HAPPINESS-FREEDOM (Deep Buddhism and Modernity)

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This volume presents advanced buddhist philosophy, its particular relevance for the modern world, and its applications.

Advanced, deep, philosophical, or analytical buddhism – a classical category in buddhist teaching – is a psychological philosophy based on a knowledge of the human mind without equivalent elsewhere – by far. This knowledge consists of a distinction of the various types of elements a person (*pugdala*) consists of; of the analysis of their properties and relations; and, essentially, of the description of the various dynamics of chains of causal influences that develop among these elements. This knowledge is transmitted by direct teaching where one is invited to become aware of the information by introspective spiritual exercizes largely based on various uses of the faculty of attention – this awareness also transforms the person, and this is in fact the intent of these exercizes.

Indeed, if you ask a knowledgeable buddhist (who is always a monk) what buddhism is, you obtain two answers. One is "it is the theory of the mind (*mana*)." But the second is: buddhism is the diminishing of suffering or insatisfaction (*dukkha*), and anyone who manages to deeply and durably diminish his *dukkha* is ipso facto a buddhist, even if he has never heard about the *dharma* (the body of knowledge) or the Buddha (yet, this possibility is seen as highly improbable). Hence, buddhism presents itself as a therapy, and the efficient one. The distant aim is the extinction (*nirvana*, *nibbana* – "no-wind") of suffering and of its conditions – agitation, ignorance (*avidiya*) and illusion (*maya*).

Hence, the central concern of buddhism are the causes of suffering and insatisfaction – buddhism is also the discoverer or inventor of the notion of causality in general. A very important part of these causes rests in the mental dynamics – whose theory is metaphorically described as cycles of "rebirth". The efficient and radical way to undermine the experience of "I suffer" or "I am unsatisfied" is to question the nature of this "I." Serious introspection about this core "self" finds nothing, only void, emptiness, or, if you want, only a dynamic interaction of primitive psychological elements of various kinds. This is the liberation (*moksa*, *moksha*) – in the end the

great liberation (*mahamoksa*) – from the illusion (*maya*) of the self (*atta*, *atma*) (an illusion put in us by society), from ignorance in this respect (*avidiya*), from he grasp of the detrimental and painful mental dynamics, and hence from suffering and insatisfaction. Yet, this progress can be a long process along this way, depending on the capacities of the person.

Practically, the first steps lead to mastering the birth of one's desires, so as to avoid desires that cannot be satisfied. In particular, attachments are advised against, since they entail suffering when you lose the object and fear of losing it when you don't. Some buddhist schools advise to soften all desires, while others advocate consciously cultivating satisfactions you can have without hurting other people. This mastering of one's own desires is a main difference with the conceptions of the modern world, where desires are essentially imposed to people from outside their will, often under an influence of society. Of course, Western philosophies in the Antiquity, from the Hellenistic period, were very much on buddhist lines in this respect, and this is not by chance. Stoicism (and Epicureanism) had this objective, and very elabore mental techniques for reaching it – yet not as developed as those of buddhism. But this was lost, and uncontrolled desires seek satisfaction, notably in economic consuption and activity.

Indeed, the economy became the inflated and domineering dimension of modern society. It is therefore interesting to compare or evaluate the analysis of this activity with buddhist psychological and philosophical knowledge (especially since the core of this knowledge constitutes a distant but deep basis of the outlook of one third of mankind).

Diminishing suffering or insatisfaction is, for buddhism, both what is good and what people want. This is a priori and formally not that different from "maximizing utility," which economics presents both as representing people's desires and the index of the good. In contrast, the means of these objectives are in a sense opposite in these two sciences, and this provides a deep and essential lesson for Western thought. While the economic approach faces these desires in considering the ways of satisfying them, buddhism first considers how to prevent the birth of desires that cannot be sufficiently satisfied. While the economic view considers both social freedom in exchange and the real freedom provided by wealth, buddhism focuses on the mental freedom of willfully moulding one's own desires and on the liberation from suffering and from illusion and ignorance about oneself. These two approaches are thus opposite in outlook but can be complementary in application for an essentially common aim.

In fact, the buddhist "middle way" is the optimal allocation of one's effort between affecting one's desires (consciously but sometimes indirectly) and satisfying them (notably by labour and income). The outcome is the balanced "good life," neither socially impossible ascetism, nor the

addiction to goods and gadgets which characterizes the psychologically ignorant modern ethos with desires let loose.

On social grounds, the buddhist non-violence (*ahimsa*) entails the respect of other people's "negative" or "social" freedom of classical Western liberalism, while the virtue of compassion (*karuna*) leads one to take care of others' needs and real freedom. However, the best thing you can do for your neighbour is to enlighten him about his own psychology, since he only can efficiently control most of the causes of his unsatisfaction, pain, or distress.

More generally, the psychological knowledge and philosophical (and ontological) stance of advanced, analytical buddhism turns out to be precisely what is the most needed for facing the deepest malaise and insatisfactions of the modern world. However, the diffusion of this information and cure is sternly limited by the fact that its traditional and efficient transmission is through durable direct individual interaction. This direct transmission is thought to be necessary for adapting the teaching to the specific needs, capacities, and degree of knowledge of each receiver. Written supports or mass media cannot do that (the millions of pages of buddhist scriptures are mainly *aides-mémoire* for direct teaching, and their actual meaning can be understood only when one knows the right meaning of the terms used and of the order of presentation). A main way of begining to use this corpus with sufficient effects may therefore be the use of its theoretical part by the Western human sciences (psychologgy and the social sciences).

This volume develops these points and a number of related ones.

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