

Buddhist Communication of the True Roots of the Ecological Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The attempt to explain the root cause of the ecological crisis has been carried out by environmental philosophers, scientific experts as well as religious thinkers. Buddhism with its unique approach to the human condition presents its own framework for dealing with the ecological crisis. The Buddhist framework places this issue within the larger reality of humanity being plagued by unwholesome tendencies, namely greed, hatred and delusion. These unwholesome tendencies represent the root poisons causing human spiritual and moral degeneration, which subsequently is manifested in personal and social problems, among them the ecological crisis. This paper applies this Buddhist framework to diagnosing the modern day ecological crisis and asserts that Buddhism needs to communicate its worldview to address negative human tendencies that compound the problem.

Introduction

The modern day ecological crisis is an issue that concerns the global community in the present and future. The extent of the situation demands attention not only from scientists, political leaders and social activists but also leaders of religion, which is naturally interested in what happens to humanity not only in this world but in the world to come. Buddhism is one of the religious traditions often turned to as a resource not necessarily because it

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offers ready teachings on matters related to the environment or environmental concerns, but because Buddhism provides a clear and methodical framework for addressing individual and social issues. This paper presents the Buddhist diagnosis for the ecological crisis within the overall Buddhist framework for assessing the human situation. In an age of advanced technological development coupled with increasing ecological destruction, Buddhism must actively collaborate with other religions and the scientific community to communicate truths about the world in order to counter negative human tendencies leading to environmental degradation. This task is necessary and more important than ever when there continues to be considerable ignorance of the gravity of the matter or even straight out denial of the presence of climate change.

Overview of the Buddhist Framework

Confronting the seemingly pessimistic situation of the human condition, the Sakyamuni Buddha like many of his contemporaries attempted to devise ways to deliver human beings out of the endless cycle of suffering and rebirth. After his experience of enlightenment at the age of 35, the Buddha managed to succeed in conceiving a program that would help his followers achieve emancipation through their own experience of enlightenment. The Four Noble Truths presented by the Buddha in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (SN.5.11) known as the setting of the wheel of *Dhamma* into motion can be categorized into three sequential steps: 1) Diagnosis of the perceived problem; 2) Presenting a goal or vision; and 3) Offering the path to realization of the vision.

The first two Noble Truths constitute the diagnosis part of the Buddhist pedagogy. The Buddha observed that the essence of mundane life was unsatisfactory because of the existent reality of impermanence of all things in the world. By observing life processes such as birth, aging, sickness, and death, as well as all the other events taking place in the world, the Buddha was able to give these realities a common descriptive name—suffering or unsatisfactoriness.

Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

The second truth locates the root of this unsatisfactoriness as due to the ignorance of the true nature of reality, causing one to have craving (*tanhā*) for things that do not bring about lasting happiness because they are ultimately impermanent. The Buddha listed three kinds of craving—craving for sensual pleasure, craving to become, and craving to get rid of unwanted things. Having made the diagnosis, the Buddha subsequently presented a vision of hope that is contrary to the condition of suffering that one experiences in life. That vision is stated in the third Noble Truth, which declares that human beings do not have to be enslaved to this perpetual cycle of unsatisfactoriness, that one can put an end to the suffering in one's life by achieving freedom from the various desires mentioned above. Finally, this vision of eternal bliss can be realized by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path with its threefold training of morality, concentration, and wisdom. The Noble Eightfold Path, therefore, outlines the path that leads to realization of the proposed vision.

In dealing with the escalating ecological crisis from the Buddhist approach, it is important that the situation be examined and analyzed systematically within this overall framework. The term “crisis” alone informs us that there is a problem, a state of imbalance, disharmony, dislocatedness, and lack of peace. Thus, the Buddhist approach to the ecological crisis needs to take the same analogous course as that which pertains to the entire human condition by first, making a diagnosis of the perceived problem. Only after the diagnosis has been made can there be a goal or vision presented for the problem, as well as a practical course of action that helps to realize that vision.

A clear understanding of where we are in terms of our relationship with the natural environment is helpful towards proposing a goal for where we would like to go and how to get there. An honest assessment and self-examination is crucial for devising appropriate remedial measures to address the crisis. The value of this activity is affirmed by the Thai scholar monk Phra Prayudh Payutto, who in a published talk entitled “Thai People and Forests,” posed a simple question to his listeners as follows: “Is the relationship between Thai people and forests one of friendship or of enemies?” (11).¹ Obviously, Phra Prayudh intended for his listeners to make a conscientious examination of their attitudes and behaviors in order to evaluate the quality of the relationship between human beings with not only forests alone, but nature as a whole.

¹This talk was originally published in the Thai language entitled คนไทยกับป่า “Khon Thai Kap Pa.”

Phra Prayudh's question is pertinent because how human beings view nature and view themselves vis-à-vis nature has tremendous implications for the condition of the environment now and in the future. As humanity confronts the ecological crisis unfolding in ever more dramatic and disturbing ways, the question naturally arises, "What is the root cause of the crisis at hand?" Answers such as the overuse of non-renewable resources or materialism only express the symptoms but not the real problem because these explanations do not get to the profound issues taking place in the deeper realm of human spirituality and psychology. Unless one gets to the underlying root causes in order to accurately diagnose the problem, effective curative therapies could not be proposed. No doubt diagnosis for the ecological crisis can be made from a multitude of vantage points—scientific, sociological, political, as well as spiritual. The Buddhist approach proposes that the ecological crisis, like various problems involving human society, is a reflection of a fundamental issue involving human morality and spirituality. Only when this part of human reality is brought to light and understood for what it is can there be ways to successfully deal with personal and social problems that are the consequences of the imbalances taking place from within.

The Buddhist Diagnosis of the Ecological Crisis

Among the various approaches to diagnosing the ecological crisis, one that is proposed by many secular environmental ethicists points to the underlying problem of a militant or strong anthropocentrism that leads to a conflict between human beings and nature, ultimately resulting in nature's destruction and demise. The charge of anthropocentrism given by environmental ethicists as the culprit of the ecological crisis, from the Buddhist perspective, remains at the level of mere symptom but has yet to get to the deep roots of the crisis. Buddhism would immediately raise the question: "Where do the negative anthropocentric tendencies come from?" Application of the Buddhist framework requires an even more fundamental examination of the human situation in order to shed light on the crisis. It must be said at the outset that there is no direct Buddhist diagnosis of the ecological crisis *per se*. Certainly in the Buddha's time environmental concerns were not of the same degree or nature as what humanity is grappling with at the present even though, both in the past and nowadays, there are some basic issues that affect human beings and the natural environment. Water sanitation was an issue of great concern because drinking unclean water led to life threatening

diseases. The Buddha's prohibition for monks to urinate in the river was no doubt related to this concern for preserving water sanitation (V. IV. 205-206). Human intrusion into forest land also took place as seen in the story of the two tree spirits who lost their abodes due to human interference. The story entitled *Vyagghajataka* depicts two spirits residing in two separate trees in the forest. However, one of the tree spirits was bothered by the odor of the carcasses of the animals that the tiger and the lion had preyed on and left behind. This spirit wanted to frighten the culprits out of the vicinity. However, the other spirit warned him that this would not be a good idea. Despite the warning, the unhappy spirit followed through with this plan and scared them away. As a result, humans who previously only stayed at the edge of the forest for fear of the lion and tiger eventually became more bold and advanced deeper into the forest in order to hunt and find things to sell. The humans eventually would also cut down the trees of the forest in order to farm. Consequently, the two tree spirits were left without a home (J. 272; Chapple 141-142).

Today, scholars of Buddhism generally agree that in the Ganges region where Buddhism originated, urbanization and population growth were considerable. Deforestation subsequently had to take place in order for these urban hubs to appear along with mercantile activity and trade within and between population centers that were both in close and distant proximities. Buddhism, therefore, found its beginnings and growth as part of a growing urban movement and not something just limited to the wilderness (Lancaster 11-12). The Sakyamuni spent his childhood in a city environment, and even as a wandering ascetic, taught and lived in such an environment. Of the 4,257 teaching locales found in the early Buddhist canon 96 percent are in urban settings. At the same time, of the nearly 1,400 people identified in these texts, 94 percent are identified as residing in cities.² Thus, one can extrapolate that the environmental problems of the present day had its beginning even in ancient time as human societies developed using various means that impacted the condition of the natural environment. And even though the Buddha did not address environmental problems as a social concern, the Buddha did teach the truths pertaining to the suffering of sentient beings. The suffering experienced by human beings is often the result of the imbalances in how they build and maintain relationship with the people and the world around them. These

² Johan Elverskog, "Buddhist Contributions to Environmental Ethics: From Creative Destruction to Creative Protection." Lecture delivered at International Conference on Ethics, Climate Change and Energy, Mahidol University, Salaya, Thailand, November 27, 2014.

external defects, however, reflected more deep seated internal tendencies that serve as the root causes for all personal as well as social problems.

The Buddhist diagnosis of the ecological crisis, therefore, is based not on any direct teachings or observations that the Buddha made about the environment, but rather based on the Buddha's teachings about human conditions that lead to destructive actions on both a personal and social level. These negative human tendencies manifest themselves in new issues that represent the particular context of each timeframe in the history of the world. The Buddha divided the human situation into two states: wholesome (*kusala*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) (D. III. 275). The root causes of these unwholesome states are greed (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*), while the root causes of the wholesome states are non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. All animate life is impelled by these universal forces on an individual as well as collective basis. They are the motive forces behind our thoughts, words, and deeds. Introspection tells us that the unwholesome roots also known as the poisons lead to actions that result in suffering for ourselves and others in a way that contradicts with our inner desire for happiness. Thus, the realm of the unwholesome extends beyond what is considered as immoral since certain thoughts and actions, though not deemed immoral may still be considered unwholesome and is productive of unfavorable *kamma*-results (Nyanaponika Thera 4).

In basic sense, greed is the mental state in which one is constantly preoccupied with a feeling of need and want because he feels there is a lack in his life; and since his appetite is insatiable, even when he obtains what he has desired, he continues to feel the desire for lasting satisfaction. Hatred, which in the Buddhist sense includes other negative emotions such as disappointment, despair, anxiety and dejection, also has internal origins representing dissatisfaction towards oneself and others. Finally, delusion can be seen in the form of ignorance (*avijjā*) that leads to confusion and lack of directions, or lead to false views that result in ideological dogmatism and fanaticism. These three unwholesome roots manifest themselves in various degrees from mild to extreme. For example, greed may be expressed in a simple wish or in something more serious such as craving and self-indulgence. Similarly, hatred can take the form of mere dislike to something much more serious such as vengefulness and wrath. Delusion can range anywhere from dullness to conceit and ideological dogmatism (Nyanaponika Thera 5). In

the *Visuddhimagga*, the commentarial literature, these three roots are further described using various unpleasant images to emphasize the extent of their unwholesomeness:

Greed has the characteristic of grasping an object, like birdlime (lit. “monkey lime”). Its function is sticking, like meat put in a hot pan. It is manifested as not giving up, like the dye of lamp-black. Its proximate cause is seeing enjoyment in things that lead to bondage. Swelling with the current of craving, it should be regarded as taking [beings] with it to states of loss, as a swift-flowing river does to the great ocean. (Vism. XIV. 162)

[*Hatred*] has the characteristic of savageness, like a provoked snake. Its function is to spread, like a drop of poison, or its function is to burn up its own support, like a forest fire. It is manifested as persecuting (*dūsana*), like an enemy who has got his chance. Its proximate cause is the grounds for annoyance. It should be regarded as like stale urine mixed with poison (Vism. XIV. 171)

Delusion has the characteristic of blindness, or it has the characteristic of unknowing. Its function is non-penetration, or its function is to conceal the individual essence of an object. It is manifested as the absence of right theory, or it is manifested as darkness. Its proximate cause is unwise (unjustified) attention. It should be regarded as the root of all that is unprofitable (Vism. XIV. 163)

These three roots do not exist independently in the human consciousness but intertwine with one another and often serve as the impelling force for each other. For example, a person who suffers from greed may also harbor great hatred when he is not able to attain the things that he desires due to real or perceived obstacles from others. In the same manner, delusion is the foundation upon which greed and hatred stand because delusion leads one to believe that one ought to want and need something, or that one ought to hate certain people or certain things. It is because of this that the *Dhammapada* remarks that nothing is able to cause entanglement like the net of delusion (Dp. 251). Perhaps the biggest delusion of all, according to Buddhism, is the false belief in a self or an ego that causes one to do various things on behalf of this ego—building it up, protecting it from harm, and defending it from attacks, etc.

Although the three unwholesome roots or poisons are found in individual mental states, the negative consequences are not simply confined to the individual, but occur on the collective level as well. The social manifestation of the unwholesome roots are seen when individuals who suffer from these unwholesome states vie with one another in society and try to outdo one another. One's hatred becomes the source that instigates the hatred in another person which subsequently leads to an escalation of hatred and violence. Social and political conflicts arise out of this cycle of hate that begins with individuals but eventually emerges on a communal and even global level. Hatred is an especially anti-social defilement because it results from conflicting interests between ourselves and others. Individual leaders and institutions often promote hate for others in order to rally people to their collective cause or individual egotistical goals. Wars and atrocities take place on the common foundation of hate for the others. The current state of the world where nationalism is turned into nativism, religious fervor turns into radical fundamentalism, self-protection morphs into terrorism testifies to this promotion of hate by one group towards another group or groups of people.

The presence of the unwholesome roots on a social level is likewise seen with regards to greed and delusion. The need to own things, especially those things that are expensive, because of perceived satisfaction and happiness that come from possessing them is present in people of all age groups and social backgrounds. This tendency starts even from very formative years of life. An empirical study of poor children in Britain carried out by Richard Elliott and Clare Leonard, for example, shows the prevalence of peer pressure in young people's desire for possessing expensive fashion brands. According to the study, those who own famous brands are seen by respondents as more popular in school and fit in more with groups (Elliott and Leonard 355). Such findings are far from exceptional as confirmed by a UNESCO study of youth consumption patterns in various parts of the world, indicating that social peer pressure is the most important factor in youth materialism (UNESCO 31). A society characterized by materialistic tendencies is formed when its members feel that lasting satisfaction comes from possessing various gadgets and things. Indeed, this was the observation of the writers of the UNESCO report where young people associated having more with greater happiness. These thoughts are instilled in the people through advertisements produced by companies that feel that the indicator of success is uninterrupted growth year after year. Operating business upon this fundamental goal for unceasing

growth, producers of product advertisements must make use of stimulating and entertaining words and images in order to sell a dream or a life style as much as the product itself (Clover 86). On any given day, we are bombarded with advertisements every time we turn on the television, go online, or drive down the street. This situation is not limited to any particular socio-religio-cultural context. Whether in Western capitalist New York or Eastern Buddhist Bangkok, the consumer culture is strong and is the engine that makes the world go round. The Buddhist scholar monk Bhikkhu Bodhi illustrates the intertwining of the three unwholesome states in our globalized world in the following manner:

Through the prevalence of greed the world has become transformed into a global marketplace where human beings are reduced to the status of consumers, even commodities, and where materialistic desires are provoked at volatile intensities. Through the prevalence of hatred, which is often kindled by competing interests governed by greed, national and ethnic differences become the breeding ground of suspicion and enmity, exploding in violence and destruction, in cruelty and brutality, in endless cycles of revenge. Delusion sustains the other two unwholesome roots by giving rise to false beliefs, dogmatic views, and philosophical ideologies devised in order to promote and justify patterns of conduct motivated by greed and hatred (Internet).

The Unwholesome Roots and the Ecological crisis

The Buddhist approach to the ecological crisis does not depart from the basic framework that considers all personal and social problems stemming from a combination of the three unwholesome roots of greed, hatred and delusion. As Pragati Sahni contends:

As long as the mind is influenced by the three unwholesome principles of *rāga*, *dosa* and *moha* or greed, hatred and delusion the human race will be stricken by environmental and other forms of exploitation, as well as selfish actions, greedy consumer cultures, dissatisfaction and other attitudes that can be looked upon as vices (165).

Likewise, the late Thai monk Buddhadasa would remark that climate change and other imbalances in nature being experienced at this time is a result of an internal human moral degeneration that affects the external dimension

of the world.³ The break down in human-nature relationship is reflected in the actions and activities motivated by the three poisons that promote one-sided interests without due consideration for the well-being of others, whether it is fellow human beings or the natural environment.

The first unwholesome root of greed negatively impacts the environment in multiple ways. When businesses operations are motivated by greed, environmental standards often get neglected for the sake of maximizing profit. This was seen clearly in April, 2016 when the people along the coast of Central Vietnam discovered all the fish along a stretch of more than 200 kilometers over four provinces had washed ashore. The livelihood of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese families who either directly or indirectly depended on the fishing industry, not to mention the diet of millions of Vietnamese were severely affected by this environmental disaster. After months of investigation and despite initial resistance on the part of the government to point the finger at the obvious culprit, a Taiwanese steel company, Formosa Ha Tinh Steel Corporation, it was finally concluded to nobody's surprise that the steel firm was indeed responsible. The company was found to have released toxic wastes through a pipe that extended from their onshore facility directly into the ocean.⁴ Formosa Ha Tinh was fined USD500 million, a miniscule amount compared to the immediate and long term damage to the environment and to the life and livelihood of millions of Vietnamese people. The Formosa case in Vietnam is hardly unique. Countless similar cases could be found throughout the world.

Breeches in environmental standards are often enabled by the backing of corrupt government leaders willing to institute laws and policies that grant privileges to entities that are in the business of making money through environmentally destructive means, or turn a blind eye to blatant environmental violations. Personal gains offered to government leaders and policy makers make it possible for permits to be granted to mining companies building on pristine natural reserves, or for gigantic industrial complexes to go up next to lakes and rivers used by the local people for their daily living.

³ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's ideas come from a number of works that have been compiled and translated by Grant A. Olson. Olson gives the title of his translation "A Notion of Buddhist Ecology." In addition to the negative effect on nature, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu asserts that internal degeneration hinders spiritual progress.

⁴ Associated Press, 1 July 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jul/01/vietnam-blames-toxic-waste-water-fom-steel-plant-for-mass-fish-deaths>.

When government leaders are more motivated by personal financial gains than the welfare of the citizenry or the flourishing of the natural environment, transparency and mechanisms of check and balance needed for good governance suffer.

One of the greatest consequences of greed is the development of a consumerist culture. In the age of consumerism, businesses try to maximize their profit by selling as much of a product as possible, encouraging and feeding into people's desire for owning many things, even those things that are not essential to their life. In order to make even more profit and remain competitive in the market, these same companies have to continually release new products which they will try to convince consumers that they must have even though what they have been using previously is perfectly good. At the same time, competing companies also release similar products, which consumers are told, are better than the other ones either in quality or in price. Overconsumption harms nature severely because in order to produce all the things that supposedly satisfy human needs, an exorbitant quantity of natural resources must be used.

The greed that contributes to environmental degradation is often intensified by the second poison of hatred. Environmentally destructive hatred can be seen when individuals and groups employ aggressive tactics or when government entities institute aggressive policies in order to achieve selfish economic interests. A country or organization may employ imperialistic or oppressive means in order to acquire control or monopoly of natural resources to which they will exploit for economic gains. As a result, entire oil fields can be depleted and vast stretches of forests can be laid barren so that company executives and government officials can line their pocket with huge sums of money. While hatred in this militant form is obvious, there are also more subtle expressions of hatred, which may not readily be perceived as such. An example of a subtle form of hatred is apathy. Oftentimes, when people are told of the immanent dangers to the environment which can be seen through the rapid loss of species, the depletion of forests, and the pollution of rivers and the air, they display superficial concern but do little to change their own behavior which contributes to this destruction in the first place. In a sense, apathy could be considered a passive form of hatred that collectively contributes to environmental destruction no less than the militant expressions of hatred. In addition to apathy, one can point to negligence or simply a lack of concern

as manifestations of hatred, because these attitudes also express a negative disposition towards the other. While militancy may be limited to notorious individuals, groups, organizations, or governments, apathy, negligence and lack of concern are prevalent in the great majority of the people. This makes all people susceptible to blame when it comes to determining the root cause of the ecological crisis.

Delusion in the Buddhist framework is a strong driving force behind the ecological crisis since it is the foundation for the other two unwholesome states. Sometimes referred to as ignorance or possessing false views, this is a condition where people become attached to impermanent things such as material possessions and social status thinking that they can bring about true happiness and satisfaction. Armed with this delusion, we keep on hoarding and seeking without ever attaining the satisfaction that we long for, and the search goes on. Delusion or ignorance is also played out on a systemic level when it is believed that in real development, economic growth is the measure of national good, that high levels of production and consumption signify higher well-being, and the importance of unceasing GDP growth trumps sustainability (Ives 546). Sulak Sivaraksa, an Engaged Buddhist scholar and activist, comments:

Development can emphasize quantity or quality. With the former, we can measure results, but it is presumptuous to assume that more factories, schools, hospitals, food, clothing, jobs, or income will necessarily enhance the quality of life. Although these are all necessary, they are not sufficient... Development must also take into account the essence of our humanity. (35)

When it comes to the ecological crisis, delusion is also the ignorance of the true nature of the problem leading to undermining its seriousness or even denying that it even exists. Donald J. Trump, before becoming the president of the United States on multiple occasions had referred to climate change and global warming as a hoax in his Tweets. Only less than six months after assuming the office in 2017, Trump even went so far as to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement signed by 195 countries in December 2015. The words and actions of Trump both before and during his presidency represent one of the most egregious cases of climate science denial of modern time. The idea of climate change being due to anthropogenic causes has been overwhelmingly agreed upon by scientists throughout the world. Geochemist

James Lawrence Powell surveyed 13,950 peer-reviewed climate articles published between 1991 and 2012, and found that only 24 papers rejected the reality of global warming (0.17 percent). Of the 2,258 peer-reviewed articles authored by 9,136 scientists in the period between November 12, 2012 and December 31, 2013, Powell only found one single-author article that attributed climate change to non-human causes.⁵ Despite such tremendous scientific consensus, many people still do not know of the reality of global warming. Even in the United States where no one is supposedly hindered from accessing information, only a small number of people are aware of this scientific position. In a 2017 survey, only 13 percent of respondents correctly identified that scientific consensus on climate change was over 90 percent.⁶ The vast majority either thought that there was no scientific consensus or that it was much lower.

Why is there such a glaring gap between scientists and laypersons in their understanding about climate change? Lee McIntyre points to individuals and groups who carry out campaigns of misinformation to protect that economic or ideological agenda (Kindle). ExxonMobil, for example, was found to have funded organizations that deny climate change. Although the oil company under pressure from shareholder activists had promised in 2007 that it would stop funding researchers and activist groups that promote disinformation about global warming, eight years later it was reported that the company had given money to US Congress members and a corporate lobbying group that tried to block efforts to fight climate change.⁷ The campaign of disinformation carried out by climate change deniers has been supported tremendously by the news media. Climate change skeptics would be given time on various news programs to debate with those who hold the opposite view. News programs which often upheld the model of presenting “both sides of the story” unwittingly gave equal time to climate change deniers. This gave the impression that the reality of climate change was a controversial position that needed to be debated, while in fact, the scientific community was already in near unanimous agreement on the issue (McIntyre Kindle). It was not only

⁵ <https://www.popsoci.com/article/science/infographic-scientists-who-doubt-human-caused-climate-change>

⁶ <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/7/6/15924444/global-warming-consensus-survey>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jul/15/exxon-mobil-gave-millions-climate-denying-lawmakers>

the television programs that contributed to causing public confusion; the print media also played a role since many reporters simply wrote articles based on interviews with people holding different viewpoints but did not have the time or expertise to check whether those opinions were in agreement with scientific findings. Whether it was due to the need to create drama or to project the image of being balanced in their programming, media outlets helped to propagate the notion that climate change is not “settled science” and there is “no scientific consensus” on the matter. The denial of anthropogenic climate change, therefore, is a consequence of a conscientious intent to misinform or to communicate misinformation by those with vested interest in propagating this denial, sowing confusion and ignorance in the public about what is truly happening.

Conclusion

The diagnosis of the ecological crisis from a Buddhist framework indicates that the crisis is a reflection of a moral and spiritual degeneration, in which the human person is plagued by the poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion. These three unwholesome states act synergistically in human individuals and groups in order to bring about destructive relationships between human beings as well as between human beings and the natural environment. The Buddhist outlook asserts that personal and social problems (depletion of the earth’s natural resources and destruction of the environment; proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction; utter disregard for human rights; political, ethnic, and religious conflicts; social poverty and unequal distribution of resources) all depend on how prevalent these interconnected poisons permeate human thoughts, words, and actions. The ecological crisis, therefore, is not an isolated or unique phenomenon but part of an intertwining network of issues that stem from a deep rooted spiritual malignancy infecting individuals and social systems. In this respect, the ecological crisis is consequence of human beings succumbing to the poisons of greed, hatred and delusion, causing them to indulge in selfish desires while discounting the well-being of others, especially of nature. Human-nature relationship becomes one characterized by harm and exploitation with the natural environment on the receiving end of human inconsiderateness. An unhealthy and unwholesome human-nature relationship fueled by the poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion if not rectified will increasingly cause nature to lose its vitality and equilibrium. As in any relationship, one cannot cause harm

to another without ultimately also being affected by the negative consequences that arise.

The Buddhist assessment of the ecological crisis, however, can only be useful if the truths regarding the crisis are accepted by scientists and laypersons. Consequently, Buddhist leaders and scholars must engage with both the scientific community and the public in order to educate themselves on the issue of climate change, at the same time being able to communicate accurate information to the world. Buddhism can play an important role in addressing the ecological crisis when its adherents not only avail themselves of empirical scientific facts, but also are able to analyze these facts and articulate them in ways pertinent to the well-being of humanity and the ecology. The challenge for Buddhism as with other religions and science concerned with the ecology, however, is to find ways to overcome the forces of greed, hatred and delusion working hard to perpetuate ignorance of and apathy towards one of the most serious problems of modern time.

ABBREVIATIONS

Dp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
J	<i>Jātaka</i>
V	<i>Vinaya</i>
Vis.M.	<i>Visuddhimaga</i>

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