
A RESPONSE TO NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF THE BUDDHIST APPROACH TO PAIN AND SUFFERING WITH A CONSIDERATION OF *VEDANĀNUPASSANĀ* IN BURMESE THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a critical study of Nietzsche's contention that Buddhism involves a retreat from suffering. It will offer a response in the form of an examination of the approach to pain and suffering based on *vedanānupassanā* in Theravāda Buddhism. *Vedanānupassanā* means a contemplation of feelings, which includes pain and pleasure, for the purpose of insight into the true nature of feeling. In this practice, one needs to contemplate pain as pain, pleasure as pleasure, and indifference as indifference, without either rejecting or affirming any feeling. Hence, it is a method of facing *reality as reality* in Theravāda Buddhism. The first part will study Nietzsche's general perspective on Buddhism, on pain and suffering and his criticisms on the Buddhist *retreat* from pain and suffering. The second part will specifically discuss the Theravāda perceptiveness on pain and suffering. In the third part, the practice of *vedanānupassanā* will be investigated to understand its approach to pain and suffering. Finally, the article will show that while Nietzsche has important insights which help Buddhists reflect on their own approach to pain and suffering, Nietzsche remains unaware of certain

Buddhist meditation practices that accept suffering through meditation. It will show that these practices go beyond Nietzsche's belief that one has to *affirm* suffering to affirm life.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Theravāda Buddhism, Pain, Suffering, Meditation, Vedanānupassanā

Introduction

A major emphasis of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy was the affirmation of life. He believed that his philosophy offered a corrective to the traditions of Platonism and Christianity which attempted to find refuge in a transcendental world which they considered more true than the lived world. Such traditions are understood by Nietzsche as a falsification of the world. To affirm life is to accept both joy and suffering, and for that reason, he admired the ancient Greek tradition as the highest representation of humanity. The Greeks accepted suffering as an undeniable part of life. For this Nietzsche admired Dionysus for 'saying yes to life' even at its most difficult. And following Dionysus, he recognized that passion, chaos, creativity are necessary for life, especially in the times of loss of meaning.² The Greek tragic art aestheticized both joy and suffering and so constituted a healthier approach to life. Thus, he is also well known as a life-affirmation philosopher with an optimistic view on life due to his core philosophy "*amor fati*," the love of fate.³

Nietzsche's writings on Buddhism extend throughout his work. from *Untimely Meditations* (1874) to the *Genealogy of Morals* (1887) and *Beyond Good and Evil*. Nietzsche perceived Buddhism as a life-negating philosophy that tries to retreat from existence. This was influenced by Schopenhauer's idea of suffering and involved a confusion of Buddhism with other Indian religious beliefs. Nevertheless, his understanding on Buddhism began to depart from Schopenhauer's influence and evolving between this period through his work *The Antichrist*, and finally to his final writings on the subject in his last book, *Ecce Homo* (written in the autumn of 1888).

At the time of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche begins to admire the Buddha, calling him “that profound physiologist” and claiming that the Buddha’s teachings are a “system of hygiene.”⁴ Accordingly, we will see how Nietzsche’s later comments on Buddhism become much more aligned with Buddhist meditation practice.

This article will attempt to show that Buddhism is not a religion which involves an oversensitivity or retreat from pain as Nietzsche contended. On the contrary, it attempts to face *pain as pain*. In the Buddhist practice of contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), pain is an object to be contemplated, rather than merely negated or affirmed. This awareness of pain and suffering liberates us by allowing us to realize the nature of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anatta*). So from the Theravāda perspective, it is Nietzsche who remains with an unhealthy relationship to pain and suffering by believing that redemption can only be achieved by affirmation; it is Nietzsche who is in thrall to pain and suffering. Buddhism experiences *suffering as suffering* and neither affirms or denies it. Far from being a retreat or form of decadence, it has a much clearer understanding of the presence of pain and suffering in life. Since there has been no research on Nietzsche and Buddhism that has critically studied this aspect of the contemplation of feeling (*vedanānupassanā*), regarding pain and suffering, this article hopes to contribute a new perspective in the concern of dealing with pain and suffering for both Nietzsche’s readers and Buddhist learners.

Nietzsche on Pain and Suffering

At first, Nietzsche saw Buddhism as a form of nihilism and a life-negating philosophy that involves a retreat from existence. This was partly influenced by Schopenhauer’s idea of suffering and a confusion of Buddhism with other Indian religious beliefs.

In his work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche explained the emergence of nihilism. Concerning modern man, Nietzsche writes, “his existence on earth contained no goal ... he suffered from the problem of his meaning... his problem was not suffering itself, but there was no

answer to the crying question, ‘Why do I suffer?’⁵ People now suffered from “the meaninglessness of suffering, not for suffering itself”.⁶ When people lose their value and meaning in existence, they begin a will to nothingness and non-Being. This desire for nothingness was precisely “a great danger to mankind.” Nietzsche saw this process taking place in the Europe of his day, “it was precisely here I saw the beginning of the end, the standing still, the backward-glancing exhaustion, the will turning itself against life, the final illness ... as the most sinister system of our European culture, which itself has become sinister, as itself had become sinister, as its detour to a new Buddhism? To a European Buddhism? To nihilism?”⁷ Nietzsche believed that Europe is repeating something that gave birth to Buddhism – a civilization weary of life and suffering, leading to nihilism and a will to nothingness.

In his work *The Antichrist*, he distinguished the tradition of Christianity from the original ‘glad tidings’ of Christ’s teachings. Christ’s ‘glad tidings’ were precisely an attempt to find God in lived experience, but these glad tidings were betrayed by his disciples who returned to a falsification of life and nature. To distinguish Christ from Christianity, he drew parallels between Christ and the Buddha and even called Christ’s teachings as a Buddhistic peace movement. But while he commends Christ and the Buddha for refocusing their attention to this world, he still believed that Christ and well as the Buddha were guilty of a retreat from suffering, although as religions he favors Buddhism. He writes that “they are decadence religions but they are distinguished from one another in the most remarkable way”.⁸ Buddhism is favored in comparison to Christianity as it does not employ self-deception, it just says “I suffer” rather than “I sin”.⁹

In the *Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche contends that Buddhism possesses “an excessive excitability of sensibility” concerning pain and “an over-intellectuality.”¹⁰ He contends that Buddhist meditation demonstrates an over-emphasis on sensibility or feeling (*vedanānupassanā*) and on the doctrine of non-self (*anatta*). When a civilization becomes weary due to an over awareness of excessive pain, it becomes discontented with the self

and now becomes obsessed with a retreat from suffering. Nietzsche claims that for the Buddhists, the question “‘how can you get rid of suffering?’ became the spiritual diet for them”¹¹

But there are positive observations as well. In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche remarks that the Buddha fought depression by traveling, getting fresh air, eating moderately, and cautioned against the use of intoxicants and emotions that can produce anxiety for oneself or others.¹² Moreover, he even thought that the Buddha actually returned back to a kind of “egoism” as he recognized that the teaching of non-self (*anatta*) makes one spiritually weary.¹³

But in general, he saw as decadent the Buddhists’ practice of *vedanānupassāna* (contemplation on sensation or feeling), which is mindful of pain, and the doctrine of *anatta* (non-self). The teaching of non-self, he believed, led Buddhists to deny their self-interest which was harmful to their natural instincts. When the Buddhists deemphasize the self or deny egoism, they became more depressed by the pain they were experiencing. He stated that “discontentedness with oneself, suffering from oneself is an immoderate excitability and capacity for pain with Buddhism.”¹⁴ This doctrine of the non-self is the basic cause of oversensitivity that leads the Buddhist retreat from pain. Therefore, he stated that Buddhism was a late stage of a civilization when people become weary of pain and suffering.¹⁵

As pleasure and pain go together, one has to love pain as well as joy. For Nietzsche, the desire to feel pleasure without feeling pain is unrealistic and it can lead to the negation of reality and a desire for nothingness. For Nietzsche, this desire to retreat from reality is a sign of weakness and sickness. From his early writings like *The Birth of Tragedy* to his later reflections, he contends that to retreat from reality is a kind of cowardice, and that “saying yes to reality” is the mark of a strong Dionysian spirit.¹⁶ Hence, he declared himself the last disciple of Dionysus, and the first tragic philosopher, which he adds is “the most extreme opposite and antipode of a pessimistic philosopher”.¹⁷ For him, affirming both pain and pleasure in the present moment, without looking

backwards, and forwards for all eternity is the only way to affirm life and deal with suffering. As he himself experienced intense pain and sickness, and was close to blindness, he believed a man who has embraced his pain and suffering becomes stronger than before, as we see in his famous saying, “things that do not kill me make me stronger.”¹⁸

In opposition to the Buddha, he believed in a self-overcoming, achieved through an acceptance of suffering influenced by Greek culture and tried to introduce this as a remedy for the decadence he saw in modern European culture. In this way, Nietzsche expressed himself as the last student of Dionysus, rather than a student of the Buddha. Nietzsche’s way of living with suffering is creating individual values and embracing any consequences, regardless of pain and pleasure.

In general, then, Nietzsche dismissed the Buddhist approach since it, unlike the Dionysian spirit, cannot affirm pain and suffering, leading to the doctrine of the non-self. Even though Buddhism understood suffering as a reality of existence, its methods lead to what Nietzsche considered to be a decadent denial of life.

Theravāda Perspective on Pain and Suffering and Liberation

Suffering is known as *dukkha* in Pāli language. However, the term suffering cannot encompass the entire meaning of Pāli word *dukkha* as it has broader meaning than suffering, which includes the understanding of impermanence (*anicca*) and non-self (*anatta*). The concept of suffering is much deeper than the mere feeling of pain. Regarding suffering, the Buddha introduced the Four Noble Truths in his first sermon, the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta. The Four Noble Truths that he taught are (1) suffering (*dukkha*), (2) the arising of suffering (*samudaya*) (3) liberation from suffering (*nirodha*) (4) the way leading to the liberation from suffering (*magga*).¹⁹ Concerning this, the Burmese monk, Venerable Ledi Sayādaw observes that “suffering can only be seen completely by an Arahant. As the other Nobles cannot see the suffering completely, they cannot get rid of craving and conceit. Stream-winner still enjoys the sensual pleasure”.²⁰ So the more one understands suffering (*dukkha*), the

more one is liberated from it by removing from its root. The Buddha did not teach to abolish suffering, but taught to rid oneself of ignorance, which is the root cause of suffering. Once ignorance is overcome, enlightenment is attained. This liberation from suffering (*Nibbāna*), is achieved through the eight-fold noble path. On the subject of suffering (*dukkha*), the Buddha recognized that all living beings who have not attained *Nibbāna* will face suffering, “birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief; the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.”²¹ There are three kind of *dukkha*: (1) *dukkha* as ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*), (2) *dukkha* as produced by change (*viprināma-dukkha*) and (3) *dukkha* as conditioned states (*samkhāra-dukkha*).²² The first, ordinary suffering, refers to all kinds of physical pain (*kāyika dukkha*) and mental pain (*cetasika dukkha*) that is connected with birth, aging, sickness, death, association with unpleasant persons and conditions, disassociation with beloved ones and pleasant conditions, not getting what one desires, grief, lamentation, distress, etc. Thus, this first type of suffering can be called as suffering from pain as it is directly related with the feeling of pain. The second type of suffering (*viprināma-dukkha* = *dukkha* as produced by change) is concerned with the nature of impermanence. It can be known as suffering from change. To understand *viprināma-dukkha*, it is necessary to have deeper perception than suffering from pain (*dukkha-dukkha*) because it involves seeing the nature of change in the ordinary suffering, particularly concerned with both pleasure and pain. The third type of suffering is the suffering from conditional states (*samkhāra-dukkha*). This is the deepest perception on suffering and relates to the most fundamental concept of suffering in Therāvada Buddhism. Those who understand suffering as conditional states will understand the first two forms of suffering as well. Accordingly, the Buddha taught that all living beings exist in merely a conditional state that is constituted by five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*), which are (1) aggregate of matter, (2) aggregate of sensations or feeling, (3) aggregate of perceptions, (4) aggregate of mental formations and (5) aggregate of

consciousness. Therefore there is no such thing as “being,” or “I” or “You” in the ultimate reality. In the ultimate reality, there are only (1) matter (*rūpa*), (2) mind (*nāma*), (3) consciousness (*citta*), and *nibbāna* (liberation from suffering on conditional states). As consciousness belongs together with mind, then it can be said that all beings are formed by mind and matter. Even in the ultimate reality, mind and matter are just conditional states, with the nature of arising and disappearing from the perspective of attainment of *Nibbāna*. For that reason the Buddha taught clinging to these five aggregates as “Mine,” “I,” “My Self,” is not appropriate.²³ So understanding suffering from the perspective of conditional states is the deepest understanding of suffering in Theravāda Buddhist perspective as it deals with not only the knowledge of impermanence (*anicca*), but also the knowledge of non-self (*anatta*). This process of seeing the self, based upon the conditional states of the five aggregates, is particularly important in insight meditation. In this way, the first stage of enlightenment, stream-winner (*sottapanna*) is attained.

Among five aggregates, aggregate of sensation (*vedanākkhandha*) describes pleasant feelings (*sukha vedanā*), unpleasant feelings (*dukkha vedanā*) or indifferent feelings (*adukkhamasukha* or *upekkhā vedanā*).²⁴ In that respect, pain is a type of feeling like pleasant and neutral feelings in Theravāda Buddhist perspective, and known as *dukkha vedanā* in Pāli language. In addition, feelings arise whenever there is contact of consciousness, object and sense organ, (*phasa paccayā vedanā*) according to the teaching of dependent origination. Then consciousness plays a key role in the aspect of forming feeling and there is only one consciousness at one time. So, the Buddha stated if one is experiencing pain in this moment, there is no other feeling happening in that same moment. As one experiences feeling based on contact, it can be noted whenever the body is in contact with the event of unpleasantness or despair, *dukkha vedanā* arises. Whenever the mind is contact with the event of unpleasant or despair, *domanasa* arises. The nature of bodily unpleasant feelings includes “feeling not well, painful, tired, unwholesome, aching, wearisome, hot, feverish, cold, shivering, agony, itching, etc” and “pain is very clearly

understood in this world and pervades the whole body whenever disease breaks out.”²⁵ The nature of mental pain includes “sadness, weariness, grief, aversion, misery, sorrow, distraction, anger, discontent, worry, frightened, disappointment, annoyance, despair, distressed, lamentation, anxiety, crying, melancholy, hate, etc.”²⁶ Moreover, the Buddha recognized pain is both mundane and supramundane, which means pain that comes from sensual things and non-sensual things.²⁷ In the same way, it can be understood that there is pain both in daily life and spiritual life from the Theravāda perspective. Furthermore, mind and body can impact each other, that one can have mental pain as the effect of bodily pain and vice versa. Theravāda Buddhists perceive greed, anger and ignorance as mental illness and mental pain belongs to the attitude of anger.²⁸ So, one who does not get rid of the root of anger is still in the suffering of mental pain. Similarly, one liberates from mental pain, once a person ceases anger from the root even if his body is in pain. In Therāvada Buddhism, liberation from anger or mental pain is the third stage of enlightenment (*anāgāmi-magga-ñāṇa*).

Theravāda Buddhists believe that the practice of insight meditation is the most crucial task for liberation. According to Mogok Sayardaw, it can be understood that one who is practicing *vipassanā* is already practicing all the functions of the eightfold path or all three factors, morality, concentration, and wisdom at the same time. The Buddha believed there is the precise way to liberate oneself from suffering and it can be accomplished within a day if one practices it properly according to five factors, (1) being faithful, (2) being healthy, (3) not being deceptive in oneself and others, specially a meditation teacher, (4) energetically endeavoring to get rid of unwholesome factors and to conduct wholesome factors, and (5) being wise in the knowledge of appearing and disappearing of mind and matter.²⁹ Some traditional Buddhists misunderstand Nibbāna as nothingness, as Nietzsche misunderstood it in the early works. But *Nibbāna* is a state that is free from the three kinds of thirst, (1) thirst on sensual pleasure, (2) thirst on existence and (3) thirst on non-existence (S. III. 369). Nowadays, the definition of Nibbāna, “the cessation of lust

(*rāgakkhaya*), the cessation of hatred (*dosakkhaya*), and the cessation of delusion (*mohakkhaya*).” This approach is taught by the Venerable Sāriputtarā, and widely accepted by Burmese Theravāda Buddhism.³⁰ The cessation of greed, anger and ignorance leading to the liberation from suffering, can be achieved in this life. But, it is important to notice that liberation from suffering in this life means cessation from the mental pain that is caused by bodily pain, and can in turn cause bodily pain. As long as the body is still alive, one has to face bodily pain but he will not feel the accompanying mental pain due to the cessation of all causes that can make mental suffering. Accordingly, there is a popular saying, “Dying with Smile” among Theravāda meditation practitioners that indicates even impending death cannot provoke their mind to be fearful or distracted. So, it is very important to attain at least the first stage of enlightenment, stream-winner (*sotāpanna*) according to the Burmese Theravāda Buddhist perspective because one will not deviate from the path anymore once entering into the stream and accomplish the final liberation at the end. If not, people still have to suffer in the cycle of feeling as a slave of attachment and ignorance.

Dealing with Pain and Suffering through the Practice of *Vedanānupassanā*

Insight meditation (*vipassana*) observes the impermanence, suffering and non-self, which rest upon the realities of materiality, consciousness, mental factors and dependent origination.³¹ The Buddha preached four foundations of mindfulness (*satipatthana*) as the technique of insight meditation (*vipassanā*) and confirmed this as “the only way to purification, cessation to sorrow, and lamination, cessation of pain and grief, liberation from suffering and attainment of Nibbāna”.³² These four foundations are (1) contemplation on body (*kāyānupassanā*), (2) contemplation on feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), (3) contemplation on mind (*cittānupassanā*), and (4) contemplation on Dhamma (*dhammānupassanā*).³³ Among these four foundations of mindfulness meditation, contemplation on feelings (*vedanānupassanā*) is the practice

of seeing reality through feelings. According to Mogok Sayādaw, who is regarded as an Arahant in Myanmar, the contemplation on feeling is an easy way to attain Nibbāna because feeling is always forming through the activity of dependent origination (*paticca-samuppāda*) and everyone can notice feeling very easily and clearly.

Profound contemplation on feeling is the work of mindfulness. Nietzsche perceived this practice as making Buddhists depressed due to the effect of oversensitivity to pain. In reality, Buddhists have to deal with pain (*dukkha vedanā*), pleasure (*sukkhā vedanā*), and indifference to feelings (*upekkhāvedanā*) in the practice of *vedanānupassanā*, in the aim of seeing its natural truth. This method considers not only pain but also pleasure and neutral feelings that need to be overcome for the achievement of liberation. For a beginner, it is better to progress if one practices in a sitting position for one hour without changing posture and opening eyes for the sake of high concentration. After some time, one will feel unpleasant feelings such as stiffness, numbness, itchiness, and aching on legs, back, or body. These unpleasant feelings are classified as bodily pain (*kāyikadukkhā*). When one starts to feel pain, they want to change position to ease their pain. As changing position weakens one's concentration, one needs to notice *pain as pain* by focusing on the source of pain throughout that time. Sometimes, its intensity may well increase but still one needs to have patience and determination to face pain. When pain becomes overwhelming, one can notice that their mind begins to experience anger, resentment, and sadness, as they cannot tolerate pain in their body. These unpleasant feelings are classified as mental pain (*cetasikadukkhā*). Now one can see how body and mind affect each other as pain tends to lead to its own consequences outwardly and also give rise to painful, dangerous, and difficult thoughts inwardly.³⁴ If one is in pain, they can harm themselves and others physically, verbally and mentally. Hence, pain is seen in Theravāda Buddhism as a mental infliction and connected with anger. The key to deal with pain is to label *pain as pain* till it disappears by itself.

Nevertheless, one usually tries to either retreat from pain or fight with pain or when they have to deal with intense and strong pain. If a person responds to pain through a retreat from pain or fights with pain, they are under the influence of greed, anger, and ignorance in the practice of *vedanānupassanā*. As a consequence, they seek for pleasure that can ease pain. In the view of a critique of the retreat from pain, Buddhism and Nietzsche were even much closer than Nietzsche thought. Conversely, one fights with the pain for the sake of seeking to be free from pain. In *vedanānupassanā*, if one contemplates pain solely for the purpose of ending it as soon as possible, he is driven by greed and anger that comes from ignorance. As a consequence, he will perceive that there is pleasure in pain when the pain subsides, and will therefore seek the battle with pain again and again. He may even be led to self-mortification. Literally, his intolerance to pain (anger) tricks him to pursuing pain. This is a very subtle mental state in *vedanānupassanā* and the meditation teacher needs to remind the practitioner not to have the wrong intention concerning their feelings. In the Theravāda perspective, the intention of fighting with pain also comes from the root of anger. Nietzsche's affirmation of pain rather than flight from pain, remains trapped in the cycle of suffering. How can one person be liberated from suffering if he is still love in pain? Nietzsche's affirmation to life through affirmation of suffering can trap practitioners into the pursuit of sensual pleasure.

It should be made clear that the purpose of paying attention to pain is to know its nature, not to heal it or make it go away.³⁵ To see *pain as pain*, to face reality as reality, requires endurance, patience, and courage. By contemplating *feeling as feeling*, a person can liberate themselves from pain and suffering. Even in the West, there is a realization of the value of mindfulness. Ronald Siegel, a Buddhist practitioner and a psychologist on the clinical faculty of Harvard Medical School, observes that "the practice of mindfulness can alleviate suffering and, in some cases, it can reduce the volume of physical pain sensations"³⁶ The pleasure resulting from such meditation techniques is different from sensual pleasure and jhānic pleasure that he has ever experienced from worldly things. This is called

vipassanā pleasure, which even can cure some serious and prolonged sickness. If one is ignorant of the purpose of contemplating feeling, he will fail to contemplate the pleasure that comes after pain and can slip away from the middle path. One can even misperceive that pleasure as the *Nibbāna*.

In the practice of *vedanānupassanā*, overcoming pleasure and indifference is much more challenging than overcoming pain as the nature of people is that they do not see pleasure as suffering and indifferent feeling is not obvious to notice like pain and pleasure. Pleasure is more subtle than pain to realize and hard to let it go because people love pleasure though they reject pain. For that reason, *vedanānupassanā* practice needs extraordinary durability, extraordinary effort, extraordinary courage, and extraordinary discernment to see the impermanence of feeling, including pain, pleasure and indifference (Pandita, 2006). It is noticeable that overcoming pain is just the beginning part of the method and the Buddhists' method of liberation to *Nibbāna* is straightly facing reality as reality by overcoming not only pain but also pleasant and indifferent feelings. Whether the worldly or unworldly pain, pleasure or indifferent feeling, the Buddha taught to contemplate them as they are.³⁷ One just needs to contemplate feeling as feeling without adding or changing it. One should not seek for feeling and hide from feeling. As long as one negates reality, he will be cycling in the suffering by experiencing pain, pleasure and indifference feeling like the example of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. This is not the goal of the Buddhists. Pain itself is the type of feeling that one has to engage as the object of reality in the path of liberation from suffering. Buddhism's liberation comes from insight wisdom, which faces and sees the reality as the reality by exercising mind through the contemplation on feeling. So, it does not come from the intention of retreating from pain as Nietzsche contended because that mindset of retreating from pain belongs to anger in Theravāda perspective. The Buddhist approach attempts to face reality clearly and to be aware of the appearance and disappearance of not only pain, but also pleasure and indifference.

Conclusion

Nietzsche believed he should confront pain in the form of affirmation rather than in the form of denial. In fact, he believed that the entire affirmation of life requires an obsessive affirmation of both pain and pleasure. But for Buddhism, this is a part of the delusional play of greed and anger.

Nietzsche criticized Buddhism for its retreat from pain, and as a decadent movement. But to realize Nietzsche's error, one has to consider the Theravāda technique for meditating on feeling (*vedanānupassanā*). In some ways we can even consider this as similar to Nietzsche's *amor fati* formula, "that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity...but love it".³⁸ But unlike *amor fati*, Theravāda technique cannot *love* pain. But Nietzsche insisted on his struggle of affirmation. He writes that "attacking is one of my instincts ... it needs objects of resistance, hence it looks for what resists: the aggressive pathos belongs just as necessarily to strength as vengefulness and rancor belongs to weakness."³⁹ Although Nietzsche saw the detachment from pain as a weakness, he could not see that his aggression was itself a weakness rooted in anger. Nietzsche's insistence on fighting with pain is also an intolerance to *pain as pain* considered from the Theravāda perspective. It involves wrong intentions toward one's own feelings and traps one into a cycle of suffering. We can say that Nietzsche misunderstood the teaching of "*attā hi attanō nāthō*." Nietzsche's solution was trapped in his egoism; his confusion of conventional reality with the Self. The *vedanānupassa* practice is not a retreat from pain, but instead recognizes *pain as pain* in order to see the natural characteristic (*sabhāva-lakkhana*) of pain. One does not seek feeling, one just contemplates feeling, which arises in each moment. Once that feeling ceases the next feeling arises. So this is a way of experiencing reality. Nietzsche did not understand the impermanence of all feelings, he was in inadequate wisdom to realize *annicā* of feeling. One who practices a sensitive contemplation on feeling is not weary and depressed as Nietzsche contended. But, one who *wrongly* practices meditation with the *wrong* view of mind and body as Self, and the *wrong*

intention towards feeling, this can lead to fatigue, and depression because they will feel anger when they face intense pain in his practice. It is very important to have proper intention during the practice, especially when one has to face intense physical pain and mental pain. Once one sees the ultimate reality and its nature through the practice, they will understand that reality itself involves change, suffering, and non-self. Starting from that point, the practitioner is on the path of liberation from suffering.

In the Buddha's time, there were many philosophers and ascetics who searched the ways of ending suffering. But the Buddha is considered the first one to discover the true path of liberation from suffering. The Buddha was already fully aware of what would become Nietzsche's and the Ancient Greeks' manner of dealing with pain and suffering. He knew this was not the true way. The affirmation of the feeling of pleasure and pain is still in attachment to these feelings. To conclude, the Buddha was not afraid of pain and suffering, but approached pain and suffering at the deepest level by profoundly and subtly understanding their true nature. The practitioner who can see the moment of appearing and disappearing of all feeling insightfully is on the path of *vipassanā*, which is the only path to purification, to cease sorrow, lamentation, worries, pain and to liberate from suffering.⁴⁰ The Buddha's way of insight meditation is way for people who want to liberate themselves from pain and suffering from its deepest root within in this life.

ENDNOTES

¹ KK Aung Myint finished her Master's Degree in the Program of Philosophy and Religion at Assumption University of Thailand. Dr Kajornpat Tangyin is the director of the Professional Ethics Center at Assumption University of Thailand.

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³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 10:258.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 6:230.

⁵ Ibid, 28:162.

⁶ Ibid, 28:162.

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 5:19.

⁸ Ibid., 20:141.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. H. L. Mencken (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 1918), 23:144.

¹⁰ Ibid, 20:141-142.

¹¹ Ibid, 20:141-142.

¹² Ibid, 20:70.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 20:69.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 2:272.

¹⁷ Ibid, 2:217.

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Maxims and Arrows*, 1968, 8:33.

¹⁹ Walpola Rahula. 1959. *What the Buddha Taught*. London and Bedford: The Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd, S. III. 369.

²⁰ Sayādaw Ledi. 2021. *A Manual of Not-Self (Anatta Dipani)*. Translated by Ashin Sumana. Association for Insight Meditation., p.5.

²¹ Dīghanikāya Mahāvagga Pāḷi, Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā ed. Yangon: Religious Affairs Press. 2005. 369

²² Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*. London and Bedford: The Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd., 1959.

²³ Sayādaw, Mahāsi. *A Discourse on the Anattalakkhana Sutta*. trans. U Htin Fatt (Maung Htin). Buddha Sasananuggaha Organization Mahasi

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²⁴ *Dīghanikāya Mahāvagga Pāli*, Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā ed. Yangon: Religious Affairs Press. 2005.. 17

²⁵ Sayādaw Ledi. 2021. *A Manual of Not-Self (Anatta Dipani)*. Translated by Ashin Sumana. Association for Insight Meditation) , p.9

²⁶ Ibid, p10.

²⁷ *Mūlapannāsa Pāli*. Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā ed. Yangon: Religious Affairs Press, 2005. 75

²⁸ Sayādaw Ledi. 2021. *A Manual of Not-Self (Anatta Dipani)*. trans. by Ashin Sumana. Association for Insight Meditation, p.10.

²⁹ *Majjhimapannāsa Pāli*.. Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā ed. Yangon: Religious Affairs Press, 2005. 227

³⁰ *Khanda-Saḷāyatanavagga Saṃyutta Pāli*. Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā ed. Yangon: Religious Affairs Press, 2005. 447

³¹ Hwansu Jeon. *Samatha, Jhāna, and Vipassanā*. Wisdom Publications, 2018.

³² *Dīghanikāya Mahāvagga Pāli*, 231.

³³ Ibid, 231.

³⁴ U Pandita Sayādaw. 2006. *The State of Mind Called Beautiful*, edited by K. Wheeler. USA: Wisdom Publications), p.85.

³⁵ Ibid, p.79.

³⁶ Rod Heller, "Buddhism's Pain Relief," *Lion's Roar*, September 13, 2010, accessed June 27, 2024, <https://www.lionsroar.com/buddhisms-pain-relief>.

³⁷ *Dīghanikāya Mahāvagga Pāli*, 231.

³⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 10:258.

³⁹ Ibid, 7:231-232.

⁴⁰ *Dīghanikāya Mahāvagga Pāli*, 252.

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