

Two Universes: The Utilitarian and The Appreciative

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Sometimes I like to think that we have a choice of living in two different universes. But there really can be at one end of the spectrum. Each end of the spectrum of these two ways are very separate from each other and lead very different ways, and one is conducive to support the world of clinging and attachment, and the other is much more conducive to freedom and compassion. They represent two forms of action, of how we can live our life in the world, and so, you know, then some kind of divide between these two places. I want to lay out these two sides of this dichotomy. It may be, at the end, remembering, we don't want to live in this world that's so separate between these two.

They don't have to be so separate. There's actually a way of holding them together, where they work together. They don't have to be opposed. It's just that if one side is emphasized too much, either side emphasizes too much can be a problem. But especially what I'm going to call the first side is probably the one that's most problematic for this world that's often difficult and challenging. So these two modes of action, modes of being, most modes.

The first I call utilitarian, and the second I call appreciative. We can live in the world mostly with a utilitarian attitude towards everything, or we can live in the world more with an appreciative mode for everything. And it makes a huge difference which of these you choose. And maybe in different contexts we choose different ones, but really to understand that there's a capacity to different capacities, and to be wise with them. And probably the second, the appreciative mode, is maybe really the beneficial one for really trusting emergence of the *dhamma* life that we have.

So the utilitarian mode is pragmatic, focusing on the goal and looking at what is of utility, what is beneficial, what has the greatest good as a consequence of what we're doing. And in this regard, then, often the goal is more important for people in this utilitarian direction,

like what was. What's important is how we get to the goal, and whatever is useful for that is what we're focusing on. And often then there is no sense that the means, that the goal should be represented in the means, but the means is independent from the goal. The appreciative mode is not so much focused on the goal, but is more focused on the process of how we are, whereas the utilitarian mode is focused on the future, usually about where we're going or how we can get there. The appreciative mode is more focused on the present moment and with the experience of the present moment, independent of where we're trying to get.

The utilitarian mode is more focused on productivity, a product, a result, a consequence that we want to have. And the appreciative mode can also focus on something growing and developing and being different, but it's not from being productive, but rather through enhancement. How do we enhance what's really good here? How do we make room for things to emerge and to flow in their own way, as opposed to trying to be most efficient with what's going on? And that the utilitarian mode is more about a goal, a direction, what we want to get there can be failure. We can fail to get to that goal.

We put a lot of effort in, and then there can be a lot of regret that we didn't attain it. The appreciative mode, rather than focusing on failure, the tendency is to focus more on satisfaction. It could be, well, that didn't work out. I didn't manage what I was trying to do, but boy was it satisfying to do it. That the focus on the present moment, appreciation, the enhancement of something that's really good in us—maybe it makes for many things, not everything, of course, but for many things that we do—that maybe it's less important that we succeed than how we did it was really satisfying and meaningful.

We might still have the sense that we failed or we didn't manage to do what we hoped to do, but it's eclipsed by that tremendous joy and delight in the doing itself, in the satisfaction of being engaged. And so there's no regret that we did it, because the outcome maybe wasn't, isn't as important as how we do it, the engagement in the process. The utilitarian mode is more about becoming something, making something come into being, and an appreciative mode is more about being itself—just what is here and how might be, how am I and the amnesia of us, rather than the future of us. Whereas the utilitarian mode is maybe more centred on wanting something to happen. The appreciative mode may be as more centred in loving what is. And of course with loving, it's possible to want something to be different.

But the centre of gravity, the home base, is in the loving, not in the wanting. And certainly we meet people who have as their home the place where they are rooted, or place which really is the operating volcano of their life, is their desires. Though sometimes we say some people, the neediness of other people—needless neediness is a very intense desire that is projected

onto someone else is going to help us attain it, to get it. Maybe the utilitarian mode has maybe more has to do with hope and longing for something, because hoping and longing for something different than we have. But then, in the appreciative mode, maybe it's more aspiration, our inspiration. And the difference being that hope and longing is more focusing on gain, on the goal, the outcome.

And at least in my vocabulary, aspiration and inspiration, yes. But, you know, almost because it comes from the word spirit or respire, the breathing itself. Aspiration is what emerges in us of a desire, a wish, a vision that has bubbled up from the inside out of the goodness of we are, the wholesomeness of what's here. That would be great. An aspiration doesn't have to be fulfilled in the way that a hope has to be fulfilled. An aspiration is just kind of a love for all this is possible. This is a vision. This is worth working towards. But let's work, work towards it in a way that's satisfying—the how we are with this aspiration. Let's stay close to this nice breathing, this nice sense of breath, this place where things emerge in a wonderful, free way.

I associate the utilitarian mode with acquiring, wanting, and getting. And I think of the appreciative mode as being tending to things, of wanting things to be well, but then tending to them, supporting them, of supporting them to grow, supporting, enhancing them, letting them develop. And the best in that thing or that person are then to come out, not wanting them to be a certain way, but tending to what's already here so that what's wonderful can develop—kind of like gardening, tending to a garden. You might take out the weeds so the flowers can really, the vegetables can really grow. Utilitarian mode, I think, is much more the fixing mode of fixing things, fixing people. For people involved in spiritual care, pastoral care, like chaplaincy in a hospital, one of the really important tools or attitudes or approaches of a chaplain is when it isn't ever we meet it. We don't try to fix them, but rather we nurture them. We support them. We trust their emergence. We meet there to appreciate them, to value them, and to listen to them, and to accompany them.

And it can be very hard for chaplains not to want to try to fix the problems of suffering. We meet with people, you know, sometimes that misses the point to fix. Sometimes that does actually do service for people. But sometimes it's this whole other appreciative mode, which is an affirmation and opening in. It really allows something much deeper connection for people to have with their inner life or their spiritual life that, in the long term, sometimes is much more beneficial than the fixing of a particular problem. So instead of fixing, on related to tending, the appreciative mode is nurturing. We want to nurture what's there.

And the utilitarian mode, because it's pragmatic and focusing on an outcome, and some-

times wanting to be efficient, there's often a strong need to know. And as in people who just want to get things done, just want to know how to do it, the appreciative mode, there's less need to know. And now, in fact, there's an appreciation of the value of not knowing, of showing up with beginner's mind. With not knowing mind, showing up without knowing a lot, which means can mean that because I'm there with not knowing, I'm not bringing my preferences, my projections, my bias on, and putting it on the situation that has to make my expectations, my desires on it. I'm here just to be open, not to know, and to trust emergence, to trust what's here, and to learn what's here to take in the circumstance, in the person in their fullness, rather than being ahead of what's happening with my own agenda.

So the utilitarian mode is more about efficiency, and often excluding what is unnecessary we think is unnecessary. I would like to think the appreciative mode is more about cooperation than efficiency, more about inclusion, community than it is excluding anything or anybody. And cooperation is often slower in the short term than sometimes just getting the job done for oneself. When I was working in the monastery kitchen, I was the kitchen manager for a while with a crew of maybe nine people. And in many ways, I was a better, more skilled, more competent cook than most people who are new to the crew. And so I could do many of the things that need to be done. I could do, you know, three people's job, you know. I could do it myself. It was much more efficient for me to do it. And so it was very hard to let assign things to other people.

I just wanted to do it. I could do it, you know, a third of the time. And it took me about three months to learn—I'm a slow learner—that the best thing I could do in the kitchen was not do any work myself at all, but just go around and nourish, support, affirm, supply, everyone else in their jobs. And then the kitchen worked so much better. And in a sense, the doing the particular thing that had to be done in the kitchen, that whatever the item was happened, may be slower, but the whole kitchen worked so much better. When I kind of enabled the cooperation, and I really supported everyone to do things. So the cooperation and inclusion, the utilitarian mode, focusing on the future, focusing on getting things done, focusing on being efficient, doing just the right thing, can sometimes make no room for the inner muse, for the inner heart, or spiritual, or the depths of who we are.

To listen to the music of the heart, how the heart sings, or the deepest kind of wisdom and understanding connectivity that only it can only turn into if we kind of slow down, open up, and allow something deeper to kind of manifest and respond to what's going on. I associate the utilitarian mode very much with being in our thinking mode and fixing mode and planning mode and arranging mode and being efficient mode, which doesn't really connect us

with this deeper place of knowing that we can have. So in the appreciative mode, there's a slowing down. There's a receptivity and openness. So there's room for the muse, for the heart, for the spirit, for our fullness of our being to operate together. And then finally, I think of the utilitarian mode as often being fueled by need. But the appreciative mode also can do things, but it's more may be inspired by possibility. And now, so there's no more kind of drive or clinging. It's more like, okay, let's open to this possibility. Let's reveal this possibility, rather than let's make it in an acquisitional way.

So some metaphors kind of for these two different modes that we may see it better. You know that there are. We have these two modes to be. So one is that in a utilitarian way, in the evening when we're ready to go to sleep, we can ourselves put ourselves to bed in an efficient way, but we can't. In the same way, mostly I can't put myself to sleep. Sleep is something I make room for, I allow. I have to kind of get out of the way. But I can't lay there in bed, like I'm going to be the most efficient going to sleep person ever. And like in the race to sleep, that doesn't really work. Sleep is something that comes upon me. That's not something that I do efficiently.

And acquiring knowledge is something we can do pragmatically and utilitarian way, but we can't become wise just by getting knowledge. Wisdom has a different source that is not often so efficient, not often with acquisition about the means and getting something. But it's more like allowing again and being present and paying attention in a careful and full way that allows the deeper parts of ourselves to respond and to process and digest what's happening, so we can allow some deeper source of wisdom knowledge to arise rather than just only practical knowledge. Maybe a good comparison to these two different modes is pleasure and happiness. That it's relatively easy to do something that's physically pleasant. We can get food, we can get a massage, we can go outside, we can do pleasant things, we can. But happiness, you can't just kind of do something to make yourself happy. But the appreciative mode makes room for happiness. Turns out there's much more things, much more joy available, much more happiness available any given moment than most people allow for, or most people avail themselves for. In the appreciative mode, there's time, space to take in and notice how many wonderful things there are, as well as all the challenges in this life, and to switch the mode and how we are to live in a more appreciative mode.

It's amazing how we live in a different universe and the rules of the universe. Or the understanding, the universe, the information we take in, the formation upon which we build our understanding of ourselves and the world changes radically. Which of these two kind of approaches we take in our life? The utilitarian motive, that's all we do. I think we're really lim-

iting so much what, you know, how much happiness and joy that is actually possible here, also limiting how much love and compassion. Finally, the other kind of metaphor, I guess, for these two modes is praise. It's possible to do things to get people to praise you, but you can't pragmatically get people to admire you. Admiration is something that comes from inside of people, that may be more private in them, whereas praise is just what they say to please you, or to somehow get from you what you would like. And now they know that we want praise, and so they give it to us. But admiration, that's more something in the privacy of their own inner life that arises from something deeper inside.

So to combine these two worlds. Do not see them as separate. There can be a goal, but the goal, but the process of how we get to that goal, is such an important part of it that maybe we bring them together, and often it's the process in which the best qualities of our life have a chance to flow and come. The goal itself is a little bit abstract because it's in the future. It's little limits of what we're focusing on. But if we focus on the goal, but remember the process is important, we bring along so much more of who we are and what's possible. And it's possible then to discover wellsprings of satisfaction inside that we can enhance, wellsprings of wholesomeness and goodness, that we can enhance and nourish and tend while we are pursuing what we want, what we hope for, maybe what we want to get, what we want to become. So these two modes are not opposed. They can be integrated together. But I think for people interested in *dhamma* practice, it's really important, really useful. It's utilitarian to focus on the appreciative mode.

It's actually quite productive in a spiritual way to not focus on productivity, but to focus on enhancement and nourishing and tending this life of ours here. And so how do we allow for this appreciative mode? The appreciative mode is something that we have to give time for. We have to allow for certain inefficiency. Slow down, open up, look around, take the time. And it might be in the beginning that it's helpful as a practice to practise greater appreciation, to spend more time with your world, yourself, and what's going on. Not to push away or deny the difficulties and the things which are off. But maybe make it a practice to begin appreciating more what's already here and what is good about here. There are thousands of things to appreciate in a given day. And what happens to you if, as you go to bed at night and laying there waiting to fall asleep, you go through and appreciate so much of what is of that day?

To think about the things that were valuable and doing things you are grateful for, which is a kind of two the definitions of appreciation is to value something and be grateful for it. So to spend time practising appreciation, focusing appreciation, and then more deeply than think-

ing about all things we appreciate in the present moment, what way of being, what kind of attention, what kind of way of holding oneself and being present allows you to soak in what is appreciable. So not just think about it, but to let what you can appreciate be there to nourish you, support you, tend to you, bring you satisfaction, bring you a sense of a conclusion. All things included, all things have space here. And perhaps you'll come to appreciate that. The ability to be open and receptive to what emerges, what's happening, that allowing to let things register and feel eventually will become one of the most satisfying things to do, way to be. It's the doorway to deep satisfaction, deep appreciation, and deep loving and compassion.

So two different universes you can live in. The appreciative world, appreciative mode, leads to one universe. The utilitarian mode alone leads to another universe. And then the third universe is where we really want to live, is really integrating these two together so that we get the benefit from both best worlds, and we're here to benefit this world in the best way we can, with both perspectives supporting each other. Thank you very much, and I look forward to our next time together.