

**A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF VALUE
IMMANUEL KANT AND TSUNESABURO MAKIGUCHI:
MODERN CIVILIZATION VS. HUMANISTIC CIVILIZATION
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Makiguchi and Soka University

On May 3, 2001, Soka University of America was opened in Aliso Viejo, California. It was the dream of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), the first president of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Educational Society), to establish schools that would be dedicated to teaching his pedagogy — the Soka Kyoiku Taikei (Value-Creating Educational System). He bequeathed his dream to his disciple, Josei Toda, who in turn passed it on to his disciple Daisaku Ikeda, the current President of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI). In Japan, Mr. Ikeda, then president of the Soka Gakkai, opened Soka High School in April 1968 and Soka University in April 1971. He hung out a sign reading “Soka Daigaku” (Soka University) at the main gate of the school. This sign, which was originally calligraphed by Makiguchi, had been handed down to second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, and then on to President Ikeda. The heritage of this sign demonstrates the determination of the successive disciples to realize the dream of their mentors.

Subsequently, President Ikeda opened Kansai Soka High School in 1973, Sapporo Soka Kindergarten in 1976, Tokyo Soka Elementary School in 1978, Kansai Soka Elementary School in 1982 and Soka Women’s Junior College in 1985. There are now Soka Kindergartens in Hong-Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. In Brazil, many elementary schools are adopting Makiguchi’s value-creating pedagogy. A kindergarten will be open soon. In Cambodia, an elementary school was built with the help of Japanese Soka Gakkai members. In Chaoshang, China, an elementary School was built with the support of Chinese painter Fang Zhaoling and Hong-Kong SGI members. In India, Soka Women’s College is being built by an educator, Dr. Kumanan, who has great respect for peace and educational movements promoted by President Ikeda. In Italy, many educators have expressed interest in this student-centered pedagogy.

The opening of Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo at the beginning of the twenty-first century signals the worldwide spread of the humanistic value-creating pedagogy. On this historic occasion, I would like to explore the significance of Makiguchi’s theory of value creation from a historical point of view.

What Is Value?

From Plato (approx. 427–347 B.C.E.) to Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), western philosophy has typically propounded three basic elements of value — truth, goodness and beauty. Greek metaphysics regarded truth as “absolute,” because it was thought to be independent of human conception, existing in an ideal state of its own. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle held similar beliefs regarding absolute truth. Absolute truth is the ideal, immaterial and perfect, existing

independent of human conception. Thus, absolute truth served as the standard of judgement for value, and was considered to be the foundation of value [as depicted in Fig. 1 (A)]. It was not until later that the concept of truth was connected to the notion of an absolute deity.

During the Middle Ages, the concept of absolute truth was replaced by Christian Scholasticism, which taught that God created the universe, and was, therefore, the standard of judgement for value. Although this was different from Greek philosophy, both shared in the assumption that something existed beyond the human being. Even after the Renaissance, this notion was maintained. Descartes (1596–1650) ascribed the workings of the rational mind to God. The reason why Newton (1642–1727) developed the concepts of “absolute time” and “absolute space” in physics was to prove the existence of “absolute God.”

Immanuel Kant was unique in this regard because he denied that absolute truth exists independent of the human mind. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant wanted to show the possibilities as well as the limitations of pure reason. He challenged British Empiricism by saying that knowledge is not all derived from the senses. Kant said that if we have knowledge whose truth is certain to us even before experience — a *priori* — (in other words, by intuitive understanding), then absolute truth (and absolute science) would become possible. Experience gives us only separate sensations and events, which may alter their sequence in the future, whereas truth is derived from the inherent structure of our minds, from the natural and inevitable manner in which our minds must operate. Mind is an active organism that molds and transforms sensations into an ordered cohesiveness of thought.

Although uniquely progressive, Kant’s view had limitations. According to him, since the structure of every mind is the same and all minds operate on the same principle, we can discern universal truth. However, it would seem logical to deduce that if truth is derived from our mind, each of us may come up with different truths, thus obviating universal applicability. It is suggested that Kant utilized the Newtonian concept of absolute time in formulating his ideas [ref. 1]. But in the twentieth century, the emergence of the theory of relativity as well as quantum physics demonstrate that the physical world does not behave as had previously been thought. So the validity of the naturally intuitive, *a priori* mind comes into question. Secondly, since Kant emphasized a rational and reasonable way of thinking, he denied worlds beyond our understanding. Religion, therefore, was not included in his thought system. However, he later said that human beings need religion to lead a moral life because they are held sway by the presumed eternal dichotomy of flesh and spirit. In Kant, we can see the dilemma faced by the Western philosophical tradition in reconciling the worldly and the spiritual, leading inexorably to the alienation of science from religion [ref. 2].

In *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant stated that moral conduct is based upon holy will, that is, the will toward goodness. His overriding principle was that action should be based only on whether or not the proposed action has the formal character of law, that is, the property of applying to all persons equally. He attributed the dignity of human life to the fact that people can live morally, performing virtuous deeds based upon their reason. Since Kant separated absoluteness from truth, instead emphasizing goodness as the basis for proper human conduct, the traditional structure of the value system was significantly changed [as depicted in Fig. 1 (B)].

The Kantian tendency to put humans at the center of the world became the major stream in the materialistic civilization that was to follow. Since science deals with phenomena that can be tested through experience and experiment, it could be averred that nothing could go beyond man’s experience. The success of science influenced philosophy in a manner that denied the concept of the metaphysical world. Since, unlike earlier times, humanity was less likely to recognize something outside of itself to rely on in an absolute sense, science became the hoped

for panacea to solve all problems and bring happiness to the world [ref. 3].

What Is Happiness?

A Greek philosopher, Epicurus (341–271 B.C.E.), taught what he asserted to be the best way of life, his philosophy coming to be known as Epicureanism. His guiding principle is that pleasure is good, and the ultimate aim of life is the absence of pain from the body and soul. He identified this as happiness. However, Epicurus also decreed that in order to secure happiness, a wise man should limit his desires and pleasure-seeking, practice virtue and live a secluded life. The most important aspect of human relationships is utility, which finds the highest expression in friendship. His ideal way of life is different from the modern interpretation of Epicureanism, which today signifies simple pleasure-seeking, or hedonism.

From the Middle Ages through the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, many thinkers discussed Epicureanism in terms of pleasure or utility. David Hume (1711–76) and Adam Smith (1723–90) developed the ethical concept of sympathy in order to overcome the egoistic aspect of pleasure. In the nineteenth century, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–73) developed the philosophy of Utilitarianism. Bentham replaced sympathy with the principle of utility. According to him, human beings have a tendency toward the desire for pleasure and aversion to pain. Happiness is the state where people enjoy pleasure and are free from pain. He applied this notion to the politics and well-being of society as a whole. He proposed the principle of the maximum happiness of the maximum number of people in a particular society. He also proposed the concept of sanctions, which serve to bring the happiness of the individual into correlation with that of the general populace.

Bentham regarded human beings as abstract entities and did not consider the existence of various kinds of pleasure and pain. Mill, however, proposed that there are various qualitative differences in pleasure. He suggested that happiness lay in the pursuit of pleasure, which is superior in quality — namely, goodness. One's deeds are correct inasmuch as they lead to happiness, and incorrect in proportion to the decrease in happiness that they produce. He stated that he would prefer to be a dissatisfied human being rather than a satisfied pig, because the human can strive to achieve a higher happiness. In essence, he distinguished happiness from pleasure or mere pleasure-seeking.

There would appear to be a number of problems with these philosophies of happiness. How can we measure the degree of happiness? How can we determine the quality of pleasure? Is happiness only dependent upon pleasure? Is pleasure a desire for material objects or spiritual feelings, and so on?

It is interesting to note that Mill's concept of sanction includes both external sanction (physical, political, societal) and internal sanction (pain derived from violating duty and conscience). Mill considered that conscience has altruistic aspects; a desire to be One with other human beings. He considered the highest pleasure to be that which satisfies this type of conscience. He thought that the desire for the oneness of all mankind should be taught as a religious practice. In other words, Mill proposed that the desire for altruism leads to the highest happiness, and it should be incorporated into religions. This notion is similarly expressed in Buddhism.

In Kant, the definition of happiness is quite different because he regarded happiness as “pleasure seeking” (hedonism). He wrote: “Morality is not properly the doctrine of how we may make ourselves happy, but how we may make ourselves worthy of happiness. Let us seek happiness in others; but for ourselves, perfection — whether it brings us happiness or pain” [ref. 4–6]. Kant continued: “A being possessed of a good will would always act as it ought. It

would not, however, have the concepts of duty and moral obligation, which enter only when reason and desire find themselves opposed. The opposition is continuous, for man is at the same time both flesh and spirit.” This idea reflected Kant’s own religion of the Pietist sect of Protestantism [ref. 6].

Kant was an idealist, and the goal he presented was too strict — even stoic — for ordinary people to follow. The original Epicureanism (not the modern interpretation) is impractical because we cannot retire from the world. We also know that the modern interpretation — an endless pursuit of pleasure — will ultimately not bring us happiness. How can we find the path between these two extremes, the Middle Way that will produce the greatest value for all? The answer can be found in Buddhism.

Buddhism considers that happiness consists of both material and spiritual aspects. Buddhism is not an egotistical, self-centered practice. It teaches that an individual can become happy by teaching others how to become happy. How can one contribute to the genuine, lasting happiness of others? The fundamental spirit of Buddhist practice is called *jihī*, which literally means mercy, but is deeper than that. *Jihī* means to remove suffering and give joy, but not by giving money, gifts or loving attention, which, while fine in their own right, cannot provide truly lasting happiness. In other words, to simply give joy or pleasure to others is not enough to bring them lasting absolute happiness. To remove the cause for unhappiness is the first priority.

In Buddhism, the ultimate cause for unhappiness is to slander the Law of life, *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. That is, to commit an act that goes against the dignity and equality of human life. Therefore, to eradicate slander by teaching others the correct way of life is the noblest act of a Buddhist, and constitutes the greatest good. The Law of cause and effect in Buddhism teaches that those who perform this greatest good will not only benefit others, but will also accumulate good fortune for themselves and become happy.

In essence, Buddhism is concerned with how to become happy, rather than what happiness is. Happiness in Buddhism is understood as a dynamic concept, not a static one. Buddhism is not a merely a spiritual, idealistic teaching, but rather, an action-oriented philosophy of daily life based on the highest wisdom.

David Norton, late professor of philosophy at Delaware University, (1930–95) pointed out the close similarity between the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin and the philosophy of American Renaissance thinkers Ralph W. Emerson (1803–82), David Thoreau (1817–62) and Walt Whitman (1819–92) [ref. 7]. Norton postulates that for Emerson, true happiness is the feeling that accompanies self-fulfilling work, where each person’s basic work is the worthy living that actualizes his or her genius. Genius in Emerson’s view does not mean exceptional intelligence, but rather divine idea, which each human being inherently possesses. It represents an innate potential that is similar to the Buddha nature that resides within every human being.

In this regard, it is important to note that some feelings that attend worthy living are not pleasant but painful. Moreover, every worthy life is, at times, thwarted by obstacles, and often, disturbingly so. Indeed the growth of good character is itself partly painful and the hedonistic recipe to seek pleasure and avoid pain will impede such growth. For Emerson, pain of this sort, which participates in happiness or satisfaction, is welcome pain. According to Emerson, a life that fulfills its genius realizes inner satisfaction and, at the same time, objective worth in the world.

Thoreau also expressed the belief that the will to benefit others is important. Self-satisfaction cannot be complete without recognition and appreciation of the worth of others. Here, Norton sees the closest link between the thinkers of American Renaissance and Mahayana Buddhism, in which the purpose of life is to attain supreme personal happiness through helping others to become happy.

Regarding the concept of welcome pain, it is worth noting the view of T'ien-t'ai, a renowned Buddhist scholar and priest of sixth century China. He stated that when obstacles occur, we should be neither influenced nor frightened. In other words, since obstacles represent a great chance for changing our karma, or destiny, we should welcome them rather than try to avoid them [ref. 8].

Makiguchi's Concepts of Value and Happiness

Makiguchi developed a remarkable philosophy of happiness. He believed that the goal of life is to become happy, and that a person is happy when he or she is fully creating value in their lives [ref. 9–11]. Here, happiness is defined by a person's actions, especially value-creating actions. Makiguchi pointed out that truth and value are entirely different concepts. Truth reveals "that which is," while value connotes a "subject-object relationship." Makiguchi argued that human beings cannot create truth, but can create value. In contrast to the trend of Western philosophy from the Greek period, Makiguchi eliminated truth from the value system and replaced it with the concept of *ri* (Jpn).

The literal meaning of *ri* is profit or interest, which was further, translated as benefit [ref. 10, 11]. However, this sometimes invited criticism of Makiguchi's philosophy as being egoistic and greedy. Regarding this, Hajime Nakamura, a world renowned Buddhist scholar, praised Makiguchi's theory in that *ri* in Buddhism stands for both *jiri* (gain for oneself) and *rita* (cause others to gain) [ref. 12, p. 500]. Nakamura wrote that, in Buddhism, important concepts are "working for others" and "to be beneficial for others." Nakamura also praised Makiguchi for developing a unique philosophy based upon his own experience. During that time, all college professors in Japan were simply imitating European schools of thought.

A key aspect of Makiguchi's theory is the balance between individual and social values. He believed that individual gain or benefit is an entirely proper pursuit, but each individual has a responsibility to contribute to society as well. Thus, the concept of benefit for others is well established [ref. 9].

Makiguchi defined value as something favorable to human existence, while anti-value is something harmful. In other words, Makiguchi viewed value from the standpoint of human life. Kant interpreted truth to exist in reference to the human mind. However, in accordance with European tradition, he still retained truth in his value system. Indeed, the quest for truth has been the center of human activity since the time of ancient Greece. On the other hand, Makiguchi considered that truth is neutral, and thus can be either valuable or harmful depending on how it is utilized. For instance, if dynamite is used to dig a coalmine or tunnel, it is valuable. But if it is used for war, it kills people. Makiguchi's theory of value is quintessentially humanistic.

Makiguchi was not an academic scholar. Being a teacher and principal of elementary schools, Makiguchi developed his theory largely on his own. However, several thinkers influenced his theory of value.

Makiguchi was interested in aspects of John Dewey's (1859–1910) philosophy of Pragmatism. He also emphasized the importance of the sociological aspects of education and quoted from works by Auguste Comte (1797–1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858–1917).

Makiguchi's view and Dewey's postulations are similar in that both deal with the objective of discerning what is useful for the human being. However, there is a clear distinction. Pragmatism begins with the assertion that what is useful is the truth. In contrast, Makiguchi distinguished value from truth, and dropped truth from the value system. A pragmatic outlook has helped America become the world strongest nation, but its morale has declined. Racism, violence and drug abuse by schoolchildren have been increasing at an alarming rate. Our

population is suffering from the disintegration of family and from an increase in mental disease and newly erupted viral diseases. The problems appear insoluble, but fortunately there is an answer, which I firmly believe can be found in a new value system based on the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin and Makiguchi's value-creating pedagogy. This, I am convinced, can lead to a peaceful twenty-first century.

Makiguchi defined beauty as an individual, emotional value; usefulness (to self and others) as the relationship between individual value and social value; and goodness as social value. In order to discourage the pursuit of selfish interest, Makiguchi emphasized goodness as the foundation of the value system.

Fig. 1 explains the relationship between the theories of Kant and Makiguchi. Fig. 1 (A) depicts the traditional concept of value in Greek philosophy, specifically Platonism and Neo-Platonism, which were in favor until the eighteenth century. Fig. 1 (B) shows Kant's viewpoint, which influenced the materialistic civilization from the nineteenth century until today, and Fig. 1 (C) shows Makiguchi's ideal in which Goodness is placed at the bottom to show that it is most important. In (A), absolute Truth was the foundation, while in (B), Truth became relative to the human mind, and instead, Goodness became the absolute foundation. In Kant, what is absolute in the world is "good will"—the will to follow moral laws. Therefore, in the value system of Kant, Truth already started losing its significance. Finally, in (C), Makiguchi dropped Truth from the value system and replaced it with "Beneficial to self and others." Makiguchi's value system is based upon the effect of an action upon human beings—whether the effect is favorable or not. Thus his value system is totally human-centered.

The Lives of Kant and Makiguchi

The differences between Kant's and Makiguchi's philosophy can be summarized as follows: For Kant, the concept of truth is still important, but the central role of the human being is emphasized and goodness becomes the foundation. Happiness, however, is not the goal of life, and body and mind are separated reflecting the Christian (Pietist) view. Science and religion are also separated following the tradition initiated by Descartes. In contrast, Makiguchi's way of thinking reflects Buddhist views, so there is a marked difference. Makiguchi believed that Buddhism is aligned with science and that its validity could be proven through experience.

Although Kant and Makiguchi differ in these aspects, there are several interesting similarities. Kant studied and lectured on natural history and geography. He wrote several articles on the relationship between land, sea, mountains, rivers, humans and animals. In 1755, at age thirty-one, he published *The General Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*. His holistic conception of the universe and emphasis on the human being as a central focus undoubtedly contributed to the development of human-centered philosophy.

Makiguchi also began with the study of geography and emphasized the harmony between the human being and his environment. He published *Geography of Human Life* in 1903 at thirty-two [ref. 13].

A persistent theme in Kant's critical philosophies, which he wrote between ages fifty-seven and sixty-four, is summarized in his words as "Starry heavens above and moral law within." In keeping with his critical reasoning, Kant at first denied religion as illogical and superstitious. He wrote: "It is impossible by means of metaphysics to progress from knowledge of this world to concepts of God and a proof of his existence through cogent inferences. The concept of God is one which belongs originally not to physics, but to morals." In essence, Kant said that man cannot prove the existence of god. However, he acknowledged the role of religion in contributing to a moral life. He allowed that human beings need to have religion and a god to

believe in.

After his studies in geography, Makiguchi became interested in philosophy and authored “*Theory of Value*.” At fifty-seven, he became a Buddhist. He developed the pedagogical philosophy and compiled it at fifty-nine as “*Value-Creating Educational System*” [ref. 9–11].

At age sixty-nine, Kant criticized the church in an attempt to correct and purify Christianity. He wrote that asking a blessing or waiting for forgiveness of sin by an external object of worship is not the real essence of Christianity. In true Christianity, a revolution of the mind and good human behavior is essential. Each person should do one’s best to become a good human being. Then, and only then, a greater existence (God) will supplement one’s ability. The question is not what to do to receive God’s blessing, but what to do in order to become worthy of receiving God’s help. He also stated that priests should serve church members, not control them in an authoritarian manner [ref. 6]. As a result of such critical views, Kant was persecuted by the government and prohibited from lecturing or writing about religion.

At seventy-two, Makiguchi criticized the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and its doctrines in a manner similar to Kant’s criticism of the church.

In 1795, at age seventy-one, Kant published a monumental work titled *For the Eternal Peace*. In it he expressed his belief that war is an absolute evil, since killing someone is an act of using a moralistic human being as a materialistic tool, and therefore a violation of human rights. He proposed to establish an international league to promote this idea. It took two centuries until this idea was materialized as the League of Nations (1920) and then, the United Nations (1945).

As a Buddhist, Makiguchi was also opposed to war. In the World War II era he criticized the war-mongering Japanese government as well as the Shinto religion for being a tool of the government’s militaristic policies. He also protested against the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood for knuckling under to the government and allowing the inclusion of a Shinto shrine in their temples. When Makiguchi was ordered to worship the Shinto talisman, he, unlike the priesthood, refused. In 1943, along with his closest disciple Josei Toda and twenty-two other leaders of the Soka Koiku Gakkai, he was imprisoned at seventy-two. While all the others leaders except for Toda recanted their beliefs to escape further persecution, Makiguchi remained firm in his convictions and died in prison at seventy-three, a martyr for the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin.

Both Kant and Makiguchi were men of high moral character who lived up to their beliefs. It may be said that Makiguchi completed the development of the philosophy of value begun by Kant. Greek philosophy was the foundation of the Spiritual Civilization up until the eighteenth century. Kant’s philosophy contributed to shaping the Materialistic Civilization during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Makiguchi’s philosophy will be the foundation of Humanistic Civilization, which will flourish during the twenty-first century.

Makiguchi’s ardent desire for world peace was embodied in his successors Toda and current SGI President Daisaku Ikeda. President Ikeda’s ceaseless efforts to promote peace by meeting with 1,500 world leaders and visiting fifty-four nations is now changing the course of civilization from distrust to dialogue, from confrontation to coexistence.

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