A Theravāda Buddhist Contribution to Universal Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Ethics is a subject that is taking on increased importance in various areas of human activity, especially with new challenges in the biological sciences, business, commerce, and trade. Like many fields of inquiry, the principles are clearly defined, but it is in the details that disagreements abound. This paper focuses on ethical action in Theravāda Buddhism. To do so requires a definition of ethics and morals on the one hand, and ethic and moral on the other. It also requires a discussion of the difference, if any, between moral actions and other normative actions, such as law, rituals, customs, and etiquette. When applied to Theravāda Buddhism, we find that some linguistic difficulty exists regarding a translation of ethical actions into the Pāli or Sanskrit languages. Although terms exist, they are not informative in defining the range of actions that we expect such actions to encompass. In this regard, certain axiomatic statements are introduced that serve as a basis of moral action regardless of culture. The Theravāda Buddhist response to these axioms, especially when discussing those actions reflecting sīla, indicate a goal-oriented and utilitarian approach that conforms more closely to the concept of karma than to the Western notion of ethics. Why this is so requires an understanding of Vedic culture, the source of Indian attitudes regarding karma.

Ethics is a subject that is taking on increased importance in various areas of human activity, especially with new challenges in the biological sciences, business, commerce, and trade. Like many fields of inquiry, the principles are defined clearly, but it is in the details that disagreement abounds. This paper does not pretend to solve any outstanding issues; it only wishes to clarify the field, define the bases for determining what course of action to take, and to reaffirm that human action is by nature inconsistent. It is not my purpose to defend one school of ethical thought over another; it is also not my purpose to suggest that discovering the right course of action is necessarily a solution to the problems that we face in the world. Some of my conclusions may be objectionable and open to dispute, but these conclusions arise in an attempt to understand the human condition based upon observation of the way humans act and the quandaries they face, not upon theoretical suppositions on how humans should act. The basis of this approach comes out of my long association with the field of linguistics and its methodology upon which language is understood. Out of this study comes a simple answer that appears paradoxical and even contradictory when applied to ethics: study language and human action as they are and not as one thinks it should be. Most individuals are of the opinion that a language and language performance should be examined prescriptively rather than descriptively, although many may not be aware of the difference. Traditional grammar, the subject of which most are familiar through their exposure from their early years of schooling, places a value judgment or norm on language usage. The linguistic study of a language is value free and non-normative. Obviously, this latter approach is diametrically opposed to the study of ethics, which establishes the criteria concerning the rightness or wrongness of an action. One cannot remove such criteria from ethics without denying ethics. Ethical action by definition is normative action, but such normative action can be considered from a two-tiered perspective rather than the one-tiered approach of language

performance. The first tier of ethics does not admit neutral actions, only normative actions; the second tier perspective informs us how we may interpret normative actions, not from a normative approach but from a non-prescriptive approach.

Ethics as a field of inquiry, therefore, does not refer to the first tier but to the second. This plural form, following the Oxford English Dictionary, refers to "[the] science of morals; the department of study concerned with the principles of human duty." It is a curious twist that the singular forms *ethic* (Greek *ethos*) and *moral* (Latin *mos, moris*) actually refer to one and the same subject: manners, character, custom, or what might be considered the normative human state. In the plural form, ethics tends to take on a specialized and technical meaning as the term develops over the centuries. Similarly, the plural "morals" takes on a somewhat restrictive and distinctive meaning. The difference between ethics as "specialized" and morals as "restrictive" is this: ethics becomes a field of inquiry, whereas morals retains the concept of normative actions but develops into the notion of a specific form of normative action. Obviously, if morals are restrictive, so too is the field of inquiry. Thus some questions are raised concerning the types of normative actions: for instance, the distinction between morality and law, between morality and social customs and traditions, between morality and religion in the context of rituals (as stereotypical actions: verbal and physical), food restrictions, formulaic prayer or mantra (as stereotypical words), and etiquette. All are concerned with normative actions, all bearing the notions of right and wrong, good and bad. From a linguistic perspective, normative actions are expressed in the optative mode ("one *should*, one *ought to*, one *must*") and sometimes in the imperative mode.

Is there a difference between moral actions on the one hand and law, rituals, customs or etiquette on the other? The answers depend upon the criteria that are set up to justify their differences. Basic to the argument is the question of scope. One of the arguments for the separation of morality from law is the recognition that some laws can be viewed as unethical, such as laws espousing segregation and discrimination. The issue of publishing or programming material that is legally but not morally acceptable is another example. Broadcasting violent programs or publishing material that may be considered pornographic are cases in point.[1] These examples can be taken at face value and be considered as proof that law and ethics are indeed different. On the other hand, it may be argued that defects exist in the law if a law is considered unethical. Yet again, the issue must be raised regarding the axiomatic[2] bases upon which legal and moral actions are determined.

As for moral and customary actions, Pojman[3] states that matters of etiquette concern form and politeness rather than the deeper issues of right and wrong. This argument, however, may be more culture-specific than we realize. Etiquette has taken on a far more important role in traditional China and Europe, for instance, than in the United States. The argument for the distinctiveness of ethics and etiquette as based upon the American or European experience and culture does not make the assertion universally true. The same may be said about ritual. Even the celebrations of ceremonies and festivals convey a significance that may have been lost over the decades or centuries. The most that can be said is that although there is some obligation to perform such actions in a specific format, it is not necessarily harmful if we do not perform them correctly or at all.

The problem with making distinctions of this sort is that we are determining the morality of actions based not upon the actions but upon the labels. I suspect that we in the West place too great emphasis upon labeling and analysis to the extent that we attempt to force actions into a number of categories in order to explain the categories and not the actions.

Since this paper bases its discussion on the Buddhist experience, we should attempt to understand the field primarily from this perspective. An obvious question that arises concerns labeling: are there terms in the Buddhist lexicon that translate as ethics, ethic, and morality? In reviewing the Pāli and Sanskrit lexicon, we come up with possible terms that are similar but not necessarily identical to *ethic* and *moral*. The first is *nīti*, which carries with it the sense of moral conduct that is usually associated with political wisdom or science, proper conduct or behavior.[4] *Niti-vidyā* possesses a relationship to ethics in the sense of "science of statesmanship" or "political science." Works on *nīti*, known as *nīti-śāstras* or *nīti-satthas*, works concerned with political conduct or statesmanship, were considered books of political and social conduct. A good example of this type of literature is the Sanskrit *Hitopadeśa* ("Instruction on What Is Right"). This association of morality and politics is noteworthy, especially if we compare *nīti* with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where it is stated at the beginning of the treatise that political science is the ruling science that studies the highest good, the object of moral actions.[5] Political science in the Aristotelian sense refers to conducting the *polis* or city-state, with the implication that there is a hierarchical structure for such normative actions. *Nīti*, however, does not play a large role in Pāli literature, so adopting this word would not be productive.

If the etymological sense of both "ethic" and "moral" in the sense of manners, custom, etiquette, character is meant, then Sanskrit and Pāli *ācāra* "(good) conduct," = *su-cārita* or Sanskrit *rīti* "custom, practice, way" or even *vinayarīti* and Pāli *vinaya*, which implies a system of norms, would come closest. In the Eightfold Path, *sammākammanta* assumes the sense of a more restrictive sense of physical action such as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct as opposed to verbal or professional actions.

Although the list is far from complete, the words above are indications that whatever development has taken place in the West regarding ethics should not be applied too strictly to non-Western systems. The discussions that have centered on ethics and moral actions may be of some help in understanding Buddhist actions, but many questions remain regarding the scope of ethics. At this point I would like to revisit the issue by not segregating ethical from political, customary, or legal action. Reflexively, certain axiomatic statements are assumed. Here is my list of axioms that serve as a basis of moral action:

1) Life or the act of living is the highest good.
This axiom reflects the basic "instinct" or reflex in any living being: survival. Furthermore, survival is not simply an individual reflex but a group reflex as well.

2) Any action that is harmful to life or the act of living is not condoned unless, perhaps, only in the most extreme and specific of cases.

In order to maintain one's survival or the survival of one's immediate environment, it may be necessary to commit the very act least condoned by individuals and the community: taking a life. Defense mechanisms in the form of legalisms or edicts from some authority will rationalize when taking human life is deemed justified. A paradox is thus established: the taking of life in order to preserve life.

3) Not only is life to be condoned and supported, but also the quality of life or its enrichment should be advanced by activities that are beneficial to individuals and their associates (usually in the form of families, relations, or alliances).
The quality of life is also intimately connected to the preservation of life; thus, individuals and their associates' welfare are highly valued. The welfare of the individual and community is chiefly defined through politics and the economy. This observation generates a whole subset of axiomatic and definitional statements, all dependent upon the observations of Stark and Bainbridge,[6] among which are the following:

a) "Humans seek what they perceive to be rewards and avoid what they perceive to be costs."
1. *Rewards* are anything humans will incur costs to obtain.
2. *Costs* are whatever humans attempt to avoid.

b) "Rewards vary in kind, value, and generality."
1. Reward A is more *valuable* than reward B if a person will usually exchange B for A.
2. Rewards are *general* to the extent that they include other (less general) rewards.

c) "Human action directed by a complex but finite information-processing system that functions to identify problems and attempt solutions to them."
1. The *mind* is the set of human functions that directs the action of a person.
2. Human *problems* are recurrent situations that require investments (costs) of particular kinds to obtain rewards.
3. To *solve* a problem means to imagine possible means of achieving the desired reward, to select the one with the greatest likelihood of success in the light of available information, and to direct action along the chosen line until the reward has been achieved.

These axioms and definitions help to establish the notion of quality of life. Furthermore, they help us to understand the Buddhist approach to a better life, rebirth, and ultimately, the Highest Goal.

4) Both life and its enrichment are based not on the isolation of the individual but on the network of relationships that promote these goals.
This recognizes that humans are social creatures. This is a self-evident that observation that needs no explanation. History and our own experience demand this conclusion.

5) That which motivates human actions toward survival and welfare, including health, is the underlying attraction to achieve and maintain order and harmony.

This axiom is illustrated in all religions and philosophies. This Order may be expressed in the Chinese *tao*, the Egyptian *ma'at*, the Vedic *ṛta-,* Zoroastrian *asha*, Greek *dike*, and the Hindu *dharma-*, but what is most significant is the idea that the Order that exists in the universe is mirrored also in such manifestations as societal peace and individual health.

When considered in this manner, I believe that ethical action must be viewed as goal-oriented and utilitarian in approach. Mindful of Damien Keown's *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* and other studies of Buddhist ethics, including James Whitehill's "Buddhist Ethics in Western Context,"[8] it seems to me that the issue of Buddhist ethics can be addressed in ways that do not conform to the usual discussions of this topic.

First, the word that is usually associated with morality is *sīla*, generally translated as "morality" or "virtue."[9] Usually, it is associated with the first part of the spiritual path: specifically, steps three, four, and five of the Eightfold Path; furthermore, the Five, Eight, and Ten Precepts are also considered as the basis of moral actions. The Ten *sīlas* are also included in this list. Assuming that this is a correct assessment, an argument can be made that ethical actions can be viewed as either core actions or ancillary actions based on the core actions. Moreover, such ancillary actions arise to meet the needs of the community. The three parts of the Path that comprise *sīla* are right or correct speech, action and career. As might be expected, there is overlap in these lists, so they will be listed in the following manner:

Eightfold Path	Five *sīlas*	Ten *sīlas*
Right Speech, which comprise the following:		
Abstaining from lying (*musāvāda*)	*musāvāda* (no. 4)	*musāvāda*
...back-biting (*pisunāvāca*)		*pisunāvāca*
...harsh talk (*pharusa-vāca*)		*pharusa-vāca*
...idle gossip (*samphappalāpā*)		*samphappalāpā*

Right Action, which comprises the following:		
abstinence from taking life (*pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*)	refrain from taking a life (*pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*)	*do*
abstinence from taking what is not given (*adinnādānā*)	refrain from taking what is not given (*adinnādānā*)	*do*
Abstinence from sexual misconduct (*abrahmacariyā*)	refrain from incontinence (that is, acting wrongly in regard to the sensual desires: *abrahmacariyā*)	*kāmesu micchācāra*
refrain from any state of intoxication: *surā-meraya*		

Right Career, which comprises the following:
To avoid certain career choices, such as doing business in arms, humans (slavery), meat (breeding animals for food), intoxicating

drinks (= the fifth *sīla*) and poison.

Aside from these actions, which reflect the axioms cited above, there are additional normative acts that enhance the axioms: the Eight *sīlas* (for lay people on retreat), which include the Five mentioned above plus no eating after noon, no entertainment, no perfume or ornaments; the Ten *sīlas* (for all monastics), which include the previous eight plus no sleeping on a luxurious bed and no possession of gold or silver; the list of *sīlas* in the *Brahmajāla Suttanta* (the first discourse in the *Dīgha Nikāya*) that include a number of injunctions by the Buddha that are in part not universal in scope but limited to those in the "religious" communities (*samaṇa-brāhmaṇa*). This limitation would therefore be similar to what we identify as professional ethics today. For instance, the list of long *sīlas* falls under right career, and so enjoins against the following actions: making a living by following such lowly arts as palmistry, various forms of divination and predictions, and the practice of medicine and surgery. The list of short *sīlas* reflect not only basic ethical actions but also include prohibitions mentioned in the Ten *sīlas* in addition to enjoining the acceptance of raw grain, uncooked meat, animals, land, and running errands. A few of the Ten *sīlas* are also mentioned in the list of middle *sīlas*, including the avoidance of acting as a go-between.

In a previous paper[10] mention was made of a number of additional spiritual paths besides the Eightfold Noble Path that included *sīla* as a component. These included a tenfold path[11] (an expansion on the Eightfold Path); a novel nine-fold path,[12] a fourteen-fold path,[13] a sixteen-fold or seventeen-fold path,[14] and a nineteen-fold path.[15] In the nine-fold path we find the mention of one who is possessed of *sīla*, is moderate in eating, and develops the seven good qualities, two of which serve as bases of ethical action—shame and fear of wrongdoing (*hiri-ottappa*). The fourteen-fold path includes adopting a moral life, such as abandoning of killing, taking what is not given, harmful speech, and actions to be avoided by the monastic community.[16] Likewise, the sixteen-fold path includes shame and fear of wrongdoing and the purification of bodily, verbal, and mental conduct, and purification of livelihood. The nineteen-fold path simply states the practice of *sīla*, which is basically the same as in the other paths.

The etymology of *sīla*, as given in the *Visuddhimagga* (1.19), is explained as *sīlana*, which is considered as no different from *samādhāna* "composing" or "putting together." In English idiomatic language, one who is *composed* exhibits an absence of perplexity (*avippakiṇṇatā*), i.e., of bodily, verbal, and mental action on account of good *sīlya* or conduct. In modern colloquial terms, *sīla* refers to proper and sensible action by someone who knows right from wrong. It also refers to proper disposition, especially when used in compounds. Or again, it is likened to *sītala* "cool" because it has a cooling effect by resisting the passions.[17] As mentioned above, some of the characteristics of *sīla* are more limited in scope—what might be termed professional ethics (i.e., moral actions exhibited in a specific field of endeavor) as opposed to a universal ethic. From this etymology of *sīla*, it would appear that the term emphasizes that one should be "composed," calm, or untroubled, a quality that reflects general Buddhist teaching. This calm or composure represents the normal state of affairs for humans, so much so that the presentation of general moral actions is never listed

because of their obviousness. They are, rather, listed in the negative, to indicate their aberrance or abnormality, therefore observable, qualities such as the injunction of not taking a life or taking what is not given.

The importance of such actions or *sīlas* lies in the consequences of committing moral or immoral actions. Numerous stories of conduct leading either to the heavenly regions or to the world of the hungry ghosts are recounted in the *Vimānavatthu* and *Petavatthu* respectively. In both, emphasis is placed on the consequences of actions both good and bad. In the *Vimānavatthu*, for instance, there are numerous stories involving the meritorious actions of women that lead to the attaining of a heaven, usually the Heaven of the Thirty-three (*tāvatiṃsa-bhavana*). The *devatā* or heavenly being, questioned about her good fortune by an Elder, responds with a predictable response: the act of generosity. Here are some typical responses:

> "When I was born a human among men I gave a little chair to a visitor, saluted him respectfully, raised my clasped hands, and gave the gift according to my means."[18]

The purpose of the story, according to the commentary of Dhammapāla, is to demonstrate that generosity is more effective if one gives according to one's means and not to the size of the gift.[19] This scene is repeated many times in the *Vimānavatthu.*

Similarly, in the *Petavatthu* are many tales that emphasize the negative consequences of uncondoned actions. A typical story concerns the wife of a landowner, Mattā, who, according to the commentator, was without faith, angry in disposition, and barren. Envious of the co-wife of the landowner, Tissā, who was the opposite in disposition, Mattā was obviously very unkind to her. In consequence of her negative karma of displaying anger (*caṇḍī*), harshness in her speech (*pharusa*), enviousness (*issukī*), selfishness (*maccarī*), and deceitfulness (*saṭhā*), she was reborn in the world of the petas or "hungry ghosts."[20] Her appearance was typically hideous but was also covered with dirt or refuse in consequence of Mattā's dumping refuse on Tissā. She was also covered with scabs (*kacchuyā*) because she had caused the same condition for Tissā; naked because she stole Tissā's clothes; foul-smelling because she threw Tissā's perfume, garland, and ointment into a cesspool; in distress because of her not exhibiting generosity.[21]

The lessons that we can derive from the above observations affirm, in my opinion, that what we call Buddhist ethics is a profoundly practical and utilitarian analysis of the human condition as it actually was in the past, as it is in the present, and as it will become in the future. Hence the injunction to do good, to avoid bad, and to purify the mind.[22] There is little room for speculation, at least from the texts that I have examined. It would appear that the general conclusions about what is good and what is bad had been worked out well before the time of the Buddha, although the Buddha may have added observations and details from his own unique perspective. The Five *sīlas* would be examples of pre-Buddhist ethical actions, since they were also recognized by the Jains as well. From a more comprehensive perspective, Buddhist teaching reflected certain teachings within some factions of the *śrāmaṇical* traditions,

which in turn were justified in ways that were appropriate to the intermediate and ultimate goals of Buddhism. In other words, actions were always weighed according to their consequences.

The sense of what is good or bad in Buddhism is based upon the consensus of the community, perhaps influenced in part by the *śrāmaṇical* interpretation that the community was a font of higher knowledge. Thus, the criterion for determining virtuous and non-virtuous actions is based on the twin notions of shame and fear of wrongdoing (*hiri-ottappa*), for when these two are present, so says the commentator Buddhaghosa, virtue (*sīla*) arises and persists.[23] Yet, there is a degree of authority as well. The Buddha certainly enjoined what actions should be avoided either in the restricted context of the monastic life, or among all humans regardless of status as is evident in the *Suttavibhaṅga* and the *Brahmajāla Sutta*. Furthermore, others within the community who commanded a great deal of respect and prestige, simply known as the wise (*viññū*), were also said to be in a position to censure bad conduct.[24]

The definition of good or right and bad, wrong or evil, or their Pāli equivalents, *kusala* and *pāpa*, is an important means of understanding the ethical dimension in Theravāda Buddhism. In the context of karma, *kusala* consciousness leads to desired results—a better rebirth, an improvement in the quality of life—whereas *pāpa* (or *akusala*) consciousness leads to the opposite. Consequently, *kusala* leads to happiness and *pāpa* to suffering or misery. One is rooted in non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion (*kusala*); the other in greed, hatred, and delusion (*pāpa* or *akusala*). This is the heart of Buddhist teaching: to escape misery and achieve at least a happy state in a future existing state, and ultimately to win *nirvāṇa* and arhantship. Even in arhantship, *kusala* is present as it is also in the best known of all Arhants, the Buddha, who is said by Ānanda to possess all *kusala* states and has abandoned all *akusala* states.[25] Because of the utilitarian and practical outlook of these types of action, the translation of *kusala* and *akusala* as "profitable" and "unprofitable" makes some sense since there is a clear distinction between the two regarding one's orientation and goal.

The degree of goodness or badness is an issue that might also be raised. Semantically, a distinction in kind can be made between "bad" and "evil," with "evil" connoting a far more serious deed than "bad." Otherwise, it may be related to "bad" in the privative sense suggesting an absence of good by degree. Theologically, it may be viewed as the total absence of "good." The question whether "evil" exists in Buddhism depends on how the term is employed. Under no circumstance should it be equated with an absolute absence of good, an act that can never be rectified by acts of restitution. On the other hand, if "evil" is employed in Buddhism to translate such terms as *pāpa*, for instance, it should not carry the semantic process of *hyperbole* or intensification, which probably arose out of the absolutive (absence of good) sense of the word. Nonetheless, "evil" retains a sense that bears resemblance to the Pāli *dukkha*, sometimes translated as "disease" or "disharmony." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "evil" may refer to "a diseased (organ)" or a "disease or malady." According to Kenneth Grayston's article on "Evil" in Alan Richardson's *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*,[26] the Hebrew *ra'* reflects something "displeasing (e.g. a woman in the eyes of her husband), or harmful (e.g. wild beasts, poisonous

herbs, disease)." In the general sense, it refers to any action that causes pain or unhappiness, "including the discipline of punishment sent by God."[27] Grayston also indicates that besides this descriptive sense develops the moral connotation: "a harmful action [the descriptive sense], as viewed by the injured party, is a wicked one [an immoral action]." The passages given to illustrate this point are Judges 11.27 ("It is not I [spoken on behalf of Jephthah the Gileadite by his messengers] who have sinned against you, but you are the one who does me wrong by making war on me. Let the LORD, who is judge, decide today for the Israelites or for the Ammonites.") and II Samuel 13.16 ("But she [Tamar] said to him [Amnon], 'No, my brother; for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me.'").[28] If we connect descriptive good and bad with moral right or wrong, it appears the difference between the two is that the descriptive action is executed and consequential, whereas the moral action involves ascertainment and judgment of the intended action. Furthermore, it need not be discharged. Judging from this perspective, one might conjecture that Theravāda Buddhism does not recognize moral action, only descriptive action, if one were to follow Grayston's terminology. This is, however, more of a semantic problem rather than a deontological problem.

Whether one prefers to call the actions that were discussed in this paper as ethical or not should not affect the obvious truth that Buddhism does recognize some code of behavior. What this code of behavior is leads me to certain conclusions that must be tested in future papers. First of all, ethics as a field of inquiry is decidedly Western in origin with the earliest sustained philosophical discussions appearing in the Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle. One interesting outcome that arose from these discussions is the attempt to answer what is meant by an ethical action in the first place. The question is framed in the following manner: "Is normative ethics deontological or teleological in scope?"[29] In Theravāda Buddhism, the answer falls on the side of teleology. My observations arising from the axioms that contribute to the basis of moral action and the Theravāda Buddhist response to those axioms indicate a goal-oriented and utilitarian approach that is based not so much on those concepts that I have identified as coming closest to the Western notion of ethics—*nīti, ācāra, vinayarīti, vinaya, su-cārita,* and even *sīla*—but to the concept of karma.

Like ethics, karma is concerned with the quality of action (right or wrong action, sometimes obligatory or optional action), the consequences of the action (good, bad, or indifferent), and the motivation of the actor (good will, ill will, or neutral). The basis for this approach is not theoretical but ultimately practical. Regardless of the Western analysis of ethical action, the Indian philosophical approach—Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina—is based primarily upon the ritual action. This is evident in the Vedas, wherein karma represents the ritual action, which by its very nature is connected to the result.[30] Furthermore, even in the atypical usage wherein karma conveys the sense of a "valiant deed," it still refers to some exploit performed for a specific purpose. Thus, such lines as 'see the deeds of Viṣṇu [the three strides of the god, considered as a creative act]' (*Ṛg Veda* (RV] I.22, 19a), or 'proclaim the early exploits of this powerful one [Indra] anew with words of praise' (ṚV I.61, 13ab) suggest specific deeds by the these two divinities resulting in the establishment of Order out of Chaos—in other words, the creation of the cosmos. Karma as ritual action not only entails the result but also suggests a strict causality, or perhaps in the Vedic

mindset, a magical correspondence between the actor, action, and result. In mythical and ritual language, this suggests complete predictability of the intended result. Furthermore, there are philosophical and soteriological consequences, such as in the statement of *kārikā 58* of the *Sāṃkhya-kārikā*, which states: "just as the person engages in actions (*kriyāsu*) for the sake of abstaining (*nivṛtti*) from anxiety or desire (*autsukyai*), in like manner does the Unmanifest (*pradhāna*) create for the purpose of the liberation of the Puruṣa." Such a connection between action and result also takes on philosophical implications since the question naturally arises whether the result resides in the cause. Thus the *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* suggests in *kārikā* 9 that the effect (*kārya*) must be existent even before it appears.

I would therefore conclude that Theravāda Buddhism—indeed early Nikāya Buddhism and perhaps the teaching of the Buddha himself—as a product of Indian culture which was still under the influence of the Vedic or Brāhmaṇical religion, thought of ethical action as karmic action, and that karmic action was permeated with the growing priestly doctrines of Vedic rituals as actions that bore consequences, and rewards, or results in a manner that was causally determined, and therefore entirely predictable. This set the stage for the inclusion of non-ritual actions in later compositions to be identified with moral or ethical actions designed either to alleviate or augment the burdens of individuals in their quest for the *summum bonum*.

One final observation. The ability to ascertain the positive or negative results of karmic actions was not simply rooted in axiomatic statements stated above, among which is the axiom of survival or preservation of life, or, in the Buddhist context, on the sense of shame and fear of wrongdoing. It was also based on the unique authority of the Buddha as a buddha, "one who was thoroughly awakened" and hence an all-knowing (*sarvajña-* or Pāli *sabbaññu*)[31] being who also possesses such supranormal knowledges as the "divine eye," which makes it possible to ascertain how beings pass away and appear according to their actions.[32] Thus we find that ethical or moral actions in Buddhism are based on the authority of the Buddha, on inclinations of individuals toward the good, and on a good deal of common sense.

Notes

[1] This discussion is based upon Louis P. Pojman's *Ethical Theory: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 3rd edition (Belmont, CA etc.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), 3.

[2] "Axiom" refers to a commonly and strongly held opinion on the part of the community that bears the semblance of truth. Such opinions are dependent upon the experiences and observations made by individuals and the community. In general, when an opinion is raised to the status of self-evidence, it is an axiom.

[3] *Ethical Theory*, 3.

[4] Monier-Williams, Sir Monier, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964 (reprint of the 1st edition of 1899), 565; Rhys Davids, T.W. and William

Stede, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* (London: Luzac and Company, Ltd. 1966), 375.

[5] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 2.

[6] Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 27-29.

[7] New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.

[8] *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 1 (1994), located at http://jbe.la.psu.edu /1/whitabs1.html.

[9] On the same page Keown *(The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 8) translates *sīla* as "ethics" and "morality" in the same paragraph, terms that are employed in different ways in this paper.

[10] "Humanistic Buddhism: The Relevence of Buddhist Ethics," delivered at the First International Conference of Humanistic Buddhism (Taipei, Taiwan) in January 2001.

[11] The ninth and tenth stages are right insight and right liberation (Dīgha Nikāya II.217; III. 271).

[12] *Majjhima Nikāya* I. 353-59 (*Sekha Sutta*): possessed of virtue (*sīla*), guards the doors of the senses (*indriya-saṃvara*), moderate in eating, practices wakefulness, develops the seven good qualities (*satta saddhammā*), attains the four stages of meditation (*jhāna*), recollection of one's former existences, observes the death and rebirth of beings, destroys the cankers (*āsavas*) and is liberated through deliverance of mind (*ceto-vimutti*) and through wisdom (*paññā-vimutti*). The latter two refer to the liberation of lust and ignorance. "The former is normally the result of serenity, the latter [wisdom] the result of insight. But when they are coupled and described as taintless (*anāsava*), they jointly result from the destruction of the taints by the supramundane path of arahantship." Quoted from *The Teachings of the Buddha: The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha.* Translated by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and edited and revised by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications in association with the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, 1995): 1178 (note 83). The seven good qualities include faith (*saddhā*) in the Buddha's enlightenment, shame and fear of wrongdoing (*hiri-ottappa*), that he has learned much (*bahussuta*), that he is energetic (*viriya*) in striving to do good and avoid that which is detrimental to him, that he has mindfulness (*sati*), and that he possesses penetrating knowledge (*paññā*).

[13] *Majjhima Nikāya* I. 179-84 (*Cūḷahatthipadopama Sutta*): hearing the Truth (*dhamma*) from the Buddha, believing that the Buddha is enlightened, becoming his disciple, leading the homeless life, adopting a life of morality, practicing mindfulness, entering into the four stages of meditation, recollecting his and others' former lives,

the destruction of the cankers, and liberation of the mind from these cankers of sensual desires, becoming, ignorance, and wrong views.

[14] *Majjhima Nikāya* I. 271-80 (*Mahā-Assapura Sutta*): a sense of shame and fear of wrongdoing (*hiri-ottappa*) is cultivated; purification of bodily, verbal, and mental conduct, purification of livelihood; guarding the senses; moderation in eating; the practice of wakefulness; mindfulness and full awareness; abandoning of the hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) of sensual excitement, ill-will, sloth and torpor, agitation and worry, and doubt; entering on the four stages of meditation; awakening his mind to the three psychic knowledges: recollecting his and others' former lives, knowledge of the destruction of the cankers, the Four Noble Truths, and the attainment of Arahantship.

[15] *Dīgha Nikāya* I. 62-85 (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta*): a householder hearing the Dhamma results in the arising of faith in the teaching causing him to renounce the home for the homeless life; the practice of virtue or morality (*sīla*); guarding the doors of the senses; being mindful and possessing clear awareness (*sati-sampajañña*); being content with what little he has (*santuṭṭhi*); entering the four stages of meditation after abandoning the five hindrances: developing knowledge and insight (*ñāṇa-dassana*) into the makeup of the body; a mind-made body (*mano-maya kāya*) that resembles the physical body; developing supernormal powers (*iddhi*) such as passing through solid objects or levitating; developing clairaudience (*dibbasota*); reading other's minds (*cetopariya-ñāṇa*); recollecting his former existences (*pubbenivasānussati-ñāṇa*); possessing the power of vision to observe the arising and passing away of beings (*cutūpapātañāṇa*) and to ascertain their destiny (*dibbacakkhu*); and to possess the knowledge of the destruction of the intoxicants or corruptions (*āsavakkhayañāṇa*) of sensual pleasure, becoming, ignorance, and false views, which in turn leads to deliverance.

[16] *Majjhima Nikāya* I. 179-80.

[17] This is discussed in Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 48-56.

[18] *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon: Part IV: Vimānavatthu: Stories of the Mansions and Petavatthu: Stories of the Departed,* translated by I.B. Horner and H.S. Gehman respectively (London: The Pali Text Society, 1974), 4: *ahaṃ manussesu manussabhūtā, abbhāgatānāsanakaṃ adāsiṃ/ abhivādayiṃ añjalikaṃ akāsiṃ, yathānubhāvaṃ 'ca adāsi dānaṃ//* Text found in *The Vimānavatthu-Petavatthu-Theragāthā-Therīgāthā [Khuddakanikāya Vol. II]*, general editor Bhikkhu J. Kashyap (Bihar Governement: Pāli Publication Board, 1959 (2503), 3.

[19] *The Minor Anthologies*, 1.

[20] *The Vimānavatthu-Petavatthu-Theragāthā-Therīgāthā* I.15.137; *Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon:Petavatthu: Stories of the Departed*, 33, vs. 4.

[21] *The Vimānavatthu-Petavatthu-Theragāthā-Therīgāthā* I.15.138-151; *Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon: Petavatthu: Stories of the Departed*, 33, vss. 5-18. An interesting aspect of the story is the recognition that good deeds can be transferred to

others, thus establishing that the teaching was more widespread and earlier than generally assumed.

[22]*Dhammapada* 183: sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ kusalassa upasampadā, sacittapariyodapanaṃ etaṃ buddhāna sāsanam.

[23] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*), translated by Bhikkhu Nyāṇamoli. Second edition (Colombo: A. Semage, 1964), I. 22.

[24] *Aṅguttara Nikāya* II. 228.

[25] *Majjhima Nikāya* II. 117.

[26] New York: Macmillan, 1950, 73-74.

[27] Richardson, 73.

[28] Grayston may be correct in identifying these passages as examples of passages containing a moral connotation, but I detect some room for interpretation here and therefore leave some room for doubt.

[29] The deontological approach perceives actions as having intrinsic value whereas the teleological approach is concerned with the results of the act.

[30] *Kātyāyana Śrautasūtra* 1.1.2: *phala-yuktāni karmāṇi.*

[31] *Majjhima Nikāya* I. 482; II. 31, 126.

[32] *Majjhima Nikāya* I. 279.

Once the great philosopher Socrates was enrolling students in an informal class he was giving on public speaking. The fee for the class was ten cents. A young man came to register for the class, and as he was doing so he explained at great length why he wanted to learn to become a good speaker, what the value of speaking was, and so on. After he at last stopped speaking, Socrates asked him to pay an additional ten cents. The student was shocked to hear this and asked him why he was being required to pay twice as much as the other people in the class.

Socrates said, "The other students are paying ten cents to learn how to talk, but you must pay twenty cents because not only do I have to teach you how to talk, I also must teach you how to stop talking." — *Buddhism: Pure and Simple, Hsing Yun, p.88*