Cultivation of Wisdom in the *Theravada* Buddhist Tradition: Implications for Contemporary Leadership and Organization

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Introduction

Although by no means mainstream, there has been a growing interest in wisdom studies amongst western scholars in recent decades.[1] This is an encouraging development in light of the general neglect of the concept, if not its outright eschewal, on the part of sciences and humanities which have been largely preoccupied with *rational* explanation and *cognitive* representation of human conduct in the post-Enlightenment period. Indeed, in the core discipline of philosophy, any serious inquiry into the *practical* dimension of wisdom, that is, study that extends beyond mere historical interest in the term, has largely been abandoned. This state of affairs is

perhaps typified by John Kekes' terse essay on 'philosophy' in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* and his observation:

> Although wisdom is what philosophy is meant to be a love of, little attention has been paid to this essential component of good lives in post-classical Western philosophy. It is perhaps for this reason that those in search of it often turn to the obscurities of oriental religions for enlightenment (Honderich, 1995: 912).

The irony here is self evident and the fact that this extract represents a significant proportion of the entire entry for 'philosophy' in Honderich's *Companion* also speaks sub-textual volumes about the widespread disinterest in wisdom. Quite why western scholarship has, in general, lost its appetite for philosophy in the practical sense – particularly in light of its central importance within classical understandings of knowledge and ethics - is an intriguing and complex question that I shall not

engage with directly in this chapter. For those interested, accounts of the development of western knowledge offered by Hadot (2006) and Pieper (1999 [1952], 2007 [1966]) are highly instructive. Case et al. (2012) offer reflections on the denuding of theory in contemporary organization and leadership studies, while Case et al. (2011) argue for the reinvigoration and reconnection of these fields with practical forms of wisdom.

My purpose in this chapter is to take up what Kekes rather uncharitably refers to as the 'obscurities of oriental religions' for further enlightenment on the theme of practical wisdom. I do not share Kekes' view that the religious and spiritual traditions of the orient are obscure; they only appear so to those with an orientalist (Said, 1978) or ethnocentric attitude which permits them to overlook and dismiss the rich cultures in which these traditions have flourished and developed for centuries. Such a view also ignores the undeniable fact that, following a lengthy scholarly interest in oriental philosophy and

religion on the part of westerners, many of these traditions and their associated spiritual practices have now been 'imported' into western cultures (e.g., in Europe, North America and Australia) and have taken a firm root (see Batchelor, 1994).

What can be learned about wisdom from non-western and spiritual traditions, philosophies and related practices and what, furthermore, might be the implications for modes of organizing, leadership and organizational engagement? If one accepts a degree of universality within the human condition and the premise that aspects of leadership, organization and organizing are both transcultural and transhistorical, then it seems to me that a great deal can be learned from such non-western traditions and philosophies. In this chapter, I shall focus attention exclusively on the conception of wisdom and its practical cultivation as advanced within the *Theravada* school of Buddhism (Gombrich, 1988; Nārada, 1980). The latter is a

branch of Buddhism, dominant in contemporary southeast Asia, whose genealogy can be traced, via its monastic order, directly back to Gotama Buddha some two-and-a-half millennia ago. It is also one of the many traditions hailing from the orient that, through processes of migration, has been taken up by practitioners in the west (Batchelor, 1994). Buddhism is of direct relevance to the theme of this book insofar as the cultivation of wisdom is, arguably, its principal raison d'être. My purpose is to outline the basic forms of wisdom embodied within the formal philosophical teachings of *Theravada* Buddhism and the course of training set out for those who wish to cultivate them (Nānamoli, 1979, 1984). I base my contribution on twenty-five years of study and training in Buddhist meditation, some of which time was spent as an ordained monk. This chapter thus combines my practical interest in Buddhism with my professional interest in organization and leadership studies.

Buddhism (*Dhamma-vinaya*): A Brief Overview

My point of departure for this enquiry into Buddhist wisdom lies in ancient, non-modern history; namely, the spiritual teaching of Gotama Buddha, his founding of a monastic order and establishment of rules of training which inform monastic and lay life (Gombrich, 1988). Siddhartha Gotama (Skt. Gautama) was born into a wealthy family in northern India, modern day Nepal, in c.563 BC. His father, Suddhodana, was a ruler of the Sāka clan and kingdom, and, accordingly, Gotama enjoyed a very privileged upbringing as a young prince. At the age of 28, however, confronted by the realities of death, disease, and other forms of human suffering, he decided to renounce worldly life and become a wandering mendicant. After perfecting skills in concentration meditation and experiencing the deep tranquillity that this yielded he was still dissatisfied and embarked, instead, on a series of ascetic practices (some of which brought him close to

death). Following 7 years of spiritual searching and maturation, he discovered what has become known as the 'Middle Way' between sensual indulgence and the austerities of self denial. He was 35 years old when, it is said, he realized Enlightenment whilst sitting under a tree on the bank of the river Neranjarā near Gaya in modern Bihar (Nānamoli, 1984; Nārada, 1980; Rahula, 1985).

Although initially reluctant to teach, Gotama discovered that he was able to assist others in coming to the same subtle insight that he had alighted upon and, subsequently, spent the remaining 45 years of his life wandering the Ganges valley teaching monks and lay people alike. What became known as 'Buddhism' began as *dhamma-vinaya* which, leaving aside nuances of translation and etymology, roughly means a 'path of discipline leading to insight'. Hundreds of his followers developed the wisdom of the Buddha (the 'Enlightened' one) and benefitted not only from

supra-mundane insight (which I shall discuss shortly) but also from Gotama's highly practical understanding of how to live a good and rewarding life. Having left this rich legacy, Gotama himself died at the age of 80 in c. 483 BC.

Buddhism became a highly influential religion with variants and an international diaspora that saw the teachings spread north via Tibet to China, where it became *Chan*, then down into Japan where it gave rise to *Zen* (both *Chan* and *Zen* are phonetic adaptations of the Pali word *jhānam* – Skt. *dhyana* - meaning simply 'meditation'). While these latter traditions, known collectively as the *Mahayana* ('Greater Vehicle') schools, passed on the teachings using a mixture of Sanskrit and local languages, the earliest teachings were transmitted and preserved via the aural tradition of collective recitation within the *Theravada* monastic order. The *Theravada* tradition spread southward through India to Sri Lanka

and the countries of southeast Asia (Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam).

Within these various Buddhist traditions – *Mahayana, Zen, Theravada* - there still exist living spiritual or mystical traditions whose teachers focus not so much on *religious* observance as on coming to realize the ultimate goal of the Buddha's teaching, that is, *nibbāna* (Skt. *Nirvāna*) or the cessation of the suffering associated with subjective attachments (see, e.g., Kornfield, 1977).

In approximately 80 BC, the oral teaching of the *Theravada* order was committed to script recorded on Palm parchment by Sinhalese monks at a monastery called Aluvihara. Although the oral recitation of the Dhamma (the Buddha's teachings) persists to this day, the *Pali Canon* is now available in textual form in many languages. This *Canon* is arranged in three so called 'baskets' (*tipitaka*) as follows: (1) the *Vinaya Pitaka* (numbering 5 books)

which deals with the rules governing the monastic order and training; (2) the *Sutta Pitaka* (15 books) which record the Buddha's discourses to monks and lay people; and (3) the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (7 books) which consists in a phenomenological and philosophical psychology which analyses consciousness and conditionality in extremely fine detail.

Pali is an Indo-Aryan language closely related to Sanskrit and now, rather like classical Greek and Latin in Europe, extinct as a spoken language except for its use in religious chanting, scholarly discussion and recitation of Canonical teachings (Warder, 2001). It is widely held that Magadhan, the language most likely spoken by the Buddha, was a Pali vernacular. Pali does not have an exclusive script (largely because of its oral origins) but has been transliterated in scripts that adopted the Buddhist religion, notably Sinhalese, Thai, Burmese, Lao and Cambodian. Nineteenth and early twentieth century western scholars of Pali also undertook the task of

rendering Pali into Latin script so that it would be accessible for wider western readerships. The combined corpus of the *Pali Canon* stretches to over forty bound volumes in English translation, many of them quite sizeable.

The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path

The purpose of following the Buddha's teaching as documented in the *Pali Canon* is to realize *nibbāna* (Skt. *Nirvāna*), Enlightenment, and thereby to eradicate suffering. Common to all major forms of Buddhism – *Theravada* and varieties of *Mahayana* - are the core teachings of Gotama summarised as the four Noble Truths: (1) there is suffering (*dukkha*); (2) there is a cause of suffering, namely, all forms of craving and attachment; (3) there is the cessation of suffering (*nibbāna*, which means literally 'extinction'), and; (4) there is a path to the cessation of suffering, known as the Buddha's 'Eightfold Path'. With respect to the fourth and final Noble Truth, as

its name suggests, the Eightfold Path contains eight path factors: right understanding, right thinking, right action, right speech, right livelihood, right concentration, right effort and right mindfulness. These are grouped into three sections as follows: *pannā* (wisdom), *sila* (ethical discipline), and *samādhi* (meditation). The classical Buddhist scholar Budhaghosa (c.400 AD), wrote a comprehensive compendium of the Buddha's teaching which classifies these three elements as 'paths of purification', that is, the 'purification of bodily conduct' through ethical discipline, the 'purification of mind' through meditative discipline and the 'purification of view' through insight and wisdom (Nānamoli, 1979).

Two Forms of Wisdom

There are two forms of wisdom (*pannā* – Pali) acknowledged in the *Theravada* tradition (Nynatiloka, 1972): mundane (that pertaining to

everyday human and non-human worlds) and the supra-mundane (that pertaining to the phenomenological realm of meditation and insights deriving from meditative practice). With respect to the mundane universe, Buddhism recognizes truths and laws relating the world as it is conventionally experienced: laws governing material physics, biological organisms and causality in these domains. Importantly, however, unlike western philosophy it also asserts that there is a law governing the complex interrelationship between moral conduct and its results. This is known as the law of *kamma-vipāka* (action-resultant). *Kamma* (Skt. *Karma*) translates as 'action', while the result of action is *vipāka* (often in the west we mistakenly take *karma* to refer to the results of action, as in the phrase 'bad karma'). According to Buddhism, we inhabit a universe which is made up of interdependent conditioned and conditioning phenomena. Human actions of body, speech and mind form an integral part of this cosmic whole. Thus one's actions in

what we might call a 'participatory universe' will have material and psychological consequences for oneself and others. In general terms, if one acts in a self-centred or self-interested manner, the *consequences* of these actions will rebound in negative and personally painful ways. By contrast, unselfish actions (those primarily motivated by and directed toward the welfare of others) will have pleasant results in the future. This law carries particular normative implications for how one should conduct oneself in the mundane world. The precepts for lay followers of Buddhism, for example, are aimed at minimizing and, ideally, eliminating what the Buddha colourfully referred to as the 'guilty dreads' that follow from unwise action.

So what would constitute wise ethical conduct? This is often framed in terms of the avoidance of unwise conduct rather than in terms of positive imperatives. It is concisely summarized, for example, in the five precepts which lay followers strive to keep, that is, undertaking the rules of training to abstain from:

killing or harming living beings; taking that which is not given; wrongful or harmful speech; drinking alcoholic beverages or taking mind-altering drugs; wrongful forms of sexual conduct (e.g., promiscuity, rape, paedophilia). A lay person following a training in meditation typically takes on extra rules during a period of retreat (e.g., abstaining from handling money), while monks and nuns have many more detailed rules to uphold. The latter range from those which can lead to expulsion from the order (such as, killing a human being or making false claims about meditative attainments) through to minor rules that dictate, for instance, the way robes should be worn, how and when meals should be consumed, and so forth.

The law of *kamma-vipāka* is, as the Buddha maintained, extremely complex and its intricacy is not at all easy to comprehend. However, he did set out some broad correspondences between choices of action and the kinds of results that might follow.

Take, for example, the area of speech. Such acts as lying and deceitful speech, according to Buddhism, is likely to result in the perpetrator being perceived and treated as untrustworthy by others and also being prone to vilification and abusive speech. Indulging in gossip or frivolous speech results in a person not being believed by others, while slander is likely to result in friendships ending without apparent cause. By contrast, unselfish action, such as generosity, leads to the acquisition of wealth; serving others in some capacity leads to one gaining a good reputation, and so on. In other words, according to Buddhism, there is a moral economy to action and a form of natural justice that operates intrinsically within the universe.

The manner in which results (*vipāka*) of unwise action ripen are difficult to predict as they are bound up with many other non-*kammic* factors that act as past and present supporting conditions for any given action. Nonetheless, the general principles

are, I suggest, open to subjective empirical observation. By striving to keep the precepts, for example, for a sustained period of time it is possible to observe, phenomenologically, whether or not one's well-being improves and also to discern the connection between acting wisely (according to these principles) and its subjective and inter-subjective effects. Of course, such a claim is not open to *objective proof* according to the forms of criteria that are applied within western empirical sciences but this, I contend, does not render it unempirical.

That there is subjective *benefit* from avoiding unwise action and pursuing 'the good' is precisely what makes *kamma- vipāka* a *mundane* matter within Buddhist cosmology. It is action, whether for good or ill, pursued with a sense of *subjective* purpose that ties the actor to the wheel of birth and death. We *produce* and *reproduce* ourselves as *subjects*, as it were, from moment-to-moment in the ethical

volitions and choices we make with respect to thought, speech and action. This process of conditioned and conditioning interaction is represented in what is called the 'law of conditioned dependent origination' (*paticca-samuppāda*; Skt. *Pratītyasamutpāda*), which charts the co-relationship and causal interdependency between different elements of consciousness[2]. The experience of *agency* in the actions we pursue is what makes us worldly creatures subject to birth and death, not only in everyday life but also, in terms of Buddhist cosmology, from life-to-life through the process of rebirth.

I have chosen to focus primarily on ethical actions and their consequences, the *sila* or ethical discipline section of the Eightfold Path, on the assumption that readers unfamiliar with Buddhist philosophy will be able to relate and compare the principles to other ethical systems with which they are familiar and also to their own subjective experience. It should be

pointed out, however, that mundane wisdom also plays an important part in the other two sections of the Eightfold Path, namely, *pannā* - wisdom itself - and *samādhi* or meditation. For example, it is possible to gain proficiency in *samatha* (concentration) meditation and experience deep states of bliss and tranquillity. Such experiences are categorized as 'mundane' rather than genuinely 'spiritual' as, in themselves, they do not lead to a permanent release from suffering, or the craving and attachment which produces it. The experience is very pleasant while it lasts but the experience of mental and physical release is only temporary; once concentration can no longer be sustained, it ends and one is back in the everyday world of 'normal' consciousness.

What, then, is meant by supra-mundane wisdom within this tradition? In addressing this question we perhaps momentarily lose sight of the purpose of this book and its intention of exploring *practical*

wisdom. Nonetheless, I shall endeavour to explain selective aspects of supra-mundane wisdom and also consider how, for those who pursue an experiential course of training in meditation, the resulting insights carry indirect practical implications for the way they apprehend and act in the world.

Unlike many modern western philosophies of science which, in general, contrast propositional truth with falsity and observe a logical law of excluded middle (proposition p cannot coexist with not-p), Buddhism adopts a more nuanced approach to questions of veracity. It identifies three forms of truth corresponding to three forms of reality: (1) conventional truths (*vohāra-sacca* in Pali) that relate to consensus reality as socially conditioned and constructed; (2) so called 'ultimate' truths pertaining to ultimate reality (*paramattha-dhammā*), which reduce human experience to constituent phenomenological events and processes of consciousness, and; (3) *nibbāna* or *Nirvāna* (Skt.)

which refers to an intuitive experience of truth and reality that transcends duality and representation (and, in so doing, is said to remove all the personal suffering that results from attachment to conventional things from a subjective position.)[3] Although forms (2) and (3) are immanent in (1), Buddhism maintains that it makes no sense to conflate the three. Form (3) is literally unspeakable. It is beyond representational duality and therefore by definition ineffable – although it is defined as a *type of knowledge*. Investigation of form (2) through meditative discipline and practice reveals that the conventions of form (1) are illusory *at this level of enquiry*; that selves, authors, *personal* intention, trees, mountains, cars, organizations, management, critique, writing are not sustainable or meaningful categories in any *ultimate* or *absolute* sense. All that exists in form (2) are transient sensory phenomena, reducible to bare serial experiences of shape and colour, sound, taste, touch and a complex host of psychological concomitants (of which volition, feeling, perception and discursive thought would be

discernable elements). Repeated and patient meditative observation of experience with respect to form (2) in time prepares the mind for a mystical realisation of form (3) – *nibbāna* – which is the ultimate purpose of spiritual endeavour, according to Buddhist teachings.

The main vehicle for cultivating supra-mundane wisdom within the *Theravada* tradition is insight (*vipassanā*) meditation, sometimes also referred to as mindfulness meditation. Unlike concentration meditations that have tranquillity as their primary objective, insight meditation aims at working toward a deep understanding of *ultimate* reality (form 2, above) and its three intrinsic 'marks' or characteristics. These marks are: the transience of all sensory phenomena (*anicca*), their propensity to cause suffering (*dukkha*) if ignored, craved for, or pushed away, and their interdependence or being void of an essential self (*anattā*). The development of 'right mindfulness', alongside a level of skill in

concentration and balanced effort, is what permits experiential investigation of consciousness and its characteristics. In everyday waking consciousness the mind is generally so busy and caught up in a whirl of its own perceptions, thoughts, feelings and objects of desire, that discerning how these elements of mind interact with one another is practically impossible. By concentrating and calming the mind to a level where physical and mental sensation is still present - where there are perceptions, feelings and occasional thoughts - it is as though these elements are 'slowed down' and can be examined with a degree of dispassionate clarity. Too little concentration means the mind is still subject to neurotic worries, petty concerns, desire for pleasurable experience and hatred of unpleasant experience, and hence cannot be *mindful* of events occurring in the psycho-physical system. Too much concentration means that the mind gets absorbed in tranquillity to the exclusion of anything else. It is also possible to wrongly (as opposed to rightly) concentrate the mind (e.g., with too much effort)

and end up with a headache or simply fall asleep during seated meditation practice.

The cultivation of mindfulness is not confined exclusively to seated practice. We might liken sitting meditation to a laboratory – a special set of conditions in which experience can be observed closely – but, to be effective, the discipline of mindfulness has to be extended into everyday living. Someone taking up this practice strives to be mindful as much as they possibly can as they go about their daily business, whatever that might be. It should also be added that successful development of these skills is only possible if one adheres to ethical disciplines and precepts. This is not a *moral* imperative as much as a *practical* requirement. Persistent unwise action in daily life destabilizes the mind to the point that it is unable to achieve the necessary basic level of calm and contentment necessary to *be mindful*.

Given time and application, the set of disciplines associated with mindfulness meditation can result in a series of insights. These insights are well documented in the *Pali Canon* and the voluminous scholarly commentary on it. The fact that the course of the meditative training follows a well defined path that has been experienced by practitioners in many different cultures, speaking many different languages and across many generations, would suggest that the patterns of experience and insight it produces are universal. What then, is the supra-mundane wisdom that this training yields? Without venturing too far into the technical descriptions (see Nānamoli 1979; Sayadaw, 1965), there are certain transition moments which mark profound psychological shifts in understanding of the makeup of the world-as-experienced. *Theravada* Buddhism identifies four key turning points of this sort. Each so called 'fruition moment' is deeper and more profound than the preceding one and each is reached through a portal of apprehending *one* of

the three characteristics of conditioned reality –
anicca (transience), *dukkha* (suffering) or anattā
(non-self or interdependence). Each insight serves to
weaken the hold that the mundane world holds on
the subject. For example, if one sees at a molecular
level, as it were, that every possible experience is so
transient that independent objects do not exist,
then it becomes impossible to crave, hate or get
attached to them. Similarly, if the self or subject is
seen clearly and *experientially* (not merely
intellectually) to be a social construction which does
not exist independently of the conditions that
produce it, then the mundane world has no
purchase whatsoever on it; indeed, paradoxically, 'it'
never existed in the first place. The self is
apprehended as a fiction that can no longer be
taken as seriously as it once was. In the words of
Buddhaghosa:

> For there is suffering, but none who suffers;
> Doing exists although there is no doer; Extinction

is but no extinguished person; Although there is a path, there is no goer. (Nānamoli, 1979: 587).

The Buddha himself also made a similar observation concerning the nature of insight that leads to supra-mundane wisdom and release from subjective suffering:

> In this world... substance is seen in what is insubstantial. [Sentient creatures] are tied to their psychophysical beings and so they think that there is some substance, some reality in them. But whatever be the phenomenon through which they think of seeking their self identity, it turns out to be transitory. It becomes false, for what lasts for a moment is deceptive. The state that is not deceptive is *Nibbāna*... With this insight into reality their hunger ends: cessation, total calm.
> (Saddhatissa, 1994: 89)

Implications for Contemporary Leadership and Organization

In this section I attempt to draw links between the cultivation of Buddhist wisdom and its implications for leadership and organization in the contemporary world. Given the challenging nature of this task, what follows is more an *outline* of future avenues of enquiry than a comprehensive analysis of the possibilities.

The kind of supra-mundane wisdom that *vipassanā* meditation produces is not, in and of itself, *practical* as much as it is a liberating form of *knowledge*. Nonetheless, someone who progresses with the Buddhist path of insight or, indeed, completes the course of training, can expect to enjoy many practical benefits which, in turn, have implications for the way they interact with other beings (human

and non-human) and the surrounding environment. In other words, supra-mundane wisdom carries implications for, and has an effect on, the mundane world. Having perfected their ethical discipline, such individuals, for example, would have no desire to harm others. In fact, they would be *incapable* of *intentionally* causing harm through acts of thought, word or deed. Instead, they would, from their own experience, have developed a deeply compassionate eye for the suffering of others and, within their own sphere of influence, seek to alleviate it in whatever way they were disposed or able to do so. An Enlightened person, according to Buddhist teaching, has transcended the law of *kamma-vipāka* such that all of their *doing* (mental and physical) is 'karmically neutral'; 'Doing exists although there is no doer'.

Looking at the organizational world around us, one might think it highly desirable that such individuals take up positions of leadership, authority and

responsibility. The practical problem that immediately presents itself, of course, is that only a minority of people are interested in Buddhism, fewer still take up the disciplines of meditation in a committed way and still fewer progress through the paths of insight. We might also be faced with the paradox posed by Plato (1995) in *The Republic*; that whilst it might be desirable for sages, in the guise of 'philosopher kings', to take up positions of influence within the *polis*, they, above all others, would have the wisdom precisely to eschew the mantle of such worldly responsibility. They might prefer to lead a more sheltered and reflective life. But this does not necessarily follow from pursuit of the Buddhist path. It could hardly be denied, for example, that the Buddha himself was a highly active and effective leader in the world. Not only was he a remarkably skilled and multi-lingual teacher, he also set up and ran what became, even during his lifetime, a major organization, i.e., the *Sangha* or order of monks.

Gotama's monastic order, moreover, was quite revolutionary in the socio-political context of that region and time. Individuals of any caste ('Untouchable' to 'Brahmin') were permitted to take on the rules of monastic training and, in so doing, had to renounce the imperatives of social division associated with caste (Rhys Davids [1903] 1993). Seniority was (and, within the *Theravada* tradition, still is) based purely on length of time spent in the order. Thus a former Brahmin monk could well be junior to an Untouchable and so forth. The detailed rules of training, designed in large measure to promote harmonious community living, combined with this simple hierarchical principle resulted in the creation of an organization that has reproduced itself in successive generations and migrated across nations and continents.

There is, I suggest, a practical wisdom to the principles, structuring and processes of this organization which helps explain why it has enjoyed such longevity. While meriting a more in depth

study, from a leadership and organizational point of view there are intrinsic lessons to be derived from the remarkable fact that the *Theravada* order exists now in much the same form as it did when founded two and half millennia ago. For example, the emphasis given to harmonious community living, care for others, and mutual responsibility based on ethical disciplines might have much to offer in light of the post-material challenges of the current era. I am thinking, in particular, of the impending difficulties posed by eco-crises (the threats of anthropogenic climate change, depletion of natural resources, pollution, pressures on ecosystems, food and energy security challenges, etc.). Learning to live with the basic requisites of life, as required within a Buddhist monastic community, may well become more widely germane to our own affluent societies as they struggle to address and accommodate increasing demands on natural resources and the environment. One consequence of cultivating Buddhist wisdom is knowing what it takes to *walk through the world lightly*, minimizing personal and

collective demands on environmental resources and being *contented with little.* Whether such a transition in outlook can be effected on a wide scale within societies that are so enamoured of consumerism (including those growing economies in Asia that appear so eager to emulate the materialism of the west) is, of course, a politically fraught question. Nonetheless, it may be helpful to begin a debate within the community of wisdom studies scholars about the adaptation of the kinds of principles and possibilities I am seeking to introduce here with respect to leadership and organization.

There may also be useful connections to make between current academic and practitioner interests in the theme of responsible leadership (Maak and Pless, 2006a, 2006b; Maak, 2007; Waldman and Galvin, 2008) and the corollaries of developing Buddhist wisdom. In part, this relates to previous points made about environmental sensibility but also to being 'other directed' and working to reduce the sense of individual *self importance.* From a

Buddhist point of view, many individual neuroses and pathologies stem fundamentally from an inflated and unwarranted sense of self-centredness and self-concern. This has been acknowledged in the leadership field by scholars who have explored the narcissism (Maccoby, 2000) and psychopathology (Furnham, 2010) of those in positions of power in organizations. It would also extend to the analysis of *collective* organizational pathologies viewed from a psycho-social perspective (Kets de Vries, 2006; Kets de Vries and Miller, 1984; Sievers, 1994), where we might see cases of collective organizational narcissism. The cultivation of individual and collective wisdom, from a Buddhist point of view, involves directly confronting self-centredness and taking practical steps (e.g., through ethical discipline and meditation) to erode narcissism in both its gross and subtle forms.

Buddhism, in general, has a reputation for encouraging tolerance and an ecumenical attitude toward sprituality. If we understand Buddhism as

offering *one* path to wisdom (both wordly and supra-mundane) amdist a diverse range of alternatives, it can be seen as contributing to a wider discourse and set of practices which place importance on the cultivation of *philosophy* in the literal sense. Buddhist wisdom – of the forms outlined above – may be understood to be contributing to an increasing international groundswell of interest in the *art of living* (Foucault, 1988; Nehemas, 2000) and pursuit of *philosophy as a way of life* (Hadot, 1995). That such concerns are beginning to be taken seriously is reflected in academic study of, for example, workplace spirituality (Lund Dean et al., 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2004) and 'authentic leadership' (Avolio et al., 2004). Though not without their critics, these areas of study and practice nonetheless represent serious attempts to explore alternative *ways of being and acting* in the organizations; an endeavour to engage with approaches to workplace life that are more ethically robust and appreciative of the need for greater levels of corporate social and

environmental responsibility. Buddhism, I suggest, has much to contribute to on-going debates with respect to workplace spirituality and authenticity.

There are also ways in which Buddhism, in a qualified sense, articulates with the work of scholars who are revitalizing western wisdom traditions (Rooney et al., 2010; McKenna and Rooney, 2007). There are, for instance, certainly parallels to be drawn between Buddhist forms of wisdom and the systems of virtue that emerged in Hellenic Greece in the 5th and 6th centuries BCE (Hadot, 2000), but also important differences between the two sets of traditions. As Jullien (2004) has noted with respect to Taoist and Confucian philosophy when compared with that of the ancient Greeks, oriental philosophy generally shies away from the establishment of context-free, fixed or *ideal forms* of moral principle. In contrast to the ideals of virtue found in Aristotle's writing (Aristotle, 1955), *Theravada* ethics – as we noted above - invites practitioners to live by 'rules of training' which act as a set of ethical heuristics to

be applied intelligently within any given social context. A more fruitful comparison here might be with the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis*. Often translated as 'practical wisdom', *phronesis* entails the virtuous development of a worldly sensibility and astuteness that promotes responsible living and intelligent decision-making (Aristotle, 1955). We should remember, however, that Buddhist ethics does not have as its ultimate purpose the pursuit of virtue as an ideal or end in itself. Indeed, as already pointed out, the culmination of training in *supra-mundane* wisdom is the transcendence of, or liberation from, ethics (see also Case & Brohm, 2012).

One final set of implications that I think usefully follow from the discussion of Buddhist wisdom relates to current interests within organization and leadership studies in ontological approaches which acknowledge and work with holism and interconnectedness. The Buddhist exploration of 'ultimate truths' and experiential understanding of

the interdependence of phenomena is paralleled by the intellectual pursuits of *process philosophy* (Whitehead, 2004 [1920]; Bergson, 2007 [1911]) which, in turn, has influenced certain strands of post-structural philosophy (e.g., Deleuze, 1997; Latour,2005). These process-orientated philosophies are beginning to find traction in the writing of scholars working in the fields of organization studies (Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Chia, 1998; Tsoukas, 2005) and leadership studies (Wood, 2005, 2008; Wood & Ladkin, 2008). Similarly, there are connections to be made between Buddhist wisdom and the Merleau-Ponty inspired study of inter-being (Kupers and Weibler, 2008), as well as with the concept of in-dwelling deriving from the work of Polanyi (Case and Gosling, 2011). In a closely related line of enquiry, for example, Dian Marie Hosking has applied concepts from *Mahayana* Buddhism in her development of a 'relational constructionist' understanding of organizational and leadership processes (Hosking, 2006, 2011). Others have drawn on Buddhist philosophy to augment social theory

(Loy, 2003) and organizational applications of complexity theory (Boulton, 2011). Boulton (2011), for example, explores the close relationship between the ontology of contemporary quantum physics and those of Buddhism, arguing that this correspondence carries practical implications for complexity-informed modes of action research and organizational interventions.

Conclusion

In this chapter I sought to introduce and discuss Buddhist conceptions of wisdom as understood within the *Theravada* tradition. Buddhism is perhaps best understood as a way of life whose entire raison d'être revolves around the cultivation of both mundane and supra-mundane wisdom. As I attempted to explain, it is not possible to engage in the experiential task of meditation without simultaneously working on the practical dimension of ethics. In terms of the Eightfold path, 'purification

of understanding' (supra-mundane wisdom) cannot take place in the absence of 'purification of conduct' (taking scrupulous care to speak and act ethically) and 'purification of mind' (achieved through the disciplines of meditation). An appreciation of the law of *kamma-vipāka* (action and result) encourages followers to act wisely in the world, seeking to minimize harm to oneself, others and the wider environment. Insight (*vipassanā*) meditation is a technique that enables a mind which is sufficiently calm to explore the constituents and inter-relationships between phenomena as these are manifest in consciousness. It 'slows down' the mind in such a way that complex and extremely rapid processes can be observed dispassionately. Pursuit of this technique can eventually lead to profound insights into the transience and interconnected nature of the universe which, in turn, becomes a gateway to apprehending the goal of Buddhism – *nibbāna,* or liberation from subjective suffering.

Having introduced the core concepts of Buddhist philosophy and practices which promote the development of mundane and supra-mundane wisdom, I then proceeded to offer some reflections of the potential implications that Buddhist wisdom has for the fields of organization and leadership studies. I suggested that an indirect effect of supra-mundane insight was the promotion of harmlessness in the world. The attitude or disposition of gentleness which Buddhist widom promotes, moreover, may usefully inform post-materialist debates concerning corporate social and environmental responsibility and sustainbility. There are also potentially fruitful connections to be made with contemporary literature on responsible leadership, authentic leadership and workplace spirituality; literatures that, in diverse ways, are seeking to explore different modes of *being and acting in the organizations*. Finally, I proposed that Buddhist supra-mundane wisdom has ontological implications for the way we conceive of organization and organizing. In this respect, I drew parallels with

the way in which process philosophy, complexity theory and strands of post-structural philosophy encourage students of organization and leadership to conceive of their fields of enquiry in holistic and interconnected ways. In common with these western forms of ontology, Buddhism prompts us to move beyond a world populated by discrete objects into a realm of interdependency in which all phenomena are subject to complex processes of conditionality. The reflections I offer are only partial and provisional. My hope, however, is that introducing this discussion of Buddhist philosophy may not only be informative to those unfamiliar with its principles but will also yield fruitful lines of future enquiry within the field of wisdom studies.

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End Notes

[1] For a comprehensive multi-disciplinary bibliography of wisdom-related literature see Trowbridge (2010). For a recent review of literature and research developments within the discipline of psychology see Staudinger and Glück, J. (2011).

[2] For a fuller account of *paticca-samuppāda* see Nānamoli (1979).

[3] See Nyanatiloka (1972, pp.124-5), Bodhi (1993, p.25-6).