

Moral Crossroads: Contemplating Formal and Informal Economy Through the Noble Eightfold Path

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Society has formulated constructs which we often follow without questioning their moral strengths or flaws, such as the formal and informal economy. In the formal economy, workers have steady contracts, work-hours, income, and benefits. In the informal economy, workers lack most of these stabilities. Nonetheless, the informal economy has been around for many centuries. We generally extol the formal economy, while we tend to denounce the informal economy, thereby often forgetting to consider the spiritual motives behind each. This article reviews, with Buddhist psychological underpinnings, some sample activities in both economies, aiming to instigate some critical thinking, and maybe even some paradigm shifts.

INTRODUCTION

This article reviews activities, whether conducted in the formal or informal economy, from a moral and spiritual stance rather than a political, legal, or socially acceptable stance. The term spirituality means different things to different people. Webster's Dictionary (2012) defines spirituality as: 1) "The quality or state of being spiritual; incorporeality; heavenly-mindedness"; 2) "That which belongs to the church, or to a person as an ecclesiastic, or to religion, as distinct from temporalities"; and 3) "An ecclesiastical body; the whole body of the clergy, as distinct from, or opposed to, the temporality". The term "spirituality" comes from the Latin word "spiritus" that means vapor, breath, air or wind. To first provide clarity on how spirituality will be approached in this article, here a definition about its manifestation in the workplace:

Spirituality in the workplace is an experience of interconnectedness and trust among those involved in a work process, engendered by individual goodwill; leading to the collective creation of a motivational organizational culture, epitomized by reciprocity and solidarity; and resulting in enhanced overall performance, which is ultimately translated in lasting organizational excellence (Marques, Dhiman & King, 2007, p. 12).

As can be derived from the definition above, there is no religious underpinning in our perception of spirituality, but rather a focus on enriched human values and gratifying performance, even though we are aware that some religious practices, such as prayer, can be seen as spiritually inductive.

It might also be appropriate to provide a brief explanation of the formal and informal economy: in the formal economy, workers have steady contracts, work-hours, income, social conditions, and work environments while in the informal economy they lack most of these stabilities: they have no security, regular pay, or protective system when things go wrong (Funds for NGOs, 2009). Later in this article we will share some notes from other scholars about the formal and informal economy. Regardless of the standpoints on these two phenomena, it should be stated that they have both been around for many centuries, displaying an interesting interplay in which the informal economy has been expanding or shrinking depending on the degree to which the formal economy could accommodate society's members and their needs. It may be this dynamic of shrinking and expanding depending on the economic welfare of societies that has caused us to generally adopt a positive stance towards the formal economy and an adverse one towards the informal economy. Unfortunately, there is a critical aspect that has been consistently overlooked in these evaluations: the spiritual dimension. The spiritual motives behind the formation of these economies and the possible spiritual or unspiritual drivers behind people's involvement in either of the economies have thus far not been part of the assessment.

The purpose of this article is to exemplify our tendency of labeling trends as "formal" and "informal" without questioning their moral contributions to society. In a larger scope, the purpose of this article is to encourage readers to engage in more critical thinking about matters, thus, engage in the practice of less "sleepwalking" – in this case, blindly accepting trends, rules, regulations, acceptances and rejections, without contemplating or testing these in any psychologically or morally acceptable way - and greater consciousness.

Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the most prominent Buddhist teachers of our times, explains the Buddhist perspective on consciousness as follows: "Our consciousness is composed of all the seeds sown by our past actions and the past actions of our family and society. Everyday our thoughts, words, and actions flow into the sea of our consciousness and create our body, mind, and world" (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 36). Illustrating how we usually treat our consciousness, Nhat Hanh (1998) shares an interesting story from the Buddha:

A dangerous murderer was captured and brought before the king, and the king sentenced him to death by stabbing. 'Take him to the courtyard and plunge three hundred sharp knives through him.' At noon a guard reported, 'Majesty, he is still alive,' and the king declared, 'Stab him three hundred more times!' In the evening, the guard again told the king, 'Majesty, he is not yet dead.' So the king gave the third order: 'Plunge the three hundred sharpest knives in the kingdom through him.'" Then the Buddha said, "This is how we usually deal with our consciousness, it is like stabbing ourselves with three hundred sharp knives. We suffer, and our suffering spills out to those around us (pp. 36–37).

This article may be of particular interest to scholars and practitioners with a reflective mind, who are continuously looking for ways to expand their horizons in order to see things as they become and not as they are dictated.

REASONING BEHIND SELECTING BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY

The reasons for selecting Buddhist psychology as the evaluative foundation for this article are multiple. For starters, given the hectic pace and high stress of modern life, many people are becoming increasingly interested in the amiable teaching of Buddhism as a way of life or an applied psychology. Since it has no god or immortal soul at the core of its practice, Buddhism is not a religion in the traditional sense of the word (cf. Coleman, 2001/2002). In effect, the goal of Buddhism is twofold:

awakening by cleansing the mind toward emptiness and disseminating loving-kindness, compassion, joy in even-mindedness. The 14th Dalai Lama, the person most responsible for the recent resurgence of interest in Buddhism world-wide, has repeatedly clarified in his various books and speeches that Buddhism is a science of mind based on the twin pillars of wisdom and compassion (Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998, 2003; Dalai Lama, 1999). Its approach appears to be that of a 'Do-It-Yourself-Psychology' by way of 'To-Whom-It-May-Concern.' Rahula (1974/1959) illuminates:

There are no articles of faith in Buddhism. In fact, there is no sin in Buddhism, as sin is understood in some religions. The root of all evil is ignorance and false views. The freedom of thought and tolerance allowed by the Buddha—the spirit of sympathetic understanding advocated by the Buddha is quite astonishing. This freedom is necessary because, according to [the] Buddha, man's emancipation depends on his own realization of truth (p. 3).

The Buddha was not a "close-fisted" teacher and constantly reminded his audience that there was nothing metaphysical about his approach to understanding life and its enigmas. His emphasis on the lived experience is evident from the recurring refrain in the Pali canon: "...that which you affirm must be that which you have realized, seen, and known for yourself" (Carrithers, 1988, p. 4).

It is on basis of these insights that we considered Buddhism to present a matter-of-fact, non-sectarian, and pragmatic assessment of human behavior and a rational way to address it.

DEFINING PERSPECTIVE, NOBLE TRUTHS AND EIGHTFOLD PATH

We are focusing specifically on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path because these interrelated perspectives are the foundational ones in Buddhist psychology. Yet, as can be concluded from the reasoning above, we will *not* review these essential teachings from a religious but rather from a psychological perspective in this article.

Rahula (1959) points out that the First Noble Truth is considered by almost all scholars as 'The Noble Truth of Suffering'. Bercholtz and Kohn (1993) clarify that birth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair, association with the loathed, disassociation from the loved, and not getting what one wants are all manifestations of suffering.

The Second Noble Truth pertains to the arising or origin of suffering. Rahula (1959) explains that it is the thirst, desire, greed, or craving that manifests itself in various ways and gives rise to all forms of suffering and the continuity of beings.

The Third Noble Truth is explained as the existence of liberation from suffering, thus, from the continuity of dukkha. Rahula (1959) clarifies that we can only eliminate dukkha completely when we eliminate its main root, which is the thirst that was described in the Second Noble Truth.

The Fourth Noble Truth entails the way leading to the ending of suffering, which is captured in the Noble Eightfold Path. Nhat Hanh (1998) does a great job of explaining the eight elements on the Path in a straightforward manner: he perceives *Right View* as a deep understanding of the Four Noble Truths; *Right Thought* as a means to improve Right View; *Right Speech* is a manifestation of Right Thought; and *Right Action* as a consequence of Right View, Right Thought and Right Speech, as well as the path toward Right Livelihood. Nhat Hanh (1998) further evaluates *Right Effort* to be the energy that helps us walk the Noble Eightfold Path. He states, "Our practice should be intelligent, based on *Right Understanding* of the teaching. It is not because we practice hard that we can say we are practicing *Right Diligence*" (p. 99). Nhat Hanh (1998) considers *Right Mindfulness* to be the heart of the Buddha's teachings. He clarifies, "When we are mindful, our thinking is Right Thinking, our speech is Right Speech, and so on. Right Mindfulness is the energy that brings us back to the present moment" (p. 64).

The eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are not steps to be followed in sequence, one after another. They can be more aptly described as components rather than as steps, comparable to the intertwining strands of a single cable that requires the contributions of all the strands for maximum

strength. With a certain degree of progress all eight factors can be present simultaneously, each supporting the others. However, until that point is reached, some sequence in the unfolding of the path is inevitable.

FIVE ATTENTION POINTS

It may be appropriate to first set the tone for a broader spiritual discourse before continuing this moral dialogue. We will do so by reviewing five attention points, which are not the usual ways in which formal and informal economies are analyzed:

1. The role spirituality may play in the creation of or formation of informal economies. This may include such economies arising from personal formation or transformation of the people involved in forming these economies (such as seeing the creation of the economy as a vocation or personal “calling”).
2. The role that different spiritual practices (such as prayer, discernment, and meditation) may play in the way that people who engage in these informal economies may operate.
3. The role that native or indigenous spirituality may play in the creation of these economies by myriad third world or indigenous groups.
4. The role that different spiritual values held by members of the informal economy may play in the way that people who engage in these informal economies may operate.
5. The role that different spiritual values held by members of the informal economy may play in the mission or vision of these informal economies.

CONTEMPLATING MANIFESTATIONS OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL ECONOMY

In this section we will review some notes on the formal and informal economy as observed by scholars over the past decade or so. The world is changing at a rapid pace, and so, too, are existing mental models. One such change can be seen in the way the formal and informal economies are perceived. Throughout history, working in the formal economy has been the desired goal of every adult, because it provided security and status, while working in the informal economy was considered for those who could not make it in the formal economy, and had to find ways to survive in an unstable, less reputable sector. Williams, Round and Rodgers (2007) explain, “Informal employment is [...] read as existing in the interstices, or as scattered and fragmented across the economic landscape. Formal employment, in contrast, is represented as systematic, naturally expansive, and extensive” (p. 404).

The shift that we heralded above has been delineated by several researchers in the past years, especially when describing changing trends in developing nations. Reflecting on the Philippines, Chowdhury (2005) comments that the informal sector has globally expanded to a point that it can no longer be labeled as inferior and insignificant. Acknowledging that there are still divergent perceptions on this phenomenon in developed and developing countries, Chowdhury claims that the informal economy has become an essential economic contribution-mechanism anywhere in the world.

In a critique on the shifting roles of the formal and informal economy, Williams, Round and Rodgers (2007) affirm,

“The representation of informal employment as a marginal, residual and weak realm, and the formal economy as a growing, strong and extensive sphere, has come under considerable criticism in recent decades, not least due to the recognition that in the contemporary era, it is growing rather than declining (p. 404).

With the shifting paradigm about formal and informal economy on one hand, and the enduring adherence to conventional perspectives about these two phenomena on the other, we will now discuss two professions in each of the economies. Each of the professions will be specifically reviewed in the light of

the Four Noble Truths and the steps of the Eightfold Path. We will specifically contemplate on the five attention points mentioned earlier:

1. What role may spirituality have played in the choice of this livelihood?
2. How would/could spiritual practices (such as prayer, discernment, and meditation) influence such a person?
3. Would the spiritual view on this vocation possibly be different in diverse cultures?
4. Could the ultimate performance of this person be considered spiritual?
5. Would spiritual values within the individual involved nurture or diminish involvement in this vocation?

After reviewing the professions according to the five questions above, we will engage in a spiritual view of the four professions in light of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, specifically focusing on:

1. What kind of suffering is involved in each of these professions?
2. How could it be diminished?
3. Which of the 8 steps on the Noble Eightfold Path could enhance the quality of life for the individual involved as well as his/her stakeholders?

Two Examples Within the Formal Economy

In this section we will discuss one positively perceived and one negatively perceived deployment in the formal economy.

A Positively Perceived Manifestation: College Professor

The profession of a college professor is generally perceived as a respected one.

1. *The role spirituality may have played in the choice of this livelihood:* There may or may not have been a spiritual foundation in selecting this profession. People choose the vocation of a college professor for many reasons: family tradition, a love for teaching, the idea that it might be an easy job once attained, or perhaps, a sense of connection with the academic environment. However, the very fact that this vocation relates to educating others in order for them to improve the quality of their lives, makes the job of a college professor one that could be considered spiritually sound.
2. *Influence of spiritual practices* (such as prayer, discernment, and meditation) on such a person. The fact that the vocation of college professor falls under the “formal economy” and is considered a well-respected job does not necessarily relate to any spiritual practices.
3. *The possibility of different spiritual views on this vocation in different cultures:* this may be a factor indeed, since there are some communities that consider the work of a college professor a prestigious one, while others don’t see it as significantly different from any other profession. It may be that, especially in cultures where higher education is scarce, the college professor will be treated with more prominence and seen as a greater spiritual influence in the lives of students and possibly even their parents, and other members of the community.
4. *Possibility of considering the ultimate performance of this person as spiritual:* since college professors engage in educating current and future generations of workforce members in making them better at earning their livelihood, thus enhancing the quality of their lives, their performance, if executed diligently and well-intended, may be considered spiritual.
5. *Influence of spiritual values within the individual to nurture or diminish involvement in this vocation:* If a college professor immerses into spiritual practices, he or she may find his or her involvement in this vocation deepening and reaching a whole new dimension, as the practice of serving in a constructive manner may get underscored through these spiritual values.

A spiritual view of this profession in light of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path:

1. *Possible suffering involved in this profession.* This could be versatile, depending on the individual’s perception of and approach toward his or her work. The following three examples are

merely the tip of the teaching iceberg: 1) Teaching can become tedious if not renewed regularly. This can, in turn, become an experience of suffering for the professor as well as his or her students. 2) The requirement of academics to continue their publication and studying efforts in their area of expertise may also be experienced by some as suffering. 3) The degree to which students accept or reject the professor may also be considered a source of suffering. .

2. *Possible ways to diminish this suffering:* Each of the three lines of suffering mentioned as examples above could be diminished by embracing the vocation and ensuring a proper amount of passion for what one does. If the heart is not in it, the suffering will only augment. However, when the college professor makes a continuous effort to engage in renewal by being receptive to new impressions, suffering may become minimal.
3. *Elements of the Noble Eightfold Path that could enhance the quality of life for the college professor as well as his/her stakeholders:* In fact all eight steps are involved here, because it pertains to educating (right view) the right lessons (right thought/intention and right speech) through appealing, sensible lectures and assignments (right action), while earning a decent income (right livelihood), and engaging in a fulfilling job (right effort) that requires passion (right diligence/concentration) and continuous renewal (right mindfulness).

A Negatively Perceived Manifestation: Tobacco Company Manager

The profession of a tobacco company manager is increasingly perceived as a destructive one due to the declining reputation of smoking and the heightened awareness on the effects of smoking for one's health.

1. *The role spirituality may have played in the choice of this livelihood:* The driving motives in selecting this profession may have been multiple, but it is not very likely that they had any spiritual foundations, since it has been public knowledge for several decades now that cigarettes are detrimental for human health. The reasons for selecting a job in this industry may therefore have more to do with economic pressure, opportunity, or tradition.
2. *Influence of spiritual practices (such as prayer, discernment, and meditation) on such a person.* The fact that the vocation of a tobacco company manager is considered a legal one, falling in the category of "formal economy," does not make it an ethical one. These types of professions underscore the fact that legal and ethical are not the same. Hence, the same is the case with legal and spiritual. Nonetheless, a tobacco industry manager may very well engage in prayer, meditation, and other spiritual practices. However, the influences of such practices are most likely limited as long as this person engages in this form of livelihood.
3. *The possibility of different spiritual views on this vocation in different cultures:* not every community perceives the profession of a tobacco company manager the same way. Such a person may hold a high formal status almost anywhere, but the spiritual views will diverge depending on the spiritual concepts underlying any given society.
4. *Possibility of considering the ultimate performance of this person as spiritual:* while the individual in this profession may hold high spiritual values, his or her performance cannot be considered as such, since this profession engages in wrong livelihood, being the production of cigarettes which are detrimental for human (and other beings') health.
5. *Influence of spiritual values within the individual to nurture or diminish involvement in this vocation:* If a tobacco company manager engages into spiritual practices, he or she may decide to exchange this form of livelihood for a profession that serves the wellbeing of others instead of destroying it.

A spiritual view of this profession in light of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path:

1. *Possible suffering involved in this profession.* As is the case with the college professor and any other profession for that matter, suffering in this position could be very divergent. The following three examples may illustrate that: 1) Managing in a tobacco company can cause conscious

trouble when contemplating on one's livelihood in spiritual regard. This may cause emotional and mental suffering. 2) Depending on the level at which this individual manages in this company, he or she may have to engage in manipulative practices when it comes to public relations and advertising, and continuously trying to oppose the requirement to publish information about the real impact of cigarettes on people's health. This, too, ultimately causes mental and emotional suffering. 3) The way in which this manager's loved ones (family, spouse, and children) are affected by this livelihood may also be a significant factor of suffering for the manager as well as the loved ones.

2. *Possible ways to diminish this suffering*: Each of the three lines of suffering mentioned as examples above could be diminished by re-considering this vocation and deviating from this form of livelihood. As long as one remains in such a profession, the change only increases that serious conscious problems may cause amplified suffering in later stages of life.
3. *Elements of the Noble Eightfold Path that could enhance the quality of life for the tobacco company manager as well as his/her stakeholders*: In fact all eight steps are involved here, because it pertains to deviating from (right view/right action) a destructive vocation (right thought/intention) and abstaining from deceptive information to the world (right speech) through seeking constructive employment (right action/right livelihood), and ensuring that this will be a constructive job (right effort) that will generate passion (right diligence/concentration) and better attunement into one's consciousness (right mindfulness).

Two Examples Within the Informal Economy

In this section we will discuss one positively perceived and one negatively perceived manifestation of the informal economy.

A Positively Perceived Manifestation: An Unregistered Artist Producing Religious Art and Craft

The profession of a religious art and craft producer in this example is a small micro-preneurial effort, hence, part of the informal economy.

1. *The role spirituality may have played in the choice of this livelihood*: While it may well be possible that this artist merely decided to produce religious art for money-making purposes, it is very likely that the endeavor was fueled by his or her religious beliefs. Even though spirituality and religion are not considered similar, they do reside from a similar foundation, which is to do well and live properly. Based on this fact, the artist's work may be considered spiritually underpinned, even though this vocation is part of the informal economy.
2. *Influence of spiritual practices (such as prayer, discernment, and meditation) on such a person*. Even though the livelihood of this person has a religious nature, there is no guarantee that this person also engages in spiritual practices.
3. *The possibility of different spiritual views on this vocation in different cultures*: Assuming that the artist would produce art and craft that appealed to the local religion(s), it may be assumed that this vocation is accepted, but not necessarily considered highly prestigious.
4. *Possibility of considering the ultimate performance of this person as spiritual*: the fact that this person, while performing in the informal economy, produces uplifting art and crafts, which are intended (as is the case with most religions) to remind people of threading a path of acceptance, tolerance and love, the performance of this person, if executed diligently and well-intended, may be considered spiritual.
5. *Influence of spiritual values within the individual to nurture or diminish involvement in this vocation*: If this religious arts and crafts producer actually engages in the practices and beliefs he or she portrays, this vocation may be a highly gratifying one, even if it does not bring in huge amounts of income.

A spiritual view of this profession in light of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path:

1. *Possible suffering involved in this profession:* As was the case with the two vocations discussed in the formal economy, there could also be suffering involved in this work to different degrees, depending on the person and his or her circumstances and perceptions. The following three examples may illustrate: 1) Even art and craft can become arduous if limited to one or a few particular products without opportunities, funds, or ability for renewal. 2) If this artist gets troubled by lack of inspiration, he or she may find this vocation extremely difficult to continue. 3) If market conditions are grim, either through a weak economy, powerful competitors, or a strict local policies against the informal economy, the artist will also suffer, even if he or she has an entire supply, because there will not be any demand for his or her product.
2. *Possible ways to diminish this suffering:* When a vocation is considered part of the informal economy, there seems to be an additional complication in place. In case of point 1 above, suffering might be reduced when funds become available. However, if the artist struggles with lack of opportunities, ability for renewal, lack of inspiration, or lack of sales, it may be time to look for a different vocation altogether. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done, since pressure, requirements, and control are usually higher in the formal than in the informal economy.
3. *Elements of the Noble Eightfold Path that could enhance the quality of life for the artist and his/her stakeholders:* “Right view,” “right thought,” and “right diligence/concentration,” in this case, may pertain to either changing vocations or producing art that may appeal more to the artist (to end drudgery), his or her customers (to increase sales), as well as family and friends, who will then enjoy the experience of a happier person. This right view may result in different products or services (right action/right effort), and will hopefully remain in the area of right livelihood. The interesting fact with the above discussed vocation is that it was already a form of right livelihood, even though it was part of the informal economy. Finally, the engagement in a vocation that provides a better outlook may inspire the artist to engage in continuous renewal (right mindfulness).

A Negatively Perceived Manifestation: Drug Dealer

The profession of a drug dealer is globally labeled as a destructive one, even though there are gradations to this professions, which will be addressed in the responses below.

1. *The role spirituality may have played in the choice of this livelihood:* Dealing in drugs, assuming these are not the legally accepted drugs, is a destructive activity that victimizes many people worldwide. It may therefore be considered a general notion that this vocation cannot be considered spiritually attuned.
2. *Influence of spiritual practices (such as prayer, discernment, and meditation) on such a person.* While some people may be forced into this vocation due to grim economic circumstances and heavy pressure, the activity itself is not spiritual, even if the performer would engage in prayer or meditation. It may then be concluded that the spiritual practices have no influence on this person as long as he or she continues to thread this destructive path.
3. *The possibility of different spiritual views on this vocation in different cultures:* this is a tricky topic, since there are various drugs, and they are perceived in various ways. There are cultures religious groups that consider the use of marihuana a spiritual practice, or at least a positive influence in doing so. Others consider it a perfectly legal practice. Therefore, there is great likelihood of different spiritual views on this vocation in different cultures.
4. *Possibility of considering the ultimate performance of this person as spiritual:* this will also depend on the culture and specifics of the profession. Dealing in certain drugs may be considered legal, normal, or even spiritual in some cultures.
5. *Influence of spiritual values within the individual to nurture or diminish involvement in this vocation:* If a drug dealer performs in a destructive sense, which entails the sales of illegal, addictive, destructive drugs, then spiritual values will probably be absent. If, however, the drug

dealer resides in a culture where his or her product is considered normal or spiritually aligned, there may be strong spiritual values at the core of this profession.

A spiritual view of this profession in light of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path:

1. *Possible suffering involved in this profession:* Assuming that the drug dealer is involved in the kind of activity that victimizes and destroys others, there can be multiple suffering at hand: 1) If this activity is the result of an inability to find work in the formal economy for whatever reason, the dealer probably suffers from having fallen prey to this unspiritual activity. 2) The risk of being arrested or even killed at any time, and of having to reside in dangerous circles may also be a form of suffering in itself. 3) The fact that society rejects this person, even if he would like to change, also causes suffering.
2. *Possible ways to diminish this suffering:* While there is major difference between being a drug dealer and a producer of spiritual art and crafts, both vocations happen in the informal economy, and may come forth from lack of funding or other ability to perform in the formal economy. In case of the drug dealer, suffering may even linger when money is abundantly available due to the destructive nature of the vocation. The most immediate way to reduce this suffering is to turn away from this activity and start working on a cleansing process and another way of generating income.
3. *Elements of the Noble Eightfold Path that could enhance the quality of life for the drug dealer as well as his/her stakeholders:* Concurrent with the artist, “right view,” “right thought,” “right action,” “right effort,” and “right diligence/concentration,” may transpire when the dealer changes vocation, as this will relieve him or her from the pressure of engaging in wrongdoings and turn onto the path of right livelihood, which, in turn, will prevent more people from becoming victims of his destructive product, and enhance greater happiness to those who were fearing for this person’s life during his or her dangerous venture. The engagement in a vocation that provides a better outlook may inspire the artist to engage in continuous renewal (right mindfulness).

CONCLUSION

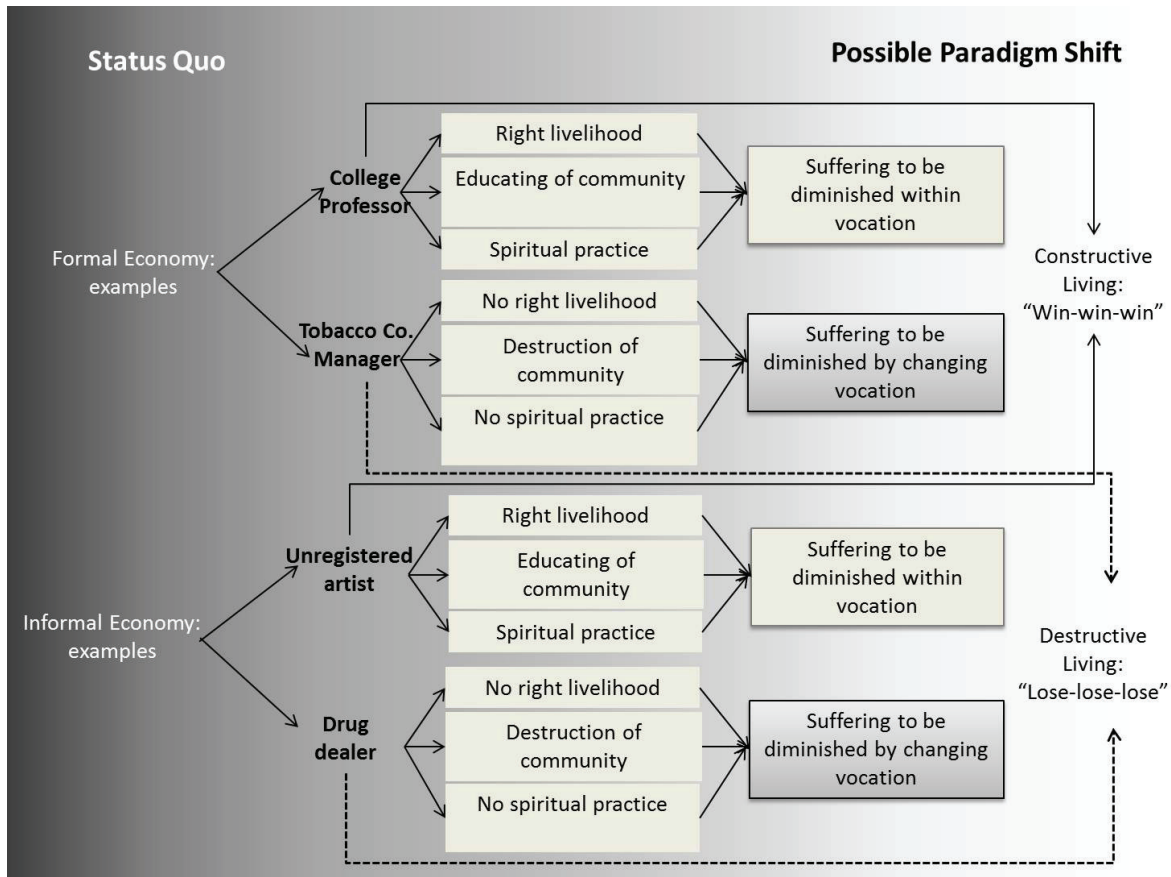
In reviewing the four examples discussed above, it can be derived that there are constructive and destructive vocations in both of the currently defined economies. In a time where new activities arise on a regular basis due to the increased speed of change, it is becoming increasingly harder to monitor vocations for tax purposes. This has been proven in the entertainment industry in the past decade when music became widely available through shared networks, and film roles became increasingly played by animated characters. As our entire scope of competition is shifting, so should also our assessment of vocations. Through the vocational examples in this article we have attempted to amplify the obsolescence of our current standards, and the need to reevaluate our paradigms about work as a constructive practice.

In figure 1 below, we illustrate the proposed paradigm shift, which entails a moral dimension in evaluating vocations. As can be seen in the figure, the examples of the college professor and the unregistered producer of spiritual arts and crafts (“artist”) will then be viewed as constructive living, as they guarantee a win-win-win outcome: advantage for the individual practicing this vocation, advantage for the stakeholders, and advantage for the world at large. The figure further shows a new evaluation for vocations with a destructive outcome, in our example: the tobacco company manager (currently considered part of the formal economy) and the drug dealer (currently considered part of the informal economy). These types of vocations, of which suffering can only be diminished by changing vocations entirely, would then be labeled as “destructive living”, as they result in a lose-lose-lose outcome: an ultimate moral and karmic disadvantage for the practitioner and his/her family, destruction of stakeholders, and destruction of the world at large.

As indicated at the onset, this article is of a conceptual nature, and primarily meant to encourage critical contemplation on our current vocational categorization and the motives behind it. It is our hope

that scholars as well as practitioners will further consider the potential merit of an overdue paradigm shift in this regard.

FIGURE 1



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