

## Filosofija ir religija

### THE HARD TASK OF HITTING THE MEAN: ARISTOTLE'S MEAN (*MESOTES*) AND BUDDHA'S MIDDLE PATH (*MAJJHIMA PATIPAD*)

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*The author compares Aristotle with the Buddha who, though incompatible with one another in their mode of thought (Aristotle was a theoretical thinker, inquiring into those very matters which the Buddha, as a practical religious thinker, considered to be completely futile), agreed at least about one point: they clearly realised the extreme difficulty of attaining the mean (or the middle), both understood it as something more complex than an equal distance from opposite ends, or an arithmetical mean, or a mechanical equilibrium (equipoise). They presented the mean regarding human beings as a state which is never given a priori, established spontaneously, or found by pure chance, but, on the contrary, is the subject of a constantly renewable creative search. The comparison is based on the analysis of Aristotle's texts (Eud. Eth., Nic. Eth., etc.) and the Buddhist texts from the Pali Canon (Vinaya pitaka and Sutta pitaka).*

If we seek to compare Aristotle's doctrine with that of Buddhism, it would be more natural to consider, on the Buddhist side, such systematic thinkers as Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu or Dignāga, all of whom lived long after the Buddha. A comparison of Aristotle with the Buddha himself is a rather problematic enterprise, open to justified criticism. Aristotle, as a theoretical thinker, was interested in "what is", "existence", "being qua being" (*to ti ēn einai*) and inquired into those very matters which the Buddha, as a practical religious thinker, considered to be completely useless, futile, not leading to the nirvāṇa. Nevertheless, both of them – though incompatible with one another in their mode of thought – agreed at least about one very important and, so-to-speak, existential point: they clearly realised the extreme difficulty of attaining the ideal (ethical for Aristotle and religious for the Buddha). As far as this ideal is associated for both of them with the mean (or the middle), I will call it "the hard task of attaining the mean". Both understood the mean as something more complex and more intricate than an equal distance from opposite ends, or an arithmetical mean, or a mechanical equilibrium (*equipoise*). They presented the mean regarding human beings as a state which is never given *a priori*, established

spontaneously, or found by pure chance, but, on the contrary, is the subject of a constantly renewable creative search. In these general, and, as one can see, quite antiseptic terms, I try to work out some purposes common to my actors. Any specification of these in terms of particular tasks, goals, conceptions and teachings leads us to abandon the sphere of generalities and to speak about differences.

The first fundamental difference proceeds from the obvious fact that for Aristotle the mean was one of the crucially important ontological and metaphysical ideas, while for the Buddha it was rather a methodological principle exemplified in a system of methods aiming at the attaining of the *nirvāṇa* – the final “blowing out” or “extinction” of sufferings. But in the times of the Buddha, the middle was not yet a symbol of a certain ontological principle, which it had become later by the time of Nagarjuna and his school, called “*Madhyamaka*”, “The Middle”.

We can come across the idea of the mean in practically all the branches of Aristotle’s doctrine, from ontology and metaphysics to ethics and politics. Aristotle argues that one can detect the mean “in everything continuous and divisible” if “there is excess and deficiency”. And the basis of this continuity is a motion, “for motion is continuous and action is motion” (Eud. Eth II 3. 1220b 21-35). In other words, the mean is characteristic of something continuous, existing in the form of arithmetical progression (from deficiency to excess), as well as of something dynamic, changeable and complex. In ethics, it is a virtue, in a syllogism – the middle term, in a country – the middle class, in time – “now”, in a person – the soul. But for every thing or field of human activity mentioned, its mean is the only static and not developing point – a point of stable equilibrium in balancing between “excess” and “deficiency”.

Aristotle argues that in the Mind (*Nous*), the knowing subject and its object become one autonomous self-subsisting “existent”, “which is a thing *per se*” (*to on ên einai*), “final good” (*to ariston*), “actuality” (*entelechia*), first mover (*to prōton kinoyon*) which is itself unmovable. All these notions presuppose a kind of a closure, coincidence or concurrence between the contraries – a beginning (*archē*), or a cause (*aitia*), is at the same time an end, or a goal (*telos*). The latter is not only a result, a final moment of any development, it is initially present from the very beginning, or even before the beginning of things and processes. Thus, a goal, constituting a limit, presents itself both as the beginning and as the cause (final cause) and substance<sup>1</sup>. In other words, there is a hidden identity beneath the contraries.

The notion of the mean here comes to the fore – it is in the middle that the beginning and the end, the cause and the goal come together. That is why “[...] in all our inquiries we are asking either whether there is a ‘middle’ or what the ‘middle’ is: for the ‘middle’ here is precisely

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<sup>1</sup> “Limit means (1) the last point of each thing, i.e. the first point beyond which it is not possible to find any part, and the first point within which every part is; (2) the form, whatever it may be, of a spatial magnitude or of a thing that has magnitude; (3) the end of each thing (and of this nature is that towards which the movement and the action are, not that from which they are, though sometimes it is both, that from which and that to which the movement is, i.e. the final cause); (4) the substance of each thing, and the essence of each; for this is the limit of knowledge; and if of knowledge, also of the object. Evidently, therefore, ‘limit’ has as many senses as ‘beginning’, and yet more; for the beginning is a limit, but not every limit is a beginning” (Met.1022a 5–10 tr. By W. D. Ross).

the cause, and it is the cause that we seek in all our inquiries” (Anal. Post. 90a 10, tr. by G. R. G. Mure). According to J. van der Meulen, Aristotle’s “mean, when it comes to the limit of penetration into a true nature of things, is the Mind in its purest form”<sup>2</sup>.

Thus the mean is a structural and ontological notion – a kind of perfect, completely accomplished actual state (*entelechia*) through which the Absolute “breathes” and which, in its most perfect form, is the empirical incarnation of the Absolute itself (*Nous, Theos*). I think that the analysis of the ethical mean must be firmly based on these metaphysical principles.

In the “Nicomachean Ethics”, Aristotle defines a virtue as that which is “concerned with pleasures and pains and disposes us to do what is best, while vice disposes us to the contrary” (Nic. II 1104b 25, tr. by Hippocrates G. Apostle). But “to do the best” stands for keeping the mean in passions, pleasures and sufferings: “[...] according to its substance or the definition stating its essence, virtue is a mean [...]” (Ibid. 1107a 5). According its definition, *mesotes* (“mean”, “middle”, “moderate”) lies between two extremes: that of the “excess” (*hyperbolē*) and that of the “deficiency” (*elleipsis*). *Mesotes* itself may never be either in excess or in deficiency: “there is not an excess or a deficiency of moderation” (Ibid, 1107a 20–25). The mean is just the right amount of some action or feeling. At the same time, the mean is possible only when and where both extremes and a continuous transition between them (continuous in the sense of divisible, that is divisible at any point, as opposed to what is made up of distinct parts and hence only divisible between the parts) are present.

As for the vices (Aristotle mentions the feelings of malice, shamelessness, and envy as well as the actions of adultery, theft, and murder), no mean inheres in them as they are “bad in themselves”, also “it is impossible therefore ever to go right in regard to them” (Ibid. 20–25, tr. by H. Rackham). However, there is no mean in temperance or in bravery, “because the mean is in a certain way an extreme (*meson kai ariston*)” (Ibid, 1107a 5, tr. by Hippocrates G. Apostle). It is important to stress that “extreme” here is something highly positive – therefore, I prefer rendering *ariston* as “excellence”, “perfection”. In this way, one can emphasise more clearly the identity of the mean and the ideal state of things.

The virtues definable in terms of the middle between the extremes are characteristic of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), directing our feelings and behaviour in everyday life. Aristotle calls them ethical virtues – *ethike*. However, there is a higher mode of existence which distinguishes man from other animals – a contemplative life, or life of intellectual contemplation (*bios theoretikos*), with its special kind of the virtues: the dianoethic (*dianoethikai*), and the most important of them – wisdom (*sophia*). These virtues, like the ethical virtues of temperance or bravery, are perfect regardless of the context in which they occur (or a progression between deficiency and excess) and thus “moderate” by their very nature.

Aristotle sorts the mean into two kinds: with regard to things, and with regard to us (*pros hemas*). In the first case, we can find the middle in a purely mechanical way: “by the mean of the thing I denote a point equally distant from either extreme, which is one and the same for everybody” (Ibid. 1106a 30, tr. by Rackham). As for the second case, there is no mean which

<sup>2</sup> J. van der Meulen, *Aristoteles. Die Mitte in seinem Denken*, Meisenheim, 1951, 124–125.

would be “one and the same for everybody”. Hence, the virtue must be specified with regard to individual capacities of men and according their particular circumstances: “[...] by the mean relative to us, [I define] that amount which is neither too much nor too little, and this is not one and the same for everybody” (Ibid.). Anyone who wants to be virtuous must decide for himself or herself what is “good” or what is “bad” in any given situation. Thus: “[...] it is a hard task to be good, for it is hard to find the middle point in anything: for instance, not everybody can find the center of a circle, but only someone who knows geometry. So also anybody can become angry – that is easy, and so it is to give and spend money; but to be angry with or give money to the right person, and to the right amount, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way–this is not within everybody’s power and is not easy; so that to do these things properly is rare, praiseworthy, and noble” (Ibid. 1109a 20). And earlier in the same work: “[...] error is multiform (for evil is a form of the unlimited, as in the old imagery, and good of the limited), whereas success is possible in one way only (which is why it is easy to fail and difficult to succeed–easy to miss the target and difficult to hit it); so this is another reason why excess and deficiency are a mark of vice, and observance of the mean a mark of virtue” (Ibid. 1106b 30).

“To hit the mean”, “to find the middle”, “to hit the target” – all these expressions evidence the active and even decisive role of the moral subject, its mental disposition and volition. As Theodor Losev remarks, “the mean in virtue is not a choice between the preset contraries of good and bad, but it is a constant self affirming of the living being as determining these contraries”<sup>3</sup>. Aristotle associates ethical virtues (as contrary to the *dianoethical*) with volition (which is for him a choice – *kata proairesin* – Ethic. Eud 6, 1223a 18) rather than with knowledge. In other words, the mean is never known *a priori*, it is a dynamic, ever migrating and elusive point, so that to find and to “hit” it one must concentrate every volitional effort. If vice presupposes a motion either in the direction of excess or in the direction of deficiency, the mean, once attained, becomes for us something like the centre of a cyclone remaining unlovable and unchangeable, or the centre of gravity due to which a thing is stable (Aristotle argues that the earth is fixed because its centre coincides with the centre of the universe). The highest goal which is pursued for its own sake but not as a means of attaining any other goal, is the highest good (*to ariston*), the good in itself (*tagaton*) and it is for Aristotle “an activity of soul according to virtue” – happiness (*eudaimonia*) consisting of reason or activity according to reason (Nic. Eth. 1099b 25–30). Concerning virtue, “with respect to the highest goal and to excellence, it is an extreme” (Ibid. 1107a 5). In this context, the extreme is also not an excess, but the highest point, the summit. Thus, as we can see, the circle is closed: the mean, from the point of view of the highest value (that of the *bios theoretikos*), tends to be the utmost good (*to ariston*), the symbol of plenitude and excellence, the highest self-sufficient goal. After attaining it, a person continues his activities (because happiness manifests itself in activity), yet they are not directed to any outer end beyond any intellectual contemplation.

Now let us turn to the Buddha’s famous sermon about the Middle path: “These two dead

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<sup>3</sup> A.Th. Losev, *History of Ancient Aesthetics. Aristotle and the Late Classics*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1975, 637 (in Russian).

ends (*anta*), monks, should not be followed by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is, among sense-pleasures, addiction to attractive sense-pleasures, low, of the villager, of the average man, unarian, not connected with the good; and that which is addiction to self-tortment, ill, unarian, not connected with the good. Now, monks, there is a middle course, fully awakened by the Truthfinder, making for vision (knowledge of the truth), making for knowledge, which conducts to calming (of the passions), to super-knowledge (*abhinna*), to awakening (*sambodha*), to *nirvāṇa* (Mahavagga, 17. – The Book of the Discipline. PTS, vol.IV, 1962, tr. by I. B. Horner).

As for the difficulties of pursuing the Middle path or the Middle course, the texts of the Buddhist Pali Canon, which we will take as our main authority in matters concerning the early Buddhist teaching, are very wordy about it while describing the Dhamma (Buddha's teaching, Truth). For in these texts, the Middle path is sometimes directly identified with Dhamma. The formulaic description of the Dhamma as "profound, indiscernible, difficult to accomplish, good, perfect, inaccessible to reasoning, exquisite, accessible only to experts" refers as well to the Middle path. What does the Middle path consist of? In the Buddha's teaching it is a system of the eight practical rules (Eightfold Path): (1) the right views – correct understanding of the nature of existence in terms of the Four Noble Truths; (2) the right intention – the resolve to practice the faith; (3) the right speech – avoidance of falsehoods, slander, or abusive speech; (4) the right action – abstention from taking life, stealing, and improper sexual behaviour; (5) the right livelihood – rejection of occupations not in keeping with Buddhist principles; (6) the right effort – avoidance of bad and development of good mental states; (7) the right mindfulness – awareness of the body, feelings, and thought; and (8) the right concentration – meditation. The whole network of rules covers the three main domains: moral behaviour (2, 3, 4), practice of meditation (7, 8) and practice of knowledge (1). The most important among them is the right understanding, or the right view (*sammadiṭṭhi*). As for the rules of moral behaviour (*shila*), the majority of them are common to almost all ascetic movements in India and contain nothing specially Buddhist. Though some meditational practices (*samādhi*) were also not of buddhist origin, it is important to stress that they are at the centre of the Buddha's teaching and his contribution to the religious life in India is mainly connected with them.

Thus the main difficulty lies not in choosing the only "right" mental disposition among many "wrong" ones, representing excess or deficiency in some respect ("right" or "wrong" they are not with regard to some moral principle, as we see later), but while systematically practising yogic and meditation exercises to be in tune with the highest Buddhist goal, the elimination of egocentric attachments to the values of worldly existence (*saṃsāra*) and the attainment of enlightenment and the *nirvāṇa*.

While for Aristotle the ethical mean pertains mainly to a life in the polis, in society, among other fellow-citizens, – and his "extremes" are also in the sphere of socially determined human connections, for the Buddha the "extremes" (*anta*) belong to different spheres and no gradual or continuous transition between them is possible. The first "extreme" (of sensuous indulgence) concerns the sphere of worldly life (though some monks can still be subject to it), and the second is characteristic of the ascetic way of life, that is the life outside lay society and outside social connections (the ascetic communities have their proper forms of communication). Thus,

the Middle path could not be situated inbetween these two modes of life, social and religious. It is rather on the monastic path, for the Buddha seems to believe that the final release is possible only for monks.

In “*Anguttara nikaya*”, the Buddha calls those who are attached to sensual pleasure “hardened sensualists” (*āgālha-gāllhā, kakkhalla, lobha-vasera*) and those attached to mortification, self-tormentors (*nijjhāma-atta-kilamathāniyoga vasena sutthu jhānāsentatta-paritatta*). The most important Buddha’s contribution to this highly important domain of religious life in Ancient India is a certain detente in the religious struggle against the human body. If we treat the Buddha’s ideas about the Middle path in terms of Aristotle’s principles (virtue is virtue regarding some particular occasion or situation), we could call the situation in question – an attitude towards the human body. In temporal pleasures there is an excess, in acetic mortification a deficiency, of attention to the human body; both are vicious. According to the Buddha, the mean lies in an attitude which makes the body an efficient instrument of spiritual life and that demands certain attention to its physical and physiological needs. The Buddha himself, as we remember, attained his enlightenment only after renouncing hard ascetic practices which had let him to complete physical exhaustion, and after having regained his health. He accepted it as an inevitable fact that to accomplish spiritual progress one needs a body which would be in a “working state”, and for this reason one should always exercise control over all bodily needs<sup>4</sup>.

While Aristotle acknowledges that sensual pleasures may have their mean in the form of prudence (*sōphrosynē*), the mean between libertinism (*akolastos*) and insensibility (*analgēsia*) (Nic Eth. 1117b 25-1118a 2), the Buddha completely extracts sensual pleasures from the sphere of “moderation”. He regards all sensual pleasures as *kilesa, āsava* – these and like terms connote affliction, defilement, obstacles on the way to spiritual progress. The mean consists in their full neutralisation (with the help of special meditative practices, for instance the practice of mindfulness – *sati*). No moderation is feasible here. Sensual pleasures do not admit of a “mean” because, to use Aristotle’s expression, they are vicious “by their very nature”.

In this respect, the ascetic way of life is different from the sensual life in which the mean is not only possible but highly desirable. Thus, if the first extreme is a “pure” vice (in Aristotle’s sense), the second is subject to different appreciations, depending on the situation.

In the “*Devadatta sutta*”, the Buddha explains to Jaina monks what is for him “fruitful striving”, “fruitful effort”: “[...] a monk does not let his unmastered self to be mastered by anguish (*dukkha* – *V.L.*), and he does not cast out rightful happiness and is undefiled by this happiness”. He compares an attitude of a monk towards pleasures (happiness) with the attitude of a man towards a woman he was once in love with: “[...] he may see her standing and laughing

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<sup>4</sup> In the “*Gaṇakamoggallāna sutta*”, he says to a monk named Gaṇaka Moggallāna: “Come you, monk, be moderate in eating; you should take food reflecting carefully, not for fun, or indulgence or personal charm, or beautification, but taking just enough for maintaining this body and keeping it going, for keeping it unharmed, for furthering the Brahma-faring, with the thought: “Thus will I crush out an old feeling, and I will not allow a new feeling to arise, and then there will be for me subsistence and blamelessness and abiding in comfort” (*Majjhima nikaya*, vol. III (2), L., PTS, 1959, tr. By B. Horner).

with another man [...] and grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair do not rise up (in him)". If that monk has eliminated these unpleasant states and has developed some equanimity, there may be a moment when he says to himself: "Dwelling as I please, unskilled states (*akusala dhamma* – V. L.) grow much, skiful states (*kusala dhamma* – V. L.) decline, but while striving against myself through anguish (*dukkhāya pana me attānam padahato*) unskilled states decline, skilled states grow much [...] After a time he does not strive against his self through anguish. What is the reason for this? Monks, the purpose of that monk who might strive against his self through anguish is accomplished [...]. It is like a fletcher who heats and scorches a shaft between two firebrands, and when he has made it straight and serviceable, he no longer heats and scorches the shaft between the two firebrands to make it straight and serviceable ... the purpose is accomplished" (Majjhima nikaya, vol. II 222–228).

In his conversation with Soṇa Kolivisa, who has injured his feet during his ascetic exercises, the Buddha asks whether it is possible to play the lute if its strings are too taut or too slack. After Soṇa's negative answer, the Buddha asks: "When the strings of your lute were neither too taut, nor too slack but were keyed to an even pitch was your lute at that time tuneful and fit for playing?". Soṇa certainly agrees. And applying this situation to ascetic efforts the Buddha summarises: "Even so, Soṇa, does too much output of energy conduce to restlessness, does too feeble energy conduce to slothfulness. Therefore, do you, Soṇa, determine upon evenness (*samatam*) in energy and pierce the evenness of the faculties (*indriyānāū ca samataū pattivijja*) and reflect upon it" (Mahāvagga V.1. 15-16).

Here, the key word for us is *samatanam*, or *sama*, *samatā* – "the same", "the like", "equal", "evenness" ("the same at the beginning, the same in the end, the same in the middle" – in this way the Buddhist texts characterise Dhamma (the Buddha's teaching)<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, only that practice is fruitful and efficient which contributes to progress on the way to *nirvāṇa*. If a monk practising *samatha*, or elimination of the affects, has become calm to the point of slothfulness and obtuseness, a little bit of self-torture would do him good: it may brace him and pull him futher to his final goal. Therefore, under certain circumstances, the extreme of "self-mortification" is quite acceptable.

We can notice that the Buddha never suggests to cheer monks up with the contemplation of a beautiful woman or anything similar. The other extreme is, therefore, completely useless for salvation. The Buddha's attitude towards sensual pleasures is clearly expressed in "Mahādukkhakkhandha sutta". He classifies five varieties of sensual knowledge: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile. The major part of this suttee is dedicated to a picturesque account of all sorts of miseries due to the attachment to these: affliction by the cold, heat, suffering from the touch of gadflies, mosquitos, wind, sun, creeping things, dying of hunger and thirst.

Any worldly occupation, any craft, may lead a person to the loss of his fortune, to the failure, and thus to the suffering from the fruitlessness of his efforts. Even in the case of success,

<sup>5</sup> We also find the identification of the mean with sameness or evenness in Aristotle: "Now of everything that is continuous and divisible, it is possible to take the larger part, or the smaller part, or an equal part, and these parts may be larger, smaller, and equal either with respect to the thing itself or relatively to us; the equal part being a mean between excess and deficiency" (Nic.Eth II 1106a 4).

As we can clearly see, the Buddha's strategy consists of avoiding categorical and general statements. He judges all these practices strictly selectively, according to their capacity to contribute to or to balk the spiritual progress of a particular person in a particular situation. (The Buddha is often called *vibhajjavādin* – the one who knows how to divide or analyse). It is the best way to formulate the later Buddhist principle of *upaya kausalya*, the skilful means of converting people to Buddhism. The Buddhist way to emancipation is not one and the same for everybody. The Buddha accommodates it to the individual character of his followers, but his general strategy is to find in each a certain point of dynamical spiritual growth, through which one can “grow out” up to the *nirvāṇa*. The Middle path is not a walk down a smooth and direct road with a measured tread; it is rather a manoeuvre across a minefield – one step does not ensure success of those which follow. On the other hand, the Middle path is not a stable equilibrium, settled once and for ever, but a constant declination to one or the other side, aiming to fit the ever changing “disposition of forces”. The most important thing here is not a point of equilibrium, but rather a point of growth. In this, in my opinion, lies the main difference between the “hard task of attaining the mean” for Aristotle and for the Buddha.

According to Aristotle, virtues and vices do not form constant properties of the soul, but they emerge only under certain circumstances (“at the right time, on the right occasion, towards the right people, for the right purpose and in the right manner” Nic. Eth. II, 1106b 20). For instance: “A man is temperate if he abstains from bodily pleasures and finds this abstinence itself enjoyable, profligate if he feels it irksome; he is brave if he faces danger with pleasure or at all events without pain, cowardly if he does so with pain” (Ibid. 1104b). Hence, Aristotle, like the Buddha, applies a differential, situational analysis and in this sense we can also call him *vibhajjavādin*.

Nevertheless, he constantly insists on the self-sufficient character of the contemplative life (*bios theoretikos*). The image of perfection and plenitude is for him a kind of circle (among the movements the most perfect is a circular one). Having reached the middle (the mean), a sage finds himself at the point of equilibrium, the point of realised actual being (*entelechia*) which is stable and unmovable like the centre of a cyclone. The Buddha, on the contrary, insists on the transient character of all the meditative techniques constituting the Middle path. None of the good mental states which can be achieved by the Buddhist follower is self-sufficient or stable. For all the *dhammas* (mental states) are transient (*anicca*) and without any proper essence (*anatta*), whether they are “profitable” or “unprofitable”.

In the “Mahaniddana sutta”, the Buddha explains to Ananda what it means to be a released monk: “[...] when a monk attains these eight emancipations (*dhyana* – V. L.) in forward order, in reverse order, in forward and reverse order, when he attains them and emerges from them wherever he wants, however he wants, and for as long as he wants”. Thus it is important not only to attain meditative state, even the highest one, but also to emerge from it, that is to be free from the attachment to it. However much you like it and feel good in it, it is nothing but a transient step which must be overcome, not a goal in itself. As for the goal, it lies beyond all normal human capacities, including reasoning and rational understanding: “[...] when through the ending of the mental fermentation he enters and remains in the fermentation-free release

of awareness and release of discernment, having directly known it and accomplished it in the here and now, he is said to be a monk released in both ways [...]” (Digha nikaya II.70, tr. by Thanissaro Bhikkhu). Thus, the resulting state is something beyond the other states of the Middle path, beyond all varieties of samsaric existence (past, actual, or future), beyond the human condition as such. It transcends the contemplative soul (*to dianoeticon*), Intellect or Mind (*Nous*) so dear to Aristotle. The *nirvāṇa* is a transpersonal state, quite the opposite of what a human being knows and feels in his or her human experience. We can say that the *nirvāṇa* is *transcendent*, whereas Aristotle’s *to ariston* (*Nous*, *entelechia* etc.) having relation to the foundation of human experience is, in my opinion, *transcendental*.

The other difference, which results from this one, is a matter of the moral or rather of the ethical status of the mean. Aristotle tries to justify the mean in moral categories. The Buddha resorts not so much to moral as to pragmatic categories: his opposition “kusala-akusala”, advantageous (profitable) or disadvantageous (unprofitable), relates to the practical effect of approaching the *nirvāṇa*. In discussing moral practices proper (which constitute only the third part of the Middle path), the Buddha accentuates not their “morality”, but their practicality.

The Buddha is often compared with the physician, but this comparison is justified only with regard to the means and not to the goal of his teaching. We can say that the individual defilement of the Buddhist adept conditions the character of the practices recommended to him in the same way as the character of illness determines the character of remedy recommended by a physician. However, for the Buddha well being and good health of a person are only a means for obtaining the transpersonal state, while for Aristotle they are a *sine qua non* for the moral perfection of the person (the ideal of *kalokagatia*).

I have already mentioned that the principle of the mean infuses the whole of Aristotle’s doctrine. The same is true for the Buddha’s one as well. The mean for him is a support – in the most efficient mode of their functioning – not only of the behaviour, but also an emotional and intellectual activity, constantly renewed balance productive of spiritual progress, while the “extremes” are a pure waste of energy, a sort of entropy, binding a person to his or her *samsarā ra*, a circle of rebirth in the world of suffering. For this reason, in his attitude towards the so-called “metaphysical questions” (the finity or infinity of the world, the existence or non-existence of the soul and so on) the Buddha never says categorically (*ekāntika*) either “no”, or “yes”. In polemics with other teachers or their followers, he tries to budge them from their “extreme” (categorical) position, and for this purpose he points to the possibility of the opposite extreme. In other words, to arrive at the equilibrium, he intentionally overloads the counterweight. For instance, to sceptics he praises the advantages of dogmatic views, and to those who do not believe in post-mortem existence he describes the benefits of this belief: if it does not exist, the believer may at least win the respect of social opinion, and, if it really exists, he wins a double prize – in this and in the other world; as for the sceptics they are defeated in both cases (“Appanaka sutta”, Majjhima nikaya I. 403–404). In the brahmanical traditionalists, believers in the supreme Brahman and in the possibility of their “union” with Him, he provokes hesitation by asking them whether they have seen this Brahman or know somebody who has seen Him and finally he compares the believer in Brahman with a man who tells everybody how he loves

the most beautiful woman in this land whom he knows not and has not seen (“Tevijja sutta”, Dāgha nikaya XIII, 19).

As for the “positive” statements made by the Buddha himself, all of them purport to offer a “moderate”, “middle” decision to the problems to which other teachers seem to give too categorical, extreme interpretation. He applies the *catushkoṇika* scheme (*tetralemma*) which tends to prove that none of the “categorical” statements<sup>6</sup> is acceptable. In the “Acela sutta”, the crucial Buddhist doctrine of the dependent origination (*paticca samuppāda*) is presented as the Middle way between eternalism (belief in the eternity of the soul – *sasvatavāda*) and annihilationism (*ucchedavāda* – believe that the soul is destroyed at the moment of death). Acela Kassapa, an ascetic, asks the Buddha whether a *dukkha* (suffering) is a result of actions of the person himself or of somebody else. The Buddha answers that none of these suggestions hold good, for the *dukkha* results from *paticca samuppāda* (Sāyuta nikaya II, 18–21).

As we have seen, under certain circumstances, when there is a need to create a counterweight to another “extreme”, the middle disposition may coincide with the “extreme”. For example, there is the “neutralisation” of attachment to sensual pleasures with the help of aversion to disgusting aspects of the dead body. In the same way, torpor is to be overcome by mental activity, and so on.

A certain “manipulation” of “extremes” in order to achieve perfection is also characteristic of Aristotle (see: Nic. Eth. 1109b 25), but “perfection” (*to ey*) is for him the same as “beauty” (*to kalon*). We cannot say the same in the case of the Buddha, for whom aesthetic contemplation was nothing but a source of attachment to the material world, and in that way, an obstacle to *nirvāṇa*. For the Buddhist follower is primarily a practician: he constantly tackles, that is, riddles through the sieve of consciousness, all his mental states to eliminate those which have nothing to do with his progress to the final release (*nirvāṇa*).

The Buddha, like Aristotle, was sure that professional activity was not fit for a wise man. However, for the Buddha it is so because it is subject to sufferings, while for Aristotle it is due to the absence of leisure (*skholē*) and its character of being pursued not for its own sake but for other goals. On the other hand, a wise man in Aristotle’s opinion is not a wandering ascetic with his basic needs, but anybody rich enough to have leisure for a contemplative life, though abstemious in his sensual desires.

Nonetheless, it would be unfair to treat Aristotle only as a purely unreligious, rational thinker, extraneous to any spiritual or religious quest. In the “Nicomachean Ethics” Aristotle ascribes to a sage an aspiration to overcome the human condition: “Such a life as this however will be higher than the human level: not in virtue of his humanity will a man achieve it, but in virtue of something within him that is divine; and by as much as this something is superior to his composite nature, by so much is its activity superior to the exercise of the other forms of virtue. If then the intellect is something divine in comparison with man, so is the life of the intellect divine in comparison with human life” (Nic. Eth. X 1177b 30).

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<sup>6</sup> 1) A is P, 2) A is not P, 3) A is P and A is not P, 4) A is neither P, nor no-P.

His Absolute, *Nous*, is at the same time God (*Theos*) – not a personal God interested in this world, but pure intelligence completely indifferent to world affairs (as is implied in the concept of the unmoved mover). Though the status of Aristotle's *Nous* remains relatively indeterminate, and in any case it cannot be interpreted either as entirely transcendental, or as transcendent, it is not just an accidental coincidence that this *Nous* serves as the basis for the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Porphyry with its transcendent One and it is not by pure chance that Plotinian texts were translated into Arabic under the title: "Theology of Aristotle".

The Buddha's Middle path also has not remained a merely pragmatic methodological principle. Its transformation into a metaphysical and philosophical doctrine achieved its full realisation in the Madhyamika, in which the contraries, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, coincide, shaping the material world infiltrated by the spiritual essence ("Buddha's nature", "emancipation", "vacuity"), in the same manner as the material world of Aristotle is penetrated by "forms" or "images" (*eidos*) proceeding from the supreme Mind (*Nous*).

Thus we can see that the notion of the mean in itself, presets a certain structure of reasoning, so that even such thinkers as Aristotle and the Buddha – otherwise different – show some symptomatic coincidences. If the mean is estimated as the highest value, we must have the "extremes" and some difficulties (whether of ethical, metaphysical, or religious character) in detecting it. Aristotle seems to think that, once attained, the mean remains intact, permitting a sage (ideal person) to lead entirely self-sufficient contemplative life (*bios theoretikos*). On the contrary, even after stepping on the Buddhist path, a monk continues to face a constant danger of losing it because none of the practices recommended by the Buddha is to be exercised for its own behalf. The highest goal, pursued for its own sake, the *nirvāṇa*, is another kind of experience – experience beyond the chain of causation productive of transmigrational experience, beyond person as such.

**VIDURIO SUNKUMAI: ARISTOTELIO 'VIDURIO SAMPRATA' (MESOTES)  
IR BUDDHOS 'VIDURIO KELIAS' (MAJJHIMA PATIPAD)**

**Viktoria Lyssenko**

Santrauka

Analizuodama pirminius Aristotelio tekstus ir ankstyvuosius budistinio pali kanono tekstus autorė siekia palyginti jų 'vidurio' principo sampratas. Atkreipiamas dėmesys į tai, kad nors Aristotelis ir Buddha esmiškai nesuderinami (pirmasis, kaip teorinis mąstytojas, samprotavimu sprendė tuos klausimus, kuriuos antrasis, kaip praktinis religinis mąstytojas, laikė visiškai Beverčiais), jiedu vieningai pritaria nuomonei, jog praktiškai įgyvendinti vidurio taisyklę yra itin sunku. Abu jie ją suvokė kaip sudėtingą sistemą, kuri negali būti vertinama kaip paprastas aritmetinis vidurkis, mechaniška pusiausvyra ar aprioriškai priimta nuostata, o kaip nuolatos kūrybiškai atnaujinamos paieškos objektas.

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