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# A Preliminary Conception of Zen Social Ethics

Ichikawa Hakugen

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A short poem “Adoring Naivety” by a Christian poet Jukichi Yagi (1827-1927) runs as follows:

Rice bread,

Whole-rice bread,

Fresh and steaming!

Whole-rice bread!

A bread seller goes about a”Non-acting” (Mu-i□□akarma) path singing cries of wares, as if in ecstacy over his singing.[1]

This verse seems to suggest the aesthetic character of the Japanese folks. In the early days, Japanese peddlers, such as gold-fish vendors, beancurd dealers and seedling-peddlers used to peddle by crying in rythmical voices. Mood, relish, flavour and atmosphere carry great weight in a Japanese life. ”Japanese philosophy”, writes prof. Robert Schinzinger, ”cannot be separated

from the aesthetic evaluation of words,….This way of thinking is intuitive and directed rather by mood, atmosphere, and emotion, than by mere calculating intellect."[2] " For most of our people, whose character is emotional rather than intellectual[3], the problem "how to be or behave", the problem of attitude of life, is more important than that of" what to think" or "what to do". This is the same in a deep sense with the way of Zen. Concerning a well-known thesis "Zettai-mu jun-no- jiko-doichi" (□□□□□□□□, literally, Absolutely contradictory self-identity) of Nishida's philosophy, Dr. D.T.Suzuki states:

> Nishida once said, I've heard through somebody, 'To realize my philosophy, one must utter "Zettai-mujun-no-jiko-doichi" at a breath without stopping as when chanting Dai-moku (the Nichiren prayer) …..'On hearing this, I burst into laughter heartily agreeing with him. "What is the absolute?" "What is contradiction?" "How is oneness of opposites possible?" Throw these concerns into hell! Devote yourself to uttering" Zettai-mujun-no-jiko-doichi", and you'll grasp the reality of life.[4]

According to Zen Buddhism, the way of attaining the Reality or of seeing into the inmost Self, lies not in "how to think" (intellectual thinking) "what to do" (moral doings), but in "how to be", in other words, how to attain a state of No-mind (□□) or selflessness. It was the same problem that Eugen Herrigel (1884-1955), the author of "Zen in the Art of Archery" (1953), came upon, when he became a pupil of Awa, an expert archer. Instead of beginning to learn the technique of the art itself, he was advised to master himself, to purify his mental attitude, to abandon the dualism of thinking, and to get to a no-mind or non-striving (□□ anabhgacarya) attitude: this was the same with Yagyu Tajimanokami (died 1646), a great fencing master of the Tokugawa era, instructed by Takuan Soho

(1573- 1645), a notorious Zen master of the day. The most essential point in archery as in other Japanese arts, is to reach the state of the mindless, to delve deeply into the Unconscious, original naivete where all dualistic doubts and tension are extinguished. To be non-striving, non-attached (□□ aslesa) or unconsciously conscious, so to speak, is to release ourselves from the bondage of discrimination (□□ Vikalpa), such as gain or loss, right or wrong, success or failure, to transcend volitional tensions, and to realize the ”artless art”. art in Vikridita (□□, play) free from every sort of constraint and restraint. ”Obeying our nature” says Sosan (□□ Sengtsan”, died in 606) in his verse ”Shinjinmei” (□□□, Hsinhsinming, literally, The Believing Mind) ”we are in accord with the Way, wandering freely, without annoyance.”

Without appreciation of the Zen way of life and discipline, words or acts of the Zen master will remain absurdity and sophistication. So it may be no wonder Zen should be called ”cosmic Nihilism,” ”Arsenic of life,” Tranquilizer of the feudal Japan[5]” and so on, by an outsider like Arthur Koestler, who leads his life on the plane of ”how to think,” ”what to do,” in a world of dualistic logic whose base is the law of identity. On the other hand, Zen teaches the problem of ”how, to be”, culminating in seeing into one’s nature where the dualism of conceptualization dies away. Our nature, which is no other than Buddha nature, is neither good nor evil, neither true nor false, knowing neither birth nor, death, leaving no trace of dualism, -not only the dualism above mentioned, but the dualism of duality and non-duality, the ultimate duality: ”In one Emptiness” says Sosan, the two are not distinguished” (□□□□). No absolute separated from the relative. It is one Emptiness (sinyata), Non attainment (□□□, nopalabhayate), which is expressed by Nishida as ”Place” (□□, Basho): the same with” Subjectless dharma-dhatu” (□ □ □□ □, Nushinaki-hokkai) named by Muso Soseki (□□□□, 1275-1351), a Zen master of the Muromachi period. Every doing of ours, right or wrong, is of no fixed nature, in other words, unattainable (□□□, nopalbhyate) in

its utmost depth. The bottomless bottom of our nature is identical with the nature of all things. Every doing as well as every other thing in the universe, therefore, is unblamable in this unattainable Emptiness. Sinjinmei says:

When the mind is one, and nothing happens,

Everything in the world is unblamable. [6]

□□□□, □□□□

In Emptiness, every thing is as it is, no more, no less, -a willow is green, a flower red: they are good as they are. Here, the cosmic Negation is identical with the cosmic Affirmation: sunyata is tathata (suchness, thus-ness), and tathata is sunyata: subject is object and object subject. Here again, all beings are interpenetrative (□□, apratihata), without losing their peculiarity or individuality. The basis of the Buddhist ethics lies in this oneness or interpenetrability, egoless freedom or cosmic love (mahakaruna, the great compassion). Karuna (non-worldly selfless love) flows out of Prajna (selfless intuitive intelligence) that sees one in many and many in one. When this freedom, intuitive insight or of non-attained love is realized, all our deeds are full of vital energy springing out of the fundamental naivety. "Enzan-wadei-gassui-shu" (□□□□□□□□) by Bassui Tokusho (□□□□, 1327-1387) in the Tokugawa era reads as follows:

> True observance of moral precepts (sila) is seeing one's nature (Satori)….. Once the opening of Satori is realized, all precepts are observed by their own accord.

Here we find preceptless precepts, so' to speak. This reminds us of "shone Seele" of German Romanticism in the 18th. century, derived from "belle ame" of J. J. Rousseau's "Nouvelle Heloise" (1761). In "Bekenntnisse einer schonen Seele," W. v. Goethe (1749-1832) writes:



about in the form of "coincidentia oppositorum" of the world and the "Pure Land".

Now, how shall we think, what shall we do in order to practise the so-called "Middle Way" morals, "super-class" morality, or to create "superhistorical" history? Are the ideas and activities, for instance, of the "Moral-Rearmament" the super-class way of superhistorical history? What is "The Third Way" or "Middle Way" in the field of social ethics? Further investigations are required to these questions. After all, the way of naivety, subjective sincerity or moral intuitionalism may leave room in a domain of social ethics for criticism by an A. Koestler who points out the poverty of Zen social morality; for instance, Zen that repels quietism and teaches how to create inward calmness in the midst of the present-day noises might be criticized as a sort of "Tranquilizer" when it leaves the noises and tumults alone and advises to adapt oneself to them closing eyes to the "fact that such morbid stimuli are being produced mainly through competitions of every sort and kind at the full maturity of the capitalist civilization. To die a "Great Death" signifies, in my view, not merely to eradicate our dichotomy of reasoning, but to awaken our humble and open minds of inquiry, aiming at the establishment of peaceful and blissful world for all mankind. An idealistic attitude as well as a rational mode of thinking once denied by prajna is now restored, by the same prajna, with deep serenity on an entirely new foundation. "No shadow of Buddha-dharma is here." declared once a great Zen master.

sions: truth in Zen belongs not to dualism of the true and the false. And defining the Zen truth in this manner, in the negation of dualism, we already fell into another dualism, dualism of duality and non-duality, which renews itself endlessly. Break this chain (□ □, samsara), and perfect peace of mind reveals itself on the spot; the cutter, is prajna abiding nowhere and yet everywhere. Out of Sunyata where infinite possibilities dwell, nonabiding activity, which is also prajna, presents itself in a certain form as .a self-determining act of sunyata corresponding to the situations there. The seat of this activity in a certain form is an individual self with a certain career. The original act which directs this activity toward such and such a form, may be termed ”original choice, -”original”, because it is not a concrete and conscious choice taking a particular form, but an unconscious disposition that directs the former (concrete and conscious choice) toward such and such a form. This original choice comes out of an ”attitude-system” that constitutes -though not of immobile quality- in part, a character of an individual self. And here, in one’s attitude-system abides one’s unconscious falsehood settled in the opaque, unconscious depth. When some ideas or behaviors occur as concrete and conscious choices directed by the original one, this process is liable to fall into inertia: it is through this inertia or Vasana, □□, habit-energy that unconscious fallacies may reveal themselves. On this crucial point, awakens the humble and open mind of inquiry, an intellectual self-realizing form of Selflessness. And here is found or shaped the turning point of Tattvajnana seeing into non-duality of Nature and Upayajnana researching into the laws and constructions of the world (the definition of these terms is my personal interpretation). The Buddhist, we may say, stand at the cross point or ”origin” (□□),to use a mathematical term, of Tattvajnana on a vertical axis and Upayajnana on a horizontal one of the co-ordinates (□□□) of the world; this point being also” oneness of opposites” where the ”revolution” of man himself and that of society or the world is started in the form of ”oneness of opposites”, in other words, the reformation of the world is set



> Ich erinnere mich kaum eines Gebotes, nichts erscheint mir in Gestalt eines Gesetzes, es ist ein Trieb, der mich leitet und mich immer recht führet; ich folge mit Freiheit meinen Gesinnungen und weiss so wenig von Einschränkung als von Reue. Gott sei Dank, dass ich erkenne, wenn ich dieses Glück schuldig bin, und, dass ich an these Vorzüge nur mit Demut denken darf)![7]

Friedlich Schiller (1759-1805) tried in his notion of ”Spieltrieb” or ”schone Seele” to moderate the rigorism and to, enliven the formalism of the Kantian ethics of ”reiner Wille” by introducing into the field of ethics a central conception of the latter’s ”Kritik der Urteilskraft” (1790), which defines Beauty as the harmonious unity of reason (Vernunft) and sensibility (Sinnlichkeit).[8] Now, the Mahayana ethics in its turn, delving into the original naivete, created the ever-refreshing vitality of spiritual freedom breaking the yoke of thousands of ”should-nots” of the Hinayana precepts. Thus a precept has become a formless one, dharma is now non-dharma, no one is duty-bound, purity-bound, nor even Suyata-bound: today freely and spontaneously, tomorrow spontaneously and freely, one leads one’s life.

The Beautiful Soul, according to my view, will be more or less easily realized by some cultured persons in the epoque organique (a period when social contradictions don’t yet clearly show themselves), to use A. Comte’s terminology, but in the epoque critique (when social conflicts become severe), they couldn’t but confine themselves in the narrower circle of their companions for fear of losing harmonious unity of their beautiful souls, keeping aloof from the hard problems of the day, because by stepping forward to remedy them with their simple minds, they would probably stumble against unexpected obstacles or be puzzled without knowing what to do: vital problems of the time are so complicated and fundamental that mere naivety or moral intuition

do not serve their purposes : even in those early days of Jesus, the apostles were advised to "be wise as serpents" (St. Matthew. X, 16). It may be reasonable that the Beautiful Soul was looked upon with some contempt in later days in Europe. It was already criticized by Hegel (1770-1831) in his "Panomenologie des Geistes" (1807). The same might be said of the spiritual freedom in Buddhism hitherto pronounced. As we have learned, selflessness or no-mindness seems to be everything for the Mahayana Buddhists, though it isn't always so as we refer to later. So here, the, stress is layed solely on "how to be", not on "what to do". The question of "what to do" is considered to be answered easily once the way of "how to be" cleared. On the Zen freedom, Dr, Suzuki writes:

> He has no self incased in his…..egocentric existence. He is gone out of his prison……One of the great Zen master of the Tang says: "With a man who is master of himself wherever he may be found he behaves truly to himself". This man I call the true artist of life. His Self has touched the unconscious, the source of infinite possibilities. He is "No-mind". Says St. Augustine, "Love God and do what you will". This corresponds to the poem of Bunan, the Zen master of the 17th. century:
>
> While alive
>
> Be a dead man,
>
> Thoroughly dead;
>
> And act as you will,
>
> And all is good.[9]



> Any child three years old may know it (to practise what is good and to avoid what is evil), but even an old man of eighty years finds it difficult to practise it.

This is true indeed, but to know what is good and what is evil[15] is not always easier than practising or avoiding it in a field of social morality, especially in the critical epoch of our century. Moral intuition, which formerly played a leading part among us, has decreased its validity in our social ethics where positive and rational investigation is of cardinal importance. The three main difficulties connecting with the Zen social ethics pointed out above, interrelate one another and are the products, to some extent, of modern industrial civilization, these difficulties cannot be overcome by intuition or subjective sincerity alone, but chiefly by consistent researches and practises through direct and indirect co-operation of our fellowmen. In his "Common Faith" (1934) John Dewey (1859-1952) distinguished "the religious" from "a religion" and accepted the former instead of the latter that contains, he thought, many forms of prejudices. H. Kawakami, though he was a Marxist, admitting" the religious truth", criticized, in his book showed above, "religion" as "the opium of the people" that formed itself by putting false or superstitious clothing on "the religious truth": he writes, "the religious truth turns into a religion by combinning itself with a belief in God." Generally speaking, I agree with them, though the former "religious" seems to me not the truth "before Abraham", so to speak, and the latter reasoning is too simple.

To attain the unconscious or transcendental origin of good and evil is of vital importance for us all. However, to bring out our unconscious fallacies (settled through all sorts of prejudices, illusions or false educations, in our unconscious depth ever since our childhood), and to examine them is none the less important for the establishment of the social ethics in Buddhism. To see into our nature is, as we have noticed, not to investigate our views and ideas; these two practises are quite different things on different dimen-

Roughly speaking, the above estimation may be applied, with a few exceptions, to the Zen social ideas: some of them together with other Buddhist thoughts were already criticized from such a viewpoint by Hajime Kawakami in his "Gokuchu-zeigo" (□□□□, Idle Talks in Prison, 1947).

3. Difficulty in connection with "No-mind":

In order to get to "genuine views" □□□□ (□□□, Linchi-lu) we are advised "to eradicate the false thinking and thought hitherto maintained" □□□□□□□□ (□□□, Wu-men-kuan), namely, to "kill" our intellectual ego, to die a "Great Death" (□□). This annihilation or Death means to exterminate the dichotomy of our thinking and to destroy our self-centricity, to get mindlessness (sunyata); in other words to eradicate false thinking and thought in this case is not to examine and rectify our thoughts or mode of thinking, because an attempt of this kind is still an intellectual reasoning on the plane of dualism of conceptualization. "True views" are those obtained through absolute negation of thinking and thought, not through test and analysis of them. When Rinzai says" the true is the place where I am standing" (□□□□), this truth is identical with pure subjectivity of the Zen master, and not with objective "truth" in our empirical world. "False" thinking and thought is not antonym of "true" thinking and thought here.To attain "no-mind" or to original naivete is one thing, and to examine one's own ideology is another. Subjective naivete, though it may be defined as absolute subjectivity, does not necessarily protect us from erroneous thinking by "erroneous thinking" I don't mean, of course, Vikalpa (□□, fantasy, discrimination) in the Buddhist terminology. Not a few Buddhists, honest and sincere, are found to be directed by conventional thinking. Freedom from Vikalpa is not always freedom from false ideologies. A Zen master once said, relating to a famous precept "The teaching of the Seven Buddhas" (□□□□□):



"Good" in this verse does not necessarily mean "good" in the objective or general sense of the word, it isn't moral good in a usual meaning, but "be true to oneself", or rather, "be free from annoyance", "be in spiritual peace". Free from self-centredness, a Buddhist "self" is still a self, an individual self lost, in intuition, or, to use Nishida's term, "action-intuition" (□□□□□) in itself. The seat of action-intuition in his case is not Hajime Kawakami (1879-1946),[10] Yanaibara (1893-1961)[11], or any one else, but is Nishida himself. There cannot be any intuition ascribed to nobody, drifting in the air. Intuition is in reality someone's intuition. Nishida's intuition was not Kawakami's, consequently their world-views were greatly differed with each other. These three contemporaries had probably thought and acted in the last war time according to their respective views. The Nishida views and practises in relation to the national morality, Shintoism and the "Holy War", I suppose, were not always amply right, comparing with those of the latter two. It follows that being good or true to oneself is not always good or true, in a usual sense, to others, to the community or to the people.

When Sosan writes in "Shinjinmei" "Everything in the world is unblamable[12]" and Bunan "All is good" in his poem, they do not mean everything is good in a moral sense. First of all "good" or "unblamable" is a state of pure subjectivity (□□, gocara): it may be the same with Robert Browning (1812-1889) when he says "All's well with the world". The Sosan's line above quoted was properly translated by Dr. Suzuki thus: "Ten thousand things offer no offence" (italics, by the writer). "All is good" and "All is well" are nothing but the expressions of the peace of the minds of the poets. Whether it is good or not in a moral sense is another question that appeals to close examinations rather than aesthetic intuitions. Subjective sincerity or spiritual peace alone is not qualified for revealing moral truths. Non-ego or super-self does not exist as mere non-ego or super-self in our society: selfless self lives in reality as an individual self; likewise, formless self, when it feels, thinks and behaves here on earth, cannot but take certain forms under certain situa-

tions. Here arise three main difficulties connected with practical, social morality in Zen Buddhism.

1. Difficulty relating to the objects of moral judgement:

The world of experience in our time is divided by a gulf separating facts in themselves and their images. In former times, people led their lives in such small communities that they were able to catch things or information, for the most part, personally with their senses. Today, however, facts, as data of our moral recognitions, are not facts themselves, but their images largely formed by and attained through the masscommunication; these images are generally distorted or even reversed mainly by policies or principles of editorial staffs closely linked with their leading powers.

The gulf thus formed and its calamity, together with our own falsehood shown below, has been revealed, on it's largest scale, through the last war experiences of our nation. To overcome this crack is a big and lasting problem of our century. Social ethics of Buddhism is facing this problem, too, because the latter may be considered to relate, at least indirectly, to the Buddhist way such as Right View (samma-ditthi), Right Thinking (samma-sankappa) and Right Speech (samma-vaca). This connection may also be found in the following matters.

2. Difficulty relating to moral subjects:

A selfless self, like the "self" of common people, thinks and acts on the ethical plane according to its moral consciousness corresponding to its world-view. It wears, so to speak, "clothes " of moral ideas and behaviors under certain situations. When Rinzai (□□ Linchi, ?-867) says "Freely wearing a cloth, I go when I want to go, I sit when I want to sit", clothes in this case are the means of the Zen instructions such as "clothes of Purity" (□□□) "clothes of no-birth" (□□□) and "clothes of Nirvana" (□□□), in other words, they are the Buddhist doctrines as the means of pointing Enlightenment. These



clothes are, from the Zen viewpoint, no more than mere nomina, for they are mere shadows of absolute subjectivity transcending a plane of denomination. Besides these, however, the Zen priests as well as laymen wear in their daily life another kinds of clothes, clothes of the so-called "ideologies", namely, a certain moral ideas, value consciousness, social thoughts and others. These clothes, unlike those of pointing Satori, are not allowed to be changed wilfully, abruptly and momentarily. Ideology that plays an important role in our life and society has to possess a certain immobility or impenetrability, so to speak, as a leading principle of life or society: for instance, we cannot be pro and con at the same instant to the same war; to judge or to resolve here, is to select either "Yes" or "No" about the matter, not to determine an attitude is also a kind of determination: no "interpenetrability" is allowed on this point.[13] The doctrine of "interpenetrability", when preached, in a sphere of social morality, to the common people, without regard to the contradictions in social systems or situations arising from them, is likely to fall into an utopianism or a false realism. Here lies a difficulty requiring further considerations. The Buddhist ethical thoughts in their concrete forms share, as a whole, with the characters and conditions of ideology in general. On social ideologies Karl Marx (1818-1883) declares:

> Die Gedanken der herrschenden Klasse sind in jeder Epoche die herrschenden Gedanken, d. h. die Klasse, welche die herrschende materielle Macht der Gesellschaft ist, ist zugleich ihre herrschende geistige Macht. Die Klasse, die die Mittel zur materiellen Produktion zu ihrer Verfuhgung hat, disponiert damit zugleich im Durchschnitt die Gedanken derer, dener die Mittel zur geistigen Produktion abgeben, unterworfen sind. Die herrschenden Gedanken sind weiter nichts als der ideelle Ausdruck der herrschenden materiellen Verhaltisse…..[14]