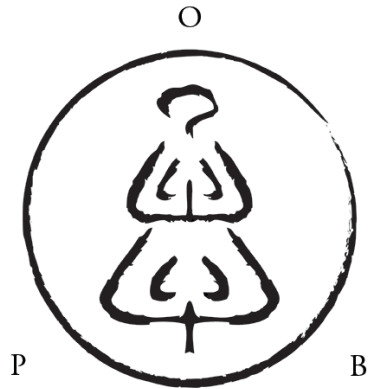


The Pragmatic Buddhist

The official publication of the Center for Pragmatic Buddhism.



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FROM THE EDITOR...

This edition of *The Pragmatic Buddhist* is the first to incorporate the perspectives and suggestions of our newly established Advisory Board. During the latter half of 2007, I determined that a relevant and contemporary approach to Buddhism might seek, in addition to the wisdom of traditional Buddhism, the under-

standing of teachers in academia, the standard of Western education. While it is accurate to say that the West has often maintained a dichotomy between practice and theory thanks to the dreaded *ivory tower syndrome*, the members of our Advisory Board are actively engaged practitioners and social activists who seek to put their knowledge into action.

I identified persons in the various fields that influence the maturation of Pragmatic Buddhism, specifically experts in Early Buddhism, Chan Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Daoism, Naturalism, Science, and American Pragmatism. These areas of study are essential to the foundation of Pragmatic Buddhism, and incorporating the advice of members of each field is necessary to ensure the best possible dialogues in *The Pragmatic Buddhist*. Dialogue, of course, is a vital cornerstone to the development of any worldview, as the exchange of ideas cultivates our ability to imagine increasingly relevant and meaningful solutions to our present-world problems. Both Socrates and Siddhartha Gautama, now known to be contemporaries (circa 450 BCE), employed the use of dialogue to facilitate understanding in their students. As someone with a deep appreciation for the necessity of social consensus—one of the two means of gathering knowledge in Pragmatic Buddhism—I understood the importance of having an Advisory Board like the one we now have. I was deeply pleased to receive the inspiring encouragement from those who are now members: David Shaner, PhD, Tom Clark, Roger Ames, PhD, Stephen Batchelor, Owen Flanagan, PhD, Peter Hershock, PhD and Steve Odin, PhD.

David Shaner, PhD is also my Sensei (teacher) since the passing of my first Buddhist teacher, Ryugen Fisher (Shi Shen Long). Dr. Shaner is the chair of the philosophy department at Furman University in Greenville, SC, and an expert in comparative philosophy specializing in Japanese and Zen Buddhist philosophy. He graduated from the University of Hawai'i and has spent substantial time in Japan studying Zen Buddhism, but also teaches Ki-Aikido all over the world as chief instructor of the *Eastern Ki Federation*. I was fortunate to have Dr. Shaner as a professor while a philosophy student at Furman, and had the opportunity to write a thesis under his direction, so I am indebted to his guidance far longer than his most recent participation as a member of the Advisory Board. His weekly advice and feedback is vital to my own practice and work at the *Center for Pragmatic Buddhism*.

Tom Clark is the founder and director of the *Center for Naturalism* and *Naturalism.org*. He has written and lectured substantially on naturalism and its applications, and recently published "Encountering Naturalism: A Worldview and Its Uses."

Roger Ames, PhD is professor of Chinese studies and philosophy at the University of Hawai'i, and served as the director for the Center for Chinese Studies from 1991-2000. He is presently the Editor of *Philosophy East & West*, the leading publication for comparative philosophy. Professor Ames has written numerous books on comparative studies, Daoism and Confucianism, and has translated many works from Chinese to English, including the *DaoDeJing*, the *Yuan Dao* and *The Analects of Confucius*.

Stephen Batchelor is a former Buddhist monk, having spent considerable time in India, Korea and Switzerland. He is presently a prolific author and lecturer, and specializes in Early Buddhist Studies, especially the *Pali Nikayas*. He has written such works as *Buddhism Without Beliefs* and *Alone With Others*.

Owen Flanagan, PhD is professor of philosophy, psychology and neurobiology at Duke University and the chair of the philosophy department. He has produced many important works that examine the intersection

of Buddhist meditation and neuroscience/psychology. Among his work is *Beyond Destructive Emotions: A Scientific Collaboration with the Dalai Lama*.

Peter Hershock, PhD is educational specialist in Chinese studies and philosophy at the *East-West Center*. He is the author of numerous works on Chan Buddhism, including *Chan Buddhism*, *Buddhism in the Public Sphere: Reorienting Global Interdependence*, and *Liberating Intimacy: Enlightenment and Social Virtuosity in Chan Buddhism*.

Steve Odin, PhD is professor of philosophy at the University of Hawai'i, specializing in classical American pragmatism and Zen Buddhism. He is the author of *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism*, a highly influential work for Pragmatic Buddhism.

I am proud to have these fine members join our Advisory Board. With their insight and support, the hard work and dedication required to synthesize a form of Buddhism relevant to our present time will no doubt emerge with more creativity and deeper perspective. The advice I have already received from many of the members on our Advisory Board has led to meaningful changes at the *Center for Pragmatic Buddhism* (CPB) in St. Louis. I thank them all, and look forward to the further growth and development of *The Pragmatic Buddhist* that their support will foster.

With Palms Together,

Jim Eubanks

Editor



THE COLLISION OF DISCOURSE AND IDIOM: MEMORY AND MINDFULNESS

by Aden Albert

"It is a poor sort of memory that only works backwards." Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

Mindfulness—in contemporary English idiom, the cultivated awareness, the observation of the present moment—is not so unrelated to memory. The latter derives from the Latin for "mindful," as a recognition that careful attention to the moment that occurs should naturally prove valuable in an attempt to recollect that moment. One cannot remember what he paid no attention to as it occurred.

Further underscoring the connection, in early Buddhist discourse, a word commonly used to denote this mindfulness was *dran pa*, "memory."¹ In the spirit of the project of pragmatic Buddhism, of allowing for adaptation and modernization of the context of the philosophy to reach and promote its practices among a society that can make apt use of its insights, I would like to examine the nature of the language prevalent in and particular to this project and its history as it moves into and before the particularities of contemporary language.² In developing any intellectual project or course of study, its proponents and theorists must neces-

sarily tunnel through language to develop a set of codes and contexts unique to that project. The overlap—and lack thereof—between language sets allows for a play of trope and connotation that further illuminates the substance both of the theory or project as well as culture at large.

In the West we value memory, privilege the account of it alongside the physical artifact evidence in court proceedings. Eyewitness accounts are integral to the construction of the narrative surrounding certain events, integral to the construction of history itself. The records and recollections of participants are *first-hand* accounts. Empirical observation, that pillar of the Enlightenment and the philosophical discourse that emerged from the Cartesian schools, appears to validate the importance of the memory and of a careful observation of that present moment.

Memory is integral to the theology of presence, both vested in it—we are our memories—and the only mental evidence that presence occurs—I remember being *here*, I remember being *me*. Crafting a more calculated mindfulness should theoretically invest the mindful presence with an authenticity, an authority, which in turn would inform the veracity of memory. If I am more attentive now than I was yesterday, my memory of now should be clearer or sharper than my memory of yesterday.

But while the above is true, at the same time that memory *informs* the self, it also acts to repress that self through a reflexive censorship. We often remember incorrectly; we “misremember”; we forget or we spin memories from whole cloth (and often at someone else’s insistence). The controversy of implanted memories that emerged from prominent criminal cases throughout the 1980s in America only highlights the fluid, ultimately impressionable essence of the memory. (Lawrence Wright’s investigation into an abuse trial in the Pacific Northwest, *Remembering Satan*, is an excellent example of the perniciousness of implanted memory.)

Likewise, that cornerstone of science and the philosophy of science—empiricism—that so swept through Europe during the Enlightenment is not a validation of presence and memory, but a recognition of the imperfection of presence and memory. I characterized empiricism as a kind of memory-in-progress; what I meant by this is that the empirical observation is rooted in observing, recording, and observing again, *ad infinitum*. It recognizes that the memory is both imperfect and material, that it is only in the cumulative evidence gathered through countless repeated phenomena that scientific principle gains force.

All this makes us notice that the moment of recollection is just that: a *re-collection*, a *re-call*, an invocation, *re-communicating* with the material of memory. Our descriptions of the phenomenon of memory automatically exposes our apprehensions regarding its authenticity. Recall, calling again, a summoning, an attempt to return to or communicate with an entity either external to us or explicitly unreliable. *Recollect*: organizing *again*, gathering *again*, requiring the agency of an external organizer. The material of memory is unreliable, imperfect, loose or scattered; *we already know this*, made clear in our names for it.

But quite incidentally, identifying the “problem” inherent to memory informs us of the same problem internal to the nature of self and mindfulness. If memory is recollection, is collecting again, then what of the act of recording? What of the initial collection? Is this, at its heart, central to mindfulness? Is mindfulness and the cultivation thereof a kind of tuning the devices through which we record the present moment we are so aware of?

Ultimately, the answer is yes and no. The awareness we must cultivate is part of the mechanism of collection; but just as integral to the nature of memory is that process that seems its opponent—forgetting, forgetfulness, the loss of memory. We have invested memory with importance although we are always already aware of its limitations; but it is not *despite* these limitations that memory is important, but *because*. The self protects itself, preserves itself, censors or denies access to what functions as threat or damage. The same is true as memory, for as *recollection*, it occurs not in the past, not in some autonomous, objective neutrality, but *as* the self, in the present. We invoke memory by recall, but we are not summoning the moment that occurred, only the mental resources involved in its initial collection. The mind collects again the structures it deems necessary to rebuild the required memory.

As such the recollection is creative, an invocation of an externality, a re-collection of different things. It is an aesthetic communication, perhaps the only such aesthetic communication between self and self (as opposed to self and other, as art is). It is already filtered through the self, and thus through language, and as such when we remember we are recreating in a manner entirely dictated by the present self. The mindfulness we cultivate, the awareness we seek, then, both help along the process of memory while simultaneously sharpening the filters through which we forget or censor. If we are more aware of the present moment, if this means there is more material available to re-collect, then there will be more effort in the censorship of such re-collection.

As we allow for greater collection we allow for more capable deletion. But this is not contradictory nor necessarily deleterious. For quizzically the more mindful one is, the more mindful one becomes of the limitations of mindfulness. And it is with an awareness of limitation that one constructs an informed mindfulness.

What I mean is this: cultivation of mindfulness will inform itself to further cultivation. We must recognize that cultivating mindfulness or awareness is not the cultivation of a presence without subject, some kind of objective process of experiencing the moment as it occurs. Mindfulness does not require a detachment, either of self from presence or of self from moment or presence from moment. The movement toward an informed observation, toward a mindful personhood, is the movement toward the acceptance of limitation. Memory is not a perfect recollection, nor is the memory's purpose a perfect recollection; instead the memory is an act performed in the present to inform the self *in the present*. It does not record the past, it recreates the past in the image of the present. Memory is a kind of history in reverse.

If we seek mindfulness, we must cultivate awareness, both of the moment we experience as it occurs, and of the self that experiences that moment. It is then cultivating a recognition not just of *what is*, but also of *what is not, what could be, what might be*. The greater mindfulness is not a repression of the self toward a detached objectivity, some cleansing of the self from the moment it experiences. Rather it is a move toward the nature of presence as narrative, a creation, and toward realizing that what is observed—the moment as it occurs—will be a reflection of that self, that presence.

When we learn how we *always already* see ourselves in the narratives around us, we learn to see narratives *without* ourselves. It is not effortless; mindfulness requires real work. But the self can only truly know itself, when it can imagine its presence as other, and see its own reflection contained therein. I suggest the greater mindfulness is not a detachment of self from the moment it experiences. The greater mindfulness is the realization that the moment it experiences is automatically colored by the self, and in that realization, we learn

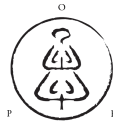
more about how *others* experience that moment. Mindfulness of ourselves begets mindfulness of others, and it is when this occurs that communication begins.

End Notes

1- Acknowledgements to Stephen Batchelor, who brought to my attention that *sati/smṛti*, the Sanskrit term translated into English as “mindfulness,” also means memory. He further notes the relationship of *sati/smṛti* to *dran pa*.

2- Here I must credit Peter Hershock, not only for helping define the scope of this article but also for providing the quotation that composes its epigraph. He says, “The use of the term [mindfulness] in the early discourses is always with a specific focus: Intentness with respect to body, or feelings, or cognition or impermanence.”

Aden Albert is a writer, photographer, and designer living in South Carolina. He graduated from Furman University in 2005 with a degree in English specializing in deconstructionist and postmodern literary theory. He has participated in the Center for Pragmatic Buddhism from afar since assisting Jim Eubanks in the founding and construction of the Furman University Chinese Arts Group (now the American Shaolin Center). He writes regularly on his website, <http://adenalbert.com/> and can be reached at questions@adenalbert.com.



PRAGMATIC BUDDHISM AND THE MORAL LIFE: DISCERNING A MEANINGFUL MORALITY

by Jim Eubanks

Openness, Pluralism and a Pragmatic Buddhist Epistemology

Pragmatic Buddhism, like all worldviews, consists of particular perspectives that together create a set of strategies for handling our human experiences. The overall orientation of a worldview is determined by the *openness* of its epistemology (methods of acquiring knowledge). The adherents of a non-dogmatic, “open” worldview maintain a willingness to accept two key characteristics: 1) self-critique and, when necessary, 2) self-revision. We can look to two revered figures in both Eastern and Western tradition for their support of openness: Siddhartha Gautama and Socrates.¹ Matthew Dillon, in his *Philosophy East & West* article, “Dialogues with Death: The Last Days of Socrates and the Buddha” notes that both Socrates and Siddhartha Gautama (the historical Buddha) were men “characterized by extreme *openness*.” He says, “Despite their own apparent conviction, they take pains to include interaction with their students...and make clear that *no question is out of bounds*” (528) [italics mine]. (Of course, Socrates’ own dialectical method is known today as the

“Socratic Method” in his honor.) In the *Anguttara Nikaya*, we are told that the Dhamma (Dharma: “teachings of the Buddha”) of the Buddha is not a secret doctrine, but an open one: “But these three things, monks, shine openly, not in secret. What three? The moon, the sun, and the Dhamma” (AN 3:129; I 282-83).² If we maintain perspectives that allow for self-critique and self-revision, then the worldview we hold might naturally be classified as *pluralistic*, for in order to embrace a critique of self and—when that critique is especially convincing—an actual *revision* of self, a worldview must accept the possibility that there are better perspectives than those it currently maintains.

Our genuine willingness to revise our own views and approaches when better alternatives present themselves makes our worldview pluralistic, but it does not make it philosophically *relativistic*. In our discussion here, which will soon focus on the construction of a meaningful and coherent morality despite our insistence on plurality, it is important to differentiate “pluralism” from “relativism.” In pluralism, we accept that there are many viable perspectives and approaches that “work well” when addressing the human condition. Perhaps often overlooked is an additional component of pluralism: despite our acceptance of multiple approaches, there are still better ways to approach our human condition—*some ways work better than others*. Pluralism is not a blind acceptance of any and all approaches to the human condition, for physically harming someone out of anger is not as viable a solution as employing emotional control. Dillon explains that for the Buddha, “As with Socrates, the truth admits no compromise: openness to questions does not imply that all paths are equal” (530). Relativism, however, is the notion that based on the given situation one person’s solution *must be as equally viable and “good”* as another’s because no one person has a privileged take on the world. This notion is often charged against pragmatists—particularly neopragmatists like Richard Rorty—however it is to misunderstand the fundamental message of pluralism inherent in the pragmatic message. For like Buddhism, pragmatism acknowledges a multiplicity of possible approaches to our life encounters, but *does not* assert that all of those approaches are equally viable or “good.”

How does an open, pluralistic worldview like Pragmatic Buddhism derive a meaningful and consistent morality? To answer this question, we must first become familiar with the basic epistemology that governs the acquisition of knowledge for the Pragmatic Buddhist. There are two parts of the Pragmatic Buddhist epistemology that are emphasized, that of experiential verification (direct, *sensory*-based experience; empiricism) and intersubjective agreement (social consensus with other members of a community that values empiricism). Famously explaining to his Indian followers that *all* human knowledge comes by way of the human senses, Siddhartha’s early Buddhist moral suggestions are not deontological, but *pragmatic*. In the *Majjhima Nikaya’s Sammaditthi Sutta*, we are told that one who understands the six senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and, for Buddhists, mind itself) understands the Dhamma:

When, friends, a noble disciple understands the six sense bases, the origin of the six sense bases, the cessation of the six sense bases, and the way leading to the cessation of the six sense bases, in that way he is one of right view...and has arrived at this true Dhamma. ³

The empirical basis of moral decision-making is something most Buddhist traditions agree upon, but is something upon which Pragmatic Buddhism especially depends. Morality for the Pragmatic Buddhist is a matter of *seeing* (not “believing”) and *agreeing* (as in social consensus with other empiricists) what solutions work best given the situation and circumstances, and this is utterly pragmatic. Among empiricists, secular humanists, atheists and agnostics, and pluralists, “what works best” are the types of actions that embrace

altruistic behavior, because working with rather than against provides us with not only a more meaningful and vibrant opportunity to flourish, but the personal benefit that fundamentally depends on others. As our human condition is one of deep interdependence, those behaviors traditionally seen as “moral” are often the same types of behaviors that also promote the best possible world for me (on a personal level) and you (on a socially-conscious level). Thus, the best human solutions—moral or otherwise—are those *solutions that privilege present-day personal and social prosperity, because both are utterly dependent on one another*. The reality of causality (*dependent origination*) and its global implications (that causal connectivity extends to innumerable interconnected phenomena) allows us to determine what actions are best, precisely because a universal causal process like that which our own experiences point to, allows us to predict what will happen based on given circumstance and our chosen actions in those circumstances.

Intersubjective agreement, while not emphasized as central in most Buddhist traditions, is heavily emphasized in Pragmatic Buddhism, where knowledge is seen as a combination of experiential verification (*empiricism*) and social consensus. Thus, in order to validate that the experiences we perceive through the senses are “accurate,” we must communicate with others who have similar experiences to ensure that we “see the same thing.” Accuracy here, it must be noted, is not a matter of seeing what is “real” or “really out there,” but achieving a level of description of our experiences that we can all agree on. The teacher-student relationship is not so much about the teacher infusing the student with his or her knowledge, but instead stimulating the kind of questioning that leads to new understanding in the mind of the student. And in this vein, it is not that the teacher has a more privileged “personal” wisdom, but that he or she has had more exposure to the various *social* arguments and explanations that are available to a given culture and society. Therefore the teacher is best equipped to guide the student, who is not yet able to benefit from this wealth of accumulated social wisdom. The “Socratic method” utilized by Socrates and the Buddha is the same kind of consensus that is achieved in academia in the West, where new views are offered, critiqued, considered and either accepted, revised or rejected.

Two components of the Pragmatic Buddhist epistemology, experiential verification and intersubjective agreement allow us to come to know our world. Using this epistemology, what is it that we can know? Following the suggestions of David Kaluphanna that the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, emphasized above all the role of causality in the human moral life, we first must accept the universality of *dependent origination*. In the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the Buddha posits that all things are causally conditioned:

And what, monks, are the dependently arisen phenomena? Aging-and-death, monks, is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, vanishing, fading away, and cessation. Birth is impermanent...Existence is impermanent...Clinging is impermanent...Craving is impermanent...Feeling is impermanent...Contact is impermanent...The six sense bases are impermanent...Name-and-form is impermanent...Consciousness is impermanent...Volitional formations are impermanent...Ignorance is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, vanishing, fading away, and cessation. These, monks, are called the dependently arisen phenomena. 4

David Kalupahana, in *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis*, states, “[Causality] is, indeed, the truth about the world which the Buddha claimed he discovered and which became the ‘central’ doctrine of Buddhism” (29). *Dependent origination*, also known as *co-dependent arising*, is simply a way of saying that we do not live in a static world of independent and separate objects, but an integrated, emergent world characterized by *co-*

creation. There are no true separations; instead, separation and disconnect occurs because we fail to see that *our world is causally connected*. A causal world is one that is continuously transforming and emerging anew out of co-creativity. This is similar to the understanding outlined in philosophical *Daoism*.⁵ In *Zen Action, Zen-Person*, Thomas Kasulis compares Zen Buddhism (Pragmatic Buddhism shares a Zen Buddhist lineage) and the American pragmatism of John Dewey on this point:

Zen Buddhism and Dewey agree that reality is what is now happening—it is not outside our experience, but the construct being worked out in our experience. For Zen, this has the implication that reality is protean, always changing shape as soon as we come into contact with it and try to pin it down. By living in the present moment, there is no longer the tendency to make reality into something static or reified. (61)

Zen Buddhism and American pragmatism are concerned with the knowledge that there is *no-thing* permanent about our experiences, that they are impermanent and continuously transforming through causal connectivity.

Our changing circumstances and ability to determine the best actions given those circumstances—as in taking a moral action—are fully explainable by the Pragmatic Buddhist worldview, where impermanence (*anicca*) and dependent origination (*patticasamuppada*, *paticcasamppada*) are central. Of the limited universal phenomena empirical eyes are willing to acknowledge, causality (*dependent origination*) and change (*impermanence*) are among them. Consistent with the famous thoughts of Japanese Zen Master Dogen in his *Genjokoan*, it is the *self* (*anatman*), defined here as an *interconnected self*, or *selflessness*, that is the starting point for our knowledge of our world. Kasulis notes:

Consider the situation of stubbing your toe and yelling “Ouch!” Who yelled? Was it a man or a woman? A conservative or liberal? Someone old or young? In looking for oneself as a model from which to learn, one discovers the self to have disappeared. But it does not dissolve into a formless void; it merges into the phenomena of prereflective experience. (89)

Here we see the concept of *anatman*, as *selflessness* ironically illuminated through the complete absence of a concrete, independent “self.” When investigating the self in Pragmatic Buddhism, we find *characteristics of an integrated experience* rather than characteristics of some tangible, independent self. As Buddhaghosa wrote in the *Visuddhimagga*:

There is no self residing in [bodymind], but the cooperation of the conformations produces what people call a person. Paradoxical though it may seem: There is a path to walk on, there is walking being done, but there is no traveler. There are deeds being done, but there is no doer.⁶

In Buddhism of all varieties (at least in principle if not in practice), the recognition of selflessness (*anatman*) is a recognition of the causally conditioned state of all things (*paticcasamuppanna dhamma*), where literally “no-thing” is independent, permanent and self-sustaining. All things are rather fully integrated into the constant renewal of the process of dependent origination, whereby reality charts a *middle path* that avoids both extremes of “existence” and “nonexistence.” As it is said in the *Samyutta Nikaya*:

To him who perceives through proper insight the arising of the things of the world, the belief in nonexistence does not occur. To him who perceives through proper insight the ceasing of the things of the world, the belief in existence does not arise. (2.17)

Cultivating awareness or mindfulness, as in the *awareness cultivation* practice so central to Pragmatic Buddhism, we become aware of two characteristics of experience, causality and impermanence, because we *observe it in our own minds*. But we see these processes in our own minds precisely because and only after we see it in our collective minds, through the social agreement with other inquirers into the human condition. We see together and then individually that randomness and accident do not explain the circumstances we find ourselves in, that it is our genetics and acculturation and the intersecting manifestations of our experiences that elicit the present condition. We also see that there is nothing permanent about our experience—it is continuously changing. As far as we can tell, causality and change are at the heart of our human experience in this Universe; it is from this foundation from which the moral life is derived in Buddhism. Before expanding upon how causality and change lead to moral imperatives, let us take a look at the prevailing morality for most Westerners.



The Judeo-Christian Imperative in Western Morality

We should note right away that the moral compass for a Pragmatic Buddhist is not engineered from a “belief” or “faith” in Absolute principles, principles accepted *a priori*. The moral view that maintains “Absolute, unchanging knowledge,” *deontological* morality justified not by a keen observation of our world but instead a “faith” in the unknowable, is pervasive among the major Western Judeo-Christian religions with which most Westerners are familiar. Judeo-Christianity shares a general veneration for the canonized principles or laws handed down through the various messengers of God (and sometimes God himself), as articulated in sacred texts such as the *Gospels*. What is important is that for the followers of these religions, the acceptance of the principles that govern their morality comes from a belief and faith that the tradition is not only legitimate, but that it above all represents *the* “Truth.” Thus, those moral principles outlined in the various sacred texts of a given tradition, when considered the singular source of *Truth*, are taken by most to be universally applicable regardless of the present situation and circumstances. The principles are not, as in Pragmatic Buddhism, followed because they can be experientially verified through the senses and re-engineered when necessary. This lineage of a singular, universal Truth in Western religions extends at least as far back as the classical Greek notion explained by the disciples of Socrates, most notably Plato and Phaedo.

Interestingly, even for many secular Westerners who no longer ascribe to an inherited religious appreciation for Judeo-Christianity, the same moral principles outlined by the Judeo-Christian worldview govern their own understanding. This is because so much of society *does* accept the faith-based moral dictums of Western monotheism, and the principles generally guide our moral compass through acculturation alone. There are plenty of opportunities for secular Westerners to change the basis of their own morality, as in receiving a

liberal arts education, or encountering prominent barriers of a deontological approach, which allow them to revise the basis for their moral decisions. 7 [Ed-See “Pragmatic Buddhism: The Relevance of a New Worldview” in *TPB Vol. 1, No. 3*].

I often speak of *inherited cultural assumptions*, something loosely referred to by the term “acculturation.” In the case of morality, there is a particularly powerful inherited assumption that Westerners must face: the idea that there are objective “moral truths” that permeate all situations we may encounter, no matter how different they may appear. This *conviction* that an underlying moral code exists is necessary only if one believes in an unchanging, static world where actions are preordained according to codified beliefs that cannot be breached. Such a conviction—or *faith*—is necessary because one particular moral solution (“thou shall not *ever* lie”) can only work *in all cases* if there is an underlying permanence to what we find in reality.

This belief in an underlying permanence to our experiences in reality, however, does not reflect what *empirical* minds can gather about the world in which we live. Neither is it supportable by our everyday lives, which are inherently defined by the far-reaching web of cause-and-effect and the resulting changing circumstances. It is because we are a part of a continuously changing reality dictated by the imperatives of causation that our moral solutions are not grounded in some assumption of a permanent reality, but rather the regularities of causal laws, laws that do indeed allow for causal regularities and a *kind* of stability. Because a causal world is one in which ontology yields to interconnectivity and interdependence, we can trust that certain actions yield certain types of results, and this gives us a vital footing as we try to build a meaningful morality. We are able to observe and implement stable moral principles even in a world of flux and impermanence. 8

In Buddhism, especially Pragmatic Buddhism, one cannot devise “principled knowledge” of moral situations precisely because each situation is unique, requiring its own consideration. Stephen Batchelor, in his article “The Agnostic Buddhist,” states that “All traditions of Buddhism agree that one should not believe something simply for the sake of believing it, but only if it can somehow be demonstrated as true, if it can be realised in some practical way.” The deontological moral angle of our inherited Western morality is antithetical to the “unprincipled knowledge” (*wuzhi*) found in philosophical Daoism, where direct experience is assimilated by the moral agent, allowing him or her to make more seamless and insightful moral decisions in the future—the basis for the East Asian ideal of *spontaneous action*. Because Daoism is an integral element of Chan and Zen Buddhism (both in the Pragmatic Buddhism lineage), *unprincipled knowledge* is an apt way to describe the kind of moral knowledge required in Pragmatic Buddhism.

Sometimes a given situation and set of circumstances requires honesty, for example, while others require the telling of lies for the sake of harmony and preservation of the “good.” One example of an inherent conflict that my teacher, David Shaner Sensei, gives in his university lectures on Buddhist morality, is the following: Imagine that you are visiting your mother. The phone rings and she asks you to pick up on her behalf. To your surprise, it is the FBI requesting to speak to your mother. As you look up at her, you see her shaking her head, whispering, “Tell them I’m not here!” The obvious conflict for a strict deontological morality is to not tell lies (especially to authorities) *and* to honor your mother. What is the “right” solution, given these circumstances? Even for a Pragmatic Buddhist who has no mandated allegiance to telling factual truths when it compromises human well-being, or honoring one’s mother if it breaks a social law, the best option is not always clear. From a Pragmatic Buddhist position, nonetheless, we utilize our allegiance not to an unknowable moral code that may or may not lead to the best results but instead an allegiance to an *awareness of*

our situation at hand, and this awareness is what will allow us to determine which of the possible options will result in a better outcome for self and other. Even when situated in difficult dilemmas, where no solution clearly leads to a more positive outcome for self and other, we can learn from this reality, and accept that there are times when moral decisions have no clear solution, and we can, in turn, be more open and accepting of others stuck in the same situation, a point often made by British philosopher Isaiah Berlin; we can practice a deeper compassion because of the reality of moral situations in which there are no clear solutions.

9

Skillful Means as a Moral Strategy in Pragmatic Buddhism

Siddhartha Gautama emphasized a brilliant point in his teachings that gives us some workability with this apparent dilemma: adapting his message to the needs of his audience. While Socrates emphasized dialogue, Matthew Dillon notes “for the Buddha, [it was] the necessity to adapt his teaching by appreciating every individual’s unique needs and capacities for understanding” (526). In the later *Mahayana* tradition, where Chan and Zen Buddhism reside, this comes to be known as *skillful means* (*upaya kusala*).¹⁰ Richard Gombrich, in *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*, says, “the exercise of skill to which [skillful means] refers, the ability to adapt one’s message to the audience, is of enormous importance to the Pali Canon” (17). Remember that instead of illuminating fixed principles in his moral approach, he emphasized (as I have here): 1) the necessity of a solid epistemology that can be trusted, and 2) building a moral approach that consistently considers the information that can be gathered by that epistemology. As we have seen, an epistemology based on the *middle way* of a personal *and* social empiricism—experiential verification and intersubjective agreement—leads us to the conclusion that our world as we experience it is causal and impermanent. Thus, our moral actions should consider in each circumstance the ranging effects of our possible decisions. Keeping this in mind and going back to our original analogy of anger, physically harming someone has far greater causal repercussions than retaining emotional control. In harming someone physically, the aggressor might go to jail and/or become burdened by guilt, and the other person might be injured or killed by violent action, and those negative effects end up affecting all aspects of both persons’ lives. Family members, friends, co-workers are affected negatively by such an action, whereas simple emotional restraint ensures the maintenance of *social harmony*.

If we remain mindful of this need or preference for causal and social harmony, we understand that a *skill-in-means* is required when we go about our business in everyday life, and to construct appropriate moral responses to the various situations we encounter. *Skillful means* is an integral method to Buddhism because it acknowledges causal harmony as more central to our moral decisions than a preordained and unbreakable moral code or belief. This is entirely pragmatic. John Schroeder, in his book *Skillful Means: The Heart of Buddhist Compassion*, points to the *Brahmavibhara Sutta* for an example of the Buddha’s use of pragmatism. The Buddha addresses two young brahmins (Hindu priests) who are confused about the way of becoming unified with God. Instead of saying to them, as one might expect, that such a goal is meaningless because there is no self (*anatman*) or God (*Brahma*) in the first place, the Buddha employs a pragmatic perspective to teach them within their own worldview. John Schroeder states, “Rather than telling the brahmins that there is no “self,” no God, no Brahma, and no metaphysical basis to life, he offers them advice on the best way to attain union with a god” (16).¹¹

Let me reiterate that the use of *skillful means* when addressing moral issues does not equate to philosophical relativism. It is, however, the extension of an acceptance of pluralism. Siddhartha Gautama understood that, for the young brahmins, their worldview was deeply entrenched in Hinduism, and to break that completely would be to, perhaps, break them as well—and *that* would be a negative moral outcome for one to bear, especially given Siddhartha's role as a spiritual teacher. So instead of asserting his own ego or beliefs, the Buddha set his ideas aside to meet the young brahmins at their need. He used the *vocabulary of their own worldview* to teach them the lesson anyway, and help them with their particular moral confusion.¹² In responding to the charge that the Buddha's skillful means strategy is "lying," Schroeder says:

to frame the issue of [skillful means] in terms of "truth" may be misleading here. That the Buddha may have "lied" or taught incompatible positions is, from a purely logical perspective, a sign of poor judgment or irrational thinking. But from a skillful means perspective it expresses an ability to respond to the various forms of suffering the Buddha encountered on a daily basis. (18)

Skillful means in Buddhism is like our knowledge of universals: we cannot know about any *singular, Absolute and eternal* "Truth" because that which we can see and know as universal is a continuously changing co-creativity that never yields to permanence of any kind. There is *nothing* to know about our world, only of the processes that create it: *continuous causality*. Skillful means, then, is a reflection of this understanding. It is knowledge that the causal nature of the Universe keeps us honest to the interconnected, interdependent and constantly emerging reality that is our everyday experience. This knowledge calls on us as mindful human beings to respect and preserve others because they are part of the equation that is also ourselves; in doing this, we aid in the construction of a causal harmony that is social. Our decisions and actions, as moral decisions and actions, employ a respect for the world around us, and do not engage in damaging actions for the sake of beliefs or faith in those things that cannot be verified meaningfully. The moral compass for a Pragmatic Buddhist employs the twofold personal and social empiricism described here, the deep understanding of causality and change, and the deferential desire to preserve harmony for all.

Refining Moral Ability through Practice

As imperfect and limited human beings who are entrenched in emotion and defect (think of the enlightened teacher with Alzheimer's), we cannot expect to make the best moral decisions all of the time. It is unrealistic to expect followers of any morality to make the best decision in every circumstance because often we are unable to see the causal connections at play. Moreover, our ability to ponder moral choices with our frontal cortex does *not* mean that it translates to the respective "good" behavior if there is no practice involved, for just as becoming an exceptional athlete requires practice, so, too, does becoming an exceptional moral agent. Those we respect in this capacity have been extending an altruistic hand for some time before they are noticed to be moral exemplars. And, as Tom Clark pointed out to me, "altruism, based in our capacity for empathy, thus becomes a central moral ideal that operates in many contexts."

Sometimes, we make the best decision given what we have and know at that time, but no matter what, we face the effects of those actions, a term Buddhists call *karma*. Other times, two moral options might be equally bad, but we are called, nonetheless, to decide between them. While we can do little about genetic defects that might affect our cognitive capacity, or of disease that afflicts our rationality, we can moderate

the effect our primordial emotions have over our behaviors through the practice of mindfulness meditation. In mindfulness, or the practice of *awareness cultivation* like that practiced in Pragmatic Buddhism, real brain-based changes occur that enhance our ability to remain non-attached to situations that might elicit harmful responses. David Kalupahana, in his classic *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis*, states:

Early Buddhism emphasizes the fact that a beginner is not in a position to reach the final state of freedom all at once, but only by a gradual process of training (*anupubbasikkha*), gradual working out (*anupubbakiriya*), and gradual practice (*anupubbapatipada*). (58)

Importantly, the approach to practice emphasized by the Buddha was one of a keen and definite understanding that change within oneself, through concerted effort and training, is required to mature or cultivate that which is seen as preferred behavior. This is also the basis of cognitive behavioral therapy and, at least combining this view with the understanding we have gained through science, would support a “gradual” approach to Buddhist training. Lastly, recognizing that human beings are not perfect—and never will be—is essential to living an appropriate moral life. We must, as my teacher, David Shaner Sensei told me, “have compassion for ourselves.”

In knowing intimately the universality of causality as well as those kinds of actions that lead to positive and negative outcomes, we can determine for a given situation what is likely to lead to the best results for self *and* other. To do this, we employ skillful means in our actions, not an unyielding allegiance to a moral code. But in employing an informed skill-in-means, which includes the components outlined here, we avoid relativism while acknowledging and nurturing pluralism. It is not “any action goes” for the Pragmatic Buddhist, but that our actions—whatever they may be—need to preserve and promote a causal harmony that benefits self *and* other.

Tom Clark, director of the *Center for Naturalism*, points out frequently that naturalists need no mandatory moral code in order to be moral agents in this world. It is because naturalists focus on *this world*—as Pragmatic Buddhists do—that they are able to see the functional benefit of being moral. Actions that promote personal and social harmony and general human happiness are the kind of actions that make a better world for *everyone*; there is no need for an essentialist explanation. Indeed, Richard Gombrich, in his book *How Buddhism Began*, states that the Buddha “was not an essentialist,” that he “was interested in how things worked rather than in what they were” (27). Naturalists, like Pragmatic Buddhists, are not interested in essential natures because such things carry no weight when put to the test. An eternal, independent and concrete self or soul has yet to be confirmed by anyone. It is not that we need to *deny* the existence of something that cannot be disproven (such as gods and the Flying Spaghetti Monster), but to assert their existence when no confirmation can be had is irresponsible, for otherwise we become drunk off the allure of fantasia. Thus, our time must be spent molding that which is in front of us. Moral actions are no different, and those actions that lead to better results for self and other are the actions that naturalists and Pragmatic Buddhists will accept, no further explanation is necessary.

Gombrich brings up a point in his text regarding the Buddha’s approach to teaching that contrasts nicely with the Socratic approach. In the *Kalama Sutra*, the Buddha takes some inquisitors of the Kalama clan through a learning process using the Socratic method. Gombrich notes that the Buddha, “proceeds to preach to them by asking them at each step whether they agree...” (29). The point, says the author, “is to show that morality has practical advantages. Again, the text [*Kalama Sutra*] is pragmatic...”

Our task, if we accept the logic of Pragmatic Buddhist morality, is to enhance or refine our ability to know what leads to harmony in this world, and what kinds of practices cultivate our capacity for decency in decision making. By focusing on solid *practice*, as Buddhists of all traditions do, we take a proactive approach to developing the necessary insight into the causality that governs our Universe, as well as the moderation of character that allows us to act with appropriate deference when faced with challenging moral decisions. By analyzing the actual situation and allowing the circumstances before us to come to fruition before we determine our moral judgments, we might better see which appropriate moral actions to take, and then employ *skillful means* to carry them out.

End Notes

1- Stephen Batchelor and Matthew Dillon have both pointed out that the most recent archeological evidence suggests Siddhartha Gautama's life should be dated about a century later than traditionally placed, to circa 450-370 BCE. This would mean Siddhartha Gautama and Socrates would have been contemporaries.

2- From *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*, Edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi. p. 88.

3- *ibid*, p.331.

4- *ibid*, p. 354.

5- See *Daodejing: Making This Life Significant*, Translated and with Commentary by Roger T. Ames and David Hall.

6- From *Teachings of the Buddha*, Edited by Jack Kornfield, p. 18.

7- For an interesting discussion of the pragmatic hope to synthesize a "compromise" between our inherited moral understanding and the aspiration to make it reflective of our needs today, see "Grandeur, Profundity, and Finitude" by Richard Rorty in *Philosophy as Cultural Politics, Vol. 4*. For an outline of a possible lineage of Western morality, see *The Genealogy of Morality* by Friedrich Nietzsche.

8- Acknowledgment goes to Tom Clark for pointing out this particular view, that even in a world of change and flux, we can still engineer relatively predictable and stable knowledge from our causal experiences, the basis, for example, of scientific knowledge.

9- Another acknowledgment goes to Tom Clark for this view, that we can learn deeper compassion for others who are also stuck in a seemingly impossible moral dilemma; there is much to offer our neighbor in simply recognizing such impossibilities do exist.

10- Acknowledgment goes to Stephen Batchelor for reminding me that *skillful means* is not a term we can attribute to Siddhartha Gautama, as historical accuracy requires that we remember its later *Mahayana* development.

11- Stephen Batchelor points out that while this is one example of the Buddha's pragmatism, in general he does not seek to preserve the popular Hindu belief in God/gods because the arguments used to justify such a belief does not stand up to critical examination.

12- John Schroeder employs an argument made by Troy Organ to support the notion that the Buddha's approach to teaching was "pragmatic": *The picture we get of the Buddha is that of a remarkably single-minded man. Speculation was not only useless but harmful, for it would sidetrack him from his main goal. He had no disinterested love for truth. He admitted that he had more truths which he might disclose, but he refrained and limited himself to the revelation of only those truths which he considered to be religiously significant. Truth was a value for him only when it was a means to man's release from suffering. For Gautama, all knowledge was ideology, that is, all knowledge was held and expressed for certain reasons. He dharma was revealed only because it contributed to man's salvation.* (35)

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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF MY STUDY?

by William Perkins

I ask, what is more pragmatic than waking up? Leaving behind, your preconceived notions of reality and strength. Realizing there is nothing to attain but many things to get rid of... like habits of posture, negative thoughts, competitive and aggressive tendencies, the notions of fighting and winning. The real work is within your own mind. Koichi Tohei stated that the subconscious mind is the store house of knowledge. It occurred to me, that alliances shift and impressions of people may change over time; but the seed of negative thought, hatred and bigotry last a very, very long time. These thoughts continue to feed our anger and resentment, hardening our hearts and minds long after there is any reason to. Essentially, we are perfecting closing our minds rather than opening them.

Training to connect, with the living quality of each moment. Coming back, to right here right now with gentleness and precision. Connecting deeply to others and realizing that separation is the illusion. Training in not causing harm and maintaining an open and flexible mind. These are very practical and lasting effects

of serious training. True training requires discipline and honest self reflection, not only of what to train but why to train.

How to change our usual perspective, and to get away from our habit of thinking of for and against. When ever we feel pain stop, breathe, breathe it in, and realize that others also feel pain in this way. When we connect to the universe in this way we can let go with out judging or allowing it to rise to the level of aggression. When we feel pleasure, enjoy it. No need to be guilty, simply enjoy it and wish that others could also enjoy this same simple pleasure. Like the first sip of tea in the morning , you know, the cream is frothed (I have become particularly found of green tea lattes) just right, you can feel it beginning to warm you as it goes down, the sun is coming up and the birds are singing, aaaaahhhh wouldn't it be great if every one could slow down and enjoy this moment. This right now, is a way of practicing, being connected, and gratitude. Which of course leads to compassion, and a deeper connection to our selves and others.

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REFLECTIONS ON DAVID KALUPAHANA'S "BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS"

by Allison Ramsaroop

1) Is the Buddhism of Siddhartha Gautama a religion? In light of Siddhartha's insistence on experiential verification, is Buddhism a science? How is Buddhism different from religion and/or science, or is it?

Buddhism is often described as a religion in that the practice shares many of the characteristics of organized religion: a ritual-based expression, a commonly held belief system or philosophy, the incorporation of symbols and phrases associated with the belief, and a figure-head type (Siddhartha). However, the complexity of Buddhism cannot be encapsulated by the term religion, which in itself is difficult to reduce to a definition. Writer Jelna Osborne suggests there are seven major religions, and recognizes Buddhism among them (Judaism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Daoism, and Buddhism). Yet this recognition might have more to do with the amount of followers. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) lists Buddhism as having the fourth largest group of followers in global belief systems, just behind the three monotheistic religions. Intellectually, however, Buddhism asks us to question our notions of reality, including our sources for pleasure and pain. This inverts the traditional means of acquiring knowledge: studying to achieve certainty. Buddhism is study coupled with practice, but unlike Western religions, this study requires the Buddhist practitioner to temper his or her preoccupation with "self" as an independent entity. Kalupahana

writes that the Buddha rejected the traditional means one employs in order to find knowledge about this world: “one should suspend judgment, and that means rejection of tradition or revelation as a valid source of knowledge” (17). Instead of using the agreed upon precepts of reason and speculation (18) to find ultimate truth, Buddhists assert that there is “[an] absence of any guarantee of its truth or falseness, it is not proper to depend on the theory as a valid means of knowledge” (Kalupahana 17). By this description, Buddhists might appear to be engaged in a religious-type of behavior, but are not limited to that religious type of behavior.

Merriam Webster defines science as “systematic knowledge or practice,” yet according to Greek scholar, HDF Kitto, Aristotle coaligned philosophy with reason. Buddhism seems to embrace both approaches. While this might be helpful in the investigation of the natural world, there are some experiences (such as emergent phenomena) that when approached scientifically cannot be categorized or simplified from their complexity. Here the Buddha suggests distancing ourselves from our futile attempts to find answers to the “unanswerables” (Pali: *avyakata*) by taking the “middle way.” If the alleviation of human suffering is a supreme goal as practicing Buddhists, we must use the combination of our ethical approach to others and our capable minds to distinguish between what is possible to know and what is not possible to know in order to be as effective as possible. For example, if we encounter a problem whose answer would require inquiry (i.e. the cure for cancer, the analysis of a complicated calculus problem) we cannot avoid the difficulty by labeling it beyond our capability. By shirking the complexity of phenomena by merely labeling it as “God’s work” instead of investigating this phenomena intellectually we are shortchanging ourselves, and therefore we must be fully committed to resolving these complexities. On the other hand, to relentlessly pursue answers to metaphysics might be “irrelevant to our overall goal of alleviating unsatisfactoriness” (Eubanks). Hence, Buddhists must be constantly aware of their purpose.

2) Why did the historical Buddha refuse to engage in metaphysics, and what does his refusal mean for us today as practicing Buddhists?

Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that investigates the origins of existence. According to Kalupahana, the Buddha believed that those who pursued metaphysics believed in a self that belonged to, or was associated to one body or one being. This attachment to a concrete or individual self was problematic because “[people] failed to emphasize the casual efficiency of factors other than the self” (154). The Buddha refused to engage in metaphysics for three primary reasons: 1) “Metaphysical theories are based on a priori reasoning without any empirical basis,” 2) “. . . a metaphysician, in the absence of direct knowledge, attempts to determine in advance what any object of knowledge must be like, without being satisfied with what he knows,” and 3) “A third hypothesis construes metaphysic statements as meaningless strings of words, sentences, which conform to the rules for grammar but are lacking in meaning, even though they are capable of arousing strong emotional responses in the people” (158). The Buddha believed that the basis of metaphysics is the self, and therefore, since the self is linguistically a misunderstanding, the pursuit of that self in higher philosophy is a corrupted pursuit. “The Culla-Malunkyaputta-sutta points out that the solutions to these questions do not lead to well-being and do not contribute to the higher religious life to renunciation, dispassion, cessation, pacification, insight, enlightenment, or nibbana” (161). Kalupahana asserts that any examination of the self would be an examination of metaphysics, and since the preoccupation with the self is what leads to suffering, that preoccupation should be, not avoided, but redirected.

The Buddha also asserted that the doctrine of causality presented “cannot be described in empirical terms” because human beings are so easily clouded by their own proclivities (155). Questions about the self, such as the following, do not have answers, and using metaphysics to attempt to answer them leaves us wholly unsatisfied: 1. Is suffering caused by oneself? 2. Is suffering caused by another? 3. Is suffering caused by both self and another? 4. Is suffering caused neither by oneself nor by another? (153). When presented these questions, Buddha replied, “Do not say so” or “It is not so” (154). This is not to suggest that people will not try to use metaphysics to make sense of the world. Kaluphanna suggests that “because people are bound by their own approaches, attachments, and inclinations . . . no form of logic or reasoning could convince them of the truth of the theory of ‘dependent arising’” (155).

As practicing Buddhists at the Center for Pragmatic Buddhism (CPB), we are surrounded by the Western Greek approach to finding meaning in relation to the self. Much of our dissatisfaction as Westerners stems from our own preoccupation with the self as different from others, and even as something separate from causal conditioning itself. The Buddha’s critique of metaphysics should be observed, but this does not mean metaphysics should be ignored entirely, for many might assume we are skirting the issue. Instead, the sound argument should be raised on the interdependence of the self. There are new approaches in philosophy emerging in which thinkers are investigating the relation of the “mind” to the “body” and the interaction between these and the outside world. The West had individuals who resisted the temptation of metaphysics. Job in the Judeo-Christian Old Testament resisted his friends’ suggestions to question, and instead relied on what he believed was a more sound belief: not questioning his situation, for he could not possibly understand the cause of his suffering. The Buddha knew that no answer is possible to the above questions and that humanity’s attachment to the self will undoubtedly lead to more suffering. Humans should be encouraged away from relying on speculation about these matters. Instead, the Buddha posited that there is lack of pragmatism behind these questions. Though I foresee this as another irreconcilable difference, at least for now, between the Western approach and the Buddhist approach to metaphysics, Buddha said this pursuit did not improve the world.

3) The Buddha was selective when choosing his sources of information. He taught that we should not embrace 1) authority figures, 2) sacred (revered) texts, or 3) personal insight alone, but rather in conjunction with one another. Why is this?

According to Kalupahana, the Buddha asserted that “there is nothing in this world that does not come within the realm of the causal law. . . . [and] all things in this world are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and nonsubstantial” (36). Since authority figures, their sacred texts, and our personal insight are all components that exist in this world, they are bound to the same laws of causality as we as individuals are. If we are to create an imbalance by favoring one of the three, we might fall to the contextual dogma and forget the interdependence that permeates all existing things and ideas. As authority figures, sacred texts and our own personal insight often shape our sense of self, and as a result, seek to create meaning out of their position in this world, they also contribute to suffering since much of suffering comes from the self’s attachment to the source of “selfhood.” “But to the Buddha, the ‘self’, whether it is identical with the body or different from the body, is a metaphysical entity. It is a metaphysical entity solely because it is unverifiable, either through sense perception or through extrasensory perception. In short, it is not given in experience. . . .” (41). Institutions, sacred texts, and authority figures might serve to reinforce this sense of self and contribute to our own perfection of self as unkillable. I do not think the Buddha was suggesting we forfeit all laws because

they are derived from authority; there must be some order in the human world, or that sacred texts are useless; they surely also contribute to some ethical behavior. I do, however, interpret the distribution of ethical, spiritual, psychological, or moral power based on authority, text, or insight as inherently flawed, because of their shared platform for insight. By suggesting we embrace these three venues in conjunction with one another, the value of impermanence and interdependence might be better recognized.

The historical context of a piece might also serve to highlight how authority might be corrupted by values that serve to protect the interests of a few and repress the rights of many. We in St. Louis are observing the breaking of Catholic canonical law with the ordaining of women as priests with help from the Central Reform Congregation in the Central West End's First Unitarian Church of St. Louis. Though to some post-modern thinkers, this ordaining might not seem to be offensive, it is greatly offensive to Catholic dogma, which perceives men as the sole spiritual vehicles. A Buddhist might approach this conundrum differently by 1) examining the authority of the church. Since Catholic dogma was created contextually during a time (Edict of Milan 313) when women were second class citizens in Roman history, it makes sense to understand how this group would have been excluded from political power. We observe the same circumstances with American history and politics. However, despite global progress that has advanced the rights of women socially and politically, the church adheres to the philosophy that change is a bad thing. This is an example of how authority and sacred texts neglect personal insight, common sense, and pragmatic virtues in order to preserve the dogma. Even a slight imbalance in this "source of information" creates great instability in the community and a divide that started with the Protestant reformation and continues today.

Kalupahana notes in Chapter 8 that scholasticism in Buddhism came from a need to classify the teachings of Buddha. I approach the spreading of Buddhism as a positive force, despite the tendency for some to classify their way as the "right" way. Human error will likely always interfere with our attempts to remove the self from our existences. Perhaps this socialization is a result of industry or materialism; regardless, we know it is reversible or preferably, preventable.

4) What role does causation (dependent origination) play in the Four Ennobling Truths and the Eightfold Path?

The examination of the origins of existence for the Buddhist differs greatly from pre-Buddhist and most western perceptions on metaphysics. "The Buddhist theory of causality seems to have been influenced by the Naturalist theory of inherent nature'. . . The Buddhist theory is not confined to physical causation alone; as is the Naturalist theory . . . the causal pattern is recognized even in the psychic, moral, social, and spiritual realm. . ." (27). Man's creation cannot be limited to one idea that stems from the simple explanation of the external realm. Although the Buddha claimed that the existing metaphysical doctrines were not correct, he also claimed that his own doctrine of causality "was beyond the sphere of logical reasoning" (155). This, however, creates dissatisfaction within humanity as it searches for a priori meaning in complicated existence: "But man will not rest content with such uncertainties regarding the nature of the world. In fact. . . the quest for certainty was one of the major incentives to lead the religious life. Hence, from the earliest times attempts have been made to find solutions for these problems, and the different solutions are embodied in the various religions that have emerged" (156). Man's search for "sufficient reason" can in fact be tainted by the scientists or philosophers own personal preferences—a search for "a priori reasoning without any empirical basis" (156-8). "The need for a rational and factual description of the life-process and how the so-

called individual comes to experience happiness as well as suffering was felt by the Buddha from the very beginning of his career” (31).

The Four Ennobling Truths and the Eightfold Path do not attempt to reduce the complexities of existence into neatly consumable explanations for the enigmas of existence; Instead, the purpose of this path is to present a means to end the suffering of all sentient beings.

Noble truths seem to have been partly influenced by the previous philosophies before Buddhism that linked meaning with “self”; Buddha used these as a springboard into his Buddhist teachings—it is the link to these that causes the suffering man seeks to escape—this is the link into the Four Noble Truths. If man is to distance himself from his sense of self and focus instead on the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Ennobling truths, his suffering will cease (after much practice) and he might be capable of eliminating suffering. The truths are a way to sidestep the muddy waters of our hunger for “reasons” regarding existence. They are a practical way to address the unanswerable questions. If our preoccupation with self is lessened and our preoccupation with the noble way is highlighted, our dissatisfaction with the lack of “evidence” surrounding existence will decrease because we will not be tied to this self that demands that very evidence. “A disciple of the Buddha who has attained freedom from suffering is called ‘one who has done what has to be done.’ But to reach this goal the disciple has to do all that is to be done by gradual and ordered stages. . . . Those who attain the highest stage of moral perfection are like the lotuses that grow in the muddy water but rise above and remain unsmearred by the water” (58).

5) What does Kalupahana have to say about the development of Buddhism after Siddhartha Gautama? Why did Buddhism—particularly Mahayana Buddhism, embrace notions of Absolutism and transcendentalism?

Kalupahana asserts that the Buddha was reluctant to assign a master teacher as his “replacement” following his death, and instead instructed the monks to use the “doctrine and the discipline” as the guide (93). This is an important choice and it differs greatly from, for example, the Roman Catholic means of appointing replacements for those in positions of high power who have died. The dogma depends upon the leader, whereas in Buddhism at the time of the Buddha’s death, Buddha stressed the importance of the ideas over the man who presents them. This removes the ego from the dharma, and keeps it “pure” from misinterpretation.

The collection of Buddha’s discourses exists in “two distinct versions”: The Theravada tradition (Mahayana descended from Theravada) and Sarvastivada school (95). It is interesting to note that the original purpose in preserving the teachings of the Buddha was to “perpetuate the teachings [sic] without allowing dissensions to mar its unity” through classification and and collection (97). Yet many interested in Buddhism today are baffled by the sub schools and variations with varying levels of difficulty of observation and involvement. The development of Mahayana changed the interpretation of Buddhist concepts, however, and steered the focus away from the distance between the Buddha and the Buddha nature to the Buddha nature within man, not just the Buddha himself. The goal was to improve upon man: “Mahayana is the culmination of the speculation concerning the nature of the Buddha. . . . the Buddha declared himself to be neither a god nor a gandhabba nor a yakkha nor a man. It is possible to interpret this statement as implying that his is a transcendental existence” (112). Kalupahana continues by asserting that because the Buddha has eliminated “craving for and grasping after the things of the world” he has “transcended” the language even used to de-

scribe those who have not eliminated craving and grasping (112). The Buddha offered a reprieve from one's self who might be too personally involved with the striving to find answers from religion, philosophy, and social policy.

The goal, it seems, of Mahayana tradition is to reconcile the Absolute and the phenomenal. Kalupahana explains that the Buddha did not "accept a suprasensuous Ultimate Reality, an Absolute which is inexpressible in terms of concepts" because these theories "were based on certain metaphysical assumptions which emphasized certain aspects of experience to the neglect of others" (133). Instead, the Buddha's thesis of "dependent arising" was used to explain what others had attempted to do using metaphysics. Kalupahana continues by detailing the conflict inherent here:

He seems to have felt that causality, as the cornerstone of the Buddha's teachings, should be accepted as the empirical reality of the phenomenal world and as the thesis with which to counter the heretical or metaphysical theories. . . It is this very dilemma—the recognition that causality is the central teaching of the Buddha with regard to the phenomenal world, on the one hand, and the difficulty of recognizing such an empirical reality in the face of the transcendental, on the other—which led the Madhyamikas to raise causality to the level of the transcendental. . . (139)

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Allison Ramsaroop (*Jiao Si*) is a native of St. Louis and a Novice monk in the Order of Pragmatic Buddhists (OPB). She became interested in Buddhism as a result of her experience teaching Hatha yoga. She is interested in the commingling of pragmatism and Buddhism and integrates her studies at CPB with her yoga studies. Allison's initial training in meditation stemmed from the yoga sutras and pranayama. She is especially dedicated to continuing her practice of the Pragmatic Buddhist methods of meditation, which focus on awareness cultivation and mindfulness. She graduated with a BA in English Language and Literature from Truman State in 1997, a MEd in Secondary Education from UMSL in 2004, and will complete an MA in English Literature in May of 2008. She currently teaches English at Parkway North High School in St. Louis.



SEEING THE DAO: AN EXAMINATION OF ROGER AMES AND DAVID HALS TRANSLATION OF THE *DAODEJING*

by Wayne Hughes

The *Daodejing* presents a teaching that is diametrically opposed to the dominant Western way of thinking. “Love thy neighbor”, in various forms, is a Judeo-Christian precept to be followed once the sins of the self have been recognized and absolved. There is always a clear separation between the self and the surrounding world that is maintained. That separation is antithetical to the Dao where it is more beneficial to all to “become one”, rather than “be one”. Becoming one entails deference playing a key role in developing and maintaining all relationships, of deeply understanding the other and letting it shape you.

All persons, things and events are an integral part of the totality. Developing a character that respects all the objects and events that encompass life allows a fuller enjoyment of that life. Think of it as, “Have fun with life and life will have fun with you.” Tang Junyi voiced that same sentiment a little more philosophically with, “. . . the commitment of the particular to do its best to realize the totality”. Developing such a character would also set a nurturing example for every event in their environment.

Cultivating this inner perspective of the world would constantly remind people that their existence was equal to all others. They would be more likely to strive for harmony, instead of struggle with dissonance. Any sort of harmful action against persons, places or things would be seen as having an equal effect on the whole world. They would be acts to be avoided.

In the universal environment each action, event and being is new and their situations are new, yet they each are equal in the procession of the whole. Each of our lives is a constant parade of faces, places and events that make an impression on us, and we have an equal impression on them. It is not so much what effect the past had on us, or what effect we will have on the future; it is how we are affecting our environment in the now that will have the most profound effect. Completeness will be found in positive connections to the surrounding environment as it plays the role of teacher and student. This is integrity in the sense of being in a co-creative process.

Creativity is *ab initio*, resulting from influences that spur novelty. Thoughts, sights and feelings that already exist bring about new ideas, visions and expressions.

There is an Art Car Show in Houston, Texas, each year that attracts increasing numbers of people who see uniquely decorated vehicles, absorb the conceptions, and revel in the atmosphere. The experience stimulates their own unique creativity and they return to continue the procession of novelty. Each year it is the same event, but the event is never the same because of its co-creative circumstance. Seen from the Judeo-Christian view of a God that makes and controls all this activity loses its spontaneity. Creativity and novelty cannot be directed, it is generated by spontaneity. “The sights, sounds, people and feelings of the event prompted me to create my own art car.”, would be instead, “God told me to do it.”

Nothing can be independent of the world around it. All experiences are a combination of the imprints left by the events in the surrounding universe. Thoughts and actions are unique in each instance, but have come and will come again.

For Western society the most difficult, and most important teaching from the Dao is the concept of interconnectivity, which Ames and Hall present as their translation of This Focus. Being an island floating independent in the universal ocean is an anchoring thought for most people. Independence is taught as soon as an infant draws their first breath. The baby is handed over to a nurse that takes them to a large room lined with clear sided bassinets. The other babies can be seen but not touched, not communicated with even on the most basic of levels. Once home the child may be left in the crib and bed to cry themselves to sleep because it will make them stronger. Later they join sport teams and are told “There is no I in team.”, but each player’s statistics are kept separately and either lauded over or commiserated over. This further strengthens the social concept of independence as a positive factor in pursuing life. The acceptance of *existential egalitarianism* would mean losing the privilege of being me, of understanding that desires and expectations do not give any special dispensation over the natural world. We would be seeing everything around as having *ontological parity among the things and events that constitute our lives*.

Two culture icons of the late 20th Century tried to put the idea of interconnectivity into the Western consciousness from two very different perspectives. Carl Sagan, renowned scientist and writer told us that everything in the universe was composed of the original “star stuff” infusing all galaxies. A popular song by Joni Mitchell reminded us “we are star dust, billion year old carbon, we are golden.” Each in their own way was trying to convince us of our close physical and psychology ties with one another, our interdependence.

Ames and Hall say “*our experience is holographic in the sense that it has implicated within it the entire field of experience*”, and acting with the belief that everything is interconnected, that existence is dependent on the totality of the environment would bring about a deluge of positive actions and feelings.

There is a guiding principle in Judeo-Christian theology that sets people outside their experiences, making them *passive participants* and taking away the responsibility for their environment. “God has a plan for you.”, “Let God direct your path.”, and “Put your life in God’s hands.” all put people on the outside of their existence playing a part, rather than becoming a part. The Dao supposes that the world contains transforming energies derived from the all that occurs on it. It is an energy that can be tapped to take advantage of all possibilities and we add to this energy with our participation in events. Ames and Hall termed this as *Ars contextualis; a way of living and relating to a world that quite simply seeks to get the most out of the diversity of experience*.

The presuppositions of the Dao provide an approach that can help us get the very best out of existence and be a focus that others can use to do the same.

In a historical context the Dao presented a world view that showed rulers how to direct their people without coercion, to use *the discernible rhythm and regularity of the world as it unfolds around and through us* and let the people be spontaneous in their reactions to the world around them. They would copy how the leader reacted to them and their environment and respond accordingly. Ames and Hall say that *spontaneous action is a mirroring response*.

This idea can be used just as effectively by anyone in Western society today. A person who understands and cultivates a non-assertive connection to their total environment projects a character that will affect everything in that environment. It is extremely difficult to imagine a world where leaders would have such a close connection to their total environment that they were exemplary, rather than dictatorial.

Our world is a continuing show of happenings, each of them unique and concrete, and all have an equal effect on our being. The Daoist lingo is “*only becomings are*”. There is nothing permanent behind the fluttering curtain of reality, just the universal whole in all its diversity moving by. Each person, action and object is an event that is taking place, or will, and each has as equal part. There is no cosmic being directing each episode, no script to read from; it is all ad-lib. Only by playing off each other’s lines will the environment created benefit everyone.

Western dogma views the process of life as mostly a struggle to obtain, to persevere, and to get the most out of existence. Anger and stress result when the struggle is unsuccessful. Happiness and contentment are felt when it is successful, but the feelings are fleeting. There is more struggle ahead.

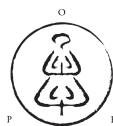
The Daodejing offers a different tack toward existence by applying the concept of acuity. Ames and Hall describe it as *mirroring of the things of the world as they are in their interdependent relations with us – that we reach a state in which nothing among all of the myriad of “the goings on” in the world will be able to agitate our hearts-and-minds, and we are able to promote the flourishing of our world.* Becoming one with all aspects of their environment would enable people to anticipate needs and respond in a way that would produce the most positive effect. Being so “in tune” with their universe would lessen the unknown factors that have negative affects on human psyches.

The deferential act of “walking in another man’s shoes”, or to *put oneself literally in the place of the other* is a certain way to change attitudes toward the whole of a person’s environment. Experiencing what an event is like from the inside, instead of simply being an observer would open eyes to an egalitarian view of all things. It would change the concept of “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” from a guiding principle handed down from a divine being, to a path made clear by one’s field of experience.

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Wayne Hughes (*Ren Cheng*) is a Formal Student of the Order of Pragmatic Buddhists (OPB) and regular attendee of the Center for Pragmatic Buddhism (CPB) in St. Louis. He grew up in a military family and moved all over the world, and was exposed to diverse peoples and cultures. Life continues to offer up a bounty of experiences and memories for Wayne. His job experiences are just as varied as his life. At present, he is a freelance writer and editor and the Religion and Spirituality Topic Administrator and Buddhism steward for an online information network where his goal is to foster an atmosphere of religious tolerance and pluralism. He read about the many faces of Buddhism, meditated on his own, and searched until he found the Pragmatic Buddhist sangha in St. Louis. Wayne felt the call to become a Formal Student at his first meeting.



IN EVERY

I S S U E . . .

ASK-A-MONK



[The “Ask-A-Monk” section includes various questions that the OPB monastics receive. More interesting and/or pertinent questions are included in this newsletter.]

Question 1: “I have a question about relationships from a Buddhist standpoint. I am in a relationship with someone I love very much, but we have been encountering many obstacles lately, such as an inability to communicate with one another—an essential part of the relationship. This is draining to me. Do you have any suggestions? Thank you.”

Response from Wayne Hughes (Ren Cheng): “Relationships can be trying, but the fact that you love this person very much will make whatever efforts you put forward worth it.

Communication is key to any lasting relationship. When it becomes difficult there are often physical barriers that need to be overcome before understanding can be achieved. During a recent Dharma talk given by CPB Monastic Director Jim Eubanks (*Shi Yong Xiang*), we discussed a helpful acronym that Ryugen Fisher Sensei (*Shi Shen Long*) taught him: **H. A. L. T.** The four letters relate to physical needs that you and your partner should meet before trying to resolve issues.

Hunger -- A rumbling stomach will keep interrupting your train of thought. Feed the body, feed the mind.

Anger -- A red haze in your eyes and mind will not allow you to see clearly.

Loneliness -- A support network, even of just one other person, can help keep things in perspective.

Tiredness -- A sense of fatigue can lead to a lack of patience.

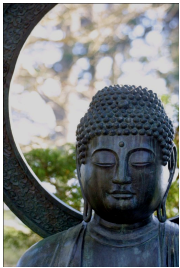
Try to balance these physical aspects before trying to overcome obstacles or engage in difficult conversations. Encourage your partner to do the same. Say, "We are 'all or some of HALT' so could we continue this once these needs are met."

Deep Listening is also an important aspect of truly communicating with another. Sometimes it is difficult to hear what the other has to say over the volume of your own thoughts and concerns. Mindfulness, being in the moment is helpful here. Focus on what your partner is saying. This is not a time to make judgments. It is a time to listen. At first the Deep Listening may be one-sided, but as your partner senses you are truly hearing what they are saying, they will be more open to hearing you. Don't be afraid to be the first to listen.

Relationships are dependent on communication, listening is the beginning of any conversation."

Response from William Perkins (*Li Rui*): "Non-Dissension requires a strong spirit and Ki which is radiating back to the Universe, you don't harbor ill feelings you accept them just as the sea accepts the tributary streams, maintain a wave less calm in our own hearts."

Making a deep connection to others requires us to let go of our self, our ego and bruised feelings... the realization of interconnection, leads to compassion, "once you realize this **you are responsible for your actions and the role you play in all relationships and must cultivate more compassion, acceptance, love, understanding etc...**"serious personal development requires serious commitment and time. We are a work in progress and never really arrive but continue to improve ourselves, and the circumstance of those around us. One way to cultivate this connection is daily breathing and Meditation practice. I would also suggest practice putting your self in the other persons place, mentally then respond to your questions and answer from this new vantage point."



UPCOMING EVENTS

OPB TO HOLD 1ST ANNUAL *COUNCIL OF MONASTIC LEADERS* AT FURMAN UNIVERSITY

The monks and formal students of the *Order of Pragmatic Buddhists* (OPB), the governing body of CPB, will be holding their 1st annual *Conference of Monastic Leaders* (CML) at Furman University in Greenville, SC this Spring. From May 2-4, OPB members will hold a public meditation workshop and a lecture event at Furman for students and all those interested.

CPB TO CO-SPONSOR EARTH DAY FESTIVAL IN ST. LOUIS

CPB will be at the St. Louis Earth Day Festival this year, April 20, to support environmental awareness and make its largest public appearance to date. A table with items for sale, including t-shirts with the CPB and/or OPB logo and catchy phrases will be used to raise money for the General Fund. If you are interested in participating, please contact Jim Eubanks at jim.eubanks@gmail.com!

SANGHA NEWS

JAN KIELY NAMED DIRECTOR OF NANJING CENTER AT JOHNS HOPKINS

Jan Kiely, PhD, advisor to the *American Chan Shaolin Center's* first location at Furman University, the *Furman University Chinese Arts Group (FUCAG)*, will serve two years as the American Director of the Hopkins Nanjing Center. The Nanjing Center was founded as a joint venture between Johns Hopkins and Nanjing University in China, to facilitate outstanding academic study between the US and China. Graduate studies for American and Chinese students include international relations, economics, history and international law. Dr. Kiely began in 2003 as the faculty advisor to FUCAG at Furman University, a meditative and martial arts organization founded by Jim Eubanks and Aden Albert.

ACBC IS NOW CPB, OACB IS NOW OPB

The *American Chan Buddhist Center (ACBC)* is now the *Center for Pragmatic Buddhism (CPB)*. This change more accurately reflects the “pragmatic” approach to Buddhism of the *Order of Pragmatic Buddhists (OPB)*-- formerly the *Order of American Chan Buddhists (OACB)*. Additionally, this change will eliminate some confusion that arose from the use of “Chan,” which is widely seen as denoting exclusively traditional Chinese Buddhist groups.

GET INVOLVED!

If you are interested in volunteering your time to help CPB with events and/or fundraising, please consider contacting us with your area(s) of interest. Volunteering is a great opportunity to reach out and contribute to the growth of CPB.

BRING A FRIEND

If you have family or friends who would enjoy our open and stimulating approach to personal development and social virtuosity, consider bringing them to Practice at CPB. Weekly practice is held at the First Unitarian Church of St. Louis, 5007 Waterman Blvd. in the Central West End off of Kingshighway just north of Barnes-Jewish Hospital.

INTERESTED IN FORMAL STUDY WITH OPB?

Persons who are interested in formal study with OPB may visit the main website, www.pragmaticbuddhism.org for more information by clicking on the “Buddhist Education” tab. An Application for Formal Study is also available. You may also contact the Monastic Director, Jim Eubanks (*Shi Yong Xiang*) directly at jim.eubanks@gmail.com.

STAY UPDATED ONLINE

If you are looking for the latest “Sangha News” at CPB, check us out on the web at www.pragmaticbuddhism.org, and join our online forum, CPB on GoogleGroups. Email Jim Eubanks at jim.eubanks@gmail.com and request an invitation to the forum. Also, check out the “Center for Pragmatic Buddhism” on Meetup.com. All major announcements are posted on the website, along with general information about CPB practice and study.

Rule #15 -- The Pursuit of Happiness

Happiness is NOT a right, but the result of karma, effort, personal opinion and often, a distorted view of the distant or not-so distant past.

<p>Contributors to this edition of <i>The Pragmatic Buddhist</i></p> <p>Editor: Jim Eubanks</p> <p>Associate Editors: Wayne Hughes Allison Ramsaroop</p> <p>Advisory Board: David Edward Shaner, PhD Tom Clark Roger T. Ames, PhD Stephen Batchelor Owen Flanagan, PhD Steve Odin, PhD</p>	<p>Authors: Jim Eubanks Aden Albert William Perkins Wayne Hughes Allison Ramsaroop</p> <p>Graphic Designers: Aden Albert (<i>The Pragmatic Buddhist</i> logo) Scott Ghelfi (CPB logo, "Ask-A-Monk" logo)</p> <p><i>If you are interested in contributing an original work to The Pragmatic Buddhist, please contact the TPB Editor, Jim Eubanks at jim.eubanks@gmail.com, or visit www.thepragmaticbuddhist.com for submission guidelines.</i></p>
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