

BUDDHIST PERSONS AND EUDAIMONIA^{BUDDHA}

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Eudaimonia^{Buddha}

A philosophical psychology ought to answer questions such as these:

- What, if anything, are humans like deep down inside, beneath the clothes of culture?
- What, if any, features of mind-world interaction, and thus of the human predicament, are universal?
- Is there any end state or goal (*telos*) that all humans seek because it is worthy, or what is different, ought to seek because it is worthy?
- Assuming that there is such an end state, one that is universal, and that is defensible as very good or the best, which natural traits ought to be nourished and grown to achieve it and which ones ought to be weeded out, possibly eliminated insofar as they are obstacles to that end state?

Here I discuss the Buddhist answers to these questions. Buddhist philosophical psychology is especially interesting to Westerners because Buddhists deny (or, so it is said) that there are any such things as persons or selves (*atman*) while offering advice, philosophical therapy, about how best to live a good and meaningful life as a person. How a non-person without a self lives a good human life, how a non-person with no self lives morally and meaningfully and achieves enlightenment or awakening, is deliciously puzzling. I'll explain how non-persons flourish, and achieve, or might achieve, a stable state of what I call *eudaimonia*^{Buddha}.

My interpretive strategy assumes this: Aristotle was right that all people at all times seek to flourish, to find fulfillment, to achieve eudaimonia, but that people disagree about what it is. When Aristotle said this he had in mind disagreements internal to the Greek situation about whether pleasure, money, reputation, contemplation, or virtue bring eudaimonia. And he thought that he could give an argument internal to the logic of his tradition that favored the last answer. The problem repeats, however, across traditions. Thus I use – and recommend that others doing comparative work

Or is confabulation merely certain structure? Or does knowledge is power, then answers to certain questions causes lightning, drought, fire bring for me? How can I ally for a price. This may be inflation caused by the desire answers to life's important opposed to speaking from communication, according to

..., Castiglioni, I., Vallar, G., and and Motor Control," *Science* 309, *Civilized Society*, New York: Harper and Aneurysm of the Anterior *Brain* 88: 237–644. *Confabulation*, Cambridge, MA: MIT present and Absent," in J. Bickle Oxford University Press. "Science," in M. Velmans (ed.), *Theology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry* University Press. *Brain*, and the Limbic System: A *Philosophy and Psychology of* *Attention and Division*," in J. Elster p. 199–212; D. M. Wegner, *The* Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*

use – a superscripting strategy, *eudaimonia*^{Buddha}, *eudaimonia*^{Aristotle}, *eudaimonia*^{Hedonist}, to distinguish between conceptions of the good life. Whether there are ways to critically compare these different views according to some shared logic is something I offer no opinion about here (Flanagan 2007). The superscripting strategy allows us to draw distinctions or contrasts between conceptions of *eudaimonia* such as this:

- *Eudaimonia*^{Aristotle} = an active life of reason and virtue where the major virtues are courage, justice, temperance, wisdom, generosity, wit, friendliness, truthfulness magnificence (lavish philanthropy), and greatness of soul (believing that one is deserving of honor if one really is deserving of honor).
- *Eudaimonia*^{Buddha} = a stable sense of serenity and contentment (not the sort of happy-happy/joy-joy/click-your-heels feeling state that is widely sought and promoted in the West as the best kind of happiness) where this serene and contented state is caused or constituted by enlightenment (*bodhi*)/wisdom (*prajna*) and virtue (*sila*), where the major virtues are these four conventional ones: right resolve (aiming to accomplish what is good without lust, avarice, and ill-will), right livelihood (work that does not harm sentient beings, directly or indirectly), right speech (truth-telling and no gossiping), right action (no killing, no sexual misconduct, no intoxicants), as well as these four exceptional virtues: compassion, loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

Atman and anatman

Before I proceed I better explain what a person^{Buddha} is, and is not. Although Buddhists are said to deny that there are persons and selves or persons with selves, this is not really so. Some kinds of persons, eternal persons, and some kinds of selves, indestructible transcendental egos or immortal souls, do not exist, but Heraclitean selves do exist. Heraclitean selves are like Heraclitean rivers where both subsist in a Heraclitean universe. We are Heraclitean selves (or, as I will now say, Lockean selves) living in a Heraclitean universe.

Person^{Buddha} (*pudgala*) is close to person^{Locke} and far from person^{Reid} or person^{Butler} (Perry 1975). I say “close to” or “far from” because part of the Buddhist insight is that no two things, events, processes, or concepts are or can be exactly the same. Buddhist metaphysics privileges processes and events. Perhaps it does more even than privilege processes and events: What there is, and all there is, is an unfolding (the overarching process, the mother of all processes) in which we participate. What we call and conceive as “things” are relatively stable processes or events inside the mother of all unfoldings. The picture here is familiar from contemporary physics (which is why A. N. Whitehead at the dawn of elementary particle physics endorsed “process philosophy”). Person^{Reid} or person^{Butler} is the view that what makes an individual the same person over time is each individual’s possession of an immutable, indestructible essence (= *atman*). Person^{Locke} is the view that a person is an unfolding that has stability in virtue of possessing certain kinds of psychological continuity and connectedness, e.g., first-personal memory connectedness (= *anatman*).

Buddhism is sometimes said to be incoherent because it gives advice on how to live a good life as a good person, while denying that there are persons. But Buddhism does not deny that there are persons^{Buddha} who live lives. It denies that a person – any person – is an eternal self-same thing, or possesses an immutable, indestructible essence which is its self (*atman*). If you think you are or possess some such thing, you are mistaken. If you don't think this, then you are not making a common and morally consequential metaphysical mistake. The consequential moral problem is that selfishness or egoism despite being a commonly adopted strategy for living does not bring eudaimonia^{Buddha}. If I don't conceive of myself as a metaphysically permanent ego, as *atman* (which is a mistake since I am *anatman*), I am better positioned to adjust how I live – specifically less egoistically – so that I have a chance to achieve eudaimonia^{Buddha}.

I think of the connection between metaphysics and morals as understood by Buddhists as similar to Bishop Berkeley's insight that metaphysical materialism and ethical materialism go together. They don't, in either case, logically necessitate the other, but they mutually reinforce each other psychologically. If what there is, and all there is, is material stuff, then what else am I to do than to try to get as much of that stuff (the only stuff that there is and thus that matters) for myself as I can?

Human nature and the human predicament

Eudaimonia^{Buddha} is the highest good, the *summum bonum* for sentient human beings in time.¹ We are not there yet. What route or path (*dharma* or *dao*) should we take to get from here to there? To answer we need to know our starting point. What is our nature, what is our predicament?

The Buddhist answer is this: Humans are beings in time who are thrust into a world in which the first universal feature of being in time in the world is that you are an unfolding, not a thing in an unfolding, but an unfolding that is part of a greater unfolding, the mother of all unfoldings. At each moment that you are unfolding or becoming in the greater unfolding, which is the sum of all unfoldings, you are considered as a series of connected and continuous events – as *anatman* – have desires that you want satisfied. But your desires cannot be satisfied. There are several reasons: sometimes (actually often) one's wanting nature overreaches and asks for more than the world can give. Other times, one changes enough that if and when one gets what one wants, one (actually one's successor self) no longer wants it. Still other times, one makes mistakes about what one wants and about what getting what one thinks one wants will do for oneself, e.g., make one happy. Then there is the fact that even when one gets what one wants one doesn't get to keep it for very long or, what is different, there isn't enough of it.

The first of the "four noble truths" of Buddhism says that there is *dukkha*. Some say *dukkha* means that always and everywhere all there is for humans (and other sentient beings) is suffering. A more plausible (charitable) interpretation is this: The world in which we are thrust, and in which we live, is one in which the supply of things that can satisfy our desires is outstripped by our desiring nature. This interpretation is reinforced by the second and third noble truths, which spell out the causes of suffering

as follows: Sometimes there is not enough objectively as in the case of shortages or scarcity of material resources. Other times, we want more than is sensible or sufficient, as in the case of having a satisfactory car but wanting the finest that there is, or in cases where there is love and one wishes never for the bloom to fade or even more unrealistically for the beloved (or oneself) never ever to die. And then there is the fact that we are prone to making mistakes and repeating them. Most people, even those with lots of experience on the hedonic treadmill, and who know that accumulating more wealth or stuff never brings stability and serenity, nonetheless keep seeking more and more.

The first noble truth of *dukkha* says then that humans are desiring beings who want their desires satisfied. Our desires are sometimes satisfied short term. But long term, no one gets everything she wants (the picture is familiar from Freud and Mick Jagger). Things are unsatisfactory in a literal sense: desires are unsatisfied.

What to do? We can't do much about the features of the world that don't deliver what we want (at least not individually and not immediately), but we can do a lot about the features of ourselves that grasp ego-maniacally, that continually overreach, that cause us to think (mistakenly) that we need what in fact we don't need, and that cause us to become angry and frustrated when our consumptive ego doesn't get what it wants.

To overcome our consumptive ego, insofar as it engenders its own dissatisfaction, it makes sense to follow the "noble eightfold path." The noble eightfold path (see Rahula 1974 [1954]) is the solution, insofar as one is possible, to the problem of *dukkha*. The eightfold path contains the sort of information that one could carry on a card in one's wallet, but its bulleted form is misleading. The eightfold path is actually the entry ticket to an elaborate and complex form of life, to a long and winding road (*dharma* or *dao*) that one will need to follow if one has any hope of attaining eudaimonia^{Buddha}.

Briefly the project as laid out by the noble eightfold path is to practice four conventional virtues (*sila*) listed above in the schema for eudaimonia^{Buddha}: right resolve (aiming to accomplish what is good without lust, avarice and ill-will), right livelihood (work should not harm sentient beings, directly or indirectly), right speech (truth-telling and no gossiping), right action (no killing, no sexual misconduct, no intoxicants).

The noble eightfold path contains then the blueprint for the project of moderating desires, tuning desires to be less acquisitive, less avaricious, and less insatiably consumptive, so that the inevitable shortage of satisfactions causes as little pain and suffering as possible.

But practicing the four conventional virtues is not sufficient to tune down destructive desires and to achieve eudaimonia^{Buddha}. In addition one needs to attain wisdom (*prajna*) about such matters as the fact that everything is impermanent and that the self is one of the impermanent things (*anatman*). Gaining metaphysical wisdom supports the worthy aim of seeing reality as it is, as well as the aim of developing strategies and techniques for moderating and modifying (possibly eliminating) destructive states of mind that interfere with the project of achieving eudaimonia^{Buddha} (Flanagan 2000; Goleman 2003a, b). Buddhist ethics is metaphysically rich and is in

that sense *cognitivist*, or, to put it another way, being morally excellent, as conceived by Buddhism, requires seeing things truthfully without delusion or wishful thinking.² A morally very good person does not achieve eudaimonia^{Buddha} unless she also knows a fair amount of Buddhist metaphysics, *prajna*.

In addition to practicing the conventional virtues listed and gaining the requisite metaphysical insight into the ubiquity of impermanent processes, the eightfold path also requires the practice of mindfulness and concentration.³ Mindfulness and concentration will be most familiar to Westerners as meditation.

Three Poisons

Original sin, Buddhist style, consists of the three poisons of delusion (*moha*), avaricious, greedy desire (*lobha*), and hatred (*dosa*). The poisons obstruct gaining eudaimonia^{Buddha}, and they come with being a human.⁴ It would be good to learn to moderate, modify, or eliminate the poisons. Luckily the universe unfolds (Buddhism is fine with there being no overarching reason for things unfolding as they do), so that we are positioned to see that our desiring nature overreaches and in particular that it contains the *three poisons* of delusion (*moha*), avaricious, greedy desire (*lobha*), and hatred (*dosa*).⁵ *Moha* causes us to think we need things we don't need (things that will not make us happy but that will make us suffer instead). *Lobha* causes us to throw caution to the wind as we seek to acquire and hoard as much of the stuff we think (incorrectly) we want, as quickly as possible. *Dosa* makes us hate, despise, and wish to crush whatever and whoever gets in the way of our acquiring what we (mistakenly) think we want in order to be happy.

Think of the three poisons, as deadly weeds or the seeds for poisonous weeds, for *kudzu*. The project is to keep these poisonous weeds from overtaking the garden, from sucking the life out of the good seeds or beautiful plants, or from pulling all the nutrients from the soil. If we can do this, stop or control the poison, then we have a chance (a) to not suffer; and (b) to achieve a modicum of happiness (*sukkha*), or better, eudaimonia^{Buddha}.

Wisdom (*prajna*) and virtue (*sila*) go some distance towards keeping the poisons under control and thus increase our chances of achieving eudaimonia^{Buddha}. But there are other tools required, specifically concentration and mindfulness, or what we often simply call, "meditation." We can understand what meditation is supposed to do if we look closely at the intricate analysis of mental life provided by the first great psychology text in any tradition, the Buddhist *Abhidhamma* (Pali) (*Abhidharma*, Sanskrit) (Bhikkhu Bodhi 1993).

Meditation and the therapy of desire

Abhidhamma is part of the original three baskets of the Pali canon (compiled between 200 BCE and CE 400), and contains the earliest compendia of Buddhist metaphysics. Understanding the nature of things – space, time, causation, impermanence, the non-self (*anatman*), emptiness (*sunyata*), and the like, is the basis of wisdom (*prajna*),

which, along with virtue (*sila*), is a necessary condition for eudaimonia^{Buddha}. But wisdom and virtue are not sufficient to produce eudaimonia^{Buddha}. In addition to wisdom and virtue there is a third element required: concentration and mindfulness. Concentration and mindfulness are techniques for mental and moral discipline, what Foucault called “technique de soi.”

A brief tour of the *Abhidhamma* reveals why “concentration,” understood as acute sensitivity to the patterns that mental states abide as they unfold, and “mindfulness” understood as *technique de soi*, are necessary if eudaimonia^{Buddha} is to be attained.

The first thing that will strike the Western reader who has taken Psychology 101 (thus everyone) is that the *Abhidhamma* taxonomizes mental states into *wholesome* and *unwholesome* and, to a lesser extent, *neutral* kinds. This can generate the observation (really it’s an objection) that “this is ethics *not* psychology.” And indeed it is. Or better: it is both. The current 14th Dalai Lama writes,

The principal aim of Buddhist psychology is not to catalog the mind’s makeup or even to describe how the mind functions; rather its fundamental concern is to overcome suffering, especially psychological and emotional afflictions, and to clear those afflictions. (2005: 165–6)

So Buddhist psychology is overtly normative or, to put it more precisely, ethics and psychology interpenetrate. But if this is right as regards the ultimate concern of Buddhist psychology – and it is – then positivist reactions will surface and we will hear not only that this isn’t psychology but also that it is shockingly irresponsible to mix scientific psychology with ethics.

There is a principled reply that can work to deflate the objection: Think of psychiatry and abnormal psychology texts, or of anatomy and physiology texts, or of surgical manuals. All these bleed normativity. Is that an objection to these texts and the fields they represent? Even engineering is normative. The principles of structural engineering enable us to build bridges and skyscrapers that last. That is what structural engineering is for. The fact that engineering is normative is not an objection to its status as science. Indeed, we like it that engineers operate with good design ends in mind. Thus the fact that the mental and moral sciences are normative, as is engineering, is not an objection in and of itself. One can, of course, criticize a physiology, psychiatry, or engineering text if it gets the facts wrong or if it imports controversial or unwarranted norms without marking this; otherwise not. The fact that the *Abhidhamma* combines descriptive, as well as normative, insights gathered from the Buddha’s teachings is not an objection of any sort, so long as the norms can be supported by evidence that embracing them captures worthy aims, and that abiding them increases the chances of achieving whatever good it is that the norms aim at, namely, eudaimonia^{Buddha}.

The *Abhidhamma* is a masterpiece of phenomenology, an early exercise in what I call, analytic existentialism (which is, I think, one reason it appeals to both analytic philosophers and to phenomenologists and existentialists). And despite what the 14th Dalai Lama says about not being concerned with taxonomy, the *Abhidhamma* remains

arguably the best taxonomy of conscious-mental-state types ever produced. In that sense it is analytic with a vengeance.

The book begins with a decomposition of consciousness (*Citta*) into conscious-mental-state types. These number eighty-nine initially, and reach one hundred twenty-one after some adjustments. Each type is characterized in terms of the sort of object it takes in (so visual and auditory consciousness differ in an obvious way); its phenomenal feel (e.g., sad or happy); its proximate cause or root (e.g., there is greed-rooted and hatred-rooted consciousness – I have your money and I am happy; this might be so because I hate you, or I might like you but want your money); and its function or purpose (scientific consciousness seeks [sometimes] to uncover the nature of things by decomposing them into elements [possibly *ad infinitum*], whereas musical consciousness functions to reveal or create patterns or relations among sounds).⁶

Most important for our purposes is the elaborate analysis of the hidden, deep structure of the three poisons. The three poisons are first elaborated as giving rise to “the Six Main Mental Afflictions,” attachment or craving, anger (including hostility and hatred), pridefulness, ignorance and delusion, afflictive doubt, and afflictive views. These in turn are roots for the “the Twenty Derivative Mental Afflictions,” anger, which comes in five types (wrath, resentment, spite, envy/jealousy, cruelty); attachment, which also comes in five types (avarice, inflated self-esteem, excitation, concealment of one’s own vices, dullness); and four kinds of ignorance (blind faith, spiritual sloth, forgetfulness, and lack of introspective attentiveness). Finally, there are six types caused by ignorance + attachment: pretension, deception, shamelessness, inconsideration of others, unconscientiousness, and distraction.

The decomposition reveals how the poisons ramify, how they mutate into, and germinate and generate, new poisonous offspring, which create ever-new obstacles to eudaimonia^{Buddha}. How does all this taxonomizing and decomposition relate to concentration and mindfulness, to what we call meditation? The answer, I hope, is obvious. If you know how the mind works you are positioned to control it. This would be good, because we know (thanks to the four noble truths) that you can’t (normally) control the suffering that the world summons up on your behalf (the tsunami hits), but that you can control the contribution you (as *anatman*) make to your own *dukkha* and to the *dukkha* of those with whom you interact.

When we follow the trail of the three poisons, we see that there are many, many psychological ways by which we undermine our quest for eudaimonia^{Buddha}. We will need multifarious mind control techniques suited for different kinds of mistakes and missteps. This is the work of meditation.

Some meditation techniques are suited for everyday problems, so the antidote for lust involves imaging the object of lust old and decrepit or, as necessary, dead and decomposing. Nonjudgmental detached thought acknowledges that normal folk might have occasional homicidal thoughts about other drivers or rude telephone solicitors and recommends that one notice such thoughts, but allow them to pass through one’s mind without judgment (and of course without action).

There are many other kinds of mental discipline or meditation. The familiar practice of concentrating on the breath (for hours) is for what? A standard view is that it is

for people who persevere on things not worth thinking about. Another idea is that it is for training in attention itself, which will come in very handy when one needs to figure out what state one is in and why, this being necessary if one is to effectively control negative states. Then there are trance-like techniques whose function is practice in learning about impermanence or emptiness by analyzing and decomposing some "thing" in thought. Finally, there is specifically moral meditation. *Metta* meditation (loving kindness), for example, involves guided thought experimentation, pitting one's selfish side against one's compassionate, loving side. Normally, when *metta* goes as planned, one will find oneself identifying with one's loving self and not with one's inner selfish creep. And this will help strengthen that positive and (now) reflectively endorsed identification.

Overall the Buddhist *techniques de soi* are similar to some techniques of cognitive-behavioral therapy, but with a depth psychological twist, since the three poisons create mischief in multifarious, often sneaky ways. Whether meditation be focused on the breath, or whether it involves relaxation exercises, or the antidotes for lust and anger, or physical techniques such as yogic exercises, the aim of meditation is to amplify wholesome ways of feeling, thinking, and being and to reduce, ideally, to eliminate, the afflictions of the mind.

The Bodhisattva's Psyche

The final piece of business is to speak about the four exceptional virtues required for eudaimonia^{Buddha}:

- Compassion (*karuna*)
- Loving kindness (*metta*)
- Appreciative joy (*mudita*)
- Equanimity (*upekkha*).

Any person who cultivates these four exceptional virtues is a *bodhisattva*, a Buddhist saint, or better perhaps, she has entered the bodhisattva's path. These four virtues are the "Four Divine Abodes" (*brahmaviharas*) – "illimitables" or "immeasurables" (*appamanna*).⁷

The divine abodes are states of mind of the individual who has them, and they have unique first-personal phenomenological feel for that person. Each abode also necessarily involves a distinctive state of mind towards others.

The aim of compassion (*karuna*) is [to end the suffering of others]. The aim of loving kindness (*metta*) is [to bring happiness to others in the place of suffering].⁸ Sympathetic joy (*mudita*) is [joy at the success of, or, what is different, the good fortune of others]. Sympathetic joy is appropriate even in zero-sum games, where the one who I am happy for has just beaten me fair and square.⁹ Even equanimity (*upekkha*) has the good of another as its object, which shows that the translation of *upekkha* as equanimity is not perfect. In English, "equanimity" can refer to a narrow state of my heart-mind which has nothing to do with anyone else's welfare, and which is not

directed at, for, or towards anything outside me. My being calm and serene might make me more pleasant to be around, or more caring towards others, but it is not constitutive of equanimity, as we English speakers understand the state, that it has this aim or quality.

This is not how Buddhists understand equanimity. Equanimity (*upekkha*) means more than personal serenity. It is constitutive of *upekkha* that I feel impartially about the wellbeing of others. If I am in the state of equanimity, interpreted as *upekkha*, I am in a state that involves, as an essential component, equal care and concern for all sentient beings. We might translate *upekkha* as equanimity in community, if it helps avoid confusion with our understanding of equanimity as a purely self-regarding state of mind.

The four divine virtues complete the picture of eudaimonia^{Buddha}. Perhaps with the description in place we can feel our way into what it would be like to achieve eudaimonia^{Buddha}, as opposed to what it would be like to achieve eudaimonia^{Aristotle}, or even some more familiar conception such as eudaimonia^{North Atlantic Liberal Early Twenty-First Century}. Each conception of the good life both presupposes and requires a certain psychological configuration. Buddhism is better than most other traditions in spelling out the psychology and explaining how to attain it. That said, a Westerner might wonder this: what “reasoning” (deep throat) could lead a tradition to develop a theory of eudaimonia that entails that the best life for a human is a life of maximal service to others?

The Buddhist answer is this: Our epistemology values experience first and foremost. When experience is not transparently conclusive about some matter of importance we try to reason our way to a conclusion. Our wisdom literature is a compendium of past observation and reasoning. It is not the word of any god (we don’t have gods), so we do not normally go to that literature for the truth. Instead we send truths we discover by observation and reason to that literature. Our wisdom literature contains the (fallible) conclusions we have reached based on past experience. It does not tell us what is true *a priori*. The answer, therefore, as to why eudaimonia^{Buddha} has the character it has, and why, in particular, it claims that a life of maximal devotion to others is the only kind of life that has meaning and significance, and that might bring happiness (*sukkhā*) to the person who lives this way, is because it is true. And it is true because we have watched many experiments in living, many different strategies for attaining eudaimonia, and eudaimonia^{Buddha} is the only form of life, the only way of living, that works consistently to produce eudaimonia.¹⁰

Experiments in eudaimonics

This claim – that among all known experiments in living, only eudaimonia^{Buddha} produces “true happiness” – appears to be empirical. It would be nice to know if it were true. *Eudaimonics* is the scientific study of eudaimonia. But studying eudaimonia empirically has proven exceedingly difficult. I do not think the reason has to do with the fact that eudaimonia is an inherently mysterious phenomenon. But studying various conceptions of eudaimonia requires considerably more delicacy

than investigators have thus far shown. Indeed, I became convinced of the merits of the superscripting strategy because of a certain amount of loose talk on the alleged connection between happiness, and other good states of the mind and the body, and Buddhism. Let me explain.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, and thanks largely to the 14th Dalai Lama's (2005) collaboration with Western philosophers and scientists over the course of the previous thirteen years, research exploring, and also often claiming, a link between Buddhism and happiness began to appear (see Davidson, 2000, 2003, 2004; Davidson and Irwin 1999; Davidson et al. 2003; Flanagan 2000, 2002, 2003; Goleman 2003a, b; Gyatso 2003a, b).

In the 1970s, credible work had been published claiming that certain kinds of meditation are useful in relaxing high-strung folk, and in that way leading to better cardiovascular health. But the turn of the century work was overtly eudaimonistic – it claimed that there was an unusual link between Buddhism and happiness (Harrington 2008). In my experience, the hypothesis that Buddhism leads to happiness, or that Buddhists are very happy, is thought to have been confirmed (at least this is so among people I speak with who have any opinion at all on the matter) and not merely advertised by Buddhists to have this effect. But that is not so. And what I have said so far explains, at least to a point, why it has not been confirmed. But there is more:

- First, the research on happiness depended on prior findings that show leftward activity in prefrontal cortex (LPFC) among (mostly) American students who report being in a good mood. But we do not know whether and, if so, how, being-in-a-good-mood^{American} is related to, e.g., being-in-a-good-mood^{Tanzanian} or how being in a good mood relates to such concepts as happiness, fulfillment, and eudaimonia. But suppose (incredibly) that being in a good mood = eudaimonia.
- Second, suppose that (a) being in a good mood = eudaimonia across all countries, cultures, traditions; and that (b) being in a good mood = eudaimonia lines up perfectly with LPFC activity. If (a) and (b) were true, then we would have learned that LPFC isn't all that illuminating, since we know in advance that different conceptions of eudaimonia are different. There is, e.g., eudaimonia^{Buddha} and eudaimonia^{Aristotle}, and these ought not to reveal themselves in exactly the same way in the folk who realize the relevant conception.
- Third, the research on Buddhism and happiness is almost always on whether Buddhist-inspired *meditation* (but not, e.g., Buddhist robes or Buddhist haircuts or even Buddhist ethics) produces good effects. But the good effects of meditation that are studied are about much more than anything that could be described as happiness^{Standard American} let alone as eudaimonia^{Buddha}. There is research on ADD, on the number of influenza antibodies after flu shots with and without meditation, on arthritis pain, and much else.
- Fourth, much of the neuro-journalism that claims to be reporting what good effects of Buddhist practice have been *confirmed*, actually reports what studies (often pilot studies) are being undertaken or, again – and even worse – what Buddhists say

about what Buddhism delivers (see Stroud [2008], for an egregious example of both the latter tricks).

- Fifth, the only meta-analysis that has been done so far on the good effects of Buddhist meditation on mental and physical health over the last fifty years (through 2002) by Ospina et al. (2007) for the US Department of Health and Human Services claims that the results are inconclusive.
- Finally, we have seen how we might proceed: (1) get clear on what conception of eudaimonia is being studied, i.e., eudaimonia^{Buddha}, eudaimonia^{Aristotle}, eudaimonia^{Hedonist}; (2) because each kind of eudaimonia (is said) to differ in terms of the mental states that cause and constitute it, expect these differences to show up when you look at the brains of those who (are thought to embody) the relevant kind of eudaimonia (e.g., serenity and equanimity are part of eudaimonia^{Buddha} but not part of eudaimonia^{Aristotle}, and if eudaimonia^{Buddha} and eudaimonia^{Aristotle} are realized in actual people, in the advocates of each form of life, then the brains of practitioners should light up in different ways, not in the *same* way, as most of the research so far assumes); and (3) if the researchers are assuming that there is a state of the mind-brain that is the essence, or kernel, of “true happiness,” then they need to explain what this essence is, and why we should believe there is such a thing.

Eudaimonics can and should proceed, but only if there is a clear understanding that the question of what eudaimonia is, where (if anywhere) it is located, and which conception of eudaimonia is the best, the real deal, is not a question that falls within the domain of brain science. It is a wide normative question about mind-world-norms-ends fit. Eudaimonia^{Buddha} and eudaimonia^{Aristotle} are only two from among several credible conceptions of the good life and both are defined as syndromes, ways of being and living with distinctive causes and components. Whatever it means to be eudaimon^{Buddha} or eudaimon^{Aristotle} it involves a great deal more than what goes on between the ears.

This is a good way to end. It leaves the philosopher with this delicious question: Is eudaimonia^{Buddha} a good way to live and be only for Buddhists, or does it depict a way of living that is *the* best, or at least better than other contender conceptions of eudaimonia? As the teacher says, Why? Why not? What would Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, Jesus, Mohammed, Hobbes, Kant, and Mill say about the picture of eudaimonia^{Buddha} and the defense of it? Explain and defend your answer.

Notes

1. I leave aside the question whether eudaimonia^{Buddha}, the highest state that sentient beings can attain, is the very best, the highest state of all. Many Buddhists will say the highest state of all is attainment of *nirvana*, at which point one ceases to exist as a desirer and the flame that one was is extinguished forever. This however is a matter of controversy. Both ancient Theravada Buddhism and contemporary secular Western varieties go light on some of the more familiar Buddhist metaphysical exotica of rebirth, *nirvana*, what I call *karma*^{int-anc} (2007), and the like.
2. Some, possibly many, Buddhists believe in rebirth. The idea that there is or could be rebirth is unstable in relation to the idea of *anatman* (that is, if there is no *atman* to be reborn?) and in addition

looks suspiciously like a piece of consoling delusion. In 2005 the Dalai Lama said that the doctrine of rebirth should yield, if we can make no sense of it scientifically (see Flanagan 2007).

3. When a Buddhist says she is "practicing" she means she is doing some form of meditation regularly, alone or with others in silence.
4. In virtue of the doctrine of *anatman* Buddhism can seem anti-essentialist. But despite the fact that the poisons are sensitive to local ecology, so that, for example, thirst for a fancy car occurs only after 1900 when fancy cars appeared, the poisons are natural dispositions, part of human nature, that come with the equipment. A Buddhist friendly to Darwinism (most sensible contemporary Buddhists) can explain why.
5. *Karma* provides some structure to the apparently senseless trajectory of the universe once sentient beings happen along. Familiarly, a karmic eschatology is one in which good actions pay and bad actions cost.
6. *Buddhist Intentionality*: *Citta* = consciousness, and the *cittas* = types of consciousness, e.g., consciousness in each sensory modality. The *citta*, for example, of olfactory consciousness is different from the *citta* of visual consciousness, and the *cittas* can be analytically distinguished from the mental factors (*citasekas*) that they, as it were, can contain. Buddhist intentionality is pretty much the same as Aquinas- and Brentano-style intentionality. So, olfactory consciousness might contain the smell [of coffee] or [of roses]. In some cases, e.g., joy consciousness about births in my family, where I am joyful that [sister Nancy had a baby] and that [sister Kathleen had a baby], the feeling may be the same, while the intentional content, marked off by brackets, differs.
7. Strictly speaking a bodhisattva has a constant and spontaneous desire to liberate all sentient beings.
8. Not suffering ≠ being happy. Anti-depressants make people suffer less. But even if they eliminate suffering, they do not also by themselves bring happiness.
9. Several years ago, 2003 I think, Luol Deng, now a professional basketball player, returned to Duke after losing an important NCAA game to the University of Connecticut. He thanked his teachers (my colleague David Wong and I) and his classmates (Comparative Ethics) for their support, and explained his admiration and happiness for Emeka Okafor and Ben Gordon, two excellent players on the victorious University of Connecticut team. That's *mudita*. *Mudita* is the opposite of *Schadenfreude*.
10. Donald Lopez reminds me that there is an (over-) simplification in the last few paragraphs. In Theravada, "equanimity" is sometimes described as a state of an individual heart-mind, not as inherently social or moral. Relatedly, the *arhat* of the earlier tradition, unlike the bodhisattva of the Mahayana tradition, achieves nirvana without necessarily living a life of maximal devotion to others.

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Further reading

Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) is a modern classic on the doctrine of no-self: great reading for analytic philosophers. Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (New York: Dover, 2003 [1951]) is an authoritative classic. See Owen Flanagan, "The Bodhisattva's Brain: Neuroscience and Happiness," in D. K. Nauriyal, M. Drummond and Y. B. Lal (eds), *Buddhist Thought and Applied Psychological Research* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 149–74, for Buddhist ethics and its possible connection with happiness; and forthcoming "Neuro-Eudaimonics or Buddhists Lead Neuroscientists to the Seat of Happiness," in John Bickle (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Neuroscience* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), for Buddhism and the neurophenomenology of happiness. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) is an excellent introduction for philosophers. For Buddhism as a kind of virtue ethics, see Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave, 2001 [1992]). Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003) offers analytic philosophy of persons and Buddhist reductionism – deep and difficult.