

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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In this thesis, in order to understand why Buddhists in Southeast Asia protect rainforests and to establish a solid foundation for a Buddhist environmental ethic, my first two tasks are to draw a clear picture regarding two major environmental concepts—nature and anthropocentrism—in Buddhism and to defend the claims that the Buddhist worldview is best understood as a Cosmological view about nature and Buddhism is a form of weak anthropocentrism. Then, after demonstrating that Buddhist ethics is best understood as a form of virtue ethics, I will argue that Buddhist ethics could also be seen as a form of environmental virtue ethics and conclude that possessing and expressing environmental virtues, including non-greed (Skt., *arāga*), non-hatred (Skt., *adveṣa*), non-delusion (Skt., *amoha*), generosity (Skt., *dāna*), non-harming (Skt., *ahiṃsā*) and compassion (Skt., *karuṇā*), are the main moral reasons why Buddhists in Southeast Asian participate in environmental movements for saving rainforests and preserving the natural environment.

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Environmental Virtue Ethics in Buddhism

by
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Chih-Wei Peng, Author

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Environmental Virtue Ethics in Buddhism

Introduction

For ten thousand or more years, Thailand was covered by several varieties of verdant and dense tropical rainforests. However, the international marketplace for lumber and other wood products has reduced Thai forests by 75 percent in only fifty years (Callicott, 232). With such significant deforestation, it is not surprising that many tragic social and environmental consequences occurred. The cycle of floods, soil erosion, landslides, siltation, and drought succeed. People who lived in the countryside had been dispossessed of their lands and forced to abandon their traditional way of life. Finally, a series of catastrophic events, which included the floods of November 1988 in southern Thailand killing hundreds of people and burying villages, prompted the Thai government to completely ban logging in the country in January 1989 (Pearson, 525).

Nevertheless, although logging is now illegal in Thailand, the ban is poorly enforced. In order to save trees and the integrity of the natural environment, Thai monks, also known as “forest monks,” have led several grassroots environmental movements. For example, by tradition, Thai Buddhist laypeople offer robes, money, and food to their temple several times a year. But, after one abbot asked villagers to plant tree saplings instead, a hundred thousand trees were planted by three thousand rural Thai Buddhists on the first occasion of this request. Carla Deicke comments, “In this way, villagers are beginning to believe that environmental

guardianship can be an integral part of their religious customs, as well as a facet of their Buddhist philosophy." (Callicott, 233)

Another example of Buddhist environmental movements in Thailand is about reorienting religious feelings from traditional human beneficiaries to trees. In order to deter tree poachers, Phrakhru Manas Natheepitak, the abbot of Wat Bodharma in northern Thailand, invented tree ordination which is adapted from a customary Buddhist ritual. This novel arboreal ordination ceremony includes wrapping trees with saffron-colored monk's robes and giving them monastic vows (Morrow, 55). After the ceremony, trees become holy beings. Thus, cutting these sacred trees down is regarded as murdering Buddhist monks or nuns and consequently leading to bad karmic results. In the beginning, people thought Phrakhru Manas was crazy and believed his effort to save trees would be futile. But, after receiving nationwide media attention, his tree-ordination ceremony did work. And gradually ordaining trees to save forests became a common practice all over the country (Callicott, 234). Additionally, this Buddhist environmental movement has spread from its original home in Northern Thailand to other Buddhist countries, including Cambodia, Laos, and Burma (Morrow, 53).

Although the above two examples demonstrate that Buddhism could help contribute to the environmental movement, it is unclear what actually motivates Buddhist monks, nuns and laypeople to protect the natural environment. Or, even though it is well-known that a tree,

especially a bodhi tree, is a sacred symbol in Buddhism—the Buddha was born, achieved enlightenment, gave most of his teachings, and died at the base of a tree—what is the ethical foundation of the Buddha’s teachings prompting Thai Buddhists to save trees?

To answer these questions, several contemporary Buddhist scholars and philosophers are attempting to construct an environmental ethic based on ancient Buddhist philosophy. However, an immediate challenge they encountered is the fact that early Buddhists didn’t face an environmental crisis as we do now. In addition, two of the major concepts in the field of environmental ethics—nature and anthropocentrism—are obscure in Buddhism. Hence, many scholars writing on Buddhist environmental ethics have failed to draw a clear picture regarding these two notions (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 32). In order to establish a solid foundation for Buddhist environmental ethics, one of the main tasks of this thesis is to explore what nature means in early Buddhism and understand the way anthropocentrism expresses itself based on the Buddha’s teachings.

In the first two chapters, I shall use a two-step approach to probe the concept of nature in Buddhism. In Chapter 1, I am going to identify three different notions of nature—the Conservationist, the Despotic and the Cosmological—in Western philosophy, proposed by Pragati Sahni. In Chapter 2, I shall attempt to understand their relationships to Buddhist approaches to environmentalism. And, through offering a general description of the Buddhist Worldview, I am going to defend the claim that the Buddhist worldview is best understood as

a Cosmological view about nature.

In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, in order to respond to the objection that Buddhism is anthropocentric and, as a result, cannot be an adequate environmental ethic, I use a two-step approach. In Chapter 3, I shall point out that anthropocentrism is not all bad for environmentalism. In fact, during the past two decades, some environmental ethicists have argued that, although strong anthropocentrism should be blamed for the boldness with which human beings have created environmental disasters, weak anthropocentrism could be the foundation of an adequate environmental ethic. Then, I shall explain how to clearly distinguish weak anthropocentrism from strong anthropocentrism based on two sorts of human interests—*felt preferences* and *considered preferences*—proposed by Bryan Norton and demonstrate that weak anthropocentrism can be a basis for an adequate environmental ethic. In Chapter 4, I shall argue that Buddhism is best regarded as a form of weak anthropocentrism and conclude that it can be a basis for an adequate environmental ethic.

After demonstrating that Buddhism can provide a basis for an adequate environmental ethic, my final task in this thesis is to argue that Buddhist ethics is a form of environmental virtue ethics. Before setting forth my argument, in Chapter 5, I am going to show the similarity between Aristotelian virtue ethics and Buddhist ethics, and argue that Buddhist ethics is best understood as a form of virtue ethics. Although Damien Keown in his book, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, has devoted a great deal of effort to show that Buddhist ethics

most closely resembles the ancient Greek virtue ethic found in Aristotle, I find that his argument is too complicated or even esoteric. In order to let those who are not familiar with the Buddhist terminology more easily comprehend why Buddhist ethics should be regarded as a form of virtue ethics, I am going to provide a concise argument through proposing two key features which I use to identify an ethical theory as a form of virtue ethics.

Finally, although, in her book, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism: A Virtue Approach*, Pragati Sahni has claimed that Buddhist ethics can be understood as a form of environmental virtue ethics, she does not clearly propose the criterion which she uses to judge whether an ethical theory is a form of environmental virtue ethics. So, in Chapter 6, I am going to propose a new argument for her claim. First, based on Ronald Sandler's work, I shall explain what environmental virtue ethics is and briefly summarize the six types of environmental virtues—virtues of sustainability, virtues of communion with nature, virtues of respect for nature, virtues of environmental activism, virtues of environmental stewardship, and land virtues—as proposed by Sandler. Ultimately, I shall argue that most of cardinal virtues in Buddhism can be seen as environmental virtues. Therefore, Buddhist ethics could be understood as a form of environmental virtue ethics.

Through these efforts, I want to demonstrate that possessing and expressing Buddhist virtues, such as non-greed (Skt., *arāga*), non-hatred (Skt., *adveṣa*), non-delusion (Skt., *amoha*), generosity (Skt., *dāna*), non-harming (Skt., *ahiṃsā*) and compassion (Skt., *karuṇā*),

are the fundamental moral reasons for Buddhists in Southeast Asian to launch environmental movements to save rainforests.

Chapter 1

Three Notions of Nature in Western Philosophy

The foundational difference between traditional Western ethics and environmental ethics is that most influential Western ethical theories, such as Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian deontology, consider nonhuman natural entities and nature as a whole to be merely a means for promoting human ends. But, for most environmental philosophers, an adequate environment ethic, to a certain extent, requires us to extend moral consideration to nonhuman natural entities or nature as a whole. So, outlining the meaning and scope of nature is a prerequisite for developing an adequate environmental ethic.

Etymologically, the word ‘nature’ is derived from the Latin word *natura*. And *natura* was a Latin translation of the Greek word *physis* (φύσις). Both terms refer to origin, growth and development of some sort. Thus, at the beginning, nature implied the changing character of the physical world (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 33). Furthermore, according to *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, *natura* is defined in mainly two senses: the first one is the physical world and creation, and the second one is the characteristics of a person or a thing (Glare, 1158-9). In the both definitions, only the former understanding of nature concerns environmental ethicists.

However, an oversimplified definition of nature based on etymology is inadequate because it cannot help us to explore what nature means in the complicated Buddhist texts and

philosophies. Furthermore, in the history of Western philosophy, the concept of nature has never been fixed; in fact, it has developed in numerous ways. This phenomenon, as John Passmore points out, faithfully reflects the hesitations, the doubts, and the uncertainties, with which human beings have confronted the world around them (Passmore, 129). Thus, the wide diversity of the concept of nature is more related to people's beliefs about the world than etymological explanation. It follows that, in order to truly understand the meaning of what the term, nature, refers to, we should investigate such beliefs in the writings of philosophers.

In her book, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism: A Virtues Approach*, Pragati Sahni explores the views of nature from three philosophers—Angelica Krebs, René Descartes, and Plato. She chooses these philosophers for two reasons. First, their understanding represents three different ways in which nature can be conceived. Second, they represent different periods in history. The aim of her investigation is to identify three different notions of nature in Western philosophy in order to help us understand what nature would mean in Buddhism. In the rest of this chapter, I shall summarize these three different notions of nature—the Conservationist, the Despotic, and the Cosmological.

a. Conservationist View about Nature

In the modern era, the blooming of environmental ethics and philosophy reflects the fact that the natural environment has degraded. Bearing this in mind, the contemporary

concept of nature has a fixed and significant mission, namely, helping us address the environmental crisis. This mission has been emphasized by many environmentalists and environmental scholars but it is most accurately and succinctly represented by the German philosopher, Angelika Krebs. Aware that many definitions of nature exist, in her book, *Ethics of Nature*, she says, “[We] will search for a meaning of [nature] which is relevant to the practical issues of nature conservation in which we are interested.” (Krebs, 5)

In order to achieve her goal, through contrasting “nature” with “artifact,” Krebs defines “nature” as something not made by humans and “artifact” as anything made by humans. This is because, in most of the situations regarding environmental issues, we might need to conserve some natural entities, such as rivers, redwoods and polar bears, while it is unnecessary to conserve artifacts, such as automobiles and smartphones. Nevertheless, Krebs is aware that, in today’s world, nature conservation cannot remain limited to pure nature (free of any human beings) alone, but must also include things like endangered flora planted by humans. Besides, she also admits that there is no clear boundary between nature and artifact (Krebs, 6).

Additionally, in order to emphasize the importance of preserving the Earth’s natural entities, Krebs goes on to claim that the cosmos and the human body do not belong to nature. This is because the cosmos is out of human control, and the human body is studied under a separate discipline altogether and is irrelevant to nature conservation. Thus, nature or

environmental concerns do not include human beings or artificial entities (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 35). After outlining the meaning of nature which is relevant to nature conservation, Krebs defines the ethics of nature in two senses. In the wide sense, "[it] addresses all moral issues of our conduct toward that part of the world which has not been made by human beings and is under human influence" and, in the narrow sense, "[it concerns] the nonhuman part of the world which has not been created by human beings." (Krebs, 8-9) In short, since nature conservation is a central concern in Krebs's ethical theory, the concept of nature exuding from her belief system is something not made by humans but under human influence. This understanding of nature is prominent in most modern theories of the natural environment that focus on conservation explicitly or implicitly. Pragati Sahni calls this approach to nature and others similar to it the Conservationist view about nature (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 35).

b. Despotic View about Nature

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a time when scientific revolution took place and the popularity of mathematics reached its peak. Scholars in all fields regarded mathematics as a powerful tool to investigate the world. During this time, natural conservation did not develop into a serious concern nor did people face an environmental crisis. However, discussions about the relationship between human beings and nature were

abundant and, through such discussions, a specific concept of nature was developed. Among these discussions, René Descartes' philosophy well expressed what nature meant in his era so I am going to briefly explain his philosophy below.

Descartes supports a dualism between mind and body. For him, mind and body are two different kinds of substances; they are wholly independent and separate of one another. Their characteristics are contrary to one another. The mind is utterly indivisible so it has no physical dimension, does not occupy physical space, is not extended and is considered immaterial. More importantly, Descartes regards mind as merely a thinking thing ("Meditations on First Philosophy" 59). On the contrary, the body by its very nature is always divisible so it has physical dimensions, occupies physical space, is extended and is considered material. Besides, the body does not have the ability to think and therefore it is not a thinking thing. Based on this general belief, Descartes claims that only human beings with the faculty of reason are of supreme value. And, "mindless nature," since it is treated at par with the body, is inferior to the mind of human beings. For instance, animals are seen as unconscious objects that could not experience pleasure and pain. In *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, Descartes says, "[Animals] have no reason at all, and that it is nature which acts in them according to the disposition of their organs just as a clock, which is only composed of wheels and weights, is able to tell the hour and measure the time more correctly than we do with all our wisdom (39)." This attitude toward nature allows Descartes' followers to torture

animals. They could administer beatings to dogs with complete indifference and made fun of those who pity these dogs as if they felt pain. (Regan, 5) This is the reason why some animal liberationists argue that the depraved attitude toward nature we inherit stems from Cartesian thought.

When nature is perceived based upon Cartesian thought, human beings are incited to reshape, reform or even dominate nature since mindless nature is inferior and must be managed by the mind which is rational and superior. I call this normatively-loaded attitude the Despotic view about nature. Not surprisingly, this concept of nature is strongly opposed by modern environmentalists.

c. Cosmological View about Nature

Having discussed the Conservationist and Despotic views about nature, let's go back to ancient Greece. In the pre-Socratic period, philosophers were engaged in searching for *arche*, the fundamental, underlying source of the being of all things (Blackburn, 21). This primordial first factor, although itself unchanging, could explain the changes which human beings experience in the everyday world. Several guesses about what *arche* is were proposed by pre-Socratic Milesian philosophers. For example, Thales claims that the first principle of all things is water and Anaximenes posits that the fundamental substance is air. Influenced by this kind of thinking, Plato proposes the theory of Forms in order to understand an

unchanging reality. The basic idea of his theory is that the sensible world we experience is in some way defective and filled with error, but there is a more real, perfect and transcendent reality, populated by “forms” that are eternal, changeless and paradigmatic (Kraut “Plato”). The ever-changing objects of the sensible world are merely an image or a copy of those invariable forms in the intelligible world.

Perhaps some environmental thinkers are worried that Plato’s theory of Forms seems to reject the value of non-human natural entities of the sensible world and is not in support of environmental protection. However, Gabriela Carone points out that the sensible world has never lost its significance for Plato since it is satisfactorily endorsed in Plato’s accounts on politics and education (118). Besides, in the theory of Forms, nonhuman entities of the sensible world are not ranked below *Homo sapiens* (Carone, 115). This understanding of the theory of Forms can be further supported by Plato’s *Timaeus*.

In the *Timaeus*, Plato presents a meticulous account of the formation of the universe; the world is modeled on a complex Form, an amalgamation of other subordinate Forms, by a Demiurge, the creator of the universe. These secondary Forms are of four species whose members reside in the sensible world; they are heavenly bodies including stars and planets, birds, watery species and land creatures (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 40). And human beings are also modeled on the universe so they are a part of it. But, since Plato states that human beings are endowed with rationality and have a special status, human beings play an

important role in the universe. Furthermore, the created world or the universe is living, intelligent and self-sufficient and has a cosmic soul with sacred value (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 40). Based on the succinct explanation of Plato's philosophy in the *Timaeus*, we can find that his thought focuses on not only human beings but also the universe because the theory of Forms covers the entirety of creation. Sahni labels this perspective on nature Cosmological.

Besides, the theory of Forms might have its positive benefits to environmentalism. If we asked Plato whether it is morally permissible to degrade the natural environment, there is little doubt that he would believe that spoiling nature is not a good thing to do. This is because he might assert that the Demiurge, the maker and shaper of the universe, is intelligent and good and, thus, his product must be ordered, intelligible, beautiful and good (Adams, 57-58). Those who cutting down a giant redwood tree for lumber are like vandals who intentionally damage great masterpieces. In addition, in theory of Forms, the Form of the Good is the highest Form and the ultimate moral principle, by which all objects in the sensible world aspire to be good. This implies that destroying the natural environment conflicts with the Form of the Good.

In a nutshell, within Plato's cosmological framework, nature includes human beings and non-human entities which are created by a Demiurge, but *Homo sapiens* play an important role in the universe and arbitrarily destroying the natural environment might be

regarded as a violation of the Form of the Good. Thus, the theory of Forms might provide a distinctive and fruitful approach to environmental thinking.

d. Overview

In short, I have summarized three possible interpretations of nature in the history of Western philosophy proposed by Sahni. About their main difference in establishing an adequate environmental ethic, it is worth noting that the Conservationist view is very positive, the Despotic view is hopeless and the Cosmological view is obscure. This is because the Conservationist view about nature looks for justifications and arguments that support natural conservation. In this approach, the concept of nature is employed to restrain human behaviors from destroying the natural environment and to increase ecological conscience. As a result, nature is defined as something not made by human beings but under human influence and does not include human beings. From this perspective, the purpose of environmentalism is to promote the well-being of non-human nature regardless of human interests.

On the contrary, the Cartesian Despotic view about nature devalues nature and treats mind and consciousness as extremely important. This dualist attitude seems to allow the uncontrolled and unlimited consumption of natural resources because the inferior must serve the purpose of the superior. Thus, it is pessimistic for environmental thinkers to establish an adequate environment ethic based on the Despotic view about nature. However, there is one

positive aspect in the Despotic perspective, that is, it emphasizes the relation between humanity and nature and admits that human beings are somehow different from non-human natural entities. From an environmental ethicist's point of view, understanding the relation and difference between human beings and nature is central to environmental ethics (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 43-44).

As to the Platonic Cosmological view about nature, human beings and nonhuman beings are unified within one cosmos but the ability to reason gives humanity a special position. Therefore, there is recognition of hierarchy in Plato's thought (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 44). Besides, the view that the ever changing entities of the sensible world are merely an image or a copy of changeless forms in the transcendental world confuses the issue for environmental thinkers since it is unclear whether this view ensures ethical action or endorses unethical action towards nature. But, as I mentioned earlier, the intelligent Demiurge, the Form of the Good, and the detailed explanation of the natural process might make the Platonic Cosmological view about nature more inclined to the Conservationist view rather than the Despotic view (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 42).

In the following section, I am going to briefly explain some important concepts of Buddhism in order to outline the Buddhist Worldview and at the same time I shall argue that early Buddhism is dominantly a Cosmological view about nature.

Chapter 2

The Buddhist Worldview

After roughly two thousand years of Indian civilization, Buddhism gradually emerged in the sixth century BCE in India and constituted an important part of the *Śramaṇa* (Skt., striver) movement, a non-Vedic Indian religious movement. The main purpose of this movement was to reject the orthodox teachings of Brahmanism (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 277).

The founder of Buddhism is Siddhartha Gautama (c. 485-405 BCE), also known as the Buddha or the historical Buddha. He was born into a noble family of the Sakya clan and was a prince in Kapilavastu. After his birth, it was predicted that Gautama would either become a very great political ruler or would give it all up and become a very influential spiritual leader. In order to let his son follow in his footsteps, the Buddha’s father, King Suddhodana, shielded Gautama from the harsh realities of life. However, after the young prince ventured outside the palace and encountered “four signs”—an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a renunciate, he realized that all sentient beings without exception have to experience the sufferings. The awareness of this existential problem led young Gautama to begin his spiritual journey as a religious mendicant. Eventually, he gained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya at the age of 35 and became a Buddha. Then, the Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching the principles of Buddhism—called the *Dharma* or Truth—until his death at the age of 80 (Keown,

“Dictionary of Buddhism” 266-267).

In this chapter, I am going to explain several key concepts proposed or emphasized by the Buddha, including *dharma*, *pratītyasamutpāda*, *saṃsāra*, *karma*, suffering, impermanence and non-self in order to outline the Buddhist worldview. The main purpose of it is to argue that the early Buddhist view on nature is Cosmological. What follows is that Buddhism might have the potential to be an adequate environmental ethic.

a. Dharma and Pratītyasamutpāda

The term *dharma* (Skt., Pāli; *dharmma*) plays a very important role in Buddhism but its multiple meanings have confused Buddhist scholars for a long time. According to Damien Keown’s *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, the term *dharma* has three significant senses. First, *dharma* refers to the natural order or universal law that underpins the operation of the universe in both the physical and moral spheres. Second, it denotes the Buddhist teachings and is regarded as one part of the Buddhist “three jewels” (Skt., *triratna*), along with the Buddha and the *Samgha* (the Buddhist community). It is believed that Buddhist teachings accurately explain the underlying universal law and seek to help human individuals live in harmony with it. Third, *dharma* represents the individual phenomena that collectively form the empirical worlds. Some of these phenomena are external to the perceiver and others are internal psychological processes (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 74). Since our goal is to

describe the Buddhist worldview, I shall examine the concept of *dharma* with reference to Keown's first definition only, that is, *dharma* is a universal law that applies to physical and moral dimensions of the universe.

If we trace the origin of the word *dharma*, we will find that *dharma* as a universal law has certain significant implications for nature. It is believed that the term has derived from the Brahmanical term *ṛta* (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 65). According to Ainslie T. Embree, *ṛta* is the foundational principle of natural order which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe. This universal law is not made by gods although they are administrators of it (Embree, 9). In addition, *ṛta* manifests itself not only in nature but also in human society. As Tachibana points out, the river constantly flows, the dawn comes after the night, the sun traverses the sky and everything in human society are guided by *ṛta* (257). However, the Vedic term *ṛta* has never played an important role in Buddhist texts but the term *dharma*, retaining the meaning of *ṛta* as a universal law, is prominent within the Buddhist tradition. This understanding of *dharma* implies that, for Buddhists, human beings and non-human natural entities are equally governed by the same law (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 66). One possible interpretation of this is that humans and non-human things, including animals, plants, rivers, mountains, etc., would be all equally natural.

In Buddhism, closely related to *dharma* as the universal cosmic law is the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda*. This concept is commonly translated as a "dependent origination" or

"dependent arising." On a general level, *pratītyasamutpāda* teaches that all things arise in dependence on multiple causes and conditions, and lack an independent, intrinsic (i.e., non-relational) being. According to Keown, the importance of this teaching is that there is nothing that comes into existence through its own power or volition and, therefore, there are no entities or metaphysical realities such as God or a soul that transcend the causal nexus (Keown, "Dictionary of Buddhism" 221). Although *pratītyasamutpāda* unifies the world under one formula, that is, human beings and non-human entities are governed by the same law, it is noteworthy that human beings have a special status in the universe because they can work towards liberation. Besides, in light of our discussion above, we can find that to a certain degree the doctrine of dependent origination and Plato's theory of Forms are similar; in both belief systems, human beings and non-human entities are unified within one cosmos but humanity has a special value. This point will be further supported when I discuss *saṃsāra*.

Based on *pratītyasamutpāda*, some environmental scholars and Buddhist masters claim that this doctrine can be regarded as a foundation for an adequate environmental ethic in Buddhism. This is because the doctrine of dependent origination will dissolve the sharp dichotomy between human beings and non-human entities and help us understand that our existence must depend on other beings. As Thich Nhat Hanh proposes, "To be is to inter-be. We cannot just be by ourselves alone (96)." This way of thinking demonstrates that the

Buddhist worldview on nature should not be understood as the Cartesian Despotic one since Buddhism does not reduce everything to two independent substances—mind and body—and does not claim that human beings with the faculty of reason are superior to the “mindless” natural world. Thus, it is wrong to say that Buddhism might encourage human beings to reform and dominate nature.

However, although Buddhism can avoid the Despotic view about nature, I do not think that scholars can establish an adequate environmental ethic in Buddhism on the basis of *pratītyasamutpāda*. It is because they will encounter the Is-Ought problem: No ought-judgment can be legitimately inferred from a set of premises expressed only in terms of “is.” In other words, no ethical or indeed evaluative conclusion whatsoever can be validly inferred from any set of purely factual premises (Cohon). In Buddhism, the doctrine of dependent origination merely describes the fact that all things are interdependent and might help us make well-informed decisions about environmental issues. But, it is a logical fallacy to infer that we ought to protect the natural environment from this Buddhist doctrine. So, we need an ethical component to develop a Buddhist environmental ethic. A more detailed discussion on environmental ethics in Buddhism will be presented later.

b. Saṃsāra and Karma

As they are for other religions established in India, the ideas of *saṃsāra* (Skt.) and

karma (Skt.) are also important metaphysical concepts in Buddhism. *Saṃsāra* means the cycle of repeated birth and death that individuals undergo until they become enlightened (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 248). Buddhists believe that one’s present life is merely one of a countless number of lives stretching back into the past without a starting point of the series (Harvey, 12). Such lives take on various forms. Someone may have been a god (Skt., *deva*), a jealous god (Skt., *asura*), a human, an animal, a hungry ghost (Skt., *preta*) or a hell-being countless times in the past. And because of the three roots of evil (Skt., *akuśala-mūla*)—greed, hatred and delusion—he is confined within the round of rebirths endlessly. Moreover, from the Buddhist perspective, the cycle of rebirths is not a pleasant affair; *saṃsāra* is a situation that is characterized as suffering (Pāli, *dukkha*).

The Buddhist hells are full of intense pain and grief and are often vividly described in popular art and folklore. In these hells, evil-doers are tortured by demons until their bad *karma* has run its course. Thus, it is not desirable to be hell-beings. Nevertheless, Buddhism has no concept of hell as a place of eternal punishment. So, even if Adolf Hitler is responsible for the deaths of millions of innocents, he will not be tormented in hells forever and might have a chance to be a Buddha in the future.

Hungry ghosts are also one of the miserable modes of existence in *saṃsāra*. They are subject to suffering in the form of insatiable desires as a punishment for greed and avarice in their previous lives (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 223). An animal rebirth is also seen

as a great misfortune and usually involves more than human suffering since most of them are attacked and eaten by other animals or live in fear of it.

As to human rebirth, it is not a happy rebirth either since human beings inevitably experience existential sufferings, such as old age, sickness, death and so on. However, the status of human life is most valuable because human beings have the capacity for the pursuit of liberation and get rid of *saṃsāra*. Jealous gods are said to experience a much more pleasurable life than humans but they are plagued by envy. Finally, even if someone becomes a god and dwells in a heaven world, he or she will die one day and might become a hell-being in the future. So, individuals merely wander from one realm of existence to another; the process of life and rebirth is not seen to have any inherent purpose (Harvey, 14).

According to Pragati Sahni's analysis, the concept of *saṃsāra* is an important link in establishing the cosmological approach to nature in early Buddhism for several reasons. First, the realm of human beings is only one among the six realms of existence and is not isolated from others. Secondly, even though human beings have an opportunity to attain *nirvāṇa* (Skt.; Pāli, *nibbāna*), the human realm in the ladder of *saṃsāra* is not the highest; the highest one is the realm of gods. Thirdly, the concept of *saṃsāra* signifies that there is an undeniable continuity between human beings and non-human animals because the animal realm is also one among the six realms of existence (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 71). From these points, we can infer that, for Buddhists, although human beings occupy an important position in nature,

they are still a part of it. Therefore, we can find that the notion of nature in Buddhism is close to the Platonic Cosmological view.

In addition, it is notable that the Buddhist understanding of *saṃsāra* has a positive benefit to environmentalism because it concerns future generations and is immune to Parfit's paradox. In his work *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit questions the idea that one generation can owe either affirmative or negative obligations to later generations and argues that current environmental decisions merely determine how many individuals and which individuals will be born in the future (Norton, 168). It is because, on different environmental policies, people might marry different people and then different children might be conceived. Thus, we can infer that, after one or two centuries, two different environmental policies—for example, if one is a policy of fast demographic growth and high consumption and the other is a policy of low demographic growth and moderate consumption—will generate two different groups of individuals. Then, although most environmentalists urge us to adopt an environmentally friendly policy for future individuals, in fact, the individuals who are born as a result of the non-environmentally friendly policy cannot complain that the current generation releases large amounts of carbon dioxide from fossil fuels, leave the burden of cleaning up radioactive wastes to them and so on. This is because their existence must depend on the non-environmentally friendly policy the current generation adopts; if the alternative policy had been adopted, they would not even have existed (Norton, 168). Moreover, if those

who are born due to the non-environmentally friendly policy agree that it is better to exist than not to exist, actually they must deeply appreciate the current generation choosing a policy of fast demographic growth and high consumption.

Although many environmental ethicists argue that an adequate environmental ethic must prohibit current behaviors or policies that have negative long-term effects upon future individuals, Parfit's paradox tells us that non-environmentally friendly policies cannot really harm future individuals and merely determine who those individuals will be and what interest they will have.

However, Buddhism does not need to address this paradox and does concern future generations in an interesting and unique way since *saṃsāra* implies that there is a clear connection between past, present and future; the same beings return again and again within the six realms of existence until liberation. To put it simply, from the Buddhist perspective, there are no new beings; the continuity of *saṃsāra* includes future generations (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 71). Thus, if we adopt a policy of fast demographic growth and high consumption and consequently destroy the natural environment, we might harm "future individuals" who are our parents, siblings, children, friends or even ourselves right now but will continue to be reborn in the human realm.

As to the movement of beings between rebirths, it is not a random process; it is ordered and governed by the law of *karma* (Pāli; Skt., *kamma*). Here, *karma* literally means action,

but it as a religious concept does not involve just any actions but actions related to moral choices. For Buddhists, *karma* is concerned primarily with the moral dimension of Buddha's teachings and indicates the consequences of moral behavior. The Buddha himself says, "It is intention, O monks, that I call *karma*; having willed one acts through body, speech, or mind" (Prebish and Keown, 19). As to which of the three modes of "actions"—body, speech or mind—has the greatest power to produce bad *karma*, the Buddha states that mental actions or intentions are the most potent of the three (Prebish and Keown, 19). This kind of thinking makes Buddhist ethics resemble Aristotelian virtue ethics because both ethical theories underline that virtuous character traits are more important than right actions in our moral lives. A more detailed discussion of this point will be presented in Chapter 5 and 6.

About how to know if an "action" is morally bad in terms of *karma*, the Buddha proposes three basic kinds of motivation known as "three poisons" or the three unwholesome roots (Skt., *akuśala-mūla*), namely greed (Skt., *rāga*), hatred (Skt., *dveṣa*) and delusion (Skt., *moha*), as the main criteria. In addition, he claims that all negative states of consciousness are ultimately grounded in one or more of these three and, as a result, generate bad *karma* (Keown, "Dictionary of Buddhism" 8). Actions of hatred tend to lead to rebirth as a hell-being, actions of delusion tend to lead to rebirth as an animal, and actions of greed tend to lead to rebirth as a hungry ghost (Harvey, 15). On the contrary, "actions" motivated by the opposites of three unwholesome qualities—non-greed (Skt., *arāga*), non-hatred (Skt., *adveṣa*)

and non-delusion (Skt., *amoha*)—create good *karma*. For Buddhists, they have to ensure that their actions are always motivated by wholesome qualities to secure a good rebirth, ideally as a god in one of the heavens, or to help them attain enlightenment.

Besides, Buddhists often use agriculture as a metaphor to explain how *karma* works. They describe “actions” as planting of seeds in the earth. Some seeds are good and some seeds are bad, and each will produce sweet or bitter karmic fruit at the appointed time. Sometimes karmic fruit will mature in the same lifetime. For example, cruelly killing and injuring living beings leads to being short-lived, and striking living beings leads to being frequently ill (Harvey, 16). Other times karmic fruit will mature in the next life. Finally, it is very important to grasp that the doctrine of *karma* is not a form of fatalism, the belief that every event that happens to an individual is preordained by destiny. It is because the Buddha accepts that random events and accidents can occur in life. In other words, not everything needs to be determined by *karma* (Prebish and Keown, 20).

In short, *karma* is seen as the mechanism that moves beings around from one realm of rebirth to another and their rebirths are based on the nature and quality of their “actions”—body, speech and mind.

c. Suffering, Impermanence and Non-self

Although the ideas of *saṃsāra* and *karma* are significant metaphysical concepts in

Buddhism, what really makes Buddhism different from other religions established in India are the three marks of existence (Skt., *trilakṣaṇa*): suffering (Pāli, *dukkha*), impermanence (Pāli, *anicca*) and non-self (Skt., *anātman*). First, *dukkha* is seen as the cornerstone of the Buddha's teachings and is the first of the Four Noble Truths. These four foundational propositions enunciated by the Buddha in his first sermon are as follows: (1) Life is suffering. (2) Suffering is caused by craving. (3) Suffering can have an end. (4) There is a path which leads to the end of suffering. The Buddha is often regarded as a physician and his teachings to medicine. So, the Four Noble Truths is similar to a medical examination: first, the condition is diagnosed; second, its cause is found; third, the physician makes a prognosis for recovery; and, fourth, a course of treatment is prescribed (Prebish and Keown, 43). For the purpose of describing the Buddhist worldview, I focus only on the explanation of the first Noble Truth and its relation to impermanence and non-self below.

Go back to *dukkha*, Keown thinks that there is no word in English covering the meaning of *dukkha* in Buddhism. The usual translation of suffering is too strong and makes people think that Buddhism is pessimistic (Keown, "Dictionary of Buddhism" 81). But, in fact, the concept of *dukkha* is illustrated as having three perspectives. The first aspect of *dukkha* or ordinary *dukkha* is *dukkha-dukkha* (Pāli), which means suffering "plain and simple" (Prebish and Keown, 44). This encompasses not only all examples of physical suffering, such as birth, sickness, aging and death, but also mental suffering, such as sorrow,

despair, depression and so on. The second aspect of *dukkha* is *viparinama-dukkha* (Pāli), which means “suffering due to change.” This kind of suffering is related to impermanence (Pāli, *anicca*). Buddhists believe that everything that arises will cease. In other words, there is nothing permanent except change (Prebish and Keown, 45). So, once the conditions are changed, a thing relying on them will gradually decay and then will be gone. Given this fundamental instability, we cannot guarantee that our happiness will endure forever. In other words, it is impossible to find lasting satisfaction or fulfilment (Prebish and Keown, 45).

The third aspect of *dukkha* is *sankhara-dukkha* (Pāli), which means “*dukkha* as conditioned states” (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 81). This kind of suffering is related to non-self (Skt., *anātman*). This teaches that the human individual is a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces known as the five aggregates (Skt., *pañca skandhas*)—from (Skt., *rūpa*), feeling (Skt., *vedanā*), perception (Skt., *saṃjñā*), volitional factors (Skt., *saṃskāra*) and consciousness (Skt., *vijñāna*). And, since the Buddha claims that the human individual can be deconstructed into these five categories and none of them makes the reference to a permanent soul, Buddhism is said to teach a doctrine of non-self (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 270). This doctrine can also be understood based on *pratītyasamutpāda*, the doctrine of dependent origination. Like everything else in the universe, the individual ego is dependent arising and conditioned. Thus, the common belief in an eternal soul or self is fallacious (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 270). More

importantly, this false belief makes one crave for satisfaction. But, as I mentioned earlier, everything in the universe is impermanent so satisfaction cannot last forever. As a result, holding to the illusion of an independently originated self only leads to a vicious circle of unfulfilled desires and causes more suffering (Keown, "Dictionary of Buddhism" 81).

The above discussion demonstrates that the meaning of life for Buddhists is to free oneself from all sufferings, so there is nothing essentially associated with natural conservation in Buddhism. The Buddha has never searched for a meaning of nature which is relevant to deal with the environmental crisis we are facing now. Thus, the Buddhist worldview is obviously not the Conservationist one. But, Buddhism as the Cosmological approach to nature does promote the well-being of non-human natural entities, especially non-human animals. This is because not only do humans experience suffering, other sentient beings do, as well. When the Buddha saw some boys tormenting a snake and poking it with sticks, the Buddha said, "All tremble at punishment, life is dear to all. Comparing others with oneself, one should neither kill nor cause to kill" (Harvey, 34). Here, it is obvious that moral patients in Buddhism include not only human beings but other sentient beings.

Perhaps critics will argue that Buddhists do not really care about plants since they cannot experience pleasure and pain and, moreover, are not included in *samsāra*. What follows is that, if it is necessary to regard plants as moral patients in environmentalism, then Buddhism cannot be an adequate environmental ethic. My response to this criticism is that,

although plants are not sentient beings (or only possess the sense of touch from Buddhists' perspective) and are not in the six realms of existence, early Buddhist texts do show concern for plants (Harvey, 175). For example, the *Brahmajala Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* contains a discussion of an ethical precept that seeds and crops are not to be injured. In the *Vinaya*, there are many examples of the Buddha praising his disciples not to harm plants (Sahni, "Virtues Approach" 66). Moreover, from the beginning of Buddhism, the forest has been described as the ideal place for meditation for monks. And, for lay people, planting groves and fruit-trees can create good *karma* (Harvey, 174). Therefore, although Buddhist scholars are not in agreement on why Buddhist precepts enjoin that vegetation is not to be harmed and the reason may be anthropocentric, it is undeniable that Buddhists do care about plants.

Besides, the doctrines of non-self is also a support for environmental ethics. Primarily, it weakens the attachment to self, that is, "I" am a positive, permanent, self-identical being that should be gratified and should be able to neglect others' interests. This belief always leads to a selfish and hubristic attitude which causes *Homo sapiens* to dominate or control over the natural world rather than attempt to find out how to live harmoniously with it. On the contrary, the idea of non-self emphasizes that the human individual is merely a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces and, therefore, no permanent self or I exists. This implies that "your" suffering, "my" suffering and other animals' suffering are not inherently different; all are just suffering. So, the doctrine of no-self can dissolve the barrier

which generally confines us to our own self-interest and can expand our moral scope until it includes all sentient beings or even non-sentient beings (Harvey, 36). A more detailed discussion of non-self will be presented in Chapter 6.

d. Overview

In this chapter, I have showed that *dharma* and *pratītyasamutpāda* as a universal law reveal that everything in the universe is guided by the same law, and human beings are interconnected with other beings. This implies that human beings are merely part of nature and that there are not independent substances at all, such as mind and body proposed by René Descartes. In addition, *samsāra* signifies that, although human beings occupy the most important position in the six realms of existence, they are not superior. These Buddhist doctrines as a whole express the notion of nature in Buddhism as Cosmological rather than Despotism. Besides, the concept of *dukkha* as the cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy demonstrates that the Buddhist worldview on nature is not the Conservationist one. This is simply because the purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to free oneself from all sufferings and attain enlightenment rather than to conserve the natural environment.

Although the main teachings of the Buddha are not to address the environmental crisis, early Buddhism, I think, has at least three positive benefits to develop an environmental ethic. First, the doctrine of dependent origination will dissolve the sharp dichotomy between human

beings and non-human natural entities and help us understand that everything, including human beings, other animals, plants, waters and soils, are interconnected with each other. This idea is strongly supported by contemporary ecologists and environmentalists. Second, the Buddhist understanding of *saṃsāra* makes Buddhists show consideration for future generations and does not need to address Parfit's paradox because *saṃsāra* implies that there are no new beings in the future; the same beings just return again and again within *saṃsāra* until liberation. Third, the Buddha's teaching of non-self can undermine the attachment to self which causes people to take a selfish and hubristic attitude toward nature.

Nevertheless, most of these Buddhist doctrines, including *dharma*, *pratītyasamutpāda*, *saṃsāra*, suffering, impermanence, and non-self that I discussed above cannot be seen as the foundation for developing an adequate environmental ethic in Buddhism because they merely describe how the world is rather than tell us what we ought to do. But, these Buddhist "facts" are relevant in support of environmental ethics. As de Silva points out, in Buddhist ethics, facts will provide a kind of grounding for values (de Silva, "Buddhist Ethics" 63). For example, although *dukkha* is just a description of a state of affairs, the nature of existential predicament, the understanding of this doctrine encourages us to include other animals within the scope of our moral concern as I mentioned earlier. Therefore, I believe that the Buddhist worldview as the Cosmological one provides a solid impetus for developing an adequate environmental ethic. The deeper quest of finding a motivation in all Buddhist doctrines that

promotes friendly environmental attitudes towards the natural world will be discussed later.

Chapter 3

Anthropocentrism

In 1967, Lynn White Jr., a historian of science and technology from the University of California at Los Angeles, proposed that the environmental crisis is essentially a spiritual and religious crisis so its ultimate solution must be spiritual and religious. More importantly, he argued that the root cause of the environmental crisis in the exploitative attitude towards nature is at the heart of the Christian tradition. Although White admitted that science and technology are responsible for the environmental degradation all over the world, he thought that they are proximate rather than ultimate causes. In his view, science and technology merely demonstrate the aggressive attitude towards nature within Christianity (Jamieson, 20).

According to White, what makes Christianity so special is that it is the most “anthropocentric” worldview among all religions¹. His point is based on the center of the traditional Christian story, that is, God became a human being in the figure of Jesus Christ. This idea is radically blasphemous from the perspective of Judaism and Islam. In both traditions, God is completely transcendent; He is utterly distinct from human beings and nature (Jamieson, 21). Besides, calling Christianity anthropocentric can be further supported by the despotic interpretation of the relationship between God, humanity, and nature which is set out in Genesis 1:26-28:

¹ What anthropocentrism means in White’s argument is ethical anthropocentrism, as grounded in an ontological anthropocentrism.

26 Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Bible Gateway).

Although there are different interpretations, on a common reading the key point from these Bible verses is that human beings have a God-given right to exploit nature without moral restraint except insofar as environmental degradation might adversely affect themselves (Callicott, 15). Based on this understanding of Christianity, natural entities do not have intrinsic value, namely the value that that thing has “in itself,” or “for its own sake.” What follows is that natural entities, including non-human animals, plants, soils, water and so on, do not deserve moral consideration if intrinsic value is regarded as the ticket that admits something to the moral community (Jamieson, 70). As a result, it is difficult for Christians to develop an environmental ethic in order to conserve nature for its own sake.

No matter whether White’s understanding of Christianity is correct or not, most of environmental ethicists agree with White’s claim that anthropocentrism is the root cause of the environmental crisis and denounce those who attempt to develop an environmental ethic based on any anthropocentric religions or worldviews.

Compared with Christianity, although the Buddha did not tell his disciples to dominate

nature and Buddhism is often seen as an environmentally friendly religion, skeptics still doubt whether there is an environmental ethic in Buddhism at all since they argue that Buddhism is anthropocentric and thus cannot support an adequate environmental ethic. Their argument can be stated as follows (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 80):

Premise 1: Buddhism constantly emphasizes that, among the six realms of existence, human beings have the best opportunity to attain liberation from *samsāra*. This can be taken to imply that human beings are most valuable.

Premise 2: Anthropocentrism is a position where human beings are considered to have the highest value.

Conclusion 1: Therefore, Buddhism (Buddhist ethics) is anthropocentric.

Premise 3: Any anthropocentric ethics cannot be an appropriate environmental ethic.

Conclusion 2: Therefore, Buddhist ethics cannot be an appropriate environmental ethic.

No doubt this argument is valid but I will argue that it is unsound since the premise 3 is false.

In this chapter, in order to argue that Buddhism can provide an adequate basis for an environmental ethic, first of all, I shall distinguish three forms of anthropocentrism—*strong* anthropocentrism, *epistemological* anthropocentrism, and *weak* anthropocentrism². Second, through discriminating between two sorts of human interests—a *felt preference* and a *considered preference*—proposed by Bryan Norton, I shall clearly explain how to recognize a

² There are two forms of ethical anthropocentrism—strong anthropocentrism and weak anthropocentrism.

weakly anthropocentric ethic and argue that, although strong anthropocentrism is notorious for encouraging a destructive attitude towards the exploitation of the natural world, weak anthropocentrism can provide the basis for an adequate environmental ethic which *can capture many morally relevant aspects of our relationship with the natural environment, such as caring, aesthetic and spiritual relationships* (Sandler, “Character and Environment” 4). Based on these studies, in Chapter 4, I shall argue that Buddhism should be understood as weak anthropocentrism rather than strong anthropocentrism and thus Buddhist ethics has the potential to be an adequate environmental ethic.

a. Three Forms of Anthropocentrism

Except for the concept of nature, "anthropocentrism" might be the most mentioned term in the field of environmental ethics. The origin of the term derives from the two Greek words, *anthropos* meaning man or human being and *kentron* meaning center. So, literally anthropocentrism simply means human-centered. In environmental literature, scholars often define anthropocentrism as any view magnifying the importance of human beings in the cosmos (Blackburn, 18). Nevertheless, during the past two decades, anthropocentrism has become a complex notion and had more than one meaning. In this chapter, as mentioned earlier, I am going to distinguish three forms of anthropocentrism—strong anthropocentrism, epistemological anthropocentrism, and weak anthropocentrism and conclude that, although

strong anthropocentrism is widely condemned by environmental ethicists, weak anthropocentrism can be an adequate environmental ethic.

Strong Anthropocentrism

First, anthropocentrism in its strong form refuses to value any natural entities other than human beings intrinsically. In other words, non-human natural entities only possess instrumental value; they are valued merely as a means to human ends. What follows is that human interests must be served irrespective of the interests of non-human living beings. This kind of thinking may cause human beings to neglect the health of ecosystems or treat other animals cruelly. Besides, for strong anthropocentrists, the only reason we human beings should protect nature is because a degraded natural environment will hinder human development. More precisely, from ecological perspective, the biotic mechanism is very complicated so that its working may never be fully understood by natural scientists. Hence, in order to ensure that human beings would continue to flourish in the future, it would be bright for us to preserve all the parts of nature and not to cause any species to go extinct. As Aldo Leopold's metaphor points out, "To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering" (Leopold, 190).

Nevertheless, for most of environmental ethicists, any environmental ethic based on the strongly anthropocentric perspective is very restricted. This is because they affirm that strong

anthropocentrism cannot ensure consistent and justified critique of environmentally unsustainable practices and policies, not to mention building an ethical relationship with the natural environment (Sandler, "External Goods Approach" 279). Therefore, they believe that strong anthropocentrism cannot provide an adequate basis for environmental ethics.

This point can be clarified by Richard Sylvan's well-known thought experiment, "the Last Man Argument." (Schmidtz and Zwolinski, 112) This thought experiment is a situation something like this. Suppose that Peter is the last human being and realizes that he will soon die. And, for some reason, he has a whim running through his head: "Before I die, it would be awesome to kill all Chinese white dolphins. Just for fun." Now, the question is whether it is morally wrong for Peter to do that. If we regard a strongly anthropocentric theory of value as true, then Peter would do nothing morally wrong since his destructive act would not cause any damage to the interest and well-being of humans, who would by then have disappeared.

For the convenience of examining the argument, let me summarize it as follows:

Premise 1: If a strongly anthropocentric ethic is true, then the last person, Peter, does nothing wrong by killing all Chinese white dolphins.

Premise 2: A strongly anthropocentric ethic is true.

Conclusion: Therefore, the last person, Peter, does nothing wrong by killing all Chinese white dolphins.

However, although this argument is valid, most environmentally sensitive individuals by their

intuition would believe that the conclusion is false. If we trust their intuition, what we can infer is that the premise 2 must be false.

In order to explain the intuition, over the past few decades, many environmental scholars have been engaged in arguing that some or most non-human natural entities have intrinsic value. For instance, from Holmes Rolston III's perspective, a mother Chinese white dolphin inhabiting the waters of Southeast Asia uses sonar to locate food, cares for her young, defends her own life and pursues her welfare. All these activities can be seen as the evidence that she is able to value things in her world. So, perhaps we can say that animals, especially wild animals, such as a mother Chinese white dolphin, are able to value their own lives for what they are in themselves, *intrinsically*, without further contributory reference (Rolston, 145). In other words, the reason why animals are intrinsically valuable is because they can generate an *objective* value in the world through their ability to value³.

Going back to "the Last Man Argument." If we agree that Chinese white dolphins have intrinsic value and so should be regarded as moral patients, then it would be morally wrong for the last man, Peter, to kill all of them just for fun. So, the conclusion of "the Last Man Argument" is false. What follows is that a strongly anthropocentric ethic is not true and thus cannot be the basis for an adequate environmental ethic. For this reason, many environmental scholars believe that non-anthropocentrism is the *only* adequate basis for a truly

³ Their intrinsic value is not a *subjective* projection of value from a human valuer.

environmental ethic since it values some part or parts of non-human world intrinsically. But this belief is untenable because weak anthropocentrism, I believe, can also provide an adequate basis for environmental ethics. The argument for my point of view will be set forth later.

Epistemological Anthropocentrism

The second form of anthropocentrism I will discuss is about the human perspective and is related to epistemology. Some environmental philosophers contend that we human beings inevitably know and understand the world from a human perspective and through human-based values. So, it is impossible for human beings to abandon anthropocentrism. As Eugene Hargrove points out, “[Anthropocentric] is not and has never been a synonym for instrumental. It simply means ‘human-centered,’ and refers to a human-oriented perspective—seeing from the standpoint of a human being” (Hargrove, 175). In other words, for Hargrove, it is confusing to assume that anthropocentrism implies that non-human natural entities merely have instrumental value and, on the contrary, that only non-anthropocentrism implies that non-human natural beings might possess intrinsic value.

Tim Hayward also claims that anthropocentrism is simply about interpreting the world in terms of human values. To him, it is impossible to eliminate anthropocentrism in all ethical theories, including even a radically non-anthropocentric ethic. This is because the ultimate

goal of an ethic is to guide human beings in their actions, and we human beings are unavoidably to determine what we should do from our own human perspective. Without using some basic concepts of morality based on our own moral sensibility to judge what counts as moral patients, whose welfare we are concerned with and so on—all of which are human concepts, we will lose our sense of morality and as a result, it is impossible for us to develop any ethical theories.

Moreover, the anti-anthropocentric claim has counterproductive effect in practice (Hayward, 49). For instance, if we discarded all knowledge of our *human* experience of suffering, not only would we be unable to consider ourselves appropriately, but also we would have no basis for compassion. Consequently, we would not have a desire to alleviate the suffering of non-human animals and to promote their well-being. So, an adequate environmental ethic must be grounded in epistemological anthropocentrism. Even those who fight against strong anthropocentrism and embrace radical non-anthropocentrism have to agree that the only way for us to know the world and to argue that non-human natural entities have intrinsic value is through a human perspective. Since there is little disagreement among environmental ethicists about anthropocentrism in its human-perspective, epistemological form, we can just put this position aside.⁴ But keep in mind that we must always determine what we ought to do from our own, species-specific human perspective.

⁴ Allen Thompson comments there is disagreement about how significant this point is. Some think it is trivially true and therefore not useful as a defense of anthropocentrism.

Weak Anthropocentrism

In addition to two forms of anthropocentrism—strong anthropocentrism and epistemological anthropocentrism—I discussed above, there is a more moderate expression of anthropocentrism between strong anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism, that is, weak anthropocentrism. According to its supporters, anthropocentrism in its weak form is capable of supporting an adequate environmental ethic. They argue that, although moral decisions are inevitably made by human beings and the interests of human beings are important, we human beings need to develop ethical relationships with non-human natural entities, such as caring, aesthetic and spiritual relationships (Sandler, “Character and Environment” 4). Besides, although some weak anthropocentrists, such as Bryan Norton, deny intrinsic moral value to non-human natural entities, they claim that weak anthropocentrism can guarantee consistent and justified critique of environmentally unsustainable practices and policies. From this perspective, weak anthropocentrism is not compatible with strong anthropocentrism since the former encourages altruistic behaviors toward some non-human living beings but the latter doesn’t. Thus, although strong anthropocentrism is notorious in environmental literature, weak anthropocentrism has the potential to be the basis for an adequate environmental ethic.

Besides, compared with a non-anthropocentrism that might require human beings to

neglect or sacrifice their wider interests in order to benefit other living entities and as a result become impractical, the proponents of weak anthropocentrism argue that human beings are still at the center of moral concern but non-human living beings matter. For example, while some non-anthropocentrists, such as Tom Regan, argue that every individual animal has intrinsic value equally and consequently might require Inuit, indigenous people inhabiting the Arctic region, to abandon their traditional lifestyle, such as using fish, walrus, and seals for food, clothing, and tools, some weak-anthropocentrists, such as Bryan Norton, ensure that Inuit's welfare is taken into account but discourage these indigenous people from selling seal fur in order to earn more money. This is because, for Norton, the commercial seal hunt violates Inuit's traditional or rational worldview, including respecting all living things, maintaining harmony and balance with nature, and so on (Tagalik, 1). I will discuss Norton's weak anthropocentrism in more detail later.

b. The Further Distinction between Strong Anthropocentrism and Weak

Anthropocentrism

After briefly describing the three forms of anthropocentrism, now I am going to explain how to clearly distinguish weak anthropocentrism from strong anthropocentrism based on Bryan Norton's work. First of all, in his well-known article, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism," Norton points out that what counts as a human interest, in fact, is

ambiguous in environmental literature. In order to eliminate the equivocation, he distinguishes two kinds of human interests—a *felt preference* and a *considered preference*. He defines a *felt preference* as any desire or need of a human individual that can at least temporarily be satisfied by some specifiable experience of that individual. As to a *considered preference*, it is defined as any desire or need that a human individual would express after careful deliberation, including a judgment that the desire or need is consistent with a rationally adopted world view which can be scientific, metaphysical, aesthetic and moral (Norton, 64). Let me provide two examples to further explain the difference between a felt preference and a considered preference. An immediate desire to eat more food should be understood as a felt preference rather than a considered preference since it is not expressed after careful consideration. For those who are convinced that greed is environmental vice, that natural resources are limited, and that we have a common duty to maintain the Earth's health and integrity, a felt preference for eating more food should be criticized and then abandoned. In contrast, a desire to recycle is not a felt preference but a considered preference if someone voluntarily adopts an environmental stewardship worldview and thinks that recycling offers significant energy savings over manufacturing with virgin materials.

Based on the above distinction between a felt preference and a considered preference, Norton further claims that, if human interests are merely originated from felt preferences, they are shielded from any criticism or objection since there is no rationally adopted world

view which can be used to check these interests (Norton, 164). For instance, economic decision making often merely refer to human interests constructed from felt preferences regardless of moral judgments. For those who endorse high economic and high tourism development, they usually do not have an environmental stewardship worldview that we human beings have a moral responsibility to be caring managers of the Earth and its finite resources or simply lack ecological conscience. In contrast, human interests which are constructed from considered preferences can be abandoned or modified if they do not fit a rationally adopted world view. For example, if someone finds that a desire to recycle does not completely meet an environmental stewardship worldview, she might try to reduce the amount of waste she generates and continue to recycle everything in her home. Nevertheless, such preferences cannot be adopted automatically; a human individual has to rationally accept a certain world view, such as an environmental stewardship worldview, in the first place and then strive to change or drop some of his interests derived from felt preferences so that all his interests are consistent with that worldview (Norton, 164).

After making the distinction between a felt preference and a considered preference, Norton goes on to define two forms of anthropocentrism—*strong* anthropocentrism and *weak* anthropocentrism. He claims that an ethical theory is *strongly* anthropocentric if all value approved is explained by reference to the satisfaction of felt preferences of human individuals alone (Norton, 165). Based on this definition, when the proponents of strong

anthropocentrism attempt to value non-human natural entities, what they have to do is to take felt preferences of human individuals seriously and undoubtedly. Consequently, it is no surprise that the entire natural world only has instrumental value from their perspective. What follows is that, if human beings enjoy the high-consumption lifestyle, then their interests constructed merely from felt preferences will encourage them to exploit natural resources and damage the natural environment. In other words, in the value system of strong anthropocentrism, there is no means to restrain endless human desires and criticize those who choose an exploitative attitude towards nature unless their behaviors harm other people.

In contrast, Norton claims that an ethical theory is *weakly* anthropocentric if all value is explained by reference to the satisfaction of *some* felt preferences or considered preferences of a human individual (Norton, 165). More precisely, according to weak anthropocentrism, felt preferences can be either rational or not. If a felt preference is not consistent with a rationally adopted world view, such as an environmental stewardship worldview, then it should be abandoned or altered. Thus, in the value system of weak anthropocentrism, some felt preferences, such as treating non-human animals merely as a means to human needs or enjoying the high-consumption lifestyle, are open to criticism.

In this way, Norton explains how weak anthropocentrism offers environmentalists two ethical resources to develop an adequate environmental ethic. First, it allows environmental ethicists to construct a world view or adopt an existing one that stresses the close relationship

between human beings and natural entities, and urges people to live harmoniously with nature. Hence, these ideals can be seen as a basis for criticizing felt preferences that merely exploit nature (Norton, 165). Second, because weak anthropocentrism emphasizes the importance of human experiences that provide the foundation of value formation, environmental ethicists can demonstrate that values or virtuous characters could be formed through interacting with nature when people criticize felt preferences and replacing them with more rational ones (Norton, 165). From this perspective, nature could no longer be seen merely as a provider of resources but should also be understood as a teacher of human values; it helps us cultivate virtues and eliminate vices.

Now, let me apply weak anthropocentrism to “the Last Man Argument” to further explain why it can offer environmental ethicists a basis for developing an adequate environmental ethic. Suppose the last man, Peter, converts to Jainism, an Indian religion that prescribes a path of *ahimsā* (Skt., non-harming, non-violence) towards all living things. This means Peter believes that self-control and non-violence are the way by which he can obtain liberation. So, even if he has a whim running through his head: “Before I die, it would be awesome to kill all Chinese white dolphins. Just for fun,” he could criticize his caprice and drop it instantly since his felt preference is not consistent with the Jain world view. Here, we can find that, although Jainism as weak anthropocentrism does not attribute intrinsic value to natural entities and does concern human spiritual development rather than non-human living

beings, it offers a reason why the last person should not kill all Chinese white dolphins.

Thus, I argue that the behavior of environmentally-minded, weak anthropocentrists are undoubtedly more similar to that of non-anthropocentrists rather than strong anthropocentrists because the former thinks that it is morally wrong for the last man to kill all Chinese white dolphins just for fun and the latter doesn't. Therefore, following Norton, I conclude that an adequate environmental ethic can be derived not only from non-anthropocentrism but also weak anthropocentrism. In the next chapter, I am going to demonstrate that Buddhism is weakly anthropocentric and, therefore, can provide a basis for developing an adequate environmental ethic.

Chapter 4

Buddhism and Weak Anthropocentrism

In this chapter, I am going to demonstrate that Buddhism is weakly anthropocentric and, thus, Buddhist ethics has a potential to be an adequate environmental ethic. But before I set forth my argument, I want to first show that Buddhism is neither egocentric nor strongly anthropocentric.

For those who criticize Buddhism as a selfish religion, their reason often goes like this: what Buddhists are really concerned with is personal liberation rather than the welfare of other people who also experience pain and suffering. My response to this charge is that this is not the true understanding of Buddhism. This is because, although the Buddha does emphasize that we should love and take care of ourselves, extending care to other people is also stressed by him. For instance, in the *Sedaka Sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha tells his disciplines that they should practice meditation and cultivate virtues, including forbearance, non-violence, universal love and compassion, and by doing so they will protect themselves and protect other people too (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 86). The further explanation of this point can be found in the *Sallekha Sutta*. In this *Sutta*, the Buddha argues that it is impossible for someone who is stuck in the mud to rescue another who is also stuck in the mud; but it is possible for someone who has gotten herself out of the mud to pull out another who is stuck in the mud (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 87). This analogy indicates that

to pursue personal liberation is not egoism or selfish security but more like moral and mental training. The purpose of this training is to help ourselves and others; if we are weak and have a hard time, we cannot help either ourselves or others. To put it simply, from the Buddha's perspective, altruism must be based on our character traits and mental development. Thus, it is false to contend that Buddhism is egocentric based on the fact that Buddha advises us to love and take care of ourselves, and to pursue *nirvāṇa*.

Although Buddhism is not egocentric, I think there is no doubt that it is anthropocentric since in Buddhism the status of human life is most valuable. Human beings, according to the Buddha's teachings, have the best opportunity to understand and practice the *dharma*, thereby having the best chance to attain liberation from the cycle of repeated birth and death. So, there is no surprise that the entire Buddha's teachings are focused on human beings and their escape from the mundane world of suffering. Therefore, it is relatively uncontroversial to classify Buddhism as anthropocentric.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that there is great stress on the importance of human life in Buddhism, this does not necessarily transform this religion into a form of strong anthropocentrism. This is because the Buddhist path to liberation includes a strong element of morality whose practice has beneficial effect not only on human beings but also on other living creatures. For example, in the *Mahavagga*, the Buddha proclaims: "A *bikkhu* [monk] who has received ordination ought to not intentionally destroy the life of any living being

down to a worm or an ant.” This concern for other living beings shaped monastic life (Chapple, 22). For instance, in ancient India, Buddhist monks avoided traveling during the rainy season to prevent themselves causing injury to the tiny creatures that become abundant after the rains (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 323). In addition to caring for non-human animals, the Buddhist canon also take plants into account. For instance, in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* of the *Digha Nikāya*, there is one precept which clearly asks Buddhist practitioners to abstain from hurting seeds, plants, roots and braches (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 50). In a nutshell, Buddhism promotes non-injury not only to animals but also even to vegetation. As to the reason why Buddhists are supposed to practice non-harming to non-human living beings, it is because *ahiṃsā* is an important Buddhist virtue and cultivating this wholesome character trait and others is part of the path toward spiritual enlightenment.⁵ Hence, I conclude that it would be absurd to classify Buddhism as strong anthropocentrism since, in the Buddhist value system, felt preferences, such as recreational hunting and clearcut logging, are not immune to criticism even though no human being will be harmed by these activities.

But for claiming, further, that Buddhism is best understood as a form of weak anthropocentrism, I need to rely on Norton’s work. As I discussed earlier, compared with strong anthropocentrism that focuses on felt preferences alone and cannot check the interests of individuals derived from felt preferences, weak anthropocentrism takes both felt

⁵ A further discussion on *ahiṃsā* as an environmental virtue will be presented on Chapter 6.

preferences and considered preferences into consideration and can determine whether felt preferences are rational or irrational by referring to one's rationally adopted world view. Once someone finds that his felt preferences are not consistent with his worldview, to be a rational person, he must modify or abandon such preferences.

Based on Norton's weakly anthropocentric view, which I summarized above, I think Buddhism is a strong paradigm for criticizing, altering and dropping irrational felt preferences and, therefore, it is weakly anthropocentric. This is mainly because Buddhists have a world-view dominated by notions, such as *saṃsāra*, *dukkha*, *karma* and so on. And all these notions require a Buddhist to calculate the merit of her actions and to develop a wholesome mind rather than to satisfy immediate desires.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, *saṃsāra*, the cycle of rebirths, from the Buddha's perspective, is not a pleasant affair but is a situation characterized as suffering (*dukkha*). And suffering is caused by *trṣṇā* (Skt.; Pāli: *taṇhā*). This Buddhist term literally means "thirst" and is commonly translated as "craving" due to the fact that *trṣṇā* refers only to excessive or inappropriate desires. Such desires are like "sticky glue" that makes us become attached to things, and once attached these unwholesome desires tend to be repetitive, limiting and cyclic (Prebish and Keown, 46). For example, once one is addicted to nicotine, he has a strong desire for cigarettes again and again. Moreover, based on the doctrine of impermanence: since everything that arises will cease, it is impossible to find lasting satisfaction or fulfilment

of unhealthy desires. As a result, dissatisfaction causes suffering. So, for a pious Buddhist, it would be irrational to adopt the high-consumption lifestyle, such as owning a private swimming pool, driving a big car with an inefficient motor, buying too many clothes and so on, since these immediate and felt preferences will cause her to remain in *samsāra* and experience suffering.

Besides, due to the fact that Buddhists believe in the concept of *karma* which is concerned primarily with the moral dimension of the Buddha's teachings and indicates the consequences of moral behavior, it would be irrational for a Buddhist to torment or arbitrarily kill non-human animals. It is because, based on the law of *karma*, one cannot intentionally harm sentient beings without giving rise to harming oneself in this life or the next. Hence, when the Buddha saw some children torturing a snake with sticks, he said, "Whoever, seeking his own happiness, harms with the rod pleasure-loving beings gets no happiness hereafter (Harvey, 156)." Furthermore, Buddhists are encouraged to promote happiness among all sentient beings and to alleviate their suffering. Releasing trapped animals or showing loving-kindness and compassion to them are believed to generate merits and eliminate bad *karma*. On one occasion, when the Buddha heard that a monk was bitten by a snake and had died, he told his disciplines that this monk had failed to radiate loving-kindness to the snake and other wild animals (Harvey, 170). Therefore, from Norton's perspective, it would be irrational for Buddhist believers to hold some felt preferences, such

as tormenting or killing non-human animals for fun, since such felt preferences are considered against the Buddhist metaphysical worldview. On the contrary, it would be rational for them to adopt considered preferences, such as promoting animal welfare, because such preferences are consistent with the relevant world view.

Finally, although the six realms of existence do not include vegetation, and plants are not sentient beings in the early Buddhist tradition, Buddhists still have strong motivation to protect plants. From the beginning of Buddhism, the forest has been regarded as the ideal place for practicing meditation because the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree. And as I mentioned earlier, the Buddhist ideal of non-harming is practiced not only towards animals but also plants. The Buddha explicitly told his disciplines not to harm seeds, plants, roots and braches. He once criticized a monk who had cut down a large tree used as a shrine and said, “For, foolish man, people are percipient of a life-principle in a tree (Harvey, 175).”

In sum, I think Buddhism is best understood as a form of weak anthropocentrism rather than a strong one since Buddhism demonstrates an environmentally friendly worldview which can successfully be used to criticize and drop environmentally felt preferences, or those for harming non-humans, which are seen as unwholesome desires. For the last man, Peter, if he converts to Buddhism, it would be irrational for him to kill all Chinese white dolphins just for fun since in order to achieve enlightenment, he has to earn merits, eliminate

vices and cultivate virtues. Finally, if my two arguments that Buddhism is a form of weak anthropocentrism and that weak anthropocentrism can provide a basis for an adequate environmental ethic, then there is no doubt that Buddhism can provide a basis for an adequate environmental ethic.

Chapter 5

Aristotelian Virtue Ethics and Buddhist Ethics

In previous chapters, through demonstrating that Buddhism constitutes a Cosmological view about nature and is weakly anthropocentric, I have explained why Buddhism can provide a basis for an adequate environmental ethic. In this and the following chapter, my main task is to argue that Buddhist ethics is a form of environmental virtue ethics since most of the important virtues in Buddhism can be understood as environmental virtues. Before I set forth my argument for this conclusion in Chapter 6, in this chapter I am going to claim that Buddhist ethics is best understood as a form of virtue ethics.

When we face the complexity of Buddhist metaphysics, it is easy for us to neglect the fact that the main teachings of Siddhattha Gotama (the Buddha or the historical Buddha), like many philosophers, is to attempt to answer the most fundamental question of ethics. Namely, what is the best kind of life for human beings to live? Or, what sort of person should I be? Besides, since the Buddha provides a detailed and systematic exposition of ethical precepts and duties, such as abstinence from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and lying, Buddhist scholars and lay people often see Buddhist ethics as a form of deontology or a form divine command theory and completely ignore the fact that the spirit or intention of Buddhist ethics rests upon the elimination of vices and the cultivation of virtues as spiritual capacity to attain enlightenment. So, in this chapter, by showing the similarity between Aristotelian virtue

ethics and Buddhist ethics, I am going to support the claim that Buddhist ethics should be regarded as a form of virtue ethics. In the first section, I shall explain what Aristotelian virtue ethics is and point out two key features of virtue ethics which I use to identify an ethical theory as a form of virtue ethics. In the second section, I shall discuss the nature of Buddhist ethics through elucidating several important concepts in Buddhism, such as nirvāṇa (Skt.; Pāli, *nibbāna*), the Noble Eightfold Path, three poisons (Pāli: *akusala-mūla*) and *sīla* (Skt., morality)

a. Aristotelian Virtue Ethics

In Book I of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle attempts to answer the question: “What is a good human life?” To address this question, he considers if human beings can be thought of as having a function, or an end. So, the question becomes “What is the ultimate end of human life?” For him, the answer is *eudaimonia*. This Greek term is composed to two parts: “*eu*” means “well” and “*daimon*” means “divinity or spirit”. Therefore, literally to be “*eudaimon*” is to live in a way that is well-favored by a god. Yet Aristotle never calls attention to this etymology. He simply thinks that the *eudaimon* is a person who is living or functioning well (Kraut, “Aristotle’s Ethic” Chapter 2). So, *eudaimonia* is commonly translated as a condition of happiness, welfare, or human flourishing. In addition, Aristotle believes that all human beings agree that *eudaimonia* is the highest end and the supreme

good, and suppose that living well is the same as doing well (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, I, 1095a: 16-17). Nevertheless, since people disagree about what exactly *eudaimonia* is—ordinary people do not give the same answer as a sage—Aristotle goes on to probe the conception of *eudaimonia*. Compared with many ends, such as wealth, health, etc., which are said to be "incomplete" due to that fact we choose them for the sake of something else, Aristotle argues that *eudaimonia*, as the highest or final end, must be something complete because it is always sought only for the sake of itself (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, I, 1097a: 25-32). Furthermore, since we always choose the highest end because of itself, never because of something else, *eudaimonia* must be complete without qualification (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, I, 1097a: 34-36).

Based on this insight, Aristotle further infers that *eudaimonia* as the highest end seems to be something self-sufficient or lacks nothing since it is the end of the things which are pursued in action. Besides, Aristotle stresses that *eudaimonia* requires a complete life because in reality life includes many reversals of fortune and the most successful person may fall into a terrible disaster in his old age. If someone has suffered these sorts of misfortunes and comes to a miserable end, Aristotle thinks that she does not achieve *eudaimonia* and no one should count her happy (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, I, 1100a: 5-10). In short, for Aristotle, the ultimate end for human life is *eudaimonia* which is apparently something complete and self-sufficient, and must include the activity of a complete human life.

According to Keown, *eudaimonia* as the final human good can be understood as a

second-order end—a kind of umbrella covering a wide range of primary or first-order ends.

These first-order ends will be chosen according to their conformity with the second-order end and then will be pursued to the extent that they form a harmonious combination with each other. Therefore, *eudaimonia* as a second-order end offers us an orderly framework to attain our first-order aims. And such aims are beneficial to our overall long-time flourishing or *eudaimonia* (Keown, “Nature of Buddhist Ethics” 196-197). Besides, we must not confuse *eudaimonia* as a second-order end with the notion of a dominant end. Let me take wealth as an example to explain what a dominant end is. Suppose that a man identifies his final end to be the richest person in the world and vows to achieve this goal. In this case, it will not be difficult for us to imagine that he is going to sacrifice many basic human goods, including knowledge, friendship, health, aesthetic experience, honor and so forth, once he thinks that such goods conflict with his final good. Thus, we can find that a person who identifies wealth as his ultimate end may exclude other human goods or simply treat them as a means to his final end. This is what it means to call such an end a dominant end. Based on this analysis, we can imagine that even if he really becomes the richest person in the world, he must still feel that he lacks something very important in his life. On the contrary, someone who identifies *eudaimonia* (a second-order end) as her ultimate end, she will pursue a number of good things in harmonious combination. And once she achieves this highest end, she must feel that she lacks nothing. So, *eudaimonia* as a second-order end is more desirable than any

dominant ends.

But how exactly do we achieve *eudaimonia*? Aristotle's answer is to cultivate virtues since he claims that *eudaimonia* is a certain sort of activity of the soul in accord with complete virtues (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, I, 1102a: 5-6). He defines virtues as dispositional states of character to act and emotionally respond in certain ways, lying at the mean, relative to the self, between two extremes, namely, excess and deficiency (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, II, 1108b: 11-12). As to what exactly the mean is, let me use generosity as an example to further explain it. For Aristotle, generosity is the virtue concerned with giving away one's wealth. Its two corresponding vices are wastefulness and stinginess; wastefulness is excess in distributing your wealth and stinginess is deficiency (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, IV, 1119b: 25-30). Besides, he emphasizes that generosity which is the mean about giving away one's wealth is relative to individuals. For a single mother who earns ten thousand US dollars a year and has to bring up two kids, if she donates one hundred US dollars to a non-profit organization every year in order to help those who suffer the misfortune of poverty, she is a generous person. But, for a chief executive officer who earns over ten million US dollars a year and have several luxurious cars, if he does the exact the same thing as the single mother does, he must be a stingy person. If he wants to exhibit generosity, perhaps he has to donate ten thousand US dollars to help the poor every year. This example helps to illustrate what it means to say that virtues, such as generosity, are a mean that is relative to individuals. In addition, once we

possess the virtues, Aristotle thinks that we will have appropriate actions and feelings at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, II, 1106b: 21-24).

After briefly explaining some key features of Aristotle's virtue ethics, now I want to point out that there are two important features which I use to identify an ethical theory as a form of virtue ethics, or more precisely, a *eudaimonistic* virtue ethic. Firstly, a virtue-based theory must answer the most fundamental question of ethics: What is the *summum bonum* in human life?⁶ Also, the answer must be understood as a second-order end rather than a dominant end. Secondly, a virtue-based theory emphasizes the virtues, or moral character traits rather than duties or rules (deontology) or the consequences of actions (consequentialism) for achieving the highest good. In the next section, I am going to demonstrate that Buddhist ethics does include these two significant features so it can be seen as a form of *eudaimonistic* virtue ethics.

b. Buddhist Ethics

Compared with Aristotle's position, according to the Third Noble Truth, the Buddha believes that the highest end for human life is *nirvāṇa* (Skt.; Pāli, *nibbāna*). The term literally means "quenching" or "blowing out," in the way that the flame of a candle is blown out.

⁶ David Hume's virtue ethics does not answer this question. Therefore, it is not a *eudaimonistic* virtue ethic.

When Buddhists use this metaphor to explain the concept of the best life for human beings, what is blown out are the three “fires” also known as the “three poisons” or the three unwholesome roots (Pāli: *akusala-mūla*). They are greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) (Prebish and Keown, 49). All negative states of consciousness are understood as ultimately grounded in one or more of these three (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 8). So, *nirvāṇa* can simply be defined as the end of greed, hatred, and delusion. Once these three “fires,” namely three character vices, are “blown out,” the individual is utterly free from *saṃsāra*, the cycle of repeated birth and death. For Buddhists, being trapped in an endless cycle of birth and death is not a pleasant affair; this situation is characterized as suffering (*dukkha*).

But, breaking the cycle of birth and death or eliminating the three poisons is not a sudden or dramatic event. Someone who is engaged in following the Buddha’s teachings has to make a great effort over the course of many lifetimes. During this gradual process, she slowly weakens her craving and ignorance, and in the meanwhile cultivates positive states of mind and experiences a spiritual transformation in which wholesome qualities come to predominate over negative ones. Finally, such individuals become saints, either as *arhants* (Skt., worthy one) or Buddhas, who possess extraordinary capacities far beyond the limits of ordinary people (Prebish and Keown, 49).

As to how to exactly achieve *nirvāṇa*, the Buddha tells his disciples to follow the

Noble Eightfold Path, the last of the Four Noble Truths. Basically, the Path is understood as the Middle Way of practice that leads from *samsāra* to *nirvāṇa*. The details of the Path are as follows: “This, O Monks, is the Truth of the Path which leads to the cessation of suffering. It is this Noble Eightfold Path, which consists of (1) Right View (2) Right Resolve, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action (5) Right Livelihood (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness, (8) Right Meditation (Prebish and Keown, 51).” Right View means the acceptance of basic Buddhist teachings such as the Four Noble Truths; Right Resolve means developing positive attitudes such as freedom from lust and ill-will, friendliness, and compassion; Right Speech means using speech in positive and productive ways rather than negative ones such as telling lies or speaking harshly; Right Action means abstaining from wrongful conduct through the body such as killing, stealing or committing sexual misconduct; Right Livelihood means avoiding professions which cause harm or suffering to others, whether they are humans or animals; Right Effort means directing the mind towards religious goals and developing one’s mind in a wholesome way; Right Mindfulness means being mindful and aware of what one is doing, thinking and feeling all the times; Right Meditation means training the mind to achieve that state of focused attention necessary to enter the meditational trances (Skt., *dhyāna*; Pāli, *jhāna*) (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 84). In addition, these eight factors are grouped into three sections. Factors 1-2 are related to wisdom (Pāli, *paññā*) which signifies knowledge and understanding of the reality and the ability to see clearly how to

achieve *nirvāṇa*. Factors 3-5 are related to morality (Pāli, *sīla*) which is the basis of religious practice since without self-discipline and virtuous behavior it is hard to make progress in any endeavor. Finally, factors 6-8 are related to meditation (Pāli, *samādhi*) which denotes the process of calming and self-integration that happens at the deepest levels of mind. Besides, we should keep in mind that each of these three parts, in fact, braces and supports one another. For instance, morality is seen as the basis for wisdom and meditation but it is also reinforced by them in turn because inner peace and transparent understanding generate an increased moral sensitivity which can help us make better moral decisions (Prebish and Keown, 53).

Here, I want to point out that *nirvāṇa* is indisputably the highest good for Buddhists. This is because *nirvāṇa* is desired for its own sake and other things, including wisdom, morality and meditation, that are desired are desired for the sake of it (Keown, “Nature of Buddhist Ethics” 199). Nevertheless, like *eudaimonia*, *nirvāṇa* should be regarded as a second order-end rather than a dominant end since it includes a number of good things in harmonious combination. In other words, there is no conflict between *nirvāṇa* and other goods. So, Buddhists do not treat wisdom, morality and meditation as a means for pursuing their *summum bonum*. In short, I conclude that Buddhism does possess the first feature of virtue ethics which I use to identify an ethical theory as a form of virtue ethics because the Buddha provides us the answer to, “What is the highest end for human life?” and his answer,

nirvāṇa, should be seen as a second-order end.

But for demonstrating that Buddhist ethics is a form of virtue ethics, I need to further discuss the concept of *sīla* (Skt.). In addition to being the name of the second of the three divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path, *sīla* has been variously translated as moral virtue (Harvey, 37), morality, ethical propriety (Prebish and Keown, 305) and moral precept (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 268) according to the context. Hence, it is unclear what type of ethical system is in Buddhism. Also, it is easy for us to mistake Buddhist ethics as a form of deontology or divine command theory due to the fact that there are at least five main sets of precepts in Buddhism, which are stated as commands or rules which we have a duty to follow. For example, the Five Precepts (Skt., *pañca-śīla*) are undertaken as voluntary commitment when a layperson converts to Buddhism. They are: (1) not to kill or injure living creatures; (2) not to take what has not been given; (3) to avoid misconduct in sensual matters; (4) to abstain from false speech; (5) not to take intoxicants. For those who think that Buddhist ethics is a kind of divine command theory, I think they neglect the fact that these Buddhist precepts are not commandments or enforced by any religious authority or God. Rather, these precepts are merely derived from the conduct of the Buddha. The Buddha is a role model. And for those who think that Buddhist ethics is a form of deontology, I think they ignore the fact that the purpose of *sīla* is to cultivate virtues and to eliminate vices in order to develop wholesome states of mind. This claim can be directly endorsed by the definition of *nirvāṇa*.

As I mentioned earlier, the term literally means “blowing out” and can be simply defined as the absence of three vices—greed, hatred, and delusion. So, the spirit of Buddhist ethics is about eradicating the unwholesome mental states rather than strictly following precepts. Besides, since Buddhist teachings place great emphasis on the cultivation of good qualities known as virtues, such as *dāna* (Skt., *generosity*), *ahiṃsā* (Skt., non-harming or non-violence), compassion and so on, I suggest that the Buddhist precepts are best understood as virtue-rules that embody the substance of the virtues or rule-like statements that indicate the target of the virtues rather than as independent rules which Buddhist practitioners are obligated to follow stringently in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment. In a nutshell, I think Buddhist ethics should be seen as a virtue-based ethical theory because it emphasizes the cultivation of virtues and the elimination of vices more than the obedience to duties or moral rules to achieve *nirvāṇa*.

c. Overview

Through explaining Aristotelian virtue ethics, I have proposed two key features which I use to identify an ethical theory as a form of virtue ethics. Firstly, a *eudaimonistic* virtue-based theory must answer the question, “What is the highest good in human life?” And the answer must be understood as a second-order end rather than a dominant end. Secondly, a virtue-based theory emphasizes moral character traits rather than duties, moral rules, or the

consequences of actions. Then by exploring the nature of Buddhist ethics, I have demonstrated that for Buddhists, the highest end for human life is to pursue *nirvāṇa* and have shown how eliminating vices and cultivating virtues plays a significant role in achieving this goal. So, I conclude that Buddhist ethics is best classified as a form of virtue ethics.

Chapter 6

Environmental Virtue Ethics and Buddhist Ethics

In this final chapter, before elucidating why Buddhist ethics can be regarded as a form of environmental virtue ethics and engaging in a discussion of environmental virtues in Buddhism, the last two things I have to do are to explain what environmental virtue ethics is and set out an example of a contemporary environmental virtue ethics, based on Ronald Sandler's work. After that, I shall discuss six Buddhist virtues, including non-greed (Skt., *arāga*), non-hatred (Skt., *adveṣa*), non-delusion (Skt., *amoha*), generosity (Skt., *dāna*), non-harming (Skt., *ahiṃsā*) and compassion (Skt., *karuṇā*), and argue that all of them can be regarded as environmental virtues.

a. Environmental Virtue Ethics

First of all, environmental virtue ethics, as its name implies, is a virtue-oriented approach to environmental ethics. Compared with two paradigmatic types of modern ethical theory, consequentialism and deontology, which emphasize the resulting state of affairs and obligations, respectively, in order to deal with environmental problems, environmental virtue ethics stresses that we must consider the character of people and put it as the first priority when we consider ethics with regard to environmental issues. This is because how we human beings interact with the natural environment is influenced by our attitudes towards it and the

root cause of our environmental crisis is our unwholesome attitude toward nature—nature is being treated merely as a resource for satisfying endless human desires (Sandler, “Character and Environment” 1-2). Moreover, Ronald Sandler as an environmental virtue ethicist argues that, given the richness and complexity of our relationship with nature and the diversity, dynamism, and interrelation of our environmental problems, it is inappropriate for us to adopt a monistic environmental ethic which simply emphasizes one type of consideration as the basis for moral concern about the natural environment, such as the integrity of ecosystems, the intrinsic value of living entities, the interests of sentient beings and so on (Sandler, “Character and Environment” 3-4). For Sandler, an adequate environmental ethic must capture many morally relevant aspects of our relationship with nature, such as caring, aesthetic, and spiritual relationships. This implies that an adequate environmental ethic must address human character, including our values, dispositions, habits, and ultimate goals. Based on this analysis, environmental virtue ethics can be seen as a good candidate for being an adequate environmental ethic.

As to what exactly environmental virtue ethics is, I think it has to include three key components. The first two are exactly the same as they have been described earlier when I argued that Buddhist ethics is a form of virtue ethics. First, an (environmentally) *eudaimonistic*, virtue-based theory must answer the most fundamental question of ethics: What is the supreme good in human life? And the answer must be understood as a second-

order end, such as *eudaimonia* or human flourishing, rather than a dominant end, such as reputation, wealth, and knowledge. Second, an (environmentally) virtue-based theory emphasizes the cultivation of virtues and the elimination of vices rather than the fulfilment of duties or the consequences of actions for achieving the highest good.

The one component which is unique to environmental virtue ethics is that an environmentally virtue-based theory must indicate virtues which can be seen as good environmental character traits with regard to non-human natural entities, and vices which can be understood as bad environmental character traits. In other words, while *eudaimonistic* virtue ethicists require a moral agent to cultivate virtues and eliminate vices in order to have appropriate actions and feelings towards human beings, environmental virtue ethicists claim that a truly virtuous person not only has appropriate actions and feelings towards human beings but also has them towards non-human natural entities at the right times, about the right things, for the right end, and in the right way. In short, when the virtue ethics approach functions with reference to matters of the natural environment and focuses on what motivates environmental choices of the moral agent, we have an environmental virtue ethic (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 113).

With respect to which character trait could be counted as an environmental virtue, Sandler identify six types—virtues of sustainability, virtues of communion with nature, virtues of respect for nature, virtues of environmental activism, virtues of environmental

stewardship, and land virtues. In the remainder of this section, I am going to clearly explain all of them. In the next section, through using these six types of environmental virtues as criteria, I shall point out that most of the wholesome character traits stressed by the Buddha can be classified into at least one type in Sandler's taxonomy and at the same time demonstrate that Buddhist ethics also can be seen as a form of environmental virtue ethics.

Virtues of Sustainability

First, *virtues of sustainability* are directly related to human flourishing. As long as we are biological beings, our survival and well-functioning have to depend on metabolizing certain materials, such as oxygen, food and water. If these goods are in scant supply or polluted, it will be difficult for us to sustain our lives and health, not to mention the pursuit of the other components of human flourishing. (Sandler, "Character and Environment" 43). So, character traits that tend to maintain access to the basic goods provided by the natural environment on a long-term basis can be seen as environmental virtues, such as temperance, frugality, farsightedness, attunement and humility (Sandler, "Character and Environment" 82). For example, those who possess frugality tend to restrict their energy use, consume less water and so on. The consequences of these habits ensure that the natural environment can sustainably support human life. On the contrary, dispositions that tend to undermine the quality and accessibility of the natural resources are regarded as environmental vices, such as

immoderation, prodigality, shortsightedness, and hubris. For instance, prodigal and shortsighted people tend to consume a lot of energy, waste food, and so forth without thinking about whether the natural environment can support their luxurious lifestyles in the future.

What follows is that natural resource will be depleted by their use.

Virtues of Communion with Nature

Except for providing the basic needs for human beings to survive, the natural environment also offers us aesthetic and recreational goods, and plays a significant role in our physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual development (Sandler, "Character and Environment" 50). But these benefits are not automatically available to everyone. For those who rekindle their energy and renew their spirit through their interactions with nature, they must be willing to go outdoors in the first place and gradually to cultivate some character traits which promote engagement with nature. These character traits are wonder, openness, aesthetic sensibility, attentiveness, love, etc. (Sandler, "Character and Environment" 82). Sandler calls them *virtues of communion with nature*. Besides, such environmental virtues not only encourage a person to explore nature and have a strong connection to it, but also motivate her to preserve it. As Rachel Carson emphasizes, for those people who possess virtues of communion with nature and whose benefits are attached to the natural environment, they are familiar with the land, disposed to care it, and less likely than others to

exploit and degrade it (Sandler, "Character and Environment" 51).

Virtues of Respect for Nature

The third kind of environmental virtues are *virtues of respect for nature*, including care, compassion, restitutive justice, nonmaleficence, ecological sensitivity and so on (Sandler, "Character and Environment" 82). The main reason why these character traits are environmental virtues is because they are conducive to promoting the good of non-human living entities (Sandler, "Character and Environment" 72). For example, a truly compassionate and ecologically sensitive person will have a strong desire to alleviate or reduce the pain and suffering in non-human animals regardless of her own interests. Besides, to a certain degree, those who possess virtues of respect for nature will believe that every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth to human beings (Sandler, "Character and Environment" 64). From this perspective, it is obvious that environmental virtue ethics avoids what many environmental ethicists find objectionable about strong anthropocentrism which is the claim that all value approved is explained by reference to the satisfaction of felt preferences of human individuals alone. This implies that environmental virtue ethics which is grounded on virtues of respect for nature can be seen as an adequate environmental ethic which requires human beings to promote the welfare of other living entities.

Virtues of Environmental Activism

In addition to environmental virtues mentioned so far, we should not ignore character traits that are justified as *virtues of environmental activism*. Due to the fact that many environmental issues, such as anthropogenic climate change, involve multiple dimensions, including economic, social, political and cultural affairs, it is extremely rare for us to solve environmental problems quickly or easily (Sandler, “Character and Environment” 49). Therefore, character traits, such as cooperativeness, perseverance, commitment, optimism and creativity are crucial to successful environmental projects, including political activism. (Sandler, “Character and Environment” 82). On the other hand, it is not difficult for us to imagine that a humble, frugal, wondering, open, compassionate, caring person is disengaged, incompetent and ineffective in achieving any environmental ends if he lacks virtues of environmental activism or even possesses some vices of environmental activism, including pessimism, cowardice, impatience and so forth.

Virtues of Environmental Stewardship

The fifth kind of environmental virtues are *virtues of environmental stewardship*, including benevolence, loyalty, justice, honesty, diligence, etc. (Sandler, “Character and Environment” 82). These character traits are particularly important for those people, such as

conservation officers, regulators and environmental leaders, who are responsible, qualified or empowered to maintain environmental “public goods,” appropriately protect or conserve them, and fairly distribute them. These environmental goods range from economic goods to aesthetic, recreational, and cultural goods (Sandler, “Character and Environment” 55).

However, considering the benevolence and good social functioning, we should not claim that virtues of environmental stewardship are merely reserved for those who have a special role, position, or responsibility regarding environmental public goods; to a certain degree all of us are required to cultivate such environmental virtues to maintain the beauty of national parks, preserve indigenous cultures and conserve natural resources.

Land Virtues

Finally, many environmental philosophers have argued that a suitably naturalistic understanding of human beings has to see us not only *socially* as members of human communities but also *ecologically* as members of “biotic communities” (Sandler, “Character and Environment” 81). As Aldo Leopold points out, we should change the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land community to plain member and “citizen” of it since our flourishing relies on the harmonious relationships between us and other members of the land community. This implies that once we see “the land” as a community to which we belong, we will show respect for our fellow-members and also for the land itself which provides

economic and non-economic goods (Leopold, 240). As to how to live harmoniously with other members of a biotic community, Sandler claims that we should cultivate *land virtues*, such as love, considerateness, attunement, ecological sensitivity, gratitude and so on, which will foster the integrity, stability and beauty of the land community (Sandler, “Character and Environment” 83).

One objection to this land-community approach to justifying environmental virtues is that most of non-human members of a biotic community do not have the capacities to participate in cooperative practices or fulfill mutual obligations, which often play an important role in the moral life of a community. Sandler’s response to this objection is that the concept of “biotic community” proposed by Leopold is not a community of moral agents; it simply means that we human beings are dependent upon and benefited by lands or ecological systems, thereby we should be grateful and caring for other members of the biotic communities. Therefore, no matter whether non-human members of the community can participate in cooperative practices or fulfill mutual obligations, character traits that endorse considerate “community” interactions, such as preserving the integrity, stability, and the beauty of the biotic community, are environmental virtues. In addition, many of the virtues of sustainability, virtues of communion with nature, virtues of respect for nature, such as love, attunement, ecological sensitivity, and so on, are also land virtues because these character traits can make us to be good “citizens” of the biotic “community” (Sandler, “Character and

Environment” 83).

Overall

In this section, I have explained what environmental virtue ethics is and proposed the criterion used to judge whether an ethical theory is a form of environmental virtue ethics. Then, I have summarized six types of environmental virtues—virtues of sustainability, virtues of communion with nature, virtues of respect for nature, virtues of environmental activism, virtues of environmental stewardship, and land virtues—proposed by Sandler. In the next section, I am going to demonstrate that most of the cardinal virtues in Buddhism can be understood as virtues of sustainability, virtues of communion with nature or virtues of respect for nature and at the same time prove that Buddhist ethics also can be regarded as a form of environmental virtue ethics.

b. Environmental Virtues in Buddhism

Once we probe deeper into some key Buddhist virtues, we will find out that most of the wholesome character traits emphasized by the Buddha can be understood as environmental virtues and lead to right actions toward non-human natural entities. Thus, I am going argue that in addition to seeing Buddhist ethics as a form of virtue ethics, it can also rightly be regarded as a form of *environmental* virtue ethics.

In this section, I shall discuss specific Buddhist virtues, including non-greed (Skt., *arāga*), non-hatred (Skt., *adveṣa*), non-delusion (Skt., *amoha*), generosity (Skt., *dāna*), non-harming (Skt., *ahiṃsā*) and compassion (Skt., *karuṇā*), and explain why each of them can be seen as environmental virtues. Then, I shall illustrate how to cultivate compassion through meditation. Finally, I shall conclude that, since most of the important virtues in Buddhism can be understood as either a virtue of sustainability or a virtue of communion with nature or a virtue of respect for nature, an adequate environmental ethic in Buddhism is best regarded as a form of environmental virtue ethics.

Non-Greed, Non-Hatred and Non-Delusion

As mentioned previously, for Buddhists, the highest end for human life is to achieve *nirvāṇa*, that is, to blow out the three “fires” also known as the “three poisons” or the three unwholesome roots (Skt: *akuśala-mūla*; Pāli: *akusala-mūla*)—greed (Skt., *rāga*), hatred (Skt., *dveṣa*) and delusion (Skt., *moha*) (Prebish and Keown, 49). According to the Buddha’s teachings, these three vices are the main reason why sentient beings are trapped in an eternal cycle of death and rebirth. In addition, all negative states of consciousness are understood as eventually grounded in one or more of these three unwholesome character traits (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 8).

Based on the above description, it is not difficult for us to infer that the opposite of the

three poisons are non-greed (Skt., *arāga*), non-hatred (Skt., *adveṣa*) and non-delusion (Skt., *amoha*). These three wholesome roots (Skt: *kuśala-mūla*; Pāli: *kusala-mūla*) can be seen as the most basic Buddhist virtues and all good character traits are ultimately grounded in one or more of these three (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 151).

If we want to use more familiar terminology to describe non-greed, we could label it as simplicity. This is because basically greed (Skt., *rāga*) in Buddhism means attachment to sense desires (Skt., *kāma*) and other unwholesome desires, and simplicity is like the “antidote.” According to the Buddha’s teachings, excessive or inappropriate desires not only give us limited satisfaction but also cause a great amount of anguish and disillusionment in us. Therefore, living simply and non-greedily would be a way to prevent suffering (Pāli, *dukkha*) and promote an individual’s quest for liberation (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 127).

Although it is true that non-greed does not have a direct environmental motive in Buddhist texts, this character trait can be seen as an environmental virtue, a virtue of sustainability, since those who possess it tend to want fewer things and appreciate more of what they have, and consequently they will not adopt a high consumption lifestyle. In ancient times, Buddhist monks and nuns were told not to consume more than was necessary; they were only allowed to satisfy their basic material needs, such as food, robes, lodgings and medicines (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 128). Besides, according to the Ten Precepts, Buddhist practitioners should refrain from using luxury items such as high seats, beds, gold and silver

(Keown, “Nature of Buddhist Ethics” 30). These precepts can be understood as virtue-rules derived from non-greed and remind Buddhists to adopt simple lifestyle. For those who embody this environmental virtue, they will not put unnecessary pressure on the natural environment and tend to maintain natural resources in a sustainable state. So, I think non-greed can be seen to support environmentalism implicitly.

Prima facie, non-hatred (Skt., *adveṣa*) seems to be irrelevant to the discussion of environmental virtues. But once we investigate it more closely, we will find that it also can be seen as a virtue of sustainability. First, in Buddhism, non-hatred signifies the absence of the intention to harm sentient beings who are the cause of frustration on us. For example, in the *Khantivadi Jātaka*, one particular ascetic, *Khantivadi*, did not feel angry at the king when the executioner cruelly cut off his limbs one by one with an axe on the orders of the king (Prebish and Keown, 245). In addition, based on Prebish and Keown’s interpretation, the meaning of non-hatred is close to benevolence or love since it presupposes an attitude of goodwill towards all sentient beings and a disposition to pursue their welfare (239). Second, in Buddhism, hatred is often seen as the cause of violent actions. A person who possesses a hateful heart is thought to immerse himself in the erroneous belief of a self (Skt., *ātman*) and to have the strong desire to protect that self from harm or retaliate against his enemies (Prebish and Keown, 245). In terms of international relations, an aggressive political leader and hostile citizens often cause their country to go to war to take over other countries or

lands. As a result, history has told us that wilderness areas will be degraded, agricultural lands will be destroyed, and water and air will be contaminated, not to mention the fact that warfare unavoidably creates a large amount of refugees who must exploit the natural environment in order to survive (Sandler, “Theory of Environmental Virtue” 259). In this context, non-hatred should be regarded as an important virtue to avoid wars in order to prevent the destruction of the natural environment. Therefore, non-hatred is an environmental virtue.

As to the reason why non-delusion (Skt., *amoha*) could be understood as an environmental virtue, let me explain the meaning of delusion (Skt., *moha*) first. Basically, in Buddhism *moha* relates to ignorance about the true nature of reality as summarized in the Four Noble Truths. This contains ignorance of one’s own nature and the essence of the world at large. More precisely, the beliefs that phenomena are permanent and stable, and that a self or soul (Skt., *ātman*) underlies personal identity are misconceptions from the Buddha’s perspective (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 179). So, *amoha* can be defined as an understanding of one’s own nature and the nature of reality. More specifically, although non-delusion as a virtue broadly means to understand the Four Noble Truths, it particularly denotes the comprehension of the Buddhist doctrines of non-self (Skt. *anātman*; Pāli, *anatta*) and impermanence (Skt. *anitya*; Pāli, *anicca*). From this perspective, I am going to argue that non-delusion could be seen as a virtue of communion with nature. In the first place, as mentioned in Chapter 2, according to the Buddha’s teachings, the human individual is a

combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces known as the five aggregates (Skt., *pañca skandhas*)—from (Skt., *rūpa*), feeling (Skt., *vedanā*), perception (Skt., *saṃjñā*), volitional factors (Skt., *saṃskāra*) and consciousness (Skt., *viññāna*). And everything, including the human individual, that arises will cease. Hence, there is no permanent self or “I” which exists within a person. For those who believe that “I” am a positive, self-identical entity that should be pleased or satisfied, the Buddha thinks they possess a vice of delusion (Skt., *moha*), since the concept of self as an object of craving (Skt., *trṣṇā*) merely causes them to grasp at it in life after life (Prebish and Keown, 55). On the contrary, for those who have a virtue of non-delusion (Skt., *amoha*), they understand the idea of non-self and consequently undermine a vice of selfishness. Besides, this character trait allows its possessors to open their mind in order to enjoy and take moral and spiritual lessons provided by the natural environment. As Holmes Rolston III points out, “‘Know thyself. The unexamined life is not worth living.’ Socrates’ classic wisdom invites us to figure out who we are. But there is complexity beguiled by these seemingly simple maxims. On an elemental level, we often gain lessons in encounters with nature, with non-self” (Rolston, 61). What Rolston means here is that living well or knowing ourselves paradoxically requires us to undermine the attachment to self in order to thoroughly immerse ourselves in natural surroundings. As a result, nature will teach us several perennial and universally available virtues, such as humility, simplicity, frugality, serenity, freedom, and self-confidence

(Rolston, 61). Therefore, based on Rolston's insight, I think non-delusion, particularly the cultivation of a sense of non-self, could be regarded as a virtue of communion with nature since this character trait promotes engagement with nature and help us gain the moral and spiritual lessons that can be provided by nature.

Dāna

The Sanskrit term *dāna* literally means charity or giving and is often translated as generosity (Prebish and Keown, 291). For those who want to join the Buddhist monastic community (Pāli: *saṅgha*), the first thing they have to do is to give all their property away as a condition of entry. In terms of economic support, it is particular important for laypeople in the surrounding community to possess *dāna* since they provide everything the *saṅgha* as a group of renouncers needs, including robes, food, medicine, and the land and buildings for the monastery (Prebish and Keown, 239). Nevertheless, monks and nuns in their turn also have to show generosity through imparting the meaning of the Buddha's teachings to laypeople (Sahni, Virtues Approach" 129). In general, Buddhists believe that generous acts always lead them to good karmic consequences, such as a heavenly rebirth, and help them achieve *nirvāṇa*.

With respect to environmental ethics, it is worth mentioning that, in Buddhism, generosity is not confined to human beings; it extends to non-human animals as well. In the

Aṅguttara Nikāya, the Buddha says, “Even if one throws dish-scourings or cup-scourings into a pool (which is either at the out-skirts of a village or near a village) for creatures there—by which these creatures are caused to be kept alive—this giving is a source of merit, I say, [not] to talk of feeding human beings (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 129).” This example shows that Buddhists are encouraged to practice generosity toward not only human beings but also other sentient beings since the rewards of generosity extends also to non-human animals. Another story in the *Jātaka-māla* tells how the Buddha in a previous life threw himself over a cliff so that on his death a starving tigress could feed herself and give milk to her young cubs (Prebish and Keown, 240)! This act of sacrifice symbolically demonstrates that in Buddhism a truly generous person is willing to give everything she has in order to promote the good of non-human animals and alleviate their suffering, and tends to believe that other sentient beings have worth independent from human flourishing. From this point of view, I think *dāna* could be seen as an environmental virtue, a virtue of respect for nature.

Ahiṃsā

The term *ahiṃsā* derives from the Sanskrit root *hiṃs*, which means to kill, to injure, or to strike. Prefixed with a privative “a,” *ahiṃsā* is often translated as non-harming, non-injury, or nonviolence (Chapple, 10). In modern times, this concept has been closely associated with Mohandas Gandhi, who successfully guided the people of India to independence from the

British Empire through the nonviolent movement (Prebish and Keown, 241). But, in fact, the notion of *ahiṃsā* has existed in Indian culture for many centuries. According to Keown, its origins can be traced back at least to the *śramaṇa* movement, a movement that Buddhism, Jainism, and other non-Vedic religions stem from (Keown, “Dictionary of Buddhism” 6). One objective in this movement was to stop the sacrifice of animals in orthodox Brahmanical tradition. The Buddha, along with other leaders of the unorthodox *śramaṇa* schools, claimed the Brahmanical sacrificial rituals not only failed to bring about the good karmic outcomes the Brahmins hoped for, but also demonstrated that they were cruel and barbaric (Harvey, 157). As a reaction to the criticism, the Brahman priests began abandoning blood sacrifices and using symbolic offerings, including fruit, vegetables, and milk, in their rituals (Prebish and Keown, 242).

But how exactly do Jains and Buddhists practice *ahiṃsā*? In ancient India, Jain monks believed that it was wrong to kill any form of life, even when it was done without *intention*. In order to minimize bad karmic consequences, they generally brushed the ground clear of insects before they treaded and wore masks to avoid breathing in tiny creatures (Prebish and Keown, 243).⁷ So, it is not surprising that Jains are strict vegetarians. For them, *ahiṃsā* is the most fundamental moral principle which they must obey in all circumstances.

⁷ In Bryan Norton’s well-known article, “Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism,” he cites Jainism as an example of a weakly anthropocentric ethic that is concerned with the treatment of non-human life (Norton, 165).

But, for Buddhists, *ahiṃsā* is more like a virtue rather than a moral principle. Although the Buddha did tell his disciples to refrain from harming or killing living creatures and *ahiṃsā* is the first of the Five Precepts, no bad karma will result from *unintentionally* taking life, such as accidentally treading on an earthworm (Prebish and Keown, 243). In other words, in Buddhism, cultivating wholesome character traits is more important than strictly obeying moral principles. My point can also be supported by Buddhist dietary customs. The Buddha himself was not a vegetarian and did not require his disciples to abandon eating meat. In fact, he resisted an attempt to make vegetarianism compulsory for his disciples and required them to eat whatever was given to them, which may include meat. This is because the belief that being a vegetarian is itself the way to enlightenment is seen as an example of the spiritual fetter of attachment or delusion (Harvery, 160). But in the Buddha's time, monks and nuns were not allowed to eat the flesh of an animal that had been directly killed for them. However, in the Mahāyāna tradition, Buddhists embrace vegetarianism as a way of life because they believe that eating meat extinguishes the seed of great compassion which is particularly emphasized by the Mahāyāna (Harvery, 163). Although there is a divergence of views within Buddhism as to whether vegetarianism is required, the *intentional* taking of life is undoubtedly forbidden by all Buddhist schools since it is an unwholesome character trait. This is also the reason why Buddhists think that making one's living as a butcher, hunter or fisher comes under the category of wrong livelihood (Harvery, 162).

In spite of the negative formulation of the virtue *ahiṃsā* (non-harming), it also has positive implication in Buddhist ethics. Those who have this wholesome attitude intend to treat all living beings with kindness and respect. From this perspective, *ahiṃsā* comes closer to Sandler's virtues of respect for nature, which are conducive to the flourishing of other living things regardless of human interests. A classic example of showing respect for nature in Buddhism is that, in ancient India, during *vassa*, the annual three-month rain-retreat, Buddhist monks avoided traveling since the tiny creatures became abundant after the rains and traveling damaged their flourishing (Keown, "Dictionary of Buddhism" 323). Therefore, *ahiṃsā* can be understood as an environmental virtue.

Compassion

The last virtue I want to talk about in this section is compassion (Skt., *karuṇā*). In Buddhism, this virtue is highly emphasized in all schools. The importance of it can be illustrated by the Buddha's own journey to spiritual awakening. According to the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*, after attaining *nirvāṇa* under the bodhi tree, the Buddha is described as being hesitant to teach other people the Truths that he just realized because he felt that no one else would be able to understand his teachings. But, after Brahmā, the Hindu deity of creation, approached the Buddha with the request to share his wisdom with those who had a little dust in their eyes, the Buddha is said to agree with the request out of compassion (Sahni,

“Virtues Approach” 119). Many scholars has pointed out that, in agreeing to share his teachings, the Buddha had nothing to gain since he had already accomplished his spiritual goal. So, a self-interest motivation can be completely ruled out in this context (Sahni, “Virtues Approach” 119).

In addition, compassion is not restricted for human beings in Buddhism. The concern for the well-being of other animals can be found in many Buddhist tales. For example, in the *Lohakumbhi Jātaka*, the king of the city of Benares is frightened by some sounds when he sleeps. His Brahmin courtiers suggest that a big animal sacrifices must be held to protect him from these horrible sounds. After hearing this news, in order to save helpless animals from being killed, a very compassionate Bodhisattva (the Buddha in his former lives), as a Brahmin with mystical powers, shows the king that the sounds are made by beings suffering in hell and contends that a big sacrificial ritual is useless for the king's well-being. Ultimately, the sacrifice is stopped (Sahni, “Jātaka Stories” 147). Based on this tale, it seems legitimate to talk about compassion as an environmental virtue and classify it as a virtue of respect for nature since alleviating non-human animals’ pain and suffering is strongly recommended by Buddhists.

Finally, I want to explain how Buddhists cultivate compassion through the *Brahma-vihāras* (Skt., a key set of four meditative practices) which is used to develop four Buddhist virtues—loving kindness (Pāli, *mettā*), compassion (Pāli, *karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (Pāli,

muditā) and equanimity (Pāli, *upekkhā*). First of all, these four attitudes are said to be sublime because they can produce the right or ideal way of conduct towards all living beings (Thera, 4). For those who possess these four virtues, they tend to level social barriers, build harmonious communities, revive joy and hope long abandoned, and promote or protect the good of non-human living things. In addition, since the Buddha emphasizes that these four sublime states should become the mind's constant dwelling places, they are called abodes (Skt., *vihāras*). In other words, the Buddha advises us that loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity should become our inseparable companions in all our common activities (Thera, 4).

Besides, these four sublime states of mind are also known as the boundless states (Pāli, *appamaññā*) because, in their perfection and their true nature, they should not be narrowed by any limitation (Thera, 5). For Buddhists, once someone completely possesses these four virtues, she will be engaged in promoting the well-being of non-human living things and at the same time achieve high stages of mental concentration called *jhāna* (Pāli, meditative absorption) (Thera, 5). To achieve this goal, Buddhists have to use these four virtues not only as principles of conduct and objects of reflection but also as subjects of methodical meditation. That meditation is called *brahma-vihāras-bhāvanā* (Skt., the meditative development of the sublime states).

In the meditative exercises, one directs her thoughts of loving kindness, compassion or

sympathetic joy to the selection of people. The whole procedure is from the easier to the more difficult. For example, one starts with an aspiration for her own well-being. Then, she extends the thought of compassion to a person for whom she has a loving respect, such as her mother, next to a stranger and finally to enemies or those who she dislikes. After having been able to deal with the hardest task, she will not make any discrimination between those four types of people and will extend her compassion to them equally. At that point of the practice, she will achieve the higher stages of concentration (Thera, 5). Generally speaking, this meditative practice will have two crowning effects upon assiduous practitioners. First, it will make these four qualities sink deep into their hearts so that they will show these attitudes spontaneously and it will be difficult for them to overthrow these virtues. Second, it will help them to show altruism toward all sentient beings (Thera, 5).

Additionally, it is worth to mention that, at the start of meditation, Buddhist practitioners often say a prayer as follows:

May all sentient beings have
happiness and the causes of happiness;

May all sentient beings be free from
suffering and the causes of suffering;

May all sentient beings never be separated from
the happiness that knows no suffering;

May all sentient beings abide in equanimity,
free from attachment and anger that holds
some close and others distant (Rinpoche, 63).

Again, this demonstrates that being sincerely concerned about the well-being of non-human animals is an essential part of Buddhist spiritual practice. And compassion is an important environmental virtue in Buddhism.

Overall

In this section, I have discussed six Buddhist cardinal virtues—non-greed (Skt., *arāga*), non-hatred (Skt., *adveṣa*), non-delusion (Skt., *amoha*), generosity (Skt., *dāna*), non-harming (Skt., *ahiṃsā*) and compassion (Skt., *karuṇā*)—and have shown that each of these positive character traits is either a virtue of sustainability or a virtue of communion with nature or a virtue of respect for nature and, thus, could be understood as an environmental virtue. Therefore, I conclude that Buddhist ethics as a form of virtue ethics could be regarded as a form of environmental virtue ethics. And this could also be seen as a fundamental reason why Buddhism appears to be an environmentally friendly religion.

Conclusion

In this thesis, in order to understand why Buddhists in Southeast Asia protect rainforests and to establish a solid foundation for Buddhist environmental ethic, I have attempted to draw a clear picture regarding two major environmental concepts—nature and anthropocentrism—in Buddhism and argued that Buddhist ethics can be understood as a form of environmental virtue ethics.

About the notion of nature in Buddhism, I have shown that, although according to the Buddha's teachings human beings occupy an important position in nature, they are still part of nature. This is because, based on the doctrine of dependent origination, all things arise in dependence on multiple causes and conditions; everything in the universe is *equally* governed by the same law. This implies that there are not independent substances at all, such as mind and body proposed by Descartes. From this perspective, the notion of nature in Buddhism is more like a Cosmological view rather than a Despotic one which is the view that “mindless” nature is inferior to the mind of human beings, and the latter are encouraged to control and dominate the former. Besides, since the purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to free oneself from all sufferings and attain enlightenment rather than to conserve the natural environment, the Buddhist worldview on nature cannot be seen as a Conservationist one. Even so, I have pointed out that Buddhism still has positive benefits to develop an environmental ethic. For example, the doctrine of *dukkha* indicates that not only is human life suffering, other sentient

beings also have suffering. Therefore, in making moral decisions, we human beings have to take other animals into account.

In respect of anthropocentrism, I have demonstrated that the objection that Buddhism is anthropocentric and consequently cannot be an adequate environmental ethic is untenable. This is because anthropocentrism is not all bad for environmentalism. Although strong anthropocentrism is notorious in environmental literatures, I have explained the reason why Norton's weak anthropocentrism can offer environmental ethicists a basis for developing an adequate environmental ethic. After that, I have argued that Buddhism is a form of weak anthropocentrism since the Buddhist worldview is a strong paradigm for criticizing, altering and dropping irrational environmental felt preferences. Therefore, I have concluded that Buddhism can be a basis for an adequate environmental ethic.

Finally, through showing the similarity between Aristotelian virtue ethics and Buddhist ethics and proposing two important features which I use to identify an ethical theory as virtue ethics or, more precisely, *eudaimonistic* virtue ethics, I have concluded that Buddhist ethics is best regarded as a form of virtue ethics. Then, after explaining what environmental virtue ethics is and summarizing six types of environmental virtues—virtues of sustainability, virtues of communion with nature, virtues of respect for nature, virtues of environmental activism, virtues of environmental stewardship, and land virtues, I have shown that most of the important Buddhist virtues, including non-greed (Skt., *arāga*), non-hatred (Skt., *adveṣa*),

non-delusion (Skt., *amoha*), generosity (Skt., *dāna*), non-harming (Skt., *ahiṃsā*) and compassion (Skt., *karuṇā*), can be seen as environmental virtues. What follows is that Buddhist ethics could be understood as a form of environmental virtue ethics. If this conclusion is true, possessing and expressing environmental virtues, I think, are the main moral reason why Buddhists monks, nuns, and laypeople in Southeast Asian participate in environmental movements for saving rainforests and preserving the natural environment.

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