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This paper aims to demonstrate that attempts to categorize early Buddhist moral thought as embodying a form of ethical consequentialism are based on a fundamental

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clearly set out. The desire to conform, and to maintain the moral authority of the , may have had the effect of limiting the extent to which monks would engage in more subtle ethical reflections.

A third kind of explanation, and the one I take up here, is philosophical in character. In this case the suggestion is that other aspects of early Buddhist philosophy tended to preclude the development of an ethical theory -- for example certain of its epistemological or metaphysical views. So, for example, with regard to the Therav!da tradition it has been suggested that the theory of nonself (!) undermines the concept of moral agency. Given the belief that the

One of the most helpful ways of understanding the varieties of normative theory is in terms of the place they give to the concept of consequence. We can usefully describe normative ethical theories as either consequentialist or non-consequentialist. A consequentialist theory is one that defines right action in terms of its consequences. Further, the right action is one that produces the best consequences. The goodness of consequences is understood in terms of some basic good or utility, which must simply be assumed to be valuable -- typically pleasure, happiness, or fulfillment of one's preferences. This value is foundational; it is considered an intrinsic good, the ultimate basis or source for moral judgment. Typically consequentialist theories like utilitarianism advise one to try to determine the consequences of the different courses of action open to one, tally up the outcomes, and act in the way that produces or looks like it will produce the greatest net benefit (or amount of the intrinsic good).

A non-consequentialist theory is one that doesn't define right action in terms of consequences, but in terms of some other consideration.

Now if one is asked whether the normative theory implicit in the Buddhist scriptures is a form of consequentialism, one's first impulse might be to think of the doctrine of karma, with its well known rubric of action and consequence (*!*). It is a fact that Buddhists hold that actions produce consequences that correspond to their moral character. Morally good action results in pleasurable, beneficial, happy effects -- including higher rebirths, and ultimately, if combined with meditation and wisdom,

Goodman comments: "This passage states that actions are to be evaluated in terms of their consequences for both self and others, just as in universalist versions of consequentialism." (Goodman 48) I would make two observations here.

The first is that this passage is extracted from a discourse in which the Buddha advises his son Rahula regarding the value of reflecting upon one's actions. Whatever the action, one should only perform it having first repeatedly reflected (!
!) upon it. Nine categories of action are dealt with, namely, actions of the body, speech, and mind, performed in the future, present, and past. Thus the quotation constitutes one ninth of the Buddha's total advice, namely that which concerns bodily action to be performed in the future. As for other future actions -- those of speech and mind -- the advice is identical. Don't perform the action if you know that it is unwholesome and will cause affliction to anyone; feel free to go ahead and act if you know the action is wholesome and will produce pleasant consequences. In all nine categories the Buddha's advice is based on the assumption that the agent possesses the relevant knowledge, rather than mere belief. Each of the hypothetical reflections is premised with the qualification of knowledge on the part of the agent. The verbal root \$! - "to know" is employed rather than a weaker verb such as \$. "to think".⁵

These considerations make it difficult to accept a consequentialist interpretation of this passage. In the context of past and present actions, it makes clear sense to think of the agent as being in possession of knowledge. When one is performing an action one can be directly aware of it as well as of at least some of its immediate consequences, and when one has performed an action one can remember what one has done and what has resulted

If Buddhism is skeptical about the possibility of knowledge of future consequences, and if consequences are the sole criterion by which one might conceivably know whether an action is wholesome or unwholesome, we should be led to conclude that Buddhism must adopt a skeptical position regarding the possibility of knowledge of right and wrong, good and evil. Given this lack of knowledge, moral conduct should be impossible. But it would be an obvious mistake to attribute such a view to the Buddha -- who is well-known for denouncing such skepticism.⁷

Although Goodman does not explicitly address this problem, he does focus on a closely related point. Consequentialist theories are, in general, susceptible to the criticism that the moral value of an action will change over time as new consequences of that action arise. If we accept the view that the actual consequences of an action are the sole criterion in virtue of which the action is good or bad, an action that initially appears to be good would retroactively become bad if negative outcomes emerged from it a later time. Thus the apparently good action of providing a meal to a starving child would later have to be deemed bad if that child grew up to be Hitler.⁸ While such implications may be acceptable to some, they are clearly unacceptable from a Buddhist perspective

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Thus rather than talk of the expected consequences of future actions, in the Buddhist context it makes more sense to think of the object of knowledge as the present wish or desire to do the action (*kat* & *kattuk!mo*). The wish to act can be wholesome or unwholesome, and properly conceived includes the intended consequences. The intended consequences are often the clearest indicators of the unwholesomeness or wholesomeness of the action itself (as in cases where, upon reflection, one realizes that what one actually intends is to harm someone). In fact, the right effort component of Buddhist meditation is based on the assumption that one can reflect upon and recognize the nature of one's own mental states, including and especially one's intentions. These considerations seem to suggest that the apparently consequentialist criterion of future consequences may actually be reducible to the factor of present intentions. We will return to the topic on intention in due course.

In any case, it does seem that additional criteria other than future consequences may be required by Buddhists when it comes to determining the morality of an action. But even if we remain unpersuaded of this, and we accept all of Goodman's arguments concerning the Buddha's advice to Rahula, I believe that there are other, deeper reasons to reject the attribution of a consequentialist ethic to Therav!da Buddhism.

In making his case for a consequentialist understanding of Buddhist ethics Goodman attempts to provide some account of the intrinsic good that provides the underlying basis for moral judgment. As already discussed, every consequentialist system must rely on some basic idea of intrinsic goodness that is assumed to have ultimate value. Goodman argues that the assumed intrinsic good in Buddhism is best captured by an umbrella term "the welfare of sentient beings". It is the welfare of sentient beings that is the ultimate and only source of moral norms in Buddhism. This phrase he defines very widely to refer to states of worldly happiness (including pleasure) as well as virtue.⁹ The former include "forms of worldly prosperity, such as 'wealth and possessions'" while the latter term includes such characteristics as "faith, morality, learning, renunciation"(Goodman 60). Thus he refers to this conception of the good as an "objective list" theory; all the items on the list are considered "intrinsically valuable" (63). Therav!da Buddhists think that these desirable states are to be maximized, and are best maximized if one bases one's actions on consequentialist type reasoning -- as in the passage quoted. Therav!da Buddhism thus embraces a kind of rule consequentialism, wherein it is thought that the greatest amount of worldly happiness and virtue will result if we follow the moral codes laid down in the scriptures (the *Patimokkha* for monks, the *Pañcavaggiya* # for laypeople).¹⁰

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⁹ As can be seen, Goodman is not so naive as to suggest that "welfare" for Theravada Buddhists could simply be equated with worldly happiness and pleasure. He also asserts that among the assumed intrinsic goods in Buddhism we also find the idea of *metta* (loving-kindness) and *brahmacharya* (celibacy). Hen

While there is a certain plausibility in the assertion that the Therav!da Buddhists tend to regard the rules of moral conduct as inviolable, we would do well to pause on Goodman's conception of the "welfare of beings", which he takes as providing the ultimate grounding for those rules. Why would Buddhists consider temporary experiences of worldly happiness and pleasure intrinsically "good"? Why not then simply the fulfillment of preferences or desires? Buddhists do not deny that transient experiences of these kinds may contingently possess some limited value, but on a deeper level they are all regarded as unsatisfactory. Further, consequentialism itself can provide no explanation as to the basis of whatever positive evaluation such experiences may have. The same holds with regard to the virtues that Goodman adds alongside pleasures on his objective list. They are left ungrounded.

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Peter Harvey lists three factors that Buddhists might consider when deciding on the morality of a particular action. In addition to the consequences of the action and its conduciveness to *!*, a key consideration must always be the motivation for the action.

"The criteria for deciding what action is 'wholesome' () and what is 'unwholesome' ()... are of three kinds:

- 1) the motivation of the action;
- 2) the direct effects of the action in terms of causing suffering or happiness;
- 3) the action's contribution to spiritual development, culminating in *!*"¹²

We may note three corresponding ways of reflecting, or epistemic strategies if you will, that can be associated with these three criteria.

a) In the case of assessing one's motivation, mindfulness would seem the natural method: one can look within oneself and examine one's own mental states. Is the motive pure? From a Buddhist perspective this is to ask oneself whether one's intention is free from the unwholesome roots of action, the mental defilements of greed, hatred and delusion. Cognitively, is the aim of one's action to harm someone? Here, the epistemic strategy employed by the agent has a perceptual or quasi-perceptual basis in the

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sutamaya paññ!).¹³ This paradigm is generally interpreted hierarchically with the wisdom of meditation (! !) considered the highest form of wisdom.¹⁴

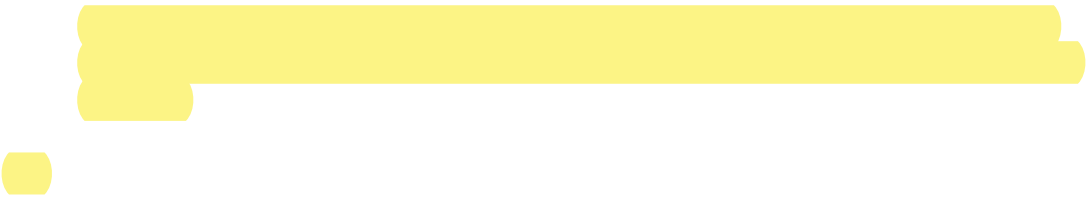
At one point Goodman (59) actually seems to recognize that the Therav!da tradition advocates a variety of modes of moral evaluation -- only to reject this as a theoretical basis for Buddhist ethics on the grounds that there would then be no way to adjudicate among the different strategies in cases where the criteria conflict. To accept such "insouciant pluralism", he says, would be to give up hope that Therav!da ethics could have any kind of theoretical unity. Thus he chooses to center



will work out as they should -- in the best possible way. This, in my view, is a point of faith as well as practical intelligence. Beneficial results come from good action. So the advice is: recognize the positive, healthy inclinations within yourself, develop them and act upon them. Recognize the negative, unhealthy tendencies within, overcome them, and avoid acting upon them. In this way, one will gradually move toward "!" . In fact, correctly or not, the Therav!da Buddhist position is that the three criteria listed above cannot ever be in a real conflict. There is a logic here. All positively motivated action is thought to lead to happy consequences, and to incline one toward "!" . Hence, Goodman, there is a theoretical unity here. The criteria for assessing the morality of action can never be in real conflict.

We have seen a number of reasons for doubting that consequentialism is an appropriate label for the ethical system implicit in the Buddha's teachings. First of all, Buddhist ethics contain a number of criteria for moral evaluation, not just one. In addition, consequentialist interpretations favor a criterion that is at best secondary (consideration of consequences) over one that is considered primary by the tradition itself (awareness of one's intentions). Finally and perhaps most importantly, consequentialist theory fails to provide a solid metaphysical foundation for moral judgment. These reasons are not unrelated. In the remaining portion of this paper I will attempt to clarify the connection between them.

Significantly, Buddhist theory does provide a sufficient metaphysical grounding for the items it considers ultimate goods (this provides us with a good



unwholesome and wholesome roots of action are summarized as greed, hatred and delusion on the one hand and generosity, love, and wisdom on the other.¹⁵

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