

ANALYSIS OF THE BUDDHA AND ARISTOTLE

Chutatip UMAVIJANI

ABSTRACT. *It is interesting to study the ideas of these two great thinkers, who lived more than two thousand years ago. Their ideas are still relevant to our present world in the 21st century. The Buddha and Aristotle were historical persons; they observed the natural order of the world, and urged us to see the reality of life. They had preached philosophy of realism and gave directions of the good way of life. Even though they had different backgrounds, their ideologies are similar in many ways. The purpose of this report is to introduce the ideas of the two great thinkers who lived about the same period but in different parts of the world, the East and the West. Firstly, in this article we have observed the methods and ways that the Buddha and Aristotle used to gain their wisdom. Secondly, we have discussed what they defined as an immanent teleological essentialism about nature and the reality of life, the transcendental substance of the real world. Their philosophies enabled us to have different points of views on this meaningful life. They had uncovered the power of knowing, that consists of realizing of the reality via using the power of our mind and being self-sufficient. The results of this study let us look on the three realms: the physical realm, the mental one and the spiritual one. Finding of this realms can lead us to knowing about the meaning and the essence of life, can unblock the ability to establish a new world order, with the new “living” approach, that may make our lives more healthier and happier. The Buddha offered the path of ending suffer via meditation; Aristotle introduced the life of contemplation. Aristotle philosophy uncovered the regularity of behavior of all things around us via comparison with the relation of heavenly body: all things are connected to each other from the very beginning and always effect to each other, that is similar to the Dependent Origination of the Buddha. If people understood this we would be able to create a New World Order that I will discuss in the conclusion of this report.*

KEYWORDS. *Buddhism, Aristotelism, dependent origination, meditation, education, end of suffering, new world order.*

1. Brief background of the Buddha and Aristotle

The Buddha was an Indian prince named Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 B.C.). At the beginning of his life, his father, King Suthothana, wanted the young prince to see only the pleasurable side of life, by keeping the prince within the palace with all possible comforts. As a father, the king wanted him to have worldly success. But one day, the prince found out the truth about life when he had escaped from the palace, and had been able to see sickness, old age and death. He had realized the suffering of life. So the young prince had decided to leave the palace, in order to find the path of ending the suffering. During that period there were many sects and beliefs in India that had been continuously influencing people for a long time, but he rebelled against the old traditions. He realized that living the life of a prince and being able to conquer the world was not the answer to his questions about life; that kind of his life and the existing beliefs were not the path of ending the suffering. The Buddha searched for the meaning of life: what is the purpose of our life? And how can we end suffering?

At first, he tried to live the ascetic life via strictly controlling the body like the yogis in India. Then he found his own path by practicing and understanding the middle path. By insight meditation, he had been able to reach enlightenment and become the Buddha, the enlightened person. Then, he spent the rest of his life teaching his disciples, for 45 years till his death. The Buddha's ideas or *Dhamma* (the teaching of the Buddha) was taught as a religion. He had taught many disciples. Those, who devoted his teaching were monks and nuns. Buddhism consists of the so-called three gems, first the Buddha (the enlightened man), the *Dhamma* (the teaching) and the *Sangha*, or monks and nuns. The Buddha's teachings have influenced the world for more than two thousand five hundred years, firstly in India and then in the Far East and now it is spreading all over the world.

Aristotle was born in Macedonia (384–322 B.C.) He was a son of Nicomachus, the court physician of the Macedonian King, Philip II. At the age of 17 he entered Plato's Academy in Athens, remaining there for twenty years, and left the Academy after Plato's death. At the age of 40 he was a tutor to the young Alexander the Great, by the invitation of King Philip. Later at the age of 49 he set up a school, the Lyceum, where he conducted and organized research on many subjects, and built the first great library. When Alexander the Great died, he fled from Athens, fearing an attack from the anti-Macedonians. He died in 322 B.C. Aristotle had wide interests and knew a great deal about everything, he had written many books, showing his great interest in all subjects.

The Buddha and Aristotle were true philosophers. They were searching for the meaning of life and reality, why things are being that way they are, regardless of any belief before them. Their wisdom and their practical ways to achieve knowledge became important sources for many intellectuals in the past and up to the present.

2. Methods of the Buddha and Aristotle

*“Believe nothing on the faith of traditions,
Even though they have been held in honor
for many generations and in diverse places.
Do not believe a thing because many people speak of it.
Do not believe the faith of the sages of the past.
Do not believe what you yourself have imagined,
persuading yourself that a God inspires you.
Believe nothing on the sole authority of your masters and priests.
After examination, believe what you have tasted yourself
And found to be reasonable, and conform your conduct thereto”*

Buddha

From the above quotation, we can see that the Buddha did not follow the path of traditional belief, but used his own observations and reasoning. His main concern was to find a way to overcome the suffering. He rejected a number of traditional notions like those of atheism, theism, monism, and dualism. He disagreed with those who tried to gain wisdom on the one side by fasting, on another side, by enjoying the pleasurable life. The Buddha chose the middle path. While seeing a harpist he

realized that the string on a harp cannot be too strong or too loose to make the best sound. He encouraged his disciples to discuss the problems of metaphysics, phenomenology, ethics, and epistemology, so that they could find their own methods and answer questions by themselves (as in the above quotation that he recited to the *Kalama* villagers).

The Buddha was able to find his own path through meditation and become enlightened. He gained intuitive knowledge and wisdom from meditation in order to overcome suffering. He discovered the natural cycle of life phenomena called the Dependent Origination Law and the Law of Nature (the three characteristics of reality or existence): *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering or conflict) and *annata* (non-self or soullessness); and the Five Aggregates and Law of Karma. He encouraged his disciples to practice meditation in order to understand these natural laws, to realize the three characteristics of reality, to finally be able to enter the path to the enlightenment.

Amidst the immense knowledge that the Buddha discovered, it is interesting to discover the path the Buddha directed people towards to overcome suffering or enable them to live a good life, in comparison to Aristotle's road to happiness. We will go through the spiritual aspect of way, which the mind can overcome the body and be able to transcend to the real world; way, which man's knowledge is so powerful through meditation as to be able to see the interrelation between the three realms: mind, body (matter) and spirit. This understanding and realization of the nature of things certainly would affect our life, knowledge, health and society.

The Buddha and Aristotle believed in reasoning and were able to use reason to know reality. Aristotle was also a naturalist; in his *Metaphysics*, he tried to understand the substance. That substance is an ultimate reality. He describes the substance as the both formal and material of reality. Aristotle introduced the law behind all change; he explained how things can change according to the relation between potentiality and actuality. Aristotle did not agree completely with Plato's World of Forms and Ideas, as he saw the importance of the existing object, or the particular object, rather than the Ideal Form. He said that each object has form in itself, not in the World of Forms and Ideas as in Plato's thought. Changes in all things can be explained under the Four Causes (Material Cause, Formal Cause, Efficient Cause and Final Cause). These causes also show that all things change and are interrelated to one another. There are great similarities and differences we can draw from studying these two great thinkers, especially the changeableness of all things. They both tried to understand the mind; the mind with consciousness. Studying their concepts enables us to pursue the purpose of life and the universe. And many practical questions can be answered, such as what is a good life, how to live a life fully, what is happiness, and how to be happy?

In conclusion, both the Buddha and Aristotle tried to know about reality and the meaning of life. The Buddha meditated and was able to overcome suffering, and became enlightened. Aristotle tried to understand changes in all things through his observations, and discovered the potentiality and actuality of all things. And finally, he discovered ways to achieve happiness. Whatever knowledge they gained came

from their own reasoning and observations.

3. The immanent teleological essentialism of Buddhism and Aristotelianism

3.1. *Dependent Origination*

The Buddha questioned the whole structure of life, asking, how did it all start? How did things come to be what they are? After the Buddha became enlightened, he explained the cycle of life phenomena or Dependent Origination. This is a basic belief of Buddhism consisting of the doctrine called *Pratitya Samuttapada*, which means that neither are the events in our life predetermined, nor do they take place randomly. It shows that the events in our life have no independent existence, rather than the notion of direct causation of events. But certain specific events, concepts or realities are always dependent on a number of other precise things. For example, cravings depend upon emotion, which in turn is dependent on our interaction with the environment. It means that all events are affected by other happenings. Nature has its own function within itself. The importance of man's intelligence is to understand this process in nature.

Dependent Origination includes the following:

- (a). **Ignorance**, or lack of knowledge; not knowing of the essence of reality. (Such as: we tend to see things and judge them from the outside, not knowing the reality behind them.)
- (b). **Volitional activities**, or the past action, habit of thinking or acting. (Such as: we are conditioned by family or environment since we were born.)
- (c). **Consciousness**: awareness or knowing; seeing, hearing, testing, smelling, touching or emotion from within.
- (d). **Animated organism**: the corporal and non corporal, mind and matter; or the mind-body relationship that is affected by the condition.
- (e). **The six sense-bases**: the senses that work according to the surroundings, such as seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, testing and the thinking mind.
- (f). **Contact**: the connection between knowing and the outer world or experiences.
- (g). **Feeling**: the awareness of being happy, sad, comforted, or not.
- (h). **Craving**: wanting more, persisting in the present condition, or wanting cessation from conditions.
- (i). **Attachment, clinging**, to the stage of liking; never wanting to let go.
- (j). **The process of becoming**: whatever process satisfies the active or passive state of being, giving rise to the next.
- (k). **Birth**: being born again.
- (l). **Decay and death**: knowing the ending of all things, the sense of departing, suffering, loneliness, anxiety and depression.¹

This cycle of life can be started and recycled from anywhere within the cycle. The vicious cycle never ends, unless the person has gone through the meditative stage and is able to gain wisdom or realize the true nature of things; including the three

¹ Payutto, P.A., *Buddhadhamma* p.124.

characteristics of existence; *annica* (impermanence), *dukka* (suffering or decline) and *annatta* (non-self or soullessness).¹

Reflection on the cycle of life means someone has to notice the beginning and changes that happen to her/him. Someone is able to realize the connected causes and results in everything. It means someone cannot observe and see only the result, disregarding the past, but understand the complete cycle, knowing the past and present, then he would be able to project into the future as well. The most important point is to learn how to focus on the present. But with the limitation of our knowledge, knowing the cycle of life enables us to have an open-mind in order to see things as they are, as all things have causes, and reasons to be what they are. This is the wisdom we can gain via understanding the cycle of life. Many times we cannot accept life with its essence or doubt why things are the way they are, but via understanding the cycle of life we can see that there are causes in everything that happens, as all is connected.

Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, on the other hand, tries to define the substance as ultimate reality. He describes the substance as both essence (form) and substratum (matter). That substance constitutes the reality of individual things and universal (form). Then Aristotle tries to explain the three kinds of substances. The first two kinds are material (physical) and are 'changeable' or 'movable'. They are capable of changing and being changed. They can be perishable or imperishable (eternal). The third kind of the substance is non-physical, non-material, eternal ('immovable' and 'unchangeable'), such as mathematical objects (numbers) and ideas. Somehow Aristotle cannot shake away Plato's concept of form. This concept turns out to be very compatible with the Buddha's ideas of virtue, that is, acceptance kindness and compassion, universal, like form, that can apply to all. It is the quality that can sustain all things together.

Aristotle further explained about wisdom. Wisdom is knowledge of the causes and principles of things. Wisdom is a science of first principles, and all its knowledge is universal. Here Aristotle has to clarify the difference between universal and particular, that universal principles are common to many things, and particular things are substances. There are four kinds of causes of things. (Why do things change the way they are?)

1. The substance or essence of a thing (the formal cause)
2. The matter and subject of a thing (the material cause)
3. The source of 'motion' or change in a thing (the efficient cause)
4. The purpose for which a thing has being (the final cause).

Aristotle was able to blend in the form and matter and how they are related to one another through these four causes. Moreover, Aristotle explained about what is prior to the Prime Mover or First Cause in the following:

"For we are to suppose that one motion is for the sake of another, the latter too must be for the sake of something else; and since the series cannot be infinite, the end

¹ Payutto, *ibid*, p. 60.

of every motion must be one of the divine bodies which are moved though the heavens...it is evident that there is only one heaven."¹

Aristotle was able to describe the connection between universalities of things and particulars; that all things are interrelated to one another: physically (matter) and mentally (form) as well as spiritually. All is under one heaven, one world, one universe. All things are connected to one another. This also can be explained according to the Buddha's Dependent Origination, that no matter what you do it always effects upon another, as all is one.

Aristotle explained that changes must occur in something for its potentiality to become an actuality, which means the capability to change or capability to be changed. Potentiality may be innate or acquired, actual or non-actual. The potentiality of something may also be a capability to act or to be acted upon, to be active or passive. The Buddha explained the changes that occur within one's action by the Dependent Origination Law. The cause that effected all the potentials, according to Aristotle, can be discontinued and continued within someone's will. That can be explained by the relation between mind and body according to the Buddha in the following: How does the mind effect the body and how does the body effect the mind? Why do we act the way we do? It can also solve the problem of predetermination and free will. For example, we cannot really determine (the body or DNA) but we can determine (the mind) and how to live life by our own will.

3.2. The Five Aggregates

The Buddha explained the composition of the body and mind. What are we made of? Firstly, someone is only matter or corporeal. The other four parts are mental or immaterial.

1. **Corporeality:** matter or qualities of all matter including energy of the corporal being.
2. **Feeling or Sensation:** the feeling of being happy or sad or normal, from all the senses (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling) and thinking.
3. **Perception:** the sense of knowing or remembering the objects or situations that lead to perception.
4. **Mental Formations or Volitional Activities:** what leads or directs the mental stage into different forms, to having good or bad thoughts, to having pity or being envious, to having compassion or hatred, etc.
5. **Consciousness:** being conscious of the senses that are perceived, either in seeing, hearing, smelling, testing, or touching and the thinking mind.²

The Five Aggregates in summary. They can be explained as the relation between the body and mind, two sides of the same coin. The body is the corporal part and the mind has different functions within four parts (immaterial), which can explain the working of the mind with more psychological details and which is very

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1074A.

² Payutto, *ibid.*, p.22

complicated. The descriptive functions of the mind above show similarities to modern psychology. To be able to understand the changes that happen to the body and mind completely, someone has to meditate. Meditation is to observe the body and mind from moment to moment, continuously. Then someone is able to see what is changing within the mind and body, and the truth about the reality of the inner self and the outer world can be realized.

It is interesting to find out what Aristotle said about human action:

“all human actions have one or more of these seven causes: change, nature, compulsions, habit, reason, passion, desire” – somewhat similar we can see in the Buddha’s observations.

Aristotle’s theory about the mind includes the following points:

“The subject of Mind involves certain difficulties. Mind is held to be of all phenomena the most supernatural; but the question of how we must regard it if it is to be of this nature involves certain difficulties. If Mind thinks nothing, where is its dignity? It is in just the same state as a man who is asleep. If it thinks, but something else determines its thinking, then since that its essence is not thinking but potentiality, it cannot be the best reality: because it derives its excellence from the act of thinking.” Finally Aristotle concluded that *“Therefore Mind thinks itself, if it is that which is best; and its thinking is a thinking of thinking.”*¹ According to the Buddha the mind is capable of being conscious. In other words man is able to be conscious of what someone is thinking, doing, acting, moving, talking; in other words we are unique because we can be conscious of our own consciousness.

3.3. Potentiality and Actuality

Aristotle explained the potentiality of the cause and effect relationship that occurs between one thing and another, including the potentiality of an effect produced by a cause, and the potentiality of a cause to produce an effect. Different effects may be produced by different causes; and different causes may produce different effects.

This explanation of Aristotle’s can clear many doubts about why things are as they are, that are similar to the law of Karma that the Buddha mentioned.

In the following: ***The Law of Karma*** or ***the Law of someone’s Action***: what s/he performed in the past, results in the present and the future. This law relates to and it is the outcome of the Dependent Origination Law. This means that whatever we do, we are the result:

“All that we are is the result of what we have thought. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows like a shadow that never leaves him.”

Buddha

Man’s action can be categorized into three realms: thoughts, speech, and acting. Thoughts seem to be the most important part

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1074B.

“All wrong-doing arises are existing because of mind. If mind is transformed can wrong-doing remain? ...It is a man’s own mind, not his enemy or foe; that lures him to evil ways..... the mind is everything. What you think you become.”

Buddha

The law of karma is the law that shows the importance of someone’s thoughts. If s/he wants to get out of the vicious cycle but takes no action, it means nothing. If someone only studies and understands the Dependent Origination without practicing meditation, one cannot get out of the cycle. Only this meditation can lead her/him to be able to realize the three characteristics of reality or existence. The first characteristic is *annica* or impermanence, the changeableness of all things. But to be able to realize the three characteristics someone has to practice the meditation.

4. How does meditation can lead to understanding the nature of reality?

Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, one of the great figures among Buddhist Burmese monks, explained clearly about meditation: that impermanence or *anatta* is like seeing lightning. The flash of lighting comes and is gone. This phenomenon of lightning describes all the characteristics of impermanence (this idea of impermanence has been expressed also since ancient Greece, such as in Heraclitus’ *“All is in Flux”*, and even the 20th Century Physicist Werner Heisenberg also stressed the same concept in his *“Principle of Uncertainly,”* that nothing can be certain, even the smallest particles from his experiment). The second concept, *dukkha*, or suffering, can be seen easily as well, especially the decline of the body in aging. Or in this 21st Century when man faces all kinds of conflicts from within and in the outer realm from social and environmental problems, and yet to truly realize the nature of suffering and awareness also has to come from meditation. Even though we can see all the suffering in life so vitally, to realize it through meditation is another thing. The last concept, *anicca* (non-self) is very hard to perceive and has been misunderstood. It is certainly easy to attach to things and to ourselves, rather than see the no-self. Some philosophers have touched upon this idea, such as David Hume; he comes to the point of there being no such thing as an identity of the self. We perceive ourselves only through our perceptions that change at all times; like a role of movie film, it never stays the same. Aristotle also stresses the change happening in nature: always in the process of becoming, but not in the sense of being detached from oneself or able to reach to *nirvana* or become enlightened, as in the same stage described by David Hume.

Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw showed the importance of meditation or *vipassana kammatan* to be able to realize the non-self.

*“It may be asked, ‘What difference is there between the pain experienced by an ordinary person and that experienced by the meditator?’ The difference lies in the fact that the ordinary person sees pain as, ‘my feeling, I am suffering.’ But the meditator knows **unpleasant feeling without any self clinging, he perceives it as just a phenomenon, arising and immediately perishing. It is vipassana nana, an object of insight knowledge, without any self clinging.**”¹*

¹ Mahasi Sayadaw, *The Great Discourse on Not Self*, p.162

In the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*, the teaching that shows “*the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness tend to afflict and, being unmanageable, are therefore not self or inner essence.*”¹

Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw explained how insight knowledge develops clearly in the following:

“Seeing thus” means seeing impermanence, suffering and not self. One becomes the instructed disciple, fully equipped with knowledge from both hearing and from personal experience.. ..Then while taking note of (the body) rising, falling, bending, stretching, moving, extending, pressing, feeling touch that is hard, coarse, soft, smooth, hot, cold, and seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, the meditator realizes that the objects he is taking note are corporeality and the knowing of these objects is mentality, and that there are only these two: corporeality and mentality (body and mind). When meditator takes note of eye consciousness, ear consciousness, touch consciousness and mental consciousness, he knows that consciousness is mentality and the location of this consciousness corporeality; that there are only these two. This is knowledge acquired through personal experience.....

*..... Again, both the objects of form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness and the knowing mind keep on arising afresh and perishing. This he knows rightly, as the Blessed One instructed that they are impermanent, suffering and not-self.”*²

We can see that the meaning of meditation is to observe ourselves at all times, be able to see our mind and body in interrelation with one another. The process of observation has to be continuous day and night, and with the instructor or the great teacher nearby in order to help the meditator reflect upon the action, and to give direction to help to progress. In the present day it is very hard to find a right teacher or guru to help the meditator. Many teachers either adapt or change methods with their own understanding, rather than follow the old tradition. This change is part of reality. But if somebody is able to find a right guru, he or she is able to lead herself to attain the *arahat*, a step toward enlightenment. This step leads someone to be able to distinguish between emotion and consciousness. For example, if emotion reaches the mind before being conscious, such as being angry, then someone gets angry. *But if one is conscious of the emotion of being about to be angry, the anger will be fully aware of itself before it can reach the emotional state; or, being noticed by consciousness it can be captured in time. Then the anger can no longer reach the mind.* Just like a cat is ready to jump on a rat, when the rat or anger or any state of emotion appears, the mind then will be able to observe any emotion that might occur. Then the anger, or unpleasant feelings or pleasant feelings will no longer affect the person, as the rat is already captured by the cat. The present calamities of the world will no longer affect someone who meditates well. Meditation is the key to overcome all the unpleasantness and suffering in the world. This is the potential that man has. Man is able to overcome suffering and attain a blissful life.

¹ Mahasi Sayadaw, *ibid.*, p.155

² Mahasi Sayadaw, *ibid.*, p.156

In turn, Dr. Konstantin Khroutski discussed meditation and unity with the world in the following way:

“Meditation, to my mind, is a basic feature of ACosmism. In other words, it is a crucial mechanism of separation from the world (to become ACosmist, with respect to the real cosmos), and which substantially starts from the waking cycle (from the Awake real world; not from the hallucinations of Sleep processes).

Substantially, likewise, meditation is deliberately aimed at the achievement of the unity with the Absolute-Transcendent Substance that has created the world (Cosmos) itself, thus (through this unity with the Absolute) arriving at the unity with the world itself.”

5. Happiness and Virtuous Activities of Aristotle and the Buddha

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be what at which all things aim.¹

Aristotle

This is the very first sentence of *Nicomachean Ethics*. For Aristotle, happiness is something that we all aim for. Some people want the political life and some want the life of pleasure. But for Aristotle, a good life has to be realized according to the best thing that man has, which is reason; the highest good is that which all actions aim at. Someone has to do it by oneself, that is – by self-sufficiency. The contemplative life is a happy life, as it can be attainable by the best thing we have, that is reasoning; and we can do it by ourselves and the action is an end-in-itself. For Aristotle, to be happy does not come easily or without any effort. He said excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We have to train ourselves to be happy with reason and practical wisdom. We choose to be happy and have to make it a habit. Happiness consists in the excellent use of reason in virtue. As the harpist’s function is to play the harp and play it well, so it is man’s function to use reason and use it well. The Buddha taught how to train one’s mind and action at all times in order to reach the end of the suffering life. Monks in Buddhism have 227 rules to follow, which means making habits to follow, to become enlightened.

Aristotle also stressed the importance of intellectual virtues and moral virtues. Our virtue consists in excellent rational activity. The intellectual virtues consist of *sophia* (wisdom, or the ability to think well about the nature of the world) and *phronesis*, “practical wisdom” or the mode of action that brings change, especially to enhance the quality of life by knowing what is good. Aristotle says that *phronesis* involves not only the ability to decide how to achieve a certain end, but also the ability to reflect upon and determine that end (*eudaimonia*) or happiness.

The second kind of virtue is what Aristotle calls “moral virtue,” and has to do with someone’s character, that consists of conducting her/his life well or doing what practical wisdom requires. Both moral virtue and practical wisdom are required to have a good life. Without practical wisdom someone cannot have a moral virtue;

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094A.

knowing and doing must be the same. Virtue does not arise naturally; it requires training and habitual action, someone has to keep on doing the right thing, with the right motivation. Man becomes what man does; and forms his moral character through choices and actions. For example, with the duty of a mother or a teacher someone has to act with commitment and love of duty through daily action the whole life through. For Aristotle man is a social animal, s/he must not only live a good life as an individual but also as a member of the community. We are responsible for what we do and who we are, and someone has to form a habit in order to be happy. Aristotle thought we become virtuous by doing virtuous acts. Therefore practical wisdom for Aristotle is very important. Knowing is doing.

All virtues require training and habitual action, meaning that we have to keep doing the right things with the right motivation. Virtues are voluntary and purposeful. We cannot excuse ourselves because of ignorance, having weaknesses or being addicted, which all come from our choices and responsibilities.

“Men acquire a particular quality by constantly acting a particular way...you become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions.”(Aristotle)

Aristotle’s concept of virtue means that a person is responsible for oneself, nobody else. It is someone’s choice to be happy or sad, according to her/his wisdom or knowledge.

A life of contemplation is the best kind of life, according to Aristotle, because when someone is contemplating s/he uses the best part of man, which is reason, and is self-sufficient at the same time. The highest form of happiness is the life of contemplation. As for all the pleasures in life, contemplation is the most continuous and self-sufficient. It aims at nothing outside of itself. It leads us to realize the best part in man or a divine element (reason) in us. It directs us to our highest activity, that leads to complete happiness.

Aristotle stressed that happiness is something a person has to practice for the whole life through. He said, *“For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy.”*¹ He stressed the importance of man’s value in life that, *“The ultimate value of life depends upon awareness and the power of contemplation rather than upon mere survival.”*

For Aristotle, the life of contemplation means to live life fully, to be aware in all things we do. We cannot judge whether a person has a good life or not, until one dies. As in watching a football game, someone cannot watch only half of the game, but must watch the complete match; to live well means to live fully and completely the whole life through.

Aristotle continued, *“suffering becomes beautiful when anyone bears great calamities with cheerfulness, not through insensibility but through greatness of mind.”* And this greatness of mind is performed through the practice of contemplation, in his words *“the ultimate value of life depends upon awareness and*

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098A.

the power of contemplation rather than upon mere survival.” Aristotle stressed that someone has to live a full life, and this full living can come by the life of contemplation with the use of reason, and depends upon oneself only. In Buddhism, being conscious is not only a temporal act but implies the whole life through. As meditation has to be practiced at all times in order to overcome suffering, someone has to be conscious of oneself at all times.

6. One World, One Heaven: interrelatedness of Mind-Body-Spirit

The spiritual life is the most important part of man, as the Buddha said *“Just a candle cannot burn without fire; men cannot live without a spiritual life.”*

Aristotle also said, *“the energy of the mind is the essence of life,”* the powerful mind brings great spirit. The life of contemplation and meditation are necessary to develop a spiritual life. With this kind of life comes the habit of being happy and a happy person is a healthy person.

The Buddha said: *“to enjoy good health, to bring true happiness to one’s family, to bring peace to all, one must first discipline and control one’s own mind. If a man can control his mind he can find the way to Enlightenment, and all wisdom and virtue will naturally come to him.”*

Mind, body and spirit are interrelated to one another. Just like the process of life, thinking and acting, as all things, are related. There is only one world, one heaven, and the connection between mind, body and spirit cannot be separated, as they are under one heaven. Man, the world and universe are all connected.

7. A New World Order: Holistic approach to the existence of Man

7.1. How should someone act? Knowledge and wisdom

The important part of one’s knowing and acting. For Aristotle someone cannot be happy without knowledge. Without knowledge, one cannot gain wisdom. Aristotle believed in the life of contemplation, that it is the best kind of life. And the Buddha encouraged one to meditate in order to become enlightened. Without meditation one cannot reach the enlightenment. But for Aristotle the life of contemplation is the life of reason. And one can contemplate the whole life through; it is the activity that can last longest. The Buddha’s meditative stage means to have the mind at one-pointedness, to be with the present at all times. Both stressed the awareness of the mind, the mind that has to be fully conscious of the present moment, to know what one is doing or acting. Wisdom and the state of enlightenment may be realized at different levels by understanding, but the latter is very difficult to be explained, especially the state of the enlightened mind. However this state of the mind can be explained in a metaphor like the perception of a blind man and an elephant. The blind man cannot see the truth, as he touches any part of the elephant he can imagine it to be anything, completely different from reality. Whereas the enlightened one can see and know thoroughly what an elephant is or be able to see things as they really are.

7.2. *Overcome suffering: A Happy life*

The more we live, the more we can see how life can be suffering. Both Aristotle and Buddha were concerned about man's happiness. The Buddha became enlightened, he became truly blissful. With his compassion, he wanted to help other beings, but the task was very difficult, as to become enlightened one has to learn how to give up the worldly life that we all are attached to. During the Buddha's time, he was able to teach according to one's need. It showed how effective his teaching was. At first he taught those who were well respected by many. So when the leaders believed in him, it was easier to teach those who followed the leader. The Buddha did not encourage his disciples to show any supernatural power to others even if they could. We can see that the Buddha wanted people to use their own reasoning other than belief rather than cling to something that could not enable them to overcome suffering, but on the contrary might encourage them to more greediness. And supernatural power one gains through mediation is not for propaganda and it does not last long, it only comes and goes as a path one has to pass on. But if one clings to it, one will never reach enlightenment.

In this 21st Century, more and more people are interested in meditation and want to taste the sense of bliss, calmness and the realization of truth. Somehow Aristotle said that habit is very important. Learning to be happy, one has to make it a habit; not only when one meditates in an atmosphere of solitude, but one also has to learn how to be happy in everyday living as well. Learning to watch over one's thoughts and actions at all times is the most important thing. For Aristotle, the habit of being happy or practicing moral virtue becomes one's character. Learning to be happy is a matter of choosing to be happy. It is our own commitment, that no one else can help. It is self determination to be happy and to know the way.

7.3. *Man, Society and Nature: All things are interconnected*

To make oneself happy is to make a better society and to respect nature. In the metaphor about one heaven and one universe, in the 1993, there was an experiment in Washington D.C. when 4000 of people meditated together at the one period of time. The result was that the crime rate decreased by 25%.¹ At first the police department did not believe this result, they said the crime rate will decrease 25% only when it snows two feet, so no one can get out of their house. The result of this experiment showed that if a great number of people meditate together at the same period, it can change considerably the atmosphere around them.

Recent catastrophes around the world² bring questions to all of us of whether or not we are consuming the natural environment with no respect for nature. At this point we have to realize a new way of leading this world. We can no longer exploit nature for our own sake, economically, or politically. We have to protect and respect the environment and other creatures more. For the last several hundred years this world has changed dramatically, both extrinsically (physical-matter) and intrinsically

¹ *What the Bleep do we know?* Science and Spirituality documentary film.

² Earth quake in Japan (8.9), 11-3-11 and many other places around the world: China, New Zealand 2011.

(man's mind), due to modern person's greediness and intentions to control the environment. Now, we line up the biggest challenges of our interrelations with Nature. We can only lose more, if we will not understand promptly the relations of ourselves, mind, spirit and the heavenly body or universe.

If someone improves oneself first, the society will improve itself gradually. Education and society have to change the standards of the old ways of thinking. Now the development of man cannot be separated from the rest of the society and the natural environment. When one part is developed, one cannot forget about the other parts as well. In this present world, we can see the changes that are happening now, having called for equality in society (embracing even closed-societies in the last 30 years.)¹ One cannot separate from the rest, as one has to be part of the whole. From now on East, West, North, South, as well as black, white or yellow – all we cannot be separated, for, we live in the one organic world. And no matter what we do, it will affect all of us, due to the law of Karma, the law of cause and effect.

As concerns education: We are to teach children about the patterns of life; The Law of Cause and Effect, the Cycle of Life, the Four Causes; and learn how to be happy through meditation. Ajahn Brahm said:

*“If you follow the path of meditation, your inner happiness rises like a tide that never ebbs. Mindfulness becomes energized as you struggle less with your inner world. Insight appears in abundance like luscious fruits on a heavily laden tree, too many to pluck and eat all at once. You realize so clearly that the path to peace is this letting go that you learned in meditation. Or you can call it the path of unconditional loving-kindness.As peace reaches its apex, as happiness crystallizes into a radiant gem at the summit, when measuring finally implodes – the mind disappears as well. One realizes at last that the mind was the measures.”*²

Children should know that all things are impermanent, suffering and no-self; and the more one holds on to things the more one suffers, as all things are in the process of change: hard facts to discover, but what one has to accept. Children should learn to observe their own self, know their emotions through practicing meditation and being conscious at all times. This will be a new approach to education, and gradually the changes in politics and society will come. Man will no longer be a victim of propagandas in this capitalistic society. For capitalism leads to greediness, illusion and depression. Children can be conscious and aware of themselves, by practicing contemplation; then they are able to learn about their own selves, the whole picture of life, and then they can be happy spiritually. Then they learn how to be satisfied with themselves and self-sufficient. The mind can overcome matter, being free from wanting more, with no limitation.

Aristotle said self-sufficiency is a part of the life of contemplation. He means the life that someone has to live by oneself; using reason as the best part of man for this kind of life. The idea of sufficient economy is being introduced by the King of Thailand, King Bhumipon in order to help Thai economy and Thai people be satisfied with their life, and not to depend or rely on outside forces or be materialistic

¹ The uprising of the people in Egypt and Libya Feb.2011.

² Brahm, *Ajahn. Happiness Through Meditation*, p. 272.

without limitation. The latter leads people to greediness and misery. Some Thai economists tried to bring in Aristotle's concept of self-sufficiency to the present economic situation. But this sense of self-sufficiency cannot be achieved without the sense of self-satisfaction, which is only derived from self-knowledge and meditation. There should be changes in the educational system; such as learning how to be self-sufficient, beside teaching them to know the reality of life, and the use of reason, and understanding the law of karma. Then a new world order can be achieved by this philosophical education.

8. A Cosmism: the transcendental substance to the real world

In conclusion

Both Buddha and Aristotle agreed that the power of observation and reasoning enables us to know and understand reality. Our mind is a very powerful source for realizing nature, through the process of meditation and contemplation of the Buddha and Aristotle. This is a great evolution of man – man's mind overcoming matter. Happiness and enlightenment can be reached. With the knowledge that all is connected, we have to learn a new way of existing, that is, how to live with one another by helping one another; otherwise, all our deeds and actions affect each other. New realms of education, politics and economics have to be introduced. Whatever we do and in each variant we influence the environment, or other human beings, or other nations, – all this reflects upon ourselves and return to us. We are to make proper changes in our world outlooks and foundations of science (cosmologies), before it is too late. This is the one and only world we have, so let us make it an area of good life and worthy living. The body, mind and spirit of a living being cannot be separated. All can be effectively (safely and happily) interconnected by using wisdom and knowledge, through contemplation and meditation.

References

- Greek Philosophy Thales to Aristotle*. ed. by Reginald E. Allen, New York: The Free Press, 1991.
- Ajahn Brahm, *Happiness through Meditation*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2006.
- Lavine, T.Z. *From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophic Quest*. Bantam Books, New York, 1984.
- Mahasi Sayadaw, Venerable. *The Great Discourse on Not Self. (Anattalakkhana Sutta)* Translated by U Ko Lay, Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1996.
- Payutto, P.A. *The Pali Canon: What a Buddhist Must Know*. translated by Somseen Chanawangsa, Thailand: Sahadhammik Press, 2010.
- _____, *Bhuddhadhamma*. Bangkok: Chanpen Press, 2007.
- Tomlin, E.W.F. *Great Philosophers of The West*. Arrow Books, London, 1953.
- _____. *Great Philosophers of The East*. Arrow Books, London. 1959.