Assignment Activity Unit 2

Department of Computer Science, UoPeople

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**Friday, 11th September 202le: The Ethical System of Buddhism: Principles, Rationale, and Personal Reflection**

**Introduction** Buddhism, a non-Abrahamic religion, offers a profound ethical system rooted in its understanding of human suffering, the nature of existence, and the path to liberation. Unlike theistic religions, Buddhism does not rely on divine commandments but instead emphasizes personal responsibility, mindfulness, and compassion (Harvey, 2000). This paper explores the principles of Buddhist ethics, the rationale behind its moral framework, and how it resonates with my personal beliefs.

**Principles of Buddhist Ethics** Buddhist ethics are grounded in the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, and are primarily guided by the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths diagnose the human condition: (1) life is marked by suffering (dukkha); (2) suffering arises from attachment and desire; (3) suffering can cease; and (4) the path to the cessation of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path (Gethin, 1998).

The Noble Eightfold Path provides a practical guide to ethical living and mental discipline. It is divided into three categories: wisdom (prajna), ethical conduct (sila), and mental discipline (samadhi). Ethical conduct, which is central to this paper, includes:

* **Right Speech:** Abstaining from lying, divisive speech, harsh words, and idle chatter.
* **Right Action:** Avoiding harm to others, stealing, and sexual misconduct.
* **Right Livelihood:** Earning a living in a way that does not harm others or exploit them (Keown, 2005).

Additionally, Buddhist ethics emphasize the Five Precepts, which are moral guidelines for lay practitioners:

1. Refrain from killing or harming living beings.
2. Refrain from stealing.
3. Refrain from sexual misconduct.
4. Refrain from false speech.
5. Refrain from intoxicants that cloud the mind (Harvey, 2018).

These principles are not rigid rules but are intended to cultivate mindfulness, compassion, and a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all life.

**Rationale for Buddhist Ethics** The rationale for following Buddhist ethics lies in its ultimate goal: the cessation of suffering (dukkha) and the attainment of enlightenment (nirvana). Buddhism teaches that unethical actions, such as harming others or indulging in greed, create negative karma, which perpetuates the cycle of suffering and rebirth (samsara) (Williams, 2009). By contrast, ethical behavior generates positive karma and contributes to spiritual progress.

A key motivation for being moral in Buddhism is the understanding of interdependence and non-self (anatman). Since all beings are interconnected, harming others ultimately harms oneself (Harvey, 2000). Compassion (karuna) and loving-kindness (metta) are not merely altruistic but are seen as essential for one’s own well-being. Furthermore, ethical conduct aligns with the cultivation of wisdom and mental clarity, which are necessary for achieving enlightenment.

In essence, one should be moral in Buddhism because it leads to personal and collective well-being, reduces suffering, and aligns with the natural order of the universe.

**Personal Reflection** Buddhist ethics resonate deeply with my personal beliefs, particularly its emphasis on compassion, mindfulness, and interconnectedness. The idea that our actions have consequences, not just for others but for ourselves, aligns with my view that ethical behavior is intrinsically rewarding. I find the principle of Right Livelihood particularly compelling, as it challenges individuals to consider the broader impact of their work and to strive for harmony with others and the environment.

However, I also find certain aspects challenging. For instance, the strict adherence to non-harming (ahimsa) can be difficult in a world where conflicts and ethical dilemmas are often complex. Additionally, the concept of non-self can be philosophically challenging, as it contradicts the Western emphasis on individualism. Despite these challenges, I appreciate Buddhism’s pragmatic approach to ethics, which focuses on gradual progress rather than perfection.

**Conclusion** Buddhist ethics offer a holistic and practical framework for moral living, grounded in the principles of compassion, mindfulness, and interdependence. Its rationale lies in the pursuit of enlightenment and the reduction of suffering, both for oneself and others. While some aspects of Buddhist ethics may be challenging, its emphasis on personal responsibility and the interconnectedness of all life provides a compelling vision of morality that resonates with my own values. By integrating these principles into daily life, one can cultivate a deeper sense of purpose and contribute to a more harmonious world.

**References** Gethin, R. (1998). The foundations of Buddhism. Oxford University Press.

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