

A BUDDHIST CRITIQUE OF LIBERALISM'S APPEAL TO GLOBAL JUSTICE

Leon Miller ♦

1. Introduction

The prominent business ethics scholar Manuel Velasquez describes business ethics as “The application of an understanding of what is good and right to transactions and pursuits that we call business. It begins with providing a framework of basic principles for understanding what is meant by the terms good and right.”¹ The global financial crisis raises concerns about the principles guiding social systems in their attempt to produce and distribute the materials needed so that the members of the society enjoy an enriched quality of life. From the Buddhist perspective individual ingenuity is intended to increase personal and social benefits. For this reason the increase of prosperity is not only viewed as the concern of the private business individual, but also a concern shared by the entire social system. Thus there is necessarily a dimension to the study of business ethics that relates to concerns about social justice – as there must be guidelines to insure that business benefits (does not hurt) public interests.

Many scholars of business ethics are now convinced that the discipline must include a study of the principles guiding social systems in their attempt to produce and fairly distribute the materials needed to enhance the quality of life of its members. Therefore, the justice aspect to business ethics necessarily involves asserting principles that assure that the institutions upon which society relies do not hurt public interests. Our notion of social justice is based on the belief that the common good can be achieved by means of a “Contractual” arrangement between individuals and social institutions who agree not to hurt public interests. Ethics, from the perspective of social responsibility, is concerned with increasing both personal profits and distributive benefits for the least advantaged of the society.

♦**Leon Miller** teaches Business Ethics and World Religions at International University Audentes in Tallinn, Estonia where he is a PhD candidate. He is published in Religion, Ethics and International Relations plus has directed several film projects on Improving Interfaith Relations.

¹Manuel G. Velasquez, *Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases*, New Jersey: The Pearson Education International Division of Prentice Hall Publishing, 2006, 1.

Economic activity is one of the cornerstones of society, thus economics as one of the key institutions of society plays an important role in increasing happiness and the quality of life. For this reason Buddhism has always recognized that prosperity is a significant component of the good life, because discomfort takes away from one's ability to focus on enlightenment. Not that wealth is necessary for true happiness but comforts do contribute to eliminating certain distractions from happiness that can occur if one's focus is stuck on what one lacks. Thus classical ethics and Buddhist ethics recognized that prosperity is important for contributing to an overall sense of well-being. Ethics then provides insight into how to experience prosperity in ways that do not result in misfortune.² Faced with the challenges of globalization many Buddhist ethicists are now emphasizing that Buddhist principles explicate how to increase prosperity because practitioners gain insight into what contributes to the overall elevation of humanity (individual and societal). Thus Buddhism provides insight into enhancing the prosperity of the individual in ways that reflect well on the person's character.

The application of the basic principles of the Buddhist approach to economic transactions calls for a particular perspective on moral reasoning. In the classical study of ethics this mental aspect of what produces beneficial outcomes and helps to avoid harmful results is referred to as prudence.³ Prudence is a particular way the mind can be disciplined to produce very desirable results. Far Eastern Buddhists refer to prudence as *yonisomanasikara*. *Yonisomanasikara* is a type of ingenuity that induces the realization of how a person can experience his or her highest good while at the same time increasing benefits to others.

Both Buddha and Aristotle presume that the primary value worth pursuing in life is happiness. They both recognized that wealth is an important factor in being able to enjoy "the good life." For Buddhism the role of material security in relationship to true happiness is exemplified by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Material needs do indeed provide the base, for without this people are disposed to being mentally distracted from concentration on their higher level needs. But once material needs are satisfied there is a realization that they are not the end within themselves; there are still higher level values worth pursuing.

²Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackman, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994, VI ix.

³Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI ii.

The current financial crisis raises concerns about business ethics because the consequences have clearly created damages to public interests. Indeed ethics is important here because the principles prescribing the contractual agreement must be re-evaluated when institutions harm public interests. The current financial crisis makes evident an ethical problem because the basic principle of “compassion for all sentient beings” has clearly been violated resulting in damages on a global scale. We cannot conceive of a well-ordered society where some of the most powerful and wealthy protect their private interests while hurting public interests. A nation with business practices based on an ethics allowing global public interests to be hurt is in need of serious “soul searching” and “collective self reflection.”

We must remember that the scope of the problem reflects not only the way in which business is conducted but raises questions concerning some of the fundamental principles of Western Liberalism. Thus the scope of the problem involves a collective mindset. Insight into the full scope of the problem requires an extensive exploration of the underlying collective perspective on existence that is reflected in certain value and ethical choices. An investigation of the crisis must include a comprehensive analysis of the way in which business practices reflect the collective Western mindset. The discrepancy with Liberalism’s business ethics puts critics in a position to attack claims of the apparent moral superiority of capitalism. The dialogue with critics necessarily involves a re-examination of the Enlightenment principles that are the basis of some of the most cherished notions of Western Civilization.

The far reaching consequences of the crisis will demand a profound response. One that has the insight to accurately identify the value crisis while offering remedies that can guide society back onto a flourishing path. Given the extent of the problem it is necessary to carefully discern how we can move ahead into a better future in a way that allows society to uphold its most treasured principles while altering those patterns that have caused failure at realizing society’s most cherished values. To adequately address this problem demands more than a comprehensive scrutiny of the financial decisions that led to the crisis. I propose that Buddhist ethics and psychology offer a perspective on the issues that is profound enough to both address the problem and provide a remedy.

The overall format for the article uses a typical Buddhist approach for addressing the mindset that causes misfortune, eliminating the

troublesome mindset and ultimately moving toward the experience of “Enlightenment.” The first section of the article investigates the ethical misconceptions that precipitated the current financial crisis. An overview of the collective value perspective and the subsequent business practices creating misfortune will be explored. The second section of the article concludes the investigation of the troublesome mindset and introduces ethical insights into how to increase prosperity and well-being. The third section of the article explains how to move past the ethical misconceptions of the recent past and move ahead toward a more progressive interpretation of the Enlightenment project.

2. The Mindset that Creates Misfortune

John Fullerton, the former Managing Director of JP Morgan, stated that “Our global economic system is broken! With the global credit crisis, and the ensuing financial turmoil *the stability and even viability of our freewheeling, complex and interconnected global financial system has come into question.* Even “experts” are scrambling for answers as they reinvent the purpose and practices of major institutions including even the Federal Reserve Bank itself.”⁴ I add that the global financial crisis is evidence of a problematic business ethics mindset for several reasons.

First, the overall American economy provides an unusually high level of prosperity for increased numbers of individuals. This has prompted a standard of living that makes America powerful and materialistically attractive in the eyes of much of the world. But the emphasis on satisfying superficial materialistic desires also gives the appearance that less essential values dominate the society. The impression that America markets superficial values overshadows recognition of America’s deeper values (a deep respect for religious values and the principles admonished by classical ethics plus a devotion to Enlightenment ethical principles). We have in fact increasingly betrayed some of our most fundamental principles resulting in a painful lack of collective authenticity and integrity.

Secondly there has been adherence to an ontology that results in a dualistic fragmentation. Western dualism, following Descartes, cuts the self off from significant intersubjective ties. Scholars have become increasingly aware that dualism is creating problematic consequences with

⁴John Fullerton, “The Relevance of E. F. Schumacher in the Twenty First Century,” www.smallisbeautiful.org, 1.

our environment, social relations and economic transactions. All of these are also wearing away the “goodwill” America has enjoyed in the eyes of the world. Such actions are not only betraying our fundamental values but presenting negative impressions of our national character. To remedy this problem requires a constructive analysis of the mindset that produces misfortune. We must realize that the current economic tendency of a one-dimensional perspective on life will tend to result in misfortune. This involves putting what has happened into a perspective that would allow reflection on the inadequacies of the current value mindset.

Modernity did empower, thus elevate, the status of the individual with its confidence in rationality as the means of maximizing personal and social utility. Business expands this into an ethical conviction that “rational choice” is the means of maximizing commercial utility. However measuring the success of a life merely in terms of its proposed increase in utility can have detrimental consequences for individuals, society and the international community. Problems occur when it encourages a particular mindset justifying actions that produce individual pleasure, satisfaction, happiness and/or profit without consideration of the “Socially Contracted” agreement to create the common good. The problematic mindset assumes that actions are justified if they allow the individual to increase personal benefits and escape undesirable outcomes.

Using utilitarian ethics to justify decisions regardless of their consequences to others can have drawbacks that are dangerous for the public. An example is the Ford Motor Company’s decision to produce the Ford Pinto in spite of the fact that it had a design fault that could possibly result in severe injury or even fatality. Indeed some owners did experience severe injuries and some suffered fatalities due to the design fault. It appears that the mindset that led Ford’s decision to produce the car was based on determining utility by means of a “cost analysis.” A cost analysis measures possible gains, subtracts possible losses and on this basis decides whether the action is profitable. I assert that such a threat to the public good betrays the social contract (which some branches of Western social and political philosophy insisted as necessary to generate both concern for the welfare of others and the common good).

Economics, sometimes referred to as the “crown jewel” of the social sciences, plays a major role in the value perspective driving society’s human interactions. When the primary focus of social interactions is concern for “the bottom line” self interest dominates. The most influential

members of such a society become “trend setters.” Others, following their example become convinced that the path to success demands rationally measuring what will quantitatively increase utility. Such economic interests tend to be one dimensional resulting in measuring the quality of life and happiness in terms of what will maximize benefits for the individual. This results in placing an emphasis on lesser, short-term, risky, superficial values while sacrificing more fulfilling and substantial values.

There are many psychologists who would agree that the basic human motivating principle is self preservation. They would add that this gives humanity a natural predisposition toward protecting or asserting self interests. From this perspective, asserting one’s self interest would be to do what comes naturally. Buddha agreed that the basic motivating behaviour for humanity is the ego driven “pleasure principle.” Buddhist psychology and Buddhist ethics state that adherence to the pleasure principle reflects an underdeveloped level of moral reasoning and poor ethical insight. Ethicists assert that such a mental outlook represents lack of prudence, thus does not reflect a character with good moral reasoning and is more likely to result in human suffering.

Pragmatist William James understood this basic Freudian pleasure instinct and agreed that it necessarily leads one to attempt a utilitarian increase in pleasure and enjoyment. The focus of a person acting on the basis of the pleasure principle is limited to increasing one’s personal benefits. This is one way of explaining what Buddha meant by the Four Noble Truths: that a wrongful mindset can cause suffering, that suffering can be caused by greed, that a proper mental outlook can rid us of suffering, and finally, that the practice of “Enlightenment” principles will lead to the achievement of one’s highest good.

Superficial, quick fixes based on speculation can supply some initial benefits, however because these superficial results do not satisfy deeper human needs, they only appeal to some superficial aspect of human desires. From the perspective of human growth psychology quick fixes, meant merely to provide immediate gratification, can in the end actually increase anxiety; even if they offer immediate gratification it soon fades and the person becomes anxious to fill the vacuum with another quick fix. The immediate financial problem results from an ongoing collective ethical problem that reflects the predominance of the pleasure principle over a preference for deeper values that bring long-term, lasting fulfilment.

We have been witnessing decisions not based on sound moral reasoning but on mere speculations.

Without a wholesome mindset a person’s material pursuits can produce wealth but not necessarily happiness and peace of mind. Clinical Psychologist, Dr Alden Cass, the author of *Bullish Thinking*, conducted a research study of the psychological well-being of top Wall Street executives. The results showed that 23% of New York stockbrokers suffered from clinical depression, about three times the national average.⁵ The Dalai Lama observed that “Those living in the most material abundance are in some ways less satisfied in spite of their affluent lifestyles. They are less happy and to some extent experience emotional suffering more than those living in the least developed countries.”⁶

Buddhist principles state that psychological well-being is the primary quality that determines whether or not a person is able to enjoy true and lasting happiness. This begins with an understanding of the ethical perspective that is best for bringing about a person’s most desired results (*samyag-di*) and then it moves toward applying this value perspective to all of one’s actions (*Śīla*). Such a person is psychologically well-adjusted, is well-integrated with the social and natural environments, creates life enhancing interactions, increases prosperity and promotes human flourishing. By adhering to Buddhist psychological and ethical principles the troublesome mindset that creates misfortune is altered and one begins to realize that economic enterprises work best when they create both personal and social benefits. “From an economist’s point of view the marvel of the Buddhist way of life is the utter rationality of the concept – amazingly small means producing extraordinarily satisfactory results.”⁷

3. The Path to Eliminating Suffering

William R. Polk announced on several occasions in recent years that there is a particular value mindset at work in American culture that if not addressed would lead to a social and financial crisis. “The American society as a whole is facing a trauma that is not over yet. But, while all

⁵Julia Kollewe, “Fear is the New Mindset in the Irrational World of Finance,” www.guardian.co.uk, Thursday 23 October 2008, 2.

⁶Dalai Lama, His Holiness (Tenzin Gyatso), *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World*, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999, 5.

⁷E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, New York: Harper Perennial, 1989, 64.

eyes are focused on the immediate financial crisis, there are aspects of it that we need to examine in order both to understand where we are and also to see what we need to consider if we are to be able to work through this crisis toward a more secure future.”⁸ Polk proposes putting what has happened into a perspective that would allow reflection on what must be understood if we are to make the future better for individuals and for the nation as a “body politic.”

Polk argues that the key to effectively managing the immediate crisis lies in investigating the underlying ethical perspective that has increasingly been driving Liberalism’s policy and economic decisions. He claims that such an investigation reveals why America “lost all sense of modesty and caution.”⁹ Polk believes that the awareness of the need for such a critical reflection has been obvious for quite some time but the current crisis makes it inescapable. The current crisis not only calls into question the ethical basis of our financial decisions but also highlights the need for clarification of the ultimate values underlying society. This takes place in the form of a dialectical critique of our basic ethical assumptions.

Liberalism has an intention that each and every person will have the right to enjoy the good life in the way that each person believes will create his or her highest good. Justice theories of liberalism guarantee freedom of conscience (this freedom is promoted in terms of both positive and negative rights but does not allow interference with the positive and negative rights of others). The vision of universalizing human rights is indeed an extension of Western Civilization’s cherished notion that each person possesses the natural right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

It was the claim of modernity that the Western style of democracy and its accompanying free market would deliver peace, freedom, liberty and prosperity. However recent history has made it clear that Liberalism’s business ethics is not in line with Liberalism’s justice claims. The attractiveness of Liberalism is diminished with the realization that the promise of enhanced individual well-being has in the end typically meant an increase in material consumption but does not necessarily increase contentment. It seems that big business believes it can reap the profits from the resources and labour of traditional cultures with no responsibility to deliver on Liberalism’s claims of improved quality of life accompanied

⁸William, R. Polk, “The Cleveland Century Club Lecture,” September 2008, 1.

⁹Polk, “The Cleveland Century Club Lecture,” 3.

with increased peace and freedom. This gives the impression that big business fails to conceive of globalization in terms of more sustainable economic planning, a more equitable distribution of resources and a greater concern for protecting the environment.

The United Nations recognizes how important a partnership with the international business community is to improving international and intercultural relations. The United Nations acknowledges that “Never before have the objectives of the international community and the business world been so aligned. The UN asserts that if the global community is to realize the United Nations hopes of promoting the ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption there must be the full support of the international business community.”¹⁰ The global effort for altruism and international cooperation (all nations cooperating to promote the common global good in terms of peace and equitable human development) is thwarted when business assertively acts to increase its competitive advantage by skirting, and disregarding or flaunting normative principles for improved global justice.

Throughout the world people are challenged with adjusting to the demands of modernity while attempting to maintain their cultural values and traditions. Modernity is believed to create necessary progress (or development) that can result in economic prosperity when trade and finance are liberalized. Modernizing does result in some obvious immediate benefits, most recognizable by the increase in material production, consumption and consumerism. This soon becomes a new-found source for satisfaction based on both materialism and the ability to gratify sense desires. However there soon follows the realization that this is accompanied by disruption of traditional values, environmental disaster and a lack of deeper fulfilment.

Liberalism (typically accompanied by its counter-part free trade) promises to bring material prosperity to the cultures that open their doors to its free market. However many traditional cultures are realizing that consumerism comes with an almost religious appeal, luring people to sacrifice traditional values and traditional cultural worldviews for its sake. Buddhism provides a way to remedy the tension between traditional values and progressive development by offering the “Middle Way” (or balance)

¹⁰“United Nations Global Compact,” The United Nations and Business, <http://www.un.org/partners/business/index.asp>.

that helps the individual and society. The Buddhist economic approach offers a remedy to this problem by emphasizing that “New economic enterprises that are introduced which depend on foreign capital, technology and expertise (such as are in no way inherent in the recipient society) must work in alignment with local traditions in order for them to promote healthy development.”¹¹

An inquiry into Liberalism’s problematic business ethics from the standpoint of Buddhism will provide insight into how to reconcile the difference between the ideal promises that Liberalism makes and the consequences it actually produces when traditional cultures experience the impact of globalization. This includes rectifying the discrepancy between the deeper values of Liberalism (justice, human rights, peace, liberty and prosperity for more of the world’s people) and Liberalism’s current business ethics. Buddhist ethics offers a constructive perspective to engage with the West in an effort to rectify this discrepancy. Buddhism does have a viable approach to socio-economic development that is in line with Liberalism’s intention to protect the individual right to freedom of conscience. At the same time, Buddhism promotes a value perspective that helps to reduce Liberalism’s problem of decreased effectiveness because its business ethics tendency to emphasize self interest.

Buddhist ethics asserts that while consumerism does represent development in material terms it gradually begins to reflect misconceptions about what brings true and lasting happiness. Ultimately, without the development of both moral reasoning and ethical insight consumerism tends to reflect a troublesome mindset that needs to be eliminated in order to reduce human suffering. The Eightfold Path is the Buddhist prescription for correcting the troublesome mindset. The Eightfold path has economic value as it results in *Anavajjasukha* – a certain state of mind that experiences economic life in a way that is wholesome (accompanied by an undisturbed consciousness). By perfecting the principles prescribed in the Eightfold Path a person develops a healthy mind that conceives of good economics as an increase in personal and social benefits.

When the troublesome mindset is replaced with wisdom (*panna*) it is possible to distinguish between what is of true benefit and what is not. This leads to the cultivation of the right motivation for acting (*chanda*), or

¹¹Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful*, 179.

the realization of a more skilful, much better and more fruitful way of conducting one’s life affairs. On the basis of Buddhist psychological and ethical perspectives the troublesome mindset-that creates misfortune-is altered and one begins to realize that economic enterprises work best when they create both personal and social benefits. The difference lies in the fact that “Modern economics tries to maximize human satisfactions by the optimal pattern of consumption, while Buddhism tries to maximize consumption by the optimal pattern of productive effort.”¹²

4. Enlightenment as a Socio-Economic Phenomenon

Satisfaction of the individual desire for happiness plus an increase in the quality of human existence require adherence to principles that can guide “people” to a more enlightened life experience. Each person should be free to move toward this awakening without interference from social authorities. Thus, neither the state nor any other official should interfere with this “natural right.” If we define Enlightenment as the elevation of the human experience then we recognize that the European Enlightenment promulgated a philosophy for achieving it based on modernity, progress and development. This was partially an attempt to restore the perennial insights of classical philosophy and humanism, along with an effort to find the best perspective from which to view ethics.

I claim that a more progressive approach to Enlightenment – as the elevation of the human experience – is necessarily inclusive of Buddhist ethics. This is especially evident because of problems with the current approach of Liberalism to business ethics. We need a reflective and dialectic inquiry into the ethical problems connected with globalization. This could result in Enlightenment in terms of insight into what would create the elevation of a larger number of the world’s people and societies. By synthesizing the viewpoints of Buddhism with the Western visions of Enlightenment we gain a clearer vision of the ethical stance needed to achieve Enlightenment as the elevation of the human experience. Buddhist ethics and psychology share a common humanistic intention with the ethical hopes of the Western Enlightenment. Both envision that Enlightenment as an individual awakening would be recognized as naturally in the individual’s best interest.

The reality of today’s interconnected global economy makes it clear that the social advancement and economic prosperity that were envisioned

¹²Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful*, 61.

in the Enlightenment cannot be thought of as limited to individuals and particular geographic regions. The challenge of globally protecting and promoting the individual's right to a better quality of life and a more enlightened life experience requires "a new level, a deeper level, of thinking based on the principles that accurately describe the territory of effectively being human and interacting effectively."¹³ "Enlightenment as a Socio-Economic Phenomenon" stresses that an understanding of how to experience enlightenment as both an individual pursuit and a manifestation of global justice is revealed as a result of taking into consideration Buddhist ethics and psychology.

Both Buddhism and Liberalism share the conviction that the Enlightenment of the individual will be reflected in how one shapes his or her social interactions and economic enterprises. Western and Buddhist visions of Enlightenment share the belief that each individual should have the complete freedom to act on the basis of conscience. Buddhist ethics and the Western notion of global justice envision individuals empowered by their own inner convictions to direct their lives toward the good life in the "here and now." Neither the state nor any other official should interfere with the individual's right to realize his or her highest good. This right is considered to be inherent in the nature of existence. Each person should be free to move toward this awakening without being the hindrance of society's economic and political pressures.

Buddhism, in many respects, agrees with the Western ethical motif to enhance public well-being and to elevate the global human experience. Buddhism acknowledges that Liberalism has a degree of global appeal in connection with growing appreciation for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Both visions of Enlightenment stress that each individual should have the complete liberty to act on the basis of freedom of conscience to pursue what is believed to bring the greatest amount of happiness. In Buddhism the almost complete elimination of outer authority encourages one to exercise the natural right to freedom of conscience. Freedom of conscience is important for Buddhist Enlightenment because it requires the right effort of an "autonomous free will."

Buddhism admonishes a deep respect and compassion for all other living things. From the Buddhist perspective rights apply to a moral self rather than to the individual promoting rights in an effort to protect self

¹³Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, New York: Simon and Schuster Publishing, 1990, 42.

interests. To understand the full implication of “Rights” in this Buddhist sense demands some degree of compassion or sensitivity to the moral worth of fellow human beings. The Buddhist respect for all other sentient beings inspires the desire to live in harmony with others and within one’s natural environment. The Buddhist sense of the individual’s responsibility to do everything possible to create and maintain harmony corresponds with the Western notion of social responsibility.

Western Liberals endeavour to eliminate the problem of self interest in international transactions by proposing a “Law of Peoples.” “The Law of Peoples” presumes that international interactions are based on contractual agreements that establish the normative basis for the relationship. From this ideal Liberal perspective intercultural transactions are made up of discrete entities called “Peoples” who act as political agents in the development of a “Society of Peoples” and who will agree to principles of peaceful coexistence under the “Law of Peoples.” The decision of how these principles apply between particular cultures would be determined in deliberation by the participants.¹⁴ Liberalism believes that Justice works best when parties contractually agree to constitute the terms of their relationship from the perspective of “A Veil of Ignorance.”

The “Veil of Ignorance” comes close to achieving what Buddhist ethics prescribe with its principles of “compassion” and “no self.” The ideal of the veil of ignorance is believed to improve justice because parties would contractually agree not to plan policy based on what would bring the greatest benefit to oneself or any special interest group. Policy must be based on what will increase distributive benefits for the least advantaged. In this respect liberals believe “Peoples,” constructively engaged in dialectic dialogue, can safeguard human rights on a global scale. “John Rawls’ *Law of Peoples* offers a framework for a Buddhist theory of social justice. That is to say, it helps clarify the relation in Buddhism between the focus on self-nature and personal enlightenment (which is an ontological concern) and the need to think about the daily behaviour of the Buddhist practitioner in society (which is a phenomenal concern).”¹⁵ In other words the enlightened individual influences society in such a way that contributes to enlightenment becoming a social phenomenon.

¹⁴John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, 32-33.

¹⁵Sungtaek Cho, “Selflessness: Toward a Buddhist Vision of Social Justice” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 7, 2000, 4.

Enlightenment principles (both East and West) share the premise that any reasonable person desires the right to decide what is in his or her best interest. Thus the primary postulation of Enlightenment as a Socio-Economic phenomenon is that any reasonable person would agree that it is best to cooperate in an effort to realize this Enlightenment aim. Prudence prompts the realization that personal profit, the public enjoyment of material prosperity and the conservation of common resources are all connected with improved cooperative interactions between the members of the global community. The value for such global cooperation interactions is depicted with the Buddhist principle *Pratītyasamutpāda* (interrelatedness or interdependency).¹⁶

The relevance of *Pratītyasamutpāda* is manifest in the global financial crisis in terms of the factor “Dependent Co-arising.” Dependent Co-arising is the Buddhist explanation for the fact that the characteristics of the global financial system that can appear to represent divergent or contingent conditions actually reflect how essentially humanity is interconnected. Thus, the realization of interdependency encourages a preference for promoting cooperation and harmony. The economic aspect of this is based on the fact that historically cooperation in trade was an important factor for extending units of cooperative alliances.

Trade allowed for the redistribution of resources, the building or strengthening of relations and for improving nutrition. Improved nutrition was important for increasing physical strength and boosting mental capacities. These units of cooperative interactions enjoyed the best chances for survival and flourishing. Liberals envision today’s global market playing a similar role to that played by trade throughout the human experience. Liberals believe that the quality of life for the world’s people would be improved and international cooperation strengthened.

The key to realizing this on a global level lies in a re-examination of Liberalist ethics and a deeper appreciation for Enlightenment as a Socio-Economic Phenomenon. A dialectic re-examination of Modernity’s ethical philosophy would make evident the need for a new basis for global social cohesion because Modernity’s values stressed the predominance of the “Autonomous Individual.”¹⁷ From the Buddhist perspective a true

¹⁶Hinichi Inoue, *Putting Buddhism to Work: A New Approach to Management and Business*, trans. Duncan Williams, Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1997, 1.

¹⁷Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981, 149.

Enlightenment (hoped for by Modernity) would be reflected in a value perspective that “understood how to achieve the happiness – which is the ultimate end in the quest for good – but also avoid harms and dangers which could incur. This is achieved by increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good.”¹⁸ MacIntyre claimed that by demanding duty without enlightened insight into natural human inclinations we moved even deeper into human fragmentation, resulting in our modern ethical crisis. The remedy lies in a re-examination of classical ethics and a deeper appreciation for a dialogue with Buddhist ethics.

Buddhist principles have proven to be reliable path for individual Enlightenment (or has had an emphasis on the individual’s Enlightenment). The best path to Enlightenment attempts to enhance the worth of the individual in a way that develops the person’s capacities to the fullest.”¹⁹ The Buddhist approach to Enlightenment does also inspire the individual to contribute to enriching the quality of life for others. “Buddha says that this begins with correcting false values and gaining true knowledge of life’s meaning.”²⁰ With this perspective Buddhism serves as a source of inspiration and contributes to enriching the quality of life for a large segment of the world’s people (individuals, cultures and nations).

Many Buddhist constituents are struggling with the pressure of trying to maintain a balanced, insightful life while attempting to manage modern economic pressures. Many are beginning to realize that to maintain a lifestyle of contentment one that is fundamentally committed to Right Livelihood there must be corresponding support from society in terms of equal rights, justice for all citizens in the society and rule of law. Without society promoting the accompanying political and economic values a person could have a desire to practice Right Livelihood but end up being disturbed by a split between the demands of the inner consciousness and those of the outer economic reality. Because of this many Buddhists are now defining the principles of Buddhism in ways that are beneficial for individuals while clarifying how individuals contribute to the common good. In this way Buddhist principles are proving to create personal

¹⁸MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 204.

¹⁹ Robert Smith, *Japanese Society: Tradition, Self and the Social Order*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 55.

²⁰Nancy W Ross, *Three Ways of Asian Wisdom*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969, 91.

growth and prosperity in ways compatible with increased over-all well-being and sustainability.

It is in this respect that the former Buddhist tendency to focus on individual Enlightenment is increasingly being expanded into advising constituents on how to adjust to globalization's impact on the individual's attempt at Right Livelihood. Buddhism, as a global phenomenon, is increasingly aware of the need to offer a critical response to the challenge imposed as a result of tension between global justice and global economics. Buddhist notions of social justice have in the past been premised on the claim that social good comes from individuals correcting the troublesome mindset and adhering to the Eightfold Path.

Buddhists are now increasingly recognizing that interdependent causation makes clear the necessity of dialectical deliberation on how to safeguard the rights of the individual in order to better facilitate the individual's right to pursue his or her highest good. In this respect Buddhist insights contribute to promoting flourishing economies by synthesizing the Eastern notion of personal self-transformation and the individual's search for personal happiness with the Western notion of Enlightenment as a globalized discourse on protecting the individual's search for personal happiness.

Thus based on recognizing the interdependence between the social and the individual Buddhists envision an enlightened approach to business ethics that would prompt three things: First is an economic system that creates individual wealth in a way that benefits public interests. Second is the vision of extending the principles connected with the Western notion of Social Contract to help resolve the problem between Liberalism and Communitarian values. This can be actualized based on the notion of cosmopolitanism, discourse politics, deliberative economic planning and contractual international relations. Third is an economic system intent on employing sustainable methods of using natural resources (eco-justice) and environmental planning inclusive of indigenous insights.

5. Conclusion

The global financial crisis has heightened awareness of our "Co-dependency." "We are long past the time when human activities and their effects can be neatly compartmentalized within nations, within sector (energy, agriculture, trade) and within broad areas of concern (environmental, economic, social, etc.). This applies in particular to the

global crisis that has seized public concern.”²¹ The global financial crisis has made evident a problem with Liberalism’s business ethics: there appears to be a dichotomy between the deeper values of Liberalism—justice, human rights, peace, liberty and prosperity for more of the world’s people and the actual consequences of Liberalism when it comes to its current business ethics.

The far reaching consequences of the global financial crisis demand a powerful response that is adequate for addressing Liberalism’s discrepancy. The response must be adequate for addressing the value crisis while offering remedies that can be of benefit for the individual and society. Buddhist psychology and ethics offer a relevant perspective from which we can critically examine the impulses motivating a troublesome mindset and its resultant ethical decisions.

Buddhist ethics are in line with Liberalism’s intention to protect the individual’s right to a more enlightened life experience. Buddhist ethics and Liberalism envision social institutional structures that would promote the individual right to be directed on the basis of a freedom of conscience to realize his or her highest good. In this respect many Buddhists are now advocating that the focus on individual Enlightenment be expanded into advising constituents on how to adjust to globalization’s impact on the individual’s attempt at Right Livelihood.

The Buddhist economic approach creates personal growth and prosperity in ways compatible with increased over-all well-being and sustainability by offering the “Middle Way” (or balance). By adhering to principles that promote “Enlightenment” not only as an individual experience, but also as a social awakening a person develops a healthy mind that conceives of good economics as an increase in personal and social benefits. By perfecting the principles prescribed in the Eightfold Path the troublesome mindset is corrected and a person develops a healthy mind-set. By perfecting the principles prescribed in the Eightfold Path a person creates life enhancing interactions (increases prosperity, promotes human flourishing and is well-integrated with the environment).

²¹Medagoda Sumanatissa, “Buddhism and Global Economic Justice,” *Business Ethics*, 12-9-2003, 1.