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Duty and Dharma: An East-West Path to Self-Realization

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Abstract

Immanuel Kant's concept of duty and the Buddhist view of dharma are essential towards living a morally meaningful life. This article traces the relevance of philosophy from the Kantian perspective of good will and duty as well as the Buddhist notion of dharma as a path to self-realization. The first part of this article explains Kantian ethics and Buddhism in general. This is followed by a comparison of the East and West notions of duty (Kant) and dharma (Buddhism) hence: (a) Kant's good will and the Buddhist condition to always proceed from loving kindness; (b) the universal aspect of duty and the command to do good to all; (c) the idea that the rational agent as autonomous, by virtue of his rationality must do what is good and the Buddha nature as consistently advocating that which is good, and (d) the notion to think for one's self and owning up to one's karma as accountability and responsibility. Methodologically, an East-West comparative approach will be used to show how Buddhism's concept of dharma or the moral teachings of the Buddha and Immanuel Kant's duty lead to one's self-actualization. These are discussed within the context of Abulad's scholarship that was extensively dedicated to Kant and in one way or another relatable to the Buddhist notion of dharma.

Keywords: *Good Will, Duty, Dharma, Prajna, Karuna*

Anybody doing philosophy in the Philippines would know that Romualdo Abulad was monumental in the study of Immanuel Kant.¹ His numerous publications on the matter and his extensive lectures, not to mention epic conversations over coffee on Kant's philosophy both encourage and inspire a life of good will dedicated to duty. Bolaños writes, "Kant is, of course, the starting point of Abulad's story, much like the pivot that holds the pendulum."² So, this paper revisits Kant's good will and duty as pre-requisite towards living a full and meaningful life and how these seminal points are embodied in the person of the late Romualdo Abulad.

Along the discussion of Kantian ethics, this paper also pursues Buddhist ethics and thus draws a parallelism between Kant's notion of duty and the Buddha's dharma.³ In the process this paper looks into the similarities and differences between the two traditions, specifically on the following: (1) the concept of good will in Kant and the teaching of the Buddha to proceed with loving kindness, (2) the universalizable aspect of duty as parallel to the Buddhist command to simply do what is good to all, and (3) the notion of the rational agent who is autonomous and therefore accountable for one's decisions and thus owns up to one's karma. From here, we are able to glean a certain kind of being that thinks beyond traditional views of good and bad or right and wrong. Here proceeds an individual who is knowledgeable but is able to detach and disentangle oneself from that knowledge and, perhaps, even shake its foundations. Thus, a comparative approach in philosophy is set to show the emergence of a postmodern ideal, an individual who is beyond the traditional concept of good and evil.

¹ Abulad in his seventy-two years of existence and in his hope to bring about what is good and fitting for a rational agent, relentlessly devoted his life as a good teacher. He exemplified what is meant by a self-actualized individual.

² Paolo Bolaños, "Introduction to the Special Tribute Section: Abulad, Philosophy, and Intellectual Generosity," in *Kritike* 13 (2019): 7.

³ The term *dharma* is common in Indian philosophy. But for the purposes of this paper, the term *dharma* is reserved for the ethical teachings of the Buddha.

The Good Will

Kant defines the good will as the only thing that is good without qualification or restriction, good in all circumstances, an absolute or an unconditioned good.⁴ It does not say that the good will is the only thing that is good, but rather claims, instead, it is the only thing that is good in itself. There are many things that are seemingly good such as power, influence, or money but all these are not good in themselves and are, in fact, easily corrupted especially if paired with a bad will. Abulad, in “Postmodern Critique and the Ethics of Postmodernism,” refers to the good will as, “also the general will of Rousseau, that primeval and unsoiled natural state of the human, unaffected by neither the glosses of civilization nor the tentacles of its institutions.”⁵ So, the good will is not influenced by positions, titles, and designations, and it remains impersonal as it upholds what is good, with the intention of carrying out only the good. This good is not the kind that is good only for the individual, or a specific few. This good is for the common good—neither does it discriminate nor isolate; instead, it accommodates. Further, the good will being good in itself, remains good. Even if the good will does not achieve its end, it remains pure and unblemished. In the words of Kant: “[a] good will continues to have its own unique goodness even where, by some misfortune, it is unable to produce the results at which it aims.”⁶

Kant’s concept of the good will allows us to re-examine what it means to be human. The thrust of Kantian ethics, the threefold readings of the categorical imperative, speaks of such freedom and accountability where the maxim is

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (New York: Harper, 2009), 17.

⁵ Romualdo Abulad, “Postmodern Critique and the Ethics of Postmodernism,” *Karunungan* 19 (2002): 78.

⁶ Kant, *Groundwork*, 17.

always universalizable, to always treat people as an end and never only as a means, and to recognize the autonomy of the individual.

The universalizability of the maxim pre-supposes the good will that is without self-centeredness or exclusivity and mainly concerned with the common good. Although, at first it is a very subjective principle, the maxim must be universalizable. The reasons why we do the things we do must not remain self-centered and elitist, but must at all times be universal. To always treat people as an end and never only as a means translates to not using people only for our own kingdom of ends. As rational agents, we must never consider using the other to further our own benefits. We must rise above our own personal agenda and apply the good will. This is in consonance with autonomy as it puts a high premium on man's reason and rationality. The law of autonomy capitalizes on man being a rational agent, and thus, he possesses freedom, rationality, and responsibility.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes, "The good of man is an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue."⁷ Here, it points to what is a self-actualized individual. To realize one's potentiality is to elevate the self from the level of animality to the level of rationality. Aristotle invites us to be the better person by recognizing what is good and habitually doing what is good. And though he carefully distinguished the different kinds of goods, from the fleeting material and sense pleasures to ultimate happiness, it is the good as an end in itself that ought to be pursued. "Aristotle argues that *eudaimonia* is the fulfilling of our function with *arete* (excellence or human virtue). Because, according to Aristotle, reason is distinctively human, the human function is the exercise of reason with excellence."⁸

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Oswald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1962), 17.

⁸ William Edelglass, "Buddhist Ethics and Western Moral Philosophy," in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. Simon Emmanuel (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 478.

Abulad lived by example and applied what Aristotle calls self-actualization when he (Abulad) dedicated himself to a life of contemplation in the pursuit of truth and wisdom. Like many others who with full conviction stood-by what they believed in, he followed Kant's good will and took it upon himself as his duty even if it became unpopular and seemingly unfavorable to some. After all, doing one's duty is not so much about enjoyment; it becomes even more compelling if it runs counter to our inclinations and motives. "A human action is morally good, not because it is done from immediate inclination—still less because it is done from self-interest—but because it is done for the sake of duty."⁹ Thus, it is the motive of duty and not the motive of inclination that gives an action its moral worth.

We should be able to step back and assess the relevance and importance of philosophy today. Is reflective thinking still possible? Is there still room for philosophy in our current times? Emerita Quito, in her essay "Lectures in Comparative Philosophy," claims that "people prefer the lights and sounds of the senses to the mute and colorless abstractions of the mind."¹⁰ What meets us is the glaring demise of the Humanities where philosophy and her muse, reflective thinking, is no longer important and is taken for-granted. It seems like any attachment to worldly and bodily cravings keeps us away from deep thought and philosophy. We need to temporarily arrest our senses if we were to explore and engage ourselves into reflective thinking. Plato claims in the *Phaedo*: The body is the source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and is liable also to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after true being; it fills us full of loves; and lusts; and fears, and

⁹ Kant, *Groundwork*, 18.

¹⁰ Emerita Quito, *A Life of Philosophy: Festschrift in Honor of Emerita S. Quito* (Manila: De La Salle University, 1990), 497.

fancies of all kinds, and endless foolery, and in fact, as men say, takes away from us the power of thinking at all.”¹¹

But all these make philosophy unpopular because what seems trending nowadays are those that would require convenience and ease, or anything that spells a quick and ready fix which unfortunately are not the tasks of philosophy. To indulge in philosophy is to value hard work. And the hard work that it entails does not necessarily mean burning the midnight oil trying to break one’s back in order to make ends meet, nor does it mean to be seen in the spotlight and being the center of attention. To enter into philosophy is to stay well within one’s own self and cultivate the stillness of passions brought about by the senses and boldly venture into abstract reasoning, not so much to readily produce things and gadgets for pragmatic means but for a higher and a loftier end. As Quito explains, “every great undertaking in the world, be it in science or literature or practical politics, began with the germ of an idea,” ... “behind every major and minor revolution, there was a potent idea to start the machinery of change.”¹² So, to indulge into philosophy might seem a painstakingly arduous task of reflective thinking but it clears the ground and prepares the individual to higher and sublime realizations. “True contemplation is, after all, an activity, from the Greek *theorein*, ‘to speculate’, and from this theorization proceed many thought-trains that lead to new discoveries.”¹³

Quito claims that the duty to think is endless.¹⁴ She says that “thinking, in fact is an unceasing motion; it is the *theoretike energia* identical to the activity of the immortal gods, so that when man thinks, he does his utmost in accordance to what is highest in him.”¹⁵ It befits our nature not to stay and be overwhelmed

¹¹ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. Jowett (New York: Walter J. Black, 1942), 95.

¹² Quito, 498.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Quito, *A Life of Philosophy*, 499.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

simply by what our sense dictates but, rather, to become a noble man, one who projects himself capable of what it means to be a rational agent.

In *What is Called Thinking*, Heidegger claims that, “what is most thought-provoking is that we are still not thinking.”¹⁶ Here, Heidegger seems to hint that all our attempts of trying to make sense of the world, our grappling with the threads of reason and rationalization seem to be to no avail. Abulad, in his featured essay, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines Towards a More Responsive Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century,” writes: “thinking in this way is no longer thinking, as usual from reason, it is thinking (for lack of an available term, Heidegger coins the word) *vom Ereignis*.”¹⁷ This kind of thinking no longer comes from the traditional Western perspective which is too reliant on logico-epistemic truths. This kind of thinking is the thrust of the oriental approach, spontaneous, intuitive, and beyond reason. It is in this light that we employ Buddhism and its teachings to try to assess what it means to live a morally meaningful life.

Just to put things in perspective, we have so far talked about Kant’s good will and duty and how these serve as guideposts towards self-realization. To be a self-realized individual is to maximize one’s nature as a rational animal. At this junction, we are ready to peel ourselves from this traditional western perspective of a rational animal. “The truly good man is one whose every action can no longer be judged in terms of our usual standards of morality.”¹⁸ We are ready to crossover into the other shore and we are more than willing to shed off all our systems and constructs in view of this different approach, this other consciousness. Let us look at Buddhism in general and some of its essential

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 4.

¹⁷ Romualdo Abulad, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines Towards a More Responsive Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century,” in *Suri*, Vol 5 No. 1 (2016): 1-20. Available from http://suri.pap73.org/issue6/Abulad_SURI_2016.pdf; 16 September 2020.

¹⁸ Romualdo Abulad, “Facing the Moral Challenge of the Post-Modern Times,” *Karunungan* 16 (1999): 2.

features that are different from the West. Then, we shall focus on the *dharma* or the Buddhist ethical teachings that will ultimately point to a morally meaningful life.

Some Preliminaries on Buddhism

“There is in Buddhism, something that transcends the definition of a philosophy or a religion in the traditional western sense.”¹⁹ On the one hand, this quality in Buddhism can attract people both from the East and the West who may be searching for a sense of direction and meaning in their lives. Yet it may also bring, in some sense, a confusion especially to the Western mind that may be discursive and logical. In his book, *Buddhism and Science a Guide for the Perplexed*, Donald Lopez mentions Albert Einstein referring to him as “the Buddha of the modern age” and on the same page quotes that “if there were to be any religion that would cope with scientific needs, it would have to be Buddhism.”²⁰ Whether or not Einstein uttered these words is contestable. There is no compulsion for people to actually believe nor for other religions to feel threatened by this claim. But this widely quoted passage just points to the matter that Buddhism has room in contemporary discourse, and even in the sphere of science.

In *Buddhism & Bioethics*, though, Damien Keown, says “Buddhism is a third world phenomenon and several hundred years out of date.”²¹ It may have come from a third world country but it should not be classified as inferior. Its

¹⁹ Alfredo Co, *Under the Bo Tree on the Lotus Flower Philosophy of the Compassionate Buddha* (Manila: UST Publishers, 2003), 43.

²⁰ Donald Lopez, *Buddhism and Science A Guide for the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1. Although the author here mentions in the introduction what Einstein was supposed to have said, in the succeeding page, he claims that Einstein never did say such things and that there was something about the statement that was just too good to be true (Lopez, *Buddhism and Science*, 2).

²¹ Damien Keown, *Buddhism and Bioethics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 7.

teachings transcend space and time as it manages to move and inspire people from all walks of life from then until now. In fact, “the Buddhism ideal of compassion, of unity with all beings, and of morality, has contributed to the humanization of Oriental peoples.”²² One of the traits of Buddhism is that it does not engage so much in the debates pertaining to current questions for the reason that its way of thinking, its methodology and views are quite different from that of the western perspective. The term “third world” implies many negative connotations such as an unstable economy, widespread corruption, and possibly a deficit in resources compared to other countries. To say Buddhism is a third world phenomenon pertains to where it all began, India, where Buddhism originated in this realm. History tells us that part of the Indian culture was the Caste System²³ which may be one of the reasons for its stunted development as a nation. And the claim, third world phenomenon may have anchored on this belief. Yet, India is rich when it comes to its age old traditions and philosophies. Let us now examine what the Indian sages have to say. According to Puligandla, “the aim of philosophy is not just the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity or the pursuit of theoretical truths; the more important aim is that philosophy should make a difference to the style and quality of life.”²⁴ So, India may seem to be just an underdeveloped country, but it has an old soul that navigated ideas and have cut across time ever since the Vedic²⁵ period. The Buddha himself, during his time managed to realize this noble pursuit of making a difference in the style and quality of life by not just being too absorbed by the

²² To Thi Anh, *Eastern & Western Cultural Values: Conflict or Harmony?* (Manila: East Asian Pastoral Institute, 1975), 39.

²³ Castes refer to a system of classification according to birth (*jati*) rather than qualification. The castes are distinguished from each other not by the qualifications of the individual, but by hereditary, dietary regulations, rules of marriage, occupation, and rank. John M. Koller & Patricia Joyce Koller, *Asian Philosophies* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998), 46).

²⁴ Ramakrishna Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2008), 5.

²⁵ The *Vedas* are the oldest extant literary monument of the Aryan mind. The origin of Indian philosophy may be easily traced in the *Vedas*. Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 15.

predominant teachings of the Vedas but most importantly used these teachings to functionally improve life. “He criticized the priests for their overweening pride and false pretensions to revealed knowledge; their elaborate rituals he ridiculed as useless for man’s improvement; he undercut the socio-religious caste structure by redefining a Brahman or high caste person in terms of character rather than birth and opening the order of monks and nuns to all men and women of any caste.”²⁶ Thus, right from the start, Buddha himself advocated for a paradigm shift, he was critical of his culture and traditions and this ultimately led to the rejection of the Vedic beliefs and practices of his time, and managed to remain alive and flourishing even over 2,500 years after its inception at a deer park in Benares.

Prajna

Edward Conze describes the experience of the *Sangha* or the congregation of monks in their Buddhist devotion:

They can then strive the more ardently to acquire both a growing understanding and knowledge of Dharma and greater ease and success in practicing it; thus they will become what they ought to be, in order finally to reach the Further Shore beyond the Rivers of Life and Death where they will stand on dry land, on the Isle of Nirvana, safe and secure in the plentitude of wisdom.²⁷

This might give a magical touch on the meaning of Buddhism and what the Buddha stands for but what I intend to show is that sublime disposition that Buddhism offers. The Buddha was not a God nor someone Supernatural, and the

²⁶ Winston King, *In the Hope of the Nibbana: An Essay on Theravada Buddhist Ethics* (Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1964), 2.

²⁷ Edward Conze (ed.). *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 10.

wisdom he offers is found in the ordinary and in the everyday. “David Loy claims that “the philosophizing intellect must be shattered in order to experience the simplicity of *prajna*.”²⁸ *Prajna* or wisdom in the Buddha was attained in a humanistic fashion. These are all parts of the humanity of the Buddha, he used his reason to apply the middle path, what Aristotle would call as moderation. The practice of excess is one extreme and the practice deficiency is also another extreme. “Siddhartha pursued his ascetic practices far more strictly than most, but realized liberation could not be achieved by torturing the body.”²⁹ This is the kind of *prajna* wisdom that was awakened in Siddhartha. There is no need for any rituals or incantations, but simply right disposition and reason that will dictate that the reliance of one extreme over another is simply not the way to achieve liberation.

Dharma³⁰

The term *dharma* in Indian philosophy has many definitions. Generally, it stands for “righteousness; merit; religious duty; religion; law; a goal of life; medium of motion ... literally means ‘what holds together’; thus, it is the basis of all order, whether social or moral. An ethical or moral value, it is the instrumental value to liberation.”³¹ But in Buddhism, the term *Dharma* directly pertains to the teachings of the Buddha. “According to Buddhism, the chief definition of this term includes cosmic order, the natural law, the teachings of the Buddha, norms of conduct, things or facts, ideas and factors of existence.”³² All these terms are brought together in the Pali canon when it claims, “in the

²⁸ David Loy. *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New York: Humanity Books, 1988), 167.

²⁹ Hsing Yun. *Biography of the Sakyamuni Buddha*, trans. Alex Wong (Los Angeles: Buddha’s Light Publishing 2013), 110.

³⁰ In Pali it is called Dhamma and in Sanskrit Dharma.

³¹ John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 112.

³² *Ibid.*, 113.

Theravada tradition the morality of the Five Precepts³³ is not mere human convention or relativistic standard but is ‘universally regarded as an integral part of that eternal and immutable order of the universe, simultaneously physical and mental ... termed Dharma.’³⁴ So, the teaching of the Buddha points to a moral code that is not only applicable to a specific few, or to a selected group, but it is something universal as closely woven with how things are in nature.

Kantian Duty and Dharma: Comparisons

Perhaps in this regard we recall Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative that talks about the universalizability of the maxim. The reasons why we do the things that we do, must not only be for the good of oneself but must come from a good will that is supposed to usher the common good.

A central theme in Kant’s philosophy is the good will which is not far from what the Buddha teaches on loving kindness and compassion or *karuna*. “Both the Buddha and Kant put forth teachings meant to be universal in character, addressing the roots of human nature and the problems faced by humanity.”³⁵ To come from the good will is to hope for humanity to have compassion and loving kindness. The central values of Buddhism according to Harvey, “are those known as the ‘divine abidings’: loving kindness, compassion, emphatic joy, and equanimity.”³⁶ Although there may be a convergence, it is also important to note that there is also a divergence. On the one hand, this *dharma* being universally regarded as integral in nature, resonates with Kant’s universalizability of the maxim that dictates the good will and thus is applied to

³³ The Five Precepts are the following: abstain from killing, abstain from stealing, abstain from immoral sexual behavior, abstain from falsehood, and abstain from intoxicating things. Co, *Under the Bo Tree*, 48.

³⁴ King, *In the Hope of Nibbana*, 128.

³⁵ Justin Whitaker, *Ethics as a Path: Kantian Dimensions of Early Buddhist Ethics*. Ph.D. Thesis (University of London, 2017), 5.

³⁶ Harvey, *An Introduction*, 243.

all of humanity. Yet, on the other hand, it speaks of a nuance because Kant's universalizability may include everyone else, but the *dharma* goes beyond that and that it does not just cover human beings but all sentient beings. From this perspective, the Buddhist teaching is more inclusive and constantly directs all goodness not just to humanity but to all sentient beings.

Further, when we consider how Kant views a rational agent as autonomous, that is, by virtue of our reason, then we ought to decide with accountability and responsibility.³⁷ We may also view this in the sense of what the Buddha nature implies in the Mahayana tradition. The more progressive³⁸ form of Buddhism, the Mahayana tradition as compared to the Theravada, proposes the Buddha nature that is found in each individual. This Buddha nature takes after the compassion and the wisdom of the Buddha, and that it dictates the common good. Although the Western tradition of Kant capitalizes on the rational capacity of human beings that is supposed to dictate what is good, Buddhism being an Eastern tradition will not be quick to rely on this rational ability but rather goes beyond the category of reason and calls it the Buddha nature. Man's intellect will dictate that actions must not come from personal interests, motives or inclination but for the sake of duty. The doctrine of Kant reminds us that "man is morally good, not so far as he acts from passion or self-interest, but so far as he acts on an impersonal principle valid for others as well as for himself."³⁹ According to Lynken Ghose, "the doctrine of Buddha nature is intimately connected to the doctrine of original mind: in fact, perhaps the

³⁷ Kant claims that, "the law, which we are bound to obey must be the product of our own will (so far as we are rational agents)—that is to say, it rests on the Idea of the will of every rational being as a will which makes universal law." Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 34.

³⁸ According to D.T. Suzuki, the difference is not so much radical or qualitative, it is due, on the one hand, to a general unfolding of the religious consciousness and a constant broadening of the intellectual horizon, and, on the other hand, to the conservative efforts to literally preserve the monastic rules and traditions. D.T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 5.

³⁹ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 31.

doctrine of original mind is best seen as the concrete description of the Buddha nature.”⁴⁰ Ghose continues that, “the doctrine of original mind states that each of us has a deeper portion of the mind beneath the part of the mind that we are most familiar with: namely surface disturbances, such as fleeting emotions, random thoughts, and so forth.”⁴¹ Thus the recognition that each individual has these distractions at the surface of one’s being. Just as the person may get distracted by rash desires and impulses but these are all on the surface and if one tends to go deeper into one’s being, there lies what Buddhism calls as the original mind or the Buddha nature. This Buddha nature is what dictates authentic goodness and is not in any way influenced by the rash disturbances of what is fleeting. This Buddha nature in the Mahayana tradition is innate in man just as we are classified as rational agents and therefore have this disposition to do what is good. This rationality dictates what man ought to do just as the Buddha nature compels man to do what is good as it comes from the Buddhist ideal of goodness that ought to be directed to all. “If we are able to get in touch with this deeper, more fundamental part of the mind in a consistent way, then we can find ultimate peace.”⁴²

Finally, to consider a rational agent as responsible in the Kantian lenses means that the individual must have already gone through the thinking process of filtering one’s thoughts and decisions. This means that our rationality will dictate us to do what is good and fitting of our nature as rational agents. This further implies that owning up to all our decisions and choices make us accountable to everything. This accountability may be seen in the light of the Buddhist concept of *karma*. *Karma* plays an important role in Buddhist ethics. It is the reason behind why things are what they are in the present due to a string of causal events in the past. There is no one single cause for a particular effect,

⁴⁰ Lynken Ghose, “Karma and the Possibility of Purification: An Ethical and Psychological Analysis of the Doctrine of Karma in Buddhism,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 35 (2007): 261.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

rather, a series of causes and conditions that allow for our existence today. Making one's decisions, that choice that we make daily as rational agents, that premium we put on our ability to think and make judgments and most importantly taking responsibility and being accountable all of these may be likened to owning one's karma. Ordinarily, in Sanskrit, karma is understood simply as action. But in Buddhism, "karma refers to the moral law of cause and effect."⁴³ Thus, when we look at an act through karma, we not only consider it as purely an action but also that has attached effects. When we as rational agents commit to something, be it a decision, or an action done, it has a corresponding reaction or effect. That is why the inclination to do what is good is essential because it is only in doing what is good can we reap good karma.

So far, we have shown that Kant's moral philosophy has some parallelisms to the Buddhist concept of *dharma*. Both try to address the common good: for Kant, through the application of the good will that is not selfish, self-centered, or self-absorbed but always accommodates the other, while for Buddhism through *metta* or loving kindness that is dictated by the teachings of the Buddha and that must be applied to all sentient beings. Man as a rational agent is equipped with the intellect that will dictate his actions that should lean towards what is good. The Buddha nature is also found in man and it identifies the goodness of man. Being a rational agent and in possession of the Buddha nature leads towards emptiness—which is the non-attachment to worldly things and the ability to let go of any unruly cravings, selfish motives, preferences and desires. Emptiness makes one recognize the interdependence of things. This interdependence does not claim or own instead is open to the endless connections and layers of causes and conditions that spell our individual existence today. Emptiness is the non-ego or the non-attachment to the self because the self as we know it is nothing more than a combination of a stream of consciousness. So, to apply the Buddha nature is to let go of the self. To let go of the self is the reason that is always accountable and thus not selfish.

⁴³ Co, *Under the Bo Tree*, 54.

Further, the rational capacity of man allows man to be accountable for his choices, decisions, and actions thus owing up his *karma*.

Realizations and Awakenings

This paper attempts to revisit Kantian ethics and show some similarities with the teachings of the Buddha. Both philosophies from the West and the East are still relevant and current to the demands of our time. Kant's threefold formulation of the categorical imperative still rings true today. The demand for maxims to be universal, to always treat people as an end and never as a means and to recognize the autonomy of the rational agent are just causes that are still relevant today. The Buddha's teachings, meanwhile, are timeless because dating back to the time of Siddhartha until today, we are still lobbying for the same vision which is a world of compassion, reverence for life, and non-attachment to things and people around us. These teachings are not affected by the passage of time thus timeless and tenseless. This paper also recognizes the roots of Buddhism as an oriental phenomenon distinct from the occidental milieu. As such, it has its own brand, its oriental nature—spontaneous and intuitive rather than discursive and logical. If the yardstick of the West is reason, then the East goes beyond reason. Not that it is discontented and that there is a mistrust with reason and logic, but the Eastern consciousness goes beyond reason, beyond debates, and beyond the rigid legalist prescriptions.

Buddhism may not be a phenomenon of the first world, but its trajectory has surpassed beyond borders as it navigates its way over time and remains relevant amassing followers from the devout to the agnostic and from the portals of ancient India to the gateways of today's global village. Thus, self-realization comes from the moral standpoints of Kant's duty and Buddhism's concept of *dharma*. It may still push for the universal use of reason but this is only in so far as this very same reason is paired alongside with compassion.

Prajna (wisdom) and *Karuna* (compassion) are the two strands of morality that ought to dictate how we make sense of the world today. Maybe this is what real loving kindness is all about and this attitude is what ultimately brings forth self-realization. Perhaps this is what Abulad means when he says:

Love is not anything which knows bounds. It is a standard which transgresses all standards. It continues the old law by breaking it. Love is always good and thus is beyond all dichotomy of good and evil.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ Abulad, "Facing the Moral Challenge," 3.

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