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Ethics of the Theravada Buddhist Tradition

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This essay is an attempt to accomplish a twofold task: to present the fundamental tenets of the Buddhist ethical system according to the Theravada canonical tradition; and to clarify the implications of these fundamental ethical principles for some moral issues that raise fresh challenges to the moral agent in the contemporary global context.

Basic Tenets of Buddhist Ethics

The claim of the Theravada school, which in the history of the expansion of Buddhism took root in South East Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand, is that it is *the* school that has preserved the teaching of the Buddha in its pristine purity. It recognizes the canonical literature preserved in the Pali language, broadly classified into three sections, viz., *Vinayapitaka, Suttapitaka,* and *Abhidhammapitaka,* as the most authoritative representation of the Buddha's doctrine. Most modern scholars who adopt a critical historical approach to the study of Buddhism believe that it is the doctrinal content in the *Suttapitaka* that is of paramount importance for the understanding of the original message of the Buddha. All later schools of Buddhism, seeking to establish the validity of their respective doctrinal positions, invariably appeal to the authority of the *sutta* literature that seems to consist of a commonly accepted core of doctrine. Therefore, in reconstructing the fundamental tenets of the Buddhist ethical doctrine, the *Suttapitaka* will be used as the primary source from which material will be drawn.

The Theravada canon does not consist of scriptures in the form of treatises devoted to a systematic discussion of moral doctrines or philosophical ethics. Yet, these scriptures serve as an invaluable

source for the reconstruction of a coherent ethical system. There is conspicuous evidence of the use of a tremendously rich ethical terminology in terms of which all aspects of human life and behavior

have been evaluated. The early Buddhist scriptures may be said to consist, on the one hand, of certain theoretical statements describing the nature of things and, on the other hand, of certain evaluative, prescriptive, and practical utterances involving the appraisal of human actions, behavior, practices, and modes of life. Moreover, they offer guidelines for people to adopt certain modes of behavior, cultivate certain mental dispositions, and aim at certain specific ends in life.

The primary postulate on which the entire ethical system of Buddhism rests is the fundamental premise that there is a supreme end in human life that all rational and intelligent persons ought to aim at achieving. This goal, the *summum bonum* of Buddhism, is referred to in the Pali *suttas* as *Nibbana.* It is the goal which is aimed at, either remotely or immediately, by both layman and recluse *(bhikku).* The religious or holy life *(brahmacariya)*is said to be lived to attain this goal.[1] The Buddha himself valued *Nibbana*as the highest attainment.[2] The goal of *Nibbana* is the guiding principle for moral action in Buddhism. *Nibbana* itself is conceived as a state of moral perfection and purification. It is defined in the *suttas* as the elimination of lust and greed *(ragakkhayajlobhakkhaya),* the elimination of hatred *(dosakkhaya),* and the elimination of delusion *(mohakkhaya).*[3] It is characterized as the highest *kusala.*[4] *Kusala* is one of the principal terms of evaluation in the moral discourse of early Buddhism, and has, in many contexts, the same meaning as the English term "good." The Buddha is said to have undertaken a noble search *(ariyapariyesana)*consisting of the quest for what is *kusala (kimkusalagavesi),* and this search is supposed to have ended in his realization of *Nibbana.*[5] Since *Nibbana* is valued in Buddhism

as the highest good, while other activities that serve as a means to the attainment of this goal are also judged to be good, the Buddhist ethical system may be described as teleological.

However, the significance of the concept of *Nibbana* to Buddhist ethics has been undermined by later attempts to interpret this concept in metaphysical terms. *Nibbana* has been interpreted as a transcendental reality, beyond any forms of conceptualization or logical thinking. This has been largely the result of the influence of the absolutistic and transcendentalist views stemming from the Vedic tradition, which the Buddha in his own teachings characterized as falling within the class of eternalist *(sassatavada)*doctrine. Radhakrishnan, for example, attributed to the Buddha the conception of an absolute metaphysical Being: He says:

Nirvana is an eternal condition of Being, for it is not a *samskara,* or what is made or put together, which is impermanent. It continues, while its expressions change. This is what lies behind the *skandhas,* which are subject to birth and decay. The illusion of becoming is founded on the reality of *nirvana.* Buddha does not attempt to define it, since it is the root principle of all and so is indefinable.[6]

The weight of evidence in the Pali *suttas* is clearly against such an interpretation. The Buddha never spoke of *Nibbana* as the metaphysical ground that explains the empirical universe. Metaphysical concepts such as God, *Brahman, Alman, Purusa,* presenting ultimate metaphysical grounds as explanations, are discouraged in Buddhism. However, Radhakrishnan, in his enthusiasm to interpret the conceptions of Buddhist *Nibbana* in absolutistic terms, even tried to attribute the theory of timeless self to the Buddha. He states:

. . . *Nirvana* is timeless existence, and so Buddha must admit the reality of a timelessself. There is a being at the back of all life which is unconditioned, above all empirical categories, something which does not give rise to any effect and is not the effect of anything else.[7]

Such attempts at describing the nature of Buddhist *Nibbana* have transformed its character from being a concept having ethical and psychological significance to being a concept having metaphysical and ontological significance, and this seems to be contrary to what was intended by the Buddha. The consequence of this view on the nature of *Nibbana* has been that the relation between the *Nibbana* ideal and the ethical life of man has been distorted, resulting in the interpretation of Buddhist *Nibbana* as an escapist and life-denying ideal which involves the most radical form of salvation doctrine. Some have even gone to the extent of saying that the highest spiritual attainment in Buddhism transcends morality altogether. S. Tachibana, for instance, says:

> The *Bhikku,* the *Brahmana,* the Buddha *(sattha muni)* are said to be free from such distinctions as good and evil, pleasantness and unpleasantness, purity and impurity and so on When one reaches this state of culture, distinctive ideas will be absolutely abolished. . . . He has reached the mental condition where there is not consciousness of moral, aesthetical or logical distinction; the relative ideas therefore of good and evil, pleasure and pain, agreeableness and disagreeableness, right and wrong are all annihilated for him.[8]

The doctrines represented in the Pali canonical scriptures do not reflect such an attitude to morality. According to the scriptures, it

is a person who attains spiritual perfection who is capable of making moral distinctions with confidence and .conviction. A person who is enlightened is said to be perfect in knowledge and virtue *(vijjacaranasampanno).*

The view that Buddhism advocates a spiritual goal that transcends moral distinctions has been based on the misinterpretation of some ethical terms used in the moral discourse of Buddhism. It is true that the Buddha instructed his disciples to get rid of both *punna* and *papa.*[9] These two terms have often been translated into the English language, without any qualification, as

"good" and "bad," respectively. It is important to note that these terms have specific meanings in the context of the Buddhist analysis of the nature of man's destiny in the universe. *Punna* and *papa* are terms used exclusively in connection with the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth and *kamma. Punna* refers to the volitional impulses that produce a happy consequence to the individual agent of action in the *samsaric* process, while *papa* refers to exactly the opposite. Within the Buddhist world view, *samsaric* existence in any form is thought to be associated with *dukkha* (dis-ease or unsatisfactoriness). The supreme goal is the cessation of becoming *(bhavanirodha)* that occurs with the perfection of knowledge and character or the elimination of all roots of evil *(akusalamula).* Therefore, all impulses leading to the prolongation of the process of becoming are to be abandoned without residue. Both *punna* and *papa* (good and bad impulses that produce pleasant or unpleasant fruit in *samsaric* life) must necessarily be abandoned. This does not mean that the perfected saint transcends the sphere of morality in the sense that he is free to act in any way he likes. The perfection of the Buddhist saint consists primarily in his perfection of moral character and his elimination of the roots of evil *(akusalamula).* The Buddha, for example, is described as a person who has abandoned all evil traits of mind *fi (sabbakusalammapahino)* and is endowed with wholesome mental traits *(kusaladhammasamannagato).*[10] While the highest attainment itself is characterized as *kusala,* the person who attains it is described as one who is endowed with *kusala* and possessed of the highest *kusala (sampannakusalam paramakusalam).*[11] The Buddha and his disciples were admired by their contemporaries for being endowed with noble *kusala* conduct.[12] Perfected persons are represented in Buddhism as ethical models to be emulated by others. They are considered persons most eminently qualified to dispense moral guidance to others and to provide moral direction for the whole of humanity. By virtue of the moral perfection they have attained,

they are spontaneously capable of conducting themselves in a right and blameless manner. They do not confront the moral struggles that one short of spiritual perfection is bound to confront for they feel no conflict between duty and inclination. It is said that a person who reaches this state' is psychologically incapable of falling into heedlessness and morally blameworthy practices *(abhabba te pamajjitum)* .

The scheme of moral evaluation in Buddhism can be clearly seen to be relative to the goal of *Nibbana.* In the moral evaluation of persons, one who has attained *Nibbana* is judged to be the most praiseworthy person. A disciple who has confidence in the Buddha and who has as his ultimate aim the attainment of *Nibbana,* is described as a noble disciple *(ariyasavaka).*[13] The *Dhammapada* describes the *arahanta*as the highest being *(uttamaporiso).*[14] It is said that as far as the abodes of living beings extend, as far as the end of the realm of becoming, the *arahanta* are the highest, the supreme beings in the universe.[15]

The Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism

The life that conduces to the attainment of *Nibbana* is called *brahmacariya*(the higher life). This attainment is possible by the understanding of the *ariyasaccani*(noble truths). The path to its attainment is called *ariyamagga*(noble path). This path is usually enumerated as consisting of eight factors, namely, right view *(samma ditthi)*, right thought *(samma sankappa),* right speech *(samma vaca)*, right action *(samma kammanta),* right livelihood *(sammaajiva),* right effort *(samma vayama),* right mindfulness *(sammasati),* and right concentration *(sammasamadhi).* .

The Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism, which t4e Buddha himself described as the Middle Way, can be called the quintessence of

the Buddhist ethical system. **It** was called the Middle Way *(majjhima patipada)* because of the context in which the Buddha preached. During that time, there were those who believed that man's spiritual elevation depended on self-mortification, and there were those who completely disregarded spiritual values and preoccupied themselves with sensuous indulgence. The Middle Way of the Buddha is sometimes described as a scheme of the threefold moral training *(tayo sikkha),* consisting of virtuous practice *(sila)*, mental composure *(samadhi),* and wisdom *(panna).* A detailed analysis of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path or the Middle Way **(Ethics of the Theravada Buddhist Tradition 41)** gives a clear picture of the nature of the ethical norms accepted in Buddhism.

The first step of this Path, Right View *(samma ditthi),* draws attention to the ideological basis necessary for a satisfactory moral outlook on life. Although Buddhism does not encourage a dogmatic ideological stance *(ditthi),* a right view is considered pragmatically necessary as a starting point. Therefore, any ideological approach to life that involves a total denial of moral responsibility and free will and denial of the power of human effort and initiative to transform oneself morally is condemned in Buddhism. Forms of strict determinism and fatalism *(niyativada),* on the one hand, and forms of strict indeterminism *(ahetu appaccayavada),*on the other, were seen by the Buddha as damaging to the ethical life of man. He rejected the view that all human experience is determined by the will of a supreme God *(issaranimmanahetu),*and also the view that it is determined by past action *(pubbekatahetu).*16 He considered the strict determinism of Makkhaligosala, a well-known contemporary, to be very damaging to mankind on the grounds that it persuaded people to adopt an attitude of absolute inaction *(akiriya).*

The Buddha equally considered as false the materialistic or nihilistic world view that rejected the efficacy of the moral and spiritual

life toward improving the lot of mankind and that denied the good or evil consequences of volitionally performed action and the reality of survival after death.

Right Thought *(samma sankappa),* the second step in the Eightfold Path, consists of thoughts free from lustful attachment or greed *(nekkhammasankappa),* free from malevolence or hatred *(avyapadasankappa),* and free from violent intention *(avihimsasankappa).*Such thoughts form the psychological basis of benevolent moral action. The emphasis on the connection between thought and action, and inquiry into the psychological roots of human behavior, are striking characteristics of Buddhism.

Right Speech *(samma vaca),* the third step, consists first of the avoidance of false speech *(musa vaca)* and the cultivation of truthfulness and trustworthiness. Second, it involves the avoidance of slanderous speech *(pisuna vaca)* intent on causing dissension among people and the cultivation of spe~ch that promotes unity among those who are divided *(samaggakaranimvaca),*and it strengthens the bonds of those who are already united. Third, it involves the avoidance of harsh speech *(pharusa vaca)* and the cultivation of speech that is pleasant and delightful to hear *(nela kannasukha pemaniya*

hadayangama). Fourth, it consists of abstention from frivolous or vain talk *(samphappalapa)*and the cultivation of meaningful, purposeful, useful, and timely speech *(kalena sapadesam ... atthasamhitam).*[17]

Right Action *(samma kammanta)* is the fourth step. It is connected with abstention from wrongful bodily action and the cultivation of right bodily behavior. It first recommends abstention from injury to life and from all violent acts of terrorism, the laying aside of all weapons used to cause injury to living beings, and the positive cultivation of a mind full of love and compassion, expressing itself in corresponding action. Second, it recommends abstention from

theft and fraudulent behavior and the cultivation of honesty. Third, it recommends abstention from wrongful gratification of the senses, especially in terms of sexual misconduct.

Right Livelihood *(sammaajiva)* is the fifth step. It emphasizes the necessity of adopting a morally acceptable means of livelihood, avoiding those occupations that might be materially rewarding but morally reprehensible. In Buddhism, engaging in any occupation that might result in harmful social consequences is considered as a wrong means of livelihood *(micchaajiva).* Trading in weapons, animals, flesh, intoxicants, and poisons are classified under such illicit occupations that ought to be avoided by the Buddhist layman. In the case of the Buddhist monk, conditions of right livelihood are even more stringent, being determined by the consideration that his life should be in conformity with a life of detachment and renunciation.[18]

Right Effort *(samma vayama),* the sixth step, recommends constant vigilance over one's character, determination to prevent the growth of evil dispositions, and the cultivation of wholesome dispositions of character already acquired. The moral agent constantly confronts inner conflict in choosing between what he considers to be the right thing to do and what passions, emotions, and inclinations prompt him to do. Right effort is considered in Buddhism to be a vital factor necessary for the triumph of the moral will over the baser emotions.

Right Mindfulness *(samma sati),* the seventh step, means watchfulness over the mind to prevent the entrance of evil thoughts. It guides all aspects of mental, verbal, and bodily behavior, giving them the right moral direction. It may be described as the alertness necessary to observe and check *akusala* (immorality).

The last step in the Eightfold Path is Right Concentration *(samma samadhi).* It stands for the clear, composed, and unconEthics of the (Theravada Buddhist Tradition 43)

founded mental condition that is conducive to the dawning of the wisdom that results in the final elimination of all evil dispositions, culminating in the perfection of moral character. The various methods of mental training recommended in Buddhism *(bhavana)* that lead to progressively higher states of mental composure are considered to be the means for cultivating Right Concentration. Methods of mental training that are usually referred to under Buddhist meditation are closely connected with the ethical life of the Buddhist, as they are considered instrumental in freeing the mind of unwholesome emotions.

The Noble Eightfold Path is morally significant for the Buddhist because it leads to the attainment of the highest moral end of Buddhism. The highest end is the total elimination of *lobha* (lust, greed), *dosa* (hatred), and *moha*(delusion). When the Buddha is requested to state briefly what in his opinion is moral evil, he mentions these three psychological dispositions.19 They are also described as the roots of immorality *(akusalamula).*20 The numerous patterns of bodily, verbal, and mental behavior that are characterized in Buddhism as *akusala* are said to be rooted in these psychological dispositions. According to the *Sammaditthisutta,* there is a tenfold manifestation in human behavior of the three roots of evil. They are (1) killing *(panatipato),* (2) stealing *(adinnadanam),* (3) wrongful indulgence in sense pleasures *(kamesu micchacaro),*(4) false speech *(musavado),* (5) slanderous speech *(pisuna vaca),* (6) harsh speech *(pharusavaca),* (7) frivolous talk *(samphappalapo),* (8) intense greed *(abhijjha),* (9) malevolence *(vyapado),* and (10) wrong view *(micchaditthi).*[21] This is the standard list of moral evils recognized in the Theravada canonical literature. Buddhism attaches ethic~l value not only to overt action, but also to numerous mental states that often are expressed in the form of overt behavior. The *Dhammadayadasutta,*for instance, enumerates a lengthy list of evil mental traits that can be conceived of as by-products of the

three basic evil dispositions.[22]

Any mental trait that hinders clarity of mind and mental composure, and which becomes an impediment to *Nibbana,* is considered evil. Buddhism mentions five such mental hindrances, namely, urge for sensuous gratification *(kamacchanda),* malice *(byapada),* sloth and torpor *(thinamiddha),* flurry and worry *(uddhaccakukkucca),* and doubt *(vicikiccha).* They are, from the Buddhist point of view, fit to be called a heap of immorality *(akusala)* because they hinder a person's progress towards *Nibbana.*[23] The four bases of mindfulness *(cattarosatipatthana),* consisting of the analysis of all

physical and mental constituents with perfect self-possession and mindfulness, are said to be a heap of *kusala* in that they consist of the certain path to moral perfection and the attainment of *Nibbana.*[24] All modes of conduct having a tendency to reduce the strength of the three fundamental evil dispositions-greed, hatred, and delusion-are considered morally good in Buddhism. While recommending the highest degree of vigilance and restraint in respect to those modes of behavior that tend to feed, nourish, and enhance those unwholesome dispositions, Buddhist ethics also recommend certain positive actions conducive to their elimination and the cultivation of the opposite wholesome dispositions.

It is in this light that the significance of the four *brahmaviharas* (divine abidings) mentioned in the Buddha's teaching have to be considered. *Metta,* the first *brahmavihara,* stands for an attitude of friendliness, a loving kindness which one can consciously cultivate through contemplative and meditative practice. According to the Buddha, this attitude of friendliness has to be boundless and all encompassing and should not be limited by the common bounds of attachment familiar in narrowly-defined human relationships, such as those of family, race, and religion. *Metta,* in its ideal form, amounts to a universalization of the mother's love to her one and

only child. The *Mettasutta,* describing how such loving kindness should be cultivated, says:

Let one cultivate boundless thoughts of compassion towards all beings thus: "May all beings be happy. Whatever living beings there are, weak or strong, long or great, middle-sized, short, small or large, seen or unseen, living far or near, born or seeking birth, may all beings be happy." Let no one deceive another or despise another in any place. Let one not, out of anger or resentment, wish harm to another. As a mother protects her one and only child, even at the risk of her life, so also let one cultivate boundless compassion towards all beings.[25]

In the same manner should sympathy *(karuna),* sympathetic joy *(mudita),* and equanimity, which involves impartiality and fairness *(upekha),* be cultivated towards all beings. The cultivation of *brahmaviharas* through contemplative exercise, conditions the mind for appropriate moral action. The four *sangahavatthu*(bases of benevolence) operate at the level of overt action. They may, on the one hand, be looked upon as the behavioral expression of the mental condition cultivated by the *brahmavihara*and, on the other hand, as the modes of behavior that feed and nourish the wholesome traits

of mind associated with the *brahmavihara. Dana* (liberality), the first base of benevolence, is one of the cardinal moral virtues recognized in Buddhism. The sacrifice of personal possession for the benefit of others, whatever the possession may be-material wealth, knowledge, expertise, or labor- is considered a great moral virtue. *Piyavacana* (pleasant speech), *atthacariya*(service of others), and *samanattata* (equal respect for all) form the other three bases of benevolence.

The path to spiritual perfection in Buddhism may be based on a systematic doctrine of moral psychology. According to one of the principal formulations of the spiritual path, it consists of three

stagesof development: *sila* (moral practice),*samadhi*(mental composure), and *panna* (wisdom). *Sila* is interpreted as the method by which the activity of evil dispositions is curtailed at the grossest level. Evil dispositions find their expression in verbal and physical behavior in the form of killing, violence, stealing, wrong speech, etc.. The function of *silti'is* to deal with evil dispositions at the most tangible level, that is, at the level of observable behavior. The behavioral expressions of evil dispositions have the effect of feeding those dispositions themselves, further nourishing and strengthening them. The starting point in the moral catharsis, therefore, has to take the form of a deliberate and conscious effort to refrain from such behavior that may further enhance the evil traits of mind. Hence, *sila* is presented primarily in the form of voluntary abstention from bodily and verbal behavior that is morally evil. *Sila* has, in addition to this negative aspect of refraining from evil action, a positive aspect of cultivating wholesome action. In both cases the goal is the same, that is, hindering the growth or reducing the strength of evil dispositions.

Secondly, evil dispositions express themselves at the level of inner mental experience *(pariyutthana).* Lust, anger, envious thoughts, jealousy, etc., may set in motion a process of inner turbulence disturbing a person's inner tranquility. *Samadhi* (mental composure) helps in preventing the expression of evil traits at the level of inner experience and promotes the further weakening of those impulses. The various techniques of calming the mind *(samatha-bhavana)*recognized in Buddhism are supposed to help a person overcome the expression of evil dispositions at the level of inner mental experience.

The third and most subtle level at which these dispositions operate is the subconscious *(anusaya).* Greed, hatred, and delusion may not alwaysbe expressed in physical and verbal action or in the form

of an inwardly felt mental disturbance. Those tendencies may be inherently there to be expressed when a person is confronted with a certain type of situation. One may not always be exhibiting angry and aggressive behavior or feeling the pangs of anger, but one may be disposed to becoming angry when confronted with a certain situation. It is understanding or wisdom *(panna)* that eradicates evil at this subtle level. Insight into the three characteristics of all existence *(tilakkhana),* namely, their transient nature *(anicca),* their dissatisfying nature *(dukkha),* and their unsubstantial nature *(anatta)* is considered the highest self-transforming knowledge that is hailed by Buddhism as the achievement of an enlightened, *nibbanic* individual.

Although the aims and goals of Buddhism, as well as the methods for achieving them, are thought of as universally applicable to all human beings, on certain practical considerations, the Buddha clearly seems to have indicated a difference in degree with regard to the moral precepts *(sila)* to be observed by Buddhist monks and those to be observed by Buddhist laymen. The life of the *bhikku* (monk) has to conform strictly to a life of full renunciation of worldly possessions. It is to be devoted fully to the contemplative exercise of purging one's mind of all defiling tendencies *(asava)* with alertness, self-possession, and intense self-analysis. The *bhikku* is not expected to pursue certain worldly occupations for his livelihood but is to depend on the faithful and generous laity for his material needs. The frugality and simplicity required in the life of the *bhikku* is amply illustrated in the enumeration of the moral precepts that the *bhikku* is expected to observe.[26] Thus, in addition to the main abstentions such as abstention from killing, stealing, and wrong speech, the *bhikku* is expected to be celibate, moderate in food, and not given to luxurious living. He should be content with the barest minimum of material requisites. Although the Buddha shuns self-mortification as a useless exercise leading to no elevation

of the character, the life of the *bhikku* is expected to be free from the lower pursuit of material luxuries that could divert his attention from the higher spiritual ideals. The virtuous *bhikku* is referred to by the Buddha as one who does not inherit material luxuries *(amisadayada)* but one who inherits righteousness *(dhammadayada).*[27] The good society envisaged by the Buddha is one in which the *bhikku,* the *samana,* or the *brahmana* (all three terms stand for the person truly committed to the" spiritual pursuit) has an important role to play in the general moral well-being of society. The monk's

role in society was conceived by the Buddha as an exclusively moral and spiritual one. He may not rule, but he may give moral guidance to rulers. He may not engage in trade and business, but he may point out to laymen how to engage in such activities without violating the principles of good conduct. The moral direction given to society from such a detached and disinterested position is considered by the Buddha as very significant. The degree of detachment cannot be expected of an ordinary lay person who is bound by various ties and bonds of personal relationships and attachments. But a *bhikku* is one who has renounced everything-wealth, property, family ties. The *Singalovadasutta,*in which the Buddha outlines certain principles of conduct for the laymen, considers the spiritual community as the upper direction *(uttara disa)* that a virtuous layman ought to worship in place of the traditional, superstitious ritual I of worshipping directions *(disa vandana).* The goal of the *bhikku* is moral perfection involving the eradication of all ties and attach- I ments, including attachment to his own self. What is aimed at by I such an ideal is not the production of a band of selfish seekers after . individual salvation but spiritual leaders capable of setting the right : moral pace for the whole society. Critics of the Buddhist ideal of I *Nibbana*miss this aspect of the Buddha's moral teaching by con- I eluding that Buddhism merely offers an individualistic, other-

I worldly, life-denying ideal of salvation.

! To say this is not to deny that Buddhism aims at salvation in an i individual sense as well. For Buddhism sees *samsara,* the cycle of ~ becoming, as unsatisfactory *(dukkha)*and seeks to put an end to it. I Escaping this cycle is considered the real well-being of each individual. However, it sees no opposition between this goal and benevolent, altruistic action. The path that leads to salvation is precisely

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one involving the eradication of evil tendencies of the human mind. Moreover, man is capable of becoming happy here and now by getting rid of evil dispositions that hinder his happiness. This

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ideal is one of immediate concern for the Buddhist monk, though it may not be for the layman. Once it is achieved, the Buddhist saint does not lapse into a state of inertia and inaction. Rather, by virtue of the new benevolence of heart that replaces the former selfishness, he is spontaneously moved to disinterested action for the wellbeing of humanity.

Buddhism admits that there are certain limitations to the degree of moral perfection that a layman may attain. It is said that a householder *(gihi)* cannot live the higher life *(brahmacariya)*in its most

perfect form.28 The life of renunciation *(pabbaJJa)*is said to be free from the encumbrances of lay life. Yet, this does not preclude the layman from reaching the same spiritual heights that a monk is capable of reaching, provided he trains himself in the same discipline. On practical considerations, however, the Buddha recommends to lay people, as a minimum moral requirement, that they observe the five moral precepts *(pancasila):* abstention from killing, abstention from stealing, wrongful enjoyment of sensual pleasures, false speech, and abstention from intoxicants. More detailed instruction regarding how the layman should strike a good balance

between his economic and moral life has been given by the Buddha in several *suttas*.[29] Righteous acquisition of material wealth is praised as a virtue in the case of laymen. Energetic and industrious persons who make a success of their material condition in life, adhering to righteous principles, are praised while inert individuals who live purposeless lives are condemned. The conscientious performance of one's role in society as father, son, ruler, or teacher is praised. Sharing of one's material possessions with one's own family, friends, and relatives is highly commended. Caring for aged parents, fulfilling one's responsibilities towards members of the family, and safeguarding marital fidelity are considered important virtues of the lay life. Above all, the layman is expected to cultivate his spiritual welfare. Hence, he is periodically expected to visit spiritual teachers and recluses who can give him proper guidance on spiritual matters.

In the foregoing account, a general description of the content of Buddhist ethics has been presented. It is important, especially from the point of view of moral philosophy, to determine the formal characteristics of Buddhist ethics. Buddhism, like any system of religious morality, subscribes to a cognitivist position with regard to moral issues. In other words, Buddhism admits to the possibility of achieving ethical knowledge. It affirms that there are moral truths to be known. "Nothing is right or wrong, but thinking makes it so," is not a position favored by Buddhism. What, then, are the formal characteristics of the Buddhist ethical system? What light does Buddhism throw on the problem of the rationality of moral discourse?

The *Kalamasutta* can be considered the *locus classicus*for the interpretation of the Buddhist method of moral reasoning. The *sutta* can be said to have been preached by the Buddha in a typically ethical context. It raises a fundamental question that concerns the moral

philosopher, namely, how do we know what is right or wrong? To what criterion can we make a rational appeal? The Kalamas were a people who were confronted with doctrines evidently involving mutually contradictory moral teachings propounded by numerous teachers who visited them. When the Buddha visited them they expressed their puzzlement and asked him to offer a sound criterion for making moral choices. On this occasion, the Buddha advised them to disregard tradition, revelation, authority, *a priori,* or speculative reason, and to use their own judgment based on what they themselves could observe objectively. The Buddha's attempt to resolve the moral problem which the Kalamas faced can be seen in the following dialogue:

Now what do you think, Kalamas, when greed arises within a man, does it arise to his benefit or harm?

To harm, Sir.

Now Kalamas, this man, thus become greedy, overcome by greed, with his mind completely filled with greed, does he not kill a living creature, take what is not given, commit adultery, tell lies and induce others too to commit such deeds as those which conduce to disadvantage and unhappiness for a long time?

He does, Sir.3D

The same is said about malice and delusion. The Kalamas admit that greed, malice, and delusion *(lobha, dosa, moha)* are *akusala* (morally bad), *savajja* (blameworthy), *vinnugarahita* (censured by the wise ones), and when one is under their influence, the results are illness and suffering. The Buddha's attempt here is to show that the Kalamas can know for themselves the distinction between good and bad, without depending on external authority.

A similar exposition of the Buddhist criterion for distinguishing good and bad behavior is presented in the *Bahitikasutta* of the *Majjhimanikaya.* Here, bad conduct, censured by wise recluses and brahmins, is defined as conduct that involves injury or harm *(savyapajjha).*

Injurious conduct, in turn, is described as conduct that has an unhappy consequence *(dukkhavipaka).* **It** is conduct that results in tormenting the agent, tormenting others, and tormenting both the agent and those affected by the action.[31] The *Ambalatthikarahulovadasutta* states the same criterion, emphasizing the need for a moral agent to reflect carefully on the general tendencies that particular actions can be known to possess.[32] Rahula is advised to reflect on the observable consequences of action of body, word, and mind

before performing it, while performing it, and even subsequent to its performance.

It should now be clear that the Buddhist enumeration of moral virtues and moral precepts, and its recommendation of a supreme goal for rational beings, has conformed to a teleological or consequentialist criterion. The concepts of happiness and well-being play a central role in Buddhist ethics. The goal of *Nibbana* is a worthwhile ideal to pursue because it constitutes the real happiness that man can attain. *Nibbana* puts an end to *dukkha.* The highest happiness from the point of view of the individual is attained when there occurs a total emotional transformation. It is on hedonic considerations that *Nibbana* is conceived as the highest happiness. Individuated existence in the cyclic process of *samsara,* subjected to the hazards of birth, old age, disease, and death, and numerous other depressions, anxieties, and frustrations due to the transient nature of phenomenal existence, is *dukkha.* This process does not cease until the psychological defilements *(asava)* are laid to rest. The evil tendencies that function as the driving forces of *samsaric* life are precisely those mental traits that produce immoral behavior. At the root of all conflicts, dissensions, rivalry, and warfare are the basic evil dispositions *(lobha, dosa, moha).* From the Buddhist point of view, man is incapable of becoming happy as long as these evil bases are dominant in his behavior. Disharmony at a social level, and the

resultant suffering produced by man himself in the form of violence towards fellow members of the society, discriminative treatment, and violation of the rights of others are all explained in Buddhism as being rooted in these evil dispositions.

Buddhism believes that observation and analysis of the facts of human experience should form the rational basis of a sound ethical system. Human behavior can be evaluated only on the basis of our knowledge of the nature of the human predicament. It is the facts about the nature of the human situation that reveal to us what, in the ultimate analysis, constitutes happiness and well-being. Buddhism accepts as facts about the human predicament the reality of *kamma,* rebirth, and *samsara.* Morally praiseworthy action is, from the Buddhist perspective, action that conforms to a hedonistic, consequentialistic, or teleological criterion. However, this hedonsim is universalistic in the sense that Buddhism admits that, in the ultimate analysis, there is a universal harmony of interests. One can be happy only by the development of a character that is conducive to the happiness of others as well. There is no opposition, in the final

count, between one's own welfare and the welfare of others. The Buddha says:

Monks, in looking after one's self, one looks after another. How, monks, does one in looking after one's self, look after another? By the practice, development, and cultivation (of wholesome qualities). . . . How, monks, does one in looking after another look after oneself? By endurance, non-injury, loving-kindness, and sympathy.[33]

The significance of this statement is that altruistic action, involving love and compassion, promotes the cultivation of the nobility of one's character, and that in turn promotes altruistic action. Buddhism insists that one cannot pull another person out of the mud unless one comes first out of the mud oneself.[34] One becomes suitable for acting as a liberator of mankind only when one is free from

the moral depravities that prompt one to act in evil ways. Those who have no moral basis for their so-called social commitment usually end up doing more harm than good to society because of their depraved condition. The morally perfect man in Buddhism is one who is intent on the welfare ot himself as well as of others.[35] The enlightened person intends the well-being of all, not only of himself. 36 The Buddhist emphasis on the moral significance of liberating the mind from evil dispositions as a causally necessary condition for one's own well-being cannot be interpreted as an egoistic doctrine. For, in the long run, there is no opposition between what conduces to one's own well-being and the well-being of others. According to Buddhism, such an opposition occurs only when our perception of a moral situation is confined to a narrow perspective. The Buddhist claim is that it is possible to give good reasons in favor of an ethical judgment. Unlike contemporary non-cognitivist ethical theories, such as emotivism and prescriptivism37 that claim there is, in the final analysis, no valid reason that can be given for having a particular moral attitude, nor for accepting a fundamental moral premise, the Buddhist position is that there is a certain limit to the kind of reasons that can be adduced in favor of a moral judgment. When Buddhism judges killing to be a bad action, it bases this judgment on one or more factual premises:

1. that such action springs from and enhances *lobha, dosa,* and *moha,* or any of those mental conditions or character traits that impede the individual's progress towards the highest happiness,
2. that killing has harmful *kammic* consequences to the individual in this life itself or in a future life,

3. that killing has harmful consequences resulting from the individual's guilty conscience, social and legal sanctions, etc.,
4. that killing results in unhappiness and harm to persons other than the individual agent of such action.

In favor of a judgment of the sort, "X *is kusala,))* one cannot adduce any arbitrary fact. "Giving food to A who is now suffering from hunger is a *kusala* deed" is not justified, for instance, by supplying some idiosyncratic reason as, "Today is Sunday." It is justified by the reason that it leads to the alleviation of another person's suffering, and to the cultivation of the benevolent character of the person who performs that action.

In terms of the above Buddhist position, one can be said to be mistaken about one's moral opinions under two conditions:

1. If one is mistaken about the relevant facts and lacks factual knowledge about what constitutes real happiness and well-being and the causal laws operating in the sphere of human action.
2. If one oversteps the legitimate sphere of morally relevant facts, that is, if one pays no attention to the consequences of an action but appeals to external authority, traditions, etc. *J*

The above criteria for the evaluation of human behavior seem to conform to a utilitarian doctrine. However, it is often contended by those who are opposed to utilitarian or consequentialist moralities that the criterion of utility does not accord with some of our basic moral intuitions. It is argued that moral notions such asjustice, fairness, and equal treatment of all persons cannot rest on a purely utilitarian criterion. Buddhism could answer this objection by pointing out that utility need not be the sole criterion of morality. For Buddhism explicitly uses another criterion within which moral notions other than those that fall under a utilitarian criterion can be included. According to an explicitly stated alternative pattern of moral and practical decision making advocated in the Pali Nikayas, one way in which a moral agent can reason in situations is as follows:

I do not want X to be done unto me.

Other beings who are like myself in this respect, too, do not want X done unto them.

I ought not to do unto others what I do not like to be done unto myself.

Therefore I ought not to do X.

This was a familiar ground on which the Buddha based his moral injunctions. In the *Dhammapada,* for instance, this pattern of moral

reasaning is clearly exemplified.38 It is this criterian that is called the Galden Rule *af* marality. Kant farmulated a similar criterian and referred to' it as the "marallaw." R. M. Hare refers to' it as the "Universalizability" af the maral imperatives. [39]

Buddhism accepts as fact that all sentient beings have in their psychalagical canstitutian certain camman feelings, desires, and I attitudes. NO' sentient being desires to' be deprived af life, ar to' be : subjected to' tarture, ar to' be deprived af passessians by farce ar I theft. TO' have a maral attitude tawards life is to' have the ability to' I

put aneself in the pasitian af the ather persan whO' might be affected by ane's actian. Buddhism alsO'seeks to' establish seven r maral values upan this criterian. These are frequently mentianed I under the cancepts af *sila* and *kusala.* The *Samyuttanikaya* cantains an explicit instance af an applicatian af this criterian:

Here a noble disciple reflects thus: "I like to live; I do not like to die. I desire happiness and dislike unhappiness. Suppose someone should kill me, since I like to live and do not like to die, it would not be pleasing and delightful to me. Suppose I, too, should kill another who likes to live and does not like to die, who desires happiness and does not desire unhappiness, it would not be pleasing and delightful to that other person as well. What is not pleasing and delightful to me is not pleasant and delightful to the other person either. How could I inflict upon another that which is not pleasant and not delightful to me? Having reflected in this manner, he (the noble disciple) himself refrains from killing, and encourages others, too, to

r.efrain f4r0om killing, and speaks in praise *of* refraining from kill- mg....
Similar reflectians are said to' *accur* cancerning theft, adultery,
false speech, slanderaus speech, harsh speech, and vain and frivalaus
talk.

In recammending the abstentian fram certain types *af* evil actian
and the pasitive perfarmance *af* certain types *af* whalesame actian,
Buddhism seems to' depend *an* this criterian as well. It shauld be
painted *aut* hawever, that peaple may sametimes cammanly desire
what is nat in their interest, and it wauld, under such circumstances,
nat be marally right to' dO'an actian that is nat in the real
interest af aneself ar athers. It is therefare necessary canstantly to'
check this criterian against the farmer criterian af utility in arder
that it may genuinely become a maral criterian. It is aften the case
that, if peaple really understand what is in their real interest, they
do nat hesitate to' pursue it. But this maynat always happen, as ane
can ignare ane's greater interest due to' same weakness af will ar

addiction to base pleasure. Therefore, the mere fact that someone,
in common with fellow members of a society, has certain desires
does not imply that it is alwaysright to work for the fulfilment of I
such desires without ascertaining the worthwhileness of those I
desires. Thus the criterion of utility along with the Golden Rule
can be said to be the dual criteria for moral decision-making in Buddhism.
They are to be applied as mutually supportive criteria in
order to avoid certain conflicts that might otherwise occur with our
common moral intuitions.

The foregoing account affirms that Buddhist ethics is not
founded on the authority of a supernatural being. Certain modes of
behavior are good or bad, not because God or any other authority
has commanded them or prohibited them, but because people
themselves can discover these distinctions on an autonomous basis.
In any case, with reference to a moral precept that is accepted on

the ground that God has commanded it, the question arises as to whether God has commanded it because it is good, or whether it is good because God has commanded it. To say that God commands only what is morally good reduces itself to a circular definition of goodness unless one accepts a criterion other than that a particular morality is commanded by God. Buddhism insists that the pursuit of morality is an autonomous exercise and that, as rational beings, men can determine what is right and wrong only after a comprehensive understanding of human nature and the human predicament.

If this is the Buddhist attitude to moral questions, one might wish to know what is the difference between Buddhist morality and the morality of a scientific humanist. Although Buddhism is a nontheistic religion, it is not materialism. The Buddhist world view rests on an epistemological basis that is different from that accepted in the empirical sciences. Like the scientific humanist, Buddhism rejects revelation and external authority. But it admits certain special methods of knowing that, in the Buddhist scriptures, are referred to as *abhinna* (super-cognitive knowing). These cognitive abilities are said to be a consequence of mental composure *(samadhi)* attained in meditative training. These special cognitive abilities are

supposed to enable the person to verify in his own experience the truth of survival after death and the operation of the laws of *kamma.* The consequentialist position of Buddhism sees the effects of action' as extending beyond the span of a single lifetime. This is significant

ground for a wide divergence of opinion between Buddhism and scientific humanism on specific moral issues.

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Implications of Ethical Principles for Moral Issues

No system of morality is capable of supplying one with a readymade set of moral rules that are applicable to all times and climes,

although a moral system may be said to contain certain general principles in terms of which we may derive new moral rules to meet altogether new situations. Conditions of living have undergone vast changes and life has become much more complex today compared with the social milieu of the Buddha's day. Modern empirical science is increasingly wielding its influence on people's thinking and is generally recognized as the paradigm of cognitive activity. It has not only brought about changes in the way people perceive but has given them enormous skills with the aid of its technology. These developments in the realm of science and technology are raising new moral issues, especially for those whose outlook has been traditional. Therefore, the question, Can contemporary man adequately respond to these fresh challenges with the aid of the fundamental tenets of traditional moralities? is most significant. Our inquiry will focus on the extent to which Buddhist moral principles can still provide guidelines for moral choices, personally, socially, and on a global scale. The specific issues we shall address include the areas of population, abortion, sexual relationships, the family, and violence.

Population

The problem of the population explosion is a contemporary issue that modern communities expect to solve with the help of scientific technology. It is unlikely that anyone can deny the danger of a steadily increasing population on a global scale, especially under circumstances of limited resources, and in those areas where the boom is greatest. Several national organizations have already responded to this population crisis by adopting methods of birth control and family planning, despite opposition from traditional religious bodies. The question in our context is: What are the implications of Buddhist moral principles on the issue of population control?

It has already been stated that Buddhism does not derive its morality from a divine source. Human morality is based, first, on a

concern for well-being that is to be determined on the basis of experientially observed facts, and second, on the Golden Rule that treats other sentient beings in the way one would want to be treated by others. There is no room for sacred commands that need to be observed as man's moral duty, irrespective of the consequences that

would follow to oneself and others from such performance of duty. Buddhist ethical doctrine has a teleological rather than a deontological structure. It is in terms of this formal structure of Buddhist ethics in general that one has to determine the Buddhist moral response on an issue such as birth control.

A genuinely Buddhist response therefore has to be preceded by a careful investigation of facts related to birth control. An investigation of currently practiced birth control devices shows that they are mostly methods for the prevention of undesired conceptions. Contraceptive methods involve some form of interference with the natural order but do not involve causing any pain or affliction to a living being or the destruction of existent life. Buddhism definitely would raise moral objections to the destruction of existing life however minute that form of life may be, provided it is done with malicious or selfish intentions. But the mechanical or artificial prevention of unwanted conceptions, especially when the rise in population may have harmful consequences on society as a whole, would not be looked upon as a moral evil. Since man has a duty to promote the welfare of the community as a whole, Buddhism would rather consider it a duty to regulate deliberately one's social environment in order to make it conducive to harmonious and satisfactory living.

Abortion

While contraceptive birth control would not be objectionable from the point of view of Buddhist morality, abortion is definitely condemned on moral grounds. In the disciplinary rules for Buddhist

monks, abortion falls under one of the four offenses of the highest gravity, as it is considered equivalent to the murder of a human being *(manussa viggaha))* [41] involving the destruction of a life that has already come into existence. One could, however, question whether abortion is unconditionally a moral evil from the Buddhist point of view. Situations with all sorts of dilemmas can arise that favor the moral rightness of abortion in those special instances. One instance may be the case in which it is medically determined that the child that the young mother is carrying is stricken with some complication that could result in its being born with serious abnormalities, and that the birth would be at the cost of the mother's life.

Is abortion morally justified in this situation? The present case is certainly to be distinguished from one in which a young woman wishes to resort to the abortion of a fetus that has been conceived as a result of premarital or extramarital sex, and the woman is now

concerned for the protection of her social prestige. There are no definite moral rules in Buddhism to deal with the former type of dilemma. The moral precept that has direct relevance to practical moral decision making with regard to abortion is the one concerning the destruction of life *(panatipata).* The reasons given in Buddhism for abstaining from the destruction of life are, the evil nature of the psychological source of such action, the resulting damage to one's character, and a need for sensitivity to the interests of other sentient beings who have similar psychological, physical, and emotional constitutions. Therefore, in making moral choices in such dilemmatic situations, one cannot abide by any hard and fast moral rules. One needs to take into account the total situation, motives, and other moral factors, and then make one's choice with a full sense of responsibility. The physician, for instance, might hold the opinion that it is morally more worthwhile to save the mother, and that abortion is the best recourse in this difficult situation. The

mother may, perhaps, reckon this situation as an opportunity to cultivate her moral character by determining to sacrifice her life for the sake of her child, even though she is aware that the child will most probably be abnormal. Such a decision may appear awkward in terms of scientific humanism or materialistic secularism that deny certain cardinal Buddhist doctrines, such as *kamma* and rebirth. But it would not be so from the Buddhist standpoint, for Buddhism views an individual as a pilgrim in a long *samsaric* journey, heading towards the ultimate goal of *nibbanic* perfection. Alternatively, however, the mother may weigh the various consequences of her decision, such as its effect upon the well-being of her other children, and, purely as a matter of choosing the lesser evil, she may opt for abortion. From the Buddhist point of view, what is of primary moral importance in situations of this sort is the goodness of the intention. Benevolent motivation partly depends on the type of consequences one intends to bring about by one's practical choice. Since Buddhism does not subscribe to a deontological system of ethics, moral action is not looked upon as mere obedience to sacred commands. There is enough room for independent deliberation on moral matters and flexibility in moral choices, depending on the peculiarities of a specific situation.

Sexual Relationships

Closely related to the specific issues of contraception. and abortion is the more general subject concerning the contemporary attitude towards sexual relationships. Moral opinions in the sphere of

human sexual relationships can be considered as a major area in which contemporary attitudes and traditional religious morality come into conflict. In most Western societies, the puritanical approach to sex has been discarded. The result has been an increasingly liberal attitude towards sexual relationships. People concerned about the moral outcome of this contemporary trend complain

that it has led to increasingly promiscuous behavior among young adults, a growing disregard for the sanctity of the bonds of marriage, and the breakdown of the institution of the family. What should the Buddhist moral response be in this regard?

According to Buddhism, the sexual impulse in man is one of the strongest expressions of what it conceives as *kamatanha* (craving for sensuous pleasures). *Raga* (lust) is at the root of the sexual impulse, and it is one of the bases of unwholesome action that has to be completely eliminated in order to achieve full liberation from *dukkha.* The sexual relationship is itself referred to as the vulgar practice *(methuna-gama-dhamma)* from which the *bhikku* should completely abstain. Strict celibacy is enjoined for the Buddhist monk, and violation of this precept is one of the four gravest offenses for which the penalty is excommunication from the order of monks. Whatever form sexual offenses have taken, the Buddha condemned monks who committed them on grounds that they have acted completely contrary to the higher way of life they have avowedly chosen, that is, a life free from lust *(viraga).* Although indulgence in sexual pleasure is conceived as an impediment to the highest form of spiritual perfection *(brahmacariya)* and is totally prohibited for the Buddhist monk, the Buddhist layman may enjoy sexual pleasures in moderation. It is taken for granted that the life of the layman is one in which there is sensuous enjoyment. Laymen are therefore referred to as those who enjoy sensuous pleasures *(kamabhogi).*

The third moral precept for the Buddhist lay devotee is abstention from wrongful gratification of sensuous desires. An explanation of the Buddhist ethical response with regard to human sexual behavior depends largely on the interpretation of this moral precept.

The Family

Buddhism seems to favor the institutional regularization of sexual behavior, and views unregulated sexual behavior, as among lower

animal species such as dogs and cattle, as highly undesirable for the human community. According to the *Cakkavattisihanadasutta,* the

disregard for family relationships and considerations of propriety in respect to one's sexual conduct is a mark of moral degeneration. In such a corrupt society, "There will not be mutual respect of the consideration that this is mother, mother's sister, mother's sister-in-law, or teacher's wife, or father's sister-in-law. The world will fall into promiscuity, like goats and sheep, fowls and swine, dogs and jackals. ,,[42]

The ideal recommended for laymen in Buddhism with respect to sexual behavior is the satisfaction of this urge in a wholesome and lasting relationship between persons who are brought together by bonds of mutual love. It is on this basis that the institution of the family arises in human society. The family is considered a unit within which the layman can have his basic spiritual training by converting his self-centered urge for personal pleasure-seeking into a responsible and dutiful relationship of mutual love and respect. Parents, in their self-sacrificing care for their children, sublimate the sexual desires in the more wholesome relationships of parental love. Buddhism does not seem to conceive of a better alternative to the family unit as a foundation for a healthy lay society. The parental care and love that children receive within the family in the formative years of their growth is considered extremely conducive to the development of a healthy society. Buddhism considers parents to be worthy of veneration and respect. They are equal to the highest God, Brahma. The ideal form of love and fellow-feeling expressed through the concept of *metta* is derived from the mother's self-sacrificing love for ht;r own child.43 Looking after one's parents when they grow old is one of the cardinal virtures of a layman. In the *Anguttaranikaya,* the Buddha says:

Monks, those families where the mother and father are worshipped

in the home, possess *Brahma.* Those families where the mother and father are worshipped in the home possess the foremost teachers. .. . the foremost deities. . . . *Brahma,* monks, is a name for mother and father, foremost teachers. . . . Foremost deities, monks, is a name for mother and father. Those worthy of gifts, monks, is a name for mother and father. What is the reason for this? Mother and father, monks, are of great assistance to their children; they bring the children up; nourish them and introduce them to the world.44

The relationship between parents and children operating within the institution of the family is believed to be essential to a harmonious social order. This relationship gives a mutual sense of security to both parents and children, the maintenance and continuance of

which requires the fulfillment of mutual duties. **It** is under a stable marital relationship that such family bonds become possible. Therefore, Buddhism recognizes the great value of a wholesome marital relationship. Adultery is considered one of the cardinal sins in lay life. Although Buddhism does not condemn polygamous or other nonmonogamous forms of marriage, it evidently recognizes monogamy as the ideal form of bonding. Marital fidelity of both husband and wife are considered great virtues. The *Anguttaranikaya* mentions as the exemplary and ideal marriage relationship the one between the householder, Nakulapita (Nakula's father) and Nakulamata (Nakula's mother). The following passage illustrates the ideal form of marital relationship which won the approbation of the Buddha:

Nakula's father said to the Exalted One: "Sir, ever since the housewife Nakula's mother was brought in marriage to me when I was a mere lad, and she yet a girl, I am not conscious of having been unfaithful to Nakula's mother even in thought, much less in physical action. Sir, we desire to be in the company of each other not only in this very life but also in the life to come."

Then also the housewife, Nakula's mother, said this to the Exalted One: "Sir, ever since I was taken in marriage by Nakula's father, the householder, when he was yet a lad, and I yet a girl, I am not conscious of having been unfaithful to Nakula's father even in thought, much less in physical action. Sir, we desire the company of each other not only in this very life but also in the life to come."

(The Exalted One said):

"Herein householders, if both husband and wife desire the company of each other both is this life and in the life to come, and both are equal in faith, virtue, generosity, and wisdom, then they have each other's company not only in this very life but also in the life to come.,,[45]

Buddhism values stable marital relationships primarily because of the emotional stability that such relationships provide to the society as a whole. Marital relationships would not become stable if marriage was conceived merely as a means for gratifying one's sexual desires.

Although Buddhism may not look upon divorce as a sin against the commands of a supreme moral lawgiver, it would definitely agree that it is generally undesirable for the emotional stability of all members of society to have an increasing number of broken families. **If** individuals cease to enter a marital relationship without a sense of responsibility and, if they take it as a loose bond that may

be dissolved once the initial infatuation wears off, then the institution of the family will not survive. It would seem to follow that the Buddhist moral attitude toward divorce does not support an extremely liberal position. There is, however, no explicit condemnation of divorce or remarriage. Therefore, in the absence of any hard and fast rules, the Buddhist stand point advocates the examination of the merits and demerits of each case in making moral choices in this regard, while recognizing in general the desirability

of preserving stable family bonds.

The Buddhist attitude toward sexual morality tends to differ from that of a theistic ethical system because Buddhism does not regard sexual conduct as consisting of a divinely ordained form of human behavior for the continuance of God's creation. Therefore the Buddhist attitude toward certain "deviant" forms of sexual behavior, such as homosexuality, does not bear the same degree of disapprobation as theistic moralities do. Buddhism disapproves of homosexuality, not because it is "deviant," but because it is the expression of lust. As such, there can be no room for permissiveness toward homosexuality because it widens the area for people to indulge their carnal appetites.

Violence

Another serious moral dilemma that most contemporary societies are confronting concerns the justification of violence as a means for achieving some morally desirable end. The global situation testifies to the increasing number of advocates of the theory that it is morally right to use violence to overthrow an unjust regime or to win the inalienable rights of a socially oppressed group. Associated with that is a similar ideology-the concept of "holy war." The problem of terrorism has also caused grave concern during the recent past and continues to hold the major cities of the world in the grip of fear. A major test not facing Buddhist morality is whether it can condone violence in situations where non-violent means for overcoming injustice have slim prospects for succeeding. Buddhism accepted that violent revolutions, social upheavals, and conditions of disharmony and insecurity result as a sociological fact from unjust, tyrannical, and oppresive regimes. In the *Cakkavattisihanadasutta* and the *Kutadantasutta* of the *Dighanikaya,* the Buddha's teaching cautions rulers against the creation of conditions that lead to economic disparities and unfair distribution of wealth. However, given its opposition to killing, bloodshed, and violence

as the foremost evils, is it possible for Buddhism to approve of violence as a method for securing the greater good? The categorical answer is that, under no set of circumstances does Buddhist morality justify the use of violence as the means for achieving some I benevolent end. Instead, it calls for a sound causal analysis of situations and circumstances in which violence and social conflicts arise and attempts to enlighten men on ways to prevent violence from ever taking place.

Buddhism's opposition to violence stems from the analysis that violence is psychologicallyrooted in *dosa*(hatred). This is a dispositional trait that is conditioned by malicious conduct and, in turn, determines the way human beings behave. It is the fundamental cause of a whole cycle of violence from which individuals and societies find it impossible to escape. Therefore, no matter what the intended merits of a projected social order may be; if it is established by violence, it will have to be perpetuated through violence, for *dosa*can only beget *dosa*.Social change through nonviolent means is the only *realistic*path to a stable social order. Buddhism does talk about conquest but it is the conquest of righteousness *(dhammavijaya)* which, in root and in fruit, has nothing in common with the notion of "holy war." In *dhammavijaya*conquest is effected without the use of weapons *(adandenaasatthenadhammena abhivijiya).46* Thus, Buddhism upholds the reality of an eternal law that hatred, vengeance, and animosity can never cease as long as they are met with hatred, vengeance, and animosity. These age-old forces of evil can only be permanently disarmed by virtue of their opposites *(na hi verena verani sammantidha kudacanam-averena ca sammanti esa dhammo sanantano).[47]* Hatred should be conquered by nonhatred, unrighteousness by righteousness, miserliness by generosity, and falsity by truth.48 Fundamentally, the Buddha only permits a single weapon to vanquish one's foes-compassion! He insists that the

training of his disciples in the practice of compassion should be such that it would be a moral violation if they were to express the slightest irritation or anger, even if wily robbers were to lay hold of them and cut them apart limb by limb with a double handled saw.49A canonical *sutta* mentions an instance in which one of the Buddha's immediate disciples, named Punna, was tested by the Buddha himself for his strength to withstand any form of harassment to which he might be subjected by the atrocious people of Sunaparanta, and that he did, in fact, succeed in winning them over through compassion. [50]

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We have also seen that the propensity to violence is addictive and causally forges a chain of reciprocal links. An example from the contemporary global situation is the build-up of nuclear weapons by the superpowers that threatens the survival of life on this planet. It is increasingly and ominously evident that mankind is now faced with two alternatives: either to let the reciprocal hatred and suspicion of arch rivals continue until its momentum achieves its end, or to abandon war as an outdated and inefficient means of resolving conflicts and explore, instead, avenues of mutual understanding, cooperation, and friendship. The consequentialist ethic of Buddhism is squarely on the side of the latter alternative. Buddhism does not have some private agenda whereby it seeks to impose a particular brand of morality from above. Rather, it attempts to give directions to people in all parts of the globe who are disillusioned with the false promises of greed *(lobha),*hatred *(dosa)*, and ignorance *(moha),* and to enable them, by the use of untapped resources, to make discoveries of lasting happiness in their own moral expenence.

Notes

1. *Anupada parinibbanatthamkhoi avuso bhagavati brahmacariyamvussati. Majjhimanikaya,* Pali Text Society Edition (PTS) M. 1.148.

2. *Nibbanam paramam vadanti buddha.Dighanikaya* (PTS) D. 2.49.

3. *Yo kho avuso ragakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo idam vuccati nibbhananti. Samyuttanikaya* (PTS) S. 4.251.

4. D.3.102.

5. M. 160.

6. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1929), vol. 1: 449.

7. Ibid., 452.

8. Shundo Tachibana, *Ethics of Buddhism* (Colombo: The Bauddha Sahitya Sab, 1943),37-38.

9. *Suttanipata* (PTS) Sn. 522; 547; 790; *Dhammapada*(PTS) Dh. 267,412.

10. M.2.115.

11. M. 2.28.

12. *Anguttaranikaya* (PTS) A. 5.66.

13. M.l.477.

14. Dh. 97.

15. S.3.83.

16. A.1.173-174.

17. A full description of good conduct in speech is found in D. 1.4-5.

18. S. 1.9-12.

19. M. 1.489.

20. M. 1.47.

21. Ibid.

22. M. 1.15; also see *Sallekhasutta* for a list of evil and wholesome traits of mind. M. 1.40.

23. S. 5.145.

24. Ibid.

25. *Suttanipata* (PTS) Sn. vv. 146-149.

26. D. 1.64-71.

27. M. 1.12.

28. *Nayidam sukaram agaramajjhavasataekantaparipunnamekantaparisuddhamsankhalikhitam*

brahmacariyamcaritum. M. 2.55.

29. Sn. 18-20; D. 3.180-193; A. 4.281.

30. A. 1.189.

31. M.2.114.

32. M.1.415.

33. S.5.169.

34. M. 1.45.

35. A. 2.95.

36. A.2.179.

37. For a fully developed emotivist meta-ethical theory, see *Ethics and Language,* c.L. Stevenson, Yale University Press, 1944; for a fully developed prescriptivist theory, see *The LanguageofMoraIs,*R.M. Hare, Oxford University Press, 1964.

38. Dh. 1129-131.

39. See *Freedomand Reason,* Richard M. Hare, Oxford University Press, 1965.

40. S. 5.354.

41. *Vinayapitaka* (PTS) 3.83.

42. D. 3.72.

43. Sn. v. 149.

44. A.2.70.

45. A.2.61.

46. D. 3.59.

47. Dh. 5.

48. Dh. 223.

49. M. 1.129.

50. M. 3.267.