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Invited Paper

The moral malaise of modernity: Codes of conduct, authenticity, lifelong learning and the case of Thailand

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Abstract

It is argued in this paper that the project of modernity has not only undermined commitment to traditional frameworks of morality or ethics but has also failed to provide any ethical frameworks sufficiently persuasive to replace that loss. Contemporary modernist culture has become what may be seen as a culture of instrumentalist individualism, in which morality is increasingly individualised and contextualised, creating moral conflict and uncertainty: the moral malaise of modernity. The development of situated codes of conduct or ethics has become a standard response to that moral malaise. They are, though, insufficient foundations for ethical or moral practice, since they fail to provide a conception of the goal or telos of ethics, from which may be drawn a compelling purpose for being ethical. An alternative response to the moral malaise of modernity, though, is to recognise and encourage the development of an ethic of authenticity, which would seem to provide a moral telos and in which lifelong learning is a core dimension – suggesting the centrality of lifelong learning engagement in the on-going search for ethical authenticity. Such an ethic may be seen as an emergent feature of contemporary modernity, but as more congruent with cultures – such as that of Thailand – where individual authenticity has strong traditional foundations and links with lifelong learning. That tentative idea is here examined and assessed. It is concluded, though, that contemporary Thai culture is unlikely to provide a particularly fertile site for the fuller development of an ethic of authenticity.

Introduction

An ethic, or a moral framework, may be seen as a body of belief about how we should live our lives by doing what is right and being persons of good character in ways that impact on human welfare or wellbeing: constraining (or restraining) what individuals should (or should not) do and how they should (or should not) present themselves as persons with respect to the effects of their actions on individual or collective welfare and wellbeing (Bunge, 1989). It thus embraces two key subject domains: on the one hand, our actions, what we *do* as persons (ethical or moral conduct), on the other, what we *are* as persons (ethical or moral character). Ethical conduct, then, refers to what it is right for us to do, whereas ethical character refers to what it is good for us to be. That *ethical* conduct and character involve only matters impacting on human welfare or wellbeing seeks to recognise the common distinction between *ethical* precepts and others: variously, prudential, formal, regulatory, advisory, and such like (Olafson, 1967). Ethical conduct and character are generally recognised as being essential to civilised life, at all levels of social organisation, not only the individual, but also organisational, institutional and political (Williams, 1993).

Ethical conduct and character imply or assume, though, a set of criteria and standards for determining what it is right to do and good to be: criteria in the sense of dimensions or

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variables of assessment (such as the extent to which we *respect others as persons*) and standards in the sense of what is expected on each of those dimensions (such as that one should *always* respect others as persons). Ethical conduct and character, though, also imply a telos or goal of intrinsic value that provides a compelling purpose for *being* ethical, by living one's life according to those criteria and standards (MacIntyre, 1981). We may *understand* what we should do and be, but without good grounds for living our lives according to that understanding, there is no good reason to suppose that we *will*, in fact, do so.

Traditionally, systems of religious belief have provided each of those three elements: criteria, standards and a telos or intrinsically valued goal impelling us to be ethical. Protestant Christianity, for example, provides a set of (ethical) commandments (criteria and standards of ethical conduct and being), and many case studies in its parables, of what those commandments mean in actual situations; and it provides a goal or telos for following those commandments, in that doing so is the only path to salvation (as distinct from eternal damnation) on the judgement of God (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011). *Faith* in such a religious metaphysics of the universe is thus central to ensuring one's commitment to being ethical. Without it, ethical commitment becomes uncertain, questionable and even bizarre.

The Enlightenment project of modernity, though, has undermined faith in and commitment to systems of religious belief, in its promotion of secular reason and enquiry, cultural progress and human advancement (Lyotard, 1984/1979). It has replaced traditional religious frameworks of ethical belief with an array of formal normative ethical frameworks, none which, however, provides a common compelling purpose for *being* ethical (MacIntyre, 1981). And it has led to a contemporarily prevailing modernist culture of instrumentalist individualism, substantially lacking commitment to commonly shared intrinsic values, but highly valuing individual achievement and progress (Bagnall & Nakar, 2018).

It is the ethical consequences of that prevailing modernist culture of instrumentalist individualism, and its relationship to lifelong learning, that is examined in this paper. That examination has been driven by the idea that the Thai cultural context may provide an example of how the ethical limitations of instrumentalist individualism may be addressed, through its strong tradition of commitment to Buddhism and lifelong learning.

The methodology of the work reported here follows contemporary scholarly traditions in analytic philosophy. It presents the argument developed in the project, grounding the points made therein in contemporary social science and philosophical literature. That grounding, and the argument itself, are unavoidably sparse, given their breadth and the length restrictions on the paper. This paper, then, presents the argument in the following sections: the project of modernity, ethics in modernity, codes of conduct as a response to the moral malaise created by the modernist project, an ethic of authenticity, lifelong learning in the search for authenticity, Thailand as a case study, and some concluding comments for further consideration.

The Project of Modernity

Modernity is understood here as a current of thought that potentially conditions all aspects of human existence: economic, political, educational, social and individual (Habermas, 1983). To the extent that it does so condition all aspects of human existence in a given culture, that culture may be said to be *modernist* (Toulmin, 1990). While modernity may be seen as having its origins in Western Renaissance humanism of the late fourteenth-century, it has developed progressively since then, through the eighteenth-century Enlightenment to its present 'late modern' or even 'post-modern' form (Bauman, 1991). It is characterised by its rejection of tradition – both religious and secular – and its focus on secular, instrumentalist rational empiricism: a commitment to knowledge that serves cultural progress and human advancement and is generated through reason and the objective, scientific, study of realities and our experience of them (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011).

In its rejection of traditional belief, it undermines historically shared values of what is right, good, true and beautiful (Taylor, 1991a). There is a general loss of faith in the traditional frameworks of belief that served not only to explain our experiences of reality but also to provide us with shared values: grounding morality in a natural metaphysical order (Taylor, 2007). Non-arbitrary intrinsic value, previously grounded in cultural tradition and religious belief, is replaced by a shifting array of values drawn from a multiplicity of different domains of human engagement, in which the only constant determining value is that of achieving competitive advantage as effectively and efficiently as is (instrumentally) practicable (Bauman, 1995). The privatisation, commodification and marketization of goods and services thus becomes, not only economically, but also socially pervasive (Giddens, 1990).

This state of affairs has been characterised as a culture of performativity – of *instrumentalist individualism* (Taylor, 1991a). In it, value is highly individualised and irreducibly economistic, in that its common currency is fiscal: monetary value pervading all political, social and individual action (Halliday, 2012).

Although modernity is a Western cultural development, the modernist forms of globalisation and communications technology that it has generated have ensured its contemporary impact on cultures throughout the world (Bauman, 1998). To varying degrees, it has pervaded all nation-states, where it challenges traditional frameworks of belief, eroding cultural traditions and values, but also generating fundamentalist revivalism in opposition to its destructive consequences (Thomas, 2007). It has been characterised as the *project* of modernity to emphasise the point that it is the evolving product and process of deliberate and deliberative human action (Toulmin, 1990). Its form at any point in time and place is thus the product, not only of what has been before, but also of critical self-reflection, human intention, aspiration and action (Taylor, 2007).

Ethics in Modernity

The modernist rejection of traditional frameworks of belief has thus undermined the moral traditions that have historically been embedded in those frameworks, leading to the generation

of *ethics* as a discipline, focused not only on critiquing traditional moral frameworks, but also articulating, promulgating and critiquing (normative) modernist frameworks of ethical value and precepts in their place (MacIntyre, 1981). Such normative ethical frameworks or theories encompass and provide normative statements of how we should live our lives by doing what is right and being persons of good character, articulating a set of criteria and standards for determining what it is right to do and good to be (Bagnall & Nakar, 2018). The project of modernity has generated a large array of such ethical theories, which compete for academic acceptance as theories of ethics and for public adherence as guides to ethical action (Singer, 1991). Some such theories have focused, deontologically, on the common form of moral precepts in frameworks of religious belief, articulating ethical frameworks of *principles* to guide human action (Baier, 1958). Others have developed instrumental theories in which ethics is governed by the *intended outcomes* or *consequences* of human action (Singer, 1979). Others have articulated conceptions that focus as ethics as *caring for* others (Noddings, 1984). Others have seen ethics as a matter of *human character* – a conception that has its origin in the classical Greek, Aristotelian conception of ethics (Oakley & Cocking, 2001). Still others have seen all such theories as delusional, characterising ethical action as merely the dressing-up of *enlightened self-interest* (Preston, 1996).

However, none of those normative ethical theories has generated sufficient public adherence to obtain anything approaching general purchase as a guide to ethical conduct (Williams, 1993). They all – individually and collectively – fail to provide an over-arching telos or goal of intrinsic value sufficient to provide a compelling purpose for being ethical. Such a telos was previously associated with theistic systems of belief, but the modernist secularization of belief removed the telos. The ethical theories of Enlightenment modernity thus present different ways in which we might construct ourselves as ethical beings, but they lack a commonly accepted compelling telos for doing so (MacIntyre, 1981). There has thus been created an ethical vacuum, in which moral responsibility and action have become radically individualized and contextualized (Bauman, 1995): a condition that may be seen as the moral malaise of contemporary modernity (Taylor, 1991a). Ethics is individualized in that individuals are left without the certainty of frameworks of ethical belief to guide their actions and evaluations (Taylor, 1991a). And it is contextualized in that they are left to craft their ethical actions and evaluations on the basis of their interpretations of the immediate situations in which they themselves (Bauman, 1993). The capacity of individuals to respond to situated moral challenges – their capacity for moral reasoning and action – and their individual character as centers of moral action, thus come to the fore (Bagnall, 2004). Individuals find themselves being held responsible for the actions they take in response to morally challenging situations in their work and other aspects of their lives, but for which their moral education and development has failed to equip them (Hill, 2003).

That ethical vacuum has been seen as contributing to a flourishing of moral neo-tribalism, in which morality is drawn from the array of messianic ideologies and other identity and interest groups with which one is associated at any given point in time (Maffesoli, 1996). It has also contributed to the oppositional rise of religious fundamentalism, in which individuals retreat from the moral conflict and uncertainty of modernity to the moral certainties of traditional and reformist frameworks of religious belief (Carroll, 2005).

Contemporary modernist ethics, though, is highly situational, and hence heterogeneous (Bauman, 1995). Different practices in which we engage as persons – employment, recreation, family, etc. – make distinctive and different ethical demands of us and give our actions different purposes. As individuals, we move across different ethical contexts and we are confronted by others: challenging our ethical integrity and presenting us with conflicting demands and ends (Van Meijl, 2000). Lacking any shared understanding of what is important for civilised human existence, such situational ethics are prone, not only to uncertainty, but also to disagreement, incongruity, conflict, and violent confrontation – both within individuals and interpersonally (Bauman, 1993). Ethical uncertainty and conflict are thus internalised to individuals.

Ethical action and its impacts, though, are matters of public interest and concern. They are not private matters and they are often matters of concern that go beyond the situation to which the individuals involved were responding (Singer, 1979). Not only are individuals faced with uncertainty about what to do in ethically challenging situations, but the outcomes of their actions reflect on the standing of the organisations, professions or other entities with which they are seen to be associated. Those entities stand to be threatened by inappropriate ethical action, and they may be exposed to legal action in cases where individuals acting on their behalf are seen to have made ethically unwise decisions (Carasco & Singh, 2003). They may also seek to take action against such individuals, but situational ethics fail to provide clear grounds on which they may do so (Bauman, 1995).

Codes of Conduct

In responding to those failures of contemporary situational ethics to adequately provide ethical guidelines, responsible government agencies, employing and professional bodies, and other organizations have thus tended to see themselves as being faced with the task of providing regulatory frameworks or codes of conduct to which individuals in public aspects of their lives have been increasingly required to conform (Forster, 2012). The codes, accordingly, commonly respond to the following needs: (1) to provide guidelines for proper conduct by individuals in ethically challenging situations associated with or pertinent to the entity responsible for the code (i.e., the professional body, organization, etc.); (2) to protect and enhance the public perception of the responsible entity as ethically responsible; (3) to protect the responsible entity from charges and legal claims arising from inappropriate ethical action taken by individuals in the name of the entity; and (4) to provide standards of accountability against which ethical action taken by individuals in the name of the entity may be assessed (Bagnall & Nakar, 2018). They are recognized as operating in this last way in a strongly *auto-regulatory* fashion, through individuals policing and moderating their own practices in regimes of self-surveillance to avoid exposure, embarrassment or censure for transgression (Foucault,

1992/1961). They serve more publicly and explicitly, though, as standards to promote good practice through rewarding achievement and as grounds for punitive action where self-surveillance fails (Carasco & Singh, 2003).

All such codes of conduct are formal specifications – either positive or negative – of actions, ways of being, or ways of doing, applying to individuals covered by the code in the specified contexts (Shortt, Hallett, Spendlove, Hardy, & Barton, 2012). They are directed to defining the limits and the general expectations of situated roles. They have become a common and, in many fields a standard part of contemporary reality in business, public service and not-for-profit organisations, professions and occupations in general (Bagnall & Nakar, 2018). Codes of conduct commonly contain a mix of ethical and other precepts (prudential, formal, regulatory, advisory, and such like), in varying proportions, rendering the drawing of any distinction between codes of conduct and codes of ethics – as some are want to do (e.g., Gilman, 2005) – of no practical value.

The problem, though, with all such codes of conduct is that they are insufficient foundations for ethical practice. They respond to the situatedness of contemporary ethics by being themselves situated: in specific organisations, professions, or other entities. They thus lack any grounds for common commitment across situations. In their situatedness, they fail to provide any basis on which to resolve conflict *across* codes and they may, in fact, be seen as exacerbating such conflict (Carasco & Singh, 2003). That situatedness applies most noticeably to the ethical precepts of the codes, but it applies no less significantly to the lack of any common telos, towards which they are directed. What is thus lacking is an over-arching goal of intrinsic moral value through which we might resolve inter-situational conflicts with commitment, confidence and individual integrity.

The contemporary failings of situational ethics – and the codes of conduct that they have spawned – thus centre on their failure to provide the common confidence of and commitment to an over-arching conception of the goal or telos of ethical conduct and being, through which we might resolve the conflicts arising from situational ethics with confidence and individual integrity.

An Ethic of Authenticity

Such a telos or goal, though, may be found in an alternative construction of ethics that is developing in the contemporary cultural context of modernity: that of an *ethic of authenticity* (Taylor, 1991b). An ethic of authenticity is focused on individuals' perceptions of themselves and their perceptions of how they are perceived by others (Cooper, 1999). It is thus expressed in qualities of who we are and what we do as persons, but those qualities of individual character are not the universal properties of the good recognised in traditional aretaic virtue ethics (Statman, 1997). They are individualistic properties of self-definition (Taylor, 1989). At the core of the ethic is thus the Heideggerian existentialist norm of self-identity, tied to the project of self-definition through freedom, choice, and commitment (Heidegger, 1996/1927), but it is also social and political. It is social in its embrace of Macquarrie's (1972) interactive conception of authenticity, "where people discover themselves in a relationship with others in which they also endeavour to assist others to be themselves" (Jarvis, 1992, p. 147). And it is political in the sense that it recognises the power of social constructs, traditions, and norms in shaping individual identity and in limiting individual autonomy (Jarvis, 2007). It is grounded in the value of integrity, involving consistency and coherence in what we do and are as persons: in what it means to live a meaningful life (Williams, 1993). It thus involves reason in its determinations of what is ethical (Habermas, 1983). It applies to all that we do and are, in those aspects of our character that are within our conscious wills to affect (Warnock, 1970). It provides, in any given situation, grounds for others to evaluate our actions and being, and for us to do the same (Taylor, 1991b). It thus provides the basis for resolving ethical differences and conflicts – both internally and between individuals (or collectivities) – across situations and time.

An ethic of authenticity picks up on the socially-embedded individualism of the modernist contemporary cultural context, in which individualism is strongly determined by its cultural context through social media and other forms of contemporary communications technology (Taylor, 1991a). It thus seeks approval from others and gives expression to concern for the welfare and wellbeing of others. The impact of one's actions on others is thereby made immediately apparent to oneself: social approval being dependent on what one does (Olafson, 1967).

Lifelong Learning in the Search for Authenticity

An ethic of authenticity may be seen, existentially, as involving individuals in an on-going, lifelong, *search* for authenticity: as a project that is coeval with each individual's life (Jarvis, 2006). That project is one of *learning* from one's lived experience – both direct and vicarious – and from one's reflection on that experience (Jarvis, 2009). It is, in other words, a project of *lifelong learning*, through which we inform the on-going creation of our individual moral identities as authentic human beings within the context of our cultural realities (Jarvis, 2006). Lifelong learning thus underpins our identities as moral beings, and is driven, at least in part, by the search for authenticity (Jarvis, 2006).

Lifelong learning as a social philosophy – as, in other words, a body a normative belief about the nature of social and cultural reality (Wilson, 2010) – entails beliefs about the nature of human existence: what it means to be human, what that means for our relationships with others and our cultural contexts, and hence also what it is important for individuals and societies to do *as* human beings. Lifelong learning, as a universalising social philosophy, seeks to embrace and service contemporary modernity in ways that respond to the humanity of its participants (Jarvis, 2006).

The social philosophy of lifelong learning involves the recognition of three key realities. First, it recognises that learning from one's experience is a universal life-long and life-wide phenomenon, in that it involves all persons, throughout their individual lives, across all situations in which they engage as persons (Visser, 2012). Second, it recognises that it is through learning – as the reflection on our lived experiences as persons – that we are defined as individual persons at any point in our lives (Jarvis, 2009). Learning thus makes us who

we are (including our morality) through its moulding of our inherited potentialities, within the context of the physical and biological impacts of our situations. Third, lifelong learning recognises that individuals stand to learn, through reflection on their experience, from any or all of those experiences, not just those that are contrived to encourage and facilitate desirable learning through educational and training events and engagements (Wain, 1987). Lifelong learning thus includes what has traditionally been regarded in modernity as 'education', and 'training', but it goes far beyond the limitations of those concepts, indeed, reducing them to tools of modernity in the service of political power and economic productivity (Jarvis, 2004).

Although the social philosophy of lifelong learning has its origins historically in the field of adult education, it is as a project of modernity that it has been given contemporary universality, importance and impact (Bagnall, 2017). As such, lifelong learning has become widely accepted at all social and political levels and across all cultural institutions: political, educational, commercial, organisational, recreational, developmental, artistic and intellectual (Jarvis, 2008). It is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-national in its acceptance (Aspin, Chapman, Evans, & Bagnall, 2012). And it embraces an ethical commitment to authenticity (Jarvis, 1992). Lifelong learning, then, may be seen as a contemporarily emergent social philosophy that serves the lifelong search for ethical authenticity in the contemporary situationalist culture of modernity.

Thailand as a Case Study

Pursuing that idea, it may be informative to consider as a case study a country that has a strong commitment to modernisation and, in that, a strong history of lifelong learning, but which also has a strong over-arching framework of values associated with authenticity. We consider here, Thailand as such a case, in which there is a strong central government commitment to politically autonomous modernisation (Rhum, 1996) – making it a model of modernisation in SE Asia (Reynolds, 1998) – and to lifelong learning in pursuit of that agenda (Han, 2009). It also, though, has a strong traditional and continuing commitment to an ethic of virtue in all matters, both nationally and locally, through its Buddhist inheritance (Bhavilai, 1979).

Buddhism is standardly and traditionally presented as following the form of the Buddha's teachings – the Dhamma (Macpherson, 1996). Those teachings articulate the path for individuals to attain enlightenment as persons: a path that progresses through various stages (Bhikkhu, 1991). The path is one of learning (of becoming ever more enlightened) through the education of one's virtue, concentration, and wisdom (Johnson, 2002): virtue grounded in compassion, concentration grounded in reflection, and wisdom grounded in reason and experience (Johnson, 2002). The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, which form the foundation of all the remaining Dhamma, present the human condition as engagement in the ongoing search for individual authenticity: autonomous individuals embedded in their cultural context of other individuals, traditions and expectations, while being responsible for their own life decisions and the consequences of those decisions (Bhikkhu, 1991). The Noble Eightfold Path through which enlightenment is progressively attained may also be seen as assuming individual authenticity in the way in which we have articulated it above, with a focus on individual integrity, situated holism, compassion for the welfare and wellbeing of others, and personhood as a life-long progression, understood through one's character as an (enlightened) individual.

Thailand has a long and strong tradition as a Buddhist Kingdom, in which Buddhism has not only prevailed as the popular informing social philosophy but has also been used from the nineteenth century by its ruling monarchy – and from 1932 also its constitutional monarchist government – as a core component of a reform agenda to consolidate and unify Thai identity (Ishii, 1986). That agenda has involved formalising and centralising the Buddhist ecclesiastical system of belief around the traditional Pali Canon, bringing all Thai Buddhist monks (the Sangha) under state control and standardising their education across the Kingdom (Swearer, 1999). It was intended to strengthen Thai national identity and prosperity in opposition to the constant threat of foreign colonisation by Western countries (Stockwell, 2000) and to assert the superiority of Thai culture (Winichakul, 2000). Thai Buddhist ethics, although therein grounded in the Buddha's pithy proverbs (McDaniel, 2006), became consolidated as an aretaic ethic of virtues defining individual character (Mulder, 2000). That reform agenda allowed Thailand to escape culturally distorting colonisation by other countries and to retain and strengthen its Thai identity and Buddhist nature (Zebioli, 2009). In that context, "Thai Buddhism has not merely been impacted by modernity. It has creatively engaged with … foreign influences brought by an increasingly interconnected business and intellectual world" (McDaniel, 2006, p.125). Thailand, *a priori*, may accordingly be imagined to constitute a case study of a culture in which an aretaic ethic of virtue provides a congruent context for the development of an over-arching ethic of authenticity and hence a telos for modernist ethics.

The ongoing Monarchist and Thai Government project for the modernisation of Thailand has sought to draw significantly on lifelong learning as the informing social philosophy for that project (Han, 2009; Ishii, 1986). For example, the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej's initiative of the 'sufficiency economy', launched in the mid-1990s (United Nations Development Programme, 2007), which seeks to provide a modernist social philosophy grounded in Buddhist teachings as a counter to the excesses of modernist capitalism and instrumentalist individualism, sees lifelong learning as a means to the end of nation-wide adoption of the philosophy (Office of the Education Council, 2017) – lifelong learning having been recognised as a tool in social and cultural change in Thailand now for some decades (Siltragool, 2003). Lifelong learning is also a strong feature of Buddhist philosophy, as has been argued by Macpherson (1996) and Johnson (2002). The Thai embrace of lifelong learning in supporting its project of modernity is thus congruent with its Buddhist traditions.

However, closer examination of contemporary Thai culture argues against that *a-priori* position. Four general points of counter-argument are noted here. First, we note the failure of the Monarchist and Government reforms of Thai Buddhism to

be at all modernist in nature (McDaniel, 2006). Those reforms have not, in themselves, been focused on the modernisation of Thai culture, but rather, on refining beliefs in accord with its Buddhist origins (McDaniel, 2006). In consequence, Thai Buddhist ethics has tended to remain strongly aretaic in nature, with a singular focus on virtues of individual character (Mongsawad, 2010). It has thus tended to be side-lined from the modernist focus on authenticity. This situation is exemplified in the current sufficiency economy project, in which the informing ethical condition of the sufficiency economy is identified as that of *virtue*, including the virtues of honesty, integrity, patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom, and prudence (Mongsawad, 2010). Buddhist ethics have thus tended to remain *separate from*, rather than integral to, the project of modernity (Ishii, 1986), although the sufficiency economy project has sought to address that separation by using traditional Buddhist virtues to moderate the excesses of modernist development (Mongsawad, 2010).

Second, we note the continuing neo-tribalism among Thai Buddhist nikāyas (denominations) in their differing responses to the project of modernity. The Thai Monarchy and Government attempts to unify Thai Buddhism have been only partly effective, leading to a diversity of denominations which, then, variously see traditional Buddhism as either in opposition to or congruent with modernity (Swearer, 2003). Similarly, there has developed a pattern of disparity in the benefits of modernisation between the (poorer) rural districts and the (more advantaged) metropolitan districts (Zebioli, 2009). Inter-denominational differences and conflicts have tended, then, to be founded on oppositional responses to modernity: either embracing or resisting modernity (Satha-Anand, 1990). Modernist ethical authenticity may thus be seen as failing to gain sufficient popular purchase to provide a bridge between those opposing agendas.

Third, we note the failure of recent Thai educational reforms to capture the full magnitude of modernist lifelong learning philosophy. Although lifelong learning has been mentioned repeatedly in Government developmental and educational policy and programs, Thai education and its public funding remain solidly focused on traditional schooling and higher education, as is evidenced, for example, in the action plans associated with the sufficiency economy (United Nations Development Programme, 2007).

Fourth, we note the continuing high level of political corruption and fraud in contemporary Thai culture (Mulder, 2000). The failure of Thai politics to address the morally corrosive problem of corruption in government (Neher, 1995) has tended to reinforce the opposition of (tainted) modernity to (righteous) Buddhism. That opposition, as we have noted above serves to marginalise the opportunity for the development of a modernist ethics of authenticity from the foundation of Buddhist virtue ethics.

Concluding Comments

The analysis presented here is grounded in the view that the moral malaise of modernity may be addressed through an ethic of authenticity. Such an ethic, although evidently emerging across different contemporary modernist cultures, we imagined to be particularly favoured in those cultures in which a traditional aretaic ethic of virtue has continued to prevail against the mainstream modernist programs of instrumental ethics. Thailand is clearly a national culture of that sort, in which a strong program of autonomous modernisation within a Buddhist social philosophy have maintained a pubic ethic that should be congruent with and supportive of the development of a modernist ethic of authenticity. However, against that position, we observe a number of features of contemporary Thai culture that would seem to be inimitable to the development of a modernist ethic of authenticity.

We tentatively conclude, then, that contemporary Thai culture is unlikely to provide a particularly fertile site for the fuller development of an ethic of authenticity.

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