A Buddhist Approach to International Relations

Radical Interdependence

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About the Author

William J. Long is professor of political science and former dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Georgia State University. He is the author of six books and numerous articles and the recipient of awards from the Fulbright Commission, European Union, MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Council on Foreign Relations, and U.S. Institute of Peace.

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Introduction

Abstract Many scholars have wondered if a non-Western theory of international politics founded on different premises, be it from Asia or from the "Global South," could release international relations from the grip of a Western, "Westphalian" model in which self-interest (and opposition to the other) and system anarchy treat conflict and violence as natural and ethical behavior among states. As part of the emergent literature in Global International Relations, this monograph suggests that a Buddhist approach to international relations could provide a genuine alternative. Because of its distinctive philosophical positions and its unique understanding of reality, human nature, and political behavior, a Buddhist theory of IR offers a means for transcending the Westphalian predicament. This chapter situates a Buddhist approach to international relations within the sweep of traditional and recent international relations theory. It then outlines the subsequent chapters of the monograph that address the philosophical foundations of Buddhist IR; Buddha's ideas about politics, economics, and statecraft; and the manifestations of Buddhist political principles in practice, one ancient and one modern, that illustrate this alternative approach.

Keywords Buddhism · Politics · International relations theory

> *And the crowning superstructure of uncharity is the organized lovelessness of the relations between state and sovereign state—a lovelessness that expresses*

itself in the axiomatic assumption that it is right and natural for national organizations to behave like thieves and murderers, armed to the teeth and ready, at the first favorable opportunity, to steal and kill.

Aldous Huxley[1]

The Call for an Alternative Theory of International Relations

Huxley's characterization of Western international relations (IR) has led many to question if there might be a different set of axiomatic assumptions that could lead to more charitable possibilities for interstate relations. Some scholars have wondered if an alternative perspective such as a non-Western theory of international politics[2] founded on different premises, be it from Asia or from the "Global South," could release IR from the grip of a Western, "Westphalian" model in which self-interest (and opposition to the other) and system anarchy treat conflict, violence, and greed as natural and ethical behaviors among states. This monograph contributes to a growing literature in IR that has taken up that challenge and suggests that a Buddhist approach to international relations could provide a meaningful alternative.

Huxley pinpointed what is fundamentally amiss with mainstream Western IR in the first place: it tolerates (some would say perpetuates) and fails to remediate a world of existential dangers in terms of warfare and environmental threats and one of gross inequality and exclusion. To extricate ourselves from incessant conflict and violence—both physical and structural—requires a perspective based on a unique and different understanding of reality, human nature, and the possibilities for political behavior. A Buddhist theory of IR offers an alternative vision, a means for transcending the Westphalian predicament. This book presents a Buddhist theory of international relations: its philosophical foundations; its ideas about politics, economics, and statecraft; and its historical and contemporary expressions.

Many believe that the problem with mainstream IR lies in its Eurocentrism, which reduces the scope and utility of its theorizing. By relying on a limited range of ideas, cultures, politics, histories, and experiences, mainstream IR ignores or misrepresents the ideas, culture, politics, history, and experiences of most of the world thereby diminishing its efficacy in addressing global challenges and undermining its claims of universalism (Acharya 2014). In practical terms, the world is headed for a more

pluralistic, less Western-dominated future and traditional IR theory must expand its conceptual repertoire to better understand the distribution of power, wealth, and influence in the twenty-first century (Acharya and Buzan 2019).

In response to these shortcomings, recent IR scholarship has generated several new approaches designed to broaden and improve our understanding and practice of international relations. Below, I briefly review both traditional and emergent IR theories and begin to situate a Buddhist approach within this theoretical landscape.

A Theoretical Sketch

Unfortunately, Huxley's lament would go unanswered for several decades. About the time of Huxley's writing in the 1940s, Western "Realist" IR asserted that the eternal verities and "objective laws" of international relations were the will to dominance; the inherent violence of human nature; and the natural competition and warfare among autonomous, sovereign states in anarchy (Morgenthau 1948 at p. 4). These observations about human nature and state behavior were presented as immutable truths and are still held as such by some. In reality, however, this view was only one possible depiction of the world reflecting a distinctive history, geography, and consciousness. It was founded on Western European experience since the seventeenth century when the establishment of sovereign, independent units (states) became the cornerstone of Western IR theory. Sovereignty meant that state actors had the right to rule over a territory and the people within in it and were legally equal to all other states in terms of their autonomy and authority. Dominant Western "Realist" IR theory emphasized these *independent,* not interdependent, states as actors operating in an anarchic environment, that is, one where there is no central authority to protect states from each other or to guarantee their security. It underscored the enduring propensity for conflict among these autonomous, self-interested states seeking security through self-help. Realists argued that, given these systemic conditions, international cooperation will be rare, fleeting, and tenuous—limited by enforcement problems in anarchy and each state's preference for larger relative gains in any potential bargain because of the state's systemic vulnerability. War, therefore, was perfectly normal, ethical, and well, "diplomacy by other means" (von Clausewitz 1989).

The major alternative theoretical school, "Liberalism," working in the same milieu and under the same meta-theoretical assumptions as Realism, identified ways to mitigate the worst conflictual tendencies of IR through commercial exchange, shared norms, laws, and institutions. It relaxed some realist assumptions and introduced[3] the concept of *interdependence*—reciprocal meaningful connections among states that could shape characteristically self-interested interactions and facilitate greater cooperation.[4] Interdependence, according to some liberals, is always a matter of degree and kind, but when the density of relations and range of shared interests are significant, states may construct institutions, norms, and regimes that act as intervening variables that reduce transaction costs and raise the cost of cheating for states, thus facilitating international cooperative arrangements. By including a role for internationally shared norms and institutions in its constructs, Liberalism makes a little room for the causal power of ideas and interactions, not just a state's material power and individual interests, as explanatory factors in IR theory.

Despite these differences, modern versions of Realism and Liberalism both adopt a rationalist, and philosophically "realist," approach to explaining individual and state choice of action.[5] That is, they maintain that individuals, and by extension states, are (1) atomistic, (2) materially real, and (3) self-interested actors. Buddhist IR, as we will see in the next chapter, rests on first principles diametrically opposed to all three assertions.

Mainstream IR also asserts that these independent, inherently real, and self-interested actors are "strategic" in that they pursue their principally self-determined goals in the international political environment, much like rational economic actors make choices in a marketplace (Smit 2005). The distinction between the two theories turns largely on whether "rational" behavior means pursuing relative or absolute gains in exchange relations with other states, that is, whether the international political system is best conceived as a zero-sum or a variable-sum game. Buddhism, as discussed in the following chapter, would instead characterized most individual and state actions as misdirected (unskillful) and based on misperception (delusions), but capable of achieving greater clarity and wisdom.

Beginning in the 1980s, IR theory began to offer important alternatives to these traditional approaches that would challenge some of the underlying philosophical assumptions of Realist and Liberal IR theory and broaden the scope of theory beyond the experiences and voices of the West. The most widely accepted alternative was Constructivism, which

took the idea of interdependence among social actors to a new level. It maintained that actors and their ideas co-create ("mutually constitute") themselves and their social worlds, which makes possible the conceptualization of a wider range of possible behaviors among states or other actors.[6] Constructivism emphasized the role of ideational, nonmaterial factors both as explanatory variables *and* as the source of actors' identities and interests, in contrast to realist and liberal theories that focus fundamentally on the distribution of material capabilities across states in the international system or institutional structures to explain states' interests and actions. Constructivism also challenged the rationalist assumptions of modern realism and liberalism. For constructivists, actors are not atomistic egoists whose interests are largely determined *before* their strategic interactions with others. Rather, actors exist in an intersubjective or "social" reality that shapes their identities (who they are) and interests (what they want) and, hence, their actions (what they will do). This social, ideational, interactive accounting for the creation of state identities, interests, and actions extends the concept of "interdependence" in constructivist IR theory. This open-ended approach to IR both offered a different way of thinking about the world and would serve as a bridge to other novel approaches, including some non-Western theories. Constructivism's emphasis on interdependence and the power of mental constructs, for example, trends in the direction of Buddhist thought.

About this time, a wide range of "Critical" IR theories emerged to challenge what it viewed as the pernicious effects on individuals and groups of the current state system and world economy. Rather than seeking to maintain the existing order or marginally improve cooperation among states, Critical IR theory contained an explicit normative, even teleological, element: IR theory should contribute to the emancipation of people from repressive social practices (pre-existing knowledge or gender structures, for example), and institutions (structures of production, for instance) and improve social justice within and among societies defined as greater economic equality and political recognition and agency for those previously disenfranchised (Ashley 1981; Cox 1996; Linklater 2007).

This vast literature, which includes Poststructural, Postmodern, and many Feminist writings, cannot be engaged in this short volume, but I would note several points where Critical theories share common purpose with Buddhist social thought that the reader will encounter in the chapters that follow. First, Buddhist understandings of politics and economics,

like Critical theories, sees politics as part of a larger whole, not a separate and discreet area of human activity nor one that should be studied divorced from ethical considerations. Second, Buddhist IR, like Critical IR, contains both a normative and teleological component, it too sees as its larger goal as contributing to human liberation. The Buddhist concept of liberation from suffering differs from what Critical theorist mean by emancipation and freedom from repression, and the source of liberation in Buddhism comes necessarily and primarily from within the individual rather being found principally and originally in the external worlds of politics and economics. Nonetheless, the end point in both Buddhist and Critical theory is far more ambitious than mainstream IR. Third, and related to the second commonality, is a basic humanism and belief in human equality shared by Critical and Buddhist approaches that displaces the fixation on states as the sole legitimate agents in the international system and power predominance as actors primary motivation. Finally, Critical and Buddhist theories challenge the positivistic epistemology of mainstream IR and the notion of theory leading to the discover of objective facts about politics. Critical and Buddhist approaches assert that knowledge about the social world is not neutral but depends on the observer as much as the observed.

Western scholars generated the vast majority of Critical IR theory and its reasoning was grounded in, or in reaction to, Western philosophical principles and social theory. Enlightenment, Marxian, and Kantian ideas figure prominently in Critical theories, for example. Significantly, neither mainstream IR nor Critical and reflexive theories that oppose it "fundamentally question the materiality or identity of the self" (Grovogui 2006 at p. 4). Buddhism, in contrast, offers a different ontological starting point for the self and social theory that will be discussed in Chapter 2.

One exception to this Western-centric dialogue emerging at about the same time was Postcolonial scholarship, which gave voice to the experience of international relations by people and societies formerly colonized and marginalized by the Western world (Krishna 2009; Hobson 2012; Sabaratnam 2017). Like Critical theory, it was especially concerned about disparities in global power and wealth, contained a normative aspiration for international relations, and did not accede to mainstream theory's claims of offering universal or unbiased truths. More so than Critical theory, however, it focused on the enduring impact of the history of Western imperialism, colonialism, and racism in shaping the current international system, which it sees as more hierarchical than anarchical. From

a Postcolonial perspective, the hierarchical international system was and remains the product of practices and discourses constructed in the West that treated non-Western people as "the other," different from and lesser than the citizens of the imperial later "major" or "core" powers, and thus justifiably excluded from voice, power, and prosperity. Postcolonial literature argues these unequal practices and conceptual biases remain embedded in the contemporary international system and must be shed or transformed to create a more just world. Although distinct from Buddhist IR in many respects, Postcolonial theory shares with Buddhist philosophy a common belief that holding to a self and other as distinct and unequal entities is the root of social inequities and conflict and that knowledge claims about politics are provisional.

Postcolonial theory aside, it has long been recognized that the discipline of international relations traditionally was, and to a lesser extent still is, anything but international in terms of the individuals composing its essential theoretical literature. Many have called for greater diversity and pluralism that includes non-Western voices and ideas previously excluded as a source of IR theory (Hoffman 1977; Waever 1998; Grovogui 2006; Jones 2006; Acharya and Buzan 2007, 2010 and 2017; Kayaoglu 2010; Acharya 2011; Zhang and Buzan 2012; Buzan 2016; Capan 2017).

Scholars offering perspectives from the regions of Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and particularly Asia and national approaches to IR theorizing, particularly Chinese, have answered this call for a non-Western IR and have recently become a significant part of IR theorizing (Acharya 2011, 2017). Each of these regions has its own distinctive narrative and contains significant variation within them.

Illustrative of this regional and national diversification in IR literature is the emergence of a so-called "Chinese School of IR," which reflects China's self-conscious rise as a great power and its prodigious history, culture, and philosophies (Kang 2010; Qin 2007, 2016, 2018; Yan 2011; Zhang 2012; Zhao 2009; Wang 2013). Characteristic of Chinese IR is the blending of Western and Eastern concepts to create an alternative to mainstream IR. One important example of this work is Qin Yaqing's marriage of Confucian notions of harmony and social or emotional processes occurring between actors (rather than a focus on rationalistic, autonomous individual actors) with Western constructivism and relational theory (Qin 2016).[7] Qin writes it is "relationality that determines human actors' existence and meaning; we can exist only as 'actors-in-relations'" (Qin 2016 at p. 38). States, therefore, also should

be understood as existing in relationships—hierarchical, equitable, and everything in between—not as independent entities. Similarly, the writings of Yan Xuetong fuse ancient Chinese virtue ethics, including concepts such as Kingly righteousness, with concepts akin to classical political Realism in explaining the rise of great powers in international relations (Yan 2011).[8] Perhaps best known is Zhao Tingyang's application of the concept *Tianxing* (all-under-heaven) as the basis for an idealistic world order that is fair, impartial to all, harmonious, and cooperative. Zhao contrasts this "world-building" project to the state-building and conflictual relations associated with Westphalian IR (Zhao 2006, 2018). Some have critiqued this literature as parochial and nationalistic (Callahan 2008), that is, too Chinese, others as "derivative," that is, too Western-influenced (Shih and Yu 2015). Buddhist ideas are curiously absent from this literature, but as will be seen in the next chapter, Buddhist theory parallels Qin's writings and others as it is also based on a relational understanding of reality.

Moving beyond the binary of Western and non-Western IR is the recent call for a "Global IR," first articulated by Amitav Acharya in 2014, which seeks to transcend the distinction between West and non-West (the "Rest") in a way that encourages diversity and improved understanding (Acharya 2014). Acharya outlined what he hoped would be the defining features of Global IR to include its:

•foundation on "pluralistic universalism," meaning that IR theory that does not necessarily apply to all but recognizes and respects the diversity of humankind as it searches for common ground between foundational approaches;

•grounding in world history, not just Western history;

•inclusion, not exclusion, of existing IR theories and methods, including the relevance of both ideational and material factors in theorizing;

•integration of the study of regions;

•rejection of theory based on cultural or state exceptionalism;

•recognition of multiple forms of agency beyond the state and material power; and

•responsiveness to the increasing globalization of the world including the diffusion of wealth, power, and cultural authority and growing interdependence and shared fates.

The discussion of a Buddhist approach to IR in following chapters meets many of these aspirations.

In discussing the various founts for theoretically rich Global IR, Acharya and Buzan note that one critical source will be classical religious and philosophical traditions. Here too, this invitation has not gone unanswered. In recent publications scholars have generated novel IR theories that draw on sources as diverse as the application of Japanese thought (Rösch and Watanabe 2018), Sufism (Shahi 2018, 2020), Daoism (Ling 2014), Islam (Sheikh 2016), Ubuntu (Mandrup and Smith 2014), and Indian philosophy (Malhotra 2011; Shahi and Ascione 2015; Shahi 2019). Notably, this incipient work has largely ignored Buddhist ideas in the study of international relations despite the recognition that Buddhism could be a promising foundation for an alternative approach to IR (Acharya and Buzan 2019 at p. 311; but see, Chan, et al. 2001; Moore 2016; Chavez-Segura 2012). This book is an attempt to fill that gap.

In discussing the promise of a Buddhist IR, Acharya expressed a reservation about our ability to bridge the "strict separation between this and other-worldliness, and between the material and spiritual" raised by the great religious traditions. He asks specifically whether Buddhist ideas like dependent origination (introduced in the next chapter) are "too unscientific or other-worldly to deserve a place in IR?" (Acharya 2011 at p. 636). While this short study cannot lay this question to rest, in the concluding chapter I will briefly address how a Buddhist approach to social theory is surprisingly consistent with our best scientific understandings of the physical and biological world coming from post-Newtonian quantum physics and emerging findings in neuroscience.

Much like Global IR, the premise of this work is that there is great value in a dialogue between non-Western IR theory and Western political philosophy and theory. In the case of Buddhism, I would argue that such a dialogue can be a particularly fruitful conversation because these systems of thought are "sufficiently proximate to each other [to be] mutually intelligible, but sufficiently distant from one another that each has something to learn from the other" (Garfield 2015 at p. xi). This manuscript hopes to catalyze that dialogue with those who study international relations.

Chapter Outline

Beginning in Chapter 2, this study asserts that a Buddhist perspective provides a *systematic* and *genuine* alternative to Western models of IR not so much because it arose in Asia, but because it is founded on distinctive first-order philosophical principles or substructures that differ from those that dominate in the West. The book introduces this fundamentally different worldview through the concept of "radical interdependence"—the basic Buddhist "truth" about the nature of our existence and ourselves that departs from most Western understandings of reality and interdependence. Buddhism's unique ontology asserts that we are not atomistic, independent entities and that, when we fully realize this basic truth, our natural underlying social disposition is equanimity and altruism, not selfishness. Together, these Buddhist philosophical claims offer a different starting point for thinking about ourselves and the world we live in, one it characterizes as deeply interdependent. Moreover, Buddhism maintains that the failure to appreciate the full extent of interdependence is the ultimate source of all conflicts, up to and including interstate war, whereas an understanding the truth of radical interdependence is the key to imagining a different vision for politics, economics, and IR.

Having explained the distinctive philosophical foundations of Buddhist thought in Chapter 2, the monograph then outlines doctrinal Buddhist political and economic theory[9] in Chapter 3, including its notions about interstate relations, which are based on its unique understanding of the nature of reality. Although largely unknown, a Buddhist approach to politics, economics, and international relations is not a mere extrapolation of Buddhist philosophical principles but can be found throughout the Buddhist canon.

Some readers may be surprised to hear that there exists a theory of politics, economics, and statecraft in Buddha's teachings.[10] But in fact, Buddha spoke extensively about politics, economics, and society, contrary to the claim of Max Weber who famously asserted that Buddhism was "a specifically a-political and anti-political status religion" (Weber 1958 at p. 206). Although the overriding goal of Buddha's teachings is the liberation of individuals from pervasive suffering, Buddha considered politics and economics as important, not so much for their intrinsic value, but because they create an external environment that can facilitate or impede an individual's pursuit of happiness, defined as spiritual advancement and achievement of wisdom about the true nature of oneself and the world.

Although best understood as an extension of his teachings on human liberation, Buddha was also an innovative social thinker and a significant political and economic philosopher (Iliah 2000). Buddha's original social and political teachings include: rejecting the prevailing hierarchical social order of his day and asserting individual equality; appealing to human reason and pragmatism in solving real-world problems; offering a contractual theory of the state 2000 years before Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau; creating a model for an egalitarian, institutionalized democracy in his order of monks and nuns a century before the origins of Western democracy; calling for a federation of like-minded states to keep the peace internationally two millennia before Kant's famous essay on perpetual peace; and arguing for sustainable economic growth ages before that idea occurred in the West. Chapter 3 outlines Buddha's political and economic theory, including his thoughts about statecraft and the possibilities for international order.

It should be noted that, in general, one can discuss the relationship between Buddhism and politics in two ways that are often conflated or confused. On the one hand, we can study what Buddha himself said about politics, that is, his words as recorded in the *sūtras* (fundamental teachings) and the *vinaya* (instructions for the ordained community). I call this doctrinal approach "Buddha *on* Politics," and that will be the method adopted in Chapter 3. I rely on mining this expansive literature because it is the most essential and unfettered source for understanding Buddhist politics in this meaning of the phrase. Looking at subsequent interpretations of Buddha's social teachings are, by definition, secondary and derivative and sometimes distorted for contemporary exigencies (think twentieth-century Japanese Fascism, for example), and will not be engaged here in this concise publication format.

On the other hand, one can approach the question of Buddhist politics by examining how, in practice, Buddhism and politics interact in a particular setting or settings either historically or presently, as Buddhism has shaped many societies throughout Asia, and there is a literature that considers the numerous examples of the relationship between Buddhism and the state (See, e.g., Harris 1999). I call this type of investigation "Buddhism *and* Politics," and in Chapters 4 and 5, I consider Buddhism and politics in the ancient Aśokan empire and in contemporary Bhutan.

These two case studies serve as empirical referents for a Buddhist approach to politics, economics, and statecraft and as "proofs of concept" for the possibility of applying Buddhist ideas in practice. Why these

two cases and not others? I chose these two cases because they most vividly and authentically illustrate a Buddhist approach to statecraft. Other ancient or medieval empires after Aśoka's either were not definitively Buddhist in character or left insufficient documentary evidence of their governing principles and policies.[11] As for modern countries, I would argue that Bhutan is uniquely *politically* Buddhist, and that other countries, such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, or Myanmar, do not present comparable cases for understanding modern Buddhist statecraft. Because of its Himalayan location, its centuries of closure to the outside world, and the good fortune of having avoided conquest by invading Tibetans, Mongols, and Brits, when Bhutan emerged as an independent state on the world stage in the second half of the twentieth century, it did so with its 1300-year-old Buddhist belief and value system *fully intact*. The ideas of the European Enlightenment, capitalism, or later ideologies, such as Marxism or fascism, never penetrated Bhutan. The foundation for its political identity is unique: it is the only country in the world rooted *constitutionally* and culturally in Mahayana Buddhist principles and ethics.[12] Other countries in the world have a predominantly Buddhist population to be sure, but because they have been colonized (except Thailand), and influenced by Western political thought and integrated into the global marketplace for centuries, little is left of their political and economic systems that is distinctively and conclusively Buddhist. They are culturally Buddhist, not politically and economically Buddhist nations. Thus, if we are looking to succinctly compare a Buddhist approach to statecraft relative to dominant Western approaches, which is the point of empirical chapters of the book, Bhutan provides the most powerful and pristine exemplar in the modern world (Long 2019).

Chapter 6 concludes with a summary of essential features of a Buddhist approach to thinking about the world, our role in it, and the type of political environments conducive to our higher nature. I argue that Buddhist principles for good government, economics, and statecraft provide general guidelines for developing adaptable solutions to contemporary political, economic, and international problems. The chapter also engages the question of the scientific quality of a Buddhist approach to IR.[13]

NOTES

1. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classic, 2004, p. 94.

2. I adopt an ecumenical approach to defining IR theory recommended by Acharya and Buzan as including: (1) positivist, rationalist, materialist, and quantitative approaches; (2) reflectivist, social, constructivist, and post-modern approaches; and (3) normative or emancipatory approaches that strive not so much to explain or understand international relations as to set out ideas about how and why it might be improved (Acharya and Buzan 2010 at p. 3).

3. The concept was not, of course, wholly new. Its origins can be found it the writings of Grotius and, in the twentieth century, in the works of Hedley Bull and others who emphasize the existence of an international society of states, not just an international system (Bull 1977).

4. Interdependence refers to two qualities of interconnectedness that are important: sensitivity and vulnerability. The former refers to the shared impact of interactions and the latter to the significance of an interruption in interstate relations (Keohane 1984).

5. In metaphysics, realism about a given object is the view that the object exists independently of our conceptual scheme, perceptions, linguistic practices, beliefs etc.

6. Alexander Wendt, for example, argues that a constructivist approach to international relations allows for at least three kinds of possible system structure. These three structures are the Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian. They are, respectively, characterized by relations of enmity, rivalry, and friendship among states (Wendt 1999).

7. Unlike the atomistic ontology of Western theorizing, relationality begins by assuming interconnectedness existing prior to the defining of individual entities. This approach, like a Buddhist one, unites observer and observed and argues no things exist in isolation. A relational approach to IR was formally described by Jackson and Nexon (1999) in the West and has been adopted in the East as a way of conceptualizing traditional Asian explanation for politics.

8. Emilian Kavalski combines the notion of *guanxi* (the establishing and maintaining of a functioning network of reciprocal obligation among actors) and relational theory in a novel East–West explanation of inter-national affairs (Kavalski 2018).

9. For a contemporary, non-Western view of Buddha's political writings see Ilaiah, 2000.

10. The word "Buddha" is not a proper name, but a descriptor meaning the "awakened one." The Buddha's name was Siddhārtha Gautama Sākyamuni (great one of the Sākya tribe). Although the designator "Bud-dha" is not limited to this one individual, for convenience sake and given common convention, the text will refer to "Buddha" rather than "the Buddha," which is more grammatically correct.

11. The closest possibilities were the empire of the first Japanese Buddhist ruler, Prince Shotoku (c. 574–622), and the twelfth-century Khmer emperor, Jayavarman VII. Prince Shotoku was schooled in Buddhism and built temples throughout the country. Unfortunately, his supposed seminal political work, the *Seventeen-article Constitution*, which contains provisions of both a Buddhist and Confucian nature, is most likely not the work of Prince Shotoku (that is a national myth) and was actually composed a century later by unknown authors who attributed it to Shotoku to give it legitimacy. So, there is no reliable record of Prince Shotoku's political thought that compares with Ashoka's edicts. Emperor Jayavarman VII, although clearly establishing a Mahayana Buddhist empire of size and duration, left no documentary historical record and is known by the prolific art and architecture produced during his reign. This physical record has been mined for occasional political extrapolations or inferences by art historians, but, after reviewing this literature, I concluded that it does not create a workable record for social scientists.

12. The 2008 Constitution of Bhutan provides: Buddhism is the spiritual heritage of Bhutan, which promotes the principles and values of peace, non-violence, compassion, and tolerance. … The State shall strive to create conditions that will enable the true and sustainable development of a good and compassionate society rooted in Buddhist ethics and universal human values" (*Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan*, 2008, Art. 3.1; Art. 9.20). Nowhere is the influence of Buddhism on the state as total as it is in Bhutan.

13. "Science," here, refers to both Newtonian physical science and post-Newtonian quantum physics as well as the biological sciences.

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Radical Interdependence: Buddhist Philosophical Foundations for Social Theory

Abstract This Chapter asserts that a Buddhist perspective provides a *systematic* and *genuine* alternative to Western models of IR not so much because it arose in Asia, but because it is founded on distinctive first-order philosophical principles or substructures that differ from those that dominate in the West. The chapter explains this fundamentally different worldview through the concept of "radical interdependence"—the basic Buddhist "truth" about the nature of our existence that departs from most Western understandings of reality and interdependence. Buddhism offers a different starting point for thinking about the world we live in, one it characterizes as deeply interdependent. Moreover, Buddhism maintains that the failure to appreciate the full extent of interdependence limits our human potential and is the ultimate source of all conflicts, up to and including interstate war, whereas an understanding the truth of radical interdependence is the key to imagining a different vision for politics and IR.

Keywords Radical interdependence · Dependent origination · Self · Human nature

BUDDHISM'S RADICAL INTERDEPENDENCE

The concept of radical interdependence is the basis for developing an alternative, global IR theory based on Buddhist philosophy. Before outlining essential Buddhist principles, however, one qualification is in order. Because Buddhism has existed for thousands of years and has spread across Asia and more recently to the West without being organized by a unified institutional authority, it must be noted that there are numerous, divergent forms of Buddhist thought and practice. It is said that Buddha gave 84,000 teachings in all and each of them has been the subject of multiple translations, interpretations, and debates for millennia. With this caveat, it is still possible to distill a fundamental core of commonly held Buddhist tenets (Gethin 1998).

Buddhism asserts that *every functioning thing we perceive arises (and ceases) in dependence on its causes and conditions, its parts, and the minds that perceive it*; like a rainbow that appears to our senses when heat, light, and moisture come together in a certain manner and dissolves when those conditions change. In its original Pāli transcription,[1] this principle is known as the doctrine of dependent origination (*patica-samuppada* in Pāli, in Sanskrit, *pratitya-samutpada*) expressed poetically in the verse:

> When this is, that is
> This arising, that arises
> When this is not, that is not
> This ceasing, that ceases (SN.12:61).

The doctrine asserts that reality (including our "self") lacks a fixed, inherent, or essential nature (a concept known as *anātta* in Pāli, *anātman* in Sanskrit) and, on analysis, can be decomposed into other, simpler elements,[2] and that all things are impermanent (*anicca* in Pāli, *anitya* in Sanskrit), the product of ever-changing causes and conditions.

The individual self, for example, at any given moment is in fact made up of various physical and mental elements (aggregates),[3] and the notion of an enduring self is illusory, albeit an illusion that is hard to dispel.[4] This approach is known as a "reductionist" definition of the self, which differs from so-called "essentialist" approaches to the self that dominate in the West.[5] For certain functional purposes, one may choose to refer to selves or objects in keeping with worldly conventions, but *ultimately* the self and other phenomena lack a fixed, inherent nature in Buddhist thought. The *conventional* reference to the self and other objects, up to and including

nation-states, *is* meaningful if properly understood, however, because it can serve practical, functional purposes and because it can eventually lead one to understanding the ultimate nature of things through sustained analysis.[6]

Given this reductionist understanding of "self" and all objects of existence, radical interdependence maintains that the alleged separation *between* self and others and *between* enduringly real subjects and objects, which is the Archimedean starting point (ontologically) for realist, liberal, and even many constructivist approaches[7] to politics in the West, is *ultimately* incorrect, a misperception. According to Buddhism, the alleged separation is a "delusion" or "ignorance" (of the nature of reality). Instead, a Buddhist social paradigm necessarily begins with the fundamental truth of the essential interdependence and impermanence of all reality, including ourselves (the no-self doctrine). It asserts a *radical* interdependence between individuals and between humans and their social and natural environments. This Buddhist ontology is analogous in modern thinking to a form of radical relationalism in Western social thought and quantum theory in the natural world, a point I return to in the concluding chapter.

Epistemologically, this means the notion of fixed, objective reality is an impossibility. Given that the only ultimate truth is the *lack* of inherent existence, all other forms of knowledge are provisional or "conventional" truths. It is important to reiterate, however, that our conventional notions of reality *are a form of truth* in that they can help us function in the world and, when used correctly, can lead individuals to a realization of ultimate truth, which is the source of liberation from suffering in Buddhism. Because conventional truths perform practical and soteriological functions, Buddhist epistemology has developed a sophisticated literature regarding what constitutes "reliable forms of knowledge," (*pramāṇas,* in Sanskrit), generally held to be a product of our direct perceptions or logically drawn inferences. In seeking reliable knowledge, Buddhism emphasizes personal experience, a pragmatic attitude, and the use of critical, skillful, and contextual thinking toward all types of knowledge, including Buddhist teachings! Buddha did not ask for blind faith or allegiance: "One must not," Buddha says, "accept my *Dhamma* from reverence but first try it as gold is tried by fire" (Jayatilleke 2008).

Misunderstanding the deeper, radically interdependent nature of reality has severe consequences, according to Buddhism. It leads to problematic *actions* (karma)[8] that result in suffering (*dukkha* in Pāli, *duhkha,* in

Sanskrit). Grasping and cherishing a false sense of independence and a desire for permanence keeps us locked in pervasive suffering (*samsara* in Pāli or Sanskrit). In short, all our problems, including complex political problems, and all the unwanted consequences of our actions flow from a basic misunderstanding of the radical interdependence of reality. As the twelfth century Buddhist monk, Geshe Chekowa instructs in his *Seven Points in Training the Mind*, "Place all blame on the one." By this he means blame the delusion of self-grasping and self-cherishing as the true source of all our problems and suffering. Buddha's teachings, beginning with his first teaching on the Four Noble Truths, are designed to illuminate (1) the problem of suffering (birth, aging, sickness, death, and existential uncertainty); (2) its source (self-grasping ignorance); (3) its means of cessation (awakening to an understanding of the true nature of reality and ourselves); and (4) the path to the cessation of suffering (mindful ethical behavior and meditation to inculcate virtue and wisdom).[9]

This fundamental mistake leads to reifying oneself and objects of desire or aversion in the belief that protecting and cherishing ourselves and our desires and harming and destroying our enemies and aversions will bring us security and happiness. This tendency is only made worse in collectives, like states, nations, and institutions, which are projections based on a false premise (Macy 1979). Paradoxically, and directly contrary to our ordinary belief, self-reification and grasping at self and objects, from a Buddhist perspective, do not bring happiness but only discord and dissatisfaction. The championing of the autonomous and independent self (and, necessarily, an alien other), from a Buddhist viewpoint, will not promote individual or social well-being. Instead this dualistic thinking will produce dissatisfaction, personal insecurity, incessant striving, conflict, and violence. Taken to its logical conclusion, clinging to an autonomous self and exalting self-interest are the sources of social and political division, and they perpetuate political systems, including our current international system, which have created military and environmental threats that could consume us.

The Buddhist ontology of interdependence and impermanence leads to a different starting point for the social/political world and individual well-being and a way out of this dilemma. Buddhism is the basis for a politics of radical interdependence and, ultimately, what Buddhists call "fearlessness," that is, caring equally for others' welfare. The latter connotes that *individuals have the potential of overcoming perceived duality and*

accepting the creative possibilities and moral responsibility of open-ended impermanence and interdependence. According to Buddha, one's nature, when realized through training the mind to understand the true nature of reality, makes equanimity, unselfishness, and cooperation our *natural*, *underlying* social disposition, not self-interest, because caring equally for all is only logical when one fully realizes the truth of our radical interdependence. Human nature in Buddhism contains the essence of enlightenment, a fully awakened being, called our "Buddha nature" in some Buddhist schools.[10] This alternative view of human nature is the second major difference between Buddhist social theory and those of the West, a difference that follows from the first and fundamental difference: the Buddhist assertion that all reality is radically interdependent. As will be discussed in the next chapter, our political systems can and should, therefore, reflect and support individuals in recognizing this fundamental truth and in realizing their underlying nature.

Buddhist ontology encourages our connection with, not separateness from, others. By this logic, empathy (feeling with others) is fundamental to human nature, and altruism (acting on behalf of others) and cooperation are humans' deep-seated behavioral traits, our fundamental and unbound nature. Separateness and selfishness are the result of pervasive but mistaken conceptions that lead to negative actions—greed (attraction to objects that do not exist as they appear and do not endure), anger (aversion to such false objects), false pride, and jealousy—and thus suffering. Buddhist logic does not deny the prevalence of our more selfish or conflictual traits. Instead, Buddhism suggests only that a selfish, fearful orientation is not humans' *fundamental* nature and therefore ultimately is an erroneous starting point for designing political institutions and policies. While Buddhism acknowledges that individuals may behave in selfish or discordant ways, this behavior is considered the result of "adventitious defilements," like mud in water. Because these defilements are not part of one's true nature, they can be removed by following the teachings to reveal a root mind which is clear, altruistic, compassionate, and wise, like a Buddha's. For Buddhists, an innate empathetic and altruistic orientation is a real possibility *because it accords with the how things actually exist*, i.e. interdependently, and it is an option that can be chosen and worked toward.

Buddhism does not disagree with Western philosophers that self-interest *appears* to drive most behavior. But it does differ when we ask the question: "What is the base-line position regarding the social emotions

and thoughts that form our human nature?" Is our *root* nature fundamentally self-interested or altruistic? Clearly, ample evidence can be found in everyday social behavior to suggest that self-interested behavior is ubiquitous. But pointing to evidence of selfish behavior may mislead us about human's root nature. Just as we "see" physical reality as corresponding to classical propositions of subject–object dualism (although, for Buddhists, reality ultimately does not exist this way), Buddhism would argue that, despite their appearances, we are mistaken about the ultimate reality of our human nature, too, and our prescriptions for social behavior reflect that basic misunderstanding.

Buddhism asserts that human beings only behave in ways that are selfish and often discordant if they misperceive the real nature of their existence and if they suffer from delusions about the nature of themselves and reality. If individuals remain attached to the notion of themselves as separate from, and in opposition to, other selves and all other things (the classical Western ontology), when push comes to shove they will act predominantly in selfish and non-cooperative ways. From a Buddhist perspective, individual and social pathologies such as violence and destructiveness, or merely sub-optimal levels of cooperation, are ultimately linked to misguided efforts to find certainty and separateness in a world that is indeterminate and interdependent, *not* from our basic makeup.

According to Buddhism, the mistaken feeling of duality between the world and "us" feeds our incessant insecurity and fears and drives our preoccupation with power and control over others and our environments to secure ourselves. Averring the truth of this duality, Western political thinkers typically begin their social thinking with the dilemma of how, through the social contract, to control the clash of interests seen as *inherent* in human individualistic pursuits and thereby secure the benefits of social order without unduly constricting individual freedom. This alleged dilemma has been the starting point for all Western contract theories of social organization from Hobbes to Rawles. Buddhism does not begin with the self at the center of the universe but describes a decentered world, where what is to be feared are delusions of independence that keep humans in suffering, rather than fearing perceived external threats to the security of what they consider a constructed self.

This depiction of human nature and natural conduct is not intended to suggest that there is an inevitable nexus between an intellectual understanding of our ontological status and social behavior in practice. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. Rather, Buddhist ontology

provides a paradigmatic orientation that can unlock thinking about certain social possibilities that are fundamentally different from those based on Western, Cartesian assumptions. Buddhist philosophy does not change the widespread expression of selfish behavior; rather it treats that behavior not as human beings' ultimate nature, but as our choice, albeit a choice made under the pervasive delusion of duality. For Buddhists, dualistic thinking based on independent selves and objects is a constructed reality that can be deconstructed, not so much through clever philosophical discourse, but through hard work via mindfulness and meditation that teaches one to recognize and transform one's own thoughts, intentions, and emotions and the behaviors that ultimately flow from them.

Because, in Buddhism, political and economic systems necessarily reflect the mentality of the individuals within them, that is to say, our present world is the expression of the collective karma (actions) of its inhabitants, the starting point of the work needed to recognize a more cooperative society is self-transformation, but government, the economy, and even the international system can structure themselves consistent with the fundamental wisdom of radical interdependence to provide supportive environments for the attainment of humans' true nature and lasting happiness.[11] These helpful social provisions are known as "conducive conditions" in Buddhism. Buddhist social and political designs are instrumental: they exist not for their own sake, but as an important means for supporting individuals' progress along a path that culminates in wisdom and transcendence of suffering. In Buddhist metaphorical language, these conditions are a raft that carries us to the other shore, not an end in themselves.

Radical interdependence as the nature of existence applies equally across the different "levels of analysis" in IR (individual, state, and state system), with primacy/originality given to the individual level. States and the state system are the summation, projection, and institutionalization of individual ways of thinking, an intersubjective consensus, as constructivists would say. The underlying nature of the state and state system is contingent on the individuals who compromise them, an assertion that reflects Buddhism basic humanism.[12] As discussed, these individual selves, in turn, lack a permanent essence. Individuals, states, and the state system are, therefore, all changeable phenomena. Individuals have the capacity to shape the character of their minds, and thereby, their institutions, such as the state and the state system (Chavez-Segura 2012). The scientific basis of these assertions is touched on in the final chapter.

Peace and social progress, therefore, depend ultimately on the individual. At an individual level, the ontology of radical interdependence and no-self implies an alternative ethics or way of being in the world. Primarily, this view encourages a reduced attachment to self and thus undercuts selfishness—the basic Western assumption about human nature (Harvey 2000). The movement away from an essentialist self toward no-self implies "a drift toward impartiality and impersonality, a lessening of the gap between persons since my relation to others is not so significantly different from my relation to my own past and future" (Perrett 2002 at p. 375). By focusing more on a collection of experiences and less on an immutable self, we can view others and ourselves with greater equanimity. Through familiarity with no-self, a person experiences reduced egoistic concern and recognizes that the pursuit of her own welfare is not fundamentally different from her regard for the well-being of others. Operating under this ontological stance means our responsibility to our future selves rests not on selfishness, but largely on a pragmatic rationale: we are well situated to affect the well-being of ourselves (and our intimates), and therefore should act to promote the welfare (or reduce the suffering) of those we are in the best position to help. Moreover, failure to look after our "self" would make us of little value to "others." This immediate concern, however, does not detract from our obligation to avoid harming and to promote the welfare of others more distant from ourselves to the extent we can do so. The Buddhist path for achieving this level of personal development is reducible to ethical conduct and shaping our thoughts and emotions to remove negativity and replace it with positive thoughts and emotions (such as generosity and compassion) through the practice of mindfulness, concentration, and meditation. These same practices can also lead ultimately to an "awakening" to the wisdom that realizes radical interdependence directly. This worldview is directly opposed to the egoism, separation of self from other, fear, insecurity, competition, domination, conflict, violence, and revenge that have traditionally been considered natural elements of politics and IR in the West.[13] Radical interdependence, if realized, can lead instead to a sense of connection, community, tolerance, responsibility, and ultimately, a universal sense of humanity and a greater willingness to find common purpose according to Buddhism. As individuals develop these abilities, by extension, they

develop more peaceful and cooperative social institutions, which, in turn, support individuals in their material and spiritual ambitions. The next chapter looks at the nature of the social and political institutions that Buddhism prescribes.

Notes

1. Buddha's words were first transcribed in the Pāli Canon. I rely on it to distill Buddha's ideas about the political world in Chapter 3. The Pāli Canon is the earliest authoritative text of Buddha's teachings. It is often called the *Tipiṭaka* ("three baskets") and includes the *vinaya*, disciplines for the monastic order; *sūtras*, discourses; and the *abhidharma*, further teachings of a philosophical and psychological nature.

2. One could go further with this ontological inquiry and ask "What, then, is the ontological status of the parts or aggregates that make up the objects we perceive?" This is a very complex question and has spawned numerous different schools of thought about fundamental ontology in Buddhism, much like in the West. Some early Buddhists were philosophically "realist," arguing that the elements of existence, while reducible to simpler parts or causes, were ultimately materially real and truly existent (the *Vaibhāṣika* school, for example). Other Buddhist traditions, such as certain branches of the *Sautrāntika* school, maintained that elemental particles of reality are representationally real, i.e., that both cognition and external objects have some ontological status, analogous to Western critical realism. Still other Buddhist schools, like the *Cittamātra*, or the *Yogācāra*, are comparable to Western philosophical idealists, asserting that all phenomena are the same nature as the mind that apprehends them and do not exist external to the mind. Buddha, himself, eschewed discussions of metaphysics for a pragmatic approach to human problems. The spirit of Buddha's anti-metaphysical stance is adopted in the Middle Way (*Madhyamaka*) philosophy captured most systematically in the works of Nāgārjuna (second century CE). This approach also has sub-schools within it, but in Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamaka-Prasaṅgika* philosophy, he adopts a skeptical or what we might call deconstructivist or post-modern orientation to ontological assertions. Nāgārjuna, and his followers clarified the argument that all phenomena are empty (*śūnya*) of *inherent* existence, but can be usefully understood to exist *conventionally* and *provisionally*. He argued for a "Middle Way," which, in this context, means steering a path between eternalism (things have a fixed and enduring nature) and nihilism (everything is relative and our reality has no meaning). In the *Madhyamaka*, conventional, ever-changing truth is still meaningful because it allows the law of karma (cause and effect) to operate—if reality were fixed and

inherently real, such changes would not be possible, and one could not make progress along the spiritual path to enlightenment. According to this school, eventually one can come to understand that all phenomena have both a conventional and ultimate nature (emptiness) and the two natures are non-contradictory or unified. For example, emptiness is not an abstraction apart from conventional reality; emptiness is always the ultimate nature *of* some conventional object. Colloquially, ultimate and conventional truths are two sides of the same coin. Nāgārjuna did not offer these insights as affirmative ontological claims, but only as methods for deconstructing all other ontological assertions that might stand in the way making the changes necessary to liberate ourselves from suffering.

3. These "aggregates" (*skandhas*, in Sanskrit, *khandhas*, in Pāli) that make up persons include: (1) material composition or form; (2) sensations (feelings); (3) perception; (4) mental activity (formations); and (5) consciousness. Clinging to these aggregates as inherent real rather than recognizing their evanescent nature is a fundamental mistake that leads to suffering.

4. Buddhists, unlike Western thinkers such as David Hume discussed in the footnote below, believe that it *is* possible to realize the non-essential nature of the self (the no-self) and necessary to try to do so to liberate oneself from suffering.

5. Reductionism argues that one's existence or continuity as a person can be understood as reducible to certain other facts about physical or psychological connectedness that are ontologically more basic than the individual. The mind links together closely related mental and physical states to fabricate the notion of a self that continues across time (Parfit 1984). Dismantling this artifice of self requires sustained analysis, contemplation, and meditation. Essentialism asserts that the self or individual typically is considered to have an essence: persons are separately existing entities, distinct from their brains and bodies and their experiences or, alternatively, persons are wholly and solely their brain and body. In the former case, the argument is that, in addition to the various parts that contribute to the psychophysical complex of the person, one extra part constitutes the core or essence of the system. An essentialist approach tends to refer to this special part as the "self." There are many candidates for what constitutes this non-reducible essence. For Plato, this essence was the immaterial and immortal soul. For Augustine, an immaterial soul and material body makes one self, and, for others, some brute physical continuity (usually the brain) constitutes the self. The latter notion, that is, the self as the total person (mind and body), accords with our commonsensical notion that we simply "are who we are," a physical and mental system that persists as a single entity from one period to the next, ending perhaps at death. Either

way, ontologically, this self persists over time and has genuine autonomous causal and explanatory powers that cannot be reduced to the causal and explanatory powers of its constituent parts. Although essentialism is the historical norm for understanding the nature of the self in the West, the range of thinking is wide, and a minority of Western philosophers gravitate toward the reductionist end of the spectrum. Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger all have reductionist views of the self, for example. At the far end of the spectrum, a very few Western philosophers, such as David Hume, reject the notion of self or personal identity. It is possible that Hume was familiar with Buddhism (Gopnik 2009). Hume does not posit a substantial self that exists beyond one's experiences. (Giles 1993). How then do we account for the everyday perception of a self? Hume explains that we misconstrue this flow of diverse perceptions as an enduring identity because the many independent experiences *resemble* each other. When successive perceptions resemble each other, it is easy for us to *imagine* that the first simply persists. Our imaginative propensity to misconstrue an identity from diversity begins in infancy and continues unabated without our awareness of the misperception. For Hume, discussions about the self are merely verbal exercises. The self then can be addressed at two levels: on ultimate or metaphysical terms where we should recognize that there is no self; and on a conventional, verbal, or grammatical level of social standard, where it can be convenient or useful to designate a self (Hume 1739 [2000]). Buddhists reached the same general conclusion 2000 years previously.

6. These so-called "conventional truths*" are only true in the sense that they function to achieve our conventional purposes*—like a tea kettle functions to help make a cup of tea, but it does not *exist in an ultimate sense* apart from its parts (handle, spout, etc.) or our designation of its parts as a "kettle." Conventional "truth" is truth in that it can be distinguished from conventional falsehoods. The kettle on the stove is a conventional truth, whereas averring the reflection of a kettle in a mirror as a kettle is a conventional falsehood in that it will not function in an everyday sense to help us make tea. Conventional reality is known as the second truth of reality in the doctrine of the Buddhist doctrine of the "two truths." The two truths doctrine maintains that the self and objects of existence have both a conventional and an ultimate nature.

7. "Constructivism" is a label that has been applied to a wide range of theoretical approaches. As to constructivism's underlying *ontological* assumptions, that is, its assertions about how the things theorized about ultimately exist, these run the gamut from Alexander Wendt's so-called "rump materialism" which he equates with the scientific realist notion that our ideas ultimately refer to something that is mind independent to

more post-modern, interpretive constructivism that argues it is impossible to divorce the seer from the seen and that all reality is mind-dependent, what is known as philosophical idealism. It should be noted that such distinctions are complicated by the fact that Wendt's understanding of scientific realism differs from how others generally use this term, and, by the fact that Wendt also refers to himself as an idealist in the same work in which he claims to be a scientific realist! (see Rivas 2010). Perhaps not surprisingly, some constructivists (and most realist and liberal scholars) avoid directly addressing the fundamental ontological foundation for their theories.

8. The law of karma is a special instance of the law cause and effect which maintains that all our actions of body, speech, and mind are causes and all our experiences are their effects. Karma means "action" or "volition" and refers specifically to the mental intentions that initiate any action. Ignorance (of the nature of reality) is considered the root mental karmic cause of human suffering.

9. Buddha did not teach to establish a religion or philosophical school but to offer others a means to reduce and ultimately eliminate their suffering. After his enlightenment, Buddha's first teaching was that of the Four Noble Truths, and the first of these is that "one must know suffering." Human suffering includes manifest forms such as the pains of birth, aging, sickness, and death. But in addition to encountering those things that cause us pain, because of our very impermanence, we will also suffer from being parted from the things we love and the failure to ever fully satisfy our desires for permanent worldly happiness. Temporary pleasures, then, are merely transitory relief from our manifest suffering. It is not that things like family, career, and pleasurable pursuits are not enjoyable; rather it is the mistaken belief that they can endure that leads to suffering. Inescapably, realization of our existential dilemma makes all our pleasures temporary, fleeting, and ultimately in the nature of suffering. More-over, given the Buddhist teaching of rebirth, one cycles through these sufferings again and again in one life after another without control or freedom, what is known in Sanskrit as *samsara*, or "pervasive suffering." The Second Noble Truth reveals the origin of our suffering: namely, our craving and grasping at self and objects that are impermanent and unable to provide true happiness. This self-grasping ignorance leads us to perform innumerable negative actions motivated by anger and attachment. Further, given the "law of karma" that maintains that all actions have their similar corresponding effect, our negative actions will necessarily perpet-uate suffering for us now and in the future. Thankfully, in the Third Noble Truth, Buddha explains that we can change our negative karma by good thoughts, words, and deeds leading eventually to a cessation of our

suffering by abandoning grasping at self and phenomena and awakening to our true compassionate nature having removed our delusions and come to understand how things truly exist. In Buddhism, the underlying nature of our mind is clear, luminous, and discerning (in that it understands the true nature of reality). With discernment comes liberation for ourselves and spontaneous compassion for all similarly suffering beings. Ignorance is a curable disease. We must come to recognize that our reality is impermanent, there is no self and all things are interdependent; failing to recognize these truths is the source of our dissatisfaction. Lastly, in the Fourth Noble Truth, Buddha sets out the way to end suffering and achieve a state beyond sorrow, nirvana, and invites everyone to examine and experience the effects for themselves. The Eightfold Noble Path is a means to that end and has three dimensions to it: wisdom (*prajñā*), mental discipline (*samādhi*), and morality (*śīla*). The Eightfold Path includes eight stages of ethical management: (1) right view, (2) right intention, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration. The elements of the path are offered as mutually supportive, and at the heart of the matter is wisdom, which is the realization of the true nature of reality. The path, then, might be distilled down to practicing moral behavior and concentrating/meditating on and inculcating virtues to train the mind and lead it to the realization of wisdom.

10. The concept "Buddha nature" is complex and the subject of intersectarian doctrinal disputes. One debate surrounds the question of whether "Buddha nature" is best interpreted as a potentiality yet to be fulfilled or as an actuality as yet unrecognized. Another debate surrounds the question of how to reconcile the notion of an essential Buddha nature with the notion of impermanence and emptiness. Both debates draw from a variety of root texts and have generated extensive commentaries that, while fascinating, will not be engaged here.

11. Happiness has a meaning in Buddhism that is distinct from the West. This topic is addressed in Chapter 5.

12. Alexander Wendt calls this integrative approach from the individual level of analysis through the analysis of the international system of states a "holistic" approach to IR theory (Wendt 1999).

13. In Western political theory, a realist ontology is the underpinning for a politics of separateness and fear, captured most artfully in the work of Thomas Hobbes. By extension, in the international realm, this notion of separation, insecurity, and violence is supported most strongly by Political Realists.

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Buddha on Politics, Economics, and Statecraft

Abstract This chapter outlines doctrinal Buddhist political and economic theory including its notions about interstate relations, which are based on its unique understanding of the nature of reality. Some readers may be surprised to hear that there exists a theory of politics in Buddha's teachings. But in fact, Buddha spoke extensively about politics, contrary to the assertion of Max Weber who famously asserted that Buddhism was "a specifically a-political and anti-political status religion." Although the overriding goal of Buddha's teachings is the liberation of individuals from pervasive suffering, Buddha considered politics as important, not so much for its intrinsic value, but because it created an external environment that can facilitate or impede an individual's pursuit of happiness, defined as spiritual advancement and achievement of wisdom about the true nature of oneself and the world. Although best understood as an extension of his teachings on human liberation, Buddha was also an original social and a significant political philosopher. Buddha's social teachings parallel modern democratic thought, mixed market economics, and cosmopolitan internationalism in the West. This chapter outlines Buddha's political and economic theory, including his thoughts about statecraft and the possibilities for international order.

Keywords Buddhist politics · Buddhist economics · Buddhist statecraft

Buddha on Politics[1]

Early Buddhist literature[2] addresses several political, economic, and international issues. While the primary purpose of Buddha's teachings is the liberation of individuals from pervasive suffering, his teachings also acknowledge the interdependence of the individual with society, polity, and economy. Buddha's teachings sought to mediate these relationships constructively. Although largely unknown in the West, Buddha was an original and important social, political, and economic philosopher, and a rationalistic, humanistic, and democratic one at that (Ling 1981).

What are the essential elements of Buddha's normative vision for politics? Buddha saw politics not as an end in itself but as an instrument that could either provide favorable conditions or create harmful obstructions for individuals' personal advancement. Buddha recognized that government is necessary to provide social order and welfare and that its values, content, and processes should be consistent with the "*dharma*." "*Dharma*" (*dhamma* in Pāli) has many meanings but here refers to the teachings of Buddha and their realization, which are offered as universal or natural laws—such as the law of dependent arising and the suffering that results from ignorance of this basic truth. These laws are not created by Buddha, they operate with or without him, but Buddha revealed these laws and recommended that we examine them and act accordingly; not through blind faith, but through a process of rational human assessment.[3] A political system organized consistent with these basic truths could minimize the manifest forms of suffering for all members of society—especially for the least fortunate whose visible suffering is greatest—and play a positive role in an individual's attainment of higher forms of well-being.

What does it mean to say that political practices must be consistent with the *dharma* for their legitimacy? A fundamental principle of the *dharma* relevant to politics is the equality and dignity of all individuals. Buddha stressed that all human beings have an inherent worth and capacity for enlightenment, so-called, "Buddha nature."[4] In contrast to the prevailing Brahmin teachings, Buddha rejected the caste system and argued that virtues were distributed equally, not hierarchically, across society. Buddha states: "Now since both dark and bright qualities, which are blamed and praised by the wise, are scattered indiscriminately among the four castes, the wise do not recognize the claim about the Brahmin caste being the highest … [anyone can] become emancipated … by virtue of *dharma*" (DN, 27, 2012 at p. 408). The *dharma* applies equally

to everyone regardless of class, social status, or economic circumstance. Because citizen and ruler alike are equal under the law of *dharma*, political institutions should reflect this basic truth. For it's time these were truly groundbreaking social insights.

Buddha's teachings also reflect the principle of equality when he prescribes that monarchy, the dominant form of government during his lifetime, should be based on popular consent (not divine right), conducted in consultation with the governed, even-handed in the application of justice, and conform to the *dharma*. Democracy, however, is the form of government where equality is paramount, and Buddha's own political creation, the *sangha* (the order of monks and nuns in Pāli and Sanskrit), is governed by strict equality in its rules for admission, participation, administration, and dispute resolution.

Because of the equality and ultimate goodness of every individual (and because they all suffer), Buddha taught that they are each worthy of our compassion and, at a minimum, should not be harmed by the state. Nonviolence or non-harm (*ahimsa* in Sanskrit and Pāli) is a natural corollary to Buddha's teachings on the equality of human potential and the basis of the protection of individual rights.[5] Perhaps the most direct example of this principle to politics is Buddha's repeated admonition that a righteous ruler must follow the ethical precepts of no killing, no stealing, no lying, etc. More affirmatively, the successful leader must demonstrate compassion and care through the practices of kindness, equanimity, patience, and generosity. Nonviolence and equality are the bedrocks of Buddhist social justice, and good government requires moral and legal protection against the arbitrary use of power. Buddha, like America's founding fathers, was concerned about the danger of tyranny.

The third feature of Buddha's political teachings is a tolerance for different political configurations and a pragmatic and non-doctrinaire ("liberal" or "pluralistic" in this sense) approach to political questions. Rather than overtly endorsing a particular form of government, Buddha, in befriending and advising republics and monarchs alike, implies that good governance can take more than one form but must allow for the maximization of individual happiness of its citizens (defined in a way that goes beyond mere sensual enjoyment to include self-realization) and that minimizes their suffering, allowing them to cultivate compassion, patience, generosity, meditative concentration, and wisdom while discouraging greed, hatred, and ignorance. Buddha did not *explicitly* advocate for a single form of government, and, at one level, recognized that different

types of regimes could be considered legitimate if the spirit of the ruler and the ruled was in accordance with the dharma.

Nonetheless, Buddha indicated a preference for democratic and representative forms of government. In his teachings and prescriptions, Buddha endorsed democratic principles such as citizen participation and free expression of opinion; deliberation, consultation, and consensus-building; voting and respect for popular consent; transparency via face-to-face meetings and public debate; primacy of the rule of law and limited government. We see these predilections in Buddha's endorsement of republican principles in the *sūtras* and the incorporation of democratic principles into the rules governing Buddha's own society of monks and nuns in the *vinaya*. Buddha's teachings are directly relevant to contemporary politics and are compatible with the governance of a modern democratic state. Buddha's political thinking parallels Western liberal-democratic thought with its emphasis on equal rights, protection against tyranny via equality before the law, and participatory and deliberative governance.

The most important distinction between "dharmic" democracy and Western liberal democracy is Buddhism's emphasis on one's individual *duties* to others as much as one's individual *rights*, duties that exceed compliance with the law. Where liberal democracy has little to say about the moral qualities of what constitutes good governance beyond the values of equality of opportunity and protection of individual choice and instead focuses on the *process* of good governance not the *substance* (Garfield 2001), "dharmic democracy" delineates a clear duty of care owed to others and to the natural world as well. Fundamentally, in dharmic democracy individuals have a duty not only to avoid abridging other's freedoms, but to strive to develop a sense of universal responsibility and concern for all human beings and the natural world. Although this duty is everyone's responsibility, political institutions and their leaders should reflect these principles, and policy should encourage their inculcation and practice. The emphasis on responsibilities as well as rights follows directly from Buddhism's underlying ontology of dependent origination and a theory of causation that maintains our lives are not separate but deeply interdependent. Contemporary Buddhist writer and monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, captured this difference in the context of the United States when he remarked: "We have the Statute of Liberty on the East Coast. I think we have to make a Statute of Responsibility on the West Coast to counterbalance Liberty. Liberty without responsibility is not real liberty"

(Hanh 2006 at p. 137). "Freedom" in Buddhist thought means freedom from the chains of self-grasping ignorance, not the unbridled pursuit of "self" interest.

Buddha on Economics

Just as Buddha had important things to say about politics, he offered numerous profound and practical insights on economic matters throughout the *sūtras*. These teachings provide guidance on how spiritual advancement and material well-being could be compatible and mutually supportive.

The purpose of economic activity in Buddhism is to provide the necessary material basis for individuals to enjoy a comfortable life, thus freeing them to pursue higher forms of well-being. Production, consumption, and distribution of material goods should reduce suffering and provide sustainable welfare and dignified work for all members of society through the wise use of scarce resources. This view of economic activity as a means toward higher ends contrasts with classical or neoclassical Western economics where the focus is on material well-being alone and production, consumption, and distribution are designed to maximize an individual's "utility" or "welfare" through ever-increasing material production and consumption, in the aggregate, to grow Gross Domestic Product (GDP), under resource constraints.

Like politics, Buddhism treats economic life as part of living in accordance with the *dharma* and therefore views it as part of a larger ethical framework from which it cannot be separated.[6] By virtue of the doctrine of radical interdependence, economic activity is necessarily part of a larger whole, an important part, but only a part, and it must be kept in harmony with familial, social, environmental, and spiritual aspects of life. In Buddhist economics, there are no "externalities." Economic progress, for oneself or society, is not an end in itself but part of broader process of personal and social advancement.

Nonetheless, Buddha warned against ignoring physical needs and eschewing material pursuits, and recommended balanced progress in material and spiritual well-being—a so-called "Middle Way" between physically destructive asceticism and soul-crushing material indulgence as the way to happiness. The goal of Buddhist economics is to provide material security and economic stability for individuals and society and

sustainable growth. The state must guarantee the physical needs of individuals in the form of the "four essentials": food, clothing, shelter, and medicine, as these constitute the foundation for other pursuits such as moral development and the acquisition of wisdom.

Buddha's economic teachings are not anti-wealth. He taught that no suffering arises from experiencing or enjoying objects of the senses. The problem with material wealth arises from our pervasive delusion that misapprehends the real nature of phenomena in our *samsaric* existence as discussed in Chapter 2. That is, we forget the impermanent nature of material pleasures and are misled into thinking they are a true source of lasting happiness. It is our craving and grasping at evanescent objects (and ourselves) based on fear, greed, and the underlying ignorance of the nature of reality that leads to suffering. The problem lies neither with the objects of the senses nor the enjoyment derived from them, but from misperception of their impermanent nature and the pursuit of material objects as the supreme source of happiness for a self that also ultimately does not exist. Wealth, then, does not stand in the way of liberation, but the attachment to wealth does.

For laypeople, Buddha recommended the acquisition of wealth and material prosperity through industry, frugality, entrepreneurship, and resourcefulness, but he also advocated for values such as concern and care for others, non-harm, generosity, and, eventually, nonattachment to wealth given its impermanence and inability to provide lasting happiness. To be nonattached "is to possess and use material things but not be possessed or used by them" (Sizemore and Swearer 1993 at p. 1).

Consumption, like wealth, is not discouraged by Buddha, but one should remain mindful of its associated risks.[7] Because humankind has virtually unlimited desires, Buddha encouraged moderation in consumption that can distinguish material needs and wants.[8] As guidance in making this distinction between needs and wants, Buddha listed the following things money should be spent on: food, clothing, and shelter; attending to parents; treating relatives and guests; alms in memory of the departed; religious offerings; and payments to the state (AN, 3:45, 2012).

In short, for individuals, Buddha advised a balanced life, free from the sufferings of both poverty and indulgence and guided by wisdom, discernment, and right view. This approach can lead to a deeper sense of contentment, which Buddha said is "the highest form of wealth" (Dhp. 204, 2007). In Buddhism, it is one's attitudes and actions about wealth, not the level of wealth, that is important. Nonattachment is the

appropriate attitude toward wealth, which can be cultivated by acquiring wealth through righteous means, consuming it with moderation, and developing contentment and sharing wealth generously, but wisely (SN, 99, 2000).

For the state, poverty is the primary threat to individual and societal advancement and providing sufficiency in the four material requisites for all is the first purpose of a political-economic system. Both the individual and the state have a duty to protect and promote the welfare of all citizens. For the individual, this duty of care for others flows from the development of higher states of mind such as generosity and compassion and an appreciation for the equality and dignity of all human beings. But charity alone will not fully address the problem. The challenge of poverty must be dealt with systematically, necessarily involving government policy that can fully utilize the productive resources of society (DN, 5, 2012). If the state fails to care for its citizens it could lose its legitimacy and create social pathologies and unrest. The state must also prevent economic injustice, eliminate corruption, and protect the environment and consumers from exploitation. Thus, Buddha's teaching envisions a somewhat greater role for the state in economic affairs than in most traditional liberal economic models, but his prescription is not too different from the welfare liberalism found in many advanced market economies.

As for the private sector, Buddha acknowledges that possession of private property by the laity is a pragmatic response to our egocentric tendencies and an efficient means for creating incentives for work and productivity (DN, 27, 2012).[9] He recognized commerce and profitmaking as legitimate and necessary economic activities. Buddhist economics is in no way anti-business. The *sūtras* encourage economic freedom and entrepreneurship if pursued righteously, without harm to others, and without excessive greed. At various points throughout the canon, Buddha encourages business people to be energetic, mindful, pure in deed, self-controlled, considerate, right living, and heedful. Indeed, the merchant classes were among the first proponents of Buddhist philosophy and carried Buddhism throughout Asia. Traders are advised to act with wisdom, acumen, and reliability and should know what is an appropriate profit margin for their goods (AN, 1:116, 2012). Profits are essential and necessary if they are obtained honestly and without fraud or cheating. Business people are encouraged to work hard and avoid laziness and managerial efficiency is praised. One writer described the tenor of Buddha's economic advice contained in the *sūtras* as "unmistakably

bourgeois" (Reynolds 1993 at p. 71), another as reflecting "merchant type" values (Ornatowski 1996 at p. 206). Profitmaking should not be the only concern of producers and traders, however, as they have responsibilities to their employees,[10] society, and the natural world too. And trading in certain goods is explicitly prohibited, namely trade in weapons, living beings (slave trade), butchering, intoxicants, and poisons (AN, III: 209, 2012).

With regard to the relationship between economic activity and the environment, Buddha was one of the first thinkers to advocate for environmentally sustainable economics as an essential social principle. Because of our deep interdependence and our ethical responsibilities, which extend beyond humans to all sentient beings and the natural world in this and future lives, Buddha advised maintaining a proper relationship between productive activities and the environment. Buddha asserted that in amassing wealth humankind must treat nature as a bee collects pollen in that the bee harms neither the beauty of the flower nor its fragrance and ensures its future fruition. Analogously, economic production must not harm the natural environment or impair the well-being of future generations by destroying nature's regenerative powers or its beauty (Dhp. 2007 at p. 49). Buddhism does not view the environment as a divine creation for human exploitation, nor is it seen as "external" to the production process. It too must be treated with care and without harm as humans and nature are interdependent.

Buddhist economics differs from dominant Western models in several important dimensions and yet is not fundamentally estranged from Western thinking. At a fundamental level, the most important difference is that whereas liberal market economics view the material world as real and permanent and the source of happiness, in Buddhist economics material reality is seen as impermanent, and if treated wisely, as the source of lesser happiness and prerequisite to higher forms of well-being. Liberal economics is concerned with satisfying the ever-expanding needs and wants of the self, and Buddhist economics is a means to assist individuals in transcending the self and controlling the negative emotions underlying our untamed desires through the development of moderation, contentment, and wisdom (of the nature of reality). Buddha's approach emphasizes right view: understanding the true nature of our existence, and right livelihood, working, acquiring wealth, and consuming consistently with this view. With right view, one recognizes the ultimate impermanence and insubstantiality of ourselves and all phenomena and

understands that material things are not the source of true happiness and that clinging to them will only perpetuate our suffering. Finally, from a Buddhist perspective, it follows that increasing output and consumption is not necessarily an accurate measure of improvements in the well-being of society or its members. Measuring societal well-being as synonymous with the expansion of GDP is flawed and must be replaced with more holistic metrics that consider a much broader range of factors important to human flourishing and that examine the quality and sustainability of growth. Many international organizations are moving in this direction,[11] and in Chapter 5 we will see the application of these economic principles in Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) development policies.

Like Buddha's thoughts on politics, his economic teachings do not mandate a single economic system, but are broadly compatible with a modern, mixed market economy. By mixed market, I mean the belief that while markets do many things well, they are not the answer to all economic problems, and that the government has some responsibility to uphold in the economic sphere societal values that exceed liberty and legal competition to include a duty of care for others and the environment.

So, despite the differences between Buddhist and liberal economics, these approaches have much in common and a meaningful discussion is possible between the two philosophies regarding important contemporary economic issues such as poverty and income inequality, sustainability, business–government relations, and the role of the state among others (Daniels 2005). Importantly, both Buddhist economics and liberal market capitalism share a rational and pragmatic approach to economic issues that recognizes a role both for the public and private sector. Much like Buddha on politics, Buddhist economics is not doctrinaire and suggests that economic systems must be flexible and culturally appropriate for a particular time and place (Welford 2007). This adaptability also opens the door to a consideration of the possible contemporary relevance of Buddha's economic teachings to modern life.

Buddha on International Relations and Statecraft

The Buddhist conception of politics as serving the common good extends to the international realm where our humanity and fundamental interdependence ultimately transcend national, racial, and other barriers, which are, at most, only conventional distinctions. This is not to say that the state must wither away in Buddhism. States, like our conventional

designation of our "selves" as distinctive individual entities, can function effectively as long as one recognizes their nominal, transactional, and dependent nature and avoids grasping at them as *inherently* real. States can serve an important function by equitably supplying public goods. Likewise, a system of such like-minded states can "exist" and function effectively, if one recognizes and does not lose sight of the deeper, interconnected nature of all things.

Thus, Buddhist statecraft is an international extension of Buddhist political and economic principles of equality, harmony, social welfare, nonviolence, conciliation, and mutually beneficial commercial exchange what has been summed up above as ruling in accord with the *dharma*, sometimes called "righteousness" in the Buddhist cannon.[12] Buddha discusses statecraft mostly in parables,[13] introducing the concept of world-ruler (*cakkavatti* in Pali, *cakravartin* in Sanskrit), who would provide exemplary leadership for states in the international system. The *cakkavatti* is a lesser or worldly Buddha that provides for the material welfare (more than the spiritual welfare) of mankind.[14] By example and generosity (not violent conquest), this ruler (either a single individual or a representative body) establishes an ideal government with the consent of the governed which is followed by a series of similar democratic and constitutional states based on shared principles. This loose network of ideal states would constitute an international political system that served the interests of worldwide peace and prosperity. One can see certain parallels here with Kant's vision of perpetual peace among like-minded representative states and with democratic peace theory and notions of an "international society" and cosmopolitanism in modern Western IR writings.

Buddhist IR begins with the establishment of a righteous state, ruled by consent of the governed with policies consistent with the *dharma*. This government would work for the interest of its people with care, impartial justice, tolerance, and the equal promotion of material and spiritual welfare of society's members. In modern parlance, the exemplar would be an enlightened democratic welfare state guaranteeing freedom and economic security and promoting equality, tolerance, and care for its citizens (Jayatilleke 1967). In time, this model would extend naturally and infectiously or "travel" to other parts of the world, via the Buddhist metaphor of a rolling "Wheel of Dharma," much like Buddha's initial teaching after his enlightenment set in motion a wheel of spiritual guidance. These other countries, in turn, would establish similar states

with analogous governing principles and constitutions. The international system would not be centralized empire, but a loose constellation of states revolving around an archetypal entity (Tambiah 1976).

In relating with other states, hostility and aggression is forbidden and the cultivation of friendliness and neighborliness and mutually beneficial commerce is endorsed, both to conform with the *dharma* and on grounds of expediency and efficacy, that is, aggression does not serve one's self-interest in the long run. Buddha counseled, "Hatred never ceases by hatred in this world. Hatred ceases by love—this is the ancient law" (Dhp. 2007 at p. 105).[15] A state could retain its army for defensive purposes but nonviolence is thought to be the higher ideal and Buddha counseled against the resort to war as a means of settling international disputes (King 2013).[16] The first ethical principle in Buddhism is to refrain from killing or injuring any sentient being. There is little or no support for "just war" in Buddhism (Jerryson 2013; Jayasuriya 2009). Buddha said that wars only perpetuate future conflict. As noted, he also spoke out against the trading in weapons as "wrong livelihood."

In sum, in foreign affairs, the state has the obligation not to commit aggression and to cooperate with other states in a spirit of friendliness and equality for the common good of mankind. Like all Buddha's advice, this admonition was offered for its practical benefits—it strengthened both the individual state and encouraged common bond of humanity that would bear fruit in international peace and prosperity. Buddha's political doctrine of equality, democracy, popular sovereignty, and political institutions that serve the common good materially and spiritually find their ultimate fulfillment in a worldwide network of states each acting according to these principles. Hence, in Buddhism, states may exist, but they are artifacts that endure for the benefit of a broader humanity.

Empirical Referents for Buddhist Statecraft: Aśoka's Mauryan Empire and Contemporary Bhutan

Buddhism has shaped many cultures throughout Asia and, more recently, has become influential in the West. Buddhism's political impact has been more muted, however, in part, because from the start the Buddhist order, the democratic *sangha*, was to remain apart, although not wholly separate, from politics.[17] The devoted practitioners of the *sangha* were to be considered a source of advice and example to the wider society and polity, but refrain from participating directly in the political process. So,

there are few instances where one can find an empirical example of a political system founded truly on Buddhist principles or practicing what might be called Buddhist statecraft. This is not to say that Buddhism has not been used by politicians past and present to cloak their actions in Buddhist rhetoric, much as other religious traditions have been used, only that an authentic effort to align Buddhist principles with political practice is quite rare. I offer two possible cases of Buddhist statecraft—one ancient and one modern (an alpha and omega)—for consideration. The ancient case is the Mauryan Empire of King Aśoka, the first ruler of a Buddhist state, and the modern case is contemporary Bhutan—the only extant example of a democratic state that is rooted constitutionally, politically, and economically in Buddhism.[18]

Notes

1. Portions of this discussion are taken from the author's earlier work, *Tantric State: A Buddhist Approach to Democracy and Development in Bhutan*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.
2. The discussion of Buddhist political and economic principles presented here is drawn from several well-known *sūtras* that bear on political or social matters and from the *vinaya*. These *sūtras* include the: *Mahāparinibbāṇa, Aggañña, Mahāsudassana, Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda, and Kūṭadanta*. For purposes of names, I use the Pāli language names as they appear in the translated canon.
3. God-given laws or commandments do not exist in Buddhism, only vows people take for their own well-being to assist them with their spiritual advancement. Vows are the acknowledgment of naturalistic facts about how the universe operates. In this sense, Buddhist ethical recommendations are often described as "conditional," "hypothetical," or "non-categorical," although these characterizations of Buddhist ethics are the subject of much debate (Moore 2016).
4. Buddhism, particularly the branch known as Mahayana Buddhism, maintains that humans and all other sentient beings possess Buddha nature. As noted, the concept "Buddha nature" is complex and the topic of inter-sectarian doctrinal dispute. For our purposes, the basic idea is that all individuals possess the essence of the Buddha's enlightenment, which forms the basis for all positive qualities. These qualities are not states of mind to be added; they are already fully present but obscured by grasping at an inherent self, dualism, and other misconceptions that flow from this misunderstanding of reality.
5. On Buddhism and human rights see Damien Keown (2000).

6. Buddha's economic ideas are firmly rooted in his first teachings on the Four Noble Truths: the truth of suffering, the causes of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path that leads to cessation of suffering. The "path" is known as the Noble Eightfold Path and the fifth step of that path, "Right Livelihood," is the material dimension of the moral practice necessary to achieve enlightenment.

7. Because wealth often produces craving, attachment, jealousy, and other unhealthy minds, Buddha advises worldly people to develop four qualities that will protect them from developing negative attitudes toward wealth and its use, namely: (1) confidence in the law of karma; (2) morality or virtue; (3) generosity; and (4) discernment (as to the true nature of reality) (AN 4:284, 2012). Developing these qualities will inoculate one from the potential dangers associated with wealth.

8. Regarding our desires, Buddha remarked: "Even a shower of gold cannot quench the passions" (Dhp. 186, 2007).

9. In contrast, common property and a conscious decision to not engage in the material world is recommended only for those few who make a voluntary commitment to withdraw from productive economic activity to strive vigorously for nonattachment (although overcoming craving for wealth is a chief obstacle to enlightenment for both laity and the ordained). The monastic orientation toward wealth is not expected of, or recommended to, the laity. Indeed, the intense pursuit of spiritual advancement leading to the foregoing of productive economic activity and the virtual elimination of private property by the ordained would not be possible *unless* the laity followed a different economic model that included economic productivity, private property, and growth sufficient to create a surplus from economic activity that could sustain the materially nonproductive *sangha*.

10. The *Sigalovada Suttra* explains what constitutes appropriate employer–employee relations. An employer has five duties that must be fulfilled toward an employee: (1) assignment of work in accordance with the capability of the employee; (2) provision of food and wages; (3) provision of medical care (benefits); (4) sharing of windfalls (today what we might call offering bonuses or profit sharing); and (5) granting leave and vacation at the proper times. Employees, in turn, owe their employer the following: to (1) rise early; (2) go to bed late; (3) refrain from stealing; (4) discharge their duties well; and (5) speak well of their employer. Fulfilling these mutual responsibilities will lead to increased output and productivity (DN, 31, 2012).

11. Emerging trends in scholarship and policy focus less on GDP and increasingly on alternative and expanded measurements of national progress such as the United Nation's Human Development Index and its Sustainability

Goals, the Happy Planet Index, the Genuine Progress Indicator, the Organization for Cooperation and Development's Better Life Index, and others (Brown 2017).

12. U.N. Ghoshal called the "total application of the principle of righteousness" to politics "the most important contribution of the early Buddhists canonists to the store of our ancient political thought" (Ghoshal 1959 at p. 69).

13. Buddha, using skillful means, offers guidance on how to promote harmonious social relations through parables, rather than through direct recommendations to an actual monarch, as that would have been inappropriate, ineffective, and dangerous (Chakravarti 1987). Given the growth in monarchies during Buddha's lifetime and their aggressive ambitions and violent methods, compromise and accommodation with this form of government was unavoidable, and ameliorating extreme forms of royal despotism by instructive parables was an adroit method of indirectly advising kings and humanizing and constraining the worst excesses of monarchy. If Buddha did not prescribe a vision of international relations in greater detail, keep in mind this was not his primary task and one can look to his detailed directions in the *vinaya*, instructions for the *sangha*, for more specific guidance on political administration.

14. See the *Cakkavattisihanada sūtra* D.N. 26 and *Mahasudassana sūtra* D.N. 17 (2012).

15. The quotation continues, "Victory breeds hatred: the vanquished live in sorrow. The peaceful ones live in harmony giving up both victory and defeat. Conquer enmity with amity, evil with good, miserliness with charity, and falsehood with truth" (Dhp. 2007).

16. See Buddha's advice to the Sākya and Koliya tribes who stood on the threshold of war over contested water rights (Jayatillake 2008).

17. In Indian society during Buddha's lifetime and immediately afterward, the relationship was conceived as a triangle among the state, the *sangh*a, and the laity. Society and government supported the *sangha* materially, and the *sangha*, in turn, legitimated and counseled the government and educated and modeled the *dharma* for the laity. This triangular relationship was adopted by other Buddhist Asian societies, such as Burma/Myanmar (Walton 2012).

18. Buddhist comprise about two-thirds to three quarters of the Bhutanese population and the constitution provides that the King is both head of state and protector of the Buddhist faith and culture. Buddhism is not explicitly the state religion, but it is strongly emphasized in Bhutan's constitution and institutions. For a comprehensive discussion of the Bhutanese political and economic system in theory and practice and its relationship to Buddhism see Lee (2014), Long (2019).

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The Aśokan Empire

Abstract This chapter introduces the first case study that serves as empirical referent for a Buddhist approach to statecraft in ancient times by considering the early kingdom of Aśoka. This chapter and the one that follows offer "proofs of concept" for the possibility of applying Buddhist ideas in the practice of politics and statecraft. Aśoka governed according to the *dharma*, meaning principles and policies that reflect Buddha's teachings, although Aśoka expressed his principles and policies in edicts written in nonreligious, nonexclusive language. Aśoka's rule was characterized by the promotion of nonviolence; social welfare; environmental protection; religious tolerance; political pluralism; the fair and compassionate administration of justice; and sound and responsive public administration meaning transparency, accessibility, impartiality, and accountability. His foreign policy was founded on principles of nonviolence, nonaggression, conciliation, stability, and improved understanding among international actors through diplomacy and mutually beneficial commerce. Aśoka even practiced the exercise of "soft power" by establishing medical facilities in foreign lands, sharing beneficial plants, and installing infrastructure beyond his immediate borders as acts of goodwill toward neighboring countries. While these governing principles and policies may be commonplace today, Aśoka, it should be remembered, governed in Asia in the third century B.C.E.

Keywords Aśoka · Aśokan empire · Edicts

Who Was Aśoka?

Historians generally consider Aśoka (c. 304–232 BCE) to be the paradigmatic leader who governed according to Buddhist principles and the closest approximation to the mythic *cakkavatti* discussed in Chapter 3.[1] In the West, he is most famously memorialized by H.G. Wells, who wrote:

> Aśoka worked sanely for the real needs of men. Amidst the tens of thousands
>   of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousnesses, and serenities and royal highnesses and the like, the name of
>   Aśoka shines, and shines almost alone, a star. From the Volga to Japan, his
>   name is still honored. … More living men cherish his memory today than
>   ever have heard the names Constantine and Charlemagne (Wells 1921 at p. 371).

He is similarly heralded in ancient Indian, Sri Lankan, and Chinese legends. Separating the historical Aśoka from the legend, however, can be difficult.

We know that Aśoka was the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya (reign: 321–298 BCE). Chandragupta founded the Mauryan dynasty and was the patron of the great Indian political theoretician, Kautilya, who authored an early treatise on power and politics, the *Arthaśhāstra*. After an interregnum following the death of his father, Bindusara (reign circa: 297–273 BCE), Aśoka successfully prevailed over his brothers in a competition for the throne, and Aśoka assumed authority circa 269 BCE. Aśoka brought the Mauryan dynasty to its apogee and ruled virtually the entire Indian subcontinent (today, most of India, and much of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan) as a hegemonic power for nearly 40 years. His reign was a unique period of peace, unity, and prosperity on the subcontinent (Fig. 4.1).

Although extolled in ancient legends of the East,[2] Aśoka is best understood through his own words, his "Edicts," 33 in all, which were etched in rocks, stone pillars, and other materials and posted throughout his empire during his lifetime (Basham 1982).[3] For nearly two millennia, the messages of the Edicts were lost to history because they were written primarily in *Brahmi*, a language that became extinct within a few centuries
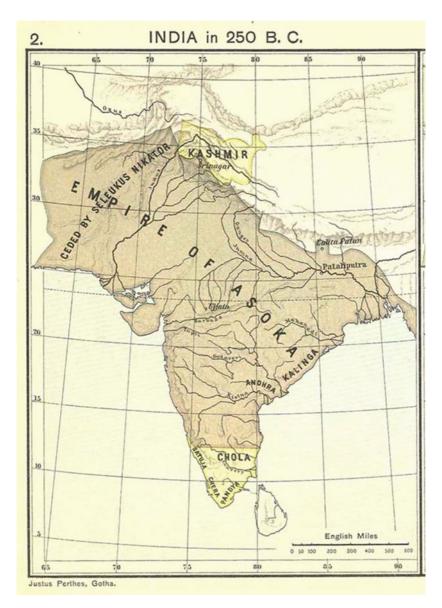
Fig. 4.1 India in 250 B.C. (From "Historical Atlas of India," by Charles Joppen [London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907], scan by FWP, Oct. 2006)

of Aśoka's death. Eventually, the linguistic code was broken in the mid-nineteenth century, and since that time, the Edicts have been accepted as the standard for interpreting Aśokan politics (Tharpar 1997). Although one thinks of an edict as a sovereign's statement with the force of law, Aśoka's Edicts also included exhortations and persuasive writings and declarations of Aśoka's "devotion to the *dharma*," a phrase that has two intertwined meanings that will be explained below. Aśoka had three audiences for his edicts: most directly, his ministers; indirectly, all those people under his rule; and ultimately, posterity (Singh 2012).

Aśoka's Reign

Following the consolidation of his empire through military conquest over the eastern kingdom of Kalinga (modern Orissa) eight years into his reign, Aśoka underwent a spiritual transformation, a metanoia or moral revolution. Reflecting that moral reckoning, Aśoka described in his own poignant words in Rock Edict XIII the great remorse he felt for the carnage, suffering, and displacement caused by his military campaign against the Kalingas[4]:

> When he had been consecrated eight years the Beloved of the Gods, the
>   king Piyadasi [Aśoka], conquered Kalinga. A hundred and fifty thousand
> people
>   were deported, a hundred thousand killed and many times that number
>   perished… On conquering Kalinga the Beloved of the Gods felt
> remorse…
>   the slaughter, death, and deportation of the people weighs heavily on
> the
>   mind of the Beloved of the Gods.

The experience marked an inflection point in his governance.

Aśoka henceforth dedicated his rule to the principles of charity and nonviolence, designed to serve his subjects and all living beings. He committed himself to rule according to the *dharma* in the First Pillar Edict, "For this is my principle: to protect through *dharma*, to administer affairs through *dharma*, to please the people with *dharma*, to guard the empire through *dharma*."

Two Notions of Dharma: *Buddha* Dharma *and Aśokan* Dharma

In the Rock Edict I, thought to be the oldest edict, Aśoka discusses his conversion to Buddhism.[5] Aśoka states in Minor Edict I at Bairat-Calcutta (Bhabra) that he became a lay devotee (*upāsaka*) dedicated to Buddha, the *dharma* (Buddha's teachings), and the *sangha*—the three "gems." One's commitment to the three gems constitutes the gateway to Buddhism. Aśoka describes how his practice of Buddhism strengthened three years after his conversion when he spent a year as a layman monk affiliated with the Buddhist *sangha*. His faith continued to strengthen over the course of his reign. Late in his life, he went so far as to issue a proclamation against those who might promote schisms with the Buddhist *sangha*[6] and specify several Buddhist scriptures with which all Buddhist practitioners should be acquainted. Although Aśoka was a devout practitioner of Buddha's *dharma* personally; for example, he made highly visible pilgrimages to Buddhist holy places, erected shrines, and donated to Buddhist monasteries, he did not seek to make Buddhism the state religion, convert his subjects or others outside his kingdom to Buddhism, or discriminate against those who did not practice the Buddhist faith. In the Edicts, he rarely directly referred to Buddha's teachings, spoke in universal, humanistic terms, and promoted explicitly ecumenical policies toward all religions.

The contrast between Aśoka's strong personal beliefs and his nonsectarian policies, universalistic prose, and the general absence of theology or philosophy in the Edicts raises two critical questions. First, one may wonder, therefore, what Aśoka meant when he said his rule is dedicated to the propagation of "*dharma*." How was Aśoka using this term? Second, it prompts the question: "Was Aśoka a ruler who happened to be Buddhist, or was he a 'Buddhist ruler,' that is, one who governed according to Buddhist principles, even though he was genuinely nonsectarian and even-handed in his rule and did not use his religion *explicitly* as a source of authority and legitimacy?" On this second question, scholars express a range of opinions.[7] This author concludes that Aśoka was a Buddhist ruler, acting on Buddhist principles, although he usually presented them shorn of any explicit religious trappings.

Returning to the first question—what did Aśoka mean when he said he governs according to the *dharma*? Here, it is essential to begin the answer at the source, Aśoka himself. In the Second Pillar Edict, Aśoka poses the question, "What is *dharma*?" His answer: "To abstain from

unwholesome deeds, to perform wholesome deeds, compassion, donation [generosity], truth, and purity [of mind]." In offering this definition note that, although Aśoka uses the same word, "*dharma*," that is often applied to Buddha's teachings, *dharma* has many meanings and in this context he was not referring to religious doctrine, per se. Aśoka's *dharma* was not preaching the way to Nirvana (he never uses that term in his Edicts) or teaching Buddha's Four Noble Truths,[8] which is Buddha's *dharma*. Instead, he used the term to mean the worldly *dharma* of a *cakkavatti*; a humanistic civic doctrine based on common ethical principles contained in Buddhism (and in many other religions) that Aśoka believed would provide a practical and unifying standard of behavior for his heterogeneous empire, one conducive to prosperity, peace, and virtue. This interpretation is the more general meaning of the word "*dharma*," that is: "law, duty, justice, righteousness, virtue, the social or moral order; the unity of life" (Dhp. 2007 at p. 256).

Does Aśoka's use of *dharma* in this broader sense suggest that he was not a Buddhist ruler, but rather a worldly ruler who personally practiced Buddhism? I would answer, "no." Aśoka, by emphasizing the universal, nonsectarian, and practical value of his governing principles, was nonetheless acting consistent with Buddha's message and methods. Aśoka's emphasis on instructing on common truths that are practically useful parallels Buddha's approach to teaching his spiritual *dharma*. When Buddha was asked by an unlettered woman, "What is *Dharma*?" He replies, exactly like Aśoka's advice to his lay citizens: "To perform all wholesome deeds and to abstain from all unwholesome deeds and to continuously strive to purify one's mind is the *dharma*" (Dhp. 2007, p. 183). Buddha recognized that in teaching his *dharma* he should start with the universal and practical dimensions of his instructions. Buddha, like Aśoka, understood that what is most important to teach is not particular religious doctrine, specific rituals, or arcane philosophy, but fundamental ethical principles that will be helpful to all individuals right now and in the future. When asked why he did not teach all that he knows, such as answers to life's philosophical dilemmas, Buddha explained, "What do I not teach? Whatever is fascinating to discuss, divides people against each other, but has no bearing on putting an end to sorrow. What do I teach? Only what is necessary to take you to the other shore" (Dhp. 2007 at p. 58). Buddha, like Aśoka, was a pragmatic humanist; he did not speak of gods. Instead, he offered practical solutions to human problems in a way that would lead to lasting peace of mind.

This down-to-earth orientation is especially evident in the early translation of Buddha's teachings in the Pāli Canon. Perhaps the most famous illustration of Buddha's preference for focusing on practical problems is found in the *Cūla-Māluṅkyaputta sūtra*, wherein Buddha eschews metaphysical speculations for their own sake through the parable of a man shot with a poisonous arrow who would die while demanding answers about the caste, clan, color, size, and hometown of his assailant before focusing on the need to have a physician remove the arrow (MN, 63, 1995)! So, too, Buddha said people should not waste time in metaphysical wonderings at the expense of failing to put his practical teachings on ending human suffering into practice. Aśoka, in promoting his worldly *dharma*, both within his empire and beyond, took his cue from Buddha and focused primarily on extolling ethical fundamentals designed to improve the personal growth and societal well-being of people, rather than the formal or metaphysical dimensions of his Buddhist religion. Aśoka, in his Edicts, chose to teach his citizens the aspects of the Buddhist path that are essential and immediately relevant to the creation and maintenance of a just and virtuous *civic* life (not the other shore of Nirvana), and he left out of his messages anything (including any aspects of his personal religious beliefs) that could divide his people or be interpreted as sectarian or exclusionary.

Consistent with his broad approach to *dharma*, in Pillar Edicts II and VII, Aśoka emphasizes the personal traits one should inculcate: goodness, little defilement, mercy, generosity, liberality, truthfulness, and gentleness. These qualities should be developed in fulfilling one's worldly duties to others including: respectful, reverential relationships with parents, elders, and teachers; liberality with friends, acquaintances, and relatives; appropriateness with slaves and servants; and protection for all living creatures. Those familiar with the Buddhist canon will recognize these instructions as directly parallel to those given by Buddha in the *Sigālovāda sūtra*, but Aśoka makes no such reference to it in his Edicts. Likewise, in Rock Edict III, he encourages moderation in consumption and expenditure and care regarding one's speech. In Pillar Edict III he warns against malevolent attitudes such as impetuosity, cruelty, anger, pride, and malice. All these admonitions were consistent with Buddha's emphasis on the inculcation of basic virtues and positive emotions, the development of contentment, the practice of restraint, and the pursuit of the Middle Way, but Aśoka presents them as secular guidelines wholly apart from any specific, and thus exclusionary, religious mooring. Instead,

Aśoka sought to personally embody and exemplify these qualities for his citizens, much like the virtuous ruler, the *dharma-raja*, in Buddhist parables, but Aśoka did not use religion as the basis of his authority or legitimacy. To put it simply, Aśoka knew that it was more efficacious to "act like a Buddha" than to "act like a Buddhist." So, in this author's interpretation, Aśoka was very much a Buddhist ruler, not just a ruler who was a Buddhist. I discuss below how many Aśokan policies comport with specific dimensions of Buddha's teachings.

While clearly animated by Buddhism, Aśokan *dharma* was nonsectarian and inclusive in its presentation. We might today call it a form of secular ethics. For Aśoka, *dharma* was the designation of ethical principles with a unifying and broad appeal to a wide swath of his citizens and a practical means of conforming behavior in the empire through the creation of a civic culture. Aśoka's *dharma* infused universal ideals—respect for the sanctity of all life, equality, charity, and compassion—into the everyday practice of citizens in a multicultural, multiethnic empire. He did not use religion cynically, but as a true believer, he identified and employed the universal principles of his religion to connect with all his subjects. This approach was consistent with Buddha's use of "skillful means" (*upāya-kauśalya*): adapting one's teachings to the level of the audience's ability to understand the *dharma*, their spiritual potential.

For Aśoka, the essential instrument for inculcation of the *dharma* was not state policy or legislation but self-examination, introspection, or what we might today call mindfulness, contemplation, and meditation. Aśoka sought to elevate the ethical practice of citizens, not through an exercise of coercive political power or statute (although he used these too, for example outlawing ritualistic animal sacrifice), but through encouraging personal insight and meditation and by insuring that his government supported citizens in these efforts through good governance, sound and responsive administration, public works, social welfare, and transparency and equality under the law (Pillar Edict II). In Pillar Edict VII, he notes, "of these two [legislation and moral suasion], pious regulations are of small account, whereas persuasion is of greater value." This belief in the supportive role of government for citizen's personal development is also fully consistent with Buddha's political teachings: real change must come from within, and the government's and society's role should support individuals in these pursuits by providing conducive conditions for personal advancement and by demonstrating virtue in its policies and administration. For example, as will be discussed below, peace was a central tenet of

Aśoka's rule. In Aśoka's dialect and in Sanskrit the word for peace, *śānti,* means "calming of one's own mind and the suppression of one's own mental and spiritual deficiencies and negative inclinations" rather than the Western reference to the absence of large-scale political violence (Salomon 2007 at p. 57). In Buddha's teachings, one cannot meaningfully change the world and create peace until one has mastered his or her own mind. Although there is no substitute for personal effort, there is a close connection between individuals' pursuit of the *dharma* and the goals of the state. They are mutually reinforcing: personal cultivation improves the larger society, and appropriate social, political, and economic policies of the state, in turn, support individuals in their personal development. Aśoka praised both personal and official efforts designed to create this integrated moral and political order. In their translation of the Edicts, Nikam and McKeon conclude that Aśoka's *dharma* "provides a code of personal conduct, a bond of human relations and political justice and a principle of international relations, and *dharma* turns the lives of men [sic] away from evil deeds, mutual intolerance, and armed conflict…. the whole political organization was made subsidiary to moral law in a concrete translation of the law into specific forms of human relations" (Nikam and McKeon 1959 at pp. 19–21).

Aśoka's *dharma* was truly revolutionary. Bruce Rich asserts: "Aśoka's revolution is one of public as well as private morality. A daring attempt to move Kautilyan society toward transcending its grounding in an ethic of power, force, and wealth to one evolving toward nonviolence, tolerance, and charity" (Rich 2010 at pp. 131–132). As Tharpar notes, "Religious texts of the time stressed man's responsibility to his religion and to his ancestors. To these Aśoka added yet another responsibility, perhaps the most important, that of responsibility to one's fellow human beings …" (Tharpar 1997 at p. 271). Empires of the ancient world were founded and governed by ruthless monarchs, and their external relations were characterized by constant conflict, not peace. Viewed against this norm, we can begin to appreciate the uniqueness of Aśoka's doctrine of nonviolence, ethical development, and mutual care. As distinguished Indologist Richard Salomon maintains, "even a cursory study of the history of ancient India suffices to show that war was the rule and peace very much the exception," that exception was the kingdom of Aśoka (Salomon 2007 at p. 60).

Aśoka possessed a paternalistic conception of his monarchy, combining affection with authority, delight with duty. He explicitly states in Kalinga

Rock Edict I that his citizens should come to realize "that the king is like a father, and that he feels for them as for himself, for they are like his own children to him." This attitude extended beyond his kingdom too, embracing all of mankind: "all men are my children; and, just as I desire for my children that they may attain every kind of welfare and happiness both in this world and the next, so do I desire for all men." In Pillar Edict IV, he further instructs his appointees to adopt the same protective attitude; as if they had been entrusted with the care of Aśoka's children. This benevolent authoritarianism of Aśoka differs somewhat from the Buddhist ideal of kingship, however. Buddha, in his teachings, idealized the monarch as a "great elect," one chosen by the people and ultimately responsible to them.[9] By Aśokan times, however, republican states and more democratic monarchies had been subsumed by ever-larger, more centralized and more controlling monarchies, and Aśoka's empire reflected this authoritarian trend.[10] Aśoka's notion of kingship was benevolent but also more absolute than the Buddhist ideal.

Aśokan Policies

Beyond these general governing principles, the Edicts also describe the chief characteristics of Aśokan policy and administration. As noted, the first principle was nonviolence, which for its time, and perhaps for any time, made Aśokan governance exceptional. Policies of nonviolence are most evident in Aśoka's renunciation of the use of offensive war in state-craft. He recommended the same for his successors, although he allowed in Rock Edict XIII that, if his heirs must resort to warfare, it should be accompanied by "mercy and light punishments." Aśoka was not a pacifist, however. He did not disband his army, and the use of force defensively remained an available option if necessary for the security of his kingdom. Aśoka also limited state violence as a tool in the administration of justice for criminal offenses, although he did not eliminate capital punishment. Consistent with his Buddhist beliefs, nonviolence or reducing violence was a policy that Aśoka applied to all living beings, not just humans. In this respect, Aśoka was not an absolutist, but he refrained from eating living beings, outlawed ceremonial animal sacrifice, and reduced the use of meat in the royal kitchen (limited to two hens and one deer per day). He restricted hunting and fishing practices by protecting certain species and banning killing on certain dates and he gave up the traditional prac-tice of royal hunts as a diversion, instead using his travel as an opportunity

to explore sights of religious significance and to share the *dharma* with his subjects.

Second, Aśokan policy was characterized by strong social welfare initiatives and the provision of expanded public works. Several scholars have noted that Aśoka's policies contained the seeds of the modern welfare state (Sarkisyanz 1965; Tharpar 1997; Singh 2012; Rich 2010). Aśoka himself proclaims in the Sixth Pillar Edict "Thus do I provide for the welfare and happiness of the world—in the same way as I bring happiness to my relatives, both close and distant and work for it, so do I provide for all classes." Perhaps most significant in this regard was Aśoka's policies of providing medical care for his citizens and foreign travelers through the construction of public hospitals and clinics. He further provided for the care of animals via the creation of veterinary centers. Aśoka constructed roads, dams, and irrigation facilities. He planted medicinal trees and herbs inside and outside his kingdom for their beneficial public health effects. In Pillar Edict VII, he describes how he provided rest houses, wells, and shade trees along trade routes for the benefit of citizens and foreign travelers. According to Rock Edict II, Aśoka extended these charitable works beyond his own kingdom to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Near East (Syria), and Greek territories near his borders—an early form of foreign assistance.

Aśoka's policies also reflected an environmental awareness that is consistent with Buddha's guidance to live in harmony with the natural world given the interdependence of all living things. As noted, he attempted to ban or limit the unnecessary killing of animals, specifying in detail in Pillar Edict V protected classes of animals. He prohibited the burning of animal habitat as a technique for clearing agricultural lands or driving animals for a hunt, he outlawed the feeding of animals to other animals, and he sought to improve cultivation of agricultural and medicinal crops.

The Aśokan principles of tolerance, pluralism, and dialogue are best seen in his policies promoting the practice of all religions and encouraging mutual understanding among people of all faiths. Aśoka's Edicts promoted not only Buddhism but also traditional Brahmanical sects and those of the "*śramaṇas*" (those practicing outside the mainstream).[11] In Rock Edict VII, Aśoka acknowledges that all sects encourage self-restraint and personal purification and, therefore, he desires that they should all dwell anywhere in his empire. He further recommends in Rock Edict XII that all people should appreciate and listen to the teachings of religions other than their own to recognize their underlying ethical unity.

Aśoka's policies went far beyond mere passive "tolerance" of other religions to include an active engagement, "inter-faith dialogue" in modern terms, an effort to appreciate and learn from other traditions. In Rock Edict XII he cautions: "whosoever honors his own sect and condemns the sect of others wholly from devotion to his own sect…injures more gravely his own. Therefore, concord is to be commended, so that men may hear one another's principles and obey them." Aśoka recommended generosity toward the Brahmins and *śramaṇas* in the Ninth Major Rock Edict and, leading by personal example, Aśoka dedicated large sums for the housing of ascetics of the Ajivika and Jain sects, noted in the Barabar Cave Inscriptions, not just for the Buddhist *sangha*.

Aśokan policies advocated for rule of law and the impartial administration of justice consistent with Buddha's principle of the equality and dignity of all human beings. In Pillar Edict IV, he says "there should be uniformity in judicial proceedings and punishments," a remarkable phrase that has been read in two ways. More narrowly, this directive has been interpreted to mean that Aśoka was mandating uniformity in the application of the law throughout all geographic areas of his empire. If so, this was an important call for consistency and fairness in rule of law. Aśoka's call for uniformity in judicial proceedings and punishments has also been interpreted more expansively to suggest that Aśoka was mandating that law and the administration of justice should not discriminate by caste, class, or occupation unlike the prevailing Brahmanic tradition that distinguished offenders and punishments by caste and position. If so, then Aśoka's words were mandating full equal justice before the law for all citizens (Rich 2010). Although either reading would constitute an important step in the advancement of social justice, in the broader meaning, the Edict's pronouncement would have been a breakthrough in terms of human rights and equality consistent with Buddha's rejection of social caste and hierarchy.

Aśokan policies also tempered justice with mercy. He encouraged his rural administrators to be both fair and moderate in their administration of justice. Aśoka did not do away with the death penalty, but, he instructs in the Fourth Pillar Edict that judges must provide a three-day respite to any prisoner sentenced to death so that their family may appeal the order and, even if unsuccessful, the prisoner may have time to undertake final good works in preparation for his next life. In his Fifth Major Rock Edict, Aśoka promotes the welfare of prisoners more generally: advocating for the release of those who have children, are afflicted, or aged. In his

Fifth Pillar Edict, he remarks that he has released one prisoner for each of the 25 years of his reign. To ensure that officials were not abusing their judicial authority, Aśoka instituted triennial and quinquennial surveillance tours from the central government, what we might call policy audits, and he personally participated in these efforts.

In addition to the fair and compassionate administration of justice, Aśoka was also an early advocate of policies of "good governance," meaning transparency, accessibility, impartiality, and accountability. He warned his administrators to avoid weaknesses such as anger, laziness, impatience, and any kind of prejudice and, as noted, he followed up on his admonitions by sending a royal or provincial inspector to insure his directives were followed. Through his Edicts, his travels, and the peripatetic nature of his administrators, Aśoka underscored that regular communication with his subjects was a major policy priority. Aśoka was committed to a policy of personal accessibility and sought to demonstrate his commitment to good governance. For example, he commits to be available to his citizens stating in Rock Edict VI: "In all places do I dispose of the affairs of the people … [important information] should …be reported to me in all places, at all hours." He adds, "I never feel satisfaction in my exertions and dispatch of business. For work I must for the welfare of all the folk … the root is energy … for nothing is more essential than the welfare of all the folk." In the Edicts, he exhorts his administrators to efficacy and hard work. "Transparency, efficiency, and exertion" was the motto of his governance.

S.J. Tambiah summarizes Aśoka's policies as "protection and liberality" (Tambiah 1976 at p. 39). Bruce Rich describes the underpinnings of Asokan rule as "justice, prudence, and beneficence" (Rich 2010 at p. 129). The resemblances between Aśoka's ideals and policies with the principles of the European Enlightenment in terms of equality, rationality, tolerance of dissent, freedom of belief, and justice under the law, and the parallels between Aśoka's social policies and those of the modern welfare state, are obvious, but recall that Aśoka was writing in Asia in the third century BCE. For historical comparison, this was the Warring States period in China.

Aśoka's Foreign Policy

Aśoka's message of acceptance of diversity, good works, tolerance, and nonviolence also extended to his foreign policy and his treatment of foreigners within the empire. The promotion of the *dharma* was also the hallmark of Aśokan foreign policy. For example, in Rock Edict I he states: "The Beloved of the Gods [Aśoka] considers victory by *dharma* to be the foremost victory … [and] has gained this victory on all frontiers to a distance of 600 yojonas (about 4000 miles)" (Tharpar 1997).

Recall, following his remorse over the bloodshed and suffering of the Kalinga war, Aśoka foreswore future military aggression as an instrument of policy (a promise he kept) and vowed to engage only in peaceful "conquest by *dharma*."[12] This reference to conquest does not mean seeking political dominion over others or a religious crusade, but rather refers to the Buddhist notion of conquering of the self and coming to understand one's responsibilities for others as discussed in Chapter 2. For Aśoka, the essence of law, politics, and administration was insight into oneself and respect for others. Consistent with his word, he made propagation of *dharma* his main objective, and he pursued a statecraft of conciliation, stability, and security designed to reduce international tensions (Rock Edicts I, XVI).

Aśoka lived in a time of expanded communication and travel between the Eastern Mediterranean and South Asia. As part of his diplomacy, Aśoka dispatched emissaries (*dharma* ambassadors) to Ceylon, Egypt, Syria, Greece, Macedonia, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and the Himalayas and to the Cholas and the Pandyas, his immediate neighbors to the South (Zhang 2012). The stated goal of these foreign missions was not religious promulgation or conquest (although conquest was within Aśoka's powers in some cases) but promotion of mutual understanding, acquaintance with Aśoka's *dharma*, and economic betterment through commercial exchange. Aśoka established particularly friendly relations with Ceylon, his neighbor to the South and encouraged the spread of *dharma* there. Aśoka's foreign policies, like his domestic policies, were designed to be both morally correct and expedient and likely to prove beneficial to Aśoka's empire (Jayatilleke 1967). History does not reveal what reception his ambassadors received but Aśoka undoubtedly increased the stature and spread of his ideas throughout Asia (Bandarkar 1925; Gelblum 1957). Aśoka was an early practitioner of foreign aid and cultural diplomacy as instruments of statecraft. He practiced the exercise of "soft power" by

establishing medical facilities in foreign lands, sharing beneficial plants, and installing infrastructure beyond his immediate borders as acts of goodwill toward neighboring countries.

Aśoka did not live in peaceful times and he had to govern a geographically vast and ethnically variegated empire,[13] so his transition from violent conquest to forgoing aggression must have been challenging. Aśoka had to deal with tensions among social classes and religious sects, lawless people on his frontiers, and other nations and empires with vastly different political systems. Aśoka chose to address these challenges affirmatively. First, he developed and promulgated a unifying ethic, a civil *dharma* of social responsibility designed to raise people's moral outlook both within and beyond his borders. Second, in his actions, Aśoka pursued policies that advanced social welfare and happiness through good deeds, public works, and the provision of good governance or foreign assistance. In Rock Edict VI, he states "I consider the promotion of the people's welfare my highest duty…. I owe to all living creatures to make them happy in this world and help them attain heaven in the next" (Nikam and McKeon 1959 at p. 38). In this respect too, Aśoka was following Buddha's political teachings on what constitutes a just and legitimate monarch contained in the *sūtras* of the Pali canon.[14]

Aśoka's Forcefulness

Lest one conclude that Aśoka was naïve in his approach to domestic politics or foreign relations in his appeal to people's better nature, it should also be noted that Aśoka's Edicts reveal a practical shrewdness, an understanding of power, and great skill in administrative control. Some interpreters of Aśoka's policies characterize Asoka's forcefulness as what one author calls "Buddhist realism," that is, Aśoka kept the requisites of putative power: a full treasury; a large, strong, and well-equipped army; and an extensive administrative structure (Tambiah 1976; Gokhale 1966). A more recent work describes Aśoka's empire "as a fusion of real *politik* and moral *politik*" (Shahi 2019 at p. 57; see earlier Albinski 1958). Recall Aśoka had inherited a philosophy of real *politik* from his grandfather and his grandfather's advisor, Kautilya, and a substantial bureaucracy from his ancestors.

While this is one possible interpretation of Aśoka's actions, viewed through a Buddhist lens, Aśoka's understanding and use of power could

be interpreted as a form of "wrathful compassion"—strong actions moti-vated by love and compassion for those acted upon, although they appear to an outside observer as motivated by anger or desire for power. The best example of wrathful compassion in the West is the parable of Christ throwing the moneychangers out of the temple. Buddhism, espe-cially in its later Mahayana and Vajrayana forms accentuates the wrathful compassion of Buddha's representations.

Aśoka's subtle exercise of tolerance with strength and compassion can be seen in his message to the lawless people on his frontiers:

> Unconquered peoples along the border of my dominions may wonder what
>   my disposition is toward them. My only wish with respect to them is they
>   should not fear me, but trust me; that they should expect only happiness
>   from me, not misery; that they should understand further that I will forgive
>   them for offenses that can be forgiven; that they should be induced by my
>   example to practice *dharma*; and that they should attain happiness in this
>   world and the next (Nikam and McKeon 1959 at p. 53).

Implied in Aśoka's message, of course, is that he has the *power* to forgive, or not. In addressing the unruly forest dwellers of his empire, he was even more direct, warning them in Rock Edict XIII that they should follow his instructions so that, despite his avowed restraint, they may not be shamed or killed. Perhaps for these reasons, in her classic study, Tharpar concludes that Aśoka was a "stern monarch" (Tharpar 1997).

CONCLUSION

History does not provide a detailed record of Aśoka's empire. In the Indian library, philosophy and myth predominate and history is described as "the empty shelf" (Salomon 2007).[15] We do know that he ruled a great and vast state of growing wealth and expanded commerce (based on archeological records) for nearly 40 years and the final 32 years were a unique time of both prosperity and peace on the subcontinent. Roughly

50 years after Aśoka's death, the Mauryan empire fragmented for reasons that history can only speculate upon.[16]

Notes

1. Aśoka, in his writings, never refers to himself as a *cakkavatti*, instead describing himself as the "Beloved of the Gods," or by the name, "Piyadasi," meaning "one who sees affectionately" or "one who is of gracious mien" (Bandarkar 1925). Interestingly, the name Aśoka translates as "one without sorrow" or "one beyond sorrow," which is an appellation often applied to Buddha, himself, as he had transcended the sufferings of samsara.
2. A.L Basham explains that the legends of Aśoka described in Sri Lankan, Indian, and Chinese sources have little in common except that they describe a "mighty Indian ruler, whose capital was Pataliputra, and who adopted a new enlightened policy as a result of his conversion to Buddhism. Almost everything else is missing in one source or another" (Basham 1982 at p. 132).
3. The Edicts consist of fourteen Rock Edicts, seven Pillar Edicts, and miscellaneous site-specific Edicts, often found in caves.
4. Interestingly, for reasons of shame, sensitivity, or pragmatism, Aśoka did not post this message in Kalinga itself (Singh 2012).
5. Prior to his conversion, scholars believe that Aśoka practiced the prevailing Brahmanical religion and was said to be a devotee of Shiva (Gelblum 1957). It should be remembered that at that time Buddhism was an influential sect but not a major religion.
6. In the Rummindei Pillar inscription he declares: "No one is to cause dissension in the Order. The Order of monks and nuns has been united, and this unity should last for as long as my sons and great grandsons, and the moon and the sun. Whoever creates a schism in the Order, whether monk or nun, is to be dressed in white garments, and to be put in a place not inhabited by monks or nuns."
7. Some authors, such as Tharpar, assume a skeptical attitude toward the notion of Aśoka's rule as Buddhist (Tharpar 1997). Others, such as Bandarkar, Gokhale, and Kumar are inclined to see Aśoka's reign as a more direct extension of his Buddhist beliefs in the worldly sphere of politics (Bandarkar 1925; Gokhale 1948; Kumar 2017).
8. Following his enlightenment, Buddha's first teaching was on the Four Noble Truths: one must know life's sufferings; the causes of these sufferings; what is the end of suffering; and the path to liberation from suffering.
9. See, in particular, the *Aggañña sūtra*.

10. While under siege from powerful monarchies and in retreat at the time of Buddha, republican forms of government in India likely began in the late Vedic period (the early first millennium BCE) and persisted in some form until the third or fourth century AD (Muhlberger 1998; Sarkisyanz 1965). "Republican" in the context of ancient India means that a larger group of individuals were involved in decision making and governance processes relative to monarchic states and that political practice reflected a preference for decision making by deliberation rather than command. The republics were not fully democratic, but they did involve collective decision making by select groups, families, castes, or occupations. This governance by discussion and limited enfranchisement can be viewed as a form of republicanism. Furthermore, K.P. Jayaswal notes that Buddha's *sūtras* refer to ballot voting, majoritarian decision making, and referendums without definition, leading him to conclude that these political procedures must have been taken for granted by the time of Buddha's teachings (Jayaswal 2005).

11. In contrast to the dominant Brahmanical sects, the *śramaṇas* is a term that referred to those groups, including Buddhists but also the Ajivaka, Lokayata, Jaina, and the agnostic (Ajñana) sects, that went forth out of mainstream society and governmental control to wander and think freely without societal constraints, supported by alms and donations from followers and those attending their public lectures. Later, some of these groups, most particularly Buddhists, settled in enclaves near cities and along trade routes and developed codified principles in the governing laws for their communities. The *śramaṇas* generally believed that experience alone was the highest authority and that the universe is subject to natural, discoverable laws and that by understanding and living in accordance with these laws, human beings could find meaning. They rejected the prevailing religious justification for social hierarchy, advocated for the equality of all individuals in their potential for spiritual advancement, and promoted tolerance of personal difference. Buddha specifically rejected the Brahmanical myths of divine creation of the world and separation of humans by race and class.

12. Elsewhere, Aśoka specifically instructs his successors, sons, and grandsons to aim for victory by *dharma*, not military means.

13. Rock Edict II mentions ethnic groups such as the Yonas (those of Greek or Western ethnicity), Gandharas, Yavanas, Kambojas, Ristikas, and Pitinikas, within or at the outskirts of his empire.

14. See the *Aggañña, Mahāsudassana, Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda, and Kūṭadanta sūtras*.

15. Salomon notes: "In broad terms, Indian civilization is more concerned with the presentation and consideration of normative theories than in the recording of pragmatic realities" (Salomon 2007 at p. 53).

16. See Romila Tharpar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, 3rd ed., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997. In Chapter 7 of this work, Tharpar dismisses several theories that attempt to explain the decline of the Mauryan empire by reference to military inactivity during Aśoka's reign, Brahmin resentment of his *dharma*, popular uprisings by restive groups, or economic pressures. Instead, Tharpar cites the general lack of a national consciousness on the subcontinent and the absence of strong leadership after Aśoka as reasons for the empire's decline.

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Modern Bhutan's Buddhist Statecraft

Abstract This chapter introduces the country of Bhutan and its unique pursuit of a Buddhist-inspired foreign policy during the modern era (1949–present). This chapter illustrates how a modern state implements a national security and economic development policy consistent with Buddhist philosophical principles and Buddha's political and economic teachings and, like the prior chapter, it serves as proof of concept for the possibility of putting Buddhist ideas into practice. The cornerstone of Bhutan's foreign and domestic policies is its pursuit of Gross National Happiness, a concept that endorses holistic progress in the material, spiritual, emotional, cultural, and environmental welfare of its society.

Keywords Bhutan · Gross national happiness · Bhutanese foreign policy

Introduction

Foreign policy is a tool in the hands of a nation-state that allows it to advantageously shape the behavior of other states and the international system. For a very small state like Bhutan, however, foreign policy is less grandiose and more defensive in nature, allowing it to ward off pressures and other adverse aspects of the international system and pursue its essential goals of physical security, economic development, and preservation of its identity and culture.[1]

Bhutan is a small and vulnerable country because of its physical features, including: geographic size (about that of Switzerland); inaccessibility (it is landlocked with the closest international port 450 miles away through India), population (about 800,000), economy (per capita GNP about 3000 USD), and military strength (an 8000-person army with no navy or air force). Its vulnerability stems not only from its size but from its location. Bhutan is "sandwiched" between two nuclear-armed, antagonistic Asian giants, India and China, or as the locals say using their own gastronomic metaphor, Bhutan is "caught like a yam between two boulders."[2] Nevertheless, this improbable country, by virtue of its Himalayan boundary to the north, the forests and diseases of its southlands, and its centuries of closure to the outside world has avoided conquest or colonization by invading Tibetans, Mongols, and Brits[3] and has remained an independent Buddhist nation since the early seventeenth century, with a distinct archeological identity stretching back 4000 years.

A History of Modern Bhutanese Statecraft

For our purposes, I will consider only modern Bhutan, meaning the period from 1949 to the present.[4] Since 1949, Bhutan has followed a foreign policy based on close relations with India, pursuing an alliance strategy not uncommon for small powers. The reasons for the association with India are primarily threefold.[5] The first reason is historical. India, when it became independent in 1947, stepped into the shoes of Britain vis-à-vis Bhutan. In 1910, to retain its sovereignty against British encroachment, Bhutan's First King, Ugyen Wangchuck,[6] signed the Treaty of Punakha with the British that left Bhutan's autonomy sufficiently ambiguous to both parties: Great Britain agreed "to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan," but Bhutan agreed "to be guided by the advice of the British government in regard to its external relations."[7] A 1949 successor treaty of friendship and cooperation between India and Bhutan similarly provided that Bhutan would seek Indian guidance in its foreign affairs. This provision with India lost much of its authority de facto over time but remained in effect *de jure* until 2007.[8]

The second motive for close ties with India was pragmatic and material. In the early years of Bhutan's emergence from isolation (1949–1971) the country lacked the human, financial, and institutional resources to function as a fully independent international actor without India's support.

Further, Bhutan's travel and supply lines ran south through India as the easier and more direct route for commerce relative to the mountainous northern route to Tibet. India quickly became Bhutan's major source of trade, foreign aid, and investment.

The third reason for the alliance with India was security. Although Bhutan had historically pursued a policy of isolation, events immediately after World War II made isolation and neutrality untenable policies. In 1950, the new Chinese government, the People's Republic of China (PRC), invaded Tibet, and Bhutan found itself with Chinese troops on its border.[9] Subsequent crackdowns by the Chinese government on the Tibetan people (Bhutan's cultural and spiritual cousins), an influx of Tibetan refugees into Bhutan following the PRC's consolidation of control in 1959, and a dispute over border territories between Bhutan and the PRC combined to constitute a direct security threat to Bhutan. This threat led Bhutan to close its northern border, thus ending commercial exchange with China and severing a 1000-year-old relationship with Tibet. These events also cemented Bhutan's security and economic ties with India and led Bhutan out of its isolation policy and toward a gradual engagement in international relations to better define and defend its statehood (Fig 5.1).[10]

The alliance between Bhutan and India made geostrategic sense for India too, especially after its 1962 border war with China. Bhutan serves as a buffer state between India and China. Moreover, Bhutan, along with Bangladesh, border and protect a narrow strip of land known as the Siliguri Corridor, which connects the main body of India to its northeastern states.[11] These northeastern Indian states have often been the locus of insurgency against the Indian central government and could be cut off from the main body of India by a Chinese incursion into the Corridor.

Bhutan's Third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who came to power in 1952, expanded Bhutan's international relations by applying for United Nation's observer status in the late 1960s, and the country was granted full U.N. membership at the end of his rule in 1971.[12] Bhutan also joined regional international organizations and expanded bilateral ties with several countries to diversify its relations with the international community. But, Bhutan had no interest in Cold War great power politics, and to this day, has not established direct diplomatic relations with any of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council. Similarly, in seeking foreign assistance for its development, Bhutan's former

Fig. 5.1 Main features of South Asia (*Source* Updated from map courtesy of University of Texas Libraries, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/txu-oclc-247232986-asia_pol_2008.jpg)

Prime Minister explained "We are looking for economic assistance from countries other than traditional donor nations, but we are determined to ensure that such aid has no political strings attached. We shall not seek aid from either the U.S. or the USSR as we do not wish to get involved in the super power racket" (Bhardwaj 2016 at p. 60).[13] Instead, Bhutan has cautiously engaged with a variety of other multilateral and regional initiatives to further its independence and interests. The Third King also began a concerted focus on Bhutan's economic modernization through the institution of five-year economic plans beginning in 1961.

The Fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, came to power in 1972 and set the country on a generation-long path to full democratization and decentralization, believing that good government in the modern era could not be assured by an absolutist regime but required full participation by its citizens.[14] He accelerated the process of modernization through encouraging a greater role for the private sector in the economy. He established the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to capitalize on Bhutan's new U.N. membership as its second major channel with the outside world. Importantly, to help the country secure a national identity that would meld Bhutan's culture and Buddhist values with the modernization process, he introduced the strategy of pursuing Gross National Happiness as the touchstone of all governmental efforts, both domestic and foreign.

GNH is Bhutan's unique multidimensional approach to development that seeks to maintain a harmonious balance among material well-being and the spiritual, emotional, and cultural needs of society (Ura et al. 2015). It is authentically distinct from the Western notion of development where the sole measure of success is material, the expansion of Gross National Product (GNP).[15] GNH seeks to promote sustainable development without sacrificing Bhutan's Buddhist values and culture. Bhutan's most important economic policy body, the National Planning Commission, explained Bhutan's independent path: "Simply imposing development models from outside which do not take religion and tradition into account will only serve to diminish existing culture [and] meet with limited success" (Wangmo and Valk 2012 at p. 56). Bhutan was clear that its Buddhist development model differs profoundly from the Western GNP growth model: "Our approach to development has been shaped by beliefs and values of the faith we have held for more than 1000 years firmly rooted in our rich tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism.[16] The approach stresses not material rewards, but individual development, sanctity of life, compassion for others, respect for nature, and the importance of compromise" (Royal Government of Bhutan Planning Commission 1999 at p. 19).

Bhutan's GNH approach to national development challenged many tenets of economic orthodoxy, most importantly the fundamental assumption that increasing material output and consumption automatically equates with increasing levels of human happiness (Upreti 2016). Buddha directly rejected this idea (as does recent social and behavioral sciences)[17] and taught that a singular focus on material acquisition and

consumption leads to dissatisfaction and unhappiness, not enduring and meaningful happiness.

"Happiness," in the Bhutanese Buddhist sense of the term, has a meaning distinct from Western conceptions of happiness. In Buddhism, happiness does not equate with Western notions of hedonic ("feel good") pleasure or the concept of overall life satisfaction used by Western social scientists. Nor is the Buddhist notion of happiness fully analogous to Aristotle's notion of happiness as *eudemonia*, the sense of deep contentment arising from living a virtuous life (although moral discipline and virtue are the foundations for higher forms of happiness in Buddhism). In Buddhism, true, lasting happiness is a state of mind and therefore can only be obtained by understanding, purifying, and controlling the mind, not merely improving one's external circumstances.[18] Enduring happiness is not principally about securing ever-better external conditions because happiness is the product of an *internal* state of mind. The former prime minister of Bhutan, Jigme Thinley, summarized the notion of genuine happiness from a Buddhist perspective: "We know that true abiding happiness cannot exist while others suffer, and comes only from serving others, living in harmony with nature, and realizing our innate wisdom and the true and brilliant nature of our own minds" (Gross National Happiness Center 2014).[19]

As noted, Buddhism does not ignore the need for material comforts or good external conditions as these assist one's development and provide a lesser form of happiness in themselves. Buddha instructed that society should be organized to provide good conditions for all. Government policies, no matter how charitable or enlightened, however, cannot *directly* make its citizens happier in the Buddhist sense. The state's responsibility is to provide the best possible conditions to contribute to material and mental development for the greatest number of people given available resources. It is the job of government to remove obstacles that inhibit an individual's personal progress and to reduce unnecessary suffering. This responsibility is what makes happiness a political and socioeconomic project, as well as an individual goal, and justifies the state's pursuit of GNH. Bhutan's development strategy has succeeded in improving material and social conditions consistent with this broader definition of progress. Further, Bhutan's development strategy reflects many Buddhist economic principles and priorities including poverty eradication; providing for full employment; guaranteeing life's essentials such as

health care, housing, and education; and safeguarding a healthy environment. Bhutan accomplishes these aims through a mixed market economy with substantial state involvement. Looking at the most widely recognized measures of social and economic development in the areas to which Bhutan and many other countries aspire reveals impressive improvement in many important dimensions of development. The World Bank Survey of Bhutan concludes, "The Kingdom of Bhutan is considered a development success story with decreasing poverty and improvements in human development indicators" (World Bank Group 2016).

Pursuing its distinctive course of development was not just a policy preference; it was believed to be essential to the country's very existence, that is, a key component of national security policy. Journalist and government official, Dasho Kinley Dorji, underscored the importance of GNH to Bhutan's survival: "We will never be a major economic or military force so we decided our strength must lie in our identity, our cultural identity. We must be different from other billions of people in the region or we will be swallowed up" (Dorji 2010 at pp. 103–104). Bhutan's constitution provides, and its political elite repeatedly states, that Bhutan's sovereignty and its national survival depend on the preservation of its unique identity. The Fourth King reminded his citizens "Nor must we ever lose sight of the fact that our nation is the last standing independent Mahāyāna Buddhist kingdom in the world. We are the sole surviving custodians of a social and cultural system that extended beyond the Eastern Himalayas to embrace a large part of Eastern and South East Asia. The world has been impoverished by the loss of the social and cultural system which is today unique to Bhutan and where it both survives and flourishes" (Upreti 2016 at p. 6).[20]

It is important not to view Bhutan's emphasis on culture through Western eyes. Culture is not a secondary foreign policy issue for Bhutan, it is its raison d'etre, essential to its very existence and one of the foremost articles in the constitution. The Fourth King was clear on the existential importance of culture for the country: "The only factor we can fall back on, the only factor which can strengthen Bhutan's sovereignty and our different identity is the unique culture we have. I have always stressed the great importance of developing our tradition because it has everything to do with strengthening our security and sovereignty in determining the future survival of Bhutanese people and our religion" (Brunet et al. 2009 at p. 244). The king's reference to "our religion" is telling because

although Bhutan has a rich culture in the form of extended family relations, volunteerism, indigenous arts, and medicine, Buddhism and culture are virtually isomorphic in Bhutan (Mancall 2004). Historian Karma Phuntsho calls Buddhism in Bhutan a "civil religion" that informs the country's worldview, lifestyle, social behavior, economic practices, and political thinking (Phuntsho 2013).

GNH also shaped other facets of Bhutan's foreign policy. This influence is evidenced in Bhutan's approach to accepting development assistance only if it does not distort its values. Bhutan also chose to shelve its accession to the World Trade Organization in 2009 after the protracted debate when it concluded that membership would threaten Bhutan's GNH approach to development and drown the country's identity in a wave of globalization. A third example is Bhutan's restrictive tourism policy, styled as "High Value, Low Impact," again to balance economic growth with cultural and environmental protection (Brunet et al. 2009).

The Fourth King also sought to strengthen Bhutan's independence by continuing to diversify its sources of foreign support and developing indigenous economic capabilities, most particularly in hydropower. Bhutan would come to play an active role in SAARC, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and in U.N. organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). He also built on the work of the Third King in gaining international recognition for Bhutan's sovereignty, most importantly with China who recognized Bhutan's independence for the first time in a 1998 agreement on maintaining peace in the border areas between the two countries,[21] and with India, who, as noted, renegotiated its treaty of friendship with Bhutan in 2007 without any suggestion of influence over Bhutan's foreign policy as contained in the 1949 predecessor. Today, Bhutan is a member of more than 150 international organizations and has established diplomatic relations with more than 50 countries.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the Fourth King began a controversial initiative that emphasized the need for cultural continuity as a source of Bhutan's national security, noting that prosperity, modernization, and development will not bring satisfaction, if it comes as the cost of a loss of tradition, culture, or religion (Tobgye 2012). Bhutan, a latecomer to development, had seen numerous other nations shed their traditional culture and values, or in the case of the Buddhist kingdom of Sikkim, lose its sovereign independence, on the road to modernization. The government's concern for cultural preservation led to the passage of

revised, more restrictive citizenship laws and laws promoting the dominant *Drukpa* language and culture,[22] thus creating frictions with Bhutan's large ethnic minority Nepali population, many of whom are Hindu, speak Nepali, and had immigrated to Bhutan for work during the 1950s and 1960s. The tension between the rights of economic migrants on the one hand and the government's effort to preserve Bhutan's delicate ethno-demographic balance through its citizenship laws and cultural promotion policies on the other, erupted in violence beginning with an uprising against the government by ethic Nepali Bhutanese in the south of the country in 1990, governmental suppression of the uprising, and the eventual departure of roughly 100,000 ethnic Nepali from Bhutan to Nepal and India and then on to host countries in the West when Bhutan and Nepal failed to negotiate a settlement agreement. This ethnic strife and the subsequent dispute over refugee settlement with Nepal were the most significant exception to Bhutan's otherwise tolerant domestic policies and its friendly relations with neighboring states during the modern period (Hutt 2003; Long 2019).

Conclusion

Bhutan's foreign policy is, in many ways, a product of its small size and precarious location within the international system. These are "givens" for Bhutan. Nonetheless, Bhutanese foreign policy also reflects elements of a distinctive "Buddhist statecraft." The Buddhist dimensions of Bhutanese statecraft are reflected in its efforts at internal consolidation, external security, and modernization through its GNH-led development policies and Bhutan's problematic cultural unity initiatives. Bhutan's GNH development strategy is a direct reflection of its longstanding Buddhist beliefs. Second, Bhutan's efforts to gradually expand its international relations in a peaceful, multilateral, and conflict-avoidant approach to diplomacy is consistent with its Buddhist values of nonviolence. Bhutan's decision to eschew great power politics and ideological debates in establishing its foreign aid partners and its foreign embassies are two key examples of its cautious, conciliatory, and pragmatic approach to diplomacy. Likewise, its good neighbor policies and its efforts to build regional links that are mutually beneficial and respectful are consistent with idealized notions of Buddhist statecraft.

Most would conclude that for a small country Bhutan has been successful in its foreign policy during the modern era. It has navigated a

course from isolation to engagement and defined an independent identity among much larger states in its region. Can this small, exceptional state continue to modernize without losing its unique culture and Buddhist values in the face of the pressures of globalization? The answer remains to be seen (Long 2017). But for now, Bhutan provides us with a modern prototype of a Buddhist approach to international relations.

Notes

1. Article 4 of Bhutan's constitution provides: "The State shall endeavor to preserve, protect, and promote the cultural heritage of the country, including . . . language, literature, visual arts, and religion to enrich society . . ." This emphasis on culture traces its roots to the consolidation of the Bhutanese state by Ngawang Namgyal in the seventeenth century. To create a distinct Bhutanese identity, he established the *driglam namzha* (national values and traditions) that provided guidelines for architecture, festivals, and public dress and behavior.
2. The phrase was first used in the eighteenth century to refer to Nepal's plight, but has since been applied with equal accuracy to Bhutan.
3. Bhutan did suffer a defeat at the hands of the British in the Duar War (1864–1865) and the loss of a piece of its southern territory in the Treaty of Sinchula.
4. See Phuntsho (2013) for a comprehensive history of Bhutan.
5. Bhutan also shares with India a long history of anticolonial struggle against Great Britain and ties of religion that date to 672 AD when the Indian holy man Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche, brought the Buddhist religion to Bhutan for the first time.
6. The monarchy is relatively new to Bhutan. From the seventeenth to the twentieth century, Bhutan existed as a collection of feudal principalities governed by a bifurcated system of national government with both a spiritual and temporal leader. The instability of this system led the country to elect the first monarch in 1907 via popular consensus, as Buddha had recommended in his political writings.
7. Great Britain did not insist on the creation of a regency in Bhutan as it had in Sikkim and Nepal.
8. In 1978, Bhutan formally expressed its concern over the interpretation of Article 2 of the treaty, which provided Bhutan would seek India's advice in foreign affairs. In a circulated statement by the Bhutanese government, Bhutan emphasized the nonbinding nature of Article 2: "in regard to its external relations, it would be entirely up to the Royal Government of Bhutan to decide whether to accept such advice or not. It is not correct to say that Bhutan's future still depends on Indian goodwill

and friendship" (Kharat 2007 at p. 277). In 2007, the 1949 Bhutan–India Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was formally renegotiated. The language of Article II of the 1949 Treaty, which had provided that Bhutan would be guided by India in its foreign affairs was changed to read: "the government of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the government of the Republic of India shall cooperate closely with each other on issues related to their national interest. Neither government shall allow use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other" (Chandra 2017). Bhutan also demonstrated its independence in foreign affairs by launching boundary talks with China in 1984 on its own accord.

9. Bhutan has a 470-kilometer border with China in its Tibetan region. For more on the border dispute see Bhardwaj 2016.

10. Military cooperation in the form of training missions began in 1961 when India introduced the Indian Military Training Team in Bhutan to help with border security vis-à-vis a Chinese threat (Kharat and Bhutia 2019).

11. At its narrowest point the Siliguri Corridor is 25 km in width and contains all the major train and road lines between India's northeast and the rest of the country.

12. In 1971–1972, Bhutan also established diplomatic relations with its neighbor, Bangladesh, without seeking approval from India.

13. Bhutan was also an early and active member of the Non-Aligned Movement.

14. Bhutan adopted a democratic constitution in 2008. Since that time, the legal and institutional basis for democracy has taken root in Bhutan. Most state institutions associated with democratic governance are performing well, especially the Parliament, judiciary, and independent constitutional agencies. Non-state actors such as the press, civil society organizations, and parties, which are also critical to democracy, are at an early stage of development and may need to increase their capacities to play a significant role in Bhutan in coming years. For a discussion of Bhutan's unique transition to democracy see Turner, Chuki and Tshering 2011; Long 2019.

15. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness policy seeks progress in nine domains of human life. These domains are: psychological well-being (including spirituality), health, time use, education, cultural diversity and resilience, community vitality, good governance, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards (Ura et al. 2015 at pp. 10–11).

16. For simplicity more than accuracy, Buddhist traditions often have been fitted to a tripartite taxonomy of Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna forms. In general, Theravāda Buddhism is found in much of Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka; Mahāyāna Buddhism throughout East and Central Asia (China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Bhutan, Tibet, and Taiwan); and

Vajrayāna (sometimes called "Tantric") Buddhism is practiced primarily in North Asia in countries such as Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia, although tantric practices can be found in most Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism. Although all forms of Buddhism share a common set of core teachings, in terms of philosophy and practice, the Theravāda (Sanskrit for "teaching of the elders") tradition closely follows the *sūtra* teachings of the historical Buddha with the goal of achieving personal liberation from suffering by abandoning all delusions. The Mahāyāna (Sanskrit for the "Great Vehicle") tradition is primarily focused on the spiritual path to "great enlightenment." That is, the Mahāyāna goal is to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all living beings by completely abandoning all delusions and their imprints and coming to understand the non-dual nature of all reality. Mahāyānists strive to exceed the goal of personal liberation by making a compassionate commitment to seek enlightenment for the liberation of all sentient beings. The means for pursuing this end is the path of the *bodhisattvas*, those with a compassionate heart. The Vajrayāna (Sanskrit for powerful and indestructible—like a lightning bolt or a diamond) tradition is sometimes classified as a part of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but some scholars consider it a different branch altogether. In general terms, the aspiration of Vajrayāna practice is to train the mind by bringing the future result (Buddhahood) into the present path by transcending ordinary appearances and conceptions that keep human beings in suffering. Through visualizing their body, environment, enjoyments, and deeds as those of a Buddha, Vajrayāna practitioners attempt to expedite their progress toward actual Buddhahood.

17. Contemporary social science, particularly psychology and economics, have turned their attention to empirically studying the pursuit of happiness by individuals and nations and identifying the correlates of happiness. This literature finds that, regarding individual happiness, the evidence does not support the assumption that more material welfare (money) necessarily brings ever greater happiness (Diener and Seligman 2004). Rather, surveys of subjects reveal that, over time, increases in income beyond the level of satisfaction of basic needs did not produce significant differences in felt well-being. Extra income matters most when we do not have a lot of it, but the positive impact wears off once one reaches a basic level of material comfort. There are many explanations as to why this is so. Instead the correlates of personal happiness most often include: material sufficiency; friends; marriage and family togetherness; good health; age (which has a U-shaped relationship with happiness, with the low point in the late forties); spirituality and religion; a sense of agency; altruistic activities; social harmony; and a government perceived as stable, fair, and efficacious (Layard 2005). As for societies, the data reveals, paradoxically, that within

a given country huge increases in overall material welfare over time have not led to corresponding increases in happiness (Easterlin 1974, 1995; Diener et al. 1995; Inglehart 1990).

18. Understanding, purifying, and controlling the mind requires three related practices: (1) developing moral maturity through mindfulness of one's ethical responsibilities; (2) reducing and eventually eliminating negative emotions of hatred, greed, and ignorance, and replacing them with positive emotions of equanimity, compassion, and generosity that allow for contentment and peace of mind; and (3) developing "wisdom," which, as discussed in Chapter Two, is an understanding of how ourselves and all things truly exist, that is, realizing the radical interdependence of our reality. By developing compassion and wisdom, one can abandon self-grasping and self-cherishing (the pervasive delusions that are the root cause of all unhappiness), liberate oneself from suffering and enjoy an inexhaustible source of happiness that comes, naturally, from within, according to Buddhism.

19. Most observers neglect the deeper meaning of Bhutan's national goal because they apply Western understandings of happiness to their analysis of GNH. As Ross McDonald noted, it is "very easy to miss the deeper [meaning] implied by GNH thinking and to completely miss the fact that we missed this" (McDonald 2010 at p. 616).

20. Bhutan's GNH alternative development model is a holistic approach to well-being rooted in Buddhist values. The assertion of GNH became Bhutan's national desideratum and, in practice, Bhutan is the only country in the world to completely adopt an alternative form of measuring economic performance from that of expanding GNP. Michael Rowbotham asserts that substituting a single word "happiness" for the word "product" "injects humanity, in all its rich complexity, into economics" (Rowbotham 2013 at p. 175). The change in phraseology is said to have put people, not output, at the center of development (Bracho 2013), and it made interiority (happiness), not external conditions, the starting point for assessing development (Hargens 2002).

21. As part of its growing independence in foreign affairs, Bhutan began direct talks with the PRC over their border disputes in 1984. Previously, India had led talks on Bhutan's behalf. Bhutan–PRC talks have continued annually over three different disputed areas, with yet, no final solution, but a commitment signed in 1998 to settle the dispute peacefully in accordance with the sovereignty of both nations.

22. Bhutan has four major ethnic groupings: (1) in the west of the country are the *Ngalong* or *Ngalop*; (2) in the center of the country are various indigenous tribes; (3) in the east are the *Sharchops*; and (4) in the south of the country are ethnic Nepalis known as the *Lhotsampa* (people of the south). These first three groups are collectively known as the *Drukpas*.

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A Buddhist Alternative

Abstract This chapter concludes with a summary of essential features of a Buddhist approach to thinking about the world, our role in it, and the type of political environments conducive to our higher nature. It notes that Buddhism has historically shaped a wide variety of societies in Asia and is adaptable to the Western world and to contemporary international challenges. Further, rather than being unscientific or otherworldly, Buddhist concepts are remarkably consistent with emerging findings in the natural and biological sciences.

Keywords Buddhist policy · Neuroplasticity · Quantum · Buddhism and science

Introduction

A Buddhist approach to IR provides an authentic and useful basis for comparison with Western models because of its distinct philosophical foundations: its ontology of radical interdependence, its ethics of responsibility for "others," and its assertion of the fundamental altruistic quality of a fully realized human nature. This approach, to use an overused term, is "revolutionary" in the sense that it challenges the deepest assumptions of mainstream Western social theory. Unlike most revolutions, this one is realized not on the streets so much as within our own minds; necessitating

a fundamental reorientation in our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and actions, including ultimately, political actions at the national and international level.

This short work outlines the political, economic, and international prescriptions that flow from this different mindset and that, in turn, support the mental and material development of individuals in reaching their fuller potential. Further, it provides two examples of attempts to put these ideas into practice: one historical and one contemporary.

Implications for Today's Challenges

A Buddhist social theory necessarily begins with the doctrine of radical interdependence, which underscores an individual's responsibilities for others, not just the promotion of individual choice and self-interest. Buddha's social formula gives greater emphasis to the duty of care we owe each other and our natural and social environments. This concern is reflected at a minimum in the principles of non-harm, nonaggression, and equality and ideally grows into an ethic of universal compassion. At a national policy level, this political orientation might translate into the promotion of democracy with an equal emphasis on individual freedoms and social and environmental responsibility, for example. Buddhist politics counsels that political systems must consciously weigh the balance between the independence and interdependence of individuals in society, and Buddhism's assertion of radical interdependence tells us our current fetish of radical individualism does not reflect reality. Politics, in Buddhism, is not divorced from ethics and it recommends an emphasis on civic virtues. Politics should reflect society's aspirational values, especially the value of equality in terms of political access and avenues for participation and equality of justice under law. Beyond impartiality, politics and policy must also reflect ethical principles such as honesty and transparency, generosity, non-harm, forbearance, empathy, and a willingness to compromise. National economic policies in turn should focus on reducing the suffering of poverty by providing a strong social safety net and encouraging full employment. Economic policy must also protect workers and the environment from exploitation.

At the international level, a Buddhist approach might include initiatives that encourage a deeper recognition of our common humanity and equality over particularism and nationalism. To illustrate a Buddhist approach to one contemporary global challenge, the world might learn

from humble Bhutan's example in addressing the issue of environmentally sustainable economic growth. Because of its Buddhist conviction that all reality is interdependent and that our ethical responsibilities apply not just to other individuals but to "all sentient beings" in this and future lives, Bhutan has adopted strict environmental policies that govern its economic development despite its status as low-income country. This commitment is embodied in Bhutan's Constitution, the first in the world to require environmental sustainability and one that mandates that 60 percent or more of all land remain forested in perpetuity (*Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan*, Art. 5.3). In practice, Bhutan keeps 70 percent of its land in its pristine state and is a carbon negative country while maintaining an enviable growth rate. Notably, as discussed in Chapter 3, sustainability is an integral and natural dimension of Buddhist economics through its emphasis on contentment, moderation, concern for others (even future generations), and the importance of living in harmony with nature. This approach differs from the prevailing liberal economic approach where notions of sustainability are awkwardly bolted onto, and in tension with, a maximization model. In her recent work on Buddhist economics, Clair Brown explains that Buddhist economics requires "strong sustainability" whereas free market economics pursues "weak sustainability" (Brown 2017). The former connotes that physical limits on natural capital exist and critical ecosystems must be preserved; and the later means that humans can freely trade off different inputs into the production process (Brown 2017 at pp. 64–65).

Buddhism's instrumental view of politics and its basic pragmatism and flexibility make it amendable to many different and culturally appropriate ways for putting its basic social principles into practice. In the East, Buddhism has shaped societies as diverse as India and China, and it is reasonable to assume that its social teachings can be integrated into Western social theory and practice too.

In a Buddhist perspective, these "obligations" to care for others broadly, both within and across societies, are not an imposition on, or at odds with individual freedom or particularistic identities, but an opportunity for individuals to find happiness and fulfillment that transcend the pursuit of personal desires or in-group advantage and gain *real* freedom from excessive self or national concern. Moreover, this alternative view of social reality is, for Buddhists, consistent with how all things actually exist (interdependently) and consistent with our abiding human nature,

which is, at its core, altruistic. From a Buddhist perspective, the separation, insecurity, and fear that constitutes the starting point of Western social thinking, is based in ignorance, not truth. Because this deluded way of looking at ourselves and the world is pervasive, however, we must work the problem, "free our minds" as it were. Buddhist's call this exertion on behalf of ourselves and others the "perfection of effort." With effort, everything comes.

Lest we think these ideas are mere fantasy, we can consider past and present efforts to put these ideas into practice, however imperfectly, in the ancient empire of Aśoka and in modern Bhutan. These examples are not presented as earthly Shangri-las, but they each reflect an effort to pursue policies of nonviolence, nonbelligerence, tolerance, equality, generosity, good governance in supporting individuals' holistic development, social responsibility, mutual benefit, and rule of law.

Although a Buddhist perspective is different from those that predominate in the West, it is not, fundamentally, an alien one. Buddhism, while ancient and "oriental" in its origins, at its core makes universalistic, not particularistic, assertions—suffering, for example, is a human condition as is the potential for liberation. And, as noted earlier in the work, many Buddhist ideas accord with those of the Western Enlightenment and with the principles of modern welfare state democracies, liberal internationalism, international society, and cosmopolitan ethics. Having introduced this Eastern model to Western IR, and aware of their many common interests, this author encourages those concerned with a politics of human liberation to continue the dialogue.

BUDDHISM AND SCIENCE?[1]

This work concludes by considering a profound doubt that surrounds a Buddhist prescription for the social world: is Buddhism, as a spiritual tradition, "unscientific"? Specifically, the concern centers on two key principles of Buddhism that are the foundation of its social theory articulated in Chapter 2: first, the notion of the radical interdependence of reality and, second, the assertion of an ultimately altruistic and perfectible human nature. Although appealing ideas, even scholars sympathetic to integrating Eastern philosophy with international relations, such as Acharya, worry that these concepts might appear unrealistic, otherworldly, spiritual aspirations and therefore outside of the scientific study of international relations.

To understand why Buddhist assertions might be viewed as outside the scientific mainstream requires an appreciation for the relationship of the natural sciences to Western social theory (including mainstream IR theory) historically. Mainstream international relations theory, like most Western political theory, paralleled and conformed with the Enlightenment's classical scientific tenets regarding the physical world: material realism, objectivism, and localized physical causation. Social thinkers intuitively adopted these ontological and empirical assumptions and offered theories of human nature and social possibilities based on them. The link between the social sciences and the natural sciences was primarily metaphysical, epistemic, and methodological; that is, social theorists adopted the Cartesian separation of subject from object, self from other, and mind from matter; the positivist assumption of the possibility of discovering law-like generalizations about social behavior, much like scientists seeking to establish facts about the natural world; and the preference for third-party, replicable empiricism methodologically. The predominant political and economic conclusion flowing from a classical scientific foundation is that insecurity and conflict naturally arise in groups of inherently real, independent, and self-interested actors. Thus, the benefits of society are unlikely without a fear-based social contract, a "Smithian" economic system that maximizes the benefits possible from humans' propensity for incessant competition, and by extension, the pursuit of a balance of power among self-interested states acting in an anarchic environment. Buddhist social theory, based on the ontology of radical interdependence, refutes this approach.

The Buddhist assertion that human nature is fundamentally altruistic and perfectible through mind training also contradicts traditional scientific notions in biology and physiology. According to the historically dominant scientific view, individuals have been hardwired over thousands of millennia to be self-interested, competitive, even aggressive. Social institutions can, at best, modulate and channel these propensities. For classical material science, the notion of molding one's mind through right view (intention), mindfulness (attentiveness), concentration, and meditation to reorient our thoughts, feelings, and actions in a more altruistic and cooperative direction and claiming that our reality is impermanent and wholly interdependent as Buddhism does, are untenable assertions. Buddhism, in contrast to materialist science, asserts a causal power for a nonphysical mind and it treats material realism only as functional appearance, not ultimate truth.

During the past century, however, Western science itself has begun to question the precepts of the dominant physical and physiological paradigm and, in so doing, encouraged those of us in social disciplines to reconsider our assumptions about reality, human nature, and the possibilities for human behavior and social organization. Emerging findings in physical and life sciences, much like Buddhism, suggest that reality may be much more interdependent than we previously appreciated and that our human nature and our ability to shape our thoughts and emotions in more positive directions are greater than once realized.

To appreciate this convergence between Buddhist philosophy and contemporary Western physical and life sciences requires a summary of recent findings in quantum physics and neuroscience, which suggest that our reality is interdependent and indeterminate and that the brain regenerates and reprograms itself throughout life in response to environmental challenges and the mental force of intention and attention. These recent scientific discoveries may be pointing to a different scientific picture of reality and human nature, one that is consistent with Buddhist philosophy. Recent scientific investigations, while speaking an entirely different language than Buddhism, may be saying much the same thing about the nature of our reality and our mental capacity. The quantum revolution in the physical world and discoveries in the life sciences that address directly the malleability of the structure and function of the brain (the seat of human nature for modern science) are challenging the ontological and epistemological foundations of materialism, objectivism, and atomism and, by extension, undermining the presumed unchangeable self-interested behavior that flows from these classical science foundations.

New findings in contemporary neuroscience and physical science suggest that human nature may be more variable and flexible and more susceptible to our mental training than once imagined. From this perspective, although we inherit certain morphology and traits, these traits, and even the morphology, may be more malleable than we thought. We may be able to change our thoughts, emotions, and the resulting behavior through repeated *mental* effort. These ideas are relatively new, partial, and highly contested, but worth our consideration. To better appreciate these new scientific discoveries and how they are comparable to Buddhist philosophy, below I provide a very brief outline of quantum science and neuroplasticity.

The Quantum Revolution

A formal discussion of quantum hypotheses (they are numerous, varied, and vigorously debated) is outside the purview of this book and well beyond the author's capabilities. The basic findings of quantum physics and a consideration of their possible behavioral and ethical implications are reachable and relevant to this discussion, however.

Quantum theory challenges the ontological and epistemological foundations of the classical scientific worldview that formed the implicit philosophical foundation for modern Western political thought, including mainstream IR. Recall that under the classical view, reality consists of material objects forever separated from the immaterial mind, and objects exist independently of the subjects that observe them. Science concerns itself with discovering the cause and effect of natural laws that operate in the physical world. Causation is mechanical, determinable, and localized. The mind, therefore, as a nonphysical entity, is no longer relevant or real from a scientific perspective.

Quantum physics describes a very different world. When scientists analyzed atomic and subatomic particles, the ultimate building blocks of the material world, they discovered that they do not conform to classical suppositions. In the subatomic world, particles have no definite position or values, no fixed or material properties, until they are measured. Reality does not exist "out there" independent of human choice and our observation of it. Instead, scientists found that subatomic particles exist—or can best be represented as existing—as an immaterial wave of potential realities (probabilities) that only become fixed with material properties when the subject observes them (the so-called collapse of the wave function or the quantum leap). Before the observation, the quantum system has a range of possibilities; afterward it has a single actuality.

This finding (upheld in countless experiments), that there is no fixed reality until an observer asks a specific question of nature and observes the answer nature provides, overturns the separation of subject from object and mind from matter that have been the essence of the classical material world-view since Francis Bacon. In quantum dynamics, observer and observed are now understood as part of one system. They only emerge as independent entities through the process of observation and measurement. There are no objects independent of our conceptual designations. Likewise, epistemology is changed by the quantum revolution. Rather than certainty waiting to be discovered, the physical world is uncertain

(existing as probabilities) and indeterminate. Physics then is about determining what is known or knowable, not about what "is." There is no one true and complete description of the way the world is. Physical theory thus underwent a tectonic shift, from a theory about physical reality to a theory about our knowledge, from ontology to epistemology. Science is what we know, and what we know is only what our observations tell us. As Werner Heisenberg phrased it, "What we observe is not nature itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning" (Heisenberg 1962 at p. 58).

Classical notions of mechanical, localized causation are also altered by quantum science. Locality means that physical reality in one place cannot be affected instantaneously by an action in some faraway place. That is, separation implies physical independence absent a demonstrable physical and temporal link (contact) between objects. Quantum theory violates locality, at least in certain circumstances. Quantum "nonlocality" means that wave functions have effects on other wave functions in the absence of any apparent, material, localized causal connection. Particles are "entangled." Scientists discovered that when one wave function changes as the result of measurement, the appropriate description of the other wave function under examination instantaneously changes as well, "and that 'other' can be as far away as one would like, from the other side of the laboratory to the other side of the galaxy" (Schwartz and Begley 2002 at p. 347). Particles are not atomistic and do not behave as distinct objects, but operate as parts of a seamlessly interconnected whole that absorbs their individual identities (Albert 1992). Quantum science implies a radical interdependence among particles and a universe that is more closely enmeshed than the classical worldview. In this realm, nothing can be defined except in relation to another thing.

The possible ontological implications of quantum physics are truly revolutionary. First, subject and object are reconnected in creating our reality. Second, since everything is interdependent, nothing can be self-defining and exist inherently. Finally, in the quantum universe, causation ultimately is holistic, not mechanistic.

What then of the world as we think it exists, as tangible objects independent of our minds and, absent a local link, independent of each other? Quantum physics explains that, when one moves from the molecular level to larger objects, quantum states normally "decohere" and appear to us as classical matter, even though, ultimately, they do not exist this way. Whenever particles interact in their environment, in a lab or in nature, they are

in effect measuring each other, inducing decoherence (they are no longer able to remain "entangled"). This decoherence explains why, in everyday life, we see only material objects, not wave functions, and these objects appear to conform to classical mechanics. Classical science can still study observables, and classical physical theories explain more-or-less accurately larger observed phenomena.

Quantum ontology forces us to distinguish between the way things *appear* and the way things *exist*, between working "truth" and reality, or, in Buddhist terms, between conventional and ultimate truth. Quantum discoveries suggest that indeterminacy is the only absolute truth, that is, everything lacks an inherent, fixed existence, or, to phrase it another way, all things are interdependent. The usefulness of classical physics for interpreting the action of objects larger than atomic or subatomic particles should not be confused with the *ultimate* nature of these objects. The quantum view of matter and mind as dependent on each other refutes metaphysical realism and is generally more consistent with the Buddhist notion of the "two truths"—conventional and ultimate—discussed in Chapter 2.

Finally, quantum metaphysics also avoids the two extremes of materialism (all is matter) and idealism (all is mind). In quantum metaphysics, neither mind nor matter take precedence as inherently real; together they give objects a defined nature. Object and subject are, to use an earlier Buddhist term, "dependent co-arising" (*pratitya-samutpada*).

A basic tenet of classical science is reductionism: larger objects can be reduced to smaller ones in determining fundamental physical principles. Further, because physics is the science that explores the elemental constituents of reality, it is foundational to other sciences and, implicitly, social depictions of reality as well. Ironically, in pursuing reductionism to its limits, physicists discovered a world fundamentally different from classical representations, and their findings challenge other scientific fields, and I would argue even social scientific disciplines, to accommodate this new conception of reality.

Reconsidering Brain, Mind, and Human "Nature"

In addition to revolutionary changes in the physical sciences, the life sciences too have made remarkable new discoveries that challenge our thinking about human nature as irreversibly self-interested and expand the possibilities for considering our cooperative potential and corresponding

social arrangements. Until relatively recently, the prevailing view in neuro-science was that the brain contained all its neurons at birth, and the number and circuitry of these neurons were set within the first few years of life. Scientists believed that the only lifelong brain changes were minor alterations in synaptic (interneuronal) connections and accelerating cell death with aging. Social scientists in the Western tradition assumed that this relatively fixed brain was, by nature, first and always primarily self-interested and self-serving.

In the 1990s, however, neuroscientists discovered that the brain continues to generate new neurons throughout life (neurogenesis) and that new and existing neurons undergo structural and functional changes in their circuitry in response to their environments, by training and experience (neuroplasticity). Contrary to what was once believed, the brain is highly dynamic (Eriksson et al. 1998). When referring to changes in the brain, it is important to distinguish between gross morphology and cellular structure and function. The overall structure and pattern of brain development is under genetic control and does not change markedly. But our 35,000 genes are not up to the job of prescribing the wiring for the brain's 100 trillion or more synapses. These connections are shaped by our ongoing experiences. It is at this cellular level that the brain is remarkably plastic.

Neuroplasticity refers to altering connections in the brain, the strengthening, withering, or rerouting of synaptic connections. Neuroplasticity is more than mere learning or storing a memory. The brain is far more flexible than that. It can make wholesale topographical reorganizations throughout life (Elbert et al. 1995). For example, experiments demonstrate that some brain areas that were thought to be "hardwired" for one function can in response to injury and adaptive effort, take on a totally different function, what scientists call cross-modal functional plasticity. Altering connections in the brain in a way that strengthens the efficacy of a neuronal circuit over the long term is the essence of neuroplasticity.

How does the brain accomplish these adaptive feats? Various new technologies are giving us a glimpse of this process. These new technologies are illuminating the neural correlates for specific adaptations wrought through repeated experiences. These technologies can also show us the brain areas and patterns of electrochemical activation associated with a mental process. In discovering and observing the link between brain circuitry and mental states, some scientists are also suggesting that *the causal connection between brain and mind works in both direction*s

(Lutz et al. 2004). Specifically, they offer intriguing new evidence to suggest that the processes of brain wiring and rewiring may be shaped by mental (nonphysical) events. This work reveals that it is not just experience that molds the brain. Rather, changes in brain circuitry are generated only when behavior is specifically attended to. Attention (mindfulness), is required for use-dependent brain changes. In fact, imagined physical movements, if repeated with concentration, can produce the same synaptic changes as actual repetitive body movements (Schwartz and Begley 2002; Slotnick 2004). Similarly, mental imagery correlates with the activation of the same brain areas as those associated with the actual perception of the imagined object. In short, mental force appears to express itself through the brain, but it is not reducible to the brain.

Some neuroscientists began looking at the brain activity ("brain state") and cognitive and neural characteristics ("brain traits") of meditators to better understand the immediate and long-term effects of focused awareness. These studies produced preliminary evidence for the possibility that mental training may alter brain activity, shape the physical brain, and affect human behavior. Early work by Richard Davidson, Antoine Lutz, and others found that sustained thoughts activated certain neuronal pathways in the brain associated with the regulation of positive affect (like compassion), reduced negative thoughts and feelings such as anxiety and depression, and subdued self-referential thoughts (See Davidson et al. 2003; Pollard 2003; Lutz et al. 2004). These early studies lent support to the notion that a willful refocusing of mental awareness could bring about important changes in brain activity and structure (Brefczynski-Lewis et al. 2007; Lazar et al. 2005).

These initial investigations have led to hundreds of recent studies on the impact of various forms of mindfulness and meditation on brain functioning and morphology. Two "metastudies" (studies of studies) reviewed these experiments looking for methodological reliable and comparable results. One of these metastudies concluded "that meditation appears to be reliably associated with altered anatomical structure in several brain regions" (Fox et al. 2014 at p. 69). The brains of meditators were altered in eight brain regions including areas related to meta awareness (our ability to watch our own minds), body awareness, memory consolidation and reconsolidation, self and emotional regulation, and infra and interhemispheric communication (Fox et al. 2014; see also Afonso et al. 2020). The second metastudy concluded that meditation produces positive effects on cognitive and emotional processes (Sedlmeier et al. 2012).

Several individual studies raise intriguing possibilities. For example, one study found that meditators, unlike control subjects, had reduced activity in "self-referential processing," i.e., mind wandering, which appears to be our default mechanism and is often correlated with unhappiness (Brewer et al. 2011). Another study found that meditation increased compassionate responses to suffering, even in the face of social pressures to avoid so doing (Condon et al. 2013).

As noted, these changes in brain function and form do not occur without sustained and repeated effort, however. Absent focused attention, the brain will produce predictable patterns of brain activity, that is, our default mode of thinking. Through choice and willful attention, however, it appears that an alternative synaptic path may be activated and perpetuated. The idea that immaterial forces such as intention and attention could shape the brain's function and form runs counter to classical materialist science. Working in the materialist tradition, most scientists, including almost all neuroscientists, have assumed that mental processes are inefficacious byproducts of purely physical brain processes. To the extent that one can recognize the mind at all, brain to mind is a one-way street. All our thoughts and actions are reducible to impersonal, microscopic, physical processes. Nothing that is nonphysical, such as the mind, consciousness, or will, can even exist in the sense of being a measurable, real entity much less shape physical outcomes.

This classical approach has been unable to explain how brain activity gives rise to consciousness (subjectively felt mental states), however, and what role consciousness might play in the brain's workings. Why, if exclusively local physical processes in the brain control us, do we possess a stream of conscious thoughts capable of understanding large-scale phenomena? After 350 years of classical material science and more than half a century of neuroscience, materialist approaches have done a good job of linking structure and function in the brain, but have made no progress in explaining consciousness, something we all experience most all the time. In the materialist paradigm, accounting for consciousness is the "hard problem," and because consciousness cannot be effectively explained by reference to material forces, for most scientists in the classical material tradition, consciousness either is not a legitimate area of inquiry or, if it is, they have promised, since the eighteenth century, that a materialist answer to the hard problem of consciousness is only a matter of time (Araujo 2012).

The idea that the process of brain wiring and rewiring is shaped by immaterial mental events may confound classical materialist science (which either denies mind or separates mind from matter), but it is not inconsistent with quantum science (which sees mind and matter as inextricably entwined). Recall that in the quantum world, the subject determines which of many possible realities becomes actualized through its intention and attention. Quantum theory reunites consciousness with the causal structure of nature, joining subjective experience and objective outcomes. Thus, quantum theory creates a "causal opening for the mind," a point of entry by which mind could alter the functioning and shape the physical structure of the brain.

Is there evidence for the existence of a "quantum brain" or "quantum consciousness?" At this point we do not know, and it remains to be seen where, if anywhere, there exists a demonstrable locus for quantum effects in the brain. Because the environment for sustained quantum effects to operate in the brain has not been sufficiently established, traditional neuroscience argues that brain functions can, indeed must, be understood as the interactions of neurons operating under classical physical principles. Still, we know that quantum physics operates sub-atomically everywhere, and we know that mechanical explanations of neuronal function cannot account for the processing speed of the human brain. Furthermore, there is evidence that sustained thought alters brain states and traits; we just do not know how or precisely where this occurs. Quantum theory raises the following question to material neuroscience: How can the mind and consciousness be reduced to the function of atoms within the brain if we know that ultimately these atoms have no fixed or non-probabilistic existence outside of subjective mental events? If atoms derive their properties from interaction with consciousness [in quantum], how can consciousness depend only on those same atoms? (Schwartz and Begley 2002).

In truth, at this moment, both materialism and quantum approaches toward mind are meta-physical assertions awaiting more evidence, an epistemic exercise. Science should be about epistemic pursuits, not meta-physical closure, so let us keep an open mind. Asserting that a nonmaterial force (thought) can shape a material object such as the brain, as quantum theory does, is no more speculative than asserting a material basis for nonmaterial consciousness, which is the prevailing materialist neuroscience view. With the advent of quantum theory, the nature of matter has become as problematic as the nature of mind.

Implications of New Scientific Discoveries for Social Theory

I only report on this ongoing scientific debate to consider its possible implications for the discussion at hand. As noted, some social scientists wonder "Are Buddhist ideas harmonious with science?" The answer, I suggest, is "yes," they are remarkably consistent with the latest findings in the physical and biological sciences, not "otherworldly."

Coming back to the focus of this discussion (and firmer footing for the author), the quantum explanations for brain plasticity and a causal role for mind carry *potentially* important behavioral and moral consequences for social thought and action coming from the world of science (Wendt 2015). If true, they would imply that, although we are endowed with a given brain morphology and basic circuitry, not all aspects of our responses are passively determined by neurobiological mechanisms. Instead, our volitional choices moment to moment to attend to one bit of environmental stimulation over another and to form, through our intention and attention (the driving force of karma, for Buddhists), one thought pattern rather than another, can sculpt our brain and make us who we are.

Cartesian science divorced morality from the material world by separating it from the mind. Physical things just are; they are not right or wrong. Our mind is just brain, and our brain is just an amalgam of determined electrochemical processes. This view of mind as reducible to classical physical forces is inimical to both moral responsibility and personal freedom. But if the mind is not fully controlled by deterministic physical phenomena and can shape thought patterns, emotions, and even physical reality (such as the brain) by the choices it makes and the causal efficacy of will, then mental phenomena are morally responsible. In this view, it is the interplay between the electrical and chemical processes and the role of consciousness that determines both our thoughts and physical correlates in brain circuitry.

What then of human nature and the range of possible and ethical human behavior and social organization in view of the quantum revolution and recent neuroscientific findings? Evidence for the power of the mind would carry profound implications for our understanding of "human nature" and responsible social behavior, too. Some of the consequences for social theory are clear. First, it would that mean whatever we decide is our inherent nature (selfish, altruistic, or some combination thereof), our nature may not be fixed and fully determined and it changes,

in part through the mental decisions (actions) we make throughout life. If this assertion is true, then it may be possible to alter the balance in the mind between selfishness and empathy, between fear and compassion, and between anger and patience through conscious mental effort.

The implications of this proposition for our moral responsibility are truly sobering: ultimately, our brain is as selfish or as altruistic as our mind trains it to be, and our behaviors and actions, including our collective actions are, ultimately, our responsibility. Furthermore, if society, polity, economy, and even international relations in theory and practice should align themselves with our best understanding of physical reality and human nature and potential, then we would need to look anew at our assumptions about human "nature" and the possibilities for our social constructs.

Conclusion

Buddhism presents us with a wholly different set of assumptions about ourselves and our relationship to others and all things. It recommends political and economic institutions and policies that comport with an ultimate ontological truth of radical interdependence and the ethical responsibilities a trainable mind entail. Einstein reminds us: "no problem can be solved by the same consciousness that created it." A Buddhist approach to today's international challenges represents at its deepest level an ancient, yet innovative, way of thinking about our social and natural worlds, our ethical responsibilities, and "ourselves."

Note

1. Portions of this discussion are taken from the author's earlier work, *Tantric State: A Buddhist Approach to Democracy and Development in Bhutan*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

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