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RESEARCH ARTICLE

JUDEO-CHRISTIAN AND BUDDHIST JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

This article compares and contrasts the traditional Judeo-Christian and Buddhist notions of justice. It begins with an examination of some traditional biblical resources, such as the Job story, and moves ahead to trace Buddhist ideas about justice as developed in the Pali Canon. In the Conclusion, more recent Buddhist considerations are developed, such as those found in Zen and in modern socially engaged Buddhism.

TEXT

I. Judeo-Christian Justice

There is no mystery as to the cultural origins of the much invoked concept "justice" in the Western world: it came directly out of the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition and teaching. The word "just" occurs eighty-four times in the Judeo-Christian scriptures (Bible), and its derivative, "justice," occurs twenty times. And what was the meaning of "justice" in this context? Though written from a Christian perspective the following definition would seem to be essentially correct:

Justice is that essential perfection in God, whereby he is infinitely righteous and just, both in his nature and in all his proceedings with his creatures. [1]

But what of the term "righteous" with which "justice" is here intimately linked, and by implication, "righteousness" with

"justice?" In the same source we read:

Righteousness signifies. . .that perfection of the divine nature whereby God is most just and holy in himself, and in all his dealings with his creatures, and observes the strictest rules of rectitude and equity. [2]

"Righteous" and "righteousness" occur hundreds of times in the Bible, especially frequently in the Jewish scriptural portion. This would seem to indicate the foundational position of righteousness in the character of God and all his dealings with man. Justice is obviously the term used to describe the basic nature of God's active dealings with his creation and with man in particular. This relationship is well expressed in the following passage, characteristic in tone with many others:

The Rock (i.e. God), his word is perfect; for all his ways are justice; A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right(eous) is he. (Deuteronomy 32:4) [3]

And since God is conceived to be the Creator and Ruler of the universe it is also a basic Biblical (Jewish-Christian) assumption that in accord with this righteous/just nature of God, that human history is the story of God's just dealings with man. In other words one should get what one deserves of good or evil in one's lifetime.

Before expanding on this theme and its ethical consequences for the values of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is worth noting a dissenting voice in the Jewish scripture, that of the book of Job. The general story of Job is well known. Job was a prosperous man of impeccable character and piety. He treated everyone --servant, friend, stranger, rich, poor-- justly and humanely, even generously; no one was ever turned away from his door empty handed; he was upright in his personal conduct, and offered sacrifices daily to atone for any wrong his children might have done. He even conscientiously conserved the fertility of the soil.

And what was his reward? Calamity after calamity struck: all his wealth was destroyed by storms and marauders; his children were killed in accidents; he himself was prostrated with grievous illness. His wife urged him to curse God and die. He did curse the day that he was born and berated God. Surely this utterly disproved the belief in a just God!

In the rest of the book two basic questions are raised. One is in the words of Eliphaz, one of Job's would-be comforters:

//Can// mortal man be righteous before God?
//Can// man be righteous before his maker? (Job 4:17, emphasis added).

This is to say: Can insignificant mortal man presume to understand

the ways of Almighty God? Is puny human righteousness commensurable with Divine Righteousness? Clearly Eliphaz believes that both questions must be answered in the negative and that the truly pious man must simply bow his head and meekly accept whatever

Divine Power does to him.

Interestingly Job, the impious questioner, is more Biblically orthodox than his presumably pious consoler. In his assertion that God's and man's righteousness are of the same sort, Job was in full accord with the lawgivers of the Pentateuch, the chroniclers of Israel's history, the prophets, as well as the later mainline Christian tradition. We may observe here that the kind of righteous and just conduct prescribed by the Biblical writers, as that suitable to God's people, seems remarkably like that of Job. . .and of present-day justness:

You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God gives you ... and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall now show partiality; and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow. (Deuteronomy 16:18-20)

We may further note some very mundane particulars, Justness (justice) of a very practical sort:

You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. . .You shall have just balances, just weights. I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:35)

A just balance and scales are the Lord's; all the weights in the bag are his work. (Proverbs 16:11)

And from the Christian New Testament:

Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (Colossians 4:1)

The question of the justice of slavery seems not yet to have arisen in the Christian community!

Thus it would seem that present day meanings of justice are little different from the above. The justice, or justness, of a statement, attitude, action, or policy is its honesty, fairness, impartiality, or reasonableness under the prevailing circumstances.

And on the societal/governmental level justice is "the use of authority to uphold what is right, just, or lawful," according to Webster's dictionary. Those under the authority of a given political entity are presumably treated fairly, as their conduct deserves, again in general accord with the biblical concept of justice.

There is a second important issue raised by Job himself. Why

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should men be righteous, just in their dealings with others: because it is noble to do so? because it produces pleasant feelings? because it accords with some abstract standard or is beneficial to society? This question in Job's own case is "Why has a righteous/just God punished me, one who has been righteous and just in the ways that God himself has commanded? Does not righteous conduct deserve the 'rewards' of prosperity and health?"

This conception of the results of righteous conduct is central to the Judeo-Christian theodicy. This theme appears early in the scriptures and remains constant therein. Thus to the previously quoted call for "justice and only justice" there is a strongly motivating conclusion. . . "that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God giveth you." (Deuteronomy 16:20) There are many more passages of the same sort:

Be careful to heed all these words that I (God) command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you. (Deuteronomy 15:26)

He that pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor. (Proverbs 21:21)

. . .as long as he sought the Lord God made him prosper. (II Chronicles 26:5b)

Perhaps these words (Psalm 1:1-4) sum up the mainline Biblical conviction about God's dealings with mankind:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does he prospers.
The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away.

But the experience of Job poses a direct challenge to this dominant conviction. Job the "perfect godly" man had been nearly destroyed by God's actions. Job challenges God to justify himself. The result of this challenge is a let-down, a moral cop-out on the part of God. Elihu rebukes Job for his presumption in challenging the Almighty's decrees. Then God himself answers Job out of a whirlwind and derides his pretensions to righteousness or knowledge before Almighty creative Power. Job repents his self-justification "in dust and ashes" and ceases to complain, and is rewarded for his servile submission with renewed riches and a second family!

If individual life does not quite bear out the assurance of righteous/just individual conduct infallibly producing prosperity, neither did it quite work out on the collective national level.

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Israel, the Chosen People of Yahweh, after two or three generations of relative prosperity in their Promised Land of Palestine, began to suffer reverses climaxing in their conquest and exile at the hands of un-Godly, idolatrous peoples. Where then was the God of justice and righteousness? A psalm poignantly expresses this sense of desertion by God:

Lord where is thy steadfast love of old, which by thy faithfulness thou didst swear to David?
Remember, O Lord, how thy servant is scorned, how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples. . .with which they mock the footsteps of thy anointed. (Psalm 89:49-51)

The answer of the Jewish tradition to the harsh destiny of God's Chosen People is found in the words of the prophets who charge the people of Israel with unfaithfulness to Yahweh: they have not followed the principles of righteousness and justice in their daily conduct and had sought to bribe God with mere ceremonial. The prophet Amos, speaking for God, put the charge thus:

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. . . .
Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. (Amos 5:21, 23-4)

To Amos and his fellow prophets it was the just God punishing his morally unfaithful people by famine, pestilence and even conquest by their "heathen" idolatrous neighbors; it was not God's unfaithfulness to his promises of health and prosperity to the righteous.

Ever since in the Jewish traditions this position has been maintained: If there is "unmerited" suffering, sin lies at the door. God's "chosen people" have through the centuries been struggling to understand the dark mystery of their continuing ordeal, examining their conduct with an ever more powerful moral microscope. So too, Christians, inheritors of the Jewish view of a just God have continued to apply the mathematics of suffering = sin. . .sometime, somewhere.

Without seeking to solve all of the problems of seemingly undeserved suffering we must observe another element in the Judeo-Christian theodicy and general world-view that puts a joker in the cosmic-justice deck, so to speak. It is given double expression in the book of Genesis. The first is found in the story of Adam's and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. They were enticed into disobedience to God by the wiles of the serpent, the prehistoric ancestor of the Christian Satan. This implies that God the Creator is not simply and mechanically almighty. Not only is there a resident factor of moral evil (serpent/Satan), but a portion of the divine power to alter the course of events, the power of a choosing will-force, on the part of his creatures. The

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other aspect of the creation's moral order is stated thus:

So God created man in his own image, male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion. . .over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1:27-8)

Thus man, in some small measure at least, is called to be a kind of co-governor of the earth, God's deputy, so to speak, in the establishment of righteousness and the administration of justice. This understanding of the function and responsibility of the political ruler is primary throughout the Jewish scriptures. There was first the archetypal figure of Moses the Lawgiver, followed by "judges," and sovereigns, all presumed to be upholders and enforcers of justness in Israel's corporate life. That this should have been adopted by the Christian tradition might well have seemed very unlikely in the New Testament period. During the first

century CE, the Christian community was first of all articulating its own beliefs and nature, and in the last decade denouncing imperial Rome as the Babylonian harlot drunk with the blood of Christian martyrs.

But one of the first century's Christian voices, that of St. Paul, anticipated the future more perceptively. He wrote prophetically of the semi-divine nature of civil government:

Let every person be subject unto the governing powers for there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. . . (The ruler) is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong be afraid for he does not bear the sword (of power) in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:1-2, 4)

A little less than three centuries later when Constantine, the inheritor of the ancient Roman emperors, eastern division, converted to Christianity St. Paul's justice-enforcing emperor became a Christian one. And St. Augustine (354-430), a century later proclaimed Rome to be the City of God, seat of the Christian Roman emperor, and seat of the supreme pontiff of the Christian church. It was not long after this that the European doctrine of the divine right of kings was framed. From the human side power derived from the emperor's lineage; his divine power was derived from the church's investiture, and presumably God's will. As Cristiano Grottanelli phrases it:

Although he was no god, the king was believed to be singled out (by birth and control of the throne) to represent God's will on earth and thus somehow godlike. [4]

Thus was man taken into full partnership with God in the

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administration of justice on the earth.

This religiously certified right and power of the government to maintain justice on the earth has long since disappeared --save in the form of the British sovereign's mostly symbolical headship of church and state. But the career of "justice" has not ended with the disappearance of divine kingship. Indeed the religiously originated concept of justice, in its semi-secularized form, has become ubiquitous in the Western cultures. Anti-religious Communism sought to bring perpetual justice to the down-trodden by the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Building on, but outwardly discarding the Christian doctrine of the immortal soul, fueled by Renaissance humanist values, modern democrats like to speak of the inalienable right of each individual person to justice --cultural, social, legal. And we have a plethora of "justices": from the humble justices of peace, up through several levels of court justices, up to Supreme Court justices and governmental Ministries of Justice. Justice is surely one of the supreme cultural-social values of Western civilization.

II. Justice in Buddhism

"Justice" is a rare, almost non-existent word in the Buddhist

canonical literature. Is this because there were/are no cases of injustice, of either the human or the cosmic sort in Asian Buddhist countries through the centuries? Emphatically not. Asia has had its full share of cruel oppressive rulers, in whose realms there was much of what the West today calls injustice. . .the dominance of the powerful over the weak, the few over the many. Greed and avarice have been as frequent in their occurrence as elsewhere. Recurring floods, famines, plagues and conquests liberally sprinkle Asian history. There have been inequalities of fortune irrespective of the virtuous or evil character of those involved.

But on the whole the social order was accepted much like the natural order, simply as the way life was. One ducked one's head and hunched one's shoulders, accepting everything passively and continually, hoping that the present storm of oppression and misfortune could be waited out. As Ken Jones has written:

Until the nineteenth century the social order in the Orient evidently presented for many people much the same kind of inevitability as the natural order. Oppressive rulers and their wars and exactions together with flood, pestilence and famine were experienced as all a part of the same inevitable order of things within which good and bad fortune alternated. [5]

And there appears to have been no Buddhist Jobean protest raised against this passivity. One goes on to ask: Were there no Buddhist ideals for a good, perhaps "just," society? Not at least in those terms. We do encounter a sense of what the right and properly balanced relation between various social groups of the

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time should be. In the //Sigaalovaada Suutra//, for example, the societal world is divided up into six "directions" of relationship, namely to (1) mother and father, (2) teachers, (3) wife and children, (4) friends and companions, (5) servants, workers and helpers, and to (6) ascetics and Brahmins. The passage relating to conduct toward servants and work-people will serve as an example:

There are five ways in which a master should minister to his servants and workpeople at the nadir (direction): by arranging their work according to their strength, by supplying them with food and wages, by looking after them when they are ill, by sharing special delicacies with them, and by letting them off work at the right time. [6]

There are elements here of what the modern West would perhaps call social justice in the form of proportional rewards for varying responsibilities, or the "justice" of an equable balancing of existing social structures. It represents a fine-tuning of the existing social order with no questions about whether the order itself is fair or just such as are today raised in the "justice"-conscious West. It is only fair to say, of course, that at the date of this Buddhist writing no such questions were being raised in the West either.

However, the reasons for this seeming insensitivity to "injustice" run deeper than that: the main ones are rooted in Buddhism itself. Something of this same indifference or unconcern

with questions of personal and social justice has characterized Buddhist cultures from the beginning. In the Canon of Pali scriptures the Buddhist Way was not conceived as having much responsibility or concern about making over the sa.msaaric socio-political order of the world. The sa.msaaric world, driven by greed, hatred, and delusion, was one ruled by the desires for power, wealth, fame, sensual enjoyment, and was intrinsically unsalvable. Hence it must be escaped by detachment from its lures; there was no hope of fundamentally reforming it of making it into a "Nirvaa.na on earth." It was a gospel of personal salvation in and from time-space life, not its transformation. Thus, while today reform movements and "social awareness" are developing in the Buddhist world, the traditional base from which they must develop is scanty. Even the many Mahaayaana reformations of Pali Canon Buddhism have not entirely overcome this "otherworldly" bias.

There is a further almost constitutional allergy in Buddhism to the seeming quid pro quo quality of most schemes of "justice." For Buddhists "justice" often seems too much of an unending revengeful tit for tat, a totally sa.msaaric entity structured by human pride and anger, an endless balancing of rival claims and "rights." This disposition is expressed in a well-known passage in the //Dhammapada//:

"He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me," the hatred of those who do not harbour such thoughts is appeased. Hatreds never cease by hatred in this world; by love alone they cease. [7]

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Retaliatory emotions and actions however "justified" are but one link in the ongoing chain of cause and effect that drive sa.msaaric futility and sa.msaaric rebirth forever onward.

While these two factors are important in explaining the general lack of concern for justice in the Buddhist world of past and present, there is a more basic and fundamental reason for this disposition. Its name is karma. In the schema of time-space structured existence embodied in sentient existence at all levels and in all forms (human, sub-human, super-human) the karmic principle of justice rules without exception or hindrance. There is no such thing as unexplained, causeless suffering, Job to the contrary. Every state of existence, good or bad, animal, ghostly, hellish or heavenly is caused by ethically good or evil deeds. Karmic justice, like the mills of the Greek gods, may grind very slowly but grinds exceedingly fine. The only genuine escape from karmic justice is not into a better life or better world but into Nirvaa.na. There is an endemic disdain for the sa.msaaric world that has persistently haunted Buddhism.

Two results have flowed from this basic world-view: With the all-pervading karmic principle in place in every age and part of the universe why should human beings think that they can or should do anything substantial to alter the "unjust" situations and conditions? All the actors therein will receive their full recompense, sooner or later; their actions, good or bad, just or unjust, will have their inescapable consequence. Second, there is the fully individualized character of all social conditions. A "bad" society is simply made up of a majority of people who have a "bad" individualized karmic character. Sometimes, according to some Buddhist scriptures, the proportion of individuals in human

society with "bad karma" is so great that a whole universe (and there are many of them) is dragged down to destruction. Buddhaghosa even painted a fearsome portrait of such evil-caused cataclysms, a Buddhacizing of Indian cyclism. Since society is perceived as only a collection of individual karmic characteristics, to talk about improving or reforming society in a collective way is futile. It is only by means of a one-by-one improvement of individual persons that any society can be changed. Thus it is fully evident that justice as an achievable goal of either individual or collective human effort does not rank high in the traditional Buddhist scale of values or possibilities.

What then has been the Buddhist attitude toward governmental authority? What are rulers presumed to be doing as rulers? Presumably their karmic destiny has put them in positions of power, though not necessarily for the benevolent use of it. It is enlightening to observe what some Pali Canon scriptures have to say about rulers per se. When sense pleasures are greedily pursued they

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cause men "to break into a house and carry off the booty ... and wait in ambush and go to other men's wives." Then:

Kings (i.e., ruling authorities), having arrested such a one, deal out various punishments: they lash him with whips. . .canes. . .rods, and they cut off his hand. . .his foot. . .his ear and nose; they give him the "gruel-pot". . .the "shell-tonsure". . .the "fire-garland". . .the "flaming-hand". . .the "hay-twist". . .the "bark-dress". . .the "antelope". . .the "flesh-hooking". . .the "disc-slice". . .the "pickling-process". . ."circling the pin". . .they spray him with boiling oil, give him as food to dogs, impale him alive on stakes and decapitate him with a sword. [8]

This passage seems only to be saying, "Yes, these gruesome tortures inflicted by the 'justice' of rulers are the result of the conduct of a man's seeking sense pleasures." No ethical judgment is passed on the value, rightness, or efficacy of such justice.

Another passage [9] seems to simply assume that a ruler, by virtue of being a "noble anointed king", has "power in his own territory to put to death anyone deserving to be put to death, to plunder (fine) one deserving to be punished, to banish one deserving to be banished." Again this is merely illustrative of the way things are in the world. "Deserve" means no more than "decreed by the sovereign's law," and is used only as a teaching device to illustrate the meaning of complete control. The Buddha in conclusion asks his Jain questioner whether he has such kingly power over his own "feeling. . .perception. . .habitual tendencies . . .consciousness": the goal of Buddhist meditation. No judgment whatever is made upon the ethical worth of kingly "justice."

What then is the Buddhist model, if any, of what the West would term a just, or justice-supporting society? It must be remembered that Buddhism came only slowly to a sense of societal values and a social responsibility. The earliest message, if we may believe the Pali Canon, was primarily an individual-oriented way of life: men (and women) seeking their individual nirvaanic freedom from the coils of their individual karmic formations of character and destiny. Their banding together in the society of

the sangha was to the end of achieving this goal; the rest of society would go on its own age-long way of grasping for pleasures and physical power. Only gradually did Buddhism come to the assumption of societal responsibility outside its own sangha.

Some have seen the ideal (without injustice?) social order bodied forth here Schwey Yoe, a Burmese writer of the late nineteenth century, praised the "republicanism" of the sangha in which everyone wore the same robe and begged food every day. So too the totality of their personal possessions was the same for all: the eight requisites (bare necessities); all were subject to the same rules of conduct; questions were decided by the total group and no one was condemned unheard in his (or her) own defence. Yet this pattern of life could scarcely serve the whole world at

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large because of its limited character; and besides there was one glaring exception to "justice" here: the subordinate position of nuns in the sangha.

We find the first noteworthy attempt to produce a good (ethical? just?) Buddhist social order in the world at large in the reign of the Mauryan Indian monarch A"soka (270-230 BCE). So far as we know he was the first ruler of significance to attempt to achieve a state structure built fundamentally on Buddhist principles. One might say that he tried to build a society which conformed in its major features to the Five Precepts (no killing, stealing, lying, sexual immorality, or use of intoxicants) though they are never specifically mentioned in his edicts. The general portrait of his statecraft which emerges from the Edicts is that of dealing with such problems as theft, violence, and aggression by benevolent social welfare measures that removed their social and economic causes. The state sought to provide the basic physical necessities to all, to generate a climate of tolerance with regard to cultural and religious differences. "Justice" here --though the term is never used-- might be termed the justice of preventive benevolence, a motif that appears in most later Buddhist formulations of a code of conduct for a Buddhist ruler.

In passing one might speculate as to what A"soka would have done in case of a revolt in the empire which he had carved out by his later-repentant bloody conquest. Would he have suppressed it by force however reluctantly? Would he have termed it a "just" war in such a case? or simply a political necessity? It is impossible to make more than a surmise; and the A"sokan ideal, which has been so potent in Buddhist social ideology ever since, does not deal with the subject of the possibility or impossibility of "just" war. It may well be that A"soka was motivated by the ideal of the Dharma Wheel Turning Monarch, which is found in at least two places in the Pali Canon. It is the portrait of a ruler who as far as possible embodies the practice of the Five Precepts in his rule. The Wheel-Turning (Dharma Abiding) Monarch should be one who

leaning on the Norm (the Law of truth and righteousness), honouring, respecting and revering it ... being thyself a norm-banner. . .shouldst provide the right watch, ward and protection for thine own folk, for the army, for the nobles, for vassals, for vassals of the brahmins, and householders, for town and country dwellers, for the religious world, and for beasts and birds. Throughout thy kingdom let no wrongdoing prevail. And whosoever in thy kingdom is poor, to

him let wealth be given.

Monarch Strongtyre, counseling his son on how to restore the Dharma Wheel and become a Wheel-Turning Monarch, further tells his son that he should listen to the counsel of righteous men (monks) from time to time. The son did so and the Dharma-Wheel reappeared on earth. Then the Wheel

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rolled onwards toward the region of the East, and after it went the Wheel-turning king, and with him his army, horses and chariots and elephants and men. And in whatever place, brethren, the Wheel stopped, there the king, the victorious war-lord, took up his abode, and with him his fourfold army. Then all the rival kings in the regions of the East came to the sovran king and said: "Come, O mighty king! Welcome. . .All is thine. . .Teach us."

Then the Wheel-turning monarch spoke thus:

"Ye shall slay no living thing. Ye shall not take that which has not been given. Ye shall not act wrongly touching bodily desires. Ye shall speak no lie. Ye shall drink no maddening drink." [10]

And so it was that the whole world in all its four quarters was conquered for peace and righteousness; and that era of Dharma-peace and righteousness (and no-need-for-justice producing measures) lasted under successive wheel-turning sovereigns "many hundred years. . .many thousand years" until the seventh king, a war-lord, the anointed Kshatriya, was informed that the Dharma Wheel had slipped down from its dominating height, i.e., the Dharma was less faithfully observed in the kingdom. Is his being called a "war lord" significant? Not seemingly: for he could have asked concerning the Ariyan Duty of a sovran "war-lord." Apparently even Wheel-turning monarchs did not disband their military forces; perhaps they maintained a "justice-with-compassion structure?"

In any case when the seventh king was told that his practices as sovereign were not properly fulfilling the Ariyan Duty of a sovereign, he took no counsel with the "hermit king" but undertook to govern "by his own ideas." He ceased bestowing on the poor, who then began to take others' property to meet their own need, i.e. the welfare system broke down. This man was then given property and wealth. Others seeing it began to steal, also expecting to be rewarded. But now a punishing-"justice" system was put into place.

"Let me now put a stop to this," said the king and had the man beheaded. From this justice/punishment system beginning, the whole society was perverted. Thieves now armed themselves with sharp knives and violence grew apace. The situation went from bad to worse. Thus from goods not being bestowed on the destitute, poverty. . .stealing. . .violence. . .murder. . .lying. . . evil-speaking, immorality grew rife. In the end this situation led to the deterioration of the whole earth! Whatever the importance of this cosmic scenario the moral is clear: The way of tit-for-tat, or avenging justice is not the Buddhist way.

III. Conclusion

There is of course a softer side to the Judeo-Christian tradition than the words "just" and "justice" suggest. "Mercy," "compassion," "loving-kindness," and "love" are to be found throughout the scriptures. The Sermon on the Mount might be

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compared in some respects to the portrait of the ideal bodhisattva in "Saantideva's Path of Light. But that does not mean justice is to be displaced by love. In the Christian pattern it will always be love and justice. And other non-theistic humanistic influences found in modern Western culture will never settle for less than "justice." Buddhists for the most part remain uncomfortable with the ideal and practice of justice. Thus writes Masao Abe:

[T]he Christian notion has at least two aspects: The first aspect is justice as a kind of balancing between various human beings as they strive to actualize their potential for being. The second aspect is the justice which entails judgement and punishment. [11]

He believes that the first aspect can be incorporated into Buddhist wisdom and compassion.

But the second aspect of justice is hard for Buddhism to incorporate into itself, and furthermore, in my view, is not necessary. Justice in its second aspect is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it judges sharply what is right and what is wrong. On the other hand, judgment based on justice naturally calls forth a counter-judgment. . .Accordingly we fall into an endless struggle between judge and judged. [12]

This would seem to suggest that all judgments of "right" and "wrong", or "good" and "bad" are relativistic. Are there no such things as "crimes against humanity?" Cannot, should not, one judge the Nazi holocaust for example as "evil," "wrong," "immoral?" Does the "interrelationality and the lack of any fixed nature" of anything, everything, put all ethical judgments beyond possibility?

Rather tentatively and indecisively in the next paragraph Abe does recognize the existence of "social inequality and injustice," to be dealt with in Buddhism by a "new notion of justice on the basis of wisdom and compassion."

It is hard to resist the conclusion that a covert, unavowed reliance on the individualized, eventual justice dealt out by the power of karma is at work here, perhaps unconsciously, weakening the sense of the necessity for human intervention. It is noteworthy, however, that some Western-born and educated Buddhists have come to allow for the legitimacy of vigorous human attempts to secure social justice. Ken Jones, a British Buddhist, in his book The Social Face of Buddhism argues vigorously for active societal participation on the part of Buddhists. He states his general position thus:

The great bodhisattva vow to "liberate all beings" now also implies a concern for changing the social conditions which in every way discomfit us. [13]

In much of Asia "the vulnerable dependence of the oriental sangha

on the political establishment for patronage and protection forces it at best into a kind of 'apolitical' conservatism." [14] Further, the traditional oriental view of karma is, as previously noted, purely individualistic. But Jones believes that there is a social karma that predisposes to certain attitudes and actions, one which must be dealt with by modern (Western) Buddhism:

A socially engaged Buddhism needs no other rationale than that of being an amplification of traditional Buddhist (five precept) morality, a social ethic brought forth by the needs and potentialities of present-day society. [15]

And finally, in a radical departure from traditional Asian Buddhism he writes the following:

[M]any possible situations come to mind, in both personal and public life, wherein a lesser killing may be the means of a greater killing, as in the case of disease-bearing insects, for instance, or an armed murderer running amok in a crowded street. . . Sometimes we are condemned by circumstances to find a middle way between an immoral literalism and an immoral situationalism. [16]

Curiously, though its values may be implied in his program for societal improvement, Jones does not list "justice" in his index of important words and seldom if ever uses it. The other Western-born and educated Buddhist writer to be noted here is Christopher Ives. In his book Zen Awakening and Society he criticizes Abe's rather negative view of justice thus:

In his treatment of justice, however, Abe usually considers one view of justice: justice as judgment, by either a divine Judge or "His" human judges here on earth. Because this aspect of justice does not exhaust the meaning of the term, justice in a certain sense may be more compatible with Buddhist principles than Abe makes it out to be. [17]

Ives also freely concedes that because Zen has so consistently focused its attention upon inner states it has often been socially and politically conformist. He quotes at length a biting critique of Zen's conformitarian history in Japan by Hakugen Ichikawa. One item will serve as an example:

[With respect to the] problem of human rights and justice, Ichikawa states that the doctrines of dependent co-arising and no-self did not provide a foundation for notions of autonomous, individual personalities and as a basis for modern human rights and justice.

Without this basis "Buddhism in Japan generated an 'ethic of the

emotions'. . .as opposed to an 'ethic of responsibility' centered on the results of external actions." [18] But Ives believes this need not be the result of the Zen ideation and practice. He believes that Zen and Buddhism in general need not, ought not, function in this manner.

"To be" means to be in relationship, to participate in-contribute to and receive from-the whole of which one is a part. . .Insofar as it might use the term, Zen can construe "justice" as participatory justice. [19]

He goes on to delineate some of the aspects of this type of justice:

Full participation in human relationships. . .presupposes the right to speak, to contribute one's ideas. . .to have a say in matters affecting oneself, whether in a dyad, family, small group, organization, society or humanity as a whole. [20]

After detailing some of the forms which this free expression of ideas might take, he extends the idea of participative justice into the economic realm in support of a kind of economic justice which would prevent the downgrading of the weak into grinding poverty, limit the upper boundary of wealth by taxes, seek to achieve an environmentally sustainable way of life, all of which can be done in accord with the Buddhist principle of the organic interdependency of all beings.

What then shall one say in conclusion? Perhaps this: That the Judeo-Christian West need have no monopoly on "justice" and that if Buddhism can disavow its spoken/unspoken reliance on the individualized version of karma to effect justice in sa.msaara and embody some forms of social activism, pointed to by the concept of "participative justice," the Buddhist tradition might well importantly contribute to and modify the sometimes stark vindictiveness of "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" Western justice.

NOTES

[1]. Alexander Cruden, _A Complete Concordance to the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments_ (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., no date).

[2]. Ibid.

[3]. All biblical quotations are from the _Revised Standard Version_ (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1952).

[4]. _The Encyclopedia of Religion_ (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), Vol. 8, p. 316.

[5]. Ken Jones, _The Social Face of Buddhism_ (London: Wisdom

Publications), p. 208.

[6]. Maurice Walsh (tr.), _Thus Have I Heard [Diigha-Nikaaya]_ (London: Wisdom Publications), p. 468.

- [7]. Narada Thera (tr.), *_Dhammapada_* (London: John Murray, 1954), pp. 15-16.
- [8]. I.B. Horner (tr.), *_The Middle Length Sayings [Majjhima-Nikaaya]_* (London: Luzac and Co., 1954), Discourse 13, p. 114-115.
- [9]. *Ibid.*, Discourse 35, p. 284.
- [10]. T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids (trs.), *_Dialogues of the Buddha [Diigha Nikaaya, Part III, Volume IV]_* (London: Luzac and Co., 1965), Dialogue 26, pp. 62, 63-4. Following; phrases from pp. 65, 67, 68.
- [11]. *_Buddhist-Christian Studies_*, Vol. 9 (1989), p.67.
- [12]. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- [13]. Jones, *_The Social Face of Buddhism: An Approach to Political and Social Activism_*, p. 194.
- [14]. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
- [15]. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
- [16]. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- [17]. Masao Abe, *_Zen Awakening and Society_* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), p. 90.
- [18]. *Ibid.*, p. 92-93.
- [19]. *Ibid.*, p. 193-194.
- [20]. *Ibid.*, p. 125.