



## HARMONY AND CONTRADICTION: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF BUDDHIST ETHICS AND POLITICAL ETHICS

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### Abstract

**Background and Objective:** The convergence of Buddhist ethics and political ethics occurs when there is a complex interplay between spiritual principles and practices of good governance. Buddhist ethics are based on basic concepts, such as non-harm and compassion. This creates a unique moral perspective when woven into the fabric of political ethics, which must contend with administrative complexities. The power dynamics and social justice interactions present a wide range of possibilities and challenges. Scholars explore how Buddhist principles can inform political decision-making. It emphasizes the potential for building unity and character development among political leaders. This interdisciplinary examination not only reveals opportunities for adaptation but also reveals ethical tensions and quandaries at the intersection of Buddhist ethics and political ethics. Therefore, this article aims to explore the harmony and contradictions between Buddhist ethics and political ethics.

**Methodology:** The research used rigorous methods with a literature review and critical analysis of documentaries to shed light on the interplay between Buddhist ethics and political ethics. This approach attempted to present a comprehensive understanding of the harmonious intersections and potential conflicts that marked the relationship between these ethical frameworks through a synthesis of diverse perspectives. This research aimed to facilitate an exploration of various sources and perspectives, providing a holistic perspective on the complex dynamics at the intersection of Buddhist ethics and political ethics. It provided a more thorough insight into the complex interconnections and challenges.

**Main Results:** The results of the research found that harmony between Buddhist ethics and political ethics, included adjusting the principle of harmlessness, emphasizing mutual sympathy, being mindful in decision-making, principles of good governance and social justice, and adherence to the truth. Conflicts between Buddhist ethics and political ethics included conflict in Non-Harm Principles, compassion and political realism, sanity and political expediency, ethical governance and political realism, and truth and political rhetoric.

**Involvement to Buddhadhamma:** This research article is involved in Applied Buddhism and categorized within "Buddhism for social benefits," which applies Buddhist principles in the



context of modern science and society. It aims to bridge the gap between traditional Buddhist principles and contemporary challenges for cultivating a more compassionate, mindful, and ethical world that responds to the complex needs of today's society.

**Conclusions:** There was a noticeable correspondence between Buddhist ethics and political ethics. This was evident in general principles, such as non-harm, compassion, mindfulness, good governance, and truth. However, inherent conflicts arose in some areas, such as disagreements over seemingly benign principles. The difficulty of reconciling humanist values with the practicality of political decision-making and the potential tension between the ethical ideals of governance and the practical demands of political realism. The inclusion of truth in political rhetoric had also become a matter of debate. These observations highlighted the complex and subtle dynamics that characterized the intersection between Buddhist ethics and political ethics. It emphasized the need to take a careful and careful approach when navigating the interplay between these two ethical frameworks.

**Keywords:** Harmony, Contradiction, Buddhist Ethics, Political Ethics

## Introduction

Buddhist ethics is a basic component of Buddhist philosophy. It is centered on the pursuit of moral and spiritual development. The ethical framework is rooted in the teachings of Siddhartha Buddha. Emphasis is placed on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path as guidelines for correct and mindful conduct. According to Harvey (2000), Buddhist ethics are critical to cultivating kindness, non-harm (Ahimsā), and mindfulness in all aspects of life. The ethical guidelines established by Buddhism are guidelines for individuals who wish to attain enlightenment and escape the cycle of suffering (Dukkha). Therefore, Buddhist ethics is characterized by adherence to the virtues known as "Sila" which covers principles, such as not killing animals, stealing, lying, committing sexual misconduct, and the use of intoxicants. These precepts are not presented as commandments, but it is a guideline for living life with skill, and promoting personal and social harmony (Gethin, 1998). In addition, Buddhist ethics promotes the cultivation of mental virtues by emphasizing correct mindfulness, correct concentration, and correct understanding as mentioned in the Eightfold Path. By integrating these ethical principles into everyday life, each individual aims to create a foundation for inner peace and contribute to the well-being of others. However, while Buddhist ethics provides an overarching framework for individual behavior, challenges arise when trying to reconcile these principles with the complexities of political ethics and governance issues, such as the use of force in defense political power dynamics and social justice. This raises complex ethical dilemmas. Keown (1992) discusses debates within the Buddhist tradition regarding the application of ethics in social and political contexts. It emphasizes the tension between nonviolence and the responsibility of political leaders. Exploring this challenge provides a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay between Buddhist ethics and the complexities of the political sphere.



The idea is that good politics is based on the character and actions of good politicians. Reinforcing the moral dimension of political leadership by Aristotle's Ethical Framework as discussed in "Nicomachean Ethics," it maintains that the virtues of individual leaders are the foundation for creating a just and harmonious political community (Aristotle, 2000). In this context, a good politician embodies virtues, such as honesty, wisdom, and courage, which are expressed in political decisions that will contribute to the general benefit. Characteristics of politicians according to Aristotle influence the ethical nature of political institutions and policies, which determines the overall moral structure of society. It is understood that the link between good politicians and good politics extends beyond individual virtue to include a commitment to the common good. Contemporary political theorists like MacIntyre (1984) argue that Ethical Leadership involves dedication to principles that prioritize the well-being of the community over narrow self-interest. In this context, good politicians engage in practices that promote justice inclusivity and unity in society. This perspective emphasizes the importance of moral character in political leaders as a driving force in ethical governance and cultivating a political environment that promotes the prosperity of all citizens.

Political ethics serves as an important framework for examining the moral dimensions of political decision-making and governance. Political ethics are rooted in political philosophy and theory. It covers the principles and values that guide individuals and institutions in the public sphere. Scholars often refer to the works of political theorists like Rawls (1996) and Arendt (1998) to understand the basic concepts of political ethics. Rawls's "Theory of Justice" explores the principles of justice that should govern a just society. Its emphasis is on justice and equality, while Arendt's "Human Condition" delves into the nature of political action and the importance of citizen participation in ethical governance. Political ethics, of course, faces complex challenges in dealing with the ethical dilemmas inherent in political decision-making, such as the use of power, responsibility, accountability, and the balance between individual freedom and collective well-being. This requires careful ethical consideration. Scholars like Machiavelli (1992) have addressed the practical aspects of political leadership. It introduces the idea that the ends may justify the means. On the other hand, contemporary political theorists like Nussbaum (2013) argue for a more comprehensive ethical approach that integrates principles of justice, human rights, and citizen well-being in political decision-making the pursuit of an ethical public sphere is therefore not only relevant to the actions of political leaders, but it also includes citizen participation in the democratic process. Scholars, such as Dahl (1991), emphasize the importance of political participation and a vibrant civil society in supporting ethical governance. The ethical responsibilities of political actors extend beyond individual actions to creating just institutions and policies that promote the common good. As society grapples with global challenges, exploring political ethics is increasingly relevant in promoting a political culture that is consistent with principles of fairness, transparency, and ethical conduct for diverse populations. However, exploring the intersection between Buddhist ethics and political ethics is a rigorous and nuanced research endeavor. The basis for this research lies in the



recognition that these two ethical frameworks have different historical, philosophical, and cultural roots that converge and diverge in the context of social governance. As society grapples with the complexities of political decision-making and the pursuit of a just and harmonious social order, understanding the issues of harmony and conflict between these ethical systems becomes essential. The research attempts to reveal the interplay and challenges that can arise when Buddhist ethics and political ethics intersect. It provides a deeper understanding of how these various ethical paradigms can inform and enrich each other in the pursuit of ethical and effective governance.

Thus, there are questions about reconciliation and conflict between Buddhist ethics and political ethics. It is a key point of inquiry that delves into the complex relationship between spiritual principles and political governance. Examining how these ethical systems align or diverge in the pursuit of well-being and social justice raises fundamental questions about the compatibility of spiritual values with the practical realities of political decision-making. This research aims to answer these questions by delving into their historical, philosophical, and practical dimensions. Its purpose is to shed light on the challenges and opportunities arising from the intersection between Buddhist ethics and political ethics by promoting a deeper understanding of the differences involved. This survey contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the role of ethical considerations in shaping the political landscape and the potential for integrated and morally grounded governance approaches.

### Objective

This article aims to explore the harmony and contradictions between Buddhist ethics and political ethics.

### Methodology

This article involved a comprehensive analysis of current literature, documentaries, and academic works. Initially, a systematic review of the literature was undertaken to identify key themes, theoretical frameworks, and historical perspectives related to Buddhist ethics and political ethics. This involved accessing reputable academic databases, journals, and sources to capture a wide range of perspectives. The documentary and visual media were also critically examined to provide a thorough understanding of how the scientific framework worked, and how did these ethics manifest in real-life situations. The research used qualitative methods to synthesize information from various sources to find harmonious intersections and potential conflicts between Buddhist ethics and political ethics. This approach aimed to present a holistic and informed exploration of the topic. It drew on a variety of data sources to contribute a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between these two ethical domains.



## Results and Discussion

Harmony between Buddhist Ethics and Political Ethics:

### 1. Alignment of Non-Harm Principles;

Buddhist ethics emphasized the principle of doing no harm or nonviolence. It called for not harming living things. This principle was consistent with political ethics that aimed to promote a society free from violence and conflict. Scholars, such as Harvey (2000), had examined the ethical foundations of Buddhism, including not harming and how to integrate it into political decision-making to promote a more peaceful and just society.

### 2. Shared Emphasis on Compassion;

Both Buddhist ethics and political ethics emphasized empathy. The Buddhist teachings emphasized cultivating compassion for all living beings. Political ethics, on the other hand, always aimed to create policies and governance structures that promoted the welfare of all citizens. This shared value of compassion could have served as a bridge between individual ethical practices and the broader social goals envisaged in political ethics.

### 3. Mindfulness in Decision-Making;

Incorporating mindfulness, an essential part of Buddhist ethics, into the political decision-making process would have resulted in more careful and ethical governance. Mindfulness involved a higher awareness of one's thoughts and actions. This was consistent with the principles of transparency and accountability in political ethics. Integrating mindfulness practices could have enhanced the ethical quality of political leadership by promoting a deeper understanding of the consequences of decisions. Beauchamp & Bowie (1983) proposed a framework for ethical decision-making. Emphasis was placed on considering principles, such as justice, kindness, compassion, and respect for independence when using this framework. Politicians could have assessed the ethical implications of policy choices to ensure that their decisions were based on moral principles and contributed to the well-being of society. Ethical decision-making had become an essential component of responsible and principled political leadership.

### 4. Ethical Governance and Social Justice;

The pursuit of good governance and social justice was a common theme between Buddhist ethics and political ethics. Both systems shared a concern for the well-being of individuals and supported policies that addressed inequality. Rawls's Theory of Justice (1971) provided a theoretical framework within political ethics that was consistent with Buddhist principles of promoting social welfare and justice.

### 5. Adherence to Truthfulness;

Buddhist ethics emphasized the importance of truth and avoiding false statements. This was consistent with the ethic of honesty in political ethics. It emphasized the need for transparency and realistic communication in political discourse. The alignment of these principles contributed to fostering trust between political leaders and the public.





In conclusion, the consistency between Buddhist ethics and political ethics was evident in the shared basic principles that promoted a harmonious and just society. Commitment to principles was not dangerous. This was supported by both ethical systems. It reflected a shared desire to promote a society free from violence and conflict. The emphasis on compassion was a shared value between Buddhist ethics and political ethics. It served as a unifying force that connected individual ethical practices to broader social goals. Integrating mindfulness into political decision-making processes would have enhanced governance in line with the principles of transparency and accountability. The convergence of Buddhist ethics and political ethics in the pursuit of good governance and social justice reinforced shared concern for the well-being of individuals and promoted policies that addressed inequality. Finally, emphasizing shared truths contributed to building trust between political leaders and the public. It emphasized the important role of ethics in promoting an ethical and cohesive social framework. Integrating these principles was the way to build a peaceful society have compassion and be fairer.

#### Contradiction between Buddhist Ethics and Political Ethics:

##### 1. Conflict in Non-Harm Principles;

A potential conflict between Buddhist ethics and political ethics arose in the interpretation and application of the Non-Harm Principle. Although, Buddhist ethics, which was rooted in the principle of nonviolence, encouraged avoiding and causing harm to living things in some situations. Political ethics might have involved decisions or actions that might have been viewed as harmful in the pursuit of national interests or security. Harvey (2000) explored the tension between these principles. It delved into the challenges of integrating the ethical foundations of Buddhism, including not harming and entering the realm of political decision-making.

##### 2. Compassion and Political Realities;

Although both Buddhist ethics and political ethics emphasized compassion, conflicts might have arisen in the application of the principle of compassion within the political sphere. Buddhist teachings promoted cultivating compassion for all living beings while political ethics, which was driven by practical considerations might have involved decisions that prioritized national interest over universal compassion. The tension between these views was explored in the work of the Dalai Lama and Cutler (1998), who discussed the challenges of integrating Buddhist principles with contemporary political realities.

##### 3. Mindfulness and Political Expediency;

Conflict could have arisen when trying to integrate mindfulness, which was an important aspect of Buddhist ethics compatible with the political decision-making process. Although mindfulness encouraged greater awareness of one's thoughts and actions, political expediency might have required quick decision-making. This was not always consistent with the nature of mindfulness, Anālayo (2003) explored the challenges and nuances of integrating mindfulness into political decision-making.



#### 4. Ethical Governance versus Political Realism;

The conflict between Buddhist ethics and political ethics was evident in the tension between the pursuit of ethical governance and the practical demands of political realism. Both systems, though, were concerned with the well-being of individuals and supported social justice. However political ethics might have faced challenges in adhering to these principles in the face of complex geopolitical dynamics. The theoretical framework of Rawls's (1996) theory of justice within political ethics might have conflicted with the practical limitations of real-world politics. In the same view, Nye (1967) argued that transparency in the decision-making process along with responsibility for actions was necessary for a healthy democratic system. Politicians had an ethical duty to communicate openly with the public, reveal relevant information, and take responsibility for their decisions. This commitment to transparency not only preserved the ethical standards of governance but also helped foster a relationship of trust between politicians and voters.

#### 5. Truthfulness and Political Rhetoric;

The potential conflict between Buddhist ethics and political ethics was evident in their emphasis on truth. Although the Buddhist code of ethics encouraged honesty and the avoidance of lying, political ethics might have also involved strategic communication and political rhetoric. This led to a conflict of principles. The challenge of balancing truth and political discourse was explored in the context of Gethin's work on the foundations of Buddhism (Gethin, 1998).

In conclusion, the potential conflicts between Buddhist ethics and political ethics were examined. It revealed the complex challenge of reconciling spiritual principles with the practical demands of governance. Tensions arose from conflicting harmless principles, differences in the use of empathy, the challenge of integrating mindfulness into political decision-making, the clash between ethical governance and political realism, and conflicts that might have arisen in reality. It underscored the complexity of reconciling these two ethical frameworks. Navigating these conflicts required a deep understanding of both systems and careful consideration of integration to promote a more ethical and just social and political landscape, as depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Harmony and Contradiction between Buddhist Ethics and Political Ethics



The intersection of Buddhist ethics and political ethics was a fertile field for exploration. It covered both harmonious intersections and potential conflicts. In essence, Buddhist ethics focused on principles, such as non-harm and compassion, which could have reflected important issues of political ethics. The scholars had examined the ethical foundations of Buddhism. In particular, how could the principle of non-harm (Nonviolence) have informed political decision-making and affected the well-being of society (Harvey, 2000).

To enhance harmlessness, the emphasis on mutual empathy created a harmonious foundation between these two ethical frameworks. Both Buddhist ethics and political ethics aimed to promote the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. The Dalai Lama and Cutler (1998) discussed the challenges that existed in integrating humanistic principles into the political sphere. It acknowledged the need to balance universal sympathy with practical considerations in contemporary politics. In addition, Walzer (1973) emphasized the importance of political ethics in promoting the integrity of political processes and institutions. Politicians understanding and applying the principles of political ethics was essential to maintaining public trust, promoting responsibility, and ensuring the ethical foundations of democratic governance.

However, potential conflicts had arisen. This was especially true when attempting to integrate deliberative practices, such as mindfulness, into political decision-making processes. Mindfulness was an important part of Buddhist ethics, encouraging awareness and critical reflection. Anālayo (2003) explored the challenges of integrating mindfulness into the urgent and often high-stakes political realm. This might have required rapid decision-making that was not always consistent with the smooth nature of consciousness.

The conflict between the pursuit of ethical governance created important foundation of Buddhist ethics and the practical demands of political realism. This was another important point of discussion. Political ethics in the face of the complex dynamics of governance might have needed to deal with challenges that appeared at odds with ideal principles of ethical governance. Scholars building on Rawls's theory of justice would have studied how political leaders could have balanced the ethical aspirations of justice with the practical constraints of real-world politics.

In the realm of reality, conflict could have arisen because political discourse often involved strategic communications that might have deviated from the emphasis on honesty in Buddhist ethics. Gethin's work on the foundations of Buddhism (1998) provided an insight into the challenges of meeting a commitment to truth with the imperatives of political discourse and a thorough exploration of the harmony and conflict between Buddhist ethics and political ethics. It contributed to a deeper understanding of the interplay and tensions that could have occurred within this intersection.

## Originality and Body of Knowledge

It can synthesize some general insights into the intersection between Buddhist ethics and political ethics, as depicted in Figure 2.





**Figure 2** Harmony and conflict between Buddhist ethics and political ethics

From the body of knowledge depicted in Figure 2:

Harmony in Buddhist Ethics:

Inner Peace: Buddhist ethics often emphasize inner harmony and peace through practices, such as meditation. Focusing on individual well-being can help make society more harmonious.

Compassion: Central to Buddhist ethics is the concept of compassion. Humanistic policies and governance may be consistent with Buddhist principles to promote a harmonious social environment.

Conflicts in Buddhist Ethics and Politics:

Non-violence vs. Political Realities: Buddhist ethics traditionally emphasize non-violence (*Ahiṃsā*). However, in political contexts, there may be situations where the use of force is deemed necessary, posing a potential contradiction.

Detachment vs. Political Engagement: Buddhist teachings often advocate detachment from worldly concerns. This may conflict with the active engagement required in politics, where individuals need to address social and political issues directly.

Balancing individual and collective well-being:

Individual Enlightenment vs. Social Justice: Buddhist ethics may focus on individual enlightenment, but political ethics often involves addressing systemic issues and promoting social justice. Balancing these priorities can present challenges.



#### Environmental Ethics:

Interconnectedness: Buddhist philosophy emphasizes the interconnectedness of everything. This can be applied to environmental ethics in politics. It promotes sustainable policies that recognize the interdependence of ecosystems.

#### Mindful Governance:

Applying Mindfulness: Buddhist practices, such as mindfulness, may be integrated into political leadership to encourage thoughtful decision-making and empathy in governance.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Exploring the intersection of Buddhist ethics and political ethics revealed both harmonious interplay and complex conflicts. Alignment on principles, such as non-harm, compassion, and mindfulness, demonstrated the potential for shared ethical foundations. However, conflicts were examined, including conflicts of principles that were not harmful, and differences in the use of empathy. The challenge of integrating mindfulness into political decision-making, the clash between ethical governance and political realism, and conflicts that might have arisen in reality highlighted the complexity of navigating this intersection. This research contributed to a thorough understanding of how these ethical frameworks intersected. It provided insights into the possibilities and challenges inherent in integration. However, the complexity found in exploring the intersection between Buddhist ethics and political ethics suggestions for both policy and practice could have been considered. 1) Policy Recommendation: By being aware of potential conflicts and challenges Policymakers should have strived to incorporate the do-no-harm principle. Compassion and mindfulness were included in the ethical governance framework. Policies should have aimed to be consistent with these ethical principles. At the same time, it accepted the practical realities of political decision-making. A balance between ethical aspirations and political realism could have been achieved by integrating careful consideration of Buddhist ethical values into policymaking. This was especially true in areas, such as conflict resolution, human rights, and environmental sustainability. 2) Practice Recommendation: In practice, people involved in political decision-making including politicians and policymakers should have been encouraged to cultivate mindfulness and compassion in their roles. Training programs and workshops could have been developed to promote awareness of potential conflicts and challenges in research. Emphasizing the importance of sincerity and ethical communication could have promoted a more transparent and trustworthy political environment. Moreover, joint efforts among Buddhist practitioners, ethicists, and political leaders could have facilitated this mutual understanding and promoted the practical application of common ethical principles in governance.

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