

The Human Rights Philosophy of Daisaku Ikeda

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Introduction

The concept of human rights sounds very beautiful, but it is far from easy to define. Why do human beings have rights? What are these rights? Do they apply equally to everyone, in all cases and circumstances? Who decides what these rights are? How have these rights been determined thus far? Such questions soon lead us into a bewildering maze.

Despite the seeming impossibility of coming up with a universal definition of human rights, there is in fact a common premise shared by all human rights theories—that is, following the dictates of reason. Answers to various human rights questions are invariably based on reason. Even those human rights theories that stress human sentiment and intuition are ultimately founded on rational discourse—namely, the rational criticism of reason. That being the case, a reconsideration of human rights in the light of the way reason is used will have relevance for all human rights theories.

In this paper I will attempt such a consideration from a Buddhist perspective, with a specific focus on the human rights philosophy of the Japanese lay Buddhist leader and thinker Daisaku Ikeda (president of Soka Gakkai International; SGI), who embraces the tenets of Nichiren Buddhism. My aim is to compare his philosophy with existing human rights theories in which the limitation of human reason is regarded as axiomatic. Amartya Sen, an economist known for his strong interest in human rights, notes that some Asian cultures have a long history of valuing individual freedom and acknowledges, “In Buddhist tradition, great importance is attached to freedom.”¹ I believe an understanding of the relationship between human rights and the Buddhist concept of freedom is indispensable to any meaningful discussion of a universal conception of human rights.

1. From reason to wisdom

Most modern philosophers have regarded human reason as the foundation of human rights; that is, they have argued about human rights from such viewpoints as natural law, human nature, human dignity, and human autonomy. This rationalist approach, however, has also given rise to the view that people who do not possess reason have no human rights. Richard Rorty criticizes the foundationalism evident in such

¹ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), p. 234.

views and places his hope on the creation of a human rights culture based on the progress of human sentiment.² John Rawls also later parts with foundationalism to reexamine the concept of human rights from such perspectives as the Law of Peoples, reasonableness, and decency.³

The intentions of both Rorty and Rawls appear to lie in the criticism or modification of modern reason-centered theories. This kind of tendency in contemporary philosophy, I think, has something in common with the Buddhist conception of wisdom (Skt. *prajñā*). Wisdom in Buddhism indicates the spiritual power that enables a person to achieve the enlightened state of Buddhahood through purifying and overcoming afflictions (*kleshas*). Especially in the Mahayana tradition, this wisdom is used altruistically. For instance, in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha says, “How can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?”⁴ The guiding wish of the Buddha, therefore, is the happiness of all human beings, and indeed of all living things. Colored by this lofty sentiment, reason and intuition come to function soundly and wisely to the fullest degree.⁵ This is the ability to freely employ “expedient means” (*upāya*) that all buddhas possess—an ability that ultimately represents the use of reason and intuition that has been enhanced by such noble, altruistic sentiments. Enhanced reason and intuition in turn elevate the spirit to even more lofty planes. Wisdom in the Buddhist context—which could also be called the life force of the universe—can harmoniously integrate the diverse scope of human mental and spiritual functions. In his discussions with British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, Ikeda touched on the totality of life that is the agent of wisdom. He notes: “Intellect, reasoning, and emotion are superficial aspects of life itself, but they are not the totality of life. They must protect the total life and work to enable it to manifest itself in loftier ways.”⁶

Aristotle regarded philosophic wisdom (Gk. *sophia*) as the supreme good, and placed it higher than practical wisdom (*phronesis*). According to him, philosophic wisdom is a part of virtue (*arete*) as a whole, and human happiness lies in living one’s life in accord with virtue. Aristotle’s philosophic wisdom is deeply concerned with the wholeness and happiness of the human being, just as Buddhist wisdom is. Thus let us define the entirety of the human mind’s abilities that can be directed toward the happiness of all

² Richard Rorty, “Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality,” in *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993*, ed. Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley (New York: Basic Books, 1993), pp. 111–33.

³ In his *Law of Peoples*, John Rawls makes it clear that he disagrees with the foundationalism of human rights. He writes: “The features of human rights as I have so far described them have been accounted for in two ways. . . . These rights do not depend on any particular comprehensive religious doctrine or philosophical doctrine of human nature. The Law of Peoples does not say, for example, that human beings are moral persons and have equal worth in the eyes of God; or that they have certain moral and intellectual powers that entitle them to these rights.” See John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 68.

⁴ *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 232.

⁵ Of course, I use the term *intuition* here not in the sense of Kant’s sensible intuition (*sinnliche Anschauung*), but in a sense that encompasses intellectual, philosophical, moral, and religious intuition.

⁶ Arnold Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, *Niju isseiki no taiwa* (Choose Life), *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu* (The Collected Writings of Daisaku Ikeda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1991), vol. 3, p. 298. (Translated from the original Japanese.)

beings as wisdom. Wisdom refers to human reason becoming the totality of our life. It is a wisdom that utilizes reason rather than negating reason. In that sense, wisdom must be the whole that gives meaning to all the parts of that whole.

Ikeda, who is also the founder of the Soka school system ranging from kindergarten through university level, presented the students of Soka University with the following credo: “For what purpose should one cultivate wisdom? May you always ask yourself this question.” His fundamental belief is that education should not merely exist for the pursuit of truth and knowledge but also concern itself with the acquisition and cultivation of wisdom that can be used for the happiness of all humanity. His vision for Soka University is that it educate students to be well-rounded human beings who, in addition to possessing intellectual knowledge, have compassion and consideration for others, along with a sense of personal autonomy and a solid self-identity. Aspiring for the creation of a new human rights culture based on wisdom, Ikeda says, “In order to establish an age of human rights, it is imperative that we foster well-rounded human beings who possess a spirit of concern for others as well as self-mastery. . . . We must make the spirit of compassion the foundation of human rights philosophy in the twenty-first century.”⁷

The above consideration will reveal that Ikeda’s conception of a human rights philosophy based on wisdom places greater importance on reason than Rorty, while giving a more positive endorsement to the role of sentiment than Rawls. It is Ikeda’s belief that people, when possessed of wisdom, would value both reason and sentiment, as well as intuition which gives rise to reason and sentiment, and utilize all three of these attributes harmoniously. Thus Ikeda would say the following: human beings possess inherent dignity and rights in the totality of their being, and human rights are not to be considered solely based on reason but on wisdom as totality, which positively utilizes reason, sentiment, and intuition. In the first place, we can protect human rights in various ways. For instance, if someone verbally abuses us, we may find it difficult emotionally to acknowledge that person’s human rights, but the dictates of reason or our rational mind will compel us to respect those rights nonetheless. On the other hand, as John Locke says, the right to life of a person who unjustly takes another’s life will be unacceptable if we adopt the theory of social contract. Still, the murderer’s family will likely be driven by sentiment to want to protect him or her, and there will also inevitably be some people who, though complete strangers, wish to protect the murderer’s right to life based on moral or religious intuition. This is how I come to believe that those who can always show wisdom as totality are the most reliable guardians of human rights.

Modern human rights theory is being confronted with fundamental changes in philosophical methodology—moving away from reason to focus more on sentiment and intuition. I consider such changes to be reactions to reason-centered philosophy. However, insofar as they remain only reactions, we will enter into a new polemic. From the Buddhist perspective, human reason originates from the power of life as a whole. I would like to suggest that human beings must recognize the indivisibility of reason,

⁷ Felix Unger and Daisaku Ikeda, *Ningenshugi no hata wo—Kanyo, jiji, taiwa* (Raising the Banner of a New Humanism: Tolerance, Compassion, Dialogue) (Tokyo: The Institute of Oriental Philosophy, 2007), p. 184.

sentiment, and intuition and recover the original state of reason, and finally become the agents of wisdom. Only if this happens can we truly transcend modern rationalism.

2. From “liberty that must be recovered” to “liberty that utilizes all things”

From the standpoint of practical theory, wisdom in Buddhism can also be understood as “the power to utilize all things.” (By *utilize*, I mean in the sense of “putting to good use” or “giving positive value or meaning to.”) Because Buddhism elucidates such concepts as the “nonsubstantiality of the self” (Skt. *anātman*) and “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*), it would at first glance seem to have nothing to do with this type of active power or agency. Literally speaking, both nonsubstantiality of the self and emptiness mean “absolute nothingness.” However, Ikeda sees these concepts as merely being a way of explaining what could be termed as “the ascent to the summit of enlightenment.” In a dialogue with Norwegian peace scholar Johan Galtung, he observes:

Even if they are only milestones along the way, the doctrines of impermanence and the nonsubstantiality of the self indicate the way to enlightenment. In Mahayana terms, these teachings are [expedient] means (*upāya*) of guiding sentient beings to the truth. After reaching the end of this phase of the journey, the enlightened being returns to his or her sphere of existence to apply this enlightenment to the creation of new [value]. Enlightenment makes creating new [value] possible.⁸

Ikeda holds that a true recognition of absolute nothingness must lead us to awaken to the infinite power of the universe. The absolute nothingness of the self, he believes, means that the self is as vast and boundless as the universe itself. Further, he asserts, that if we take the view that “I am nothingness, therefore I am everything,” we can postulate the existence of the power of “nothingness”—in truth, the essence of the universe—that supports the “beingness” of the universe as a whole. I would therefore like to call this “the power to utilize all things.” In the real world, “I who am everything” means “I who have the power to utilize all things.” In addition, since the oneness of nothingness and beingness in the absolute totality of the universe lets both affirmation and negation stand simultaneously in a logical sense, it may be presumed that the tension or strain caused by holding this logical contradiction is the origin of this utilizing power. Be that as it may, we will be able to find within us the creative self that is endowed this power as we make our return journey or descent back to the reality of our daily existence from the summit of enlightenment, a state in which we apprehend both nothingness and beingness.

I would like to further explain this power to utilize all things from a slightly different perspective. Enlightenment in Buddhism is described as a state of nonattachment. Accordingly, Shakyamuni was not attached to any particular principle or theory. As we can see in these words of the Buddha in the *Sutta-nipāta*, “[The] thinker, knowing both ends [extremes], does not cling to the middle. Him I call a great

⁸ Johan Galtung and Daisaku Ikeda, *Choose Peace: A Dialogue*, ed. Richard Gage (London: Pluto Press, 1995), p. 93.

man,”⁹ Shakyamuni tried to avoid making definitive philosophical conclusions. And in the *Majjhima-Nikāya*, the Buddha teaches that, just as a raft that is useful for crossing a river should be left behind when continuing one’s journey on foot, bhikkus who have gained liberation from attachment should discard the teachings which enabled them to do so. In this way, from the very earliest times, Buddhism has warned against attachment to dogma.

Even a person who understands the Buddhist realm of enlightenment as absolute nothingness will, by clinging to that very understanding, fall into attachment to dogma. However, while agreeing with the view of enlightenment as absolute nothingness, we do not cling to it stubbornly—indeed, we are not to be attached to either the world of nothingness or the world of beingness, or anything else in between. Therefore, we can adopt the standpoint of the oneness of nothingness and beingness and, based on it, can assert the power to utilize all things. Naturally, some would quickly claim that the concept of this utilizing power is itself a form of dogma. That is true; we do use this dogma. The reason being that it will be far easier for real-life human beings to put into practice the power to utilize all things than it would be for them to practice absolute nothingness. Moreover, it is a dogma that stands to be extremely useful in terms of constructing Buddhist social philosophy. By the same token, however, it does not mean that we will be solely attached to this dogma. For instance, in the case of metaphysical discussions, it is possible that we might use other dogma.

What kind of human rights philosophy can we formulate, then, based on this Buddhist concept of the power to utilize all things? First, let us discuss liberty. Generally, liberty is considered to be the opposite of unliberty. But, such liberty is very fragile. The liberty to do something will be lost if we lose the ability to do that particular thing. To give an example, today anyone who is relatively affluent has the liberty to travel all over the world thanks to dramatic advances in air transport, but if an individual is unable to fly by plane because of a serious heart disease or some other condition, then for them it is tantamount to not having that liberty at all.

Sen’s assertion that we should create a society where all people have functional capabilities (“substantial freedoms”) to achieve is worth heeding. Needless to say, however, not all problems would be solved by doing so. In any age, there will always be people who have been deprived of important capabilities by reason of such things as disabilities, accidents, illness, natural disasters, civil unrest, war, and so on. Inevitably, liberty for all people in the true sense must be liberty that is in harmony with unliberty. In other words, it is liberty that positively utilizes even unliberty; it is the Buddhist conception of liberty as the power to utilize all things.

Let me take up a more familiar example. Imagine finding yourself in a situation where you’re thirsty but have nothing on hand to drink. This could be called a state of unliberty. But for beer lovers, being very thirsty can enhance the refreshment of drinking a cold beer. Knowing that a cold beer will be waiting for

⁹ K. R. Norman, trans., *The Group of Discourses (Sutta-nipāta)* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1995), vol. 2, p. 117.

them, their thirst is both a pain and a pleasure. The unliberty of thirst makes the liberty of drinking beer more enjoyable. This represents liberty that is in harmony with unliberty or liberty that utilizes unliberty. The most important thing here will be having the vitality to be able to enjoy unliberty. The more vitality we have, the greater unliberty we are able to enjoy as well as positively utilize. The ultimate expression of this vitality is the power to utilize all things, while a buddha is none other than the embodiment of this power.

At the outset of his *Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau observes: “Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains.”¹⁰ We are brought up with many Enlightenment ideas such as this, and so unconsciously tend to think that we must recover the original human liberty lost in the course of living our lives as members of society. This idea of “liberty that must be recovered,” however, will inevitably give rise to struggles that resort to armed force to do so. Can true liberation be said to exist in liberty that is recovered through bloodshed and hatred?

Buddhists believe that a mere confrontation with something will be an unliberty in itself. They stress that absolute liberty for human beings lies in the utilizing power of wisdom and, as a result of that, bring harmony to our world. Although it would be impossible for them to eliminate all confrontations, people of wisdom would be able to utilize some inescapable confrontations. More specifically speaking, they would transform a simple incident of confrontation into an educational opportunity or an indispensable process for manifesting social justice. In this regard, Ikeda says:

When we make the world of Buddhahood our basic life tendency, we can advance toward a future of hope while making the most of all our activities in the nine worlds [i.e., the states other than Buddhahood, ranging from hell through bodhisattva], both past and present.¹¹

Here he asserts that a person in the state of Buddhahood—that is, a person of wisdom—would be able to positively utilize all things, irrespective of whether it is something painful or pleasant, good or bad. In this way, Ikeda maintains the necessity of change in our contemporary world from liberty that must be recovered to liberty that utilizes all things.

3. From “equality that eliminates difference” to “equality that utilizes difference”

How do Buddhists view equality? Basically, modern democratic equality is equality that is in opposition to difference—that is to say, equality that seeks to eliminate difference. The principle of equality in democratic societies equally guarantees all citizens certain rights, such as the right to receive an education, the right to vote, the right to social security. Insofar as difference is an inherent part of the very structure of human society, however, an excessive pursuit of such rights can lead to a perverted equality.

¹⁰ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract, and Discourses* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1950), p. 3.

¹¹ Daisaku Ikeda, et al., *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra: A Discussion* (Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press, 2000), vol. 4, p. 219.

In contrast, from the Buddhist viewpoint of utilizing all things, equality is by no means the opposite of difference but is equality in the capacity of utilizing difference. In other words, it is equality in terms of the right to give fullest expression to our personalities and individual lives—in other words, equality of opportunity for self-realization. In order to utilize difference rather than formally eliminate it, people of wisdom would no doubt support the basic democratic principles of equality. Directing serious effort to utilize difference could help remove from society not only discrimination that hinders individual self-actualization but also the perverted equality that overly disregards difference.

In modern Japan, some Buddhists have advocated equality as difference and criticized the idea of Western democratic equality. As a result, they justified emperor-centered nationalism—also called *kokutai* nationalism—and backed Japanese imperialist wars. This is because they viewed equality as difference statically, when in fact it should be supported by the power to utilize all things. The static view of equality as difference led these Buddhists to a wholesale acceptance of actuality. They reached the conclusion that whatever discrimination exists in society, that reality in itself constitutes equality, and that we should therefore accept the existence of discrimination because this is the Buddhist way of harmony and equality. What they did was cleverly replace the true Buddhist spirit of equality that utilizes difference with equality that maintains discrimination.

Equality in the power to utilize difference as seen in authentic Buddhism is active. The more that Buddhists utilize difference, the more they would reject discrimination based on race, gender, disability, and so on and other discriminatory practices including slavery that go against this spirit. However, in cases where it is difficult in actuality to eliminate discrimination of this kind, they would take the alternate course of utilizing discrimination. Shakyamuni did not directly endeavor to change the ancient Indian caste system, but he taught instead that far more important than differences arising from birth is the nobility one shows through one's behavior. Because the disciples who heard these teachings lived in a society with a discriminatory caste system, the ideas of human equality and dignity would probably have had a far greater impact on them than people living in a modern democratic society. If that were so, then Shakyamuni could be said to have utilized the negative example provided by the caste system as a tool for instructing people on the correct path. Or put another way, precisely because the caste system existed, he was able to refine the idea of human equality.

We can see this same path of utilizing discrimination as a springboard for progress in the struggles of Mahatma Gandhi who, under British colonial rule in South Africa and India, spread his philosophy of nonviolence throughout the world, and Martin Luther King Jr. who, in the midst of deeply entrenched, institutionalized racial discrimination in the United States, proclaimed the ideals of universal equality and the brotherhood of man. Shakyamuni, however, out of his belief in human being's power to utilize all things, seems to have tried to change the caste system from within by means of promoting the inner transformation of those who used that particular social system. Inheriting this Buddhist legacy, Ikeda today advocates the realization of an ideal society and peaceful world by means of a similar inner

transformation—what he terms “human revolution.” Those who, like he, aspire for institutional reform through change in human beings themselves, would reject cultural imperialism of the kind seen in the case where democratic institutions formed within the Western European culture sphere have been forced on countries of other cultural spheres. Instead, they would support and take as their goal each country devising and developing their own democratic institutions organically in accord with that country’s unique circumstances.

In conditions that do not permit such a gradualist approach—for instance, in a dangerous situation where large numbers of people stand to lose their right to life under a brutal and oppressive regime—those who advocate human revolution would be likely make an exception and give priority to institutional reform (here specifically, revolution or humanitarian intervention) over inner transformation of the individual. Nevertheless, we must not acknowledge this as a set principle. If we were to make revolution and humanitarian intervention in times of emergency a principle, it would put a limit by means of reason on wisdom that transcends reason. Radical decisions in times of emergencies should be the result of efforts based on the wisdom of those parties involved; they should not be a foregone conclusion.

Equality that utilizes difference is an equality that utilizes discrimination as a trial that, through being endured, serves not only to elevate people’s humanity but nurture within them an inner-motivated ethos of reform, and as a result prompts them to pursue equality while giving due consideration to the regional nature of the particular form of discrimination. This in no way means, however, that it is a static equality that maintains discrimination.

4. From “obedience to duty” to “response to expectation”

Here I will turn to the question of duty or responsibility. Human rights, insofar as they have universal value, are accompanied by certain duties or responsibilities. For instance, those who would claim their human rights also have a duty to respect others’ human rights. In the fundamental principle of Buddhist human rights philosophy, however, there is no such compulsion of duty. This is because people of wisdom—namely, people possessing the power to utilize all things—would fulfill their duties based on the standpoint of utilizing those duties. Buddhist human rights philosophy calls for people’s voluntary, inner-motivated obedience to duty. While it may resonate somewhat with the concepts of civic virtue presented by Aristotle, Rousseau, and others, it is not considered to be pure virtue because of its utilization of duty. Voluntary obedience to duty guided by Buddhist principles is also similar to a notion of responsibility, although it is an active response unlike the passive response seen to duty in general.

I would like to term the virtue of people who utilize duty by actively responding to it as “response to expectation.” In people of wisdom, obedience to duty will be transformed into response to expectation. Response to expectation is more voluntary or inner motivated than obedience to duty, and more normative than the exercise of virtue. The civic lives of people of wisdom reflects their voluntary obedience to norms and rules as individuals who utilize duty. This may sound utopian, but much is possible through education.

Certainly it may be important for us today to teach children obedience to the moral law or conscience based on, for example, the Kantian theory of duty. But, in addition to that, and beyond that, I feel from the Buddhist perspective the ultimate aim of moral education must be to help people acquire the agency to control reason as well as develop the capacity to live up to the moral expectations of society.

If the number of people who fulfill their duty in response to expectation gradually increases, what kind of change will occur in our society? Leaders in society often have greater rights (in the form of privileges and prerogatives) and duties than ordinary citizens. But in fact, the greater the rights they obtain, the stronger their aversion grows toward obedience to duty. This is one of the biggest reasons why corruption among those in power, reactionary movements against such corruption, and social instability as a result remain a common reality of human society, irrespective of the political system. The only way to solve the problem is to remove the confrontation between rights and duties. The idea of response to expectation will make this possible. If we follow this idea, we will choose social leaders of wisdom who are skilled in exercising the liberty to utilize all things. Because such leaders live with a sense of limitless freedom, they will gladly go about discharging their important social duties. This means that leaders fulfill people's expectations. The power to utilize all things changes the paradigm of obedience to duty into response to expectation. Duty becomes a voluntary norm, and therefore confrontation between duties and rights will be eliminated. Just as regular physical training for a top professional athlete may be seen not only as a duty but also a right or privilege, the burden of leadership for leaders of wisdom is inseparable from their greater rights.

The transition from obedience to duty to response to expectation will also have an impact on such areas as environmental ethics. Let us take, for instance, the case of animal rights. Ikeda believes that animals have much in common with us and much to teach us,¹² whereas Immanuel Kant sees them as “analogues” of human beings. Supposing all beings are manifestations of the power to utilize all things that is the essence of the universe, one might say that the difference between human beings and animals is quantitative. In brief, compared to animals, human beings as a rule have much higher creativity (I use the word *creativity* here as being equivalent to the power to utilize all things, which is equivalent to wisdom).¹³

¹² Aurelio Peccei and Daisaku Ikeda, *Before It Is Too Late: A Dialogue*, ed. Richard Gage (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1984), p. 55.

¹³ A question that is often raised in this regard is that of the difference between animals with relatively high intelligence and human beings with mental disabilities. While this subject is beyond the scope of this paper, I must explain the origin of our sense of respect for the dignity of human beings from a Buddhist standpoint.

Addressing Aurelio Peccei, cofounder and first president of the Club of Rome, Ikeda said: “Our recognition [based on the Buddhist perspective of the eternity of life and rebirth] that all human beings were at one time or other our parents, our siblings, or our children in past lifetimes should provide a sound basis for us to forge human relations based on love and compassion and live together peacefully.” See Aurelio Peccei and Daisaku Ikeda, *Niju isseiki e no keisho* (Before It Is Too Late), *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu* (The Collected Works of Daisaku Ikeda) (Tokyo: Seikyō Shimbunsha, 2001), vol. 4., p. 272.

The idea of reincarnation is central to Buddhism. Ikeda argues that human beings will be united together as a

In particular, Buddhism teaches that the active attainment of Buddhahood is open only to human beings who have acquired this power or capacity, namely, perfect wisdom. The human mind can be regarded as a manifestation at a higher level of this utilizing power inherent in the universe, in which case we may consider that animals too have minds because they are also a manifestation of this power to varying degrees.

When we arrive at a sense of brotherhood with animals, our direct duty to them arises. However, this duty has never been perfectly fulfilled, because the right to live that is the core of all other rights means that we tacitly make it a rule to give priority to human beings over animals. Our civilization will not last without this tacit premise. Accordingly, even radical ecocentrists intuitively give priority to human survival over that of animals. Why, then, if this is our reality, do we have to assume the duty to protect animals, while failing to assume the duty to respect their right to live? This poses one of the most serious issues for environmental ethics, and the claim that human beings have a direct duty to animals results in being deadlocked theoretically.

In contrast to this, response to expectation is not merely a theory, but actually entails dedicated effort. Effort is action directed toward accomplishment or completion. It can even turn theoretical contradiction into energy for fresh progress, and constantly attempts to overcome real-life difficulties. To the extent that human beings find it unavoidable to kill other species to live, they should have deep appreciation for the animals whose lives they take. They should also seek to elevate their own lives, and put their wisdom to positive use in finding ways to protect the whole ecosystem. This is what it means to live according to the

single global family when they consider their existence in terms of their infinite reincarnations in past lifetimes. I believe that the concept of “one-worldism” or “global family” espoused by Ikeda’s mentor and second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900–58) has the same ideological trend.

With regard to reincarnation, Buddhism teaches that sometimes human beings are reborn as animals, and animals as human beings. Thus, in the broadest sense, all living beings are one big family. Humans will nevertheless tend to have a closer relationship or connection with humans than with animals. And the extent of our sympathy for one living being is in proportion to the depth of our relationship to it. Imagine you are taking a walk on the banks of a beautiful pond. You see a large bird swoop down and with its sharp beak catch one of the small fish that had been swimming in the pond. This sight may not particularly shock or disturb you. But if it were a small fish that you personally knew and fed every day, then the sight of seeing its flesh being torn by the bird’s sharp beak would surely be rather distressing. You would probably have no little sympathy for the fish. Imagine, however, if you were to see a stranger being fatally stabbed by a thug, you would no doubt shrink back and tremble with fear as if you yourself were being stabbed. You are likely to feel far more sympathy for a human being whom you have never seen before than the fish in the pond that you feed every day. This illustrates the strength of the relationship between human beings.

Regardless of age, gender, race, or ethnicity, human beings have a close relationship with one another. The reason why we assign special dignity to human beings over other living beings could perhaps be explained biologically from the standpoint of our being one species, but it could also be explained religiously from the Buddhist viewpoint of the close exchanges we share with each other in the dimension of life itself. Someone who may be a stranger to us in our present existence may still have been a close relative or family member of ours in a past existence. This is the Buddhist way of thinking seen in Ikeda’s philosophy.

path of response to expectation. What needs to be emphasized here is that environmental ethics based on this path will be more inner motivated and practical than those based on the theory of duty, and more normative and progressive than those based on the theory of virtue.

5. Positively utilizing all human rights theories

So far I have outlined Ikeda's wisdom-based human rights philosophy and some ideas on liberty, equality, and duty that it inspires. Wisdom as the power to utilize all things does not mean the power to opportunistically use everything for our own personal profit or gain, but rather, it means the creative power to make it possible for both oneself and all other things to thrive and prosper. Having clarified this point, I will now go on to discuss the practical implications of Ikeda's philosophy of wisdom.

People of wisdom would positively utilize all philosophical ideas and thought. Those possessing absolute liberty would not be bound by any fixed set of ideas; rather, they would be interested in actively using all available ideas. It is clear that even the concept of the power to utilize all things is one of many philosophical standpoints, and yet it could be interpreted as "the standpoint with no standpoints" from which we can make use of all philosophical ideas and thought.

In relation to human rights theory, people of wisdom would be in an active position to utilize all human rights theories. What this means is that sometimes they may adopt a human rights theory based on sentiment, and sometimes they may stress a human rights theory based on reason. They may also assert a human rights theory in which intuition is regarded as primary, or may return to human rights theories that are grounded in classical foundationalism. It will all depend on the given times and country in which they live. My point is that we should not be bound by any one particular human rights theory but maintain our agency by which we can utilize all such theories.

It is important to note that human rights is a concept closely related to the power to utilize all things. We should not forget that the practical use of a variety of human rights theories by Buddhists of wisdom does not deny the universal value of human rights. In his discussion with Galtung, who doubts the universality of human rights, Ikeda said:

While appreciating your evaluation and respecting your views that the presently accepted concept of human rights has served to justify Western prejudices and bears the imprint of certain phases of Western history, I nonetheless believe firmly in the universal value of human rights.¹⁴

The above passage seems to clearly indicate that Ikeda affirms the universality of human rights.

6. Positively utilizing the negative

What is equally important in the practical use of human rights theories is that a person of wisdom

¹⁴ Galtung and Ikeda, *Choose Peace*, p. 111.

would positively utilize even some acts generally regarded as being negative. Take the case of Soka Gakkai members, who in the past have disclosed the reality of corrupt Buddhist priests in Japan, their criticism occasionally seeming to ridicule and insult the clergy. One might say, “Religious people should not take such a derisive attitude,” in spite of the fact that exposing the faults of immoral priests is justifiable. This criticism, I think, somewhat reflects an ignorance of Buddhist wisdom. Soka Gakkai members publicly exposed the abuses and misconduct of these priests not in order to deride them per se, but to awaken Japanese people—who tended to blindly venerate the authority of Buddhist priests—to the importance of religious equality between clergy and laity, and to spread a more humanistic view of Buddhism. Derision for derision’s sake is wrong, but, when used by people of wisdom, even derision—something normally deemed negative—can serve as an effective means or tool for communicating the message that all people have equal dignity.

Positively utilizing the negative has much in common with the Buddhist concept of employing expedient means. Mirroring the maxim, “A lie is sometimes a justifiable expedient,” expedient means in Buddhism are never immoral lies; rather, they represent the Buddha’s skilled discourse for enlightening all people. Buddhist expedients could be called truth in educational process; they derive from the compassionate spirit to free people from suffering.

According to the categorical imperative formulated by Kant, one must never tell a lie under any circumstances. It insists that that we follow the universal moral law, forsaking lies irrespective of the misery or misfortune that doing so may inflict. Kant insisted on human beings’ obedience to the moral law, albeit autonomous obedience. In contrast, the human ideal in Buddhism is a person who can positively utilize the moral law. Shakyamuni stressed that the master of the self should be the self. The master of the self is neither God nor Nature nor a will subject to the moral law. It is nothing else but the self that is possessed of wisdom. This self can be called not only an agent that imposes the moral law upon itself but also an agent that obeys the moral law in order to positively utilize it. Here obedience to the moral law is simply a means for utilizing that law. The moral rule that we should not tell a lie relates to mutual trust that forms the basis of human society. Therefore, as a member of society, everyone must abide by this rule. Depending on the circumstances, however, there may be times when it is better not to tell the truth exactly as it is. Let us take the following example. A killer, whom we shall call A, is in pursuit of a target, called B. A third party, called C, knows where B is, but decides to lie to A to protect B, saying: “I don’t know where B is.” This is an illustration of utilizing a lie based on wisdom. In this example, the lie spoken does not transgress the moral law. This is because the moral law demands integrity of us. The person telling the lie in this instance did so out of the integrity to reject the moral wrong of aiding and abetting murder; therefore, he duly meets the demands of the moral law, albeit it in a somewhat divergent manner.

Therefore, to temporarily utilize a lie means to make free and unrestricted use of the moral law. Here, I believe, we can find perfect human liberty—that is, the liberty of the human being as “master of the truth.” We may say that Buddhism views human beings as God, so to speak. Nietzsche exclaimed that God

is dead. Buddhist humanism proclaims that God is us ourselves. If we were to term the ultimate reality of the universe as God, then I would say that Buddhist humanists believe in God, but nevertheless they do not believe in any discontinuity or separation between God and the human being.

Modern Western thinkers such as Kant, Locke, Rousseau, Adam Smith, and so on, all developed social theories in accordance with the framework of thinking in which God and human beings, or, the unrecognizable and the recognizable, are strictly separated. So, Western philosophy has a history where a majority of thinkers unconsciously avoided examining the possibility of interpenetration between God and human beings, and just focused their argument on the existence or nonexistence of God. On this point, both devout Christians and immoral atheists could be the same type of people; that is, they all stand on the same presumption that God is completely separated from human beings.

This presumption must be, if not biased, regarded as a product of dichotomic thinking that is so evident in Western tradition. The peculiarity of dichotomy lies in the disregard through abstraction for contradictions in actuality. Consider the dichotomy of affirmation and negation. According to this dichotomy, my action of scolding somebody can be understood as the negation of that person. But if it is accompanied by my deep affection for that person, my act of negation—namely, my scolding—will at the same time be an action of affirmation. As we see here, dichotomy is not an adequate means by which to reach the perfect recognition of our actual world. It is true that dichotomic thinking, such as the division of God and human beings, phenomena and things-in-themselves, is an indispensable yardstick by which to understand our world. (In Asian intellectual history, negligence toward this yardstick of dichotomy seems to distance the people from a reasonable understanding of the world.) Nevertheless, dichotomic thinking is no more than a measure. Something must be the master of that measure. That master is wisdom. I would like to emphasize, borrowing a concept from Jacques Derrida, that we need to open the eyes of wisdom first, and secondly deconstruct the hierarchical dichotomy between God and human beings, or phenomena and things-in-themselves, liberating ourselves from set cultural premises, and then finally reexamine modern social philosophy.¹⁵ When this has been done sufficiently, Buddhist humanism which upholds the ideal of the God/human—that is, the conception that human beings are one and the same as God or the ultimate truth—will come to be properly valued.

7. Justice as utilization

In the dialogue with Toynbee, while implicitly supporting the ideal of democracy, Ikeda emphasized that each nation should choose the political system in accordance with its national situation:

Each nation should attempt to adopt the political system that best suits its own national personality, educational

¹⁵ In this connection, I would like to emphasize the following point. Some philosophers such as Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and others sought to reunite phenomena and things-in-themselves, between which Kant had made a strict distinction, but we must recognize that their way of thinking was still pervaded by dichotomies.

level, international position, and level of economic development. . . . Though it is impossible to make blanket judgments as to which systems are good and which are bad, the elevation of the people's intellectual and educational levels and the creation of general affluence always meet unconditional approval.

What is the ideal political system for a nation that enjoys both high intellectual and educational levels and economic plenty? The consensus of current opinion seems to be that democracy is the ideal.¹⁶

People of wisdom would not wish to reach a fixed conclusion about social justice. Instead, while fundamentally striving to encourage others to gain the power to utilize all things, they would in terms of institutional theory have the flexibility to employ diverse policies that suit diverse realities, by which means they would seek to maximize political liberty and equality. When this political approach is extended to the context of social justice, utilizing all things would itself constitute the substance of justice. I would like to call this "justice as utilization."

As to social justice, we already know of such conceptions as Plato's justice as harmony, Aristotle's distributive and remedial justice, and Rawls' justice as fairness. My understanding is that these conceptions of justice are all established on a kind of deterministic notion according to which our abilities to change the environment are so limited that the best we can do is conceive the most suitable theory and method of social justice under the given conditions. If people were to uphold the belief that human beings possess boundless agency and are thus able to utilize everything, they must in turn come up with a new conception of justice—namely, a conception of justice as utilization based on endless hope. This justice would mean that we constantly progress toward hope, positively using all human rights theories.

Justice as utilization could be considered to have the following characteristics. The first is an idealism that would allow all actual political systems to be utilized and improved upon. Since people who have the wisdom to utilize all things would recognize and respect others' dignity in light of the boundless agency all people possess, they would invariably support the realization of equality of opportunity in society. At the same time, however, they would not adopt a radical idealism but choose a gradualist approach toward how a given social system should be reformed. This is because they would always have the freedom to actively harmonize with any actuality of discrimination and thus infuse positive value into the systems, no matter how problematic.¹⁷ Even in a discriminatory society, by utilizing discrimination as a trial to be borne and seeking steady social reform through individual human revolution, we should be able to peacefully carry out solutions to discrimination in the most suitable form for that particular society. In terms of the viewpoint of justice that believes in people's power to utilize all things, Ikeda's approach of human revolution will be much more important than radical institutional reform or revolution. In this sense, those

¹⁶ Toynbee and Ikeda, *Choose Life*, p. 237.

¹⁷ No matter how society may improve, it will still be impossible to give all people equal liberty in every sphere. For instance, not everyone will have the liberty to play the piano as beautifully as Mozart. Instead, the majority of people would have the liberty of being able listen to the music, empathize with it, and enjoy someone else's liberty of playing it, thereby becoming one with the pianist in a sense. This is an example of the liberty to harmonize with the actualities of difference in society.

who support the notion of justice as utilization might have a different opinion from Rawls' exclusive theory of justice in which he insists that any legislation or institution in a society must be abolished if it is unjust.¹⁸

However, as mentioned above, people of wisdom would not always necessarily adopt a gradualist approach. Given that they would be unattached to any fixed perspective, it is quite conceivable that they might temporarily pursue a radical approach if circumstances warrant. Nevertheless, their move to radicalism would be no more than their positive utilization of radicalism.

The second characteristic of justice as utilization is that it is a concept that would lead the majority of people to assume leadership or basic initiative in any social system. Supposing that everyone can attain enlightenment as the Mahayana Buddhists state, the agents of the power to utilize all things should be wide-ranging members of the populace. Further, the so-called ordinary people are defined by the fact that they never lose sight of the reality of daily life in which they seek to make the good use of everything. Those who are able to utilize all things would avoid discussion about which ideology is the best, and attempt to positively use the merits of all ideologies. For these individuals, social justice would itself be the power to utilize all things, and thus a society's people having the wisdom to take leadership or initiative in political systems would be more important than the establishment of ideal political systems for the people. Ikeda says:

Of course each system has its own faults and merits. In the future, the extent to which it contributes to the happiness of humanity must be the major criterion for judging a system. In other words, we cannot afford to forget that the majority must assume basic initiative in all systems. If the people do not take the initiative, no matter how ideal the system may appear to be, it will degenerate into a regime of evil and oppression.¹⁹

The third characteristic of justice as utilization is that it would aim at the elimination of sacrifice. Whether we are utilitarian or liberalist, we tend to raise questions such as how we should distribute limited resources. But, why do we need to argue on the premise that all resources are limited? It is also important to make all possible efforts to overcome limits and maintain the hope of being able to utilize all things, as well as to come to a reasonable conclusion under given limited circumstances. It should be an essential part of social justice that we become free from the set presupposition of limited resources, rack our brains to find better solutions, and never stop making efforts for the elimination of sacrifice.

When we encounter many obstacles, it will be the most realistic course for us to strive to remove them

¹⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Original Edition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 3.

I must add that Rawls later attempted to overcome this exclusivism by reasonable tolerance. However, that does not mean he essentially condoned unjust legislation and institutions. He remained exclusivist toward injustice, while embracing a slogan of tolerance. Here is the fundamental difference between Rawls' theory and the Buddhist viewpoint of justice that utilizes unjust institutions as trials to be borne, and that moreover, in terms of changing institutions from within through a process of human revolution, seeks to utilize the unique characteristics which form the backdrop to specific unjust institutions.

¹⁹ Toynebee and Ikeda, *Choose Life*, p. 236.

while also accepting them and reasonably dealing with them. Actually, introducing justice as utilization into political liberalism is not so difficult. Take the case of global environmental problems. Garrett Hardin articulated the metaphor of Lifeboat Ethics, in which the individual lifeboats represent rich nations, while the numerous swimmers in the ocean outside represent the people of poor nations. According to his theory, the rich nations should not provide aid to poor nations or open their doors to immigrants, otherwise the rich nations will go to ruin, just as an overloaded lifeboat will be swamped. “Complete justice, complete catastrophe,” is Hardin’s warning.

It is clear that Hardin’s Lifeboat Ethics are based on a premise of limited capacity. This is what advocates of justice as utilization would call into question. People of wisdom would explore a way, for instance, of increasing farm productivity that leads to prosperity of all humankind rather than be anxious about limited food resources.

People of wisdom would actively make good use of every theory of society through a trial-and-error process, seeking for both liberty and equality. They would always devote great thought toward the elimination of sacrifice, and never abandon the hope of being able to utilize all things. Ikeda asserts: “For sincere, earnest people, life itself is the way to hope, that is, the endless and limitless progress to hope.”²⁰ There will be no Buddhist social justice except in the process of advancing toward hope. Consequently, justice as utilization might also be termed “justice as progress” and “justice as hope.”

The same thing will also apply to the problems of the antiwar movement. Since early times, political realists have wanted to discuss the subject of “just war.” To lay down the rules of just war, however, appears from the viewpoint of Buddhist wisdom to throw cold water on human efforts to abolish war, namely, justice as utilization. Therefore, Buddhists of wisdom would reject every theory concerning just war.

In a dialogue in the early 1970s with Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, founder and president of the Pan-European Movement, Ikeda said: “I have no choice but to conclude that all forms of war and violence are wrong.”²¹ For Buddhists of wisdom, justification of war for self-defense means abandonment of hope for permanent peace, and thus it is to be thought as injustice. On the other hand, radical antiwar activities are also considered to abandon hope of being able to utilize all things, if they lack educative dialogue with those who support war for self-defense. Ikeda focuses on the human heart which is the true origin of all wars, and expects much of dialogue as a means for building fortresses of peace in people’s hearts. Ikeda is a Buddhist of wisdom who never abandons hope. In the pursuit of lasting world peace, he is regularly found engaging in dialogues with leading figures from around the world, including scholars, thinkers, artists, and civic leaders. He is not merely committed to peaceful dialogue as a proponent of peace or

²⁰ Jin Yong and Daisaku Ikeda, *Kyokujitsu no seiki wo motomete* (In Search of a Brilliant New Century), *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu* (The Collected Works of Daisaku Ikeda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 2008), vol. 111, p. 319.

²¹ Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and Daisaku Ikeda, *Bunmei: Nishi to Higashi* (Civilization: East and West), *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu* (The Collected Works of Daisaku Ikeda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 2003), vol. 102, p. 80.

nonviolence; rather, it should be explained that Ikeda never gives up striving for progress toward peace through dialogue as an individual who has unceasing hope in humanity's ability to positively utilize all things.

Conclusion

Up to the present, human rights have been something that we have struggled to obtain or defend. But, history shows that such a struggle-oriented human rights culture sometimes denies the human rights of individuals who violate others' human rights, and consequently falls into a severe self-contradiction. I shall suggest that nothing outside of an awakening to wisdom as the power to utilize all things could solve this aporia. The Buddhist human rights philosophy is based on the wisdom that Ikeda calls "the path of fulfillment for both oneself and others."²² People of wisdom give positive meaning to all people, no matter how immoral a person may be or how cruel a crime he or she may have committed. In addition, they strive to protect others' human rights from all angles by utilizing their own reason, sentiment, and intuition. Where there is wisdom, there will be human rights.

Actually, wisdom as the power to utilize all things is something we experience in our daily lives rather than just some abstract Buddhist doctrine. We live our lives unconsciously expressing the wisdom that enables both ourselves and others to flourish and thrive.²³ Although our manifestation of this wisdom may lack constancy, I believe most of us will surely share the view that there is nothing better than living together happily with others at all times, for real peace and security lie only in getting along well with other people. As a matter of fact, we live learning from experience that our happiness will not last long if other people around us are unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives. This recognition probably does not derive from lofty virtues such as benevolence or affection toward others but a sense of mutual nonaggression and mutual aid, both of which have quite naturally become the foundation of our society. Adam Smith called mutual nonaggression justice. John Stuart Mill, meanwhile, who is deemed a proponent of qualitative utilitarianism, emphasized mutual aid, stating that the people living in a society have the feeling that acting in other-interest ultimately serves their own self-interest too. In *Utilitarianism*, he wrote:

²² Ikeda, et al., *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 4, p. 137.

²³ Scholars have a tendency to statically apprehend living wisdom under the name of objectivity. As a result, the concept of unreal and fixed harmony has become prevalent through a variety of normative theories. It is true that such a concept of harmony helps build a stable society, but I think that it may preclude people's unknown potential in exchange for stability.

In real life, most people simply wish happiness for both themselves and others, and constantly endeavor to find a proper way to achieve such happiness. Utilitarians, however, restrict the happiness of all people to "the greatest happiness of the greatest number." Rawls, on the other hand, restricts it to "the greatest benefit to the least advantaged persons." By use of the words "the greatest," both rigidly fixed the meaning of living wisdom, even though this wisdom constantly encourages us to change our environment. If they paid more attention to living wisdom, such criticisms as "utilitarians denigrate human rights" or "Rawls does not include disabled people into 'the least advantaged persons' in his theory of justice" would not exist.

They [people] are also familiar with the fact of co-operating with others, and proposing to themselves a collective, not an individual, interest, as the aim (at least for the time being) of their actions. So long as they are co-operating, their ends are identified with those of others; there is at least a temporary feeling that the interests of others are their own interests.²⁴

I think that for ordinary people, what Smith and Mill try to explain here is a matter of course. The Buddhist human rights philosophy is founded on this practical sense—that is, our primary sense of mutual respect on the basis of which human society exists. However, as we know, this sense is very frail, and that is where the need for rules or moral discipline comes in. This is one reason for the existence of morality, laws, philosophy, and religion in our world.

Incidentally, though a full discussion here is beyond the scope of this paper, a wisdom-based human rights philosophy will place special importance on education. This is because human rights are closely related to human potential, and education plays a crucial role in drawing forth that potential. We can measure the desirability of a given society by its capacity to produce people with the wisdom to realize their full potential, enable others to do the same, and make positive use of nature and all things and events. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), founder of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-creating Education Society; forerunner of the Soka Gakkai), was a pioneer of such social theory. Throughout his life, Makiguchi continued to inquire into the scientific laws of life that are the foundation for happiness for both oneself and others. He attempted to educate children on these laws of life and foster people highly capable in creating value who would work to bring about a harmonious and prosperous society. The concept of “value creation” put forward by Makiguchi means positively utilizing all things; it is another word for wisdom.

In contemporary times, Ikeda has stressed the importance of humanistic education. This may be thought of as a reinterpretation of Makiguchi’s Soka (value-creating) education based on the perspective of humanistic considerations. No matter how reasonable the laws of life we have learned, we cannot put them into practice and create value in actual society if we lack sufficient vitality in our agency.²⁵ Based on the philosophy of the Soka Gakkai International, vitality is the driving force behind moral agency. Ikeda believes that this vitality is fostered through humanistic education in which students are empowered by their teachers to have the courage to stand up for justice and work for the happiness of themselves and others, thus becoming vibrant agents of value creation.

²⁴ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901), p. 47.

²⁵ Makiguchi had also noticed this fact. As a consequence, in his later years, he began to maintain that anyone who becomes a believer of Nichiren Buddhism and embraces the Dharma can readily attain strong life force. Even more interestingly, he took on the challenge of demonstrating his claim through conducting an active experiment in faith.