

UNIVERSALLY VALID ETHICAL NORMS OF BUDDHISM APPLICABLE TO GLOBAL EDUCATION IN ETHICS

by Pahalawattage Don Premasiri*

ABSTRACT

The greatest conceivable hindrance in determining the basis for global education in ethics is the obvious fact about the diversity involved in ethical norms, principles and attitudes held by different global communities belonging to different regions of the globe, characterized by their own traditional cultural and religious backgrounds. While it may be possible to extract a common core of ethical values from this diversity, there appears to be a sufficient degree of disparity too, reflecting intense dogmatic clinging to certain moral beliefs and attitudes that could result in conflict in societies which are being exposed to the immense influence of the contemporary trend of globalization. Under such circumstances the most significant issue that arises in adopting any approach to global education in ethics seems to be connected with the ways and means of reconciling such diversity. Diversity in ethical standpoints has a proximate relationship with diversity of beliefs relating to very fundamental questions about the nature of existence itself. Historically, Buddhism emerged at a time when the land of its origin was evidently characterized by a diversity of individuals and groups exhibiting a high level of maturity in intellectual engagement with the most fundamental issues relating to the good life. The Buddha

*. Prof. Dr., University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

happened to be one of them, and the principles of the good life that he proclaimed cut across all limitations of racial and national identity, being principles meant to promote the wellbeing and happiness of all. When moral principles are the product of dogmatic, authoritative and strictly deontological foundations, serious conflicts relating to the ethical life can be its outcome. In determining the basis for global education in ethics the most important consideration has to be the fact that despite the accidental regional and cultural differences, humanity is characterized by an identifiable body of common needs, and a common sense of what constitutes their long term happiness and wellbeing, discoverable by means of unprejudiced application of human intelligence and empirical observation. An inherent characteristic of the Buddhist teaching is its non-authoritarian approach to the ethical life, emphasizing the importance of the autonomous capacity of each individual to determine what is ethically right and wrong in conformity with the perceptions of all such enlightened humans who may justifiably be referred to as 'Knowledgeable Persons' (विद्वान् पुरिसा). In the present paper emphasis will be laid on the necessity to draw the attention of educators to the need to train the minds of people globally, from a reasonably young age to engage in intelligent self-reflection for establishing a fundamental ethical premise or premises general enough for the determination of human ethical choices when confronted with particular problems calling for appropriate ethical decisions and adoption of patterns of behavior that accord with such decisions. The core elements of such an ethics derivable from such a basis for the edification of the younger generation as well as persons of all strata of society shall be identified. In this process due attention will be paid to matters relating to a common human nature that should be taken into account in determining ethical values.

The sphere of ethics may be considered as one in which great diversity of opinion prevails. As a consequence of this obvious diversity many intellectuals who have reflected on the possibility of identifying a universally valid basis for ethical norms have expressed skepticism regarding the extent to which such a basis could successfully be determined. In philosophical reflections that developed in the English speaking Western world since the middle of the previous century a considerable number of moral philosophers of great repute, in their pursuit of the method of investigation into ethics which they conceived as an inquiry into the

logical features of ethical discourse, maintained that ethical norms have no real rational foundation. Such philosophers attributed them to human emotions, or commitment to purely subjective principles for which no firm basis for their universal validity could be affirmed. The Buddhist stance on ethical norms can be said to be characteristically universalistic and objective, and therefore, stands in contrast to all philosophical theories that have argued for diverse forms ethical relativism, subjectivism, or prescriptivism.

With the development of the empirical sciences a prominent philosophical standpoint came to be established resulting in making a sharp distinction between what was conceived as science and non-science according to which only the empirical sciences were conceived as representing the paradigmatic sphere in which genuine cognitive activity is to be found, and matters of fact could be established. As a consequence, two important forms of human engagement, namely, religion and ethics came to be relegated to the sphere of the non-cognitive. It came to be widely held that we are mistaken in all attempts to find truth and knowledge in the sphere of ethics and religion. Emphasis was given to a logical distinction that could be made between fact and value. It was argued that universally valid judgments are possible only in the sphere of facts, whereas values are to be considered as necessarily relative and subjective. This viewpoint was backed by the observation of the fact about the diversity involved in ethical norms, principles and attitudes of different communities belonging to different regions of the globe, characterized by their own traditional cultural and religious backgrounds. Despite this diversity it is undeniable that there is also the possibility of extracting a core of common ethical values which could be incorporated into a universally valid set of ethical norms. However, there is a significant degree of diversity as well which cannot be ignored, resulting in intense dogmatic clinging to certain parochial moral attitudes and beliefs, having the potential to give rise to conflict in societies that are exposed to the immense influence of the contemporary trend of globalization. The facts mentioned above reflect a situation which could be conceived from the Buddhist standpoint as involving two unwarranted extremes. The first extreme amounts to a kind of resignation to relativism and subjectivity which implicitly promotes the attitude that in the

ethical life anything goes. The second extreme represents a radical form of dogmatic traditionalism and conservatism that could lead to intense conflict in the sphere of values. It is in view of these extremes that we might be able to discover a possible contribution from Buddhist teachings taking a middle position guiding humanity to adopt a system of universally valid ethical norms that could have practical applications in the sphere of ethical education.

The main issue people are faced with, especially in the context of a social environment in which a plurality of worldviews exists pertains to the way in which we could seek to reconcile the diversity of ethical attitudes. Diversity in ethical standpoints has a proximate relationship to diversity of beliefs regarding very fundamental questions about the nature of existence itself. This point was clearly recognized in Buddhism, and when formulating the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, which may be considered as the Buddhist foundation for the ethical life, right view (*sammāditṭhi*) came to be placed as the first of the eight factors. Right human intentions (*sammāsaṅkappa*) and right modes of ethical conduct consisting of right bodily action (*sammā kammanta*) and right verbal behavior (*sammāvācā*) follow from right view. The Buddha introduced the Noble Eightfold Path as that which avoids the two extreme positions commonly adopted by persons who opt for a way of life. These two extremes were described by him as the extreme of self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*) and sensuous indulgence (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*). The first of these extremes, as pointed out by the Buddha rested on the belief in the notion of eternal life making a sharp distinction between what was understood as the indestructible, spiritual and eternal component (*jāva, attā*) and the destructible, impermanent and material component (*sarāra*) in living beings. The Buddha pointed out that people in general are inclined to believe in one or the other of these two extreme world views, the first of which was described as the eternalist view (*sassatavāda*) and the second as the annihilationist view (*ucchedavāda*). There is no doubt that even to the present day people have not overcome the tendency to cling to one or the other of these two extreme positions.

Out of the two dominant world views that influence the ethical

life of the global community is the world view associated with theistic religions. The eternalist view about human destiny is usually built into the theistic doctrine. The Buddha did not dismiss it totally as a basis for the ethical life for the reason that it was contrary to the other extreme position that rejected any kind of survival of a person after death. It was the observation of the Buddha that those who totally denied the notion of a life after death and held the belief that there are no long-term consequences of what are to be conceived as wholesome and unwholesome actions (*natthi paro loko, natthi kusalākusalānaṃ phalaṃ vipāko*) were more inclined to live a morally irresponsible life. On the contrary those who believed in eternity believed in the reality of the consequences of wholesome and unwholesome behavior. However, the Buddha considered the eternalist view to be unsatisfactory (*anassāsika*), involving the promotion of certain dogmatic life-styles, subservience to authoritarian codes of morality, unwarranted forms of austerity and adherence to ritualistic practices having no actual ethical value.

The other dominant worldview that influences ethical attitudes of the contemporary global community is that which is derived from empirical science. A similar view had been present even during the Buddha's time among those who admitted that the only valid means of obtaining knowledge about reality is ordinary sense perception. Those who subscribed to that view were considered in the Buddha's teaching as the annihilationists. The verificationist and objectivist approach of contemporary empirical science has provided a more solid epistemological justification for the annihilationist world view. Although some persons who accept the utility of empirical science may still not entirely discard the cultural influences of their respective time-honored religious traditions, and continue to adhere to ethical ideals derived from them, a considerable number of contemporary intellectuals desire to sever their connections with tradition, which they consider as being outdated and outmoded by the empirical and positivist approach inherent in the method of thinking characteristic of modern science. It is with a clear understanding of this contemporary background relating to the two major world views that have a global influence on the way of life that people opt to live that we need to consider valid ethical norms of Buddhism applicable to global education in ethics.

It is important at this point to consider the socio-cultural background on which Buddhism emerged in ancient India. Early Buddhist scriptural sources point to the fact that both with regard to matters relating to truth and reality and to the moral life the authority of tradition weighed heavily on the thinking of the people. The Buddha emerged at a time when a sufficient degree of maturity in intellectual inquiry was developing regarding the nature of existence as well as action guiding norms relating to the fundamental principles of a reasonable moral life. As reflected in the canonical Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha was faced with two main sources on which people depended to determine a world view as well as a moral way of life. The most dominant influence had been that of authoritative sacred scriptures that assumed the unquestionable status of divine revelation. Secondly, both among the orthodoxy and independent thinkers there was an attempt to resolve empirical and ethical issues by resorting to mere rational reflection. Rational reflection, either by way of pure self-evident reasoning paying no attention to any conformity of the consequences of such reasoning to observed matters of fact, or rational reflection with an intermixture of empirical data, may have been resorted to particularly by persons who were not willing to tolerate the dogmatism associated with tradition and convention. This perhaps was partly a reaction to the prevalent conservatism associated with dependence on authority. The Buddha appears to have found both those methods as unsatisfactory and advocated a method which in some sense could be conceived as empirical or experiential for determining not only matters relating to fact and reality, but also matters relating to goodness and morality. Clear expression to this method of the Buddha has been given in the discourses on the Dhamma appearing in canonical Suttas such as Kālāma, Saṅgāra, Caṅkā and Vāmaṃsaka. In these instances attention is drawn to the inadequacy of dependence purely on a belief system that one has committed oneself to on the basis of mere faith (*saddhā*). It was considered equally inadequate to accept any world view or way of life purely due to a natural inclination of the mind, or due to an individual liking or preference (*ruci*). Contemplating on a certain view and finding it acceptable (*ditṭhinijjhānakkanti*) may also be inadequate. Several other grounds have also been identified by the

Buddha as unsatisfactory such as hearsay (*itikirā*), consideration of something as part of an authoritative body of sacred teachings looked upon as a revelation that has been transmitted from generation to generation (*anussava, paramparā, piṭakasampadā*), and recognition of the authority of a teacher who is looked upon as competent and honoured (*bhabbarūpatā, samaṇo no garu*). As pointed out above, apart from such authoritative sources, others attempted to derive truths about the world as well as the ethical life through mere rational reflection (*takka hetu, nayahetu, ākāraparivittakkena*) without considering whether views so reached were in agreement with observed reality. The Buddha emphasized the need to depend on what one could independently and directly know by means of observation (*yadā tumheva jāneyyātha*). It is this aspect of the teaching that becomes extremely relevant in finding universally valid ethical norms applicable to global education in ethics through an investigation of Buddhist ethical ideas.

A point that needs emphasis is that ethical commitments are widely dependent upon authoritarian foundations. This is increasingly so in the case of theistic systems of ethics usually seeking to derive ethical norms from divine commandments. An obvious problem regarding a system of normative ethical rules conceived to be derivable from the authoritative foundation of divine commandments is the debatable question whether some mode of conduct is ethically right because it is commanded by God. It might sometimes be difficult to determine which set of divine commandments should be adhered to, if it is the case that communities subscribing to alternative systems of theistic belief happen to consider mutually contradictory modes of ethical conduct as being commanded by God. Furthermore, there is the possibility that what is believed to be commanded by God in a particular theistic system may, on the independent consideration of persons with a high degree of ethical consciousness, be found to be offensive from the perspective of their own ethical judgment. A commandment theory is acceptable, provided that there is some assurance that God invariably commands what is good. However, in order to determine that, the independent judgment of intelligent human beings becomes necessary. This consideration points to the fact that the ultimate responsibility for determining a universally

valid system of ethical norms rests on humans themselves who are endowed with clarity of thought and intelligence. This is perhaps why in ethical contexts Buddhism lays stress on what is praised by the wise (*viññūpasattha*) and censured by the wise (*viññūgarahita*) as a dependable basis for determining what is ethically right and wrong.

Any attempt to impose upon the global community a system of ethical norms considering it to be having universal validity resting on the respective authoritarian foundations of those who subscribe to diverse belief systems is likely to produce more moral chaos than harmony in the global context. In this regard it is to be noted that the Buddha himself advocated a non-authoritarian approach in matters relating to the making of ethical decisions. The affirmation of such an approach places Buddhism in a relatively more advantageous position in the matter of promoting universally valid ethical norms for the global community. It also helps in avoiding narrow sectarianism due to the fact that the appeal is not to the authority of sectarian principles, not even to the authority of the Buddha as a teacher, but the ethical consciousness of humans who are capable of achieving a sufficient degree of intellectual and emotional maturity enabling them to make independent decisions leaving aside all kinds of sectarian biases, complexes, and prejudices. By such means it should be possible to reach a common ground for ethical education, avoiding the tendency to generate conflict and disharmony characteristically associated with moral dogmatism, having the consequence of negating the very foundations of an ethical life. In this process it might be case that the enlightened ethical principles of different religions would converge obviating the need for any conflict or disharmony.

As indicated in the Buddha's instruction to the Kālāmas, authority, tradition, and mere rational reflection devoid of a consideration of actual observed consequences of adopting certain modes of behavior are inadequate and unsatisfactory as sources for guidance in the ethical life. In any kind of global education in ethics, what is more important is not the authoritative prescription of a pre-conceived code of ethics in terms of which the global community could regulate its ethical conduct, but to educate the community regarding the fundamental principles

involved in making the appropriate ethical decision in a given situation. An actual instance in which the Buddha provided such ethical education for his own son Rāhula who opted to follow the Buddha's path of ultimate liberation may be considered at this point for illustration. The Buddha teaches Rāhula that when contemplating on the performance of a bodily, verbal, or a mental action he should engage in repeated reflection on the probable observable consequences of the action itself, taking into account its consequences on oneself as well as others who may be affected by it. If there is the probability that the action to be performed will lead to harm to oneself (*attabyābādhāya saṁvattati*) harm to others (*parabyābādhāya saṁvattati*), harm to both (*ubhayabyādhāya saṁvattati*) and could be productive of the growth of suffering (*dukkhudrayaṃ*) and could have a consequence associated with suffering (*dukkhaviṭṭakāṃ*) such action is unwholesome and ought not to be done (*akusalaṃ... akaraṇāyaṃ*). Rāhula is advised to engage in similar reflection while performing an action too and to refrain from continuing with the performance of such action if it is observed to have consequences of a harmful nature. After the performance of an action he is advised to assess the consequences of it in the same manner and resolve not to engage in the future, in the sort of actions that he has observed on previous occasions to have had harmful consequences.¹ This same criterion for determining ethical action is mentioned in another canonical source called the Bāhātika Sutta of the Majjhimanikāya.² It is also closely related to the teaching of the Kālāma Sutta where the Buddha instructs the Kālāmas to know by themselves what ought to be done by finding out what actions conduce to well being (*hitāya*) and happiness (*sukhāya*) and what actions conduce to harm (*ahitāya*) and suffering (*dukkhāya*).³ It is observed in the above instances that actions that are conducive to the well being of oneself, others and both ought to be pursued with diligence.

A second criterion to which the Buddhist teaching draws our attention is one which has been recognized by almost all the major

1. Majjhimanikāya (Pali Text Society) Vol. I, p. 415f.

2. Ibid. Vol. II, pp. 114-116.

3. Aṅguttaranikāya (P.T.S.) Vol. I, p. 189.

religious traditions of the world.⁴ It is generally referred to as the Golden Rule Criterion of ethics. The seven forms of ethical conduct applicable to a person's bodily and verbal behavior that have to be cultivated by one who subscribes to the Buddhist way of ethical living are made to rest on the general principle that could be stated as doing unto others as one would want others to do unto oneself. The following passage from the Saṃyuttanikāya which occurs in a discourse of the Buddha within a typically ethical context may be quoted to illustrate the point:

“Here a noble disciple reflects thus: ‘I like to live. I do not like to die. I desire happiness and dislike unhappiness. Suppose someone should kill me, since I like to live and do not like to die, it would not be pleasing and delightful to me. Suppose I too should kill another who likes to live and does not like to die, who desires happiness and does not desire unhappiness it would not be pleasing and delightful to that other as well. What is not pleasant and delightful to me is not pleasant and delightful to the other person either. How could I inflict upon another that which is not pleasant and not delightful to me?’ Having reflected in this manner, he (the noble disciple) himself refrains from killing, and encourages others too to refrain from killing, and speaks in praise of refraining from killing. In this manner his bodily conduct becomes pure in three ways.

Further, a noble disciple reflects thus: ‘Supposing someone should take away from me from thievish intent what was not given, it would not be pleasing and delightful to me. Supposing I too should take away from another from thievish intent what was not given, it would not be pleasing and delightful to the other as well’...⁵

Similar reflection is recommended concerning other spheres of conduct having an ethical significance such as enjoyment of sensuous pleasures particularly related to the sexual life, and the four forms of speech behavior.

In the foregoing discussion attention was drawn to the fact that

4. It is found in the teaching of Jesus Christ as stated in Mathew 7.12 in the following terms: ‘In everything, then, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the essence of the Law and the prophets.’

5. Saṃyuttanikāya (P.T.S.) Vol. V, p. 353.

authoritarianism in ethics may sometimes negate any attempt to establish universally valid ethical norms. Ethical norms identified in Buddhism are established on the basis of the recognition of general standards applicable to ethical evaluation that seem to be in conformity with universal human nature. There is no appeal to any mysterious revelation. A person is called upon to engage in reflective thinking about the requirements of morality. Ethical decisions, in the first instance, have a relation to observed facts relating to the decisions made mainly in terms of their observed consequences. The applicable range of consequences is to be considered in terms of the appropriate ethical standard that is identified as valid. In the second instance, ethical decisions have a relation to legitimate human interests. A decision becomes ethical when it is determined not purely on the basis of self interest but with a sufficient degree of empathy or sympathy, with a keen awareness of the other person's legitimate interest as well as well as one's own. A standard that changes relative to what is expedient from the point of view of a given individual cannot be an ethical standard. If it is wrong for others to inflict any pain upon me when I am innocent, it should be wrong for me to inflict pain upon another who is innocent. This principle is clearly recognized in Buddhism and needs to be used as a cardinal principle in global education in ethics.

Describing an aspect of what is conceived as holding a right view according to Buddhism, the *Sammāditṭhi Sutta*, draws attention to the same modes of conduct mentioned by the Buddha in the passage quoted above as those in conformity with ethical living. They are to be clearly recognized and deeply understood by a person as general norms for making the distinction between what is ethically wholesome (*kusala*) and ethically unwholesome (*akusala*). Bodily conduct taking the form of acts of killing, stealing and indulgence in illicit forms of sexual behavior for the gratification of self-centered desire, verbal conduct taking the form of uttering falsehoods with the intention of misleading or deceiving others for the sake of self-interest, harsh speech unpleasant to the hearer, slanderous speech intent on creating dissension and disharmony, and frivolous or meaningless speech that gives rise to unnecessary social problems and having no beneficial effect upon

one's own moral progress are mentioned here as unethical. In this instance three further items are added to indicate the psychological sources of all the former types of misconduct. They are thoughts of intense greed, thoughts associated with malicious intentions and entertainment of erroneous views.⁶ Abstention from such forms of bodily, verbal and mental behavior that have the tendency to negate human well being, constitute the sphere of the ethical. In addition to abstention from unethical ways, commitment of positive acts that are directly in opposition to them such as adopting a caring and compassionate attitude towards all living beings, being satisfied only with possessions legitimately acquired, enjoying sensuous pleasures without violating the established social norms particularly in the gratification sought in connection with the sexual life consist of the basic ethical norms to be adhered to in connection with bodily behavior. Being non-deceptive, truthful, honest and reliable in one's speech, speaking endearing, kind and compassionate words pleasant to the hearer, speaking words that conduce to unity and harmony and speaking timely, beneficial and meaningful words that enhance overall well being are the basic ethical norms that pertain to the sphere of verbal behavior. Having a mind free of intense greed and avarice characterized by thoughts of charity and generosity, entertaining compassionate thoughts free of malicious intentions, and holding a right view conducive to one's moral development and purity are recognized as positive ethical patterns associated with mental conduct.

It should become clear from the above discussion how Buddhism derives specific patterns of behavior recognizable as ethical and unethical based on criteria that have no authoritarian foundation. The universal applicability of Buddhist ethical norms can be said to rest on these criteria. In this discussion no attempt is made to list in detail an explicit and elaborate code of ethical conduct for the purpose of global education in ethics. It is considered more important to educate people to use their autonomous ability to discover by themselves the principles of the ethical life. An ethical education that is authoritatively imposed on people is unlikely to produce the desired results. This was precisely the Buddha's standpoint on

6. Majjhimanikāya Vol. I, pp. 46-47.

ethical education when he pointed out in the Kāḷāma Sutta that the tendency of people to depend on the authority of others for matters relating to the moral life was unsatisfactory and emphasized the idea of knowing oneself (*yadā tumheva jāneyyātha*) what is right and wrong. What becomes necessary in moral education is a kind of enlightened guidance of the manner that is resorted to in modern approaches to psychological counseling whereby people are made to make their own enlightened choices. This appears to have been the role of the Buddha himself as a teacher of morality.

From the Buddhist point of view, unethical conduct (*akusala*) has its roots or sources (*akusalamūla*). The sources of unethical behavior are identified in the Buddhist teaching as greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion or confusion of mind (*moha*). This point is also made by the Buddha in the Kāḷāma Sutta where he instructs the Kāḷāmas to find out themselves the conditions under which unethical behavior proceeds. Acts such as destruction of life, stealing, and sexual misconduct proceed from persons who are overwhelmed by greed, hatred or delusion (*luddho lobhena abhibūto* and so on).⁷ Buddhism considers these as directly observable and personally verifiable phenomena (*sandiṭṭhiko dhammo*). People could be educated to discover these phenomena themselves so that depending on their direct experience they could ethically transform themselves.

It is important to point out that people are not always competent to determine accurately matters relating to what Buddhism conceives as well being (*attha* or *hita*) and harm (*anattha* or *ahita*) happiness (*sukha*) and unhappiness (*dukkha*) due to the fact that their clarity of judgment is usually hindered by erroneous cognition and unwholesome emotions. The gravest error that is often committed pertains to judgments people make regarding the above notions. For any genuine pursuit in global education in ethics, the global community needs to cultivate the awareness of what real happiness and well being consists in. The widely prevalent opinion that is exerting an influence on the thinking of the global community is that the source of happiness and well being lies in

7. Aṅguttaranikāya Vol. I, p. 189.

the single minded pursuit of material prosperity. Material values are prioritized over ethical values making ethical values subservient to material prosperity. The ill effects of such a pursuit that have already become globally evident such as the deterioration of the natural environment resulting in the continuing loss of the ecological balance that needs to be sustained, climate change, global warming etc. are just a few examples that can be cited as those coming within the Buddhist concept of harm and negation of human well being. Buddhism has incorporated within its ethical concern not only principles concerning the relationship of humans with other humans but also with all other constituents of nature. A view of ethics that considers only humans as ends in themselves whereas other aspects of nature are considered merely as means to human ends does not conform to the Buddhist standpoint relating to ethics. Humans have ethical obligations towards other lower animals, aspects of nature such as trees and forests, rivers and other material things in nature that are connected with the preservation of the balance of nature. An absolutely materialistic outlook that caters to the demands of human greed, is therefore, found to be unethical from the Buddhist standpoint. Therefore, in the current global context where material resources are limited, Buddhist ethical norms relating to the reduction of greed appear to be universally valid. They form a very significant part of universally valid Buddhist ethical norms that should be recognized in global education in ethics. Buddhism never advocated poverty as a virtue, but on the contrary recognized material prosperity as constituting an important element of human happiness. This is evident in the Buddhist teaching concerning the four kinds of happiness that it approves of, out of which the first three are called happiness related to the possession of substantial material wealth (*atthisukha*), happiness related to the enjoyment of such material wealth (*bhogasukha*), and the happiness of being free from indebtedness in life relating to material needs (*anaṇasukha*). It is the fourth kind of happiness that is prioritized in Buddhism referring to it as the happiness of living an ethically blameless life (*anavajjasukha*). It is further pointed out that the former three kinds of happiness are not worth as much as a sixteenth part of the latter.

The universal validity of Buddhist ethical norms rests on the fact

that they are derived from the recognition of a close relationship between ethics and psychology. We have seen that Buddhism considers unethical action as rooted in greed, hatred and delusion that is inherent in all humans who have not eliminated or reduced their causal potency. It is by a process of education that effectively reduces in gradual stages and absolutely eliminates those roots of unethical conduct that human beings become ethically perfect. Those negative psychological traits need to be replaced by the positive ones, generosity, compassion and wisdom. In addition to the recommended abstentions that the Buddhist ethical training promotes there are positive ethical qualities that are recognized such as the four forms of sublime abiding (*cattāro brahmavihārā*), consisting of loving kindness (*mettā*), sympathy (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) and the four grounds of benevolent conduct (*cattāri saṅgahavatthūni*) consisting of charity (*dāna*), endearing speech (*piyavacana*), commitment to the well being of others (*atthacariyā*) and equal recognition of the other person's interest (*samānattatā*). All of them can be seen as components of ethical norms that have universal validity in global education in ethics.

In conclusion it could be stated that Buddhist teachings have dealt with matters relating to ethics on a naturalistic basis. Buddhism has recognized the fact that ethics cannot be divorced from our understanding of what kind of living beings humans are, what their natural psychological constitution is, what their needs and aspirations are, as well as what conduces to their happiness, unhappiness, well being, and harm. All these are matters that apply universally to all humans. This is why it is reasonable to say that Buddhism is placed in a unique position to affirm a set of universally valid ethical norms applicable to global education in ethics.

