The Wonder of Intrinsic Motivation

Bhikkhu Cintita

During my days in graduate school, where I studied theoretical linguistics (of all things), I happened to have a conversation with a young man outside my normal circle that went something like this:

"So, what do you do?"

"I am a linguistics graduate student."

"Oh? What is linguistics?"

"Well, …," I very briefly explained that linguistics is the science that studies human language as a natural phenomenon and how much it fascinated me.

"Is it, um, something you can make a lot of money doing?" he asked.

"Hmmm, I've never thought about it. I suppose not."

"Why would you do something that takes so much work if you can't make a lot of money? And why would you not think about it?"

Why indeed? Nothing I said from that point on made the least sense to him. What *he* said made sense to *me*, but had a twisted logic to it, and the conversation quickly devolved into mutual bewilderment. For me, after all, this was human *language* we were talking about. Where was this guy's sense of *wonder*?

I didn't realize it at the time, but the two of us were talking from

opposite sides of a chasm, a deep gash through the middle of our culture with profound implications for human psychological and spiritual well-being, for the very direction of people's lives, for the structure of our economy, and for the way children are brought up and educated. This guy represented what seems to be the dominant, utilitarian view in our culture, one that speaks of maturity, rationality and purpose. Mine was the more foolhardy, silly view that something can be worth doing for its own sake. I consider myself fortunate to have since lived a life of “silliness,” which, many years later as a rather elderly, scholarly Buddhist monk, I continue to live to this day.

The dichotomy here has acquired the names, in modern psychological research, “intrinsic motivation” and “extrinsic motivation.” In *extrinsic motivation* a task is performed in order to achieve some goal outside of the task itself, for instance, receiving a reward or avoiding a punishment, as when we work for pay, and we work even harder in order not to be fired. In intrinsic motivation a task is satisfying and worth pursuing in itself, as when children play with nothing further in mind than to play, and then as adults raise children with nothing further in mind than to raise children, and then still later to knit or fly-fish just to knit or fly-fish. Psychological research indicates some astonishing differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in terms not only the greater degree of satisfaction, meaning and well-being enjoyed by the intrinsically engaged, but also in terms of the greater proficiency and creativity they bring to their engagement.

As I only recently became familiar with some of this research, it struck me how closely these conclusions resonated with a

Buddhist understanding of such matters. Even though the distinction goes unnamed in Buddhism, it seems that Buddhist practice across the board is a push toward what modern psychology identifies as intrinsic, and that Buddhist psychology predicts many of the same virtues of intrinsic motivation demonstrated experimentally in modern psychological research.

My intention here is twofold. First, I would like to introduce intrinsic motivation to other students of Buddhism as a valuable perspective from which to better understand the logic of Buddhist practice and understanding. Second, I would like to introduce relevant aspects of Buddhist psychology to students of motivational theory, particularly to point out some striking *contrasts* between the Buddhist model and the modern model advanced in modern psychology that may be worth further investigation. In this way I hope, moreover, to make a contribution to the growing literature on the connections between Buddhism and modern science.

Examples and benefits of intrinsic motivation

The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is easy to grasp intuitively. I will provide a range of examples in this section and to discuss actual experimental evidence for the contrasting consequences for human well-being, but leave theory aside until later. Most of these examples come from the modern research.

People in general love the intellectual challenge of solving puzzles – crossword, jigsaw, Rubik's – with no immediate purpose in mind other than that it seems interesting. Significantly, this seems to be a drive shared by other primates, for even

monkeys, given an apparatus with hasps, hooks and hinges, will take great interest in figuring out for many hours how to open and close parts. Focused and determined, they require no tangible reward outside of obvious enjoyment in the activity itself.[1] Cats may have some of this quality as well, for they are notoriously curious. This is *intrinsic motivation*.

Now, what happens if we reward such behavior, for instance by paying cash for a successful solution to such a puzzle? This would be an *extrinsic motivation*. Do we get *twice* the motivation by laying an extrinsic motivation on top of an intrinsic? A number of experiments demonstrate that this is not the case: extrinsic motivation in fact *displaces* intrinsic motivation rather than supplementing it. In one experiment, each member of groups A and B is presented with a puzzle intrinsically interesting in itself. A is offered a monetary rewarded for good performance, while B, the control group, is unrewarded. Once they have been paid, members of A will no longer have interest in the puzzles during a free choice period, whereas members of B will continue to play with the puzzles.[2] In another experiment each member of A was instead given a punishment for poor performance rather than a reward for good. The results were much the same. (Deci 1995, 31). In another experiment, the extrinsic motivation given to A was that of beating a competitor. The results were much the same.[3]

An illustrative Jewish fable recounts a Jewish tailor who moves into town. The town's bigots encourage some ruffians to jeer at the tailor each day, which they were apparently delighted to do. But the tailor was very clever. He offered each ruffian a *reward* each time he came to jear, say 50¢. Each day they came, jeered

and received their payment. Then the tailor reduced the payment to 10¢, and then finally to 1¢. 1¢ was not enough payment for their valuable time and skill, so they stopped coming. The extrinsic motivation displaced the intrinsic motivation, the extrinsic motivation was then removed, and the ruffians were left with no motivation at all.[4]

Children, like monkeys, are fonts of intrinsic motivation. Naturally curious, they are learning machines in their early years. Shouldn't this be good news for educator who need only to direct and deepen this reservoir of motivation? Unfortunately, education, at least in the US, has relied heavily on extrinsic motivators, doubled down with the introduction in 2002 of mandated testing nation-wide. In spite of expectations, our schools tend to be dreary and uninspiring places for future scientists, artists and explorers.

In a typical experiment, group A of young eager minds was told that they would be given a test to evaluate their comprehension of a passage they were asked to read. Group B, the control, was asked to read the passage did not know that they also would be tested. But then both A and B received the same test. It was found that, although A had better rote recollection, B was found to have a better conceptual understanding. Moreover, one week later a second, unannounced test was administered to both groups. B had *superior* recollection of the passage.[5]

In another experiment, more advanced students were asked to learn some complex material on neurophysiology. Members of group A were told they would be tested and graded on the material, members of group B that they would be asked to teach the material to others. Group B was found to have acquired

greater conceptual understanding.[6] (Actually it is not clear why preparing to *teach* is an intrinsic motivation under our current definition. I'll come back to this later.)

Similarly group A students' artwork, produced under extrinsically motivating conditions, was found to be, under objective criteria for evaluating such things, of poorer quality than group B's artwork, produced under intrinsic conditions.[7] Consistently intrinsic motivation is discovered to lead to improved problem-solving, to better conceptual understanding, to greater creativity, and to a richer more satisfying learning experience.[8]

Intrinsic and extrinsic *orientation* have become key concepts in modern psychology of religion. Religion and modern psychology started off on the wrong foot after Freud bluntly declared that religion is not only *associated* with mental illness, but that religion *is* mental illness.[9] Although Jung had a different take than Freud, for years empirical evidence that religion produces any substantial benefit to mental health remained elusive. A major shift in our understanding of the psychology of religion began with Allport (1956), who qualified what it is to be religious in terms of “mature” religion and “immature religion,” which in later works he renamed “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” religion respectively. It seems that, regardless of how much one attends church, one can relate to one's religion in either of these two distinct ways.

The intrinsically religious sees religion as an end in itself. Her attitude is variously described as genuine, heartfelt, devout and living her religion. They find in their religion the master motivation in life, harmonizing all other needs with this master motivation. Experimental studies show that intrinsically religious

people experience more meaning in life.[10] A more recent meta-analysis of many studies in psychology of religion[11] shows, with certain exceptions, an overall highly significant correlation between intrinsic religion and mental health.

The extrinsically religious, on the other had, sees religion as instrumental in satisfying non-religious goals. It provides social connections, sometimes status, and often self-justification. Religion has a way of attracting scoundrels alongside the devout who find therein excuses for their own unethical acts and attitudes. Rather than *living* their religion, the extrinsically religious *use* their religion. We all know of Christians who cherry-pick the Bible, for instance, for ways to justify much of the hatred and prejudice they in all likelihood had prior to picking up the Bible.

Allport[12] asserts that most of the popular criticism of religion applies to its immature or extrinsic forms that have not evolved past self-centered interests, that are unreflexive and provide no context of meaning in which the individual can locate oneself and assess one's own conduct. They don't get it. He also points out[13] that the religiously immature tend uniformly to exhibit similar lack of reflection toward their parents, political issues and social institutions. He speculates that the preoccupation of many schizophrenic or depressed people with religion is the effect of mental breakdown, not the cause.

Much of the early research in the psychology of religion in the USA had been concerned with its relationship to “prejudice,” particularly racial prejudice, and pointed to a *positive* correlation between general religion and prejudice, with a punitive attitude toward criminality and drug abuse, and with general intolerance

and bigotry.[14] The flaw was that this research failed to distinguish between these two types of religiosity. In fact the high prejudice of the extrinsically religious majority was masking the relatively low prejudice of the intrinsically religious minority.[15]

It is perhaps significant in this regard that intrinsic motivation in *non-religious* contexts is described by some researchers as often turning into spiritual-like experiences of vitality, dedication, transcendence, hightened awareness and flow.[16]

Consumerism is the master-motivator in our culture, encouraged by modern marketing, and manifesting as desire for wealth, fame, attractiveness, power, and so on. Materialism or consumerism is such a dominant motivator that it is regarded by many critics as having taken on the role of religion in defining the ultimate values and strategies of many of our lives. It belongs, by definition, solidly within extrinsic orientation, and has accordingly been discovered to have many adverse consequences for the well-being of people in our society. Psychologist Tim Kasser (2002) reviews extensive research of the qualities of those of materialism orientation.

Merely aspiring to wealth is associated with lower levels of vitality, and higher levels of depression or anxiety (Kasser 2002, 7-8). Those oriented toward possessions, popularity and attractiveness tend to suffer more frequent headaches, back-aches, sore muscles and sore throats.[17] The materially oriented have higher levels of alcohol and drug consumption and fewer positive emotions.[18] Materialistic teens tend to be more socially isolated and suspicious of others' intentions.[19] Death is a theme in the 20.5% of the dreams of materialistic people, and in only 3% for the non-materialistic.[20] Beyond satisfying basic needs, such as

food and shelter, reaching goals of attaining wealth, possessions or status yields *no* long-term increase in well-being whatever. Rather such success tends to feel empty and unsatisfying.[21] Lottery winners end up on average being no more happy and tend to find less pleasure in everyday events.[22] Materialism is associated with chronically low self-esteem.[23] Materialists have lower quality relations and tend to be more aggressive.[24] Even goal-oriented people who actually manage to achieve their goals – often exalted as celebrities in our society – experience *no* measurable increase in happiness.[25] We are such fools.

Nonetheless, we cannot entirely eliminate goals from our lives. How would we become educated, build a career or find a partner? Once these goals once become established, they become extrinsic motivations for whatever activities are necessary to satisfy these goals. Fortunately, it turns out that we can often moderate our goal-orientation mentally, sometimes quite easily, in favor of wholesome, selfless motivations, without substantially changing the outer form of the pursuit, nor completely sacrificing the goal, but in a way that benefits our enthusiasm and well-being. Often this is simply a matter of how we frame our goal. For example, dieting:

Most typically one diets with the explicit goal of a sexier, slimmer 20-pounds-lighter “me” on the beach next summer. This goal is achieved by keeping eyes on the prize while undergoing starvation and exercise, a process that provides little satisfaction in itself, for as any dieter knows, there is a lot of emoting and suffering in the process, constantly weighing oneself, continually prodded by shame and longing for the end result. Moreover, when the goal is reached, satisfaction is short-lived, for now one must

by the same means *maintain* one's sexier, slimmer and healthier "me" for the *following* summer.

Alternatively, one might instead frame the same pursuit in terms of a simple health standard to bear in mind, that of living an optimal lifestyle with daily nutritional intake and bodily activity optimized for one's body type. The standard never lies in the future, but is achieved each day. In case of lapse, one acknowledges it and determines to do better the next day. There is effort involved, but no striving or emoting. In fact, as one inhabits this practice, one is very likely to become an expert on nutrition, on exercise and on the other real needs of the human body, to which one's attention is directed in lieu of standing on the scale each day and emoting accordingly. One finds satisfaction in the process itself. One becomes devoted to this aspect of health and joyful. As an extra benefit, one attains, and maintains, with ease the goal one gave up in the first place. "If you dare to be fat, then you can be thin."[26]

There seems to be a process of development whereby extrinsic motivation takes on the character of intrinsic motivation. For instance, most non-religious, extrinsically religious, and incipient religious people see devout religious standards as an imposition, finding no delight in its series of do's and don't's. However, with maturity, the devout generally experiences these same restrictions positively as part of a freely chosen path of spiritual development. At some point and in some way the devout must have reconceptualized and internalized the same content in an intrinsic way. Similarly, at some point a child may give up his reluctance to go to school or help arount the house and actually internalize values of responsibility and scholarship.

So, how do we choose to live our lives?

Self-determination theory

The dominant view of human motivation for many years, well represented in psychoanalytic and behavioral theories, seems to have been that human motivation comes from discomfort or dissatisfaction with one's current circumstances, followed by the desire to do something about it. Without discomfort we are not motivated. This was challenged beginning in the 1950's with research on curiosity and problem-solving, and the discovery of intrinsic motivation.[27] *Self-determination theory* was developed as a further explication of intrinsic motivation. I should caution that my knowledge of this field is very limited and perhaps naive, but I'll do my best.

In *self-determination theory* the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is primarily a matter of who is in charge. It identifies three fundamental needs necessary for the health and well-being of the individual: *competence*, *relatedness* and *autonomy*. Briefly, we have a need to do well, to interact with and care for others, and to be the author of our own actions. This last need, autonomy, stands in opposition to *control*, in which some external agency or external circumstance dictates our own actions. Control means our own behavior has no personal endorsement, it is not an “expression of one's self.” *Authenticity* refers to actions for which one is the author, in accord with one's “true inner self.”

So, for example, rewards or threats can be sources of control, of coercion, of getting us to do things we would not otherwise be inclined to do. Social norms can also be a source of control,

primarily by restricting our choices. Presented with such control we respond by *complying* or by *defying*, both of which reveal lack of autonomy. On the other hand, our actions are *authentic* if they come from deep within ourselves, from our own initiative. This is when we are most alive and fully engaged. Self-motivation is the heart of creativity, responsibility and healthy behaviors.

Now, it is not so clear-cut as we might like to separate what part of our motivations come from external sources and what part comes from within. Children are self-motivated in their play, but much of the content of their play may be informed by television shows they have watched, for instance. Parents may try to coerce their good-for-nothing kid for years to help around the house evoking defiance or at best reluctant compliance, but in the end produce an adult authentically delighted to help others in any situation. For this reason, much attention has given within self-determination theory to personal development, to how we *internalize* external influences to the point of personal endorsement, particularly social standards and values. Internalization can go through stages including *introjection* – in which compliance is accepted without new reinforcement, but in which one nonetheless still feels pushed around – and *integration* – in which compliance is brought into harmony with one's innate, core self. Self-knowledge, commitment and rationale have been identified as contributing factors in integration.[28]

Self-motivation is put forward as the locus of mental health and well-being. Critics however point out that this presents a problem with respect to psychotic behaviors, self-indulgence and irresponsibility.[29] Aren't intrinsically motivated people those who do as they please? Isn't authenticity a justification for

irresponsible, selfish, self-indulgent or egoistic behaviors? Such behaviors do not seem to be particularly controlled. Rather we must assume that they violate some other innate human need, and that this need has some kind of ethical sensibility. This brings us to the Buddhist approach to intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation in Buddhist psychology

Buddhism provides an alternative model that accounts for the most if not all of the remarkable differences observed between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, including differences in mental health and human well-being. Whereas self-determination theory sees these differences primarily in terms of autonomy and control, Buddhism would account for the differences primarily in terms of *ethics*.

Buddhism really has three interlocked systems of ethics: precepts, giving and purity of mind.[30] *Precepts* are rules of thumb whose primary function is to avoid harm. *Giving* is a compementary practice of bringing benefit to the world. Whereas precepts and giving characterize outward behaviors, *purity* is psychologically rooted, and the most characteristically Buddhist.

Purity is the quality of character developed in Buddhist practice through which we cannot be other than harmless and of benefit to the world. Purity is broadly defined in Buddhism in terms of wholesome or skillful (in Pali, *kusala*) intentionality as opposed to unwholesome or unskillful (in Pali, *akusala*) intentionality.[31] For example, kindness is wholesome and anger is unwholesome. Most attention is given in Buddhism to reducing what is unwholesome, under the assumption that it will be naturally replaced by what is wholesome. The Buddha observed that

unwholesome intentions or motivations have five qualities in common, all of which are absent in wholesome intentions:[32]

(1) Unwholesome intentions are rooted in grasping, in aversion or in delusion.

(2) When unwholesome intentions give rise to bodily or verbal actions, those actions generally cause harm.

(3) Unwholesome intentions give rise to misperception.

(4) Unwholesome intentions give rise to personal suffering.

(5) Unwholesome intentions are an obstruction to positive personal development.

We will find the three roots of the unwholesome also translated as *greed, hatred* and *delusion* in English Buddhist literature. The roots of the wholesome are their opposites: *renunciation*, *kindness* and *wisdom*. Grasping and aversion put us in personal relation to the things of the world as to be sought out or as to be avoided. They are tied in with craving, attachment and the quest for personal advantage. We grasp at wealth, fame, a sexy partner or chocolate. We avert shame, poverty or ugly twiddle bugs. Delusion is harder to pinpoint because we are, uh, deluded about it. It is found in erroneous views or justifications, conceptualizations, misperceptions, ignorance and denial.[33]

We act on the basis of our wholesome and unwholesome intentions, with beneficial or harmful results. For instance, when we act out of desire we tend to steal, swindle or otherwise deprive others. When we act out of aversion we tend to assault, kill, insult and so on. We generally do not see these consequences for what they are because we usually distort, or are blinded to, reality

according to our own interests.

The last two qualities of the unwholesome are particularly relevant because they involve our own personal experience and well-being. We experience immediate discomfort or even pain when we are caught up in an unwholesome intention. When we have habituated that unwholesome intention we tend to relive it and shape our character accordingly, to our own detriment. We suffer emotionally, but also spiritually.

Somehow we humans have an innate ethical sensitivity even when it does not manifest in our thinking and action. What obscures the identification of our own benefit with our own purity of mind is delusion.

Let’s take “fear of being fired from employment” as an example. Fear is a particularly strong form of aversion, with an element of loss of control. It can drive one to cheat customers, backbite colleagues, lie to shift blame from oneself and so on. Anyone who disrupts productivity or reputation becomes a demon and subject to one's wrath; the world is viewed with suspicion. A high level of tension associated with fear that can lead to depression, and even degrade one's physical health, weaking one's immune system, and so on. Moreover, with persistent fear, it will become increasingly difficult to bring the mind into states of calm and insight necessary for contemplation and spiritual development.

The key point to notice is: *Extrinsic motivations are across the board unwholesome for Buddhists.* They are based in grasping or aversion. This is not to say they are dispensable in a Buddhist life; only the fully awakened can be expected to dispense with them entirely. But this *is* to say the we try to minimize and mitigate extrinsic motivations where possible for our own and others' well-

being and for our own spiritual progress. Buddhism can be seen as consistently turning us toward the intrinsic. We will find that Buddhist practice across the board has a systematic leaning away from extrinsic and toward intrinsic motivation.

Let's consider mindfulness. Mindfulness is part of the infra-structure of Buddhism in that it is engaged as a part of almost every other practice. It also has a characteristic motivational structure. To explain this, I will rely on the definition of mindfulness found in the early texts, which on the surface differs markedly from definitions current in modern psychology, which are something like “bare, non-judgmental, present moment awareness.”[34]

The word we translate as “mindfulness” means memory. It is having learned something in the past, bringing it to mind, and keeping it in mind.[35] What do we bring to mind? In Buddhism, primarily the Dharma. But for any activity we might engage in, we can bring to mind whatever knowledge or skill is relevant to that activity, for instance, for bird-watching what we know about birds, for pottery what we know about clay and the use of various tools. Part of the skill of mindfulness in Buddhism is to hold distractions at bay; we easily forget what is really relevant to the present task when we are distracted. For Buddhists distractions are primarily unwholesome factors: lust, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and doubt.

It might seem odd that in modern literature mindfulness has to do with the *present* moment, when in fact mindfulness recollects the *past*. In fact, avoiding distractions in mindfulness induces an important shift in our relationship to the present moment. The present is suspended between past and future and any task we

perform there is potentially conditioned by either past or future concerns, or both. The past concerns, communicated through mindfulness, are typically the learned values, standards and skills that define the “how” of the present task. The future concerns, on the other hand, generally take the form of self-concerned “striving,” which is just grasping and aversion that define the “why” of the task.

The present task shares concerns of past and future.

Ideally, mindfulness attends to the needs of the task at hand, while striving attends to the neediness of “me.” While mindfulness upholds, striving contrives. Significantly, striving counts as an unwholesome distraction. As we practice mindfulness without distraction, the “why” tends to drop out of mind, nudging the motivational structure of the task: We “inhabit” the task as something satisfying in pursuing well, rather than “utilizing” the task for some purpose outside of the task itself.[36]

For instance, if our action is washing dishes, mindfulness brings to mind an array of knowledge and experience about which implement to scrub with, about how much detergent to use, about how much force to exert, about how hot the water should be, and so on. Without mindfulness, our future concerns might induce us to hurry through the job so that we don't get fired, or to look forward to the praise we will receive when people behold sparkling clean dishes. Thich Nhat Hanh tells us[37] that it is best if we wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes, rather than in

order to have clean dishes. This makes washing the dishes more an act of devotion rather than a utilitarian act. In washing in order to wash, mindfulness rather than striving becomes the guide.

Similarly, a sales employee named Bob in a clothing store can be mindful of the inventory, color schemes, current fashions, etc., but also be intent on getting a commission for a successful sale and worried about doing something that will get him fired. When Bob is worried about being fired or anxious for a bonus, he has, in his striving, been known to cut corners and lie a little to the customer, sometimes to overcharge. But with mindfulness training, Bob is more likely to be diligent, upright and honest in his approach to his job. He might still get fired, but it is actually more likely for his boss, admiring his greater competence and the acclaim of customers, to give him a raise.

Although its nudge gives general mindfulness a somewhat upright quality, the mindful practice of virtue provides a broader context for practice that points to the difference between “mindfulness” and “right mindfulness.” A sniper or a jewel thief can engage his skill mindfully by holding striving momentarily at bay, but at the same time be engaged in a plan frought with wickedness, that is, without regard to the standards of virtue. *Right* mindfulness, on the other hand, recollects the entire Dharma as needed, and so will never neglect the standards of virtue.

Accounting for intrinsic motivations in terms of ethics predicts connectedness and responsibility as aspects of intrinsically motivated activities. It also puts strict limits on “self-indulgence.” In Buddhism sensual pleasures are in themselves not unwholesome. But it is well understood that we humans have a strong tendency to spin easily out of control when our enjoyment

triggers the desire for more of the same, or the aversion toward the inevitable end of our enjoyment. The modern marketing industry understands this perhaps better than Buddhists. Much Buddhist practice centers around guarding the senses to avoid spinning out in this extrinsic way.

It is revealing to recall an experiment described earlier in which group A was motivated to prepare for a test and group B was motivated to prepare to *teach* the learned material. Group B exhibited the conceptual understanding and satisfaction characteristic of the intrinsically motivated. Strickly speaking the goal of teaching is also extrinsic, but we note that teaching is in service to others, and therefore generally a wholesome act of kindness. The Buddhist account makes the correct distinction.

Devotion is a sense of wholehearted commitment that motivates Buddhist practice as meaningful and satisfying in itself. Devotion has a similar motivational structure as mindfulness and virtue, but at the higher level of overall life-commitment. The meaning of the Pali word for devotion ranges over “clear,” “bright” and “glad” as well as “pious.”[38] It is through devotion that we completely inhabit Buddhist practice and understanding. Rather than “utilizing” the the practice of Dharma by striving toward some goal outside of the Dharma itself we settle into this simply as a way of life. Devotion or faith is also described in terms of *refuge*, refuge in “the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha,” a safe dwelling place, rather than a place we would rather be.[39] When we practice for its own sake, with no goal in mind, simply out of devotion, that is best.

None of us starts out with this level of devotion, we have to develop it. Many of us, particularly in the beginning years of

Buddhist practice, show great pride, compare ourselves to others, excel in debate and boast great attainments in the higher meditations. When we apply the higher meditations to achieving mystical states, perhaps known only to ourselves, we are also striving, craving and suffering, which are actually impediments to the calm and composed mind. Moreover, we may respond to many elements of practice with either defiance or reluctant compliance. We see many Buddhist values and standards as restrictive. This is natural if we don't see the point of our effort.

The development of a more mature devotion to practice is attained primarily through *contemplation*, through the knowledge and vision which results from clear comprehension and dispels delusion. When we see clearly what makes our lives so problematic, we begin to let go of our cravings and attachments, much as an alcoholic needs to acknowledge his problem clearly before he is willing to do something about it. We recognize that there is a more beneficial way to live our lives.

As we flee from suffering into the arms of intrinsically motivated Buddhist practice, we are further encouraged by the *delight* we find there. For instance, as we settle into the practice of giving, we will begin to observe delight in giving. We experience many sensual pleasures in our life – food, music, sex, jewels and zombie movies – but we should become aware as well of the great delight, a supra-mundane pleasure beyond the sensual, that comes with giving. This delight is greatest when our intentions are purest. If this delight is the direct experience of giving with a pure mind, consider how much joy there must be in a lifetime dedicated to giving. We also find delight in refuge, in contemplative practice itself, in simple mindfulness and in

whatever is wholesome.

Delight does not stop there, but gives natural rise to *tranquility* and tranquility easily gives rise to *mental composure* (meditative states, aka as concentration or *samādhi*). The Buddha speaks of this as a natural progression that arises effortlessly in the virtuous person. Mental composure is then put to good use in improving the quality of our contemplation, and thereby of wisdom.

The need for competence, identified in self-determination theory, belongs to the "how" of our activities. It is not fully predicted from these ethical considerations alone, although mindfulness seems to highlight the "how," as we have seen. It is noteworthy that the Buddha, in advising laypeople concerning livelihood, repeatedly puts emphasis on the way we inhabit our work, on carrying it out in an upright, responsible and harmless way, on diligence, on proficiency and on protecting the results of our labor, rather than on getting rich. In the *Mangala Sutta* (*Blessings Discourse*) he extols "much learning and handicraft" as among the highest blessings. Elsewhere, he also states,

> What is the accomplishment of persistent effort? Herein … by whatsoever activity a householder earns his living …, at that he becomes skillful and is not lazy. He is endowed with the power of discernment as to the proper ways and means; he is able to carry out and allocate (duties).[40]

This is to work mindfully and competently, and to put aside extrinsic striving.

Conclusions

An aspect of self-determination theory raises red flags for the Buddhist. This is the use of “self,” and its various qualifications like “true self,” “authentic self.” Most people have heard that Buddhism teaches “non-self.” There is an experienced self in Buddhism, but it is a delusion. Losing that delusion is what makes our behavior selfless. So there is nothing like a “true self.” Nonetheless, there are ways in which we talk about human character and what is common to all humans, what is learned, what is culturally conditioned and so on. So I assome phrases like “true self” as denoting common aspects of the human character, or what it is to be human. Whatever it is, it seems to have an ethical sensibility in both Buddhism and self-determination theory, that somehow commonly gets lost, to our own detriment and to the detriment of others, by the time it comes to behavior in the world. In Buddhism this is a result of our own delusion. Isn't it weird that people should be like that? In short, the true self seems to be non-self.

That said, I would like to speculate that the distinction between autonomy and control might not be necessary in explaining intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. That ethical criteria might be enough, along with the tendency to resist effort when we do not appreciate its value.

Most modern Buddhists are staunch believers in science. I feel that Buddhist readers will find inspiration in pointing out some strong parallels between age-old Buddhist ideas and the hugely important conclusions of this area of experimental psychology and find their further ramifications useful in our own understanding. Most experimental psychologists are not

Buddhists, but I hope that these readers will also find inspiration in pointing out some of these parallels, and that they will find in the alternative ways of looking at the data provided in Buddhist psychology some new research ideas. I would be delighted if these reflections were to provide some aspiring Ph.D. candidate with one foot in each of these domains a cool dissertation topic.

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3 Deci,(1995, 32).
4 Deci (1995, 26).
5 Deci, (1995, 48-9).
6 Deci, (1995, 47).
7 Deci, (1995, 49-50).
8 Deci, (1995, 51).
9 Batson (1993, 232).
10 Batson (1993, 199).
11 Hackney (2003).
12 Allport (1956, 54).
13 Allport (1956, 59).
14 Batson (1993, 296).
15 Batson (1993, 303-4).
16 Deci (1995, 45).
17 Kasser (2002, 11).
18 Kasser (2002, 12).
19 Kasser (2002, 17).
20 Kasser (2002, 38).
21 Kasser (2002, 43).
22 Kasser (2002, 44).
23 Kasser (2002, 49).
24 Kasser (2002, 62-3)
25 Hari (2018, 95).
26 Deci (1995 ,116-7).
27 Batson (1993, 237).
28 Deci (1995, 136, 162, 165).
29 Deci (1995, 33, 103).
30 Cintita (2020, 31-2).
31 Cintita (2020, 14).
32 Cintita (2020, 44).
33 Cintita (2020, 42-3).
34 The current definitions of mindfulness cannot be found in any Buddhist sources before the mid-twentieth century, and, in fact, seem to conflate a number of factors as a matter of subjective experience that are more clearly differentiated in early Buddhism. I would recommend that modern researchers take a closer look at the early definition, because it seems to be much more precise. Cintita (2019) discusses the origins of the modern definition of mindfulness and how it relates to the ancient tradition.
35 Mindfulness is a translation of the Pali word *sati*, which literally means memory. See Cintita (2020, 14-5).
36 Cintita (2020, 28-9).
37 Nhat Hanh (1987, 3-4).
38 Cintita (2020, 52-3).

39 Cintita (2020, 56-7).
40 Cintita (2020, 100).