

THE ROLE OF THE CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS IN THE EARLY BUDDHIST ETHICAL SYSTEM

The concepts of *sukha* and *dukkha* play a central role in the early Buddhist ethical system. The distinction between good and bad action is made to rest ultimately on *sukha* and *dukkha* and other related concepts such as *attha* and *hita*. Many scholars who have attempted to clarify the ground of Buddhist morality have referred to the significance of the concepts of *sukha* and *dukkha* and rendered the terms into English as happiness and unhappiness.¹

Much of the philosophical discussion in Western ethics too centres round such concepts as happiness and unhappiness. Apart from the philosophical question whether happiness is a necessary or sufficient criterion on which morality can be based, there is a question as to what happiness is. K.N. Upadhyaya contends that the early Buddhist concept of happiness is different from all known Western concepts. According to him the Buddhist ideal of the highest bliss is not the mundane happiness with which the Western hedonists or eudaemonists chiefly concern themselves.²

Kant's reluctance to base the distinction between right and wrong on happiness was at least partly due to his view that happiness is an indeterminate concept. In the history of Western philosophy the Eudaemonists, the Epicureans, the Stoics and the Utilitarians have held different conceptions of happiness. R.M. Hare says that the utilitarian concept of happiness is so indeterminate that it has created more problems than solving them.³ Most philosophers have doubted whether happiness can be appealed to in making moral evaluations on the ground that our judgments regarding what happiness is, and what unhappiness is, also involve an evaluation. Happiness can be used as the ground of moral evaluation only if this term can be said to have

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1. K.N. Jayatilleke, *The Message of the Buddha*, ed. & introduced by Ninian Smart (New York 1974), p. 229ff.
 2. K.N. Upadhyaya, *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgita*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1971 p. 431ff.
 3. R.M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford University Press 1965), p. 125.

independent criteria of application, that is, criteria which cannot in themselves be moral criteria. Hare has argued that statements about someone's happiness cannot be purely empirical statements. According to Hare we call a man happy not only when we have empirical reasons to think that his desires are adequately satisfied, but when we also approve, to some extent of the desires he has.⁴

Therefore, one of the most significant philosophical questions which must be faced in an analysis of early Buddhism is the question whether the concepts of *sukha* and *dukkha* should be understood as descriptive or evaluative. Much of the discussion relating to ethics in modern Western philosophy rests on the logical distinction between fact and value. In the Western philosophical tradition, this distinction came to be emphasized with the development of science and the attempt to conceive scientific statements as being value-neutral. In the early Buddhist ethical writings (as is generally the case with all ordinary language), there is no clear distinction made between evaluative and descriptive terms and utterances, although we can, technically, draw such a distinction. This distinction did not appear to be important to early Buddhism; but if we are to understand the early Buddhist ethical system from the perspective of contemporary Western philosophical analysis, we need to know when an utterance in it is evaluative or purely descriptive. The early Buddhist attempt is primarily to show that *sukha* and *dukkha* are objective and determinate concepts. What this means is that disagreement as to what should count as an instance of *sukha* or *dukkha* cannot ultimately amount to mere disagreement in attitudes, but must instead be taken as disagreements about questions of fact, disagreements which, on the basis of empirical evidence, can finally be resolved.

The Buddha himself admits that what is called *sukha* by others (i.e., ordinary mortals) is called *dukkha* by the noble ones (i.e., those who have attained enlightenment), while what is conceived as *dukkha* by the former is conceived as *sukha* by the latter.⁵ In the *Suttanipāta*, Dhaniya,

4. Ibid., pp. 125-129.

5. *Yaṃ pare sukhato āhu tadariyā āhu dukkhato yaṃ pare dukkhato āhu tadariyā sukhato vidū. Saṃyuttanikāya* P.T.S. 4.127.

a rich herdsman, and the Buddha compare their respective achievements in life, the former mentioning his material possessions and the latter his spiritual gains. At the end of the dialogue, Dhaniya expresses his desire to follow the Buddha's spiritual path. Here *Māra*, (the evil tempter, according to the legendary clothing with which the idea is presented) is said to express the following view:

One who has sons is happy on account of sons. One who has cows is happy on account of cows. A person's happiness is on account of his attachment (to material things). A person who is detached is not happy.

Here the Buddha puts forward exactly the opposite point of view.⁶

Concerning such disagreement we may raise the question: "Is it merely that the enlightened ones found *sukha* in one way of life, while the others found *sukha* in another way of life?". If this is so, what *sukha* or *dukkha* is would be merely a matter of attitude, opinion and preference. The Buddha maintains that one party is mistaken about what they consider as *sukha* and that an objective basis for the distinction between *sukha* and *dukkha* exists.

Dukkha is conceived in Buddhism as one of the truths to be understood. In one of the earliest and basic formulations of the Buddha's doctrine, *dukkha* is one of the four noble truths to be comprehended (*dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ*). It is said that beings in this world go through incalculable births and deaths in the *saṃsāric* cycle due to their inability to understand the truth of *dukkha*.⁷ *Avijjā*, ignorance, is explained in early Buddhism as the inability to comprehend the four noble-truths. One who mistakes what is *sukha* for *dukkha* and vice versa is said to suffer from perverted perception, perverted views and perverted mind (*saññāvipallāsa, diṭṭhivipallāsa, cittavipallāsa*).⁸ If *dukkha* itself is viewed as something that can be compre-

6. *Suttanipāta* 33-34.

7. *Dukkhaṃ bhikkhave ariyasaccassa ananubodhā appaṭivedhā. evaṃ idaṃ dīgham addhanaṃ sandhāvitāṃ saṃsaritaṃ mamcā ceva tumhākaṃca. Dīghanikāya. P.T.S. 2.90.*

8. *Aṅguttaranikāya* 2.52.

hended and about which people can be mistaken, then it cannot be something about which disagreement is merely attitudinal.

But how can Buddhism maintain that *dukkha* is a truth about existence, a characteristic which can be known to be true? Is it an ontological feature of the universe, or is it a fact about human minds? In order to answer these questions we need to examine carefully the use of these terms in the early Buddhist teachings.

The Buddha's teaching has, as its ultimate goal, the cessation of *dukkha*. It is also important to note that this cessation is possible in this life itself. The Buddha and the *arahants* who followed him are said to have put an end to *dukkha* in this life itself and to have won the supreme happiness of *Nibbāna*. Now, such a situation would not be possible if *dukkha* were taken as an ontological characteristic of the universe. The Buddha speaks of *sukha* and *dukkha* as terms which have meaning relative to human subjects and human experience. The objective world of material things can causally be related to the experiences of *sukha* and *dukkha* which beings have, but those things cannot in themselves, be *sukha* or *dukkha*. It is possible, according to early Buddhism, to specify the empirical conditions under which *sukha* and *dukkha* are produced. The twelve fold formula of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, for instance, is an attempt to specify those empirically observable conditions.

Dukkha, according to early Buddhism, is often said to be one of the three fundamental characteristics of *Saṃsāric* existence. The Buddha analyses the entirety of existence (*sabbam*) into the senses and their respective sense objects, as the eye and visible forms, the ear and audible sounds, etc. With regard to all these factors of existence it is said that impermanence is a universal characteristic (*anicca*).⁹ The Pali *Nikāyas* consist of many discourses which repeatedly emphasize the characteristic of *anicca*, universally applicable to factors of existence in whatever manner they are analyzed, whether into the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*), the twelve spheres of sense (*dvādasāyatanaṇi*) or the eighteen elements (*aṭṭhā-*

9. *Saṃyuttanikāya* 3.22f; 4.1f.

rasadhātuyo). It is said that whatever is *anicca* is *dukkha* (*yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ*). Does this signify a logical entailment, or does it signify an evaluation of the facts?

There is likely to be no disagreement about the fact that impermanence is a perceptible characteristic of empirical things. Given that impermanence is a perceptible characteristic of things, does it follow logically that *dukkha* is also a characteristic of things? This can be so only if *yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ* can be considered as an analytic statement.

Paul Dahlke, for instance, interprets the relationship between transiency and *dukkha* as an analytic one. According to him, 'sorrow' (*dukkha*) in Buddhism, is one with transiency (*anicca*), and is considered as self evident.¹⁰ It seems highly unreasonable, however, to suggest that it was taken as a self-evident proposition by the Buddha. If it were analytic, then the fact of *dukkha* would have to follow from the fact of *anicca* just as 'this is a rectangle' follows from the premise 'this is a rectilinear figure, all angles of which are 90°'. We suggest instead that the Buddha's statement '*yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ*' is better understood neither as an ontological fact entailed by the premise that all empirical things are impermanent nor as an evaluation of human experience, but as a matter of psychological fact which is true given also the condition that we have the ordinary psychological dispositions such as attachment to, and the grasping of, impermanent things.

In early Buddhism, the concept of *anicca* in no way includes the concept of *dukkha* so that by an analysis of the concept of *anicca* alone, we could make an inference to *dukkha*. The relationship between *anicca* and *dukkha* is a contingent psychological relationship. It is the presence of a certain psychological attitude towards the impermanent things in the world that, according to Buddhism, leads to *dukkha*. Once the disturbing passions and the ceaseless thirst for the possession and enjoyment of impermanent things is completely got rid of, there occurs the happiness which early Buddhism called the happiness of

10. Paul Dahlke, *Buddhist Essays*. Translated from the German by Bhikkhu Silacara (Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London 1908), p.69f.

Nibbāna. If *dukkha* is conceived as a necessary truth following from the empirical premise that everything is *anicca* then no one can be said to overcome *dukkha* in this life itself, no more than one can be said to be able to square the circle.

The Buddha's attempt is to bring about a change in the human attitude which leads to *dukkha* stemming from our contact with the impermanent things of the world. *Dukkha* is causally conditioned. The elimination of the causes leads to the cessation of it. The Buddha's view is clearly represented by the following statement made by Sāriputta, one of the Buddha's chief disciples, in attempting to describe the attitude of the emancipated person towards the five aggregates of personality:

He says not, 'I am body'; he says not, 'body is mine', nor is he possessed by this idea. As he is not so possessed, when body alters and changes, owing to the unstable and changeful nature of body, then sorrow and grief, woe, lamentation and despair do not arise in him.¹¹

There is, however, another significant aspect to the concept of *dukkha* in early Buddhism. The psychological factors which cause unhappiness in this life, are precisely the factors that bring about a continued series of existence in *samsāra*. The Buddhist view is that *samsāric* existence brings along with it a whole mass of *dukkha*, which in the formulation of the four noble truths is described as follows:

Birth is *dukkha*, decay is *dukkha*, sickness is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*, association with those that one does not like is *dukkha*, separation from the beloved is *dukkha*, not getting what one wants is *dukkha*, in brief the five aggregates of grasping are *dukkha*.¹²

When examined closely the life of sense pleasures is said to consist of three aspects all of which, a realistic assessment of human experience should not fail to take into account. Mundane life has its pleasures (*assāda*), the

11. *Saṃyuttanikāya* 3.3f.

12. *Ibid.* 5.421.

aspect which the Buddha classified under *kāmasukha*. It also has its harmful consequences (*ādīnava*), and there is a possibility of transcending this lower level of happiness which is not really satisfying, and attaining a higher level of happiness. This is called *nissaraṇa* or freedom from the harmful consequences of the lower forms of happiness. With reference to the common pleasures of sense the Buddha says that they consist of little delight and much unhappiness and anxiety (*appassādā kāmā, bahudukkhā bahūpāyāsā ādīnavo attha bhiiyo*). When birth, old age and sickness are given as instances of human suffering, they are interpreted in the Buddhist tradition mainly in terms of the physical suffering involved. What is of greater importance for early Buddhism, however, is the mental suffering involved in the life of an unenlightened being. Such beings are said to suffer constantly from psychological disease (*cetasika roga*), whereas the mind of the person who has attained *Nibbāna* is said to be healthy (*anītika*). The question whether one who has attained *Nibbāna* is happy or not, is considered, not as an evaluative question, but as a psychological question which may be examined on the basis of behavioural criteria or on the basis of introspection.

In psychological terms, early Buddhism makes the judgment that the experience of life, when considered on the whole, in its unenlightened condition is *dukkha*. It appears that the basis of such a judgment is a hedonic criterion and not an evaluation. It is intended to be an empirically justifiable interpretation of human experience and not a mere expression of an attitude towards the facts of life.

The Buddhist attainment of the perfectly happy state, which results from the complete elimination of passion, thirst for sensuous enjoyment, and grasping after the impermanent things of the world is also said to be the point at which the whole cyclic process of *samsāra* is said to come to an end. The Buddha himself joyfully claimed after his enlightenment: "It is my last birth, and there will not be any becoming again (*ayamantimā jāti natthidāni punabbhavo*). Thus *Nibbāna* is positively the attainment of a blissful existence, free from the afflictions of lust, hatred and delusion, and negatively an ending of the conditions leading to the recurrence of the process which brings

along with it birth, old age, disease, death and other physical and mental afflictions. This is the *attha*, *hita* and *sukha* in the highest sense that the Buddha declared to be valid for all human beings. Anyone who believes some state other than this to be the true and highest wellbeing or happiness of man is, according to the Buddha, mistaken.

Sukha is often represented as an experiential state the continuance of which is desired. According to the Buddha, such a state can arise from various conditions. One commonly acknowledged source of such *sukha* is sense-perception. In the *Vedanāsaṃyutta*, the Buddha makes certain clarifications about his view regarding *sukha* which are of importance in understanding the Buddhist concept. The Buddha speaks here of several levels of *sukha*, one higher than the other, implying that it is possible to make qualitative distinctions within *sukha* itself.

He says:

... There are these five strands of sensuous desire ... There are material shapes cognizable by the eye, delightful, agreeable, pleasant, lovely, associated with sensuous desire and alluring, sounds cognizable by the ear, ... smells cognizable by the nose ... tastes cognizable by the tongue ... touches cognizable by the body ... These are the five strands of sensuous desire. Whatever pleasure happiness (*sukha*, *somanassa*) arises due to these five strands of sensuous desire, this is called the happiness of sensuous desires (*kāmasukhaṇṇ*). But with regard to those who may say thus: 'This is the highest pleasure, happiness that living beings experience', I do not agree with that view of theirs. What is the reason for this? ... For there is a happiness which is more delightful and more pleasant than this.¹³

This other form of happiness is explained by the Buddha as the happiness resulting from the withdrawal of the mind from sense-pleasures and attaining the different levels of *samādhi*. Here the Buddha enumerates several levels of *samādhi* in which the *sukha* experienced at each succeeding level is more delightful and pleasant than that

13. Ibid, 4.225ff.

experienced at the preceding level. The quality of the experience is to be known experientially by the individual himself. The basis for saying that one experiential state is more pleasant than another is to be found in the experience itself. For, a person who is acquainted with both finds one more pleasant than the other. The use of *sukha* and *dukkha* in such instances implies both that there is a phenomenologically distinct experience in such situations and that it is liked by those who experience it. The Buddha considered these experiences as pleasurable, yet not involving the harmful consequences that sense pleasures would involve. They were therefore recommended for his disciples as the abodes of pleasurable experience available here and now (*ditṭhadhammasukhavihārā*).

The Buddha assigns the lowest status to *sukha* derived from the gratification of sense desires. He does not reject the fact that *sukha* results from such gratification. The fact that he wishes to emphasize is that his wider vision of reality leads him to assign a very inferior status to such *sukha*. Considering the consequences of enslavement and bondage to such *sukha* by the ignorant who do not recognize a more stable and secure *sukha*, it should be avoided. The Buddha does not wish to condemn the *sukha* attained by the gratification of sensuous desires merely because it is gratification of sensuous desires but because of its tendency to make man a slave to passions and to blind him to the more stable and secure happiness that he is capable of attaining. As against his contemporaries who shunned *sukha* altogether, the Buddha claims: "Why should I fear such *sukha* which is apart from sensuous desires and evil and immoral states" (*kiṃ nu kho ahaṃ tassa sukhasa bhāyāmi aññatreva kāmehi aññatra pāpakehi akusalehi dhammehi*).¹⁴ The Buddha does not condemn *sukha* provided it does not have any harmful consequences. The harmfulness (*ādīnava*) and harmlessness (*anādīnava*) of *sukha* is the basis on which one kind of *sukha* is valued in Buddhism over the other. But the harmfulness itself in turn is to be judged on what future *sukha* or *dukkha* one will have to experience as a consequence of one's present indulgence in some form of activity from which he derives his *sukha*.

The Buddha's reasons for assigning a low status to

14. *Majjhimanikāya* 1.247

sense pleasures is very clearly illustrated in the *Māgandhiyasutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*. Here the Buddha says:

Māgandhiya, when I was formerly a householder, I lived endowed with and provided with the five strands of sensuous desire, with material shapes cognizable by the eye agreeable, pleasant ... But later having known as it really is, the origin, the cessation, the enjoyment, the harmful consequence of and the emancipation from sensuous desires themselves, I abandoned the thirst for sensuous pleasures, got rid of the affliction from sensuous desires, and having become devoid of thirst I live with a mind inwardly calmed. I see other beings who are not free from passion for sensuous enjoyment being consumed by the affliction of sense desires, excited by sense desires. I do not envy them, I do not delight therein. And why is that so? Māgandhiya, this delight which is free from sensuous desires, and free from *akusala* states, stays even surpassing the divine *sukha*. Delighting in this delight I do not envy the lower, nor do I delight therein.¹⁵

Although there is *sukha* in sensuous things, viewed from a wider perspective and taking into consideration their long range consequences, they are *dukkha*. This is to say that they give rise to frustration, anxiety, dissatisfaction, mental confusion and instability. The wider understanding of the nature of sense pleasures and the realization of a happiness which transcends the meagre happiness which is found in sensuous delight leads the Buddha to take a different view of them. So the Buddha declares, as a universal fact true in the past, present and the future, that indulgence in sensuous desires eventually gives rise to unpleasant experience.

In the past sense desires gave rise to unpleasant sensation, they were immensely afflicting, immensely painful; in the present they are ... and in the future they will be ... These beings not free from their passions for sensuous things being consumed by the thirst for sensuous things, being afflicted by the affliction of sensuous things with their sense-organs adversely

15. Ibid. 1.506.

affected, take a perverted notion of sensuous things whose contact is painful by taking them as pleasurable.

Māgandhiya, it is like a leper, a man with his limbs all ravaged and festering, and being eaten by vermin tearing his open sores with his nails heats his body over a charcoal pit, the more those open sores of his become septic, foul smelling, putrefying and there is only a meagre relief and satisfaction to be had from scratching the open sores.¹⁶

Thus while admitting certain things as certainly productive of a kind of *sukha*, the Buddha at the same time emphasizes another aspect of reality associated with them. Ultimately, the happiness of sensuous desires leads to more *dukkha*, and the *sukha* that seemed to be there is said to be deceptive and mirage-like. The *sukha* derived from sense pleasures is described as a "vile *sukha*, the *sukha* of the ordinary, an ignoble *sukha*" (*mīḷhasukhaṃ, puthujjanasukhaṃ anariyasukhaṃ*).

The Buddha makes the claim that a person who experiences the happiness of passionless *Nibbāna* will find that it is eternally satisfying and that he will not fall back on the transient pleasures of ordinary life. In order to appreciate the value of such *sukha* one has to experience it oneself. Speaking of his own experience of other pleasures that life can afford and the happiness of *Nibbāna*, the Buddha says that the enjoyment of the pleasures of a sensuous kind are comparable to the infant's play with his own excrements, when viewed from the standpoint of the experience of *Nibbāna*.

"Just as, Upāli, an infant, feeble and lying on his back, plays with his own excrements, what do you think Upāli, is this not fully and entirely a childish sport?"

"It is, Sir."

"Well then, Upāli, that boy, on another occasion, when he has grown older, with the maturity of the

16. Ibid, 507.

sense faculties, plays with whatever may be the playthings of such children ... Now what do you think, Upāli? Does not this sport come to be finer and more valued than the former?"

"It does, Sir."

From this point onwards the Buddha describes the spiritual attainments of the person who leads the holy life, as it was laid down by him, and assures Upāli that in each of these higher stages of spiritual attainment there is a more preferable experience.¹⁷

What becomes evident from the above is that the Buddha, like Mill, admitted qualitative distinctions within *sukha* itself. The experience of happiness in the spiritual attainments transcending the sphere of sense pleasures was considered to be higher (*uttaritarāṃ*). It is also evident that the Buddha made moral distinctions within happiness itself as noble happiness (*ariyasukha*) and ignoble happiness (*anariyasukha*). This shows that the Buddha considered *sukha* itself as a non-evaluative term, which can be qualified evaluatively as *ariya* or *anariya*.

One reason why most philosophers object to taking pleasure or happiness as a criterion of moral evaluation is that pleasure or happiness itself may be morally evaluated as right or wrong. The question here is whether early Buddhism distinguishes between *sukha* that ought to be abandoned and *sukha* that ought to be cultivated, on some moral criterion which is not, in turn, established on the basis of *sukha* and *dukkha*. The evidence in the Buddhist writings seems to be in favour of saying that one form of *sukha* is to be valued over another, not in terms of a *sui generis* moral quality, but in terms of the nature of the *sukha* itself. As we have already mentioned, some conditions under which *sukha* is experienced can be productive of much greater *dukkha* when considered from the point of view of their long range consequences. At the same time, abandoning the immediate pleasures of a sensuous nature, and even with displeasure for the moment, one may perform certain deeds which conduce to his real happiness. Such actions, though involving immediate displeasure, are called *kusala* in Buddhism.

17. *Anguttaranikāya* 5.203.

The fact that there are certain modes of life which give pleasure in the present but lead to much suffering in the future is much emphasised by the Buddha. In the *Majjhimanikāya*, the Buddha makes four distinctions between ways of life undertaken by people in terms of the happiness that they find in them in the present and their inevitable consequences in the future as follows:

1. Undertaking a way of life involving unhappiness in the present and productive of unhappiness in the future (*dhammasamādānaṃ paccuppannadukkhāṃ āyatīṇca dukkhavipākāṃ*), e.g., the case of a person who even with unhappiness, even with grief, becomes one who kills living beings, and on account of killing living beings, experiences unhappiness. Such a person is said to be reborn in hell, or a woeful existence after his death.
2. Undertaking of a way of life involving happiness in the present but productive of unhappiness in the future (*dhammasamādānaṃ paccuppannasukhāṃ āyatīṃ dukkhavipākāṃ*), e.g., the case of a person who even with happiness, even with pleasure, kills living beings, and on account of killing living beings experiences happiness and pleasure. Such a person too is said to be reborn in hell or a woeful existence after death.
3. Undertaking of a way of life involving unhappiness in the present but productive of happiness in the future (*dhammasamādānaṃ paccuppannadukkhāṃ āyatīṃ sukhavipākāṃ*), e.g., the case of a person who even with unhappiness, even with grief abstains from killing living beings, and on account of his abstention from killing living beings experiences unhappiness and grief. Such a person is said to be reborn in a happy state of existence after death.
4. Undertaking of a way of life involving happiness in the present and productive of happiness in the future (*dhammasamādānaṃ paccuppannasukhāṃ āyatīṇca sukhavipākāṃ*), e.g., the case of a person who even with happiness, even with pleasure abstains from killing living beings and on account of abstention

from killing living beings he experiences happiness and pleasure. Such a person too is said to be reborn in a happy state of existence after death.¹⁸

What is evident from the above is that early Buddhism recognizes the possibility of making a distinction between being happy by doing the right thing and being happy by doing the wrong thing. In other words some *sukha* can be *akusala*. What makes one thing wrong and another right is that one involves a far greater sum of unhappy consequences in the future even though one may take pleasure in doing it in the present, while the other involves happy consequences in the future even though one may or may not take pleasure in it in the present. In using happiness as a criterion for valuing different modes of life, the Buddha appears to be applying the hedonic calculus over a wider range of an individual's existence, taking into consideration even the future births, in terms of the doctrines of *kamma* and *saṃsāra*.

The term *sukha* in Pali stands for what is denoted by the terms 'pleasure' and 'happiness' in English. Mrs. Rhys Davids makes the 'observation': "The word *sukha* in Buddhism covers in extension both the relatively static state which we name happiness or felicity and the conscious moments of such a state to which our psychology refers as pleasurable or pleasant feeling."¹⁹ This observation is quite appropriate in view of the applications made of the term *sukha* in the Pāli *Nikāyas*. Early Buddhism works with the one generic term *sukha*. It stands for the happiness of sensuous gratification (*kāmasukha*), the happiness attained in various stages of ecstatic meditative experience (*jhānasukha*) and even the felicity of *Nibbāna* (*nibbānasukha*). The gratification of sensuous desires involves a distinctive experience which is phenomenologically different from that of *jhānasukha* or *nibbānasukha*. The characterization of all these phenomenological experiences as *sukha* is probably due to the fact that they are desirable experiences (desirable in a non-evaluative sense). In Buddhism, the qualitative difference between these different types of *sukha*, seems ultimately to be made to rest not on an eval-

18. *Majjhimanikāya* 1.310ff.

19. ERE, Ed. James Hastings (New York 1925), p.571.

uation of a moral kind. The *sukha* of a sensuous nature is often compared with the states of spiritual bliss in quantitative terms and it is said to be meagre compared to the latter. Hence the former is called small (*matta*) and the latter immense (*vipula*).

In the West the terms 'pleasure' and 'happiness' are sometimes used with distinctive meanings and sometimes as synonyms. Aristotle denied that happiness is pleasure. Bentham and Mill considered them as being synonymous. Regarding the concept of happiness, it has also been claimed that the term is not a purely descriptive one, and that the application of it is in need of evaluative criteria as well.

The evaluative use of the terms 'happy' and 'happiness' is, according to Hare, what creates problems for utilitarian systems of morality. According to this view, happiness judgments are appraisals, and such appraisals sometimes involve moral considerations. It is argued that although it is held that 'happy' is a word which is mainly descriptive and tied to the concepts of contentment and enjoyment, yet, contrary to this belief, it is also partly evaluative. Happiness statements involve, to some extent, a report on a person's state of mind. In one sense of the term 'happy' we call a man happy if he takes pleasure in whatever condition and state of mind he is in or activity he is engaged in. If this is the only sense in which the term 'happy' is used, then an empirical account of happiness would be adequate. For to ascertain whether a man is happy we would need to apply only introspectional and behavioural criteria. Whenever a man is prepared to claim of himself that he is happy, that his life's wants and desires are satisfied and the evidence of his appearance and behaviour is also consistent with these claims, we must, if this account is true, call him happy. But an objection raised against such an account of happiness is that such evidence alone will not entitle us to call him happy. For we need to consider also the worthwhileness of the activities from which he claims to derive his satisfaction. As one writer puts it:

Some may be satisfying a large number of wants, but still not be accounted happy if the pattern arising from satisfying these wants adds up to what is thought

of as a radically vicious style of life.²⁰

According to Hare, in judging that some one is happy we apply standards which may differ from those that would be used by the person being appraised:

..... before we call a man happy we find it necessary to be sure, not only that his desires are satisfied, but also that the complete set of his desires is one which we are not very much averse to having ourselves.²¹

One may not call Hitler truly happy even if he were satisfied with himself and really did enjoy life, because one may apply non-hedonic evaluative criteria in commenting on Hitler's state. It is perhaps on such an irreducible form of evaluative ground that Socrates contended that the unjust man is unhappy despite the fact that his life's wants and desires are satisfied.

Irwin Goldstein contends:

Many recent philosophers have discussed happiness as if it were a concept solely hedonic in meaning whereby non-hedonic considerations were really irrelevant in a discussion of how happy a person is, whether or not he is happy, or what happiness is. It is a fact, however, that many people (perhaps all) use happiness words ('happy', 'happier', 'happily') in such a way that they will judge one person happier than another or they will deny that some person is happy on the basis of some non-hedonic, evaluative criterion. There seems to be enough reason to say that *while being hedonic, happiness words are also non-hedonically evaluative.*²²

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20. B.M. Barry, *Political Argument* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1965), p. 41.
21. R.M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford University Press 1965), p. 125.
22. Irwin Goldstein, "Happiness: The Role of Non-Hedonic Criteria in its Evaluation," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 13 (1973), p. 523f.

By saying "non-hedonically evaluative" it is probably assumed that a consideration of the consequences in hedonic terms is not necessary and by no means sufficient in such applications of the term. This is said to be the case even with Mill's qualitative differences between 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures.

It is because Mill approves of the 'higher' pleasures, e.g., intellectual pleasures, so much more than he approves of the more simple and brutish pleasures that quite apart from consequences and side effects, he can pronounce the man who enjoys the pleasures of philosophical discourse as "more happy" than the man who gets pleasure from pushpin or beer drinking.²³

According to Hare's view, in our third person ascriptions of happiness, the mere fact that a person enjoys a particular activity and pursues it with much desire and enthusiasm is not sufficient to call him happy, although it would be a necessary condition for calling one happy that he is not displeased with his state. If we take happiness as a concept, the application of which is governed by the necessary and sufficient condition that whenever a person takes pleasure in or enjoys some state of being or activity, we must call him happy, then the most abominable things could be called a person's happiness. For there are no logical limits to what a person may like or desire.

It is difficult to say that the concept of happiness according to Plato and Aristotle is governed only by hedonic criteria. Bentham, of course, thought that it is exclusively governed by hedonic criteria, but his view met with strong criticism on that account. Mill modified the theory, introducing the notion of qualitative distinctions, but his critics have questioned the plausibility of making these distinctions without bringing in evaluative criteria.

In the case of early Buddhism, the application of the term *sukha* and its opposite *dukkha* seems clearly to be governed by hedonic criteria in instances where the conse-

23. J.J.C. Smart, "An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics," *Utilitarianism for and Against*, J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams (Cambridge University Press 1973), p. 22.

quences of action are considered in terms of the theory of *kamma*. The doctrine of *kamma* plays a central role in the Buddhist ethical system. In terms of the *kamma* doctrine, even though one takes great pleasure while engaging in vicious or abominable acts, one eventually will be subject to much displeasure, pain and suffering as a consequence of it. For, evil acts bring about unhappy consequences and the unhappiness is to be determined in terms of felt undesirable experience.

The Dhammapada, for instance, says:

The fool thinks it very sweet, as long as his evil has not come to fruition. But when it comes to fruition he suffers unhappiness.²⁴

The *sukha* to which certain actions *kammically* lead is also conceived largely in hedonic terms. In the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta*, for instance, the Buddha is said to have experienced innumerable pleasures of sense in heavenly existences as a result of practicing good deeds in former states of existence.²⁵

It is the conceptual fact that there are no logical limits to what a person may like or desire that has led most philosophers to argue that on a non-evaluative application of the term happiness it becomes an utterly indeterminate concept. But early Buddhism attempts to attach an objective empirical meaning to happiness statements by showing that there are certain experiences and conditions which can commonly be called *sukha* or *dukkha*. There is, according to Buddhism, a sense in which what is *sukha* and what is *dukkha* can be determined objectively. It is true that there is an indeterminate range for the application of the term *sukha*, just as there is for the term happy. For, some people take pleasure in having certain experiences from which other people may not derive pleasure. If a person is seen to take pleasure, in Hare's sense of the "typical hunting-shooting and fishing square"²⁶ kind of life, we will not be disposed to call such a person abnormal, although we would not be inclined to approve of such a life. But suppose a man wishes to subject himself to

24. *Dhammapada* 69.

25. *Vṛghanikāya* 3.145f.

26. R.M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason*, p. 126.

torture for no other gain than the mere enjoyment of the pain associated with it (and assume that no other background can be provided for this behaviour, such as his peculiar religious aspirations). Now, we would surely be inclined to pronounce him abnormal. There is a sense in which what is pleasant and what is unpleasant, what leads to happiness and what leads to unhappiness, can be determined objectively; for, objective judgments in other spheres too cannot be said to be completely independent of certain facts about the way human beings are constituted, the way they subjectively experience properties of objects, such as 'red' and 'sweet'.) There are certain conditions of human existence which can commonly be called productive of unhappiness. It is hardly plausible to say that the assertion "torturing will make X unhappy" merely expresses an opinion or makes an "evaluation of the facts".

Early Buddhism recognizes a clearly determinate range for the application of the terms *sukha* and *dukkha*. The evaluation of actions in terms of the *kamma* doctrine may be said to involve the application of a hedonic criterion. To that extent early Buddhist ethics may be said to possess the character of a hedonistic ethical system. But a question arises, however, about its conception of the highest *sukha*, the happiness of *Nibbāna*.

It is in this connection that K.N. Upadhyaya contends that Pratt's remark that the Buddha's system "may be classed as a form of altruistic hedonism (in which the higher spiritual pleasures are rated much more important than those of the body) is questionable on the ground that the concept of happiness in Buddhism is a supra-mundane one.²⁷ It can, however, be argued that at least in one respect, there is a hedonistic aspect to the happiness of *Nibbāna* as well. In discussing the Buddhist concept of *sukha* we cannot isolate it from its opposite *dukkha*. *Nibbāna* is considered to be *sukha* partly because it is an ending of *samsāric dukkha*, and *samsāric dukkha*, as we have noticed in the foregoing discussion, does not stand for an ontological characteristic of the universe, but for the unpleasant experiences that living beings have in the cyclic process of birth, old age, death and re-becoming. *Nibbāna* is, in negative terms, the ending of this painful process,

27. K.N. Upadhyaya, *Early Buddhism and the Bhagavadgita*, p. 431.

and in this sense it is the attainment of happiness or freedom from unhappiness.

It is true, however, that on the side of *sukha*, the Buddha conceives of a hierarchy of states, with the pleasurable experience derived from the activity of the senses placed at the lowest level. We find in early Buddhism a reluctance to characterise the higher spiritual experiences such as those in *Nirodha samāpatti* and *Nibbāna* as *vedayīta* (felt), because *vedanā* is a term so closely associated with the activity of the five senses. But it is claimed by the Buddha, as well as his disciples who are supposed to have become enlightened, that these spiritual attainments consist of positive experiential content. The Buddha is said to have lived experiencing the bliss of emancipation (*vimuttisukhapatisamvedi*). This happiness does not have any direct relation to the causal process consisting of sense-object contact (*phassa*). It is a happiness derived from the elimination of the defilements of mind (*āsavakkhayo*) as well as from the stability, security and freedom one is assured of having attained. The Buddha, as well as his disciples who attained *Nibbāna*, are found to have spontaneously given utterance to paeons of joy having reflected on the nature of their attainment. The happiness in *Nibbāna* neither arises from, nor consists in, pleasurable sensation, but in the total condition which one is convinced of having attained. This conviction is based on the entertainment of certain factual beliefs concerning the human predicament and not on the ascription of an arbitrary moral value to *Nibbāna*. On this factual basis, the happiness of *Nibbāna* is to be distinguished from certain illusory forms of happiness (*micchāvimutti*) which, for instance, a drug addict may experience.

If the early Buddhist notion of *Nibbāna* as the real happiness of man is to be called an evaluation on moral or any other grounds, it may be argued that although Buddhists evaluate it as such, it need not be so evaluated universally. One may even argue that it is not a worthwhile goal to attain, for it involves the renunciation of all wordly attachments and the pleasures derived from them. Moreover one could say, the attempt to use *sukha* 'happiness' as a ground of moral evaluation involves circularity,

All indications in our foregoing discussion of the concepts of *sukha* and *dukkha*, however, are that Buddhism sought to explain questions about them as factual questions. These concepts in Buddhism have both an unqualified hedonistic aspect as well as a hedonistic aspect in a qualified sense. In evaluations of action on the basis of the theory of *kamma*, the unqualified hedonistic aspect is dominant, whereas in evaluating action in terms of *Nibbāna*, the qualified hedonistic aspect is dominant.

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