

The Concept of Happiness and its Relation to the Value of Life from the Perspective of Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Thought

Phyu Phyu Shein

Dr, Professor, Department of Philosophy, Meiktila University

Abstract

The research question is why the concept of happiness plays the vital role of the value of life? The research finding is that an action is right in so far as it promotes happiness. Action and speech that proceeds from unwholesome mental states harms both ourselves and others. The training in morality consists of a commitment to certain precepts as guiding principles in one's daily life. One's mind inclines toward peace and clarity. Morality is the firm basis for all spiritual endeavour and happiness. It can be seen to provide the indispensable foundation for an intelligent and caring society. Thus, moral, spiritual and intellectual happiness is involved in the value of life. The methods to be used in this paper are the Descriptive Method and the Evaluative Method. This paper contributes that man is a spiritual happiness can be performed by proving the guidance for moral life.

Key Words: Happiness, morality, the value of life

Introduction

The aim and objective of this paper is to understand the concept of happiness is moral concept, to benefit others, and to say happiness is truly universal and it is a universal goal. In order to be good life, it is necessary to get happiness or pleasure. In the history of Western philosophy, for some thinkers, happiness or pleasure is the only good and valuable. In this paper, the first chapter is discussed the concept of happiness and its relation to the value of life in some Western philosophy. The second chapter is discussed Myanmar Theravada Buddhism view on the concept of happiness. Myanmar culture based on Theravada Buddhist thought is acceptable since it has moral, spiritual and intellectual goodness. According to Myanmar Theravada Buddhist thought, the end of human life is nirvana which can attained through the eight-fold paths. These are right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. *Pyanna*, *Sila* and *Samadhi* are the three steps in which these eight- fold paths are included and these three are the ways of attaining nirvana, i.e. the value of life.

The research question is why the concept of happiness plays the vital role of the value of life? The research finding is that an action is right in so far as it promotes happiness. Action and speech that proceeds from unwholesome mental states harms both ourselves and others. The training in morality consists of a commitment to certain precepts as guiding principles in one's daily life. One's mind inclines toward peace and clarity. Morality is the firm basis for all spiritual endeavour and happiness. It can be seen to provide the indispensable foundation for an intelligent and caring society. Thus, moral, spiritual and intellectual happiness or goodness is involved in the value of life. The methods to be used in this paper are the Descriptive Method and the Evaluative Method. By evaluating and making assessment the relation of the concept of happiness and the good of life on Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Culture, it can be said that happiness sees a way out through higher

consciousness and mindfulness practice. It is through such an engagement with one's self, the world and reality that one is able to achieve a transcendent happiness. Equanimity, a deep sense of well-being and happiness, is attainable through proper knowledge and practice in everyday life. This research paper contributes to show that men can perform an important service by providing plentiful guidance for moral life. It can be concluded that moral, spiritual and intellectual goodness or happiness are involved in the concept of value of life in the Myanmar Theravada Buddhist thought.

The Concept of Happiness as the Good Life in Some Western Philosophy

In the history of the Western philosophy, some philosophers regarded happiness or pleasure as good. In order to be a good life, it is necessary to get happiness or pleasure. In Greek tradition, good life was an important factor in the discussion of moral philosophy in Greek period. It can be seen that the Greek philosophy can be divided into two categories. They are Ionian or Cosmological tradition and Socratic or Humanistic tradition. The first tradition especially emphasized on nature and they were interested in reality of the external world. The second one mainly focused on man and his problems. However, it can be said that both traditions were interested in discussing the value and purpose of life. Regarding the value of life, the first traditional thinkers had discussed in terms of natural principle. However, those who mainly focused on man and his problem, discussed within the context of knowledge, moral, ethics, reason etc. Thus, it can be seen that a good life must be happy and rational in early Greek philosophy.

The Philosopher, Stoics said that if we have a good life, we must have happiness in our life. The following is the concept of good and its relation to happiness.

Man must know the laws of the universe. If he knows the good, he will be good. If he knows what is expected of him by nature, he will be good. Such thing is happiness. Happiness is not to be sought by itself nor it is to be gained by itself. It is natural that man always wants happiness or pleasure. Thus, man usually seeks it as possible as he can. Many philosophers took happiness as the goal or value of life. They seem to think life without that happiness as the value of life. They seem to think life without any happiness is not a good one. If there is no any happiness or pleasure then there cannot be a good life. Therefore, the unhappy condition cannot lead a valuable life.

The philosopher, hedonists said that only pleasure is intrinsically desirable. And they believed that only displeasure is intrinsically undesirable. Moreover, they completely stated that only pleasant states of mind are desirable in themselves and that only unpleasant states of mind are undesirable in themselves and that one state of affairs if and only if it contains more pleasant states of mind than the other.

In the D. R. Bali's *Introduction to Philosophy*, Epicurus also says that as follows:

"Every pleasure then because of its natural kinship to us good, yet not every is to be chosen: even as every pain also is an evil, yet not all are always of a nature to be avoided. Yet by a scale of comparison and by the consideration of advantages and disadvantages we must form our judgment on all of these matters. When we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasure of profligates and those that consist of sensuality but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind." (D. R. Bali (1997))

Aristotle said that the happy life is the good life. The good life is the life of excellent rational activity. If it is right, it uniquely does. Human function is to reason, since it is that alone which humans uniquely do. Performing one's function well is good. According to him, the life of excellent rational activity is the happy life. Therefore, he believed that the highest good of man is the complete realization of his reason.

Aristotle states in Book I of his *Nicomachean Ethics* this statement as follows:

"The good is that at which all things aim". "Men aim at happiness. Happiness is the end which he chooses for its own sake and never for the sake of some other thing. It is the end to which all our conscious arts are directed." Thus, "happiness is the best, the noblest, the most delightful thing in the world". (Dev Raj Bali. (1997))

This statement states that men aim at happiness. He chooses for happiness own sake but not for the sake of some other thing. Moral goodness is a quality disposing us to act in best way when we are dealing with pleasures and pains. We were being ordered by moral goodness to act in best way when we are dealing with pleasures and pains. It suggests that happiness is the best to be pursued in human life and in the world.

On the other word, Aristotle also regarded that happiness is the good life. He suggested that pleasure as the good life is not an activity in itself but also something which accompanies satisfying activities. He affirms that pleasure may be a component for good life, but it cannot be a good life itself. The good life is for its own sake but not for the sake of anything. Moreover, he stated that the good life is to be never found in the pleasure itself but it to be found in the notion of satisfying activities. Man, aim is not the pleasure; he can be attained by the performance of moral activities because by performing activities pleasure can be gotten. These activities may be forbidden or admirable or challenging and painful e.g. running, jumping etc. Happiness is the end of human activities and it is attained by the performance of virtuous activities. The virtuous activity which is contemplative is lied by the perfect happiness. So, the good life is the happiest life which is accompanied by virtue.

In nineteenth century, Jereme Bentham and J.S. Mill was Utilitarian and British philosopher, considered good life as the happy life. Happiness is the ultimate end of human life and both admit. According to Mill, good life is the life of happiness and the life of happiness is the satisfied contended life.

For utilitarian, the moral quality of an activity must be judged by its consequences production of happiness for the greatest number. They developed a moral theory which was universalistic in intent. They also regarded that all men are acceptable to the good life which means pleasurable life without any discrimination. Therefore, it is emphasized that if the moral quality of activity was to be preferred morally good, it promised the greatest happiness for the individual or the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Jeremy Bentham says that nature has placed man under the guidance of two masters, pleasure and pain. These two sensations determine man's behavior. They are whatever takes pleasure is good and whatever takes pain is evil. He found pain and pleasure to be the only intrinsic values in the world, and this he derived the rule of utility that the good is whatever gives the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. Therefore, he developed the principle that good is the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

In the *Philosophy: The Pursuit of Wisdom*, Bentham accepts as follows:

"Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what use ought to do, as well as what use shall do". (Louis P. Pojman. (2000))

Moreover, he regarded that pleasure or happiness is good and pain is evil, the consequences rather than the motives are the important part of actions. If motives are good or evil, it is only on account of they are effect. There are good when they tend to produce pleasure, evil when they lead to pain. Goodness or badness cannot be predicted of movies, since it is with disposition as with other things. He says that morality

depends directly upon the consequences. He admits that some motives are more likely than others to increase happiness.

John Stuart Mill also holds that happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. Pleasure and the absence of pain are, this account the only things. It means to the attainment of pleasure and the prevention of pain.

In this sense, in Jeremy Bentham's *Ethics*, he accepts as follows;

"The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, utility or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure" (Jereme Bentham. (1996))

Mill accepted that pleasure alone is good and general happiness. It is being greater in amount to both merely the happiness of the individual by himself or merely by the happiness of others. It brings about the greatest amount of good. Hence general happiness is to be preferred to individual happiness alone or the happiness of others only.

Mill said that pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends. It is meant to the promotion of pleasure. But he carefully distinguished between higher and lower pleasures. There would hardly be a human creature who would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs'. Thus, man being rational and social, prefers higher pleasure to lower pleasures.

In this sense, Mill also stated as follows:

"It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied". (John Perry Michael Bratman.(1999))

The philosopher, Kant also said that the highest good plays an important role in moral philosophy. He defines the highest good as a combination of two heterogeneous elements, namely virtue and happiness. This conception lies at the center of some of the most influential Kantian doctrines such as his famous "moral argument" for the rationality of faith, his conception of the unity of reason and his views concerning the final end of nature as well as the historical progress of mankind.

For Kant, moral faith has focused on the place of the highest good in his Kant's moral theory, on the antinomy of pure practical reason, and on the idea of the primacy of practical reason.

Many earlier philosophers have suggested a connection between being a morally good person and

being happy. According to Kant, if happiness correlates with the satisfaction of desires, there is no guarantee that moral goodness will match perfectly with happiness.

For Kant, in this sense *Rehabilitating Reason, Reason and Morality* as follows:

The sight of a being who is not graced by any touch of a pure and good will but who yet enjoys an uninterrupted prosperity can never delight a rational and impartial spectator. Thus, a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition being even worthy of happiness. (Norman Melchert. (2002))

Therefore, it may not be the case that happiness correlates perfectly with a good will in this world, but it should be so. Any impartial spectator will feel uneasy at the sight of some really rotten person who is really happy. Goodness may not guarantee happiness, but it seems to constitute the condition for deserving it.

The Concept of Happiness from the perspective of Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Thought

Happiness is a mental factor. It is a type of mental activity with which we are aware of an object in a certain way. It is one section of a broader mental factor called "feeling", which covers a spectrum that spans a wide range from totally happy to totally unhappy.

It can study the concept of happiness from the point of view of the Buddhist tradition. It can correctly say that happiness is truly universal and it is a universal goal. It can be said that the definition of happiness is many and varied.

Happiness in Pali is called *Sukha*, which is used both as a noun meaning "happiness", "ease", "bliss", or "pleasure" and as an adjective meaning "blissful" or "pleasant". (Concise Pali-English Dictionary. (1957))

Buddhism provides two definitions for happiness. One is defined in terms of our relation to an object, while the other is defined in terms of our relation with the state of mind of the feeling itself. The first defines happiness as the experiencing of something in a satisfying manner, based on believing that it is of benefit to ourselves, whether or not it actually is. Unhappiness is the experiencing of something in an unsatisfying, tormenting way. The second defines happiness as that feeling which, when it has ended, we wish to meet with it once more. Unhappiness as that feeling which, when it arises, we wish to be parted from it. While a natural feeling is that feeling which, when it arises or ends, we have neither of the two wishes. The two definitions are related. If men experience something in a satisfying way, the way he experiences something the object is that the object, which means "comes to our mind" in a pleasant manner. He accepts the object and it remains comfortably as the object of his attention. This implies that he feels his experience of the object of benefit to

his. It makes us happy and it feels good. Because of that, he wants the benefit from this experience to continue and, if it ended, we would want it come back. It would say that he enjoys the object and the experience of it.

According to Buddha, for leading a good life *pyanna*, *karuna* and *samata* are essential. The end of human life is nirvana which can attained through the eight fold path. These are right views, right efforts, right conduct, right resolve, right mindfulness, right livelihood and right concentration. *Pyanna*, *silā* and *samadhi* are the three steps in which these eight- fold paths are included and these three are the ways of attaining Nirvana.

The Buddha said that happiness is in the mind which is released from worldly bondage. The happiness of sensual lust and the happiness of heavenly bliss are not equal to a sixteenth part of the happiness of craving's end. It can explore how the Buddhist tradition views the nature of happiness and the path to that happiness. The Buddha described elements of a happy life in the *Dhammapada* as follows:

- Living without hate among the hateful.
- Living without domination of the passions among those who are dominated by the passions.
- Living without yearning for sensual pleasures among those who yearn for sensual pleasures.
- Living without being impeded by the Three Poisons of craving, anger and ignorance which are seen as hindrances to spiritual progress.
- Giving up thoughts of winning or losing.
- Overcoming the Five Aggregates (a sense of objects, emotional attachment to those objects, categorization of those objects, mental states arising from contact with those objects, a dualistic view of a perceiver and that which is perceived).
- Subjugating the passions.
- Not being in the company of the foolish but being with the wise.
- Attaining the final happiness which is Nirvana, sometimes referred to as Bliss. (U San Pe *The Dhammapada* (1952))

It can do all these things was outlined by the Buddha. He called it the Noble Eightfold Path. It is the path that leads to the ultimate happiness, i.e. Nirvana. Moreover, the Noble Eightfold Path is also a state of mind, a state of happiness, something which is universal. It is the practice of happiness in our daily life.

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of eight paths or steps. These are as follows:

- (1) Right understanding
- (2) Right intention
- (3) Right speech
- (4) Right action
- (5) Right livelihood
- (6) Right effort
- (7) Right mindfulness
- (8) Right concentration (Ledisayadaw.(2004))

It can see how each one produces its own kind of happiness.

1. Right understanding

This teaching appeals to us on many levels such as intellectual, emotional, logical, and spiritual. They are very straight forward and specific in that they spell out very painstaking how and why we suffer and how this suffering can be cured. This is the happiness of encountering path and will allow us to liberate ourselves from the round of birth, suffering, aging, death and rebirth. It is the happiness of finally getting to the satisfaction which is inevitably sad.

2. Right Intention

This teaching appeals to end suffering for ourselves and for others. It produces the happiness of mutual benefit. Men always feel good when he does well for others. Even when he is forced to do good for others, he is also forced to admit that there's some kind of a good feeling associated with it. This is where compassion and wisdom come together.

3. Right speech

This teaching also appeals to end harming for ourselves and for others. If whenever we lie and whenever we speak harshly or gossip, there must be a negative energy that goes along with it. When we look at it closely, we really don't feel happiness when we speak that way such as guilt, sorrow, fear and so on.

4. Right Action

This teaching lies in knowing that whatever we do with our words, with our deeds and with our thoughts is respectful of people's lives, property, sexuality, dignity and so forth. It also helps them to ease their suffering. People whose actions harm others in any way carry at least a subconscious echo of those harmful acts, not to mention all the other things bottom of our problems and of being able to see things exactly as they are.

5. Right Livelihood

This teaching appeals to respect for people and for the welfare of others. It can usually find that people whose jobs don't cause suffering and only serve to create peace and harmony are happy, even though they may be overworked, underpaid and underappreciated. Any job that uplifts humanity, respects life and promotes the welfare of all is ultimately the most satisfying despite a lack of economic benefits. For example, when we deal in weapons or other such harmful industries, even though we may not be directly involved in their manufacture we tend to sweep that aspect of our company's activities under the rug so that we don't get our hands dirty. This is a form of shame and fear that isn't experienced by someone who is engaged in right livelihood.

6. Right Effort

This teaching appeals to avoid and clear our minds of negative and unwholesome thoughts. By applying right effort in our lives, we can reduce and eliminate the number of unwholesome mental states and establish wholesome thoughts as a natural as a natural part of our mind. For example, when we play sports, whether we win or lose, if we've put absolutely everything we have into our game we don't really care

about the outcome. This is the happiness of right effort.

7. Right Mindfulness

This teaching appeals to eliminate the delusion of our mind and to have precision and clarity of our mind. Mindfulness is essential of our actions, feelings and thoughts as well as that of our environment. We can able to keep an eye on our body, our mind. Our mind is trying to hold on to be a happy thing, a noble thing. We are the guardian of ourself, protecting ourself from that which causes delusion and suffering.

8. Right Concentration

All kinds of happiness come from meditation.

- The happiness of possessing tranquility and insight.
- The happiness of a state of mind that is balanced and alert, tranquil and enthusiastic.
- The happiness of doing just what our fundamental teacher the Buddha did to become liberated from suffering. (Ledisayadaw. (2004))

Therefore, it has looked into the Noble Eightfold Path in terms of happiness there are some other example from the Buddhist tradition that it may examine. For example, by the principle of loving-kindness, love is great, there's no doubt about it. But unless that love is extended to others, its power is going mostly unused. Extending loving-kindness to others is one of the most uplifting things we can do and we also cultivate it within ourselves.

Another means of happiness takes the form of accepting one's kamma. If we can embrace the truth of cause-and-effect, we can realize that whatever happens to us is not necessarily bad or good, but that it is the end of a kammic cycle, i.e. the wheel of birth and death. And of course, the ultimate happiness is Nirvana, the cessation of suffering, the end of the round of birth-and-death, the realization of perfect oneness, perfect joy, perfect peace and perfect happiness.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the ancient Greek value of life is good, and it is acceptable since it has, to certain extent, moral, spiritual and intellectual goodness. Similarly, such kinds of happiness as moral, spiritual and intellectual goodness can be seen in Myanmar Theravada Buddhist culture.

It can be concluded that Aristotle's view on happiness is the ultimate end and purpose of human existence. It is not pleasure, nor it is virtue. It is the exercise of virtue. It cannot be achieved until the end of one's life. So, it is a goal and not a temporary state. It is the perfection of human nature. Since man is a rational animal, human happiness depends on the exercise of his reason. It depends on acquiring a moral character, where one displays the virtues of courage, generosity, justice, friendship, and citizenship in one's life. These virtues involve striking a balance between an excess and a deficiency. Therefore, it requires

intellectual contemplation, for this is the ultimate realization of our rational capacities.

It can be concluded that Bentham says "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure." For this reason, his ethical theory is entirely concerned with the two. Bentham saw that everyone wants pleasure and nobody wants pain. From this he derived the principle of utility which was that the good is whatever brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people.

It can be said that Mill's good life contain the entire element relevant to lead it. Such as happiness, sympathy, freedom, justice, love, reason, experience etc. are all included in his good life, i.e. in the life of happiness. Good life can be determined on the basis of action and the action is evaluated as good or bad in the light of actual experiences. The only criterion of making an experience good is its pleasantness.

It can be related to Kant's views on happiness that he emphasizes the importance of rationality, consistency, impartiality, and respect for persons in the way we live our lives. In virtue of being a human being, we have rights, dignity and intrinsic moral value. If everyone has intrinsic value then each one should have the same rights and equal for all.

In Buddhism, it can be concluded that, morality is also deeply concerned with the things we do and the things we say. Action and speech that proceeds from unwholesome mental states harms both ourselves and others. Morality is defined as the will to refrain from all such words and deeds. We develop the power and skill to refrain from acts of body, speech, and mind that cause ourselves and others pain. We can learn to perform those acts of body, speech, and mind that lead to happiness and peace. We can purify our minds.

According to Buddhism, happiness sees a way out through higher consciousness and mindfulness practice. It is through such an engagement with one's self, the world and reality that one is able to achieve a transcendent happiness. Equanimity, a deep sense of well-being and happiness, is attainable through proper knowledge and practice in everyday life.

The Eightfold Path is presented as a whole system, but the three paths associated with the area of mental cultivation are particularly relevant to the happiness that we can find in equanimity, or peace of mind. Therefore, the Buddha has prescribed a very practical way of cultivating loving-kindness which brings happiness. To sum up, it can be concluded that happiness as moral, spiritual and intellectual goodness are involved in the concept of value of life in the Myanmar Theravada Buddhist thought.

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