A*'s. If *A* no longer wishes to live, he can use his rights to kill himself, and his death is not considered to be a breach of moral precepts (the clause '*pāṇātipāta*' of the five precepts) because the action is still within the domain of the rights he possesses. But suppose that *A* is unable to kill himself, and he persuades *B* to do the job for him: Buddhism considers this to be a wrong, not on the part of *A*, but on the part of *B*. *A* is not wrong because his decision to die is his own right, but *B* has no right to kill *A*. Rights to life cannot be transferred. *A*'s desire to die and his asking *B* to do the job for him is not a transference of rights. Since there is no transference of rights, *B*'s actions are a violation of another person's rights. This is why *B* is wrong.

Primary natural rights and being human

Sartre has stated that human beings are cursed with freedom. He meant that freedom was the essence of being human, and that essence is bound to human life. It is not possible for human beings to disconnect this essence from themselves. They can liberate themselves from it only when they die. The attitude to rights to life in Buddhism is very similar to Sartre's idea. In the Buddhist view, a human being is the five *khandhas*. When these five *khandhas* are brought together in the form of a human being they produce a vast number of potentialities. Among those potentialities are conscience, aspiration for that which is believed to be good in life, and desire for excellence. These mental qualities are the essence of being human, and this essence is the source of the natural rights to the body and life mentioned above. *A* is born a human being. He is like other human beings, with their aspirations and hopes and their drive to pursue excellence. These potentialities are values in themselves. Whenever another person treats *A* in a way that does not conform with the acceptance of these values (such as by employing him to do work for a low wage without good reason), that person is violating *A*'s rights to life and his body. We may call this a violation of human rights in the Buddhist view. In the Buddhist view, being human is a product of many essential factors, and one of those is the potential to aspire to and strive for excellence. This potential is essentially the same as the primary natural right. Human beings are unable to shake

off this essence of their humanity. Since primary rights are an essential factor of being human, primary rights are not something that can be transferred from one person to another.

The point made in the previous paragraph is a profound one, and its profundity may be more clearly explained if we distinguish between the ways the two kinds of natural rights can be referred to.

1. When saying that man has primary rights, the correct description of the relationship between human beings and those rights is 'man is rights.'

2. When saying that man has secondary rights, the correct description of the relationship between human beings and those rights is 'man has rights.'

'Being' and 'having' have disparate philosophical implications. We can relinquish something we have but we cannot relinquish something we are. Once we are born as human beings, we are endowed by nature with certain essential factors, and these essential factors are the core of our being human. Buddhism holds that rights to the body and life are endowed by nature as our essential humanity. Since they are the essence or actuality of being human, it is not possible for human beings to relinquish those rights. A man who is fed up with life may kill himself, because that is his right. If he is afraid to do it himself or is unable to do so for some other reason, he may ask someone else to do the job for him. His request is still within his rights, but that request does not empower him to relinquish or transfer his rights to another, because those rights are a core within him. Any person who kills him, be it out of compassion or for any other reason, is, according to the Buddhist view, committing a wrong. We have no right to kill another, even if he agrees to it. Only the owner of a life has a right to put an end to that life.

The Buddhist attitude described here can be used to answer a number of ethical questions that are ongoing points of controversy, such as the question of buying and selling bodily organs to be used in medical transplants. Mr. Green is poor, so he decides to sell one of his bodily organs to Mr. Red, who is rich. In the Buddhist view, Mr. Red has no right to Mr. Green's organs, even though he may buy them fairly and Mr. Green was fully agreeable to the sale. Rights to the body and to life are not transferable. Thus, under no circumstances can one buy or sell human bodily organs without violating moral principles.

Be that as it may, since these rights come to an end the minute a human being dies (rights to the body and to life begin when the five *khandhas* come together as a human being and come to an end when the five *khandhas* break up),[18] making use of organs from a person who has already died and bequeathed them for such uses is not considered to be a violation of rights.

Legal rights

When people live together in a community there will naturally be the problems of friction and conflict. These problems can be alleviated and prevented by establishing communal regulations. An example of such regulations is the laws we use in our societies. The problems of conflict and friction between people in society arise from people not respecting each other's natural rights. The institution of laws to protect these natural rights is thus one way of solving the problem. Rights that are supported by law are known as legal rights.

In the Buddhist view, all human beings already have natural rights. They are rights to one's own body, rights to one's own life, and rights to whatever wealth accrues from that body and life. When people live together in a community, there will be those who do not respect these natural rights. This non-respect expresses itself in destructive actions such as murder. Such problems make it necessary for the community to institute regulations for protecting the natural rights that people already have. Buddhism has the following essential principles for instituting these regulations :

1. *Legal rights must conform with natural rights*. This is a general principle. It means that in instituting laws the first and foremost thing a legislator needs to consider is that all human beings already have natural rights. These natural rights are the foundations of legal rights. The legislation of laws for protecting rights will have no rational foundation if the legislator does not bear in mind these natural rights.

[18] An example of how Buddhism holds that rights to the body and to life come to an end at death can be seen in the fact that Buddhism does not hold that 'killing' a person already dead (believing that he is alive) is a moral wrong. See the first of the factors for *pāṇātipāta* (*pāṇa* means the being is alive. Killing a dead animal is not considered to be *pāṇātipāta*) in the Commentary to the Majjhima Nikāya, vol. 1, p. 211.

2. *The legislation of laws that cause the violation of the natural rights of some members of the community can only be done when there is sufficient reason.* Generally the natural rights that laws are capable of supporting are those rights that do not interfere with or violate the rights of other people. The legislation of laws for protecting these rights as in item (1) would present no problem if human society was without conflict, but in reality human society is full of conflict. In solving this conflict through legal means it is inevitable that a certain portion of the people will have their rights violated. Buddhism maintains that such violation of natural rights is tenable if there is sufficient reason for it. Here I would like to divide this question into two kinds, showing for each kind how much reasoning is sufficient for violation:

a. Individual problems. *A* is a human being. As a human being he has natural rights to his body and his life as already explained. When *A* commits a serious wrongdoing, the society deems that such a wrongdoing deserves capital punishment. Executing *A* is a violation of his natural rights. Buddhism holds that his rights to the body and life are not transferable. Thus, we can under no circumstances deprive *A* of life without violating these rights.

However, since *A*'s actions have a severe effect on the community, when the adverse effects resulting from the violation of *A*'s right to life are weighed up against the adverse effects that would result if society had no standards for punishing people who committed such wrongdoings and find the latter to be greater, Buddhism allows the use of laws that violate the rights of individuals who commit wrongdoings, as can be seen from items 1 to 6 of the Buddha's 10 principles for instituting the *Vinaya*, referred to in note 9 of this article.

Summarizing this as a principle, if an individual in a society commits a wrongdoing (a), and society considers that wrongdoing (a) is a greater evil than wrongdoing (b), which is the evil resulting from a violation of the natural rights of the person who commits the wrongdoing, the greater weight of that evil is in itself sufficient justification to enable us to institute a law that violates the rights of that individual. Since the punishment of the wrongdoer is not seen by Buddhism as a retribution, but as a lesson to the

wrongdoer to correct his ways,[19] one thing that an assignor of punishment for any wrongdoing must bear in mind is how to make the punishment as light as possible but at the same time sufficiently heavy to effectively induce the wrongdoer to mend his ways.

In theory, it is possible to ask whether or not the legislation of a law that infringes on a person's rights is supported by Buddhism if the evil that arises from the punishment is equal to the evil it is meant to punish. In this respect I feel that in practice it would be very difficult to weigh up two kinds of evil and adjudge them to have the same 'weight.' Thus such a question, while it makes sense on the theoretical level, presents no problem on the practical level. Even on the theoretical level, we may say in answer that a law that imposes a punishment of equal wrong to the evil it is meant to punish is still feasible, but the law will be more acceptable if we are able to demonstrate that the amount of evil resulting from the commission of that wrong doing does in fact exceed the evil resulting from the punishment. A good punishment in the Buddhist view is one that violates the natural rights of the wrongdoer to the least possible extent and at the same time has two basic effects: it helps the wrongdoer to repent and become a good person, and it prevents the future arising of a similar kind of wrong doing.[20] Criminologists of some schools are of the view that the best way to prevent repetitions of like acts of evil is to impose heavier punishments for them. Buddhism does not dispute this outright, but it does demand a balance between the gravity of the violation of rights and the efficacy of that punishment in preventing future similar acts of evil from

[19] Khuddaka Nikāya, Jātaka, Pathama Bhāgo, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 27/359.

[20] The principles for punishment as described here were never directly spoken of by the Buddha. I have gleaned them from two important Buddhist teachings: 1. The principle that punishment is not retribution but a corrective measure to bring about improvement in the wrongdoer (see note 19); 2. the teaching that if one must do evil, then one should not do it often (Khuddaka Nikāya, Dhammapada, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 25/19). While the Buddha's statement refers to time, it would seem reasonable to extend it to the intensity of evil committed. Bringing the two teachings together, we can surmise that if it is necessary to give a punishment (a necessary evil), it should be as mild as possible, and it must always be born in mind that it is not an act of revenge or retribution, but a corrective measure given to allow the wrongdoer to correct himself and become a constructive member of the community in future.

arising. Simply speaking, Buddhism does not condemn the imposition of a severe punishment when necessary, but the punishment must be a means that has undergone careful consideration and seen to be one that violates the natural rights of the wrongdoer to the least possible extent, and also to be effective in preventing future similar acts of wrongdoing.

b. Problems between groups or between individuals and groups. In ıtting one Bangkok expressway, the government had to demand the rrender of some land belonging to a certain group of people. The people ho were to surrender the land got together and protested, refusing to ıove from their land. This is an example of a conflict between groups. In this conflict there are two sides: the first is the community of people who own the land though which the expressway will pass; the second is the group of people who will be benefited by the expressway.

Suppose that ultimately the government decides to make the expressway, with the result that the people who had their land taken away had to move and, due to an outdated repatriation system, were given low payments for their land. The government's decision in this case could clearly be said to violate the property rights of the people of that community. The question arises as to on what basis the government's action, even though it violates the rights of a number of its citizens, can be justified. The problem of conflict between groups or between an individual and a group is referred to in Buddhism as *vivādādhikaraṇa*. It refers to the problems that arise from two groups or sides with different views about a certain issue. When both sides have explained the reasons for their stance in order to win the other side over to their view, and both sides continue to maintain their position, the Buddha recommended taking the will of the majority as the deciding factor. A decision made on the basis of the majority is known as *yebhuyyasikā*.[21]

In making decisions on a majority bases, we are often led to consider the question of justice: is a majority vote enough to make a decision a just one? Is it just that one group of people must relocate themselves from the place they have occupied for many generations simply because they

[21] Vinaya Piṭaka, Cullavagga, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 6/611.

happen to be a minority when compared to the group of people who stand to benefit from the expressway? How do we explain this?

This kind of problem arises with all systems that adhere to the majority consensus for solving conflicts (such as the democratic political system). In answer, Buddhism states that when speaking of justice we must see it as of two kinds: the first is justice of the system, the second is justice of individual cases which arise within that system. The question above is a problem because it is asked in reference to the second kind of justice, justice of specific cases. It would present no problem if we were to answer the question in reference to the first kind of justice, justice of the system.

It is said in the *suttas* that shortly after the Buddha had entered into *parinibbāna*, the Brahmin Vassakāra had a meeting with Venerable Ānanda. He asked Venerable Ānanda whether, before his *parinibbāna*, the Buddha had appointed any monk to be the head of the Order in his place. Ānanda answered that he had not, and went on to explain that before the *parinibbāna* the Buddha had announced that the Order were to uphold and revere the *Dhamma* in his place.

The word 'Dhamma' here refers to the principles or the system established by the Buddha. Ānanda then went on to say that these principles or this system are what can be used to explain where the justice is in violating the personal rights of a monk when he commits a wrongdoing and a penalty is conferred on him. Note the following:

> Brahmin! The *Arahant*, Perfectly Enlightened Buddha, he who is all seeing, laid down the training rules and the *pāṭimokkha* discipline for monks. When the *uposatha* (observance) day comes around, we of the monks who live in the same area all come together and invite a monk who has accurately memorized the *pāṭimokkha* to recite the content of the *pāṭimokkha*. While that monk is reciting the *pāṭimokkha*, for any monk who has committed a wrongdoing we will impose an offense (*āpatti*) in accordance with the teachings and principles established by the Buddha. It is not we who impose the offenses; it is rather the *Dhamma* which does it through us.[22]

From the above passage it can be seen that in the Buddhist view, once someone has entered the monastic Order, that entrance is in itself the acceptance of the community regulations which all members of the Order

[22] Majjhima Nikāya, Uparipaṇṇāsaka, Syāmraṭṭha Tipiṭaka, 14/111.

accept as good and just principles. When one of them commits a wrong, the Order confers a penalty. The imposition of that penalty is essentially a violation of the individual rights of the wrongdoer, but it is a violation that is valid, and that validity is a validity of the system, not a validity of the group of individuals who have been appointed by the Order to confer the penalty.

The same principle applies to the settlement of disputes by reference to the majority: when two groups of monks have different views on a certain matter, and the minority is defeated, it is not the views that have been defeated, but the numbers. We must consider the issue of justice in terms of the system. The system referred to here is what the Buddha considered to be fair and just. It is natural to have different views on certain issues arising in large groups of people. When neither side is able to persuade the other to come over to its view, the best way to resolve the conflict is to refer to the voice of the majority. This does not mean that the 'winning' side is necessarily right or that the 'losing' side is necessarily wrong. Adherence to the majority view is simply a means for ensuring that the activities of the community proceed smoothly. The losing side in this instance need not necessarily be the losing side in other cases. Summarizing, the Buddha established the system of 'majority rule' to allow the Order, which will naturally contain differences of opinion on various issues, to proceed and function smoothly. The system is an open one. It is open in that 'winners' or 'losers' are not restricted to particular groups within the Order. The group that wins today may lose on a later day. To talk of justice we must look at the system as a whole, not at individual cases in isolated points in time.

The people in the community who had to surrender their land may seem to have been dealt an injustice when their case is looked at in isolation, but if we look on a wider scale, at the system as a whole, we find that these people may also be included in a larger group of people who will be benefited by the building of a dam, which is another case. At the same time, the villagers who are relocated in order to build the dam may be included within the larger group of people who will benefit from the building of a nuclear power station in another case. This is the justice of the system as a whole.

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BUSINESS AND BUDDHIST ETHICS

Subhavadee Numkanisorn

Business can be viewed as an important part of the modern world. Economic life plays the significant role in the daily life of people. As human life contains so many dimensions other than the economic one, human life which is seen through the economic dimension only could be considered too narrow. However, most of people in today's world seem to be directed by economics as if it were all of life. This fact leads to a question of how religion will benefit the people within this context. The author aims to answer this question, basing the ideas on the Buddhist teaching. The main points of the article will focus on: "How to do business and have a happy life in terms of individuals and society at the same time."

The concept of benefit in Buddhism

Buddhism has always accepted the truth that happiness is an essential part of ethics. Happiness gives significance to the practice of *dhamma* and forms the ground or support for religious observance both on the level of *dhamma* practice and the level of ethics in general.[1] Therefore, all people should have suitable happiness in accordance with their standing in life. From the Buddhist view of happiness, which sees it divided into three levels—sensual happiness (*kāmasukha*), *jhāna* happiness (the happiness of meditative absorption states), and *nibbāna* happiness—we see that the pursuit of happiness on the sensual level, or physical or material happiness, is not at odds with Buddhist ethics if we do not allow our minds to become infatuated with it or attach fast to it, and our minds are free and ready to step up to higher levels of happiness.

Buddhism believes that the mind leads all kinds of actions.[2] Mind or consciousness is what cognizes the mental contact (*phassa*) that gives rise

[1] Phra Rājavaramunī, *Buddhadhamma* (Bangkok: Mahāchulālongkorn University Press, 1986), pp. 556–557.

[2] Khuddaka Nikāya, Dhammapada, 25/1-2. (The *Tipiṭaka* used by the author in this paper is the *Royal Thai* version, the commentaries and sub-commentaries are the *Pāli Syāmraṭṭha* version-*editor*.)

to gladness and sadness.[3] People are pleased when they feel pleasant feelings and displeased when they experience suffering. Human beings therefore love happiness and hate suffering. Thus human beings avoid the contact that leads to suffering and seek only contact that leads to happiness, and so they are self lovers. Since human beings love their own selves, and love happiness and hate suffering, they must free themselves from exploitation, because that gives them suffering, and find benefit, because that gives them happiness.

According to Buddhism, 'benefit' means things that are conducive to happiness (*attha*), things that help the experience of happiness (*hita*), and things that are happiness itself (*sukha*),[4] and in establishing such benefit, human beings must create it for themselves, for others, and for both themselves and others, as described in the Buddha's words:

> You should reflect thus: When considering one's own benefits, it is fitting that you achieve that benefit with heedfulness; when considering the benefit of others, it is fitting that you achieve that benefit with heedfulness; and when considering the benefits of both yourself and others, it is fitting that you achieve that benefit with heedfulness.[5]

Among these three kinds of benefit, benefit produced for both oneself and others is considered the highest value. Next is benefit produced for one's own self, and producing benefit for others is the third, as stated:

> Between two groups of people, those who practice neither for their own benefit nor for the benefit of others and those who practice for the benefit of others but not for their own benefit, those who practice for the benefit of others but not for their own benefit are better. Among three groups of people ... (the two groups mentioned above) and those who practice for their own benefit but not for the benefit of others, those who practice for their own benefit but not for the benefit of others are best. Among four groups... (the three groups mentioned above) and those who practice both for their own benefit and the benefit of others, those who practice both for their own

[3] Khuddaka Nikāya, Suttanipāta, 25/877.
[4] Paramatthamañjusā, 4/32.
[5] Aṅguttara Nikāya, Sattakanipāta, 23/72.

benefit and the benefit of others are most excellent, special, eminent, perfect, and precious.[6]

This excerpt shows that the essence of the concept of producing benefit according to Buddhism lies in that benefit leading to happiness both for oneself and for others. Benefit is received not only by oneself and not only by others. Thus the Buddhist idea of creating benefit refers to a harmonizing of the interests of the individual and society. Buddhism, however, admits that one should produce one's own benefit first, because if everyone could bring about his or her own benefit, the result would also benefit others and society as a whole. When each person is self reliant, he or she does not burden others, and is also capable of helping others.[7]

From the above, we can summarize the relation between Buddhist ethics, happiness, and benefit as follows:

1. Conduct and behavior in the course of the path (*magga*) will lead to the benefits which are the goal of life, which Buddhism divides into three levels: 1) benefits obtainable here and now, visible in our everyday lives; 2) further benefits, which are the spiritual benefits, and 3) the highest benefit, the benefit that is the highest goal of Buddhism, which is *nibbāna*. Buddhism accepts the importance of all these levels of benefits or goals. At the same time, it points out that even though not all people can attain the highest goal, *nibbāna*, they should direct themselves to attaining the immediate benefits and the further benefits. We might say that the course of conduct for reaching each of these levels or goals is to practice according to the path (*magga*). In practicing this path, one must start from developing one's own self, to be one who knows how to think and examine the things one sees and hears prudently (*yoniso-manasikāra*), which is an internal factor, and also to have good guidance from good friends (*kalyāṇamitta*), which is an external factor.

2. Buddhism accepts the importance of all levels of happiness in life, including bodily or material happiness. To obtain happiness in this level, however, morality must be employed as the guideline in order to prevent exploitation both to one's own self and others.

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[6] Aṅguttara Nikāya, Catukkanipāta, 21/95

[7] Vinayaṭṭhakathā Ṭīkā, 1/365.

3. Buddhism believes that benefit is not only something that enhances the arising of happiness but also happiness in itself. The creation of benefit, therefore, should be for one's self and others. Buddhism teaches people to consider themselves as well as others. In other words, to do things that harmonize the benefit of oneself and others. Any action that leads to harm or is detrimental to others should not be done because all people love themselves. Thus we should not harm others.

The principles of creating benefit according to the Buddhist perspective resemble the economic view of liberalism in that both accept that all human beings love their own selves, and it is this love of self that is the motivation for people pursuing their own benefit. The difference is that, in creating this benefit, Buddhism takes into consideration the benefit of others, and regards the creating of benefit for both oneself and others of higher value than creating benefit solely for oneself or solely for others. Liberalism considers that creating economic benefit for oneself will at the same time be beneficial to others, though this benefit that arises for others is not an aim as it is in Buddhism.

The economic life of the Buddhist

Since human beings must inevitably be involved in material things, because their lives are naturally dependent on them, they must have material things like food, clothing, dwelling places and medicine in order to live. Since human beings have to be involved in material things, they inevitably have to be involved in one economic system or another.

Magga, the Buddhist system of conduct, contains one factor known as *sammā-ājīva*, which means right livelihood, indicating that Buddhism also accepts the importance of economics. Buddhism admits and confirms the importance of material things, particularly the four supports, as appears in the Buddha's statement, for instance, that '*sabbe sattā āhāraṭṭhitikā*,'[8] which translates as "all beings subsist on food." Requirements for the four supports must be in a proper amount for the body to work normally—safe and free from illnesses—in order that one can perform duties and cultivate higher mental virtues and wisdom.

[8] Dīgha Nikāya, Pāṭikavagga, 11/226.

Consumption

According to the Middle Way (*majjhimā paṭipadā*), behavior in terms of consumption is to follow the principle of *mattaññutā* mentioned in the *Ovādapāṭimokkha*. The principle is to lead a simple life, living moderately. To determine what is moderate one should use the principle *of yoniso-manasikāra* (wise attention). The principle in relation to consumption is not to consume playfully, not to be infatuated with consumption, and not to consume for ornamentation or decoration, but for subsistence of the body, for life to go on, for the relief of physical discomfort and painful feelings such as hunger, and to live comfortably enough to practice higher levels of *dhamma*. The other three supports, dwelling, clothing, and medicine, also apply similar principles, as follows: Dwelling: for protection from natural dangers such as wind and sunlight. Clothing: for protection from harmful animals, insects, cold, heat, etc. Medicine: for relief of physical pains caused by illnesses.

The form of consumption according to Buddhist ethics is, therefore, economical consumption, because that is consumption according to physical necessity. Resources are used only for what is really necessary. Furthermore, this concept of consumption will help establish and instill proper habits and values in regard to consumption, correcting the approach to consumption in present liberal economies that emphasizes and promotes extravagant values in consumers through advertising in the mass media. The result is that people in society tend to consume things unnecessary to life in order to express their social status. Social values and quantities have therefore become factors in pricing products and services. According to the general principles of economics, if a product is cheap, people will have more purchasing power and sales volume will be boosted, but if the product becomes more expensive, the people's purchasing power is reduced and the sales volume will go down. The present situation, however, in which people's values incline to flaunting status and wealth, is that the higher the price is, the more people want to buy it because expensive products reflect social status. Consumer habits and values have become an important factor for production of unnecessary goods and services which consequently lead to extravagant wastage of our limited natural resources, and we see these habits and values cited when business people maintain that they encourage immoral values only in the response

to social demands, despite the fact that such demand is created by the businesses themselves.

For items apart from the four supports, which are necessary for human beings to subsist, the value and importance would vary in relation with social conditions and personal factors, such as the wisdom to understand advantages, disadvantages, and limitations of material things, as well as the ability to attain higher levels of happiness than sensual happiness. For this reason, Buddhism is not interested in stipulating that each person should have an equal amount of belongings since such is not a criterion for people's happiness and well-being. Buddhism concerns itself with the minimum standard, that everybody should have the four supports in sufficiency for their lives to proceed smoothly. Over and above this, Buddhism allows as many possessions as one's situation and spiritual development will allow, but within the limit that such possessions must not be a cause for exploitation of oneself or others. Some people feel content with just enough material possessions to get by on, turning their focus to spiritual and intellectual development. Others are not yet ready, their lives rely more on material things. If their way of life does not cause distress for others, this is acceptable. Furthermore, some people have the tendency, the skill and the ability to help other people. For them, a great deal of wealth will be for the benefit of their fellowmen.

Wealth and competition

Having enough of the four necessary supports, one should seek more wealth to be able to create benefit of other kinds. Householders must not only see to their own physical well-being, but also have other burdens for which material wealth is needed. For instance, they must look after the people dependent on them, such as their families, and also participate in social services, and help support the dissemination of *dhamma* for a better life. Therefore, householders have economic burdens and must seek further wealth.[9]

We see from the above that apart from the four supports of life, Buddhism also allows householders to seek wealth and possess it in accordance with their ability and readiness, but within limitations and so

[9] Phra Dhammapiṭaka, *Economics According to Buddhism* (Bangkok: Mahāchulālongkorn University Press, 1994), p. 63.

long as it does not entail exploiting themselves and others. This point agrees with the right of ownership in the liberal economy. However, Buddhism not only sees a great deal of wealth as allowing the owners to bring well-being to themselves, their families and their dependents, but also expects that they will use the wealth they have acquired to help other people in society as well as to support religious activities. That is, it still emphasizes spiritual values.

The Buddha taught householders the way to attain benefit and happiness in the here and now, or the so-called "*diṭṭhadhammikattha*," which is economic stability, making oneself wealthy enough for self-reliance. The qualities that lead to benefit in the here and now, the *diṭṭhadhammikattha*, are four in number, as follows:

1. *Uṭṭhānasampadā*, endowment with persistent effort: being diligent in one's responsibilities and work; to maintain an honest livelihood, to develop skills, and to wisely seek effective means to execute those aims.

2. *Ārakkhasampadā*, endowment with protection: guarding one's wealth and the fruits of one's labors obtained rightfully from one's efforts, not to let them be endangered or to decline.

3. *Kalyāṇamittatā*, endowment with good friends: understanding the people in one's area, choosing to associate, converse and study with and emulate those who are virtuous and learned.

4. *Samajīvitā*, endowment with balanced livelihood: determining one's income and expenditure in livelihood moderately, not allowing one's life to be too austere or too extravagant, so that one's income is higher than one's expenditure and there is some left over for saving. Those who can fulfill these four principles will find happiness in their wealth through moderation, which is a kind of happiness.[10]

These four principles show that according to Buddhism, the important factors for economic stability are to maintain an honest livelihood diligently, and to know how to be economical and save. In this respect, very diligent people will obtain more and more wealth, which means each person has to compete with oneself as much as possible: the more diligent one is, the more wealth one secures. According to the principle of creating

[10] Aṅguttara Nikāya, Aṭṭhakanipāta, 23/145.

benefit, once benefit is obtained for oneself, it also leads to benefit for others.

Buddhism does not judge people's goodness or badness from the size of their wealth because wealth is considered merely a stairway to other goals, not a goal in itself. Whether the possession of wealth is encouraged or not lies in the goals for which it is used. As a result, there are two points of interest concerning wealth for Buddhism: the ways wealth is obtained and conduct in regard to the wealth secured. In other words, Buddhism does not emphasize wealth itself, but its seeking and its use.

Since Buddhism gives such importance to the ways of seeking and using wealth, apart from competing with oneself to attain more wealth, fair competition with others for better efficiency and for increased benefit to oneself and others should not be against Buddhist principles.

Buddhism has mentioned many different types of wealth seekers. Here I vould like to mention three, as follows:

1. People who seek wealth improperly and selfishly, then do not spend that wealth on their comfort, do not give alms, and do not make merit.

2. People who seek wealth improperly and selfishly, then spend that wealth on their comfort, but do not give alms and do not make merit.

3. People who seek wealth improperly and selfishly, then spend that wealth on their comfort, give alms, and make merit.

Among these three types of people, those who seek wealth improperly and do not use it for their own comfort are harmful both to themselves and to society. They harm themselves by not obtaining happiness from the wealth they have acquired. Also, they may be punished for their misconduct, which negatively affects people at large in that it is a way of destroying the economic cycle because wealth is not properly circulated. The second group harms themselves partially, in that they seek wealth improperly. However, they use their wealth only for their own comfort, so they are not advantageous to society. The third group harms themselves and society partially, but is also partially advantageous to society because they use their wealth for themselves, for alms giving, and for merit making.

Apart from this, having or acquiring wealth and then just hoarding it is also considered wrong, like seeking wealth improperly and using it wrongfully.

The Buddha criticized a very wealthy millionaire who had accumulated a great amount of wealth and possessions, but who lived on bad food of broken rice and vinegar, wore only three pieces of coarse-grained fabric, used an old vehicle and a sunshade made of leaves. He died without descendants to inherit his wealth. King Pasenadi of Kosala had to cart the uninherited wealth off into the palace. The Buddha criticized the millionaire who possessed wealth without making use of it thus:

> This is how it is, Your Majesty. The unworthy man, acquiring great wealth, does not spend it for his own happiness and comfort, does not spend it for the happiness and comfort of his parents... his children and wife... his servants and workers... his friends and colleagues, does not place offerings in recluses and holy men (*samaṇa brahmaṇa*) that are for spiritual happiness and lead to heaven. That wealth of his, not rightfully used, is inevitably taken by state authorities, stolen by thieves, destroyed in fire or lost in water, or taken by some unbeloved relatives. That wealth, not rightfully used, disappears to no use, unconsumed. It is like a pond in a land of demons, full of clean, cool, fresh, transparent water with good approaches, a shady place. No one can use the water for drinking or bathing.
>
> As for the worthy man, having gained great wealth, he spends it for hi own happiness and comfort, spends it for the happiness and comfort of his parents... wife and children... his servants and workers... his friends and colleagues, and places offerings in recluses and holy men that are for spiritual happiness and lead to heaven. That wealth of his, rightfully used, cannot be taken away by state authorities, thieves cannot steal it, fire cannot burn it, water cannot sweep it away, and unbeloved relatives cannot take it away. That wealth, rightfully used, is consumed, not wasted, just like a pond near a villages or market town full of clean, cool, fresh, and limpid water, with good approaches and shady setting. People can come and take the water, drink, bathe, or use it as desired.[11]
>
> A bad person, having gained wealth, does not use it for himself nor give it (to anyone else). Just like a pond in a land of demons, people cannot drink or use its water. A wise person, having gained wealth, uses it for himself and for his tasks (personal activities and charities). He is excellent. Having taken care of his kinsfolk, he is blameless. He attains to heaven.[12]

[11] Aṅguttara Nikāya, Aṭṭhakanipāta, 23/145.
[12] Saṁyutta Nikāya, Sagāthavagga, 15/386–9.

The above *Buddhavacana* teaches us that one should utilize wealth or possessions, not just hoard them uselessly. The presence of wealth is for the purpose of benefit. As for the ways in which wealth is to be used, we should take the guideline of five principles of *bhoga-ādiya*, which are:

1. To use wealth to support oneself, one's family, and parents comfortably.
2. To use wealth to foster one's friends and colleagues comfortably.
3. To use wealth for protection from danger and harm.
4. To make *balī*, the five kinds of offerings:
   4.1 *Atithibalī*: offerings given as reception for guests
   4.2 *Ñātibalī*: offerings for kinsfolk
   4.3 *Rājabalī*: offerings made to the state, such as taxes and duties
   4.4 *Devatābalī*: offerings made to deities, the things worshipped according to beliefs or social traditions
   4.5 *Pubbapetabalī*: offerings made to the deceased
5. To support recluses and holy men, monks who conduct themselves properly, practice well and develop themselves, who are not heedless or infatuated, and who maintain righteousness in society.[13] As for methods for apportioning spending, they are given in the four *bhogavibhāga*, which teach the division of wealth into four parts. The first part is for consumption in one's own livelihood, for comfortably raising one's family and people under one's care, as well as in performing good works for public benefit. The second and third parts are for investment. The fourth part is to be kept as savings for use when the need arises, as there may be dangers, accidents, or obstacles in one's occupation such as illnesses.[14]

However, even though one seeks wealth rightfully and spends it beneficially, this is not yet considered to be perfection of conduct concerning wealth according to the Doctrine.The *dhamma* also emphasizes spiritual and intellectual values, as stated by the Buddha:

> Monks, these three kinds of people exist in the world: the blind, the one-eyed, and the two-eyed. What are the blind? Some people in this world do not have the eye that helps to obtain wealth not yet obtained and to increase wealth already gained; neither do they have the eye that helps to know

[13] Phra Dhammapiṭaka, *Economics According to Buddhism*, pp. 57–58.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

skillful qualities (*kusaladhamma*) and unskillful qualities (*akusaladhamma*) ... qualities that are harmful and those that are not harmful... the inferior and the superior... the black and the white. These are the blind. What are one-eyed people like? Some people in this world have the eye that helps to obtain wealth not yet obtained and to increase wealth already gained, but not the eye that helps to know skillful qualities (*kusaladhamma*) and unskillful qualities (*akusaladhamma*)... qualities that are harmful and those that are not harmful... the inferior and the superior... the black and the white. These are the one-eyed. What are two-eye people like? Some people in this world have the eye that helps to obtain wealth not yet obtained and to increase wealth already gained, and also the eye that helps to know skillful qualities (*kusaladhamma*) and unskillful qualities (*akusaladhamma*)... qualities that are harmful and those that are not harmful... the inferior and the superior... the black and the white. These are the two-eyed.

Those who are blind or have bad eyesight are bad off in both ways: they gain no wealth and they make no benefit. The other kind of people, the one-eyed, occupy themselves in securing wealth, both rightfully and wrongfully, be it by stealing, cheating, or deceiving. These people are clever at accumulating wealth, but afterwards they go to hell, and the one-eyed fall into trouble. As for the two-eyed, they are the excellent ones: they share a portion of the wealth secured rightfully from their own labors to other people. They possess noble thoughts and determination, so they are bound for a good destination and do not live in distress. Keep a distance from the blind and the one-eyed, and associate with the excellent two-eyed ones.[15]

The truly proper conduct in regard to wealth, according to the *dhamma*, is to have an attitude known as *nissaraṇapaññā*. This means to be wise to and understand the real values and benefits of wealth, as well as the limitations of such values and benefits, to have a mind that is free, not the slave but the master of wealth. Wealth should be our servant, our tool for creating benefit and goodness, for helping relieve suffering, and bolstering happiness. It should not be allowed to cause us more suffering, destroy our mental health, destroy human values, or cause alienation among human beings.

Thus, among those searching for wealth, the Buddha praised those who seek wealth rightfully and unselfishly, use it for their own well being, alms giving, merit making, who are not greedy, not deluded, and not too much

[15]Aṅguttara Nikāya, Tikanipāta, 20/468.

involved in wealth, and who are mindful of the disadvantages of seeking wealth and employ wisdom to fling off infatuation with it. They are praiseworthy on four accounts:

1. They secure wealth rightfully.
2. They spend for their own well being.
3. They give alms and make merit.
4. They are not greedy, not deluded, not over-involved, but are mindful of the harm of wealth and employ wisdom to free themselves from infatuation in wealth.

The proper conduct concerning wealth according to Buddhist ethics can therefore be summarized as follows:

1. Seeking: seeking wealth rightfully
2. Using:
   a) to support oneself (and one's dependents)
   b) to share with others
   c) to contribute to beneficial and meritorious activities
3. Attitude toward wealth obtained: not to be infatuated with wealth, but utilize it mindful of its advantages and disadvantages,to have a mind that is free and to use wealth for further spiritual and intellectual development.[16]

From the above summary of the Buddhist principles for dealing with wealth, we can see that Buddhism gives freedom to everyone in seeking wealth. All people have the right to choose an occupation according to their skills and ability, but that occupation should be within the frame of ethics. Possessions obtained from rightful labor can be used for the comfort of oneself, one's family and one's dependents. This conforms with the economic principles of liberalism. The difference, however, is that, be it methods of seeking wealth or the use of wealth already gained, the emphasis is on spiritual and intellectual values. That is to say, Buddhism does not reject physical comfort, but says that such physical well-being should proceed in conjunction with spiritual development.

The Buddha also mentioned four kinds of happiness of a lay person. A householder should have four kinds of happiness which are taken to be

[16] Phra Rājavaramunī, *Buddhadhamma*, p. 781.

things he should strive for. There is for example the *Buddhavacana* addressed to the wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍika:

> See here, householder. These four kinds of happiness are things that a householder, one who partakes of sense pleasures, should always gain. They are *atthisukha, bhogasukha, anaṇasukha,* and *anavajjasukha.*[17]

The four kind of happiness for a householder are:

1. *Atthisukha:* the happiness of having possessions, the pride and contentment that one has possessions obtained rightfully from the sweat of one's own brow and the strength of one's own arms, rightfully acquired.

2. *Bhogasukha:* the happiness of spending, the pride and contentment of using the wealth one has rightfully earned to support oneself, to support one's dependents, and contribute to useful activities. To have possessions but hoard them and not use them is miserliness, which is harmful to oneself and society.

3. *Anaṇasukha:* the happiness of not being in debt. To be in debt is considered a kind of suffering in this world. The suffering of creditors is the fear of not getting their possessions back, while the suffering of debtors is the worry that creditors will ask them to clear their debts.

4. *Anavajjasukha:* the happiness of blameless conduct, having good conduct which has no flaws in any way and is not censurable, either in body, speech or mind; not behaving in a way that is censurable.

Among these four kinds of happiness, the fourth kind, *anavajjasukha,* is the most valuable of all because it is what connects economic life with the wholesome life to be developed to perfection. We can see that Buddhism considers economic issues as a part of life. Apart from economic well-being, there must also be other values in life. Economic well-being should help promote and nourish life in other aspects, including the spiritual. Wealthiness should, therefore, facilitate and enable human beings to live more comfortably and be more ready to lead wholesome lives and perform good deeds in order to gain access to more and more wholesome things. Thus, Buddhism perceives economics, competition, seeking of wealth, and spending as a part of the good life. They are not good in themselves, but good because they help support other aspects of life, particularly the

[17] Aṅguttara Nikāya, Catukkanipāta, 21/62.

spiritual aspect. In conclusion, Buddhism has the following attitude towards wealth and competition for wealth:

1. In terms of the individual, Buddhism praises only those who become wealthy from their own hard, honest labor and who use their wealth to good and wholesome ends. In other words, it praises being a good and useful person above having wealth. In this respect, competition for wealth is not wrong in itself, but it is wrong if it involves wrongful methods or immoral conduct.

2. In terms of society, wealth is a tool or support for life, but it is not the goal of life. Wealth should therefore be something that enables people to live more conveniently and prepares them to lead a wholesome life and perform good deeds in order to gain access to the higher good in accordance with Buddhist doctrine. When wealth arises for one person, that means wealth has arisen for mankind, or wealth has arisen in society. When one person becomes wealthy, society thereby becomes more prosperous and bounteous. Thus, when wealth arises for a good person, it is just as if it arose for society. These wealthy persons are compared to good fields in which rice grows for the benefit of all people,[18] and the Buddha said "Wealth possessed by a good person is like a pond in a safe place: everyone can use it and benefit from it. Wealth possessed by a bad person is like a pond in a land of demons: even though the water is clear and refreshing, it is of no use."[19] Wealthy people according to this principle should therefore be proud as representatives managing wealth to support their fellow beings and in comfort and give them the opportunity to do good deeds.

The duty of the state

In Buddhism there is also mention of principles of government. For instance, one of the duties of an emperor is to share wealth to the needy.[20] Buddhism recognizes the importance of wealth in worldly society. Poverty and need are important causes of crimes and social evils,[21] and it is

[18] Aṅguttara Nikāya, Aṭṭhakanipāta, 23/128.
[19] Saṁyutta Nikāya, Sagāthavagga, 15/387.
[20] Dīgha Nikāya, Pāṭikavagga, 11/35.
[21] Dīgha Nikāya, Pāṭikavagga, 11/39.

considered the responsibility of the state or government to look after and apportion wealth to poor citizens and to remove poverty from the land. To do this, many methods are required, in keeping with each situation, especially creating opportunities for the people to pursue honest livelihoods, giving career support, allocating funds and equipment, as well as preventing and controlling unfair and wrongful methods, exploitation, etc. We can see from the Buddhist viewpoint that the state has a major role in the economy, unlike the economics of liberalism in which the state has only a minor economic role.

Goals of economic behavior and economic activities

From the Buddhist principles dealing with wealth, as far as can summarized from the general teachings, we can see that in Buddh economic behavior and activities are not separate from other activities in life. This view is in accordance with the practice in real life, because in real life human economic activities cannot be separated from activities in other areas. A good life entails good activities in many areas proceeding in harmony.

Therefore, economic behavior, activities and results are important in terms of Buddhist ethics in the following ways:

1. They are supporting factors or bases for happiness up to a degree. We have to admit the truth that material prosperity helps to make us happy. Buddhism also accepts this truth.

2. They are factors or bases for preparing human beings to develop the quality of their lives and develop their human potential. An example can be cited from the Buddha's time. Once when the Buddha was staying at Jetavana in the city of Sāvatthī, he saw in his psychic vision that a cowherd living in Āḷavī was ready to attain *dhamma*, so he went there to give a teaching to that cowherd. As for the cowherd, when he heard that the Buddha was coming, he wanted to go and hear the teaching, but just then one of his cows went missing. He decided to go and look for the cow first, then came back to listen to the teaching. He walked through the forest looking for his cow and eventually found it and drove it back to its pen, but by that time he was exhausted. However, he went to the place that had been prepared for the Buddha's teaching.

When the Buddha saw the cowherd coming he knew that he was tired and hungry, so he asked a lay supporter to prepare some food for him to eat his fill, after which the Buddha began to teach. After hearing the teaching the cowherd attained stream entry (*sotāpattiphala*). After giving the teaching, the Buddha took leave of the people of Āḷavī and returned to Jetavana, but along the way the monks accompanying him speculated on the Buddha's actions. The Buddha then explained to those monks that "People dominated by hunger, who are suffering with hunger, are in no position to understand a teaching.[22]"

From this story, we can see that if the belly is empty people will not understand a teaching; that is why the Buddha let the cowherd satisfy his hunger first. Economics is therefore a very important issue. On the other hand, consumption or economic prosperity are not goals in themselves, but the ground for human development, for helping human beings achieve a better quality of life and attain something of higher value. For example, the cowherd, having satisfied his hunger, listened to the teaching. The creation of economic prosperity is an important task, but economic progress and prosperity must be related to the goal, to lead to a quality of life that prepares people to develop their potential, to create, or practice for, a wholesome life.

Buddhism considers economics to be only one factor or one activity. Life is a union of many factors and activities, thus we have common goals in life and society. Buddhism sees life, in keeping with this common goal, as advancing to liberation. Every moment of life, properly conducted, becomes training, a development of potential, and an increase of the quality of life. We should therefore always ensure that economic activity becomes part of the procedure or process of development of potential to increase the quality of life, because all aspects of life or all human activities are related and interdependent.

Activities that are correctly carried out, or proper economic behavior, is called *sammā-ājīva* (Right Livelihood), which is an element of the way of life or process of living known as the *Noble Eightfold Path*, as mentioned earlier. Arriving at this point, we now have a view of the status of

[22] Phra Debvedī, *Buddhist Economics* (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1988), pp. 5-6.

economics in Buddhist ethics, which is to say: Proper economic practice is Right Livelihood; Right Livelihood is a factor of the Buddhist way of life known as the Noble Path; The Path comprised of 8 factors is the way to the ultimate common goal of Buddhism. We may conclude the importance of economics from the position of Right Livelihood as follows:

1. Economic activities, which are called Right Livelihood, are part of the system which develops human potential or raises the quality of life to the level of liberation and peace. Since the Path has this aim, Right Livelihood, as an element of the path, has the same goal.

2. The Path is a system of practice that consists of eight factors. These factors must be interdependent and cooperate and harmonize in achieving the goal of Buddhism, which is the wholesome life. This suggests that economic activities are an element which is interdependent with other elements in the system of the wholesome life.

From the above we can see the Buddhist economic way of life as well as the importance and relation of economics in Buddhism thus: a good economic life is one of the elements helping to attain the Buddhist goal which is the wholesome life. Buddhism, therefore, does not reje economic wealth, because economic wealth, or a good economic life, ca enable human beings to advance to goals that are better and higher tha that.

From the study of economics according to Buddhist ethics, we may conclude that Buddhist ethics does not conflict with liberal economics, but is "compatible" when some additional conditions are applied, as explained below:

1. Buddhism accepts personal wants and seeking, and accepts the benefits obtainable here and now, which are matters of bodily or material happiness, with a view that seeking one's own benefit must always take into account the benefit of others, in effect harmonizing one's own benefit with the benefit of others.

2. Buddhism also accepts property rights, but economic assets or wealth are not goals in themselves, but a bridge to the physical and spiritual goals of oneself and others.

3. The seeking of wealth in the Buddhist view emphasizes rightful methods of seeking and spending. Economic competition which is fair and

not an exploitation of oneself or others is therefore not against Buddhist doctrine.

4. In the Buddhist point of view, the state has a major role in social justice. Even so, in a liberal economic system which does not have a truly perfect market situation, the state needs to facilitate equal opportunities for the poor before there is the possibility of achieving a good life. By this token, we may say that the state according to the Buddhist perspective must also guarantee freedom of opportunities.

5. Buddhism gives the freedom to choose occupations in accordance with each person's skills and ability, but this freedom must lie within the bounds of morality. The use of freedom without the guidance or control of morality will bring bad effects to society as a whole.

We can see, however, that Buddhism emphasizes a seeking of happiness or benefit which has morality (*sīla*), *dhamma*, and the principle of non-exploitation to guide it, and so tells entrepreneurs or businessmen that seeking benefit from business must be righteous and not an exploitation of society or the environment. At the same time, another important point is that questions of ethics in business must also be addressed at consumer habits, not just at business organizations.

The solution of ethical problems in business

1. *Production*

1.1 Production in economics means creating and transforming one object into something else in order to make that object valuable in terms of utility of satisfaction, or valuable in market terms. A persisting problem of production is that the production process under the business system is based on the principle of using production resources for maximum profits without paying attention to consequences that may arise, such as exploitation, environmental pollution, etc.

In his book, *Buddhist Economics*, Phra Debvedī expresses points out that in producing we think we are creating things, but actually we are only transforming things—transforming something into something else, from one substance into another, from one kind of labor into something else. This kind of transformation is creating a new condition by destroying the former condition. Thus production will always involve destruction. Some kinds of destruction are not acceptable, so some questions on economic

production remain for consideration. For instance, the value of some products is only equal to what is destroyed, in which case there is the question of whether to produce them or not. In some cases, it may be better to abandon such production, and such abandoning is an activity that promotes quality of life. As a result, it is not right for the new concept of economics to judge people only from whether they produce or not. Non-production may be a good economic action or activity. We must consider production as of two kinds: production which has an equally productive and destructive value (such as production that destroys natural resources and damages the environment) and production that is directly for the purpose of destruction (such as manufacturing weapons). There is production which has a positive result, and production which has a negative result, production that promotes the quality of life, and production that destroys it.[23]

Manufacturers should therefore employ Buddhist ethics as the guidelin in their economic activities. The principles that can be applied i production are Right Livelihood—having livelihood or business tha produces goods that are beneficial to humanity, not producing harmful items like poisons, narcotics or dangerous addictive substances, lethal weapons, etc. The principle of benefit should also be used, meaning to produce at an amount that is appropriate to market demand, and produce goods that are of good quality and durability. Producers should not produce low-quality products in the expectation of profit from people having to repeatedly buy new items without any consideration for the consumer's benefit. They should use the principle of non-exploitation by choosing production technology carefully and not using natural resources in excess to the extent that the balance of the natural environment is destroyed, which means exploitation of nature and human beings themselves.

The *Aggañña Sutta*, which tells the origin of the human world, reflects the Buddhist point of view on ecology in which human beings and nature are united and inter-related. Production activities according to Buddhism must therefore be in harmony with the ecology and must contribute to the

[23] Phra Debvedī, *Buddhist Economics*, pp.38–39.

normal balance of nature. So production according to Buddhist ethics should be of goods and services that are not harmful to life, but are beneficial to the conduct of a good life (*sammāmagga*), taking into consideration benefits to the body and the mind as well as to preservation of the environment. Goods that damage physical or mental health and the environment are, according to Buddhism, of little or no benefit. Thus production according to Buddhism is such that it aims for happiness and peace for the members of society, allowing them to support their lives reasonably according to their incomes, neither too poorly nor too extravagantly, and not causing difficulties to others. The addressing of ethical problems in production requires use of the principle of Right Livelihood; that is, manufacturers should produce goods that are of value to life, and do not exploit themselves, others, or the environment, and should take the benefit of consumers into consideration.

1.2 On the issue of labor in production, liberal economics takes labor as a cost that should be minimized. Thus it tries to employ more and more technology in production to cut down cost and to increase productivity. Taking too much account of production efficiency sometimes causes conflicts between employers and employees. To reduce such conflicts, manufacturers should treat their workers as fellow humans, not as mere labor in the production process which can always be replaced by machines. The conflicts between employers and workers most frequently found have many causes. For instance, workers are not interested in taking responsibility for their duties and their work because of lack of familiarity with the lifestyle of an industrialized society or anything other than an agricultural lifestyle; employers do not abide by labor laws; employers use unfair methods to administer their workers or fail to understand them; workers demand higher wages to catch up with the cost of living and employers refuse to grant them. These situations lead to conflict. In these conflicts, if one side gains the other loses. For instance, if an employer increases his workers' wages, he will feel that his production costs have increased. However, most of the conflicts begin from the workers' feeling that their employers are taking advantage of them or treating them unfairly, so they form groups to demand what they want or go on strike. Mutual destruction is the result, causing a waste of human resources and

leading to destruction of the country's natural resources as well as unemployment problems.

If we carefully examine these conflicts, we will see that their major cause is selfishness on the part of both workers and employers. Workers are selfish in that they do not care about the efficiency of their production and do not take into account economic, social and other situations, including the troubles of their employers, while employers are selfish in trying to maximize their profits, and so pay no attention to the workers' feelings or what is righteous. Such conflicts would not arise if both parties tried to find a meeting point in their thought, activities, and benefits adhering to the Buddhist teaching called *sārāṇīyadhamma* (qualities leading to conciliation) given by the Buddha, in which each of the points can be applied to find a meeting point as follows:

1) A meeting point on opinions: When people are working together, they must have common thoughts according to the principle of *diṭṭhisāmaññatā*, which means having equality in good views, having a common agreement. When communal problems occur, all people get together to correct them with mutual goodwill (*mettā*). This is called *mettāmanokamma*: establishing kindly mental actions, establishing mental actions that are imbued with goodwill, love, benevolence, and the desire to look on each other without aversion, danger or exploitation. Both parties must try to develop this kind of feeling and not push the burden to only one party. In addition there is the principles for establishing mutual understanding through lingual communication, *mettāvacīkamma*. This is speaking on the basis of goodwill by not using one's emotions or personal dislikes in one's work, but expressing words that are true, conciliatory, gentle, polite, and constructive, adjusting one's attitude to accept the truth that the continuity and progress of work also means the continuity and progress of business, rather than each of the parties struggling to get excessive results. Greed leads to destruction, as stated in the *Saṁyutta Nikāya, Sagāthavagga*: "Greed is dangerous to all *dhamma*,"[24] and "Desire brings men down,"[25] and the discussion of the reasons for inferior wisdom

[24] Saṁyutta Nikāya, Sagāthavagga, 15/73.
[25] Saṁyutta Nikāya, Sagāthavagga, 15/79.

and lack of reflection on consequences, both direct and indirect, both for the owner of the business and the employees. When reasoning and mindfulness are dominated by desire, intelligence in work will disappear, leaving only foolishness. This is destructive to oneself and to others, as in the saying "Wealth kills the fool, not those who look for the shore. Because of his greed, the fool kills himself just as he would kill another"[26]

2) A meeting point in activities: This is the undertaking of activities on the basis of physical expressions which reflect mutual love and goodwill. This should be based on the principles of relationship between employers and workers, or the duties between employers and workers. The Buddha described them thus:

Employers should support their workers by: 1) assigning work that is suitable according to physical strength, gender, age, and ability; 2) giving a wage according to the work assigned and cost of living; 3) providing welfare, such as health care in time of illnesses; 4) sharing any extra benefits with them; 5) allowing days off for rest as appropriate.

Employees should respond to this support by: 1) starting work before their employer; 2) finishing work after their employer; 3) taking only what is given by the employer and being honest; 4) striving to improve their work; 5) spreading the virtues of their employers and businesses.[27]

3) A meeting point on interests: This is a very important problem because in all kinds of work people want benefit. Conflicts and enmity often begin from conflicts of interests. Business owners want maximum profit from their investments to expand their businesses and increase their wealth as much as possible, so they try to minimize expenses and maximize profits. Employees want as much returns from their labor as possible. Because their interests go in opposite directions, a meeting point in thinking is required, such that it brings benefits together on the ground of loving kindness, i.e., "... to share rightful acquisitions to one another, not keeping only for one self."

Understanding the importance of sharing promotes stability, because in order for one party to survive the other has to survive too: both parties must depend on each other. Aiming only to hoard benefits for oneself is an

[26] Khuddaka Nikāya, Dhammapada, 25/93.

[27] Dīgha Nikāya, Pāṭikavagga, 11/171.

obstacle to happiness, as said in Buddhism: "He who eats alone eats not happily."

The implementation of the principles of *sārāṇīyadhamma* will help create good relations between employers and workers. For workers to have good relations with employers, they have to make an effort to do their jobs as well as possible, and so production efficiency will be improved.

Our discussion of production describes the characteristics of production that is morally right, but it is not only right morally. This concept of production can also bring about efficiency in production since limited resources are used appropriately and labor is used more efficiently because of good job motivation.

2. *Marketing*

Once goods and services have gone through the production process, they are brought into the process called "marketing". According to economics, consumers want to buy products at low prices while producers want to sell their products at high prices. For this reason, producers must maximize their profits by minimizing costs, then price the products as hig' as possible. This leads to both positive and negative results. Positively, leads to technological research in order to manufacture products at tl lowest cost, which could mean cheaper products to consumers. Negatively, it leads to underpricing labor, underpricing the factors of production, and release of toxicants resulting from that production to pollute the environment. To solve these negative results, we will here present the principles of Buddhist "market ethics" so that the market serves as a response to people's needs for the necessities of life, not just as a mechanism for unlimited profits without concern for people.

Buddhism does not prohibit seeking wealth or making profit, as shown in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya, Tikanipāta* (20/458), which refers to merchants and householders who obtain great amounts of wealth as "farsighted people who know how much they bought their merchandise for, how much they have invested, how much they will sell their merchandise for, how much profit they will make, and how much investment return they will have. They are clever in their trade."

From the above we can see that Buddhism teaches traders to anticipate and analyze market situations, to know how much to buy and sell for in order to make a profit, and to know which products have good liquidity,

meaning which goods are in high demand and are in sufficient supply to be conveniently marketed. All this does not mean it is good to trade any kind of good that makes a profits, because the Buddha recommended avoiding certain types of goods, calling them *micchāvaṇijjā*: trades that should be avoided by a Buddhist lay follower (*upāsaka* or *upāsikā*). There are five of these:

1. *satthavaṇijjā*: trade in weapons of destruction such as spears, swords, guns, etc.;
2. *sattavaṇijjā*: trade in human beings;
3. *maṁsavaṇijjā*: trade in livestock and meat;
4. *majjavaṇijjā*: trade in intoxicants;
5. *visavaṇijjā*: trade in poisons.[28]

Trading in weapons is prohibited because they are tools for killing and destruction. Seeking profits from selling weapons is tantamount to making profit from the death and destruction of human beings. Trading in human beings is prohibited because human beings are born equal. All people are equally human beings, so for people to buy and sell other people is extremely wrong. Such trading brings human dignity down to the level of animals or inanimate objects. It is exploitation, one group suppressing and exploiting another as goods.

Trading of livestock is prohibited because all beings love life. Selling and seeking profits from animal trading is a kind of exploitation because it causes people to go around taking animals and confining them in order to be sold, at a cost of great misery to the animals. Trading of meat for food, as well, is prohibited. For lay people there must be some killing of animals for food, but such killing should be done only in accordance with the necessity of consumption, which would mean only a little killing. If animals are killed commercially, however, large numbers of animals are involved. This is profiteering from the lives of animals, which is a more serious kind of exploitation than killing for consumption.

Trading of intoxicating beverages is prohibited because imbibing them is a cause of activities that lead to suffering. They are harmful in many

[28] Aṅguttara Nikāya, Pañcaka-Chakkanipāta 22/177.

ways to both oneself and others. The *Tipiṭaka* lists six disadvantages of drinking as below:

1. wealth visibly disappears;
2. quarrels are caused;
3. bodily and mental health are impaired;
4. there is dishonor to oneself;
5. one becomes shameless;
6. intelligence is impaired.[29]

The Buddha considered drinking to be one of the serious causes of ruin, so he forbade trading of intoxicating beverages. Trading of poisons is prohibited because poisons kill people, or at least are seriously harmful to the mind and the body. Nowadays, we find that most entrepreneurs focus only on low costs and high profits. They will do any kind of business as long as it makes high profits. Therefore we see trade in weapons, from spears and swords to guns, poisonous gases, bombs, and nuclear weapons that can kill tens of millions of people at a time. Those who sell these weapons make profits and become rich, but those who use them die in countless numbers.

Human beings are sold in many places of entertainment such as bars and brothels. Women are tricked and forced into prostitution. Some people buy children and women, then force them to work without pay in factories treating them like slaves. Animals and meat are sold widely. Some wi animals have become extinct through people catching or hunting them sell. Some are kept captive waiting to be sold to foreign countries. These are profits made on the suffering of animals. Slaughterers seek profit from the flesh, blood and lives of countless animals. Sometimes, in order to maximize profits, surplus animals are incinerated or thrown into the sea, causing a huge waste of lives.

Liquor is sold as completely normal, and alcoholics are numerous. Money is wasted, health ruined, arguments inflamed, and mistakes made in the work place due to carelessness from drunkenness.

Although sales of poisons is controlled, many poisonous substances are made widely available to extract a profit from ignorant people, ranging

[29] Dīgha Nikāya, Pāṭikavagga, 11/198.

from pain killers, tranquilizers, stimulating drinks and MSG to food colorings and cosmetics loaded with poisonous chemicals.

In the Buddhist view, selling these things is harmful to other people and to society as a whole. If society as a whole is troubled, unstable and confused, eventually all are affected, even those who conduct these trades. In the *Kandaraka Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (13/12), twenty-six kinds of persons who cause no troubles to themselves or others are mentioned, and one of these, number 24, deals with trade, stating "Abstaining from cheating by the scale, deception by fakes, and cheating with measuring instruments." However, the reality of the market place in society is that these things are commonplace. Traders adulterate their products, ruining the reputation of the country. Examples are the adulteration of tablet cassava with pebbles, sand and corncob, or adulteration of oil with water and color to make more profits.

The 25th of these points states that deceit causes troubles to other eople, and should be refrained from. But we see advertisements designed › sway us with deception in the expectation of increased sales. For example, some locally made low-cost products are advertised as expensive imports, and harmful products such as MSG and certain cosmetics are portrayed as useful and beneficial. This kind of advertising bends consumers' feelings in favor of the advertised goods, all of which is deception.

The Buddhist ethical principle that can be applied to marketing activities is *pañcasīla,* the Five Precepts, which is the minimum level of training rules for human conduct. *Pañcasīla* consists of: 1. refraining from *pāṇātipāta*: not killing and leading a life free of physical exploitation; 2. refraining from *adinnādāna*: not taking what is not given and leading a life free of exploitation of others in terms of wealth and possessions; 3. refraining from *kāmesumicchācāra*: refraining from sexual misconduct, leading a life free of exploitation of others in terms of their spouse or beloved ones, and being faithful to sexual customs and one's spouse; 4. refraining from *musāvāda*: not speaking falsely and leading a life free of exploitation of others through false speech, lying, deceiving, depriving them of their interests, or defaming; 5. refraining from *surāmeraya-majjapamādaṭṭhāna*: taking no intoxicating liquors which are a cause of heedlessness, i.e., refraining from intoxicants and leading a life free of

heedlessness, carelessness and delusion caused by narcotics that impair mindfulness and comprehension.[30]

If businessmen adhered strictly to the Five Precepts there would be no unethical businesses such as trade of weapons and narcotics. The *apāyamukha* (pathways to ruin) and vice industries, as well as swindling and deceit through various means, would not arise. In the same way, without demand, there would be no supply: i.e., no production or service. Thus it is also up to consumers to correct their own habits.

Bringing together the principles and teachings dealing with commerce in Buddhism, we can conclude that business dealings according to Buddhist ethics must accord with Right Livelihood, exploiting neither oneself nor others. To not exploit others in Buddhism refers not only human beings, but all beings; i.e., all life systems that interrelate with one another in the environment made up of human beings, nature, and society. Mankind's way of life must relate to and depend on these three elements. Therefore, business operations must be such that they do not exploit oneself—not damaging the quality of life but rather developing and promoting it— and not exploit others—neither creating distress in society or destroying the quality of the environment.

Profit

In business, profits are the returns for investments and labor, and are the incentives for business to go on. A question to be considered is, since the supreme goal of Buddhism is *nibbāna*, and that is a state of liberation from all craving and attachment, is profit maximization, which is directly related to selfishness, against Buddhist ethics—can a businessman who seeks maximum profit be a good Buddhist? To put it another way, *nibbāna* is a state in which there is no longer clinging to *attā* (self), which means those who attain it have no selfishness. In term of business, however, selfishness or profit maximization is the highest stimulation for business activities to begin. It seems that seeking maximum profit contradicts the path to the ultimate goal, *nibbāna*. In order to consider this question, the researcher feels we must begin with another question: whether a Buddhist who is not

[30] Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā, 2/226.

capable of attaining *nibbāna* can still be considered a good Buddhist or not.

To answer this question we have to admit that Buddhist ethics is divided into two levels, which are:

1. *Lokiya* (mundane) level, which is the level for those who still seek worldly happiness. Business life is classified into this level.

2. *Lokuttara* (supramundane) level, which is for those who aspire to a happiness that is beyond the mundane level, which is the state of extinction of all defilements and sufferings, i.e., *nibbāna.*

According to Buddhism, a moral person is one who lives according to the path (*magga*), and practicing according to the path is the way to three levels of goals, as follows:

1. *Diṭṭhadhammikattha*: initial goals. It refers to benefits that can be seen in everyday life, or the ordinary things that people aim for in this world, such as possessions, rank, honor, happiness, praise, wealth, money etc. that have been obtained rightfully. Benefits or profits rightfully gained in business are included in this level of goal.

2. *Samparāyikattha*: further goals. It refers to development of body and mind as well as mental values, the meditation attainments known as *jhānasamāpatti.*

3. *Paramattha*: highest goals. It refers to realizing the reality of all things as they really are, having a mind that is free from defilements (*kilesa*). It is called liberation (*vimutti*) or *nibbāna.*

The first two levels are the mundane while the third level is supramundane. Buddhism accepts the importance of all levels of goals in life in accordance with the readiness of different individuals. Even though ideally the aim is for everyone to attain the supreme goal of *nibbāna*, Buddhism admits that not everyone can attain this final goal.

From the above principles, we can summarize that while some Buddhists cannot attain the highest goal, *nibbāna*, which is the goal on the supramundane level, they can attain goals on the *diṭṭhadhammikattha* or *samparāyikattha* levels, which are mundane, if they follow the path of *magga*, that is, if they have "*sīla*" (morality) in their lives, and they can be good Buddhists too. So businessmen who run their businesses morally can also be good Buddhists. For this reason, Buddhism provides appropriate

teachings and practical guidelines for Buddhists who are not yet capable of attaining *nibbāna* and are still looking for worldly happiness.

We have learnt from the Buddhist principles relating to wealth that Buddhism allows householders to seek and possess wealth according to their individual ability and readiness, within limitations, so long as they do not exploit themselves or others. There are also the principles that lead to immediate goals (*diṭṭhadhammikattha*), which concern economic wealth. There are four of these: 1. *uṭṭhānasampadā* (endowment of diligence): diligent application to work, making an honest living, and knowing how to examine methods to execute one's work so that it is fruitful; 2. *ārakkhasampadā* (endowment of protection): knowing how to protect the wealth obtained from one's diligent labors from danger or deterioration; 3. *kalyāṇamittatā* (having a good friend): association with good people; and 4. *samajīvitā* (balanced life): having a balanced lifestyle.

We can see from the four principles above that what leads to economic prosperity, in the Buddhist view, is honest livelihood and diligence, and from the second principle, having obtained wealth rightfully, looking after it well and not letting it disappear. Thus the accumulation of wealth or funds is not against Buddhist principles. Buddhism has never condemned a millionaire simply for being a millionaire, because wealth achieved justly through hard work is not something to be condemned. By this token, if a businessman is ready and able, he may seek wealth or profit, then rightfully store it and accumulate as much as he can, as far as his/her potential allows.

To seek maximum profits within the bounds of fairness and morality is not against Buddhist ethics on the mundane level. Again, while Buddhism accepts that Buddhists are able to seek maximum profit according to the capitalist system, it must be understood that profit maximization means a fair maximum profit, one obtained through a pure process, a profit gained through a commercial system which has been created efficiently without exploiting or violating others.

Conclusion

We have described the concept of economics according to Buddhist ethics, and we find that an economy according to Buddhist ethics involves 5 basic principles—ownership, liberty, a market system of operations,

competition, and the role of the state—just as in the liberal economic system. This shows that Buddhist principles do not contradict those of liberal economic system. Even so, Buddhism suggests solutions to existing ethical problems in business operations under liberalism which may be summarized as follows: 1. a Middle Way (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) economics that focuses on sufficiency; 2. an economics without exploitation of oneself, of others, or the environment; 3. economic activities as the ground for further human development.

According to the first characteristic, an economics that focuses on sufficiency, the form of consumption will be such that it responds to physical necessities. Thus limited natural resources and social costs, such as soil, water, air, and natural resources, are utilized sparingly and only as much as is necessary.

Since values or habits of consumption according to Buddhist ethics are based on the principle of consumption out of necessity, not for the expression of social status, extravagant goods such as perfumes and cars, products harmful to health such as cigarettes and liquors, products that lead to destruction of life, such as weapons, as well as services leading to immorality, will decrease or eventually disappear. This is made possible through the principle of supply and demand. The principle of supply and demand attains a balance once supply and demand are in tune with each other. If consumption values or habits are in accordance with Buddhist ethics, unnecessary demands will not arise, and consequently there will be no supply. Supply will be a response to real demands, not to demands forced on consumers by the manufacturers.

The second characteristic, economics without exploitation of oneself, others, or the environment, will cause a production process based on Buddhist ethics to focus on ease, simplicity and cost saving without exploitation of labor. Employment of technology in the production process will be for the purpose of facilitating human labor, not replacing it, and will not force human beings into enslavement to machines. Human labor in any economy based on Buddhist ethics is such that it enables human beings to develop themselves. It will be energetic and lively, which in effect means people work at their best. Production efficiency will be increased without having to violate moral principles. In this system, human beings are more important than goods.

Since an economy according to Buddhist ethics would lay emphasis on producing in accordance with consumer necessities, goods and services would not be over diversified. Then consumers would not be induced into maximum or excessive consumption. The employment of simple technology and keeping the focus on human beings would mean that dignity would be afforded to the human being, and nature would not be exploited.

The third characteristic, economic activities as a ground for human development, means that once human beings have achieved economic well-being, they will not stop there. Their economic stability will be a base for them stepping up to higher level, to a wholesome life according to Buddhism. A wholesome life is a life practiced according to the path, *magga*, the result of which is goals on different levels, starting from initial goals to ultimate goal of Buddhism, which is *nibbāna*, the state in that all suffering is extinguished. This is the state most capable of effectively solving human problems, and it is the highest quality of life.

Perpetrators of violations of business ethics usually cite as an excuse that if they were not allowed to do so, production efficiency would be reduced. But experience has proven that such excuses are wrong, because violations of ethics have not led to increased efficiency and liberty. Th Buddhist answer gives both liberty and production efficiency, on th condition that there is mental control in both consumers ar manufacturers. Unethical practices will not be corrected simply by telling manufacturers not to do them. Consumers, as well, need to change their habits. The approach to solving ethical problems in business operation according to Buddhist ethics, therefore, emphasizes adjusting the values and habits of consumers while at the same time solving spiritual problems.

Translated from the Thai version by *Bruce Evans*

About Contributors

Wit Wisadavet currently serves as the director of the Chulalongkorn Center for Buddhist Studies. Professor Wit was trained in Western philosophy with a Ph.D. thesis focusing on Buddhist philosophy and had taught social philosophy and ethics at the philosophy department, Chulalongkorn University before his retirement. His major publications include: *The Concept of Anattā in the Suttas.*

Somparn Promta teaches Buddhist philosophy at the philosophy department, Chulalongkorn University, and serves as the deputy director of the Chulalongkorn Center for Buddhist Studies. He also serves as the editor of the Chulalongkorn Journal of Buddhist Studies, a Thai version. His major works include: *Buddhist Philosophy*; *Suffering in Buddhism: A Darwinian Perspective*; and *Buddhism and Ethical Dilemmas.*

Subhavadee Numkanisorn teaches business ethics at Assumption University. She obtained a Master degree in philosophy from the philosophy department, Chulalongkorn University with a thesis concerned with business ethics of Buddhism. Subhavadee has published a number of articles related to business ethics.

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