

Emptiness and the Education of the Emotions¹

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In a supermarket parking lot not far from my home I witnessed a terrible row between a man and a woman. The man, whose face I could not see, was in an expensive sport utility vehicle, and the woman—possibly his partner—was walking back and forth not far from the car. The man was shouting loudly and hysterically hitting the steering wheel with his hands. I could not determine what had caused his rage at the woman, but I feared for her safety, so I watched at a safe distance from his vehicle. Thankfully, he eventually calmed down and the two drove away. However the event made me wonder about how important it is for people to develop more refined emotional lives; surely this man would have been ashamed of his behavior had he been in my position, watching it from fifty metres distance. I wondered too how education might have helped his situation; did his schooling somehow fail him, at least in this regard?

The education of the emotions is possible only if two conditions are met. First, there is a *normative condition*². Now, since persons, not emotions *per se*, are the proper objects of education, it is the emotional life of a person that is evaluated. In other words, while there is a sense in which particular emotions can be evaluated, as I did regarding the enraged man above, I hold that we are really evaluating the person experiencing or expressing the emotion—the man is somehow at fault for his experience or expression of the rage. The normative condition is necessary because the concept of education is itself normative; to say that one is educated with respect to her emotional life implies that she has achieved a worthwhile emotional life. Second, it must be possible to acquire or develop this worthwhile emotional life at least in part through learning and teaching. I call this the *pedagogical condition*. If the achievement of a worthy emotional life were brought about through chance or entirely through a process of natural development, then we could not talk of educating the emotions. Further, because we think of education as a matter of transforming the person, the learning must contribute to an enduring and deep change in the person, rather than a superficial skill.

Therefore, any theory of the education of the emotions must include both a normative component stating and justifying the norms of emotional education, as well as a pedagogical component that describes how those norms are to be met. This satisfies the two conditions noted above. There is a logical priority to the first component. Diverse conceptions of a worthwhile emotional life necessarily require distinctive approaches to emotional learning and teaching. I hope that this is obvious: we cannot determine the

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² In this I follow the tradition of R.S. Peters (1966) and numerous others, including Barrow and Woods (2006) and Kazepides (2010).

methods or content prior to determining the goals. That said, it is important to note the caveat that were a proposed educational goal impossible to achieve through learning and teaching, then that goal must necessarily be excluded from our educational ideal. This follows from the Kantian principle that 'ought' implies 'can' (See Kant 1931). The purpose of this paper is to show that central Buddhist teachings suggest a rich and promising theory of the education of the emotions, in both the normative and the pedagogical dimensions.

I argue in this paper that the Buddha's Four Noble Truths outline a promising theory of the education of the emotions, systematically satisfying both the normative and pedagogical conditions noted above. Fleshing this picture out, I draw on the teaching of conditioned arising along with the Madhyamaka teaching of emptiness, and the connected idea of *anatman*. My point in this paper is to defend a model of emotional education that takes emptiness seriously.

I will not attempt to defend Buddhism as a religion. While it clearly is a religion—or family of religions—with distinctive sects, rites and hierarchies, my interests are more on Buddhism as practice, along the lines of Stephen Batchelor's (1997) approach to the tradition. I hold that Buddhism can be practiced regardless of an individual's religious creed, or even with no creed at all. However, the normative vision for the emotions to be outlined in this paper does stand in need of some defense and I will discuss briefly the oft-heard charge of nihilism below. A full treatment of the charge of nihilism, however, requires a distinct paper.

1. *The concept of emotion*

Emotions do not form a natural kind; so a definitive analysis of the concept of emotion will be impossible—the distinctions between emotions, motives, thoughts, beliefs, intentions, desires, moods and feelings are neither clear nor distinct. These terms do not denote distinctive items in the mind; as Peters (1962) points out 'these terms [emotion and motive] are not classificatory ones; they are rather terms which are used to relate states of mind such as fear, anger, jealousy to distinctive frames of reference, those of activity and passivity' (p. 120). These terms are thus rather terms of art intended to serve particular purposes in particular contexts. For example, jealousy can be an emotion, perhaps describing a reaction to news that a competitor got the promotion to which one aspired, but it could also be the motive for, perhaps, sabotaging her efforts in her new position. It is not as though we have two distinctive mental states or events, but nor is it the case there is a single state causing both the feelings and the actions. We use the terms 'motive' and 'emotion' not to pick out any real entities in the mind, but rather to explain, predict, or describe an individual's actions or other behavior.

That said, there are three conditions to the ordinary application of the term 'emotion.' First, emotions are cognitive events; they have specific intentional content. Second, emotions have a feeling component; indeed we sometimes use the term 'feeling' to refer to emotions, although clearly not all feelings qualify as emotions. Third, we refer to a mental event as an emotion only if we are passive with respect to it; in other words,

emotions are reactive rather than active. Let me further briefly elaborate on these three conditions.³

Emotions are cognitive events inasmuch as they imply thoughts. One cannot just be afraid, but must always be afraid of something, conceived under a given description. A fear of spiders implies seeing spiders as threatening; similarly I cannot just be angry but always must be angry toward someone under a given description, such as ‘Johnny, the man who stole my wine.’ The cognitive element in emotion is essential in distinguishing emotions from each other—even if there are physiological distinctions between, say, envy and jealousy, it is the cognitive elements that provide the key distinctions between the two emotions (jealousy has two objects, whereas envy has just one: I envy George Clooney for his good looks, but I could feel jealous only if I somehow saw him as possessing good looks that were properly mine (perhaps God, showing a lack of care, erroneously gave him my good looks!)).

Second, emotions are passions, which is to say that they involve feelings. Without a ‘feeling’ dimension, a state would be unlikely to be referred to as an emotion. Of course, feeling is a matter of degree, and there are distinctive kinds of feelings that accompany distinctive types of emotions: flushed face, quickened heartbeat, nausea, or perhaps what Stocker (1983) refers to as ‘psychic feelings.’ In general, we seem to evaluate the strength of an emotion largely through the strength of the corresponding feelings. The feelings associated with emotion are sometimes pleasant and sometimes unpleasant, but they are often exciting nonetheless; thus there can be a thrill to anger, jealousy or love that might make the one inclined to pursue the emotion, even with the knowledge that the emotion is potentially harmful or otherwise inapt.

The third aspect of emotions is passivity. By this I mean that emotions are best thought of as reactions, rather than actions. They are events that reflect our vulnerability, as opposed to being things that we *do*. This is reflected somewhat in our language: we ‘fall’ in love, for example. Emotions are consequently signs of our vulnerability. By saying that we are passive with respect to our emotions I do not suggest that we are not responsible for our emotions; Robert Gordon (1987) compares the passivity of emotion to the passivity of intoxication, which is similarly a state in which one is affected by something else. In intoxication I am affected by the intoxicant, but I am (usually) not helpless here: I can choose not to imbibe, I can govern the situation in which I imbibe, and at least in moderation, I can control the way I respond to intoxication (by not drinking and driving, for example). Analogously, I can control my emotions indirectly: avoiding situations where I will be prone to certain emotions, by using techniques to control the way I am affected in emotion, and by controlling the way I express the emotion. I am thus at least partly responsible for my emotions, despite my passivity.

The passivity of emotion suggests that while responsible for my emotions, I cannot choose them directly, in the way I can choose my actions. I can, if I choose, get up from my desk and go to watch the hockey game on TV. My choice directly determines my action, whereas in emotion my choices are at best indirect. I cannot just become angry or fall in love; instead I must put myself in the way of these emotions, by focusing on a

³ See White, J. (2002), Peters, R.S. (1962), Solomon, R. (1982)

perceived injustice, in the case of anger, or someone's virtues broadly conceived, in the case of love. Anger or love might befall me, but perhaps not.

Because emotions are events in which we are passive, and because they often cause us to act—or react—in inopportune ways, emotions will often seem disruptive in our lives. Witness the enraged man in the parking lot. It would be great were there educational means by which we can transform one's emotional life so that it better meets one's needs. This is where Buddhism comes in.

2. The Buddhist dhamma and the education of the emotions

Gautama Siddhartha or the Buddha in his first teaching articulates the central Buddhist teaching: the Four Noble Truths. In this section I will argue that this teaching outlines an important theory of the education of the emotions. First, let me articulate and briefly explain this teaching.⁴

Legend has it that the Buddha did not arrive at his enlightenment easily. After leaving his luxurious home, including his wife and infant son, the Buddha practiced all sorts of ascetic practices, following the practices of other teachers, in order to achieve enlightenment. These practices did not have the desired effect, leaving him severely malnourished and weak. One day, a peasant girl offers him a bowl of rice, which he eats thankfully. Then he sits under a Bodhi tree and meditates, eventually arriving at what he calls a 'middle way' between the excesses of self-indulgence and asceticism. It is not a middle way in the manner of Aristotle's 'doctrine of the mean,' because he does not suggest, for example, eating the right amount, which is midway between the extremes of gluttony and denial. Rather, the middle way suggests a path that neither indulges the self nor denies it. The point is not so much about the quantity one eats, for example, but the manner in which one eats. To see how the Four Noble Truths exemplify this idea, let's look at each of the Truths.

The First Noble Truth states that life is dukkha, often somewhat misleadingly translated as 'suffering.' Indeed, suffering is part of what the Buddha meant: we are subject to pain, sickness, old age and death, and these are all experienced as unpleasant. But not all life is unpleasant in this way, so the Buddha indeed means something deeper: that all life is unsatisfactory, indeed deeply so. Life is unsatisfactory because our desires are insatiable. True, I can be thirsty and then satisfy my thirst with a glass of water, but this is just one desire and a similar desire will surely return at a later hour. Moreover, there are multiple desires and many cannot be satisfied. In those cases where I can satisfy my desires, I find that my satisfaction is short-lived, as I soon become anxious over whether I will continue to possess the object of my desire: my new car, new lover, new job. Finally, one becomes attached to the self as though it is permanent, when it is just as subject to change as any other entity. The experience of change causes dukkha, especially if one craves permanence. This suggests the Second Noble Truth.

⁴ In the following account of Buddhist thought I rely especially on Rahula (1974), Gombrich (2009), Koller, (2006).

The Second Noble Truth holds that *dukkha* has a cause: craving. Now it is clear that we need to gloss ‘craving’ carefully, because if it were understood as synonymous with ‘desire,’ then it would be impossible to eliminate it, at least short of death. I could not eliminate basic desires for food and drink, at least without some sort of divine transformation. I must therefore accept the desire cannot be eliminated. However, craving is special sort of desire that aims to possess the object of desire as a permanent entity, as for instance if one craves fame, fortune or relationships. The idea is that craving is the source of *dukkha*. However, *dukkha* can be defeated through eliminating craving, as the Third Noble Truth states. This is called *nirvana*; it is meant to be a way of life without craving, rather than a place to which one might proceed on one’s death, as suggested by some Christians regarding Heaven or Muslims regarding Paradise.

The Fourth Noble Truth indicates the path to *nirvana*. There are eight elements to the path, grouped under three headings: Wisdom, including Right View and Right Intention; Ethical Conduct, including Right Speech, Action and Livelihood; and Mental Discipline, including Right Effort, Mindfulness and Concentration. I will discuss Mental Discipline later, as part of a discussion to Buddhist pedagogy regarding the emotions.

For now, it is important to see that the Four Noble Truths can be read as adumbrating an account of the education of the emotions. The first three Truths articulate a norm for emotional life, including an ideal (*nirvana*) along with a diagnosis of how we fall short of that ideal (*dukkha*) and an account of the cause of falling short of the ideal (craving). The fourth Truth suggests a remedy. If we want to eliminate craving and therefore *dukkha*, then we follow the eightfold path. So the Four Noble Truths constitute the outline of a theory of the education of the emotions. But we can move deeper: is it true that our uneducated emotional lives are as unsatisfactory as the Buddhist claims? If so, why?

It is important to note that the Buddhist need not argue that every single emotion constitutes *dukkha*. The claim is that our uneducated—unrefined by the eightfold path—emotional lives are *dukkha*. This is because we, the unenlightened, are subject to craving. So the Buddhist does not need to argue that all emotions must be eliminated. *Nirvana* allows emotions, but rejects emotions that are caused by craving. The trouble is that many or most emotions are so caused. So for those of us who have not eliminated craving, our overall emotional lives will fall short of the ideal and will constitute *dukkha*. To explain why this is so, we need to consider three related Buddhist principles: conditioned arising, emptiness and *anatman*.

Conditioned arising is the basic metaphysical Buddhist insight. Events are caused by other events, and will in turn cause further events. From a metaphysical or theological point of view, this principle has the consequence that there is no first or uncaused cause, i.e. a creator God. But its personal (i.e., educational or psychological) importance is that it suggests that no substance or quality is an essential characteristic of the universe. We are familiar enough with this idea regarding constructed objects; it is obvious that the computer on which I am writing is caused by other events, and that later it will not exist. A similar point can be made regarding relationships and, importantly, the self. My self is not a permanent entity, but is rather a series of events with no defined substantial identity.

In this way, conditioned arising suggests the two other foundational ideas, emptiness and anatman.

Emptiness (*sunyata* Sanskrit) refers to the idea that permanent substances do not exist, which is a consequence of the principle of conditioned arising. In the works of Nagarjuna, the doctrine of emptiness is strongly emphasized, partly in response to the development of Buddhist schools that argued that there are some permanent entities that constitute the basic building blocks of the universe. Nagarjuna's 'Middle Way' interpretation of Buddhist teaching denies the essential substance of any object (See Nagarjuna 1995). Indeed, Nagarjuna holds that appreciating the emptiness of everything is the main point of Buddhist teaching. The concept of emptiness obviously presents some deep philosophical puzzles.

The teaching comes under fire for being nihilistic—if nothing has permanent and substantial existence then nothing matters—but this seems strange, because suffering need not be permanent in order to warrant compassion. Deeper puzzles concern the emptiness of the doctrine of emptiness. If the doctrine itself is empty, then how can it have any significance? If it is not empty, then there is a counterexample to the teaching. This latter is an important criticism and leads to the development of the 'two truths' theory in Madhyamaka thought, which suggests that we can distinguish between ultimate truth and conventional truth. The idea is that emptiness indeed expresses the nature of reality, including the nature of the teaching of emptiness. However, the teaching has mere conventional truth, in that it leads us towards *nirvana*. It becomes, to use a further Buddhist concept, a manifestation of 'skillful means,' which means that it is a teaching that is valuable due to its pragmatic force in moving one in the right direction, but that may be incomplete or even false if taken as ultimate truth.

Emptiness as I understand it, applies to all phenomena, even to the self. This gives us the important teaching of *anatman*, which states that the self, like every other object, lacks permanent independent existence. It is misleading to think of this teaching as holding that there are no selves, because the two truths theory allows us to talk of the self at the conventional level; rather, the teaching of *anatman* applies at the level of ultimate truth. At this level we are to see that the self is a kind of fiction, that there is a human tendency to reify it and crave its continuity through time. But everything changes, including the self. To see this, we are to think of the self as having five attachment groups: physical activities, sensations, perceptual activities, impulses to action, and consciousness. A little reflection on these aspects of the self shows that these groups are not permanent independent existents, but are conditioned like all other events. The self is not to be thought of as a substantive entity, but is rather best thought of as a series of events undergoing constant change. An analogy might be a university that includes campuses with buildings, administrators and faculty, staff and students, which are bound together by common purposes and regulations, including admission criteria, course stipulations and graduation criteria. There is no university over and above these elements, and these elements are always changing, so the university is never identical from one time to another.

The idea of *anatman* is indeed radical, at least to ordinary ways of understanding our selves. Moreover, philosophers have often attempted to reduce personal identity to one aspect of the person, such as the soul or the body. These proposals are all open to serious questions, and no reductionist view has achieved widespread acceptance. I shall not attempt to discuss these arguments here. However, in the West, albeit long after the Buddha, we do indeed find empiricist thinkers such as Locke and Hume coming close to the Buddha's thought on this issue (see Flanagan 2011). More recently, Parfit is well known for his embrace of a version of the teaching of *anatman*. Parfit himself finds that the position is 'liberating' and makes him 'more concerned for the lives of others' (Fearn 2005).

Armed with the related teachings of conditioned arising, emptiness and *anatman*, we can better understand *dukkha*. We suffer because we crave, and craving can never be satisfied. The three related teachings of conditioned arising, emptiness and *anatman* preclude permanent satisfaction. Of course, if one desires a slice of pineapple, one can satisfy that desire. However, the impermanence of the self, along with the impermanence of the objects of our craving, leads to inexorable frustration of desire. The principal reason for this is that there can be no permanent satisfaction. Both the subject (the self) and the objects of desire are impermanent, so satisfaction is at best a temporary condition. In itself this is not *dukkha*; however, people often desire permanent satisfaction, and this creates a conflict that leads to *dukkha*. The trick, then, will be to overcome the desire for permanence, whether regarding the self or the objects of our desires. Overcoming the desire for permanence is the job of the Eightfold Noble Path, which I will discuss later, after I explore a couple examples of the Buddhist diagnosis of emotions

So let me sum up this section. First, I argue that the Four Noble Truths, the most basic Buddhist teaching, outlines an approach to the education of the emotions. The first three truths articulating a normative account that identifies the normative ideal (*nirvana*), how we fall short of the ideal (*dukkha*), as well as the cause of our shortcoming, craving. The fourth truth suggests a pedagogical approach to eliminating the cause of *dukkha*. Moving a little deeper, I clarified the Buddhist normative vision of the emotions by outlining the three teachings of conditioned arising, emptiness and *anatman*. In the following section I will explore this account further by considering a couple examples.

3. *Evaluating emotional life: Emptiness and the emotions*

All of this might seem abstract. How does the teaching of emptiness affect the interpretation and evaluation of a person's emotional life? Can—or should—a Buddhist be emotional? I will argue in this section that there are at least two important implications of the teaching of emptiness on the issue of emotions. First, I argue that the objects of our craving necessarily lack permanence, and thus emotions that arise due to craving for permanence necessarily cause *dukkha*. Second, I argue that one implication is that we must recognize that emotions, like all other events, are caused by conditions and will therefore pass in time. Emotions lack permanence and the craving for emotional permanence creates *dukkha*. Therefore, we ought not to cling to our emotions, but rather

are enjoined to be aware of them as caused mental phenomena. We may enjoy our emotions, but ought not to attempt permanence in our emotional experience.

Consider first an emotion that is often deemed a worthwhile emotion, loving another person. I do not attempt a complete analysis of the concept of love here, but simply need to hold that a necessary condition of loving another person is that one is emotionally attached to the other person; I feel suffering as she suffers, joy as she feels joy, and so on. If I love X, then I am affected by X's well-being. There is more to love of course than this, but this is sufficient for my purposes. Now, to be attached to a person's well-being in this way is not intrinsically wrong; indeed it is a sign of compassion to be in this state regarding another person. However, love often becomes more than simply attachment to another's well-being, becoming also a desire for possession of the other person as object. One problem with this is that people, as has already been discussed, are not permanent. A person, like every other thing, is really a conditioned series of events, always changing. The change is not random, as the past conditions the future, but a person is not to be thought of as a permanent thing. However, it is easy to see that the desire for permanence regarding other people necessarily causes *dukkha*.

To restate the obvious: people change. So to be attached to a person as a permanent entity that will not change creates *dukkha*, not only for the lover but also for the beloved. It does so for both reasons noted above: first, one craves the permanence of the object of emotion; second, one craves the permanence of the emotion itself. The lover's desire for the beloved's permanence will be constricting, especially to the beloved. To the lover, change in the beloved might seem threatening, as the lover cannot be relied on as an object of one's passion. This creates a tension, as the lover desires permanence, but the beloved cannot guarantee this permanence. The beloved cannot be what the lover craves. The inevitable consequence is *dukkha*.

Second, the lover suffers in craving permanence for the emotion itself. One will love the beloved forever, hoping to maintain a kind of permanent feeling that lasts—some people imagine—beyond death! But emotions are caused and therefore cannot be permanent. As the conditions that give rise to them change so too must the emotion. So love cannot last. Wanting love to stay the same is inevitably *dukkha*. However this does not imply that one cannot love for long periods of time, it just means that one ought not to expect the love to be the same. It must continually be recreated. I suspect that one must come to see this continual recreation as a choice, an act of will. So the point is not that one ought not to love. It is that we need to love without the expectation of permanence. We ought neither to expect the beloved to be permanent, nor should we expect our emotion itself to be permanent.

Let me consider a second emotion, fear, from a Buddhist standpoint. Fear as an emotion implies the felt thought that something is dangerous to oneself. (Again, this is not a complete analysis but simply a necessary condition of fear.) One can fear snakes, cougars, heights or public speaking. Clearly, sometimes fear is warranted in the sense that the object of fear is genuinely dangerous; being afraid of a charging grizzly bear makes sense, given the risk of serious harm. However, a fear of public speaking or crowds is questionable, given that usually these objects do not have the power to harm

the individual. The harm is more apparent than real. Justified or not, fear can be debilitating—although one could respond with courage too.

How does the teaching of emptiness help here? First, we need to recognize that the object of fear might not be genuinely dangerous, once we take account of the doctrine of *anatman*. Fear has the proper function of enabling us to prevent suffering, but we must be sure that the suffering in question is bona fide. The charging bear is a genuine threat: if it succeeds there will be suffering. However, a fear of losing face in public speaking appears to be a fear that inhibits one from carrying out legitimate purposes, due to an exaggeration of the importance of the self. I do not want my flaws to be public, so I run from those situations in which my flaws might be made apparent. This, I argue, is to over-emphasize the self as a permanent and real entity, forgetting that the self is impermanent. In these cases, we must see that fear does not prevent suffering but in fact contributes to it. Second, note that fear is often pointless too: while some suffering can be avoided through fear, the Buddhist notes that *dukkha* is the general condition of life. So suffering cannot be fully avoided, whatever one does. Buddhist thought suggests that we accept *dukkha* is the necessary consequence of our ordinary (natural) ways of living, and that we need to develop a second nature that frees us from the attachment to the self and other entities. In this way, Buddhism helps one to reduce the impact of fear in one's life.

4. *The Eightfold Noble Path: Buddhist Pedagogy*

The Eightfold Noble Path outlines a theory of what one must learn in order to reach *nirvana*. The three elements of the path: wisdom, ethical conduct and mental discipline all are necessary for achieving *nirvana*, but here I want to focus on the third element, mental discipline, especially 'right mindfulness,' as this most clearly applies to the transformation of one's emotional life.

We can begin with a diagnosis of our mental life without mindfulness. Our thoughts and our feelings are subject to a kind of wandering, in which they are only partly comprehended, becoming embedded in complex networks of other thoughts and feelings. At a department meeting I begin to feel angry at the remarks of a colleague, which cause me to imagine acts of revenge, and to focus on the perceived slight, perhaps long after my colleague has moved onto other issues. My feelings are only partly experienced, partly comprehended, and lead to other only partly comprehended feelings and emotions. The wandering stream of consciousness from one thought or feeling to the next prevents me from taking proper ownership of my thoughts, recognizing them for what they are. We *indulge* emotions without *embracing* them. Mindfulness is meditation on our experience, with the aim of recognizing and accepting our emotions (and thoughts) for what they are.

Mindfulness attempts to remedy the aimlessness of experience though focus on each and every mental event, recognizing it for what it is, along with its cause and its effect.

Stephen Batchelor says:

To embrace hatred is to accept it for what it is: a disruptive but transient state of mind. Awareness observes it jolt into being, coloring consciousness and gripping the body. The heart accelerates, the breath becomes shallow and jagged, and an

almost physical urge to react dominates the mind. At the same time, this frenzy is set against a dark, quiet gulf of hurt, humiliation, and shame. Awareness notices all this without condoning or condemning, repressing or expressing. It recognizes that just as hatred arises, so it will pass away. (Batchelor 1997, p. 60)

The idea is that we do not need to react to emotions, but can instead simply recognize and embrace them, non-judgmentally noticing focusing awareness inward, on the emotion itself, rather than outwardly, on the object of one's emotion. So as the anger arises at the perceived slight, I focus on my responses, rather than on the person who apparently slighted me. I recognize my physical reactions, the desire to hit back in response, as well as the feelings of powerlessness and resentment. I am aware, and this awareness allows the feelings to pursue their natural course of arising and passing away.

The point is very much one of the direction of one's attention. My rich emotional life is only partly conscious, as I consider primarily the objects of my emotions: the offensive remark by the nasty colleague, the loss of one's lover, the dangerousness of the public speaking engagement, the ungraciousness of one's friend. Turning my attention to the feelings that I experience, rather than toward their objects, I cling neither to the emotion nor to the object, but rather allow my feelings to take their natural course as temporary conditioned events. Their significance is neither rejected (suppressed) nor is it amplified as though the emotion provides a reason justifying further action.

Buddhist psychology is very rich, with detailed classical taxonomies of the varieties of emotion that people experience⁵. I could not attempt to do justice to this work in this short paper. However, it is clear that mindfulness, if one can master it, is a particularly powerful tool against the vicissitudes of ordinary emotional experience. How it could be taught I leave to another paper, but my case is that the education of the emotions benefits greatly through the acquisition of mindfulness as an element of personal development.

5. Concluding Thoughts

This paper attempts to show that Buddhism offers rich resources for enriching one's emotional life. My case is that (a) the basic Buddhist teaching, the Four Noble Truths, offers a basic outline of a coherent theory of the education of the emotions, (b) that the somewhat deeper account of conditioned arising, emptiness and *anatman* as a way of explaining *dukkha* suggests promising approaches to understanding how *dukkha* arises through our emotions, and (c) that the Buddhist technique of mindfulness offers an important means of experiencing emotions without exaggerating their importance. The account offered here can be developed further, especially by explicating how each element in Eightfold Noble Path contributes to emotional development; I focus only a

⁵ The *Abhidhamma* literature provides detailed normative taxonomies of emotional and other mental events, but does not accept the wholehearted emptiness that Nagarjuna later espoused—it denies that composite things are permanent., but holds that there really exist permanent atomic entities. Flanagan (2011) strongly praises its thoroughness, as a 'masterpiece of phenomenology' (p. 104).

little on the value of mindfulness, but it is clear that all must be part of an adequate summary of the Buddhist path to emotional well-being. Whether this account will seem plausible is, however, a matter of the whether one agrees with the Buddhist depiction of human life as *dukkha*.

It could be argued that the Buddhist view of life is unjustifiably pessimistic. Is life really so bad? Perhaps, on balance, suffering is outweighed by joy. Perhaps we might have recourse to a John Hick inspired theodicy that holds that while the world today is replete with suffering, that this offers the possibility for us to create a new world that is our own, rather than one we inherit. If Buddhism is correct, then it is not simply a contingent matter-of-fact that we suffer, but this is an essential feature of the human condition. We cannot overcome *dukkha* by working harder to develop technologies that alleviate suffering, at least if the Buddha is right.

Furthermore, one might worry that Buddhism might lead to a kind of self-absorption that eschews close relationships and other deep personal commitments. Of course, Buddhists especially of the Mahayana traditions do emphasize compassion, but compassion is not love; I can feel compassion for a stranger's suffering but it would be impossible to love the stranger. However, it could be argued, this alleviation of suffering comes at too great a cost. By abandoning deep personal commitments we might overcome suffering, but would such a life be rich? As Garth Brooks' song says, "I could have missed the pain, but I would have had to miss the dance." Perhaps *nirvana* is an achievement not worth pursuing.

Indeed, I find these worthy challenges to the Buddhist ideal, and certainly have not adequately addressed them here. I am persuaded that we can reply to the first objection with the claim that suffering is in fact inevitable, despite the possibility of technological advance; further, I doubt strongly that pleasurable emotions outweigh the painful. But I need to admit that this paper has not established these claims as true. The second challenge, namely that the *dukkha* is worth it because it is the cost of meaningful commitments, is even harder to address. For my part, I hold that it is possible to have loving relationships with partners, children, parents and friends, while not craving these relationships as permanent states. However, a defense of this position would demand another paper.

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