Sīla and Soul (Part 7)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:20:13

Let's go into this issue of the complexity of values and the conflict between different values, the oppositions. Let's go into that a little bit more.

In a way it's obvious that every value stands in oppositional relation with its opposite, with a disvalue. These are obvious oppositions. So, for example, kindness as a value is in oppositional relation with unkindness, which we call a disvalue – an absence of a value, something that has negative moral weight. Or loyalty with disloyalty, honesty with dishonesty, and courage with cowardice. Those kinds of oppositions are obvious.

Although they present challenges – the choice towards a value may ask a lot of us in different situations – still, that opposition is relatively straightforward and not complicated, not essentially problematic or theoretically problematic.

But there are others, and we've already touched on them or thrown them out as examples at different stages of the talk. There are other oppositions, other conflicting duties and allegiances and relationships between different values that are more problematic. Hartmann uses this word – I'm not sure what the German is, but in English it translates as "antinomy," or "antinomies" in the plural. It's philosophical jargon for this kind of oppositional relationship. "Anti" means against, as we know, and "nomi" is from nomos, which means law. So two laws that pull in opposite directions – antinomos, antinomy, antinomies.

As I said, we've touched on a few of these, mentioned some in passing, some in a little more detail.

There is, which I've already mentioned, the antinomy – the curious antinomy – between the actualization of a value and its non-actualization. Obviously, when a value is actualized, that actualization is valuable. But there's also value in its non-actualization, because its non-actualization, its non-presence, its non-existence allows us, in our being, in our moral orientation and moral will and what we bring of our soul to a situation – that non-actualization of a value in a situation allows us to rise up morally, to discern, to cultivate our sensitivity, to choose, to gather our soul, and to grow morally through our intention, through our will.

So this curious oppositional relationship between the actualization of values and their non-actualization – in a way both are valuable.

If we look at this even more closely, when we have the non-actualization or only partial actualization of values, we have there the values beyond us. The beyondness is what's not completely actualizing, what's not completely manifest. And that's valuable for our soul-making purpose. The eros needs those beyonds.

It creates those beyonds. It discovers those beyonds. It needs those beyonds. And those beyonds are part of this non-actualization. Those beyondness are also part of the dimensions, the unfathomability and the divinity and mystery of a value. And as such, they are valuable to us because of that soul sense that they give.

So there's an oppositional relationship between the values beyond us, so to speak, and their manifestation on the other hand.

There's also then the value of our moving towards something – as I said before, our engaging of our moral capacity, moral sensitivities, moral will, a whole organ of ethical sensibility and choice. There's a value in our moving towards something, our striving to actualize a value, and there's a value in our achieving it, our having actualized something when there's no more striving there.

There's an antinomy perhaps between acceptance – the value, the virtue of acceptance on one hand – and the value, the virtue of decisive action or effort towards a goal.

There's an interesting antinomy between, as Hartmann points out, what he calls the grade and the range. So I have to explain what those mean. The grade is another word he uses for the height of a moral value. One can pursue single-mindedly and devotedly a single moral value. One can be absolutely devoted to one moral value and accentuate one's efforts towards that, one's sensibility towards that, one's cultivation of that value, whatever that is. And in a way, there's value in that. There's value in that single-pointedness, in that effort, in that singling out and streamlining of one's being and one's will and effort towards that one particular value.

Hartmann points out that many of the extraordinary achievements of not just individual human beings, but also the cultures or traditions that they found, follow from that kind of singleness of moral vision, singleness of moral emphasis – really being able to develop one virtue to a great extent, often at the expense of other values, a wider range. So this is grade versus range. There's an antinomy there, because there's also a value in encompassing, being sensitive to, taking care of a broad range of values. It's depth versus breadth, something like that.

Related to this, there are antinomies between simplicity and complexity. We can even talk about some of these in relation to aesthetics and art. Both simplicity and complexity have value. Unity and uniformity have a value, but also diversity has a value – again, whether we're talking about a single person and their ethos, or a community or structure or institution.

The perception of unity—the capacity to see oneness and not focus so much on differences—has great value. But so does, conversely and simultaneously, the perception of diversity, what we might call discernment or differentiation. Constancy has value, as does stability. Whether we speak of a person's ethos, an institution, or a community or tradition, constancy and stability possess undeniable worth. On the other hand, change and dynamism also carry value. These are opposing, antinomical values.

There is value in harmony, and there is value in conflict. We can speak of harmony within oneself—not being pulled in different directions in a way that creates disharmony—or harmony within a community. Yet we've already touched upon the value of conflict in various ways and areas.

Let me read again a short passage from Hartman about this. He cites Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic philosopher, on what Heraclitus called the cosmic war—*polemos* in Greek. What Heraclitus called the cosmic war and regarded as the father and king of all things exists also in ethical actuality. That element of restlessness and flux which carries all things, that inexhaustible productivity of new and ever new relations, situations and demands with their endlessly new conflicts and puzzles—this is what constitutes the infiniteness of content in ethical being, its wealth, its eternal freshness and abundance. It is no exaggeration to speak in this sense of conflict as a value.

Hartman gave that example we discussed before of a parallel in the domain of knowledge or research or theoretical understanding or insight, where a problem itself becomes a value. He continues: "Conflict is that from which decision, intention, action are born. But the values of intention are the ethical ones. Conflict is that which keeps discernment and the feeling of value alive and opens up new vistas."

So again, there's this antinomy between the value of harmony and the value of conflict. I'm moving through these quite quickly, though they all bear considerable meditation and reflection. They differ from one another—some are obviously related, some are antinomical in slightly different ways. For those interested in this exploration, you can take these themes and delve into much greater detail and richness.

There exists also an antinomy between our duty to ourselves as individuals and our duty to the community, whether a small community or the larger society. All kinds of fascinating tensions and pulls can arise from this antinomy.

There's also an antinomy between what Hartman calls "love of the nearest"—those closest to us—and "love of the remote." This particular phrase comes from Hartman's friend and philosophical predecessor Max Scheler, who also wrote extensively about ethics. This phrase "the remote" is quite interesting to me, as it highlights certain issues around the complexity of ethics and the difficulties we encounter.

Love of the remote involves devotion to and service of those in the distant future, those far away whom we will never meet. It particularly encompasses those we regard as—and this language is somewhat problematic—the best types, those on whom we pin our hopes for humanity, for a tradition, for certain deep understandings, or for extraordinary development of soul, insight, heart, or courage.

Some people dedicate their work now to future beings they will never meet, never knowing if their efforts succeed, if their contributions land, if they're received, assimilated, digested, and used as platforms for support and inspiration. In this devotion, this love of the remote, there necessarily arises some degree of pulling away from, or neglect of, the love of the nearest—those around us. Perhaps I'm not as available as I could be as a friend, not as present for everyday socializing, less available to family or children, because

my soul's eye holds a sense of duty and dedication to those I may never meet, whose fruits I may never see ripen, whose harvest I will never enjoy because it exists after I die.

Is there an antinomy between love of the nearest and love of the remote? Hartman would say yes, and I tend to agree. Perhaps there's a similar antinomy between the love one has for family and children—the devotion to caring for them, making them happy, being interested in their lives—and the value of universal *mettā*?

There are others, many others. This represents a truly rich and important area for exploration, both in terms of the general principles implicated and in the specific details. As I've mentioned, I've simply rattled through a whole list here, and there are many more worth reflecting upon, investigating, feeling into, becoming sensitive to.

I'm not certain whether Hartman was the first to point out this fact of antinomies between moral values.

I'm not sure. But certainly going back to Plato, his consideration of virtues and ethics was founded on the idea that a virtue cannot be in conflict with another virtue. This was almost axiomatic to his entire philosophy. There cannot be "rival goods at war with each other," to quote Alasdair MacIntyre's phrase describing Plato's position. Aristotle, his somewhat student, somewhat successor, somewhat foil, held the same view—that virtue cannot be in conflict with virtue. Later, Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages took a similar stance. While there are differences between Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas, they shared this view that there cannot be real conflict between one virtue and another. Virtues cannot pull in different directions.

Furthermore, they believed that all virtues require each other. This returns us to what we mentioned about Aristotle and his idea of synthesis. Sometimes he calls it the mean—like an average between virtues—where one virtue actually needs a counterweight in another virtue so that the true virtue is some kind of synthesis of two lesser or incomplete virtues. All virtues require each other in that system.

In some understandings of the Dharma, there's a similar principle. All the wings of awakening that the Buddha spoke of—all thirty-seven wings of awakening—work synergistically and may, to some extent, require each other. This was quite a common ancient view, probably present in the Buddha's teachings, certainly in Plato and Aristotle, and in many ways in Thomas Aquinas.

Alasdair MacIntyre reflects on this and writes that Aristotle's moral psychology led him to misread Sophocles—and really the whole genre of tragic theater, which was a significant artistic direction and manifestation in Greek and Hellenistic times. Because of his moral psychology, Aristotle simply couldn't understand tragic drama. It made no sense to him, or very limited sense.

"For the conflicts of tragedy," MacIntyre writes, "certainly may in part take the form that they do because of the flaws in this or that character. But what constitute those individuals' tragic opposition and conflict is the conflict of good with good embodied in their encounter prior to and independent of any individual

characteristics."

In other words, it's not really that this person is flawed in this way or that person is flawed in that way. The tragedy is rather that this person is pulled between two antinomical values, torn by their sense that their allegiance belongs to two opposite directions. They are in a way torn apart, forced to choose by a situation or by the deeper structure of the antinomies between certain values.

MacIntyre continues: "And to this aspect of tragedy, Aristotle is and has to be blind. The absence of this view of the centrality of opposition and conflict in human life conceals from Aristotle also one important source of human learning about and one important milieu of human practice of the virtues."

This is a point I want to emphasize. This is part of our life—these inevitable, unavoidable conflicts that arise either from the structure of the situation or from the deeper nature of the complexity of virtue itself. Remember that quote when we were discussing traditions and the necessity of conflict and argument within traditions? John Anderson urged us not to ask of a social institution "what end or purpose does it serve," but rather "of what conflicts is it the scene?"

So in a way, Aristotle is missing something of the complexity—and also the reality—of our moral life. Perhaps this is even more so in a modern society where there is wider divergence in our very sense of life and what it's for. There isn't a unified idea that life is for this, that this is how it serves, this is what it serves, this is the direction. We cannot unite all our soul's energies and our intellect and our ethical aspiration into that one stream which everyone agrees upon.

There is that view that a synthesis is possible and virtue cannot really conflict with virtue. But again, I would ask: even if one might have that sort of integrated view over time, where values work together, might it still be that on one occasion, or simultaneously, or in one situation, we're pulled in different directions?

I'm reminded of something that came up in response to a question on the last retreat. I remember a period when I lived in the States, shortly after the jhānas were really opening for me quite a lot. I had been on a solitary retreat and was practicing a great deal at home afterward while working. What I noticed was that there were days when the samādhi went really well, and the mind and being had this kind of jewel-like radiance to them—very bright, very sharp, very clear. There was a pristine, beautiful radiance to it.

On other days, that was less present. The samādhi was there, but not to that pristine depth and fullness. But what was sometimes there instead was a kind of tender-heartedness—a real soft pliability, availability of heart, tenderness, tears in a good sense, being easily moved in a beautiful way.

What I noticed was that on the days when the samādhi was really bright and radiant—when the mind was like a jewel—on those days there was less of this tender-heartedness. And vice versa: on the days where there was tender-heartedness, there was less of this jewel-like, bright, almost diamond-like radiance of the mind.

Are these antinomical values?

This quality I'm calling tenderness of heart, and that bright samadhi mind-heart—they didn't seem able to exist in their fullness at the same time. The being, the consciousness, would move toward one or the other on any given day.

Now, within the Dharma, you do encounter teachings about balancing different qualities. In the teachings on the seven factors of awakening, for instance, there are three energizing qualities: *dhamma vicaya* (investigation of Dharma or investigation of mental qualities), *viriya* (persistence, effort, determination), and *pīti* (rapture). Then you have three pacifying qualities—calming in their affect and effect: *passaddhi* (tranquility), *samādhi* (which we could translate as concentration), and *upekkhā* (equanimity).

The Buddha gives teachings that say: pay attention to this balance. Where am I right now with the seven factors of awakening? When he presents this teaching in the fourth foundation of mindfulness as one of the framework lenses, he says to notice the balance. What do I need—more of these energizing qualities or more of the pacifying ones right now—in regard to dispelling the hindrances and cultivating the whole movement toward awakening?

So you get that guidance partially, but I don't know if this quality of tenderness of heart—which isn't quite compassion itself, but perhaps more akin to empathy—is antinomical with the brightness and adamantine quality of samādhi. This quality of tenderness isn't really highlighted in the Pali Canon teachings. So is there an antinomy between a value that many people nowadays, certainly those in meditation traditions, would place great importance on, and other spiritual qualities? Might there be a kind of inevitability to our having to negotiate, to choose, to deal with these complexities, these conflicts, these antinomies, these impossibilities?

In Mahāyāna teaching, the Buddha nature is said to have three bodies, three *kāyas*. Though there are infinite hermeneutic possibilities here, let me give them some narrow interpretations for the sake of the point I'm making. A Buddha has three *kāyas*—three bodies of their being, of their essence, of what a Buddha is: the *rūpakāya* (the body of physical manifestation), the *saṃbhogakāya* (sometimes translated as the bliss body or enjoyment body, also akin to an imaginal body with its associated imaginal realm), and the *dharmakāya*.

We've touched on this word *dharmakāya* before, and it has had a wide range of translations in the Mahāyāna tradition—very fertile, with hermeneutic possibilities opening in all directions. One translation, perhaps one of the earlier ones, is "body of teachings" or "body of *dhammas*"—meaning body of attributes, mental qualities, or virtues. *Kāya* means body, as in body of water, but here body of *dhamma s*, *dharmakāya*.

The Mahāyāna Buddha is a transcendent entity far beyond anything we encounter in typical human lives. So one translation of *dharmakāya* is as a body of qualities, a body of virtues, which actually cannot

manifest all at once because of their antinomical values—because they embody antinomical values. This points to a kind of beyond, a synthesis, an absolute that synthesizes in a way beyond our grasp, beyond our ken, beyond our completely discerning or understanding mind.

How can a Buddha, who in Mahāyāna teaching has mysterious qualities—for instance, being able to see thoroughly the emptiness of something while simultaneously perceiving its form—embody such paradoxes? There could be a parallel here between the notion of *dharmakāya* as part of Buddha nature—as a body of qualities including antinomical values and virtues that cannot all instantiate at once in human beings—and this transcendent absolute.

As I mentioned, you find teachings in the Abrahamic religions about the names and attributes of God. They speak of balancing mercy with judgment, judgment with mercy, and so forth. But certain attributes cannot manifest simultaneously.

When we consider this fact of conflicts, complexities, counterweights needed, antinomical relations between different values, and the unavoidability of this, it might prompt us toward considering the possibility of some kind of absolute—one we cannot know rationally or see directly, but can perhaps intuit, can have a sense of its beyondness. It is transcendent.

Perhaps we might construe the Buddha mind in its ineffable transcendence, in its forever beyondness—what a Mahāyāna Buddha truly is—as embodying in the *kāya* that kind of transcendent absolute, that transcendent synthesis of which we can only get partial glimpses.

Remember the analogy with maps: neither the Mercator projection nor the polar projection can capture in two dimensions the reality of the three-dimensional globe. Something gets distorted, something gets shrunk, something gets expanded. This is one solution, one way of thinking about it, one way of tying it in with Buddha Dharma and notions of Buddhahood—that beyondness we aspire to or hold as inspiration. That of Buddhahood, that of the *dharmakāya*.

Listen to what John Findlay says about absolutes: "The absolute is not to be conceived as something which instantiates or exemplifies the highest values, since instantiation is necessarily one-sided and imperfect, and since the highest values also lie in different directions and cannot be instantiated altogether"—a point often stressed by Nikolai Hartmann.

The contemplative traditions, he suggests, have indeed converged on certain ethical insights and the transcendence of self-centeredness, yet this convergence itself may be more constructed than discovered. As Kripal observes, it becomes remarkably easy to curate a selective anthology of mystical exemplars who conform to our contemporary moral sensibilities, while conveniently overlooking or dismissing those whose conduct challenges our assumptions about the inherent goodness of spiritual realization.

This circular reasoning—declaring mysticism inherently moral and then cherry-picking evidence to support this declaration—reveals something profound about our relationship to spiritual ideals. We are,

perhaps unconsciously, engaged in what Kripal calls a "creative revisioning and reforming of the past" rather than an honest reckoning with the historical record in all its complexity and moral ambiguity.

The traditions themselves, as Kripal unflinchingly notes, have often served as "elaborate and sacralized techniques for dissociating consciousness"—methods that, rather than fostering genuine integration and ethical maturity, have frequently enabled spiritual bypassing, authoritarianism, and the very dualistic thinking they purport to transcend. The shadow side includes patriarchy, sexual repression, rigid hierarchies, and what he terms "transcendentalism"—that flight from embodied existence which we've been examining throughout these talks.

Yet there's something crucial that Kripal himself may be missing in his otherwise penetrating analysis. His conclusion—that "there is no shared ocean of emancipation in the history of religions"—may itself reflect the very postmodern skepticism that, while valuable as a corrective, can become its own form of dogma. When he speaks of privileging "the ethical over the mystical" and insisting on "human wholeness as human holiness," he's making what is essentially a mystical claim about the nature of authentic spirituality.

What if the question isn't whether there exists some metaphysical ocean of liberation that all traditions access, but whether there might be something in human consciousness itself—call it Buddha nature, call it the imaginal, call it the creative principle—that tends toward both transcendence and integration when properly cultivated? The ethical convergence that Ferrer notes, even if partially constructed through our interpretive lens, might point to something real about human potential rather than mere wishful thinking.

This brings us back to our central theme: the relationship between the absolute and the relative, between transcendent ideals and embodied existence. Perhaps the very tension Kripal identifies—between mystical aspiration and ethical grounding—is itself pointing toward a more sophisticated understanding of awakening, one that neither dismisses the transcendent dimension nor allows it to become a refuge from the complexities of human existence.

The Dharmakaya, in this light, is not some metaphysical absolute existing independent of our experience, but neither is it merely a projection of our desires. It might be understood as that dimension of consciousness which, when touched, naturally expresses itself through wisdom and compassion—not because we've constructed it that way, but because that's how consciousness moves when freed from the contractions of ego and the distortions of spiritual materialism.

Indeed, from many of our own modern perspectives, the waters of the past are barely potable, barely drinkable, as what most contemplative traditions have meant by emancipation or salvation is not at all what we would wish to imply by those terms today. It is, after all, frightfully easy to be emancipated from the world, or to become one with a deity or ontological absolute, and leave all the world's grossly unjust social structures and practices—racism, gender injustice, homophobia, religious bigotry, colonialism, caste, class division, environmental degradation—comfortably in place.

This is a long passage, but I think there are important considerations here for the very reason I was discussing ethics in the first place. Yet it may be, given all that he has said, that Kripal is missing something of Nikolai Hartmann's insights about the nature of the realm of values, or what Hartmann calls the firmament of values. One key point is that humanity is only capable at any time of shining a light and illuminating a certain narrow radius of this vast firmament—we can only discern, see, sense, focus on and emphasize a limited range of all the values that exist. Secondly, there are antinomies between values—inherent contradictions and opposing pulls.

In a way, though I'm not certain this applies to Kripal, it could be that he's operating from a somewhat naive or oversimplistic view of values. Not in much of what he has said, but it could be that lurking beneath is that kind of narrowness and naivety. Because one might interpret things differently—that it is not that emancipation, liberation, or awakening fails to bring moral purity automatically. Rather, our idea of morality may not take into account the moral antinomies that Hartmann draws attention to.

Awakening could, I would say should, bring with it a moral devotion. Moral devotion is both part of the road to awakening and should issue from it as well. But such moral devotion and faithfulness can never be devoted simultaneously to the totality of moral archetypes, or to all the figures of what we might call the moral zodiac—those imaginal figures embodying different values, different moral orientations.

There is either a soul element or a cultural conditioning element, or both, involved in determining one's moral orientation, one's moral compass and bearing. And whatever that bearing is, that orientation will likewise be evaluated by others who do not share it—those looking in different directions, evaluating different values differently. If no one is aware of the complexity and multi-directionality of this moral value firmament, then we have only one way of talking about what is moral, one standard, one true north. In that case, Kripal's conclusion becomes inevitable—that there is no morality issuing from mysticism, no connection between mystical insight or awakening and morals. But this might be based on assumptions that are not fully explored.

Regarding ethics and morality, something in us often wants simple, unitary answers—if not to the complex particularities of ethical life and actual situations, then at least to the theoretical understanding and scope of values. We want simplicity. But partly due to the transcendent range of values relative to our human capacity at any given time, and partly due to the antinomical structure existing between values, that simplicity may not be possible.

There are also considerations about the nature of the soul and psyche. James Hillman speaks of a polytheistic psyche, a polytheistic psychology. Each individual being has a range of moral allegiances that differ according to the ethos of the imaginal figures that call to us, that speak to us, to which we have duties. If we have duty to just one or few imaginal figures as central archetypes—a calling to, rapport with, duty to those few—then over a lifetime, a person will display corresponding moral lacunae, gaps, neglects, and transgressions in their behavior.

This is not at all to condone the instances we have all read about or encountered of gross, inappropriate behavior by some teachers and so-called liberated beings. It is simply to suggest that this whole consideration may be more complex in ways that Kripal does not consider.

If we recognize that we have a polytheistic psyche, as I have discussed before, I am pulled in different directions with different senses of duty that I cannot possibly execute simultaneously. I cannot possibly fulfill all those duties in my life, certainly not at the same time. I have spoken before about the calling or claim that the god of music has on me—I cannot fulfill that while simultaneously being a Dharma teacher, among many other duties.

This is part of our existential finitude and fragmentation. But to me it has a noble tragedy and beauty. It retains a sense of beyondness, as opposed to a finitude and fragmentation that tends to flatten and render the sense of beyondness, nobility, and beauty—how these can flourish and grow.

I find all this fascinating. You can hear the different tendencies in how different people think about this, how they seek solutions. It is certainly theoretically possible, if one wishes or if it feels soul-making at any moment, to retain the notion of some transcendent synthesis among these antinomies. I cannot quite understand how it would manifest, but it is possible to retain that—to have an even prayerful, meditative, contemplative, intuitive glimpse or sense of that—while simultaneously recognizing the impossibility of instantiation in certain situations due to their structure, due to these antinomies, these inherent, polarły opposite, differing directional pulls between values. And to recognize the impossibility due to the structure of our psyche being, as Hillman would say, polytheistic in nature—polydevotional.

Polytheistically devotional. Polytheistically called. Different angels pulling us in different conflicting directions, demanding different things of us. It's not actually possible for this human life to perfectly, adequately encompass all that, hold it all together at the same time.

So there's something really important in all this, I feel. Again, it matters what our attitude to it is. That attitude would also be part of what would constitute a virtue. It's one thing to be conscious of these different impossibilities. It's another then to let them touch the soul and the mind and the heart in ways that are ennobling, in ways that are vitalizing—difficult as that might be, challenging as that might be, complicating as that might be. There's something, I think, necessary for the soul there, to some extent. But attitude matters, and attitude to this very situation is, or is not, virtuous.

Let me read another passage from Hartman. He's talking about the antinomy between love of the nearest and love of the remote, and he criticizes Nietzsche actually, who in his devotion for love of the remote, kind of poo-pooed and neglected—also in his life, I think—love of the nearest, to some extent. And he also makes the point that it sometimes falls to the founder, the discoverer, the adventurer, the one who opens up new territory first. It sometimes falls to them, or goes with that role, unfortunately, to be a little one-pointed and therefore neglectful.

We talked about this in Hartman's antinomy of grade and range—this concentrating on one ideal value and the development of that and the manifestation of that to the neglect of others, and sometimes putting others down. So he criticizes Nietzsche for that. He's talking about this antinomy between love of the nearest and love of the remotest, criticizing Nietzsche for praising love of the remotest at the expense of almost total neglect of love of the nearest.

But there's a general point about antinomies. Hartman writes, "The fact of their antinomy does not release us from the task of blending two values. In itself, love of the nearest, for example, is right and must not be discarded." So I cannot completely... I have to give some care, some attention for those that are near me—my circle of immediate friends, the people I run into every day, my family, etc. I have to have... I cannot discard, as Hartman said, that value.

"If precedent should be given to a higher value, the lower at most should be restricted in its domination." In other words, we don't totally neglect it, totally disregard it. We just restrict it at most. "The conflict, the antinomy, leads to a reciprocal restoration of both values. In every synthesis, the conflict must on principle be retained."

So retaining that conflict means retaining the sense of the conflict, retaining the sense of being pulled in different directions. I'm sure there's some mythical figure that was pulled in different directions—I can't remember who that was. So there's a tension here. There's an inevitable challenge, an inevitable tension, an inevitable difficulty of choice that we encounter regularly and in different ways and in all kinds of levels of ethical life and all kinds of gradations of difficulty in our life.

And we want, we need to keep that conflict. We can't just choose completely in favor of one versus the other. But neither is it this flaccid, dull and a bit soul-dead kind of middle-of-the-road tendency. I've got to live with and have the capacity for and the maturity for holding and navigating this conflict, holding this tension.

When we talked about eros, this is a very different kind of tension, but we talked about eros needing to maintain the two—not collapse into oneness. Merge. A tension needs to be retained with eros, an erotic tension between the soul and its beloved soul. And there's a different kind of tension here, but again, for our soul's growth, for the building of our moral being as Hartman has it, for our creativity and discovery, that tension needs to be maintained to some degree.

So often we want simple answers, as I said, and a simple code of ethics. And when you start to go into it in more detail, things are more complex. Things are not so easy. Not so facilely unifiable.

Again, passage from Hartman: "Goodness consists in selecting values according to their relative height."

from among the diversity which is always met with in any given circumstance.

So remember we said that was his definition of goodness - it's like the tendency to choose the higher. And

this selection of the higher, the relatively higher among different values, is a selection, he says, which cannot be made *semel*, which just means just once in a lifetime. You cannot just say, "Okay, I've made that decision now, and that's done." It cannot be made purely theoretically either, he says, once and for all, but must be made anew each time from the very foundation, out of an ever-living sense of value.

There can be no diagram to assist us in this, no help from precepts or rules of life. It is selection not by way of contemplative deliberation - he means not by way of rational thinking - but through the intuitive element in our impulse towards the higher, an element which is always generated in our actions, our dispositions, desires and behavior, or, on the other hand, is sometimes lacking.

So we are forced to live ethical complexity. And that's hard. It's hard.

We do have precepts. We have commandments. And an interesting point is that they often refer to a kind of simplifying, and that's why a lot of people can find the precepts or the commandments very helpful as codes of life. But they are simplifying. In the Jewish tradition, you have Ten Commandments and then volumes and volumes of small print, if you like, regarding the nuances and different situations that come in the Talmudic commentaries - encyclopedic volumes. The commandments themselves are very simple.

But this kind of simplicity is only possible for what Hartman would call the lowest values - lowest in the sense that they form the basis, they form the minimum. So, much as we would like, or sometimes we would like to just think, "I'm just keeping the precepts, that's it, that takes care of things." And in a way, as I said at the start of this talk, they function for the sake of simplicity. Those precepts and the whole movement of *sīla* in Buddhadharma were originally taught because they simplify our life and purify us from the negative consequences of contravening those precepts, which would obviate and obstruct our path to liberation.

But actually, they're a minimum. And those commandments are a minimum. The Ten Commandments - or the last five commandments, which deal with human beings' relationship with each other - those last five are a kind of minimum. But as a minimum they form the basis, they form the kind of minimal allegiance we must have. And is it enough? Is it complete? Is it too simple?

So again, I'll read you - I'm reading a lot of Hartman, but he's talking about justice, though the point is similar. He's previously said that Socrates and Plato put justice as the highest moral value, but he says actually among the virtues proper, justice is to be classed not as the highest but rather as the lowest.

"This is seen in the fact that injustice that ought to be puts forth not the maximum of moral demand but quite evidently the minimum. Its claim upon a person's conduct is purely negative: not to do injustice, to commit no transgression, not to encroach upon another's liberty, not to injure another or anything that belongs to him."

And same in the last five of the Ten Commandments: not to murder, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to bear false witness or covet what is not yours.

And he says, "If that is the whole meaning of morality, its tendency is merely conservative, not constructive. The one concern is the protection, the conservation of the lower, the elementary goods" - in other words, life, property, family, etc. If that is the whole of justice, then it is only a means to those goods values. If that's the whole of ethics, then it's only a means to those kinds of things.

But that, he says, doesn't exhaust the essence of justice. Because, in the first place, behind those goods values is hidden something of positive moral value: the sphere of personal freedom. Justice merges into respect for this, he says, but beyond it there arises something still greater.

"The higher spiritual, the communal and cultural values, one and all, can flourish only where body, life, property, personal freedom of actions and the like are secured. There only is scope found for the higher purposes."

So in other words, we need these basics - body, life, property, personal freedom of action to a certain extent - and where they are there, then on that basis the higher purposes of life, the more beautiful reaches of ethics are based. But they bring with them complications.

"Justice, then," he continues, "makes room in the sphere of actuality for the higher values. The more diversified moral life cannot begin till the simple conditions are supplied. Justice is the moral tendency to supply these conditions. It is the prerequisite of all further realizations of value. Justice is the minimum of morality that paves the way for all the higher forms."

And when we get into those higher forms, again, that's where a lot of the complexity comes in. And a lot of these antinomical relations come in.

We encounter these moral complexities and must grapple with them directly. We must choose. When a situation forces a choice upon us—when we are presented with genuine alternatives—we can attempt to avoid that choice, but such avoidance is not virtuous. It represents a kind of moral cowardice.

When we find ourselves in situations where either the structural nature of circumstances or the actual antinomial relationship between values demands a response, we inevitably choose one side of a pair of conflicting values over another. This cannot be avoided. As Hartmann observes, someone in such a situation cannot avoid making a decision. Every attempt to remain neutral only makes the difficulty worse, for in doing so, one violates both values.

To refuse to make a choice—to do nothing, to withdraw, to shrink back from the situation—means that when two values stand in opposition, we end up manifesting neither. We thereby violate both values. The attempt not to commit oneself is fundamentally moral cowardice, reflecting a lack of responsibility and unwillingness to assume it. Often this stems from moral immaturity or fear of others' opinions.

How frequently are we paralyzed by concern for what others might think? But there is also the deeper fear of consequences—the recognition that in devotion to one value, we must relatively neglect another,

potentially valuable response.

What should a person do when confronted with serious conflict fraught with responsibility? Hartmann suggests we must decide according to our best conscience—according to our own living sense of the relative height of the respective values—and accept the consequences, both external and inward, including the guilt involved in violating one value. We ought to carry this guilt and, in doing so, become stronger, learning to bear it with dignity.

Real moral life is not such that one can stand guiltless within it. Each person must, step by step through life, settle conflicts that are theoretically insoluble—conflicts that cannot be resolved to satisfy both demands of antithetical moral values. That each person must navigate these dilemmas through their own free sense of values and creative energy should be regarded as a feature of the highest spiritual significance, representing complete humanity and genuine freedom.

Yet we must not make this into a comfortable theory, as the vulgar mind does with permissible lies, imagining that one incurs no guilt in offending against clearly discerned values. Only unavoidable guilt can preserve us from moral decay.

So even a Buddha must choose. Even an awakened being confronts situations where one value receives emphasis and care while an opposing or conflicting value is necessarily neglected. Both possess legitimacy, both have valid claims, but choice remains inevitable, and consequences follow.

Perhaps when Siddhartha Gautama, at twenty-nine, left his family—his very young son and wife—to strive for awakening, he was choosing the value of spiritual liberation over the virtue of being a loving, responsible husband and father. The possibility of awakening that he intuited took precedence over conventional familial duties.

Sometimes we long for a once-and-for-all answer to resolve these complexities. We desire simple codes, rational frameworks for navigating moral terrain. We want clarity, simplicity, guiltlessness. But these comforts may not be available to us.

There are additional elements to consider in all this, which I will explore when we meet again.

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