

EDUCATION AS HEART-MIND
TRANSFORMATION CAN WE WORK
TOWARDS A GLOBAL ETHIC OF EDUCATION?
ARISTOTELIAN AND BUDDHIST
PERSPECTIVES COMPARED

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I draw on Aristotelian and Buddhist scholarship and wisdom to consider education as a process of intellectual and moral formation, a process of “sentimental education” or transformation (“ex-ducere”), by which the student is guided out of intellectual and moral ignorance and towards intellectual and moral skill. Whereas much modern educational practice rests on the assumption that education is mostly about developing the rational mind, both Aristotelian and Buddhist conceptions of education emphasize the need to shape and transform the student’s sensibilities so that morally appropriate (virtuous) behavior becomes second nature rather than merely a matter of rational cognition. Yet, while both traditions share key assumptions and formative strategies (which set them apart from the dominant Western model), they also differ in interesting and illuminating ways.

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Both traditions assume, for example, that moral development and growth require the student's transformational change from a state of incontinence (Aristotle) or defilement (the Buddha) to a state of temperance and wisdom. In a state of incontinence / defilement, a person is a slave to their craving (Buddha) or appetites (Aristotle) framed as aversion, greed, delusion in Buddhism and as the vices of gluttony, lust, anger, greed, pride etc in Aristotle. In this state, reason is often used merely to rationalize what the cravings and appetites dictate.

To get out from under the enslavement of the appetites, Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethic prescribes a path of developing habits of moderation, and developing and strengthening settled dispositions of virtue ('character') through repeatedly engaging in virtuous acts. On that basis, the young person is thought to acquire intellectual knowledge, learns to resist acting on his or her incontinent urges, and acquire a degree of practical wisdom (phronesis). Finally, by learning to live convivially with virtuous friends, a person becomes ready and capable for the highest life, the life of theoria or contemplation (often mistranslated as 'life of study').

Buddhism, too, recognizes the importance of contemplation as end and means towards the development of virtuous dispositions. In fact, there are similarities between the path prescribed by Aristotle and the noble eight-fold path. Both include training in virtue (correct action, speech, and livelihood), training in contemplation (correct effort, mindfulness, and concentration) and training in wisdom (correct view and intention). But there are also crucial differences in that the ultimate end of the Aristotelian path is "the good life," while the ultimate end of the eight-fold-path is complete release from suffering.

Still, in an increasingly globalizing world, it seems important that we become aware of the shared goals in Western and Eastern educational traditions that emphasize the development of virtue, ethics, and inner peace.

"Suppose, monks that the rice seedlings have ripened and the watchman is negligent. If a bull fond of rice enters the paddy field, he might indulge himself as much as he likes. So too, the uninstructed worldling who does not exercise restraint over the six bases for contact indulges himself as much as he likes in the five cords of

sensual pleasure.” (Samyutta Nikaya iv 195)¹

“One may be puzzled how a man with a correct view of a situation can be weak of will. For some deny that this is possible if he really knows what is the right thing to do. [Such a person is] like a city that votes for all the right decrees and has excellent laws, but does not apply them.” Aristotle, 1152a20.

1. OVERVIEW

In the above quotes, Aristotle and the Buddha talk about a person without proper self-restraint. Often this is a person who knows right, but does wrong—a self-indulgent or “incontinent” person whose deliberating or “rational” faculty is overwhelmed by their greed for sense pleasure or their aversive sense of hatred or resentment. To educators, this type of “uninstructed worldling” or “akratic” person represents a formidable problem as we cannot be satisfied to raise people who may have high levels of knowledge, intelligence, or technical “competence” but who lack the self-regulation and moral compass to apply these competencies to good and wholesome ends. In fact, the recognition is growing worldwide that our education systems too often err on the side of education for competence and neglect the side of moral development, character, and wisdom, producing what some have called “smart fools” (Sternberg 1990, 2007; Steel 2014; Seligman 2009; Lewis 2007; Zajonc 2006; Meyer 2016; Meyer 2018). At a time of rapid globalization which exposes people to great varieties of different and seemingly incompatible moral codes, this need to integrate rational-cognitive and moral development and to help young people grow past the point of *akrasia* and self-indulgence is of ever greater importance. If globalization is not to issue in lasting moral confusion and hostility, the community of educators needs to evolve standards of moral development that can be shared by educators worldwide. I propose here that moving towards

1. Vīna Sutta: The Lute. Cf. Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s alternative rendering: “Suppose that corn had ripened and the watchman was heedless. A corn-eating ox, invading the corn to eat it, would intoxicate itself as much as it liked. In the same way, an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person, not exercising restraint with regard to the six media of sensual contact, intoxicates himself with the five strings of sensuality as much as he likes.” Samyutta Nikaya, iv 195.

virtue, wisdom, and contemplation can provide such a standard. In fact, two major global ethical traditions, the Aristotelian and the Buddhist, coincide on this point. They share a conception of education as “heart-mind transformation” in opposition to what is often called a “banking model” of education (Freire) preoccupied with forming the cognitive mind only (and often in ways that do not facilitate independence of judgment). Exploring the similarities and differences of these two influential perspectives provides us with a useful point of departure for a constructive dialogue about the possibility of a global ethic of education.

2. INTRODUCTION

On the United Nations celebration of Vesak in 2000, the Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi said in his speech at the United Nations Assembly in New York City:

“Buddhism can provide helpful insights and practices across a wide spectrum of disciplines—from philosophy and psychology to medical care and ecology—without requiring those who use its resources to adopt Buddhism as a full-fledged religion.”

He went on to say that Buddhism proposes “a practical path of moral and mental training ... for tackling the problems of the world in the one place where they are directly accessible to us: in our own minds.”²

In this paper I want to consider the contribution Buddhism can make towards evolving a global ethic of education for peace, morality, and insight. Specifically, I will suggest

a) that such an ethic requires that we approach the educational task as one of *heart-mind transformation* rather than merely cognitive training—a process that conceives of education as changing not only our knowledge and cognitive faculties, but also our moral sensibilities, skills and discernment;

b) that Buddhism shares this concern with other moral traditions, including those of Western provenience, and that understanding

2. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Buddha and his Message. Past, Present, and Future*. Lecture on Vesak Day. United Nations, 15 May 2000.

these shared concerns through developing a shared conversation is helpful, even vital in building education into a global arena of cooperation and community;

c) that Buddhism as a highly developed path of moral and mental training can contribute significantly to such a conversation.

Concretely, I will compare the Aristotelian tradition of virtue education and its emphasis on effecting the student's moral transformation with the Buddhist tradition of mental and moral training—two traditions that, although they have lastingly shaped educational practice in the world's two hemispheres, have, to date, rarely communicated or explored their common concerns.

The Need for a Global Ethic of Education

It hardly needs emphasizing today that we are living through a time of rapid, even dramatic globalization bringing in its tow formidable challenges to steer a path between its opportunities and perils. Judging from the changes of just the past few decades, the forces that drive this global trend seem nowhere near exhausted. Over the next several decades we will likely witness further acceleration of the trends that raze traditional boundaries of community, prompt yet unforeseen further technological revolutions, continue social changes including mass migration, and further reshape the way we communicate and interact with each other. Recent experience shows that these trends can forge new ties and new bonds, but they can also exacerbate ancient differences and adversities.

These trends pose a profound challenge to educators the world over: how to educate our young so that they are able to live convivially and peacefully with themselves and with others in a sustainable and balanced fashion, without exploiting our limited planetary resources, without exploiting or excluding those others of different view or tradition, and without exploiting themselves in a quest for ever more economic growth or material acquisition. While a balanced growth of our economic resources is important, it must not come at the price of sorting the world into winners and losers, causing cultures or civilizations to clash, or facilitating short-term gains that are unsustainable and even ruinous in the long run.

There is reason to be concerned that, to date, we—as global-minded educators—are not meeting this challenge. Often our education practice and policy seems more committed to competitiveness than conviviality, more to standardization and uniformity than to respectfulness of diversity, and more to “winning” in a game of ranking than to expanding our moral commons and cultivating tolerance (Meyer and Benavot 2014). The ethic that often seems to dominate educational practice is an ethic of education for economic success rather than moral development, an ethic of outranking rather than of solidarity and compassion.

Yet, what is the basis for an ethical shift that emphasizes our common concern for peace, solidarity and sustainability, when education is traditionally shaped by diverse moral and religious traditions with their seemingly irreconcilable differences? And how can such an ethic become more than window dressing that adorns our speeches or textbooks? How can the moral transformation towards virtue and insight become second nature?

In what follows I discuss the contribution Buddhism can make towards a global conversation for an ethic of education for peace, morality, and insight. I propose that such an ethic benefits from approaching the educational task as one of *heart-mind transformation* rather than mere formation of the cognitive faculties. It will benefit if we can demonstrate that there is substantial common ground in this regard with other traditions of education and moral development, my test case here being Aristotle’s virtue ethic.

The paper is organized in three main parts. I will begin with a discussion of key points of the Aristotelian virtue ethics, followed by an exposition of related aspects of mental and moral training in Buddhist teaching, and end with a discussion of common concerns of the two traditions and how they can become building blocks towards a global ethic of education.

3. ARISTOTLE’S CONCEPTION OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT: VIRTUE, WISDOM, CONTEMPLATION AND THE OVERCOMING OF AKRASIA

It is hard to overstate Aristotle’s influence over Western thought.

At the time of the founding of the University of Paris, Aristotle was often referred to simply as “*the philosopher*.” The work of leading philosophers like Augustine, Boethius, and especially Thomas Aquinas, had kept Aristotle alive for generations of students who were steeped in a curriculum that was often a long echo of his towering reign. Even modern founders of education like Humboldt (Meyer 2017) and Newman were indebted to Aristotle. And while his virtue ethics suffered a temporary eclipse as utilitarianism rose to prominence, the decades since the 1980s have brought about a strong resurgence in interest, due, not least, to the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Alasdair MacIntyre, and contemporary writers like Wiggins, Davidson, Burnyeat, Kosman, Rorty. Lately, this turn has also found its way into education through the work of philosophers like Joseph Dunne (1997) and Sean Steel (2014) and psychologists interested in character ethics and the proper shaping of school culture (e.g. Seligman et al 2009; Galla and Duckworth 2015).

Action over Cognition

Aristotle’s Ethic has often been summarized as revolving around the idea of virtue conceived as “the habit of moderation according to right reason.” That can be seen as both the property of an action as well as a person. When seen as property of an action it consists “in the reasonable moderation of the affection from which the action proceeds.” Seen as property of a person “it consists in the habit of this reasonable moderation, in its having become the customary and usual disposition of the mind.”

I take the above quotes from Adam Smith’s summary of Aristotelian virtue because it is both representative of the consensus in a vast secondary literature on Aristotle, as well as to remind us that, as Amartya Sen has pointed out, that Smith was a moral philosopher who sought the cultivation of the “moral sentiments” to be the human task par excellence—one to which the development of markets and economic wealth was subordinate (Sen, in Smith 2009, p. xiii).

Smith is also perceptive of the difference that distinguishes Aristotle’s account of virtue from that held by (Plato’s) Socrates: “Virtue, according to Plato, might be considered as a species of science, and no man, [Plato] thought, could see clearly and

demonstratively what was right and what was wrong, and not act accordingly.” By contrast, Smith summarizes Aristotle as holding the view that “no conviction of the understanding was capable of getting the better of inveterate habits, and that good morals arose not from knowledge but from action.” (323)

Smith is very perceptive in emphasizing that for Aristotle a person becomes virtuous not by an act of the intellect, but by a gradual reshaping of his or her sensibilities or affections in the process of building a habit of virtuous actions. We not so much think but *act* our way into becoming virtuous. In fact, in his ethic Aristotle—quite like the Buddha (who sidesteps all questions that do not contribute to the end of suffering)—shares a singular concern with *practice*. In the Nichomachean ethic, he frequently states his goal not to present a theoretical understanding of virtue, but rather to demonstrate how people *become virtuous*:

“A state [of character] arises from [the repetition of] similar activities. Hence we must display the right activities, since differences in these imply corresponding differences in the states. It is not unimportant, then, to acquire one sort of habit or another, right from our youth; rather, it is very important, indeed all-important” (pg. 35)

“We must examine the right way to act, since, as we have said, the actions also control the character of the states we acquire” (pg. 35)

Aristotle makes it abundantly clear that he wants his *Ethic* to be read as a treatise on the practical steps, the path, if you will, that one needs to pursue to become virtuous. Unlike Plato, whose chief practical concern was the education of an elite of guardians headed by a philosopher king, Aristotle wanted to lay out a path towards moral excellence and happiness that was—in principle—accessible to everybody.³

By emphasizing the role of acting rather than thinking or cogitation our way into virtue Aristotle has bequeathed us with a challenge: how is this action to be structured in practice? Where do we start and where can we expect to end? The *Ethic*, to be

3. The fact that Aristotle excluded slaves and women from eligibility has been frequently remarked upon as a reflection of the limitations of Aristotle the historical individual, but not a limitation of the validity and viability of his principles. It is noteworthy, however, that the Buddha explicitly rejected any conventional limitations of the Dhamma to certain classes of people.

sure, encompasses an enormous range of moral development: beginning with baby steps of an initially rather formulaic aiming for the mean between moral extremes (e.g. courage as the mean between cowardice and recklessness, or generosity as the mean between stinginess and spendthrift) and ending with developing in the practitioner a taste for *theoria*, the contemplative life as the highest life. Along the way we are to advance through consolidating habits of moderation, developing intellectual virtues like open-mindedness, reflective deliberation, and practical wisdom, and the skill of sociability with similarly high-minded friends. As we do so, we become increasingly able to appreciate man's highest life and highest potential in contemplating "what is noble and divine and noble and divine in us." But to arrive at that end our sensibilities need to undergo major transformations, especially with regard to how we perceive pleasure. We must grow, as it were, from the taste for pleasure at the level of sense pleasures to an appreciation to an appreciation of the higher pleasures of well-spiritedness, wisdom, and contemplation. This requires a reordering of our tastes and loves as we realize that cultivating the lower pleasures blocks the path to the higher pleasures.

Virtue as a Transformation of Heart and Mind—The Kosman-Burnyeat-Rorty Thesis

A frequent reading of Aristotle emphasizes a point made early in *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE): that happiness/eudaimonia is "an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue;" that virtue is a state, condition, or disposition [a *hexis*] that reliably aims at the mean between excess and deficiency; and that habits of moderation are crucial in becoming virtuous. This account leaves out much of what concerns Aristotle in the latter half of the NE, in particular the parts that have to do with moving a person beyond the point of mere continence. To move beyond continence—a state of mere outward pacification and moderation—and towards temperance—a state of inner peace and equanimity—the person must evolve from somebody who acts virtuously as a matter of habit to someone who acts virtuously as a matter of wisdom. Burnyeat (1980), Kosman (1980), and Rorty (1980) importantly influenced a re-reading of Aristotle on this point. Though their contributions

were distinct, they are meaningfully complimentary. Hence, to simplify matters, I treat them as a single theorist.

Virtue requires a change of heart: “becoming properly affected”

Kosman is one of the writers most explicitly interested in the *affective* dimension of the changes required for a person to become established in virtue as a robust disposition to choose well (a *hexis prohairetike*). He offers a reading of Aristotle whereby the question of ethics is not simply how to live well, but “how to become the kind of person readily disposed so to conduct myself.” 103. This involves learning not only “how to act well but also how to feel well” (105) or, in keeping with his title how to “*become properly affected*.” Moral philosophy and in particular Aristotle is thus about a person’s “sentimental education,” the “cultivation of feelings” or what the early Adam Smith called the “moral sentiments.” (106)

Kosman thus challenges the long-standing assumption that feelings are ‘primordial’ and preclude choice. If this were so, we could not cultivate feelings and cultivate them towards a particular end where we are, say, frightened, shamed, or inspired by the right things in the right way.⁴ Kosman’s Aristotle holds that “becoming properly affected” is within the compass of human volition. We can, albeit gradually, cultivate a disposition to affectively respond to the world in the right way. But the acquisition is not the result of a simple act of willful calculation or deliberate choice. The affections must be cultivated, grown, developed (111).⁵ For this, we need to imagine the process of affective cultivation as a path with a temporal dimension, a path that extends in time as a person directs their moral self-development.

Virtue as a Developmental Path

Burnyeat’s reading of Aristotle’s *Ethic* develops the temporal dimension of building moral sentiment, reading the *Ethic* as

4. [this is different from the social psychology of the Western enlightenment which takes the passions as primordial and beyond our power to shape, transform, or cultivate. The best we can do is to rationally devise institutional regimes that limit the passions’ negative and facilitate their positive consequences by, for example, breaking absolute power into several separate branches and setting them up so that they check and balance each other.]

5. onathan Jacobs has extended this argument into an argument about “choosing character.”

laying out a “temporal” path across a person’s formative years (presumably from their early years to adulthood). Importantly, he also emphasizes Aristotle’s repeated point that moral change is not synonymous with intellectual learning (Aristotle: “if arguments were in themselves enough to make men good, they would justly ... have won very great rewards”).

This moves his interpretation of Aristotle away from the standard reading that the *Ethic* is about leading a person to happiness and the good life by their acquisition of virtue by becoming habituated to a path of moderation. But if the Aristotle wants us to morally grow over years (perhaps a lifetime) and if that growth is not chiefly effected by deliberate choice nor by the formation or schooling of the intellect, then how and to what end does this growth occur?

Here Burnyeat suggests an interesting trajectory that has several stages:

--first, there needs to be a starting point in that the young person needs to hear about what Aristotle calls the object of moral development, “the that.” Without knowing the object of moral formation the whole process is blind and aimless. That object must be “the noble and just.” The young person must know that there are high aims to strive for and he/she must gradually want to strive for them on their own volition and for their own sake.

--becoming self-driven and self-direct towards the good for its own sake can, however, not be the uninitiated person’s state. At first, their “knowledge” will only be at the intellectual level. The young person thus has to accept it on trust from their parents or trusted teacher. But hearing it, it will not immediately “sink in” and become second nature to him.

--for this to happen, the young person needs to gradually build ‘doing the right thing’ into the firm and reliable pattern of his daily living. For this, they ideally need the guidance of trusted teachers. Aristotle is quite clear that there is an element of paternalism here. The young person’s knowledge of the noble and just can grow deeper only as they reliably and consistently perform noble and just acts. Aristotle seems to assume that a person who sees themselves acting unselfishly or courageously gradually develops a settled preference,

a taste for acting unselfishly and courageously. But importantly and characteristically for Aristotle: the active deed precedes the insight. We start by imitating trusted teachers and grow inner conviction in the process of doing so.

--the reward from acting virtuously is twofold: a) it teaches the young person that they have the capacity to act virtuously; b) it delivers a reward to delight in, e.g., seeing that by foregoing a short-term pleasure one secures deeper, more lasting ones; or seeing that by acting unselfishly one adds to the well-being of another person. “... *practice has cognitive powers, in that it is the way we learn what is noble or just*” (73).

--it is through repeatedly acting virtuously that a person becomes virtuous, or better perhaps: enters the path of virtue. He thus learns about “the because” of virtue, the deeper reasons and rewards of the virtuous life that allows him to desire “the noble and just” on his own and for its own sake. As that happens, virtue becomes more than skin-deep, it becomes second nature. As a result the maturing person develops an “ethos”—the character of a virtuous person.

Thus Burnyeat underscores that, for Aristotle, moral development involves a reordering of what one loves. As sentient beings, all humans start out disposed to seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. As we morally develop we must learn that not all pleasures are choice-worthy. Cultivating the disposition of seeking sense pleasures and avoiding pain can lead to a self-indulgent, immoderate life or a moral development arrested at the akratic stage. There are pains (e.g. associated with strengthening one’s health) that are worth to tolerate. And there are pleasures that when indulged or indulged in excess weaken our ability to choose well. Hence, our initial affective ordering needs to be transformed. We need to become “a lover of what is noble” and learn to “*find pleasant what is by nature pleasant.*” 76

Akrasia as Failure of Character: Akrates, Enkrates, and Phronimos

Kosman and Burnyeat demonstrate Aristotle’s point that to learn to choose right requires that we know not only know the good with our head, but also our heart. But this does not mean that the

development of the head, the intellectual virtues is unimportant. Open-mindedness, deliberation, and good judgment are needed to arrive at the right choice, the right course of action. While the young initiate has to rely on the initially somewhat formulaic “aim for the mean between extremes” method of choosing, the morally maturing person confronts challenging and novel situations where conflicting demands and values must be weighed and integrated into the right choice. The person must move past the akratic and enkratic stage and develop “practical wisdom” (phronesis) and become a “phronimos.”

Technically, the *akratic* person can be the ‘victim’ of two different kinds of failures, an intellectual and an appetitive one. At the intellectual level he may falsely discern the stakes. For example, although he knows that a rich desert after a full meal depletes the person of energy, he may falsely conjecture that cheesecake is not a rich desert. At the appetitive level, the person’s appetitive urges may be so strong as to temporarily deceive him against what he knows to be the case (as when anger or lust blind us to seeing clearly) or they may simply override the intellectual knowledge. “[D]ragged around by pathos” he is not yet “properly affected.”

The enkratic person, by contrast, does not give in to the urge of sense pleasure. “He is tempted by pleasure: he can be affected by it as much as the akrates. The difference is that he does not act from his reactions: he holds out against them and continues to act in accordance with his ends (1150a9-32).” Rorty, 274.

Finally, the phronimos: “... the phronimos does not have to use knowledge to resist the lures of pleasures (1145b13-14). Because he does not perceive what fails to accord with his ends as pleasurable, he is in the fortunate position, as the enkrates is not, of being unconflicted.” 274. The phronimos / temperate person is *properly affected*. For him, heart and mind feel and perceive in unison. He can trust his sensibilities and motive energies and does not need to suspect or suppress them. His inclinations have been transformed.

Aristotle’s solution is thus, according to Rorty’s reconstruction, that *the akrates is deficient not in knowledge but in a proper reordering of his sentiments or character*. “But the akrates’ failures of knowledge

are not merely failures of knowledge...” they are “a failure of character.” More specifically: “[h]e has habits that give his *pathe* undue dominance in the determination of his actions.” 279. Thus, Rorty’s answer seems to be that the akrates has failed to (or not yet progressed to) acquire the right character. He or she suffers from immature heart-mind transformation.

Virtue as a Package Deal: The Role of Wisdom and Contemplation

The Burnyeat-Kosman-Rorty thesis takes us a long way past the notion that Aristotelian virtue simply consists in a settled disposition to choose right. It properly emphasizes the need to morally grow towards acquiring reordered affective sensibilities that lead us to temperance, where we overcome being internally conflicted. But one may wonder whether even that notion goes far enough, as it makes little use of the final stages of NE, in which Aristotle extols the life of wisdom and contemplation as the highest life.

In the latter part of the NE (books VI through X) Aristotle develops a program to deal with the problem. In these sections, the role of habits of moderation recedes into the background in favor of the person’s learning to weigh moral goods (deliberation), judge and act wisely (*phronesis*), develop deep friendships with morally superior people, and, finally, enter into the delights of wisdom (*sophia*) and contemplation (*theoria*). Without wisdom and contemplation, the moral agent is still affected by the impatient urges of sense pleasure. He still does not delight in the goods that are “by nature good.”

Hence, for Aristotle virtue was not the final or highest stage in a person’s moral development. Rather it was both part of and a prerequisite for clearing the path towards a person’s ability to delight in the highest goods of wisdom (*sophia*) and contemplation (*theoria*). In some sense, virtue could only be perfected in a life that would open us up to these delights, for only the person dwelling in wisdom and contemplation would do the right thing not from habit but for its own sake.

An important contribution to this discussion is Thomas Smith’s (2001) “Revaluing Ethics,” especially the concluding chapter which offers, to my mind, the most sensible explanation of what Aristotle

meant when he pointed to the life of “*theoria*” as the highest life. In line with philosophers like Pierre Hadot and Josef Pieper, Smith interprets Aristotle’s “*theoria*” as mindful *contemplation*, rather than as “life of reason” or “theoretical study” (Irwin), life of “pure thought” (Charlesworth), “review or survey of existing knowledge” (Barnes), or similar renderings that bring ‘*theoria*’ close to the kind of purely cognitive, discursive thinking that professional philosophers presumably engage in. By contrast, Thomas Smith (like others in the practical philosophy tradition) renders *theoria* as a life of “detachment from external goods” that fosters “peace and balance” resulting from “doing ‘nothing’ and clear[ing] one’s mind from fretting about the concerns that constitute the bulk of the so-called practical life.” Such a life demands “a mindfulness and attentiveness to realities that most of us are only dimly aware of” (p. 250).

Clearly, for Aristotle the pursuit of virtue is not completed when a person has established habits of moderation. Rather this is a fairly early stage in moral development which prevents us from acquiring unwholesome tastes. At some point, we need to outgrow these habits of moderation like training wheels, thus clearing the way to become established in tasting and practicing the “that”: the noble and just.

4. THE BUDDHA’S STRATEGY OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT: AKRASIA AS LACK OF SKILL

Above we saw that Aristotle thought that *akrasia* could be overcome as a person grows along the path of acquiring the skills of virtue, wise deliberation, wise judgment and action, noble friendship, and, ultimately, developing a taste or love for wisdom and contemplation as the highest manifestation of the human search for happiness. The Buddha’s suggestions on this score parallel Aristotle, but also go further. The student who wants to train in self-restraint and morality is encouraged to cultivate heart-mind transformation and moral skill building cultivating the factors of the noble eight-fold path. These teachings can take the practitioner all the way to liberation or arahantship. But the Buddha’s teaching is “graduated.” He tempers his teaching to suit the needs of his audience’s level of development, whether they are ordinary persons (“uninstructed wordlings”) (1), people “with little dust in their eyes” (2), or “disciples” that have chosen the path of higher training.

In the morality cluster of the eight-fold path the training aims at virtue (sila / morality) by way of cultivating right speech, right action (moral restraint via keeping the precepts), and right livelihood are key for lay and monastic followers alike. In the wisdom cluster, the training aims at development of discernment/wisdom by way of right view (understanding existence in terms of the four noble truths and the three characteristics) and right intention (of non-ill will and harmlessness). Thirdly, in the concentration cluster, the training aims at right effort, right concentration, and right mindfulness on which I will focus here. While there are interesting points of family resemblance with Aristotle's developmental path, together they exhibit a different and, in many ways, more refined and practical way of tackling the person's mirrored in sense pleasures.—Given space constraints, I will limit myself in what follows to some examples from the three factors of the concentration group.

Right Effort

Right or correct effort is effort that is comprehensive, capable not only to stave off wrong action and encourage the occasional virtuous action, but effort that eventually establishes the practitioner firmly in wholesome states of joy and tranquility. An approach to merely avoid negative states would leave a lot of doors open for our interior experience to be shaped by the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion. To ward that off we need a four-pronged right effort that aims at a) preventing unarisen unwholesome states from arising; b) uprooting arisen unwholesome states; c) causing wholesome states to arise; and d) expanding, stabilizing, and cultivating arisen wholesome states.

This corresponds to a typology of defilements at three levels: at the coarsest level, the defilements drive us to act and transgress against others and ourselves (corresponding to Aristotle's stage of "incontinence"). At the next level the person is sufficiently self-controlled not to transgress in their outward behavior, but their inner life is still in the grip of these defilements in the form of inner dissatisfaction and frustration (the manifest stage). Finally, even when greed, anger, and delusion no longer manifest in one's

inner life, they may continue to be operating at the subtlest level of “underlying tendency” (Bodhi 2006).⁶

For example, when sense desire has not yet arisen, the disciple is oriented to invest in the continuous non-arising by generating wholesome states through virtuous action and by cultivating dwelling in the “divine abodes” of good will, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

When sense desire has arisen the disciple is directed to bring to mind an awareness of negative consequences of unwholesome action by reflection and foresight to forestall or shorten unwholesome behavior. When thoughts of sensual desire arise the disciple reflects that “this leads to affliction and away from Nibbana. When I considered ‘this leads to my own and others affliction, it subsided in me.” (quoted in Goldstein, p. 17).

Further, wholesome states are generated and consolidated when the practitioner “rouses his will, stirs up energy, exerts his mind and strives” (AN 4:13) and develops the seven factors of enlightenment: mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, equanimity. The practitioner will seek seclusion to help keep in mind a favorable object that has arisen (through meditation and contemplation).

Right Concentration

Through right concentration the practitioner overcomes the mind’s lust for endless and often aimless proliferation and pondering. An untrained mind becomes easy prey for unwholesome akratic desires. In the grip of ignorance and delusion it sees the alluring surface of sense pleasure, but ignores or does not fully know the hook in the bait. There is an important difference here to the Aristotelian scheme in that Buddhism views not only the “appetites” but also the mind as a sense organ with an inclination towards greed and self-indulgence.

6. Tillemans (2008) offers a stimulating account of akrasia in Buddhist, in particular Santideva’s thinking revolving around the idea that akrasia reflects “a defiled intelligence reifying persons” (159), i.e. a mind that has not fully uprooted the self-view. This would be an example for the person who has moved past the “manifest” stage but not yet uprooted the “underlying tendency” to, in this case, self-view.

Overcoming akrasia is hence a matter of checking the “monkey mind” tendency to seek ever further pleasures on the next tree, and the tree after that. “Quivering, wavering, hard to guard, to hold in check... Like a fish pulled from its home in the water and thrown on land: this mind flips and flaps about, to escape Mara’s sway.” This mind is tossed around by circumstance like a leaf in the wind.⁷ The Buddha’s view of the untrained mind differs somewhat from that of Aristotle: the untrained mind not only is lacking knowledge or reason. Greedy for experience, a magnet for delusory experience and distraction, it lacks concentration and stability. To undo and overcome this tendency, it does not suffice to fill the mind with epistemic knowledge. It becomes necessary to train the mind in wise attention and inattention; mobilizing countervailing states; and skilled investigation.

Guarding the Sense Doors

Training to “when seeing, just see” the practitioner does not overlay the eye-consciousness with mind-consciousness. When a particular object (like a bowl of ice cream) comes to view, the eye-consciousness in and of itself does *not* lead to an urging of the appetites to indulge it. For that to happen requires that eye-consciousness combines with mind-consciousness—e.g. the thought that the taste buds will rejoice when we eat the ice cream.

“And how does [a practitioner] guard the doors of their senses? On seeing a form with the eye, they do not grasp at any theme or details by which—if they were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail them. [... same for hearing, smelling, tasting, touching] Endowed with this noble restraint over the sense faculties, they are inwardly sensitive to the pleasure of being blameless. This is how [a practitioner] guards the doors of their senses.” (Long Discourses, 2.64).

7. In the modern West, we are often prone to see a volatile mind as a reflection of desirable qualities like “curiosity” or “imagination.” But even the Aristotelian and post-Aristotelian tradition did not see an ever meandering mind as a positive thing: curiositas is seen as greed for news (which survives in the German term “Neugier”, literally ‘news-greed’), not too different from gluttony which is greed for food-related sense pleasure.

Avoid Mental Proliferation

“Dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is sense-contact. With sense-contact as condition, there is feeling. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one thinks about. What one thinks about, that one mentally proliferates.”

But we are not helpless victims of this kind of proliferation. We can train the mind to arrest proliferation by practicing “when seeing just see (don’t proliferate); when feeling, just feel (don’t proliferate), etc...”

Generating Counter-Balancing States

When the pull of sensual desire is very strong, the Buddha recommends that we generate counter-balancing states. A well-known example is to counterbalance the allures of the senses by heightening awareness of the transient nature of these allures. This can be done by meditations on the body in various forms of aging or on the dead corps in various forms of decay. When plagued by persistently unwholesome urges we can mobilize disgust and think, for example, of the ultimate end of gluttonous indulgence. The Buddha advises his son Rahul, “Make disgust strong in you.” P. 30.

Together, these trainings aim at a skillful use of our attentive powers. Without such training, the mind’s default state is being scattered and fragmented—a state in which a person is the easy prey to akratic temptations. In contrast to Aristotle, the Buddha offers teachings that are more encompassing (the untrained monkey mind is as much a source of attachment to sense pleasure as the “appetites”), more detailed and more practical.

Mindfulness: Continuous and Comprehensive

The Buddha’s highlighting mindfulness as a key factor of moral development is the clearest difference to Aristotle. In mindfulness the moral agent is encouraged to train in keeping continuous and comprehensive watch over the four main aspects of our mind world or the “four frames of reference”: body, feelings, mind states, and mental qualities (Analayo 2003; Goldstein 2013; Thanissaro

1996). If we want to train our minds to see things as they are, we cannot selectively train in some areas—say our feelings—and neglect others, e.g., the way we construe or frame phenomena. To know and experience them correctly requires that we penetrate all of them “with [right] view.” This means, that we train ourselves to see any object or event in terms of the three characteristics, as void of self, unsatisfactory, and impermanent. To the extent that the disciple becomes skilled on this path, she can no longer be tempted by coarse states like greed or aversion. Beyond the reach of greed and aversion and with delusion dispelled, she “knows” objects of sense pleasure to be “empty.” They thus lose the urgent pull that rice paddies have for the indulgent bull, and a mindful person experiences no desire for them.⁸ Heart and mind are now “one.” The dualism of head and heart, of cognitive and emotional experiencing is overcome. The disciple sees with a faculty that fluidly and appropriately *discerns*: an act that integrates and unifies rational and emotional aspects of perception into one act of “direct knowing.” Direct knowing dispels misperception and readily discerns wholesome and unwholesome.

Wisdom or direct knowing and insight dispels illusion of selfhood and investigates phenomena in terms of the five hindrances, the five aggregates, the three characteristics, and the four noble truths. This training will eventually uproot the underlying tendency for craving and attachment. Insight is a form of discernment into the conditioned nature of sense objects gained through sustained contemplation of experience in terms of the three characteristics (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, no self).

The goal of mindfulness training is to make mindfulness continuous and comprehensive rather than selective and episodic. In the West we often find conceptions of the educated person that delight in shunning coarser forms of greed, but indulge greed that attaches to refined objects of aesthetic experience especially when they are also useful as a status marker and a strategy of social distinction (e.g. Bourdieu’s “Distinction”). Likewise, one finds

8. Socrates famously attributes wrong action to not knowing in Protagoras ([2], 357d) and in Gorgias: “As for me, if I act wrongly at all in the conduct of my life, you may be assured that my error is not voluntary but due to my ignorance” ([4], 488a).

that aversion and resentment are often condoned if they attach to approved or “correct” targets.

Although the Buddha and Aristotle’s concerns bear a family resemblance, they are not identical. Most importantly, the Buddha does not share Aristotle’s essentialism.⁹ Objects are void of an essential nature. They are not intrinsically pleasant or unpleasant. They are what they are; the mind construes them into being pleasant or unpleasant. We can train our minds to know the feeling tone to which objects give rise as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral and to see their inherent lack of permanent essence. Knowing that a certain object gives rise to a “pleasant feeling” we can dwell in this awareness without greedily seeking to indulge it. This is the path to dispassion and freedom from the fetters.

A Graduated Path

Like many other aspects of the Buddha’s teaching, mindfulness, too, offers fruit for practitioners at a range of skill levels, from elementary to mature. The beginning practitioner can practice on achieving mindful awareness of her bodily formations and feelings. (This is practiced today in a growing number of schools and colleges.) As mindfulness of body and feelings matures, mindful watch of thought states and finally, of mental qualities and phenomena, comes within reach.

Renunciation: From Lower to Higher Pleasures—The Gathering of Momentum

The practitioner develops a preference for the higher delights and avoids the lower pleasures because they block access to the higher ones. But advancing on the path generates its own joys:

*“If, by forsaking a limited ease
He would see an abundance of ease,
The enlightened person
Would forsake the limited ease*

9. William James: “There is no property ABSOLUTELY essential to any one thing. The same property which figures as the essence of a thing on one occasion becomes a very inessential feature on the other” (PP 959).

For the sake of the abundant.” (Dhammapada, 290).

As one engages in these practices, there is a progression here from relying on the will / right effort (“fabrication”) to a generation of momentum that is nourished by a realizing a “delight apart from sensual pleasures ... which surpasses even divine bliss. Since I take delight in that, I do not envy what is inferior...” p. 127. One realizes “pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality” and “pursue[s] pleasure within.” “I am no longer afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality.” (Middle Length Discourses, MLD 36.31) MLD: 139.9: “One should know how to define pleasure, and knowing that, one should pursue pleasure within oneself.” “[A] heedful person, absorbed in jhana, attains an abundance of ease.”⁸ Finally: the blamelessness that is the result of the virtuous life gives rise to a state of joy.

5. DISCUSSION

In this section I will discuss important commonalities and differences between the two traditions.

Transformative Conceptions of Moral Development: Educating the Heart-Mind

Buddhism and Aristotelianism share a conception of education and moral development as a transformative process by which a person not only develops their cognitive faculties, but rather develops both heart and mind, and, importantly, develops them *together*.¹⁰ In other words, the process is neither one of mind over heart, nor of heart over mind. While the modern educational practice (as for example in Bloom’s famous ‘taxonomy’) construes education largely as a process of cognitive formation, Aristotle and the Buddha teach that neither part can be trained well in isolation. Their separability is an illusion.

Both traditions stand in opposition to the modern view that an effective transformation of the heart is beyond an external agent’s deliberate effort. The best we can do is to establish the rational mind (the intellect) in reason and rationality and then let reason

10. For a recent Buddhist articulation of this notion see Thanissaro Bhikkhu, “Head and Heart Together. Essays on the Buddhist Path.” 2010.

take control over the heart. This is largely the view that informs dominant education practice and public policy.

The separation of heart and mind in moral development has, of course, frequently met with suspicion and there are two often found alternatives to the modern view which, yet, differ from the one held by Aristotelians and Buddhists:

Equal and separate

One alternative view is the idea that heart and mind are equal but master over separate spheres, each in their separate sphere and dominion. This view is expressed famously in LaRochefoucauld's aphorism: "the heart has reasons that reason does not know." The implication here is that reason ought to understand and respect the heart's different logos and share its dominion over our actions with the heart (thus articulated in Thomas Jefferson's "Dialogue between the Head and the Heart") but each operate in their separate spheres. In some kind of co-determination, in matters of personal interaction and family the heart should rule; in matters of politics and society the head.

Heart First. Another alternative view is the romantic reversal of the modern "mind over heart". This is the view that a well-tuned heart should direct reason as the best path towards happiness and flourishing. The mind (understood as intellect) should largely take its cues from the heart. Most fully articulated by Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters*, education should focus on developing and maturing the heart. In practice this stipulates a focus on aesthetic education through the arts and free play.

In Buddhist thought, language fortunately and advantageously mitigates against the artificial separation of heart and mind that has taken root in Western thought. The mind ("*citta*") combines the faculties of head and heart, intellect and affect, and translators use both terms, "heart" and "mind," to translate the Pali word "*citta*." In recent Western research there is an attempt to open to this more realistic and comprehensive view of the mind through work on "*embodied cognition*."

Renunciation as the Heart of the Transformation: A Reordering of High and Low

The process of becoming virtuous must involve a reordering of what one loves... from loving sense pleasure to noble delights of

virtue and wisdom and acting in accord with them. This is where the transformative part is most clearly visible. The carnal pleasures become less, and the delights of noble pursuits more attractive and compelling. In Greek thought this is, of course, the case as people move from loving lower goods like sense pleasures, power, or fame to develop *philo-sophia*, a love for the path of wisdom, which for Aristotle at least includes a love for what is “noble and divine and noble and divine in us.” We see this in the important shift in Aristotle’s treatment of pleasure in book VI and X. Aristotle believes that the good life cannot do without pleasure, but the key is the changing appreciation of what constitutes pleasure. The Buddha likewise and perhaps more trenchantly points out that advancing along the path opens rather than closes the mind for those things that are truly and lastingly pleasant (see above quote from the Dhammapada).

Becoming virtuous is thus a sustained transformative process that, once it is in motion, is increasingly agent-initiated and agent-driven. The student’s desire to become virtuous is kindled and maintained by “small wins” as a result repeated experience of choice à fruit à insight à desire to continue. This increasingly self-authored process confirms the notion that virtue cannot (and need not) be “taught” (in the sense in which certain kinds of epistemic knowledge can be taught), but rather must be aroused and awoken (“recollected”) by removal of the defilements.

Rejection of mere Intelligence / Cleverness; The Deinos; Studying Like a Snake

Another important point of convergence between the two traditions is their rejection of the merely clever person, the “smart fool” (Sternberg) whose head is highly developed at the expense of the heart. Aristotle emphasizes that the person who merely develops their intellect cannot deliberate properly because they know nothing of ultimate ends. Such a person is a “deinos”—someone “capable of anything.” Literature and art (and history) supply plenty of examples of such a type (one thinks of Shakespeare’s Iago or Dostoyevski’s Raskolnikov). In German the smart fool is called by the harsher name of “Fachidiot” (“expert idiot”). In the Buddhist tradition there is the injunction against studying for personal gain only, which is called “studying like a snake.” And the Visuddhimagga holds that “virtue without learning” is less harmful than “learning without virtue.”

A Point of Difference: Habit, Will, and Skill

Both traditions agree that for people to become virtuous the untamed longings must be transformed, the locus of control must move from external (fear of sanctions) to internal (failing to meet one's own self-defined standards). Although there is a need for the exertion of energy and will, a transformation that would consist merely in willful self-discipline is unsustainable and would not yield the desired fruit. Rather, in time, this transformation must be buoyed by growing insight, discernment, and renunciation, as a result of a sustained process of cultivation where one develops a taste for the higher goods.

But while there is agreement on the role of willful resolve, there is a different emphasis on the factors of habit versus skill. In the traditional reading of the NE, habits play an all-important role. Aristotle says that one becomes virtuous by making virtue a habit (by repeatedly engaging in virtuous acts). I suggested above that in the latter parts of the NE habits seem to take a backseat behind the intellectual virtues and the growing taste for wisdom (*sophia*) and contemplation (*theoria*), which would suggest that for Aristotle habits play the role of training wheels or crutches to be eventually discarded. Yet, in much of the secondary literature, they remain all-important as they do in William James' influential treatment.

By contrast, the moral and mental training taught by the Buddha foregrounds *skills* rather than habits. Choosing wisely requires the skill of discernment; the skill of wise attention and inattention; skillful effort, concentration, mindfulness. The idea here is that advancing on the path laid out here is like moving from being able to strum a few chords on the guitar to virtuoso skill levels.

There are good reasons that construing moral maturity as skill-building is better than habit formation:

- habits don't require choice; they are a "dumb" way of doing the right thing;

- habits don't allow for deliberation. It's hard to imagine someone making a tough decision as a matter of habit.

Even someone well-established in virtue will need vigilance

and discernment as they respond to a given situation (e.g. a friend who is not speaking the truth). Secondly, virtue requires correct perception of a situation and settled habits at the level of perceptions would make us see only what we are used to see. As Lichtenberg (quoted by Nyanaponika) says: “I wish I could disaccustom myself from everything, so that I might see anew, hear anew, feel anew. Habit spoils our philosophy.” 105. Likewise, Rousseau points out: “...habit kills imagination. Only new objects reawaken it.” Virtue, it would seem, does not thrive under the rule of fixed mental habits. It requires open-mindedness and discernment, or what Zen Buddhists have called “beginner’s mind.”

To the extent that good habits are useful in the early stages of the transformation, their use resembles that of training wheels—to be discarded or transcended by the more mature practitioner. During these early phases their use would seem mostly negative as good habits help to ward off the possibility of acquiring bad habits, i.e. Tocqueville’s “depraved taste for the cause of one’s affliction” that are hard to shake later.

Easing the weight otherwise borne by habits would also address the problem of virtue as a result of “moral luck.” When habits are all important then for a person to be “capable of rational choice ... depends on whether he developed the appropriate sorts of habits at a time before he could have determined those habits himself.” 280 this creates the problem of “moral luck:” that only by having the kind of upbringing that sets a person early on the proper path of character development can one become virtuous.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper I aim to show a) that a ‘global ethic of education’ is not a pipe dream; that we have common ground to stand on in the concern to realize a pragmatic degree of shared concern while honoring our diverse moral traditions; b) that Buddhism is uniquely positioned to act as a catalyst and contributor to the development of such a global ethic.

While I could only explore the similarity between Buddhist and Aristotelian concerns for virtue / *silā*, the approach could readily be extended to include Christian (e.g., Weil 1952), Confucian

(e.g. Li 2012), Daoist (Slingerland 2014), Hebrew (Blau 2000) or Muslim (Bucar 2019) traditions. Other prominent educational philosophies like the German tradition of *Bildung* (Söckness 2010) or Dewey's philosophy (1932) have strong virtue foci as well. The point is that upon inspection there may well be a robust fund of shared concerns with education as moral formation towards virtue and self-regulation that a global ethic of education can draw on. Not cultivating that unifying common ground at a time when differences of culture and civilization threaten so forcefully to pull us apart would seem both derelict and foolish.

Patience and toleration, generosity and good will, compassion and empathetic joy, equanimity and wisdom are moral skills without which young people (and adults) are unlikely to be able to

- share wealth justly;
- understand and deal with strangers empathically;
- use the world's limited resources sustainably;
- find the inner peace and equanimity to judge and act reasonably.

These skills would seem every bit as important as the engineer's skills to build cars and bridges, the researcher's skills to contain epidemics, or the administrator's skills to govern fairly and efficiently. It would stand to reason that our common weal and wealth today is endangered less by whether the global economy grows by a percentage point faster or slower or whether this or that school system rises faster in certain rankings than by our ability or inability to act wisely and indwell peacefully.

While educators across the globe have recently been exhorted to push their students into competitions to learn faster and achieve more, we have spent less energy on cultivating a dialogue over the values we share and the virtues we need to do our part to extend peace and well-being in the world.

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