

The Virtues of Asian Humanism

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It is man that makes the Way great and not the Way that can make man great.

—*Analects* 15.28

The Buddha is an ordinary human being; ordinary human beings are the Buddha.

—Nichiren Daishonin

HUMANISM, one of the greatest achievements of world civilization, has become a dirty word. Humanism, one of the essential aspects of the American heritage, has become an un-American word. Something is terribly wrong when a good term like this is abused by people who ought to know better. It used to be that all of America's ills were blamed on a "communist" conspiracy, but now this has been replaced by a "humanist" conspiracy. Humanists are being targeted as the source of every "evil," from homosexuality to one-world government. The fact that the American Communist Party had become fossilized and a laughingstock did not deter earlier conspiracy theorists. And now to propose that the 3,000-member American Humanist Association has a stranglehold on our minds is an insult to all intelligent Americans. Communism, by and large, deserves the bad press that it receives. One can understand how Communism has become a dirty word. Many lives and much freedom have been lost in the name of Communism, just as formerly many were lost in the name of Christianity. But as far as I know, no one has ever been killed in the name of humanism.

Why has this innocent name of been blackened? Why has the humanist become the new Satan and anti-Christ? The Religious Right must certainly take most of the blame, even, regrettably so, some of the best evangelical theologians. John Jefferson Davis, who otherwise makes some positive contributions to systematic theology, claims that "antirevelational" humanism is the cause of mental illness, international terrorism, and other evils.¹ Some of the blame also lies with narrow-minded

humanists who have insisted that only their views are “true” humanism. When some humanists say that only those who reject a belief in God and put their trust squarely in the scientific method are real humanists, they are distorting the meaning of humanism. When someone like B. F. Skinner, one of the signers of the Humanist Manifesto, claims that human beings have neither freedom nor dignity, this is also a significant deviation from traditional humanism.

The evangelist Jerry Falwell charges that humanism “challenges every principle on which America was founded. It advocates abortion-on-demand, recognition of homosexuals, free use of pornography, legalizing of prostitution and gambling, the free use of drugs...and the socialization of all humanity into a world commune.”² Needless to say, traditional humanism is not bound at all to any of these positions. Many of the humanists in the Libertarian Party would agree with most of this list, but as *laissez-faire* capitalists, they would definitely reject the world commune idea. There are also many Christian humanists who would disagree with most of these points. It is also clear, as I have argued elsewhere,³ that America was founded on humanist principles.

This attack is truly incredible if one considers that the Greek humanism contributed to the ethical foundations of a democratic liberalism that is worldwide in scope. The humanism of the Greek Sophists gave law its adversarial system and inspired Renaissance humanists to extend education to the masses as well as to the aristocracy. The Christian humanism of Aquinas and Erasmus helped temper negative views of human nature found in the biblical tradition. The humanism of the European Enlightenment gave us political rights, representative government, and free market economics. It has been said that “the pluralistic, democratic, secular, humanistic state...is one of the greatest political inventions of all time...”⁴

In this essay I will argue that both Confucian and Buddhist humanists can offer sage advice to Euro-American humanists, whose emphasis on the individual has sometimes undermined social stability and traditional values. We will also see that both Confucian and Buddhist humanism presents a balanced view of heart-mind, which unfortunately has been upset by an overemphasis on the intellect in European philosophy. I will also show these Asians joined Greek humanists in affirming a virtue ethics rather than a rule-based ethics. Furthermore, the fact that Buddhism includes animals in the moral community allows contemporary humanists to avoid the mistake of becoming overly anthropocentric and exclusive in their thinking. Finally, I will propose that the Soka Gakkai is the most promising and constructive Buddhist humanism in the world today.

The Origins of Asian Humanism

Humanism has a long, distinguished history which goes all the way back to Confucius and the Buddha, whose emphasis on human dignity and right human relationships makes them, a full generation before Socrates, strong candidates as the world's first great humanists. A good one-sentence summary of Confucian humanism can be found in the *Analects*: "It is humans that makes the Way great and not the Way that can make humans great" (15:28). When the Jesuits first went to China, they thought they had discovered the Asian equivalent of their own Christian humanism. It is important, however, to note that Christian humanism is theocentric, whereas Buddhism and Confucianism are humanistic in the strong sense that neither view requires divine aid for attaining liberation or achieving the good life. Accounts indicate that neither the demon Mara nor the Hindu Brahma could prevent the Buddha from achieving enlightenment. It is only some Pure Land schools, with their emphasis on "other" power rather than "self" power that do not meet the criteria of strict humanism.

I would like to propose a Buddhist equivalent of *Analects* 15:28: "It is humans who make the Buddha nature great, not the Buddha nature that makes humans great." Let me hasten to prevent a possible misunderstanding. In a basic sense it is the Buddha nature that makes all things great, but the humanistic principle here is that it is people themselves who have to actualize their Buddha natures; no one else can do it for them. Also consonant with Confucian philosophy is that idea that humans play a unique role, through language and thought, in revealing the true nature of all things in the cosmos. In this regard a Soka Gakkai reading of *Analects* 15:28 is, I believe, particularly instructive: "It is we who create value and it is we, through art, religion, and culture, who reveal the value of all nature around us." Protagoras' *homo mensura* is therefore too strong: humans are not the measure of everything; rather, they are the only beings that can reveal the true nature of things through philosophy, religion, art, and science.

This strict definition of humanism—human beings achieve their goals completely under their own power—is not suitable as a general definition. I believe that it is essential to formulate a basic definition of humanism that is religiously neutral. It is imperative, especially in a world of cultural pluralism, for believers and nonbelievers to be able to share the same basic humanistic values. A religiously neutral definition of morality is necessary so as to protect atheists from unfair charges of immorality. Common dictionary definitions of humanism are compre-

hensive enough to include both European and Asian traditions and sufficiently neutral to embrace both theists and nontheists. This one from the *Random House College Dictionary* is eminently suitable: "Any system of thought or action in which human interests, values, dignity, are taken to be of primary importance...."

Both Asian and Greek humanists focused on this-worldly concerns but without giving up the idea of a transcendent realm altogether. In other words, humanism's principal concerns in Greece, China, and India were secular. Confucius, the Buddha, and Socrates turned from cosmology and metaphysics to the important problems of human action and conduct. A central imperative for both of them was to establish correct human relationships with the goal of peace, harmony, and justice. The stress on reason has been a pervasive element in European humanism, an element clearly subordinate in Asian traditions. For Confucians the highest virtue *ren* consists in reciprocity and loving others; they do not emphasize cultivating virtues according to right reason. Although the Buddha was a consummate dialectician, he, too, insisted that right living was much more important than right reasoning.

In Search of Buddhist Humanism

In an unpublished paper entitled "Buddhism and Chinese Humanism," David Kalupahana contends that it is Buddhism, not Confucianism, that should be promoted as the true humanism of Asia. He claims that Gautama's rejection of transcendental knowledge, his declaration of moral freedom in the midst of karmic determinants, and his refusal to go beyond immediate experience all converge nicely with major elements of European humanism. Based on knowledge gained from experience and induction, a Buddhist, says Kalupahana, can use an evaluative knowledge called *anumāna*, a mode of moral reflection, which allows her to complete the eight-fold path and become an *uttamapurisa*, an "ultimate" person. This ideal person is one who acts with a clear goal in view and harms neither herself nor others. Although Kalupahana translates *uttamapurisa* as "superman," this obviously does not represent a Buddhist Titan, as it may have in Hinduism or as it does in the later Buddhist *Māhāvastu*. (Spiritual Titanism is an extreme form of humanism in which human beings take on divine attributes and prerogatives.)⁵ The *uttamapurisa* simply acts "with a clear goal in view and does not waver when faced with obstacles. He is one who has attained freedom from the suffering and unhappiness in the world.... Such a person...is not only happy by himself, but also makes other people happy by being pleasant and helpful to them."⁶ This Buddhist saint sounds very much

like a Confucian sage rather than a spiritual Titan.

Kalupahana sums up his view of Buddhist humanism in this way:

The philosophy of...Buddhism...undoubtedly represents one of the most comprehensive and systematic forms of humanism. It is based on naturalistic metaphysics, with causal dependence as its central theme. Rejecting any form of transcendentalism, determinism, or fatalism, it emphasizes its ultimate faith in man and recognizes his power or potentiality in solving his problems through reliance primarily upon empirical knowledge, reason and scientific method applied with courage and vision. It believes in the freedom of man, not in a transcendental sphere, but here and now. The highest goal it offers is not otherworldly but this worldly.⁷

Kalupahana concedes that Euro-American humanists would not be sympathetic to the Buddhist belief in transmigration, but he counters that the Buddhist version of reincarnation does not undermine human freedom in the way that he believes that Hindu or Jain views do.

Two other objections to Kalupahana's thesis should be mentioned. First, Buddhist monks claim that the capacity of retrocognition, clairvoyance, and telepathy aids them in apprehending the twelve-fold chain of causal dependence. Contemporary Euro-American humanists, especially those associated with a leading humanist journal *Free Inquiry*, have consistently rejected claims of ESP and other claims of paranormal experience. Second, these same critics might also respond negatively to Buddhism's "soft" determinism, claiming that true humanism must be based on a theory of genuine self-determination. If freedom of this sort is a requirement for humanistic philosophy, then none of the classical Asian philosophies, including Confucianism, qualifies as such. Ironically, Euro-American humanists cannot consistently hold to this criterion of freedom either. The Humanist Pantheon, comprised of historical humanists chosen by the editors of *Free Inquiry* and listed on the back of each issue, features determinists such as Lucretius, Epictetus, Spinoza, Hume, Mill, and Freud. Their Academy of Humanism also contains sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson and other prominent scientists who subscribe to the theory of universal determinism. It is clear that ancient and contemporary humanists support moral and social freedom, but do not agree on the issue of free-will and an internal self-determining agent.⁸

Buddhist Ethics as "Character Consequentialism"

European humanism commenced with the classical Greeks, especially

Socrates, Protagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, who celebrated the use of reason and discovered human conscience—Socrates' *daimon* that always warned him of wrong actions. In Plato's *Protagoras* (324 ff.) we find the idea of an inner habit of virtue by which we become morally responsible and to which punishment is directed if we do wrong. In this dialogue Socrates' debate with Protagoras reveals a basic split in Greek humanism, a division that is still with us. In the passage referred to above, Protagoras is a protoutilitarian in his concept of moral responsibility and punishment. The modern doctrine of rehabilitation and deterrence is actually 2,500 years old: "He who desires to inflict rational punishment does not retaliate for a past wrong which cannot be undone; he has regard to the future, and is desirous that the man who is punished, and he who sees him punished may be deterred from doing wrong again. He punishes for the sake of prevention..." (324 B). Plato, Aristotle, and Kant have a different view of moral responsibility and punishment. Their moral objectivism is nonutilitarian and their idea of justice is retributive: punishment is not future-oriented with deterrence in mind; but past-oriented, focusing on the deed done, rather than on the hypothetical better deeds which will come by rehabilitation.

We, therefore, have two major schools of Greek humanism. The Sophists and Epicureans are fully secular humanists; they are protoutilitarians; they believe that moral laws are conventions, and they hold that virtues come about as the result of a pleasure-pain calculus. In their rejection of hedonism and relativism, Plato, Aristotle, and their modern followers affirm a virtue ethics basic on objective moral values. Although they still emphasize human dignity, Plato and Aristotle reject Protagoras' famous motto *homo mensura*—humans are the measure of all things. Furthermore, Plato and Aristotle preserve the unity of truth, goodness, and beauty. Following the Greek atomists, the Sophists and Epicurus separate fact and value. For them the fundamental nature of reality consists of inert atoms bouncing around in empty space. Accepting this view of reality, modern science essentially agrees with the Sophists: values such as goodness and beauty are merely human projections upon a valueless world.

Anticipating the Greek philosophers by a generation, the Buddha established an essential link between goodness and truth on the one hand and evil and untruth on the other. Mahayana Buddhism in China and Japan is most aware of the aesthetic dimension of being moral, and the founder of the Soka Gakkai continues this tradition. Even though Tsunesaburo Makiguchi substituted benefit for truth in his trinity of benefit, goodness, and beauty, he still agreed with the Greeks that beau-

tiful deeds are performed by beautiful souls.⁹ Makiguchi's focus on the idea of benefit sounds utilitarian and it is completely consistent with a pervasive consequentialism that is found in the Buddhist tradition. One of the most striking and controversial examples of consequentialism is that some Mahayanist Buddhists hold that Bodhisattvas may kill persons who will, if not stopped, murder others in the future.¹⁰ At least three good consequences result from such action: Bodhisattvas accrue merit that they then can bequeath to others; the would-be murderers are saved from the horrors of Hell; and the lives of many people are saved.

In a famous passage that demonstrates that the Buddha is a humanist in the strong sense, he exhorts his disciples to reject all traditional forms of authority. He tells his disciples that they should not accept any claim merely on the basis of appeal to holy scripture or that it was said by a great yogi; rather he says "if you find that it appeals to your sense of discrimination and conscience as being conducive to your benefit and happiness, then accept it and live up to it."¹¹ After 60 of his disciples had reached enlightenment, he offers the same advice: "Go forth, O monks,...for the good, benefit, and happiness of the people and devas."¹²

Buddhist consequentialism, however, is not utilitarian because the Buddha rejected all forms of hedonism, and he also believed that intentions were just as important as consequences. Consequentialism is a moral theory that insists that all moral value lies in consequences not intentions, but not all consequentialists agree that moral value is established by a pleasure-pain calculus. Gandhi's works contain a strong appeal to consequences as well, but his view is what might be called a "spiritual" consequentialism rather than the utilitarianism with which we are most familiar. A theory that is even more appropriate, however, is the "character" consequentialism that P. J. Ivanhoe has attributed to Confucianism and which can be applied to Buddhism as well.

As opposed to most hedonic calculations, character consequentialism focuses on the long-term benefits that the virtues bring to individuals and society as a whole. Ivanhoe illustrates this distinction between the short-term utility of quarterly results in American corporations and the lifetime commitment of Japanese companies to their employees. What the Japanese lose in terms of quick and large profits, they gain in the form of corporate, civic, and personal virtues of loyalty, perseverance, and benevolence. One of the weaknesses of the hedonic calculus is the myriad contingencies and uncertainties that make prediction virtually impossible. In stark contrast, the value of the virtues is well-attested and the person of character is eminently predictable and reliable.

A thoroughly contingent future makes the application of rules diffi-

cult, but the virtue theorist, always working from concrete particulars, offers moral agents the freedom to adapt and to improvise. Although critics claim that virtue theory is vulnerable to perfectionism, it appears that both rule ethics and utilitarianism have even a greater liability on this point. Their abstract and universal perspective may deceive them into thinking that there must be a solution to every moral dilemma. The particularist and contextualist perspective of virtue theory should save it from this danger. Furthermore, Ivanhoe adds: "If one does not recognize that some moral problems simply have no satisfactory solution, one runs the risk of cultivating a seriously deformed character."¹³

This conclusion leads Ivanhoe to one of his most powerful insights. He is very concerned that both rule ethics and utilitarianism, primarily because both assume a disembodied moral agent, occasionally require actions that ignore the impact on personal integrity and character. Ivanhoe grants that it is conceivable that a few people in isolated situations may be forced to perform gruesome deeds in order to maximize the social good. But there must be something fundamentally wrong with a theory that uses the language of moral necessity in hypothetical actions such as torturing a child to save the lives of 10 adults. There is also something terribly wrong with the Kantian rule that it is always wrong to lie, even when doing so might save the life of your best friend. The Kantian allows that it is prudent for you to lie but insists that your action has no moral worth at all. Kant's reasoning has the absurd result that it moves many of our most trying decisions, ones that have the most moral force and difficulty, out of the realm morality altogether.

Aristotle, the Buddha, and Virtue Ethics

If we are to speak of a Buddhist virtue ethics, at least two major differences must be noted vis-à-vis the Greek tradition. First, for the Buddha pride is a vice, so the humble soul is to be preferred over Aristotle's "great soul" (*megalopsychia*). Second, the Buddha would not have accepted Aristotle's elitism. For Aristotle only a certain class of people (free-born Greek males, to be exact) could establish the virtues and attain the good life. In stark contrast, the Dharmakaya contains all people, including the poor, the outcast, people of color, and women. Even though the *Analects* contains one reference to a feudal class structure (8.9), there are other passages that imply universal brotherhood (12.5) and the education of all children (7.7, 15.38).

An Aristotelian definition of virtue ethics might be phrased as the following: It is the art of making the soul great and noble (*megalopsychia*). A Platonic definition, drawing on the principal insights of the

Republic—the art of making the soul balanced and harmonious—is actually more compatible Confucianism and Buddhism. But it is again a Soka Gakkai definition that gets at the full meaning of art in the modern sense of the word. Virtue ethics for them would be the art of creating value for themselves and for the world around them. The Chinese have a wonderful image of all people as rough gems at birth, each with the responsibility of polishing their stones so that each shines uniquely and distinctively as radiant gem-persons.

Even with the significant differences mentioned above, there are still several constructive parallels between Aristotle and the Buddha, and David Kalupahana and Damien Keown are the scholars who have led the way in this comparative analysis. As far as I can ascertain, Kalupahana is the first to suggest a parallel between the Greek *eudaimonia* and the Sanskrit *sukha* and *sugata*, both best translated as “well-being,” “inner peace,” or “contentment,” although “happiness” is acceptable if it is understood in a nonhedonistic way. Kalupahana appears to go astray in his interpretation when in his later work he identifies Buddhist ethics as primarily utilitarian. Damien Keown critiques Kalupahana and others on this point, proposes a full fledged Buddhist virtue ethics, and offers a brilliant comparative analysis of the Buddha and Aristotle. Keown should also be commended for rejecting an intellectualist reading of Buddhist ethics, one that holds that insight (*prajñā*) alone, just like Aristotle *sophia*, can lead us to *nirvāṇa/eudaimonia*. Keown states that *prajñā* “is the cognitive realization of [no-self] while *silā* (*virtue*) is the affective realization,” and cites Croom Robertson to strengthen the point: “wisdom...is a term of practical import; it is not mere insight, but conduct guided by insight. Good conduct is wise; wise conduct is good.”¹⁴ The Buddha would have agreed with this statement completely.

One can discern the operation of Aristotle’s practical reason in the Buddha’s eight-fold path and also in one of his most famous sayings: “They who know causation (*pratītyasamutpāda*) know the Dharma.”¹⁵ Let us unpack the meaning of this pithy proposition. First, a more accurate translation of the Sanskrit phrase *pratītyasamutpāda* is “interdependent coorigination.” Second, the word Dharma can be translated as “reality,” “truth,” “moral law,” or “righteousness.” Contrary to some European humanists and modern science, the word Dharma fuses the realms of facts and values. Sometimes the term is used to describe basic moments of reality, an anticipation of the quanta of energy of contemporary physics. Dharmas in this sense are not substantial things but events and processes. The Buddha embraced what is best called an organic, holistic, interdependent world, one that has been reaffirmed in

many disciplines, including contemporary physics. The Buddhist virtue of compassion (*karuṇa*) is based on the interrelatedness of all life, and this was the fundamental moral discovery of the Buddha's Enlightenment. The Buddha realized that compassion and sympathy can have no meaning if the Śāṅkhya *puruṣa*, Jain *jīva*, or Vedantist *ātman* are, as these schools hold, independent soul substances.

We are now ready for an interpretation of this powerful phrase. I propose that it means the following: Those who know their own causal web of existence know the truth (i.e., the true facts of their lives) and they will know what to do. As Kalupahana states: "Thus, for the Buddha, truth values are not distinguishable from moral values or ethical values; both are values that participate in nature"; and this means that Dharma consists in moral and physical principles derived "from the functioning of all dharmas," as basic constituents of existence.¹⁶ The truths we discover by means of this formula will be very personal truths, moral and spiritual truths that are, as Aristotle says of moral virtues, "relative to us." Both Aristotle and the Buddha thought it was always wrong to eat too much, but each person will find his/her own relative mean between eating too much and eating too little. A virtue ethics of moderation is still normative, because the principal determinants in finding a workable mean for eating are objective not subjective. If people ignore these objective factors—e.g., temperament, body size, metabolism, and other physiological factors—then their bodies, sooner or later, will tell them that they are out of their respective means.

The motto above can also be interpreted in terms of the Buddhist idea of mindfulness. Those who are mindful of what is going on inside of themselves as well as what is going on in the world about them will know what to do. For most ancient philosophers this meant breaking through the veil of disordered desire to the truth of the situation, which essentially means learning to desire only that one needs rather than craving for things one does not need or cannot obtain. This is not simply a cognitive knowing of everything but a practical grasp of what is appropriate and what is fitting for us and our surroundings. (Like Aristotle's *phronesis* it is primarily nonsensuous correct perception.) The famous "mirror of Dharma" is not a common one that we all look into together, as some Mahayanists believe, but it is actually a myriad of mirrors reflecting individual histories, distinctively individual needs, even different environments and cultures. This is why mindful and tolerant Buddhists would excuse the Inuit from their exclusive meat eating.

"Those who know causation know the Dharma" sometimes has a provocative addition: "Those who know the Dharma know me."¹⁷ This

conclusion appears to undermine the thesis above that we are essentially our own standard for determining the Dharma. In Mahayana schools that deify the Buddha one is faced with the possibility that the Buddha becomes the absolute standard for value in the same way that God is in Christian ethics. The fact that this additional phrase appears in Pali texts as well as later Sanskrit texts indicates that there may be an alternative reading to “knowing me.” The Buddha would not be a Spiritual Titan if he claimed, especially in the context of the Indian acceptance of knowledge of past lives, that he knew the Dharma better than anyone heretofore. One need only compare the moral knowledge that mindful people learn from trial and error in one life to a vastly expanded font of moral lessons one could learn from thousands of past lives. Therefore, we can see the Buddha as a paragon of virtue without at all deifying him, and “knowing me” could be interpreted as an invitation for us to find our own middle way using the Buddha’s example. This would coincide with the Confucians referring to the ancient sage kings as models of virtue. We therefore must reject Keown’s claim that the Buddha’s choice “determines where virtue lies.”¹⁸ This is simple not compatible with Buddhist personalism and contextualism, but more importantly, it undermines the foundations of Buddhist humanism.

Let us now look at a humanistic interpretation of Nichiren’s *myoho rengo kyo* and relate it to the motto about causality and the Dharma discussed above. The Japanese *rengo* means “lotus” and *kyo* means “sutra,” so the passage is calling on the authority of the *Lotus Sutra*. *Myoho* means the Dharma as moral law and fundamental reality. Separating out *myo* as “potentiality” and *ho* as “action,” we can see the basic link between causality, personal action, and the Dharma discussed above. *Myoho* is sometimes translated as “mystic law,” and many Euro-American humanists would reject this as irrational. In terms of our interpretation of the Dharma above, the word “mystic” should mean “incomprehensible” rather than “irrational.” This is especially true if we are speaking of ordinary humans and not perfected Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. Even though we might be very mindful of how the law of causality works in our life and the lives of others, this does not mean that we can claim to understand it completely. When the millions of Nichiren Buddhists chant *myoho rengo kyo*, they are attempting to actualize the best possible action from the great potential of the Dharma and the flux of interdependent coorigination. In their chanting they are dedicating themselves to acting nonviolently, developing the virtues, and improving their overall personal character. In short, as they know causation they know and realize the Dharma. Most significantly, they act

through their own personal virtue rather than according to abstract moral law.

The Asian Fusion of Heart and Mind

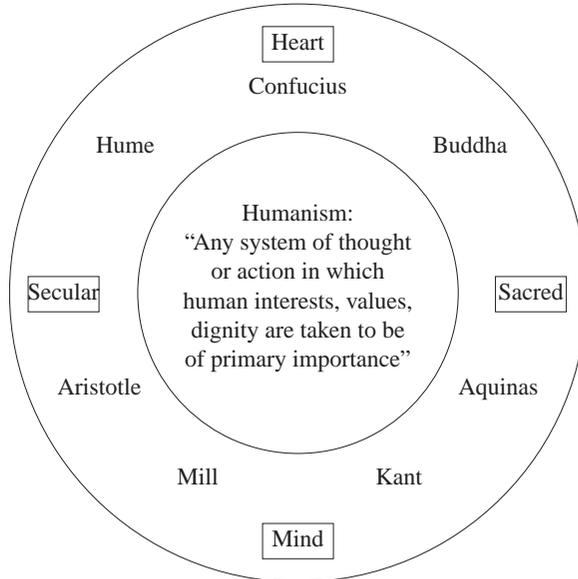
In his book *The Abolition of Man* C. S. Lewis, who calls himself a Christian humanist, declares that secular humanists who reject human immortality undermine what it is to be truly human.¹⁹ Just the opposite, I believe, is true. The doctrine of natural immortality is not only unbiblical but is also a basic element of spiritual Titanism. True humanists are they who recognize their earthly limits and their proper place in the world, and that is obviously not at its center. Genuine humanists reject the idea that they are the sole focus of cosmic activity; and they do not suffer from the illusion of Nietzsche's "otherworldly hopes"; rather, they follow Zarathustra's gospel of remaining "faithful to the earth." I must also respectfully disagree with Joseph M. Shaw's thesis that the Incarnation actually makes Christian humanism "revolutionary."²⁰ The humanization of God is just as serious a mistake as the divinization of human beings. The former confuses divine nature as badly as the latter undermines human nature.

Daisaku Ikeda has written a very fine biography of the Buddha that strongly emphasizes the humanity of the Buddha,²¹ and thus avoids the docetism that characterizes many other Mahayana schools. In a most striking statement Ikeda paraphrases Nichiren as follows: "The Buddha is an ordinary human being; ordinary human beings are the Buddha."²² The interpretation of the second phrase is essential to formulating Buddhist humanism correctly. For Pali Buddhists to say that we are all Buddhas simply means that all of us have the potential to understand the Four Noble Truths and to overcome craving in our lives.

The Mahayanist interpretation would be that we all possess a Buddhature that has an intimate relationship to the Dharmakāya, the cosmic "body" of the Buddha. One of the problems with this option is the absolute monism that some Mahayanist schools affirm: the belief that our Buddha natures are completely one with the Dharmakāya. This position of course undermines a central tenet of humanism: the individual integrity of each human being.

For the absolute monist or nondualist, the Mirror of Dharma shows one reality united with one universal soul, but for Buddhist humanist the mirror reflects all personal histories as distinctively unique and valuable united within the Dharmakāya. Thich Nhat Hanh offers his own playful critique of absolute monism: "Non-duality means 'not two,' but 'not two' also means 'not one.' That is why we say 'non-dual' instead

of ‘one.’”²³ Radical individualism has been humanism’s greatest flaw, and it certainly is if the individual is conceived as a social atom externally related to other isolated selves. But if the individual is interpreted as a real relational and social self within the unity of life and reality as whole, then we have found the Buddhist Middle way between the two extremes of monistic dissolution and social atomism.



Let us now look at the diagram above that we will call “The Circle of Humanism.” The cardinal directions of the circle indicate the “heart” as north, the “mind” as south, the “secular” as west and the “sacred” as east. The significant feature of this graphic is that except for Hume, all the European philosophers are in the lower “mind” part of the circle. What the graphic demonstrates is that both Buddhism and Confucianism offer an essential corrective to European humanism, which has generally not only split the heart from the mind and made it the dominant faculty, but has also dichotomized the secular and the sacred. I believe that the Buddha would agree with the Confucian concept of *xin*, the essence of humanity is not just the intellect, nor is it the just the passions, but a unity of both heart and mind. Unfortunately, the ascetic tradition in Buddhism devalued the passions and the world in general in a way that the Buddha would have disapproved.

Some Mahayanist schools, such as Zen and Soka Gakkai, should be commended for preserving this all important balance of heart and mind

and also affirming the passions and the body. (Indeed, Daisaku Ikeda has one of the most positive views of the body in all of Buddhism.)²⁴ Furthermore, we should reiterate that both Confucianism and Buddhism offer a significant corrective to the concept of self. The Euro-American tendency to see the self as self-contained and self-sufficient is balanced by a Confucian-Buddhist self as social and relational, a position that some political philosophers are now calling a “situated autonomy.” Therefore, in Nichiren Buddhism a “practice for self” is also a “practice for others.” Finally, more than any other Buddhist school, the Soka Gakkai should be praised for its refusal to dichotomize the secular and the sacred, which has led them to a firm commitment to worldly concerns and to the promotion of interreligious dialogue, social justice, and world peace.

NOTES

¹ John Jefferson Davis, *The Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 83.

² Quoted in Charles Krauthammer, “The Humanist Phantom,” *The New Republic* (September 25, 1981), pp. 20–21.

³ See N. F. Gier, “Religious Liberalism and the Founding Fathers” in Peter Caws, ed., *Two Centuries of Philosophy in America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp. 22–45.

⁴ Robert Primack and David Asby, “The Roots of Humanism,” *Educational Leadership* (December, 1980), p. 225.

⁵ See N. F. Gier, *Spiritual Titanism: Indian, Chinese, and Western Perspectives* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000). Parts of this paper have been excerpted from chapter 8. Parts of the introduction are taken from N. F. Gier, *God, Reason, and the Evangelicals* (Lanham, MD: University Press of American, 1987).

⁶ David J. Kalupahana, “Buddhism and Chinese Humanism,” p. 11. This paper was presented at a Symposium on Chinese Humanism, sponsored by the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy during a special session of the American Philosophical Association, March 25, 1977.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁸ See N. F. Gier and Paul Kjellberg, “Buddhism and the Freedom of the Will” in *Freedom and Determinism*, eds. J. K. Campbell, D. Shier, M. O’Rourke (Seven Bridges Press, forthcoming).

⁹ Dayle M. Bethel, ed., *Education for Creative Living: Ideas and Proposals of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), pp. 75, 82.

¹⁰ See Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 145.

¹¹ *Anguttara Nikaya* 3. 65.

¹² Cited in *Radiant Mind: Essential Buddhist Teachings and Texts*, ed. Jean Smith (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), p. 12.

¹³ Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Character Consequentialism: An Early Confucian Contribution to Contemporary Ethical Theory,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 19:1 (Spring, 1991), p.

62.

¹⁴ Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 112; see also pp. 38–43, passim; the Croom Robertson passage is cited in Mrs. Rhys Davids, *The Birth of Indian Psychology and its Development in Buddhism* (London: Luzac Press, 1936), p. 268.

¹⁵ *Majjhima-nikaya* I.190-1, quoted in Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), p. 64.

¹⁶ Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 63; *Ethics in Early Buddhism*, p. 44.

¹⁷ See the *Shalistramba Sutra*, trans. N. Ross Reat (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), §3, p. 28.

¹⁸ Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, p. 226.

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p. 30.

²⁰ Joseph M. Shaw, et al., eds., *Readings in Christian Humanism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), p. 25.

²¹ Daisaku Ikeda, *The Living Buddha: An Interpretative Biography*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Weatherhill, 1976).

²² Nichiren, "The True Aspect of All Phenomena" in *The Writings of Nichiren Dais-honin* (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1999), p. 384.

²³ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1987), p. 39.

²⁴ Daisaku Ikeda, *Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth and Death: Buddhism in the Contemporary World* (London: MacDonald, 1988), pp. 141–42.